

PURIFICATION (Hindu).—There is nothing that an orthodox Brāhman, or Brāhmanized castes generally, will shun so much as external defilement. 'The predominating idea in their general conduct, and in their every action in life, is what they call 'cleanness,' says J. A. Dubois.¹ The rules regarding impurity (*āśauca*) and purification (*suddhi*) occupy, therefore, a conspicuous place in the Sanskrit law-books, and there are many special treatises in Sanskrit on this subject—the *Āśauchanirnaya*, *Suddhitattva*, *Suddhima-yūkha*, etc. The horror or superstitious dread inspired by the sight of a corpse becomes particularly manifest in these rules. The impurity of a Brāhman caused by the death of a relative is declared to last in general ten days. Those who have carried out a dead relative and burnt his

¹ *Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies*, p. 179.

corpse are required to plunge into water, dressed in their clothes. During the period of impurity they must sleep on the ground and practise other austerities, and must give up all intercourse with other people in order to avoid defiling them. When the impurity is over, they must bathe, sip water, and make gifts to Brāhmins. Even those who have merely come near the smoke of a funeral pyre must bathe. Childbirth is an occasion of impurity in the same way and for the same length of time as death. Menstruating women are considered unclean, and their touch contaminates. They become pure after four days by bathing. A bath is also ordained for a man who touches such a woman, or the carrier of a corpse, or members of the lowest castes, or the corpses of certain animals, or one who has had his hair cut, or has vomited or been purged, etc. If the lower part of the body has been defiled by one of the impure excretions of the body, it is sufficient to cleanse the limb in question with earth and water. In minor cases of pollution, as after spitting or sneezing, one has to sip water. The ancient and popular story of King Nala shows how one neglecting such purification was supposed to be liable to be possessed by a demon. Even before birth men were believed to be tainted with uncleanness, and the various *saṃskāras*, such as tonsure, investiture with the sacred thread, marriage, etc., were regarded as purificatory ceremonies capable of removing that taint (Manu, ii. 27).

Purity in regard to food was considered even more essential than external purity, and the rules concerning allowed and forbidden food are very numerous (see FOOD [Hindu]). Drinking alcoholic drinks was reckoned as a mortal sin, like killing a Brāhman or incest. Any one offering spirits to a Brāhman was liable to capital punishment, and one offering forbidden food to such had to pay a heavy fine (*Viṣṇu*, xxxv. 1, v. 98 ff.). A Brāhman tasting the food or water of, or eating with, a Śūdra or other person of low caste had to perform a penance, such as the *parāka* (fasting for twelve days) or *sāntapana* (subsisting for one day on the five products of a cow, including her urine and dung, and fasting the next day). Another set of rules concerns the purification of inanimate objects (*dravyasuddhi*). Spirituous drinks and the impure excretions of the body are declared to cause the worst kind of pollution. If an iron vessel has been defiled by them, it should be cleansed by heating it in fire; utensils made of stone or shells should be dug into a pit for seven days; objects made of horn, ivory, or bone should be cleansed by being planed; but wooden or earthenware vessels should be thrown away. In lighter cases of pollution the defiled object should be washed or sprinkled with water, or rubbed with earth or ashes, etc., the general rule being that earth and water should be constantly applied as long as the scent or moisture caused by an unclean substance continues on the defiled object. Specially purifying qualities are attributed to cows, the cow being considered a sacred animal. Thus not only are the five products of a cow (*pañcagavya*) swallowed, but a piece of ground may be cleansed by allowing cows to pass some time on it or by plastering it with cow-dung; stagnant water is pure if a cow has drunk from it; and even drops of water trickling from a cow's horn are said to have an expiatory power. The detailed provisions regarding a man's daily bath, which include the recitation of prayers and other religious ceremonies, also fall under the head of purificatory rules. Bathing in a sacred river is believed to be specially purifying, and the water of the Ganges is considered the purest of all kinds of water.

The Buddhists, Jains, and other religious sects

have each their own code of defilements and purifications. Nor have these ancient notions of purity and impurity died out in modern India. Thus, according to Dubois (in India from 1792 to 1823), the Hindus immediately after a funeral 'hasten to plunge themselves into water . . . even the news of the death of a relative . . . produces the same effect.'¹ The ten days' period of mourning or impurity is still observed, and during all this time the mourners must neither take more than one meal a day, nor shave, nor perform domestic worship, nor use dainties or spices. A sick person is entirely excluded from some religious ceremonies. Married women near the period of confinement are taken into a small room or shed, where they are shut up for a whole month, during which period they must touch neither domestic utensils nor clothes, still less any person. The same rule is observed during the monthly sickness of a woman. The time of seclusion being over, she has to take a bath, or else a large quantity of water is poured over her head and body. If a woman miscarries, the family become impure for ten days. 'A scrupulous Brahmin,' Dubois says, 'would be defiled and obliged to bathe if by accident his feet should touch a bone, a piece of broken glass or earthenware, a rag, a leaf from which any one had eaten, a bit of skin or leather, hair, or any other unclean thing. . . . but any one may sit on the ground without fear of defilement, if the place has been recently rubbed over with cow-dung.'² Here we have a modern instance of the veneration paid to the cow. A mediæval instance of it may be found in al-Birūni, where he speaks of Hindus returned to their homes from Muslim captivity, when, after fasting by way of expiation, they were buried in the dung, stale, and milk of cows for a certain number of days, and given similar dirt to eat afterwards. The fear of personal contact with people of a different caste is gradually dying out in this age of trams and railways, but there are even now depressed castes—*e.g.*, in Kashmir—which are obliged to live outside of the villages, and must make a sign to persons of high caste from a distance so as to avoid meeting them (see PARIAH). Many of the ancient rules regarding food and commensality are still in force, and nothing is so apt to cause loss of caste as a breach of these rules. The rumour that the British Government was conspiring to rob the Sepoys of their caste by greasing the cartridges of the guns with offensive fat was among the causes of the Mutiny of 1857. Earthenware vessels have to be destroyed in case of defilement, whereas metal ones may be purified by washing.³ It is true that Brāhmins and rich Śūdras are gradually abandoning the use of earthenware vessels for cooking. Silk and cloth made of the fibres of certain plants are and were believed to remain always pure. It is for this reason that the ancient Brāhman hermits used to wear clothes made of such material, and that a modern Brāhman doctor, when feeling the pulse of a Śūdra, first wraps up the patient's wrist in a small piece of silk so that he may not be defiled by touching his skin.⁴ The prevailing belief in the sanctity and purifying power of Ganges water is too well known to require illustration.

LITERATURE.—*The Institutes of Viṣṇu*, tr. J. Jolly in *SBE* vii. [Oxford, 1900]; *The Laws of Manu*, tr. G. Bühler, *ib.* xxv. [do. 1886]; J. A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies*, tr. H. K. Beauchamp, Oxford, 1906; J. Wilson, *Indian Caste*, Bombay, 1877; S. C. Bose, *The Hindoos as they are*, Calcutta, 1881; al-Birūni's *India*, tr. E. Sachau, 2 vols., London, 1888; *BG*, *passim*. J. JOLLY.