

NEW INDIA

OR

INDIA IN TRANSITION

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BY
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K.C.S.I.

NEW AND REVISED EDITION

LONDON
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER, & CO., LTD.
DRYDEN HOUSE, GERRARD STREET, W.
1904

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Preface

ambition to which English education has given birth, make demands which are continually more and more reasonable and more irresistible. The waves of the ocean of Indian progress are dashing against the breakwater of English prejudice. The members of the Anglo-Indian community, like the courtiers of Canute, call loudly on the Government to restrain the advancing tide. The Government, insufficiently attuned to the requirements of the situation, unlike Canute, is not yet strong enough or wise enough to turn a deaf ear to their advice.

India's political problem is the growth of an Indian nation; her economic problem is the poverty of her people. The solution of the problems lies in the sympathetic and systematic encouragement of legitimate aspirations and spontaneous tendencies. A constructive policy is needed which shall not only guide and control events during the period of transition, but shall also when necessary abstain from interference. The difficulty is to pass from the old to the new order without disturbance.

In their religious and social aspect the changes taking place are not less considerable. The function of Government in this case is to preserve, as far as possible, the existing basis of order by a policy of wise conservation.

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I have confined myself to the discussion of general questions, avoiding detail as much as possible, principally because details are unsuited to the English reader for whom this book is primarily intended. If I appear to have written strongly, it is because I feel strongly. I am profoundly convinced of the importance of the changes which are taking place. No one is in a better position than I am to appreciate the benefits which our rule has conferred on India. I have served for thirty-five years as a member of the Indian Civil Service. My father and grandfather were members of that service before me for sixty years. My son is now employed in that service. It is my pride that I am, as it were, a hereditary member of the administration, and I have never been deficient in respect and loyalty to the Government. A spirit of devotion to the people of the country is not inconsistent with, and has never obliterated, my sense of official duties. But while I am not slow to recognise the valuable qualities of our English rule, I am equally assured that the benefits we have conferred will never receive their due fulfilment, unless we can raise ourselves above associations of the official groove, and prepare ourselves for the exercise of higher functions than those of mere administration. The Government has

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deliberately infused new life into the Indian nation, and must not shrink from the responsibilities which are involved in giving full effect to this policy. What these responsibilities are, and what our future line of policy should be, are subjects which I have deemed it right to place before the consideration of the public.

H. J. S. COTTON.

January 1904

Note.—The first edition of this book appeared in 1885. It has been out of print for many years, and is now republished in a revised and enlarged form. Although it has been rewritten for the most part, there is no change in the method of treatment or in the substance of the original work.

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APPENDIX.

*Being a Letter addressed to an Indian Friend
on the Hindoo Joint Family System.*

UNITED SERVICE CLUB,
CALCUTTA, June 24, 1881.

MY DEAR SIR,—Your long and interesting letter¹ of May 16 deals with the most important principles of the Hindoo Social System, and raises difficult questions which I am very imperfectly prepared to answer. Moreover, as you are aware, I have little leisure to give to the subject. I venture to offer you only the following observations.

.

We are accustomed to the conditions of a Hindoo Joint Family differing from those of a family which we look on as the unit of society. The Hindoo Family System is the result of a past history to which Europe presents no

¹ The substance of that letter was reproduced in an article entitled "Our Joint Family Organisation," and published in the *Calcutta Review* for October 1881.

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parallel. Taking its remote origin from the same sources as caste, it has been largely modified by the existence of the tribal *gotra*, which may be described as a caste within a caste, the members of which are of equal rank, but are precluded from intermarriage, until it has developed into its present phase of coparcenary relationship with all the members of the same family. It is unnecessary that I should follow you in your inquiries into the antiquity of the system. I take it as you describe it in its normal type as consisting of seven generations of agnates, who are entitled to a common mess, to common worship, and to a share in the common estate. Only, I may add, that in practice other relations join the family who are not entitled to commensality, but who are admitted to the enjoyment of their share by charitable considerations.

From the nature of the case, therefore, the Hindoo Joint Family System consists of a large number of persons, many of whom depend upon it for their general support, and, as you point out, joint families certainly serve to maintain a number of idle mouths. This I look upon as an evil. The climate of India is enervating, while the necessities of life are very easily and cheaply obtained ; and there is a tendency in consequence among a great mass of the population to become idlers, and to rest content with the support they receive from the charity of the central family.

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These drones of society are, in fact, a very numerous class in India. It is this state of things which I condemn as a bad one. It is desirable to encourage among individuals not only a sense of self-reliance, but a desire to be independent, and a feeling of shame in receiving support from the charity or labour of others without the return of any corresponding equivalent. It is only the sick and infirm, women and children, and, for special reasons, the priesthood, who are rightly supported by the labour of others. The able-bodied man must work, and the necessity of work is a principle which, above all others, requires to be implanted in the mind of the Oriental, whose home is in a hemisphere where the bounty of nature seems almost to remove every physical stimulus to exertion. The dignity of labour is a faint glimmering light even in Western Europe; but in India such an idea is not only unknown but repellent, and it is considered disgraceful in a man to work for his livelihood by the labour of his hands. Therefore I believe that in India any system of social life which indirectly or directly may be said to afford encouragement to sloth is injurious, and that we should do our best to modify or eradicate it.

At the same time I agree with you in recognising the value of the Hindoo Joint Family System even in this particular aspect. Too much stress cannot be laid on the importance of encouraging the charitable sentiments to

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which it gives occasion. These sentiments, you truly remark, evoke a large measure of kindness on one side and reverence on the other.

I can, however, by no means admit that the system affords a practical solution to the difficulties of the pauper question in India. I think you somewhat unnecessarily assume that if the family drones were bereft of family support they would sink into the condition of paupers, and become a burden upon the general community. This argument may be unduly pressed. For there is indeed little or no analogy between the problem of pauperism in Europe and of poverty in India. In ordinary times—famine and other similar calamities apart—the pauper of India is not like the pauper of England, for whom sustenance can only be found at the public cost ; and the reason of this is that the necessities of life in an inclement country like England are so immeasurably greater and more expensive than they are in India. In ordinary times I should have no fear of the pauperisation of India if the Hindoo Joint Family System ceased to exist. There is no pauperisation among Mahomedans with whom no such system prevails. In times of crisis the charity of the joint family dries up unavoidably, and the misery and starvation among the idle mouths dependent on it for their support is even greater than it would have been if they had previously been in the habit of endeavouring to support themselves. These

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drones are paupers already. They should be compelled to work, but the existence of the Family System removes the necessity. Only in time of famine it is that they are cast out, a useless number of mouths to feed, who in no inconsiderable degree enhance the difficulty of the problem of famine administration.

My principal objection to the influence of the Hindoo Family System is based on these grounds. But there are other objections which at first sight may appear even stronger than these. You do not hesitate to draw prominent attention to them when you write :—

A family like this cannot dispense with the *Purda* System.¹ A numerous group like our joint family, between whom the bonds of natural affection are very unequal, cannot, I fear, be allowed the fullest social intercourse, and that within the seclusion of the home, without serious danger to their moral purity; and the *Purda* being thus necessary within the family, it cannot be dispensed with in respect of outsiders.

The *Purda*, as well as the subordinate organisation of the *Zenana* System, requires that the newly married wife should be trained to the habits and ways of the society she enters into. To this end infant marriages are indispensable more or less.

I am not competent to say, with reference to the above remarks, whether you are justified

¹ *Purda* means a curtain. The *Purda* System means the system under which women are secluded in the *Zenana* or women's apartments.

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in assuming that the fullest social intercourse between the sexes within the seclusion of their homes is calculated to endanger their moral purity. There is a great difference between Eastern and Western homes in this respect. In the mere construction and disposal of the rooms, an English dwelling-house affords complete privacy to the women of the family; while, at the same time, the men and women meet together in the discharge of their daily domestic duties with perfect freedom, and without the faintest sense or trace of any impropriety. But an Indian home is different: the fewer rooms and comparative absence of privacy, the larger and more varied elements of the household, even the character and limited quantity of clothing of both sexes necessitated by the exigencies of climate—these reasons, it may be, lead to the imposition of some restrictions as a wise arrangement. But, if so, the result is to be deplored, and I can never be persuaded to look upon the *Purda* System as consistent with the relationship which should exist between the members of a family. It consigns women to a condition of subordination and subjection which experience shows us is inseparable from a life of domestic servitude. It is based upon a coarse view of life, which has no other bond of union between the sexes than a mere sensual idea, and, as you are forward to admit, it is entirely incompatible with the important functions which Western civilisation prescribes for women.

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The *Purda* and *Zenana* Systems you describe as indispensable complements of the Hindoo family as it at present exists, and, this being so, you add that infant marriages are also indispensable, more or less. I am obliged to accept your statement of this part of the case; but, if the facts are so, it is almost unnecessary to adduce any other evidence to show that the conditions of a Hindoo Joint Family are irreconcilable with the ideal requirements of a Family System. I have never heard any sound argument adduced in favour of the institution of infant marriage. It is intended, no doubt, as a preventive of immorality. But even from this aspect it is a failure, for it allows boys and girls a free scope for indulgence in their passions, at an age when they have reached neither their physical nor mental maturity, and when the observance of chastity ought to have been enforced on them as a moral discipline. I need add nothing about the physical deterioration in the offspring of such marriages: it is a notorious fact, too patent to be ignored. I will only point out another evil result of the practice, in that early marriage often leads to early widowhood, and the abundance of young widows in India, as the police annals of the country amply testify, is a fruitful source of immorality and crime. There is something, no doubt, to be said for the *Purda* and *Zenana* systems, but nothing, that I can see, for infant marriage; and, looking to its effects in

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the domestic circle as well as more generally in society, both in its present influences and future results, I can but declare that the institution is one which should be unreservedly condemned—condemned in the same category as polygamy, for instance.

I have already said that my principal objection to the Hindoo Family System is the opportunity it affords to a large proportion of the able-bodied population of the country to live in idleness: without your authority I should never have been prepared to admit that the seclusion of women and infant marriage were essential concomitants of the system. I regret that the system should be held responsible for having done something more than accord to these evil customs its baneful sanction. For I am not blind to the excellencies of your family organisation; and I desire to especially acknowledge the admirable domestic influence it exercises upon its members. As an Englishman, with my home in a country where the family tie is comparatively lightly regarded, and the members of a family tear themselves asunder as a matter of course and almost without compunction, and settle apart from one another in all the quarters of the globe, I cannot but appreciate the immense affective superiority of the organisation you enjoy. Properly speaking, it is only by the natural cultivation of the family affections that a man is able instinctively

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to call into existence dispositions calculated to fit him individually for public life. In your family arrangements you possess, therefore, through a process of progressive development, the necessary panoply of life, and I trust that this high recognition of the urgency of domestic sympathy will never be forgotten, whatever may be the vicissitudes the Hindoo Joint Family System is destined to experience.

In conclusion, I will only add, as you have pointed out in your letter, that the whole force of the British administration has been directed to break up the existing social order; and though the influence of a foreign domination is superficial in most respects, it has been able at least to undermine the foundations of the Hindoo Joint Family System, which, partly from this cause and partly from its own inherent defects, I cannot but look upon as a doomed institution. I am not inclined to overrate the force of Government as a solvent power in any social direction, but in this case the action of Government is, so far as I can judge, in consonance with a natural and even healthy tendency of events. The interference of Government in this case is therefore not altogether matter for regret, and, in my opinion, it only remains for the leaders of the Hindoo community, by gentle and judicious guidance, to control the period of transition, so that it may be passed over with the least possible disturbance, and, after

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rejecting the environments which prejudice and disfigure the present system, to reorganise the excellent materials which are available for their purpose upon a sound basis.

I am, my dear Sir,

Yours very sincerely,

H. J. S. COTTON.

TO BABOO ;