

P.V. Kane: The Authority on Ancient and Medieval Indian Law¹

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Pandurang Vaman Kane (P.V. Kane) is one of the most important pioneers in the field of Indology. He is the most frequently consulted authority on Dharmasastras, the ancient Indian law books, by indological scholars all over the world. Although he has worked on many works related to Sanskrit, his *magnum opus* is the five volume work *History of Dharmasastras* subtitled *Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil law in India*. There is no other work in the entire Indological literature that could rival the History of Dharmasastra by Kane. The British government honoured him with the title Mahamahopadhyaya (meaning greatest teacher among teachers) and the Government of India conferred on him the highest civilian award- the prestigious Bharatratna. This article summarizes the life and achievements of P.V. Kane and focuses particularly on his *History of Dharmasastras*.

Life, Education and Career

Pandurang Vaman Kane was born on 7 May, 1882 in Maharashtra in a Citpavana Brahmin family to Shri Vaman Babuji Kane and Srimati Ganga as the eldest of nine children. Kane's father was trained to become a priest and later on abandoned that profession and pursued his studies to become a practicing lawyer. Kane had his initial training in Sanskrit, the Vedas, Upanisads and *Bhagavadgita* from his father and then pursued his studies in Sanskrit at Wilson College. He passed his B.A in 1901 and was awarded the Bhau Daji prize for proficiency in Sanskrit. He worked for two years as the Dakshina Fellow at Wilson College and taught Sanskrit. He passed his first LL.B examination in 1903 and his M.A in 1904. He was awarded the Zala Vedanta Prize of Rs. 400. In 1905 he was awarded the "Y.N. Mandlik Gold Medal" for his essay "Aryan Manners and Morals as Depicted in the Epics" and again in 1906 for his paper on the "History of Alankara Literature."

In 1908 he was appointed as Professor of Sanskrit in Elphinston College in the place of Prof. S. B. Bhandarkar who had been deputed on some Government Work. During this period he authored a couple of school books and an annotated version of the Sanskrit literary piece *Sahityadarpana*. Besides he authored books on Bana Bhatta's *Kadambari*, *Harsacarita* and *Uttararamacarita*. Besides teaching Sanskrit he was also coaching many students to appear for the law exam. This teaching gave him the opportunity to familiarize himself with the enormous literature of law. In November 1908 he passed his second LL.B examination.

At the end of 1911 he resigned from his Government job as a Professor and started practicing law at the Bombay High court as a lawyer. In 1912 he passed his LL.M in Hindu and Mahomedan law. In 1913 he was appointed as Wilson Philological Lecturer to deliver six lectures on Sanskrit, Prakrit and Allied languages. The

¹ Sainath, R. Saraswati. (2017). P.V. Kane: The Authority on Ancient and Medieval Indian Law. In *Makers of Modern India* (pp. 125-133). Chennai: Dr. MGR-Janaki College for Women.

same year he became a member of the Bombay branch of the Asiatic Society and in 1915 a life member. He was also appointed as Springer Research Scholar for two years by the Bombay University and researched on ancient geography of Maharashtra. In 1916, he worked as an Honorary Professor of Sanskrit at Wilson College to replace Prof. Bhandarkar.

In 1917 he was appointed as Professor of Law in Government Law College, Bombay. He continued in this job until 1923. Besides he also appeared in many cases not only in Bombay but also in Poona, Sholapur, Satara and other places. His in-depth knowledge of Dharmasastras enabled him to get justice for many of his clients. One particular case was that of a poor Brahmin widow who was untended. Because of this, the priests at Pandharpur prevented her from keeping her head at the feet of the deity whereas all other Hindus irrespective of their caste and gender were allowed to do so. Kane went to Pandharpur thrice at his own expense and spent a week in the court. Kane won the case and has documented this case in Volume II of his *History of Dharmasastra* from pages 587-593.

The other important case was that of the Deccan College, Pune. The British government decided to close the college and convert this into a Parsi high school. Some alumnus of this school approached Kane for help. Due to his stepping in they appealed at the Bombay High court and won the case. The Maharashtra government then agreed to convert Deccan College into a research institute for Vedic Studies, Classical Sanskrit and Indian History, and this continues till today. Kane was in the management council of the Deccan College for many years.

In 1944 he was appointed by Bombay University to deliver four lectures on Hindu Dharmasastras and customs. Kane was also the chairman of the managing committee of the Brahmana Sabha in Bombay. In 1927 at the time of Ganapati festival some people from the lower Mahar caste—who are considered untouchables—approached the Sabha requesting permission to touch the idol at par with others including those from other religions. Kane considered that their request was a fair one and allowed them also to touch the deity. Some orthodox people filed a case against him and the Brahmana Sabha for allowing Mahar people to touch the deity. The situation was intense. However, many people supported Kane and he won the case. It is worth mentioning that this act of abolishing untouchability was done in 1927 by Kane while the Indian Constitution abolished untouchability only in 1950.

Kane was one of the people involved in the foundation of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune in 1917. At the request of his fellow scholars he started an exhaustive study of the vast Dharmasastric literature of ancient and medieval India. In the meanwhile, in 1926 the Institute published the *Vyavaharamayukha* of Nilakantha -a law book of ancient India, which was edited by Kane. In this book he indicated that he is working on the Dharmasastras.

Kane was the member of managing committee of Royal Asiatic Society and then its Vice-president. He was also one of the editors of the *Journal of Asiatic Society* for many years. In 1946, Dr. B.C. Law donated three thousand rupees for instituting the P.V. Kane Gold Medal for a student who excelled in the field of Kane's expertise. In 1941 Dr. S. M. Katre and Prof. P. K. Gode edited a book titled "A Volume of Studies in Indology" in his honour.

In 1942 the British Government conferred on him the title of Mahamahopadhyaya (the greatest among great teachers) and the Allahabad University conferred on him the Honorary Degree of D. Litt. In 1946 he presided over the All India Oriental Conference held at Nagpur. From 1947-49 he served as the Vice-Chancellor of Bombay University. Because of his request many Sanskrit plays such as the *Abhijnana Sakuntalam* of Kalidasa were enacted during the All India Oriental Conference in Bombay in 1949.

Kane was deputed by the Indian Government to attend the International Conference of Orientalists held in Paris in 1948 along with Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Dr. S.K. Chatterjee. In 1951 he attended the conference held in Istanbul along with Dr. R.C. Majumdar and Prof. Siddiqui. During this conference he appealed to UNESCO for sponsoring a project titled "An Encyclopaedic Sanskrit Dictionary on Historical Principles" to be undertaken by the Deccan College and consequently UNESCO sanctioned a grant of \$5000 to Deccan College. In 1953 he presided over the Indian History Congress at Waltair. In 1954 he led the delegation sent by the Government of India to participate in the International Congress of Orientalists at Cambridge. Kane was the only Indian to be nominated as an Honorary Fellow by the London School of Oriental and African Studies.

Kane was a Member of Rajyasabha of the Parliament for eleven years from 1953. During his tenure he was a member of many committees involving the Hindu marriage, succession and adoption. He was also a member of the central Sanskrit Board. In 1956 he was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award for his *History of Dharmasastra*, Volume IV.

On 15th August 1958, the President of India granted Kane a Certificate of Merit and an award of Rs. 1500 per year and in 1959 nominated him as the National Professor of Indology for five years, to work on his *History of Dharmasastra*. In 1960 the University of Poona conferred on him the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters. Kane published the last volume of his *History of Dharmasastra* in 1962 and in 1963 the Government of India conferred on him the highest civilian award Bharatratna for excellence in literature.

In 1974 the Asiatic Society of Bombay, where he conducted his research, named an institute after him "MM Dr. P.V. Kane Institute for Post Graduate Studies and Research". In addition, P.V. Kane Gold Medal award is being awarded to scholars for their outstanding contribution in the study of Vedas, Dharmasastras and Alankara literature (poetics). P.V. Kane passed away at the ripe age of 92 in 1972, and in 1974 the Asiatic Society dedicated an institute for the study in Religions and Civil law in his name.

The Works of P.V. Kane

Kane's *magnum opus* book was the *History of Dharmasastra*. Being a scholar of Sanskrit, Kane has also authored many other books especially in the field of Sanskrit poetry, and articles in English and in his native language which is Marathi. Besides he has also written several reviews of works by other scholars. Given below are some of the books and articles published by Kane in English.

Books

History of Dharmasastra

For writing the history of Dharmasastra, Kane has consulted a huge variety of law books related to ancient India from Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas besides many individual texts. Till today this work is considered as the sole authority on Dharmasastra. This is frequently consulted by scholars who wish to have an idea of ancient Hindu law. The book consists of five volumes and runs to more than five thousand pages. The first volume was published in 1930, volume II, part I in 1941 and part II in 1942, volume III in 1946, volume four in 1953 and volume V part I in 1958 and part II in 1962. Various editions have appeared after the first edition. While writing the History of Religious and Civil law in ancient India, Kane has consulted enormous sources of authoritative texts. For example, in his last volume he has given the list of Dharmasastra works he had consulted in two columns arranged in Sanskrit alphabetical order. This list extends to approximately 253 pages thereby showing the vastness of Dharmasastra literature. A brief outline of some of the contents of each volume is now given below:

Volume I: Meaning of *dharma*, sources of *dharma* according to Gautama, Apastamba., Vasistha, Manu, Yajnavalkya; when Dharmasastra works were first composed; Dharmasutras of Gautama, Baudhayana, Apastamba, Hiranyakesin, Vasistha, Visnudharma, Harita, Sankhalikhita, Atri, Usanas, Kanva, Kasyapa, Gargya, Cyavana, Jatukarnya, Devala, Paithinasi, Budha, Brhaspati, Bharadvaja, Satatapa and Sumantu; *Manavadharmasutra*, *Arthasastra* of Kautilya, *Vaikhanasadharmasutra*; smrtis (dharmasastras), Manusmrti, the two epics- Ramayana and Mahabharata, Puranas, Yajnavalkyasmrti, Parasarasmrti, Naradasmrti, Brhaspati, Katyayana, Angiras, Rsyasnga, Karsnajini, Caturvimsatimata (the view of 24 schools of Dharmasastras), Daksa, Pitamaha, Pulastya, Paithinasi, Pracetas, Prajapati, Marici, Yama, Laugaksi, Visvamisra, Vyasa, Sattrimsanmata (the view of 36 schools of Dharmasastra), *Smrtisangraha*, Samvarta and Harita; commentaries on smrtis such as those of Asahaya, Bhartryajna, Visvarupa, Jitendriya, Balaka, Balarupa, Yogloka, Vijnesvara, Kamadhenu, Halayudha, Bhavadevabhata, Prakasa, Parijata, Govindaraja, Laksmidhara (*Kalpataru*), Jimutavahana, Aprarka, Pradipa, Sridhara (*Smrtiyarthasara*), Aniruddha, Ballalasena, Laksmansena, Harihara Devannabhata (*Smrticandrika*), Haradatta, Hemadri, Kullakabhata, Sridatta Upadhyaya, Candesvara, Harinatha, Madhavacarya, Mandanapala, Vijnesvarabhata, Madanaratna, Vidyapati, Varadaraja (*Vyavaharanirnaya*), Rudradhara, Misramisra, Vacaspatimisra, Vardhamana (*Dandaviveka*),

Govindananda, Raghunandana, Narayanabhatta, Todarananda, Nandapandita, Kamalakarabhatta, Nilakanthabhatta, Mitramisra (*Viramitrodaya*), Anantadeva, Nagojibhatta, Balakrsna or Balambhatta, Kasinatha Upadhyaya and Jagannatha Tarkapancanana.

Volume II: Various divisions of *dharmā*, *varna*, *jati*, profession and crafts in Vedic *samhitas*, duties, disabilities and privileges of *varna*, untouchability, slavery, *samskaras* (purificatory rites), purpose of *samskaras* and list of *samskaras* such as *jatakarna*, *namakarna* etc., rules about names, *upanayana* (sacred thread ceremony), information about *upanayana* for women and how they performed sacrifices, greatness of Gayatri mantra, rules of conduct of students who have completed their Vedic studies, *asramas*, Manu's theory of how *varna* and *asrama* are complementary, different points of view about the four *asramas*, marriage, rules for selection of bride, forms of marriage, marriage with arka plant (a marriage performed before a man marries for the third time), marrying before an elder brother or sister, polygamy and polyandry, rights and duties of marriage, duties of an ideal chaste wife, position of women in ancient India, eulogy of mother, duties of widows, rules of conduct of widows, practice of tonsure of brahmin widows, *niyoga* (the practice of a widow getting a child through one of the male members of her husband's family), *niyoga* forbidden in *kaliyuga* by Brhaspati and other *smṛti* writers, remarriage of widows, Hindu Remarriage Act of 1856, Kautilya's view on divorce and Sati, references to practices of Sati in classical Sanskrit literature, restrictions imposed upon widow burning, procedure of the rite of widow burning; concubines and their rights to maintenance, *ahnika* and *acara* (code of conduct) duties of householders describing in detail about activities such as brushing the teeth, bath, wearing religious mark etc., *homa* (sacrifice), *havis* (sacrificial offering), *japa* (muttering) of Vedic texts, *tarpana*, description of five *yagnas*: *brahmayagna* (chanting the Vedas), *devayajna* (worshipping the gods), *bhutayajna* (feeding animals and birds), *pitryajna* (worshipping the manes) and *manyusyayajna* (feeding the guests), worship of Siva and Visnu, 16 modes of worship of gods, rules of taking meals, rules about flesh of beasts, fish and birds, rules of taking the *tambula*, rules about women in their monthly periods, rules about starting and cessation from Vedic studies, serpent festivals from ancient times, rules about *dana* (gifts), three kinds of gifts, valid and invalid gifts, founding of temples, rules pertaining to rejuvenation of temples, distinction between temples and *mathas*, rules regarding removal of idols from temples, *vanaprastha asrama*, duties prescribed for *vanaprastha* and *sannyasa*, Vedic sacrifices and their various interpretations, different kinds and divisions among Vedic sacrifices.

Volume III: Table of cases cited during the course of the book, *rajadharma* (duties of kings), the seven limbs of a kingdom, duties and responsibilities of the ruler and ministers; territory, fort, treasury, army, allies; purpose of study of the *rajadharma* and the ends of the state; the view of Kautilya on kingship, law, administration and justice; grades of courts, judges, lawyers, court fees, pleadings, means of proof, documents, possession, witnesses, ordeals, decisions, decrees, fines and punishments, limitations, contracts, debts, pledges, mortgages, sale of property by a person who is not its owner, partnership, resumption of gifts, non-payment of wages, non-rendition of service, dispute between master and herdsmen, violation of compacts and other titles

of law, boundary dispute, abuse and assault, theft, adultery, incest and rape, gambling and prize fighting, partition of wealth, adopted son, order of succession after the son, woman's property, wills, customs and customary laws, ancient instances of transgressions of *dharma*; Purvamimamsa customs and Dharmasastra works, actions forbidden in *kaliyuga*, theory of *yugas*, date of the *Mahabharata* war, beginning of *kaliyuga* and customs in modern Indian law.

Volume IV: Sin in Vedic literature, enumeration and classification of sins, grave sins and lesser lapses, doctrine of *karma*, means of reducing the consequences of sins viz., confession, repentance, *pranayama*, penance, *homa*, *japa* (muttering sacred texts), gifts, fasting, pilgrimages, *prayascitta* (expiation) and secular punishments, circumstances to be considered in prescribing expiation, assembly of learned men and their duties, expiation for grave sins such as killing a brahmin and for lesser sins, procedures followed, tonsure, substitutes for expiations, names and descriptions of all individual expiations, consequences of not undergoing expiations, historical accounts of the ideas of heaven, hells and torments, doctrine of ripening or fruition of evil actions or sins, rites after death, impurity on birth and death, purification, Vedic references to rites on death, cremation, burial, offering of water to deceased, collecting charred bones and casting them into sacred waters, *santi* rites, graces, person competent to perform rites after death, purification after birth or death, purification of body, of substances (pot, wells, food) of images and temples, circumstances in which periods of impurity depended, exceptions to rules about observance of impurity, *narayanabali* for those who commit suicide, emphasis on mental purity, derivation and definition of *sraddha*, *sraddha* and the doctrines of *karma* and rebirth, manes, eulogy of *sraddha*, person entitled to perform *sraddha*, qualifications of brahmins to be invited, people unfit to be invited, food recommended and condemned in *sraddha*, *sraddha* rites as described in Vedic texts, different kinds of *sraddha*, gift of cow; greatness of pilgrimage to holy places (mountains, rivers, forests) called *tirthas*, greatness of Ganges, Kasi, Gaya, Kuruksetra and other famous *tirthas*, comprehensive list of *tirthas* and concluding remarks on *tirthas*.

Volume V: *Vratas* (fasts) in Vedic literature, sutras and smrtis, definition and importance of *vratas*, people entitled to engage in *vratas*, classification of *vratas*, individual *vratas* such as Ramanavami, Aksayatriya, Ekadasi, Rsipancami, Navaratra, Durgotsava, Vijayadasami, Divali, Makarasankranti, Mahasivaratri, Holika, and Grahana (eclipses); importance of *kala* (time) *muhurta* (auspicious time), and influence of Astrology on Dharmasastra, Calendars, *santis* (propitiatory rites for averting a deity's wrath); Puranas and Dharmasastras, causes of disappearance of Buddhism from India, Tantrik doctrines and Dharmasastras, *yantras*, *cakras*, *mandalas* and Dharmasastras, Purvamimamsa and Dharmasastra, relation of Sankhya, Yoga and Tarka to Dharmasastra, cosmology and the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth, the fundamental conceptions and characteristics of Hindu (Bharatiya) culture and civilization from Vedic times to about 1800 A.D and future trends.

Harsacarita

Harsacarita in seven chapters is the biography of King Harsavardhana of Thaneshwar written by his court-poet Bana Bhatta in prose. This work is dated to the seventh century. Kane has edited this book with notes in English. In his introduction he has also dealt with the personal history of the author Bana Bhatta, his date, the biography of Harsavardhana and also the political and religious situations prevailing in the country at that time. This text is thus very important from political and historical points of view.

Kadambari

Kadambari is a prose romance written by Bana Bhatta. This is one of the most popular and astounding works of Sanskrit literature. Bana Bhatta is famous for his usage of lengthy sentences extending to many pages. This is a prose fiction dealing with one main story and many interrelated stories. The work is divided into two parts: *purvabhaga* and *uttarabhaga*. Scholars are of the opinion that Bana Bhatta wrote only the first part and the latter part was completed by his son Bhusana Bhatta. Kane has edited and written notes on the *Kadambari* and his work is one of the most ancient in this regard.

Sahityadarpana

Sahityadarpana literally meaning 'Mirror of Aesthetics' in Sanskrit, was written by Visvantha belonging to Orissa in 15th century. The book consists of ten chapters and deals with the two aspects of poetics and dramaturgy. Kane edited this book and wrote elaborate notes on the chapters.

Vyavaharamayukha

Vyavaharamayuka is a dharmasastric text. It consists of twelve chapters dealing with various aspects of code of conduct by individuals. The author Nilakantha belonged to the seventeenth century. Kane has edited and written detailed notes on this work. Besides he has also translated this text and has cited many case-laws.

Katyayanasmrtisaroddhara

This is a summary of the dharmasastric text written by Sage Katyayana. Kane has reconstructed this text from quotations, translated into English and has written notes.

A Brief Sketch of the Purvamimansa System

This book summarizes the ideals of the Purvamimansa system of Indian Philosophy which deals with the ritualistic portion of the Vedas. Kane originally published this as a paper in the *Annals of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* and then published it separately.

Dharmasutra of Sankhlikhita

Dharmasutras are aphorisms on *dharma* and the huge volume of Dharmasastra texts are indeed based on the Dharmasutras. Sankhalikhita is one among the authors of Dharmasutras. Kane has reconstructed the text from quotations. Initially this was published in the *Annals of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* and later was published separately.

Vedic Basis of Hindu Law

Kane contributed this originally as a paper to the *J.B.B.R.A.S* in 1922 and later on published it separately.

Uttararamacarita

Uttararamacarita is one of the most beautiful dramas of Sanskrit literature. It was written by the eight century poet Bhavabhuti. It deals with the story of the later life of Rama, his coronation after vanquishing Ravana, Sita's abandonment and the reunion of Rama and Sita. Kane has edited this text and written notes in English.

History of Sanskrit Poetics

This is a very popular work of Kane. Kane originally wrote this as an essay titled, "History of Alankara Sastra" and later on converted this in the form of a book. This book contains two parts. In the first part Kane deals with the important works in Sanskrit poetics, analysis of their contents and also the chronology of various writers on Sanskrit poetics. The second part consists of review of subjects that fall under the category of poetics.

Articles

"Bhamaha and Dandin" in *J.R.A.S*, 1908, pp. 543-547.

"Outlines of the History of Alankara Literature" in *Indian Antiquary*, vol. 41, 1912, pp. 124-128, 204-208.

"Pahlavas and Parasikas in Ancient Sanskrit Literature" in *Dr. Modi Memorial Volume*, 1930, pp. 352-357.

"Gleanings from the *Abhinavabharati* of Abhinavagupta" in *Dr. Pathak Commemoration Volume*, 1934, pp. 385-400.

"Imprecatory Verses in Ancient Copper Plates and Other Grants" in *Bharatiya Anusilana* in honour of Mm. Gaurshankar Ojha, part . V, 1935, pp. 1-17 (in Marathi).

"Intercaste Marriages in Modern India and in the Smrtis and Epigraphic Records" in the journal portion of *38 Bombay Law Reporter*, 1936, pp. 81-86.

"Gotra and Pravara in Vedic Literature" in *J.B.B.R.A.S (New Series)*, Vol. 12, 1936, pp. 1-18.

"The Marriageable Age of Girls in Ancient India" in *Dr. Jha Memorial Volume*, 1937, pp. 191-197.

"The *Mahabharata* and Ancient Commentators" in *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. XIX, 1938, pp. 163-172.

"A Note on the Kayasthas" in *The New Indian Antiquary*, Vol. I, 1939, pp. 740-743.

“Vedanta Commentators before Sankaracarya” in *Proceedings of the 5th All India Oriental Conference*, Lahore, Vol. II, pp. 937-953.

Conclusion

India is famous for her huge preserved rich literature right from the Vedic times till the present. The Dharmasastras or law books occupy a very important place in the heritage of India. The voluminous Dharmasastric works utilized by Kane enable us to have a very good idea of how people in ancient India contributed zealously towards maintenance of law, order and justice in the society. At the same time they also contributed to the spiritual well-being of the people. It is because laws in ancient India were given by sages rather than ordinary people. Unlike the modern day education where religion or spirituality have lesser room, in ancient India, the sages made sure that the education rendered came from a spiritual background and thus it had a dual purpose: taking care of the individual’s daily needs and also purifying his mind and preparing him for the highest spiritual well-being. In other words, the education was comprehensive, holistic and beneficial to the society. It may be observed that these Dharmasastras or law books called smrtis (meaning that which has to be remembered by individuals) deal with each and every aspect of an individual’s life beginning from the time he is in his mother’s womb, his education, gifts, taxation, duties as a citizen, his death and even after his death. Thus, these are part and parcel of an individual’s life irrespective of whether he is a commoner or a king and they are complete. This is quite different from the modern law system where there are different branches of law for different situations in life. And it is remarkable to note how our ancestors had handled many situations and problems that we face today with better poise and wisdom. Thus it is extremely important for every Indian to have a good knowledge of these Dharmasastras that enable us to shape our lives and live a complete life. They are also a veritable source for us to consult and handle some of the problems that we face today such as environment pollution or corruption. In this connection, *the History of Dharmasastra* is one of the most remarkable contributions of Mahamahopadhyaya Bharatratna P.V. Kane to India. His work enables Indians to be extremely proud of our ancestral heritage and knowledge and continue this tradition with pride. In the present day academic situation where there is knowledge sharing with people from all the countries of the world, if there is one Indian scholar whose writings are universally consulted by every Indologist—who works in the field of Dharmasastras all over the world—it is none other than P.V. Kane. Thus P.V. Kane is definitely the pride of India and plays a very important role in maintaining India’s spiritual and societal lineage in the three phases of time of past, present and the future.

References

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Kane, P. V. *History of Dharmasastra*. Vols. I-V. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1930-1962.

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