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ARTICLE No. 3.

## A New Indian Version of the Story of Solomon's Judgment.

By CHINTAHARAN CHAKRAVARTI.

Quite a good number of stories similar to the story of Solomon's judgment as told in the Bible<sup>1</sup> are known in different parts of the world.<sup>2</sup> These stories differ, of course, in the matter of details, but the *motif* of ingenuity in the matter of deciding a crucial point is the same in all. In India different versions of the story have been known to exist among the various religious sects. Four versions of the story have been traced in the literature—Sanskrit and vernacular—of the Jains.<sup>3</sup> One version belonging to the Buddhists was translated by Prof. Rhys Davids in his *Buddhist Birth Stories*.<sup>4</sup>

I have recently come across a new version of the story in a Tantric work entitled *Guruparamparācaritra*,<sup>5</sup> a work which describes legends connected with the lives of several saints who followed the Tantra form of worship. The story in question occurs in Chapter XXIX of the second half (*uttarārdha*) of the work. It is a comparatively recent work having been composed as late as the year 1872 A.D. by one Rāmākṣṇa. It is not known definitely whether, as would seem very likely, our author had any traditional old story to go back upon or whether he only modified the versions of the story as found among the Buddhists and Jains and introduced novel elements. The matter must be left to students of comparative folklore for decision. It will be noticed, however, that this version shows some noticeable points of difference from the usual type of the story. The quarrel turns not on the ownership of the child but on the identity of its murderer. Further, the test suggested by the prince for the solution of the problem is a novel one and does not agree with the tests found in other versions. I now propose to give a summary of the story for what it is worth. It runs thus :—

1 I. Kings, iii. 16-28.

2 *Buddhist Birth Stories*, Vol. I, Rhys Davids, London, 1880, pp. xlv ff.

3 These were collected and translated by L. P. Tassitorty in the *Indian Antiquary*, 1913, pp. 148ff. It is to be noted that Frazer in his monumental work, *Folk-lore in the Old Testament* (Vol. II, pp. 570-1), has only referred to these four Jain versions. It seems that he was not aware of the Buddhist version.

4 Vol. I, pp. xiv-xvi.

5 It has been published from the Venkateswar Steam Machine Press of Bombay.

'A hermit wandering towards the north went to a big city where Dharmasimha, the good and pious king, ruled. He had a son seven years old.

In that city lived a wealthy Brahman who had two wives. He was childless ; but in course of time had a son by his younger wife. The elder wife was very good-natured and looked after the step-child as if it were her own. As a matter of fact, all outside people thought it to be hers ; only a few who were intimately related to the family were aware of the actual relation. The husband was naturally pleased with the elder wife on account of her kind behaviour. The younger wife was jealous of the affection shown to the childless co-wife ; and one night administered poison to the child, placed it by the side of the co-wife, and went to bed herself. When she got up in the morning she touched the child to make sure that it was dead and then cried out. The elder wife was wakened by the screams and, finding the child lifeless, was so shocked that she could utter no words.

The husband and all other people shortly came upon the scene. Seeing the husband the younger wife said with false tears in her eyes, "Confidently did I place the child beside my co-wife in the night. Now she must have killed it by poison. You love her, though childless, more than you love me. Not knowing her mind you have always been angry towards me. I shall now go along with this child. I shall keep no more company with her. You may live happily with her."

Hearing all these words of the younger wife the people around had no suspicion in their minds and said, "It must be the work of the elder wife".

Receiving report of the matter from a messenger the king summoned all concerned to his presence. The younger wife narrated the whole story to the king even before she was asked anything about it.

After hearing what she had to say the king had no doubt that she spoke the truth. For who else, thought he, could there be to kill the child. So he decided to punish the elder wife.

Now, the young prince approached at that time and said, "She who will proceed naked to the tank near by with a pitcher and, bringing water therefrom, pour it on the image of Siva before all present, will be recognized as the truthful one and not the other". The younger wife readily agreed to this vulgar proposal. At that the prince asked his father to consider who really was guilty. The king then detected his mistake and punished the younger wife.'

It may be of some interest to relate here how modern scientists have recently dealt with a similar problem—the problem of determining the parentage of two children quite identical in appearance. We quote in detail from the editorial notes of the

Calcutta daily the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of the 8th August, 1930, where a case<sup>1</sup> has been described in some detail. The note runs :—‘ Scientists have worked wonders in the past, but who ever thought that they might be called upon to solve a puzzle which the Chicago anthropologists are now trying to do ? The puzzle consists in establishing the identity of two three-weeks-old babies born in a Chicago hospital within a few hours of each other. The mothers had gone home with their babies ten days after they had been delivered and one of them, Mrs. William Watkins, discovered there that her baby had around its neck a piece of tape on which was written ‘ Bamberger ’. Rushed Mr. Watkins to the Bambergers and shouted, “ You have got the wrong baby ”. “ Guess not ” was the calm reply from Mr. Bamberger, for did not everybody say that the baby looked just like him ?

Then followed investigations and inquiries. The Bambergers’ nurse had removed, it was ascertained, from the person of the baby they had taken home a tape which bore the inscription “ Watkins ”. But this was to no effect, for the Bambergers would not be convinced of the fact that they had the wrong baby which everybody said looked so much like Mr. Bamberger. The hospital authorities having failed to solve the problem, the scientific experts are taking a hand to do so. Elaborate physical examinations of the fathers and the babies have been made. Skulls have been measured, pigmentations of eyes and skins have been tested, and hairs have been examined. They have compared their findings, and have stated to be hopeful of solving the riddle. We hope they will. In the meantime, the Chicago Health Commissioner had issued the fiat that maternity hospitals should take foot-prints of new-born babies to make identification infallible.’ . . .

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<sup>1</sup> A similar case from Germany in which proceedings were started eleven years after the birth of the children was reported in another Calcutta daily, the *Advance*, of the 4th April, 1931.