

SOME PARSEE MARRIAGE CUSTOMS. HOW FAR THEY ARE BORROWED FROM THE HINDUS ?*

Read on 27th January 1909.

President—MR. JAMES MACDONALD.

In a paper, entitled "Marriage Customs among the Parsees: Their comparison with similar customs of other nations," read by me before this Society at its sittings of 22nd February and 26th July 1899,¹ I said: "After the several vicissitudes of fortune, that the community has passed through, it is difficult to determine, how many and which of these Parsee marriage customs are originally Zoroastrian or Persian, and how many, and which, are taken from the sister communities of India. But this much can be said, with well-nigh a certainty, that the strictly solemn or the religious part of the ceremony, wherein the priests take part, is more or less originally Persian. M. Harlez seems to be correct when he says on this point that: *Nous ne trouvons pas non plus, dans ce qui nous reste des livres avestiques, de cérémonies particulières pour le mariage; il est probable cependant que l'origine de celles qu' observent encore les Parses modernes remonte aux temps les plus reculés.*"² In the very commencement of the Paêvand-nâme, now recited at the marriage ceremony, the officiating head priest says that the ceremony is 'according to the rules and customs of the Mazdayaçnân religion.'³ We learn from Herodotus also, that there was some regular ritual, though he does not say what it was.

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¹ Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay, Vol. V, Nos. 4 and 5, - *Vide my "Marriage Customs among the Parsees", p. 5.*

² Harlez, *Avesta, Introduction*, p. CLXXI.

Dâd-i-Âinidin-i-Mâzdayaçni.

While speaking of the marriage of Darius, the son of Xerxes with Artayntes, the daughter of Masistes, the brother of Xerxes, he says that it was performed with "usual ceremonies."¹

That the strictly solemn part is originally Persian is proved from the fact, that the coinage mentioned in the commencement of the *Paiwand-nâme*, which can be compared with the *Kanyadânam* ceremony of the Hindus, is not Indian but Persian, *viz.*, that of Nishapur in Khorasan.

While studying, this month, for a lecture on "Symbolism in the marriage ceremonies of different nations," delivered on the 21st of this month, before the Ladies' Branch of the National Indian Association, I noted several points showing a marked similarity between the Parsee and Hindu marriage customs.

This study has shown me that I can more confidently say now, that some of the Parsee marriage ceremonies that precede and follow "the strictly solemn or the religious part of the ceremony, wherein the priests take part" are borrowed from the Hindus.

The following is a list of such ceremonies:—

1. Putting on of the *Mangalasutram* by the Hindus and the *Rehâl* by the Parsees.
2. The details of the *Hand-fastening* ceremony among the Hindus and the *Hâthêwârâ* ceremony among the Parsees.
3. *Skirt-fastening* among both.
4. Holding of curtains between the pair.
5. Throwing of rice.
6. *Feet-washing*.
7. Eating together.

In this short paper, I propose to describe briefly these ceremonies with a view to show their similarity and to show how far the Parsee ceremonies are borrowed from the Hindus.

¹ Bk. IX, Chap. 108; Rawlinson's Herodotus, Vol. IV, p. 472.

My authority for the description of the Hindu ceremonies is "The Hindu at Home, being sketches of Hindu daily life," by the Rev. J. E. Padfield, B.D., (1896).

The Mangalasutram (मंगलसूत्रम्) and the Rehâl.

Among the Hindus, there is a ceremony known as that of tying on the bride the Mangalasutram, *i. e.*, an auspicious thread or cord. "The is a saffron-coloured thread or cord to which is attached a small gold ornament; it is fastened round the neck, and hangs down in front, like a locket." It is the bridegroom, who puts round the neck of the bride the Mangalasutram with an appropriate declaration.

Among the Parsees, the bride puts on round her neck at the time of the marriage ceremony a large silver coin known as *rehâl*. This coin is previously sent to the bride, about two days before the marriage, by the family of the bridegroom. It is put on without any particular ceremony.

The Mangalasutram ornament is put on over a beautiful cloth given to the bride by her father. A Parsee bride also puts on a cloth of silk, called *sorni kâchli* (सोरनी कांचली) and then the Rehâl over it.

Hand-fastening.

Among the Hindus, after the second declaration by the bridegroom, of "his willingness to accept the bride," and after her father's "declaration of his willingness to give her," and after the subsequent ceremony of washing the feet of the bridegroom, the father of the bride "takes the right hand of the bride and placing it underneath the curtain, in the right hand of the bridegroom, pours over the clasped hand some water from the vessel."¹

The Parsees, have a similar custom which is known as *hathê-varô* (हाथे वारो .i e., hand-fastening), with this difference, that instead of the father of the bride, it is the officiating priest who gives the right hand of one into the right hand of the

¹ "The Hindu at Home", by Rev. Padfield, pp. 124-125.

other, and instead of pouring water over the clasped hands, he passes raw twist round them. The hand—fastening ceremony itself is originally Persian but the details of the way in which it is done are Indian.

Tying the Bridal Knots (એડા એડી).

Among the Hindus, on the bridegroom answering in the affirmative, a question put to him by the family priest, whether he was “willing to take so and so to wife” . . . the ends of the upper garments of the pair are tied together in what is called “the Brahma knot.” . . . The priest, on tying this knot, says, ‘*Vishvéth trátet,*’ that is, “you both must trust and be a prop to each other” . . . This tying of the cloths, which is an important part of the marriage ceremony, is repeated at various stages of the proceedings.”¹

Among the Parsees, a similar ceremony is performed at the end of the strictly religious part of the ceremony, and it is known as *chhedá chhedí* (એડા એડી) *i. e.,* (tying) the skirts (of each other’s clothes). It is not the priest who does this, but a near lady friend or relation of the couple. Thus united, the bride generally goes to the house of the bridegroom. The process of fastening the knots is accompanied by a song.

Holding of Curtains.

Among the Hindus, on the evening of the first day of the marriage ceremonies, after the sacred bath known as *Mangala-snânam* (*i. e.,* blessed or fortunate bathing), the couple are made to sit opposite one another, separated by a curtain, so that they cannot see each other. This curtain is removed later on.

Among the Parsees also, such a ceremony exists and is known as that of *âdâ-antar*, *i. e.,* a separation. This ceremony commences the marriage ceremonies proper. The bride and the bridegroom are first made to sit opposite each other, separated by a piece of cloth held between them as a curtain.

¹ *Ibid.*

Later on, this curtain is dropped. This ceremony of holding the curtain in the beginning and then of dropping it later on, signifies, that the separation that hitherto existed between them, no longer exists now, and that they are now united into the bond of matrimony. As long as the curtain is held, they sit opposite each other, but on its removal they are made to sit side by side. This also signifies that they, who were upto now separate, are now united together.

Throwing the Rice.

Among the Hindus, "some rice which has been steeped in milk, is brought, and the bridegroom places a portion of these into the hand of the bride." The bridegroom "then takes some of the rice from her hand and puts it on her head. She then takes some of it and puts it upon his head. This is done several times, after which they both do it at the same time, putting some of the rice upon each other's head."¹ The priest also gives some of the coloured rice in the hands of those present who also throw it on the heads of the couple.

Among the Parsees, it is the couple that throws rice upon each other. The priests also throw rice while reciting the benedictions.

Rev. Padfield seems to think that "the modern English custom of throwing rice after a newly married couple arose from this Indian rite." He adds that "there are many similar ways in which English customs have originated" from Englishmen's connection with India.

The use of rice in marriage ceremonies is common among many nations. It is likely that it was used in Persia also. But the way in which it is thrown by the couple over each other does not seem to be originally Persian.

Washing of the Feet.

Among the Hindus when the bride and bridegroom return home from some of the several marriage processions, their

¹ *Ibid* p. 123.

feet are washed by some attendants.¹ Up to a few years ago, the Parsees also had a similar ceremony. It is altogether extinct in Bombay, though still performed, at times, in some mofussil towns.

Eating together.

Among the Hindus, the last ceremony during the first day's marriage ceremonies, is that of pointing out to the bride and bridegroom a small star called Arundhati, which is a star 'near the middle one in the tail of Ursa Major and is named after Arundhati,' the wife of Vasishtha, one of the seven Rishis."² After this ceremony, "the bride and bridegroom are made to take food together, eating from the same leaf."³ I think it is this Hindu custom that was followed by the Parsees, in their custom—now well-nigh extinct, at least in Bombay—known as that of Dahi Kumro (*i.e.*, the virgin curd). In that ceremony, the bride and bridegroom were made to give to one another, one or more morsels of food prepared from a mixture of curd and rice.

¹ *Ibid* p. 133.

² *Ibid* p. 132.