

INITIATION (Hindu). — The ceremony of initiation, or girding with the sacred thread, is considered one of the most important events in the life of a young Hindu. Before it he is, under the ancient Sanskrit law, equal to a low-born Śūdra, but the investiture is supposed to confer a spiritual birth in virtue of which he is reckoned a member of the higher classes, and these are therefore called the twice-born (*dvija*). It appears probable that the original meaning of this Indian custom has been preserved in those celebrations which take place among wild tribes all over the world at the time when a youth attains puberty, the Indian notion of a spiritual re-birth, or beginning of a new life, being present at many of these ceremonies. The Brāhmanical law of India seems to have narrowed the original meaning and importance of the custom by converting it into an 'introduction' (Skr. *upanayana*) to the future teacher, but the extension of the privileges conferred by it to many non-Brāhmanical castes was retained, and the now prevailing neglect of the course of sacred studies prescribed for the young novice seems to have been very common from an early period even among the Brāhmins. The Sanskrit law-books and the *Gṛhyasūtras* (domestic rules) are prolix in their descriptions of the rite of *upanayana*, the principal part of which consists in the communication of an ancient Sanskrit prayer (*gāyatrī*) to the novice by his future teacher, and in the investiture of the boy with a girdle which he puts round his waist, and with the sacred thread which he carries over the left shoulder. The performance of this rite is enjoined in general for a Brāhman in his eighth year, for a Kṣatriya in his eleventh, and for a Vaiśya in his twelfth. After initiation the youth has to live at the house of his spiritual teacher, studying the Veda under him, obeying his commands, begging for alms on his behalf, and collecting fuel for his fire. The period of studentship lasts for twelve years, or until the student has acquired a knowledge of the Vedas, and it terminates with another ceremony called *samāvartana* ('return'). The expense incurred by initiating a boy is defrayed by his parents, and after their death it becomes a charge on the inheritance.

At the present day the rite of *upanayana* is performed by Brāhmins and other high castes all over India, and the ancient ceremonies are preserved more or less in their original form. Thus among the Mādhyā class of Deshāsth Brāhmins in Dhārwar (Bombay Pres.) eight is the usual age for a boy's thread-girding, and the season from mid-February to mid-July is the right time. An astrologer chooses a lucky day for the ceremony, for which great preparations are made, the house being cleaned and whitewashed, a porch erected in front of it, with posts ornamented with twigs and flowers, an altar raised facing the east, and invitation letters sent to friends and kinsmen. The lucky day having arrived, musicians begin to play at the boy's house; he is anointed with oil and turmeric, and bathed; a barber shaves his head, leaving three or five locks, according as he is supposed to study the Rigveda or the Yajurveda. He is then taken to the dining-hall, where his mother places him on her lap, feeds him, and for the last time eats from the same plate with him. The barber shaves the boy once more, leaving only the top-knot on his head; he is bathed, and made to sit down on a low wooden stool between his parents, and the Brāhman priests present chant eight auspicious hymns. As soon as the 'lucky moment' has arrived, the musicians raise a loud

noise, the guests clap their hands, and the Brāhman priests and guests throw red rice over the boy. The priest then formally girds him with the sacred thread, one part of which rests on the boy's left shoulder, the rest falling below the right arm. A piece of deer-skin is tied to the sacred thread, and a staff is placed in his hand. Money presents are made to Brāhman priests, and fruits and flowers are handed round among the guests. At noon the boy is made to say his midday prayers, and in the evening his evening prayer. He asks alms of his mother in Sanskrit, and afterwards of his father, and in the same way of friends and kinsmen. Each drops rice and silver coins into the boy's cloth wallet. On the following three days he is taught to say his regular prayers, and is made to worship the sacred fire. On the fifth day he is dressed in fine clothes and taken in procession with music to a temple in the village, where he worships the idol and returns home. Among the Paradesā Brāhmins of Travancore, in the extreme south of the Peninsula, the *upanayana* consists of no fewer than fourteen parts, which have retained their old Sanskrit names, and correspond in the main to the ceremonies in vogue at Dhārwar as above described. The actual initiation, however, is performed by the teacher instructing the boy in the holy *gāyatrī* prayer, which he mutters in a low voice so that the assembled throng of friends may not hear it. Elsewhere it is the father who mutters the *gāyatrī* in the boy's right ear, whereas it rests with the priest to kindle the sacred fire and to gird the boy with the sacred thread. The initiation ceremony entails considerable expense; thus it is said to cost 40 to 100 rupees among the Deshāsth Brāhmins of Bijāpur, and 20 to 50 rupees among the Patane Prabhus of Poona. The course of instruction in the sacred books and prayers after *upanayana* has in most cases dwindled down to a period of a few days, but the privilege of wearing the sacred thread continues to be highly prized. In the 17th cent. the valiant Sivaji, the founder of Mahratta power, on account of his low origin did not venture to wear the sacred thread till his solemn coronation had taken place. On the other hand, customs precisely analogous to the initiation of the Brāhmins are found to occur even among those castes the members of which never wear the sacred thread. Thus among the Agarvāls of Poona it is customary for every boy at the age of eight or nine to prostrate himself once before his teacher, who presents him with a wreath of flowers and mutters a sacred verse in his ear. The Kanphatas of Cutch, a religious body, give every novice a black woollen thread, which he ties round his neck with a knot; and on receiving him into their Order the teacher whispers a certain verse into his ear.

LITERATURE.—J. Jolly, 'Über die indische Jünglingsweihe,' in *Jahrbuch der internat. Vereinigung für vergleich. Rechtswissenschaft*, Berlin, 1897; A. Hillebrandt, *Ritualliteratur*, Strassburg, 1897; *The Census of Travancore*, 1891, vol. i., Report; *Bombay Gazetteer*, *passim*.
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