

# SHOULD PARSIS ABANDON ANCIENT CUSTOMS ?

By NOSHIR H. DADRAWALA

Abraham Lincon once said, "Conservation is adherence to the old and tried against the new and untried."

Fortunately, Parsis over the ages, in one way or the other have always been a conservative lot. It was perhaps this very virtue which led to the survival of the community through thick and thin.

Although an ancient universal custom, the menstrual period of a woman has been of a firm religious observance in its best form among the Parsis.

Normally a Hindu woman in her "Periods" is supposed to refrain from all forms of ceremonies, worship, rituals, cooking, etc. etc.

The Jews are believed to have borrowed the custom and belief from Iran. However, according to the interdiction of Moses — the giver of Laws, a menstruating Jewish woman must not go near rivers, wells, sea, fire or the kitchen. She must also keep away from grain fields, furnitures and cattle.

The Beduin Arabs observed menstrual customs in as much the same way as the Jews, but astonishingly even the illiterate Aborigines have been known to respect this observance, although they are very much isolated from the rest of the society and in many ways an uncivilised lot.

Pliny, Aristotle and other Greek writers too have dealt with this subject extensively. It is rather unfortunate that now-a-days people have (more so Modern day Parsis) come to look down upon this ancient traditional custom, as superstition.

The "Vendidad" (chapt. XVI para 2) mentions "Dastanistan ghal Kunishan, shapiran puryootkishan ghal kart. Pavan hambargan ba

kunishan memon shan kartwanas baen jast wad baen avokar wadoonat pavan kola Kari Shayat."

The above means that "the practice of seclusion during menses in a separate place has been in vogue from times immemorial and that such a place should be an unfrequented part of the house".

"Vendidad" (Chapt. XV) states further, that the woman in a state of menses should keep fifteen steps away from fire and water. Also she should keep three steps away from pious men. If she even chances to glance at a person in prayer the latter must undergo fresh preliminaries and renew his prayers all over again.

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Lord Jesus Christ has been known to cry out "Who touched me?..... my glory is gone out of me"! (Gospel of St. Luke) when a woman suffering from irregular menses touched him.

When such a woman's TOUCH can drive the glory out of a holy Son of God, what are we ordinary mortals in comparison?

Let us now set out to analyse why such customs of isolation, during menses are observed, from the medical point of view, just in case the scriptural point of view was found unappealing to some.

Now-a-days no theory is accepted by modern Parsis unless and until it carries the seal of Modern Science or Medicine. Under the circumstances all scriptural and religious customs yet to be proved by modern science are, for all practical purpose, shelved, until some scientists in the future proves them valid.

Fortunately for us, the first scientific trend of mind towards the elucidation of the truth of this age old belief (Menstrual Customs) was shown in 1920 by Prof. B. Schick. Actually it was a small incident in his laboratory which later led him to investigate a certain marked phenomenon.

According to the story, the Professor once handed over to his maid a fresh bouquet of flowers with instructions to place them in a vase. Strangely the flowers faded earlier than usual. The maid explained in no uncertain terms that flowers handled by her during menses withered very soon. This prompted the investigative professor to probe further into the nature of a woman's menstrual state.

Amazingly the Professor discovered a certain TOXIN in the red blood cells of the maid when she was in a state of menses. The Toxin incidently was absent in the plasma.

To experiment further the Professor now requested the maid to wear gloves and touch fresh flowers. Surprisingly the gloves protected

the flowers against menstrual influences and needless to say the flowers did maintain freshness for the Normal period.

Perhaps now we know why in Great Grandma's days Parsi Women (and probably others too) wore gloves during menses.

Prof. Schick was now confident that a certain amount of Toxin is normally excreted by the skin (during menses) through the sweat and sebaceous glands, which has a TOXIC influence on **ALL LIVING THINGS WHEN TOUCHED.**

Further studies at the John Hokins University Laboratory (by Macht and Lobin) once again proved the existance of a Toxin in various body fluids of a menstruating woman. The Toxin later came to be called "MENO TOXIN".

It was proved beyond doubt that menotoxin produced an inhibitory effect on the growth of roots and stems of living seedlings, yeast and in all cases, freshly cut flowers. Menotoxin has also been known to distort the geotropic properties of young seedlings.

Now we know why the holy scriptures prohibited menstruating women from going near grain fields, rivers, wells, kitchen, and members of family. The ancient ones knew all about the Toxin influences of a woman in menses, and in view of the fact advised total seclusion during the period, for the benefit of all concerned. On the ultra physical level too, a menstruating woman was known to drive the "virtue" out of holy men, and render ceremonies, rituals, prayers ineffective.

It is indeed very unfortunate that Modern Society has begun to ridicule this custom and poke fun at those intelligent ones who still adhere to this highly scientific custom.

No doubt Thoreau said "Things do not change; only we change".