



# **A SEARCH IN SECRET INDIA**

**PAUL BRUNTON**

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# **A SEARCH IN SECRET INDIA**

“SACRED INDIA” would be as apt a title for this book. For it is a quest for that India which is only secret because it is so sacred. The holiest things in life are not bruited abroad in public. The sure instinct of the human soul is to keep them withdrawn in the inmost recesses accessible to few—perhaps to none. Certainly only to those who care for spiritual things. And with a country as with an individual. The most sacred things a country keeps secret. It would not be easy for a stranger to discover what England holds most sacred. And it is the same with India. The most sacred part of India is the most secret.

Now secret things require much searching for; but those who seek will find. Those who seek with their whole heart and with the real determination to find will at last discover the secret.

Mr. Brunton had that determination, and he did in the end find. The difficulties were very great though. For in India, as everywhere else, there is much spurious spirituality through which a way must be forced before the true can be found. There is an innumerable crowd of mental acrobats and contortionists through which the seeker after pure spirituality must elbow his way. These men have trained their mental as well as bodily muscles till they are extraordinarily efficient. They have exercised powers of concentration till they have nearly complete control over their mental processes. Many of them have developed what we call occult powers.

These are all interesting enough in their way and are well worth study by scientific men interested in psychic phenomena. But they are not the real thing. They are not the springs whence spirituality comes gushing.

They do not form the secret sacred India that Mr. Brunton was seeking. He saw them. He noted them. He describes them. But he pushed through them. Spirituality at its finest and purest is what he wanted. And this he found at last.

Remote from the haunts of men, deep in the jungles to which—or to the Himalayas—the holiest men in India always return, Mr. Brunton found the very embodiment of all that India holds most sacred. The Maharishee—the Great Sage—was the man who made most appeal to Mr. Brunton. He is not the only one of his kind. Up and down India others—not many, but a very, very few—may be found. They represent the true genius of India, and it is through them that the

Mighty Genius of the Universe manifests Himself in peculiar degree.

They, therefore, are among the objects most worth searching for on this earth.  
And in this book we have the results of one such quest.

By Sir FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND, K.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., CLE.



# **A SEARCH IN SECRET INDIA**

## CHAPTER I

### Wherein I Bow to the Reader

There is an obscure passage in the yellowed book of Indian life which I have endeavoured to elucidate for the benefit of Western readers. Early travellers returned home to Europe with weird tales of the Indian faqueers and even modern travellers occasionally bring similar stories.

What is the truth behind those legends which come ever and anon to our ears, concerning a mysterious class of men called Yogis\* by some and faqueers by others? What is the truth behind the fitful hints which reach us intimating that there exists in India an old wisdom that promises the most extraordinary development of mental powers to those who practise it? I set out on a long journey to find it and the following pages summarize my report.

“Summarize” I say, because the inexorable exigencies of space and time required me to write of one Yogi where I had met more. Therefore I have selected a few who interested me most, and who seemed likely to interest the Western world. One heard much of certain so-called holy men who possessed repute of having acquired deep wisdom and strange powers; so one travelled through scorching days and sleepless nights to find them—only to find well-intentioned fools, scriptural slaves, venerable know-nothings, money-seeking conjurers, jugglers with a few tricks, and pious frauds. To fill my pages with the records of such people would be worthless to the reader and is a distasteful task to me. Therefore I omit the tale of time wasted upon them.

I feel quite humbly that I have been privileged to see a remote aspect of India seldom seen and less understood by ordinary travellers. Among the English residents in that vast land only an infinitesimal fraction has cared to study this aspect, and of this fraction very few were free enough to examine it more deeply and give their report, for official dignity must needs be respected. Therefore, English writers who have touched on this subject swing over to a hearty scepticism which, by its very nature, renders many sources of native knowledge not readily available to them, and which causes the Indian who really knows

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\* Pronounced *Yogees*.

something about the less superficial side of the matter to shrink from discussing it with them. The white man will, in most cases, possess but an imperfect acquaintance with the Yogis, if he knows them at all, and certainly not with the best of them. The latter are now but a mere handful in the very country of their origin. They are exceedingly rare, are fond of hiding their true attainment from the public, and prefer to pose as ignoramuses. In India, in Tibet and in China, they get rid of the Western traveller who may happen to blunder in upon their privacy, by maintaining a studied appearance of insignificance and ignorance. Perhaps they would see some sense in Emerson's abrupt phrase: "To be great is to be misunderstood"; I do not know. Anyway, they are mostly recluses who do not care to mingle with mankind. Even when met with they are unlikely to break their reserve except after some period of acquaintance. Hence little has been written in Western continents about the strange life of these Yogis and even that little remains vague.

The reports of Indian writers are indeed available, but they must be read with great care. It is an unfortunate fact that the Hindus lack any critical approach to these matters and will mix hearsay with fact quite indiscriminately. Therefore such reports diminish greatly in truth as documentary records. When I saw the cataract of credulity which covers so many Eastern eyes, I thanked Heaven for such scientific training as the West has given me and for the common sense attitude which journalistic experience had instilled in me. There is a basis of fact underlying much Oriental superstition, but vigilance is needed to discover it. I was compelled to keep a critical but not hostile eye widely open wherever I went. Those who learned that I was interested in the mystical and miraculous, apart from my philosophical concerns, applied liberal paint and plentiful varnish to their few facts; many would think nothing of indulging in breath-taking exaggerations. I might have spent my time trying to teach them that Truth is so strong she can stand upon her own legs without falling to the ground, but I had other things to do. I felt glad, however, that I had preferred to gain my knowledge of Oriental wonders at first hand, just as I prefer Christ's wisdom to his commentators' ignorance. I searched through a welter of crass superstitions, incredible impostures and ancient pretensions for those things which are true, which will stand the acid test of thorough investigation. I flatter myself that I could never have done this did I not contain within my complex nature the two elements of scientific scepticism and spiritual sensitivity, elements which usually range themselves in sharp conflict and flagrant opposition. I have titled this book *Secret India* because it tells of an India which has been hidden from

prying eyes for thousands of years, which has kept itself so exclusive that today only its rapidly disappearing remnants are left. The manner in which the Yogis kept their knowledge so esoteric may appear selfish to us in these democratic days, but it helps to account for their gradual disappearance from visible history. Thousands of Englishmen live in India and hundreds visit it each year. Yet few know anything of what may one day prove more worthy to the world than even the prized pearls and valuable stones which ships bring us from India. Fewer still have taken the trouble to go out of their way to find the adepts in Yoga,\* while not one Englishman in a thousand is prepared to prostrate himself before a brown, half-naked figure in some lonely cave or in a disciple-filled room. Such is the inevitable barrier imposed by this form of caste that even men of generous character and developed intellect, if suddenly taken from their habitations in the British quarters and set down in such a cave, would find a Yogi's company uncongenial and his ideas unintelligible.

Yet the Englishman in India, whether soldier, civil servant, business man or traveller, is not to be blamed because he is too proud to squat on the mat of the Yogi. Quite apart from the business of upholding British prestige, doubtless an important and necessary procedure, the kind of holy man he usually encounters is more likely to repel than attract. It is certainly no loss to avoid such a man. Nevertheless it is a pity that after a sojourn of many years the English resident will often leave the country in blameless ignorance of what lies behind the frontal brain of an Indian sage.

I plainly remember my interview with a Cockney under the shadow of Trichinopoly's gigantic rock fort. For over twenty years he had held a responsible post on the Indian railways. It was inevitable that I should ply him with many questions about his life in this sunburnt land. Finally I trotted out my pet interrogation, "Have you met any Yogis?"

He looked at me somewhat blankly and then replied: 'Yogis? What are they? Some kind of animal?' Such ignorance would have been perfectly pardonable had he stayed at home within the sound of Bow Bells; now, after twenty-six years' residence in the country, it was perfectly blissful. I permitted it to remain undisturbed.

Because I put pride underfoot in moving among the varied peoples who inhabit Hindustan; because I gave them a ready understanding and an intellectual sympathy, a freedom from finicky prejudice and a regard for character irrespective of colour; and because I had sought Truth all my life and was prepared to accept

\* Pronounced *Yohg*. Its spelling is unphonetic.

whatsoever Truth brought in its train, I am able to write this record. I picked my way through a crowd of superstitious fools and self-styled faqueers in order to sit at the feet of true sages, there to learn at first hand the real teachings of Indian Yoga. I squatted on the floor in many a secluded hermitage, surrounded by brown faces and hearing strange dialects. I sought out those reserved and reclusive men, the best Yogis, and listened humbly to their oracular instruction. I talked for hours with the Brahmin pundits of Benares, discussing the age-old questions of philosophy and belief which have tormented the mind and troubled the heart of man since he first began to think. I stopped now and then to divert myself with the magician and wonder-worker, and strange incidents crossed my trails.

I wanted to gather the real facts about the Yogis of today by the method of first-hand investigation. I prided myself that experience as a journalist fitted me to draw out, with the least possible delay, much of the information which I sought; that sitting at the editorial desk and curtly wielding the blue pencil had trained me to become ruthlessly critical in separating wheat from chaff; and that the contact with men and women in every grade of life which the profession generally gives, with ragged mendicants as well as well-fed millionaires, would help me move just a little more smoothly through the variegated masses of India, among whom I searched for those strange men, the Yogis.

On the other side of the sheet I had lived an inner life totally detached from my outward circumstance. I spent much of my spare time in the study of recondite books and in little-known bypaths of psychological experiment. I delved into subjects which always have been wrapped in Cimmerian mystery. To these items must be added an inborn attraction towards things Oriental. The East, before my first visit, threw out vast tentacles that gripped my soul; ultimately they drew me to study the sacred books of Asia, the learned commentaries of her pundits and the inscribed thoughts of her sages, so far as English translations could be procured.

This dual experience proved of great value. It taught me never to permit my sympathy with Oriental methods of probing life's mysteries, subvert my scientific desire of critically and impartially finding the facts. Without that sympathy I could never have gone among people and into places where the average Englishman in India may disdain to tread. Without that strict, scientific attitude I might have been led away into the wilderness of superstition, as so many Indians seem to have been led away. It is not easy to conjoin qualities which are usually held to be contradictory, but I sincerely tried to hold them in sane balance.



That the West has little to learn from present-day India, I shall not trouble to deny, but that we have much to learn from Indian sages of the past and from the few who live today, I unhesitatingly assert. The white tourist who “does” the chief cities and historical sights and then steams away with disgust at the backward civilization of India is doubtless justified in his depreciation of it. Yet a wiser kind of tourist shall one day arise who will seek out, not the crumbling ruins of useless temples, nor the marbled palaces of dissipated kings long dead, but the living sages who can reveal a wisdom untaught by our universities.

Are these Indians mere idlers sprawling in the fierce tropic sun? Have they done nothing, thought nothing that is of worth to the rest of the world? The traveller who can see only their material degeneration and mental flabbiness has not seen far. Let him substitute consideration for his contempt and he may open sealed lips and hidden doors.

Grant that India has nodded and snored for centuries; grant that even today there exist millions of peasants in this land who suffer the same illiteracy, share the same outlook blended of puerile superstition and kindergarten religion as did English peasants of the fourteenth century. Grant further that the Brahmin pundits in native centres of learning waste their useless years splitting sacerdotal hairs and drawing metaphysical wire as subtly as our own medieval scholastics ever did. Yet there still remains a small but priceless residue of culture classified under the generic term Yoga, which proffers benefits to mankind as valuable in their own way as any proffered by the Western sciences. It can bring our bodies nearer the healthy condition which Nature intended them to possess; it can bestow one of modern civilization’s most urgent needs—a flawless serenity of mind; and it can open the way to enduring treasures of the spirit to those who will labour for them. I admit that this great wisdom hardly belongs to India’s present, but to her past; that this guarded knowledge of Yoga flourishes little today when once it must have had worthy professors and faithful students. It may be that the secrecy in which it was carefully enshrouded succeeded in killing all spread of this ancient science; I do not know.

It is perhaps not amiss, then, if one asks one’s Western fellows to look Eastward, not for a new faith, but for a few pebbles of knowledge to cast upon our present heap. When Orientalists like Bumouf, Colebrooke and Max Muller appeared upon learning’s scene and brought us some of the literary treasures of India, the savants of Europe began to understand that the heathens who inhabited that

country were not so stupid as our own ignorance had presumed. Those clever people who profess to find Asiatic learning empty of useful thoughts for the West thereby prove their own emptiness. Those practical persons who would fling the epithet “stupid” at its study, succeed only in flinging it at their own narrow-mindedness. If our ideas about life are to be wholly determined by a mere accident of space, by the chance that we were born in Bristol instead of Bombay, then we are not worthy the name of civilized man. Those who close their minds to the entrance of all Eastern ideas, close them also to fine thoughts, deep truths and worth-while psychological knowledge. Whoever will poke about among this musty lore of the Orient in the hope of finding some precious gems of strange fact and stranger wisdom, will find his quest no vain one.



I journeyed Eastwards in search of the Yogis and their hermetic knowledge. The thought of finding a spiritual light and diviner life was also entertained, though it was not my primary purpose. I wandered along the banks of India's holy rivers—the quiet, grey-green Ganges, the broad Jumna and the picturesque Godavari—in this quest. I circled the country. India took me to her heart and the vanishing remnant of her sages opened many a door for the unfamiliar Westerner.

Not so long ago I was among those who regard God as a hallucination of human fancy, spiritual truth as a mere nebula and providential justice as a confection for infantile idealists. I, too, was somewhat impatient of those who construct theological paradises and who then confidently show you round with an air of being God's estate agents. I had nothing but contempt for what seemed to be the futile, fanatical efforts of uncritical theorists.

If, therefore, I have begun to think a little differently about these matters, rest assured that good cause has been given me. Yet I did not arrive at paying allegiance to any Eastern creed; indeed, those which matter I had already studied intellectually much earlier. I did arrive at a new acceptance of the Divine. This may seem quite an insignificant and personal thing to do, but as a child of this modern generation, which relies on hard facts and cold reason, and which lacks enthusiasm for things religious, I regard it as quite an achievement. This faith was restored in the only way a sceptic could have it restored, not by argument, but by the witness of an overwhelming experience. And it was a jungle sage, an unassuming hermit who had formerly lived for six years in a mountain cave, who promoted this vital change in my thinking. It is quite possible that he could not

pass a matriculation examination, yet I am not ashamed to record in the closing chapters of this book my deep indebtedness to this man. The production of such sages provides India with sufficient credentials to warrant attention from intelligent Westerners. The secret India's spiritual life still exists, despite the storms of political agitation which now hide it, and I have tried to give authentic record of more than one adept who has attained a strength and serenity for which we lesser mortals wistfully yearn.

I have borne witness in the book to other things also, things marvellous and weird. They seem incredible now, as I sit and type my narrative through the inked ribbon amid the matter-of-fact surroundings of English country-side; indeed, I wonder at my temerity in writing them down for a sceptical world to read. But I do not believe the present materialistic ideas which dominate the world will remain for all time; already one can perceive prophetic indications of a coming change of thought. Yet quite frankly I do not believe in miracles. Neither do most men of my generation. But I do believe that our knowledge of Nature's laws is incomplete, and that when the advance guard of scientists who are pushing forward into unexplored territory have found out a few more of those laws, we shall then be able to do things which are tantamount to miracles.



## CHAPTER II

### A Prelude to the Quest

The geography master takes a long, tapering pointer and moves over to the large, varnished linen map which hangs before a half-bored class. He indicates a triangular red patch which juts down to the Equator, and then makes a further attempt to stimulate the obviously lagging interest of his pupils. He begins in a thin, drawling voice and with the air of one about to make a hierophantic revelation:

“India has been called the brightest jewel in the British crown...”

At once a boy with moody brow, half wrapt in reverie, gives a sudden start and draws his far-flung imagination back into the stolid, brick-walled building which constitutes his school. The sound of this word INDIA falling on the tympanum of his ears, or the sight of it caught up by the optic nerve of his eyes from a printed page, carries thrilling and mysterious connotations of the unknown. Some inexplicable current of thought brings it repeatedly before him.

When the mathematics master believes that this pupil is laboriously working at an algebraical problem, little does he know that the young rascal uses the school's desk for ulterior purposes. For under the cover of skillfully arrayed books he rapidly sketches turbaned heads, dusky faces and spice-laden ships being loaded from flat junks.

The youthful years pass, but this interest in Hindustan remains undimmed. Nay, it spreads and embraces all Asia within its eager tentacles.

Ever and anon he makes wild projects to go there. He will run away to sea. Surely it would then be a mere matter of enterprise to get some brief glimpse of India? Even when these projects come to nought, he talks rhetorically to his schoolmates until one of them falls an easy victim to his immature enthusiasm.

Thereafter they conspire in silence and move in secret.

They plan an adventurous tramp across the face of Europe; it is then to continue into Asia Minor and Arabia until the port of Aden is reached. The reader, contemplating the innocent boldness of that long walk, will smile. They believe that a friendly ship's captain could be approached at Aden. He would undoubtedly prove a kindly, sympathetic man. He would take them aboard his steamer

and a week later they would begin to explore India.

Preparations for this protracted excursion go on apace. Money is thriftily collected, and what they naively imagine to be an explorer's outfit is secretly brought together. Maps and guide-books are carefully consulted, the coloured pages and attractive photographs raising their wanderlust to fever heat. Finally they are able to fix the date when they intend to snap their fingers at destiny and leave the country. Who knows what lies around the corner?

They might have saved some of their youthful energy and conserved some of their early optimism. For on an unfortunate day the second boy's guardian discovers the preparations, elicits further details of the affair, and comes down with a stern hand. What they suffer as a result is not to be related! The enterprise is reluctantly abandoned.

The desire to view India never leaves the promoter of that unfortunate expedition. The dawn of manhood, however, brings bonds in the form of other interests and holds his feet with enchaining duties. That desire has to be put regretfully in the background.

Time turns page after page of the calendar of years until he meets unexpectedly with a man who gives a temporary but vivid life to the old ambition. For the stranger's face is dusky, his head is turbaned, and he comes from the sun-steeped land of Hindustan.



I fling out the line net of remembrance to sweep the past years for pictures of that day when he steps into my life. The tide of autumn is fast ebbing, for the air is foggy and a bitter cold creeps through my clothing. Clammy fingers of depression strive hard to grip my failing heart.

I wander into a brightly-lit cafe and seek the borrowed comfort of its warmth. A cup of hot tea — so potent at other times — fails to restore my serenity. I cannot banish the heavy atmosphere which surrounds me. Melancholy has determined to make me serve her dark ends. Black curtains cover the entrance to my heart.

This restlessness is difficult to endure and it ends by driving me from the cafe into the open street. I walk without aim and follow old tracks until I find myself in front of a small bookshop which I know well. It is an ancient building and harbours equally ancient books. The proprietor\* is a quaint man, a human relic surviving from an earlier century. This hustling epoch has little use for him,

\* Now, alas, he has departed from terra firma and his shop has disappeared with him!

but he has just as little use for this epoch. He deals only in rare tomes and early editions, while specializing in curious and recondite subjects. He possesses a remarkable knowledge—so far as books can give it—of learning's bypaths and out-of-the-way matters. From time to time, I like to wander into the old shop and discuss them with him.

I enter the place and greet him. For a while I finger the yellowed pages of calf-bound volumes or peer closely into faded folios. One ancient book engages my attention; it seems somewhat interesting and I examine it more carefully. The bespectacled bookseller notes my interest and, as is his wont, commences what he imagines to be an argument anent the book's subject—metempsychosis.

The old man follows habit and keeps the discussion to his own side. He talks at length, appearing to know the pros and cons of that strange doctrine better than my author, while the classic authorities who have written about it are at his finger-tips. In this way I glean much curious information.

Suddenly, I hear a man stirring at the far end of the shop and, turning, I behold a tall figure emerge from the shadows which hide a little inner room where the costlier books are kept.

The stranger is an Indian. He walks toward us with an aristocratic bearing and faces the bookseller.

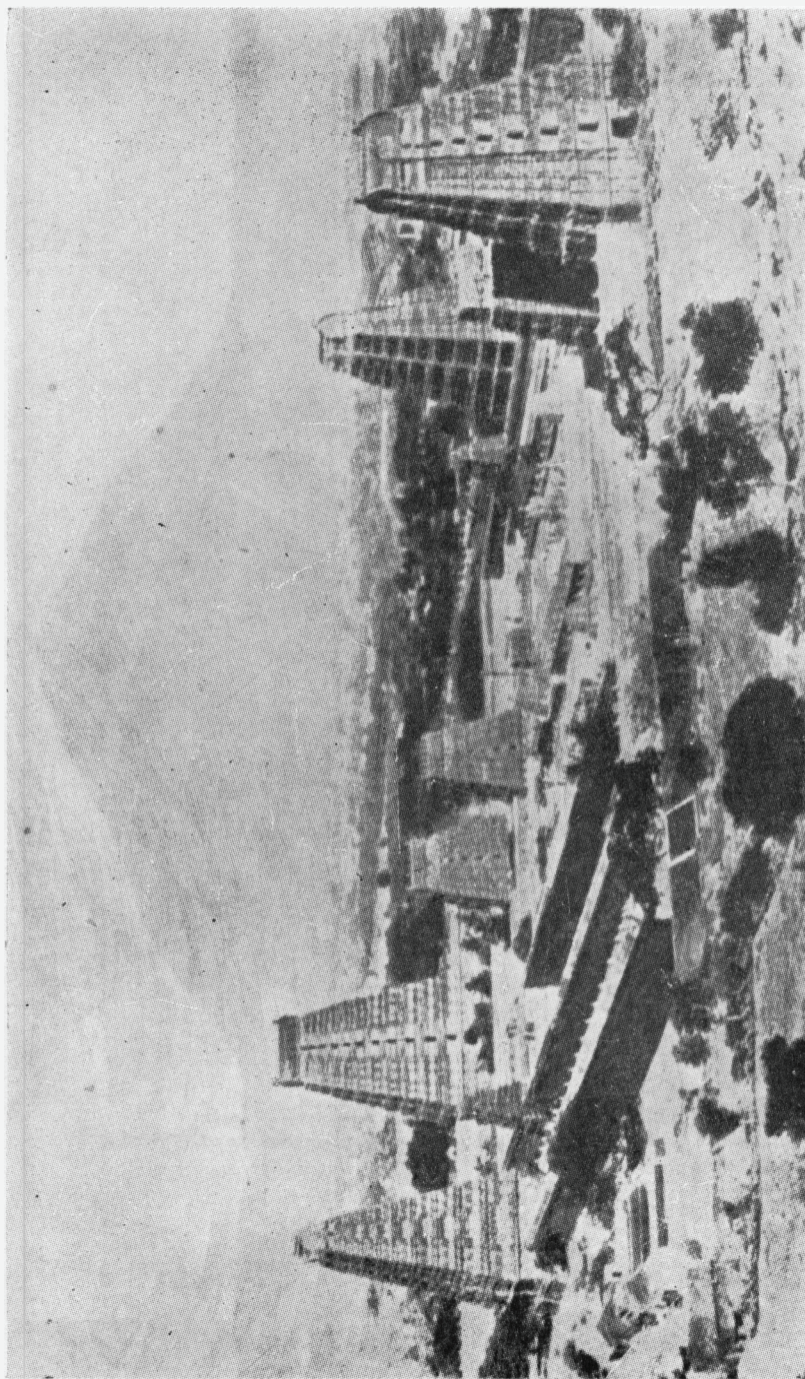
"My friend," he says quietly, "pardon me for intruding. I could not help overhearing you, while the subject you discussed is of great interest to me. Now you quote the classical authors who first mention this idea of man's continual re-birth upon this earth. The deeper minds among those philosophic Greeks, wise Africans and early Christian Fathers understood this doctrine well, I agree. But where, do you think, did it really originate?"

He pauses for a moment, but gives no time for a reply.

"Permit me to tell you," he continues, smiling. "You must look to India for the first acceptance of metempsychosis in the Old World. It was a cardinal tenet among the people of my land, even in remote antiquity."

The speaker's face fascinates me. It is unusual; it would be distinguished-looking among a hundred Indians. Power kept in reserve—this is my reading of his character. Piercing eyes, a strong jaw and a lofty forehead make up the catalogue of his features. His skin is darker than that of the average Hindu. He wears a magnificent turban, the front of which is adorned with a sparkling jewel. For the rest, his clothes are European and finely tailored withal.

His slightly didactic statement does not appeal to the old gentleman behind the counter; in fact, vigorous opposition is offered to it.



THE GREAT TEMPLE OF ARUNACHALA AND THE HILL OF THE HOLY BEACON

'Here is not stone building whose columned beauty stay one's emotions in a few minutes of silent wonder, as do those courts of the deities near Athens, but rather a gloomy sanctuary of dark mysteries.'





**YOGIS' CAVES HEWN OUT OF SOLID MOUNTAIN ROCK**

'Go to some place over which the mighty Himalayas keep eternal guard. There you will find a totally different class of men. They live in humble huts or caves, eat little food and constantly pray to God. They, too, are called Yogis.'

“How can that be,” comes the sceptical observation, “when the East Mediterranean cities were flourishing centres of culture and civilization in the pre-Christian era? Did not the greatest intellects of antiquity live in the area which embraced Athens and Alexandria? So, surely their ideas were carried Southward and Eastward until India was reached?”

The Indian smiles tolerantly.

“Not at all,” is his immediate reply. “What really happened was quite the reverse of your assertion.”

“Indeed! You seriously suggest that the progressive West had to receive its philosophy from the laggard East? No, sir!” expostulates the bookseller.

“Why not? Read your Apuleius again, my friend, and learn how Pythagoras came to India, where he was instructed by the Brahmins. Then notice how he began to teach the doctrine of metempsychosis after his return to Europe. This is but a single instance. I can find others. Your reference to the laggard East makes me smile. Thousands of years ago our sages were pondering over the deepest problems while your own countrymen were not even aware that such problems existed.”

He stops curtly, looks intently at us, and waits for his words to sink into our minds. I fancy the old bookseller is a little perplexed. Never before have I seen him so struck into silence or so obviously impressed by another man’s intellectual authority.

I have listened quietly to the other customer’s words and make no attempt to offer a remark. Now there arises a conversational lull which all of us seem to recognize and to respect. Soon the Indian turns abruptly and retires to the inner room, only to emerge a couple of minutes later with a costly folio which he has selected from the shelves. He pays for the book and prepares to leave the shop. He reaches the door, whilst I stare wonderingly at his departing figure.

Suddenly, he turns again and approaches me. He draws a wallet out of his pocket and selects a visiting card.

“Would you care to pursue this conversation with me?” he asks, half smiling. I am taken by surprise, but gladly agree. He offers me the card, adding an invitation to dinner.



I set out toward evening to find the stranger’s house, a task not without its discomfort, for I am companioned by an unpleasant fog which has descended

thickly upon the streets. An artist, I presume, would find a touch of romantic beauty in these fogs which sometimes brood over the town and dim its lights. My mind, however, is so intent upon the forthcoming meeting that I see no beauty and feel no unpleasantness in the surrounding atmosphere.

A terminus is set to my travels by a massive gateway which suddenly looms up. Two large lamps, as in greeting, are held out by iron brackets. My entry into the house is followed by a delightful surprise. For the Indian has given no hint of this unique interior, upon which he has obviously lavished a fine taste and free purse.

Let it suffice that I find myself in a great room, which might be part of some Asiatic palace for aught I know, so exotically is it furnished and so colourful are its gorgeous decorations. With the closing of the outer door I leave behind the grey, bleak Western world. The room has been decorated in a quaint combination of Indian and Chinese styles. Red, black and gold are the predominating colours. Resplendent tapestries, bearing sprawling Chinese dragons, stretch across the walls. Carved green dragon heads glare fiercely from all the corners, where they support brackets which carry costly pieces of handicraft. Two silken mandarin coats adorn both sides of the doorway. Boldly patterned Indian rags repose on the parquet floor, one's shoes sinking delightfully into their thick pile. A gigantic tiger skin stretches its full length in front of the hearth.

My eyes meet a small lacquered table which stands in one corner. Upon it rests a black ebony shrine with gilded folding doors. I glimpse the figure of some Indian god within the recess. It is probably a Buddha, for the face is calm and inscrutable and the two unwinking eyes gaze down at its nose.

My host greets me cordially. He is impeccably dressed in a black dinner suit. Such a man would look distinguished in any company in the world, I reflect. A few minutes later we both sit down to dinner. Some delightful dishes are brought to the table, and it is here that I receive my initiation into the pleasures of curry, thus acquiring a taste which is never to leave me. The servant who attends on us provides a picturesque note, for he wears a white jacket and trousers, a golden sash and spotless turban.

During the course of the meal our talk is superficial and general, yet whatever my host says, whatever subject he touches, his words invariably carry an air of finality. His statements are so phrased that they leave one with little ground for argument; his accents are so confident that his talk sounds like the last word upon the matter. I cannot help being impressed by his air of quiet assurance.

Over the coffee cups he tells me a little about himself. I learn that he has travelled widely and that he possesses some means. He regales me with vivid

impressions of China—where he has spent a year, of Japan—whose amazing future he tersely predicts, of America, Europe and—strangest of all—of life in a Christian monastery in Syria, where he had once spent a period of retirement.

When we light our cigarettes he touches on the subject which was mentioned at the bookshop. But it is evident that he desires to talk of other things, for he soon leads the way to larger issues, and broaches the subject of India's ancient wisdom.

"Some of the doctrines of our sages have already reached the West," he remarks impressively, "but in most cases the real teachings have been misunderstood; in a few instances they have somehow been falsified. However, it is not for me to complain. What is India today? She is no longer representative of the lofty culture of her past. The greatness has gone out of her. It is sad, very sad. The masses hold on to a few ideals at the cost of being enmeshed in a fussy tangle of pseudo-religious fetters and unwise customs."

"What is the cause of this degeneration?" I ask him.

My host is silent. A minute slowly passes. I watch him while his eyes begin to narrow until they are half-closed; then he quietly breaks the silence.

"Alas, my friend! Once there were great seers in my land, men who had penetrated the mysteries of life. Their advice was sought by king and commoner. Under their inspiration Indian civilization reached its zenith. To-day, where are they to be found? Two or three may remain—unknown, unrecorded and far from the main stream of modern life. When those great sages—Rishees, we call them—began to withdraw from society, then our own decline also began."

His head droops till the chest must support his chin. A sorrowful note has entered his voice with the last sentence. For a while he seems withdrawn from me, his soul wrapped in melancholy meditation.

His personality impresses me again as being provocatively interesting and decidedly attractive. Eyes, dark and flashing, reveal a keen mentality; voice, soft and sympathetic, reflects a kindly heart. I feel anew that I like him.

The servant noiselessly enters the room and approaches the lacquered table. He lights a joss stick and a blue haze rises to the ceiling. The strange perfume of some Eastern incense spreads around the room. It is not unpleasant. Suddenly my host raises his head and looks at me. "Did I tell you that two or three still remain?" he asks queerly. "Ah, yes! I said that. Once I knew a great sage. It was a privilege about which I rarely speak to others now. He was my father, guide, master and friend. He possessed the wisdom of a god. I loved him as if I were really his own son. Whenever I stayed with him at fortunate intervals, I knew then that life at its heart is good. Such was the effect of his wonderful atmo-



sphere. I, who have made art my hobby and beauty my ideal, learnt from him to see the divine beauty in men who were leprous, destitute or deformed; men from whom I formerly shrank in horror. He lived in a forest hermitage far from the towns. I stumbled upon his retreat seemingly by accident. From that day I paid him several visits, staying with him as long as I could. He taught me much. Yes — such a man could give greatness to any country.”

“Then why did he not enter public life and serve India?” I question frankly. The Indian shakes his head.

“It is difficult enough for us to understand the motives of such an unusual man. It would be doubly difficult for you, a Westerner, to understand him. His answer might probably be that service can be rendered in secret through the telepathic power of the mind; that influence can be exerted from a distance in an unseen yet no less potent manner. He might also say that a degenerate society must suffer its destiny until the fated hour of relief strikes.”

I confess to being puzzled by this answer.

“Quite so, my friend, I expected that,” observes the other.



After that memorable evening I visit the Indian's home many times, drawn by the lure of his unusual knowledge as much as by the attractiveness of his exotic personality. He touches some coiled spring among my ambitions and releases into urgency the desire to fathom life's meaning. He stimulates me, less to satisfy intellectual curiosity than to win a worthwhile happiness.

One evening our conversation takes a turn which is destined to have important results for me. He describes on occasions the queer customs and peculiar traditions of his countrymen; sometimes he portrays in words a few of the types who people his amazing land. He drops a remark this evening anent a strange type, the Yogi. I possess but a vague and incoherent idea of what the term really means. It has come to my notice a few times during the course of my reading, but on each occasion the terms of reference differ so much from the others that confusion is the natural result. So, when I hear my friend use the word I stop him short and beg for further information.

“That I shall do with pleasure,” he answers, “but I can hardly tell you, in a single definition, what constitutes a Yogi. No doubt, a dozen of my countrymen will define the word in a dozen different ways. For instance, there are thousands of wandering beggars who pass by this name. They swarm through the villages and

attend the periodic religious fairs in droves. Many are only lazy tramps and others vicious ones, while most are totally illiterate men, unaware of the history and doctrines of the science of Yoga, under whose shelter they masquerade."

He pauses to flick the ash off his cigarette.

"Go, however, to some place like Rishikesh, over which the mighty Himalayas keep eternal guard. There you will find a totally different class of men. They live in humble huts or caves, eat little food and constantly pray to God. Religion is their breath; it occupies their minds day and night. They are mostly good men studying our sacred books and chanting prayers. Yet they, too, are called Yogis. But what have they in common with the beggars who prey on the ignorant masses? You see how elastic the term is! Between these two classes there are others who partake of the nature of both." "And yet there seems to be much made of the mysterious powers possessed by Yogis," I remark.

"Ah! now you must listen to a further definition," he laughs back at me. "There are strange individuals in solitary retreats far from the big cities, in the seclusion of lonely jungles or mountain caves, men who devote their entire existence to practices which they believe will bring marvellous powers. Some of these men will eschew all mention of religion and scorn it; others, however, are highly religious; but all of them unite in the struggle to wrest from Nature a mastery over forces invisible and intangible. You see, India has never been without her traditions of the mysterious, the occult, and many are the stories told of those adepts who could perform miraculous feats. Now these men, too, are called Yogis."

"Have you met such men? Do you believe these traditions?" I ask innocently.

The other man is silent. He seems to be ruminating over the form in which to couch his reply.

My eyes turn to the shrine which stands upon the lacquered table. I fancy, in the soft light which fills our room, that the Buddha is smiling benignantly at me from its lotus throne of gilt wood. For half a minute I am ready to believe that there is something uncanny in its atmosphere; and then the Indian's clear voice breaks into my thoughts and arrests my wandering fancies.

"Look!" he says quietly, holding something out for my inspection. He has loosed it from under his collar. "I am a Brahmin. This is my sacred thread. Thousands of years of strict segregation have made certain qualities of character instinctive in my caste. Western education and Western travelling can never remove them. Faith in a higher power, belief in the existence of supernatural forces, recognition of a spiritual evolution among men—these things were born in me as a Brahmin. I could not destroy them if I would, while reason is overpowered by

them whenever the issue comes to battle. So, although I am quite in sympathy with the principles and methods of your modern sciences, what other answer can I give you, except this—I believe!”

He looks intently at me for a few moments. Then he proceeds:

“Yes, I have met such men. Once, twice, three times.

They are difficult to come across. Once they were easier to find, I believe, but today they have almost disappeared.”

“But they still exist, I presume?”

“Most likely, my friend. To find them is another matter. It would require a protracted search.”

“Your master—was he one of them?”

“No, he belonged to a higher order. Did I not tell you that he was a Rishee?”

The term needs some elucidation before my mind can digest it. I tell him so.

“Higher than the Yogis stand the Rishees,” he answers. “Transfer the Darwinian theory to the realm of human character; accept the Brahmin teaching that there is a spiritual evolution running parallel with the physical one; look upon the Rishees as men who have attained the crest of this upward climb; then you may form some rough conception of their greatness.”

“Does a Rishee also perform those wonders of which we hear?”

“Yes, he certainly does, but he will not value them for their own sake, whereas many of the Yogi wonder-workers do. Such powers arise in him naturally by reason of his great development of will and mental concentration. They are not his chief concern; he may even disdain them and use them little. You see, his first purpose is to become inwardly something akin to those divine beings of whom Buddha in the East and Christ in the West are the most illustrious examples.”

“But Christ worked miracles!”

“He did. But do you think he performed them for any vain self-glory? Not so; he desired to help the souls of ordinary people by thus catching their faith.”

“Surely, if such men as Rishees existed in India, multitudes would flock after them?” I conjecture.

“Undoubtedly—but they would first have to appear in public and announce themselves for what they are. Only in the most exceptional cases have Rishees ever been known to do that. They prefer to live apart from the world. Those who wish to perform a public work may emerge for a limited time and then disappear again.”

I object that such men could hardly be of much service to their fellows if they hide themselves in inaccessible places.

The Indian smiles tolerantly.

“That is a matter which comes within the province of your Western saying: ‘Appearances are sometimes deceptive.’

Without intimate knowledge of these persons, the world is not in a position to judge them accurately, if you will pardon my saying so. I have mentioned that the Rishees did sometimes live for a while in towns and move in society. In olden times, when that was a little more frequent, their wisdom, power and attainment became obvious to the public; their influence was then openly acknowledged. Even Maharajahs did not disdain to pay reverent homage to those great sages and to consult them for guidance in their policies. But as a matter of fact, it is certain that the Rishees prefer to exert their influence in a silent and unknown manner.”

“Well, I would like to meet such men,” I mutter, half to myself. “And I should certainly like to encounter some real Yogis.”

“You shall do so one day, without a doubt,” he assures me.

“How do you know that?” I ask, somewhat startled.

“I knew it that day we first met,” is the astonishing answer. “It came to me as an intuition—does it matter what you call it?—as a message deeply felt but inexplicable by outward evidences. My master taught me how to train this feeling, to develop it. Now, I have learnt to trust it implicitly.”

“A modern Socrates guided by his daemon!” I remark half-jocosely. “But tell me, when do you think your prophecy will come true?”

He shrugs his shoulders.

“I am not a prophet. So I regret that I cannot date the event for you.”

I do not press him, though I suspect he could say more if he would. I meditate upon the matter and then offer a suggestion.

“I suppose you will return to your own country eventually. If I am ready at the time, could we not travel together? Would you not help me locate some of these men we have been discussing?”

“No, my friend. Go alone. It will be better that you do your own finding.”

“It will be so difficult for a stranger,” I complain.

“Yes—very difficult. But go alone; one day you will see that I am right.”



From that time I feel strongly that a momentous day will dawn which will find me at anchor in the sunny East. I reflect that if India has harboured such great

men as the Rishees in the past, and if, as my friend believes, there may be a few of them still in existence, then the trouble of locating them might be balanced by the reward of learning something of their wisdom. Peradventure, I might then gain an understanding and content which life has so far denied me. Even if I fail in such a quest, the journey will not be a vain one. For those queer men, the Yogis, with their magic, their mysterious practices and their strange mode of living, excite my curiosity and arouse my interest. The journalistic grindstone has sharpened to an abnormal keenness my concern with the unusual. I am fascinated by the prospect of exploring such little-known trails. I decide to carry out my fancy to its full proportions and, when opportunity allows, take the first boat to India.

My dark-skinned friend, who has thus clinched and rendered final this determination to trek towards the rising sun, continues to receive me at his house for several months. He assists me to take my bearings upon the swirling ocean of life, though he always refuses to act as a pilot across the uncharted waters which stretch ahead of me. To discover one's position, to be made aware of latent possibilities, and to get one's vague ideas clarified, is nevertheless of indubitable value to a young man. It is not amiss, then, if I pay my meed of gratitude to that early benefactor of mine. For a dark day comes when fate spins its wheel once again, and we part. Within a few years I hear, seemingly by accident, of his death.

Time and circumstance are not ready for my journey. Ambition and desire lure a man into responsibilities from which it is not easy to extricate himself. I can do little more than resign myself to the life which hems me in, and watch and wait.

I never lose my faith in the Indian's prophecy. One day it is strengthened by an unexpected confirmation.

Professional work throws me for several months into frequent contact with a man for whom I entertain a high respect and friendly regard. He is exceedingly astute and knows human nature through every letter of its alphabet. Many years earlier he held the post of Professor of Psychology at one of our universities, but an academic life was not to his taste. He deserted it for pastures where he could put his amazing range of knowledge to more practical use. For a time he acted as adviser to magnates of the business world. How often has he boasted of drawing several retaining fees from the chiefs of large firms!

He is born with the remarkable gift of inspiring others to their best endeavours. Every person he meets—from office boy to millionaire magnate—finds practical help and new enthusiasm from the contact; sometimes they receive golden advice. I make it a practice to take careful note of any counsel he gives me, for

his foresight and insight usually receive startling verification in both business and personal matters. I enjoy his company because he has succeeded in fusing the elements of introspection and extrospection in his own nature, with the result that he can talk profound philosophy one minute and deal with a commercial report the next. Withal he is never dull, always witty and radiating good-humour.

He admits me into the circle of intimate friendship and, sometimes, we spend several hours at a time in mingled work and pleasure. I never tire of listening to his talk, for its latitude of subject enthralled me. I wonder often that one small head can carry all he knows!

One night we go out to dine together in a little Bohemian restaurant where pleasantly shaded lights and nicely cooked food accompany each other. After the meal we find a full moon resplendent in the heavens, and tempted by the witchery of its poetic light, decide to walk homewards.

The conversation has been somewhat light and frivolous for most of the evening, but as we walk on through the city's quieter streets, it drifts into philosophical depths. The close of our nocturnal peregrination finds us discussing subjects so abstruse that some of my companion's clients would take fright at the mere sound of the names. Outside his door, he turns and proffers a hand in farewell. As he grips mine, he suddenly addresses me in grave tones and says slowly:

"You ought never to have entered this profession. You are really a philosopher caught up in the ink-slinging business of writing. Why did you not become a university don and spend your life in secluded research? For you like to put on those carpet slippers of yours and walk around inside your brain. You are trying to reach the very source of the mind. One day you will go out to the Yogis of India, to the Lamas of Tibet and the Zen monks of Japan. Then you will write some strange records. Good night!"

"What do you think of these Yogis?"

The other man bends his head towards mine and half-whispers in my ear:

"My friend, they know, *they know!*"

I walk away greatly puzzled. This Eastern journey is not likely to happen for a long time ahead. I am sinking deeper and deeper into a maze of activities from which escape becomes proportionately more difficult. For a while pessimism seizes me. Am I not doomed by destiny to remain imprisoned in this maze of private bonds and personal ambitions?

Yet my guess at the unseen writ is wrong. Fate issues its orders every day, and though we are not literate enough to be able to read them, nevertheless we unconsciously move about to obey! Before twelve months pass I find myself dis-

embarking at Alexandra Dock, Bombay; mingling with the motley life of that Eastern city, and listening to the weird medley of Asiatic tongues which contribute to its cacophony!



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# A SEARCH IN SECRET INDIA

*A Search in Secret India* is the story of Paul Brunton's journey around India, living among yogis, mystics and gurus, some of whom he found convincing, others not. He finally finds the peace and tranquility which come with self-knowledge when he meets and studies with the great sage Sri Ramana Maharishi.

Paul Brunton was a British philosopher, mystic, traveler, and guru. He left a journalistic career to live among yogis, mystics, and holy men, and studied Eastern and Western esoteric teachings. Dedicating his life to an inward and spiritual quest, Brunton felt charged to communicate his experiences about what he learned in the east to others. His works had a major influence on the spread of Eastern mysticism to the West.

Taking pains to express his thoughts in layperson's terms, Brunton was able to present what he learned from the Orient and from ancient tradition as a living wisdom. His writings express his view that meditation and the inward quest are not exclusively for monks and hermits, but will also support those living normal, active lives in the Western world.



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