



India's Child Widows

It is difficult for people of other countries to comprehend some of the customs of ancient India—but little changed, except outwardly, after centuries of British rule. "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," quoth Kipling, and his phillippic might well be extended to include the entire world as far as India is concerned, for her centuries-old customs can never form a common meeting ground between herself and the rest of the world.

One of these customs is that of child widowhood, which, in turn, stems from the Indian custom of child marriage, against which even Gandhi himself has railed. It has resulted in the lifetime torture of thirty million baby widows, condemned to despair of hope for the rest of their unhappy lives.

Hindu parents frequently marry their daughters at the age of six, although some quijotic quirk of mind makes them decree at this point that their daughters may not consummate marriage until the ripe age of twelve. Most authorities agree with Katherine Mayo's statement in "Mother India" that child marriages stem from the sex perversion of the Hindu male.

Ancient custom decrees calamity for the six-year old bride should her husband die before her. Thenceforth her life is worse than death itself,

for the death of her husband is ascribed to his wife's sins in a previous incarnation. She is forbidden to remarry, and must spend the rest of her tragic life in expiation of those "sins," even though at the death of her husband she is yet too young to comprehend the meaning of sin, let alone to have transgressed herself. Starvation, filth, and degradation are her lot.

Her husband's family treats her worse than a beast, yet she cannot return to her own family, nor may she exercise the rights of a parent over her children. Often she is allowed but one meal a day, or even less. She is made to perform the commonest kind of menial labor, and is expected to pray constantly for her late master's reincarnation to a more delightful state than he had on this earth. But she herself gets no prayers, for there is no hope for her in a next world.

She must shave her head. She is not allowed the pleasure of bathing in the river with her former associates, (an important social contact in India), and cannot attend any event where others rejoice. She must fast. She is the object of contempt, and is frequently reviled.

She has two methods of escape. She may become a beggar, and travel the dusty roads with her hand out-thrust for alms, or she may become a prostitute. And even as a prostitute, the degradation of her state is constantly thrust upon her, for she must live in a "widows' house" with other widows, segregated like nuns.

One other form of escape was formerly open to her: *suttee*, or the burning alive of widows on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands. This custom, however, was forbidden by the English in 1829, although frequently, widows commit voluntary *suttee* even today, either through religious frenzy, or from fear of the fate that awaits them should they live.

Foreigners in India are impressed by the strange stoicism with which

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these child widows accept their lot in life. Either because they are too young to understand the cruelty with which they are treated, or because they really believe some sin in a previous incarnation was responsible for the death of their husbands, they accept all manner of ill-treatment accorded them, and wait patiently for death to put an end to their sufferings.

One duty the young widow must perform before she is cast out of the society of her former associates: she must burn her husband's body. Much of this takes place at ancient Benares, on the banks of the Ganges river. Foreigners have often seen these funeral pyres crowded together on the river bank, each pyre consuming the remains of a husband, and turning his widow's life to ashes.

India carries the caste system even to funerals. Funerals are of the first, second, or third class, depending upon the quantity of wood used. There are very few first-class funeral pyres in India, as wood there is very high in price. Most young widows can afford only third-class funerals, thus adding to their degradation in the eyes of their husband's family.

Some people believe the practise of ostracism of widows was originated by Hindu men, who feared poisoning by their wives, because of their cruel treatment of them. The psychological idea behind it, they say, is that if wives are threatened with ostracism after the death of their husbands, they will do all in their power to preserve the lives of their hated spouses.

Whatever its origin, we have the word of Gandhi himself that "there is no warrant in any Hindu book of sacred rules for such widowhood." The English government has established many schools for these widows, where they are taught useful trades, and are given a new outlook on life. These schools serve a double purpose in that they tend to break down the caste system which so long has shackled India's progress. Widows in these schools work and live together, whatever their caste or religion.

Station KZIB . . .

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At first, inevitably, most of the programs consisted of phonograph records. Records are still used frequently, but KZIB has also recruited a large staff of talented pianists, singers, actors, and others who perform

regularly over the airplanes. As the station's reputation has grown, it has continued to present the best available talent to Philippine listeners.

The station gets all of its funds from sponsors only. Business houses pay for radio time, and the staff of KZIB cooperates with them in arranging programs which will be of interest to listeners. The station receives no Government aid. Yet it continues to meet competition in a very capable manner. As Mr. Naftaly, Beck's General Manager puts it, "we have been here a long time, and we intend to be here a long time more."

Among the most popular programs now being presented over KZIB are "The Voice of Philco" program, presented by Jack Speirs, which includes a serial story "The Trial of Vivian Ware," followed by a program of Rhumba music. This program utilizes the radio audience as a jury to decide the fate of Vivian Ware, and the novelty has created a great deal of interest in the program.

F. E. Zuellig & Co. present "Leaders and Men," a semi-educational series of biographies, presented with a background of descriptive music. The program is given every Wednesday evening.

Isuan, Inc., sponsors a musical aggregation called "The Naturals," who present two programs a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. "Musical Spots," for Dana and Totem perfumes is a novel program following the latest idea in the United States. Poems are read to a delightful musical background.

A popular non-musical program is presented every Sunday evening by Prof. A. H. Heinman, world-famed painter and art-singers, (Please turn to page 40)

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