

Autobiography of a YOGI



By
Paramhansa Yogananda

WITH A PREFACE BY
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"Except ye see signs and wonders,
ye will not believe."-John 4:48.

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Dedicated To The Memory Of
LUTHER BURBANK
An American Saint

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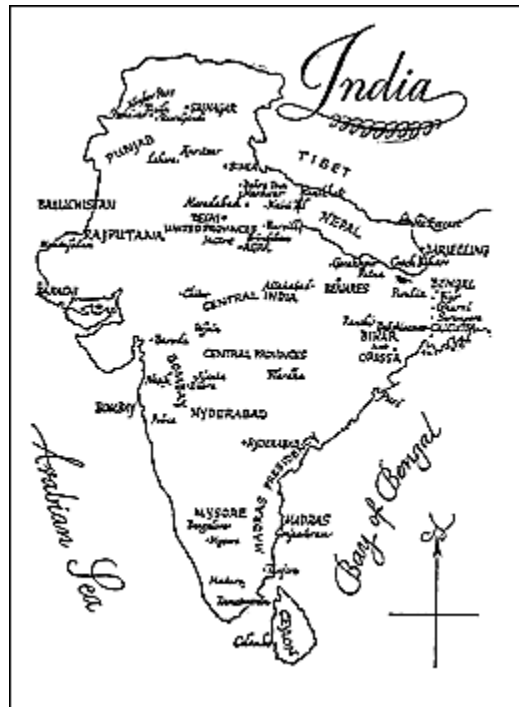
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Map of India

PREFACE

By W. Y. EVANS-WENTZ, M.A., D.Litt., D.Sc.

Jesus College, Oxford; Author of

The Tibetan Book of the Dead,

Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa,

Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines, etc.

The value of Yogananda's *Autobiography* is greatly enhanced by the fact that it is one of the few books in English about the wise men of India which has been written, not by a journalist or foreigner, but by one of their own race and training--in short, a book *about*

yogis *by* a yogi. As an eyewitness recountal of the extraordinary lives and powers of modern Hindu saints, the book has importance both timely and timeless. To its illustrious author, whom I have had the pleasure of knowing both in India and America, may every reader render due appreciation and gratitude. His unusual life-document is certainly one of the most revealing of the depths of the Hindu mind and heart, and of the spiritual wealth of India, ever to be published in the West.

It has been my privilege to have met one of the sages whose life- history is herein narrated-Sri Yukteswar Giri. A likeness of the venerable saint appeared as part of the frontispiece of my *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*. ¹¹ It was at Puri, in Orissa, on the Bay of Bengal, that I encountered Sri Yukteswar. He was then the head of a quiet ashrama near the seashore there, and was chiefly occupied in the spiritual training of a group of youthful disciples. He expressed keen interest in the welfare of the people of the United States and of all the Americas, and of England, too, and questioned me concerning the distant activities, particularly those in California, of his chief disciple, Paramhansa Yogananda, whom he dearly loved, and whom he had sent, in 1920, as his emissary to the West.

Sri Yukteswar was of gentle mien and voice, of pleasing presence, and worthy of the veneration which his followers spontaneously accorded to him. Every person who knew him, whether of his own community or not, held him in the highest esteem. I vividly recall his tall, straight, ascetic figure, garbed in the saffron-colored garb of one who has renounced worldly quests, as he stood at the entrance of the hermitage to give me welcome. His hair was long and somewhat curly, and his face bearded. His body was muscularly firm, but slender and well-formed, and his step energetic. He had chosen as his place of earthly abode the holy city of Puri, whither multitudes of pious Hindus, representative of every province of India, come daily on pilgrimage to the famed Temple of Jagannath, "Lord of the World." It was at Puri that Sri Yukteswar closed his mortal eyes, in 1936, to the scenes of this transitory state of being and passed on, knowing that his incarnation had been carried to a triumphant completion. I am glad, indeed, to be able to record this testimony to the high character and holiness of Sri Yukteswar. Content to remain afar from the multitude, he gave himself unreservedly and in tranquillity to that ideal life which Paramhansa Yogananda, his disciple, has now described for the ages. W. Y. EVANS-WENTZ

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PARAMHANSA YOGANANDA

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Encinitas, California

CHAPTER: 1

My Parents and Early Life

The characteristic features of Indian culture have long been a search for ultimate verities and the concomitant disciple-guru ¹⁻² relationship. My own path led me to a Christlike sage whose beautiful life was chiseled for the ages. He was one of the great masters who are India's sole remaining wealth. Emerging in every generation, they have bulwarked their land against the fate of Babylon and Egypt.

I find my earliest memories covering the anachronistic features of a previous incarnation. Clear recollections came to me of a distant life, a yogi ¹⁻³ amidst the Himalayan snows. These glimpses of the past, by some dimensionless link, also afforded me a glimpse of the future.

The helpless humiliations of infancy are not banished from my mind. I was resentfully conscious of not being able to walk or express myself freely. Prayerful surges arose within me as I realized my bodily impotence. My strong emotional life took silent form as words in many languages. Among the inward confusion of tongues, my ear gradually accustomed itself to the circumambient Bengali

syllables of my people. The beguiling scope of an infant's mind! adultly considered limited to toys and toes.

Psychological ferment and my unresponsive body brought me to many obstinate crying-spells. I recall the general family bewilderment at my distress. Happier memories, too, crowd in on me: my mother's caresses, and my first attempts at lisping phrase and toddling step. These early triumphs, usually forgotten quickly, are yet a natural basis of self-confidence.

My far-reaching memories are not unique. Many yogis are known to have retained their self-consciousness without interruption by the dramatic transition to and from "life" and "death." If man be solely a body, its loss indeed places the final period to identity. But if prophets down the millenniums spake with truth, man is essentially of incorporeal nature. The persistent core of human egoity is only temporarily allied with sense perception.

Although odd, clear memories of infancy are not extremely rare. During travels in numerous lands, I have listened to early recollections from the lips of veracious men and women.

I was born in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and passed my first eight years at Gorakhpur. This was my birthplace in the United Provinces of northeastern India. We were eight children: four boys and four girls. I, Mukunda Lal Ghosh ¹⁻⁴, was the second son and the fourth child.

Father and Mother were Bengalis, of the *kshatriya* caste. ¹⁻⁵ Both were blessed with saintly nature. Their mutual love, tranquil and dignified, never expressed itself frivolously. A perfect parental harmony was the calm center for the revolving tumult of eight young lives.

Father, Bhagabati Charan Ghosh, was kind, grave, at times stern. Loving him dearly, we children yet observed a certain reverential distance. An outstanding mathematician and logician, he was guided principally by his intellect. But

Mother was a queen of hearts, and taught us only through love. After her death, Father displayed more of his inner tenderness. I noticed then that his gaze often metamorphosed into my mother's.

In Mother's presence we tasted our earliest bitter-sweet acquaintance with the scriptures. Tales from the *mahabharata* and *ramayana* ¹⁻⁶ were resourcefully summoned to meet the exigencies of discipline. Instruction and chastisement went hand in hand.

A daily gesture of respect to Father was given by Mother's dressing us carefully in the afternoons to welcome him home from the office. His position was similar to that of a vice-president, in the Bengal-Nagpur Railway, one of India's large companies. His work involved traveling, and our family lived in several cities during my childhood.

Mother held an open hand toward the needy. Father was also kindly disposed, but his respect for law and order extended to the budget. One fortnight Mother spent, in feeding the poor, more than Father's monthly income.

"All I ask, please, is to keep your charities within a reasonable limit." Even a gentle rebuke from her husband was grievous to Mother. She ordered a hackney carriage, not hinting to the children at any disagreement.

"Good-by; I am going away to my mother's home." Ancient ultimatum!

We broke into astounded lamentations. Our maternal uncle arrived opportunely; he whispered to Father some sage counsel, garnered no doubt from the ages. After Father had made a few conciliatory remarks, Mother happily dismissed the cab. Thus ended the only trouble I ever noticed between my parents. But I recall a characteristic discussion.

"Please give me ten rupees for a hapless woman who has just arrived at the house." Mother's smile had its own persuasion.

"Why ten rupees? One is enough." Father added a justification: "When my father and grandparents died suddenly, I had my first taste of poverty. My only breakfast, before walking miles to my school, was a small banana. Later, at the university, I was in such need that I applied to a wealthy judge for aid of one rupee per month. He declined, remarking that even a rupee is important."

"How bitterly you recall the denial of that rupee!" Mother's heart had an instant logic. "Do you want this woman also to remember painfully your refusal of ten rupees which she needs urgently?"

"You win!" With the immemorial gesture of vanquished husbands, he opened his wallet. "Here is a ten-rupee note. Give it to her with my good will."

Father tended to first say "No" to any new proposal. His attitude toward the strange woman who so readily enlisted Mother's sympathy was an example of his customary caution. Aversion to instant acceptance- typical of the French mind in the West-is really only honoring the principle of "due reflection." I always found Father reasonable and evenly balanced in his judgments. If I could bolster up my numerous requests with one or two good arguments, he invariably put the coveted goal within my reach, whether it were a vacation trip or a new motorcycle.

Father was a strict disciplinarian to his children in their early years, but his attitude toward himself was truly Spartan. He never visited the theater, for instance, but sought his recreation in various spiritual practices and in reading the *bhagavad gita*. ¹⁻⁷ Shunning all luxuries, he would cling to one old pair of shoes until they were useless. His sons bought automobiles after they came into popular use, but Father was always content with the trolley car for his daily ride to the office. The accumulation of money for the sake of power was alien to his nature. Once, after organizing the Calcutta Urban Bank, he refused to benefit himself by holding any of its shares. He had simply wished to perform a civic duty in his spare time.