



Smithsonian Institution

Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

The People of India, Volume Three

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BRINJARA AND WIFE.

is employed, it must be quilted and stitched in the same manner and with the same patterns as the ordinary clothing, nor would any deviation be permitted. It is said of the Brinjaree women that they are the most perfectly chaste and faithful in India; and that however great a temptation may be held out to them, beautiful as many are, to change their rough out-door life for one of ease and luxury, they have never been known to yield to it—to become concubines of Mahomedans, or to enter in irregular connections with men of other castes. Whether among themselves their conduct may be equally correct, is perhaps open to doubt; but living as they do, as belonging to no settled society, it is hardly possible to understand, in all respects, their social condition. The men are bold, patient, hardy, and venturesome; and among all classes of merchants in India have acquired, as is their due, a reputation for perfect honesty. No matter how long, or how arduous the march, or how great the value of the goods they carry, they deliver them according to promise. In marches of hundreds of miles along unfrequented roads, without any one to overlook them or guard them, the Brinjaree conveys travel patiently and persistently, and deliver their invoices correctly. The consignment may be worth tens of thousands of rupees, but malversation is unknown. Thus by all native mercantile communities in India the Brinjarees are implicitly trusted. They frequently receive large advances for purchase of cattle or grain, and take up loans for the use of their Tandah, or, as it may be rendered in this sense, community for marriages, new gear, and the like, which are paid off with punctuality, though they may not return for one or two years, or even more, to the place where the sum was taken up. Sometimes they act as mere carriers; but the wealthy among them take contracts, such as to deliver so much wheat, or other grain, on a certain date, at a certain price, at a certain locality. The profits or losses upon the venture are divided among the members of the Tandah, according to the number of cattle employed by each. Railroads and metalled cart roads are inimical to Brinjarees; and yet from parts of the country where there are no made roads, their droves of cattle feed both railways and carts, and it will be long ere they can be dispensed with. As carriers of grain to large armies they are unsurpassed. The Duke of Wellington, in the Mahratta war, trusted them, and his supplies of grain and ghee never failed. When the British army before Seringapatam, in 1791, was sorely distressed for provisions, the Brinjarees who accompanied the Mahratta camp of Hurry Punt proved efficient and plenteous purveyors. Nor were their services the less conspicuous and beneficial in the Sikh campaign, under the direction of the great commissariat contractor Jotee Pershad.

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