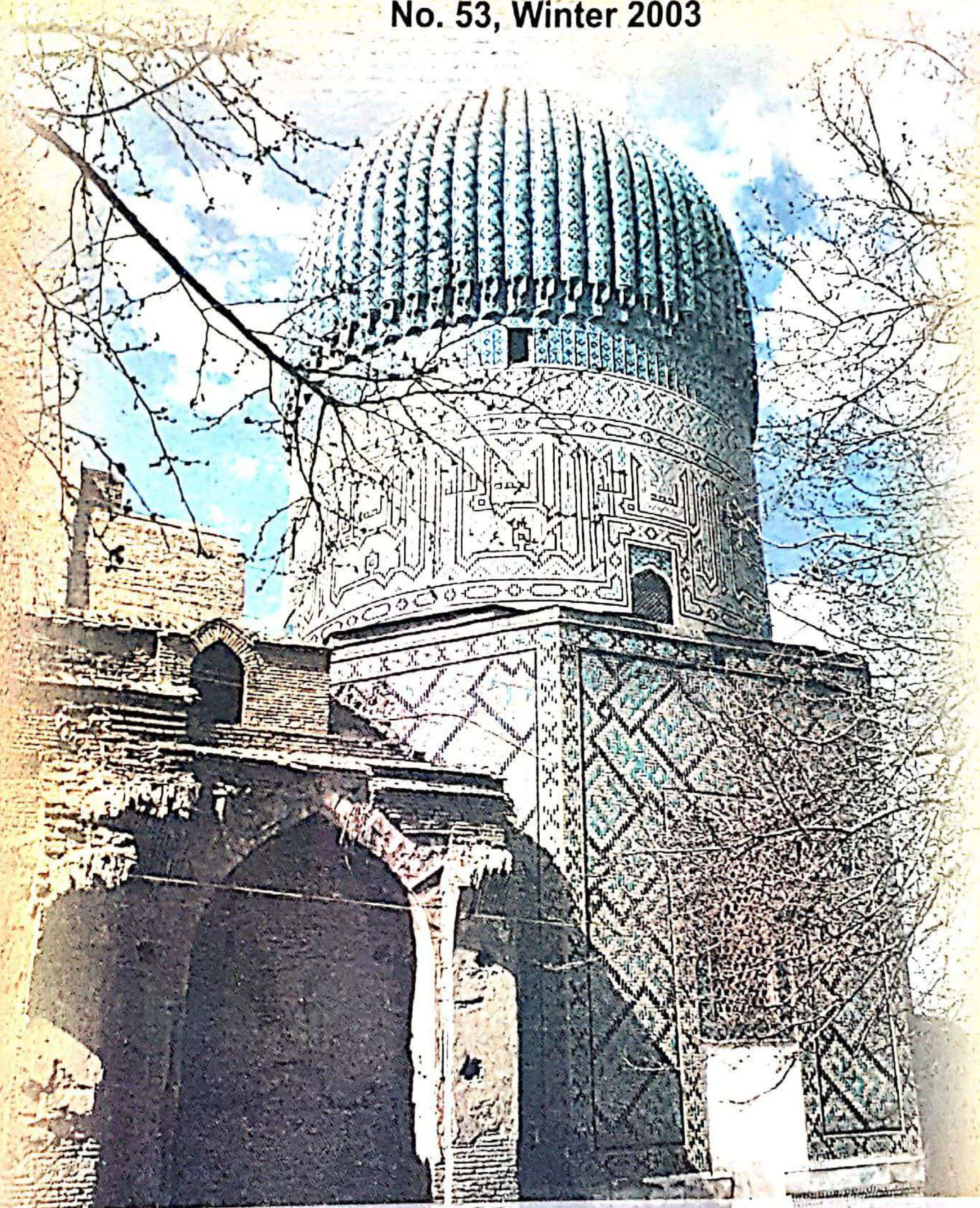


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WRITING ON AFGHANISTAN IN THE JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL CENTRAL ASIAN SOCIETY 1919-1945 – AN APPRAISAL

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The purpose of the present study is to evaluate and analyse different writings appeared in the *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* between the years 1919-1945. Basically these were the lectures delivered at the Central Asian Society, London, later on published in the above mentioned journal. In these meetings majority of the participants were prominent scholars, militarymen, administrators, and, those who had empirical knowledge of Afghanistan and the Central Asia. Some of the prominent participants in these seminars were Sir Percy Sykes, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, General Sir George MacMunn, Sir Frederick Fryer, General Sir Edmund Barrow, Colonel C.E. Yate, Sir Raleigh Egerton, General Robert Scallon, Sirdar Ikbāl Ali Shah, Colonel Pemberton, General William Thomson and Colonel Lewis. The major reason for focusing on this particular period is due to the fact that year 1919 saw the emergence of Afghanistan as an independent country and 1945 marked the end of hostilities on the global level i.e. the end of the Second World War, the culmination point of my present research and the collection of material for my

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ongoing project on the German activities in Afghanistan and the N.W.F.P. during the War Years.

The first article Afghanistan in 1919, is based on a lecture delivered by Sirdar Ikbāl Ali Shah on 22 October 1919 at the Central Asian Society, London. Ikbāl Ali Shah gave a background of the pro-British attitude of Amir Abdur Rahman, the grandfather of Amanullah Khan, then Amir of Afghanistan. According to the speaker since Amir Dost Mohammad Khan's days, the general attitude of the Afghans towards the foreigners was full of distrust. Amir Abdur Rahman tried to convince his people that the British were friends of the Afghans and the Russians were their real enemies. He favoured foreign assistance but not their direct interference and involvement in the Afghan affairs. Consequently, many Afghans, according to the speaker, 'are obsessed by the idea that if they are to retain their liberty they must keep the Russian and the British subjects out of their country'.¹

The Afghans were apprehensive of the 'gradual absorption' of Central Asia by Russia. Despite the Russian assurances to the British government that they would respect the boundary line between Russia and Afghan outposts at Panjdeh, on the Murghab and on the Pamirs, they could not trust the northern neighbours. He blamed Russia for inviting troubles for Amir Sher Ali Khan which eventually led to the Second Anglo-Afghan war. Many Afghans, according to the speaker, were suspicious of the 'good intentions' of Britain as they fought wars with it. Russian diplomats were wise, astute and influential enough to 'make the best of the deal' while negotiating with Britain over Afghanistan. The territories of Panjdeh, Shighnan, Roshan and Darwaz were taken by the Russians by force. The Afghans, according to Shah, believed that 'they would have held their own if the British Government had controlled their policy. They held, and still hold that it was through British influence and Russian misunderstanding of geographical conditions and racial questions that Afghanistan lost such large areas of their country.

Another factor for creating hatred against the British was keeping the deposed Amirs in India, as if to hold them in reserve

¹ Ikbāl Ali Shah, 'Afghanistan in 1919', *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, Vol. VII, 1920, Part I, p. 5.

for future contingencies. This policy being regarded as the one directed to interfere with the freedom and independence of their country. Moreover, after recognizing Amir Abdur Rahman as the ruler of Afghanistan, the British Government treated him; 'within limits'. He was denied the privilege of dealing directly with the British government and was directed that all negotiations should be conducted through the Government of India. Even Persia was given the privilege of having its own representative at London. This promoted a feeling in Afghanistan that it was virtually a semi-dependency although nominally independent.

During the First World War, Amir Habibullah whom the speaker termed as 'the friend of Great Britain and the real friend of his countrymen', prevented his country being plunged into war to serve the purpose of Germany. He, however, paid the price: was assassinated to pave the way for Nasrullah, his younger brother who, according to Shah, was deeply respected by the clergy of Afghanistan and the 'fanatical tribes'. The drastic changes at Kabul changed the whole scenario. Amanullah was proclaimed as the Amir of Afghanistan who ordered for an inquiry regarding the murder of his father and ordered the imprisonment of Nasrullah. This created a wave of protest among the eastern frontier of Afghanistan and in the Jalalabad district. They threatened Amanullah of his disposition and declared that like his father Habibullah he was an ally of the infidels. They did not wait for a declaration from Kabul and declared a holy war, and attacked the British territory. The Amir, thus was deceived and threatened and he found himself in a war, caused partly by misunderstandings and partly by intrigue.

Ikbāl Ali Shah demanded the extension of railways and telegraph system from India to Afghanistan. He made it clear that they should be worked and controlled by the Afghans after a period of training. If India were connected by railways with Kabul, remarked Ikbāl Ali Shah, 'the Central Asian markets would be magnificent "feeders" of British commerce. Afghanistan would benefit greatly by drawing custom duties, and its future tranquility would be assured by wealth obtained in this connection and by the facilities railways would afford for the transport of troops and the

effective policing of the whole country'.² However, according to the speaker, before the extension of the railways to Afghanistan, an important step to be taken is to guarantee that the Amir's country will always remain strictly independent. All causes for suspicion or misunderstanding should be removed. Let there be an Afghan ambassador in London and a British ambassador at Kabul, and let there be restored to Afghanistan the provinces of Panjdeh, Darwaz, Shighnan and Roshan, of which it was deprived by Russia with the consent of Great Britain – and consent due entirely to a misunderstanding of the geographical conditions. A generous and far sighted policy would ensure good relations between Britain and Afghanistan in future....³

The second article is based on another lecture delivered by Sirdar Iqbal Ali Shah on 10 November, 1920. He spoke on The Federation of the Central Asian States Under the Kabul Government. The idea of the Pan-Islamism, according to the speaker, originated in 1863, when Jamaluddin "The Afghan" advocated this idea that the Muslims Powers should unite themselves for the consolidation of Islam, and should in future possess a common political aim. It was noted that during his travels in Egypt, India and Persia, his exhortations were marked by studious moderation, but that when he reached Turkey they became more militant in tone. It soon became evident that Sultan Abdul Hamid was using him for own purposes i.e. for him the Pan-Islamic movement meant a movement for his own personal aggrandizement. They were thinking to hold a Muslims Conference at Makkah in 1902. But Abdul Hamid realized that such a Conference might give support to the Arab nation, so the very idea was dropped. Next step was the launching of the Pan-Turanism. It was aimed at bringing together culturally, religiously and politically the Tartar race. It was proposed that the sermon (*Khutba*) should be read in Turkish and that Turkish should be used throughout the Muslim world, and that all Arabic words should be eliminated from the Turkish literature and language.

These diverse forms of the Asian national ideas, which Iqbal Ali Shah termed as 'crude and unworkable' had a positive effect

² *Ibid*, pp. 10-11.

³ *Ibid*, p. 11.

on the people of Central Asia. The notion of a confederacy of Central Asian States grew, the real object being the erection of a barrier against the Russian aggression. In this connection, Amir Abdur Rahman proposed an alliance between Afghanistan, Persia and Bokhara. This being purely defensive one, and the parties to it retained their normal position as ruler of the several countries involved, no one was given superiority over other. The rulers of the new alliance had no illusions as regards the intentions of Russia towards their several States. The Russian policy, according to the speaker, was one through which the Islamic Kingdoms in Asia would assuredly suffer a slow but certain disintegration. According to the speaker, 'this was to be affected in three different ways: first by force of arms; secondly by false alliance with the several Islamic States, by which the territorial expansion of Russia might be aided; thirdly by the creation of political difficulties between the Islamic countries of Asia and the British and the French, with the intention of weakening the Asian countries so that they might more easily fall prey'.⁴ Habibullah simply followed the policy of his father as he was convinced that if the States of Central Asia were to save themselves from the 'hungry northern bear, they must defend their freedom by the creation of a common federacy'.⁵ Amir Amanullah also carried out the same policy regarding an alliance with the Central Asian states.

Ikbal Ali Shah pointed out that as a measure of self-defence 'it is absolutely essential that Afghanistan should proceed with task of founding a Central Asian alliance. This design is one which should be of the greatest importance to the British people, who by fostering such a scheme will help to erect a barrier between Bolshevism and their Indian Empire. It must not be forgotten that the British Empire is now more truly an Eastern Empire than at any time in its history; intrigues against its position in the East should be resisted with all the address at its command. The danger of the Bolshevist aggression in the East is no more bogey, no mere journalistic figment, but a very real menace indeed, the shadow of which is gradually creeping farther and farther south. It is

⁴ Ikbal Ali Shah, *'The Federation of the Central Asian States Under the Kabul Government'*, *Ibid*, Vol. VIII, Part I, 1921, p. 31.

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 31-32.

therefore essential to take the most active steps for the protection of your interests in Asia, which are most assuredly in jeopardy from the Bolshevik operations in Turkestan and Persia'.⁶

The third article *The Mohammedans of India and India's Mohammedan Neighbours* is based on the lecture of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, the one time Lt. Governor of the Punjab. The speaker described the social background of the Indian Muslims with the marked tendency of tracing their ancestry to an extra-Indian source. According to him the Muslim aristocracy in India is of foreign origin namely the Persian, Arab, Afghan, Mughals and many of the priestly and educated classes, the Saiyids, Kazis etc. Claims to an origin outside India. 'It is natural therefore' commented the speaker 'that political events in Moslem countries should be followed with keen interest by the educated Indian Mohammedans'.⁷

He referred to the 'misunderstanding' created between them and the British after the 1857 crisis which he termed as a 'failed mutiny'. He gave credit to Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan who convinced his co-religionists that the path to progress lay, not in isolation, but in close co-operation with the British government. The British government in its turn, desired to assist the Muslims to make up the ground that they had lost. Various acts of the Government including the generous grants given to Aligarh College (est. in 1882); passage in 1901 of the Punjab Land Alienation Act to prevent the further exploitation of the Punjab peasantry, particularly of Muslims by Hindu urban classes and the partition of Bengal in 1905 in which Hindu influence was dominant, and the creation of a separate province of Eastern Bengal in which the Muslims formed the majority. However, the steady decline of many prominent Muslim states including Persian, Tunis, Morocco under the pressure of the European Powers, and the menace to Turkey from the Tripoli and Balkan Wars (1909-1912) convinced the Indian Muslims that the kingdoms of Islam were crumbling, and it aroused a natural sentiment of sympathy and Islamic

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 33.

⁷ *Sir Michael O'Dwyer, 'The Mohammedans of India's Mohammedan Neighbours', Ibid, Vol. VIII, 1921, Part IV, p. 195.*

brotherhood. Hence the anticipation of a large number of Indian Muslims in the pan-Islamist activities.

The speaker dwelt on the activities which he regarded as 'intrigues' of declared Indian 'rebels' including Barkat Ullah, Ubaid ullah, and others in Berlin and Kabul, where they joined forces with the Hindu revolutionaries Mahendra Pratap, Hardyal and Ghadr activists, and their activities were linked up with the more covert anti-British movements in India. Giving information on their activities in Kabul and in Central Asia urging the Russian Governor of Turkestan and the Tzar himself to join the anti-British forces in overthrowing the British Empire in India. The mission to Russia was turned back by the Russian authorities in Turkestan, and the 'conspirators' then made their next move. This was embodied in the far - reaching Pan Islamic conspiracy, better known as "the Silk Letter plot", as some of the documents which fell into the British hands had been written by Ubaid Ullah at Kabul on yellow silk. The object was to combine all the forces of Islam in a great effort against the British Empire in India. The speaker praised the statesmanship of Sharif Hussain of Makkah, who was expected to play a big part in the scheme, but he, according to the speaker, was 'thinking of making a carrier of his own', upset the plans. Thus the early disclosure of the Plot, prevented it from becoming a serious menace at a critical period of the War. It never passed into the stage of action, and by the time it was exposed, had acquired but few adherents in India.

After the collapse of Germany, the anti-British sections turned to Bolshevist Russia which was rapidly gaining popularity in Asia. Bolshevist Russia, according to the O'Dwyer, since its rise had realised that the British empire in India was a serious obstacle to its domination of Asia, 'has therefore, set itself to combine all the forces hostile to that Empire throughout Asia to compass its downfall. This furnishes the explanation of most of our troubles with revolutionary India, with the Frontier Tribes, Afghanistan, Angora, and Turkey, and perhaps in Persia, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Egypt, to a lesser extent. But in 1919, without the active help of Afghanistan, rebellion in India and a general rising of the Frontier Tribes were out of the question. While the Amir Habibullah was in power, Afghan help would not be forthcoming.

The Amir was murdered at Jalalabad in February, 1919, many think at Bolshevik instigation. His successor, the present Amir, soon came under the Bolshevik and anti-British influences, which were now so firmly established in Kabul, and which his father-in-law, the Turcophile Mahmud Tarzi, now Foreign Minister, had throughout the war sedulously fostered by his paper, the *Siraj-ul-Akhbar*'.⁸

Amanullah, the new Amir, according to the speaker, instigated the pan-Islamists in India and the Frontier Tribes to rouse against the British. The Afghans and the hostile tribes, according to Dwyer, urged on from behind by Bolshevik influence, and encouraged by the overtures from India and the reports of general disorders there, expected to find the door to Northern India open to them. But the disorders had been speedily suppressed and the Afghan invasion was hurled back. The speaker also cited examples of the loyalty shown by the Punjab Muslims towards the Raj who regarded the Afghan invasion of India as a 'suicidal folly committed by Amir Amanullah in his utterly unjustifiable and unprovoked encroachment on British territory'.⁹ The speaker concluded that the restoration of friendly relations with Kabul would 'at once react favourably on our relations with the Frontier tribes'.¹⁰

The fourth article *The Problem of Afghanistan* is based upon a talk by General Sir William Thomson given on 11 March 1926 at London. The main purpose of the speaker was to draw the attention of the scholars and general public to the Russian activities in Afghanistan and its effects on the local population in Afghanistan. After giving a background of the Russian policies in Central Asia, he elaborated on the Soviet rule in Central Asia and its repercussions upon the neighbouring countries. After consolidating their position in Central Asia, the Soviets, according to the speaker, portrayed themselves as the champion of Eastern progress 'by espousing the cause of the discontented elements in Asia. Soviet Russia calculated on achieving the two fold object of diverting the native discontent and antagonism from herself by

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 203.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 205.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 212.

depicting Britain in Asia as the real tyrant, and of winning over to her side those new movements in India and elsewhere which, if properly controlled, might be turned into powerful weapons against British influence in Asia'.¹¹

According to the speaker, after successful in splitting the whole of Turkestan into small republics on an ethnological basis like Turkmenia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and many others, the Soviets started penetrating Afghanistan gradually. They obtained a firm footing both politically and economically. Politically they followed the policy of disintegration into ethnological units. They reminded the local Turkmen and other ethnic groups inhabiting the northern Afghanistan that they had close kinship with the Panjdeh and Merv Turcoman and that they had nothing in common racially, tribally or individually with the Durrani tribe who occupied throne at Kabul. The Soviets, according to the speaker, 'are paying such great attention to commercial and economic penetration into Afghanistan at the present moment, and they are making a bid for the good will of native population by encouraging and facilitating local trade relations.'¹² The speaker wanted his Government to give attention to the development of border towns in India. 'Only by getting a sound commercial footing in the country', he said, 'can Britain hope to contest Russian progress towards India.' To him the best solution lies in the fact that the 'time is rapidly approaching when the primitive Afghan will learn to discard his camels for mechanised transport. If we do not teach him to do so, the Russians will, and, petty as it may seem, our reputation as the most cultured power in Asia will suffer if we are not the teachers'.¹³

Fifth Article The Outlook in Afghanistan is based upon a talk given by Abdul Qadir Khan on 20 April 1932 at Society's Office at London. The speaker gave a brief historical background of Afghanistan particularly its relevance to the Indian Subcontinent. After elaborating on the life and times of Amanullah Khan, he appreciated Amanullah for his establishing diplomatic relations

¹¹ Sir William Thomson, 'The Problem of Afghanistan', *Ibid*, vol. XIII, July 1926, Part III, p. 188.

¹² *Ibid*, pp. 190-191.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 193.

with various countries of the world and his bold steps regarding the modernization of Afghanistan. He pointed out various reforms introduced by Amanullah and which were opposed by the mullahs. Amanullah's popularity during his world tour was disliked by many in Afghanistan. The 'reactionary forces' in the country found it a focal point for their agitation. Soon Amanullah found himself surrounded by his opponents. He was compelled to abdicate the throne and say goodbye to Afghanistan forever.

Bacha-i-Saqao occupied the throne of Kabul. His short reign brought disaster upon Afghanistan. The British were the first among the European nations to recognize him as the ruler of Afghanistan. 'His autocratic behaviour', remarked the speaker, 'unfettered powers of the Mullahs, an empty treasury, the waywardness of mercenary soldiers who have no permanent bonds creating faith in the ruler, the economic ruin of the country and numerous other factors indicated that his rule could no longer be borne'.¹⁴ Nadir Khan, the ex-Commander-in-Chief who was in France came back to serve Afghanistan. Kabul fell into the hands of Nadir; Bacha-i-Saqao was executed and on 16 October 1929 Nadir was proclaimed as the king of Afghanistan. He took various steps in connection with the restoration of Afghanistan to its normal conditions. The speaker provided details of Nadir's relation with Britain and Soviet Russia.

The sixth article A Tour Through Afghanistan is based on an informative talk by J.C. French, who toured Afghanistan in 1932. He entered Afghanistan by the Khyber Pass, went to Jalalabad and from there over the Jagdalak Pass to Kabul. From Kabul he went to Charikar, then to Bamian, came back to Kabul. From Kabul then to Ghazni, Kalat-i-Ghilzai to Kandahar. From Kandahar he went across the Argandab and Helmand to Girishk and Farah and then north to Sabzewar and Herat. Then he came back to Kandahar; from there went south to Chaman in British Balochistan. Like many other European tourists he was fascinated by the old cities and archaeological monuments at various parts of Afghanistan, particularly the 'colossal statue' of Buddha at Bamian. 'It is astonishing', remarked the speaker, 'that so much of

¹⁴ Abdul Qadir Khan, 'The Outlook in Afghanistan', *Ibid*, vol. XIX, July 1932, Part III, p. 467.

Buddhist art has survived here, considering that the last fanatical idol breaker to try his strength the statue was the Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb, less than three centuries ago. The mark of his artillery can still be seen on rock face and on the statues. Their massive constructions and the remoteness of the locality alone prevented them from destruction in the stormy sea of Mohammedan fanaticism which has for so many centuries raged round them.¹⁵

The seventh article *Afghanistan: The Present Positions* based on a lecture of Brig-General Sir Percy Sykes delivered on 13 March, 1940. After giving a background of Afghanistan since the 1870s he elaborated on the causes of the Second Anglo-Afghan war. To him the despatch of the Russian mission to Kabul in 1877-78 and the refusal of Amir Sher Ali Khan to receive a British mission precipitated the Second Anglo-Afghan war. Sher Ali was deceived by his 'treacherous' Russian allies. Later on Afghanistan signed various treaties with British India including the Durand Agreement of 1893. He also dwelt on the Anglo-Russian negotiations on Afghanistan which eventually led to the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. The defeat of Russia (after the Russo-Japanese war of 1905) produced a genuine readiness on her side to affect a general settlement with Britain in Asia, the main idea being to remove all possible causes of friction in the 'present and also, as far as possible, in the future'.

'Early in 1907', according to Sykes, 'Lord Morley, the secretary of State for India, informed Lord Minto, the Viceroy, that negotiations for an Anglo-Russian convention were taking place, and sent him an outline. Minto strongly passed for permission to keep King Habibullah informed confidentially, but Morley tactlessly laid down that the Amir "should not be consulted, but be merely advised of its terms after signature". Minto, when the treaty had been signed, informed the Amir that, for the first time in a formal document, the Russian Government recognized that Afghanistan lay outside their sphere of influence, and that all their political relations with Afghanistan should be conducted through the intermediary of the British Government; that Great Britain conceded to Russia her permission for Russia

¹⁵ J.C. French, 'A Tour Through Afghanistan', *Ibid*, vol. XX, January 1933, Part, I, pp. 29-30.

and Afghan local officials to settle purely local questions; and, finally, the principle of equal treatment for British and Russian trade was laid down'.¹⁶

To Amir Habibullah and his younger brother Nasrullah, who was 'fanatically anti-British', the Convention destroyed the independence of Afghanistan and possessed no advantage. Minto also reported that Habibullah was favourable to the Convention, but could not overcome the opposition of the anti-British party. It had been stipulated that the Treaty would not be valid without the signature of the Amir, but in the autumn of 1908 the Russians declared the convention would, whether the Amir gave his formal adhesion or not, be considered to be a valid instrument.

Sir Percy Sykes' talk was informative but at certain points biased, particularly targeting Amanullah Khan, the young revolutionary anti-British Amir of Afghanistan. He elaborated in detail on the 'Grand Tour' of Amanullah and his treaties he had negotiated and the friendship he made with certain countries. According to the speaker, during the absence of Amanullah from Afghanistan, the mullahs had excited the people, 'more especially against the appearance of the Queen unveiled while in Europe, as proved by the Press photographs, and fuel was added to the fire when, after her return to Kabul, she appeared unveiled at a banquet. Amanullah, heedless of the rising storm, increased the length of compulsory service in the army, while a month's pay taken from every official to cover the purchase of the armaments. He next ordered that any Government servant who took a second wife would be called on to resign his appointment. Perhaps his most foolish order was to insist on all Afghans wearing complete European dress, including hats, in Kabul. The result of this truly preposterous edict was the creation of a body of men who set up booths on each highway and hired out clothes for the day to villagers bound market'.¹⁷ Sir Sykes seemed unhappy over the growth of the nationalist movement in the North-West Frontier Province which, according to him, had organized an 'unscrupulous campaign of hatred and vituperation against the British Raj' which

¹⁶ Sir Percy Sykes, *Afghanistan: The Present Position*, *Ibid*, vol. XXVII, April 1940, Part II, p. 146.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 155-156.

might 'have reacted unfavourably on our position in Afghanistan. It is, however, satisfactory', commented Sir Percy Sykes 'to know that the Afghan Government discouraged the movement...'¹⁸

Interestingly, while appreciating the long informative talk of Sir Percy Sykes, the Marquess of Zetland, Chairman of the session, however, disagreed with the remarks of the speaker regarding the Frontier nationalists. 'I feel that I must say a word in favour of Dr. Khan Sahib who has been painted in somewhat dark colours by our distinguished lecturer', commented the Chairman. The Marquess of Zetland informed the gathering that he had only been brought into contact with Dr. Khan Sahib in very recent times. 'He was at one time the medical officer of that famous frontier regiment the Guides, but more recently he has been the Primer Minister of the North-West Frontier Province, and I do not think that the Governor of that province would dissent if I were to say that Dr. Khan Sahib proved to be a most charming man to work with. He provides us, indeed, with a very striking illustration of the almost universal experience of mankind: that when a man is once charged with real responsibility, his outlook upon the affairs of men is apt to undergo a very marked change'.¹⁹

Eighth writing on Afghanistan entitled *Afghanistan's Rebirth* is an interview of Hashim Khan, the then Prime Minister of Afghanistan, taken in 1937 by Ms. Ella Maillart, a French lady. The interview was taken at Kabul.

'I watched the Prime Minister, Hashim Khan', writes Ms. Maillart. 'He was one of the most impressive figures I had ever met, a man of fifty, with a sallow, oval face, straight nose, narrow eyebrows, a Richelieu billy goat beard and a supple mouth which could be hard or indulgent; when my questions revealed my ignorance. Was it exterior which created an impression of greatness, or even more, his eyes, those windows of the soul, which were both quick and searching and followed my thoughts beyond my words.'²⁰ The interview, however, was full of tirade against Amanullah Khan's policies. 'We began our efforts from

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 158-159.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 163.

²⁰ Ella Maillart, '*Afghanistan's Rebirth*', *Ibid*, vol. XXVII, April 1940, Part II, p. 224.

zero' explained Hashim Khan. 'From below zero, for the mistakes of Amanullah had made everyone hostile to progress'.²¹ Further, Hashim Khan elaborated on the present development of Afghanistan and his contributions in this connection. 'The people of my country know that I am devoting my life to helping them, for I have no family of my own' commented the Prime Minister. When asked that despite being a heterogeneous population with different languages including Pashto, Persian and 'Farsi' of the Tajiks, how would they succeed in keeping them united in Afghanistan. Hashim replied: 'Our disparity is perhaps mainly superficial. Beneath the surface we are all united in Islam, our communal strength whose foundations must not be destroyed by progress. We must watch to see that the ideas which free us do not in the end divide us... Then, again, who knows if our mountain climate which is so harsh may not give us a common character, as in Switzerland, independently of race? Then you have mentioned Pushtu... From next year it is to become the language of our officials, doing away with Persian. Our legends and our poems will then be understood by everyone. We shall draw from them a pride in our culture of the past which will unite us. We, too, like Switzerland, though we are in Asia, may become an indispensable buffer state without colonial ambition, bounded by great powers'.²²

Ninth article entitled Afghanistan: A Brief Description is based upon the Anniversary Lecture of Sir Kerr Fraser - Tytler, gave details of the geographical boundaries of Afghanistan and the communication network of all the major roads linking various cities in the country. He dwelt upon the social structure of the Afghan society particularly on various ethnic groups inhabiting Afghanistan. He also elaborated on the religious communities of Afghanistan. He informed the audience of Afghan way of life, especially various festivals during different times of the year. He concluded his talk by giving his own impression of Afghanistan that: 'We enjoyed most of all our spring and autumn expeditions, either by car to fish in the streams beyond the Hindu Kush, or on ponies across one of the great passes. On these expeditions one saw Afghanistan at its best, and could enjoy to the full its

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 225.

²² *Ibid*, p. 227.

magnificent scenery, beautiful rivers and most interesting flowers. It was also on these occasions that one met with the Afghan peasants and wayfarers at large and discovered what delightful kindly people they were. It might be an Uzbek, ambling along on his wiry pony, or a small caravan bringing down salt from the mines near Khanabad, or a few Pathans with their camels, or a Ghilzai encampment on the move. Whoever they were they seemed cheerful people who passed with a kindly greeting or stopped to enquire who we were and whether they could do anything for us. They gave one the impression of free men in a free country, who took no account of rank and position, but talked as equals and as hosts in a land where a traveler who passed through the country on his or her way to stay with us in Kabul. The Afghans do not care about foreigners if they suspect that they are seeking to tamper with their independence or to exploit their country. But towards those who are not doing so, and are prepared to take them as they find them to meet them on an equal footing of friendliness and courtesy, no people in the world could reciprocate more readily'.²³

The tenth writing on Afghanistan is the Obituary of Sir Percy Sykes by Lord Hailey. Sir Percy Sykes joined the Royal Central Asian society in 1907, became its Honorary Secretary in 1932, and, was one of its six senior members. Just before his death in June 1945, he was elected as an Honorary vice-president of the Society. 'He brought to the Society', commented the writer, 'a wealth of experience and an intimate knowledge both of the past history and present circumstances of Central Asia such as few others could claim to possess. The Empire owes much to its soldier scholar, who have pursued into the fields of historical or archaeological research the interests first formed during the travels incidental to their foreign service'.²⁴

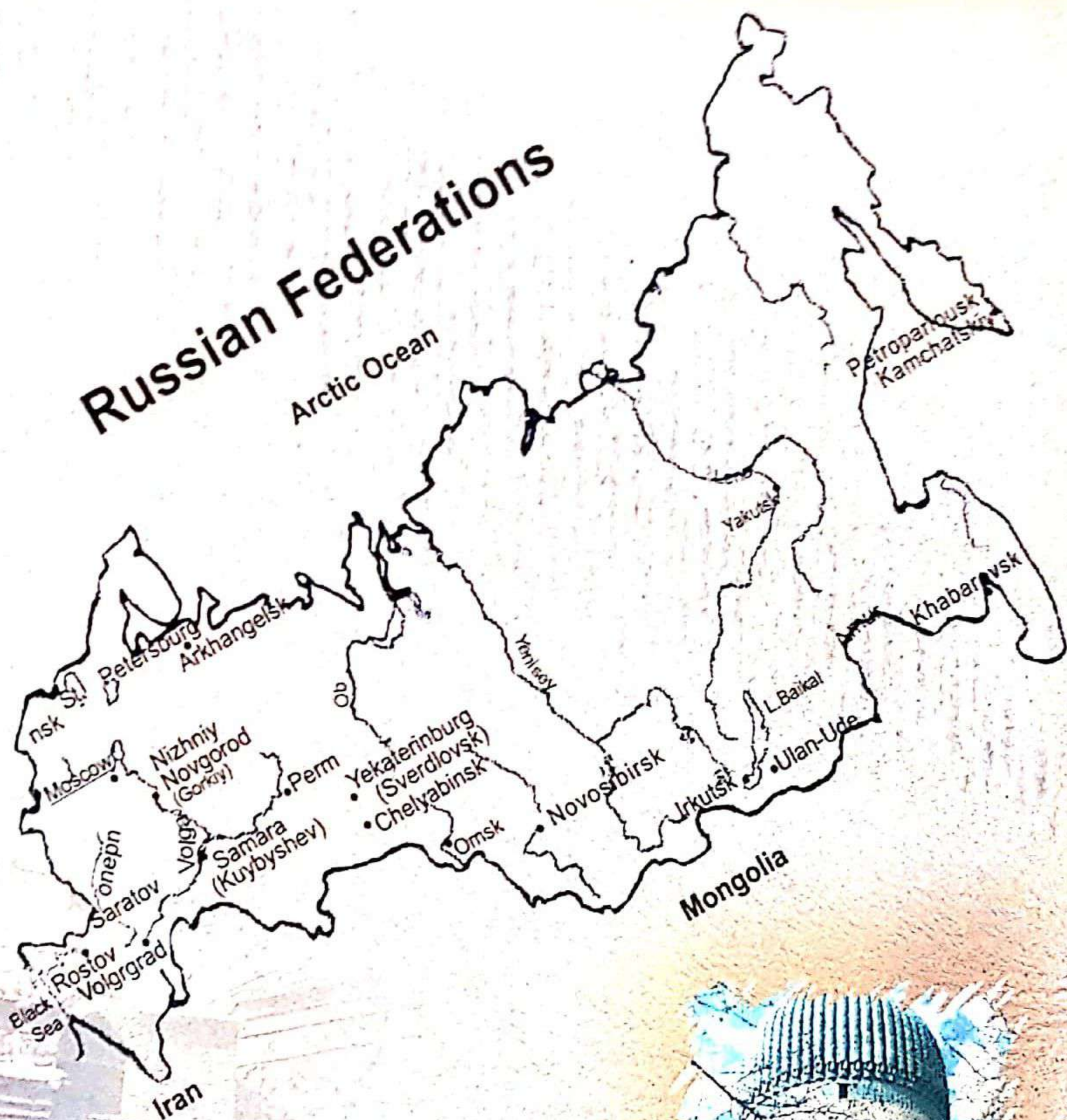
²³ Sir Kerr Fraser - Tytler, 'Afghanistan: A Brief Description', *Ibid*, vol. XXIX, July - October 1942, Part III & IV, p. 174.

²⁴ Lord Hailey, 'Obituary Brigadier - General Sir Percy Sykes, K.C.I.E., C.B., C.M.G.; *Ibid*, vol. XXXII, July - October 1945, Parts III & IV, p. 230.

Russian Federations

Baltic Sea

Arctic Ocean



Gor-a-Amir Taimur
(Samarqand)