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IDEALS OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD

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BY
PANCHANAN BHATTACHARYYA, B.A., B.T.

With a Foreword

BY

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It is very interesting and
for female person to see
Amarah (in India)

"Women have more heart and imagination than men. Enthusiasm arises from imagination, self-sacrifice springs from the heart. They are, therefore, by nature more heroic than heroes. And when this heroism becomes supernatural, it is from the woman that the wonder must be expected. Men would stop at valour."

LAMARTINE.



CSL

TO
Lady Mukhopadhyaya,
WIFE OF
The Hon'ble Sir Asutosh Mukhopadhyaya, Kt.,
Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University
AND
Sometime Chief Justice of Bengal,

This small volume
IS
Dedicated respectfully
AS
A sincere token
OF
The Author's regard
FOR
The type of Indian womanhood
She so truly represents.



CSL

FOREWORD.

It has been said that women are the 'poetry of the world' in the same sense as the stars are the poetry of heaven. Clear, light-giving, harmonious, they are the terrestrial planets that rule the destinies of mankind. Poet Burns has also truly said "Women are the blood-royal of life: let there be slight degrees of precedency among them, but let them be all sacred." In India the woman has been treated as a goddess in the shrine of the family, although people who do not know our inner life have charged us with being unchivalrous to her. In India she is like the plant in the woods, and derives softness and tenderness from the shade. She has not been in the open air, but homage has been rendered to her by poets, philosophers and priests, and she has always been loved and honoured.

The writer of this work has historically treated the subject, and he has taken instances from the mythic and the historic cycles and also from the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata. He has dealt with the ancient period, the medieval period and also the present period which he calls the period



of transition. He has dealt with Arundhati, Sati, and Shaibyā as instances of purity, self-consecration and constancy, and has given us the story of Seetā, Sāvitri and Gāndhārī as instances of self-abnegation, fidelity and righteousness. He has taken from the medieval period Durgāvati, Mirābāī and Ahalyā Bāī and others. The modern instances have also been very well chosen. He has produced a remarkable work which deserves to be widely read. It will serve to teach our women how great Indian women have been, and the place they can take in advancing a nation. The author deserves our thanks for having undertaken the task and accomplished it so well.

BALLYGUNJ,
2nd May, 1921. }

A. CHAUDHURI.



THE WRITER'S NOTE.

In presenting the reading public with the life-stories of the following Indian ladies I cannot help touching briefly on the very painful circumstances that led to their compilation.

In June, 1918, my only daughter Ambālikā, a sweet little child of great beauty and promise, was cut off untimely by the cruel hand of Death, after a short illness of ten days, and the wretched parents were left to mourn the loss. When the first shock of the great grief was over, and I came slowly to realize that the best way of expressing love was rather to weep than to be wept for, I turned to the great epics of my country for whatsoever consolation these could bring. They did their work ; and though consolation was never meant to be compensation, the stories of Shāibyā, Seetā, Damayanti and Sāvitri revealed to me the chastening aspect of grief : I learnt the valuable lesson that grief is holy and has a moral to teach.

The idea then entered my mind that I should pay my humble tribute to the memory of the saintly women whose lives had exerted such a



steadying influence on my heart when it had almost reached the breaking point. Thus the stories of the earlier cycles came to be written ; the narration of the later cycles was only a natural unfolding of the theme originally conceived. It should be observed in this connexion that I have ended with the cycle of the Transition. My explanation is that the cycle of the New Light has yet to be judged.

In a compilation like this I can possibly lay no claim to any originality of conception. The vernacular literature extant in the country, and the traditions transmitted through generations afford sufficient materials to build with. But the presentation is my own.

For the materials of some of these stories I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to many writers of distinction, chief among whom are the following names of my countrymen : Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore ; Pandit T. K. Kavi-ratna ; Rai Shaheb Dinesh Chandra Sen ; Babus S. N. Roy ; R. K. Gupta ; K. P. Das Gupta ; A. L. Gupta ; J. N. Bose ; J. L. Khastagir ; and the Rev. P. C. Mazumdar ; and a number of European writers such as Elphinstone, Malcolm, Grant-Duff, Todd, Payne and Walsh.

Last, though not least, it is my pleasing duty



to offer my grateful thanks to that erudite European scholar, Dr.—who occupies the highest Chair of English Literature in one of the Indian Universities, but who prefers to remain nameless in this connexion, for the trouble he took in having kindly read the greater part of the book in manuscript with a view to improvement; and to Babus Benimadhava Das, M.A., B.E.S., and Raj Kumar Das, M.A., B.E.S., without whose encouragement and helpful suggestions I greatly doubt if the book could have been written at all.

KRISHNAGAR, BENGAL, }
June, 1927.

PANCHANAN BHATTACHARYYA.



PUBLISHERS' NOTE.

So much has been said or written, of recent years, concerning Indian women that the appearance of a fresh volume at this late hour of the day needs a word of apology. But so rich is Indian womanhood in its traditions of sacrifice, so ennobling the theme, and so varied the ideals that the tale can easily bear the frequency of repetition.

Alcestitis and Laodamia have given eternal life to the mythic lore of ancient Europe; the peasant maid of Dômmremy has immortalised the medieval history of France; Florence Nightingale stands out as the redeeming grace of the scandalous blunders of a civilized nineteenth-century war-cabinet; and the Western world has heard of their life-stories from day to day with sustained delight. Indian mythology and Indian history have, in a similar way, sent forth, from age to age, female martyrs or lady workers who have inspired the succeeding generations with their messages of Hope and Faith and Charity. They have shed a soft radiance on the pages of contemporary history. That the world does not



Know of them what it should is not the fault of the glorious traditions they have created: it is the meagreness of narration, or the defective presentation that accounts for much of the lamentable ignorance professed by foreigners about Indian womanhood.

Some years ago there appeared a small publication from the pen of a European lady containing the sketches of five 'distinguished' Indian women. The volume saw the light of day under august patronage. Though not much, it was something in its way. But the real distinction of Indian women has never consisted in simply being captivated by the glare of a materialistic civilization; it has never consisted in merely achieving academic laurels at home or abroad; not certainly in undertaking continental travels, or figuring conspicuously in a court of litigation. Indian womanhood has ideals far nobler than these to show; and with all that foreign writers have done to decry the thousand and one evils, real and imaginary, from which Indian women have been represented to suffer—the 'fiery death,' the 'rigid seclusion,' the 'perpetual widowhood,' the illiteracy and early marriage, and many more nameless horrors in the midst of a glorious civilization,—India has given to the



world her contribution of womanly purity and talent "combined with so much gentleness and with so many truly feminine qualities."

Nay, the contribution has been yet greater ; and with due deference to the Noble Lady who was pleased to write this short panegyric, it is claimed for Indian womanhood that it stands on a still higher platform. It is the difference in the view-point that has caused this difference in the angle of vision. There is a basic difference between the culture of modern Europe and the ancient civilization of India. Matter predominates the West, while the spirit has ever permeated the Indian mind. This explains why the true life of Indian womanhood has ever been a tale of patient suffering under the heavy load of manifold evils which have drawn compassionate tears from their materialistic admirers in the West.

An attempt has been made by the writer in the following pages to show the real womanhood of India as it appears to an Indian, imbued in the traditions of his native land. Believing, as he does, in the lessons of the mythology of his country, he has begun with the ancient mythic lore of India, and has gradually advanced through the epic to the historic cycle. In each story a



distinct emotion of the human heart has been sought to be delineated. The types have been selected very carefully, and the same theme has not been repeated unless prejudice was apprehended to the cycle of narration.

One word more. The Indian youth has read stories from Greek, Latin and Scandinavian mythologies, from the legends of King Arthur and the Great Charlemagne, from the tragedies and comedies of Europe. But has he felt the same interest in these stories as his European compeer does ? Are these stories expected to strike the inmost chord of his heart ? Unconnected with the life of the nation they do not and cannot appeal to the Indian student so forcibly as the heroes and heroines of the land. Why should the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata, the Rājasthān and the Rājatarangini be Greek to the young man of Hindusthān ? Yet the sad truth must be told that Portia and Desdemona lend themselves more easily to analysis by the young undergraduate of the Indian University than Seetā or Gāndhārī of the land of his birth. A sad commentary on the state of things prevailing !

In dilating upon a similar theme the Hon'ble Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University, in his Convocation Address



of 1909 said, "I have no faith in the efficacy of abstract religious maxims. * * * * But I believe it will be far more profitable to illustrate the fundamental principles of every system of morals and religion by examples of truth, purity, charity, humility, self-sacrifice, gratitude, reverence for the teachers, devotion to duty, womanly chastity, filial piety, loyalty to the King and of other virtues appropriately selected from the great national books of Hindus and Muhammadans. These cameos of character, these ideals of our past portrayed with surpassing loveliness in the immortal writings of our poets and sages would necessarily captivate the imagination and strengthen the moral fibre of our young men, who would thus acquire genuine respect for those principles of life and conduct which have guided in the past countless generations of noble men and women in this historic continent."

It is hoped that the few sketches presented in this small volume, and some more to follow in the near future, will interest our young boys and girls and will also be an incentive for the general reader to further acquaintance with the ever-memorable traditions of the womanhood of India.

CALCUTTA, }
June, 1921.

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CONTENTS.

SL
PAGE

I. THE MYTHIC CYCLE

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|----|
| 1. Arundhati (<i>Purity</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 3 |
| 2. Sati (<i>Self-consecration</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 14 |

II. THE EPIC CYCLE

(A) The Rāmāyana.

- | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|----|
| 3. Shaibyā (<i>Constancy</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 31 |
| 4. Seetā (<i>Self-abnegation</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 46 |

III. THE EPIC CYCLE

(B) The Mahābhārat.

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|----|
| 5. Sāvitrī (<i>Fidelity</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 67 |
| 6. Gāndhārī (<i>Righteousness</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 83 |

IV. THE HISTORIC CYCLE

A. Ancient.

- | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 7. Gopā (<i>Renunciation</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 97 |
| 8. Supriyā (<i>Philanthropy</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 109 |

B. Medieval.

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 9. Bākpushtā (<i>Benevolence</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 125 |
| 10. Samjuktā (<i>Self-respect</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 133 |
| 11. Pānnā Bāi (<i>Duty</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 159 |
| 12. Padmini (<i>Honour</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 167 |

C. Modern.

- | | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 13. Chānd Sultānā (<i>Patriotism</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 197 |
| 14. Durgāvati (<i>Love of Country</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 221 |
| 15. Mirā Bāi (<i>Religious Devotion</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 234 |
| 16. Kshamāvati (<i>Sacrifice</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 246 |
| 17. Ahalyā Bāi (<i>The Ideal Queen</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 267 |

V. THE CYCLE OF TRANSITION

- | | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 18. Devi Sārādāsundari (<i>Sainthood</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 291 |
| 19. Mahārāni Swarnamayī C. I. (<i>Public Spirit</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 319 |
| 20. Devi Aghorēkāmīni (<i>Service to Fellowmen</i>) | ... | ... | ... | 336 |



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I

THE MYTHIC CYCLE.



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ARUNDHATI.*

(PURITY).

I

Up above the northern clouds, far removed from the home of the "Aurora Borealis", your eyes will meet on a bright starlit night a group of seven stars floating in the blue transparent ether of the upper regions. This group is called in Hindu Mythology, "The Saptarshi Mandal" or 'the Constellation of the Seven Sages'. There lives Arundhati in the never-failing company of her dear lord Vashistha. As the reward of her extraordinary devotion to her husband the gods have assigned to her this place of honour among

* Hindu legends point out that Sandhyā, the unsuspecting virgin daughter of Brahmā the Creator, was made party to a sinful thought in a world far higher than ours. But a sin in thought is no lighter than a sin in deed. So the maiden resolved to purge herself clean by penances and mortifications, and was reborn with a purified soul as Arundhati to realise the ideal of her life.

(Vide Kālikā Purāṇam.)



the Immortals. The Hindu youth in accepting his newly-wedded bride utters a holy text* from the Vedas, and pointing out to her this star of Arundhati lays upon her the holy injunction, "Be chaste in heart and pure in mind even as Arundhati was unto her lord". She is an object of adoration in the Hindu household. She is a beacon light and an inspiration to every Hindu woman. The social fabric of the Hindus has withstood the ravages of time and hopes to live through eternity, because their women have been inspired through ages by ideals such as these. The story of Arundhati, therefore, fittingly opens the series of the lives of the saintly Indian women sought to be delineated in the following pages.

II

Sandhyā was the immaculate, mind-born daughter of Brahmā the Creator, Grand-father of the Immortals. When this world we inhabit was but in its infancy, this maiden was engaged in her religious austerities on the *Chandrabhāga* mountain rising by the side of *Lohitasarovara*, a

* "Om Prajāpatir-rishiranustuv chhando kanyā devatā Arundhati darshane biniogah."—This hymn composed by the celestial sage Prajāpati in praise of the Angel of a bride is recited at the time of the showing of the star Arundhati to the bride by the bridegroom.



holy lake mentioned in the Hindu Purāṇas, from which rose the "*Chandrabhāgā**" of sacred waters.

The eyes revelled in the bewitching charms of the secluded spot, far beyond the gaze of man. It was the home of the blossoming lotus and the lily, made vocal with the song of the swan and many other members of the feathery tribe. It was gay with the gambols of the sportive fawn and the frisking gazelle that meekly watched the graceful dance of the many-coloured peacock, all enjoying themselves on an endless sheet of emerald grass. It was here that the Immortals enjoyed their occasional outings.

The maiden Sandhyā wore out her delicate frame in a very long fast and sleepless vigil. The hardships of her penances drew compassionate tears from the eyes of the gods. But Vishnu, the lord of her worship, had yet to be propitiated, and Sandhyā redoubled her efforts. She watched and prayed and fasted for many a long decade. The grass was her bed when she required one; the bark of the hill-side tree covered her down to the knees, for she would use none of her celestial raiments; the dew drops gave her a drink when she must have one. She

* A tributary of the immortal Sindhu (The Indus).



IDEALS OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD.

CSL

would not speak to any one,—nay, not utter a single whisper into her own hearing,—for she was keeping the terrible *Vow of Silence*. But in all this a link was missing. Sandhyā had not got her initiation; her soul was groping in the dark.* The divine sage Vashistha came to her at the bidding of the Creator Himself, and Sandhyā was grateful for all that he did. Vishnu, the object of her worship, came down from His heavenly abode to bless His votaress with His divine grace. The maiden fell prostrate before Vishnu and worshipped Him. Propitiated by her offerings, the Lord of the Immortals proposed to grant her boons. “If thou art pleased at the worship of this unworthy servant of thine, then grant me, O Lord, that your creatures may become proof against the blandishments of Desire before they attain their youth. Grant me, O Lord, that I may lose myself in my future husband and do not know of an existence apart from his. Finally, that I may never look with the eye of lust upon any but the lord of my

* Without initiation no one, however great, is entitled to have his or her prayers heard before God. Lord Jesus, the Son Incarnate and the Immaculate, himself went through the baptism of water in the river Jordan by John the Baptist in camel's hair, and living on locusts and honey. The Vaishnava Saint Ishwar Puri initiated Lord Gourānga who is recognised as an Incarnation of God. Instances could be multiplied.



heart". All her prayers were granted, and Vishnu ordained that the maiden should reappear in the sacrificial fire of the sage Medhātithi, and would be placed in the ever-bright regions of the sun, when her mission on earth would come to an end. Then giving her His choicest blessings, the Lord of the high heavens disappeared in a cloud of celestial glory.

III

By the holy waters of the Chandrabhāgā in Brahmarshi Desha, stood the hermitage of the great sage Medhātithi in an extensive forest tract stretching over hundreds of miles. The hermitage was a veritable picture of uninterrupted peace and happiness. It was a "better land," far better than the one conceived by the English poet who has denied access into it to any living mortal. "Death and Sorrow" could not indeed enter there, but that was no reason why it could not be lit up by the harmless joys and innocent smiles of the hermit girls whose tender little hands were engaged in feeding the fawn or patting the ferocious panther or savage lion which, forgetting their natural jealousies, yielded to the influence of the soul-enthraling strains of hymns sung by the sages of old. The Rishis



forgot themselves, but did not forget the good of the world, when they poured forth their devotion at the feet of God Almighty. The hermitage of Medhātithi was a veritable picture of everlasting peace and happiness.

The sage was celebrating the *Jyotistoma* sacrifice for the good of the world. It was a great offering, and the smoke arising from the libations enveloped the sky. All the gods came there to grace the assembly in the hermitage of the sage. All the gods, of whatever rank, had their share of the sacrificial offerings, and highly pleased at the devoted hospitality of the sage, returned to their respective abodes in their divine chariots. Medhātithi acquired religious merit that never fell to the lot of ordinary sages. The sacrifice ended. But when, at the instance of their preceptor, the disciples of Medhātithi were collecting the remains of the sacrificial fire, O miracle of miracles, what did they find there !

A beautiful baby, radiant as the rising sun, fragrant as the full-blown lotus, soft and tender as the pearl drop that falls on the green blade at early dawn,—a beautiful girl slowly opened her eyes and smiled into the wondering gaze of the bewildered sage. “Adopt this baby and cherish her as your own flesh and blood. It is Sandhyā,



the immaculate, mind-born daughter of Brahmā, reborn to fulfil her sacred mission on earth"—thus proclaimed a voice from the sky, and the sage, with the hairs of his body standing on their ends, listened to it and bowed to it. He took up the baby in his arms and pressed its sweet face to his lips with all the pride of a blessed father. He called the baby Arundhati.*

IV

The baby grew up a divine beauty. She was a delight to all that looked upon her. Flowers sprang at every step of her light feet, and the hermitage of Chandrabhāga echoed with the music of her heavenly voice. The touch of her holy feet sanctified the countryside. Her education was entrusted to veteran matronly hands, the presiding angels of the regions of the sun. There those ideal women instructed her in the virtues of womanly honour and purity. For seven long years did this girl listen to the instruction of her heavenly tutoresses, and the growth of her body proceeded with a steady expansion of her heart and mind. She became the repository of

* "Na runaddhi yato dharmam shā kenāpi cha kāranāt." Since she has not interfered in the least with the due discharge of sacrificial rites, she has been called Arundhati.



knowledge, truth, love and honour. The fame of Arundhati filled the world.

V

Arundhati now grew into perfect womanhood. She crossed the boundary between ignorance and knowledge. She became self-conscious. But did she remember Sandhyā? Did she remember Vashistha, her benefactor, and her prayers to the Lord of her worship? Let us see.

VI

A radiant figure of celestial beauty was the young ascetic, the sage *Vashistha*, a special *protégé* of the Creator. He was all that was fine and noble; he was good as good can be. He was sent by the Creator to Sandhyā to show her how she could be restored to the original purity of her soul; and he had shown her the way. *Sandhyā* had been reclaimed. It was, therefore, in the fitness of things that *Brahmā* had set his eyes upon the union of the two souls, one that had raised, ennobled and reclaimed the other. But Arundhati could not now recollect the benefactor of Sandhyā. There was a veil spread over her past, keeping Sandhyā away from Arundhati.



VII

“What folly was it to have looked upon that stranger with the eye of love?”—Arundhati put this question to herself in a searching self-examination, when one evening she met the young sage *Vashistha* engaged in his devotional exercises in *Mānasāchal*, in the vicinity of her new home. “Is this the outcome of the education I have had? Is this my self-possession? O Lord! I feel my ideal vanishes before me. My heart will break”—and Arundhati ran disconsolate to her preceptress, and there made a clean breast of herself. Her heart, however, was greatly lightened when she made the confession and asked how she could atone for this *one moment* of sinful folly and weakness. How great was her relief, when her friend the lady lifted from her eyes the mysterious veil of forgetfulness, and showed her the maiden Sandhyā who had been reborn as Arundhati, showed her that that stranger was none but the preceptor who had been the means of her purification, and told her that the time was coming when the consummation of her life would be attained by the union of herself with that young sage! It was so ordained by the Creator, and she was nothing, if she was



not the wedded wife of that favourite son of Brahmā.

The curtain of oblivion dropped again, and Arundhati was sent back to the hermitage of her foster-father. She was now calm like a mighty river that has left behind it its volumes of fury and rushing dirt, and is approaching fullness. Her goal was well within sight. No longer the light-hearted girl that she was, Arundhati waited for the day when she would merge herself into another self, never to reappear as a distinct individuality.

VIII

The sage Medhātithi is holding a great wedding feast. All the gods have been invited to the banquet. Brahmā, Vishnu, Shiva, Indra and all the important members of the Hindu pantheon are present to bless the bride. The sage gives away his daughter to Vashistha ; and at that supreme moment of her life, Arundhati promises to be a true wife to her husband for whom she had given up her life before she was reborn in the sacrificial fire of her adoptive father. She promises in her heart to follow her husband "even as the shadow follows the body." They are now united. They are *one* and an



ARUNDHATI.

13
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entire whole. They live for many a happy year, and are at last transferred to the celestial regions to shine there for ever and ever, and to bless the Indian woman who follows her husband in sickness and health, in adversity and prosperity, in life and death.

Why trace any further the earthly career of that ideal Hindu wife, Arundhati? She has no longer a separate individuality. She has lost herself in her Lord, as a river loses itself in the vast, unbounded ocean and cannot be separated from it.



SATI.

(SELF-CONSECRATION).

I

Nārada, the lightfooted messenger of the gods, visited the three worlds and invited one and all to the great *Vājapeya* sacrifice that the celestial peer Daksha was celebrating in his Marble Palace on the Himalayas. It was little short of a general invitation extended to the gods of all degrees, high and low, to saints, sages and devotees of all denominations, but there was a very noteworthy omission. The list of guests did not include the name of Shiva, or Mahādeo as he is called, the highest of the gods. It was not in the nature of a sad oversight. The omission was wilful and significant.

II

To explain this extraordinary conduct of Daksha, we have to make a little retrospect. Daksha, the eldest son of the Creator Brahmā, was the father of a numerous progeny of daughters. In marrying them he took great care that



in each case the alliance so formed would be quite worthy of the traditions of his family and his position among the Immortals. He was very proud of the high connexions he had formed : only in the case of his youngest daughter Sati who chose to marry Shiva, the match was not after his heart. Shiva was poor, and poverty itself became the richest treasure in him,—poverty that invested him with a peculiar dignity, being consecrated by the spirit of loving service. Poverty in Shiva meant the realization of his soul, freed from all appanages for its noblest flight into the Supreme, to be lost in communion. To Shiva matter was gross and lucre filthy. Being far above desire, he was infinitely above the gods. From his seclusion in the farthestmost top of the Himalayas, he would look down upon the vanities of his compatriots who rolled in wealth and fattened like sheep in their stalls. The renunciation of Shiva was worthy of that prince of ascetics. Sati had elected him for her lord, and her divine spouse cherished her as the most precious treasure he could boast of.

III

This ill-fated match, though it resulted in an abundance of supreme conjugal bliss between



the contracting parties, was anything but satisfactory in the opinion of Daksha. Brought up in the lap of luxury, Sati was wedded to poverty; she voluntarily gave up using the rich robes and jewels that went to her as her marriage portion from her royal father's home: she wore the spotted skin of a leopard and had the bark of a tree for a change. She had to obey the wishes of a husband whose parlour was the leafy shade of a *Bael* tree, and who revelled in the company of ghosts, goblins, snakes and sundry other abominations to lift them up into divine dignity. The thought itself was gall and wormwood to the haughty Daksha who was by *Brahmā's* choice the suzerain lord over the created world.

IV

Such was the state of Daksha's mind when an incident happened that widened the gulf between him and his divine son-in-law. At a great banquet in the house of the sage Bhṛigu to which all the gods were invited, Mahādeo did not show the respect due to Daksha by virtue of his being the father of Shiva's wife, from a sense of moral and spiritual dignity which ought to reign supreme over physical strength and prowess. This offended the vanity of Daksha,



and was enough to set ablaze the wrath that he cherished for his son-in-law. He returned the insult in the choicest abuse he could command and further decreed that the lord of goblins was henceforth to be excluded from all functions in the society of the Immortals. To lead the others, he himself celebrated the great *Vājapeya* sacrifice and Mahādeo was rigidly excluded from all participation in it. Sati had to suffer for her devotion to her husband and forfeited her claim to visit her paternal home.

V

So Nārada, the messenger of the gods, invited the high and the low to the great feast in Daksha's palace, excluding, of course, the household of Shiva, but he could not help paying a flying visit to Kailāsh on the Himalayas; not so much to make enquiries about Daksha's daughter as to let her have an incidental hint how the wind was blowing in her father's court. For Nārada had a motive in doing so; he was greatly interested in bringing about the fall of the tyrant Daksha who had ridden roughshod over the world for many a year, and the world was longing to be rid of his vagaries. He informed Shiva of what had happened; and to the eager



questions of poor Sati about her father's house, the celestial messenger replied that though he knew much, he was forbidden by her lord to tell her anything. This was all that the unfortunate Sati could elicit from Nārada ; it was enough to excite the curiosity of a woman,—for an affectionate daughter nothing more was needed to make the heart bleed.

VI

By the crystal stream of Alakānandā leaping with its silver foam from cave to rock and rock to ledge in the snow-capped Himalayas, stood the solitary abode of Shiva, the greatest of the Hindu gods. *Kailāsh*, for such was the name of the place, was situated in the loveliest spot that the sublime Himalayas could nestle in their bosom. It was fringed by a ring of lofty pine trees growing on the mountain side, and the picture enclosed defies the writer's pen or the painter's brush. Fruit-trees and flower plants grew there in such abundance, and were so nicely laid out that the inimitable hand of nature was visible at every turn. It was a regular feast of colours reflected from the eternal snows, when the sun and the moon rose and set in alternate succession to do the biddings of the great Lord of the Himalayas.



And at nightfall the subdued gray, when light and darkness met, conjured up a sense of other-worldliness, setting all doubts at rest and sending the heart out on a voyage beyond. The holy calm of the place spread a sacred influence to moderate the fierceness of the heart and was best suited to the meditations of Shiva.

VII

Lost in meditation the great god was seated on a raised altar under a spreading Bael tree. His favourite attendant Nandi stood at a respectful distance, watching the friendly gambols of his master's bull cordially fraternising with the tawny lion that crouched at Sati's feet and carried her on his back when she wanted a ride. There was a holy calm all around. Not a leaf fell from the trees, not a flutter ruffled the breeze. The earth seemed to be under a spell. The eyes of the great god were closed in a beatific trance. Suddenly his heart beat in sympathetic vibration with another heart elsewhere, and obstructed the smooth flow of his meditations. He opened his eyes and found his divine consort standing before him, palms folded, in an attitude of supplication.



VIII

In that submissive gaze of Sati was concentrated the mute eloquence of an agonized heart that spoke more than her lord would like to know. He read on her countenance that the visit of Nārada had done the mischief; he must now accede to the request of his wife hitherto kept in "blissful ignorance" of Daksha's doings. "Will it be consistent with the honour of our house", were the words he spoke, "for my love to be where she will be no welcome visitor?" No words escaped the lips of Sati.

But her pleading gaze fixed on the earth seemed to make the meek reply, "Should a daughter stand on formalities with her parents?" At once the great truth flashed upon the mind of Shiva that the child always finds a warm corner in the mother's bosom. As it is unnatural for the bird to shut out her younglings from her nest, so it is monstrous to suppose that the mother can shut out her daughter from her bosom. Shiva thought for a while and the sweet voice of Sati tinkled through the air, "Does my lord permit me to visit my poor mother who must be unhappy to miss her Sati from the festivals?" Shiva could not hold out any longer; the permission was ac-



corded. But coming events cast their shadows before ; and he was not without his misgivings.

IX

Sati was going to visit her mother after long years of separation. She rode her lion ; Nandi, the faithful retainer of the family, followed her on foot. Dressed in a simple yellow frock without any ornaments or jewels, without the least show of pomp or ceremony as befitted the wife of the god, with life consecrated to meditation and service of love, she was going home to her mother in the royal mansions of the lordly Daksha, now festive on a gala occasion. She imagined her rich sisters, bedecked with jewels, coming to add to the gaiety of the banquet, and looking down upon her self-imposed poverty to which she was wedded,—poverty, the real key to all the treasures of earth and heaven ; but she would not mind their slight so long as she was sure of a hearty welcome from her parents, her mother especially, at the unexpected visit. Her hopes were high and her heart was full. Alas, if she could only lift the veil that dimmed her vision ! But that was not to be.

X

She passes through the old familiar scenes, favourite haunts of her childhood, and the trees



hand down their boughs to do her homage. Flowers blossom on withered branches and strew the pathway to welcome their celestial visitant. The woodland is made vocal with the welcome notes of a thousand little songsters of the vale. Their whilom friend is coming home on a short holiday, and birds, plants, trees and flowers vie with one another in the warmth of their reception. Sati sees at a distance the white turrets of her father's marble palace, and her heart leaps with joy as she nears the porch. On she comes, and crosses the yard. A minute, and she flings herself into the extended arms of her mother in a long and close embrace. Let not the pen of mortal man disturb the supreme felicity of this meeting of hearts.

XI

Who can describe the measure of happiness the affectionate mother experienced at this unexpected meeting? What words can gauge the depth of joy the beloved daughter felt at the hearty reception from her mother after years of absence from the paternal roof?

But the stern father, though half inclined to throw all formalities to the winds and run to greet his daughter, turned his face from the scene,



and sat immovable by the sacrificial altar like an adamant rock. A sharp conflict was raging in his heart between parental emotion and pride, and pride won the day. He would not recognize the daughter that shared the fortunes of Shiva whom he hated with the hatred of hell. Sati came and fell prostrate at the feet of her father, little expecting the cold neglect that would fall to her lot. But the peer turned away from that shabbily dressed woman who came there as the wife of a mendicant. The contrast she formed to her rich sisters in dress, in speech and in general culture, seemed to exclude her from all participation in the functions marked by barbaric display and vain glory. Her sisters talked before her in subdued whispers, and pitied her on her ill-fated selection of a husband who had neither the sense of decency nor the means to give her a dress worthy of a social gathering.

XII

The words of unsolicited pity her sisters kept incessantly dinning into her ears were galling to a degree. It was to Sati a really painful discovery to miss in her richly-wedded sisters the companions of her childhood, the ingenuous friends of her early days. They were changed. The



Good in them had run out: they were now wedded to luxury, wealth and the hollowness of fashionable society. Sati would not have minded the pinpricks of her sisters; the home-thrust of her stern father cut her to the quick. Her sense of dignity rebelled against the injustice of the cold neglect shown to her. It was an insult to her sense of self-respect. It was an insult to her husband Shiva who embodied in himself all the forces of good in the universe. Realising her position, Sati turned to her mother for consolation.

XIII

At that psychological moment when the heart of Sati had almost reached its breaking point, an incident occurred that acted as the proverbial straw on the camel's back. Nandi was waiting at the gate and feeling miserable at what was happening inside. He wished to rescue his mistress from the difficult position she was forced into by inducing her to come back to Kailāsh. Further delay meant further humiliation, and Nandi made up his mind to seek her out and communicate his plan. Daksha kept a keen eye upon his movements, and, like a tiger baulked of his prey, vented his spleen upon the servant in the absence of the master. "Churlish mountain



dog", he exclaimed wrathfully, "you should have been at this time at the heels of thy tipsy master, instead of being in cultured society from which the goblin-chief of Kailāsh has been excluded at my decree". Thus talked on the blinded Daksha, forgetting that he was speaking in the hearing of his daughter. It was the last drop that filled the cup of her misery to over-flowing. A dutiful daughter as she was, she was, above all, a faithful wife. She could no longer tolerate the insolence of her father. She did not utter a single syllable of protest. But her ears refused to hear when insult poured in torrents upon the husband—the lord of her heart. Her sight failed her when her gaze met the dark scowls of her father's eyes. Her nostrils refused to breathe the air that was charged with calumny and vituperation against her dear lord. Her legs trembled, her body shook and she fell down dead where she stood. The spirit left her body, soared higher than the sacrificial smoke of Daksha's palace and passed out of sight to mingle with the great spirit of her husband in distant Kailāsh. Something disturbed the great god in his peaceful meditations. He felt its shock and opened his eyes. Seeing nothing he again fell into his pensive mood.

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XIV

Nandi ran disconsolate towards Kailāsh. His lamentations filled the skies and reached the ears of his master. His swollen eyes, his ruffled mien and broken sobs communicated the sad tidings to the Lord of Kailāsh. He took in the situation at a glance. For once the wrath of the great god whose great heart was impervious to the failings of the flesh broke into an all-consuming fire. The keenness of a poignant sorrow overpowered him, and the fire of fury that flashed forth from his eyes brought into being a messenger of Death that dealt out destruction right and left. The tyrant Daksha with his godless court could not stay the hand of Doom. The fire of Shiva's wrath consumed the proud chief and his famous Vājpeya sacrifice had a calamitous end.

XV

This is perhaps the first instance in the annals of the world when a woman resented an insult to her husband by making the supreme sacrifice by way of a protest. The story told and retold in Indian soil has infused the Indian woman with a very lofty ideal of wifehood. She has received the unstinted adoration of her



countrymen and country-women and has been styled Sati (the chaste wife), when devotion to her husband has led her to a similar course under similar circumstances. We present the story particularly to that section of our readers through whom the very name of Sati will send a thrill of shudder, to whom it will conjure up a lovely young Hindu widow immolating herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband, and who will bless the name of Lord William Bentinck for his famous Minute of 1829, penalising the committing, aiding and abetting of Sati in India. The custom, as it developed in post-Mogul India, was certainly blind and barbarous : all spontaneous outpourings, when consolidated into a custom enforced by religious sanction, degenerate into a mummerly or heartless and soulless form of slavery ; but a reference to these pages will explain the extreme religious fervour and self-forgetting frenzy of love underlying the reckless disregard of life shown by a Hindu widow.



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II

THE EPIC CYCLE.

A—THE RĀMĀYANA.



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SHAIBYĀ.

(CONSTANCY).

I

In *Vaikuntha*, the world of light, Vishnu was to preside at an annual social gathering of great importance. Accordingly most of the gods assembled there with all the sages and saints that inhabited the upper, middle and lower regions of the created universe. The gods, demi-gods, sages and saints of all denominations were seated in the order of their rank, when a flourish of divine trumpets heralded the approach of Vishnu into the audience-hall. The assembly rose in a body to greet the Lord of Vaikuntha, and when the thousand throats mingled in a hymn of praise to the God of Light, trumpets announced that the function had commenced. They talked on various topics of earthly and unearthly concern, and the conversation drifted on to the comparative religious merits acquired by kings on earth.



The hoary sage Vashistha spoke very highly of the benefactions of king Harish Chandra of Ayodhyā, and threw the challenge that no suitor had ever come back disappointed from the royal court of Ayodhyā. His friend Vishwāmitra took up the challenge, and resolved to put to the test the much talked-of bounty of the king. It bode him no good. The assembly dispersed, curious to know how the matter would end, for every one knew that the sage Vishwāmitra was up to any mischief he was bent upon. Only Vashistha grew pensive, for the situation was of his creation.

II

Harish Chandra was the son and successor of king Trishanku of the solar line of Kshattriya Princes, and an ancestor of the far-famed Rām Chandra of the Indian epic. He held his court in Ayodhyā, past which flowed the gentle stream of the holy-watered Saraju through many a smiling plain and teeming valley. Harish Chandra was king of Ayodhyā and suzerain lord over the rest of Indian princes. His arm was long enough to reach the evil-doer in the remotest corners of his vast dominions. It was at the same time strong enough to protect the weak, to succour the distressed and to wipe the scalding tear from the



eyes of those that wept. King Harish Chandra was admittedly the flower of Indian chivalry, and reputed all over the country for his all-embracing charity. Queen Shaibyā, an equally kind-hearted lady, shared his throne as well as the noble sentiments that marked him out as a great king of the Heroic Age of India. Prince Rohitāshwa, the only offspring that blessed the union between the King and the Queen was the worthy son of worthy parents.

III

The King and Queen were just concluding a sacrificial rite they had undertaken for the welfare of their subjects at the instance of the sage Vashistha, Spiritual Director of the Solar kings of Ayodhyā. The ceremony passed off without any hitch; and on the fourth day of the fast the royal couple were engaged, as an essential part of the rite, in making presents to holy men and charities to the poor. The doors of the royal treasury were thrown wide open; the coffers were emptied; and innumerable Brahmin and other suitors came back satisfied, blessing the name of King Harish Chandra and his Queen. Not a man was turned away empty-handed, and the royal couple were about to retire after the strain of



For days' fast and vigil, when a porter announced the arrival of the sage Vishwāmitra at the gate. No sooner was the announcement made than the King and the Queen rose to receive the sage, and with the courtesy due to such an honoured guest enquired if their unworthy selves could be of any service to that holy anchorite.

"I ask for a present from the most bountiful king on earth," replied the sage, "and I hope it will be worthy of the hands that will give, and those that will accept it."

"We will deem ourselves thrice blessed," was the King's prompt reply, "if a sage of your standing accept all our earthly possessions. Though the gift is too small for your acceptance, if it can propitiate Your Holiness, I give you to-day, without the least hesitation, my everything, my throne, my kingdom, crown and jewels, all."

All the court wondered. It was an awful moment of breathless suspense. The fate of their beloved king hung on the utterance of a begging mendicant.

"The present is, indeed, worthy of Harish Chandra whose fame has reached the world of the Immortals. I accept it. But where is the supplementary fee without which the present made brings no merit to the donor?"



"Ten thousand pieces in gold," said the unsuspecting King, "will go to Your Holiness. Let not posterity say that King Harish Chandra halted in charity, the pronounced object of his life. The fee will be counted out forthwith from our treasury."

"By virtue of your gift, O Rājā," said the cunning sage, "the treasury belongs to me. You can claim nothing on this earth as your own. So, you must look for the amount elsewhere."

Harish Chandra found himself caught in a snare. But the situation was of his own making.

There was not an inch of land on this wide world that he could call his own. There was, however, no going back upon the word he had given. He thought for a while and said, "It is in the Shāstras, O Holy Sage, that *Kāshi*, the abode of Shiva, is beyond the boundaries of the earth. I will raise the amount there to redeem my pledge. Be pleased, Gracious Ascetic, to grant me a month's time to enable me to keep my word."

"Agreed," said the sage, as he chuckled within himself at the prospect that the victim was fairly within his grasp. "A month hence I come to claim my fee. No further postponement will do. It is not in my nature to be trifled with."

The bargain was struck. Far from mortal



gaze Nemesis spun a tangled web that held the fate of the woe-begone monarch fast in its silken meshes. The entrance was wide open, but the exit was closed.

IV

The ex-king now made ready for departure. His queen Shaibyā who was by his side was watching the sad turn events were taking. A very queer feeling agitated the soul of Harish Chandra. Not that he regretted this unexpected change in his fortune ; the king was a stranger to such faint-heartedness.

He thought of his poor wife and child whose rights he had bartered away in a moment of self-forgetfulness.

"Shaibyā, dear, I have to leave for *Kāshi* to work out my destiny. You have not foregone your claims to a home in what is now the kingdom of Vishwāmitra : it will be some consolation to me to know that you have found a safe asylum with your boy under the sheltering roof of your father."

"Woe unto the day," replied the queen, "that finds me live to hear these unkind words from my dear husband. I have never known a moment of separation from my lord. I have never longed



for any happiness except to be by the side of my King in weal and woe. If the husband has no home in the land where he was the sovereign lord the night before, how can the wife have a comfortable home in that unholy wilderness?"

Shaibyā wept "a river of tears." Harish Chandra found the lady firm in her resolve to share his fallen fortunes, and did not attempt further argumentation.

"I regret, lady, the indiscreet utterance that has caused you so much pain. Rest assured, it was the tongue and not the heart that was at fault. You should consider what agony of despair and helplessness brought the words to my lips."

So, without any further ado, the unfortunate royal family, husband, wife and child, left for their unknown destination to enact a new scene in their life's drama. The invisible Fates kept them company.

V

The scene now shifts to the streets of Kāshi. The thoroughfares are crowded by priests chanting their morning prayers, pilgrims on their way to the *Gangā* to take a plunge in her sacred waters, pious men hailing from different parts



of the country to offer their homage at the temple of Shiva, sight-seers, beggars and sundry other persons of different nationalities. Our readers will have no difficulty in recognising in this motley crowd the towering features of Harish Chandra leading his boy by the hand and followed by his devoted wife Shaibyā. For the last three weeks he has tried his best to raise the money to redeem his pledge, but the money is not forthcoming. He is a king no longer; his word is not sufficient to push his case with creditors. He has no land to mortgage or jewels to pawn. He is not, therefore, an approved borrower. He has no friends to advance him what he wants. Chance acquaintances are lavish in their advice, but chary of their gold. People sympathise with him, but show a cold front to his prayer for relief.

Harish Chandra became sad, and the tears of poor Shaibyā swelled the volumes of *Gangā's* waters, when their helplessness became daily manifest.

The last day of the contract arrived. True to the point the sage Vishwāmitra sought his victim out in the streets of Kāshi and demanded his dues.

"The thirtieth sun is going to set, Harish Chandra," he thundered forth in a peremptory



tone, "and a short hour remains before you must redeem your pledge, or go to eternal perdition in default."

"All my efforts have proved unavailing in procuring the money," said Harish Chandra, and his voice shook as he essayed the reply. "Kindly wait, O Holy Sage, a few minutes more, and I hope yet to be able to give you your fee."

In a last desperate effort Harish Chandra turned to the slave-market of the city, and offered himself for sale. His honour was at stake; the cherished ideal of his life was vanishing while he was yet alive. He chose to be a bond-slave rather than break his vow.

A *chandāla*, the keeper of the public crematory of Kāshi, bought him for five thousand gold pieces. It was the highest price he could fetch. But Vishwāmitra would not accept a single piece short. There was still half to be raised.

Poor Shaibyā was a silent spectator to this transaction. She did not faint; no cry escaped her lips. She saw that her King had been true to his sacred promise. Could she not help him in supplementing the money secured? "O God!" she prayed in the inmost recesses of her heart, "if I could fetch with my child the remaining half!"



The sun is going to set upon an unredeemed pledge of King Harish Chandra of the Solar Dynasty, far famed for his honesty on this earth,"—these terrible words of his tormentor rang through the pavements of the streets of Kāshi, and the echoes died away in the distant horizon on Gangā's breast.

"Not yet, O Holy Sage," replied the faithful queen, "not so long as Shaibyā lives and can find a purchaser in the slave-market yonder."

Shaibyā faced the ordeal quite heroically. She went up to an old Brahmin who happened to be looking out for a maid-servant, and with tears that told her story implored him to buy her with her child.

The price was counted out. The claims of Vishwāmitra were satisfied in full. The pledge of the king was redeemed. Husband and wife separated and went to work as galley-slaves. The cups of their misery yet wanted a drop to be brimful.

VI

Months passed and the world moved on in its accustomed groove. Why unfold the harrowing tale of misery, that befell those victims of inexorable fate? They were in life-long bondage and had to slave it out as best as they could.



Harish Chandra kept watch at his post in the southern yard of the cremation ground of Kāshi, down the river Gangā. His duty was to collect for his master the funeral fee from the relatives of the dead. Being constantly with the dead did Harish Chandra become dead to the ordinary emotions of the human heart? Let us see.

It was a stormy pitch-dark night in the month of *Bhādra* when the waters of the Gangā overflowed her banks. Harish Chandra was at his post. The darkness outside could be matched only by the inner gloom that had taken possession of his heart. Accustomed to the howls of dogs and jackals disputing sway over a half-burnt corpse, he did not notice their yells that night. The dying embers of a dog-scaring faggot or the leaping flames of a fresh burning pyre did not act as a stimulus to his sight that evening. He stood at his post, the picture of the unrelenting Gateman at the portals of Death.

VII

Suddenly the heart-rending wails of a woman startled the gate-keeper. It was a fresh arrival. No mourners followed the dead. A poor unfortunate mother bore the corpse of her only boy,



covered in a simple solitary winding-sheet. She sat by a spent-up pile, laid the lifeless burden on her bosom, and cursed her fate. All that remained to her as a solace to her miserable life was gone. The boy, a child of twelve summers, had been bitten by a venomous snake and breathed his last. Her lamentations broke the silence that reigned there. She was raving about a kingdom and a fee, and muttered something about a pledge redeemed.

The interests of his master at once brought Harish Chandra to the spot. He demanded, as usual, the customary funeral fee, and stretched his hand for the shroud of the dead.

"Don't defile us, gate-keeper, with your touch, I beseech you. My darling Rohitāshwa has felt the touch of better hands than yours. Stand aloof, and you will have your dues." Harish Chandra stepped back at a respectful distance. He caught the word "Rohitāshwa." The past flashed before his eyes with all the scenes coming back in quick succession. Was it his own flesh and blood, the heir to the throne of Ayodhyā, that lay before him low in the dust to receive the last rites from his own hands? His head began to reel. He tried to listen to the fragments that dropped from the woman's lips.



"Shaibyā has preferred to lose all," the woman went on. "She has lost her kingdom, her husband, her only child, the apple of her eye. She has sacrificed her freedom, the birth-right of a human being—."

The ears of Harish Chandra stood expectant.

"Shaibyā has not forsaken righteousness. She has helped her dear husband in keeping his plighted truth. Will the God of Truth and Righteousness abandon her at this supreme hour of trial?"

She blamed herself for the passing weakness of the moment, and thanked the name of God.

Harish Chandra could not contain himself any longer. His heart was not flint or steel. He was yet a man.

"No, lady," said Harish Chandra in a voice hoarse with emotion, "the God of Truth and Righteousness cannot abandon you. Queen Shaibyā, it is your unworthy husband that stands before you. I am now the steward of the crematorium under the master who bought me the day we separated. God willed it and God has willed this meeting of ours under very painful circumstances. Arise, Queen Shaibyā, and give our child the rites that are due to the departed."



VIII

There was a sudden transformation in the scene. The Angel of Truth descended from the skies riding on a pencil of celestial light. The deserted countryside was illumined with the glow of sacred radiance. Sweetly and softly the figure spoke, and the music of his voice enchanted the ears on which it fell like April showers.

“Arise, Queen Shaibyā, and rejoice that you have successfully stood the ordeal, for verily, I say unto you, daughter of the mortals, that God cannot abandon those that serve truth and righteousness. Noble King Harish Chandra, you have gained immortality for all ages to come. Awake, boy Rohitāshwa, and continue to be the darling of your parents. Conquered by the nobility of your soul, O best of men, the sage has given back the kingdom to your minister. Go back to Ayodhyā and be once more unto your subjects the fatherly protector that you were.”

The voice ceased. With the peep of gray dawn the royal couple found themselves not on the banks of the Gangā, but at the gates of their capital Ayodhyā, with the old minister standing at the head of a gay procession ready to accord a hearty reception to their King and



SHAIBYĀ.

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Queen. The shouts of "Long live King Harish Chandra," "Long live Shaibyā the virtuous Queen," rent the air.

The sage lost his wager, and the meshes of the web spun by the Fates snapped in two.



CSL

SEETĀ.

(SELF-ABNEGATION).

I

Seetā is a name to conjure with throughout the length and breadth of Hindusthān. There is not a Hindu household in India where Seetā does not receive the unstinted homage of adoration : not a Hindu woman but draws her inspiration from this immortal creation of Vālmiki's pen. The life-story of Seetā is a thrice-told tale ; but it has never lacked the odour of freshness. It is a perennial fountain of charm to the old and young alike. The purifying flame of Seetā's life has kept alive the sacred torch of domestic bliss in the Hindu home, and, for ages to come will act as a beacon-light to the Indian woman who has loved her husband and has suffered in so doing. We are told of Adam's wife who sinned the sin of disobedience ; the *Iliad* tells us of the beautiful Helen who disgraced herself. But



Vālmiki's Seetā is a unique creation in the world's literature towering majestically over truth and fiction.

II

The story of Seetā's birth is shrouded in mystery. Tradition says that Seetā was not "of woman born." While Janaka, King of *Mithilā** was, according to ancient custom, ploughing a plot of land to raise a sacrificial altar, a beautiful baby was dug up by the furrow. Taking the child gratefully as a gift from the Earth Goddess he called it Seetā,† and brought it up with all the care of a fond father. The child grew up a pretty young maiden when the king announced a *Swayamvara* for the princess. Many suitors came. Most of them went back dishonoured for they failed to pass the test. But Rām Chandra, son of King Dasharath of the neighbouring kingdom of *North Koshala*‡ passed the test and gained the prize. Beauty was mated to Valour, and Grace and Sweetness of Devotion to the Majesty of Duty.

* Modern Tirhut in North Behar.

† The ploughed-up.

‡ Ayodhyā.



III

No reception could be more cordial than what Seetā had from her husband's people. No princess could have started married life with a richer promise than she. Yet no tale is more harrowing, no woe more heart-rending, no life more full of sorrows and sufferings than hers. Rām Chandra, as the eldest-born of King Dasharath, would be installed on the throne next morning; Seetā would get her rightful place by his side as queen of Koshala. The arrangements were complete, and the city was festive in view of the auspicious ceremony. But all of a sudden a cruel bolt fell from the serene and cloudless blue. As the result of a Court-intrigue Rām Chandra was sent into exile for fourteen years, and his step-brother Bharata was nominated king instead. The hopes of Seetā were shattered.

This was the beginning of the woes that kept her company through life.

IV

Rām Chandra bowed to the decree of his father. He made ready to depart for his unknown home in the forest. Bathed in tears his



parents stood round him and cursed their fate. But he was going into exile to enable his father to redeem a plighted truth. He would not stay for all the world. And the faithful Seetā would share the hardship of the forest life with her husband. To her the palace without her husband was like the day without the Sun. It was worse than a dismal wilderness. "You are not used to forest life, my dear," said the prince, when he went to bid her good-bye, "stay here to comfort my old parents in their sorrow." Seetā replied, "Hardship is joy itself in your company. The dirt of the forest track that will settle on my body I will wear as the finest sandal-paste. The scorching rays of the summer Sun will seem cooler than the coolest spray at the sight of your face that has a unique charm for your beloved Seetā. The sharp blades of the *Kusha* grass I will remove with my feet that my husband may tread the way with ease. The forest will be to me an Eden of bliss in your company. Leave me not, or leave me to separation and certain death."

Seetā would not stay behind. So the party consisting of Rām, his younger brother Lakshman and Seetā left Ayodhyā, while the city wept.



V

Spending some time in the hermitage of the saint Bharadwāj the party moved on to *Chitrakuta*, where they fixed their temporary abode, and made the most of their time in games and manly sports. Thence they moved further south into the great forest of *Dandakāranya* on the Godāvāri. They built a hut of leaves in a central spot of the forest called *Panchavati*, and thought of spending the remainder of their exile in that secluded region.

VI

Seetā by this time grew fairly accustomed to her life in exile. Nature sported in all her glory in the grove of Panchavati, and Seetā, gay and light-hearted as the singing lark, frisked with the frisking fawn in this veritable home of romance and poetry. As into the arms of her mother, Seetā flung herself readily into the bosom of Nature, and like the fairest lily among the lilies that bloomed, the merriest bird among the birds that sang, like the loveliest maid among the sylvan deities of the grove, she graced the country-side with her matchless beauty and innocence. She was free as the air she breathed. Her



rambles with her husband through the lawns and meadows by the river-side were a source of bliss not tasted before. O the happy months she passed in the Arcadian grove of Panchavati! Would she could only see into the future!

VII

The report of the beauty of Seetā having reached the ears of Rāvana, the demon king* of *Lankā*, he was on the look-out for an opportunity to steal her away. One morning when both Rām and Lakshman happened to be away from their hut, Rāvana disguised as a mendicant presented himself before the gate as a guest of the family. Hospitality could not be ignored. In an evil moment the simple-hearted lady stepped out of the threshold. She was instantly seized by the false mendicant, and before she could well realize her helplessness she was lifted into the devil's chariot which was speeding away to his sea-girt island home in distant *Lankā*. She violently protested, and screamed and wept;—but Rāvana would not mind her piteous wails, and lashed his horses till their breath was out. So Seetā, like Proserpine when she was carried away by Dis, flung her jewels

* A powerful Non-Aryan king of ancient Ceylon.



along the way that her Rām Chandra might guess the cause of her disappearance.

VIII

In the meanwhile the brothers returned and found Seetā missing. Her disappearance was as sudden as it was unexpected. Words fail to describe the acuteness of the grief into which Rām Chandra fell. His heart was about to break, and his mind was almost unhinged. He questioned every tree and every bush,—every bird and every fawn,—he asked every rock and every ledge to tell him where his Seetā was. Only echo answered 'where.' He sought every nook and every cranny, but Panchavati could not give him back his lost treasure. His lamentations filled the grove and rent the air. Like one who has lost all relish of life Rām raved disconsolate.

For some days the brothers wandered through the South Forest when they came upon a silken scarf which Rām Chandra recognised to be that of Seetā. A few steps more, and some jewels were noticed that could belong to none other than the princess of Ayodhyā. Link after link they followed the clue, day after day they crossed miles of the dense forest till they reached



*Kiskindhyā** and met Sugreeva, a monkey chief† in exile. They struck up a strange friendship, and the monkey chief told Rām Chandra how his wife had been carried off by Rāvana, the demon king of Lankā, and of a certainty consigned to his harem. Sugreeva placed the entire resources of his kingdom at the disposal of his friend in his attempt to rescue his wife.

IX

Hanumān, the trusted lieutenant of Sugreeva, was sent to find out the whereabouts of Seetā. He crossed over to Lankā, and effected an entrance into the pleasure garden of the king. There he discovered the lady, seated under an Asoka tree, a picture of dejection and despair. Guarded by a dozen of fierce-looking female slaves, she was allowed a half hour's respite from her tormentors' attentions. Her locks were dishevelled, clothes tattered, body pale and emaciated, and eyes streaming with tears. She was always muttering the name of her dear husband to herself. Seetā was not in the pink of health: that lit up the corridors of Ayodhyā's palace: she was not the blooming lily that sweetened

* Somewhere south of modern Mysore.

† An independent Non-Aryan chief of the Deccan.



the grove of Panchavati. She was a prisoner in an alien land expecting every moment to be done to a cruel death by the orders of a baffled king. Her only sorrow was she could not once see her lord before her death.

Hanumān somehow managed to drop the hint that the night of her woe was nearing dawn, as Rām Chandra would soon be there to recover her. Seetā looked up. The sweet name of Rām Chandra electrified her frame, and she wished she might live to hear that name again.

X

The war is over. With the help of the army lent by Sugreeva, Rām Chandra has crossed the sea, invaded Lankā and killed Rāvana with all his family. The Rākshasa army has been destroyed. Rāvana's brother Bibheesana, a friend and ally of Rām Chandra, has been placed on the throne of Lankā. Seetā has been rescued.

But hitherto we have not seen much of Vālmiki's Seetā except that she is an ordinary creation, a loving and dutiful wife passing through a series of misfortunes that fall to the lot of most women. But the drama of her life has yet to be acted out.



XI

The conqueror of Lankā has not made a state-entry into the captured city. He waits outside and holds a reception on the beach in a pandal erected for the purpose. There is a large gathering of chiefs, generals and other notables. Rām Chandra is seated on a throne of gold. Bibheesana, the friendly chief of Lankā, leads Seetā in a closed palanquin to restore her to her husband. Everybody is glad beyond measure that the sufferings of the lady have come to an end. Seetā alights, and at that moment of intense self-absorption in the thought of union with her lord, she quite loses sight of the sea of human heads. She ascends the steps with her eyes fixed at the feet of her beloved husband. Suddenly she hears the terrible words: "Seetā must stop there. She cannot be taken back. She has lived for a long time in Rāvana's palace without a friend to give her protection." She staggers back. The terrible words that greet her ears fall like the words of doom; but the voice is the voice of Rām Chandra, her husband, the fountain-head of love and honour.

The voice is ringing in her ears. Seetā steps back and leans against the railing. The words



perce her soul like a burning shaft : they smoke their way into the tenderest part of her vitals and char them black. With difficulty she supports herself against a prop, and avoids a fall. Her head reels and her sight grows dim. The tantalus-cup of bliss recedes when her parched lips are about to taste it.

XII

Seetā could have more readily met the death she had been snatched from than the doom that awaited her. She had now nothing to hope for, nothing to strive for, nothing, in short, to live for. To her the world went out of joint. Sick of life, Seetā turned to Lakshman with a pleading gaze—not to ask him to intercede with his brother in her behalf, but to help her to put an end to the life she loathed.

The pyre was ready. Seetā would fling herself into the flames to make an end of the life she could not devote to the service of her husband. The flames were leaping with a thousand tongues ready to devour their victim. A moment of awful suspense hushed speech into silence. With the blue waves dashing against it in endless ripples, with the blue sky hanging



over it in boundless emptiness, the white sandy beach stood a mute spectator to this amazing sacrifice.

"If I have ever been false to my husband in thought, in speech or in deed, let the flames consume me here and hereafter." With these solemn words of adjuration Seetā leapt into the burning pile amidst the growing excitement of a compassionate crowd. But lo! the flames slackened in their fury and the faggots did not burn. Up rose a radiant figure of celestial beauty from amidst the flames holding Seetā in his arms, and making straight for the throne of the bewildered husband addressed him thus :—
"O Prince of Koshala, judge not your wife by the standard of mortal man. She is far above the failings of the flesh. She is pure and true, and the Angel of Fire stands before you to vouch that Seetā is pure as fire itself and comes unscathed out of the ordeal. Remember, Prince, the promise you made before my tribunal when you led her to the altar years ago." The voice ceased and the Angel disappeared. The crowd raised a lusty cheer in the name of Seetā. Unable to bear the tremendous weight of her happiness, Seetā fainted away in the arms of her husband.



XIII

The year wore out. The exile of Ayodhyā sat again on the throne of his ancestors. Seetā smiled again and tried to forget the episode of Lankā. Her new happiness came as a screen between Koshala and Panchavati. The kindness of her husband was so intense, so overpowering, that at times she shuddered to think of losing it again. She had, indeed, reasons to do so, for fresh troubles were ahead. Ayodhyā poohpooched the story of the Fire Ordeal held in distant Lankā. Rumour reared its thousand heads and invaded the palace with all the forces at its disposal. Trusty agents confirmed the truth, and Rām Chandra bowing to the people's will thought of removing this prolific source of idle gossip by abandoning his wife. He knew her to be chaste, but there was no choice in the matter. He was king by the people's good will. He must please his people at any cost. It was a duty inviolable. He lost the husband in the king. Seetā was abandoned to her fate in a forest. Tantalus again ! The greater the pity, for Seetā was now in an interesting condition. Poor woman ! She was told at starting that she was being taken on a pleasure trip. Her attendant Lakshman told her



his mission later on. She did not complain. She only said, "It is not for me to question the wisdom of the step my husband, the King, has taken. What he has done has been for the best. I am reaping as I sowed."

XIV

Reader, if it is not too much for your nerves to follow this harrowing tale of misery, come let us visit this wronged innocence in the hermitage of Vālmiki. Twelve long years have come and gone, and the world has not missed much of the banished Queen of Ayodhyā. She has been picked up by the hoary sage and provided with a woodland hospitality and a father's care. Lava and Kusha, the twin sons of Seetā, now full twelve years old, are dressed up like hermit children. They do not know their parentage, though they have received from the sage an education befitting Kshattriya boys. They can shoot, fence, wrestle, sing and recite the Vedas. They are now the sole delight of their mother's heart. Taught by the sage they sing before their mother the life-story of Rām Chandra to the tune of the harp. Seetā listens to the music with rapt attention. Every word of the song drops sweet nectar. It sustains her life. With this solitary consolation Seetā



brings up the royal children of the *Ikshvāku* line with the conviction that sooner or later they will get their dues. She is not the playful young bride as we found her in Panchavati. She is, no doubt, in a hermitage,—the home of peace and good will,—with its sporting fawns, and singing birds and blooming lotuses by the side of smiling hermit girls,—but the world of difference it has made to Seetā ! She misses her husband by her side : she misses the joy of her life. The banished Queen of Ayodhyā drags her miserable life from day to day in blissful ignorance of any further troubles that may be brewing.

XV

When things were in this pass the sage Vālmiki was invited by King Rām Chandra to the *Aswamedha* sacrifice he was celebrating to mark his sovereign sway. As no ritual is deemed complete in the religious law books of the Hindus unless the lawfully married wife joins in the performance, Rām Chandra had a golden statue of Seetā made and placed by his side at the inauguration of the ceremony. What news could be more gladsome to Seetā ! She was yet esteemed by her husband as his only consort ! Seetā



forgot all the woes of her life, and her heart went out in tears of love and gratitude to her husband. She would fain suffer a thousand painful years of separation for such a supreme moment of happiness.

XVI

In due time the sage honoured the king's invitation. The twin princes accompanied him. Their sweet music threw a spell over the Royal Court. The exactness of the details, the pathos, and the melody of the song attracted the king's notice. When the identity of the boys was revealed to him, Vālmiki implored the king to take back his wife whose innocence he solemnly avowed before the assembled Court. Rām Chandra was half inclined to accede to the request of the sage, but to be a model of virtues before his subjects as he ought to have been, and to remove the least vestige of suspicion still lurking in their minds, the point was raised that Seetā should submit to a fresh test of her innocence, before the assembled people.

On this memorable morning the Court of Ayodhyā is crowded to suffocation. There are princes and chiefs hailing from different provinces, sages and hermits from their forest seclusions,



and many other notables from far and near. They are anxiously watching the proceedings. Seetā has obeyed the mandates of her protector in exile. She has come that she may get her rightful place by the side of her lord, the King of Koshalā. Hope has duped her again.

She stands before this vast concourse of men. The sage explains the situation. Her husband has expressed his willingness to take her back.

Seetā does not know if to believe her ears. She looks grateful. Tears of joy trickle down her cheeks.

The sage continues :—"Seetā will be taken back if she will agree to give a fresh proof of her innocence."

Too much for the injured lady. From her girlhood Seetā has meekly borne her lot. Pure as purity itself she has suffered as no woman can. She still loves and cherishes her husband as if the world has gone all right with her. Rām Chandra has once drawn her close to him as the most loving husband does ; the next moment his strong sense of duty has come between. Yet a breath of murmur has not escaped her lips. She is, however, a woman, and flesh and blood can bear no more. A fresh insult has been added to the injury already done.



Seetā looks bewildered. The castle she has built in the air vanishes no sooner formed. She is rudely awakened from her dreams. A most cruel blow has been given to the self-respect of this tender-hearted lady. It is more than human endurance, more than patience itself can bear.

Seetā does not look up. She makes a final appeal to her mother, the Goddess Earth. "If I have ever cherished, O Omniscient Goddess," she sobs in the bitterness of her sorrow, "if I have ever thought of any one in my life save and except my husband, the best of Raghu's line, then may the name of Seetā be cursed in ages to come. Strong in the strength of this holy love and single-minded devotion to my husband I am sure, O Goddess, you will take me in your arms and lull me to the sleep that knows no waking. Open your arms wide, my mother, and take me to your bosom to bear witness that your innocent daughter has not strayed from the path of virtue and honour."

In the twinkling of an eye the earth opens with a crash, and a matronly lady of exquisite beauty seated on a throne of gold rises from the chasm. She takes the fainting Queen of Koshala in her arms and disappears into the womb of the earth as quickly as she has come.



IDEALS OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD.

CSL

The scene drops over the final act of this great tragedy. A mournful sigh of emptiness blows over the universe. When will this gap be filled ? Ages will come and go, but the original that inspired Vālmiki's pen will not re-appear in another Panchavati.



CSL

III
THE EPIC CYCLE.
B—THE MAHĀBHĀRATA.



CSL

SĀVITRI.

(FIDELITY).

I

There is great rejoicing to-day in the kingdom of Madra, * for the royal heralds have just now proclaimed with a flourish of trumpets that the old king Aswapati has been blessed with a charming little daughter. Aswapati, a powerful Kshatriya prince of the Solar dynasty, though master of vast domains and suzerain lord of a hundred vassal chiefs, did not know the bliss of fatherhood. Disappointment was rankling sore in the heart of this monarch that, with all the propitiatory sacrifices he could offer, the gods did not grant him his desire. At last a *Putresthi* † sacrifice, celebrated on a very grand scale, made the gods relent, and the king got his long-looked-for reward. So, the capital city of King Aswapati

* In the modern Punjab.

† A sacrifice offered with a view to get children.



IDEALS OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD.

CSL

was *en fête* : she was in her holiday attire, and it was a sight for the gods to see.

II

The baby was called Sāvitrī. She soon grew up a pretty little damsel, and was the delight of the royal household. Like the balm of Gilead the words she lisped brought solace to the hearts of the royal couple. She was the supreme joy of a hitherto joyless home. The old king could not do without her for a single moment : the queen would not like to send her out of her sight : so, between father and mother the girl had a very happy time of it. The king gave her the education that befitted her rank in society and birth in a Kshatriya family, and the damsel, now grown to be a tall and stately maiden, looked the right royal princess that nature and education made of her. But Sāvitrī was fast approaching her age when she must be married. The king proclaimed his royal wish from end to end in his vast domains ; but, nowhere in that age of Rājput chivalry could be found an eligible husband for Sāvitrī. The king grew sad ; and finding himself helpless in the matter allowed the princess full liberty in the choice of a partner in life.



III

A beautiful state-coach, drawn by four white horses with the banner of the royal house of Madra floating gaily over it, was on its way to a distant place of pilgrimage. Sāvitri and her maids, attended by the old minister of the State and a strong escort of the royal body-guard, went out of the city to carry out the mandate of the king. The fond parents blessed their daughter and wished her god-speed in the journey. The chariot flew with the speed of the wind and drove by a number of rivers, villages, hills and dales, went past many a city and many a hamlet, halted here and there, but its journey did not come to an end. People watched the procession with curious eyes; the nobility of the countryside flocked to have a look at the youthful princess; but the word of Sāvitri was, "Drive ahead."

At last one evening, when the departing rays of the day were vanishing fast on the distant horizon, when the cool refreshing twilight breeze was playing gently with the flowing curls of the light-hearted maiden, and the Queen of the Night was peeping through the starry casements of her royal abode by the Silver Lake in the High



Heavens, the weary procession drew up at the outskirts of a hermitage, far away from the din and bustle of luxury and wealth. It was here that the chariot halted for the night to rest.

IV

Conceive a scene of sylvan grandeur in an Elysian dale, and you will realize in part what the beauty of a hermitage meant in ancient India. It was in the hermitage that the pen of Vālmiki and Vyāsa produced, by a series of master strokes, the noblest characters that humanity could ever dream or conceive of. It was here that their genius shone in all its splendour, so that the world exclaimed approvingly, "Live now, immortal masters of Poesy and Rythm, —live in your favourite rural arbours of seclusion and everlasting peace, to be a source of inspiration for all ages and climes." It was into this spot of celestial bliss that the poet-philosopher of Germany took his excursions with his Hindu brother poet Kālidās and said in an ecstacy of delight,—“O heaven on earth, the hermitage of Indian sages !” In such a spot of wood-land beauty lived the noble King Dyumatsen of Sālwa, old, infirm, blind, expelled from his kingdom with his old consort the Queen and



their only son, Prince Satyavān, deprived of his birth-right by the cruel hands of Treason and Court Intrigue. The old king had sought out this hermitage in his exile, and while he himself was holding communion with God, the young prince was charged with the protection of the hermitage against evil-doers and the observance of the rites of hospitality to deserving guests.

V

Satyavān finding a chariot halt before the hermitage made all possible haste to make his acquaintance with the strangers. The eyes of Sāvitrī met those of Satyavān, and both loved each other at first sight. Neither of them had been smitten before with the strange feeling that now took possession of their heart. It was a new experience, and the one felt irresistibly drawn towards the other. What Sāvitrī could not find in cities and palaces she found here in the hut, presumably belonging to a hermit. She made up her mind. She belonged to none other than this hermit boy. And all her doubts were set at rest when she came to know afterwards that this tall youth with bearing as noble as that of Indra himself, with looks as bewitching as those of Kārtikeya, was no less a man than a



prince—the only son of King Dyumatsen in exile. She would not marry wealth with all its concomitant evils, but it was to be a union of goodness and purity with true nobility. Her pilgrimage came to an end. She had found the god of her worship and returned home from that holy shrine.

VI

To all intents and purposes the mission of the king in sending Sāvitrī to the hermitage was successful, and the king, her father, was very glad that a heavy load of anxiety was lifted from his heart. It was a joyful news that the Princess had chosen for her husband one in whose veins flowed the bluest blood of Kshatriya aristocracy, the graces of whose body and mind were so favourably reported by his old minister and borne out by the unimpeachable testimony of his court heralds. That the young Prince and his father, King Dyumatsen, were living in the obscurity of poverty was in no way an obstacle to the intended marriage. Aswapati had no male issue to succeed him, and his would-be son-in-law now loomed in his eyes as the prospective heir. But, unfortunately, his joy was not destined to last long. When the announcement



was made in the king's audience chamber, who would come there but the Divine Sage Nārada, and inform the Court that the match should be avoided, for Satyavān had not a long lease of life to enjoy ! "And as sure as I am speaking," the Sage went on, "Satyavān will be cut off by the cruel hands of Death before the twelfth moon from this day rolls in her course along the sky." It was like a bolt from the blue ; and the bolt were a more welcome visitor than the Sage with the terrible news that upset all the plans of the unfortunate monarch.

VII

The king shuddered at the revelation made by the celestial visitor. But not so Sāvitrī. She did not lose her self-possession. She had taken her resolve. Addressing the king she said, "O father, it matters little if this young prince dies at this moment or lives through eternity. The expression 'I give' can be uttered only once with reference to the object so given. When I have once given myself in heart to this prince, I am no longer my own mistress, and have not the right to barter myself away elsewhere for all the world. I cannot marry another man—I must wed him whom I have elected for my husband,



for it would be a great sin if I do otherwise. I should consider myself a widow even now, if you decide that I should not marry Satyavān. I have accepted him in the heart of my heart, and with him have I taken all the risk that follows." As she spoke, her face glowed bright with the firm resolve she had taken in her heart. The old king found it was no use arguing with her. The match was settled, and the celestial Sage Nārada, finding that the Princess seemed much wiser than the head she bore on her young shoulders, departed with a blessing and a pious hope that the evil that threatened her might be averted through the timely intervention of a Power mightier than Fate.

VIII

So, on an auspicious day the marriage was celebrated in the hermitage of King Dyumatsen, and Sāvitrī renouncing the comforts and luxuries of a royal house lived in the forest like one accustomed to hardship and toil from her birth. She went there to render her husband and his parents happy in their exile, and she became the mainstay of the old royal couple to feed them, to clothe them and to cheer them in their hours of trial and tribulation. She knew the doom of



perpetual widowhood that, like the sword of Damocles, was hanging over her head, but she did not make her husband miserable by giving him the sad intelligence and making him die every hour before his actual death. She kept to herself all that she knew. In silence she suffered and sent out her heart in fervent prayers to the Almighty that the impending calamity might be averted.

IX

The months chased one another in their flight, and the year was dying out. Inexorable Fate was taking rapid strides to claim his victim, and there was only a short "morrow" between Satyavān and Death. The streaks of dawn appeared as usual over the hermitage. The refreshing morning breeze gently waved the pearl-drops that had gathered over-night on the green foliage, and waked the songsters of the vale to pour forth their merry notes into the ears of a sleeping world, but to Sāvitri they brought the heart-rending message of Doom. She rose with the first peep of the gray dawn, and with a final appeal to the throne of the Almighty she calmly resigned herself to the Inevitable Decree, fully convinced that hers would

ending



be a conquest over Death. The sun was riding high in the blue heavens when Satyavān went out, axe in hand, to chop wood for sacrificial fire. Sāvitri would not allow him to go into the forest alone—she would keep him company up to the last moment, and beyond it. Under the pretext of seeing the wood-land scenery of the hermitage in the company of her husband, Sāvitri set out for her journey into the Land of Darkness.

X

The shades of evening were falling fast on the earth when Satyavān came down from a tree he had climbed for plucking fruits. He was unwell. With a burning thirst and an aching head he said to the poor girl, "Sāvitri, my love, I am in great pain. I do not know what the matter is with my head, but I feel as if I am dying." He rested his aching head on her knees and sank down to sleep. And he slept as if not to wake again. It was all the work of a minute. Sāvitri realized that the fateful moment had come, and Grim Death had come to snatch away from her her dearest treasure. Now a widow on earth, she was the blessed consort of her Satyavān in the embrace of eternity, the union



consecrated by death. She did not not weep : it was not the time to settle accounts. The woman with her all-conquering strength, born of chastity, came out. She now realized that the dreaded Doom had come. She gazed on the noble figure of her dear husband now sleeping the sleep of Death. Surrounded on all sides by an enveloping darkness in the centre of a frowning forest tract, clasping the remains of her dear lord in a last embrace, she challenged Death to show his might and spread his sway over her beloved. The world had vanished from her sight, and the earth had receded from her feet. The only object of which she was conscious was the cold corpse of Satyavān in the loving embrace of his true and faithful wife,—a half that was lifeless in the fond embrace of the half that was still living. She gazed on that pale and ashy face, and a superhuman strength seemed to invigorate her soul which seemed to say, "Death ! where is thy victory ?" Standing between life and death this heroic girl, strong in the strength of a true wife's holy love, challenged the forces of the universe, and her power rose above every other power. It knew no bounds. It rose above the elements and brought water, air and the sky under its control. Sāvitri would control



Nature and Supernature. She would follow her husband into the other world and bring him back to life. Her resolve was taken, and she waited future developments.

XI

Sāvitri was calm and immovable like a rock. She was in a trance. She knew not how long she would have to remain so, when a very clear voice rang through the firmament, and she heard the words, "Grieve not, my child. This is Destiny, and none can withstand it. Leave your husband whose soul now belongs to me of right. I relent not. I strike when the hour arrives, and I strike an unerring blow. I have come to claim my due. Give it up, daughter of the mortals, and go home." Death himself dreaded to come too near her. Sāvitri looked up and saw before her the god of Death. She gave up the lifeless corpse, but home she would not go. She followed the walking figure that was taking away the soul of Satyavān. The god, hearing the sound of foot-steps following, wondered what the matter could be. He looked back and finding Sāvitri in his track said, "Brave girl, I am not accustomed to such conduct. Your devotion to your dead husband pleases me highly. Ask a



favour save and except the life of your husband, and it shall be granted." Sāvitri now spoke. She said, "Then grant me, O Lord of Death, that my father who has no son to solace him at this fag end of life may have one who will live to perpetuate his illustrious line." "Granted, my child," said the god, "but you must not follow me any longer. Go home directly." "I have no home," replied the undaunted girl, "I know of no home except where my husband is. You cannot separate me from my self. The true wife follows her husband through poverty, sickness and death. You know, omniscient lord, that Sāvitri has desired nothing but union with her husband. Even the god of Death cannot separate her from her husband."

"You are an ideal wife, Sāvitri. But you must know that Fate is stronger than everything else. Your husband was fated to die on this day. So your devotion, unearthly as it is, could not alter that inexorable decree. But I am greatly pleased at the extraordinary loyalty you have shown to your husband. Ask another boon and be satisfied. I have told you, I can deny you nothing but the life of your husband."

"If you are pleased, O dread Lord of the dead," replied Sāvitri quietly, "then restore



to my father-in-law his lost sight and kingdom."

"It shall be as you desire. Now leave me, and do not stand further in my way."

So saying the god sped on. He thought of the beautiful mortal child, and the sorrow that the death of Satyavān had caused to his wife and his unfortunate aged parents; but he consoled himself with the thought that he was merely executing the doom of Fate Inevitable. Out of curiosity, he looked back to see if the girl had been disposed of, but lo! Sāvitrī was at his heels. What was it? How could a living mortal cross the boundaries of the regions of Death? The god halted once again, and said, "Sāvitrī, you must stop. You are now on the borders of the realm of Death." "To be plain, O god, I am resolved to come home, that is, to my husband. If I must not ask you to restore him to me, I can at least pray that you will be pleased to take me to where my dear lord goes. I did not undertake to cease to follow him."

Death was in a nice fix. He was the lord of the dead, but he could not admit the living into his realm.

"You must not come any further. The spirits of the dead I accommodate, but I have



nothing to do with the living. Your time has not yet come. I cannot admit you into these regions. Ask a third boon which I will grant you readily, and then go home to your relations like a good girl that you are."

This was the last opportunity of Sāvitri, and she resolved to make the most of it. She said, "O kind god, it is in the holy books that a childless mortal cannot enter heaven. Grant me, if you are so pleased, that I may have a number of children to perpetuate the line of my father-in-law. Believe me, I will not trouble you any more."

The Lord of Death was pleased at the prospect of being let alone. He granted her the last prayer also and hurried on. The devoted girl put herself athwart the path of the terrible dispenser of justice.

"Restore my husband to me."

"This is what I do not like," frowned the god, "one step more will make me chide you, girl. Be reasonable and leave me. I have granted all the boons you asked for."

"I am not the least unreasonable in my demand," replied Sāvitri without any sign of fear, "how can your last boon be fulfilled unless you agree to give me back my husband? You hold



the scales even between truth and falsehood. Can a god go back upon the pledge he has given?" Death saw how he was entrapped and readily acknowledged his defeat. He gave back the life of Satyavān, so that the chaste wife's love and devotion to her husband might be valued higher than any other power on earth.

XII

Satyavān came back to life. The hermit Dyumatsen had his lost sight and kingdom restored to him. King Aswapati was glad to have an heir, and Sāvitrī was blessed with a numerous progeny.

They lived a long life of happiness and prosperity, and Sāvitrī still inspires Indian womanhood with her bright example of chastity and devotion. Long afterwards this ideal was held up again in a European country, and on the shores of Hellespont burnt this purifying flame in the life-story of Laodamia.



GĀNDHĀRI.*

(RIGHTEOUSNESS).

I

In ancient Gāndhārā†, to the west of India, grew the pretty little damsel Gāndhārī, only daughter of King Subala. She had a brother, the young Prince Shakuni, cruel, crafty and sinful,—a striking contrast to the sister, in person, habits and temperament. Little did the royal children know, when they played together in the gardens adjoining the lofty mansions, that they were destined to leave their mark on the history of an empire, the princess as an ideal of righteousness, and young Shakuni as a force of evil, a man of villainy and dark design.

In course of time the little princess was betrothed to Dhritarāshtra of the royal house of

* Culled from the Great Epic, the Mahābhārata (edited by Late Kaliprasanna Sinha).

† The site of ancient Gāndhārā is identified with modern Kāndāhār.



Hastināpur. Dhritarāshtra, albeit a powerful monarch, was blind from his birth; but when this unpleasant news reached the ears of the beautiful bride, she did not pine away in silent grief. Rather, she was thankful to the gods for the good fortune they had sent her, and prayed fervently that she might prove a dutiful and loving wife to her husband. Not desiring to enjoy the sights of Nature, an experience denied to her betrothed lord, she tightly bandaged up her eyes so that the world might become a blank to her. The sun, the moon and the stars must not shine for her, for the lord of her heart was in perpetual gloom. Then the beautiful maiden came to Hastināpur to take her rightful place by the side of the blind king, and make the most virtuous wife that ever loved a husband.

II

Years rolled by. The young queen of Dhritarāshtra, now mother of a numerous family of children, was the delight of her husband and the pride of the royal household. But her sons, the Kauravas, unfortunately grew up wicked and guileful. They were envious of their cousins, the Pāndavas. A younger branch than the Kauravas themselves, they were co-sharers of



the vast territories enjoyed by King Dhritarāshtra. Duryyodhana, the eldest Kuru prince, had his maternal uncle Shakuni for his guide; so, he grew up in the ways of avarice and impiety, wishing to wrest the rightful share of his cousins. Both uncle and nephew laid their heads together for removing all obstacles from the path of ambition.

Their diabolical schemes did not easily succeed. The cousins, though terribly persecuted, escaped unhurt from all their designs upon their lives; it was a sad disappointment to Duryyodhana that they could not as yet be disposed of by means fair or foul. They were moreover, gaining in strength and popularity. Their capital, Indraprastha, overlooking the blue waters of the Jamunā wore a festive appearance in view of the Rājasuya sacrifice * they decided to perform.

Monarchs came from all corners of India and hailed the pious Yudhisthira, the eldest Pāndava, as over-lord. But the Kurus were consumed with envy, and Duryyodhana plotted the downfall of his kinsmen. Prince Shakuni, evil genius of the Kuru line, suggested that a challenge

* A ceremony to mark the assumption of imperial dignity by one king over all other kings.



should be sent to Yudhisthira to come to Hastināpur and gamble with the dice. Foolish as it was to gamble, the Pāndavas felt it to be a point of honour to take up the challenge. So, the Pāndu King with mother, brothers and Queen Draupadi went to Hastināpur to try his chance.

III

In the audience hall of Hastināpur, with its walls bedecked with gems, its windows hung with curtains of netted gold, its floor covered with the richest carpet, sat the princes and nobles amidst luxury on all sides. The dicing commenced. The old king Dhṛitarāshtra was there with his whole Court to watch the game. The Prince of Gāndhāra who played for Duryyodhana was an unprincipled gambler and played foul; so Yudhisthira lost throw after throw, and stake after stake. He lost his jewels and diamonds, his horses and elephants, his kingdom, brothers and himself. But the passion of gambling was up in him, and the game proceeded, till he had the folly to stake his wife, his sole remaining possession. It was all over. He lost the throw, —and the Imperial family of Indraprastha became bond-slaves of Duryyodhana.



IV

The eldest Kaurava, after all, had gained his cherished desire. Without waiting for another moment he beckoned to his younger brother Duhshāsan who hurried into the ladies' chambers where Queen Draupadi was waiting in breathless suspense. The queen recoiled at the sight of the villain. Her heart throbbed, her head ached, her cheeks grew ashy pale. But before she could think of escaping, the cruel messenger of Duryyodhana had caught her by the curls of her flowing hair and dragged her screaming into the audience hall.

Draupadi shook in fright. She sent the anguish of her soul in a heart-rending appeal to the assembled Kshatriya Knights, but though the elders bit their tongues and frowned from their places at the indignities heaped upon the helpless lady, they knew that Duryyodhana was relentless; so they looked on in gloomy silence. The Pāṇdus, now bond-slaves of the Kauravas, and promise-bound not to interfere, had not the freedom to act. They lowered their eyes and looked the picture of sullen indignation. Oh that they were free!



IDEALS OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD.

CSL

In a moment of madness that wicked Duryyodhana dragged the princess nearer and returned her protestations with a kick. He courted the annihilation of his family and race by perpetrating this horrible outrage. The elders shaded their eyes with their hands and the lights grew dim in the chamber, as if Agni, the god of fire, blushed with shame at the sight. Owls screeched, jackals wailed and ravens croaked mournfully at the distress of the queen. However, the sacrilege was done, and repentance did not visit the wicked heart of Duryyodhana.

V

But the piteous wails of Draupadi reached the ears of Queen Gāndhārī and sent a thrill of shudder through her frame. What fresh villainy her sons were about! She hurried into the presence of the blind king and took in the situation at a glance. The outraged Queen of Indraprastha stood erect before the assembly, white with rage and ready to pronounce a curse. The elders of the council, Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and others were shedding tears over the scene they had just witnessed. The Pāndus sat humiliated, as if lost to all sensation. The old king Dhritarāshtra could not see,—but his ears



were sharp enough to notice the subdued whispers passing through the assembly.

Queen Gāndhāri approached the blind king and said, "My lord, King of Hastināpur, it is Gāndhāri that speaks, Gāndhāri, your Queen, who curses the moment she bore her sons. Am I to understand, my lord, that the shameful deed was done before the King of the land, solemnly charged by Heaven with the protection of the oppressed? Were your arms too paralysed to move your weapon in the defence of a helpless woman? The monarch of the Kuru race must have ceased caring for justice, or I would certainly have wailed over the corpse of that wayward son of ours at this moment. Rather disown that black sheep of our family, my lord, than connive at this impious deed. The omens outside forebode the extinction of the whole race for the sin of one. I implore you, my King, if it is not too late, to propitiate insulted virtue that the coming doom may yet be averted."

The blind king trembled at the words of his queen, and dreading the vengeance of outraged modesty allowed himself to be led to where the insulted lady stood. Repenting the sinful deed of his son he humbly asked her forgiveness, and made some reparation by setting the Pāndus free



from their bondage. The Pāndava brothers with their mother and wife were allowed to depart as free men and women.

Draupadi shed tears of gratitude at the intercession of Gāndhāri who fought for justice and righteousness.

VI

After thirteen years of perilous wanderings in various disguises, the Pāndavas returned and wanted only five villages from their cousin of Hastināpur, one for each brother to settle in. They would forget the past, and live as friends and kinsmen. But Duryyodhana turned a deaf ear to their entreaties. Poor old Dhritarāshtra counselled peace, but the messenger of the Pāndavas returned with an insolent reply. Duryyodhana's jealousy continued unabated, and the negotiations were about to fail.

Queen Gāndhāri was sent for at this juncture to intercede on behalf of the Pāndavas. She appeared once more in the Council hall, and put forth a vigorous plea for peace with the persecuted kinsmen.

"Mind ye, my wayward child," said the virtuous mother of the black-hearted Duryyodhana, "mind ye, that a kingdom cannot be gained or



enjoyed at your sweet will. He who has no control over his self, cannot enjoy a kingdom for any length of time; the great man who has acquired mastery over his passions can lord it over the earth. Greed and anger lead you to the paths of unrighteousness; conquer these vile propensities, and you conquer the world.

"War does not bring any good in its train; victory is uncertain. So, my boy, do not rush headlong into war. Half of the kingdom is sufficient for you. Give the other half to your cousins whose claim to it is as good as yours.

"The premeditated campaign of persecution you have led against the Pāṇḍavas for thirteen long years loudly calls for reparation. Listen to your mother's advice, young man, that you may not offend your sincere friends and elders who will grow to like the virtuous Pāṇḍavas, and hate you for your impiety.

"Verily I tell you, my son, it is virtue, that triumphs in the long run, and impiety falls as sure as the sun rises in the east. Ask your own heart, my son, and judge whether your cousins really deserve a more humane treatment from you.

"Rest assured, my boy, I will never sanction this unholy fratricidal war. Do not, in your



impious avarice for power and territory, bring ruin upon the Kuru line. Let not your black design be the root cause of the doom of the world.

"Gall and wormwood though my words be to you, the truth must be told, the plain and unvarnished truth, even if it offends you, my son, whom I suckled on my breast. Do not be blind to the folly of your ways, and, for once, do what is right and just."

Queen Gāndhāri spoke. But the eyes of the dark-browed Duryyodhana flashed forth anger at the words. He frothed and foamed, and left the council chamber, hurling defiance at father, mother and the elders of the kingdom.

VII

They fought the battle on the plains of Kurukshetra, and Right triumphed over Might. Whenever Duryyodhana asked a blessing from his mother during the days the battle raged, her invariable reply was, "Know, my child, that victory ever attendeth the cause of Right." The Kaurava hosts were slain, the Chiefs all killed, and the Kuru race annihilated. The most terrible war in the annals of Epic India closed in the destruction of all that was evil and



impious. The memorable words of Gāndhārī "*Yato dharmah tato jayah*"* inaugurated the kingdom of righteousness, and are still ringing through the length and breadth of India, living through three thousand years.

VIII

This short notice has proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the father may give way to weakness, but not the mother of the type of Queen Gāndhārī of the Mahābhārata. Impelled by the sense of duty and right she tried to dissuade her son from the course of impiety he was running. Her protests were strong, her words very often caustic; but she did not fear the consequence, and told the unpalatable truth to uphold the cause of justice. This has made her immortal in the history of the famous women of India, but Duryyodhana shut his eyes to reason and right, flouted his mother's good counsel and atoned for his sin with the life of his race.

* Victory ever attendeth the cause of Right.



CSL

THE HISTORIC CYCLE.
A—ANCIENT.



GOPĀ*.

(RENUNCIATION).

I

If India, the cradle of many famous religions, has made a spiritual conquest of the world, it is due to the superhuman personality of some extraordinary characters, Buddha, Sankarāchāryya, Gourānga, Vivekānanda and a host of other religious reformers whom people have unhesitatingly called '*Avatārs*' or Incarnations of the Deity. But, if there were great apostles to tell us of higher things, and unfold purer visions, there were great women too, in this country, who worked devotedly for the propagation of the truth. The renunciation and religious devotion of these women have been one of the factors to

*For the materials of this sketch I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to the articles 'Buddha' and 'Gopā' contributed to the columns of the comprehensive Bengali Dictionary compiled by Mr. S. C. Mitra and published by the N. B. Press, Calcutta, (1912).



raise India so high in the spiritual estimate of the world.

In a subsequent narrative an attempt will be made to say something about the great Lord Buddha and his religious brotherhood. It is intended to show in the present short sketch how Buddhism owed to some lady workers for its initial success. We have heard of the various lady saints of Europe,—St. Theresa, St. Cecilia, and a number of great ladies who were canonised after their death. It is only in the fitness of things that we should also have some knowledge of the life of the great Indian lady, Princess Gopā, whose active help smoothed the way for the vigorous propagation of the great religious system of her husband.

II

About 550 years before the birth of Christ, Princess Gopā was born to a Kshatriya chief reigning over the small principality named Koli, near Kapilavāstu at the foot of the Himālayas in North-West Behar. King Dandapāni, the father of the girl, traced his descent from the ancient Solar dynasty of Northern India. He was connected, moreover, with the royal house of Kapilavāstu, a more extensive and powerful



Kshatriya kingdom to its west. King Dandapāni brought up his beautiful daughter in a manner befitting a Kshatriya girl of ancient India. He therefore believed, and not without reason, that he could marry his daughter well, when the time would come. So years went by, and Gopā grew up in the graces of her person and mind.

III

Prince Siddhārtha, only son of King Suddhodana of Kapilavāstu, was giving away the *Asokavanda** with a view to the selection of a wife. Maidens attended from far and near, and were honoured by the Prince with a valuable present; so the number of the ceremonial cups was exhausted. Last came Gopā, daughter of Dandapāni, to honour the invitation. Introduced to the Prince, the shy little maiden enquired appealingly, "Am I alone, O Prince of Kapilavāstu, to be deprived of the honour of a friendly present, because I come too late?"

* Literally, a cup of lasting friendship and good will. It appears that in Ancient India, somewhere between 30 and 40 centuries back, when Kshatriya supremacy was firmly established in the country, a custom prevailed among the princes of the Knightly caste to invite maidens of royal and noble families to a ceremonial rite preliminary to marriage. Such of the maidens as attended received the present of an ornamental golden cup from the hands of the would-be bridegroom as a token of regard, and one at least of the maidens would receive his special attentions. The custom corresponded to the Swayamvara ceremony held on behalf of a Kshatriya princess of Ancient India.

Siddhārtha was in a fix. The presents were all gone, but how could he send away the little lady empty-handed,—of all maidens this, who deserved the honour most, being his relation and and the best of the lot that came? Her appealing looks had almost conquered his heart.

Instantly the Prince took off a diamond ring from his finger, and coming up to the royal maiden, said, "Last of all, Princess, but you are not the least in my estimation. The cups are gone, but not the regard for my beautiful kinswoman. Accept this humble gift from a friend, I pray, as a memento of this eventful day."—So saying, he put the ring round her finger; and Gopā gratefully accepted this token of sincere friendship. If she had the wish, she might know that the Prince had given her his heart with the ring.

IV

On hearing that Siddhārtha was more interested in Princess Gopā than the rest of the maidens, King Suddhodana sent a messenger to the Chief of Koli, telling him of the choice of the Prince of Kapilavāstu. But Dandapāni knew that Siddhārtha was, from his childhood, more inclined to pray than to fight. So he did not



welcome the proposal, and the messenger returned with the reply that the Prince of Kapilavāstu should prove himself a true Kshatriya Knight before he could hope to win his bride. Siddhārtha took the challenge of Dandapāni in a very charitable spirit, and remembering that he was more a priest than a soldier, took to military exercises with greater zeal than ever. In a couple of years he became the most skilful archer in the country-side,—and none could surpass him in wrestling, riding and fencing. He acquired the arts with a marvellous rapidity, and his fame spread throughout the country. Dandapāni congratulated himself on his fortune, when he gave away his daughter to Prince Siddhārtha, a Knight among Knights, the most splendid warrior-prince of the Sākya tribe.

V

It was a life of blissful enjoyment for Gopā. She had the priceless treasure of a husband's love, an inexhaustible fund of parental affection in her new home, the admiration of friends and relations, and all the comforts that a royal household could procure. A young lady could desire nothing more. But she was not destined to



enjoy the comforts of the world for a long time.

It is a matter of history that Prince Siddhārtha was a man of contemplation, and though to please his father he had agreed to marry and live as the future heir to a king's throne, he could not defy his inner self which asserted itself about this time. Though luxury ministered to the comforts of the Crown-Prince of a kingdom, Siddhārtha relapsed into his pensive silence, and gave himself up to meditation. His spirit wanted to break the bars of the palace which was like a cage to him. He wanted to free himself and mankind from the miseries of the world by discovering the way to salvation. So, when a son was born to him, fearing lest the fresh tie should bind him closer to its vanities, he renounced the world and became a *Yogi*. Gopā awoke from her dream of bliss.

VI

Leaving Prince Siddhārtha to his wanderings in the country, in quest of the Highest Truth, we follow the course of Gopā's life in the royal family of Kapilavāstu. She was not an ordinary woman as her husband was not an ordinary man. She was a loyal wife and a helpmate of



her husband in the true sense of the word. She would do nothing to throw an obstacle in the way of her husband's exalted mission in life. So she resolved to play her part. Thus, while the palace was in mourning at the renunciation of the Prince, and old Suddhodana and his royal consort were pining away in grief, the young bride gave up her queenly robes, shunned luxury as poison and began to live the life of strict asceticism. The old King and Queen tried hard to make her change her resolve. But Gopā was firm. "The wife of a prince, I *was* a princess, mother," she thus met the expostulations of Devi Goutami, her mother-in-law, "but now the wife of a mendicant, it behoves me, mother, that I should be a mendicant, too. It is only for the sake of the baby," she continued, "that I must not leave this home. I am simply doing what a loyal and worthy wife should do when similarly placed. Opposition will only crush the life out of me, by slow degrees, but not the loyal spirit that impels me to this step." Opposition was silenced, and young Gopā, banishing all vanity from her heart and renouncing every comfort that she might easily secure, retired into the seclusion of monasticism in the palace chambers of Kapilāvastu.



VII

Months rolled into years, and the years swelled into a decade, but Gopā never wavered in her resolve. Her frame was worn to a skeleton, her dress like that of the poorest beggar-maid, her life regulated in the ways of piety and good-will to mankind. She held communion with the master minds of old, and her life became essentially a life of self-culture. She thought of her lord not, indeed, as a young wife would think of her absent husband, but as every other woman would think of the Saviour of mankind.

While Gopā was passing her time as a solitary recluse, waiting for the auspicious day of her final emancipation, the wandering Prince discovered the way to Salvation. Having attained the true knowledge he became the holy Buddha or "the Enlightened One." He brought his message of Hope and Love to suffering humanity: it appealed to the masses and claimed converts by thousands and tens of thousands. In the course of his itineracy he visited Kapilavāstu, the dear old place where King Suddhodana, now far advanced in years, bent under the weight of a very heavy sorrow,



was still doing his duty as the protector of his people.

News reached the king that the Enlightened One was on his way to the city. People flocked to hear him preach and to receive a blessing from him. Men assembled in the parks and promenades, and the women and children took their places on the flats and terraces of their houses. The city was on the tiptoe of expectation.

VIII

The Lord Buddha was preaching in the streets of Kapilavāstu. Clad in the rags of the poorest mendicant, with the pilgrim's staff in his hand, humbler than the humblest of God's creation, the whilom Prince of Kapilavāstu was slowly wending his way through the crowd. His eyes shed a soft radiance around, his words dropped ambrosia. He told of a purer life, a life of love and truth and holiness,—and of the end of human miseries—no sorrow, no disease, no distinction between prince and peasant, between man and man,—no death but *Nirvāna* or the final emancipation of the Soul. They heard him with rapt attention.

Budha came to the palace at the invitation of King Suddhodana. It was a moment of trial



for Gopā. For ten long years she had cherished the memory of the wandering Prince and worshipped his image in her heart. The poor wife had longed for the return of her husband, and he returned, not as the gallant Kshatriya youth of ten years back, but as the holiest hermit in the land with his message of Salvation. She did not appear before the Lord, lest her sight should come between the husband and the Saviour of mankind. She sacrificed the woman to duty. Rising far beyond the weakness of the flesh, Gopā stood towering above the women of the world.

From the terrace of the lonely retreat, where Gopā was spending her days in austere asceticism, she saw the radiant figure of the Messenger of Salvation. Her heart went out in a silent offering of homage and devotion. She bowed down her head and turned back her eyes. It was a beatific vision, and the woman of the world was not yet fit to enjoy more than a glimpse of it.

She sent on the young boy Rāhula to ask a blessing of the father. Buddha took the child in his arms and gave him the father's legacy. The child was blessed with the holy touch, and the Lord breathed into his ears the mystic words,—"Contemplation, Purity and Love."



IX

Some more years passed, and Gopā was bidding her time. She was living a life of service and poverty. She learnt to hold the sacredness of life as the first of human concerns. She realized that there was joy in loving and serving other selves than her own, and that the secret of true happiness lay, not in the spirit being cribbed and confined, but in being helped to grow and expand and embrace the meanest of God's creation. Gopā was gradually moving towards the goal of regeneration.

The old king Suddhodana was no more in the land of the living, and Buddha once more visited Kapilavāstu. The citizens flocked again to hear him preach the great truth that had by this time spread from province to province. They accepted his religion.

The ladies of the royal household were all converted. Buddha saw that Gopā had virtually renounced the world shortly after he had left. An eager desire had taken possession of her heart to serve mankind through Charity and Love. So, Buddha created an Order of Nuns, called *Bhikshunis*, and Gopā was placed at the head of this Sisterhood to help at the propagation of the new religion.



X

The life of Gopā as a Sister of the Buddhist 'Order of Charity' was one of calm contemplation and active sympathy with suffering humanity. In the sacred cloisters of the Buddhist Monastery, Gopā was an inspiration to many others who devoted their lives to the holy cause. Her humility, toleration, unselfish devotion to duty and her sincere endeavour to raise fallen humanity were object lessons to her co-workers. That the religion of Buddha made such a rapid headway in the land was primarily due to the missionary spirit of the great men and women whose renunciation will live in history, though the religion may show signs of decline, as every human institution is bound to do in course of ages; and Gopā's renunciation will ever draw the most appreciative recognition from every student of Buddhistic history in the world.



CSL

SUPRIYĀ.*

(PHILANTHROPY).

I

It is a little story about a great soul, a soul that has passed away, but has left behind its sweetness to endure. Supriyā, the Sister of Mercy, lived with the Great Master in an age the memory of which is fast vanishing from our minds, a dim and distant past, long before modern culture saw the light of day. But the story of her philanthropy is yet recalled with a glow of pride by the student of the Buddhist age of Indian history.

II

To know something of this lady of pious memory let us know a bit of the exalted mission of Lord Buddha whose advent in the history of the world is a wonderful phenomenon. Born

* Based on the poem "Nagara-Lakshmi" by Sir Rabindranath Tagore.



a Prince and bred in the lap of luxury and wealth, Goutama renounced the world and its pleasures, and moved by the miseries of man he devoted himself to the discovery of the way to to what he regarded as Salvation. *Nirvāna* or the Buddhist Salvation is a mystery incomprehensible to the ordinary human intellect: but the fact stands out clear that it was a glorious call of unbounded Love, a surging wave of universal brotherhood that issued forth from a boundless spirit tearing the shackles of colour, caste and creed, ready to embrace the meanest form of animal life in God's creation.

III

So, the great gospel of Fraternity, Equality and Love was expounded by the Enlightened One in India at the foot of the famous Bodhi tree in a glorious age of a by-gone past, and a group of devoted workers responded to this call of duty and love, and gathered round the Great Master to carry his loving message of Salvation to the door of suffering humanity. They formed the famous order of Buddhist *Bhikshus* and *Bhikshunis*, vowed to lifelong celibacy and poverty, and consecrating their lives to charity in the widest application of the word. Thus the



student of Buddhist India finds the illustrious names of Sujātā, Vishākhā, Supriyā, Sanghamitrā and many more noble spirits who wept and worked for afflicted mankind. Sister Supriyā was the daughter of a favourite disciple of Lord Buddha, Chittradatta by name.

IV

Chittradatta was originally a merchant of substance in the ancient city of Vaishālī in what is now known as North Behar. At middle age he came under the irresistible influence of the lofty tenets of Lord Goutama, and renounced the pleasures of the world in favour of the austere life of a Buddhist monk. The whole of his savings amounting to forty *lakhs* of gold pieces went to the poor as their share. The Buddhist Council of Elders, or *Sangha* as it was called, embraced Chittradatta with open arms, and gave him the distinctive appellation, *Anāthpindada*,* for this act of unprecedented liberality. The merchant prince, now turned into a begging mendicant among the followers of Buddha, became the main pillar of the infant catholic church of ancient India. In his excessive zeal for the propagation of the new religion the Bhikshu,

* A giver of bread to the helpless.



when he left home for the monastery, could make no better provision for his daughter Supriyā than by leaving her to shift for herself in this wide world. This is nothing to wonder at : our great Sannyasi Teachers, Lord Buddha and Lord Gou-rānga, renounced their immediate world in almost similar circumstances : the whole world was their family and they could not love a part without loving the whole.

V

The girl, however, did not lose heart at this sudden change of fortune. The weight of her grief could not crush her. Though she was abandoned by her only surviving parent, she did not find fault with him whom she adored as an object of worship. She realized that the home of her father was now the greater world beyond the city of Vaishālī, and that he was summoned to a sphere of duty larger in its scope and loftier in its nature than mere speculations on profit and loss. Some of the great apostles of the Buddhist faith constantly visited her house before her father's conversion, and thrown into their contact she was not slow to realise that a great religious upheaval was taking place in India, and sooner or later, she would be carried away



by that irresistible current. She was, therefore, prepared in a way for what was coming and was simply biding her time.

VI

Supriyā could boast of a rare combination of beauty, youth and culture, and deprived as she was of her rightful inheritance as the only child of her father, she was yet courted for her sterling virtues by many a handsome young suitor of the city. But the attractions of the world could not bind her to it. She was very early impressed with the transitoriness of worldly pleasures and the lofty ideals of monastic life. The wails of suffering humanity, the fruit of human actions, the miseries of birth and re-birth,—all these made an indelible impression on her mind, and the renunciation of her father very naturally spurred her on in the way of her religious inclinations. While her wooers whispered softly into her ears the music of a dream land of poetry and romance, Supriyā was listening instead to the piteous moans of her afflicted brethren who stood in need of consolation and relief. While her maids tried to deck her out prettily in a rich garb of costly jewels against her wedding day, Supriyā slowly lifted the curtain that opened



before her compassionate gaze the land of the errors, follies and miseries of man. So, she took her resolve, and while the city was eagerly waiting to join the wedding feast of Chittradata's daughter, she left her home one night, and unsuspecting Vaishālī did not know what became of the bride.

VII

Years went by and two decades of Lord Buddha's appeal to the religious consciousness of India brought in a rich harvest of peaceful progress in his glorious mission of philanthropy. Buddhism got hold of the better mind of the classes and masses in India, and made a very rapid headway into the inmost recesses of the Indian home. The faith preached by Sākya Muni was now the accepted religion in Upper India, and the missionary spirit which contributed so largely to its success, brought forth a host of Friars and Sisters who had shaped their lives in the image of the Lord. They followed the Master wherever his work called him away.

VIII

Once there was a great famine at Srāvastipur, a flourishing district at the foot of the Himalayas in North Bengal. Two consecutive



years of drought caused a failure of the staple food grain of the country. The fury of a tropical sun drank dry the streams and pools of water, and the proverbial breeze of an Indian spring could not breathe a tinge of green on the withered foliage of a once-smiling landscape. There was a wail of distress all round the country, and every home felt the pinch of hunger and thirst. The beggar was turned away empty-handed by the liveried footmen at the gates of the rich. The ever bountiful mother's breast could not supply a drop of drink,—nay, her eyes withheld a drop of tear that might moisten the parched lips of the dying baby in her arms. The death-roll increased from day to day and the dying agonies reached the ears of Lord Buddha and his Nursing Brotherhood.

IX

The heart of the Lord bled for the starving and dying millions of Srāvastipur. It was a sacred call of duty, love and sacrifice,—it was a call of the religion that he preached. With the tender solicitude of the loving mother, Buddha hastened to the city with some of his most devoted followers, and, deeply moved by the



heart-rending sight of distress, he immediately summoned his disciples to meet him at a Council outside the city gates. They obeyed the mandate of the Lord. They attended the call, from the richest of the city to the poorest, whose tearful eyes were fixed in a supplicating gaze upon the face of their Saviour. The Lord made an impassioned appeal to the benevolent instinct of each of his disciples. "Followers of the Religion of Love, who is there among you that weeps for suffering humanity? Who is there among you, my beloved disciples, that will volunteer his services to give bread to the hungry? If you have tasted a mouthful while hunger has killed a brother, if your lips have touched a delicious drink while thirst has stuck the tongue of your dying neighbour to the roof of his mouth, if you have fed and clothed your children while my helpless darlings have cried for food in vain,—then I may as well tell you that Buddhism has fallen upon barren soil, and Buddha has cried in the wilderness for all these years. Who among my numerous followers will come forward to do his duty as man to man?" The voice died away,—but the eyes of the Lord sparkled with the fire of enthusiasm. He stopped for a response.



X

But the appeal fell flat on the ears of the millionaires of Srāvastipur. The sight of distress and death could not move their stony hearts, far less could the appeal in words, couched as it was in the eloquent language of no ordinary pathos. No response came from the vast gathering,—there was only a slight attempt at excuses. *Dharmānkura*, the famous jeweller of the city, hung down his head, lest the enquiring gaze of the Master should confront his eyes. *Mādhava Sena*, the Engineer-Contractor, was out at elbows just at present after spending all his surplus wealth in celebrating his daughter's marriage. *Rājā Rām*, owner of vast estates, said he was in arrears to the landlord for his rent,—his fields were dry and his pastures, like deserts. *Suvadatta*, the Kāyastha Banker and Money-lender, had his business very dull in the year, and was just thinking of closing down. *Rādhā-gupta*, the timber merchant, feared he would have to wind up as building materials were going out of demand from month to month,—and all for the cursed famine that held the country firm in its grip. They said they had little to support themselves with and less to spare. They would



have been glad to loosen their purse-strings, if these were strong enough to bear the weight. But, as ill-luck would have it, they were short of money,—they were hard hit—sorely pressed—impoverished, and what not? They were telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in that they could not make both ends meet. Or, by *Bodhisattva*, the mandate of the Lord would.....". There was an exchange of significant glances in the assembly.

XI

The Lord would not hear any more of this unblushing falsehood. He knew that impudence could go no further. He realized that insincerity had done its worst, and that selfishness had worked its way into the hearts of the rich people of Srāvastipur and blinded them to their best interests. He was disgusted at heart, but he did not hate them. He did not curse his own flock that had gone astray,—he only pitied them. With the pain at his heart that gathered at the corner of his eyes, he looked here, there and everywhere for a soul that was above the sordidness of the world, a soul that was ready to take the whole world in its compassionate embrace, a soul that dropped a tear for all that



wept. But there was not a flutter; no body stirred. Then Lord Goutama turned towards his immediate followers, the Servants of Charity,—and lo! a timid woman in the rags of a Buddhist nun, a Sister of Mercy, about forty years of age, stood up slowly on her legs. She approached the Benign Presence, and kissing the hem of his holy garment said in a voice tremulous with emotion,—“Victory be to the mandate of the Enlightened One. It is I, Supriyā, the meanest of your daughters, that will do the bidding of the Lord. I take the charge of feeding the hungry millions of Srāvastipur. I wait the pleasure of the Lord.” Tears were running down her cheeks, and her sobs showed how she was affected.

XII

Nothing could be bolder than the announcement of Sister Supriyā, nothing more preposterous to set the whole assembly wondering.

“Mark the boasting braggart”, muttered Dharmapāl, “what can there be in her beggar’s rags?”

“She must be off her head,” commented Rādhāgupta, “to undertake this gigantic task.”

“How dare you, Sister of the Holy Order of Charity”, put in Suvadatta, the banker, “how



IDEALS OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD.

CSL

"dare you, woman, save a doomed district, when the richest find their means insufficient? Your coffers must be uncommonly large for a charity of this kind, or your wits must have gone woolgathering."

Supriyā heard the comments. She bowed to the very respectable gathering of the rich, and said, "My brethren, there is more in my beggar's bowl than you can possibly imagine. It will go begging from door to door and will come back filled with your charity. It will draw on the perpetual fountain of your kindness, and like the "gentle rain" it will moisten the parched City yonder."

The assembly heard her reply in mute wonder. Buddha blessed her again and again and prayed she might have strength enough to stand the test.

XIII

So, Sister Supriyā, the once beautiful daughter of Chitradatta of Vaishālī, now a member of the Holy Order of the Buddhist Sisterhood, found the work for which she was destined from her birth. The whole Society of the Servants of Charity worked with her wholeheartedly in organising a house-to-house collec-



tion of alms, and the movement gained volume and strength from day to day. The rich now seeing the folly of their ways could not refuse the appeal of the self-sacrificing Friars and Sisters, and in a month's time the relief was so well-organised that the starving population of the district had food in plenty to eat and cloth to wear. Sister Supriyā as the soul of the movement visited every hut and every hamlet, brought comfort to the door of the sick and helpless, and having worked there till the return of the next harvest, moved to another sphere of her activities where she might be useful in alleviating human misery.

The teachings of Buddha did not fall upon barren soil. The call of mercy has ever been a call of duty in India, and Buddha or Chaitanya, the preacher of Love to mankind, has reaped here a full harvest for his glorious call of service to humanity.



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IV. THE HISTORIC CYCLE.
B—MEDIEVAL.



CSL

BĀKPUSHTĀ.

(BENEVOLENCE).

I

Once in the far-off past that carries our readers back to the palmy days of Hindu supremacy in medieval India, there reigned in Cāshmere a very noble-minded Kshatryia Prince, Toonjina by name. Cāshmere, the delightful grove of the entire Himalayan regions, a veritable paradise on earth, was yet a Hindu principality, teeming with green meadows, pleasant valleys, rich pastures and flourishing villages with hardy warrior tribes that could easily hold their own against any foreign aggression.

In such a country reigned the very popular Prince Toonjina noted alike for chivalry, generosity and charity, and his throne was shared by his beautiful consort, Princess Bākpushtā, a queen among queens, a mother to her subjects



and the most prominent figure in the council chamber of the kingdom.

II

Now it so happened that when the harvests were ready to be gathered and the peasants were in eager anticipation of their long-looked-for holiday, September came with a chilling frost that destroyed all the crops of the country. It was like a bolt from the blue that smote the peasant and his lord with the same violence and rendered the country bereft of a vestige of vegetation. A terrible famine followed in its wake and devastated the country. The gaunt figure of Monster Famine stalked with long and rapid strides in the land from end to end, and claimed his toll every day by hundreds and thousands. Men, women and children died of starvation in their hundreds and thousands, and it was really a lamentable sight to see the mother snatching away the mouthful from her children's hands, husband tearing at a handful of *jowar*, at which his famished wife had long been looking with wistful eyes,—and many more dreadful things which create a revulsion of feeling in the human heart. Death made no distinction between the rich and the poor and



was particularly cruel to the suckling baby. Cāshmere, the home of beauty and plenty, became a long, long charnel house.

III

The wails of the people reached the ears of King Toonjina and pierced the heart of his Queen with a keener shaft than steel. The royal couple shed copious tears of agony at this unexpected calamity among their subjects and determined to fight the monster to the last, if their own death could mitigate the sufferings of their people. From morning till night, from nightfall to dewy morn, the king and his queen worked ceaselessly among their people, bringing hope to every hamlet and every hut, visiting the remotest corners of their territories, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, cheering the dying and even cremating the dead. The royal coffers were emptied and the crown jewels were sold to buy food for the surviving few of Cāshmere. But it was a dire visitation, and human aid was of little or no avail.

IV

Days rolled into weeks and weeks into months, but matters did not mend. People shut



Among the eternal snows of Cāshmere perished like a brood of birds in the hollow of a tree which could not communicate with the outer world. The distress became more acute when the rivers were frozen up in December. King Toonjina became sadly distressed at the sight of the ravages of the famine and his utter helplessness in the matter of relief. He gave way to despair. Day and night he worked for the unfortunate people. With knees bent he sent up fervent prayers to the feet of the Almighty to send succour to the land. But he cried in the wilderness. Cāshmere was doomed.

V

One night after a long fast and unavailing prayers the king lost the balance of his mind and began to weep like a child. The wailings of the king resounded through the silent corridors of the deserted palace, once sonorous with music and dance. Queen Bākpushtā, weary after her day's labours, was kneeling in her bed chamber, unattended by her maids. With joined palms and supplicating upcast eyes, she was interceding with God Almighty on behalf of her people, her children who were now beyond the aid of man. She heard the piteous lamentations of the King.



and hastened into his presence to enquire what ailed her lord. "Lady", said the King, "What is the use of a king's life if he cannot protect his people? The sin of the king is visited on his subjects, and I am certainly accountable for this appalling loss of lives in my kingdom. I can no longer bear this sight. In short, lady, I am determined to make an end of myself, so that the people may not say, "King Toonjina lived an inglorious life of ease while his subjects died for want of food."

VI

It is now that we find the Queen doing her part as the saviour of the situation. The heroic lady rose far above the ordinary run of women, and instead of timidly joining in the stream of unavailing tears of her lord, she tried her best to soothe and comfort him. She argued with him that suicide was nothing short of cowardice, and as long as there was a single soul, breathing in the land, so long the king was not free to throw away his own life even. The king must try to save himself in order to be serviceable to others. "If", said the Queen, "if we fail in our task to save the last surviving soul, then, and not till then, will come the time for us to



leave the world. We will then embrace the corpse of him that dies last and give up our lives by fasting."

While the Queen was thus engaged in her gentle persuasions, her face became radiant with a celestial halo, and her eyes sparkled with the beam of a divine fire. She seemed to be in a trance and spoke like one inspired. "No fear, my husband," went on the Queen, "if I have ever been a faithful wife unto thee, if my heart has ever bled truly in the grief of my subjects, if I have ever sent a sincere prayer to my God who is the Helper of the helpless, then there must be some way out of this hopeless situation. Rise, my lord, take heart, for this dark night of our trials must be nearing the dawn."

VII

So saying, sat Queen Bākpusthā in a desperate attitude of final prayer, committing her body and soul to the care of God. She was determined to win or die. How long could God resist the supplications of a selfless, helpless woman,—wife, mother and queen rolled into one,—bent to make her appeal heard before His eternal throne or die in the attempt? The Queen sat and wept, and prayed and watched, and lo and



Behold ! down came a shower of dead pigeons from the skies,—a tremendous shower of pigeons large and small, without end, without rest,—here, there and everywhere. God listened to the cries of the Queen, because she had wept like an innocent child whose faith in His Providence is real and sincere. God hears the prayers of those that can pray like children. He loves those that have learnt to love His creatures.

VIII

Now there was great rejoicing in the land. The people were fed on that inexhaustible supply of meat till the frost cleared up, the snows melted and the harvest time returned with a bumper crop. The land was saved, and Cāshmere once more became the home of plenty and beauty that she was. The king hailed his queen as the saviour of his dear people and conjointly offered heartfelt thanks to God.

IX

It is said that Prince Toonjina the Good left this world at the early age of forty. His queen like a faithful Hindu wife of those days mounted the funeral pyre of her husband, and their subjects set up a loud cry of lamentation, as



IDEALS OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD.

CSL

If they had lost their parents. The Queen raised both her hands from her place by the side of her dead husband and blessed all her people with a smile in her face that befitted the Immortals more than mortal men. The place where this Royal Couple put an end to their earthly labours is still pointed out as "*Bākpusth-tātabi*" or the grove of Bākpusthā.

Rest, weary pilgrim, by the side of this holy shrine to meditate and shed tears of gratitude in memory of the pious, philanthropic lady who lived and died for her people in an age that is far, far removed from ours of history and civilization, and say that death sanctifies "one crowded hour of glorious life" rather than "an age without a name."



CSL

SAMJUKTĀ.

(SELF-RESPECT).

I

The history of the Rājputs in India is a continuous story of chivalry and honour. The annals of the Rājput nation are a glowing record of noble deeds and heroic sacrifices. The incidents are so thrilling, and the instances so plentiful that it is really difficult to choose between boy and girl, or between man and woman. Every clan claims its hero, and each age transmits its rich legacy of greatness to the one that succeeds. Rājput history all along the line is what makes the reader pause and enquire how far that glorious race of India contributed to the greatness of the world's history.

Princess Samjuktā was a Rājput king's daughter and another Rājput king's wife. That is, however, at best a matter of course, and



does not justify her claim to any preferential treatment. But the life-story of Samjuktā has so deeply influenced the fate of Hindu India that she deserves more than a passing mention in the pages of history, and that is why we attempt here a pen-sketch of that extraordinary Rājput lady.

II

Towards the close of the twelfth century A. D., the old king Anangapāl sat on the throne of Delhi as the suzerain lord of Hindusthān. He had no son to succeed him to his vast kingdom. Of his two daughters, the elder married Bijaylāl, lord of Kanouj, an ornament of the Rāthor clan of the Rājputs, a memorable race of warriors holding sway in Upper India till their supremacy gave way before the conquering hordes of Turkestan. The younger of the daughters was married to Prince Someswar of Ajmere, a brave Rājput knight of the famous Chauhān clan noted in medieval India for dash and daring like the illustrious Douglasses of the Scottish Highlands. The king of Delhi was proud of his grandsons, the Rāthor Jay Chandra, son of Bijaylāl, and Chauhān Prithvirāj, son of Someswar, both of whom delighted his heart.



But the younger prince Prithvirāj was his special favourite. His right royal bearing, his soldierly qualities, his manly character and his affable manners placed him far above his royal cousin of Kanouj and fitted him eminently for the responsible duties of a ruler of men. So, old Anangapāl left by a royal decree the throne of Delhi to the Prince of Ajmere and closed his eyes in the peaceful sleep of death in 1182.

III

The final settlement of succession to the throne unsettled all the plans of Jay Chandra. It was a rude awakening to the dream he had all along been dreaming, as the senior of the rival claimants, of sitting upon the imperial throne of Delhi. The splendid throne and gorgeous Court of Imperial Delhi, the royal banner fluttering from the glittering turrets of the palace and the shining battlements of the fortress, the willing homage of a thousand vassal Chiefs,—all vanished fast from his eyes after dangling there for years together in a tempting show. For months together he had shrewdly guessed his grandfather's leaning to the Chauhān cause, but could not be brought



to believe that such a glaring injustice could really be perpetrated. But the unexpected came to pass, and though his jeers against the dead king's good sense were very caustic that evening before his youthful companions, he had to swallow the bitter pill with a good grace. Bowing to the inevitable royal decree he persuaded himself to bide his time to vent his bottled-up wrath against the innocent head of Prithvirāj who, he thought, had snatched from him his rightful inheritance. He swore by his sword so to revenge himself on the usurper that all Hindusthān would feel the shock. The terrible oath that escaped his lips was fraught with the direst consequence to Hindu supremacy in India then and thenceforward. Jealousy rankled sore in the heart of the baffled prince of Kanouj, and the hell-fire that it created there consumed himself, his family and his country, as it blazed forth in its growing fury day by day.

IV

So, the young King Prithvirāj, brave, handsome and magnanimous to a degree, the flower of ancient Indian chivalry, found himself seated on his grandfather's throne by the united suffrage of a nation. His place was secure in



the heart of a loyal people with all that vassal Kanouj could do to alienate him from the affections of his subjects. The grudge that his cousin bore him certainly did irreparable mischief to the country; but it leaves no room for doubt that the heart of Hindusthān was sound, and it beat true to the call of the king and the country when occasion arose; and the call did not come a moment too soon.

V

When Delhi and Kanouj were at daggers drawn shortly after the death of King Anangapāl, something was happening beyond the mountain walls of North West India to forge the strong fetters that would bind India in thralldom to the Mahomedan yoke. The fatal gift of beauty with which India has been endowed by Nature from time out of mind has ever attracted foreign invaders to her doors, and the conquest of the fertile plains of India with her fabulous wealth was always uppermost in the thoughts of her Mahomedan neighbours. The united efforts of the brave Rājputs, however, hitherto baffled all outside aggressions. But the tension of feeling between the two most powerful rival houses, Delhi and Kanouj, could



not escape the ever watchful eye of the Pathan Chief of Kabul, and Shahabuddin Mahammad Ghorī was loth to let slip this golden opportunity to try his luck in Hindusthān. The dice were thrown, and while cousin was wrangling with cousin over the gift of a grandfather, the terrible war cry of Islam was heard on the memorable field of Tirouri in the spring of 1191.

VI

Atreeless, desert plain is the field of Tirouri on which the fate of Hindu India was decided more than seven centuries ago. Through this boundless ocean of sand which can only be used as the grave of humanity, the Mahomedan army under the skilful generalship of Shahabuddin Ghorī was advancing by rapid marches. It was a weary march through an unknown desert tract, but it had to be made, for there was wealth with honour at the end. The Crescent and Star of Islam fluttered in the breeze and revived the drooping spirits of the way-worn war-veterans from Afghanisthān.

As soon as the news reached Delhi, the Hindu army marched out of the gates of the city and encamped a few miles off. There the main body of the Rājput army fell into sections, and each



consisting of 25,000 infantry, 5,000 cavalry and 200 elephants proceeded with very cautious steps to oppose the Mahomedan advance. The right wing was commanded by Rānā Samar Singh of Chitor, a brother-in-law of the king of Delhi; the left by Rājā Rāimull of Bundi; King Prithvirāj himself led the centre. Kanouj stood grimly aloof.

VII

With the peep of dawn on the plains of Tirouri on March 21, 1191, the anxious eyes of the Chieftain of Ghor detected to his great surprise that a vast sea of human heads lay between himself and the throne of Delhi. So, without waiting to refresh his troops, he jumped headlong into the dashing waves that he might swim across to name and fame.

Ghori, however, had counted without the host. The battle raged loud and long from early dawn to mid-day, and the white sand of the desert plain ran purple with the blood of the Hindus and the Turks, but the result was yet undecided. Now the Turks, now the Hindus raised the deafening war-cry. They closed in a deadly combat and laid down their lives in their hundreds and thousands, but victory wavered



from side to side, till at last when the crimson sun was going down behind the distant Arāvallis, a dashing charge of Hindu cavalry led by Prithvirāj himself threw the wreck of the Mahomedan army into a wretched plight, and the men of Ghor fled pell-mell in an utter rout. Not a third of the whole army found its way back by the passes of North West India. Rājput honour was saved for sometime yet.

VIII

The first battle of Tirouri covered Rājput name in India with glory that can never fade. It brought undying fame to young Prithvirāj, the leader of the famous charge. But it gave a fresh cause of offence to his cousin of Kanouj who could ill brook that his rival should have obtained such a crushing victory over the Pathan Chief, and that so easily. The situation became very acute when the whole of Hindusthān combined to make her award of praise or blame after Tirouri had been fought and won. People idolised the brave Chauhān for his valour and patriotism while they had unmixed contempt for Jay Chandra. They made no secret of it. They cursed the deserter for having selfishly refrained from raising his sword in the defence of the



Motherland. The most stunning blow to Jay Chandra, however, was the rebellion in his own household. The only daughter of the Rāthor Chief had raised the standard of revolt. Princess Samjuktā received the news of Tirouri with unalloyed satisfaction, and had the boldness to reward the messenger with a necklace of pearls for his pains.

IX

Princess Samjuktā, the only daughter of the Chief of Kanouj, was the fairest maiden of Rājput India, as Prithvirāj was undoubtedly the bravest knight of Hindusthān. A right royal maiden was this daughter of Kanouj, and the graces of her person have been sung in immortal verse by Chānd, the friend and court minstrel of Prithvirāj. The thick clusters of her black hair descended in flowing wavelets down to her knees, and her large dark eyes, moving bewitchingly in their orbs, shed a soft radiance wherever they rested. Her slender form and graceful steps, her light smiles and musical voice, and her queenly bearing have all formed the theme of the poet of "Prithvirāj-Rāso," and need not be detailed here. But the graces of her person were the pride of Kanouj, and, to



12
speak the truth, Kanouj had reason to be proud of this fairest jewel worth all the mines of Golcondā.

X

Now the Princess of Kanouj had very early felt a strange attraction for her kinsman, the bravest knight of Indian chivalry. The report of the valour and magnanimity of young Prithvirāj captivated her youthful heart, and the daughter of his mortal foe, this Rājput Juliet of medieval India, learnt to enthrone the image of the brave Chauhān in the inmost recesses of her heart. Painted in the ruddy glow of love and admiration, the enchanting vision flitted past her eyes in the ecstasies of a dream. The thoughts of her young champion filled her soul with a rapturous delight. She would listen to the story of his exploits as to those of the great heroes of old, King Vikrama of the Indian legends or Arjuna, the great warrior of Epic India, but she would not tolerate comparison, and so inexplicable are the ways of Love that the more did the father grow to hate the name of Prithvirāj the more readily did the daughter learn to offer him her homage of adoration. None could offend her Prithvirāj who,



she believed, commanded universal esteem. Thus at the close of 1191 things stood exactly like this in the royal household of Kanouj; the father with his unbearable load of jealousy and hatred against the King of Delhi was walking down his path of doom across which stood the daughter with her homage of loving adoration for this mortal enemy of her father. Had they but a foretaste of the dire consequence of a house divided against itself!

XI

When things were at this pass, the jealousy rankling in the Rāthor's black heart leaked out in a peculiar channel. To conclusively prove his suzerainty over the various rival factions of India, particularly over the House of Delhi, designing Kanouj thought of celebrating a *Rājsuya** sacrifice. The Rāthor summoned the various Rājput princes to attend the ceremony, allotting to each of them a menial work as a token of his submission. Prithvirāj was peremptorily asked to attend as a gate-keeper, and Samar Singha, Rānā of Chitor, was called upon to mount guard outside the pavilion. But

* *Rājsuya*—A religious ceremony performed by a king as a token of his overlordship.



Jay Chandra wanted something more ; he wanted to kill two birds at a stone. He, therefore, announced, as a sequel to the sacrifice, the *Swayamvara** of his daughter Samjuktā who was herself to choose her husband from among the assembled princes who must, as a matter of course, recognise him as their overlord.

"If Prithvirāj come," argued this cousin, "he shall eat the humble pie before the assembled knights of Hindusthān, and my madcap daughter, the black sheep of my family, will profit immensely by the lesson. If, on the other hand, his handsome young Majesty of Imperial Delhi have the boldness to disregard my summons, it will give me a very good pretext for beginning a campaign of armed hostilities to bring him to his senses." "Last, though not least," continued Jay Chandra, "it will set at rest the vexed question of Samjuktā's marriage. How immensely will I enjoy her disappointment !" and the father chuckled within himself at the prospect of his daughter's humiliation.

XII

"Man proposes, but God disposes" has been an accepted maxim all over the world, and there

* Swayamvara—A ceremony in which a royal maiden chooses her husband from among the invited guests.



was not the least variation from this truth in this case also. Prithvirāj did not deign to send a reply to the bragging note of his cousin ; and Samar Singha made the messenger ride a donkey, and kicked him out of Chitor. At this open defiance of his assumed authority Jay Chandra swore a mighty oath to have his revenge when he would be free. In the meantime, he caused a grotesque earthen statue of Prithvirāj, and made it stand as a door-keeper at the entrance to the Hall of Choice.

A host of Kshatriya chiefs answered the summons of Kanouj to help at the ceremony, and there was a great reception in the city. The palace and its grounds wore a gala look on the festive occasion. There were great preparations in the capital in view of the *Swayamvara* of Princess Samjuktā, and people were eagerly expecting the tournament which was to take place in a week or so.

XIII

The news of the *Swayamvara* reached the Princess, and along with that she also heard that the knight of her choice had not even been asked to the wedding. A great outrage had, moreover, been perpetrated by setting up a caricature

image of the great King of Delhi, and representing him as the head waiter at the wedding feast. She shuddered to think of the consequence of this gross insult to His Majesty of Delhi, but that was a different matter. She thought of the immediate present. Her father was an implacable foe of the King of Delhi with whom her fate was indissolubly linked up. She had once given herself up in thought to Prithvirāj, and could not now barter herself away elsewhere for all the world. To marry against her own free will would be a terrible blow to her self-respect. But the machination of her father pointed to that. The princess, however, as a high-souled and heroic lady, could never stoop to such meanness. She took counsel with her own heart and formed her resolution; she would marry the knight of her own choice or remain a maid for ever. She could do nothing else as her self-respect was at stake.

XIV

Samjuktā made a last effort at achieving the desired end of her life, and it was a desperate effort. Strength came from an unknown somewhere and revived her drooping spirits. The gloom that had enveloped her soul passed away



and left it like the glaring sun that had emerged from the darkness of hovering clouds. She would do something to save the situation.

When the insult done to the King of Delhi was burning like fire in the hearts of his loyal subjects, and sadness was brooding over the royal mansions at the prospect of an inevitable fratricidal war within the eastern principality, a trusty messenger rode post-haste from the city of Kanouj and pulled up at the main entrance to the newly built fortress of *Rāi Pithorā*. After he had satisfied the sentry at the gate that he was a friend, the man was taken straightway to the presence of the king.

"I come from the Princess Samjuktā," said the man with great respect, and as he said this he took from the folds of his turban a tiny missive carefully bound in a lace of scarlet silk,—"I deliver this letter unto Your Majesty," solemnly continued the messenger, "and charge you in the name of chivalry to be the lace-bound brother* of the distressed lady," and he twined the lace round the king's wrist on behalf of the daughter of Kanouj.

* The custom of sending a *rākhi* (a lace) to a chosen knight for succour at the moment of need was in vogue among the Rājputs in ancient India. It was an invitation of honour.



The king broke the seal of the letter and read in it the following lines written by the Princess herself :—

"The heart of Samjuktā beats true to the call of Love and Duty. Unless rescued by His Majesty of Delhi in a week's time, she goes to her death at the mock Swayamvara in her father's hall. Samjuktā looks for succour from the lord of her heart. Failing this she will prefer death to dishonour."

Prithvirāj was deeply moved. He dismissed the messenger with a miniature picture of himself to be delivered unto the Princess with as little delay as possible. The miniature had below it the following autograph of the king :
"True to my lady, the Princess of Kanouj."

XV

Seven hundred Rājput horsemen, led by a dashing young cavalier, issued out of the gates of *Rāi Pithorā*, and turning their horses' heads eastward darted hoadlong through the darkness of the evening. There was no talking, no shouting. Each one of the party seemed to know his business well, and each one knew that he was going to death or glory. Prithvirāj, for the young cavalier was no less a personage, was



going to honour the invitation of the Princess of Kanouj. The king's bodyguard, his faithful companions in weal and woe, would not let him go alone.

When the party had ridden hard for hours together, and the night was drawing to a close, they pulled up in a grove near Kanouj. Leaving the jaded animals there to refresh themselves at their will, they hastily changed their warriors' cloaks and dispersed in small batches of two or three peaceful cultivators. When morning came, they effected an entrance into the city as curious sight-seers from the adjoining villages and stationed themselves about the Hall of Choice.

XVI

At last broke the ominous day when the Kanouj Princess was to make her bridal choice. It was a day of great rejoicing in the city, and from early dawn an incessant stream of curious spectators poured forth towards the reception pandal which stood on an extensive field before the palace. To describe the beauty and grandeur of the hall were a fruitless task. The genius of Kanouj procured all that was beautiful and all that was rare from far and near. The arrangements made left nothing to desire and pleased



every age and every taste. They challenged the most fastidious critic to find fault with the decorations.

Why all this display of scenic grandeur? Was it due to an excess of paternal solicitude for the Princess Samjuktā? Certainly not. The Rāthor would humble the Chauhān in the eye of the world.

But to Samjuktā it was a day of trial. She was going to make her choice, not between man and man, but between Life and Death. She stood before the tribunal of Honour and Self-respect to receive her doom. Would she rise, or would she fall? She rose, as the womanhood of India has ever risen to the height of an occasion like this.

XVII

The cream of the Rājput aristocracy, the princes of the bluest Kshatriya blood, have assembled in the Hall of Choice, and are seated on golden thrones according to their rank. Each one is anxious that he may look fairer and younger than his neighbour. Each one is not half so sure as his neighbour that the prize will fall to his share. Everybody is anxious about himself; but nobody misses Prithvirāj, the bravest of



them all. It is the mockery of a Rāmāyana where Rām Chandra is left out of the play.

Presently the blare of trumpets announces that the daughter of Kanouj is approaching the proud assembly to choose a partner in life. All the decorative skill her maids can command has been called into service to set off her beauty in bold relief. Nature is aided by the human hand to complete her work. So, when the Queen of that bridal choice, gaily decked in her wedding jewels and closely veiled in a saffron scarf, enters the Hall with slow and dignified steps, every knight rises to his feet to send on his homage of adoration. His eyes drink in this moving vision of loveliness. His ears listen to the sweet music of her soft footfall. His heart goes out in worship at this Temple of Love. There is a spell over the Hall.

Samjuktā is preceded by a herald. This functionary introduces to her each one of the suitors in turn. For a minute or two she halts before each throne to hear the herald describe in glowing eulogy the feats achieved by the prince. She makes her respectful obeisance, and moves on to the next. The highly tempting sandal-paste and the much coveted garland of flowers rest on her tray of gold. They



have yet to mark out the blessed darling of fortune.

XVIII

While uncertainty tosses the suitors between the madness of hope and the sadness of disappointment, the troubled heart of the Princess is in eager expectation of her promised relief. Her eyes are wandering in a fruitless search of her chosen knight who has assured her of his constancy. Has Prithvirāj forgotten his vow? Samjuktā cannot believe it. The King of Delhi is a king every inch of him. He will be shortly coming. Her nerves are strengthened, and she is composed. The herald has yet a few minutes left for his advocacy.

To the amazement of all Samjuktā passes the last individual of that galaxy of princes, turning her back upon the whole lot. She is an inexplicable mystery to her father; she is no less a puzzle to her father's guests.

She reaches the door and looks up again. Her eyes meet whom she wants: but in a distorted, grotesque, earthen statue of a door-keeper. The blood of her race is up in her veins. The Rāthor is visibly stamped on her brow. The pride and courage inherited from



her father stir the inmost soul of the daughter, and send her into rebellion against paternal government.

Careless of consequences the fearless maiden of Kanouj throws the marriage garland round the neck of the distorted image. She hurls a deliberate defiance at the royal authority of Kanouj. All this happens in the twinkling of an eye, and none can prevent it.

XIX

Roaring like a lion smoked out of his lair, the Rāthor chief springs upon his daughter with a drawn sword to make an end of her accursed life. The blow is raised, but before it can come down, it is parried with an unerring counter-stroke from an unknown hand. Lo! there stands a tall and handsome young horseman, dressed in full uniform, fearless like the hero of a hundred fights. Before they can well realize the situation the knight bends over the prostrate form of the senseless lady, lifts the precious load behind his saddle and gallops off like an arrow that is sped. King Jay Chandra discovers, when it is too late, that the young hero is no other than his mortal foe, the King of Delhi, come in person to claim his bride.



All at once the banquet-hall in the palace of Kanouj changes into an army headquarters, and while the clang of swords and clatter of horses' hoofs resound through the streets of the unsuspecting city, Prithvirāj on his gallant charger has got a clear start of a couple of miles or so. A hot pursuit ensues, but the seven hundred Imperial Guards stand like an impenetrable wall between Kanouj and Delhi, and the Poet Chānd, ever faithful to his friend and king, cheers up Prithvirāj and his winsome bride with the sweet strains of his soul-stirring minstrelsy. The river of blood flows deeper and wider behind, but the muttered oath of Kanouj fails of its fulfilment, and sweet revenge is deferred till time is ripe.

XX

A year had passed since the romance of the *Swayamvara* was enacted on the banks of the blue-watered Jumna. The year was a dream of poetic bliss to the young King and Queen of Delhi. Life was an incessant round of beauty and enjoyment to the loving couple. But alas! happiness flies too swiftly, and when the royal couple awoke from their dream of elysian bliss, the gloom on the political horizon of India caught their eyes, and they discovered the clouds of doom lowering on



the western sky. For the Chief of Kanouj, baffled, humiliated and mortified beyond degree, was ever on the look-out for catching his enemy on the hip. That arch-traitor to his king and country designed the darkest villainy that was to blot the pages of India's history for all time to come. India shuddered through her length and breadth when the fiendish plot was discovered. Kanouj invited the Pathan Chief of Ghor to try another chance against Delhi with the promise that the Hindu would aid the Mahomedan in crushing his Hindu brother for ever and a day.

XXI

Early next year, the Mahomedan war-cry was again heard across the plains of Tirouri. Shaha-buddin Ghorî, encouraged by the invitation of the dark man of Kanouj who backed his word with an endless supply of men, money and rations, hurried across the borders with his picked soldiers and encamped on the bank of the Drishad-wati. The King and Queen of Delhi saw how the motherland was threatened and threw all their energies in a final struggle for independence. An army was raised, and though Kanouj and the Râthor faction stood grimly aloof at this



imperial crisis, the Rānā of Chitor was true to his king and came to do or die in the cause of national freedom. Samjuktā encouraged her lord with glowing words of duty and patriotism, and while buckling her husband's armour on to his brawny frame, the apprehensions of an unknown danger troubled her soul, and nobody noticed the few scalding drops that rolled down her cheeks. As she watched the king march out at the head of his magnificent troops, she sighed to herself : "Go, my lord, to glory and immortality. We meet shortly in the presence of our Maker, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

XXII

The second battle of Tirouri was fought and lost. The incensed Chief of Kanouj embraced the Pathan as a comrade-in-arms, and fought like a demon by the side of his new ally, far removed from him in language, creed and nationality. An unquenchable thirst for revenge blinded him to his best interests, and though the valiant troops of Delhi stood like an adamant rock round the Imperial banner till a drop of true Kshatriya blood was left in them to defend it, treachery did its worst. Young Prithvirāj,



with the sword of old Anangapāl in his hand and the armour of conscience around his breast, fell to sleep on the bed of heroes for which the true patriot all over the world has longed from time out of memory.

The shades of evening were falling fast on the plains and meadows by the crystal streams of the Jumnā, when they brought the news to Samjuktā. The light of day was vanishing into the darkness of night. But the gloom that enveloped the heroic soul of Samjuktā broke into the glow of a divine light that sparkled in her eyes, when she heard how the Rājput had fought and died for his country and his Crown. And now the Queen, finding that her earthly mission was at an end, ordered the funeral pyre to be got ready with as little delay as possible. She threw her jewels into the fire, and with the miniature picture of her lord on her breast, she stepped lightly into the leaping flames. Weep not, all who listen to the tragic end of the last Hindu Queen of Delhi. It was the supreme moment of her triumph over Infamy and Disgrace. It was a splendid triumph of Honour and Self-respect.

Thus ended Hindu Knighthood in India ; and, with the death of King Prithvirāj and



IDEALS OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD.

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Queen Samjuktā after the second battle of Tirourī, Delhi saw another sight, and the Islam banner fluttered gaily over the highest dome of *Rāi Pithorā*, flouting at the earthly remains of India's best and loveliest.



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PĀNNĀ BĀI.

(Duty).

My gentle reader, it is hoped, will not now run away with the impression that womanhood in India has nothing but a passive tenderness to hold up as its ideal. The following story is introduced to relieve the proverbial softness of the Indian woman's character. History does not present a parallel to the sacrifice that was demanded of, and willingly made by the heroic Rājput lady, Pānnā Bāi, under very trying circumstances.

I

It was considerably past the first quarter of the sixteenth century. The fate of India was decided by the adventurous Babar on the memorable field of Panipāt. His greatest Hindu rival, Rānā Sangrām Singha of Mewār, was no more. His son Udai Singha, a helpless baby was sleeping the innocent sleep of childhood.



The affairs of State were conducted by a Council of Regency, presided over by Banabeer, an illegitimate boy of Pritho Rāi, a brother of the late Rānā. Banabeer Singha was a young man of great promise, and as the nearest kinsman of the minor he was elected by the people's suffrage to be the guardian of his person and trustee of the State. For a time the arrangement worked well, and the Regent justified the confidence the people of Mewār reposed in his honesty. But a period of uninterrupted enjoyment of the Imperial dignity, the dazzling glare of regal splendour and the willing homage of a great people turned Banabeer's head. He resolved to substitute the reality for the shadow. The canker of ambition ate into his vitals. He hearkened unto the counsels of perfidy and chose to seize the Crown by removing all obstacles from his path. Macbeth-like, this young custodian of Mewār's trust looked down from his giddy height and tumbled head over heels.

II.

It was a pitch dark night that found Banabeer ready for the perpetration of the blackest villainy in the annals of Rājasthān. The silence that reigned amidst the enveloping gloom was



broken by the screeching owl and the moaning wind that sighed past the walls of Rānimahal in which the young prince lay in charge of his nurse Pānnā Bāi. A faithful old retainer of the family rushed in a hurry into the apartment next to the nursery, and shaken all over with fear, informed Pānnā of the wicked design of Banabeer upon the life of the young Prince.

“At midnight,” said the trembling messenger, “comes the thief into the room to snatch the life of the baby and offer it as an oblation to his thirst for power. The lady in whose maternal keeping the child is safe till now, is solemnly adjured to save, while there is time, the only scion of the house of Bāppā Rāo from the murderous knife of the protector. In the intoxication of reckless youth and kingly power the Regent strikes so that the last link between Rānā Sangrām and the vacant throne of Mewār snaps in two.”

Terrible words were these that greeted the unsuspecting ears of the nurse ! She realised the helpless situation of the baby ; she realized her own position. But she would not betray her sacred charge if she could help it. She suckled the Royal baby ; she clothed him ; she fed him ;

she loved the orphan with all the tender love of a mother. The Queen, when she lay dying, had charged Pānnā in the name of all that was holy, to protect the only surviving scion of the Imperial House. How could she now abandon the child to his fate ? She looked around the room and found the imploring eyes of the departed Queen fixed upon her in anxious suspense to test, as it were, the truth of a mortal's plighted word.

Pānnā Bāi resolved to rise to the sacred call of duty. She would save the child. There was no time to lose. She put the sleeping child in an empty fruit-basket, covered it over with some leaves gathered in haste and made over the precious load to the messenger to take it out of harm's way. The man left the palace as stealthily as he had entered it. Fortune blessed his endeavours. A faithful old menial of the family, he happened to be a frequent visitor at the palace, and his movements did not excite the suspicions of the dozing sentry that mounted guard at the palace gate. From a window Pānnā saw the messenger safe across the danger zone and returned to her post by the side of the vacant bed to devise means as to how she could stand the rest of the ordeal.



III

The palace gong boomed the midnight hour and every stroke fell like the grave-digger's thud on Pānnā's ears. With a resolute calm she awaited the approaching foot-fall of the would-be murderer. And she had not long to wait. Banabeer with the determined step of a hired executioner entered the nursery and demanded of the lady where the young prince was. Pānnā pointed to the couch of the boy Uday Singha. Without a word the ruffian made for the bed and taking out a dagger that glittered in the faint light of the dimly burning lamp, plunged it up to the hilt into the bosom of the sleeping child. Banabeer thought the only obstacle that lay between him and the throne of Mewār was removed. Banabeer murdered sleep and the next morning he discovered, though it was too late, that he was destined to "sleep no more."

IV

Now, reader, will you guess who the murdered baby was? It was Chandan, the five-year-old boy of Pānnā Bāi, whom she put into the bed of her master's child after she had sent him to



safety. It was her only boy, the delight of her eyes, the flesh of her flesh and the bone of her bone, the child whom she had nursed and suckled for five long years and whom she looked up to for solace and comfort in her old age. It was the best treasure she possessed on earth and it was the best thing that she could offer as a sacrifice at the altar of duty and loyalty. She witnessed as a silent spectator, the murderer plunge the knife into her own child's breast, though she could have saved him if she chose. Not a muscle of her face moved when she stood there like a rock to answer the glorious call of duty. From the salt she ate of the Royal family of Mewār she received her body, her station, her strength, her baby and her everything. True to the salt, she redeemed the debt of gratitude she owed and the word that she had plighted. With nerves as strong as those of any renowned Marshal on the field of battle, with eyes dry as the summer dust, Pānnā attended to the last rites of her only child and hastened to join the Imperial baby in his exile.

It may be contended that Pānnā Bāi could have easily left with both the prince and her own baby at the time Banabeer's design was communicated to her. But the wisdom of the



plan did not commend itself to her. The sudden exit of a large party might have aroused the suspicion of the sentry; and granting that the gate was thrown open to them by some kind Providence, the party would surely have been overtaken by the troops of Banabeer sent in hot pursuit. This would have led to the utter failure of the plan of the sagacious lady to save the life of the prince.

V

Ransack the pages of history for a similar act of superhuman sacrifice, wonderful loyalty and unselfish devotion to duty, and tell me if you can discover a parallel in any country all the world over. Pānnā is gone; but the race of Bāppā Rāo, passing through a series of vicissitudes still continues on the *Guddee* of Mewār. Pānnā is dead; the corporeal frame of the heroic nurse has vanished into thin air. But when will the *Dadhichi-spirit* which animated that woman's frame cease to inspire thousands of Hindu men and women in the heroic land of Rājasthān? "When shall," we repeat with the famous English Poet, "when shall her glory fade?" She holds her place secure in the hearts of the wondering band of patriots who have



IDEALS OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD.

CSL

learnt to love their king and the country as manifested in the spirit of loyalty shown to our King in the recent European War. Were Pānnā Bāi born in the more bracing climate of Europe or America, her life-story would have formed the theme of poets and orators. But this unfortunate land of ours has not yet learnt to appreciate the departed great as they deserve. This is why we rest satisfied by thanking the courtesy of a European historian for a passing reference to this extraordinary display of superhuman nobility.



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PADMINI.*

(HONOUR).

I

This is yet another brilliant page in the records of the medieval glory of India. The tale of Rājput chivalry would be miserably short of narration if it passed lightly over the life-story of the incomparable Padmini. For, the part that a great woman plays in creating the glorious tradition of a country is in no way inferior to the share borne by a great man; and Padmini is the central link in the chain of the national glory that has amply justified the claim of Chitor to be worshipped as the greatest shrine of Rājput chivalry and sacrifice in ancient India.

II

More than seven hundred years ago, when the Pathan in the obdurate zeal for conquest was trying to carry the banner of Islam in Hindus-

* Based mainly on Todd's "Annals of Rājasthān"—abridged by C. F. Payne.



man from the Himālayas in the extreme North to Comorin in the extreme South, and the Rājput was maintaining his birth-right as a free man at an exorbitant cost of much precious blood, when province after province was yielding in rapid succession before the unrelenting sword of the conquering Turk, the young Mahārānā Lakshman Singha was seated on the throne of Mewār, and successfully defied the troops of the great Khilji of Delhi under the protecting wings of his uncle, the heroic Rānā Bhim Singha, military Governor of the Fort of Chitor. Alauddin Khilji, however, kept a very watchful eye on the movements of the Chief of Mewār. The Pathan Emperor was anxious not so much for the sandy tracts of a western desert, for these would make but little addition to the Imperial coffers at Delhi; but his heart was set firm on carrying off the beautiful Padmini, wife of Rānā Bhim Singha, who was reported to be the loveliest woman in all Hindusthān.

The fiat came forth from Delhi that the greatest Pathan conqueror of India must have the fairest Padmini to wear in his crown; or, by Allāh, God of the true believer, he would extirpate the race of mountain-rats that would venture to thwart the Imperial will.



III

So, like the Assyrian hordes that invaded the plains of Judah in the days of old, the ruthless myrmidons of the great Khilji crossed the treeless sands by the Arāvalli Hills and fell upon the innocent cultivators of the outlying districts of Mewār. The strange wooing commenced and Chitor lay at the mercy of the invaders. Fire, pillage and bloodshed marked the way of the Pathan army. The heavy gates in the stone walls of the Red Fort of Chitor were shut against the enemy. A council of war was summoned in haste, and the Rājput veterans decided upon fighting the enemy to the last drop of their blood. They would not brook this wanton insult to the honour of the protecting Angel of Mewār. They stood round the "Padmini Mahal" as an impenetrable rock of protection, and raising a lusty cheer in the name of Padmini, the war-broken veterans of Chitor kissed their swords and vowed death to him who had dared to stretch his arm to desecrate Rājput honour with its unholy touch. The Rājput reply was not slow to reach the ears of Alauddin. It added fuel to the fire.



IV

It was some time that the Pathan troops lay encamped outside Chitor and devastated the country round, little expecting that the mountain-rats would peep out of their holes. But they were sadly mistaken. One morning they found to their terror and amazement that one of the wall-gates was flung wide-open. Instantly a stream of Rājput warriors rushed out on the plains and formed themselves in battle array. All this happened in the twinkling of an eye. The brunt of the Hindu onslaught fell suddenly upon the advanced Mahomedan posts, and before they could well realize the gravity of the situation, the Hindus had worked incalculable mischief in the enemy camps and retired into the fort without sustaining any appreciable loss. This news gave a very rude shock to the Emperor's dream of bliss, and in the fury of desperation he personally led a charge against the main gate in the city-wall. Bhim Singha and his men, however, gave them a very hot reception. Alauddin had to fall back, and before long the Pathan realized that the race of mountaineers had perfect mastery over the arts of offence and defence. These sudden sallies were



repeated almost every day, till the besiegers, worn out between the extremes of inaction now and the fury of an unexpected attack the next moment, thought of abandoning the project for some time.

V

To add to the troubles of the Imperial Suitor, a very disquieting news arrived from Delhi at this juncture. The Hindu Chief of Guzerāt who had rendered his homage to the Pathan authority a short time back, had raised the standard of revolt and aided by a large contingent of Moghul troops was marching upon the Imperial Capital to strike a blow for freedom. For this unexpected turn of events the Emperor was not the least prepared. It upset all his plans of conquering Chitor and winning "the Lotus of Mewār." He had to send large drafts of his men for the defence of his Capital and extend the hand of diplomatic friendship to the Rānā of Mewār.

Negotiations were immediately opened. Alauddin dissembled his motives as far as possible. He was highly impressed, he said, at the bravery of Mewār. The patriotic conduct of the Rājputs excited his envy and admiration. He would not



lose the opportunity of shaking hands with such a magnanimous foe. He himself offered the olive branch of peace. As a proof positive of the sincerity of his motives he had already sent, he affirmed, the greater part of his army home, and he would soon be leaving. Only as a signal mark of his royal condescension he would pay a visit to the hospitable Rānā of Chitor and have a look,—only a look—at the ‘Lotus of Mewār,’ the fame of whose dazzling beauty had brought him across a vast sandy desert on a perilous journey.

VI

The generals of Chitor met again in conference in the Audience Hall. The message of Alauddin was read in the midst of the silence of scorn and indifference. Mahārānā Lakshman Singha was absorbed in anxious cogitation. Well did he know why Alauddin was in such an indecent hurry to raise the siege of Chitor; for the messenger from Guzerāt who had come to seek the advice of Rānā Bhim Singha was not yet well across the borders of Mewār. Well did he know that the Pathan would honour him with a second visit the moment he could dispose of the Guzerāt rebellion. But he was not sure



if it was a good policy to shed any more loyal blood just now, or to reserve all the man-power of his kingdom for a future encounter some months later. In his indecision he turned to his uncle, the Rānā Bhim Singha, for a solution.

“Mahārānā,” replied the veteran general, “it looks absurd that the Pathan so easily offers the hand of friendship. He has not yet felt a tenth part of the strength of Mewār in resisting aggression. The entire manhood of the kingdom has not yet been called up. But that is a different question. In a matter like this,” went on the stalwart Chief, “in a matter which touches the honour of a lady whom the nation adores, it were good if we asked the nation what it wants. This Council represents the whole of Mewār.”

Prince Ari Singha, heir-apparent to the Guddee of Mewār, stood up and said, “If as a trusted representative of the people I am entitled to have my say, I can assure Your Highness that the nation is now, as ever, at one in fighting it out with the boasting rabble outside. But good sense seems to have prevailed in the Council Chamber of the audacious Khilji, and the main part of the army is by this time on its way back to Delhi. We have therefore to check with



difficulty the ardour of our men to try their strength against the Imperial troops. But the price of our safety is enormous. Admit the Moslem as a forced guest in the "Padmini Mahal" and you defile the holy temple. The nation will not allow the perpetration of this desecration and refers the question to the decision of the lady herself."

The boy Bādal, a nephew of the Queen, was immediately sent to her apartments. He came back with the following reply :—"The beauty of Padmini is nothing to the life of so many heroes of Mewār. Gladly will she receive His Imperial Majesty as a distinguished guest, if, by so doing, she finds that Chitor has been spared the horrors of a cruel war. The Emperor will be admitted to the honour of a seat beside her husband, the Rānā Bhim Singha, on condition he does not abuse the hospitality of Mewār when he sees that beauty, the report of which has drawn him into this thorny bush."

VII

Great preparations were being made inside Chitor for the reception of the Pathan Emperor of Delhi. The palace of the Rānā was decorated to suit the taste of a luxurious Eastern Chief.



The Padmini Mahal wore a festive look. Flags and festoons fluttered gaily in the breeze, garlands waved, and the floors and stairs were covered with a Damask carpet of the richest hues. Precious viands and costly wines were procured to please the fastidious palate of the Imperial epicure, and the men and women of Chitor eagerly looked for the day when the Emperor of Delhi would be received as a guest by Rānā Bhim Singha.

The Rājput had given his word to receive the greatest enemy of his race and family as the best of friends under his roof. On that day, at least, no angry scowl would blacken his brow, no sinful thought would cross his heart for all the world.

VIII

Alauddin with half a dozen trusted followers entered Chitor on the appointed day and found a very cordial reception waiting for him. The royal *Nahabat** poured forth its soul-enthraling strains and supplied the welcome music. There was a true ring of sincerity in the words of Rānā Bhim Singha when, on behalf of his nephew,

* The native band.

the Mahārānā, he expressed his appreciation of the friendly spirit of the Overlord of Delhi.

"The Mewār Durbār," said the Rānā, "greatly values this opportunity of meeting the Emperor of Delhi as a friend instead of as a foe, and will try to make Your Majesty as comfortable as can be expected of a simple-hearted tribe of soldiers noted for the bluntness of their speech and manners. To the Rājput, the guest, of whatever creed and colour, is a brother, and the Rājput extends to him a brother's privileges in his family."

"We send through Your Highness," said the Khilji Emperor, "our friendly greetings to the Mewār Durbār, and hope that we may, as has been said by Your Highness, enjoy a brother's liberty in your family to-day."

Probably the words stuck to the throat of this Arch-dissembler when he made a show of his friendliness to Rānā Bhim Singha whom he supposed to be the greatest obstacle between himself and Rānee Padmini.

IX

Whatever might be Alauddin's real feeling on that occasion, there is no doubt that a dire conflict was going on in his impulsive heart.



Was it not a thousand times more prudent, argued his better nature, to gain the real friendship of such a brave and magnanimous foe than to earn his implacable hatred by persecuting him unjustly for a woman's sake? But before the answer came, the voluptuous strain of music struck up by a famous choir of dancing girls had taken the Emperor away into the dreamland of the black-eyed Houris of Paradise, and he threw all considerations of fairness and justice to the winds.

X

While the dancing girls were engaged in their song, Rānā Bhim Singha led Alauddin into a richly furnished outer chamber against whose wall a large mirror was hanging covered with a silken screen from top to bottom. As soon as the royal guest entered the room the screen parted and revealed a female form of exquisite beauty reflected in the glass. The Mahomedan stood still for a moment before this mirror. Was this Padmini—the wife of an accursed unbeliever—a woman in flesh and blood? He could not believe his eyes. The ladies in the Imperial seraglio in Delhi were not even fit to touch her feet. The tints of her complexion were borrowed from the rainbow in