

Weekly Zoroastrian Scripture Extract # 120 – A Mobed’s Recollections and Involvement in Muktaḍ Gatha Days!

This email is our next WZSE #120 even though it is without verses from our Zoroastrian scriptures as well as their recitation.

These memories of Muktaḍ really fill the need of a WZSE.

So here it goes:

Our very good friend ArZan Wadia, requested me to write this article for his Parsi Khabar blog, about my recollections of the Muktaḍ days growing up in Tarapur in a priestly family and now in USA. and here it is from his Parsi Khabar blog of August 16th 2015. Hope you enjoy it reading as much as I have enjoyed writing and reminiscing it.

Love and Tandoorasti, Soli

Everyday Parsi: Ervad Soli P. Dastur

By arZan on Aug 16, 2015 09:00 am

Our sixth author in the 2015 **Everyday Parsi** series is Ervad Soli P. Dastur

A Mobed’s Recollections and Involvement in Muktaḍ Gatha Days!



On the P&O SS Oronsay ship somewhere near Suez Canal during the first part of August 1960, we some 20 or so J. N. Tata Endowment Scholars on our way to USA/UK for higher studies, read on the ship’s daily news flash that Dr. Homi J. Bhabha, “father of Indian Nuclear Program”, selected Tarapur, Maharashtra State, as the site for the first Indian Atomic Energy Station! What are they doing to my Birth Place, I wondered at that time!

Yes I was born as the last of 11 children to a Udvada Mobed family in Tarapur, where my father was a Panthaky of the Tarapur Agiary. In those days, 1940’s and 50’s, there were over 100 Parsi families in Tarapur. Most families owned large tracts of agricultural land, referred to as “Vaadi” or “Jungle”, within 10 to 30 miles of Tarapur and most of the family men spent majority of their time in these family places whereas the rest of their families resided in Tarapur. My father was in charge of all ceremonies

for these families, especially for the 18 days of Muktaḍ in those days.

Before the Muktaḍ days, our whole family was engaged in the preparations for the Muktaḍ Days and one particular activity I still remember with fondness is the preparations of “Deemori” and “Gaanghaa”, the specialized Muktaḍ prayers items. “Deemori” was made from the dough of the “Paapri” but you take a pinch of the dough and make a small ball out of it, size of a big pea, and

then these balls were fried. Whereas “Gaanghaa” was a mixture of legumes like whole Mung, and different kinds of whole beans, etc. which were roasted. The two items were then used in the Satum prayers during the Mukhtad days. We children just loved these items.

Also, the Agiary and our home was thoroughly cleaned and white washed before the Mukhtad days. During these white washing, we children were the “Go-fers”, go for this and go for that and we gladly did those chores with gusto, so as to receive some bonus in terms of “Deemori” “Gaanghaa”, or Paapri/Malido, and other sweets! The other preparation was to collect all families’ “Behraas” or “Karasyas” for the Mukhtad. Each family had to inscribe the names of the departed ones of the families in Gujarati so we knew which family they belong to. In those days, many “Behraa”s were double, one on top of the other. All were of German silver and no glass or crystal vases like today. Dad had to arrange with local “Maalis” to supply flowers of different colors, mainly roses – no carnations or other types of flowers.

On Asfandard Mahino and Ashishvangh Roj, all the age old 6-8 Marble tables in Agiary were thoroughly cleaned, washed and dried, and all the “Behraa”s were cleaned and washed in the afternoon in the Agiary with its “chokhkhu” well water. The father will then assign tables by families and all the “Behraa”s were placed in some order and the flowers were placed on top of them. Then Parsi “Deeva”s were lit and the whole Mukhtad arrangement was ready for the 18 days prayers starting on the next day of Aastaad Roj.



The whole Parsi Waad (street) was teeming with activities since all the family men from their lands would be visiting their families during the Mukhtad. Each day, early evening, the huge grounds in front of the Agiary and the huge ruins of Vicaajee Meherjee Palace was used for Hu Tu Tu, wrestling, cricket, and such other sports. I was too little to participate but was an awed spectator at the strength of these young Parsi men.

Just before sunset, my dad would come to Agiary to conduct Hum Bandagi every day of the Mukhtad. Few minutes after sunset, the

Aiwisruthrem Geh will start and all the men (only) will be coming into the Agiary, do their Kusti Paadyaab, and gather in front of the Mukhtad tables and my dad will lead all of us in a Hum Bandagi. What a sight that was!! After that the crowd scattered, some continue praying, and others gathered outside Agiary in groups swapping tall tales and some others went home. We had to continue our Daily Farajiyaat including Fraamraot Ha, Satum no Kardo, etc. One of the brothers will perform the Boi ceremony. After our prayers, Dad will orchestrate the preparations of khumchaas with fruits for the Aafringaan and Farokshi prayers next day. Then all brothers went home for our family meal and to bed for the big day tomorrow.

Every Mukhtad Day the whole family got up at 4 AM or so, took bath in an open Moree (bathroom) with cold and hot water pails from our well, which we mix to create hot water for the bath using a “karasyaa” (no shower). Then after a short morning prayer, we were in the kitchen to help out with the preparations of the morning Satums in Agiary. Mom and my sisters were busy preparing food for the Satums which consist of eggs, rotlis, a sweet dish and chaai. By this time, dad had gone to Agiary to prepare for the Satum prayers, followed by us brothers carrying Satum items in big

Khumchaas. The main hall of the Agiary was transformed into a magical ambiance with Parsi Deevas, German Silver “Behraa”s, fresh flowers in them and the sweet smell of sandalwood.



My two maternal uncles, Mobeds Maneckshah and Sohrab Bharda, will have already started a Yasna ceremony and pretty soon you will hear the sonorous sound of “Laalo” (pestle) striking “Haavanim” (mortar) which you can hear from far away. My Dad and brothers will be reciting Satum prayers for different families and the whole Agiary would be filled with wonderful sounds of prayers, sandalwood and loban smoke! After a Satum, the attending family members will do the loban ceremony and then on to the next Satum for another family. During the Satum recitals, we had to walk to our home where mom and our

sisters have prepared “Daran”s, Paapri, Malido, etc. for the Baj ceremonies in “Langri”s with a lid on them and we had to carry them to Agiary for our uncles to recite Baj prayers.

After all Satums were recited, there will be a short break for the breakfast using the items from Satums. Then the main prayers of Aafringaans and Farokshi will start with Humdin family members attending the prayers and doing Loban ritual after the prayers were done. During that time, our uncles have completed the Yasna ceremony and they will be performing the Baj ceremonies for the Humdin families.



During these prayers, it is time for the “lunch” Satums and we had to walk home to get the khumchaas with the Satum items usually rice, some meat or fish dish and may be a vegetable. While Satums were being prayed, Dad will prepare Baj “Langri”s with Daran, Malido, Paapri, some sweets and fruits from Afargan for the Humdin families and we had to deliver them to the families homes by foot. There was one humongous home in which multiple families resided and one of the family did not even have an outside window and even during the

mid-day, the home was dark and we used to be scared to deliver Baj to this family. After the deliveries, and after the “lunch” Satums are over, we went home for our family lunch usually from the “lunch” Satum items. Then it is time for the adults to have a siesta and us kids usually had a ball playing different games.



Jashan at the M.F. Cama Athoroman Institute in Mumbai

The siesta is over before 3 PM and it is time for tea together with some sweet dish. And then the preparations for the evening Satums and around 5 PM we have to carry the khumchaas again to the Agiary with the evening Satum items and Satums were performed. After that, the day's prayers were completed and the cycle of the activities with sports, Hum Bandagi, etc. is repeated. This then was the daily schedule of the Muktdad days.

During the 5 Gatha days, we had to pray each Gatha prayer after the night Hum Bandagi. On the fifth Gatha Day, the Pateti, we also had to pray Patet Pashemani which is a prayer to repent for all the bad

things you did during that year and ask forgiveness from Dadar Ahura Mazda and promised to yourself not to repeat those bad things next year.

At the midnight, we had to get up and prepare for the "Paachhli Raat nu Bhanwaanu" – Aafringaan, Farokshi and Satum prayers for the night to say good bye to the Asho Farohars who will return to heaven with blessings to you for treating them right with food, flowers, water, etc.

The next day will be Navroze – Farvardin Mahino and Hormuz Roj – Saal Mubarak to all! This was the most important day for us children since we get to wear brand new clothes, and after performing all chores mentioned above, we get to visit our maternal grand parents next door and other friendly families with our new clothes where we were treated with all kinds of delicious foods and even a Silver Rupee coin at some places. We stuffed ourselves with sev, dahi, malido, paapri, mesur pak – chick peas fudge, and my favorite kopra pak – sweet coconut fudge. This was the best day of the whole Muktdad for us.

The next big day was Rapithwan Ijwaani – Farvardin Mahino and Ardibehesht Roj – when we restart the Rapithwan Geh and there will be a community Jashan in Agiary to welcome Rapithwan Geh with the whole village in attendance!



2007 Muktdad Prayers in Vancouver, Canada

And finally there was Khordad Saal – Farvardin Mahino and Khordad Roj – the birthday of Zarathushtra – Khordad Saal Mubarak! Again a full house afternoon Jashan in Agiary with the whole village attending.

The 18 Days Muktdad is over and on Farvardin Mahino and Amardad Roj – Amardad Saal Mubarak – after the morning prayers, all the Behras will be dismantled, washed, dried and given back to the Humdin families. The days of hard work, great food, feeling of belonging to the Parsi customs are all over and

routine daily life will start again.

When we were in our beloved M. F. Cama Athornan Institute, we used to get enough holidays for Muktdad so we can attend the 18 Muktdad days. After I became Navar and Martab and Saamel, I will pitch in for all prayers like Satums, Afringans and Farokshis a gratis.

Each Gatha Day, there will be at least an Anjuman Jashan in the Ujiran Geh led by Dad and we had to participate in it after being a priest. Just before praying the Doa Tandoorasti, the Anjuman Secretary, Nana Bhai, will give Ashodad to all participating priests and we had to slide the Paavli coin (four Anna, 1/4 Rupee) towards Dad in style – no Ashodad for us.

Well these are my recollections of Deemori, Gaanghaa and 100+ homes of Tarapore Gaam! Alas, today there are no such families but one yes one old wonderful lady residing in Tarapore, and the Agiary is hardly attended and once a year my dear brother Palanji celebrates Dharamshalla Anniversary on January 26th with a Jashan and a Gahambar lunch for over 200 Parsi/Irani Humdins!

Moving on to M. F. Cama Institute, in our SSC year (High School Senior), we had to go to an accredited school over a mile away on foot. We could not get away for Muktdad and we four SSC students (Dasturji Feroze Kotwal, Mobed Kersey Antia, Mobed Noshir Bharucha and myself) were all alone in the “Aalishaan” (humongous) building of MFCAI. But we were allowed to take leave for 5 Gatha days and I was lucky to be asked by the Panthaky of Patel Agiary down the road from MFCAI to pray for his Behdins for five Gatha days and for the first time in my life as a Mobed, I was paid a princely sum of 125 rupees! With the help of my eldest brother Kawasji, I bought a golden colored watch with lighted up dial in the dark, a prized possession of mine for many a year!

After 2 years in St. Xavier's College hostel, I moved to Dadar Parsi Colony for the four year course in Chemical Engineering at the UDCT. During the first Muktdad there, I was asked by the Panthaky to come for 5 days of Gathas to pray for his Behdins! The first day I went there and after my daily prayers, I was given a Naamgharan book of a Behdin family and an instruction of 20 minutes! I was baffled and upset and after thinking for a while, I went to him, returned the book and left! That was the end of my Muktdad Days in India!



So, we finally reached New York via London/Southampton after about 6 weeks and settled in Evanston, IL for my Graduate Chemical Engineering. My next Muktdad experience was in 1999, when I was getting lonely not to be involved in Muktdad prayers and so visited Mumbai and took part in Muktdad prayers at the J. D. Colaba Agiary where my brother Mobed Palanji was the Panthaky. That was a wonderful, uplifting experience of being involved in the Muktdad prayers for 10 days; but it did not compare with my Tarapore Muktdad days!

Well after that, I was reading about Gatha prayers in many major Humdins' cities like Toronto, ZAGNY in NY, Houston, etc. and I informed Jo Ann that I want to be a part of these prayers somewhere and so in 2006 we visited Chicago ZAC and I took part in all 5 Gatha days prayers leading 3 Jashans with my Mobed friends. Then next year in 2007, we were invited by Vancouver

Humdins to lead their Gatha prayers since they were having trouble finding Mobeds. Jo Ann and I visited Vancouver and once again I performed all 5 Gatha prayers. One of the highlights of this visit was that I asked Kashmira Suraliwalla, Vancouver President, if Irani Humdins take part in the Muktdad and answer was no. I further inquired if there is an Irani Mobed and yes there was Mobed Jamsheed Jamsheedi. I wanted to meet him and after many denials, he finally agreed for Jo Ann and me to visit them in their home and they were very hospitable to us. I discussed with Mobed Jamsheed about participating in the Muktdad prayers and first he was quite reluctant but after much persistence, and comparing our Jashan prayers and finding quite a bit of similarity, he agreed to join us in Muktdad prayers and lo and behold! He joined us for all 5 Gatha days Jashans and to me that was the most satisfying experience!

The next year we visited San Jose Gatha prayers under the leadership of my very good friend Mobed Kobad Jamshed, an ex-MFCAI and a Udvada Mobed, and we had a wonderful time in their beautiful Dar-e-Meher, most beautiful we have found in North America.



And then came 2009 when one of our best friends, Dick Vazir, passed away unexpectedly in Miami! Dick and his wife Sheroomai have been very big help to Miami ZAF people and it was a shock to hear about his

passing away. Dick always used to ask me when we are going to have a Dar-e-Meher in Miami. And his favorite complaint to me was: Sheroo and I have been going to Toronto for over 20 years to attend Muktdad Gatha prayers and when are we going to have Gatha prayers in Miami? So, we started to talk in ZAF Miami to have our first Muktdad Gatha prayers in fond memory of Dick: Sheroomai generously offered her home for the prayers and our own Dinyar Mehta of Orlando CFG not only donated white marble top tables for the Behraas but offered to bring them to Sheroomai's home from Orlando for which we in whole South Florida are very grateful. In fact, Dinyar Bhai is doing it ever since each year!

Our first Miami ZAF Muktdad Gatha prayers started in 2009 with 71 names in Naamgharan. We performed 3 Satums each day, one community Jashan and also "Paachhli Raat nu Bhanwaanu" (prayers after 12 midnight on the last Gatha to say goodbye to all Asho Farohars). Jo Ann and mine experiences with the three previous years of Muktdad Gatha prayers participation was a big help in arranging and managing our first Muktdad. The whole Tampa ZATAMBAY, Orlando CFG and Miami/Ft. Lauderdale/Boca Raton Humdins participated in this first Muktdad Gatha prayers. Our ZAF President Jahan Daruwala and his wife Nancy and our own Moti Goraani, Arnavaz Irani, were very big help to us to start this tradition in Miami. In 2010, we were very thankful to Hovi and Burjis Shroff for offering their home for the prayers and we did this for four years. Once again we were without a home when our another very good friend, Soli Irani, passed away unexpectedly in 2014 and his wife Jeroo and his son Furrokh (who is our ZAF President) offered Jeroo's home for our Muktdad prayers in fond memory of Soli Irani. And this year, we are continuing in Jeroo's home again, we have 9 marble tables, 48 families participating and 151 Naamgharan names and same regimen of 3 Satums, one community Jashan each Gatha day and "Paachhli Raat Nu Bhanwaanu" and today is the Ushtavad Gatha and we hope to continue this tradition for some years to come! We know that other Zoroastrian Associations have been performing Muktdad Gatha prayers for a very long time but a smaller group like ours in South Florida are very proud for doing this for 7 years!



As the main Mobed of these 3 groups, Jo Ann and I are very happy to be able to do this and personally I get this unbelievable spiritual uplifting in performing these prayers! In my humble opinion, the whole ZAF Humdin group is in it with many many volunteers for collecting names and Behraas, for setting up tables, flowers and daily Satum food items prepared in their homes by themselves and for donating home made Parsi/Irani food for all attending Humdins 2-3 days of the 5 Gatha prayers. We have never seen such good feeling of belonging among all who help and attend the prayers! That is the Essence of Muktaf Gatha prayers!

In the closing, after a tumultuous year of personal physical problems, staging and selling our beautiful Hira Villa of 21 years, downsizing and buying our Hira Villa II, I often wondered if I would be able to perform this year's Muktaf Gatha prayers! But with the help of blessings from Dadar Ahura Mazda, Zarathushtra Saheb, Iranshah, my dear wife Jo Ann of 49 years and our girls and their families, and the best wishes of all you friends and families from all over the world, here we are in the second Gatha! Thank you all for your support and these memories will stay with us for ever!

Love and Tandoorasti, Soli

Ervad Soli P. Dastur was born as the last of 11 children in a small village, Tarapur, India, to a priestly family from Udvada, Soli completed his high school in the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute boarding school, completing his Navar, Martab, and Saamel ceremonies in Udvada Iranshah Atash Behram.

After first two preparatory years in St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, and completing his B. Chem. Eng. from the Bombay University Department Of Chemical Technology in 1960, he proceeded to USA for his graduate schooling and received his M. S. and Ph. D. in Chemical Engineering from the

Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

He joined the Procter & Gamble Co. in Cincinnati in 1964 as a Research Chemical Engineer, but drifted away to Computer Technology, developing Marketing Data Analysis, working with UPC Technology, and eventually developing Store Shelf Management Software for managing stocks in Grocery and Mass Merchandising industries for P&G Sales Division. The last 3 years of his service with P&G, Soli was transferred to Brussels, Belgium, where he trained P&G sales people in computer technology in 11 countries from UK to Saudi Arabia and UAE. After retiring from P&G in 1994, Soli worked as a partner in the Partnering Group for 5 years consulting with the Grocery and Mass Merchandising industries.

He has been performing Mobed duties all over Florida and NA wherever he is requested to do so. He was elected on the Zoroastrian Association of Florida (ZAF), Miami, Executive Board for 4 years. Jo Ann and he has been visiting different Zoroastrian Associations during the Gatha Prayers and started the first ever annual all Florida Muktad Gatha prayers in Miami in 2009 which is being continued for 7 years to date. He is an active member of NAMC and is in charge of all its communications.

At the North American Zoroastrian Congress in Houston, December 2010, Soli was awarded the Rohinton Rivetna Outstanding Zarathushti Award.

Soli has been conducting Zoroastrian Religious Classes from Tampa, Orlando and Miami over the years. In January 2011, he started a teleconferencing Zoroastrian Religious Class. Class Material in form of PowerPoint Presentation is sent out to all participants ahead of the class. At appointed time, the participants dial into a telephone bridge and the class is conducted on telephone. So far, he has conducted 17 such Tele Classes. Soli started and published over 119 weekly scripture extract with translation and audio recitations. He has contributed articles in FEZANA and WZO Hama Zor Journals.

He met Jo Ann in Cincinnati on a blind date and has been married to her for 48 years. They have twin daughters, Shirin and Anahita, and 5 grand children.

Soli is fully retired and lives with Jo Ann in University Park, Florida. He is an avid tennis player and dabbles with the computer for his free time.

The post **Everyday Parsi: Ervad Soli P. Dastur** appeared on **Parsi Khabar**.

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