

# S K E T C H E S

O F T H E

# M Y T H O L O G Y

A N D

C U S T O M S

O F T H E

H I N D O O S.



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L O N D O N :

P R I N T E D I N T H E Y E A R

M D C C L X X X V .

# S K E T C H E S

O F T H E

M Y T H O L O G Y

A N D  
C U S T O M S  
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M O S T R E S P E C T F U L L Y I N S C R I B E D

T O T H E H O N O R A B L E T H E

C O U R T O F D I R E C T O R S

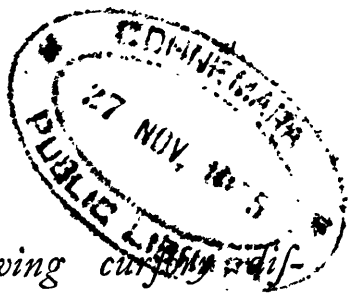
O F T H E

E A S T - I N D I A C O M P A N Y ,

B Y T H E I R D U T I F U L S E R V A N T ,

G E O R G E F O R S T E R .

London,  
July, 1785.



*T*HE following curious dissertation, which has been extracted from private letters, the Author is induced to lay before the Public, from a desire of throwing some light on a subject, hitherto, but partially known in Europe; and also, with the view of prompting others, whose bent of disposition and conveniency of situation may lead them into such researches, to enlarge on so curious a matter.

To hold out an asylum to the memory of an antient, and a once great people, who before the fall  
of

of their empire were amply enlightened by science, and who were governed by a system of laws and policy, which had the most salutary effects in rendering them virtuous and happy, will yield a sufficient compensation to the man of philanthropy, for every difficulty that he may encounter in the pursuit of a study which will be found, it is to be feared, entangled in some discouraging perplexities.



*Extract of a Letter, dated at  
Banaris in September, 1782.*

**T**HE city of Banaris, in point of its wealth, costly buildings, and the number of its inhabitants, is classed in the first rank of those now remaining in Hindustan, in the possession of the Hindoos.

To describe, with any degree of precision, the various temples dedicated in this place to the almost in-

B                      numerable

numerable deities, and to explain the origin of their foundation, with the necessary arrangement, would require a knowledge, infinitely superior to mine, in the mysterious rites of the Hindoo mythology.

They are, at this day, enveloped in such impenetrable obscurity, that even those Pundits who are the most skilfully versed in the Samscrit,\* are not able to throw on them lights sufficiently clear for the rendering them comprehensible to the generality of the people.

But as some relation, though imperfect, of a city so famous in Hindustan, and now so well known in

The language in which all their sacred legends are preserved.

Europe

Europe for having been one of the grand sources of the religious worship of the Hindoos, and being the chief repository of what science yet exists among them, may not be unacceptable to you, together with some cursory investigations of the mythology of Brimha, the task shall be attempted with every attention to the subject, and with the strictest adherence to truth.

If errors should arise on the treating on a matter hitherto slightly discussed, and from its complication exceedingly abstruse, I have to intreat your liberal indulgence; and that though mistaken in my conclusions, you will give me some commendation were it only for the endeavour of administering to a rational pleasure.

At the distance of eight miles from the city of Banaris, as it is approached on the river from the eastward, the eye is attracted by the view of two lofty minarets, which were erected by the order of Aurungzebe, on the foundation of an ancient Hindoo temple, dedicated to the Mhah Deve, or the God Eishwer.

The raising, on such sacred ruins, this towering Mahometan pile, which from its elevated height seems to look down with triumph and exaltation on the fallen state of a city so profoundly revered by the Hindoos, would appear to have been prompted to the mind of Aurungzebe by a bigotted and intemperate desire of insulting their religion.



If such was his wish, it hath been most completely fulfilled.

For the Hindoos consider this monument as a disgraceful record of a foreign yoke, and as proclaiming to every stranger, that their favorite city has been debased, and the worship of their gods defiled.

From the top of the minarets there is seen an entire and a very beautiful prospect of Bānaris, which occupies a space of about two miles and a half along the northern bank of the Ganges, and a mile inland from the river.

Many of the houses are remarkably high, some of them having six and seven stories, and built in a style resembling that fort *Fort of the Ganges*

ries of Portland, and which abounds in this part of the country.

The streets, wherein these lofty buildings are situated, are so narrow as not to admit of two carriages abreast.

The consequence of this large city being constructed on so confined a plan, is, that the air, from being deprived of a free circulation, becomes putrid and obnoxious, and in particular seasons causes fevers of a malignant species, and severe bilious obstructions.

In addition to this pernicious effect, proceeding from a corrupted atmosphere, there is at most times an intolerable stench, which arises from the many tanks dispersed in the different

ferent quarters of the town, whose waters and borders are appropriated to the common use of the inhabitants.

The filth also, which is indiscriminately thrown into the streets, and there left exposed, (for the Hindoos possess but a small portion of a general cleanliness) add to the compound of ill smells which so much offend the nostrils of every one entering this city.

The irregular and very confined mode which has been invariably adhered to in the construction of Banaris, has, in a great measure, destroyed the pleasing effects which symmetry and arrangement would otherwise have bestowed on a city, entitled from its numerous and expensive habitations,  
to

to demand a preference to any capital which I have seen in India.

In the researches which I have been enabled to make into the principles of the Hindoo religion, I have received great aid from a conversant knowledge of the Mhahrattah language, and an acquaintance, though trivial, with the Sumscrit.

The use of this last tongue is now chiefly confined to a particular sect of Bramins, who officiate in the character of priests, and it hath ever been adopted as the channel of conveying to the Hindoos, the essentials of their religion, with all the various forms of their worship.

The Sumscrit is a sonorous language, its periods flow with great  
boldness,

boldness, and terminate in a cadence peculiarly musical, and it abounds in a pith and conciseness far superior to any other, with which I am in any wise acquainted.

An extract of a floke or stanza, which has been quoted by Mr. Halhed, is a striking testimony of the nervous composition, and the laconic turn of the Sumscrit.

As it is a stanza of only four lines, I will insert it, and also attempt the translation.

Pētāche rēñwān śhētrōō

Father — in debt — enemy

Mātāh śhētrōō rēśhēlēnēē

Mother — enemy — extravagant or immoral

Bhāriāh rūpēwūtēē śhētrōō

Wife — beautiful — enemy

Pōōtrē śhētrōō n'pūndītāh

Son — enemy — unlearned

The mother who hath lost her fame,  
The fire profuse, and foe to shame,  
Are to their race a pest.

A bride's soft joys oft' thorns implant,  
And he, who roams in folly's haunt,  
Destroys his father's rest.

The Hindoos believe in one God,  
without beginning and without end ;  
on whom they bestow, descriptive of  
his power, a variety of epithets.

But the most common appellation,  
and which conveys the sublimest sense  
of his greatness, is, Sree Mun Narrain,  
the universal Protector.

The Hindoos, in their first and  
grand supplication to the Deity, ad-  
dress him as endowed with the three  
attri-

attributes, of omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience; which, in the Sumscrit, are expressed by the terms, neer anjin, neer akar, and neer goon.

Though this explanation may not, in literary strictness, comprise in it the precise meaning of the English text, it doth so virtually, and in the amplest sense.

A circumstance which forcibly struck my attention, was the Hindoo belief of a Trinity.

The persons are, Sree Mun Nar-rain, the Mhah Letchimy (a beautiful woman), and a Serpent, which are emblematical of strength, love and wisdom.

These persons, by the Hindoos, are supposed to be wholly indivisible.

The one is three, and the three are one.

In the beginning they say, that the Deity created three men, to whom he gave the names of Brimha, Vyftnou, and Shevah.\*

To the first, was committed the power of creating mankind, to the second of cherishing them, and to the third that of restraining and correcting them.

Brimha, at one breath, formed the human kind out of the four elements; amongst which he infused, as I understood the intrepertation, a vacuum.

\* Often called Eijhwer, or the Mhah Deve.



Before the creation of man, Sree Mun Narrain framed the world out of a chaos; it was covered with the waters, furrounded by an utter darkness, and inhabited by a demon, the supposed author of evil, whom the Godhead drove into an abyss under the earth.

The Hindoos, as Mr. Halhed, in his Translation of the Code of Hindoo Laws, has fully and clearly set forth, are arranged in four grand casts or tribes\*; that of the Bramin, the Chittery, the Bhyse and the Sooder.

\* There is, in India, an aboriginal race of people who are not classed in any of the sects, and are employed in the meanest and most menial offices. They are not permitted to enter any temple of the Hindoos, and in their diet they have no restriction. On some parts of the coast of Choromandel they are called Pariahs, and, in Bengal, Hurges.

Each

Each of these casts are sub-divided into numerous sects, the particular usages of which are preserved with great care and attentive distinctions.

There is an immense number of sectaries of the same tribe, who do not admit of the intercourse of marriage with each other, or of eating at the same board.

From the best information which I have been enabled to procure, it would seem that the genuine Chittery, or Rajah race, has for a great length of time been extinct, and in its place a spurious tribe has been introduced.

The Hindoos, composing these casts and classes, are ultimately branched out in two divisions; the one denominated

minated the Vyftnou Bukht, and the other the Shevah Bukht.

The followers of the first are diftinguifhed by marking the forehead with a longitudinal, and thofe of the fecond with a parallel line.

In the temple of Vyftnou, he is worfhipped under the representation of a human figure, having a circle of heads and four hands, emblems of an all-feeing, and an all-provident Being.

The representation of a fabulous bird, on which he is fuppofed to ride, and denotive of the velocity of his motion, is frequently placed in front of his image.

Shevah or Eifhwer, or as he is ufually called by the Hindoos, the  
Mhah

Mhah Deve, or great God, is represented by a compound figure, describing the male and female parts of generation, and designed as symbols of procreation and fecundity.

These faculties or qualities being held amongst the Hindoos as the choicest blessings, and the deprivation of them deemed a severe reproach and misfortune.

Facing this designation of the Mhah Deve, is generally seen, in a suppliant posture, the image of a cow, which is said to have derived its peculiarly sacred qualities from having been chosen by this god as his favorite conveyance.

The more enlightened Pundits tell you, that this animal hath been preserved from slaughter from its great utility

utility to man; it being his ablest assistant in the labors of the field, and the chief support in his immediate maintenance.

Not to say that it argues a sound policy to stamp this creature with so sacred a mark; for were its flesh eaten, as Hindustan is productive of but few horses, the various branches of agriculture would suffer an essential injury.

Another figure represents Shevañ with four hands (holding in them different emblems of his power) and five heads; four of which are directed to the cardinal points, and the fifth is placed with the face upwards, in the act of contemplating the grand Deity.

After the service which Brimhah has performed on earth, it would reasonably be concluded, that his praise for the obligations which mankind have received at his hands, in some degree, would be conformable to his works.

But the Hindoos have not dedicated one temple to his honor, nor have they set apart or sanctified one day in remembrance of his deeds.

It would redound but little to my credit, were I to insert in this place, the reason alledged in their religious tracts, for this seeming neglect of Brimhah.

It is a tale framed to amuse the credulous Hindoo, and procure a meal to an artful priest.

This

This ostensible want of attention to the memory of Brimhah, may on a more abstracted ground be attributed to the opinion, that the powers of procreation having been once set in action, and operating by a law, general and undeviating, whose immediate benefits exists and are evidently displayed in its effects, there was no necessity of commemorating the first individual cause.

The Hindoos believe implicitly in predestination, and in the transmigration of the soul.

The first, as it frequently cramps the genius and obstructs its progression, yet has a tendency in consoling them in every misfortune, and administering to them a comfort in all the untoward events of life.

They say it is the hand of God, which for some inscrutable purpose directs and impels the actions of his creature.

The doctrine of the metempsychosis restrains them from the use of animal food\* ; an aliment not necessary, and often attended with pernicious consequences in a hot climate,

This belief has also a strong tendency to infuse into their minds an abhorrence of all sanguinary acts, and to inculcate the virtues of humanity and a general affection,

\* This tenet is not at this day strictly adhered to, for the Hindoos of the second and fourth cast occasionally use flesh meats, and the Bramins of Bengal invariably eat fish.

The



The Hindoos compute their grand evolutions of time by Joques, of which they have four, corresponding in their nature with the golden, silver, brazen, and iron ages of the antients.

The present, they say, is the Khullee, or the fourth Joque; and that at the expiration of every age, the Supreme Being has destroyed this globe of earth, which has been recreated at the commencement of the one succeeding, and that a continued succession of Joques will revolve *ad infinitum*.

The records of this ancient and extraordinary people, unfortunately for the learned of the present day, teem so profusely with fable, and abound throughout in such extravagant relations

tions of the actions of their demi-gods, greatly similar in their feats to the Bacchus, Hercules, and Theseus of the Greeks, that no rational or satisfactory conclusion can be drawn for any adjustment of chronology.

A Pundit will introduce into his legend a laack\* of years with as much facility, and perhaps conviction to himself, as a modern commentator would reduce to his standard half a century.

The principles of the Hindoo religion, with its most essential tenets, were composed, it is asserted, by Brimhah, and comprized in four books, entitled the Baidis or Vaidis, a word

\* An hundred thousand.

signifying

signifying mystery in the Sumscrit language.

In that part of the peninsula of India bordering on the Choromandel side, these sacred writings are named the Vaidums.

The Telingahs and the Malabars commonly change the letter B into a V, and invariably terminate all Sumscrit words with an M.

The Shaftre, meaning science, is a most voluminous commentary on the Baidis; and has been written by various Pundits, for the purpose of illustrating their mythology. From the Shaftre proceed those preposterous and irreconcilably superstitious ceremonies which have been dragged by their  
doctors

doctors into the Hindoo system of worship ; all of them tending to shackle the vulgar mind, and produce in it a slavish reverence for the tribe of Bramins.

The privilege of reading the Baid and expounding its texts is only allowed to them, and prohibited under severe penalties from the inspection of the other casts.

By the sole investment of this singular authority, the priest is left at liberty to explain the original doctrine as may be the most conducive in consolidating the power and promoting the interests of his order.

In the transmigration of the soul into different bodies, consists the various

ous

ous gradations of reward and punishment amongst the Hindoos.

Conformably to their good or evil actions they are transfosed into the bodies of such creatures, whether of the human or brute species, as by their conduct, whilst in the occupation of their former tenements, they may have merited.

They do not admit of the infliction of eternal punishment, and shudder at the idea of a belief so disconsonant to the opinion which they have formed of the Supreme Being.

Evil dispositions, they say, are chastised by a confinement in the bodies of those animals whose natures they most resemble, and are constrained to occupy them until their vices are either

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eradicatèd,

eradicated, or so purged as that they shall be judged worthy of possessing superior forms.

The good actions of man, the Hindoo law-giver has written, will be rewarded by their being made to personify such beings as enjoy the utmost human happiness.

As that which the magistrate experiences on the just and merciful execution of the trust which has been committed to him; or, that high sense of pleasure which the man of humanity partakes of, when he has alleviated the distresses of the unfortunate, or otherwise promoted the welfare of mankind.

The man who is acceptable in the sight of his God, the Hindoo says, will  
will

will copiously imbibe all those heart-felt satisfactions, which are produced from the well performance of the different duties of life.

After having occupied a series of bodies to the approbation of the Deity and his soul, from a pursuit of virtue, shall be purified from the taints of evil, the Hindoo is then admitted to participation of the radiant and never ceasing glory of his first cause.

The soul's receiving this act of bliss, is described, by comparing it to a ray of light, attracted by the grand powers of the sun, to which it shoots with an immense velocity, and is there absorbed in the blaze of splendor.

Yum Durm Rajah officiates in the same capacity amongst the Hindoos,

as Minos did in the infernal regions of the antients.

At the tribunal of Yum Durm, all departed souls are supposed to appear, and their actions are proclaimed aloud by this judge, who passes an immediate sentence.

Should the disposition of a man have been so flagitiously wicked and depraved, as to be judged unworthy even of an introduction into the body of the vilest animal, such corporeal torments are imposed on him as may be thought adequate to the transgression, and the soul is afterwards placed in some suitable station on earth.

According to the religious traditions of the Hindoos, Sree Mun Narrain, since the creation of the world, has at  
nine



nine different periods assumed incarnated forms for the purpose of eradicating some particular evil, or otherwise chastising the sins of mankind.

The Hindoos worship a secondary species of deity, which they wildly reckon at the number of the thirty-three crore\*, and who in their different functions are designed to represent the multiplied infinitude of power of the Supreme Deity.

From the croud of images which the Bramin has placed in the temples of the Hindoos, they have been branded with the appellation of idolaters, or adorers of many gods.

Let this mode of offering up supplications

A crore is a hundred laacks.

plications or thanksgivings to the Supreme Being be dispassionately examined, and it may be seen, that a personification of the attributes of the Deity, is not unfitly adapted to the general comprehension.

For those, and they compose a great portion of the people, who, from a want of the requisite education, are not endowed with the ability of reading the praise of God, can with facility conceive an idea of his greatness, by contemplating a figure, sculptured with many heads and with many hands, adorned with every symbol of human power, and beheld by all classes of men with the utmost reverence and awe.

Were the origin of emblematical figures deduced with a positive degree  
of

of certainty, there would remain little doubt of discovering, that they far preceded the use of letters.

The Spanish records mention, that the intelligence of the first arrival of the Europeans on the coast of Mexico, was described to Motezuma by figures painted on cotton cloth.

In a rude society, it was evidently a more easy operation to convey an idea thro' the medium of a simple figure cut in wood or moulded in clay, than to invent an alphabet, and out of it compose an assemblage of words necessary for the formation of a language.

The immense group of Hindoo gods enjoy immortality, which they are gifted with from drinking a beverage, called

called Amrut, and which seems to bear some analogy to the nectar of Homer's deities.

In their mythology, there is an elegant description of nine goddesses, resembling in a great degree the muses of the antients, in the nature of their provinces.

There is also, most picturesquely delineated, the God of Love, who has a variety of epithets, all significant of the unbounded sway, which he possesses over the hearts of men.

His common names are Kaum and Mudden, and he is represented as a pleasing youth, armed with a bow and five arrows, denoting the five senses, each of which weapon is baited with different qualities of the poison, which  
is

is infused by the communication of the passion of love.

A curious picture was found at Tanjore, when the fort was captured, of Kaum riding on an elephant, whose form was composed of the figures of seven young women, which were entwined together in so ingenious and whimsical a manner, that they exhibited an exact shape of that bulky animal.

In the Biss Eishwer Pagoda at Banaris, there is a design well executed in stone of the God of the Sun, sitting in a chariot and driving a horse with twelve heads, allusive of the twelve signs of the Zodiac.

If the perusal of this rough and abbreviated sketch, should lead on any

F gentleman

gentleman established in this part of the country, and possessing an inclination to this cast of investigation, to prosecute a farther and a more minute inquiry into the principles of the Hindoo religion, I shall deem the trivial labour undergone in this research, as most amply compensated.

Without putting etymological proofs to the torture, or moulding to the shape of his system the generally unsatisfactory and deceitful aids of chronology, the careful observer might be enabled to trace some points of the religious worship of the Hindoo into Egypt.

There he would discover the sacred Bull, or the Cow of Shevah, placed high in the holy legends of the Coptis; he would see the Snake, one of  
the

the mysterious associates of Sree Mun Narrain, devoutly revered by that nation, as an hieroglyphical emblem of wisdom and longevity.

It would also appear, that the Onion so frequently mentioned by historians and travellers, as held in profound veneration amongst the Egyptians, is no less marked with reverence in Hindustan; where, though the use of a vegetable diet, is so strongly inculcated, and with a few deviations, commonly adopted, the Onion is forbidden to some of the sects of priests; and, in the upper part of India, when an oath, on which a matter of consequence depends, is administered, the Bramin frequently introduces the Onion to render the ceremony more awful.

On comparing the religious tenets, and the forms of worship of the Hindoos, with those of the ancients, there appears in the functions of some of the deities, a strong uniformity of likeness, which is not unreasonably placed in the same point of view, and were it possible to procure a description of the occupations and the various powers of the Hindoo subaltern gods, it might be found that the celestial group of the western pantheon, had been selected from the divine assembly of Bimhah.

The Egyptians and the Greeks in their commerce with India, thro' the channel of the Red Sea, have left, I am induced to believe, many tokens behind them of their connection with the Hindoos,



In the collection of a gentleman at Banaris, there are several valuable antiques, which he purchased of the merchants of that city; one of which, representing a Grecian matron, is cut in a style bearing every mark of a masterly hand.

There is another, on which Cleopatra is exhibited in the act of being bitten by the asp.

The same gentleman had in his possession a Medusa's head, on an emerald, found also at Banaris, which he sent to England, and it has there been acknowledged to be genuinely Greek.

There was procured at Guzerat, some years ago, a very high finished cameo, whereon, Hercules slaying the Nemean Lion, was executed in a most beautiful and striking manner.

These

These circumstances are adverted to with some shew of evincing, that during the intercourse which existed between the natives of Egypt and of India, the former might have introduced into their country, with the rare and luxurious products of Hindustan, certain tenets and ceremonies of the Hindoo mythology.

In considering of the tract by which these antiques were brought into India, I must not omit mentioning, that they might have found their way into that country in the cabinets of some of the Mussulman conquerors; who, in the more early period of their empire, were as warm and as enthusiastic admirers of Greek productions and literature as ever the Romans were; and it is a fact, in need of no illustration,

illustration, that the revival of letters and the arts, after Rome had been swallowed up in Gothic ruin, received the most potent aid from the Arabian Kaliph, Haroun ul Rachid.

I am sincerely to lament that my knowledge in astronomy is so very confined, that I am almost wholly incapacitated from describing the attainment which the Bramins had arrived at in that science, long, previously to the æra in which it flourished in the western world.

The Zodiac, with its twelve signs, is well known to them; and they have bestowed on the seven days, commencing the week with Sunday, the names of the planets.

The

The solar year of the Hindoos consists of twelve months, making three hundred and sixty days, and once in three years they annex an additional month, for the inclusion of those days which are wanting to compleat the exact space of time required by the earth in making its triennial revolution round the sun.

The days of the month are calculated from the period of the full moon, and the number of them is divided into two equal parts.

To the portion of days comprized in the increasing half of the moon, they give the name of Sodd, or filling; and the other, they term Bole, or the Wain.

The Jogue is divided into Iuftra of twelve years, each of which is diftinguifhed by its peculiar denomination.

The obfervatory at Banaris is an undeniable proof of the knowledge which the Hindoos have acquired in the motions of the celeftial bodies.

Could access be gotten to fuch records of the Hindoos, as are unaccompanied with that redundancy of fable, with which their priests have fo copioufly interwoven them, it would not be prefumptuous to fuppofe, that we fhould difcover they were, in the more early age of the world, one of the moft enlightened and powerful nations then inhabiting the face of the earth.

Their empire, as related in many of their historical tracts, consisted of fifty-six separate principalities, ultimately governed by one ruler, whose kingdom extended from the southern borders of Tartary to the island of Ceylon, and from the confines of Af-fam and Arracan to the river Indus.

This immense territory was inhabited by a people divided into four distinct tribes, each exercising different functions and occupations, and all uniting in their various branches to promote a general good.

It abounded in fair and opulent cities, which were decorated with magnificent and lofty temples for the worship of the gods, and with sumptuous mansions, gardens and fountains  
for

for the pleasure and accommodation of the people.

Useful and elegant artifans, well skilled in their various trades, in the raising stupendous buildings, in the fabricating gold, silver, and the most delicate cotton cloths, and in the curious workmanship of precious stones and metals, all found ample encouragement in the exercise of their several professions.

It were almost superfluous to say, that if some glaring indulgences in favor of the sacred tribe are excepted, Hindustan must have been governed by salutary and well digested laws.

From the translation of the code by Mr. Halhed, it is seen, that a well chosen system of equitable regulations

directed the Hindoos in the punishment of crimes, and for the security of property.

The traveller was enabled to journey through this extensive empire with an ease and safety unknown in other countries.

The public roads were shaded with trees; at every halting place a caravan-fera, with a pond or a well pertaining to it, was founded for the conveniency of the passenger, and should he in any part of the country have been pillaged, and could produce a testimony of his loss, the district in which the damage had been sustained was obliged to make restitution.

When this empire, its polished people, and the progress which art and science



science have made amongst them, are attentively considered and reflected on; when, at the same periods, a retrospective view is thrown on the states of the European world, then immersed in, or only immerging out of ignorance and barbarity, we must behold Hindustan with a wonder and respect; and we may assert, without forfeiting a claim to truth and moderation, that, however far the western nations have, in improvements and refinement, outstripped the followers of Brimhah, yet in the more early periods of life, they, certainly did possess valuable materials of philosophy and useful knowledge.

The humane mind, will, naturally, be impressed with a sense of sorrow and pity for a people who have fallen  
from

from so conspicuous a height of glory and fortune, and who, perhaps, have contributed to polish and exalt the very men who now hold them in subjection.

To form a satisfactory judgment of the genius of the Hindoos, or to describe, with a due accuracy, the degree to which they raised art and science, it were requisite, if the necessary materials could be procured, that we did endeavour to exhibit a view of the situation in which these people were placed before they were conquered by the victorious followers of Mahomed.

A partial and a very degrading relation would be made of them, were the description of their laws, government and manners, taken from the appearance

ance they make in the eye of the world at this day.

The empire of Hindustan was overthrown by a fierce race of men, who in their furious course of conquest, exerted the most strenuous efforts, in levelling every monument of worship and taste.

They massacred the priests and plundered the temples, with a species of keenness and ferocity, which their prophet, himself, might have gloried in.

A people thus crushed, groaning under the load of oppression, and dismayed at the sight of such cruelties, must soon have lost the spirit of science and the exertion of genius.

Particu-

Particularly, as their fine arts were so blended with the system of religion, that the persecution of the one must have shed the most baneful influence on the existence of the other.

To decide on, or affix the character of the Hindoo, from the point of view in which he is now beheld, would be in some degree tantamount to an attempt of conveying to the mind an exact idea of antient Greece, from the materials now presented by that wretched country.

The disquisition of the man of philanthropy, and who has shaken off the fetters of prejudice, will be far different; he will enjoy an heart-felt pleasure in contributing his aid towards dispelling the mortifyng cloud, which

which hath long inveloped the history of the Hindoo.

This candid investigator will carry him back to that æra of grandeur which his country enjoyed in her day of prosperity, and there hold him out for the inspection and information of mankind; the generality of whom, whether from motives of contempt or habits of indolence, have acquired but a trivial and a very incorrect knowledge of this antient people.

It will then be seen, that the genius of the Hindoos was so happily led on, and their bent of disposition so aptly regulated and attempered by the rules established for the performance of their several occupations and professions, that we are forcibly induced to

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entertain a most respectable opinion of the equity of their laws and the wisdom of their government.

A precision, which eradicated the idea of an error, prescribed to them their respective duties in the state and in society, and wholly precluded any one sect from infringing on the privileges of another.

The Bramin, was invested with uncontrollable power in all matters of religion; he became the invariable medium, through which the three inferior classes addressed their God; he was also the sole repository and dispenser of science, and to his care and ability was intrusted the education of youth.

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The importance of these offices must have given to the Bramin great sway in a community, where the attaining at a knowledge of the mode of worship from its inexpressible variety of ceremony, becomes a task of arduous labor, and where at the same time it is deemed an obligation indispensably incumbent on the Hindoo for his future welfare, that he be well versed in the performance of the rites of his religion.

These employments were judged of sufficient magnitude to occupy the study and attention of the Bramin, and he was strictly prohibited from engaging in any temporal concern.

The authority of exercising every function of royalty seems to have devolved, without a reserve, on the

Chittery or Rajah, and his possessions were held hereditary in the line of legitimate male primogeniture.

The younger branches of this race had commands in the army bestowed on them, and they were commonly entrusted with the charge of the forts and the strong holds of the country.

The occupation of a merchant, with the transaction of every species of traffic, was delivered over to the Bhyse or Baniam, and it was declared unlawful for the other tribes to engage in any branch of commerce.

The husbandman, the artisan, the common soldier and the labourer, composed the fooder, or the fourth cast of the Hindoos, and each of these  
 respective



respective professions was strongly guarded against encroachments.

Thus distinctly arranged and on the severest penalties, interdicted from any extraneous mixture or the admission of profelytes, the Hindoo government acquired an uniformity and a vigor, the natural result of its happy principles.

Were an analogy ascertained between the mythology of the Hindoos and the Egyptians, very perceptible traces of which present themselves, it may then become a matter of doubt, which people for the greatest space of time have been the most polished and enlightened.

From the adductions which I have brought forward, for the explanation of  
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of some of the most essential tenets of the mythology of the Hindoos, and for the general demonstration of the antiquity of that nation, it may appear to you, that I maintain the doctrine of Egypt's having received a portion of her stock of science and religion from India.

With a deference to popular opinion, but without the prepossessed determination of fabricating a system and adapting to it partial arguments, cautiously selected for its support, I will confess to you, that I am a follower of the belief.

One fact, amongst some others, has afforded me a satisfactory proof of the high antiquity of the Hindoos, as a civilized nation, and marks the  
strongest

strongest disapprobation of any foreign intercourse.

They are forbidden to cross the river Attoc, the name of which, in many dialects of their language, signifies prohibition, and should they pass this boundary, they are immediately held unclean, and in the strict sense of their religious law, forfeit their rank in the tribes they may be classed in.

It is not, therefore, reasonable to suppose that any part of a people, under this restriction, and who seem to have been so centred in themselves, as to positively reject the admission of profelytes, would have emigrated into a distant country, and bring from thence a system of religious worship.

Let

Let me conclude this comparative review with observing, that—When we see a people who were possessed of an ample stock of science and well digested rules, for the protection and improvement of society, and who professed a religious creed, whose tenets consist of the utmost refinement and variety of ceremony, and at the same time, observe, amongst other Asiatic nations, and the Egyptians of former times, but partial distributions of this knowledge, law and religion, we are led to entertain a supposition—that the proprietors of the lesser have been supplied from the sources of the greater fund.

If the positions which I have stated, are thought to convey reason, they will afford greater pleasure to the man of  
 curious

curious study than those unsubstantial and confused chronological proofs, which are often framed as they may most commodiously accord with some favorite Hypothesis.

Amongst the Hindoos, marriage\*, when it can be performed with any degree of conveniency, is deemed a religious duty of an indispenfable nature; and it is believed, that propagating species in that state, entitles parents to singular marks of divine favor.

\* This word, in the Sanscrit language, signifies pleasure. The Hindoos in common usage have but one wife, and when this rule is deviated from, it is considered as an indecency. There is a set of mendicants, called Joquees or Byraghees, who live in a state of celibacy, but it is not a numerous one.

They shew a disapprobation of celibacy by many marks of opprobrium and scorn ; and, I have frequently observed, that when a Hindoo has been asked if he was a married man, he has appeared disconcerted, and ashamed at the fact obliging him to answer in the negative, and immediately attributed the cause of his situation to some particular misfortune.

It is to this institution, which is so strongly recommended, and from a stigma being affixed on the non-obedience to it, I may say, even enforced—that the generally great population of Hindustan, and its speedy recovery after the calamities of war and famine, must be largely ascribed.

The entire system of the domestic ordinances and œconomy of the Hindoos, is founded on a strong, yet a simple basis, out of which arise effects the most happy in themselves, and powerfully operative in uniting the leading bonds of society.

From the established laws and usage of the country, the wife depends for the enjoyment of every pleasure, as well as for the mere ordinary accommodations of life, on the immediate existence of her husband.

It becomes her invariable interest to preserve his health, and her happiness is absolutely centred on his living to an old age.

On the demise of the husband, his wife, literally, devolves into a *caput*

*mortuum*, she cannot marry again. she is deprived of all consequence in the family, and is divested of every mark of ornament and distinction,

There are certain religious ceremonies not lawful for her to perform ; and, in some instances, she is held unclean ; but, on all occasions, after her husband's death, the widow is classed in the house as a slave, or a menial servant.

Amongst the three first casts of Hindoos, where the idea of honour is more refined, and is oftentimes carried to an extreme, rather than suffer this gradation, by which every female attraction is extinguished, and the women themselves reduced to the lowest degree of mortification, on the pretence



pretence of matrimonial affection, they frequently devote themselves on the funeral pile of their husbands.

In addition to the dread of so degraded a state of humiliation, the widow, on the other side, is told by the Bramins, that in consequence of performing this act of heroïsm, she will partake of the most exquisite future joys, and that her progeny will become the immediate charge of the deity,

Though the issue of such a resolution must forcibly affect the feelings of humanity, yet as it would appear to originate in a principle, tending to strengthen a salutary domestic policy, it ought not to be hastily condemned as a custom wholly cruel and unjust.

Con-

Conformably to the state of domestic subordination, in which Hindoo women are placed, it has been judged expedient to debar them from the use of letters.

The Hindoos invariably hold the language, that female acquired accomplishments are not necessary; whether for the purpose of contributing to a woman's own happiness, or for preserving that decorum of character, and simplicity of manners, which alone can render her useful or amiable in the estimation of her family.

They urge, that a knowledge of literature would have an injurious tendency in drawing a woman from her household cares, and would conduce to give her a distaste to those offices

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in which are centered the only satisfaction and amusement that she can with propriety and an observance of rectitude, partake of; and such is the force of custom, that a Hindoo woman would incur a severe reproach were it known, that she could read or write.

The dancing girls, whose occupations are avowedly devoted to the pleasures of the public, are on the contrary educated in most branches of learning, with the utmost care, and are minutely instructed in the knowledge of every attraction and blandishment which can operate in communicating the most refined pleasures.

You

You will be pleased to observe, that these women are not obliged to shelter themselves in private haunts, or are they, on account of their professional conduct, marked with any opprobrious stigma.

They compose a particular class of the society they may have been originally attached to, and enjoy the declared protection and sanction of government, for which they are assessed according to their several capacities.

No religious ceremonies or festival of any kind is thought to be performed with the order requisite, unless accompanied with dancing girls, and it is usual for them on a fixed day in the week to attend at the court of the prince or governor of the district,  
either

either to make their obeifance, or exhibit fome entertainment.

And as a compenfation for fuch fervices, they are endowed with certain grants of government lands.

An Hindoo family, is implicitly governed by the male fenior in it, to whom there is fhewn every token of reverence and refpect.

A fon will not fit in the prefence of his father without an exprefs defire, and in his deportment and converfation obferves to him the moft affectionate behaviour.

In the courfe of my refidence in India, and acquaintance with the Hindoos, I have known but few instances of female incontinence amongft their

married women, and not one of direct undutifulness to parents.

I cannot avoid observing, also, in this place, that I never heard of a Hindoo free-thinker, and that their most illustrious characters, and men of the world, such as Scindia, Nanah Purnawees\* &c. believe the tenets of their doctrine with as much sincerity, and practise ~~the~~ the most minute ceremony with as much scrupulous attention as the simplest peasant in their country.

\* Eminent Mhahrattah chiefs.

*Extract*

*Extract of a Letter written at  
Kachmire, April, 1783.*

**T**HE religion which prevails in these parts\*, is that of Brimhah, and as I have already in a small sketch endeavoured to throw some light on that ancient and curious system of worship, I will now pass it over, with an offer of presenting those remarks to you should you ever be disposed to read them.

There does not exist a greater difference in the manners of the inhabitants of these mountains, and the people of your quarter, than generally does between high and lowlanders of the same nation.

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The mountains at the head of the Punjab.

I took notice of two usages, which seem peculiar to these mountaineers, that of not shaving the beard, and embracing; this ceremony is performed by inclining the head over the left shoulder of the party embraced, and is never used more than one time at a meeting.

The custom of permitting the beard to grow, proceeds, perhaps, from a certain ferocity and roughness immediately incident to their situation, and predominant in the disposition of all mountaineers; which, prompts them in different modes to shew their disdain and contempt of the softer and more luxurious manners of their low country neighbours.

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The embracing over the left shoulders only, take its rise, I would conjecture, from the desire of having the right hand at liberty in case of danger.

The women have bright olive complexions, are pretty, and most delicately shaped.

There is a pleasing freedom in their manners, which without having any tendency to immodesty, or seeming to arise from habits of licentiousness, strikes you, as the simple result of that unlimited confidence which the Hindoo husbands in general repose in their wives.

I have known the women to stop in the way, though a pot of water has been on their heads, and converse unreservedly

fervedly with passengers, directing them with great good nature and civility in the right road, or communicating to them any other common information.

Their dress I think, is agreeable and decent, consisting of a petticoat with a border, commonly of a different colour, and a close jacket, which comes half way down the waist, and, from the bottom of the fore part of it, drops a loose stomacher, which reaches to the girdle,

Their hair, which is held by them in as high an estimation as that beautiful ornament can be regarded by our gayest western females, is plaited and interwoven with black silk or cotton strings,

strings, which falling down the back, almost sweeps the ground.

Over this dress, they throw in a most becoming and graceful fashion, a veil, which seldom touches, but never wholly conceals the face.

The women of the principal people are kept in Zinanahs, as amongst the Mussulmen, and this practice existing in a country\*, where little danger is to be apprehended from the inspection of foreign visitants, affords some reason of believing, that the concealing certain ranks of women has been a custom established amongst the Hindoos, previously to the date of any Mahometan government, in Hindustan.

\* Mountainous and difficult of access.

It was once my opinion that the Hindoos, adopting the usage of their Mussulman conquerors—who deem females in the issue of war a lawful prize, had secluded them from public view.

But seeing these mountaineers practising the same mode, and knowing also that the Mhahrattahs, who are an independent people, and consequently free from the apprehensions, which the conquered Hindoos may entertain, use Zinanahs for their women of rank; I am induced to think, that this custom did prevail in India before the æra of the Mahometan invasion.

At the same time, were I to hazard an opinion on some of the manners of  
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the Hindoos from their history; the best of which, I am to observe, is ravelled in a maze of obscurity and fable, I would say, that the Hindoos in former times, did not confine any classes of their women.

But as their manners from the great influx of wealth and luxury amongst them became less simple, though they are a people who have undergone fewer changes than any other, that the Princes of the country produced this innovation for the purpose of impressing in the minds of their subjects, an awe and respect for their families.

In the different relations of the incarnations of Vyshnou, and in the history of their antient Princes, it is seen,

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that

that at those periods, the Hindoo women had an unrestrained admission into the assemblies of men, and oftentimes possessed great sway in them.

In the history of Ram, who, you know, my dear sir, made a great figure on earth, I have met with a passage, which may serve to illustrate this position, and trace also to a high source, a mode of trial hitherto practised in Europe.

I will premise, with informing you, that Sree Mun Narrain, the Grand Deity of the Hindoos, together with his indivisible associates, the Mhah Letchimy and the Snake, with the view of correcting certain evils and abuses which at that time had de-  
ranged

ranged the terrestrial system, found it expedient to personify human beings.

Narrain, accordingly, took on him the form of Ram, a renowned soldier, Letchimy became his wife, under the name of Seetah Devee, and the Snake was transformed into the body of a Letchimun, the brother and constant attendant of Ram.

Under this designation, these personages mixed freely in all human societies, nor is there the least mention made in any part of the history of Seetah's having been restricted from an admission to them.

On the contrary, she is represented as bearing a part on every occasion;

where it might have been proper for her sex to appear.

A service of a dangerous nature required, that Ram should leave Seetah behind him, and the party being then in a desert, she was consigned to the charge of Letchimun, until Ram might return.

Seetah and her companion remained some time in perfect security and quiet, when a famed magician, led on doubtless by the devil, who is ever on the watch to draw astray the ladies, came that way, saw Seetah, and became deeply enamoured with her.

This subtle man having discovered, perhaps, by his spells and incantations, that the eyes of women are the soonest ensnared, contrived that a bird  
of



of a most brilliantly beautiful plumage, should fly full in the sight of Seetah.

This horrid experiment had the desired and the completest effect; for the deluded fair one instantly conjured Letchimun, by every thing he could hold dear, by the affection he had for her, by the respect he bore to Ram, to procure for her the charming bird.

Letchimun was amazed and much troubled at this entreaty: he endeavored to expostulate on the eminent danger of quitting her in so perilous a situation.

He pointed out to her, in the most lively language, the certainty of incurring the severest displeasure of Ram, for a breach of his orders; and, in short;

short, he urged every argument which a regard for his own character, or her safety, could suggest.

The dazzling hues of this bird had taken such ample possession of the mind of Seetah, that there did not remain in it one unoccupied space for the reception of Letchimun's advice.

She must possess this object of her wishes, or she should become the most miserable of women; and, on the repeated denial of Letchimun to comply with her desire, blinded by the disappointment of her fondest hopes, and hurried on by a burst of rage, she accused Letchimun of the design of seducing her, and alledged that as the only reason of his dislike of leaving her.

This accusation convincing Letchimun of the inefficacy of his arguments, and the necessity of an acquiescence, he immediately went in quest of the bird ; but, previously to his departure, he drew a magic circle around the spot where Seetah remained ; and told her, while she continued within that space, that no misfortune could betide her.

Letchimun had no sooner gone, than the plotting necromancer, assuming the appearance of an old and a very infirm man, in a languid and a feeble manner approached near the place where Seetah stood, and through excess of weakness, he seemed obliged to extend himself on the ground.

He besought her, in an affecting and a pitiable tone of voice, to administer  
to

to him a little water to allay his thirst, and to recruit an almost exhausted strength.

The tender hearted, but ill-fated Seetah felt the full force of the prayers of a distressed old man, and with a bosom overflowing with the effusions of humanity and benevolence, unmindful of her own happiness, she stepped beyond the prescribed bound, and fell that instant into the power of her betrayer.

Here the story sets forth, what would but little contribute to my credit to relate, or your amusement to be informed of; it only now concerns me to make mention, that after Ram had recovered Seetah, he ordered, for the removal of every suspicion in his own breast,

breast, and for effectually shutting the mouth of Slander, that she should undergo the ordeal trial.

Seetah, eager to banish the most latent doubt from the mind of her Lord, and anxious to exhibit to the world so public a testimony of her purity, heard the mandate with pleasure; and, without any shew of dread, walked over the burning iron; but the feet of Seetah, says the historian, being shod with innocence, the scorching heat was to her as a bed of flowers.

Pardon me, my friend, for thus intruding on you this eastern tale, which would be altogether a trifling one, did it not tend to indicate, that the

Hindoos had a knowledge of the ordeal trial, at, doubtless, a very early period, and that in those ages it would seem their women of the first rank appeared in public.

The same use may be made of this story, as that which is contained in the Arabian Nights entertainment, where amidst the olio of talismans, genii and devils, you are enabled to extract just representations of the manners and dispositions of the people.

As I have thus far entered into a subject, which has often excited my curiosity, I will, with your permission, proceed somewhat farther, and recite to you a circumstance which may assist in corroborating my belief, that the Hindoo women of rank, conformably  
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to ancient usages, and to some now existing, were not wholly secluded from the sight of men.

When a young woman of the Rajah or the Royal Race, was marriageable, or supposed to possess an understanding discrimination of choice, she was conducted into an apartment, where there were many youths of her own sex assembled, and desired to select the person the most pleasing to her.

She performed the ceremony, of declaring her sentiments, by throwing a wreath of flowers over the neck of the favored young man, who, if the lady should have been agreeable to him, was esteemed her future husband.

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This rule, I have been informed, is observed at this day in Tanjore, where I resided some little time, and received the intelligence from a Mharattah Bramin, who had an employment at the Rajah's court.

The aforegoing opinions, my friend, I have freely given you, and I am to intreat, that you will as freely dissect, and analyse them; taking such parts as may appear to you founded on reason and natural principles, and rejecting such as may seem vague or dictated by fancy.

REVEREND

F I N I S.