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Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

The People of India, Volume Four

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In the Trans-Sutlej States a great number of descendants of formerly converted Hindoos are found, who have lost any tribal distinctions, such as have been already noticed in the Ranghurs (No. 178), Pachadas (No. 180), &c., and have become merged into the general local Mahomedan population. The original converts from Rajpoots or Jats are not called Sheikhs, but preserve distinctions which are understood among themselves, and are continued in relations of marriage and in other respects, which continue to keep up, even among Mahomedans, an affected distinction arising from superiority of original Hindoo caste. The Sheikhs, however, probably belonged to the lower orders of Hindoos, and are now in no respect different from ordinary Mahomedans; yet in the Photograph the figure to the right, with the strong black beard and full moustache, has the features of a Rajpoot, while those of the elder person on the left are as decidedly Mahomedan, and the moustache is removed in the orthodox Mahomedan manner, showing him to be a person of careful religious observances. The sheikhs are found everywhere in the Punjab, and in all manner of employments. During the Sikh domination Mahomedans were not allowed free exercise of their religion, and in pursuance of the ancient hereditary feud between them, in which the Sikhs had been victorious. Mahomedans in general, and especially those descended from converts, are held to be a despised race. Under the British administration, however, they have already risen very considerably, and are likely to rise in a corresponding degree with their natural intelligence. The persons represented are men in comfortable circumstances, landowners and farmers. The old man on the left wears a quilted tunic of purple chintz, with a plain muslin scarf, and is five feet seven inches in height. The figure on the right has a green embroidered coat, a loose white turban or handkerchief on his head, and a scarf of rich brocade over his shoulders.

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