

OBSERVATIONS AND INQUIRIES
CONCERNING THE
SEEKS* and their COLLEGE,

AT PATNA, IN THE EAST-INDIES,
By CHARLES WILKINS, Esq.

WRITTEN MARCH 1781.

I FOUND the College of the *Seeks* situated in one of the narrow streets of *Patna*, at no very considerable distance from the Custom-house. I was permitted to enter the outward gate, but, as soon as I came to the steps which led up into the Chapel, or public hall, I was civilly accosted by two of the Society. I asked them if I might ascend into the hall: they said it was a place of worship open to me and to all men; but at the same time intimated that I must take off my shoes. As I consider this ceremony in the same light as uncovering my head upon entering any of our temples dedicated to the Deity, I did not hesitate to comply, and I was then politely conducted into the hall, and seated upon a carpet, in the midst

* A sect of people distinguished by that appellation from the Worshipers of BRAHMA and the followers of MAHOMMED.

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near the altar, on a low desk, a great book of a folio size, from which some portions are daily read in their divine service. It was covered over with a blue mantle, on which were printed, in silver letters, some select passages of their law.

AFTER I had had a long conversation with two of the congregation, who had politely seated themselves, on each side of me, on the carpet, and whom I found very intelligent, notice was given, that it was noon, and the hour of divine service. The congregation arranged themselves upon the carpet, on each side of the hall, so as to leave a space before the altar from end to end. The great book, desk, and all, was brought with some little ceremony from the altar, and placed at the opposite extremity of the hall. An old man, with a reverend silver beard, kneeled down before the desk with his face towards the altar; and on one side of him sat a man with a small drum, and two or three with cymbals. The book was now opened, and the old man began to chant to the time of the drum and the cymbals; and, at the conclusion of every verse, most of the congregation joined chorus in a response, with countenances exhibiting great marks of joy. Their tones were by no means harsh; the time was quick; and I learnt that

of the assembly, which was so numerous as almost to fill the room. The whole building forms a square of about forty feet, raised from the ground about six or eight steps. The hall is in the center, divided from four other apartments by wooden arches, upon pillars of the same materials, all neatly carved. This room is rather longer than it is broad. The floor was covered with a neat carpet, and furnished with six or seven low desks, on which stood as many of the books of their law; and the walls, above the arches, were hung with *Europe* looking-glasses in gold frames, and pictures of *Mussulman* Princes and *Hindoo* Deities. A little room, which, as you enter, is situated at the left-hand end of the hall, is the chancel, and is furnished with an altar covered with a cloth of gold, upon which was laid a round black shield over a long broad sword, and, on either side, a *chowry* of peacock's feathers, mounted in a silver handle. The altar was raised a little above the ground, in a declining position. Before it stood a low kind of throne plated with silver; but rather too small to be useful; about it were several silver flower-pots and rose-water bottles, and on the left hand stood three small *Urns* which appeared to be copper, furnished with notches to receive the donations of the charitable. There stood also

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near

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the subject was a Hymn in praise of the Unity, the Omnipresence, and the Omnipotence, of the Deity. I was singularly delighted with the gestures of the old man: I never saw a countenance so expressive of inselt joy, whilst he turned about from one to another, as it were bespeaking their assents to those truths which his very soul seemed to be engaged in chanting forth. The Hymn being concluded, which consisted of about twenty verses, the whole congregation got up and presented their faces with joined hands towards the altar, in the attitude of prayer. A young man now stood forth; and, with a loud voice and distinct accent, solemnly pronounced a long prayer or kind of liturgy, at certain periods of which all the people joined in a general response, saying, *Wü Goaroo!* They prayed against temptation; for grace to do good; for the general good of mankind; and a particular blessing to the *Seeks*; and for the safety of those who at that time were on their travels. This prayer was followed by a short blessing from the old man, and an invitation to the assembly to partake of a friendly feast. The book was then closed and restored to its place at the altar, and the people being seated as before, two men entered bearing a large iron caldron, called a *Curry*, just taken from the fire, and placed it in the center

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of

of the hall upon a low stool. These were followed by others with five or six dishes, some of which were of silver, and a large pile of leaves sewed together with fibres in the form of plates. One of these plates was given to each of the company without distinction, and the dishes being filled from the caldron, their contents were served out till every one had got his share: myself was not forgotten; and, as I was resolved not to give them the smallest occasion for offence, I ate up my portion. It was a kind of sweetmeat, of the consistence of soft brown sugar, composed of flour and sugar mixed up with clarified butter, which is called *Ghee*. Had not the *Ghee* been rancid, I should have relished it better. We were next served with a few sugar-plums; and here ended the feast and the ceremonies of the day. They told me the religious part of the ceremony was daily repeated five times. I now took my leave, inviting some of the principal men amongst them, who were about to return to their own country through *Banares*, to pay me a visit.

IN the course of the conversation I was engaged in with the two *Seeks* before the service, I was able to gather the following circumstances. That the founder of their faith was called *Náneek Sab*, who flourished about four hundred

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visits would permit me to learn of this book. It is a folio volume, containing about four or five hundred pages.

THEY told me further, that some years after this book of *Náneek Sab* had been promulgated, another made its appearance, now held in almost as much esteem as the former. The name of the author has escaped my memory; but they favoured me with an extract from the book itself in praise of the Deity. The passage had struck my ear on my first entering the hall, when the students were all engaged in reading. From the similarity of the language to the *Hindoovee*, and many *Sanskrit* words, I was able to understand a good deal of it, and I hope, at some future period, to have the honour of laying a translation of it before the Society. They told me I might have copies of both their books if I would be at the expence of transcribing them.

I NEXT enquired why they were called *Seeks*, and they told me it was a word borrowed from one of the commandments of their founder which signifies "*Learn thou*;" and that it was adopted to distinguish the sect soon after he disappeared. The word, as is well known, has the same import in the *Hindoovee*.

I ASKED them what were the ceremonies used in admitting a profelyte. A person having shewn

hundred years ago at *Punjab*, and who, before his apostacy, was a *Hindoo* of the *Kshetry*, or military tribe; and that his body disappeared as the *Hindoos* and the *Mussulmans* were disputing for it; for upon their removing the cloth which covered it, it was gone. That he left behind him a book, composed by himself, in verse and the language of *Punjab*, but a character partly of his own invention; which teaches the doctrines of the faith he had established. That they call this character, in honour of their founder, *Gooroo-Mookhee*: from the mouth of the preceptor. That this book, of which that standing near the altar, and several others in the hall, were copies, teaches that there is but one God, omnipotent and omnipresent, filling all space, and pervading all matter, and that he is to be worshipped and invoked; that there will be a day of retribution, when virtue will be rewarded and vice punished (I forgot to ask in what manner); that it not only commands universal toleration, but forbids disputes with those of another persuasion; that it forbids murder, theft, and such other deeds as are, by the majority of mankind, esteemed crimes against society; and inculcates the practice of all the virtues, but particularly an universal philanthropy, and a general hospitality to strangers and travellers. This is all my short visit

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shewn a sincere inclination to renounce his former opinions, to any five or more *Seeks* assembled together, in any place, as well on the highway as in a house of worship, they send to the first shop where sweetmeats are sold, and procure a small quantity of a particular sort, which is very common, and as I recollect they call *Batafa*, and having diluted it in pure water, they sprinkle some of it on the body, and into the eyes of the convert, whilst one of the best instructed repeats to him, in any language with which he is conversant, the chief canons of their faith, exacting from him a solemn promise to abide by them the rest of his life. This is the whole of the ceremony. The new convert may then choose a *Gooroo*, or preceptor, to teach him the language of their scriptures, who first gives him the alphabet to learn, and so leads him on, by slow degrees, until he wants no further instruction. They offered to admit me into their Society; but I declined the honour; contenting myself with the alphabet, which they told me to guard as the apple of my eye, as it was a sacred character. I find it differs but little from the *Devnager*: the number, order, and powers of the letters are exactly the same. The language itself is a mixture of *Persian*, *Arabic*, and some *Sanskrit*, grafted upon the provincial dialect of *Punjab*, which is a kind of *Hindoovee*, or, as it is vulgarly called by us, *Moors*.