

MARRIAGE CEREMONIES IN ANCIENT INDIA.¹

AS PORTRAYED IN HER EPIC LITERATURE.

BY JOHANN JAKOB MEYER.

MANY passages in the ancient Indian marriage rituals reveal a sublime view of marriage in connection with the wedding ceremony. In instructions for the religious side of domestic life we find, besides many a superstition handed down through endless generations, that marriage was contracted with two distinct ends in view: first, the blessing of children, especially a large number of brave sons; and second, a relation of devotion between husband and wife implanted in mutual love. In choosing a bride, according to a stanza frequently quoted though not often observed, all other considerations ought to be subordinate to the idealistic one of the man's personal inclination. A large number of the rites and maxims included in the consummation of the marriage are intended to produce an actual bond between the hearts of the betrothed, and Kama, the god of love, is invoked in the wedding ritual. Surrounded by children and grandchildren, and rejoicing in them and their play the happy pair desires to live a hundred autumns in true harmony of soul. Such is the ideal handed down from Vedic times but often obscured in actual life and in later development.² Here we will only recall the peculiar verse in the Rig Veda (X, 85, 24) in which the bride is thus addressed: "I set thee free from the fetters of Varuna (the guardian of the moral world-order) by which the gentle Savitar has bound thee (hitherto to thy father's family). In the lap of Rita (natural and moral law), in the world of good deeds I place thee with thy husband." In several portions of epic court poetry the wedding is beautifully described as an experience of great importance in the life of the heroic couple.

We learn from the song of Nala and the episode of Savi-

¹ Chapter III of the author's *Das Weib im altindischen Epos* (Leipsic, 1915). Freely translated from the German by Lydia G. Robinson. A review of the book will be found in the March issue.

² "The keen observer of the inner life of Hindu society will have no difficulty in discerning... that the poorest Indian villager loves his wife as tenderly and affectionately as the most refined mortal on earth." Ramakrishna, *Life in an Indian Village*, p. 100. This is the testimony also of many other Indians. A different view is given by S. C. Bose in *The Hindoos as They Are*.

tri that care was taken in selecting a fortunate day and an hour of good augury for the wedding, as was the universal custom in India for every important step. After Rama had won Sita and had sent messengers to summon his father, and after the family records on both sides had been examined, Janaka, the father of the bride, said to Rama's father, Dasaratha, that he would like to give another daughter Urmila in marriage to Lakshmana, Rama's younger brother, and continued: "Now the moon stands in Magha (the tenth lunar mansion). In three days, when the moon passes through Uttaraphalguni, the marriage ceremony will take place. Let sacrifices be offered to the shades, let the *godana* ceremony³ be performed upon Rama and Lakshmana and make them auspicious donations."

Visvamitra, Rama's ancient councilor, then sued for the hands of the two nieces of Janaka for Bharata and Satrughna, Rama's younger brothers, and it was agreed that the four couples should be married on the same day. Dasaratha went home with Rama, saw to it that the rituals for the dead and the *godana* rites were performed, and gave the Brahmans for each son one hundred thousand fine golden-horned cows with calves, each filling a brazen pail full of milk; four hundred thousand cows and many other treasures he gave to the Brahmans at the time of the *godana*. On the same day came Bharata's uncle on his mother's side who had been looking in vain for his nephew in Ayodhya, and he took part in the celebration.

The next morning, adorned for the wedding and with the red marriage cord of wool on their wrists, the princes went with the rishis to the place of sacrifice. Janaka announced that his daughter was standing at the foot of the altar in entire readiness for her wedding and so the ceremony might be performed without delay.

"The priestly sage Vasishtha prepared the altar in a pavilion,⁴ took fragrant flowers, golden vessels, gay pitchers entwined with branches of trees and earthen plates adorned with sprigs, incense young shoots of trees and earthen plates adorned with sprigs, incense burners with frankincense, shell-shaped dishes, large and small sacrificial spoons and dishes containing water for the guests, also dishes filled with roasted corn, and unhulled corn, and with all these things he decorated the altar.

"After Vasishtha had complied with the custom of strewing

³ *Godana* is a sacramental act performed on the hair of a youth when he was sixteen or eighteen years old—as Hopkins calls it, "giving the family cut to the hair."

⁴ The Sanskrit word is *prapā*, which really means simply shed.

darbha grass around the altar during the recitation of certain sacred lines, he kindled the flame on the altar and offered burnt sacrifice. Then Janaka led forth Sita in all her wedding array and placed her before the fire facing Rama, speaking as follows to Rama, the son of Kausalya: 'This is Sita my daughter, thy wife. Accept her, I pray thee: take her hand in thine. This bride whom fortune has favored will be a faithful wife, following thee always like thy shadow.' After saying these words the king poured upon Rama's hand water consecrated by sacred words."

The same sacred ceremonies were then repeated with each of the other couples. All walked three times to the right around the fire, the king, and the rishis.

The next day Janaka gave his daughters their dowries, consisting of many hundreds of thousands of cows, draperies of great value, linen robes, and ten million garments, elephants, horses, chariots, and foot-soldiers, all of heroic stature and well equipped; likewise a hundred girls, men servants and maid servants of the highest excellence, wrought and unwrought gold, pearls and corals. Then all departed for their homes.

The Mahabharata (IV, 72) relates how the marriage of Arjuna's son Abhimanyu with Uttara, the daughter of King Virata, was solmenized with great splendor. Conches were blown, drums were beaten and trumpets sounded. All sorts of animals were slaughtered by the hundreds, and many kinds of liquor were drunk in great quantities. Minstrels and story tellers, dancers and eulogizers, contributed to the splendor of the feast, while crowds of beautiful and glittering women joined in the festivities and gathered around the lustrous bride. Her father presented Arjuna—probably for his son—seven thousand chargers as fleet as the wind, two hundred thoroughbred elephants and much wealth beside, and Arjuna's friend Krishna also made a number of costly presents, of women, jewels and garments. On this occasion the exiled brother of Arjuna, Yudhishtira, manifested himself as a very god of plenty for the Brahmans.

Still more significant is the passage (I, 198f) in which Vyasa urges his son Yudhishtira: "To-day the moon enters the mansion Pushya, therefore be to-day the first to take the hand of Draupadi." The bride's father brought in the maid bathed and adorned with many jewels. Joyfully came the friends of the prince, the counsellors of state, the Brahmans and all the eminent citizens to be present at the wedding. The palace shone with men and precious stones. The court was decorated with lotus flowers strewn round about.

The five youths entered in festive array, with rings in their ears and clad in costly raiment, sprinkled with sandal-wood water, bathed and consecrated with ceremonies of good omen. They were accompanied by their officiating priests.

The priest kindled the fire, offered sacrifices while uttering sacred verses, and united Yudhishtira and Draupadi in matrimony. He bade the pair take each other by the hand and be led around to the right. In like fashion then the four other brothers were wedded to Draupadi. After the wedding the bride's father bestowed elaborate gifts, and Draupadi herself, clad in linen and adorned with a marriage cord, was greeted by her mother-in-law where she stood with body bent forward and hands folded across her brow. To her daughter-in-law, Draupadi, graced with virtuous behavior, and endowed with loveliness and many lucky beauty marks, Pritha spoke thus with tender affection: "As Indrani to the god with the yellow chargers (Indra), as Svaha to the brightly beaming one (Agni), as Rohini to the god of the moon, as Damayanti to Nala, as Bhadra to Kubera, as Arundhati to Vasishtha, as Lakshmi to Vishnu, so mayest thou bear thy husband strong and long-lived children—so mayest thou be the mother of heroes, favored with much happiness, beloved by thy husband, gifted with perfect enjoyment, a mistress of sacrifice and a faithful wife. As the years pass mayest thou pay fitting honor to guests and strangers, to all good people and to those for whom it behooveth thee to have regard, both old and young. Among the kingdoms (of which Kurujangala is the chief) and in the cities mayest thou be honored as only second in virtue to the king himself. All the regions of the earth which thy husband has conquered with heroic prowess, do thou deliver to the Brahmans when the horse-sacrifice, the great offering, is celebrated. Mayest thou, most favored one, obtain whatever exquisite gems the earth affords, and mayest thou be happy for a hundred harvests. As I greet thee in thy bridal garments to-day, oh daughter-in-law, I shall greet thee much more joyously when thou hast given birth to a son."

When Arjuna married Krishna's sister, Krishna likewise made lavish presents of great magnificence. On them [the Pandu princes] Krishna, of great renown, bestowed great riches because of the new relationship,—the dowry of Subhadra, the gift of her family. The glorious Krishna gave a thousand golden chariots festooned with rows of tiny bells, drawn by four horses and provided with skilled and experienced charioteers; also a myriad of cows from the neighborhood of Madhura, glossy-coated and giving an abun-

dance of milk. And also because of his love Krishna gave a thousand thorough-bred mares that shone like the bright moonbeam and were caparisoned with gold; and also for each of the five brothers five hundred well-broken black-maned white she-mules as fleet as the wind. The Lotus-Eyed One also gave them a thousand women young and charming, beautifully clad and radiant, with hundreds of golden ornaments hung around their necks, finely arrayed and skilled in service. He also gave to Subhadra a hundred thousand saddle horses from Bahli as a matchless wedding gift and ten men's burdens of the best wrought and unwrought gold gleaming like fire. Krishna's elder brother Baladeva, the doer of bold deeds, sent to Arjuna for a wedding gift to honor the union a thousand fiery elephants that towered aloft like mountain peaks, that never fled in battle, well accoutered were they and hung with loudly ringing bells, magnificent, adorned with gold, and each one furnished with a driver.

According to the commentary, two passages in the Ramayana allude to a custom that is not without charm. At the wedding of Sita and Rama, Sita's father took from her mother's hand a gem which he handed to the groom's father for Rama to put on his bride's head.

It is clear from these citations that when a maiden flies away from the paternal nest flocks of gold birds fly from her father's money bags. It is a familiar fact that the marriage of a daughter in India often means the ruination of the family, even extending to children and children's children.

MARRIAGE A LA HINDU.

BY BASANTA KOOMAR ROY.

LADIES who enjoy or endure single blessedness are as scarce among the Hindus as tigers are in America, because Manu, the Moses of the Hindus, unequivocally enjoins the marriage of every Hindu girl as soon as she attains maturity. If, perchance, a girl gets to be sixteen years of age, her parents feel humiliated for having such an "old maid" in the family. The neighbors, friends, and relatives begin to talk about it. The ladies in their after-dinner gossips condemn the negligence of the family as regards the marriage of the girl of sixteen. A meddling woman may