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Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

The People of India, Volume Eight

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LINGAYETS.

equalised the masses in spiritual rank, and allowed all, even Brahmins, to be converts. Some portions of the Vedas were admitted as orthodox, but the Purans were rejected as human inventions. The morality of the whole creed was unexceptionable, while the sacred book might be read by all, and was expounded by the Lingayet priests, who were termed Jungums. Such a creed, simple, theistic, and perfectly intelligible to all, was welcomed by the middle and lower classes with enthusiasm, and Bussappa was treated as an incarnation of the sacred bull of Siva, and was acknowledged to be a divine apostle with a holy mission to men. The progress of the new faith alarmed King Vijala, and he attempted to apprehend Bussappa; he escaped, however, and put himself at the head of his converts, but was defeated. Bussappa then surrendered, and endeavoured to obtain the king's sanction to his sister's child being nominated successor to the kingdom; but this was resisted, and shortly after the king died, whether of poison, or in the course of nature is not certain. This event happened in A.D. 1166, nine years after his usurpation, and after it the persecution of Bussappa commenced. The eldest son of Vijala had succeeded his father, who pursued Bussappa to Krishpoora on the Malabar coast, where, to save himself from dishonour and torture, Bussappa threw himself into a well, and was drowned, his remains being cast out to be devoured by wild beasts. Another version, which is believed by the Lingayets is, that during his flight from Kulliani, he sat down, praying for refuge, on a sacred lingam at the village of Sungmeshwar, at the confluence of the Gutpurba and Malpurba rivers, when the stone opened, and he was absorbed into the divine essence. Bussappa's death did not, however, check the progress of his creed. Chun Bussappa, his nephew, born at the village of Arla Goondagee, of Shorapoor—where many relics of him still exist, and are annually worshipped by pilgrims, his cradle, some of his clothes, his silver drinking vessel, &c., being among the number—took up the great cause, and was perhaps more successful than his uncle. His followers grew to be literally hundreds of thousands. Wherever he went on his missionary tours, he is said to have defeated all Brahmins and Jains in argument, and to have been accepted as a divine apostle wherever he preached to the multitudes which thronged about him. So for upwards of 700 years this Lingayet creed has progressed rapidly and well. At times it suffered heavy persecutions from Brahmins, but in the end it has prevailed, and its professors may now be reckoned by millions, fairly rivalling, if not exceeding in some localities, the creed of Brahminism. As the Lingayet faith admits of converts, it is still increasing, especially among the lowest classes; for it gives them a status which, under their original condition, it would be impossible to attain. It has never relapsed into Hindooism, nor are Brahmins revered as with modern Sikhs; and it bids

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