



Beyond The Devil's Teeth

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A magical journey through uncharted territories, 45 million years ago, Gondwanaland split apart to form India, Africa and South America. Roughing it for most of journey, Shah shared his travels and his tales with a diverting mix of eccentric characters.

Beyond The Devil's Teeth Details

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Author : Tahir Shah

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From Reader Review Beyond The Devil's Teeth for online ebook

Pialita says

brilliant

Ita says

When I first read, and thoroughly enjoyed, 'Beyond the Devil's Teeth,' just after it was first published, I assumed it was a straightforward account of a long and arduous, surprise generating journey through Gondwanaland, the super-continent which existed when India, Africa and South America were joined. Eighteen years later, I am more aware of Tahir Shah's extraordinary powers of observation; of the incredible imagination which allows him to create works which are finely balanced between fact and fiction; and of the humour which can bubble up into his writing.

The journey starts when he flies to India in search of antique treasure. A Mumbai tailor supplies him with shirts of sackcloth and boxer shorts of silk, and finds two assistants to help in the quest. One is a translator because the other is illiterate, cannot speak English and communicates through Indian sign language. The treasure is more elusive than expected, but the search for it brings him to places tourists rarely, if ever, see, in Mumbai, Dehli, and on the edge of the Thai desert. It allows him to meet people like pimps and arms dealers whom tourists tend to avoid; and he finds treasure in the shape of regal Rachana whom he succeeds in dating.

Before he leaves North Gondwanaland, his sister Saira entices him to Pakistan with promise of treasure. It is just after the Soviet-Afghan war, and the frontier town of Peshawar is full of reporters, aid-agency workers and heavily armed Mujahadin. The Russians have left Afghanistan, but warrior factions fight over the country. Saira brings Tahir to a hospital where child victims of the conflict are being treated.

The journey through Central Gondwanaland, starting in Senegal and ending in Kenya, is gruelling and hindered by bullying officials. Everywhere there is evidence of the brutality of totalitarian regimes, but the kindness of simple people touches his heart. One of the aims of the journey is to learn about African healing. A penfriend in Sierra Leone brings him to see his Babalawo but, when it becomes evident that the latter needs blood for his Borfima, Tahir's travelling companion takes fright. Later in Manaus on the Amazon, following a chance encounter at a fish market, he has the opportunity to attend a Macumba initiation ritual. Macumba is a Brazilian cult originating in Nigeria.

Travelling through South America, from Venezuela to Patagonia, Tahir feels the force of nature as strongly as he did in Africa. There he climbed the Nyiragongo volcano, went to see mountain gorillas in Rwanda and was conscious of the abundance of insect life. In Brazil he sees intact rainforest, the devastation caused by its removal, and the unwillingness of people to accept that our incursions are not without consequence.

'Beyond the Devil's Teeth' is a book written at more than one level; but Tahir Shah is an immensely gifted storyteller and it can be enjoyed at any level. I don't pretend to understand it at all its levels, and it leaves me with questions. Are the writer's travelling companions real or imaginary? Do they represent aspects of himself which need to be integrated? Did the ill-equipped expedition to a glacier in Patagonia really take place? The inevitable next question is, 'What is reality?'

Toni says

Aug 29th 2018.....Page 57... old printed edition

'Another week passed and I asked Prideep and Osman to try and find out if there was a town hall in Bombay. They both thought however that it was totally logical to be taken to the control tower of an airport when asking for the main building of public affairs. I began to get to grips with the fact that it might be me who was going insane.....'

'Do I look cuckoo to you Vinod?'

'Sahib you not a cloo-koo.'

And so it goes on... but Tahir Shah is mad in a special way and it behoves one to keep one's reading eye open. Do read this book. Highly recommended.

Have just re-read Beyond the Devils Teeth.

Oct 19th 2013.

Even more interesting second time round.

The journey through Gondwanaland is strewn with sights/insights. Some shocks too. It culminates in the ice mountains of Patagonia, with a magic ring which you have to know how to use.

2018 27th July.

'We stood together: he waited for my reply. I gazed out through the long panes of glass to lake Kivu, which sprawled away from the bottom of the once-landscaped gardens. Such beauty enveloped the place that it seemed enchanted , as if by a spell. I thought back to the pollution of the West, the problems of its societies and the misdeeds of educated men.

The guardain looked expectantly his eyebrows knotted together and I addressed him.

'Where we come from there are bad men. They lie, they steel they are discouteous; these are the values which they teach each other: even the educated, on the Other Side. Monsieur... we have come to Zaire to increase ur own education. We shall return soon to our own countries, but we must return alone.

Daren says

I am a big fan of Tahir Shah, and I mean with all respect, that this book read as an early work. It had the same excellent content, unusual interactions with interesting people, and quirky expansions of reality (yeah, some stretching of reason and massaging of belief is occasionally required), but it lacked the flow and polish of Tahir Shah's more recent works.

For me, from the very beginning, this book seemed more like a story shoe-horned into an overarching concept, rather than a realistic concept with a story unfolding under it. The whole Gondwanaland link seemed too tenuous to me, and didn't add to the book.

Having pointed out the negatives, this is still a great read. Shah attracts off-beat people, and participate in their weirdness, and survive to write about it.

Travels in this book are supposed to further the authors own research in to Gondwanaland - and touch on

India and Pakistan (fairly extensively). Then Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, The Gambia on the West Coast of Africa, Congo DR in Central Africa, and Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya on the East Coast of Africa. In South America, he spends time in Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina. No mention of Australia and Antarctica - which were pretty important parts of Gondwanaland, even if New Zealand wasn't a big part.

Still - can't go wrong with this author. 3.5 stars, rounded up.

Lenny Hall says

One of the first book I read by Shah.

Lesley says

I love anything written by Tahir Shah. He's a fantastic traveler, visiting places and hotels never mentioned in the tour guides for good reason and meeting the oddest people. As though the stories aren't strange and fascinating in themselves, his writing is spot-on funny. Try one of his books, any one, and you'll become addicted as I have.

Pablo says

Talented writer with a fantastic ability to describe place and people. A shame it's so overdone with just unbelievable bullshit. Why one asks, when it's sooo unnecessary to his story? One reviewer spoke of the need for a "suspension of belief" to enjoy his stories fully. For me, I prefer my travel literature and non-fiction rather more accurate and truthful. Paul Theroux speaks of his bullshit detector becoming ever more finely calibrated as he aged. Well , with this book, all the alarm bells are ringing loudly!!! 1 star raised to 2 only due to writing quality. Unfortunately, honesty weighs far heavier with me! Disappointing!
