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Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

The People of India, Volume Four

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NUTS.

perhaps, pure aborigines, yet have a strong aboriginal element among them in demon and snake worship, and in peculiar and very secret ceremonies, to which they attribute their success as performers, and their protection in their dangerous feats. Such ceremonies are only performed in their own camps, and in desert places where no one can see them; and they form the initiatory rites of young beginners, who necessarily preserve the secrets, whatever they may be, with perfect faithfulness. Sacrifices of animals and fowls take place on these occasions, nor is demon worship in any form unaccompanied by blood shedding. In Nut families the best looking girls are chosen for performers. These are not married, except to a dagger, and ordinarily become courtezans, being instructed in dancing and singing. In later life they become the concubines of men of the tribe, or contract second class marriages with them; but some females are always set apart for regular marriage. They are not taught performances of any kind, and their duty to the tribe is to bear as many children as possible. Some of the Nut women are very handsome; all, particularly the performers, are fond of gay clothes and ornaments, and Nut females are sometimes possessed of considerable wealth in jewels and gold. If a performing girl should bear a child, she is withdrawn at once from performance. Such a proof of her fertility is too valuable to be wasted.

Nuts belong to no settled community; they wander as they will from town to town, or village to village, living in tents after a true gipsy fashion, or in tents made of reed screens, which are weatherproof, and can be removed at will, rolled up, and carried away. They use asses for carriage, with bullocks, and ponies, which are ridden by the women. Reasons have already been given why they have to be watched carefully by the police; but of late years their feats in dacoity have been sharply suppressed, and it is probable that the crime is now rarely practised by them. At one period, however, before the department for the suppression of dacoity was established, the Nuts were among the most daring and notorious dacoits of India.

Although Nuts profess to be Hindoos, and, for the most part, bear Hindoo names, yet Mahomedan names are not unknown among them, and they are all votaries of some Mahomedan saints. Of these, Shah Madar, of Mukkinpoor, in Bengal, is perhaps the greatest, but there are other shrines in various parts of India to which equal reverence is paid. Nuts also observe some Mahomedan ceremonies, but they do not practice circumcision. In marriages they do not employ Brahmins. Their ceremonies are performed in their own camps by elders of the tribe, who are held in great reverence. The Nuts eat meat, but not beef, and drink frequently to excess. Those who perform dangerous feats have to train themselves for them, both men and women, and their gymnastic exercises are very severe. During the period of training all intoxicating liquors are forbidden. There are many divisions of the Nut tribes: Ingias, Bamunwal, Naheewal, &c.; and

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