

WIDOW-BURNING: A NARRATIVE

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Widow-burning: a narrative by Henry Jeffreys Bushby

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HENRY JEFFREYS BUSHBY

**WIDOW-BURNING:
A NARRATIVE**

WIDOW-BURNING.

By the same Author.

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WIDOW-BURNING:

A NARRATIVE.

BY

HENRY JEFFREYS BUSHBY,

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HON. E. I. CO.'S CIVIL SERVICE.

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WIDOW-BURNING.

ON the 30th of August, 1838, the princely city of Oodypore was the scene of a terrible solemnity. About mid-day, a prolonged discharge of artillery from the fort announced the unexpected decease of Maharána Juwán Singh; and, as is usual in tropical climates, preparations for his obsequies immediately commenced. The palace-gate was thronged with the expectant populace. Something, however, in the excitement of their voices and gestures, boded the approach of a spectacle more thrilling than mere pomp could render even a royal funeral. It was not the dead alone whom the eager crowd were waiting to see pass from among them. Sculptured in startling abundance on the tombs of their rulers, the well-known

effigies of *women's feet** gave ghastly assurance, that a prince of Oodypore would not that day be gathered to his fathers without a wife, or a concubine, sharing his pyre. The only question was—how many? It was known that the youngest of the two queens came of a family in which the rite was rarely practised; while the suddenness of the Maharána's death had given but scanty time for any of his inferior women to mature so tremendous a resolution. Great, therefore, was the admiration of the multitude when they learnt that, immediately on the fatal tidings reaching the zenána, both the queens and six, out of seven, concubines had determined to burn. The seventh, a favourite, had excused herself on the plea—which, characteristically enough, was at once admitted—that “she felt none of the inspiration deemed necessary to the sanctity of the sacrifice.”

It next became the duty of the chief nobles to address the ladies with the forms of dissua-

* The distinctive memorial of a Suttee. The feet of each victim are represented in relief, with the soles outwards, on the face of the mausoleum.

sion. But to these they quickly put an end by an act that rendered retreat impossible:—loosening their hair, and unveiling their faces, they went to the gate of the zenána, and presented themselves before the assembled populace. All opposition to their wishes now ceased. They were regarded as sacred to the departed monarch. Devout ejaculations poured incessantly from their lips. Their movements became invested with a mysterious significance; and their words were treasured up as prophetic.

Meantime the pile had been prepared. The eight victims, dressed in their richest attire, and mounted on horseback, moved with the procession to the cemetery. There they stripped off their ornaments and jewels, distributed gifts to the bystanders, and, lastly, mounting the pile, took their places beside the corpse. As the Maharána had left no son, his nephew, the present Sovereign, applied the torch. The crash of music, the chanting of the priests, and the cries of the multitude arose simultaneously, and the tragedy was consummated. “The father of one of the queens” (concludes the native report) “was present