

[E-BOOK] Chasing the Mountain of Light

Chasing the Mountain of Light

Kevin Rushby

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Kevin Rushby : Chasing the Mountain of Light before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Chasing the Mountain of Light:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting and enjoyable travelogue of IndiaBy Tim F. Martin_Chasing the Mountain of Light_ by Kevin Rushby is an interesting and sometimes humorous travelogue about India, ostensibly about the author's efforts to track the origins and history of the Koh-i-Noor or Mountain of Light, one of the most famous diamonds in the world, from its origins in the mines of Golconda in southern India to centuries

later and its presumably final resting place in the Tower of London. Though the diamond's history and lore was indeed chronicled, the book was really the story of one traveler's adventures and encounters throughout India. Journeying from Madras on the Coromandel Coast in southern India all the way north to Amritsar in the Punjab, near the Pakistani border, Rushby undertook an epic quest to find the origins of this stone and to relate its bloody history. He had to contend with reluctant, unfriendly, tight-lipped officials, shady sellers of black market diamonds in dangerous back alleys, eccentric but knowledgeable experts on diamond lore and Indian history, and thieves, alerted to Rushby's inquires about diamonds, thinking him not a writer but a man who actually possessed large quantities of these gems on his person. The diamond known as Koh-i-Noor was believed by many devout Hindus to actually be mythic in origin, to be a stone that was once called the Syamantaka, a gem which the Hindu sun god Surya gave as reward to a worshipper. Later the god Krishna was accused by the people of stealing the gem and fought terrible battles to return the diamond back to humanity. The stone was owned by the Mughals for generations, beginning with the first Mughal emperor Babur in the 1520s, though many scholars dispute the notion that the Syamantaka and a magnificent stone known simply as "Babur's diamond" are the one and the same. The Persian invader Nadir Shah sacked Delhi in 1739, leaving the Mughals as vassals but along with many other treasures took the great diamond with him, giving it the name Koh-i-Noor (which means Mountain of Light). After Nadir Shah was assassinated in 1747 the Koh-i-Noor was taken by Ahmad Khan Abdali to Afghanistan. The last member of the Durrani dynasty (which was founded by Ahmad Khan Abdali), a ruler by the name of Shah Shuja, went into exile, the gem then taken by Ranjit Singh in 1813 (a man who founded a Sikh kingdom in the Punjab in 1799). During one of the Anglo-Sikh wars the Koh-i-Noor was captured by the British, who took the diamond to Queen Victoria, who in turn had the 186 carat diamond re-cut to improve its brilliance, bringing the stone down to a 108 carats (though strangely enough improving the diamond's allure, as the number 108 is a very auspicious number in India). Many in India believe the stone is cursed and that the stone can only be given freely to another person by its owner or be won rightfully in battle; horrible things will result when the stone is bought, sold, or stolen. Further, they also believe that the stone will produce good fortune for good people but very bad things for the wicked. Like many other great Indian diamonds, the Koh-i-Noor was always searching for a new master, "leaving behind the failed and the dead." Claimed by India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, the Sikhs in particular are keen to retrieve it as a symbol of Sikh nationalism (though they insist that like their famed Golden Temple, it would be the property of all Indians). Given its history and the immense prestige that would be gained by any in the subcontinent or the region who came into possession of the stone, Rushby wondered if the diamond was not best left in the Tower of London. As fascinating as the Koh-i-Noor was, its history fills a fairly modest part of the book. More interesting perhaps was the numerous encounters Rushby had. He toured Fort St. George in Madras, the largest building left in the world constructed by the East India Company; never a favored post by Englishman, many sent there never returned, often committing suicide or drinking themselves to death. Also in Madras the author visited an Armenian church and met a Mr. Gregory, the last remaining Armenian, sole representative of a once thriving Armenian trading community. Rushby met with astrologists, men who believed that they could control fate by the proper manipulation of gemstones. Religious encounters as one might imagine definitely occurred, as Rushby met with Zoroastrians who had fled from Aden, Yemen after the British left, observed a Sikh worship ceremony in the Golden Temple, and met a number of Jainists, going on a Jain pilgrimage and encountering members of both sects of the religion, both the Digambaras or "sky-clads," who believe that it is most holy to be without clothing, and the Svetambaras or "white-clads," who believe that nudity is not possible in an imperfect world. Rushby visited Alaung, the world's largest ship breaking yard, where tens of thousands of unskilled laborers work on an oil-soaked beach to destroy 50,000 tonne tankers with practically their bare hands. One of my favorite parts was his visit to Bilkha, once a tiny state that was only 7 miles wide and 10 miles long. Rushby met with the last descendents of its raja, a man with memories of a garage of Rolls-Royces, a stable of fine race horses and elephants, and lion-hunting expeditions, now a friendly and affable man sought by the locals for kindly advice, with only a single servant that he treats like a son, a man who took pleasure in personally fixing his own jeep and in participating in studies of the lions of the Gir Forest, no longer seeking them as trophies but working hard to conserve them for the future. A good book, at the back of the book there was a helpful chronology of the diamond and a bibliography. Though there were two maps some of the places he visited were not noted on them.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Review of Chasing the Mountain of Light By William I thoroughly enjoyed Kevin Rushby's book about the Koh-I-Noor diamond and was truly fascinated with his account of travelling across India in search of it's details. The book is full of history, myth, and plenty of really funny humor. I recomend this book to anyone wishing to learn more about famous diamonds, or the history of India in general. It is a most fascinating and informative book to read.

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Chasing the Mountain of Light : Across India on the Trail of the Koh-i-Noor Diamond By Karthik Menon The author should have added the words "MY MODERN DAY DESCRIPTION" before the title. Not only is this book typically a westerner's view of India, it has all the historical facts probably gleaned off Google itself. The inter-personal activity with the different people who helped on his "so-called" journey feels more like a Merchant Ivory movie plot than anything substantial which is not available on the web. Don't buy this unless you don't have access to the internet or can't type "Kohinoor" on the Google or Bing search engine. Total waste

In the beginning diamonds came from India. And the greatest of those ancient stones, the Koh-i-Noor, the Mountain of Light, cut a deep and bloody path across its history and legends. Fought over, cursed and occasionally lost, taken from the mines of Golconda in the south to the Mughal palaces of Agra and Delhi in the north, it finally reached the Sikhs in the Punjab, only to be seized by British agents eager to please the young Queen Victoria. It now lies in the Tower of London, its ownership still disputed. Kevin Rushby follows the trail of this great jewel through fascinating corners of India, crossing along the way the paths of dealers, smugglers and petty crooks. The historical characters he also encounters are no less colourful, from the bloodthirsty tyrants who built mountains of human heads to the man-god Krishna. Rushby unravels the religious symbolism and mysticism behind our passion for diamonds, on a journey that is humorous, informative and, as it progresses, more than a little dangerous.

.com A shiny piece of carbon is what ensnares writer Kevin Rushby, luring him into a strange world of hidden towns with no names, a land of charms, chakras, cardamom, and missing gem mines. But it's not just any chunk of glittering jewel with which Rushby is obsessed: he's pursuing the history of the Koh-I-Noor diamond, a 106-karat piece of crystalline perfection now part of England's Crown Jewels. Research pulls him across India and into a diverse culture that is so exotic--and simultaneously so mystical, esoteric, and often criminal--that he may as well have fallen into Middle-earth. The diamond now sits in the Tower of London, but the magnificent gem's past proves elusive, its light flickering in a maze of mirrors, cloaked in myth, lies, and mystery. The truth about whence it came and which palms it crossed may ultimately never be uncovered. Nevertheless, Rushby artfully uses the pretext to uncover rich stories: of the excesses of wealthy jewelers, of impoverished farmers who discover gleaming wealth in the fields, and of clandestine diamond markets, where cloth-wrapped baubles are sold on the streets like peddled crack. Names of Indian places and people do get confusing--and there are more characters spinning around in this book than a Russian novel--but that doesn't matter. Rushby weaves *Chasing the Mountain of Light* with lush detail, creating a tale as compelling, multifaceted, and breathtaking as the diamond itself. --Melissa Rossi
From Publishers Weekly
Rushby's interest in the ancient diamond trade was piqued after a chance meeting with a diamond smuggler in Ethiopia. Driven to unearth the history-drenched underbelly of the diamond trade, Rushby (*Eating the Flowers of Paradise: A Journey Through the Drug Fields of Ethiopia and Yemen*) treks across India in search of old gemstone mines and ancient accounts. Rushby isn't quite sure what he's looking for, but he narrows his focus to the fate of Koh-i-Noor, the world's largest diamond, from its origins circa 1000 B.C., when it was believed to be a gift from the Sun God, to its present home in the Tower of London. He seeks out unorthodox storytellers, be they miners, peasants, gem dealers, diplomats, gurus or Jesuit priests. Unfortunately, Rushby is limited to the stories told by those who speak English; he very eloquently describes the frustration of watching someone gesture and talk excitedly, only to receive a two-word translation from a jaded interpreter. However, Rushby's keen sense of humor and sharp eye more than compensate for this handicap. Acutely written, this meandering adventure will appeal equally to mystics, gemologists, historians and travelers. (Feb.)
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From Library Journal
In some circles, gems--like the Koh-i-Noor diamond--are believed to influence people for good or ill. Now in the possession of the British Crown, that legendary Indian diamond has been coveted and fought over through the centuries. Here, Rushby (*Eating the Flowers of Paradise*) tours the subcontinent in order to trace the diamond's blood-splattered history. He visits diamond mines in Andhra Pradesh, Bombay and Gujarat, and Delhi and the Punjab; stops at roach-infested hotels; travels by bus and train; and gets robbed by diamond smugglers. Whether you agree with Rushby that the accursed diamond should not be returned to its lawful owners (India) is beside the point. This travelog--as spellbinding as any thriller--contains some brilliant portrayals of ex-princes, scholars, cranks, and other sundry characters whose hospitality Rushby enjoys. Highly recommended for public libraries.-Ravi Shenoy, Hinsdale P.L., IL
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