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THE SAMSKARAS.

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INTRODUCTION.

IN order to gain an insight into the inner life of India it is essential that one should be well acquainted with the religious aspect of the question. The term religion is not here used in the sense of that vague something which as an imaginary object of love or worship is supposed to satisfy the emotional nature of man. Philosophy, as apart from religion, is not known in India. The ideal of religion is derived more from reason than emotion. In short, religion here consists of a closely reasoned-out theory of the aim of existence. This theory serves as a basis of society, ethics, politics, and every similar human institution. That this religion must largely consist of the metaphysical is clear enough, but that it does not ignore physics or other useful material sciences, at least in so far as they can assist in explaining the phenomena of life, will be plain to any careful

investigator. Though India teems with an innumerable variety of religions, comprising all shades of belief, the central idea of all creeds, however divergent in exoteric forms, is none other than this closely reasoned-out ideal of this aim of existence. This is not the place to animadvert at any length on this point, but it is enough to state that this ideal is fully represented in the adwaita theory of the distinctionless absolute Atman as the soul of all. This explanation will show to what extent everything Indian is saturated with the idea of religion, and derives life or strength from it.

CASTE.

The very foundation of Indian society is religion. Even the modern institution of caste is an outcome of that idea. Before we turn to the Samskâras it is important to understand the exoteric constitution of Indian society. Let me premise at the beginning that individuality is not the spirit of the social fabric here. And every institution, however insignificant, is conceived with a view, and marked in a manner, to suppress individuality and foster altruism. This sentiment is a result of the philosophy of religion which demonstrates the utility of an ideal of pure altruism as the aim of existence.

The unit, therefore, of ancient Áryan society is not the individual but the family; and even the sovereign, though apparently a despotic monarch, is no less the father of a family, a partner in the deeds of his subjects, physical, mental, moral. The whole society is one family, and the different classes are but members of a corporate body, each fulfilling to its utmost that which may be assigned to it on the principle of the division of labor. In very ancient times, it would appear that the whole people were divided into two broad divisions: the men of (white) color (*varna*)*, and the (black) aborigines referred to as the *nishâdas* in the *Veda*. The *varna* was divided again into two classes: *dwijas*, twice-born, and *Sudras*. The *dwijas* were those who by the purity of their physique and mind were held eligible for initiation to certain mystic rites. This initiation constitutes the second birth. The *Sudras* had no such privilege, and it would appear that that class was created to serve the purpose of an order preparatory to admission into the

* Called Aryan. The word "arya" is derived from the root "re", to go, and it means one fit to be gone to: hence respectable, civilized, learned. The derivation of the word from "ar", to till, has no authority in Indian literature, though it suits well with those who would make primitive agriculturalists of the ancient Aryans. There are two opinions on the question of the aryas, they being either foreign immigrants, or natives of the country; but the point cannot be discussed here.

community of dwijas. The dwijas were divided into three classes: Brâhmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, which with the fourth, Sudras, constitute the four varnas. The Brâhmins, knowers of Brâhma, were ministers of spiritual and temporal welfare, the keepers of secret and secular learning, the advisers alike of kings and peasants, as also the teachers of occult and other branches of learning to all. The Kshatriyas had to look to the general well-being and welfare of the commonwealth; the Vaisyas being the general purveyors to the whole as traders, cultivators, etc., and the Sudras the artisans and laborers engaged in inferior and menial service. Intercourse between all these classes was as free as could be, and intermarriages, with the restriction that no woman should choose from any varna inferior to her own, were most common. Nor was it a rare occurrence to see a man losing his varna, or rising to a higher one, according to his deserts. Intermarriages, change of class, free intercourse, were all rendered possible by that purity of blood which was most religiously preserved. The ancients set the greatest value on this consideration, and punished adultery, especially if the male defaulter were of a varna inferior to that of his co-partner in crime, with nothing short of death. The pollution of the Kshetra (woman), and through it of the whole future generation, was not a crime compoundable by civil damages; it could be atoned for only by self-sacrifice and death. Early marriages were unknown, the status of woman was nobly superior, and longevity with strength of mind and body was more the rule than the exception. This state of things, however, speedily altered, and external influences led to promiscuous intercourse. Purity of blood being thus destroyed, the constitution of the varnas was convulsed to its very foundation. New classes, of the issues of such intercourse, were formed, and they began to be known not by their occupation and position (âshrama), not by their color (varna) but simply by the incident of their birth (Jâti). The varnas closed up their ranks against each other, as also against these Jâtis of impure blood, which, following the example of their superiors, became, in their turn, mutually exclusive. Different Jâtis appropriated different occupations to themselves, and formed communes or associations like the modern guilds and unions. The liberal principle of the varna having given place to the exclusive narrowness of the Jâti; individualism, in some form, displaced altruism at the basis of Indian society, which henceforth began to degenerate. Jâti is the basis of the modern caste-system. Though several pure varnas exist to the present day, the evil genius of narrowness and individualism, which governs all, and which perhaps is being daily fostered, though in another form, by the purely

individualistic influences of the West, eats at the very core of society and drags it perceptibly down the abyss of degeneration and decay.

THE ĀSHRAMAS.

A subject intimately connected with the above is that of the āshramas. As the varna was the direct outcome of the religious idea, so the distribution of the work of a life-time over certain kinds and periods of activity was also a prominent result of the same conception. Each of these kinds of activity is called an āshramas. I purposely refrain from calling it a period of particular activity, because ancient writers do not appear in favor of necessarily restricting any āshrama to a fixed number of years; nay, they do not seem to insist even on their regular sequence. The ashramas are four in number; the first being Brahmācharya, a period of strict studentship and celibacy extending over from nine to thirty-six years, or even the whole life, if so chosen. The next is Grihasthāshrama, the state of a family-man; and it is followed optionally by Vānaprastha (forest-life) and Sannyāsa (entire renunciation). The Vānaprastha āshaama begins with a family-man's retiring, either alone or with his family, into the solitude of a forest, there to prepare himself for Sannyāsa, entire renunciation of self, the merging in the Absolute. The first three varnas have a right to all these āshramas, and the Sudras only to the second. Some, however, maintain that all four are for Brāhmins alone, except Sannyāsa for Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. But there are a few who hold that, as regards realizing the Absolute (ātma-jñāna and sannayāsa), all ought to have an equal right. Some appear to believe that Sudras and females cannot receive the rites of initiation, but so far as the latter are concerned, names like Gārgi, Maitreyi, Sāvitrī, and others do not entirely bear this out in practice. As to the former it is doubtful whether of the names of a few of the Rishis we cannot trace some relation even with Sudra-hood.

THE SAMSKĀRAS.

Samskara means impression, hence purification. There are certain rites accompanying each āshrama, and without a due performance of these no one can be said to belong to any particular āshrama, and, therefore, to any particular varna. The first three varnas alone are entitled to receive the Samskāras, Sudras being either entirely excluded, or allowed to receive them without the recital of Vedic matras which accompany every ceremony. All customs, and all religious observances, governing even modern Hindu society, are derived from these Samskāras, and so great is

the hold of religion on the Hindu mind that numerous political revolutions and the absolute sway of foreign nations, extending over centuries, have made but little alteration in the original forms. The Samskâras are generally taken to be sixteen in number, but there are authorities which fix the number at twenty-five. I shall adopt the latter view, inasmuch as it will then be convenient to dispose of the whole subject of ritual worship in a connected form. It will be convenient to follow the division adopted by the Smritikâras, and classify the Samskâras as the occasional, the necessary, and the optional. The occasional Samskâras are those that are performed on occasions such as conception, birth, initiation, marriage, etc. These are sixteen in number. The necessary ones are those incumbent on all after attaining spiritual majority, so to speak. They are five in all. The four optional ones are connected with certain general ceremonies connected with rites for the dead, and may be performed or not according to the wish and ability of the performers. I begin with the occasional Samskâras.

I. Garbhâdhâna (The conception). The wife goes to her husband's house after attaining puberty. The husband offers oblations to certain deities in order to seek their blessing for the prosperity of the union, and cohabitation is with the particular aim that the wife may conceive. The ceremony is performed only at the first physical manifestation of puberty, for its object is the purification of the Kshetra (woman, properly the womb). * * * This Samskâra is at the present time neither generally nor carefully attended to.

II. Pumsavana (The purification). When it is known that the wife has conceived, the husband, in the third month after conception, performs certain religious ceremonies for the purification of the Kshetra, with a view to the strength, goodness, and greatness of the future child. Instructions as to diet, general enjoyments, associations, etc., are included in the ordinances on this head, and they vary according to the nature and character of the issue desired. This ceremony is, at present, not attended to.

III. Simantonnayana (The parting of the hair of the head). This ceremony consists of prayers to certain deities, and the offering of oblations with a view to purify the Kshetra and protect the garbha (foetus). It is performed generally in the eighth month after conception. It derives its name from the circumstance of the husband's making a number of passes with Kusha-grass over the head of his wife, and in the act, parting the hair into two equal divisions by an imaginary line (called Simanta) parallel to the tip of the nose.

IV. Bali (The offering). It consists of the offering of oblations with the special purpose of prohibiting certain elementals likely to be obnoxious to the wife at the moment of delivery, from being attracted to the spot by the impurity of the instant. This ceremony is generally performed with the preceding, but in many cases it is postponed to any length, and performed, at some holy place, on the occasion of any such difficulty as is hinted at above. This and the preceding ceremony are observed to the present day, though in Samskâra No. 3 much has been added by popular taste and fancy, of which costly dinner parties, which in some form or other are expected to accompany every Samskâra, form not the least feature.

V. Jâtakarma (The birth). The father of the child, if it be a male, washes it himself, on its birth, and puts in its mouth, before the cutting of the umbilical cord, after repeating certain mantras, some clarified butter and honey which have been fused together with a piece of gold on a slab of stone. The object of the ceremony is transparent, and it is observed to this day in one form or another. On the birth of a child, as on the death of a relation, the Hindus regard themselves as defiled and impure, and therefore abstain from performing religious rites or touching others not so defiled, for a number of days. The subject has been minutely defined and discussed in a number of treatises, and the custom is observed in all its minuteness to the present day, but it is sufficient merely to hint at it in this place.

VI. Nâmakarana (The naming). This practice, one observed to this day, consists in giving a name, after certain ceremonies, to the child on or about the eleventh day after birth. What sort of name should be chosen for a male and what for a female child, and what would best suit what varna, is a subject which has been discussed with some minuteness, but this is no place for a description of it.

VII. Nishkramana (The going out of doors). The child is, as it were, entrusted to the care of certain family gods by proper invocations and offerings, in the fourth month after birth, when it is allowed to go out of doors and walk and crawl about. Usually the child is shown the disk of the sun, after due ceremony, and left free to move about. This ceremony is not generally attended to.

VIII. Annaprâsana (The eating). Even the time and manner of beginning to give the child some nourishment other than the milk of its mother, are regulated by religious injunctions. This ceremony is performed in the sixth month after birth, and is not generally attended to in the prescribed form.

IX. Chaul (The shaving). It is a ceremony performed at the

time of the first shaving of the child's head. This takes place only in the case of male children. The ceremony is regulated more by family custom than by word of Law, and it, as well as all the fore-going ones, is performed along with Upanayana. The time for this Samskâra is the third or fourth year after birth.

X.-XIV. Upanayana and Mahâvrata (The initiation and the four great pledges). This is an important ceremony, for with it begins an important epoch in the life of an Ārya. The age at which it is performed in the case of a Brâhmin varies from five to eight, and in very exceptional circumstances it is allowable to postpone it even to the age of sixteen. In the case of a Kshatriya and Vaisya, it should be performed at the eleventh and twelfth year respectively, twenty and twenty-four being the respective exceptional limits. Females have nothing to do with this Samskâra, inasmuch as in this case it consists of marriage or being engaged for marriage.

The boy's head is shaved clean, on an auspicious day appointed for the purpose, and he is clad, if a Brâhmin, in the skin of a black deer, and given the initiatory mark (yajnopavita) consisting of three lines, each of a thrice-twisted thread of cotton which he always wears in a circular form, above the left shoulder and under the right arm. He is also given a stick (danda) of the Patâsa-tree, and a waist-band consisting of a string of the grass called Munja. These accompaniments vary according to the varna of the boy; and it may interest the reader to know that the yajnopavita of a Kshatriya is made of flax and that of a Vaisya of sheep's wool, with corresponding variations in the other accompaniments. To the boy wearing these marks of a Brahmachârin,* and therefore ready for initiation, the father imparts the sacred gâyatri mantra, which he is thenceforth required to mentally repeat at least three hundred times every morning after washing himself and performing the Sandhyâvandana (worship at the twilight). He is expected to worship the sun at noon and in the evening as well. The family guru then steps in and initiates the boy into his order, and takes him away to his abode, there to teach him befitting learning and arts, for a period varying from nine to thirty-six years. But before he does this he requires his pupil to take four distinct pledges which he is most religiously required to keep and observe. The pupil solemnly pledges himself in this wise: (1) I shall observe the strictest celibacy. (2) I shall always tell the truth. (3) I shall regularly say the twilight and noon prayers, repeat the gâyatri, and beg my food. (4) I shall devote myself entirely to my teacher,

* Brahma means the *Veda*, and a Brahmachârin is one who, so to speak, walks in the *Veda*—that is to say, a student.

and the study he points out. These vows of poverty and celibacy relate to the years of studentship. The Brâhmin learns the *Veda*, and the various angas, together with the secret of occult learning. The Kshatriya learns the ways of war, and the science of government, together with the use of arms; and the Vaisya the methods of agriculture, economy, and commerce. This ceremony is at present observed only in name. The mock initiations, accompanied with an equally ludicrous mockery of the pledges, does take place at the appointed time when the yâjnopavita is given. The Vaisyas do not observe the ceremony at all. And what crowns the whole is the short space of an hour or two within which a ceremony is disposed of which ought to extend over at least a dozen years.

XV. Samâvartana (The return). It is a moment of no small joy to the father when his son returns home from a pupilage of about twelve years generally full of learning, and desirous of beginning the world, by taking some eligible girl to wife, and keeping a family. The pupil makes a fitting reward to the guru, from his own purse, or begs it of some king or wealthy man who gladly gives what assistance he can. He then begins life with his teachers' permission. This ceremony used to be performed with great éclat, but at present it exists in the form of a pompous procession following an innocent boy of eight, and meant to crown the two hours' initiation ceremony described above. With this Samskâra ends the first Âshrama-Brâhmacharya.

XVI. Vivâha (Marriage). This is a very important Samskâra, as with it begins the Grihasthâshrama, and the married man is able to perform all rites and ceremonies necessary for his spiritual welfare. The meaning and aim of this institution should be clearly defined. The Grihasthâshrama is the life of all other âshramas, inasmuch as through and in it is obtained that training of the heart, which complements that of the head already acquired, and leads to that suppression of self which results in the absolute realization of all being one self. Moreover, it is the Grihastha alone who, by acts of charity, can help members of the other âshramas who possess nothing of their own. And nothing can conduce to this end better than an education of the heart resulting from the union of two harmonious souls. And indeed well say Manu, and Yajnavalkya, and almost all Smritikâras, "the female is the light of the family", "the fountain of love, joy, and happiness"; and they fitly conclude "where females are worshipped and respected all happiness attends; where they are ill-treated and despised calamities are imminent." Marriage, according to the Aryan law is not, then, a contract for enjoyment, protection, service, or progeny. It is a union of hearts having nothing but education of

the heart as its sole end, with a view to the realization of that condition of being wherein self is merged in the All. Indeed it is well said "on the wife depends one's own as well as the Pitris' heaven", the former by this education, the latter by the continuance of the line through the birth of a son. That marriage, in this sense, should be one and indissoluble goes without saying. The sacred texts regard it as one in the sense of one for a lifetime; but they appear to make an exception in the case of males. And this not because there is any idea of inferiority or superiority of the one or the other sex, to influence the judgment. The rationale of the distinction, as implied in the Shâstras, is at any rate, interesting. The male is regarded as the embodiment of the active principle in nature, and the female of the passive. Religious merit is a something to be acquired by active labor and work, and marriage has no other aim than the accumulation of such merit. The female being naturally of a passive temperament, remains dependent on her male companion; and both strengthen and sweeten the union by mutual exchange of services, those of the one tending to the education of the heart, and those of the other to the preservation of the body. The female as the incarnate ideal of love has simply to devote herself to her husband, and thereby to share in the results of all he acquires, temporally or spiritually. The wife has no separate religious rites to perform for her individual welfare. It should thus follow that, even after the death of her husband, the wife will continue to acquire religious merit, and become fit to realize the aim of existence, by simply continuing and intensifying the devotion and love she bore to her husband. Comfort, protection, enjoyment being no elements in the Áryan idea of marriage, any the least thought of another will be a deadly sin. But the case is different with the husband bereaved of a partner. He has, unless he at once goes into the Vânaprastha—or the Sannyâsa—âshrama, yet to finish his education in love, and he is still responsible for his as well as his deceased wife's spiritual welfare. He can perform no religious rites without a wife, and he must needs take some *suitable* unmarried girl to wife. This is the sense in which the Shastras understand the words "one and indissoluble" as applied to marriage. The Áryas have tried their best to realize, with due regard to the religious ideal of the aim of existence, the greatest practical good that can be derived from the systematic union of two loving beings. This institution is still observed, in this form, among some of the higher families of those classes of Hindu society who claim descent from any of the pure varnas, and do not belong to a Jâti (caste).

The greatest care has been enjoined in the selection of the principal parties to a marriage. Though courting and love-making in the modern sense are unknown, the parents or guardians of the pair are required to pay the greatest attention to the birth, relations, physique, age, qualifications, education, nature, and substance of either. The care of parents exercised with due circumspection rarely brings about unions terminating in misery or failure. All the present misery incidental to unhappy matches is a direct result of the institution of caste, which has narrowed the field of selection. The male is not allowed to marry before Samavartana, and the female is to remain unmarried till the first physical manifestation of puberty. Under all circumstances the pair should not belong to the same family, or even different lines of the same family. The general usage of the Shastra appears to allow the engagement of a girl for marriage at about eight, and the performance of the ceremony of marriage at about eleven. The completion of the marriage takes place any day immediately after the event mentioned above. Engagement is meant as a period of probation and love-making, and is allowed to be broken off under necessity. The girl may receive such education as her father could give, but she is expected to complete it under her husband who is her "Guru".

The forms of marriage recognized in ancient times are eight in number. (1) Giving away the bride with suitable dowry to a properly-educated young man, without his proposing, is called Brâhma marriage. (2) Giving away the bride, in a similar manner, to an officiating priest, or any other Brahmin, is the second, called Daiva. (3) To give the bride for a couple of cows to a suitable husband is called Ârsha marriage. (4) The Prâjâpatya form of marriage is that wherein the bride is given away, with suitable dowry, to a husband for the express purpose of acquiring spiritual merit by the union. (5) To exchange the bride for some money consideration is called Asura marriage. (6) The Gândharva is that marriage which is brought about by mutual love and consent. (7) The carrying away the bride by main force is the Râkshasa form of marriage. (8) The carrying away a woman asleep or intoxicated for the purpose, is the last called Pishacha. Of these the first four and the sixth are supposed to be the best; though different forms are prescribed for different varnas, the eighth being prescribed to none. The forms at present in vogue are the fourth and fifth, and very rarely the sixth.

Before the sacrificial fire, and in presence of the god invoked, the wife and husband exchange a few pledges in accord with the meaning and object of marriage. The whole ceremony is gen-

erally divided into six parts. The first consists of certain rites of hospitality on the arrival of the bridegroom. From the ancient texts it would appear that a bull or goat was killed on this occasion, but now simple curds mixed with honey serves the purpose. This is called the Madhuparka. The next stage is giving away the bride. The father of the bride joins the hands of the pair at an auspicious moment, till the arrival whereof the bride or bridegroom, though sitting very near each other, are not allowed, by a thin screen of cloth held between, to look into the face of each other. The giving a bride in marriage is in itself considered an act of great charity, and therefore of supreme spiritual merit, in obedience to which idea the parents or other near relative of the bride do not accept of anything, not even food or water, from the bridegroom, both before and even after marriage. The whole act is praised and accepted by the pair as arising out of pure love. The third step consists in the married couple worshipping the family gods and indulging themselves in such innocent play as befits the occasion. Each of the pair ties a piece of red tape, to which a dry fruit called Madaufala (the fruit of love) is attached, around the right wrist of the other—the act being symbolic of the tying of hearts with the knot of love. The fourth step commences with offering oblations to fire, and the taking of pledges of mutual fidelity and indissoluble love, in the presence of all the gods invoked, the Brâhmins officiating and the relatives standing as witness. This is followed by the fifth part of the ceremony ashma-rohana (the mounting the stone), being suggestive of the fact that the pair should be as firm in love and virtue as the stone. The last act in the ceremony is the well-known saptapadi (going seven steps in company) meant as a pledge of eternal friendship, for, says the law, “the good become friends only by walking together seven steps”. The pair go round the sacrificial fire seven times in company. The bride and bridegroom then put a few mouthfuls each in the mouth of the other, of some sweetmeats cooked in the sacred fire at the spot, and complete the pledge of love. They retire from the spot after devoutly looking at the polestar and wishing it to impart, magnetically, some of its firmness to their union. The marriage is completed when it is time for the Samskâra described as Garbhâdhâna. (No. 1.)

The fire present at this ceremony is, even now in very exceptional circumstances, preserved as an object of worship in the family, and kept alive and worshipped regularly three times a day by the married couple. When either or both of them die, this very fire is used to set fire to the burning-pyre. The Grihastha generally passes over the worship of this fire to his son, and be-

comes with his wife, if still alive, a Vanaprastha, one residing in a forest and studying to be free from the world and its attractions, with a view to take up the last Ashrama, *sannyâsa*, entire renunciation, the complete realization of the distinctionless Absolute.

XVII-XXI. The Mahâyajnas (the five great sacrifices.) The man who renounces life after Grihasthâshrama has no religious rites of any description to perform, and the subject of occasional Samskâras is, in a sense, rightly held to be finished with Vivâha. But the Grihastha while he is a family-man is bound to conform to certain unavoidable daily rites, the non-performance of which involves dire sin, and is capable of degrading him to any, even the lowest, varna. These are the five Mahâyajnas, great sacrifices, great because of their potency for good. Every family-man is supposed to be under three important obligations. He is indebted to the Rishis, in that he has acquired learning from them; to the pitris, in that they are his prototypes in heaven, and the givers of all good; and lastly to the Devas, the elementals, who confer favors on him. He must discharge these debts, and at the same time guard himself against the evil influence of various spirits, as also do his duty by all men in earnest charity. These five objects are served severally by the five great sacrifices. The writers of sacred texts say that in every family there are involuntarily killed a number of Jivas, in acts of beating grain with the pestle, cooking, grinding, sweeping, and fetching water, and the five sacrifices have also the indirect object of atoning for all such involuntary sins. Hence they maintain that though the non-performance of these involves sin, their careful performance confers no special merit.

The first is called Brahmayajna, meaning the sacrifice relating to Brahma, the *Veda*, or whatever branch of learning the Grihastha has learned. He should rise before twilight, wash himself, say his Sandhyâvandana, repeat his Gâyatri, and then address himself to revising what he has learned. The Brahmayajna consists in this revising, as also in imparting the same, without any remuneration, to pupils ready to receive. A distinction is here to be made. To teach and be taught, to give and receive, to worship and assist others to worship, are six things permitted to Brâhmins alone; the other varnas cannot teach, receive, or assist at worship. Thus then is daily paid the debt one owes his teachers.

This is followed by giving a few handfuls of water mixed with sesamum seeds, and purified with kusha-grass, to the pitris, with proper invocations. This finishes the debt he must daily pay to the pitris; but more properly, the Grihastha is relieved from his

anxiety only when a son is born to him to continue the ceremony after him. This is pitriyajnâ.

The third devayajna consists in offering oblations, meant for the Devas, in the marriage-fire preserved in the house. This relieves the family-man of the daily quota of his due to the gods.

Bhuta-yajna is offering oblations of a certain kind to the Bhutas, with propit incantations; and the fifth Nriyajna consists in the Grihastha going out in search of an Atithi (a guest who turns up at any unappointed time) whom he should bring home with due ceremony, and feed before himself, if a Brahmin, and with him, if of any other varna.

These five are not very carefully observed in these days; but it is not at all rare to come across several pious families of Brahmins where they are religiously observed. The *Shastras* allow the comingling of the second, third, and fourth sacrifices in one act called the Vaishvadeva, which all true Brahmins perform every day.

XXII-XXV. Agrayana, Ashtaka, Upakarma, Utsarga (the worship of Agrayana, the Shraddha—called Ashtaka, the giving up, and the taking up of study).

The subject of necessary Samskaras is finished with the five Yajnas. The four here described are simply optional, and may be performed by the Grihastha according to his ability and desire.

The fifteenth day of the bright half of the month of Ashvia (October) is called Agrayana, and all family-men are expected to worship the gods and pitris on that day, with the new corn that is brought in. This worship corresponds to the Greek worship of Ceres, the god of corn.

Before speaking of the Shraddha called ashtaka, it is necessary to know what Shraddha, in itself, is. Shraddha is an act done through Shraddha, faith; that is to say, faith in the existence and power of the pitris; for these ceremonies have the satisfaction of the pitris as their end. The pitris could be satisfied only by vâsanâ, mental desire, which cannot be communicated to them unless shown in acts under complete magnetic rapport, established through faith. The subject of Shraddha is a very long and complicated one. Considered briefly, however, they are of four kinds: Akoddishtha (that in which only one pinda* is given), Sapindana (the unifying the pinda), Sârvana (Shraddha performed on any parva *i. e.* every fifteenth day of the month, as well as any auspicious day of the year), and Nândi (the Shraddha of joy). Let us take the last first. It has for its object the conveying of a message of congratulations and thanks to the pitris at the birth of

* Literally the word means any individual body, and is here used to mean a ball of cooked rice or of rice-flour, meant as a symbol of the body of the pitri.

a son; that is to say, of one who is expected to continue to feast them, or on the occasion of other auspicious ceremonies such as marriage, Simantonnayana, or Upanayana, with the same object, only in an indirect manner. The other three Shraddhas are for the dead. The soul of a dead man is supposed to become a preta (that which has passed out of the body), and to hover between this earth and the abode of the pitris (the moon), or of the gods (the sun). In order that the preta should not be prevailed upon by earthly tendencies to become an earth-bound spirit (bhuta), these ceremonies are undertaken. The first akoddishtha is, again, of three kinds,* and has for its object the relief of the preta from the influence of the earth. Almost all things that the dead man liked while living are given away in gifts to Brâhmîns, all kinds of food, including fruits, sweets, etc., are given to deserving persons;—all with a view to disentangle the Kâma (desire) of the preta from such things. The next, Sapindana, is meant to unify the preta with the pitris. In all ceremonies relating to Shraddhas, balls of cooked rice or rice-flour are worshipped with kusha-grass, flowers, sandal-wood ointment, and water mixed with Seasamum seeds,—the whole act being accompanied by the repetition of proper mantras. The balls represent the preta and the pitris; and at the Sapindana the ball representing the preta is cut up into parts, which are carefully unified with the balls representing his immediate pitris. The object of the ceremony is obvious. The Pârvana is a ceremony whose meaning is plain enough. The Ashtakâ is a kind of Pârvana Shrâddha performed every eighth day of the dark half of the months from Mârgashirsha to Fâlguna (December to March). It includes the Shrâddha on the day preceding (called purvedyu) and that on the succeeding (called anvashtaka). Special stress is laid upon this one rite on account of the great auspiciousness of the time enjoined for it.

Upâkarma is a ceremony connected with the commencing the study or revision of the *Veda*. It is performed at the time of the budding forth of all herbs in the month of Shrâvana (August), when the Yajnopavita also is changed for a new one. This study continues for about four months; and in Pausa (January) the ceremony called Utsarga is performed, with a view to suspend the study for a time. Having taken rest for a fortnight or a day, the study may be resumed, in the order of the *Vedas* in the bright, and the angas in the dark, half of every month, up to the day of Upâkarma.

* Nava, navamishra, and purâna. The first performed every day from the day of death to the tenth after death; the second includes all performed on the the anniversary day, though in the mode of its performance there is a variety of opinions.

All these ceremonies are generally observed to this day by those who profess to be orthodox Brâhmins.

The writers of sacred texts thus define the religious duties of the different varnas and âshramas, and even specify the various callings which each should follow,—all with a view to enable every one to, in the end, realize the religious ideal of the aim of existence. But they have taken care to add a distinct chapter on the subject of “duties under calamity”, wherein it is laid down that under very great calamities, in sickness, or under other inconvenient circumstances, any man might infringe the law with impunity. But this immunity is allowed in very trifling cases, for a *prâyaschitta* (atonement) is always enjoined for any and every default not wilfully done, for acts wilfully done in defiance of law are beyond atonement. But this opens up another subject of great complexity and one which is foreign to the present paper.

THE WORK OF THE ORIENTAL DEPARTMENT.

This Department is intended to serve as a means for carrying out the second object of the Theosophical Society, in respect to investigating Eastern religions and sciences. It was begun under great difficulties which have not yet disappeared. The first is a lack of funds, as the money the Society has the use of must, perforce, be used judiciously in many different things, and cannot all be spent on this. To carry this Department on in the best manner a separate staff is needed in the U. S., including the entire service of a competent orientalist acquainted with Theosophy. But we have neither the money for that nor such an orientalist if we had the means. Like all other departments of our activity in the General Secretary's Office, this one is carried on chiefly through unpaid service rendered by the General Secretary, Mr. Fullerton, Mr. Pryse, and others. Hence it is not claimed that perfection of method or system has yet been attained. That is expected in time together with larger means.

In the greater number of cases members have expressed themselves as having received benefit from the work of this Department, and a few have objected to the matter published. In one of the latter cases a newly-admitted member said that if she had seen a certain issue of the Department before joining she would not have entered the Society. We are sorry for this member, but do not think the objection well founded. Our standard of thought cannot govern in an investigation of Eastern literature, and we cannot be in a position to judge until all has been laid before us

that is accessible. The opinion of Prof. Max Müller of Oxford should be remembered, where he says that only by treating the Eastern religions with respect and calmly investigating can one get at the truth about them.

Furthermore, the particular issue objected to was one giving certain ancient rules about postures. No matter how foreign and peculiar these seem to some of us, there are other competent Theosophists who know that each one of the postures so defined produces a definite change in the body. This being a fact, as many of us know, it is valuable, however peculiar it looks to our narrowed vision. But it is also true that the Hindus, not being so full of mock modesty as the Caucasians, speak freely of facts in life and processes in the body which are kept in silence among us. In these respects the General Secretary will have transliterated passages (instead of the English) printed in any paper when such references occur. This, however, is not because he has false modesty, but solely because we live in a land where laws exist that make it a misdemeanor to take from the Christian Bible certain very vulgar and blemishing passages for reprinting by themselves and thus condemning as obscene such a publication. By this I do not mean it is a commendable act to have compiled such a work—quite the contrary—but only that the laws to some extent restrict freedom in those who would not violate any proper code, while the laws themselves should only be meant to confine the actions of men and women who strenuously object to every established order of affairs, no matter what.

It has also been decided for the present not to bind the office to issue an O. D. paper every month, but to probably make the numbers fewer and with an increased number of pages. In this way it will be more possible for us to compass the complete publication of translations which now have to be spread over many months with intervening breaks.

A pedantic style of spelling has not been adopted, but one is followed which comes as near as possible to a phonetic rendering of Sanscrit terms necessarily used. For this method, the General Secretary, and not our Pundit, Prof. Manilal N. Dvivedi, is responsible.

It is expected in the course of time to secure for the Department an interesting collection of folk-lore from the East, under which are buried many facts and laws of value.

Let us have patience, therefore, and not expect to do with a petty sum of money that which the Asiatic Society requires many thousands of pounds to accomplish. With hardly anything we have done much.

WILLIAM Q. JUDGE,
General Secretary.