

Hindu Customs in Bengal

BY

BASANTA COOMAR BOSE, M.A. B.L.

ADVOCATE, HIGH COURT, CALCUTTA,

AUTHOR OF CONQUEST OF BENGAL.

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DEDICATED
TO MY WIFE
PART AUTHORESS
OF THIS BOOK.

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HINDU CUSTOMS IN BENGAL

INTRODUCTION

I intend describing the customs that prevailed in Bengal half a century ago, many of which are either becoming obsolete or are not observed to-day. In process of time most of them will become obsolete, and I therefore think it necessary to record them for the benefit of posterity. There are different customs in different parts of India, but as I happen to know very little about the customs prevailing outside Bengal, I shall confine myself principally to Bengal where I have spent the best part of my life. I shall make very few comments upon the customs as they may be unpalatable to orthodox Hindus, but they have no right to complain if mere facts are stated. I have no doubt that future generations will laugh at some of our customs but they will like to know what sort of people their ancestors were. If any body asks what my justification is for writing such a book, my reply is that there is no book on the subject as far as I am aware. There are books on the several castes and sects among the Hindus, their feasts, festivals, and religious ceremonies. These books are concerned with the religious beliefs and ceremonies of the Hindus. I am not concerned with the religious beliefs of any person. In fact I shall try my best to avoid the religious aspect of

Hindu customs and beliefs. I shall try my best to narrate facts as they are but shall have nothing to do with the Hindu religion, though it affects the daily life of every Hindu and influences almost all his daily acts.

The orthodox Hindus may feel insulted at my disclosure of certain facts but the world at large and our descendants have a right to know what sort of people the Bengalis of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century were. If they think concealment is the best policy, then I beg to differ from them. So long our customs were fashioned and beliefs imposed by the Brahmins often to serve their own purposes, but now education has made rapid progress among the upper classes and we have a right to judge which of these customs should be altogether abolished or modified. In fact my long experience tells me that English education has made deep inroads upon our beliefs and the following pages will show to what extent abolition or modification has taken place in our customs.

It might be objected that some of my statements are incorrect, but in my defence I must state that many of these customs obtained among my own kinsmen who are not inferior in social status to any Kayastha in Bengal and my knowledge of this subject is mostly derived from observing the practices of my kinsmen and neighbours. No doubt there are slight variations in different localities and in different families in the same locality, but in the main my narrative will be correct.

To avoid constant reference to the fact that many of our customs are becoming obsolete, the reader is to note that this book was written in the year 1875 when I was 25 years of age and had acquired mature understanding.

I shall divide the subject into separate heads I shall begin with customs connected with pregnancy, next I shall take up the child's birth, his infancy, his adolescence, his marriage and lastly his death.

PREGNANCY AND BIRTH

When signs of pregnancy first become manifest, the young wife is treated with the greatest consideration by the members of her family. The reason is very simple. Naturally everybody expects that the child will be a male one and is most glad when he gets his first son. This applies to all men, Hindus or non-Hindus. The word for a son is *putra*, derived from the root *put* and affix *trai*. *Put* is a hell and *trai* means delivery. So *putra* or son is one who delivers from that hell. So Hindus believe that the first son delivers his parents from hell. There is no knowing whether the child in the womb is a male or female. Everybody hopes for the best. This is the legacy left by Pandora for the human race. As everybody expects the mother to give birth to a male child, the pregnant mother is treated with the greatest consideration. If she gives birth to a male child, the mother's position is assured in the family. In ancient times all females were excluded from inheritance by the male agnates and to-day in all provinces outside Bengal the males living in joint family exclude all females. Though a Bengali mother would succeed to her deceased husband's estate if he dies sonless, still the ancient idea of helplessness of females, is still prevalent in Bengal. Further, the law of Bengal is a recent one, Jimutavahana, its author, being the fifth in descent from one of

the five Brahmins who came to Bengal in 1072 A. D. at the invitation of king Adisura, and it must have taken some time to make the law of inheritance uniform throughout Bengal, as Jimutavahana was a resident not of Bengal but of Assam, its king having made him his chief Pandit and so at first his influence was not great in Bengal.

No ceremony is observed till the fifth month, when the ceremony of *panchamrita* or the five nectars takes place. But during this period she cannot have the services of the barber or the washerman and her nails remain unpared and her clothes unwashed, but nothing prevents her from paring the nails herself or getting them pared by a maid servant or getting her clothes washed by a domestic.

On an auspicious day in the fifth month the barber pares her nails, the washerman takes her clothes to wash, the young wife anoints herself with mustard oil mixed with pounded turmeric and *moong* dal and then she bathes and wears a silk saree. She then takes *panchamrita* or the five nectars consisting of a mixture of (1) curd (2) milk (3) ghee (4) sugar and (5) honey. A priest is in attendance to recite some mantras to sanctify the holy ambrosia which she quaffs off. She must fast till she drinks the *panchamrita*. Afterwards she takes her rice and fish and vegetables in plenty. A boy and five married women, whose first born children are still alive, eat with her out of the same dish. She cannot take rice again at night but if she feels inclined to take any

nourishment she takes only milk and fruits. In some families the first ceremony takes place in the seventh month and is called *saptamrita* or the seven nectars when plaintain and *dab* water (green cocoanut) are added to the above mentioned five nectars. Henceforth she can have the services of the barber and the washerman.

In the eighth month there is another ceremony called *astambarikapuja* when the goddess Astambarika is worshipped by a priest and the young wife wears a new saree and takes the blessing of peace from the priest.

In the ninth month the goddess Mahamaya is worshipped by the priest who cooks all the dishes for the young wife on that occasion. She must be joined in the ceremony by five other married women whose first born children are alive. Then they all sit together to breakfast and eat out of the same dish.

In the same month on an auspicious day she eats her first *shad* which means wish. The first *shad* must be given by the mother-in-law, and in well-to-do families all near relations and even the villagers are feasted. But often only females are invited on this occasion. The young wife bathes and then wears a new silk saree presented by the mother-in-law, and takes a sumptuous breakfast. After the first *shad* is over all the near female relations give her *shad* and she gets a new saree of cotton or silk and presents of sweetmeats and fruits or regular invitations to breakfast on each occasion.

The object of this round of invitations and presents is to keep the young wife in a contented and happy state of mind. Her slightest wish is attended to on these occasions. It is said that Seeta, when she was pregnant, wished to go out on a journey to see the ladies of the house of Valmiki Muni, and her husband Rama took advantage of this *shād* or wish to send her with his brother Lakshmana to the hermitage of the Muni, where Lakshmana left her behind in exile.

One thing is very strictly observed in all orthodox families. No female can undertake a journey in the eighth month of her pregnancy, nor ride a palanquin or carriage.

With the exception of *shad*, the above customs and rules are not generally observed in cases of subsequent pregnancies, and on these occasions she is not treated with the same consideration as on the first occasion and the round of feasts and presents rapidly diminishes.

When delivery is approaching a new hut is erected for the occasion and it must not touch any other hut or building, the reason being that no one can touch the hut or anything touching it after the delivery takes place without being compelled to bathe. This untouchability lasts 5 days. For this reason, in some families there is a permanent lying-in-hut or room detached from any other hut or building.

After the delivery takes place and the child cries, the ladies present join in making a noise with their tongues. This is called *ulu*. It is a sign of welcome to the new-born babe.

When the bridegroom enters the house of the bride on the occasion of his marriage this ceremony is invariably observed and even distinguished persons are received in this way. When the image of Durga is brought to the house for worship, it is also received with *ulu*. If the new-born babe be a son, the *ulu* is cried five times, but in the case of a girl, only thrice. After this the midwife cuts the navel string, and after washing the child's body, asks the mother thrice if the child is hers or the midwife's. The mother says 'mine' on each occasion, and the child is then placed on her lap. Five lamps are lighted after the child is born and they must burn continuously for five days and nights. They must be oil lamps and they all must burn mustard oil. There was no kerosene oil or tallow candles in India in the beginning of the nineteenth century. As the Hindus are opposed to any kind of innovation in social or religious matters, they will stick to the mustard oil and avoid kerosene lamps, tallow candles, gas or electric lamps on ceremonial occasions. Electric light was once introduced in the temple of Jagannath at Puri, but it had to be removed. During the Durga Puja a mustard oil lamp burns continuously for three days and nights in the house where the puja is performed. This burning of lamps is regarded as a necessary feature of all festive and religious occasions ; as fire is perhaps the only surviving vedic god except Vishnu, a minor vedic god.

The mother has now to lie down for the rest of the day and night without taking any food.

Her bedding consists of a mat and a pillow without a cover as every piece of cloth or linen or any other thing that enters a lying-in-hut during the first five days has to be thrown away after use and is never washed for future use. Even the mat and the mattress, if any, have to be thrown away. The mother is not generally provided with a mattress or a curtain for the first five days, though there may be plenty of mosquitoes in the hut. Sometimes but not always a pillow is not allowed and the mother rests her head on a wooden plank. On the first day she gets no nourishment. On the second and third days, she lives upon milk and sago, and it is only on the fourth day that she takes rice cooked in the hut itself. From the fifth day she takes regular diet. A charcoal fire is kindled and placed in an earthen vessel, and this fire is kept up in the hut for a whole month and the young mother is practically roasted as every part of her body, particularly the abdomen, must be rubbed with a piece of cloth which is heated upon the fire. One result of this is that even very fair women, when they come out of the confinement room, have their skin tanned and their complexion very much darkened. This is intended to remove all humours from the body. Allopathic doctors have abolished this roasting of mothers and have introduced trained midwives and nurses into the lying-in-room. One lamp must continue to burn during the whole month.

On the birth of a child it is necessary to inform all near relations of the event and there

is music for 2 or 3 days after the birth. The servant who gives this information is rewarded with *bakshish*, and it is the rule that the father presents the cloth he is wearing when he gets the news. Of course the present is larger in the case of the birth of a boy. Near relations come to see the face of the child and present silver or gold coins to the child.

On the fifth day the mother comes out of the hut, anoints herself with mustard oil mixed with pounded fresh turmeric, *moong dal*, *gila*, and *methi*, and her finger nails are pared by the barber and she afterwards bathes, wears a new cloth, and takes her child in her arms and pounds some paddy placed in the centre and the four corners of a mat and puts some grains of rice out of the paddy into her mouth and eats them. From this day the mother and the hut become touchable.

On the sixth day a cow's head is placed in front of the door of the hut and a lighted lamp is placed upon it. This is a relic of the ancient custom which required the slaughter of a cow for feasting near relations on the birth of a child. Now a day a cow is regarded as sacred and an incarnation of Vishnu, and so cannot be sacrificed, and therefore a dead cow's head is substituted in its place and placed at the door.

Orthodox Hindus will be astonished to hear that formerly Hindus ate beef. But this fact has been amply proved by Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitra in the Chapter on Beef in India in his work "The Indo Aryans" The Vedas mention *gomedha* sacrifice. The Taittiriya Brah-

mana of the Yajur Veda gives the following directions for the selection of the cow in a gomedha jajna ; "a thick legged cow to Indra, a barren cow to Vishnu and Varuna, a black cow to Pushan, a cow which has given birth only once to Vayu, a cow having two colours to Mitra and Varnua, a red cow to Rudra, a white barren cow to Surya, etc."

The Grihya Sutra speaks of *Sulagava* or spitted cow i.e. roast beef. The Asvalyana Sutra gives directions to eat the remains of the offering. The Taittiriya Brahmana gives the following directions to cut up the carcase "Separate its hide so that it may remain entire. Cut open its breast so as to make it appear like an eagle with spread wings. Separate the four arms, divide the arms into spokes, separate successively in order the 26 ribs, dig a trench for burying the excrements, throw away the blood to the Rakshasas &c. O slayer of cattle, O Adhrigu, accomplish your task, accomplish it according to rules."

The Gopatha Brahmana of the Atharva Veda gives in detail the names of the different individuals who are to receive shares of the meat for the parts they take in the ceremony. The following are a few of them "The Prastota is to receive the two jaws along with the tongue, the Pratiharta the neck and the hump, the Udgta the eagle-like wings, the Neshta the right arm, Sadashya the left arm, the householder who ordains the sacrifice the two right feet, his wife the two left feet, etc."

In the Rig Veda also mention is made of

eating of beef and in Mandal 10, Sukta 89, verse 14, we find mention of slaughter houses for cows. Even such a late writer as Manu in Chapter 5 of his Laws which relates to diet, verse 18, declares as lawful food, "all quadrupeds, the camel excepted, which have one row of teeth." All ruminating animals have but one row of teeth, therefore the goat and the cow are both included in this category, and both are therefore lawful food. Medhatithi, the commentator of Manu, is of the same opinion. As regards the horse sacrificed in the Ashamedha it was comforted with the idea that it was going to the gods, Rig Veda 1.162, Verse 21. "Here thou diest not, thou art not injured, by easy paths unto the gods thou goest," but there is no such solace given to the cow sacrificed in the gomedha. Modern pundits say that the cow sacrificed in the gomedha jajna was revived afterwards, in other words there was a resurrection of the cow, but how could that be after its parts had been eaten and digested by participants, its hide removed and its entrails buried? The parallel of Jesus Christ cannot apply. His body was entire; only there were four holes in his arms and legs, the hole in his side being an addition by St. John. So there is great difference between the resurrection of Jesus with his entire body and the resurrection of the cow with its dismembered and digested body. In fact the Vedas do not give any support to this modern explanation of the Pundits, who are generally speaking, not versed in Vedic literature. In fact I doubt if one per

cent of our so-called titled Pundits in Bengal has ever read the Vedas.. They recite the Gayatri every day, and because the Gayatri is a part of the Rig Veda (iii 62. V.10), they satisfy their conscience by thinking that they read the Vedas every day, which is the duty of every Brahmin to do.

In the Vedas we find mention of all sorts of sacrifices. Even the sacrifice of human beings (Purushameda jajna) is mentioned, but as this matter is foreign to my subject, I shall confine myself by simply stating that human sacrifice was enjoined by the Vedas for the attainment of supremacy over all created beings and that the Taittiriya Brahmana of the Black Yajur Veda gives directions as to the kind of human being to be sacrificed before a particular god. It says, "to a divinity of the Brahmana caste a Brahmin should be sacrificed" and so on till it comes to the one hundred and seventy ninth god and ends by saying, "to the goddess of hope for attainable objects a virgin is to be sacrificed." So one hundred and seventy nine different kinds of human beings were sacrificed to as many deities. Now a days in all these jajnas, no one will sacrifice a cow, a horse or a man. This is owing to the rise of Buddhism which prohibited slaughter of animals as there is no knowing whether any ancestor or any other near relation of the performer of the jajna has or has not transmigrated into the body of the animal which was going to be sacrificed. This injunction of Buddha was embodied in the edicts of Asoka which forbade the slaughter of animals,

and Asoka having been the emperor of the whole of Northern India, his edict, which had the force of law, stopped the killing of all animals. Even now no orthodox Brahmin will eat the flesh of any goat which has not been sacrificed before a deity, though formerly even cows were sacrificed for the entertainment of guests who were called *gognas* or cow killers as a cow was killed for their entertainment. Thus the conclusion is clear that the cow's head represents symbolically the cow slaughtered on the sixth day of the child's birth on the occasion of a feast to celebrate the happy event.

On that day an important ceremony takes place. Six kinds of very small unburnt earthen vessels or rather toys are brought from the potter's shop, sixty of each kind. These consist of sixty pots with covers, sixty lamps with stands, sixty kartals and sixty mridangas (both musical instruments), besides sixty *larus* (sweetmeats), sixty plantains and *khai* (fried rice). The sixty pots are filled with rice, dal, dried chillies, etc., and other things. There are also sixty leaves of the *bakula* tree. The Brahmin priest performs a *jajna*, and the leaves after being dipped in cow's ghee are burnt and some *jajna* faggots are burnt upon a layer of sand. After the ceremony is over, young boys and girls who are invited on this occasion scramble for the earthen vessels, and I remember having taken part in some scrambles. The clay is not burnt lest it should injure the youngsters, and the result is that most of the earthen vessels are broken

into pieces. However, the youngsters enjoy the fun very much and the khai, laru and plantains are distributed amongst them. Brahmins tread upon a gamcha (towel) and leave the dust of their feet upon it. The priest takes some curd and the gamcha into the hut and leaves them there. The child's forehead is made to touch the gamcha containing the dust.

Some ladies take their evening meal before nightfall and enter the hut and shut the door which is not generally opened during the night for a whole month. They keep vigil alternately during the whole night and the child is not allowed to lie on its bed. It must spend the whole night on somebody's lap. On that night the god Brahma comes and writes on the child's forehead its whole future life. Nothing can alter his decrees. I do not know what characters Brahma writes and do not know if any characters are visible on the forehead of any Hindu. Of course Brahma never comes to the house of any non-Hindu to write his destiny on his forehead as he is untouchable by the gods. Perhaps the characters are written with invisible ink as no one can find any trace of writing upon any Hindu skull. However, I leave this matter to the learned Brahmins and my orthodox readers to decide as I understand very little of the mysteries of the gods. This Brahma is called Bidhata or Fate. Hindus and many non-Hindus believe in kapal (forehead) or kismet which is the same as fate, the idea being that each man's fortune is written on his forehead and nothing can alter the decrees of fate. The

Mohammedans also believe that every man's fate was written from eternity in the Book of Fate, a book of vast extent in which the future of every man is written, (Koran Ch. VI). Even Jesus speaks of the elect who will be saved, (Mat. XXIV 31. Mk. XIII. 20. 27). If the child is not on the lap of someone then some evil spirits will enter the room and affect the child's destiny before the entry of Brahma.

On the evening of the eighth day another ceremony takes place. It is called *atkalai* or eight kalais. On this occasion all the boys and girls of kinsmen and neighbours are invited and sing a few songs addressed to the child. On the sixth day the kinsmen and near relations are invited to witness the ceremony and there is music and great rejoicing but on the eighth day only children are invited and they get parched kalais and pice and sometimes sweet-meats but no other food is given to them, and they gladly return home wishing well of the new-born babe.

On the twenty first day the mother comes out of the hut, anoints herself with mustard oil; turmeric and *methi*, bathes, wears a new cloth and the floor of the hut is besmeared with cow-dung mixed with water, and she finally leaves the hut on the 30th day, when she bathes, wears a new cloth and enters her own apartment with the child in her arms amidst cries of *ulu* and the beating of musical instruments. All the linen, mat, mattress and other things except bell metal plates used by the mother are thrown.

away. Thus ends the first month of the infant's life.

There is music in the house for two or three days after the birth of the child and also on the sixth, eighth, twenty first, and thirtieth days.

RICE TAKING

When the boy is six months old or the girl seven months old the rice-taking ceremony takes place. If for some reason the child cannot take rice at that age, then it takes rice two or four months after, that is, the boy must be six, eight or ten months old and the girl seven, nine or eleven months old.

The ceremony is very elaborate. At night-fall of the day previous to the day fixed for the rice taking ceremony, all the married ladies and their unmarried girls go out in a procession with a small kalsi (pitcher) accompanied by music and they visit all the houses in the neighbourhood and every housewife pours a little water into the pitcher. The houses of the untouchables are avoided, as their water is polluted and can be of no use in an orthodox household. The ladies then return to the house and afterwards a puja is performed with the water brought by them. Rich people sometimes offer the sacrifice of a goat to the goddess Kali, the greatest destroyer of evil in the whole Hindu pantheon. Next day very early in the morning a little curd is given to the boy and the married ladies and their young daughters again go out in a procession accompanied by music

to fetch water, this time from a tank in the village. A married female relation carries this water home. In some families the parents carry this water to their home. This *kalsi* is placed in one of the principal rooms in the inner apartment, and upon it is placed a twig of a mango tree, a dab (green cocoanut), a bunch of *kathali* plaintains, called *kabari* in East Bengal, and the whole is tied together with a new *gamcha* (towel). An idol is painted on the *kalsi* with vermilion. This ceremony is called *adhibash*. In some families the ladies do not go out on the previous evening to fetch water but all ceremonies and processions take place on the day the rice taking ceremony takes place.

In the morning the ceremony begins. A shraddha is performed and the ancestors are offered pindas and a Brahmin priest officiates. The boy's nails and toes are pared and the washerman bathes him. The boy wears a red silk dhoti and a chaddar and sometimes a silk shirt. He wears on his head a coronet made of pith, mica, and tinsel, beautifully coloured. The rich man's son is decked with gold and silver ornaments and other kinds of jewellery. For the first time in his life he wears gold bangles, gold necklace, gold waist chain, and silver anklet with jingling bells, besides other ornaments, but no Hindu can wear any gold ornament below his or her waist, the only exception being the rulers of states and their queens.

The infant is now made to sit on a *piri* (wooden seat) painted in various colours. A

winnow is placed before him and the following twenty one articles are placed upon it :—

(1) a lighted lamp burning mustard oil, (2) paddy (3) grass (4) sesamum (5) wheat (6) rye (7) jute leaves (8) *moong* (9) *maskalie* (10) myrabollam (11) mustard oil (12) vermilion (13) turmeric (14) *gila* (15) *methi* (16) boar's tusk (17) conch-shell (18) pestle (19) dhuna (incense) (20) white sandal paste and (21) red sandal paste. Then five names are written on a black stone plate by the priest which must agree with the zodiaical sign of the boy's nativity. Then five wicks are soaked in mustard oil and placed in front of each name. That name before which the flame rises highest is adopted for the boy's name, so that when the boy attains manhood his name may spread throughout the country. The priest mentions that name into the father's ear who mentions it into the mother's ear and the boy gets that name. Most boys also get a false or nick name. This is to deceive the spirit, which, when he comes to attack the boy, is misled by the false name and is unable to identify or injure the boy.

After the boy has got his name he is placed on a palanquin and, accompanied by music and near female relations and children, is carried to the several temples in the village and the boy's head is lowered in the presence of the presiding deity of each temple. After his return home he is seated on his mother's lap and and the boy is made to play with cowries and rice or some near female relation does it for him. Then all the ladies present perform a ceremony

called *baran* which is performed by the trembling of the fingers and alternately showing the front and back of the palms. Then the boy's forehead is made to touch the winnow which is raised for the purpose. Then all the relations give him presents beginning with the mother. Then he is taken to the outer apartments and all the male relations and invited guests take him into their lap and give him presents. In rich families land is given to the boy so that he may live in ease and plenty upon its produce.

The boy is then taken inside the house and is seated on the *piri* and if there be any *prosad* of a god, that is, anything which had been offered to him, then a drop or particle of this *prosad* has to be put into the child's mouth; otherwise a particle of rice boiled in milk and sugar has to be given. Then balls of rice are taken near his mouth and thrown into the sacrificial fire. This is done by a very near relation, but the maternal uncle, if present, is preferred to all others. Two stone plates are used, in one of which *prosad* and portions of the dishes are placed and on the other the five names are written.

On this occasion all near relations and a large number of guests are invited. Rich people invite all the people of the village on such auspicious occasions such as rice taking, hair cutting and marriage, etc. No meat is offered to the guests as no animal sacrifice can take place on that day. If thought necessary the sacrifice takes place the previous day. The guests are given luchi, rice, fish, vegetables,

dahi, khir, sandesh, and sweetmeats. Rich people sometimes add polao to the dishes. The abolition of sacrifice on such occasions is evidently due to the influence of Buddhism which at one time was the prevalent religion in Bengal. It has been mixed up with the Hindu religion and the two together have given birth to the Tantric religion, which is the prevalent religion in Bengal.

HAIR CUTTING

When the boy is two years old, his hair is cut after some religious ceremony is performed. This hair cutting ceremony may be performed at home or if the parents had made a vow to cut the hair before a particular goddess then the parents take the child to the shrine and the boy's hair is cut there, after performing a puja of the goddess. In East Bengal the most celebrated shrine where the Hindus flocked to have their children's hair cut for the first time was that of the goddess Kali in village Chachurtala in the Dacca District, now in the bed of the Padma since July 1926, where I was taken to have my hair cut, seventy years ago. This ceremony is not of much importance, but a puja is performed and the Brahmins get something.

CHURAKARAN

The ceremony of *Churakaran* or ear piercing also takes place after the child is two years old. The ceremonies of this occasion are very elaborate and almost the same as those which

are performed on the occasion of a marriage. In fact it is commonly said that there is no difference between the two ceremonies except that a bride is wanting. Water has to be fetched from the neighbours' houses and from a tank by the ladies on two successive days accompanied by music as on the occasion of the rice taking ceremony. The *sradh* of the ancestors must be performed. The boy must wear a red coloured silken dhoti and a silk chaddar and a coronet of pith and the winnow with its twentyone articles must be placed before him. A *jajna* must be performed and the services of the *barbar* and the washerman are necessary. The child is placed on a slightly raised platform of earth upon the four corners of which four plantain trees are planted, and a string, which' passes through perforated *moochhies*, that is, small earthen plates, is hung round the trees. The child sits on a *piri* and it is the duty of the washerman to bathe him, his perquisite among other things being the cloth which the boy was wearing when he bathed. The lower lobes of the ear are pierced with a thorn and then two gold or silver pins are placed in the hole and they must remain there until the wound heals but if they are removed too early the holes will close up. The holes are very necessary as a man or woman without any hole in his or her ear is unable to touch any water which is to be offered to the gods, and this rule is strictly observed in orthodox families. The boy is also to be carried in a palanquin to the idols and in fact all ceremonies in connection

with marriage have to be performed on this occasion and as I shall fully describe the ceremonies in connection with marriage, it is unnecessary to anticipate them here.

HATEKHARY

When the boy is five years old, the ceremony of *hatekhari* takes place and a *jajna* is performed by the family priest, but no *pindas* are necessarily offered to the ancestors. *Hatekhari* literally means chalk in hand. The young boy wears a red silk dhoty and chadder and is seated on a painted wooden plank (*piri*) and a piece of chalk (*khari*) is placed in his right hand by the priest and he is asked to scrawl with the chalk over some characters written by the family priest on a black stone dish. Rich people invite their kinsmen and relatives on these occasions but it is not compulsory to do so.

Both the above ceremonies, that is hair cutting and writing, are prescribed for male children only. Daughters have not to have their hair cut or initiated into the mysteries of writing. It appears that in ancient times Hindu women were not prohibited from acquiring learning. Instances of highly educated ladies writing books or engaging in disputations on philosophical subjects with the most learned sages are to be found in Sanskrit literature. Ghosha, the daughter of Kakshivan, composed Rig Veda X.39. The names of Gargi and Maitrayee are well known to all Sanskrit scholars and their disputations are recorded in books,

and Lilabati has left a treatise on Mathematics. But whatever might have been the rule in ancient times, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Indian women were prevented by social rules from acquiring learning. Education even of males was at a very low ebb. Almost all learning was confined to Brahmins and to Sanskrit literature. The village guru who taught all the young boys knew the three R's only, Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic, and the reading of the adult was confined to half a dozen translations into Bengali, including metrical translations, of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Printing had not made much progress and books were very scarce and very dear. The Brahmins could only teach sanskrit which their women did not like to learn and there was no school for the education of girls. The first girl school was established by Mr. J. E. D. Bethune in Calcutta in the middle of the last century and the first girl school in East Bengal was started in my village Malkhanagar by my father at the suggestion of some young kinsmen in the year 1865. This caused *daladali* (factions) in my village which spread throughout the whole of Vikrampur, the most celebrated and advanced Paragana in East Bengal and this *daladali* lasted three or four years. It was like a battle between the ancients and the moderns. All sorts of social weapons were used and the whole of the Brahmin and the Kayastha communities, the two principal ones, were divided into two hostile camps. There

were five unmarried girls not exceeding 10 or 11 years of age with whom the school was started. Nevertheless, as I have already stated, there was bitter party feeling and the school came to untimely end, but to-day there is a school in my village where nearly 50 unmarried girls attend it, and the parents of every unmarried girl think it necessary and wise to send their girls to the school, as to-day no uneducated child will be selected as a bride by any Brahmin or Kayastha. Such are the changes which time has made in our society. My grand-mother could never write; my mother learnt Bengalee after her marriage, my wife knew it before her marriage, and my daughter-in-law knows English. Such is the progress of education and enlightened ideas in our society caused by the progress of time and English education.

HOLY THREAD

The ceremony of taking the holy thread or *upanayana*, which the three superior castes must perform, takes place when the child is five to nine years old but the utmost limit of performing this ceremony is fifteen years three months. Here again the ceremonies are almost the same as in *Churakaran*. There is a peculiar custom in connection with this ceremony. For twelve days the boy is confined to his room and cannot see the face of any low class man and in the case of Brahmins they cannot see the face of any non-Brahmin and if they do they will lose *brahmatez* or the vigour or light of the god Brahma. Sradh and adhibash have to be per-

formed, the boy has to fast till the ceremony is over, which is the invariable custom in all ceremonies including even the rice taking ceremony, although the child is six to ten months old. In *churakaran* and *upanayan* ceremonies there must be, as already stated, adhibash, sradh, visit to the idols, giving of a feast to friends and relations, presents to the boy from the mother's relations, then from paternal relations and afterwards friends.

Formerly only the Brahmins had the sacred thread in Bengal. As the five Kayastha immigrants from Kanouj intermarried with the aboriginal Kayasthas of Bengal who were mostly Buddhists, the Brahmins thought that they were degraded and as the aboriginal Buddhist Kayasthas had no sacred thread, the descendants of the five newcomers also gave up their sacred thread and therefore no Kayasthas wore the sacred thread in Bengal. In the year 1901 or soon after an agitation began among the Kayasthas of Bengal and they claimed to be Kshatryas whom they divided into two classes, the sword bearers and the pen bearers, the duty of the former being to fight and of the latter to write, and they asserted that the real administration of the country in Hindu times was entirely in the hands of the pen bearers. It appears that the Kayasthas of Northern India called Lalas wear the sacred thread and in imitation of them the Kayasthas of Bengal began to wear the sacred thread and this movement is still going on.

Among the Vaidyas of West Bengal some of them formerly wore the sacred thread but Vaidyas of East Bengal wore no sacred thread. But now almost all the Vaidyas of West Bengal wear it and many of the Vaidyas of East Bengal have commenced to wear it. Now the Vaidyas claim to be pure Brahmins. The origin of Vaidyas in Bengal is very obscure. Formerly they said that they were the descendants of a Brahmin by a Vaisya woman. Whether they were married or not was left uncertain. Now, as I have already stated, they claim to be pure lineal descendants of Brahmins and have begun to call themselves Vaidya Brahmins which means physician Brahmins, the word Vaidya meaning a physician. Speaking for myself I do not know anything about the real origin of the Vaidyas and I doubt very much whether anybody really knows anything about this matter. A very high authority informed me that Vaidyas were originally Kayasthas who took to the profession of medicine and thus formed themselves into a separate community. This is not at all strange. In Vedic times there was no division of castes. The Purusha Sukta (Rig Veda X.90.) contains the only passage in the Rig Veda (V.12) about the origin of caste, an account of the separate creations of the four castes. It is a palpable forgery, as in verse 12 it is stated that the Brahmin was the mouth of the Purusha and the Sudra his feet, and again in the next two verses it is stated Indra and Agni were produced from his mouth (V.13) and the earth was produced from his

feet (V.14). Therefore verse 12 is an interpolation and European Sanscritists are of opinion that the language of verse 12 is written in modern and not Vedic Sanskrit. Every householder in Vedic times could perform a jajna but owing to the principle of the division of labour some people became versed in the Vedas and got the mantras by heart and their services were required to perform jajna and they gradually became a separate caste. Similarly these Vaidyas have become a separate caste. Their pretensions are very high. They claim Raja Ballal Sen of Bengal to be a Vaidya, but they forget that Raja Adisur, the grandfather and immediate predecessor of Ballal Sen, invited only Brahmins and Kayasthas from Kanouj and no Vaidya was invited and there is no tradition as to how they came to be settled in Bengal which in Vedic times was beyond the pale of civilisation. They rely upon the fact that Ballal was a Sen and among Vaidyas there are Sens, but there are Sens also among inferior classes of Kayasthas, gold merchants (an untouchable class) and betel leaf growers and others. So this identity of patronymic does not assist us much in solving this question. Ballal Sen introduced Kulinism only among the five Brahmins and five Kayasthas who came from Kanouj but not among the Vaidyas. This shows that he had no regard for the Vaidyas who claim him as one of them. Further Adisur had the patronymic of Sur and Surs are Kayasthas and no Vaidya bears such a patronymic.

Some ancient copper plates have been discovered and manuscripts found which show that Ballal belonged to the Kshatriya caste and the Kayasthas claim to be Kshatriyas but no Vaidya will ever claim to be a Kshatriya. This is a matter which is involved in very great obscurity and I leave it to the decision of my learned readers.

This holy thread movement has taken hold of the country and even Namasudras, the lowest of the untouchable castes, have in many places in Bengal adopted the sacred thread. This movement has been so rapid that the time is not far distant when they will all adopt it and they will be followed by all other castes in Bengal, so that all Bengalis will in time wear the sacred thread. The Namasudras have gone so far as to change their patronymics. They were formerly called Mandals, but after the adoption of the sacred thread they assumed the patronymics of the Brahmins and now call themselves Banerjees, Chatterjees, etc. This upward movement is advancing in such rapid strides that the Rishis or tanners of skins and hides call themselves the descendants of the Vedic Rishis and they will adopt the sacred thread without any loss of time.

MARRIAGE

I shall have to deal with this subject a little elaborately. All other ceremonies are one sided, but here there are two parties and various considerations arise before a marriage takes place. In Bengal, as is well known, the two

principal upper castes are the Brahmins and Kayasthas. The Brahmins again are subdivided into three main subdivisions, the Rarhis, the Vaidics and the Varendras. The Vaidics again are divided into two branches, the Western and the Southern. There can be no intermarriage between any two of these subdivisions. No doubt lately there have been such intermarriages but the parties thereto belong mostly to the reformed Hindu religion and are not followers of the orthodox Hindu religion. The origin of the Varendra is somewhat obscure and there are different stories regarding their advent to Bengal. They are called Varendra because they were originally settled in Varendra in Northern Bengal, that is north of the Ganges or Padma and west of Brahmaputra. The Varendras allege that they belong to the original stock of the Rarhis but the latter do not acknowledge this kinship. The Southern Vaidics came from Southern India, the Western Vaidics came from Western India and are numerically superior to the Southern Vaidics. As regards the Rarhis, tradition says that king Adisur, the first orthodox Hindu ruler of Bengal, wished to perform a jajna but found no Brahmin priest fit to officiate in it as Bengal had previously been a Buddhist country under the Pal dynasty. So he wrote to the king of Kanouj to send some learned Brahmin priests to perform the ceremony. Five Brahmins were sent and they were accompanied by five Kayasthas. Mr. Vincent Smith in his History of India during the Hindu period does not admit Adisur to be a king of Bengal. But

Bengali social rules are based upon his invitation to the Brahmins and Kayasthas.

After the jajna was over the king requested them to settle in this country and gave them grants of villages. They were originally settled in Rarh, the country west of the Ganges and therefore they are called Rarhi Brahmins and Dakshin Rarhi Kayasthas but some of the Kayasthas settled in Bengal which originally meant the whole country lying to the east of the old Ganges now called Bhagirathi and Hoogly, west of the old Brahmaputra, south of the Varendra country and to the north of the Bay of Bengal. These Kayasthas are called Bangaja Kayasthas. The Dakshin Rarhi Kayasthas intermarry among themselves but no intermarriage can take place between the Dakshin Rarhi Kayasthas and Bangaja Kayasthas. I am not aware of any marriage, except one, between Dakshin Rarhi and Bangaja Kayasthas having taken place in the nineteenth century, but Kayasthas are becoming more and more liberal and several such marriages have recently taken place.

After Adisur's death his successor king Ballal Sen, the most famous among the modern kings of Bengal and the father of Lakshana Sen, the last king of Bengal, divided the Rarhi Brahmins into two classes, Kulins and non-Kulins. The non-Kulins were again divided into several classes, such as Suritri and Bangshaja. The Kulins represent the highest class among Rarhi Brahmins and they cannot marry any Bangshaja girl. If they do so, they become Bangshaja.

Their first wife must be a Suritri and their second and subsequent wives are Kulins, and when I was young I knew the son of a Kulin Brahmin who had more than hundred wives, as marriage was a profession with them, but during the last fifty years such plural marriages have not taken place, but most Kulin Brahmins are practically obliged to marry a Suritri and afterwards a Kulin girl. A Suritri girl can be given in marriage to a Kulin or a Suritri but a Kulin girl can be given only to a Kulin. The Bangshaja sub-division is swelled every day by Kulins who have intermarried with them, as intermarriage with them degrades a Kulin into a Bangshaja. The Kulins regard the Bangshajas as very inferior in rank, and on ceremonial occasions, particularly in marriages, the Kulins will not interdine with them, and are therefore rarely invited on occasions of marriage of Bangshajas who are practically social outcastes of Kulin Brahmins. The rich and ambitious Bangshajas are very desirous of giving their daughters in marriage to Kulin Brahmins and I know instances in which very heavy *ponas* (dowries) were given to the bridegroom's parents for inducing them to give their sons in marriage with the daughters of Bangshajas. In one instance in this century the *pona* of Rs. 35,000 was given to the bridegroom's father by the richest Bangshaja zeminder in the district of Barisal. The Bangshajas usually marry amongst themselves unless, as just stated, a Bangshaja thinks of paying a heavy bonus for a Kulin bridegroom. The

Kulins again are divided into several *melas*. Some *melas* are so low in the estimation of Brahmins, such as Kishorekuni, that if a man of a superior *mela* marries a Kishorekuni girl he at once becomes a Kishorekuni which is the lowest of *melas*. Ballal Sen alone is responsible for the division of Rarhi Brahmins into abovementioned three classes. Subsequently one Debibar Ghatak framed very strict rules regarding the marriage of Brahmins which are still followed. He was a great Ghatak or family genealogist. On the occasion of the marriage of Kulin Brahmins a ghatak or family genealogist, on each side, must be present and if any dispute arises about the social position of the parties to the marriage, the two family ghataks present must settle it.

* The Bangshajas find it very difficult to get brides and they have to pay a heavy *pona* or bonus to the father of the bride which usually is Rs. 100 per year of the bride's age, so that if the girl be twelve years old her price is Rs. 1200. Cheap brides also can be had. People take a boatload of Bangshaja girls. They may not be Brahmin girls at all but they are passed off as such and Bangshaja bridegrooms buy these girls from out of the boatload. These girls can be had at cheaper prices and therefore poor people buy these girls. Instances have been known when Mahomedan girls sold out of the boatload have been passed off as Bangshaja girls. One such girl after her marriage ordered the servant to bring a *cherag*, which is a Persian word for lamp, a word always used by the

Mahomedans but never by the Hindus. On cross-examination she was discovered to be a Mahomedan, but she was not driven away by her husband and she remained in the family, as such a procedure would have entailed loss of caste, and the matter was hushed up.

The Kulin Brahmins who lose their social status by marrying Bangshaja girls are called Bhangas or broken. After 4 or 5 generations they lose their patronymic in East Bengal where there are more Kulin Brahmins than in West Bengal. The Banerjees, Mukherjees and Chatterjees are then called Barorys, Mukhutys and Chathatys.

Ballal Sen had nothing to do with the Vaidics and they had no Debibar Ghatak among them, so their rules of marriage are not complicated. They only follow the ordinary rules of Hindu law regarding consanguinity and affinity like all other Hindus but they have a peculiar custom amongst them. Their children marry at a very early age and it often happens that two pregnant Vaidic women settle the marriage of the babes in their wombs provided they be of different sexes and so it sometimes happens that the wife is a few months older than the husband, a thing unheard of among any other class of Brahmins or non-Brahmins in Bengal. In upper India no such rule regarding seniority is observed amongst the superior or inferior class of Brahmins or non-Brahmins, and I know instances amongst Brahmins and Kshatriyas in Behar where the wife was senior in age to the husband.

Ballal Sen divided the Kayasthas into Kulins and non-Kulins and the latter are called *Moulicks* in West Bengal and *Bangals* in East Bengal, the word *Bangal* literally meaning a native of Bengal. The five Kayasthas who accompanied the five Brahmin priests to Bengal were made kulins, but one of them Purushottam Dutt was degraded from his kulinism for some reason or other. In West Bengal he is ranked among the Moulicks but in East Bengal he has a much higher position, though he is not a Kulin and as he belonged to the Madogollya gotra, he is called Madgollya in East Bengal and is socially higher than a *Bangal* but lower than Kulins in East Bengal. Similarly the Mitras are Kulins in West Bengal but Mouliks in East Bengal and Guhas are Mouliks in West Bengal but Kulins in East Bengal. Boses and Ghoses are all Kulins in West Bengal, but some of them have become degraded into Mouliks in East Bengal and the rest are Kulins.

Besides the descendants of the five emigrants, there are eight superior Kayasthas in West Bengal and seventy two other subdivisions of inferior Kayasthas. In East Bengal besides three Kulin and semi-Kulin families of Ghose, Bose and Guha and the Madgollyas, the rest are treated as of almost equal rank, but the descendants of Kulins, degraded from Kulinism, are ranked higher.

Besides the Dakhin Rarhis and Bangajas, there are also two other classes of Kayasthas, the Uttar Rarhi and the Varendra. Uttarrar is the country to the north of the Hoogly and

Burdwan districts and Varendra, as already stated, is to the north of the Padma, and west of the Brhmaputra river. The origin of these Kayasthas is obscure. The Varendra Kayasthas were probably the original inhabitants of Bengal. Uttar Rarhis say that they are new settlers.

These Kayasthas have no Ballaly system among them but they recognise superiority and inferiority amongst themselves. There is nothing extraordinary in this. Even among Chandals, one of the lowest castes in Bengal, there are higher and lower sub-divisions. In fact, this rule obtains among Christians and Mahomedans also and perhaps throughout the world. Every English peer tries his best to marry into the family of another peer, every Mahomedan of low rank tries to give his daughter in marriage to a Sayed and thus ennobles himself. So it might be said that in imitation of the Kayasthas of Eastern and Western Bengal, the other Kayasthas have introduced amongst themselves a modified system of Kulinism, but Ballal never introduced this system among them and it is difficult to ascertain how this modified system of Kulinism originated among them.

Now it is necessary to state the rules and customs regarding marriage amongst these four sub-divisions of Kayasthas. Let me premise by saying that intermarriage between these four sub-divisions never took place before 1897, but the institution of a Society called the Kayastha Sabha in the year 1901 has much advanced the views of the Kayasthas and they

have come to regard themselves as children of a common ancestor called Chitrugupta who is regarded by the Hindus as a god presiding over the deaths of all mankind. In fact Brahma, the Creator, may be called the Registrar-General of Births and Chitrugupta may be called the Registrar-General of Deaths. There is a movement throughout India to assimilate all Kayasthas into one common fold and as Kayasthas are the most liberal among all Hindus, just the reverse of Brahmins, it is hoped that all the Kayasthas of India will soon intermarry amongst themselves. Almost every year Kayasthas from all parts of India assemble in a general meeting in some big city in India and discuss this and other social customs and pass resolutions for amalgamation. The last meeting was held in Jaunpur in the year 1925, in which a resolution was unanimously passed to the effect that it is desirable that the Kayasthas of Bengal who are descendants of Chitrugupta, and the Sribastabya, Ambastha, Shaksen, Mathur, and other classes of Kayasthas do intermarry and interdine. Even to-day Kayasthas belonging to the several sub-divisions of Bengal and the Kayasthas of other provinces do often interdine and in all annual sessions of the All-India Kayastha Association or of the Provincial Associations Kayasthas interdine but I have rarely heard of Brahmins of different sub-divisions interdining. In fact the orthodox Brahmins do not interdine with persons belonging to other sub-divisions. I may be permitted to foretell that the Kayasthas of India, who are

as much advanced in intelligence and education as the Brahmins themselves, but less illiberal than they, will at one time be the social leaders of India. They will be the first to introduce intermarriage amongst themselves and by degrees abolish all distinctions of caste which have barred the social progress of India, and the Brahmins will come last, their education and self-interest standing in the way of their making much progress in the levelling of the Indian races. Many intermarriages have taken place since the commencement of this century between the Dakhin Rarhis and the Bangaja Kayasthas, as there is no doubt that both these people belong to the same stock having descended from common ancestors. Of the Kulins amongst them, all trace their descent from the five Kayasthas who accompanied the five Brahmins who came from Kanouj to officiate at Adisur's *jajna* in the year 994 Shak, corresponding to 1072 A. D., according to Golap Chandra Sircar Shastri.

Regarding marriage customs, I shall begin with the Dakhin Rarhis. The Boses, Ghoses, and Mitras are the only Kulins among them. The Guhas and Duttas, though descended from two of the five companions of the Brahmins brought down to Adisur's court, are not recognised as kulins. The eldest son of the Kulin must marry for the first time a Kulin girl. There is a peculiar custom among Kulin Kayasthas, both of East and West Bengal. They count their pedigree from the common ancestor which is called *pariyya* and the boys and the girls

must belong to the same parjya. The younger sons of West Bengal Kulins are at liberty to marry either a Kulin of the same pedigree or a Moulik girl. In rich Moulik families and in all Moulik families near about Calcutta there is no such thing as intermarriage between two Mouliks. The standing generations among Kulins in West Bengal are twenty six and twenty seven. Formerly Kulin boys only used to get large dowries or *pona* but now the tables have been turned upon the Kulins who have now to pay large dowries to Moulik boys. I have known instances where a Moulik boy got Rs. 10,000. in cash from a Kulin father-in-law as dowry, besides other gifts on the occasion of his marriage. Formerly Kulinism was a very valuable asset but now, owing to the progress of the democratic spirit, Kulinism has become an empty name and now everything depends upon the boy's education and his worldly prospects and blueness of blood does not now count much.

Among East Bengal Kulins there is no fixed rule that the eldest son must marry a Kulin girl but among them the principal rule regarding marriage is that there must be giving of a Kulin girl to a Kulin boy and taking of a Kulin girl into a Kulin family within three generations, otherwise the Kulin is socially degraded and ceases to be a Kulin. In East Bengal there are many people who are descended from the original stock of Kulins but have become Mouliks, but in West Bengal such a thing rarely happens as the only condition imposed upon them is that the eldest son must

marry a Kulin. Another rule prevails among Kulins of East Bengal though not in West Bengal. In East Bengal certain tracts of territory are excluded from the residence of Kulins and if any Kulin settles in such a tract he ceases to be a Kulin, but there is no such rule among Kulins of West Bengal ; they can settle anywhere they like in Bengal. The promulgation of this rule in East Bengal is generally attributed to Raja Paramananda Bose of Bakla in the district of Barisal. He was the head of the Kulins in East Bengal. It is said that on the death of his maternal grand-father he became the Raja of Bakla and put to the sword all his maternal relations and banished his younger brother who settled in the western portion of the Dacca District outside Vikrampur, and he passed an edict that if any Kulin resides in any portion of Dacca District outside Vikrampur he ceases to be a Kulin.

In East Bengal there is no rule prohibiting intermarriage between two Mouliks who often intermarry amongst themselves and do not follow the rule prevailing in West Bengal prohibiting intermarriage between Mouliks. As a Kulin boy demands heavy dowry on account of his being both a boy and a Kulin, the poor Mouliks of West Bengal who are forced to give their daughters in marriage to Kulins have to incur large debts on the occasion of the marriage of their girls, though if they have boys they have a chance of recouping themselves by exacting heavy dowries from Kulins, when their sons will marry. But if he has no son but many daughters

and is poor, he is a ruined man. It is not so in East Bengal where Mouliks rarely demand dowry and in the last century such a demand by Mouliks, particularly from Kulins, was unheard of. Formerly it was the invariable custom for a Moulik to pay dowry, big or small, if he intermarried into a Kulin family. Kulin boys and girls had to be paid for by Mouliks and even now the fathers of Kulin girls sometimes get large dowries. In West Bengal Kulin girls get no dowry but in East Bengal the father of Kulin boys and girls get dowries but the rate of dowry of a Kulin girl in East Bengal has become much lower than it was a hundred years ago. I shall give an example of such a dowry. My grandfather's brother's daughter was given in marriage about the beginning of the last century to a Moulik and my paternal grand uncle got a very large dowry which was not counted but measured in a *bouta*. A *bouta* is a cane basket which can hold sixteen seers of paddy and a heapful of rupees must have amounted to between 15 and 20 thousand. The bride-groom was very rich and it was the first marriage of his family into our family, regarded as one of the highest Kulin families in East Bengal. This was an extreme case. The usual dowry for a Kulin girl is between two and three thousand rupees or even less in East Bengal.

There are certain differences in the customs of East and West Bengal. In West Bengal the bridegroom's party go to the bride's house and some of them spend the night of the marriage there, and are feasted and return home the next

day with the bride, but it is not so in East Bengal. There the bridegroom's party remains in the bride's house for three days and nights and then return home with or without the married pair. In West Bengal the marriage feast takes place on the night of the marriage, but it is not so in East Bengal. There no marriage feast takes place at night, the bridegroom's party receiving *shidha* or raw articles of food which their Brahmins cook for them. On the next day a regular feast takes place with meat, fish, and other eatables. In West Bengal, particularly in the towns, all classes dine together but in villages such promiscuity is not permitted. In East Bengal Kulins do not allow any Moulik to partake of the marriage feast sitting in the same room with them. The Mouliks must sit in a separate room. This rule is strictly observed. In this marriage feast the bridegroom's party and the bride's party sit to breakfast in the same room if they are Kulins. There is a peculiar custom in East Bengal which is still in vogue. A Moulik bridegroom is not permitted to go to the house of a Kulin bride to marry her. The Kulin bride goes to the Moulik bridegroom's village with her near relations and a residence is assigned to the bride's party. Just before the marriage the bridegroom gets on a palanquin and accompanied by near relations and musicians goes to the bride's residence and the bride gets upon another palanquin and follows the bridegroom to the latter's house where the marriage is performed but this custom is gradually being abolished and the marriage of Moulik bride-

grooms now often takes place in the Kulin bride's house but as the kinsmen of the Kulin bride will not join in the marriage feast with the Moulik bridegroom and his kinsmen, such marriages take place in towns where a house is hired for the purpose. In West Bengal it is considered derogatory for the bride to come and get married in the bridegroom's village or house but in East Bengal it is not at all considered derogatory, not even among Brahmins. This custom of the bride going to the bridegroom's village to get married is laughed at by the people of West Bengal. But this is not a rare thing in the civilised world. Where did George IV and Edward VII of England marry? Did they travel to the Continent to marry? Rather the brides came over to England for the marriage.

There is a modified Kulinism among Uttar Rarhi and Varendra Kayasthas though its origin, as already stated, is obscure. Most probably they have introduced it among themselves in imitation of the Dakhim Rarhi and the Bangaja Kayasthas. They also observe the rules and customs prevalent in East and West Bengal.

Kulinism which was introduced by Raja Ballal Sen among the five Brahmins and the five Kayasthas brought down by Adisur from Kanouj has permeated all ranks of society in Bengal. I have known some sweepers claiming superiority in social position over other sweepers. This is natural and I believe that Kulinism in some form or other prevails in every rank of society throughout the world, with this difference

that Brahmins permanently lose their *kul* by marrying a girl of an inferior rank and I believe that this custom of Brahmins is peculiar only to them. In other castes a man may be temporarily socially degraded by marrying a girl of a very low caste but within the subdivision of his own caste, but if he afterwards marries into a high family he recovers his position. But it is not so among Kulin Brahmins. Once they lose their *kul* they can never recover it.

As regards the ceremony of marriage it is almost the same as that of Churakaran. A priest performs some ceremonies in the bridegroom's house on the previous day and white sandal paste is rubbed over the bridegroom's forehead. The remnant of the sandal paste is sent to the bride's house with a silken or cotton *sari* and some sweetmeats. The bride's priest performs a similar ceremony with that sandal paste over the bride's forehead. In the evening the ladies of the house fetch water from neighbouring houses and the goddess Kali, the protectress from evil, is worshipped with that water. Next day, at early dawn, the bride and the bridegroom take some curd and some ceremonies are performed by the ladies of both the houses accompanied by the sound of conch shell and music. Afterwards *sradh* is performed by some kinsman. In the evening one or more relations of the bride go to the bridegroom's house or lodging as the case may be and bring down the bridegroom and his party to the bride's house. The procession must be accompanied by music and lights. In towns rich people spend lots of

money in this procession and display fancy *choukies* some of which are made of tinsel. When the procession approaches the bride's house, all these *choukies* are looted by the spectators. In East Bengal all expenses in connection with the journey, food and conveyance of the bridegroom have to be paid by the bride's father if the parties are both Kulins or Mouliks but it is otherwise in West Bengal where each party pays his own expenses. When the bridegroom's party arrives at the bride's house the first carriage must contain the bridegroom, and all the other guests must follow him in their carriage or on foot. The barber takes the bridegroom in his arms and takes him inside the house where he is seated on a velvet sheet with velvet bolsters on his three sides. The bridegroom must be very well dressed and is generally accompanied by a small near relation but in Calcutta two Jewish girls accompany him and fan him. The bridegroom is heavily garlanded and everyone of his party must be garlanded. The bridegroom's party sits round him. But there is a peculiar custom among Kulins in East Bengal. My kinsmen claim precedence and insist on sitting on a velvet sheet (*masland*) near the bridegroom and will not allow anybody else to sit there. Rival Kulins object to this, and once there was a regular fight on the occasion of the marriage of the sister of the late Mr. Mon Mohon Ghose, the well-known Barrister of the Calcutta High Court. Since then, where my kinsmen go, no seat is provided for anybody and they

and all other Kulins remain standing when the marriage ceremony takes place. This is really a barbarous custom but no one will yield and therefore this custom will remain in force for many years. If anybody is inclined to sit, he must go to some other room and take a seat, as, for the above reason, no one gets a seat near the place where the marriage is performed. But in places where my kinsmen are not invited, seats are offered to Kulins who occupy the place of honour and the Mouliks sit behind them.

Before the commencement of the marriage the bridegroom is taken into the inner apartment and is there made to sit on a mat or carpet with the bride in front and the ladies round them, who perform the *baran* ceremony and the bridegroom goes back to the place of marriage.

When the marriage ceremony begins, all the relations of both the parties are asked to come to the place where the marriage takes place. In some families the marriage must take place under the sky and in some families in a covered place or a room. The priests recite the necessary formulæ which the father of the bride or his representative has to repeat, then the bridegroom is asked to stand and the bride goes round him seven times keeping him to the right. In some families a male relation takes her in his arms and goes round the bridegroom. In some families in East Bengal the bridegroom and the bride are both raised on two *piris* (wooden seats) which are held aloft by people called *nafars*

or hereditary slaves who live on rent-free land and have rent free land to maintain them. This was our family custom also, but now my kinsmen hold the *pīri* and have dispensed with the services of the *naḥars*. These *naḥars* are a privileged class. If they have no food at home they begin service in their master's house and take their food there. They always accompany the marriage party of their master, and get as their perquisite all that is left after eating of the *sidha* given to the bridegroom's party. When the bridegroom gets his breakfast on the day after the marriage the *naḥar* gets all the plates and cups in which rice and the dishes are served. The bride and the bridegroom are now confronted. The bride's veil is removed and the pair is asked to look at each other. The bride is brought to the place of marriage just before she moves round the bridegroom. After they have looked at each other a yellow thread is tied round the right wrist of each of them, and the bride's father is made to repeat the formula of giving away the bride and the bridegroom repeats the formula of acceptance coupled with a promise to guard her honour and to maintain her. Then there is a ceremony called *saptapady*, the wife taking seven steps, her feet being urged by the bridegroom's gentle kick from behind. After this the bridegroom receives a *dakshina* of gold. Instances have been known where a Kulin bridegroom has insisted on receiving a large amount of *dakshina* as no marriage is complete without it. Fortunately such instances are rare. After

the receipt of *dakshina* the marriage is over and the parties are considered as lawfully wedded. After this the bridegroom is taken to the female apartment and there he is received by the ladies of the bride's party. The pair sit on a mat or a carpet placed upon the floor and they play with the ladies with rice and cowries as emblematic of wealth.

The poor bride and bride-groom have almost to fast the whole day. Before marriage they can take only milk and *dahi* and no solid food. After the marriage they get some sweetmeats to eat but no regular food, but every body in the house and all guests are sumptuously fed. The mother of the bride fasts the whole day, but the mother of the bridegroom, if not a widow, takes seven regular meals in the course of the day. This custom arose out of a curious legend. It is said that Kartic, the god of war, was on his journey to marry when he suddenly remembered to have left something behind, and he returned home and found that his mother, the goddess Durga, was taking a sumptuous feast and he asked the reason. She replied that she was taking this sumptuous breakfast because after his marriage it might be that his wife would not give her proper nourishment and it was therefore that she was eating to her heart's content. This reply struck Kartic as extraordinary and he resolved not to marry lest his wife should starve his mother. The result is that Kartic is still a bachelor and all mothers of bridegrooms, if not widows, enjoy seven meals on the day of the marriage whereas the mother

of the bride has to fast the whole day until the marriage is over.

Hindu religion or shastras do not insist that the marriage should take place at night but such has been the custom all along. Moreover the marriage cannot take place at any hour of the night but must be performed in an auspicious moment. The almanacs fix the time when the marriage is to begin and when it is to end, and after the marriage is over a Brahmin priest performs a *yajna* which is not always compulsory in the case of some Dakhin Rarhi Kayastha families but is always compulsory in the case of all superior castes, Brahmins or other Kayasthas.

After the happy pair has played with rice and cowries they get their supper and are led to the nuptial bed. In East Bengal they are allowed to spend the night alone without any disturbance, but in West Bengal the room in which the nuptial couch is laid is filled with ladies who chaff away the whole night with the bridegroom, who is not permitted to sleep but who is rather exposed to all sorts of tricks by the ladies present at the marriage,—a most barbarous custom.

On the day after the marriage there is another ceremony which is called *bashibibaha* or stale marriage and the Brahmins perform the worship of the sun and the happy pair after bathing go round the four plantain trees, at the four corners of a square, which had been planted on the previous day and there is a small hole inside the square called a miniature tank,

in which some water is poured and the happy pair throw their wedding rings into the water which they pretend to try to find out of the muddy water. After this ceremony is over there is no other ceremony to be performed, except on the tenth day on which occasion the pair is taken inside the above square, and the water which had been brought from the tank on the first day and preserved in a jar with a figure of an idol in vermilion is poured upon their bodies and five myrabolams, grass and paddy which had been presented to the bridegroom at the time of the marriage with a golden ring and which had been tied in a corner of his dhuti are thrown away.

After the *bashibibaha* is over the married couple get some refreshment, as until this marriage is over they are not permitted to take any food, though the bride and the bridegroom had practically fasted on the day of the marriage. On the tenth day also until the ceremony is over they cannot take any food. In fact on every ceremonial occasion the parties concerned have to fast until the ceremony is over. Even the priest who officiates at any ceremony has to fast. During the three days of Durga puja, the priests cannot take any cooked food at all and take slight nourishment after the day's work is over, and it is only on the night of the third day when all the rites in connection with the puja are over that they can cook and eat their rice. Christians have much faith in the rite of baptism, but Hindus must baptise every day before performing any religious ceremony

and must also fast until the religious ceremony is over. Roman Catholic priests perhaps also observe this custom. I was once travelling with a Roman Catholic priest who told me that he had taken no dinner. I offered him some biscuits which I had with me, he looked at his watch and he said that it was past midnight, therefore he could not take any food until he had said his prayers in the morning. I believe this baptism and this fasting have been introduced into Christianity in imitation of the Hindus, with this difference that Christians think that one baptism in one's life-time is enough, whereas Hindus are of opinion that they must baptise every time they perform any religious ceremony. That baptism and fasting are very important ceremonies is proved by the fact that Jesus fasted forty days and nights after his baptism, IV Mat. 2.

The Mahomedan religion also enjoins fasting for purification. In fact all Mahomedans are directed by the Koran to fast every day during the month of Ramadan, (Ch. II. V. 181.) At night they can take refreshment, but when one can clearly distinguish a white thread from a black thread by the day-break they begin the fast until night and their fast is so strict that they cannot even swallow their spittle or even bathe, and Algazali reckoned fasting one-fourth part of the faith. So the institution of fasting is not peculiar among Hindus though it seems somewhat strange that on the day of marriage, the happiest event in one's life, he should have to live upon curd and milk only.

On the day of marriage a big feast with *luchis*, fish and all sorts of eatables is given to the bride-groom's party, and to all kinsmen and relations, male and female. This is the rule in Calcutta and in some towns, but in villages the marriage feast is given at noon of the day after the marriage, as no social feast can take place at night. On this day meat and pilau are also served, as goats may be slaughtered on this day but not on the previous day.

On this occasion frequent disputes arise regarding payment of caste money. If a Kulin gives his son or daughter in marriage with a Moulik, his kinsmen are entitled to have *bedai* and in all cases each house gets some cash payment which varies from rupees two to five, in our family, besides mustard oil, betal leaves, *dahi* and fish. Sometimes kinsmen do not give these things or pay any cash money but promise to pay them after they have got money from the Moulik. They sometimes fail to keep their promise and the kinsmen insist on realising all previous dues before joining in the feast. I have known an instance in our family when the quarrel lasted from noon to midnight. As the parties could come to no agreement there was no feast and most of the eatables had to be thrown away. This rule is still in force at least among my kinsmen, who are regarded as the highest Kulins in East Bengal.

On this occasion, in my younger days, I used to see every invited kinsman sending his servants with the necessary *piris*, *thalis*, cups, and glasses to the host's house and they arranged

the seats for their masters, the host supplying only salt, lemon and water and no plates of any kind. The first thing to be served was pilau accompanied with meat curry. After every body had filled himself with these two dishes, a little rice was served, then *moong dal*, fried fish and an acid. After these were consumed, *dahi*, *khir*, and *paramanya* or rice cooked in milk and sugar were served. There were no sweetmeats such as *shandesh*, *rashgolla*, *pan-tooa*, *amriti* in those days. The females were served with other dishes in addition, as fish curries, etc. The villagers also got fish and vegetable curries and *dal* but very little pilau or meat. Such was the custom in our family when I was young. But now the host provides everything and plantain leaves have been substituted for *thalis* (bell metal plates). The pilau which is served is prepared with fresh pure cow's ghee, but sometimes turmeric is mixed with boiled rice and a little ghee is added and this pilau is for the guests, the bridegroom's pilau being prepared in the usual way with good ghee.

On the occasions of these feasts Kulins and Mouliks do not eat together, the Mouliks being accommodated in a separate room. In fact there can be no interdining between Kulins and Mouliks during the ten days that the marriage festival lasts and I know of Kulins who strictly observe this rule even to-day. Some of my kinsmen ate rice in the house of a Moulik on the occasion of the marriage of a Moulik, who married a girl of our family, and each of my

kinsmen who ate got Rs. 500-0-0 for simply eating rice in his house. My brother and first cousin married the daughters of the richest Kayastha in East Bengal who did not dare ask us to eat rice in his house. Let it be understood once for all that every thing turns upon the eating of rice ; *luchies* or any other preparation of wheat can be eaten almost every where, even though cooked by a *modak* (sweetmeat-seller). But no rice can be taken if cooked by a man of an inferior caste or by a servant. This is an universal rule in Bengal among the orthodox people.

On the second day, after the *bashibibaha* is over, all the ladies of the house and the invited female guests give presents of cloth, cash or jewellery to the bride and bridegroom.

On the third day of the marriage there is no ceremony. The bridegroom's party and kinsmen are treated with *luchies* and sweetmeats but not rice at night. This is called dry food and the nuptial bed is bedecked with flowers and the married pair get new dhuti, chaddar and sari which they wear before going to bed.

It is the invariable custom among all Brahmins, Kayasthas, Vaidyas, and all rich people, that the bridegroom and the bride must wear a red silken cloth at the time of the marriage. This is a very ancient custom, for we find that the poet Kalidas says that when Shiva went to marry Parvati he was dressed in China silk, the words being *Chinansuka pattabastra*. Formerly silk could come only from China, as we find from Gibbon's History, Chapter 40, Vol. VII,

page 92 that, "till the reign of Justinian the silk-worms, who feed on the leaves of the white mulberry tree, were confined to China" The price of silk was so high that, "Aurelian complained that a pound of silk was sold at Rome for twelve ounces of gold", page 94. Gibbon also says that two Persian monks who had long resided in China, soon discovered that it was impracticable to transport the short-lived insect but that in the egg numerous progeny might be preserved and multiplied in a distant climate, and they, after a long journey arrived at Constantinople, imparted their project to the emperor and were liberally encouraged by the gifts and promises of Justinian. They returned to China and concealed the eggs of the silkworms in a hollow cane and returned to Constantinople and hatched the eggs. This led to the introduction of silk-worm throughout Europe and Asia and silk became gradually less costly.

There are other customs in connection with marriage which are prevalent in all castes. For instance, during the ten days that the marriage festival lasts, the husband and the wife must spend the night together except on the second day when after nightfall the husband is not permitted even to see the face of his wife and must sleep in a separate room, the reason being that there is a legend to the effect that Lakshindhar was bitten by a deadly serpent because he, notwithstanding the injunction of the goddess Manasha, the presiding deity of serpent, slept with his wife on that night

It is said that Lakshindhar disobeyed the injunction of the goddess and slept with his wife in a hermetically sealed room, but, as the fates would have it, there was a very small hole in the wall and the goddess sent the thinnest venomous snake called Kalinda to bite him, and Lakshindhar was bitten and died of the bite, though revived by the goddess at the intercession of his wife. Therefore no Hindu is permitted to sleep with his wife on the second night.

There is another custom. During the ten days of the marriage the married pair are not obliged to observe any auspicious day for undertaking a journey ; in fact all these ten days are auspicious for them for any undertaking. There is another custom. Immediately after the father or his representative has repeated the formula of the gift of the bride, the ends of their cloths are tied together and they should remain tied together for the rest of the night, and also on the occasions of the performance of the rites previously mentioned, which are performed on the second and the tenth days, the ends of their cloths are tied together.

There is a peculiar custom among the Vaidyas. When the bridegroom enters the house of the bride a winnow containing *kasla* (a water fruit) is brought by the bride's party to be touched by the bridegroom's forehead. The object of this is to make the bridegroom henpecked and it is supposed that in future the husband will do every thing at the bidding of his wife. This is opposed by the

bridegroom's party and sometimes *lathies* decide the battle ending in some broken heads and bloodshed. It was my misfortune to attend one of these marriages where some heads were broken and blood spilled.

When the married pair go to the bridegroom's house, they must wait till nightfall before entering it. This is the custom in East Bengal. The bride's *palkee* precedes that of the Bridegroom's and she alights first and then her husband. A cloth is spread upon the ground and she walks upon it, followed by her husband, the ends of their cloths being tied in a knot. When they have proceeded a little, another piece of cloth is laid upon the ground, or the first one is turned over and they proceed thus till they enter the room of their house. They sit on a mat with pith crown and tiara on their heads and they play with rice and cowries and the next day the ladies of the bridegroom's house and kinswomen come to see the bride's face and give her presents of cloth, jewellery, or gold or silver coins, the bride in turn giving sares to the ladies present. On the first night the bride must not eat any food prepared in her husband's house but she brings her food with her from her father's house and eats it. In some families the bride is made to hold a live *kai* fish in her hand and stand on a stone plate with milk in it.

On the day after her arrival the mother-in-law gives a sumptuous breakfast to the bride which is served on bell metal plates and cups which become her property and she gets a new

silk saree. This food is given by the bridegroom with his own hands and he must ask her to eat.

The married pair go back to the bride's father's house and after spending a night or two there return home. This is called *diragaman* or second coming. It must take place within ten days of the marriage, otherwise the bride will have to wait for an auspicious day when her husband goes and brings her home.

When a newly married woman and her husband come to the latter's house for the first time they are received by all near relations. They are received with *ulu* and the blowing of conch shells, besides music. This blowing of conch shells is necessary in all ceremonial occasions and is intended to scare away the evil spirits. If there be earthquake or an eclipse there must be blowing of conch shells as both these events are attributed to the action of evil spirits who must be scared away. On ceremonial occasions there is blowing of conch shells in the house where the ceremony takes place but in the case of eclipses and earthquakes there is blowing of conch shells in every house. The reason is curious. If a man blows the conch shell on these occasions the evil spirits will leave his house and go to his neighbour's house and it is therefore that the latter thinks it his duty to drive the spirits away and the spirits go to the house of a third man whose duty again is to drive them away and so on, so that the whole country resounds with the blowing of conch shells, with the result that the evil spirits do not find any resting place anywhere and are

obliged to leave the country. An eclipse is caused according to our Hindu astronomers by the demon Rahu which literally means shadow but in Vedic times he was known by the name of Svarbhamu, (Rig Veda V. 40). It is quite natural that the evil spirits should be driven away, otherwise they would devour the sun or the moon but the earthquake is believed to be caused by the shaking of the tortoise or of the hood of the endless serpent upon which the earth rests and these are not evil spirits, and I can find no reason why they should be scared away by the blowing of conch shells.

After the arrival of the newly married wife in her husband's house, all near relations male and female go to see her face and the next day there is a regular levee, when the pair sit on a mat and everybody comes to see her face and gives them presents, when the bride's veil is removed from her forehead. She must then shut her eyes in East Bengal but in West Bengal this rule is not observed and she sees her visitors. She touches the feet of every one who is superior in pedigree and age to her husband and every one puts some grass and paddy upon her head as tokens of blessing. The mother-in-law must commence this ceremony. As to the custom of touching one's feet, the invariable rule is that a wife will touch the feet of every one who is senior in age and relationship to her husband. Those who are his juniors will touch his feet and his wife's feet too. In fact her position in this respect and in most other respects is that of her husband whose *ardhanga* or half body she is.

As to the putting of grass and paddy upon the head, it is the invariable custom in Bengal for females to put them on the head of everybody who appears before them on the Dasami day after the Durga puja is over. They will either touch the feet of the visitor or the latter touch the feet of the ladies, but the grass and paddy must be put on the visitor's head by the females. On ceremonial occasions and return from a long journey this ceremony is also observed.

If the newly married wife be the daughter of a Moulik and her husband be a Kulin, the husband's kinsmen and kinswomen are invited to a breakfast to her husband's house and each family receives half the *bedai* paid to each of the guests who were invited to attend the marriage and a few extra rupees for some petty items before any Kulin accepts the invitation. Each of the married kinswoman receives a saree for eating with her and those whose feet she can touch get another cloth each. But this does not permit the newly married wife to touch the food of her Kulin kinsmen. If she wishes to do so then she must again pay another half *bedai* to the head of every family among her kinsmen and give the kinsmen a feast or she can amalgamate the two feasts together. This last ceremony is called *paka-shparsha* or touching cooked food. On this occasion, when all the guests are seated for breakfast she enters the room and puts a handful of rice or pilau upon each plate beginning with her husband's, and retires. Then the servers come and serve other dishes as usual and the

breakfast commences. Every family which partakes of this breakfast is bound to take food cooked or touched by her, but if she does not perform this *pakashparsha* ceremony then no kinsman is bound to take any cooked food touched by her. But female kinswomen will simply eat with her in the same room, if she performs the first ceremony called *boubhat* or a wife's rice taking. This only raises her to a level with her other kinswomen, Kulin or Moulik, but if she performs the ceremony of *pakshaparsha* then she raises herself on an equality with kinswomen who are daughters of Kulins. Nevertheless no outsider Kulin is bound to eat any food cooked or touched by her unless some money is paid to him. This practice is rigidly observed in East Bengal, but there is very great laxity in this respect in West Bengal where for all practical purposes Kulinism has been abolished, in so much that every educated Moulik bridegroom receives a *pana* or dowry from his Kulin father-in-law sometimes to the extent of Rs. 10,000 in hard cash, besides presents. In East Bengal also Kulinism is on the decline and some Moulik bridegrooms accept *pana*, though the amount may be very small and hardly exceeds Rs. 1,000. Formerly all Moulik brides and bridegrooms had to pay dowry to marry or be married into a Kulin family but now this rule is not always observed. If the Moulik bridegroom be highly educated or belongs to a highly respectable or a rich family then no *pana* is demanded from him rather in some cases he expects *pana*.

But in the case of a Moulik bride her father must pay some *pana* to a Kulin bridegroom. It is the prevalence of the democratic idea brought in by English education that is levelling up the people of this country and removing all barriers among sub-castes. Now-a-days such marriages take place between people as could not possibly have taken place fifty years ago. Even the Brahmins have begun to intermarry into different sub-castes, and if Brahmins, the most conservative people in India, can do so, the more liberal sections of the community will naturally do something more and I believe the time is not far distant when there will be intermarriages between all castes, the Legislatures having paved the way by passing a recent Act called "Gour's Act," No. 30 of 1923, which enables Hindus to marry one another, irrespective of caste.

In the marriage procession of rich people there is plenty of musicians and lights and in cities there is a long train of carriages but of which the poor people cannot afford to bear the expense. In towns motor cars and motor buses have replaced the horse-drawn carriages, the result being that there can be no musicians or light-bearers walking on foot.

Formerly among the upper classes marriages took place between infants, and fifty years ago it was very difficult to find a bride who was more than twelve years of age but now-a-days, except among the poor, marriages rarely take place before the girl is at least fourteen years old and the bridegroom has just finished his college

career and entered service or is going to finish his studies soon. These grown-up boys object to be led in procession and therefore there is very little hubbub in the marriage procession now-a-days.

In towns also there is one peculiar custom. When the bridegroom's party enters the bride's house all sorts of well-dressed uninvited strangers enter the house with them and partake of the marriage feast. Therefore the bride's father has to make arrangements for a much larger number of guests than that estimated by the bridegroom's party. As the marriage takes place soon after the bridegroom's party arrives, it is very difficult to find out who these uninvited strangers are. In villages there is no such difficulty. No outsider is permitted to sit in the marriage feast and as the feast must take place in the day time it is very easy to detect all interlopers and to eject them. In towns, particularly in Calcutta and its neighbourhood, the marriage feast takes place at night. It is not so in villages where people observe the strict rule of Hindu society that no ceremonial feast can take place at night. The rule is so strict that the feeding of Brahmins at night does not count as a virtuous act, but feeding Brahmins at day time is always reckoned as a meritorious act. If Brahmins are fed by a non-Brahmin the Brahmins must get some *dakshina* but no *dakshina* is given if the feeding takes place at night. The reason being as just stated that this feeding does not add to the virtue of the host and will not count in the next world. In fact the

word *bhojan* or feast is restricted to feeding people in the day time.

Fifty years ago marriages took place between infants. The girls rarely exceeded the age of twelve and it was a meritorious act on the part of their fathers to give them in marriage preferably in the eighth year when the gift of the bride was considered as the gift of the goddess Durga. So great was the merit of such a gift. The merit decreased every year and if the girl was twelve years old the father incurred sin in giving such a grown-up girl in marriage, because Raghunandan says that if a girl attains puberty before marriage her father goes to hell. It was for this reason that when a bill was introduced in the Legislative Council nearly forty years ago to raise the age of consent to twelve years, there was an agitation in Hindu society, the Hindus thinking that if the marriage is deferred till the girl attains puberty the soul of the bride's father will be condemned to hell. But now Hindu society, at least of the upper classes, has much advanced in liberal ideas and even orthodox Hindus have to wait till their daughters exceed the age of puberty for the simple reason that no well-educated boy can be had at a very tender age and if the bridegroom is a grown-up one, as he must be if he has finished his education, he will disdain the idea of marrying a little girl. Now-a-days, there is a great demand for grown-up girls because the bridegrooms are grown-up boys who never think of marrying before they have graduated or finished their academic career. In my time

when I was young I never heard of the marriage of a graduate if he was in affluent circumstances and I believe that among my contemporaries I was the first man to marry after I had joined the bar. Now-a-days the rule is just the reverse. Two years ago, when the age of consent was raised to thirteen years, there was no commotion in Hindu society. So great is the advance of liberal ideas in our society.

Marriages are proposed by common friends and relations or by professional marriage brokers and the bridegroom's party sees the girl but the bride and the bridegroom, half a century ago, never saw one another before marriage. Fifty years ago I know only of three cases, including mine, in which the bride was seen by the bridegroom before the marriage was settled. But now-a-days after the parents have approved of the bride, the bridegroom goes and sees her and the final choice rests with the bridegroom and sometimes with the bride also, particularly when the bride is a grown-up girl aged about eighteen to twenty-five, as marriages of such girls are not very rare.

After the marriage is settled there is something like a formal agreement between the parties, not necessarily a written one but a ceremonial one. On an auspicious day some very near relations of the bride are invited to the bridegroom's house to a feast. A Brahmin accompanies them, recites some mantras, puts grass and paddy—the necessary emblems of blessing—upon the bridegroom's head and rubs some sandal paste upon his forehead. The bride's

father gives to the bridegroom a sovereign. The Kulins among the guests get some money, and the party is feasted, but in East Bengal, they will not take any rice in a Moulik's house and they will only take some dry food, but in West Bengal everybody partakes of rice with many fish and vegetable dishes and sweetmeats. A piece of paper is daubed with a vermilion mark on the top and several items which the bride's father agrees to pay are written down, consisting of the amount of the dowry, and the several items of jewellery with their weights and fineness entered therein. In East Bengal only the amount of the dowry is written, no mention is made of the jewellery, but it is not so in West Bengal which is much richer than East Bengal. Another reason is that East Bengal people rely upon the word of the bride's father that he would give proper jewellery, but in West Bengal every item of jewellery must be noted down with its weight and fineness. This ceremony is called *patra* in West Bengal and *patipatra* in East Bengal. On another auspicious day the bridegroom's father and his near relations go to see the bride and there a similar ceremony is repeated but nothing is written on paper; only the bride gets a present of jewellery and a Brahmin officiates. On both these occasions the father of the bride and the father of the bridegroom invite their own relations to their house and they are present at the ceremony and join in the feast. After this ceremony the marriage is, according to Hindu custom, irre-

vocable and if by some mishap the bridegroom dies before marriage, it is very difficult to get a bridegroom because the bride is recognised as the widow of the deceased and widow marriage does not prevail in this country, though legalised in 1856.

There are some peculiar customs relating to marriage among certain sects of the Vaishnavas, or the followers of Chaitanya. They are divided into two classes, the householder and the mendicant, as among the Buddhist, from whom Chaitanya has copied many customs. The customs relating to the householder Vaishnavas are the same as those among the general Hindu population. The mendicants are those who have renounced the world and live, generally speaking, by begging and on charity. They live together as a separate community under the leadership of a local *guru* or spiritual guide. The householders do not take meat diet but take fish and vegetables like the general body of Hindus. The mendicants do not take meat or fish. The marriage customs of some mendicants are very peculiar. If any one of their community wishes to marry, then he has to pay a fee of Re. 1-4-0 to the *guru*. Then unmarried Vaishnavis or widows are made to lie down in a room and their bodies and faces are covered up and he is asked to remove the covering over some one's face from among these females. He removes the covering, sees the face, and if he likes the particular woman and she agrees, there is an end of the thing and no further marriage.

ceremony is necessary. But if he does not like to marry her, he pays a further fee of Rs. 1-4-0 to the *guru* and removes another covering and goes on paying this fee till he makes his selection and the woman agrees, when he has to pay no more fee. So there is no formal marriage between a Vaishnava and a Vaishnavi. It is rather a concubinage. At any time a Vaishnava can divorce a Vaishnavi whereas there is no divorce according to Hindu Law, and both parties may marry again. On the first night of this marriage the *guru* sleeps with the bride and must cohabit with her. From next day the so-called husband may approach her. This is called *guruprasady*, *prosad* means what is left after eating or enjoying. The enjoyment of this *guruprasad* is considered a devotional act and enhances the religious merit of the partaker. Be it understood that the *guru* in ninety nine cases out of hundred is a Brahmin and therefore this custom was probably introduced by them for their own benefit. The householder Vaishnavas do not generally follow this *guruprasady* system but I have known such cases among them also. This is not a matter of astonishment. In the Malabar country in Southern India the Nambudri Brahmins have abolished marriage among non-Brahmins and this for their own benefit. There are more degrading customs among certain castes of Hindus than among any other civilised people. Hindus boast of their civilisation which the orthodox Hindus ascribe to the Brahmins, but what have the Brahmins done to

elevate the lower castes or some hill tribes in India ? The reader will be astonished to learn that in certain parts of India on the death of a wife the husband marries his eldest daughter, and on the death of the husband the wife marries her eldest son. Similar custom, I understand, prevails in some parts of Mid Africa but I do not know if such custom prevails in any other part of the world. There were marriages between brothers and sisters in Egypt. Cleopatra, though of Greek descent, married her brother. He was the last king of Egypt, and on his death she succeeded to the throne. Similarly Darius the last king of Persia married his sister. In Burmah we find that its last king Thebaw married his step-sister Supya Lat. The story of Oedipus' marriage with his mother may no doubt be cited against the Greeks but the parties knew not each other. The Greek ambassadors to the Court of Atilla speak of his marriage with his daughter. This shows such marriages were not rare among the Mongolians but those ambassadors refer to similar incestuous marriages in Egypt, Persia and India. I have already cited the cases of the Persian, Egyptian and Mongolian and Burmese kings but I am not aware if any such custom prevailed in India except as stated above and I am of opinion that the charge laid against civilized Indians in that respect is not true. The inquisitive reader is referred to the Report on the Census of India in 1911, Vol. I, page 230 et seq. (Re: Marriage) and Guizot's History of Civilisation, Vol. II page 422.

The third wife of a Hindu cannot be a human being, as she is certain to be carried away by death. Therefore when a man is going to marry for the third time, he has first to marry a pigeon, on whom death will soon come down, and then he marries a human wife, who is thus the fourth wife, to whom death may be propitious, having devoured the previous bird wife.

Kulins extort money from Bangals in East Bengal in various ways. When they go to the houses of the latter on the occasion of a marriage, they will demand and get some money for *gramdarshany* or seeing the village, then for *chulakhudany* or digging the ground for making a hearth to cook their food. Before marriage they had extorted some money for attending the *patipatra* ceremony when the marriage is finally settled. After the marriage when they leave the place, the Kulins get *bidai*, or leave money, which varies from ten to twenty-five or more for each Kulin. The Brahmins, *gomastas*, servants, the barber, the washerman who usually accompany them all get some money, and the Bangal has to pay the cost of the food and the hire of the boat or railway fare both ways. Kulins who usually travel third class travel second class or even first class when attending a marriage at a Bangal's house.

As already stated the Bangal must give a pot of *dahi*, one of mustard oil, 80 betel leaves and a fish to each Kulin kinsman of the bridegroom before he starts for the marriage.

If a Kulin son-in-law is invited to a marriage

in his Bangal father-in-law's house he gets his *sidha*, *bidai*, and everything the other Kulins get but no money for seeing the village as he had seen it before. He will lodge with his kinsmen but his wife lives in her father's house with her children as no Hindu can demand any money from his maternal grand-father on any ground and will eat in his house though his father will not do so within ten days of the marriage.

There are various customs which it is unnecessary to relate but there is a peculiar custom prevalent in West Bengal which requires notice. The bride's father must send presents to the bridegroom's house every month of the year, thus—

(1) In the month of Baisak the presents consist of mangoes, *sandesh*, towels, *baris* made of *dal*, and prepared betel. The bridegroom sends to his father-in-law's house mangoes, *sandesh* and betel.

(2) In Jaisth, the bride's father sends mangoes, jack and other fruits, *bari*, *piri* (wooden seat), *sandesh*, betel and towel, and on the occasion of *Jamai Sasty*, which takes place in that month, the *jamai* or bridegroom gets all sorts of sumptuous presents such as *dahi*, *khir*, *sandesh*, *rasagolla* and other sweetmeats, betelnut and spices, a pair of dhoti and chaddar, banians, shirts, handkerchiefs, socks, shoes, scents, soap, towel, looking-glass, brush, comb and prepared betel.

(3) In Ashar on the occasion of the Rath, dhoti, chadder and some cash are sent. If the bride is in the father-in-law's house she

gets from her father, bodice, dhoti, *alta*, vermillion, pine-apple, mangoes, jack and other fruits, *dahi*, *khir* and *sandesh* and prepared betel.

(4) Nothing particular in Sraban.

(5) In Bhadra hilsa fish, *sandesh*, all kinds of preserves, *dahi*, vegetables, *sak* (creeper), prepared betel are sent.

(6). In Aswin on the occasion of the Durga Puja, same presents have to be sent to the bridegroom as in Jaisth on the occasion of *Jamai Sashthi*. Besides this all the members of the family of the bridegroom get dhoti, chadder and sari and the bridegroom also sends dhoti, chadder and sari to the members of the father-in-law's house. In East Bengal this custom of sending presents during Durga Puja is observed in the first year after the marriage, but in subsequent years only the bridegroom and the bride get wearing apparel from the bride's father and nobody gets any present.

(7) On the occasion of *Bhaifota*, or mark on the brother's forehead in Kartic, all married sisters give presents to their brothers of dhoti and chadder, betel and its spices, and sweetmeats, and the day after the *Bhaifota* the brothers are feasted by their married sisters.

(8) In the month of Agrahayan, winter clothing, such as shawl, banian, hose, handkerchief, mirror, comb, scents, shoes, cauliflowers, peas, oranges, *bari*, *veti* fish, lobster, *dahi*, *sandesh* and betel are sent to the bridegroom's house.

(9) In Pous, cakes have to be prepared

and sent to the bridegroom's house and with them the following articles are sent :—grapes, pomegranates, and other Cabuli fruits, hard *khir*, *chhana*, sugar, *suje*, ghee, flour, *khaja*, *moong*, *maskkalai*, *til*, mustard oil, molasses, cocoanuts, new rice, pair of sari for the bridegroom's mother, towel, *piri*, basket, cooking vessels and prepared betels. Similar articles have to be sent from the bridegroom's house to the bride's mother.

(10) In Magh, on the occasion of the Swaraswati puja, the following articles are sent to the bride if she is in her father-in-law's house, otherwise not yellow-coloured cloth which must be red bordered, *alta*, vermilion, *tip*, sweetmeats and betel nut.

o. (11) In Falgoon, on the occasion of the Dol puja the bride's father sends the following presents :—red *abir*, sugar, *futkalai*, *murki* and other sweetmeats, dhoti, chaddar, coat, shoes, handkerchief, hose, banian, scents, mirror and brush, and some cash. This is for the bridegroom. The bride will get some cash, rose-coloured cloth, chemise, bodice, golden embroidery, ribbon, hair pin, *alta*, vermilion and *tip*.

(12) In Chait, on the occasion of Charak festival, the bridegroom will get dhoti, chadder, scents and some cash. Vide Kayastha Patrika for Sraban, 1330.

The giving of these presents is compulsory in the first year of marriage in West Bengal. In East Bengal, as I have already stated, the married pair get dhoti, chadder and sari on the occasion

of the Durga puja but in West Bengal these presents must be continued by rich families, though in a lower scale. In East Bengal there is no cash payment except on the occasion of the Durga puja when amounts varying from rupees twenty five to three or four hundred are sent by rich people to their sons-in-law's house. After the married pair get children, their children also expect clothing from their mother's father, and the maternal grandfather has to present his grandchild with a cup and spoon for feeding him and toys when he is a year old. The cup and spoon may be of bell metal but rich people prefer to present silver articles.

It was the custom, particularly in West Bengal, to send presents of cloth and *sandesh* to the bride or bridegroom on receipt of an invitation to marriage. This present must be sent before the marriage takes place. But now this custom is dying out for various reasons. In the first place, the price of a piece of cloth and of a seer of *sandesh* has doubled within recent years, and secondly, a movement was set on foot by the late Mohini Mohan Roy of the High Court Bar to abolish this custom and the custom is dying out.

Rich people used to send a brass jar with some other articles with every letter of invitation to a marriage but this custom is also dying out.

The Kayastha Shabha, founded about a quarter of a century ago, started a movement for the abolition of dowry, and it has made some progress. This system of dowry is a most pernicious

ous system and it is one of the causes of the delay in getting one's daughter married. Because a father could not afford the dowry demanded from him, his daughter, Snehadata, burnt herself to death by pouring kerosene oil on her cloth and putting fire to it. All grown-up daughters of poor parents, particularly of Mouliks of West Bengal, should worship the memory of this Snehadata who sacrificed her life to save her father from ruin.

As regards the lower castes, it is unnecessary to say much. They try to imitate the customs of the upper castes as far as their means permit. Among them the bridegroom almost invariably pays some dowry, and the bride is often of tender age. Among the Chandals the bridegrooms are generally grown-up people and the brides very young, and among the Patials (mat makers) the price of the bride is one hundred rupees per year of her age.

PUBERTY.

Formerly girls were married when they were very young. Manu says that a father who gives his daughter in marriage in her eighth year has the merit of bestowing Gouri or Durga in marriage, and the merit decreases every subsequent year and if the girl is married in her eleventh or any succeeding year when she is expected to attain the age of puberty, the father who bestows such a girl in marriage goes to hell. Therefore orthodox Hindus must give their daughters in marriage before the

completion of the tenth year. When the Government introduced the Age of Consent Bill in 1890, there was heated controversy throughout India among Hindus and numerous meetings were held in Calcutta and other places to protest against the Bill, and Manu was quoted every where, though even then many girls were married after the maximum age prescribed by him. But when the age was increased two years ago from twelve to thirteen, there was no noise anywhere. Such is the progress of civilizing influences in operation in this country. This is due to the spread of other than Sanskrit education, an education which did not allow people to think out of the groove of our ancestors. But now-a-days girls are much older when they are given in marriage and in most cases after they attain puberty. Formerly girls never exceeded the age of twelve or thirteen when they were married but now-a-days very few girls of these ages are married. This is the rule among the upper classes. Among the lower classes the old rules still prevail to some extent but among them also grown-up girls are given in marriage. Among the upper classes formerly boys married when they were in school, now very few school boys are married. The bridegrooms are usually students of the college classes and in many instances they marry after they have commenced to earn money. Half a century ago it was very difficult to find a bridegroom who had finished his education and commenced to earn money but now-a-days such bridegrooms are to be found in plenty.

As formerly the bride was young when married she usually attained puberty after marriage. But in this century boys and girls are not usually, at least among the upper classes, married at such early ages. Now it is not unusual to see graduates and people earning money marrying for the first time. Among girls also fourteen is about the minimum age of marriage and now-a-days many graduate girls are married for the first time. In fact girls above twenty years of age are not very rare, though a generation ago it was a rare thing to find a spinster above that age. The result is that among the upper classes girls usually attain puberty before marriage.

When the girl attains puberty after marriage, 'ulu' is uttered by the females and the young wife is confined in a room for four days and is not permitted to see the sun or the face of any male person. She lives on vegetable diet and milk during these five days. The members of the family and kinsmen who are invited on this occasion make themselves merry in the house of the young wife. A small trench is dug and water is poured into it and people are brought to the trench and made to sit in it. Sometimes somebody is brought in by force. A regiment of boys and grown-up people go to a house, seize somebody living in that house, bring him by force and compel him to sit in the muddy water of the trench. Sometimes this water is thrown upon people standing near by. In the afternoon these kinsmen get a light repast of parched rice, *dahi*, and *khir*, sugar and molasses.

On the fifth day the girl comes out of the room, bathes and wears a new cloth, *Garbhadan* is prepared consisting of cow's dung, urine, milk curd and honey and she is made to drink it. The image of a boy is made with pounded rice and water and thrown from her navel on the ground through the inside of her cloth. The object of this is that she is expected to give birth to a male child. In the evening the husband and wife sit on two seats side by side and then a priest worships the setting sun and the husband repeats some mantras at the dictation of the priest. On that day kinsmen are invited to dinner which usually consists of *luchi*, vegetables and sweets. If for any reason this so-called 'second' marriage cannot take place within sixteen days, then it can only take place on a Thursday or Sunday after she gets her menses again.

If the girl be at her father's house, he is bound to send this happy news with a few rupees to his son-in-law's house and vice versa, so that the merry making can take place in both the houses.

During the period of menstruation, the woman is untouchable in East Bengal. She sleeps on a separate bed which no one can touch, unless he bathes afterwards. Her bedding, mat, bed covers and blankets after the expiry of three nights, are washed and she bathes and becomes touchable. Before her first pregnancy, she must bathe before the cock crows, which is very painful in the cold season. But this rule is not observed if she does not become

a mother within three or four years after her puberty.

In West Bengal, she is not untouchable, but she cannot cook anything during two days.

Madras follows the custom of East Bengal but there the rule is very strict, as the woman cannot enter any room and lives in a separate hut.

WIDOWHOOD

A married woman becomes a widow not at the moment of her husband's death but when his body is reduced to ashes. She then lays aside all the ornaments on her person, bathes, wears a new washed borderless white dhoti, as there is sizing in all new unwashed dhoties. For the first four days she and her sons live only upon milk and fruits. On the fifth day she and her sons eat *atap* rice cooked by her eldest son in an earthen pot. She can also take ghee, milk and plantains but no salt or sugar. She continues this during the whole period of mourning. On the eleventh day of the moon she observes fasting. There is a difference between the customs of East and West Bengal. In East Bengal she can take milk and fruits on the eleventh day but in West Bengal she is absolutely prohibited from taking any nourishment. Non-Hindus will be astonished to hear how rigid is the fast of a widow in West Bengal. If she is ill, she cannot take any medicine, if she is thirsty she cannot drink any water, if she is hungry she cannot take any food. In fact nothing can go down her throat. It

is usual to put some Ganges water into the mouth when a man or woman is dying. But on the eleventh day of the moon no Ganges water can be put into the mouth of a dying widow in West Bengal, but Ganges water is poured into her ear instead. This is a most cruel system still practised in West Bengal. There is fasting among Mahomedans and Catholics. The Mahomedans are directed to observe fast during the whole month of the Ramadan (Koran Chapter II) and Mahomed used to say that fasting was the "Gate of religion" and that "the odour of the mouth of him who fasteth is more grateful to God than that of musk" and Algazaly reckons fasting one fourth part of the faith. When the Mahomedans fast, they cannot bathe or swallow their spittle. But this injunction is for the day time, for the Koran permits Mahomedans to eat after sun-set and to continue eating till one can distinguish a black thread from a white thread. The fast of the Catholics is the mildest of all. Their priests do not eat anything after midnight till they read their morning prayer. It is difficult to say whether the Bengali widow's fast or the Mahomedan's fast is the more severe and exhausting. The widow's fast lasts during twenty-four hours in a fortnight but the Mahomedans' fast is for twelve hours only but it lasts for a month. Mahomedans also are not permitted to drink in the day time or take a clyster or injection. The Jews also observe the fast in the same way as the Mahomadans. In fact the fasting enjoined in the Koran is taken from the

Jews. In East Bengal the rule is not so strict. Widows can take anything but rice and cooked vegetables. They can take unleavened bread, fruits and milk, but on four days in the year they observe strict fast. Those days are :— when the god Narayana goes to bed, when he turns on the left side in his sleep, when he turns on his right side in his sleep, and on the day of Bhim *ekadashi* and if, she likes, on Sivaratri. Widows of West Bengal taunt those of East Bengal with eting on *ekadashi* days but they forget that in this respect the widows of East Bengal are more civilized than their sisters in West Bengal. This observance of *ekadashi* lasts during the life-time of the widow. The sons also observe *ekadashi* for one year after their parent's death but they can take fruits and milk.

° Two days after the performance of the *sradh* by the eldest son the widow takes rice with vegetables, ghee, milk, and everything which a widow is permitted to eat. She can take only one meal a day and that during the day time. No widow can take any rice after nightfall, nor are widows permitted to take meat, fish, eggs, *mashkalai*, and *moosori dal* and *pui* and some other vegetables. The only animal food a widow can take is milk and its preparations. A widow cannot cook her food in a vessel which has not been scoured and washed and if it be an earthen vessel it cannot be used for a second time. A widow must eat her food in the cookroom or in an adjoining room, as her cooked food cannot be removed from one house to another under the open sky and she cannot

eat the leavings of food or eat from any plate which a person has used for eating. If any person while eating has touched any cooked food then no widow will take it, the only exception being in the case of the spiritual guide who takes a large quantity of food on his plate, eats a portion and leaves the remainder for his disciples to eat, which they do with the greatest devotion. A widow must eat out of a stone dish, a brass plate or a plantain or other leaf. Every male Hindu or a married woman can eat out of bell-metal plates but the use of a bell-metal plate is prohibited to a widow but she can use bell-metal cups for putting her cooked food in them but she cannot eat out of a bell-metal plate. Of course no orthodox Hindu can use a China plate as it is made of clay and if any one eats rice out of it then it is spoiled and cannot be used for the second time and must be thrown away. In fact no earthen dish which is once used for the purpose of eating can be used again by a Hindu and it must be thrown away. Even an earthen glass cannot be used twice for drinking water out of it.

Now widow can remarry, though the law was passed in 1856 for the remarriage of widows. Nearly a hundred widow marriages take place during the year but lately societies have been formed in East and West Bengal for the advancement of widow remarriage. Formerly widow marriages took place among the lower classes but as they try to imitate the upper classes, among whom there is no remarriage, the lower castes are giving up the custom. Widows

cannot take ordinary salt, the only salt they can take is rock salt. Widows cannot wear any *dhoti* which has a coloured border or coloured body but in some cases I have seen black or green bordered *dhoties* to be used by widows. These were exceptional cases. The use of a red bordered *dhoti* is absolutely prohibited. Widows also cannot eat any food cooked on the previous day, even unleavened bread baked on the previous day cannot be taken on the next day, the only exception being *khai* or parched rice,. They can never take any *chira* unless it is prepared from *atap* paddy at home by her own caste people. Even *khai* bought from the bazaar cannot be eaten and it must be prepared at home. In the evening the widows take a slight repast. Rich people take milk and fruits but young widows take *luchi* or unleavened bread with vegetables in addition. Old widows generally crop their hair. It seems that red colour is absolutely prohibited to widows. They cannot use any cloth or chemise upon which there is a single red thread and they cannot use any vermilion. Generally speaking, widows are very strict and orthodox. They do not allow any one to touch them after their bath and before breakfast and if any one touches them they immediately bathe again. My grand-mother never allowed me to touch her before her supper. If I accidentally touched her she would forego her night repast. But in some cases a few drops of Ganges water are sprinkled upon the widow's person which serves the purpose of a bath. It is unnecessary

to say that a widow's food can be cooked only by one of her subcaste or by a person of a superior caste. No person of a lower caste can cook her food. She will not drink any water fetched by a servant of inferior caste or allow any one of an inferior caste to touch her food or drink. Formerly widows did not drink any pipe water but now many of them do so. No widow can wear shoes or slippers or any bodice. Her dress consists of a white *dhoti* and now-a-days a chemise and in winter a thick cotton or wollen *chudder*.

Widows of gentle families eat rice once from sunrise to sunrise and when it is day light but I have ascertained that in Behar even Brahmin widows can take rice in the day and again in the night, just as a married woman does. As already stated, a widow in West Bengal must totally fast on the eleventh day of the moon, and she cannot take any food, drink, or even medicine on that day but this rule does not obtain in East Bengal except in portions thereof. They can eat every cooked food but rice, *dal* and cooked vegetables. They usually take unleavened bread or *khai* and milk. Widows take slight supper at night. In East Bengal respectable widows never take parboiled rice and their rice must be cooked in a separate room and smell of cooked flesh or fish should not enter their cook room. In West Bengal respectable widows sometimes take parboiled rice cooked in a hearth where fish and flesh had been just cooked, only the hearth must be wiped with water and a rag. Sometimes cow dung is mixed

with the water. If a widow who has given birth to only one son hears the sound of a flute while eating, she must stop eating.

DEATH.

Before death it is usual to take the dying man to the Ganges and just before loss of consciousness the body is immersed up to the navel in the sacred water and the dying man is made to repeat some mantras, the idea being that if a man dies in such a state he gets the same benefit as dying within the sacred limits of the town of Benares. It is the Hindu belief that if a man dies there he goes direct to Shivalok or the abode of Shiva. Some even go as far as to say that such a man becomes a part of Shiva, which is the same thing as Nirvana, the summum bonum of human existence. The above rule cannot apply to people living at a distance from the Ganges. In their case the dying man is removed to the place where a *tulsi* plant has been planted. In all cases the body of the dying man must be removed from his room and placed under the sky. The Hindus justify this upon the ground that if a man is gasping for breath, he should be taken to the open courtyard where he gets plenty of air and feels greater ease but they forget that the gasping is caused by the loss of vital power and not by any insufficiency of air contained in the room. The real explanation is that if a man dies in a room the whole floor must be removed to the depth of some inches

and a puja must be performed, otherwise his spirit will hover round the room, So this rule is derived not from hygienic laws but from the dread of evil spirits, an ingrained belief of all orthodox Hindus. After death some kinsman or other person of the same caste must remain near the dead man touching his body or the bier or bed on which he is laid, as the moment he removes his hands from the body or the bier or bed some evil spirits will enter the dead body. Near relations and other people collect and remove the body to the place of cremation. One rule is strictly observed; no one of an inferior caste can touch the dead body or bier or bed so that castehood sticks to a man until he is burnt to ashes. The sons of the deceased put their shoulders to the foot of the bier which is always towards the house and the head is always towards the burning ghat. In the case of old and well-known people there is a *sankirtan* party which precedes the bier. Those who carry the bier repeat the name of Hari. When the body is taken to the cremation ground, it is bathed by pouring water upon it and it is made to wear a new cloth, a Brahman reads some mantras and the body is afterwards placed upon the funeral pyre with its head towards the north. If the deceased be a male, he lies upon his breast with his face downwards, but if a female, she lies upon her back. Then the sons and other descendants of the deceased turn round him seven times, keeping the dead body to the right and each holding a lighted faggot in his hand. Then

the eldest son puts a lighted faggot into the mouth of the deceased and the others follow him. Wood is gradually piled upon him and some sandal-wood and ghee are thrown into the fire. Rich people use no other wood but sandal wood in cremating the dead. In East Bengal the usual custom is to cut down a mangoe tree and burn the deceased with its wood, the reason being that raw mangoe wood burns freely. Friends also throw some ghee and sandal wood upon the fire at their own expense, thinking it to be a meritorious act and there is a well known saying in Sanskrit literature that he who stays in the cremation ground is a friend. Therefore the usual rule is that all friends and near relations are informed and they go to the cremation ground but no one whose wife is in the family way can go to the cremation ground. When the cremation is nearly over, each of the sons and kinsmen present throws seven small pieces of wood into the fire. This ceremony is called *saptakastha* or seven pieces of wood. After the body is completely cremated the place is washed by the eldest son and the *Bhurmali* gets the *kalsi* or water-jar.

Afterwards all the people who took part in the cremation take a dip in the river or tank. It is necessary that the head must go under the water, pouring water upon it is not enough and does not purify the whole body. Then the sons wear new borderless white *dhoti* and *chudder* and white collars with a piece of iron attached which they must continue to wear during the whole period of mourning which is

ten days among Brahmins and Chandals, twelve days among threaded Kayasthas, fifteen days among threaded Vaidays, thirty days among non-threaded Kayasthas and Vaidays, and all other castes. The widow changes her *saree* and wears a white piece of *dhoti* without any border and removes the ornaments from her person. This she does after the return of her sons from the ceremation ground, as theoretically she is not a widow until her husband's body is completely reduced to ashes. Henceforth she wears a borderless white *dhoti* for the remainder of her life. The sons wear white *dhoti* and *chudder*. Four small earthen pots are hung in the four corners of the house or the room in which the deceased lived and water is poured every day into these by the sons to quench the thirst of the spirit just emerged from the fire, and a mantra addressed to the soul of the departed is recited at the dictation of the priest asking him to quench his thirst by this water. This continues during the whole period of mourning. The sons and their mother cannot sleep on comfortable beds nor sit upon any comfortable seat. Their bedding consists of a blanket spread upon straw, pillows are also made of straw, and their seats consist of woven *kusha* grass about a cubit square, and whenever the sons go they must carry the seats with them. This *kusa* grass seat is the orthodox seat of Hindus. In big feasts they sit upon this seat while eating and in all religious ceremonies the participants must sit upon this seat. This is a relic of the Vedic times. In

all religious ceremonies this *kusa* grass is used and a ring made of the *kusa* grass is placed upon the water contained in a copper vessel which is used in all religious ceremonies. During the first four days the widow and her sons cannot take any rice. They subsist upon fruits, milk, cocoanut, and *moong dal* soaked in water. Excepting the milk no other food can touch the fire. On the fifth day a new earthen vessel is washed, put upon the fire and water and *atap* rice are poured into it. The mother and the eldest son only can cook this rice. No additional water can be poured into it nor the gravy thrown away. Then the eldest son must take down the pot from the fire. Only ghee without salt and milk without sugar but with plantain can be taken with the rice and nothing else. No other dish or any other eatable is allowed. At night only fruits and milk are taken. This food must be taken during the whole period of mourning and the only seat upon which the widow and the sons sit is the *kusa* grass seat, and the only covering for their body in summer is the *chudder* but if they feel uncomfortable they can use a shawl or any woollen *chudder* over the cotton *chudder* which they must always wear round their bodies. No sewn garment can be used and shoes and slippers cannot be worn. This state of things lasts during the whole period of mourning. The widow and her sons must bathe every day and recite mantras but sometimes the eldest son only recites the mantras. In fact in the cases of the younger sons the rules are somewhat

relaxed and it is considered enough if the eldest son observes the rules strictly. Now-a-days sugar and rock salt have been introduced in the food. On the eleventh day of the moon, the sons cannot take any rice, they must live upon milk and fruits only. As regards daughters there is a distinction. Married daughters observe these rules for three days only but the unmarried daughters are ranked in this respect in the same category as sons. There is a peculiar custom. If for any reason the earthen pot cracks while rice is being boiled and the rice falls into the fire and is spoiled, another pot cannot be used. The sons must pass the day without taking any rice. A new pot must be used daily and the old one thrown away. After the bath the sons wear their *chudder*, and the white *dhoti* is dried in the sun but the mother wears a new *dhoti* as she has no *chudder* to use after the bath. The sons and their mother cannot have the use of the barber or the washerman.

On the fourth day a small ceremony is performed called Chaturtha and some Brahmins and near relations are fed. On the tenth day those who assisted in the cremation are invited to a feast.

On the last day of the mourning the family barber comes, shaves the head and beard and pares the nails but a tuft of hair must be left on the top. The parties then bathe and wear new *dhoties* and *chudders* which had been previously washed, as no Hindu will use any unwashed cloth on any ceremonial occasion.

The washerman gets as his perquisite all the *dhoties* and *chudders* cast off by them.

The next day the *sradh* is performed. A raised *vedi* has to be erected a cubit and quarter high and either 4 or 8 or 16 cubits square and a covering placed upon it. All sorts of silver or brass ware and new cloths are placed upon it or in an adjoining place. No gold will be accepted by a Brahmin except of the lowest class. Therefore no gold can be used. The eldest son recites mantras at the dictation of the priests. A bull calf is brought to the place and branded with a hot piece of iron and set at liberty. The *goalas* or any other Hindus take it. Formerly it was sacrificed and eaten. I refer the reader to my observations upon cow killing in connection with the placing of a cow's head at the door of the confinement room. Some female calves also are similarly distributed. Large numbers of people are fed, all the kinsmen and near relations being invited to the feast as well as the villagers. They are sumptuously fed. No animal food can be offered on this occasion. Beggars also come, they are either fed or paid in cash. Brahmin Pandits are also invited, they are paid in pieces of silver and cash, the silver utensils used at the *sradh* being cut into pieces and given to the Pandits according to their merits. It is very easy to decide on the merit of each pandit. They are divided into five classes, the lowest ones get eight annas in the rupee, next in order ten annas, the next twelve annas, then fourteen annas, then a full rupee. If the performer of

the *sradh* intends to pay, for example, sixteen rupees to the first class pundits then he pays eight rupees in cash and eight tolas of silver, the rest get their *bidai* in similar proportion. The other Brahmins are also paid and each pandit gets a *sidha* consisting of all necessary articles of food. A *sidha* for one man is usually a *sidha* for half a dozen people. Hindus are very extravagant on occasions of marriage and *sradh*, specially the latter. They think that the more they spend the greater will be their religious merit and the efficacy of the *sradh* and therefore their ancestors will ascend higher in heaven. I was invited to the *sradh* of the Maharaja of Burdwan, Mahatap Chand Bahadur, which took place in 1879, and I saw there heaps of silver and brass vessels, besides cots, elephant, horses, etc. The silver vessels were not generally finished articles as they have to be cut into pieces. Heaps of rupees there were, all distributed among Brahmins and the poor. It must be understood that none but Brahmins can get any share in this distribution; the beggars only got eight annas each, their number exceeding a lac. The Kayasthas and other castes who were invited got only board and lodging. The principal part in the religious ceremony consists in the offering of *pindas* which consist of cooked *atap* rice and plantain in the case of Brahmins and the threaded Kayasthas and Vaidyas and of raw *atap* rice and plantains, in the case of other castes. It is a strange thing that the plantains used in most religious ceremonies, such as *sradh* and Durga puja, must be of the

worst variety, the best ones are never used. At the time of actually offering these *pindas* the officiating priests must be of the Agradani class, they being the lowest in the scale of Brahmins.

A very large number of people are fed on the occasion of a *sradh*. People from distant villages come to the feast and the beggars get food and copper as well. All kinsmen and relatives are given *luchis*, vegetable curries, *dahi*, *khir*, *sandesh*, but no kind of animal food is given.

On the occasion of a *sradh* there are music and religious songs. In West Bengal the singers are generally women and the songs relate to the *lilas* or doings of Krishna and Radhika. In East Bengal there are music and religious songs by amateurs in the case of the *sradh* of old people and female singers are not hired for the occasion. It is strange that Shiva the God of death is not addressed in these songs. Guests have to pay some money as presents to the singers.

After the *sradh* is over and the sun sets, the eldest son cooks *atap* rice, fish, and vegetables and carries them to the ghat and leaves them there with a light burning. This food is intended for the departed soul. If the deceased be a widow then no fish is given to her. This finishes the *sradh* ceremony. The widow and the sons had been fasting the whole day, which is absolutely necessary on all ceremonial occasions as already stated. They now take some refreshments which consist only of milk, *moong dal* soaked in water, plantains and other fruits.

They must sleep on the same bed as before and also on the next day when they are required to observe all the above rules, as, correctly speaking, the period of mourning includes the day of the *śradh* and also the next day. On the second day after the *śradh*, kinsmen and sometimes friends and near relations are invited to a mid-day feast, as a feast at noon is the only feast recognised among Hindus on ceremonial occasions. Then the sons and the guests sit together for breakfast. Fish is first served, then the nearest kinsman takes in his hand some fish which had been served to him and gets up and he then gives the fish to each of the sons and grandsons of the deceased and asks them to eat the fish. Then he goes back to his seat, and every body eats a little fish. Then other dishes are served and eaten by the sons and the guests. Meat is also served to all. After the feast the sons wear their shoes and their ordinary dress and at night they sleep upon their ordinary beds. In fact after the feast, the period of mourning is actually over and the sons have not to observe any rule in connection with the mourning, but on every eleventh day of the moon they abstain from taking rice but live upon milk and fruits. This rule must be observed during a whole year and during this period the children of the deceased cannot eat rice at any house excepting a kinsman's, nor contract any marriage, unless in the case of grown-up daughters, when an urgent *śradh* is performed for purification.

After the monthly *śradh* the sons perform *śradh* every month on the same lunar days as.

the day of the death and on the twelfth lunar day a yearly *sradh* is performed in which the deceased parent and ancestors up to third degree and their wives are offered *phindas*. Some people perform this annual *sradh* as long as they live.

In East Bengal all friends and relations come to see the sons of the deceased to condole with them, but in West Bengal the sons have to go out to see their friends and relations and announce the death of their parent, only very near relations and friends coming to condole with them. In East Bengal people do not follow this custom. They generally do not leave the house during the mourning period.

When a married woman dies her forehead is painted with vermilion and she is dressed in a *saree* with red border or a red silk *saree* and is cremated in this dress. But in the case of all males and widows the *dhoti* which the deceased wears just before cremation is white.

If a young man's wife dies, then some friends must propose another marriage at the cremation ground, before the body is burnt to ashes. This ensures an early marriage. The most eligible bride for a widower is his late wife's sister, just as the most eligible boy to adopt is the brother's son.

FOOD.

Orthodox Hindus take sacrificial meat of goats and sheep and venison and no other meat. They eat almost all kinds of fish except *gajar* and *shoul*. In East Bengal they eat the

flesh of the tortoise, but not in West Bengal where it cannot be had. Turtles are eaten in the Barisal district by all people. In the Burdwan and Hoogly districts shell fish is eaten and if fried in ghee is regarded as a delicacy. Ordinary Hindus eat the flesh of goats and sheep even if they are not sacrificed before any idol. Hindus never take beef, or ham or pork or fowl, though in ancient times beef was not a prohibited article of food and Yajnavalka is reported to have said that he ate beef provided that it was tender, (Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 36:p.11) and Manu makes it an allowable food, (V.18). As to pulses, widows cannot take *moosori* and *maskalai* and orthodox people will not eat *moosori* on sundays. When I was young, the Chandals used to eat wild boars. I saw that a wild boar, which was killed, was taken away by them for eating, and that was about sixty years ago. But now the Chandals, the lowest classes of Hindus in Bengal, are beginning to imitate the manners and customs of the superior castes and have ceased to eat the flesh of the wild boar. Formerly widow marriage was prevalent among them but now in imitation of the superior castes they have abolished that custom. The Chandals have gone so far in imitating the superior castes that many of them have taken the sacred thread and call themselves Banerjees, Chatterjees, and Mukherjees, etc. As to vegetables, Hindus eat almost all kinds of herbs but widows make some exceptions

Grown-up Hindus generally take two meals, only one at noon, the other after night fall.

They cannot take two regular meals in the day time as it is prohibited by the Shastras. They rarely take any lunch and never any chotahazri. But now-a-days tea drinking in the morning and in the evening has been introduced in many families and they take some slight nourishment with the tea. Fifty years ago one per cent of Hindus took tea but now more than ten per cent have adopted the habit of tea drinking. In towns nearly twenty five per cent take tea every day. In Calcutta the lowest classes almost invariably take their morning tea.

On ceremonial occasions the Hindus generally fast and in many parts of Bengal the widows have to fast on the eleventh day of the moon, and in the case of males and married women it is considered a merit to fast on special occasions.

No Hindu will cook or eat any food during the progress of an eclipse, as it is the general belief of all Hindus that eating food at such a time will bring on chronic diarrhoea. The origin of this idea is very curious and illustrates how superstitious beliefs arise. The eclipse is called *grahana* in the vernacular and chronic diarrhoea is called *grahani*. These two words are not at all connected nor is the pronunciation alike. But some fanciful etymologists have derived the word *grahani* from *grahana*. In fact resemblance in pronunciation is the cause of many superstitions. A harmless vegetable is called *gosingha* which means the horn of a cow which it resembles. Therefore no widow will take that vegetable but in the district of

Barisal it is not called *gosingha* but it is called *rekha* and therefore widows eat this vegetable.. Similarly the word *tula* has two meanings, it means a scale (Libra of the zodiac) and it means cotton, the result being that when the sun is in Libra in the month of Kartic no orthodox Hindu will use a cotton quilt at night. Such is the origin of some superstitious beliefs.

There are some customs in connection with eating. In Northern India any man who does not belong to the untouchable class can touch almost any cooked food and people of superior castes take it, the only exceptions being cooked rice, *dal* and unleavened bread. But in Bengal no inferior caste man can touch any cooked food intended for any superior caste but, strange enough, any one who is not untouchable may bake the unleavened bread of superior caste, though orthodox Brahmins and Kayasthas refuse to take such bread. As to loaves, it was not regarded as allowable food by Hindus. More than half a century ago loaves and the meat of fowls were placed in the same category but now-a-days, excepting orthodox Hindus, every body eats loaves although baked by Mahomedans, and in many houses the flesh of the domestic fowl has been introduced. There is a peculiar custom among Hindus. Almost all cooked dishes are regarded as untouchable. If any body touches a vessel containing rice or any cooked food he has to wash his hand and, as already stated, no inferior caste man can touch any such vessel and if he does no superior caste man will eat out of that dish. This is

called *sakari* which is untranslatable into any other language. There is a sect of Hindus who will wash their hands if they put a betel leaf into their mouth, as the betel being an article of food connects the mouth and the hand, but these are extreme cases. There are exceptions also on the other side. Ordinary Hindus will buy sweetmeats from a sweetmeat shop and eat them but orthodox Hindus will not take any sweetmeats so bought from a shop excepting *sandesh* and *resagolla* which are prepared only with sugar and *chhana*. When Hindus sit together to eat, their seats are generally wooden planks or *kusa* grass seats placed on the floor. These seats must not touch one another and no Hindu will touch another person who is also eating by his side. Among Brahmins this rule is very strictly observed. No one except the mother and the wife can touch a Brahmin while he is eating ; if he does, he will stop eating and get up and wash his hands and mouth. This is a most barbarous custom. Some Brahmins do not allow their wives to touch them while they are eating. As the mother is regarded as a goddess by all Hindus they make an exception always in her case. The position of the mother is so great among Hindus, that there is a well-known saying that the mother and the home are superior even to heaven. The reason why nobody is allowed to touch a Brahmin while eating is a very curious one. Eating is regarded as a *yajna* and nobody should touch a man while he is performing a *yajna*. In Europe, when people sit together to eat the man

who is first served begins to eat, but it is not so among Hindus. They must all begin at the same time and with the permission of all. The man who is highest in rank among them says, 'Let us begin', and then they begin to eat. Before commencing to eat the orthodox Hindus must recite some *mantras*, put a few grains of rice upon the floor and take a few drops of water into the palm of the hand and drink it and then commence eating. In regular feasts the Brahmins must be served first and then the other castes. Formerly in West Bengal Brahmins would leave some remnant of food upon the plantain leaf from out of which they were eating and the other castes would sit on their seats and begin taking those remnants. But this custom is gradually dying out and every body now insists on getting a fresh plantain leaf for his plate. All the diners must rise together. If any body rises the rest will stop eating and get up. Therefore the usual custom is to enquire whether every body has finished his meal. After they get up they wash their hands and mouth and are offered betel leaf and tobacco. If Brahmins are feasted they get *dakshina* which varies from one anna to one rupee per head. But if a Brahmin invites non-Brahmins then every non-Brahmin will give some *dakshina* to the Brahmin host, the result being that the Brahmin diner or the Brahmin host must get some money from the non-Brahmin in all cases. This is regarded as a meritorious act.

English dinner consists of a few courses but

a vegetable dinner in Bengal, when many people are invited, consists of many dishes, though the number has been very much reduced of late. In one case many years ago, I remember there were more than sixty dishes. When many people are invited and there is not enough space in the house, guests are fed in batches and are sometimes obliged to sit in places which were never intended to be used as dining rooms. The place is swept and besmeared with cow dung mixed with water and the food is placed upon a plantain leaf, and sometimes it is torn and the food is mixed with the cow dung, but if two plantain leaves are placed one upon another this does not happen. In Europe the host or hostess sits at the head of the table and the principal guest sits on his right and so on. But in Bengal the host does not generally sit to take his dinner before others have eaten and the women folk take their dinner after all the males have been served. If the number of guests be few then the host sits with them but he gives the place of honour to the guests who are held in highest esteem. It is not usual for girls to sit with the males unless they are very young. The usual order of serving the dishes is as follows:—first rice is served to all, then ghee and salt, and then fried fish or vegetable are served. In East Bengal this dish is usually bitter *khesari dal*. In West Bengal *khesari dal* is rarely used and therefore some bitter vegetable dish is served instead, then some pungent dishes are served, then fish curry, then pilau and meat curry then some *chatni*, then

dahi and *sandesh* and in East Bengal *khir* with sugar and plantain, rice boiled in milk and sugar. These are the usual courses served in a breakfast or dinner. In West Bengal they begin with two *luchies* and some vegetable dishes, then they are served with rice or pilau as the case may be. In East Bengal *luchies* are never eaten with rice or pilau. The usual rule is that gentlemen are first served, then the ladies, lastly the lower classes. There is a strange custom in Bengal and perhaps throughout India. On big occasions poor people and strangers who had not been invited sit down to eat and are fed. In parts of the district of Barisal genuine pilau, made of rice, meatbroth and ghee, is a rare thing. Only the bridegroom is served with it. His brothers and other relations do not generally get it. There pilau is prepared by colouring the rice with turmeric and putting a little ghee over it and mixing them together. In other parts of Bengal real pilau is served to all principal guests.

Hindus have a very unsocial custom about eating. No two castes can dine in the same room according to strict Hindu custom. The orthodox Brahmin even to-day will not dine in the same room with a non-Brahmin and no one while eating can touch another diner. A dish containing food cannot be touched by any one while eating, even by any part of his body or even by his washed left hand or his dress. If he does, the food will be thrown away or given to lower class people. A husband cannot see his wife eat; if he does, then the wife will cease

eating and get up, otherwise Alakshmi or the goddess of poverty will overtake them.

After a Hindu has eaten his food the dishes and cups are removed and the place washed with diluted cow dung, otherwise no one will pass over the place and no one will sit there to take his food. Diluted cow dung is the greatest purifier amongst Hindus. An unused place can be made fit for use even as a dining room, if wiped with a rag with some diluted cow dung. In places where Ganges water is easily available, no cow dung is necessary, this water is considered enough to purify a place. This diluted water and the rag are rubbed every day over the floor of rooms and the floor and plinth of huts and even the courtyard gets a sprinkling of this sacred water every day to purify it. The cow dung is very sacred, and it is ordained that if any body has to expiate a religious or social offence, then he must eat cow dung.

Orthodox Hindus never take the milk of a cow before three weeks have passed after calving, when they give some milk to a deity and then begin taking it. Similarly they never eat any mango or other well-known fruit before it has been offered to a deity.

No one can mix salt with milk unless curdled. If he does so, it becomes beef. Nor can anybody mention the word beef while eating. If any one does so, the rest will stop eating and get up.

After Dussera and before Sharaswati puja no orthodox Hindu will eat the *hilsa* fish. On the occasion of Sharaswati puja a pair of *hilsa*

fish is bought, a vermilion mark is placed on each and grass, paddy and jute leaves and a lighted lamp are placed on a window and then presented to a goddess with the sound of *ultr*.

MISCELLANEOUS.

When a Hindu wakes from his sleep, before he rises he must say 'Durga Durga', then he gets up, salutes the sun and after his ablutions must brush his teeth, cleanse his mouth, then leave the *dhoti* he had been wearing at night, recite his morning prayers and then commence his business whatever it may be. Then he changes his cloth, performs his puja and sits to eat. He takes a siesta if he has no business to look after, then he gets up, washes his face and mouth, does some business if any, or plays with dice or cards and in the evening recites his evening prayers, spends the evening as he likes and then takes his dinner and goes to bed. In England I understand people go to places of entertainment or otherwise enjoy themselves after dinner and usually go to bed after midnight but it is not so in Bengal or in India where people go to bed soon after their dinner is over. Hindus are very fond of betel, they begin to chew it after breakfast and go on chewing it until they go to bed at night. Young people and infants do not observe the above rule. They eat four times a day and do not usually sleep in the day time nor do they perform any puja, only Brahmin boys have to recite the Gayatri on three occasions, morning, noon and evening.

This is the usual routine of the life of a Hindu.

An orthodox Hindu will never start a journey on a day which is not auspicious. He consults the almanac, finds when it is auspicious to start on a journey, and then starts. If it be a long journey, two earthen *kalshi* full of water with two small twigs of a mango tree are placed on the two sides of the door and a deity is painted upon each *kalshi* with vermillion and when he starts he has to salute them. No Hindu will start when the two constellations of Aslesha and Magha are in the ascendant, nor on a full moon or a new moon night or on the first or last day of the month, nor during an eclipse or a week after. Before he starts he must salute his parents and other elderly people who are present to see him off. If he once starts on an auspicious day he can break his journey as often as he likes, provided he nowhere stays three nights, but if he does so, he must again consult the almanac and find out an auspicious day.

When a Hindu leaves his house if any body sneezes or calls him by name or a house lizard (*tiktiki*) makes a noise then he must re-enter his house and make a fresh start, and when a Hindu goes on a journey he considers it lucky if a jackal passes by his right side or a dead body is carried by his left side.

No Hindu will sleep with his head towards the north nor will he sit to eat with his face towards the north. They justify their action in avoiding the north, when they sleep,

on the ground that it is prohibited by the Shas-tras. Now they base it on a scientific ground, something connected with electricity as the magnetic pole is towards the north. How far they are right I am not in a position to say.

No Hindu woman will take the name of her husband under any circumstances and it is not generally proper for a woman to take the name of any ancestor or ancestress of her husband or his elder brother or cousin. It therefore frequently happens that the name of a relation or a servant is changed if it happens to be the same as that of a person whose name it is not proper for her to take.

A married woman must wear a bordered *saree* and at least some ornaments in her arms. Poor people in Eastern Bengal wear bangles of conch shell, and glass *churies* in Western Bengal. The use of these bangles is conclusive of the fact that her husband is alive. In East Bengal rich women also use these bangles but in West Bengal they must wear an iron bangle, otherwise people will take them to be widows. Old widows, particularly of the lower castes, sometimes wear bordered *dhoties* but the colour of the border can never be red. Married women put vermilion upon the forehead and the head and when so doing if any other married woman be present she must put similar marks of vermilion upon her forehead and head. Married women are permitted to take betel but no respectable widow will take it. If a married pair go to a place of pilgrimage or perform any religious act then the virtue is

equally divided between them. If a wife goes alone the whole virtue will be hers but if the husband goes alone then his virtue will be equally divided between him and his wife, although she takes no part in the acquisition of this virtue. A married woman will ever sit or stand on the right side of her husband, she must always be to the left. A newly married wife is not expected to speak to her husband in the presence of any body nor is she expected to speak to any elderly relations, male or female, on her husband's side and during her life time she cannot speak or appear before her husband's elder brother or cousin or maternal uncle. These two persons can see her face only once. I understand that in Behar the father-in-law is also included in this category. She can speak only with young females and in a very low voice. If she has to convey any idea to her mother-in-law or to other old female relations, she smacks her lips and thus draws their attention to her and she speaks by signs. This state of things does not last long.. Her state is really pitiable as she goes into a strange family and has great difficulty in communicating her wishes. Young women generally do not speak with elderly strangers or even servants ; if necessary they use the third person singular and not the second person singular. A newly married wife addresses her mother-in-law as mother and she addresses other relations by the relationship her husband bears to them but will never call any elderly person by name. Similarly her new relations address her by the

relationship she bears to them and nobody will call her by name. No newly married wife will eat with any male in the same room. She will eat with females and infants only. It is the invariable custom among Hindus that men and women eat separately, just as the ancient Greeks did, but this rule is not observed if she is an elderly woman when she is supposed to be above many restrictions. For instance young women never go to the outer apartment or courtyard. But elderly women do not always observe this rule. But in a place of pilgrimage or on a journey they appear in public and many restrictions disappear. When a wife goes to her father's house, her father bears all expenses of the journey but when she comes to her own house her husband bears the expenses and furnishes the escort, but if the wife be the daughter of a Moulik and her husband be a Kulin, her father bears the expenses of the journey both ways in East Bengal. The newly married wife must rise very early from her husband's bed, otherwise people will laugh at her.

Hindus must meet one another on the Dashahara day, or the day after, and touch the feet of Brahmins and of elderly relations, male or female and the males embrace one another, even untouchables are permitted to embrace the superior castes. The women, young or old, put some paddy and grass on the head of each male and touch the feet of their elderly male relations. The Romans had a similar custom which took place on the twenty first February every year, when even bitter enemies had to

meet and embrace one another. This is a very good social custom. Even if after the lapse of some time after the Dashahara two Hindus meet, they must perform the same ceremony. Strictly speaking this ceremony continues till Kali puja, three weeks after, but generally speaking it lasts for nearly two months.

No orthodox Hindu will take any ghee with his rice if somebody else had eaten out of the plate which he is using. The result of this is that formerly no non-Brahmin could take ghee with his rice as he usually sat to breakfast out of a plate which a Brahmin had eaten out of.

Orthodox Hindus drink *charanamrita* or the nectar of the foot. This foot is the right of an idol or of a Brahmin who is a god incarnate, as Manu, who extols the Brahmins to the skies, says (1.98-101):—

98. “The very birth of Brahmins is a constant incarnation of Dharma, God of Justice ; for the Brahman is born to promote justice, and to procure ultimate happiness.

99. When a Brahmin springs to light, he is born above the world, the chief of all creatures, assigned to guard the treasury of duties, religious and civil.

100. Whatever exists in the universe is, all in effect, though not in form, the wealth of the Brahmin ; since the Brahmin is entitled to it all by his primogeniture and eminence of birth.

101. The Brahmin eats but his own food ;

wears but his own apparel ; and bestows but his own in alms through the benevolence of the Brahmin indeed, other mortals enjoy life."

Some water is poured upon the big toe of the idol and given to Hindus who drink it with great devotional feelings. In the case of a Brahmin, who is generally unshod, he first washes the big toe of his right foot, then dips it into a vessel containing water and people drink it. I have seen my grandmother fetch water and get the *charanamrita* of our family priest, drink a few drops, sprinkle a few drops on her head, and keep the rest for future use.

If a Hindu digs a pond its length must be north to south and the breadth from east to west. It must be sanctified by a ceremony performed by Brahmins before its water can be used. Mahomedans dig their ponds in the opposite direction. Their length is from east to west and breadth from north to south, with the result that no Hindu will drink its water or use it for any purpose.

This difference in customs between Mahomedans and Hindus is shown in other ways. Hindus use the front side of the plantain leaf when they use it for a plate, but Mahomedans will use the back side of the leaf. Hindus have been digging their tanks and using plantain leaves for plates before Mahomet was born. So this opposition to Hindu customs was started by the Mahomedans, who follow the converse rule. Hindus must have the *kachha*, as without it they cannot eat their food or perform any religious ceremony. The only exception to

this rule is the Vaishnava who is a Bhikary, or beggar, who has renounced the world and who, like the Mahomedans, bury their dead. No orthodox Mahomedan will wear a *kachha*.

If any one praises the beauty or plumpness of an infant, then the mother or near female relation of the infant, if present, will throw a little spittle on it, to avoid the evil influence of the speaker, and if a woman after combing her hair has to throw away some hair which comes out of her head, she has to mix the rejected hair with a little spittle and throw it away.

If a creeper thrives well, and the passers-by are likely to envy it or to speak well of its growth, then a black pot with a white cross mark is suspended near it. All this is to avoid the influence of evil spirits.

If a house lizard (*tiktiki*) makes a noise, then all present must say—true, true, true (satya, satya, satya). The reason of this is unknown.

No one should offer anything to another, specially if of superior rank, with his left hand. If the right hand is engaged, then he should touch the elbow of the left hand with his right fist. It is very unmannerly to offer anything with the left hand and people take offence if that is done.

No son or a much younger man or an inferior man will smoke or drink wine in the presence of his father or any elderly relation. It is highly improper to do so. So father and son can never drink wine or smoke together.

Hindus sit on *piris* or other seats when eating, and they cannot touch one another when eating rice. If they do so, the Brahmin or other superior caste man will stop eating. So they can never sit at table for eating. Though the ancient Greeks and Romans used tables for dining, it is strange that Hindus never copied their custom. The Greeks sat or rather reclined on sofas placed on three sides of the table, the other side being left open for the service of the dinner. The Romans also sat at table and Plutarch says that Julius Caesar, when he came to Rome after his Proconsulship, entertained his countrymen on twenty two thousand tables, each accommodating nine people. Hindus cannot use any knife, fork, or spoon as they cannot use their left hand when eating, as the hand which touches any cooked food becomes polluted. The Greeks and the Romans had knives and spoons, but Hindus have only lately introduced them in their household. They had ladles only. As to forks, it was unknown even in Europe till the end of the sixteenth century and they are mentioned for the first time in England in a letter dated 1611 when the writer says that forks were introduced into England from Italy.

No one should enter a room containing an idol with his shoes on. All religious ceremonies must be performed with bare feet and preferably with a silk *dhoti* and *chudder* on. All cotton cloths worn while in bed or used the previous day when eating must be washed, but no silk cloth need be washed though worn for days together.

Orthodox Brahmins will never touch a Chandal or a Mahomedan or a Christian. If they do, they must purify themselves by bathing.

No Brahmin should be asked to give fire or burning faggots. The origin of this superstition is unknown. But if one asks the Brahmin to give him some wood he will give him the burning faggot.

If one is called by another, some superstitious Hindus will not answer the first call but will answer the second call, as the first call may be by some evil spirit.

It is not permissible to tread upon the shadow of a Brahmin, the lord of creation according to Manu, and if by accident a non-Brahmin's foot touches the body or foot of a Brahmin, the former must touch the feet of the Brahmin, but if the two persons are of equal rank and of the same caste, the offender merely salutes the offended person, but if the offender be a man of inferior status or caste, or a junior relation, then he must touch the feet of the offended person.

If a man has to pass by a very high personage, he must not show his back to him, but walk sidewise so long as he is within sight of him.

To address a man three forms of speech are used, as 'you sir', 'you', and 'thou'. An elderly man, an ancestor or ancestress, uncle or aunt is addressed as *apany* or 'you sir' or 'madam', as Sie in German, an equal as *toomy*, you, a younger man, a son or nephew or a servant or a low person as *tui*, 'thou'.

In villages, where there are very few or no

chairs the women sit on the bare floor, so that the back of their *dhoti* becomes dirty in no time, but in towns and in the houses of rich people in the mofussil, chairs and benches are always used, and even in the mofussil women are offered *piris* (low wooden seats) to sit on.

A newly married wife wears many ornaments including nose-ring and earring. In East Bengal she must wear two conch shell bangles on her wrists, and in West Bengal an iron bangle, sometimes covered with a thin gold sheet. Usually a married woman wears a bangle or *churries* on each arm and dispenses with the silver anklets which she wore at the time of her marriage. A woman must change her cloth every morning and wash her cloth in the evening after washing her body. In fact every woman bathes twice, except that in the evening bath she does not pour any water on her head as in that case her hair would remain wet the whole night which would bring on an attack of cold and it would disshevel her dressed hair.

Every one must salute the light when the lamp is lighted in the evening, just as everybody must salute the sun when he comes out of his room after rising from his bed. The Hindus regard light or fire as the principal form of energy. They have abolished every other principal god of the Vedas, and Fire, who is invoked in the very first sukta of the Rig Veda, the oldest book of the Hindus, is still worshipped by every Hindu. As the Vedas often speak of *yajnas*, and *yajnas* were performed almost every day and Fire must be worship-

ped in every *yajña*. I believe that Fire was the most worshipped god of the Hindus. With their limited knowledge of chemistry and physics, they believed that the Sun was the preserver of life, and in this they were perfectly right.

In West Bengal if a *kulin* is asked his name he will say that he is so and so Ghose Das or Basu Das, etc., as the case may be, but in East Bengal no *kulin* will add Das after his patronymic, except at the time of marriage or other ceremony. This addition of Das is owing to the evil influence of Brahmins who have tried their best to lower the Kayasthas to the level of all other castes. Raghunandan, the founder of the Bengal school of Dharmashastra who flourished in the beginning of the sixteenth century and was a contemporary of Chaitanya, has gone so far as to say that excepting Brahmins, all other people in Bengal are Shudras. Now-a-days all threaded Kayasthas call themselves Barmanas, and have omitted the word Das after their names. My kinsmen whether threaded or not, call themselves Barmans, and use that word in all ceremonial occasions.

Inferior classes of people have a hankering for big patronymics. The oilmen have the patronymics of Kundu and Pal, the wine-sellers that of Shaha, but the moment they become rich, they become Roys, and sometimes Roy Choudrys, and other people have assumed other patronymics, but at the time of marriage or other ceremony they must revert to the original patronymic and in invitation letters to

such ceremonies they must write their original patronymic after their names.

Kulins have also changed their patronymics. This is owing either to their eminence or to government service in Mahomedan times. My kinsmen of Malkhanagore are called Basu Thakurs, the Ghoses of Gabha are called Dastidars, the Guhas of Banaripara are called Thakurtas, the Boses of the Chandsy are called Mazumdars, the Boses of Radhanagar are called Sarbadhicarys, the Mitras of Ula are called Mustafis and there are other similar patronymics by which these highest class of *Kulins* are known throughout East and West Bengal.

Bengali Hindus have the very bad custom of chaffing with their grand daughters, and grand-nieces, and sisters-in-law. Sometimes they propose marriage with them and sometimes use obscene language. They chaff with the children's mothers-in-law and aunts-in-law, and the rule is that a man may chaff with the alternate generation so that no man will chaff with his daughter or niece but with her daughters. Similarly one will chaff with his children's mothers-in-law or aunts-in-law, but not with their daughters, but again with the daughters of these daughters.

After the Kalipuja, there is a ceremony called Bhratridwitya. The sisters put the mark of white sandal paste on their brothers' foreheads, and give a *dhoti* to each of them. The next day the brothers are invited to a sumptuous feast. The first ceremony takes place in some families the day after the Kalipuja and the second the

next day. In some families both ceremonies take place on the second day after the Kalipuja. There is an invocation to Death to prolong the lives of the brothers.

In Jeyt, there is a ceremony called Jamai Sasty when the son-in-law gets *dhoti* and *chudder* and other presents, and a sumptuous breakfast. The children of the mistress of the family who performs this ceremony also get cloths and it is believed that the lives of her progeny will be as long as the combined length of the thread in the cloths each of them gets. The Bhratridwitya is compulsory everywhere but this Jamai Sasty is an optional ceremony, but compulsory in certain parts of West Bengal.

If an infant is born after the death of his immediately preceding brother then the new born babe is formally sold to some female for some cowries not exceeding nine, or for some broken rice and the purchaser resells the child to its mother in consideration of a *shidha* (present of articles of food such as rice, ghee, *dal* and other articles) and the child is called by the number of cowries for which it was sold, such as Acowrie, Docowri, etc., but there is no sale for one or two gandas of cowries, therefore there is no such name as Charcowri or Atcowri. If the sale is for some broken rice then the child is called Khudi from *khud* (broken rice). This is to deceive the evil spirit which is supposed to be deceived by the maternity of the child and so cannot wreak its vengeance on the devoted head of its natural mother's children.

On hearing the news of the death of a very

near relation, paternal or maternal, it is usual to bathe and a man must bathe after the period of mourning is over, during which time he cannot have the use of the barber and therefore on the last day of the period of mourning every Hindu gets his nails pared and his beard shaved and afterwards he bathes. It is unnecessary to say that no man can be clean in person unless he bathes and I believe this custom of bathing was introduced among the Jews in imitation of the Indian custom and Jesus had to bathe before the Holy Ghost descended upon him and all people of Christian faith have to bathe before they can enter into the fold of Christianity.

If a woman has her monthly course she is considered as unclean. In West Bengal she is not permitted to cook for others but her touch is not pollution and she sleeps in the same bed with her husband. In East Bengal such a woman is considered as unclean. Nobody can touch her and if he touches her he must bathe. She must sleep on a separate bed and cannot use any mattress, and the mat and the improvised pillow must be washed on the fourth day. During the period of three days she cannot perform any religious ceremony or say her prayers. In Madras I understand they go to an extreme. There is a separate hut separate from the main building for the use of such a female as she is not permitted to enter a building and pollute it. In East Bengal the cloths she wears during this period cannot be used by her before they are washed by the washerman. If my opinion were asked I would decidedly

prefer the East Bengal custom. It is more sanitary and healthy to the husband and the wife.

During the period of mourning on the death of a kinsman no Hindu can take any animal food and in the case of the death of a father or mother no Hindu can accept any invitation to dinner or breakfast at the house of anybody except that of a kinsman. On the death of an ancestor or ancestress other than parents the people of West Bengal must remain unshod during the whole period of mourning, but it is otherwise in East Bengal where the strict rules of mourning are observed only in the case of the death of one of the parents.

In the last century there was a fine custom of hospitality to wayfarers. It was called *atithi'sheba* or feeding the wayfarers. There were no inns in those days and articles of food could not be bought everywhere. So rich people gave food or *shidha* to every wayfarer who arrived in their houses and demanded hospitality. In some families the days were distributed among the kinsmen. We had to receive all such wayfarers after the twenty seventh of the month till the end of it. But now there are inns everywhere and good roads and shops where one can buy articles of food and cook them. Therefore this custom now prevails in rich families only. According to Hindu custom no *atithi* can be asked whence he came before he is fed.

Englishmen are very fond of kissing one another. Indians never kiss any one but infants—and a husband will never kiss his wife.

in the presence of any body. Indians kiss cheeks, not the mouths but the mother kisses the mouth of her young baby. The kissing of the mouth was not prevalent in Europe in ancient times and it is said that the daughter of Hengist introduced it into England. The Indian practice is more cleanly and sanitary.

As regards the female dress, no one can show her person as Europeans do. The breast must be entirely covered. Mahomed had to enjoin this in the Koran (Ch. XXIV) and the back cannot be shown at all. Only the right arm is visible sometimes. When a woman appears only before her relatives, she is somewhat negligent in her dress, but when a gentlewoman leaves her house, only her feet and half of her face and portion of her right arm are visible. In cold Europe there is a display of the person, particularly in nights, but in hot India, the rule is just the reverse, and Indians wonder how Europeans bear the intense cold of their country with such scanty covering of the body.

Formerly the dress of a female consisted only of a *saree* in which she covered her whole body and her head, as every married woman must be veiled when appearing before any one. In East Bengal there are two turns of the *saree* below the waist but in West Bengal there is only one turn which somewhat exposes the person. But now-a-days ladies wear chemises at home under the *saree*—so their persons are always well covered. Now one can see Hindu ladies wear a bodice or other kind of European dress but they never wear a gown like a European.

lady, though some advanced ladies wear their *saree* in a gown-like fashion in imitation of the women of Northern India which looks much nicer than the usual mode of using a *saree*.

Bengalee ladies formerly never wore shoes and very few used slippers after evening when the day's work was over but now shoes have been introduced in many Hindu families but no one can wear shoes or slippers when at her prayer or devotion or when entering a temple.

As regards the male dress, formerly it consisted of a *dhoti* but when a man left his house or village and went elsewhere he put on a *chudder* on his bare body, afterwards they wore a short coat up to the waist tied by two strings on the two sides of the chest, then *pirans* or shirts were gradually introduced and now shirts with stiff linen cuffs have been introduced over which the *chudder* is placed. This *chudder* was used for various purposes such as a handkerchief, an umbrella or a sheet to cover the person, but now umbrellas have come into general use and a handkerchief is carried in the pocket, therefore *chudders* have become useless and there are many people who never use a *chudder* when going out in the street.

Hindus formerly did not wear shoes as they are made of the hide of a cow, a sacred animal. They used wooden sandals with a knob in them between the big toe and the next toe. They were very cheap and lasted long, but now every body wears shoes which are very dear now, though they were very cheap formerly. I remember to have bought a pair of shoes for

me in 1858 for five and half annas but its leather was not well tanned. Now such a pair of shoes would cost three or four rupees.

Every respectable Hindu keeps a horoscope for his son. In West Bengal a horoscope is kept for the daughter also, but in East Bengal no such horoscope is kept. The reason is very simple. Each horoscope gives the *gan* of the infant and there are three gans, Deva, Nara and Rakshasha, i.e., God, Man and Rakshasha. The bride and the bridegroom may both be of first two *gans* or either of them, but if one of them be of Rakshasha *gan*, the other must be of Deva *gan*, otherwise the Rakshasha will eat or kill the other, but no Rakshasha can kill any person of the Deva *gan*. If the bride be a Rakshasha then she will soon be a widow if her husband be not a Deva and in the reverse case the bridegroom will soon be a widower. Hence whenever there is a proposal of marriage, the two horoscopes are consulted to see if the *gans* are in proper order. The Eastern Bengal Hindus do not keep any horoscope for their daughters to avoid this hindrance to the marriage of their girls, thinking that where ignorance is bliss it is folly to be wise.

No boy can marry on the day of the week when he was born, nor in the month when he was born. The eldest son cannot marry in Jeyt, which also means senior, or in Agrahayana which means foremost. But some people do not exclude the whole month but exclude the first thirteen days. Similarly there can be no marriage in Bhadra to Cartic, Pous, and Cheyt,

but in East Bengal only Pous and Cheyt are considered as unholy for marriage but Aswin is generally avoided. The reason of the exclusion of these three months is given in all almanacs. If the marriage be in Bhadra, then the wife becomes a woman of the town, if in Aswin, then the wife will die, if in Cartic the wife will be a sickly woman. Thousands of such marriages take place every year in East Bengal, with no such untoward result, still the people of West Bengal will persist in avoiding these months. Sundays are always excluded as it is a neutral day and the marriage will be fruitless, that is, there will be no issue of the marriage, which is the sole object of all Hindu marriages, according to the Shastras. There are other restrictions to marriage but they are not generally observed. The bride should be even years old, counting from the conception. The curious reader will find all these prohibitions and restrictions in the Almanac.

One of the ten commandments of God to Moses was not to take his name in vain. But the Hindus follow the contrary rule. Half the names of Hindus are the names of deities, the idea being that the more one takes the name of a deity the better for his salvation.

A younger brother cannot marry unless the elder brother is married, or he promises not to marry.

Formerly women used to tattoo their forehead, and the lower classes their arms also, but now no gentlewoman will tattoo herself.

Married women and grown-up girls paint

the edges of their feet and the tips of the fingers with *alta* (lacye) in West Bengal and this custom is being gradually introduced in East Bengal. It is a very old custom and is mentioned by Kalidas in describing the personal appearance of Parvaty in his *Kumara-Samvhaba*. It need not be said that all grown-up girls and women must veil their faces. This is also enjoined in the Koran.

No Hindu will pass under the outstretched arm of any person as the Hindu belief is that the owner of the arm will have boils in the arm pit.

If any one sneezes then the people near him will utter *jiba* (live) thrice, else death will overtake him. If anybody yawns then he will put his right hand near the gaping mouth and strike his middle finger with his thumb and make a noise to drive away flies which might enter his mouth.

No Hindu will kill a cat in any circumstances. If he does he will give salt and *dakshina* to a Brahmin and perform a penance.

If a dog enters a cook-room or a dining room then all the cooked food must be thrown away, the vessels and utensils scrubbed and washed, as dogs are considered very unclean and if anybody touches a dog he must bathe.

If a cow dies an accidental death, the owner must place a rope round his neck and remain speechless for one year and subsist by begging. Such is the veneration for the cow, regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu, although the Vedas and Manu allow its flesh as lawful

food, and the former enjoined cow sacrifice (*yajna*).

There are thousand and one customs, but ~~they~~ are not of much importance and I pass them over lest I should tire the reader's patience.

Now let me conclude, but before concluding, let me pay my tribute to the late mother of my father, to my late mother, to the mother of my children who is part authoress of this book, and to the mothers of my grand children and to all Hindu mothers for their intense love for their children, their astonishing self-sacrifice and their devotion for the welfare of their children. It is for this reason that the Hindu mother is regarded as a goddess, as she truly is. I do not wish to disparage other mothers, but a Hindu mother is truly divine. May all mothers follow their example and attain godhead like them. I close with a salutation to all Hindu mothers and implore their blessing.
