

*Manners and customs.*—These vary more or less widely amongst the several distinct peoples composing the general population; but those that control the conduct of the communities massed together in the cities and settlements may be taken as a guide to the whole.

Islam is the religion of the land, and has been for eight centuries. Consequently the mode of life of the people is in the main in accordance with the precepts of that doctrine. During the last century of Chinese rule, the observance of the prophet's law fell into neglect owing to the absence of State authority amongst the priesthood, and a general laxity of morals and disregard of religious ordinances soon spread amongst the people, and even pervaded the ranks of the priesthood itself. Most prominent amongst these innovations was the restoration of woman to her former state of freedom and equality in general society. But now on the re-establishment of a purely Islamite rule, and the strict enforcement of the *Shari'at*, this liberty is taken from her, and she is accorded no other privileges than those allowed by the Mahomedan law.

In the rural districts women enjoy much of their wonted freedom, but in the cities their seclusion and the use of the veil is strictly enforced. The system of *mata'* or "marriage de convenance" which was of universal prevalence, together with public prostitution, under the Chinese rule, is now entirely suppressed, and any infraction of the new order is punished with exemplary severity. Though the regulation of society and the administration of the Government are based on the *Shari'at*, there are many national customs that remain unaffected by the trammels of that inelastic and unalterable code. For convenience sake, we will now notice the more characteristic traits of the people under separate heads in detail.

*Marriage.*—Amongst the higher classes and the peasantry, parents usually betroth their children in infancy, but the ceremony is not performed till they arrive at puberty, the age of which varies from fourteen to sixteen years. Amongst grown up people the contract is one of mutual consent. In either case it is made binding by the *nikáh* of the Mahomedan *Shari'at*. In the first case, in which the parents make the contract, the boy's parents fix the dower or *mahr* for the girl, and the parents of both provide the wedding clothes, ornaments, and household equipment for each respectively. When the marriage terms are agreed to, the girls' parents get a letter of permit from the governor of the city to the effect that "such a one, the daughter of so and so, son of so and so, of such a place, marries with their consent such a one, the son of so and so, of such a place." The fee for this letter of permit and registry is one *tanga*—about sixpence, to the city governor. After this, the day is fixed, and all the relations and friends assemble at the bride's house, where the *nikáh* is read by the priest, who receives as his fee from one to two or more *tanga* according to the rank and means of the parties. With the rich the wedding festivities are prolonged over three or four days, with music and feasts and games; but with the poor the newly married couple go to the bridegroom's house the same night, and the festivities are confined to dancing and singing amongst the guests, and the disposal of a sheep or two slaughtered for the feast. Amongst the common people, where the parties are grown up men and women, the bride merely gets a suit of clothes and such ornaments as she can persuade the suitor to give her, and, after the performance of the *nikáh*, they feast a few friends and go home together, till they disagree and separate.

Prior to the adoption of Islam by the Moghol, woman held a more exalted position amongst them, and in the relations of matrimony often exercised a supreme authority in the affairs of the household. This is indicated by the terms they applied to married woman, viz., *Khátún Aghá*, *Khánim*, *Begim*, "mistress lady," "my chief," "my lord" respectively. Numerous instances are recorded in the history of the Emperor Babar and other Moghol chiefs, illustrative of the important position held by woman in the society of the early Moghol power. In these days the sex, it would seem, commanded a far greater deference and respect than it is accorded in the present day. The effect of the Mussalman system of seclusion has been to deprive the wife of her just right and freedom, and the consequence has been to debase the noblest qualities and most prized virtues of the sex. That they are impatient of their treatment as mere chattels is evinced by their very frequent resort to the loophole of escape the law permits in divorce. The custom is extremely prevalent, and by some women is systematically worked as a means of securing an independence and