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ANCIENT ROYAL HINDU MARRIAGE CUSTOMS.

By PANDIT VISHWANATH, with notes by H. A. ROSE.

It is said that once upon a time there was a great festival among the gods. At this festival was present a king, named Mahábhísha, who had attained to heaven by performing great sacrifices and austerities. A gust of wind blew aside the clothes of Gangá—the great goddess among rivers—and exposed her body. All the gods bent their heads so that Gangá should not feel ashamed, but Mahábhísha did not do so. Upon this Brahma was wroth and cursed Mahábhísha, saying that he should fall from heaven. Gangá, too, was ordered to be born on earth, to punish the king by so acting as to inflict great mental suffering upon him until he felt a great anger, which was to free him from the effect of the curse. In the fullness of time Gangá was born on earth and sought marriage with King Pratípa, who was renowned for his piety. He refused to wed her, but seeing her great beauty of mind and body promised to mate her with his son. Pratípa and his queen then underwent severe purificatory rites so that their child should be born good and noble in soul and in due course Mahábhísha was born as their child. They named him Shántanu—"son of the peaceful"—because of the perfect control over desires and passions to which his father had attained. When Shántanu had grown into a fine youth his father, according to immemorial Hindu custom, prepared to relinquish a householder's life and retire into the forests (*vana prastha*). He seated Shántanu on the throne, and retiring from the world, told him of his interview with a celestial maiden in which he had promised that a son of his would accept her as his wife. The old king exhorted Shántanu to redeem his father's promise, should he happen to see the maiden, and marry her unconditionally.

One day while walking along the bank of the Ganges, Shántanu saw a lovely girl, fell in love with her and asked for her hand. She consented on condition that he should never question her actions, and that should he ever interfere with her freedom to do what she pleased she would desert him at once. The king was so infatuated that he accepted her on these terms. They were married and in due course had a son. The queen flung the child into the river, telling Shántanu that it was for his good that she did so. Six more children were born, and one after the other were thrown into the river by his wife. Despite his grief he would not bid her desist from her murderous conduct lest she should leave him.¹ But when the eighth

¹ The eighth child is unlucky, as it portends death to its mother's brother. Kans was warned that he would perish at the hands of the eighth son of Devakí, wife of Vasudeo. He

child was born and his wife was going to kill it he could stand it no longer, and bade her refrain from its destruction. On hearing this the queen did not throw the child into the river, but told the king that she would live with him no longer since he had violated the condition on which she had married him. She then declared who each of them had been in their previous lives and said that the sons whom she had borne were the eight *vásus*. Those gods had stolen away the Nandini cow—the giver of all desires—which belonged to a great *rishi*. The leader of this party of divine thieves was Dyán. The *rishi* by his curse had doomed the *vásus* for their misdeed to fall from heaven and be born on earth. This was their doom, but the thieves went and begged the *rishi's* forgiveness, and at their entreaties he so far relented that seven of them won permission to return to heaven within a year of their birth on earth, but Dyán, the chief offender, was not forgiven, and was condemned to a long terrestrial existence for his sinful conduct. He became the eighth child, which was saved by Shántanu's intervention. Gangá brought this child with her back to his father after training him in every branch of worldly and spiritual knowledge. He was so well brought up that his strength, energy and intellect became the envy of contemporary princes. His love and respect for his father were no less exemplary, and he gave striking proofs of them in this wise:—One day his father, while roaming along the banks of the Yamuna, saw a beautiful girl, a fisherman's daughter. The old king was so smitten with her looks that he sought her for his wife, but her father refused his consent until the king promised that her progeny should succeed to the throne after his death. The aged king was in a dilemma, between his love for this fisher girl and his recognition of the claims of his son by Gangá. At last he decided to subordinate his passion to his sense of justice and returned to his capital. He could not, however, forget the fisherman's daughter altogether, and continued dejected and morose because of his unfulfilled desire for her. His son noticed this and tried to ascertain through the minister the cause of his father's sadness. On hearing the truth he went to the fisherman and voluntarily pledged his word not to claim the throne after his father's death, but to help any stepbrothers who might be born to his daughter to secure it. The fisherman said that he fully trusted the prince to keep his word, but what if the prince's own offspring claimed the right to the kingdom against his daughter's progeny? On hearing this the prince, whose name was Davabrata, vowed that he would never marry, so that there would be no sons to stand in the way of his stepbrother's inheritance. It is said that the gods in heaven rained flowers upon the prince, who came thenceforward to be known as Bhíshma (the terrible) because of his vow.

The fisherman's daughter, whose name was Satyavati, then wedded Bhíshma's father, and had two sons, Chitrangad and Vichitravírya. On the death of Shán-

resolved to kill Vasudeo at once, but was dissuaded from so doing, and instead he slew *all* Devakí's first six sons, one by one, an excess of precaution which did him no good whatever, for Krishna, her eighth son, killed Kans: *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*, Sister Nivedita and Ananda Coomaraswamy, pp. 219 f. and 237.

tanu, the elder of the two minors, as they still were, came to the throne. Bhíshma acted as their protector. Soon after his accession Chitrangad was killed in battle and the younger boy succeeded him. The mode of winning a wife at that time amongst Kshatriyas was that called a *swayamvara*, or "self-choice."¹ Kings and princes used to be invited by the bride's father to his capital, and they displayed their skill at games and their prowess in arms, and performed great feats of strength. The bride witnessed them all, and chose him who pleased her most. Vichitravírya was too young to take part in such a competition, but his mother being eager to see him married, Bhíshma took upon himself the task of finding him a queen. At a *swayamvara* he carried off by force three daughters of the King of Káshi, challenging all the assembled princes to wrest the girls from him if they could. This they failed to do, but the eldest of the three princesses told Bhíshma that she had already made a mental vow to wed another prince, so Bhíshma let her go. The other two, Ambiká and Ambaliká, were married to Vichitravírya, but unluckily he died soon after his marriage, and the royal house of Shántanu was threatened with extinction.

In great grief Satyavati next implored Bhíshma to espouse the widows² of his stepbrothers, but he refused to break his vow of celibacy. He advised her, however, to obtain progeny from the widowed princesses by the performance of *niyoga*—a practice permissible in emergency, though not accorded recognition as an ordinary course of social conduct. It consisted in inviting some great sage to become the father of children who, being born of a widowed queen, were to be considered the offspring of her dead husband. Satyavati then informed Bhíshma that before she married his father she had had a son by a great sage named Parashar, whose name was Krishna Dvaipáyana Vyása, who had promised to come to her aid in any difficulty the moment she thought of him. She did so now, and Vyása appeared. With considerable difficulty he was persuaded to beget children on the widowed princesses. He was so ugly that he was called Krishna, "black," and as the princesses had to submit to his ugliness, they were excused a whole year's purificatory penances, as their toleration of Vyása's ugliness was in itself a penance. Thus the queen mother with great difficulty persuaded her daughters-in-law to receive Vyása for the sake of the royal line, which was threatened with extinction. The elder at the sight of his repulsive figure closed her eyes and did not open them all the time that he was with her. For her Vyása predicted a blind son. The younger, seeing how horrible his appearance was, turned pale with fear, and to her, therefore, was born a child with pallid complexion named Pandu the "pale." The queen wanted a third child, but her elder daughter-in-law evaded her wishes and sent one of her maids, to whom was born the saintly Vidura, because of the sweetly reverent attitude in which the maid received the great sage.

Bhíshma superintended the education of the boys, who developed great skill in learning and sports. In due course Pandu was made king, because his elder

¹ See Note B.

² See Note C.

brother Dhritarāshtra was blind. Pandu married two wives, Kuntí and Madrí. Once while out hunting Pandu cruelly shot a stag which was coupling with its mate. This piece of cruelty brought upon him the curse that he would die at once if he lived with either of his wives. On this Pandu was very sad and went to live in the jungles, where his wives followed him. After a time he began to long for children, and told Kuntí of his longing: she said that she knew a *mantra* whereby she could summon any of the gods to come and give her children. Pandu gave her leave to use it, and as a result she called upon Dharma, god of Justice, Váyu the Wind, and Indra the king of the gods, and they gave her Yudhishtira, Bhíma, Arjuna respectively. She also taught the *mantra* to Madrí, who summoned the twin Aswins, and they gave her Nakula and Sahadeva. It may be noted here that before she married Pandu, Kuntí had had another divine son, Karna, from the sun, and he fought against the sons of Pandu in the Mahábhārata. As a result of the curse, Pandu died while embracing his wife Madrí, and she gave up her life along with her husband, leaving her sons to the care of Kuntí.

II.—The sons of Pandu when exiled, and disguised as Bráhmans, attend the *swayamvara* of Draupadí, whom they win and make their common wife.

King Drupada had heard much of Arjuna's skill as an archer and wanted to give him his daughter Draupadí in marriage, but he also wished that she should be won in a *swayamvara*. He made a great bow which he thought none but Arjuna could bend, and placed on a lofty pole a revolving fish whose eye was to be the mark. He who could hit was to marry his daughter.

A great crowd of kings assembled for the contest, but all failed to bend the bow. Then Karna stepped forward and strung it and took aim with an arrow. Just as the Pándava brothers, who had so far not come forward and were disguised as Bráhmans, were giving way to despair, Draupadí spoke in clear accents:—"I will not take a low-born man for my husband." At this Karna put down the bow and went away, but Arjuna came forward looking like a Bráhman, lifted the bow, drew it, and hit the mark. Flowers rained from heaven, and Draupadí put a garland of sweet flowers round Arjuna's neck as a sign of her choice. The crowd of kings protested that a Bráhman must not carry off a Khshatriya girl and fought for her possession, but the Pandavas defeated them all and carried the bride home.

When they reached their house they told their mother, who was in the inner room, in jest that they had brought home the day's alms. She answered "enjoy it in common." But when she knew the truth she was filled with remorse, and when her eldest son came home, bade him decide the matter by suggesting some way whereby her words might not be proved false and at the same time undesirable results might be avoided.

Yudhishtira then remembered a prophecy that Vyása had made concerning Draupadí, who in her former life had five times besought Mahádeva for a suitable husband and each time had been granted her request, so that she was due five

husbands. So the decision was that she should remain the common wife of all the five brothers.

NOTES BY H. A. ROSE.

A. The first question raised by this interesting paper is : "Does it represent the ideas which regulated ancient Hindu society as a whole ?" I am strongly inclined to think it does *not*. It is now beginning to be realized that ruling families were often constrained by "reasons of state" to place themselves above all popular rules or codes of ethics and evolve a moral law peculiar to themselves. This has been shown to be the case among the Jews, the Egyptians of the New Kingdom c. 1000 B.C., and the Ptolemaic period, the early Roman emperors, and the rulers of Travancore. The latter is an exception, but only apparently so. According to the usages of the Nairs of the Western Coast, descent in the ruling family is in the female line, and if that line fails the Raja does not adopt males, but females through whom the line may be continued. Each Raja's heir is his sister's son, not his own son.¹ I can find no express mention in any account of the Nayars of this rule as to the chiefs' succession, nor does it appear to be the rule among the mass of the caste.

B. As the king's daughter was thus destined to carry on the royal line, the important thing was that she should have issue, and her marriage was a matter of quite secondary importance. This may explain the *swayamvara*, which allowed her not only to choose her husband, but possibly also any man, to be the father of the heir to the throne. The only limitation on her choice of a husband seems to have been a rule that she must choose the winner in the tournament, if one was held.²

Royal descent often followed the female line in ancient India. In the *Karpura-Manjari*, "Camphor-cluster," a drama of the 10th century A.D., Chandapála marries that lady, the daughter of the Kantala king, and thus becomes a paramount sovereign.³

C. It will be observed that in this episode there is no question of marrying the deceased brother's widow, but of the *levirate* in a strict sense of that term ; that is to say the king raises up issue to his dead brother, but the widows do not become his wives. Presumably then their sons are regarded as the heirs of the deceased,

¹ M. Murray, in *Journ. R. Anthropol. Inst.*, 1915, p. 307, quoting from Aitchison's *Treaties*, etc., V, p. 422 ff. This passage does not appear to be cited by E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, V, p. 283 ff., under Art. Nayar.

² Among the Bázigars of the Punjab, when a girl is marriageable, an athletic competition is held, and the competitors jump, run, and so on. The winner has a right to marry the girl, but she has no choice.

³ *Karpura-Manjari*, Cambridge, Mass., N.S. A., published by the Harvard University, 1901. Reviewed in *Calcutta Review*, 1903, p. 274.

not of their real father. This suggests an explanation of the *chundavand* rule of inheritance.

If B married N, his brother's widow, all his sons by her would be as much his sons as E and F, his sons by his first wife, and all five sons would inherit equally by *pagvand*. But if he merely raised up issue to C by N, her sons would be regarded as heirs of C, not of B, and they would only get C's half of the family land, E and F getting B's half, not $\frac{2}{5}$ ths, and we should at once have what looks at first sight like a custom of *chundavand*. If custom were studied scientifically, nothing being taken for granted, but every possible explanation tested by the facts, the facts being all completely elicited by inquiry, we should first ascertain who B's second wife was. At present all that can be said is that it is not very common for a cultivator of a caste like the Jāts to take a second wife unless his brother die leaving a widow, and then he often marries her, even if he has a wife already. So common is this form of widow re-marriage that the word *dewar* means "other," or "second husband."

It need cause no surprise to find the two ideas or practices, (i) of taking the brother's widow to wife, and (ii) of raising up seed to the dead brother by her, existing side by side and often confused by such a class as the Jāts, because the distinction is rather a fine one, and we *know* that both ideas are to be found in India.¹

¹ *Dewara* is thus explained in the Vedic Lexicon called *Nirukta* by Yaska, which is regarded as an authority by Sanskrit scholars of the old school :—*Devaro, dwitiyo wara uchhyate*, "*Devara* is said to be the second husband." *Devara* in modern Sanskrit and Indian vernaculars means the husband's younger brother.