



Smithsonian Institution

Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

The People of India, Volume Four

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SONAR.

Shroff, or a servant of Government. Many Sonars are having their children educated for this purpose, who in general turn out very well. Hereditary occupation by no means ensures improvement in work or execution, or fertility of design; but the requirements of Hindoo and Mahomedan jewellery are simple. The patterns do not change for centuries and centuries, and the same classes of ornaments which were carved upon statues and bas-reliefs a thousand and more years ago, are still worn by the people. All these have separate names. An ear-ring or necklace in English does not express anything beyond the mere ornament; but every known pattern of every description of jewellery in India has its distinctive name. It cannot be confounded with anything else, and can be ordered of a Sonar without mistake. In Delhi, Trichinopoly, Vizagapatam, &c., the English ornaments made by Sonars have attained a deservedly great and extensive reputation throughout the civilized world; and the delicate chasing of Cutch and Guzerat, the rose and other chains of the south, and the filagree work of the northern Circars, defy imitation by less subtle fingers than these Sonars.

The Photograph shows the Sonar at work. An earthen vessel of rude but very efficient form is his fireplace, which has a vent at top. His bellows a blowpipe; his tools a hammer or two, a pair of flexible tongs, a few pincers of different sizes, and a few steel chasing tools, and steel, basalt, and soap-stone dies for patterns. His anvil is generally a piece of basalt or green stone. With these simple means he executes the most delicate work in the world, and perhaps the most durable. It would be wrong to say all are of equal excellence and finish. That depends upon the workman, and a good Sonar workman is never out of employ anywhere.

The Sonar works entirely by weight, at so many "anas" in the rupee, varying from one ana as the lowest, up to two rupees for one rupee as the highest. In silver and gold, the tola, and its division into mashes is used; and the standard of intrinsic value is that of payment. The Sonar either finds gold and silver for his customers, or is found in them by them. The latter is the most general. Whatever weight is delivered to a Sonar, he must return in the ornament, and supply the same quality of metal he has received. But in this respect Sonars have an indifferent reputation, and by some, are, like tailors, considered entitled to "cabbage," over and above their wages for work. Thus, ornaments which look solid, are found filled with tiny pieces of lead. Gold is adulterated to a certain extent, as well as silver, with alloys; but as the Sonar cannot work with metal which has any great amount of alloy in it, it never suffers in any very essential degree. His best work is with the purest gold and silver, and in these the metal is treated with quicksilver again and again, until it has become soft and perfectly ductile.

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