

**FORTUNE'S WHEEL;  
A TALE OF HINDU  
DOMESTIC LIFE**

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Fortune's wheel; a tale of Hindu domestic life by K. Viresalingam & J. Robert Hutchinson

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**K. VIRESALINGAM & J. ROBERT HUTCHINSON**

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DOMESTIC LIFE**





Frontispiece.]

*Rukmini at the bathing-place.*

# FORTUNE'S WHEEL.



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A Tale of Hindu Domestic Life.

BY

K. VIRESALINGAM, PANDIT.

*TRANSLATED BY*

J. ROBERT HUTCHINSON.

With a Preface by

GENERAL MACDONALD,

LATE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION, MADRAS PRESIDENCY, INDIA.

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1887.

## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

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THAT stronghold of Hinduism, the native home, has never yet been carried. It stands impregnable within rugged walls of caste prejudice and ancestral usage. The barriers it opposes to the inquisitive outsider—barriers of race, caste, and religion—are barriers of steel; slowly corroding now, it is true, but still effectually strong to prevent curious intrusion. In this citadel of the Hindu people hangs the key to their hearts and minds and lives; and of this key the excluded foreigner can never hope to possess himself. Our knowledge of the domestic economy and social life of the Hindu family must, under existing circumstances, come from within the home itself.

Apart from its intense interest as a work of fiction, the following tale (written by a high-caste Hindu) is, in this respect, of special value. It is the 'open sesame' before which the door of the Hindu abode flies open, revealing the complete inner life of a representative Hindu family—their home, dress, food, worship, modes of thought and speech, joys and sorrows, loves and hates, hopes and fears; their simple, unquestioning piety, so strangely blended with rank superstition; the secluded quiet of their existence; their calm stoicism and uncomplaining resignation to the decrees of fate. In a word, the tale unlocks the street-door, introduces the reader to the inmates, shows him over the house,

and makes him feel quite at home notwithstanding the bewildering strangeness of his surroundings.

The numerous live social questions of the day in India have their origin in this seclusion of all domestic life within four walls. Nor does the writer ignore this important fact. The subject position of women, and their education; the inhuman treatment and wretched condition of widows; the quackeries of native charlatans, the consequent sufferings of the sick, and the opening thus presented for trained physicians of both sexes; child-marriage, with all its heartless intrigue and unnatural horrors; the remarriage of unfortunate child-widows—these and many kindred topics are treated powerfully and with enlightened good sense. While to crown all, the story into which these topics are woven is of intense interest and thoroughly Hindu.



## INTRODUCTION.

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COMPLAINTS are sometimes made that the educated natives of India have not done as much as they ought for the improvement of their vernacular literature. The Pandits, it is said, must be expected to work in their old groove, but something new ought to be produced by men who have been brought in contact with the literature of Europe, and have had the advantage of studying models unknown to their countrymen. Every effort to remove this reproach must be viewed with interest, or at least with indulgence. Kandukuri Viresalingam, Telugu Pandit of the Government College at Rajahmundry, who has had the advantage of receiving some English education, some years ago conceived the idea of translating the 'Vicar of Wakefield' into Telugu, but eventually decided on writing a tale of Hindu domestic life, in which the scene is laid in his own district, and little or nothing is borrowed from Goldsmith beyond the general idea of a family in easy circumstances reduced to poverty. Himself an ardent reformer, he has made his story a vehicle for exposing the evils of child-marriage and the miserable condition of Hindu widows. He shows us how large a part a belief in astrology, omens, fortune-telling, magic and witchcraft plays in Hindu life. He takes us into Rukmini's sick-room and exhibits the absurdity of the treatment to which she is subjected by a celebrated native practitioner. The tricks of religious impostors are satirized

in the episodes of the roguish Býragi, who professes to be an alchemist, and of the sanctimonious Yogi, who is in league with a gang of robbers. The Guru Sri Chidananda Sankarabharati-swami exemplifies the rapacity and licentiousness of the class of spiritual teachers of whom he is a type.

The English reader must not expect to find any traces of the delicate delineation of character and quiet humour which give such a charm to Goldsmith's inimitable idyl. The main value of the book lies in its minute descriptions of that domestic life which is so imperfectly known to Europeans. We sit down in the choultry on the banks of the Godavery and hear the flatteries addressed to the rich man of the village by his obsequious friends. We listen to the gossip of the women, who have come down to draw water and perform their ablutions. We follow Rajasekhara into his house; we see his wife grinding sandal-wood, and his niece cooking the midday meal. We observe how he is sponged on by distant relatives and perfect strangers. We hear him importuned for additional subscriptions for the support of the worship of Janardana-swami, who, like the gods of a good many other shrines, has seven putties of land, of which five go to the dancing-women and two to the priests. We see the silent disapproval with which Rajasekhara's attempts to educate his daughter are viewed at a period when reading and writing were considered accomplishments suited only to courtesans. We watch him and his boy listening to the poor Sastri, who comes in to expound the Mahabharata. We see Rajasekhara gradually sinking into poverty, and at last compelled to mortgage his house and set out with his family on a pilgrimage to Benares. He never, however, gets further than Peddapuram, and after some adventures returns a wiser man to his old home.

In the course of the narrative we have some pleasing descriptions of local scenery. We go into the temples and mingle with the crowds during the celebration of

various religious festivals. We are introduced to the Courts of two Rajahs. We hear of some rather improbable adventures with tigers. The incidents are perhaps scarcely of a character to prove very attractive to the ordinary novel-reader, and a less faithful translation might have given the book a better chance of success in the circulating library, but not success of a desirable kind.

Rajasekhara set out on his pilgrimage in 1618-1619. At this period the white strangers were not far off, for they had already commenced trading at Masulipatam and Nizampatam; but there are no references to them in the story, nor do we come across a single Mussulman, although Ramamurti does ask the astrologer how long the country is to remain under the yoke of the foreigner.

During the two centuries and a half which have elapsed since the period to which the tale relates, the face of the country has undergone great changes. At Dhavalesvaram, where the story opens, the magnificent stream of the Godavery is now spanned by the great anicut constructed by Sir Arthur Cotton, and the district is covered with a network of canals, which fertilize the fields and carry boatloads of travellers with an ease undreamt of in the days of Rajasekhara. Broad roads run through tracts which were once covered with jungle, and, since the establishment of Sir William Robinson's police, such highway robberies as that described by the author have ceased to be common. English education is slowly undermining the ancient faith. But the external aspect of Hindu society changes very slowly. The life described in the story is the life of the present day. The author has drawn most of his pictures from the scenes among which he is living. It is this realism which gives the book whatever merit it possesses.

Owing to the excellence of the Telugu in which it is written, and the insight which it gives us into native manners, the original story may be perused with advantage by young civilians, military officers, mission-