



PĀDYĀB

PĀDYĀB, a sacred ablution requiring washing by water, a necessary prelude to the basic Zoroastrian purificatory ritual. *Pādyāb*, a Pahlavi word meaning “ritually clean,” is now primarily used in the sense of a ceremonial ablution. The word can be derived from Avesta *āp*– “water” with adverbial prefix *paiti*– “against” (*AirWb*, cols. 325, 822), meaning “to pour water on.” In New Persian, the word is used as *pādyāw*, *pādyāb* (Boyce, 1991, p. 281). The term *pādyāb* (later modified to *pādiyāv*) is also used as a hybrid Gujarati word.

In its primary meaning, the term *pādyāb* refers to a prelude to the *kosti* ritual, which is performed by Zoroastrians several times in the day. A traditional Zoroastrian often uses the term *pādyāb* to indicate the *kosti* ritual. The term *pādyāb-kosti* is almost a synonym for the *kosti* ritual, which, among the faithful, is almost always referred to as *pādyāb-kosti* (Madan, pp. 45, 46, Motafram, p. 74; see also [CLEANSING i. IN ZOROASTRIANISM](#)).

In Persian *Rivayats*, the word *pādyāb* is used for the act of washing the head and body with consecrated and unconsecrated bull’s urine (Dhabhar, pp. 87, 91). It is also used just to indicate bull’s urine (Dhabhar, pp. 103, 120, 133, 294, 370). Perhaps that is why many modern Western academic sources indicate that in the past the *pādyāb* ritual included washing by unconsecrated bull’s urine (*gōmēz*) prior to washing with water (Choksy, p. 53; Boyce, 1975, p. 296). However, traditional Zoroastrian sources, as well as oral tradition, do not indicate the use of bull’s urine in the *pādyāb* ritual, and indicate the use only of water (Bajan, p. 293; Madan, p. 45, Motafram, p. 74). Moreover, at some places, even the Persian *Rivayats*, use the term *pādyāb* specifically only for the



pādyāb-kosti ritual. It also uses it for ceremonial washing of ritual utensils (Dhabhar, pp. 363, 398).

For the performance of *pādyāb*, before the *kosti* ritual, a Zoroastrian is expected to wash with water the exposed parts of the body. The ceremonial ablution of *pādyāb* takes place as follows: The person first recites an *Ašəm vohu* prayer. Then he wets the two hands up to the wrists, including the palm and fingers, and washes his face, which is followed by wetting the right hand again and thrice washing the right foot from below the ankle. Then again he wets his right hand and thrice washes his left foot from below the ankle. Then he washes both his hands again up to the wrists and wipes off his hands and face with a clean cloth or towel.

The *pādyāb-kosti* is performed before a Zoroastrian engages in any religious activity, such as offering prayer or visiting a fire temple. It is also performed after an act that makes a person ritually impure, like visiting a cemetery or after attending the call of nature. It is also done to acquire ritual power, for instance at the turn of each watch of the day. Like most other Zoroastrian rituals, the *pādyāb* is an expression of religious and theological beliefs translated into practice, and aims at re-establishing the sacred order in the imperfect world after the onslaught of the evil of pollution.

In the comprehensive list of fifteen virtues to be inculcated by a priest, one virtue is *pādyāv sājašne* “maintaining the power of *pādyāb*-(*kosti*).” The priest who has inculcated this virtue has the requisite ritual power by virtue of his practicing the required religious disciplines.

In the Pahlavi commentaries (Pāzand) on the scriptures (Zand), the word *pādyāv* is used as an adjective *pādyāvi(h)* qualifying the divine being *Ardwisur Anāhid* in the marriage benedictions. In the Avestan *Ābān Yašt*, dedicated to the same divine being, a similar word *paityāpa* is used in the sense of “water flowing ahead/upstream” (Kanga, p. 306). At another place in the Avesta, the word is used in juxtaposition with the word *nyāpəm* “water flowing below/downstream” (*Vd.* 6.40; Darmesteter, p. 73; Boyce, 1991, p. 281).

The *pādyāb* ritual reminds one of the Islamic religious practice of *wozu* ablution prior to performing the obligatory daily prayer, *namāz* (Choksy, p. 61), but the *wozu* a ritual is much more elaborate than the *pādyāb*.



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