



Smithsonian Institution

Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

The People of India, Volume Five

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CARPENTERS.
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There is no more respectable or useful class of artisans in India than the carpenters, who, in all parts of the country, north to south and east to west, are indispensable for the wants and needs of the population. They belong to the Soodra class of Hindoos, and though in the Punjab they have followed the belief of the Sikhs in their reverence for the Sikh Gooroos Govind and Ram Das, yet in other parts of India are worshippers of Devee, Krishna, or Seeva, according to the dominant faith of the locality. Their calling is a very ancient one. We read of them in the Institutes of Menu, and in the Mahabharat and Ramayana, and until houses were built of stone, or brick and mortar, carpenters were the sole architects. Their system of building pillars of wood crossed by beams, on the mortise and tenon principle, was followed and imitated in stone erections, and as the Hindoo science and practice of architecture admits of no arches, it is followed without deviation to the present day. Their tools are few and simple, and yet with these no work comes amiss to them. An adze with a heavy top and fine sharp edge, which is shown as used by the figure on the left of the Photograph, suffices for most upper work, and a short plane finishes it neatly. Chisels are used for mortises, and holes for nails are bored with a drill. From the rudest agricultural implements, as ploughs and hoes drawn by bullocks, to the most delicate carpenter work of balconies with rich carving and ornamentation, carpenters are found in every grade skilful workmen, though necessarily some exceed others in execution. Carpentry is one of the hereditary trades of India, nor is it, except in a few isolated cases, undertaken by Mahomedans. Hindoo carpenters only marry in their own caste or sect, for with them, as with other Indian artisans, occupation has become a caste. In some localities carpenters wear the sacred thread as Brahmins, and assume to have been descended from Kshuttries. They do not, however, rank higher than Soodras in general estimation; but those of the higher grades keep their caste exclusive, by marrying into no other.

In the ancient Hindoo polity of village communities, which are well preserved

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