



Smithsonian Institution

Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

The People of India, Volume One

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DOOANEAHs.
(34)

"THE Dooaneahs are descendants of Burmese or Singpho fathers, from Assamese women captured in predatory irruptions and kept as slaves. Assamese males, carried off into slavery, are, from the loss of caste by their connexion with the Singphos, and the adoption of Singpho habits, also denominated Dooaneahs. They are a very hardy race, and inhabit the densest jungles, cultivating scarcely sufficient rice and opium for their maintenance, and subsisting, when their stock of grain is expended, on yams, kutchos, and other roots of the forests. Without the aid of the Dooaneahs, no military detachment could move to many parts of the frontier, for none are so expert as pioneers. With the dhao, or Singpho short sword, they will cut a footpath through the densest jungles in the most expeditious manner, thus enabling troops to move almost in any direction. They are not endowed with a martial spirit, and it is said that they will not stand the fire of musketry; but, if properly trained and disciplined, their fears might be surmounted. Their addiction to opium is, however, so great, that no permanent reliance could ever be placed in them as soldiers in any emergency; and judging by the opinion entertained of them by their former masters, the Singphos (from whose thralldom they have only lately escaped), it would seem inexpedient to place them in situations of trust, where the possibility of betrayal or defeat could be anticipated. The loss of their services as slaves, in cultivating the land, is deeply felt by the Singphos; but these latter have not yet known the full extent of their inconvenience. In course of time few Dooaneah slaves will remain attached to the Singphos, who must consequently either resort to manual labour themselves, or starve, or leave the province; which, by the way, would be the greatest boon we could desire, for the safety and improvement of our peaceable subjects."—*Sketch of Assam*, London, 1846, p. 126.

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