

young people of south asia

BY

Charles R. Joy



Young People of South Asia

THEIR STORIES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

by
CHARLES R. JOY

DUELL, SLOAN AND PEARCE
New York

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Young People
of
South Asia

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FOREWORD

There was a time when the western world did not know even the direction in which the fabled lands of Asia lay. Columbus sailed westward across the Atlantic with a letter to deliver to the Grand Khan of China. He reached Central America. Henry Hudson sailed north on the river that was named for him. He was not trying to reach Albany, where his little ship went aground. His objective was Canton in China. Magellan sailed south on his extraordinary voyage round the world, hoping to find a strait in the South Atlantic through which he could pass on his way to the gold and spices of the Orient. Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope and sailed eastward, finally reaching India, the land of which the great Portuguese navigators had dreamed.

Today no one has to sail into the perilous unknown any more to find the Far East. We can draw accurate maps of it.

We used to travel to Asia on lovely clipper ships like the *Flying Cloud*, the big, white sails on their tall, graceful spars bulging in the wind. Then the steamer came. To the natives in far lands they were demons belching black smoke. Then came the clipper planes that took off and landed on the water, so big that they had sitting rooms, dining rooms, kitchens, and a long compartment in the tail fitted with pullman bunks. With the development of large fuel tanks, other heavier-than-air planes like the Constellation began to fly the oceans, making

long jumps from land to land. And now we have the speedy jets that lengthen the daylight hours to set us down in the Far East in an amazingly short space of time.

The world is shrinking in size.

Yet, to us westerners, Asia is still a very strange, complex, confusing continent. It is all the more so because it is changing so rapidly. It was Tennyson who wrote: "The old order changeth, yielding place to new." Nowhere is this more true than in the world of southern Asia, which we shall visit in this book. The day of foreign domination has almost completely disappeared. A new free world is being born.

If you want to know what this new world will be like in the future you cannot do better than listen to these young people who will help to shape it. You will begin to understand their nations better as you see them through their eyes.

What an interesting and varied group they are: a Thai classical dancer, a novice in a Buddhist monastery, the daughter of a Hindu priest, the son of an Arab sheikh, a Moslem girl from the vale of Kashmir, twins from the capital of Afghanistan!

This is the ninth book in our young people's series. Our world family grows steadily bigger. It's a united family too, striving together to bring friendship and peace through understanding.

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**Young People
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I. SOUTH ASIA

DARING ADVENTURES

One-third of the earth and two-thirds of the people of the earth are in Asia. Those who know that part of the globe say, "It's a whale of a continent!" Yet for long centuries Asia was very remote from the civilizations of the Mediterranean. It took very daring and hardy adventurers to visit this region, and there were few of them.

The most famous of all was Marco Polo, the Venetian traveler, who was struck with wonder by the splendor he found at the court of the Khan of China. He visited Southeast Asia, India, and other places in this great area. He lived in the latter part of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries.

Another extraordinary traveler was a Moslem from Tangier. His name was Ibn Batuta, and for thirty years he wandered over the world. He never met Marco Polo, for his travels probably began a year or two after Polo's death; but his journeys were more extensive than Polo's or any other

traveler's in the Middle Ages. He not only visited China and India but also Ceylon, Indonesia, Asia Minor, Syria, Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Persia. He is not so well known as Marco Polo because his writings were only discovered when the French occupied Algeria.

MOUNTAIN AND DESERT BARRIERS

Asia is six thousand miles wide, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. Between the Mediterranean countries and the countries of South Asia there were (and, of course, still are) big, waterless deserts and high ice-tipped mountains. You could reach India in those days only through the passes of the Hindu Kush. The name of these mountains means the Hindu-Killer, for the Hindus who tried to climb them often perished.

The best known of the passes through which the early traders and invaders of India toiled is the Khyber Pass up on the northwest frontier. This pass is forty miles long and lies 6,825 feet above the sea. The inviting plains of India were open to those who could fight their way through this gap in the Hindu Kush.

Far in the north, mountain ranges like the Pamirs and the Himalayas protect South Asia from attack. To the east, of course, was the formidable barrier of the greatest ocean in the world. It isn't strange that South Asia in particular was so hard to reach.

THE EUROPEANS COME

Toward the end of the fifteenth century the Europeans first came to Asia. They arrived by sea, and they were seeking what they believed to be the wealth of the Orient. This

wealth at the beginning consisted mostly of spices. There was no refrigeration in Europe in those days, so the spices were very useful for covering the bad taste of spoiling meats and other foods. After this first voyage the European ships came in greater and greater numbers.

THE PENINSULAS OF SOUTH ASIA

The land mass that extends from the Atlantic to the Pacific is called Eurasia. Asia is the greater part of it, and Europe is simply a big peninsula extending from the central mass out to the west. India is another great peninsula, almost as large as Europe. To the east of India are two more peninsulas. The peninsula of Indo-China is occupied by the countries of Viet Nam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Burma. South of this peninsula the long, narrow Malay Peninsula stretches for about a thousand miles like a snake with the egg of Singapore in its mouth. Over to the west in South Asia is the Arabian Peninsula, so arid in the interior that not a single stream flows there the year round.

A GEOGRAPHICAL EXPRESSION

Some of the countries in the southeast have been included in the book of this series called *Young People of East Asia and Australia*. Others in the west fall naturally within the limits of *Young People of the Eastern Mediterranean*. In between are a dozen countries where the young people of the present book live.

We shall have much to say about these countries as one by one we reach them in our travels. But not so much can be said of South Asia as a whole. South Asia is simply a geographical term and nothing else. The words have no other meaning.