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* I became acquainted with this person in 1832
* It appears strange, that as early as 1816 no measures for the suppression of Thuggee were adopted
* Few who were in India at that period (1831-32) will ever forget the excitement which the discovery occasioned in every part of the country
* Captain Reynolds mentioned that, at the time he wrote, upwards of 1,800 notorious Thugs were at large in various parts of India
* From 1831 to 1837, inclusive, there were:—

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Transported to Penang, &c. | 1,059 |
| Hanged | 412 |
| Imprisoned for life with hard labour | 87 |
| Imprisoned in default of security | 21 |
| Imprisoned for various periods | 69 |
| Released after trial | 32 |
| Escaped from jail | 11 |
| Died in jail | 36 |
|   | —— |
|   | 1,727 |
| Made approvers | 483 |
| Convicted but not sentenced | 120 |
| In jail in various parts not yet tried | 936 |
|   | —— |
|   | 3,266 |

**CHAPTER I.**

You ask me, Sahib, for an account of my life: my relation of it will be understood by you, as you are acquainted with the peculiar habits of my countrymen; and if, as you say, you intend it for the information of your own, I have no hesitation in relating the whole; for though I have accepted the service of Europeans, in my case one of bondage, I cannot help looking back with pride and exultation on the many daring feats I have performed. Often indeed does my spirit rise at the recollection of them, and often do I again wish myself the leader of a band of gallant spirits, such as once obeyed me, to roam with them wherever my inclination or the hope of booty prompted.

But the time is past. Life, Sahib, is dear to every one; to preserve mine, which was forfeited to your laws, I have bound myself to your service, by the fearful tenure of denouncing all my old confederates, and you well know how that service is performed by me. Of all the members of my band, and of those with whom chance has even casually connected me, but few now remain at large; many have been sacrificed at the shrine of justice, and of those who now wander, broken, and pursued from haunt to haunt, you have such intelligence as will lead to their speedy apprehension.

Yet Thuggee, capable of exciting the mind so strongly, will not, cannot be annihilated! Look at the hundreds, I might say thousands, who have suffered for its profession; does the number of your prisoners decrease? No! on the contrary, they increase, and from every Thug who accepts the alternative of perpetual imprisonment to dying on a gallows, you learn of others whom even I knew not of, and of Thuggee being carried on in parts of the country where it is least suspected, and has never been discovered till lately.

It is indeed too true, Ameer Ali, said I; your old vocation seems to be as flourishing as ever, but it cannot last. Men will get tired of exposing themselves to the chance of being hunted down like wild beasts, and hanged when they are caught; or what is perhaps worse to many, of being sent over the Kala-Panee (transported); and so heartily does the Government pursue Thugs wherever they are known to exist, that there will no longer be a spot of ground in India where your profession can be practised.

You err, Sahib; you know not the high and stirring excitement of a Thug's occupation. To my perception it appears, that so long as one exists, he will gather others around him; and from the relation of what I will tell you of my own life, you will estimate how true is my assertion. How many of you English are passionately devoted to sporting! Your days and months are passed in its excitement. A tiger, a panther, a buffalo, or a hog, rouses your utmost energies for its destruction—you even risk your lives in its pursuit. How much higher game is a Thug's! His is man: against his fellow-creatures in every degree, from infancy to old age, he has sworn relentless, unerring destruction!

Ah! you are a horrible set of miscreants, said I; I have indeed the experience, from the records of murders which are daily being unfolded to me, of knowing this at least of you. But you must begin your story; I am prepared to listen to details worse than I can imagine human beings to have ever perpetrated.

It will even be as you think, said Ameer Ali, and I will conceal nothing; of course you wish me to begin my tale from as early a period as I can recollect.

Certainly; I am writing your life for the information of those in England,[2] who would no doubt like to have every particular of so renowned a person as yourself.

Well, then, Sahib, to begin; the earliest remembrance I have of anything, and until a few years ago it was very indistinct, is of a village in the territories of Holkar, where I was born. Who my parents were I know not; I suppose them to have been respectable, from the circumstances of my always wearing gold and silver ornaments, and having servants about me. I have an indistinct recollection of a tall fair lady whom I used to call mother, and of an old woman who always attended me, and who I suppose was my nurse; also of a sister who was younger than myself, but of whom I was passionately fond. I can remember no other particulars, until the event occurred which made me what I am, and which is vividly impressed on my mind.

From an unusual bustle in the house, and the packing up of articles of clothing and other necessaries, I supposed we were on the eve of departure from our home. I was right in my conjecture, for we left it the next morning. My mother and myself travelled in a dooly, old Chumpa was mounted on my pony, and my father rode his large horse. Several of the sons of our neighbours accompanied us; they were all armed, and I suppose were our escort. On the third or fourth day after we left our village, after our march of the day, we as usual put up in an empty shop in the bazaar of the town we rested at. My father left us to go about on his own business, and my mother, who could not show herself outside, after repeated injunctions that I was not to stray away, lay down in an inner room and went to sleep. Finding myself at liberty, as Chumpa was busy cooking and the Juwans were all out of the way, I speedily forgot all my mother's orders, and betook myself to play with some other children in the street. We were all at high romps, when a good-looking man of middle age addressed me, and asked me who I was—I must have been remarkable from the rest of the ragged urchins about me, as I was well dressed, and had some silver and gold ornaments on my person. I told him that my father's name was Yoosuf Khan, and that he and my mother and myself were going to Indoor.

"Ah, then," said he, "you are the party I met yesterday on the road: your mother rides on a bullock, does she not?"

"No, indeed!" retorted I, angrily, "she rides in a palankeen, and I go with her, and father rides a large horse, and we have Chumpa and several Juwans with us. Do you think a Pathan like my father would let my mother ride on a bullock, like the wife of a ploughman?"

"Well, my fine little fellow, it shall be as you say, and you shall ride a large horse too, one of these days, and wear a sword and shield like me. But would you not like some sweetmeat? See how tempting those julabees look at the Hulwaee's; come with me, and we will buy some."

The temptation was too strong to be withstood by a child, and after a fearful look towards the shop where we stayed, I accompanied the man to the Hulwaee's. He bought me a load of sweetmeats, and told me to go home and eat them; I tied them up in a handkerchief I wore round my waist, and proceeded homewards. This transaction had attracted the notice of some of the ragged urchins I had been playing with, and who had longingly eyed the julabees I had been treated to; and as soon as the man who had given them to me had gone a short distance, they attacked me with stones and dirt, till one more bold than the rest seized me, and endeavoured to get my prize from me. I struggled and fought as well as I could; but the others having fairly surrounded me, I was mobbed, and obliged to deliver up my treasure. Not content with this, one big boy made a snatch at the necklace I wore, on which I began to bellow with all my might. The noise I made attracted the notice of my acquaintance, who, running up, soon put the troop of boys to flight, and taking me under his charge, led me to our abode, where he delivered me up to Chumpa; at the same time telling her of the scuffle, and cautioning her not to let me out of her sight again.

I was crying bitterly, and my mother hearing a strange voice, called me to her. Asking me what had happened, I told my story, and said that the person who had saved me was speaking to Chumpa. She addressed him from behind the cloth, which had been put up as a screen, and thanked him; and added,[3] that my father was absent, but that if he would call again in an hour or two, he would find him at home, and she was sure he would also be glad to thank the person who had protected his child. The man said he would come in the evening, and went away. My father returned soon afterwards, and I received an admonition in the shape of a sound beating, for which I was consoled by my mother by a quantity of the sweetmeats from the Hulwaee's, which had been the cause of my trouble, and I may add also of my present condition. You see, Sahib, how fate works its ends out of trifling circumstances.

Towards evening my acquaintance, accompanied by another man, came. I was a good deal the subject of their conversation; but it passed on to other matters, among which I remember the word Thug to have been first used. I understood too from their discourse that there were many on the road between where we were and Indoor, and that they were cautioning my father against them. The men said that they were soldiers, who had been sent out on some business from Indoor; and as there were a good many of their men with them, they offered to make part of our escort. My friend was very kind to me, allowed me to play with his weapons, and promised me a ride before him on his horse the next day. I was delighted at the prospect, and with him for his kind and winning manner; but I did not like the appearance of the other, who was an ill-looking fellow—I shall have to tell you much more of him hereafter.

We started the next morning: our two acquaintances and their men joined us at a mango-grove outside the village, where they had been encamped, and we proceeded on our journey. In this manner we travelled for two days, and my friend performed his promise of taking me up before him on his horse; he would even dismount, and lead him, allowing me to remain on the saddle; and as the animal was a quiet one, I used to enjoy my ride till the sun became hot, when I was put into the dooly with my mother. On the third day I remember my friend saying to my father, as they rode side by side.

"Yoosuf Khan, why should you take those poor lads of yours on to Indoor with you? why not send them back from the stage we are now approaching? I and my men are ample protection to you; and as you will belong to the same service as myself, there can be no harm in your trusting yourself and family to my protection for the rest of the journey; besides, the dangerous part of the road, the jungle in which we have been for the last two days, is passed, and the country before us is open. The only fear of Thugs and thieves existed in them, and they are now far behind."

"It is well said," replied my father; "I dare say the lads will be thankful to me for sparing them a part of the long march back, and they have already accompanied us some fifty or sixty coss."

On our arrival at the stage, my father told the lads they must return, at which they were highly pleased; and on their departure about noon, I gave many kind messages to my old companions and playfellows. I remember too giving an old battered rupee to be delivered to my little sister, and saying she was to hang it with the other charms and coins about her neck, to remind her of me. I found it again, Sahib; but, ah! under what circumstances!

At this period of his narrative, Ameer Ali seemed to shudder; a strong spasm shot through his frame, and it was some time before he spoke: at last he resumed:

Tell a servant to bring me some water, Sahib—I am thirsty with having spoken too much.

No, said I, you are not thirsty, but you shall have the water.

It was brought, but he scarcely tasted it—the shudder again passed through him. He got up and walked across the room, his irons clanking as he moved. It was horrible to see the workings of his face. At last he said, Sahib, this is weakness. I could not conceal it; I little thought I should have been thus moved at so early a period of my story; but recollections crowded on me so fast that I felt confused, and very sick. It is over now—I will proceed.

Do so, said I.

The Juwans had been gone some hours, and it was now evening. My friend came to our abode, and told my father that the next were two short stages, and if he liked they might be made in one, as it would shorten the distance to Indoor; but that we should be obliged to start very early, long before daylight,[4] and that the bearers who carried the dooly could easily be persuaded to make the march by promise of a sheep, which the potail of the village he proposed going to would supply free of cost, as he was a friend of his. My father seemed to be rather indignant at the idea of his taking a sheep for nothing, and said that he had plenty of money, not only to pay for a sheep, but to give them a present if they carried us quickly.

"Well," said my friend, "so much the better, for we sipahees have rarely much about us but our arms."

"True," returned my father; "but you know that I have sold all my property at my village, and have brought the money to aid me in our service. Indeed, it is a good round sum." And my father chuckled at the idea.

"What! have you a thousand rupees?" I asked, my ideas of wealth going no further.

"And what if it should be more?" said he, and the matter dropped; but even now I think I can remember that my friend exchanged significant glances with his companion.

It was then arranged that we should start with the rising of the moon, about the middle of the night. We were roused from our sleep at the hour proposed; and after the men had had a pipe all round, we set off. I was in the dooly with my mother. The moon had risen; but, as well as I can remember, there was but little light, and a slight rain falling, which obliged us to travel very slowly. After we had proceeded a few coss, the bearers of the dooly put it down, saying that they could not get on in the dark and the mud, and proposed to wait till daylight. My father had a violent altercation with them; and as I was now wide awake, and it had ceased to rain, I begged to be taken out of the dooly, and allowed to ride with my friend. He did not assent as readily as usual; yet he took me up when the bearers had been scolded into going on. I remarked to him that some of the soldiers, as I thought them, were absent. My remark attracted my father's notice to the circumstance, and he asked our companion where they were. He replied carelessly, that they were gone on in advance, as we had travelled as yet so slowly, and that we should soon overtake them.

We proceeded. We came at last to the deep bed of a river, on the sides of which there was some thick jungle, when my friend dismounted, as he said, to drink water, and told me the horse would carry me over safely. I guided him on as well as I could; but before I had got well across the stream, I heard a cry, and the noise as if of a sudden scuffle. It alarmed me; and in looking back to see from whence it proceeded, I lost my balance on the horse, and fell heavily on the stones in the bed of the river, which cut my forehead severely. I bear the mark now.

I lay for a short time, and raising myself up, saw all the men, who I thought were far on before us, engaged in plundering the dooly. I now began to scream with all my might. One of them ran up to me, and I saw it was the ill-looking one I have before mentioned. "Ah! we have forgotten you, you little devil," cried he; and throwing a handkerchief round my neck, he nearly choked me. Another man came up hastily,—it was my friend. "He must not be touched," he cried angrily to the other, and seized his hands; they had a violent quarrel, and drew their swords. I can remember no more; for I was so much frightened that I lost all consciousness, and, as I suppose, fainted.

I was recovered by some water being forced into my mouth; and the first objects which met my eyes were the bodies of my father and mother, with those of Chumpa and the palankeen-bearers all lying confusedly on the ground. I cannot remember what my feelings were, but they must have been horrible. I only recollect throwing myself on my dead mother, whose face appeared dreadfully distorted, and again relapsing into insensibility. Even after the lapse of thirty-five years, the hideous appearance of my mother's face, and particularly of her eyes, comes to my recollection; but I need not describe it, Sahib; she had been strangled! She, my father, and the whole party had come to a miserable and untimely end! I heard a narrative of the particulars of the event, many years afterwards, from an old Thug; and I will relate them in their proper place.

When I recovered my consciousness, I found myself once more before my[5] friend who had saved my life. He supported and almost carried me in his arms, and I perceived that we were no longer on the road. We were rapidly traversing the jungle, which extended as far as I could see in every direction; but the pain of my neck was so great, that I could scarcely hold up my head. My eyes seemed to be distended and bursting, and were also very painful. With my consciousness, the remembrance of the whole scene came to my recollection, and again I fell into insensibility. I recovered and relapsed in this manner several times during this journey; but it was only momentary, only sufficient to allow me to observe that we still held on at a rapid pace, as the men on foot were between running and walking. At last we stopped, and it was now broad daylight; indeed, the sun had risen. I was taken off the horse by one of the men, and laid under a tree on a cloth spread on the ground, and after some time my friend came to me. Desolate as I was, I could not help feeling that he must have had some concern in the death of my parents; and in my childish anger I bitterly reproached him, and bade him kill me. He tried to console me: but the more he endeavoured, the more I persisted that he should put me to death. I was in dreadful pain; my neck and eyes ached insufferably. I heaped all the abuse I could think of upon him, and the noise I made attracted the notice of the ill-looking man, whose name was Gunesha.

"What is that brat saying? Are you too turned woman," cried he fiercely, addressing the other, whose name was Ismail, "that you do not put the cloth about his neck and quiet him at once? Let me do it, if you are afraid."

And he approached me. I was reckless, and poured forth a torrent of vile abuse, and spat at him. He untied his waistband, and was about to put an end to me, when Ismail again interfered, and saved me: they had again a violent quarrel, but he succeeded in carrying me off to some little distance to another tree, where some of the band were preparing to cook their victuals; and setting me down among them, bidding them take care of me, he went away. The men tried to make me speak, but I was sullen and would not; the pain of my neck and eyes seemed to increase, and I began to cry bitterly. I lay in this manner for some hours, I suppose; and at last, completely tired out, fell asleep. I woke towards evening; and when Ismail saw me sit up, he came to me, soothed and caressed me, saying that I should henceforth be his child; and that it was not he, but others, who had murdered my parents. I remember begging him to do something for my neck, which was swelled and still very painful. He examined it, and seemed to be struck with the narrow escape I had had of my life.

He rubbed my neck with oil, and afterwards put upon it a warm plaster of leaves, which relieved it greatly, and I felt easier for its application. He remained with me; and some of the other men, sitting down by us, began to sing and play to amuse me. I was given some milk and rice to eat in the evening; but before it was time to sleep, Ismail brought me some sherbet of sugar and water, which he said would make me sleep. I suppose there was opium in it, for I remember nothing till the next morning, when I found myself in his arms on horseback, and knew that we were again travelling.

I pass over the journey, as I remember nothing of it, except that Gunesha was no longer with us, which I was very glad of, for I hated him, and could not bear his presence. Even in after-years, Sahib, though we have been engaged together in Thuggee, I always bore a deep-rooted aversion to him, which never changed to the last. Ismail and seven men were all that remained of the band; and we proceeded, by long and fatiguing marches, to a village in which he said he resided, and where I was to be given up to the care of his wife. We arrived at last, and I was introduced to a good-looking young woman as a child of a relation, whom he had long ago adopted as a son, and had now brought home to her: in fine, I was formally adopted by them as their own, and my sufferings were speedily forgotten.

[6]