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Collected Essays

OF

Pandit A. MAHADEVA SASTRI, B.A.,

ON

Vedic Religion and Social Reform

Vol. I.

The Vedic Law of Marriage.

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FOREWORD.

My study of Hindu social institutions such as caste and marriage with special reference to their *original Vedic basis* dates from 1905 when an association for the resuscitation of the sway of true Aryan ideals of life was formed in Mysore, with the designation of *Arya-Dharma-Ujivini-Sabha* and I was elected one of its Secretaries—Literary Secretary. The first fruits of this study took the form of an address to the association's anniversary meeting of 1907 in which I dealt with the question of the marriageable age of girls, then being hotly discussed in the Sabha. The address was published in 1908 as a pamphlet entitled *Vedic Law of Marriage*. Since then I have continued my studies, the results having been given out in various forms from time to time. I have embodied them mostly in lectures at public meetings convened for the purpose, in my presidential addresses at Social Conferences, in discourses at Theosophical Conventions, Conferences and Federations, in my Editorial leaders and notes in the English and Vernacular periodicals I edited while at Mysore, in articles in *New India* and *The Commonweal* and replies to criticisms which appeared therein. In a few cases the results of my studies were given out as expert evidence in Law Courts and as answers to questions in the course of debates with learned pandits including the head of a leading *mutt*. Out of these

expositions a considerable portion consisting of fully written out lectures as well as notes of lectures still await publication.

Ever since the issuing of the first pamphlet there has been a continuous demand for the literature; but recently I have found myself quite unable to meet the persistent demand as some of the pamphlets have gone out of print, while a large mass of literature, lying scattered over in a number of periodical publications, is not readily available. With a view to making all this literature easily accessible to those interested in the subject, I have proposed to publish in a collected form all the disquisitions and notes that have been already published and whatever else deserves publication out of the unpublished notes and lectures.

In this volume I have brought together most of my essays and notes already published, dealing with the question of marriage. I have, however, thought it proper to include in this volume my lecture on *Ancient Hindu Ideal of Education*, as it deals with *Brahmacharya* or the student-life of boys and girls which, according to the Vedic Law of Marriage, forms a necessary preparation for marriage and married life,—a preparation on which I have laid much stress as deserving special consideration in any scheme of Hindu Marriage Reform. The other essays and notes will be grouped under separate heads and published in separate volumes as follows:

Vedic Religion and Caste ;

Vedic Basis of Hinduism ;

Social Reform on Vedic lines ;
Objections and Answers.

The several sections of the subject-matter of the present volume have been arranged in the chronological order of their original production, which will serve to indicate how the thesis has developed in its details with the progress of my studies. It has indeed been a source of intense satisfaction and a strong incentive to further studies that my later studies in detail of marriage and other socio-religious institutions have not only confirmed the main conclusions drawn at first by the application of the fundamental principles of Vedic exegesis to the interpretation of the texts bearing on marriage, but have also thrown a very illuminative light on some of those aspects of our institutions such as marriage, caste and ritual, which as treated in Dharma-Sutras and Smritis, convey no intelligible idea or appear somewhat ludicrous. The results obtained so far has strengthened my faith in the method I have adopted of determining the main import of the propositions forming the subject-matter of the several kinds of our scriptural texts. The method here followed is one planned by a mind which was early imbued with the spirit of western philosophy and inductive science and later on trained in the eastern methods of exegesis by a purposeful and strenuous study—extending over thirty years—of original Vedic texts and ritualistic and philosophical Sutras in the light of the masterly exegetical expositions of Sabara, Sankara, Śuresvara, Bhatta-Kumarila, Sayana, etc.,

and in a most favourable environment consisting in a constant and close association with eminent pandits and a well-equipped library of Sanskrit Literature.

In issuing these disquisitions in a collected form, my object is not merely to make the results of my studies in this direction up to date readily accessible to those who have already appreciated them in part, but also to invite further opinions based on a fuller study of my theses from those who have adversely criticised my early conclusions and objected to my interpretation of some of the texts quoted in support of those conclusions. It is due on my part to these critics to mention here that my interpretation of one or two passages has had to be slightly altered in the light of their criticisms, though such alteration has not very materially affected the conclusions based on them.

In concluding this foreword, it is my pleasure as well as duty to convey my sincere thanks to the enterprising publisher, Mr. V. Venkatesvara Sastri of Messrs. V. Ramaswamy Sastrulu and Sons, who has so readily and enthusiastically undertaken the publication of this collection at considerable cost in these times of strain and stress.

ADAYAR,

A. MAHADEVA SASTRI.

5th September 1918.

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Part I—The Vedic Law of Marriage.

(For details see p. xv.)

Part II—Some Papers and Notes on the Vedic Scheme of Marriage including Preparation for Marriage.

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I
THE
VEDIC LAW OF MARRIAGE

THE
VEDIC LAW OF MARRIAGE

OR
The Emancipation of Woman

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PREFACE.

MARRIAGE is a social institution of such vital importance that a nation's ideals of marriage and married life have a direct bearing on its well-being and progress or the reverse. The truth of this proposition is well borne out by the history of the Indo-Aryans. The vicissitudes of their long and hoary civilization can be traced to the gradual changes in their ideals of marriage and married life and in the status assigned to woman in society.

Three important stages with reference to the laws of marriage and the status of woman may be distinguished in the history of the Indo-Aryan civilization as revealed in the extant literature.

There was a time when, among the cultured classes of the Aryan community, woman's status was almost equal to man's; when she had equal opportunities for receiving a complete education and was therefore equally free to choose between an independent life of singleness devoted entirely

to spiritual culture and a married life of temporal interests permeated with spiritual devotion ; when this idea of equality as reflected in the Vedic ideal of marriage—a free self-chosen life-long union of man and woman, of two friendly and sympathetic souls combining in harmony their temporal interests and spiritual aspirations—was a determining factor in all social relations between man and woman ; when at the time of marriage the bridegroom and the bride were both adults having passed through a well-devised course of physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual discipline as a preparation for a proper discharge of the duties pertaining to their joint life as householders, and were thus fully alive to the responsibilities that would devolve on them respectively from the very day of their marriage. Then the Aryans were a free, manly, vigorous, energetic, enterprising, progressive, noble and spiritual people, as represented by the Brahmarshis like Vasishtha and Vama-deva, Rajarshis like Ikhshvaku, Vishvamitra and Janaka, women Rishis and Brahmavadins like Ghosha, Gargi, Maitreyi and Sulabha. This was the golden age in the history of the Aryan Civilization.

The next stage was marked by a transition to a lower ideal of married life and to a lower status

of women, and by a corresponding change for worse in the fortunes of the people. Glancing over the period which intervened between the ancient golden age and the modern dark period of our civilization, we find the idea of equality of man and woman replaced by the idea of woman's subordination to man. Woman's early education became at first limited, and afterwards altogether neglected, till it became a recognised rule in practice that no woman should be taught the Veda and Sciences and should offer sacrificial worship independently of man. It was held that woman was not qualified to lead an independent life of singleness entirely devoted to spiritual culture. She was married earlier in life than man, the wife being regarded as the husband's help-mate or handmaid intended to assist him in the discharge of his duties as a householder, not as his co-partner and co-operator with equal responsibilities in the joint life. The offspring of the union of such unequal pairs, unequal in culture and status, were less vigorous and enterprising than before; they grew narrow-minded and conventional. Formalism took the place of free original thinking; outward forms engrossed men's attention, instead of the living inward thoughts which expressed themselves but partially in those forms. The place of the Rishis who discovered new useful truths of

universal application was taken by Acharyas (such as Harita, Jaimini, Badarayana and other Sutrakaras) who devoted themselves to the task of collecting, arranging, preserving, interpreting and speculating upon the accumulated fruits of the creative and progressive civilization that had gone by; while the place of the Rajarshis, the wise rulers and warriors of mighty power who carried all before them and ventured out single-handed to extend the reign of civilization and righteousness to the far-off unknown regions beyond, was taken by princes who were content to reign according to conventional laws within the limits of their immediate rule. The people in general organised themselves into classes with sharply defined privileges and disabilities attached to each class.

Coming to the present age, when the society is governed by the laws laid down in the Smritis, we see that the cultured classes hold woman as an embodiment of sensualism and evil against which man has ever to guard himself. She is religiously excluded from all education and is ordained to lead a life of dependence on man in all concerns of life, temporal as well as spiritual. It is held as the duty of men to exercise proper control over women that they may not go astray. Against all injunctions of the Smritis, boys in their

teens and still earlier ages and girls in infancy and childhood are married together for life-long union—or for life-long widowhood in the case of some unfortunate girls—without an adequate training for the responsible life of a householder, and without any sense of responsibility on the part of the girl, and often on the part of the boy as well; and thus married early, they often begin their married life as man and woman too early. While women are compelled to marry at an early age before puberty, and are not allowed to marry again when widowed or are even committed to fire alive in the name of religion along with the dead husband, men are allowed unbounded freedom to marry when they please or as often as they please or not to marry at all. As the outcome of these departures from the original ideal of married life and the status of woman, there is presented to us the sorry spectacle of the Hindu of the present day, weak in physique, ease-loving, conservative, superstitious, addicted to custom, feeding on the fruits of a past civilization which is in a state of deterioration and decay in all important phases of national life. The ancient Rishis and medieval Acharyas have their successors in the modern Bhattas who know not what the investigation of a new truth means and who hold it a sin to depart

even slightly from the established custom which governs the interpretation of Vedas and Smritis instead of being governed by them. Politically the people have no recognised status in the comity of nations, having been brought under subjection by one foreign nation after another, and there is no native prince who holds independent sway over any portion of the land as its king. People in general are divided and sub-divided into castes and sub-castes, into sects and sub-sects, with narrowed sympathies and no conscious regard for the welfare of the nation as a whole.

It being thus evident that a nation's marriage laws and ideals and the status assigned to woman in it have a great deal to do with its strength or weakness, with its progress or decay, no lover of India who will see its people recover their lost position among the nations of the earth can afford to overlook this aspect of the Indian social life at present. We find, therefore, coeval with the awakening of the modern India, attempts made to reform the existing laws and customs of marriage, to reclaim the Indian women from utter ignorance and illiteracy, and to improve their status in other ways. The steady work of social reformers of all shades of opinion, carried on from within and without against terrible odds and under most discouraging circumstances, has no doubt produced

a wholesome change in the public opinion of the educated community and led to the initiation of some measures of practical reform here and there on a small scale, though it may be doubted whether these measures will all conduce to the national progress. At any rate the results achieved so far are out of all proportion to what yet remains to be done.

One of the chief obstacles in the way of reform seems to me that the interpretation of the Shastras in favour of reform has not been based on the line of exegesis which would carry conviction to the leaders of the orthodox community, who attach all importance to the traditional method of interpretation. When, as a member of the Aryadharmojjivini Sabha in Mysore, I undertook the investigation of the question of marriage, I perceived this defect in the interpretation of the Shastras on the side of reform. It has struck me that the sound principles of exegesis adopted by Jaimini, Badarayana, Apastamba and other recognized ancient authorities, if applied rigorously in our investigation, would yield valuable results, and that an exposition of the subject based on such a method would bring home to the mind of the orthodox scholars the justice of the cause of reform and the need that exists for it. A strict application of the same method in the investigation

of other questions of importance will throw much light on them and offer solutions to many a perplexing problem of the Indian community. Then the Shastras will prove a help to the social reformer instead of an obstacle it often is as interpreted by exegetists during the last one thousand years and more, and then the cause of social reform will be divested of the stigma of irreligion and heresy now invariably associated with it. In fact an interpretation of the Shastras on the principles of true exegesis will bring into relief the fundamental religious basis of all measures of social reform and improvement which will suggest themselves to the investigator. Unless the measures of reform are given a sound religious basis, their adoption will not prove beneficial to the people at large and will not take a permanent root in the Aryan polity.

By interpreting the Vedic texts and the Smritis bearing on marriage and married life according to the principles of interpretation laid down in the Mimamsa of Jaimini, I have arrived at some important conclusions as to the original ideal of marriage and married life as laid down in the Veda, the highest authority on Law, and also as to the causes of the later deviations from that lofty ideal. These conclusions are suggestive of the lines of reform and progress which will not fail

to commend themselves at once to the most radical reformer who bases his faith solely on common sense, reason and science, and to the most orthodox Hindu who must render unquestioning allegiance to the Veda above all other scriptures. The results of my investigation are in course of elaboration for a thorough systematic exposition of the subject, and will be published later on. But the line of the investigation and the main conclusions arrived at will be found stated in outline in the following pages.

The several sections comprised in this booklet, including the opening essay which led to the later discussion in a local bi-weekly newspaper, were all written at first in a hurry, as called forth by the occasions which will be found briefly stated at the opening of the several sections; so that the indulgent reader will, I hope, kindly excuse the discursive form in which the matter is presented, involving some repetitions of ideas and also some looseness of expression here and there which may have escaped my notice in the course of my revision of the original newspaper cuttings for their reappearance in the garb of a pamphlet. The only excuse for their publication at all in this form is *firstly* my wish to invite helpful suggestions and criticisms of all sorts on the views herein set forth, of which I will gladly avail myself in the

projected exhaustive exposition of the subject, and *secondly* to bring early to the notice of the public, as suggested by some of my friends, the main results of my investigation.

A. MAHADEVA SASTRI.

21st February, 1908.

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