



Smithsonian Institution

Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

The People of India, Volume Eight

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KHONDS.

(455)

THE Khonds, following the Gonds of the Central Provinces to the north, and other wild tribes to the north-east, inhabit the high lands which lie to the east of Cattack and the Northern Circars, and between them and His Highness the Nizam's dominions. These high lands form a peculiar and almost impenetrable tract of mountain and forest, which, in continuance of the central plateau of India, runs south from the Mahanuddee river as far as the Godavery, crossing which it continues to the Krishna. Diverging thence to the westward, they form the high ranges of Cuddapa, in which the wild tribes continue under the designation of Chenchowar, and thence skirting the bases of the Mysore plateau, mingle with the primitive tribes of the Western Ghats. The most northern portion of these hills contains Gonds, Saonras, and Khonds, who call themselves Kai, and the latter compose the majority of the population south of Orissa proper. It is doubtful whether they were ever subdued by the Hindoo dynasties of Orissa; and, though their chiefs were obliged to pay tribute, the mountains were too well defended to allow of any lodgments upon them, even had the climate rendered that possible under any circumstances. The Mussulmans who subdued Orissa made no attempts to reduce, to civilize, or to convert the Khonds; and thus they remained independent and undisturbed till they came in contact with us, and their condition, habits, and practices, were thoroughly investigated.

Thus they were found to be an industrious race, cultivating the soil, which is fertile and productive, and disposing of the produce in the plains below their mountains, or bartering them for English or native manufactures, such as cloths, hardware, &c. There is nothing in the costume of either men or women to attract particular attention. They were addicted to the practice of human sacrifice, called Meria, and obtained their victims in the low country, from individuals who were in the habit of kidnapping both boys and girls for the purpose, who were gradually prepared for the sacrifice by careful feeding and nurture, as will be hereafter explained. The Goomsoor chiefs, when the result of

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