

PRIZE-ESSAY.

BENGAL PROVERBS AND THE LIGHT THEY THROW ON THE
SOCIAL LIFE AND CHARACTER OF THE BENGALEES.

There are some proverbs which throw a flood of light on the internal condition of Bengal society. Time changeth and we change with time, and as such many of the ancient social customs of Bengal have ceased to exist and many are about to become extinct. These proverbs enable us to compare our present manners and customs with those that are extinct. And what will that comparison show? It will show that in some respects we have improved and in some respects we have gone down.

Learning has always been held in esteem by the Hindus. The education of children is looked upon by them as a primary duty. Hence we have the proverb—*হিন্দুর ঘরের বিড়াল, আড়াই অক্ষর পড়ে* (lit. the cat which lives in the house of a Hindu learns two letters and a half). We have also another well-known proverb—*মূর্থ পুত্র যম সম* (lit. an illiterate son is as fierce as *yama* or the god of death). This is very true. We all know what incalculable mischief is brought about by an uneducated son. There is no happiness in that educated family that counts an illiterate fool among its members.

The *Kayasthas* of Bengal spend much of their time in pursuit of learning. They value education highly. The proverb—*কায়েতের ছেলের কলমের আঁগায় ভাত* (i. e., a *Kayastha* earns his bread by the ink of his pen) tells us that the *Kayasthas* maintain their livelihood by clerical and other literary pursuits. This proverb informs us of another thing. In days of yore the Brahmins alone used to impart education in *toles*, the *Khsatriyas* were engaged in military affairs and the *Vaisyas* in trade and agriculture. In course of time a branch of the *Khsatriyas* called the *Kayasthas* sprang up. At first they were engaged in elementary literary pursuits. But steadily they advanced and at last were able to stand side by side with the educated Brahmins. The proverb—*কায়েতের মূর্থ, কলুর বলদ* (lit. an illiterate *Kayastha*

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runs neck and neck with the bullock of an oilman) informs us of the low estimation in which an illiterate *Kayastha* is held.

Formerly liquor was an article of consumption in this country. But common people were not so fortunate as they are now. The proverb—‘চাষা কি জানে মদের স্বাদ’ (lit. a peasant knows not how liquor tastes) tells us that liquor was not an article of consumption among the lower classes. It was either because liquor was costly or was not very easily available, so that they were compelled to abstain from it. But now that these two obstacles have been removed, liquor has become a favourite beverage among them. Not to speak of towns, even over out-of-the-way villages Bacchus holds his sway. Bengal Society has now become more corrupt in this respect than it was before.

Not long ago polygamy was much practised in Bengal. But thanks to *Vidyasagara* and other honest workers, society has much improved in this respect. The proverb—‘দুই স্ত্রী যার বড় দুঃখ তার’ (lit. he who has two wives suffers much) informs us of the worry and disturbance which a man having two or more wives is subjected to. The factitious veneration which a son feels for his step-mother is best shown by the proverb—‘বাপের উপরোধে বিষাতাকে গড়’ (lit. to bow to one’s step-mother for the sake of the father). These proverbs warn men against the evil consequences of polygamy.

Formerly various kinds of arts flourished in Bengal. But now most of them have become extinct. Spinning is one of them. Women of Bengal were apt at spinning. Many families were maintained by selling the thread spun by women. Bengal women were very reluctant to while away their time idly as is shown by the proverb—‘বুধা কাজে কাটনা কীমাই’ (lit. I have neglected spinning in running after vain pursuits). The proverb—‘আপনার চরকার তেল দাও’ (lit. oil your own *charka*, i. e. spinning wheel) informs us that spinning was so extensively practised in Bengal that there was hardly any family without a *charka*.

The following proverbs tell us of the oppression of the zemindars in days gone by:—যার আছে মাটি, তা’রে নাহি আঁটি (lit. It is hard to cope with a person who possesses land); হাতী

‘চড়ি ভিক্ষা যাগি, উচ্ছায় না দাও বর ভাঙ্গি (lit. ‘I ride on the back of an elephant and beg. I demolish your house, if you do not yield of your own accord). Bengal being an agricultural country has many proverbs relating to agriculture. *e. g.* ক্ষেতের চাষে দুঃখ নংশে, (lit. agriculture relieves distress), আছে বলদ না বর হাল, তার দুঃখ সর্বকাল (lit. His lot is ever miserable who has bullocks that do not turn the plough.) The proverb যগের মুলুক পেয়েছ? reminds us of the frequent incursions of the Burmese into Bengal.

Every country has its own games. India too has many games; but being a hot country she is in favour of indoor games such as card-playing, chess-playing etc. Playing with cowries was also in vogue. Even now little boys in villages play various kinds of game with cowries. We have a proverb about this playing with cowries—‘খেলেতে জানলে কাণা কড়িতেও খেলা যায়’ (lit. he who can play well is able to play with cowries having cores in them.) The proverb means an able man manages his work even with the clumsiest utensils.

The proverb—‘আচারে লক্ষ্মী, বিচারে পণ্ডিত’ (lit. he who is clean wins fortune, he who is a good debater wins a title) informs us that the Hindus of Bengal keep their houses neat and clean. The cleanliness of the poor villagers of Bengal may serve as a model to many a wealthier man. Although the illiterate village women are ignorant of the very A B C of modern sanitary rules, yet they rise early in the morning and sweep away dirt and dust from every part of the house and then sprinkle water mixed with cow-dung over every part of the floor and verandah. After cleansing the domestic utensils they go to bathe and then begin to cook. Although they do not ride or play tennis like European ladies, yet engaged in such multifarious domestic duties they generally become healthy and strong.

The latter half of the above proverb informs us of another matter. Formerly the merit of a *tal*-student was not tested by an examination. The test which he had to pass was far more difficult. Many pundits were invited on the *Shrad* and other ceremonies to a rich man’s house. An assembly was formed of these invited pundits and in that assembly those who were

young discussed *Sahitya* (Literature), *Byakarana* (Grammar), *Smriti* (Social Institutions), *Darshana* (Philosophy) etc. The old pundits acted as judges. He who won the day was honoured with a title. This practice has well nigh disappeared now a days.

The custom of entertaining strangers is prevalent among all nations. But it is a pity that with the increase of civilization the practice is dying out gradually. In the eye of a Hindu householder, hospitality has sacredness in it. Formerly when travelling was at once dangerous and troublesome, every Hindu householder thought it his bounden duty to welcome strangers. To turn them out was deemed a flagrant crime. To keep men alive to these noble sentiments we have the proverb—*অন্ন দানের পর আর দান নাই* (to feed the hungry is the highest form of charity).

The Hindus are very particular about their food. Living as they do in a hot country, they have rejected many things as unfit to be eaten. Things such as beef are not to be touched even. When we say—“*ভীরু ক অক্ষর গোমাংস*,” it means he has discarded even the very alphabet with as much abhorrence as a Hindu does beef.

In all countries marriage causes some expense. But marriage in Bengal has become very expensive from the time of *Ballal Sen*, the founder of *Kulinism* among the higher castes of Bengal. We have a well-known proverb which informs us of the heavy expenditure in marriage—*বিয়ে করিতে কড়ি ঘর বাঁধিতে দড়ি* (lit, money is required in marriage and rope in building a thatched house). If a *kulin* marries his son into a *non-kulin* family, the *kulin* father exacts a certain amount of money called *pana* from the father of the *non-kulin* bride by way of compensation for the degradation he thereby undergoes. Save and except the Ghosh, Bose and Mitra families, the numerous other *Kayastha* of Bengal called *maulicks* have to marry their sons and daughters into *kulin* families. Therefore these *Kayasthas* are compelled to spend much in times of marriage.

The proverb—*ধনের (বা গুণের) মাথায় ধর ছাতি, কুলের মাথায় মাত্র*

‘*নাথি*’ (*i. e.* worship him who has wealth or virtues, but kick him who is simply a *kulin* by birth) informs us that the honour of the *kulin* is greatly diminished. When people saw that the *kulin* no longer possessed those qualities which a *kulin* ought to possess and violated the rules enjoined upon him by the Shastras, they naturally slighted him. They began to respect those *non-kulins* who were endowed with good qualities. Thus by degrees the word *kulin* has lost much of its charm.

The custom of visiting sacred places is prevalent among the followers of every religion. But the Hindus have carried the matter a little too far. From the remotest corners of India people flock to a sacred place. We very seldom see Hindu women come out from their inner apartments; but thousands of them go to distant sacred places on foot without any scruples on the score of decency. Not to speak of Benares and Gya, even to the distant Brindaban many poor men and women go, undergoing every sort of trouble and hardship. So fervent is the religious zeal of the Hindus! We have many proverbs concerning this practice of visiting sacred places. The following is one of them—
‘*যদি হরি পদে থাকে মন, তবে হৃদয় মাঝে বৃন্দাবন* (*i. e.* a really pious man need not visit sacred places as his heart is a temple where God most delights to dwell).

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First year class.

Mass Polarization.

In a single-fluid voltaic element, the dis-engaged Hydrogen travelling with the current is deposited on the negative plate which is thereby more or less separated from the liquid and is put under a sort of strain owing to the deposited Hydrogen tending to penetrate into the mass of the plate and is said to be polarized.