

**Kunzru Memorial Lecture 2015**

**Afghanistan Since the First World War**

**by**

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# The Territory of Afghanistan

- If one looks to the historic setting of Afghanistan at the dawn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, one can see that Afghanistan's present boundaries are the outcome of Great Power rivalry to which the Second Anglo-Afghan War was a harbinger.
- The role of Great Power legacy in boundary demarcation continued in the major part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as uneasy relations with Pakistan.
- The first boundary demarcation of Afghanistan by Great Powers began in 1885 in the aftermath of Panjdeh crisis. The Russian-Afghan boundary demarcation was complete by 1886. Soon followed the Anglo-Afghan boundary with Sir Mortimer Durand in charge. The 1893 agreement was concluded with parts of Kurram being ceded to British India.
- The Durand line remained a sore point for Afghanistan's relation with Pakistan.
- The tactics used for coercing the Amir were no different than modern day tactics. The trade embargo hurt landlocked state. A standing army on borders was shown as threat to the rein of Amir. And, also the monetary allowance was shown as a bait for compliance.

# The Impact of First WW

- The Provisional Government of India was formed on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1915 in Kabul with Raja Mahendra Pratap as its President. And, missions were opened in Turkey, Japan and Russia. It was soon followed by the birth of Indian Communist movement by MN Roy in 1920s. The Jang Party supported by Turko-German delegation and the Gadarites supported by the Indian delegation found Kabul a thriving place for intellectual and revolutionary ideas.
- In fact, first readings of Political Islam could be assigned to Barkatullah, who was given the task of writing a short pamphlet on Bolshevism in Quran.
- The Afghan newspaper Siraj ul-Akhbar published congratulatory telegram of the Indian National Committee to the Muslims of Bolshevik Russia in August 1917. And, it gave Afghans the opportunity to their antagonism towards British by declaring that Bolshevik Russia would now balance the British in the East.
- The Amir Habibullah however was apprehensive of these radical ideas and tried to supplant the tendencies with the British sponsored modernisation programme that was largely confined to Kabul. This backfired as the urban-rural divide became more glaring and took religious turn. Various mullahs gave a call for jihad seeing Amir as deflecting from the path of Shariah.

# The Mashroota Movement

- The Mashroota or the Constitutionalists were an important intelligentsia that contributed to the transition in Afghanistan.
- The Turkic nobility led by Enver Pasha, Talat Pasha and Jamal Pasha, the royal families of Habibullah, Nasarullah and Amanullah and the Tarzi and the Charkhi families were known as the leading personalities of Mashroota movement. The courtiers who were pro-reforms were known as gulam bachas, and they were led by Mohammed Wali Khan.
- The countryside was also witnessing some changes and associations known as Mashroota Khawans were created. The Makatab-i-Habibia was a teachers association having Indian intelligentsia that contributed to the activities. Another prominent organisation was Jawanan I-Afghanistan (Young Afghans), who sought Constitutional monarchy and an elected parliament.
- The Constitutionalist received boost in the form of Amanullah, who wished to use the International community for throwing away the yoke of imperialism. The support declared by Lenin in 1920 Second Congress of Communist International to support the bourgeois-nationalist liberation movement was seen as harbinger to modernisation by Afghan intellectuals.

# The Freedom

- Afghanistan got independence after brief war, the Third Anglo-Afghan war that culminated into Rawalpindi Treaty giving complete independence.
- This was an eclectic exercise as the king gave a call for ya-marg-ya-Istiqlal from Kabul mosque. The religious sentiment soon translated into national service with the help of mullahs and the confrontation with British India began. The mullahs were sent to the east of Durand for instigating the tribes against the British. The Afghans pressed hard to take Waziristan into their possession, but this was firmly refuted.
- One of the pioneer steps taken was the 1923 Constitution that marked a big change. This was also seen as challenge to the Islamic model of governance and also the tribal institutions.

# The First Challenge

- King Amanullah had weak treasury and the task of nation building mortified into miniature scale of Kabul building. A new township of Darul Aman was raised on the outskirts of Kabul.
- The task to raise new taxes and it only came from countryside, mainly, agriculture. The spending on salaries to military was trimmed and it riled Pashtun elites, who saw it a status symbol.
- The bureaucracy was sent to countryside for establishing tax regime soon got infested with the corruption and lot got siphoned off while transit.
- Then came the first blow in the form of religious insurgency in Khost by Mangal Pathans, who rallied tribal groups in the name of Islamic culture being destroyed by the king's modernist approach.

# Af-Pak relations in 1950s

- The birth of Pakistan in 1947 created a new situation on Durand line. The Afghans unilaterally revoked boundary agreements by convening Loya Jirga. Afghanistan was the only state to cast negative vote against Pakistan's membership to the UN.
- Afghanistan raised the Pashtunistan issue with Pakistan in 1955 when One-Unit plan was announced by latter. Afghanistan demanded plebiscite in FATA & NWFP (KP).
- Pakistan's retaliation in the form of trade embargo was the repeat of British predecessors. This forced Afghanistan to abandon its neutrality and look towards Soviet Union for transit and trade routes. A four year barter agreement on goods was signed between the two in 1950.
- The face of relationships changed into aid on massive scale unseen in history of one nation's assistance to another. Stalin extended more than \$10 million aid in the form of project assistance to Afghanistan in 1954.

# The Cold War creeps in

- The response to the Afghan-Soviet friendship came in the form of Pakistan joining SEATO in September 1954. The expectations for Pakistan was that it would use Afghanistan and the Communist threat as an alibi to secure its own interest vis-a-vis India.
- The 1955 Khrushchev-Bulganin visit had an announcement of 100-bed hospital to Kabul in gift. The Soviet aid created spiralling effect and the 1955 Baghdad pact to prevent Soviet advance in Inner Crescent roped in Pakistan the second time.
- The US responded to Soviet aid a little late by providing assistance for modernization of Kandahar airport in 1956.

# Democratic Experiment

- The August 1959 Independence day parade was attended by Daud and the ladies of his family without a veil and it created an electrifying impact on the masses. He was able to see the passivity of the resistant forces and the willingness of the urban citizens to look for socio-economic transition. In 1957, a delegation of Afghan women attended International Women's Conference in Colombo.
- The religious authority and traditional khans tried to stir rebellion in the countryside, but the swift intervention of the Afghan army and police changed the game. The ability to deploy state's coercive arm across the national territory was the new phenomenon while exercising its sovereign power by the state.

# The 1964 Constitution

- The period of 1963 onwards could be seen as an effort to transform Constitutional monarchy to a nominal titular monarchy.
- The Loya Jirga of 1964 with representatives from all sections of Afghan society, women and minorities, including the lone Hindu delegate from Kabul adopted and it was published apart from Pushto and Dari, in English and French.
- The bicameral legislature was instituted- Wolesi Jirga (216), Meshrano Jirga (184). The elections for both the houses were held in the same year. This is significant as in 1950 more than 90% Afghans were illiterate.
- The rule of law was guaranteed across the country and Parliament as the sole custodian for these. A debate on Shariah law and Parliamentary law emerged to which it was said that Parliament shall observe Islamic law as binding limit to law formulation.
- The Constitution provided for the formation of political parties and the civilian freedoms were also defined. The first major party that came in its aftermath was the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1965.

# The Saur Revolution

- Afghan state still remained a fragile state as in 1972 nearly 68% of the revenue came from foreign trade, petrol and sale of tobacco. The state's aggressive taxation regime pinched hard on tribal chiefs.
- They found an opportunity in the growing disenchantment in the form of political demonstration in big cities and particularly Kabul. The PDPA had convened no lesser than 2000 meetings between 1965-73. The KU was closed for six months in the aftermath of clashes between leftists and Islamists.
- The influence of the Soviet forces and turbulence in Pakistan and Iran paved way for new political forces in Afghanistan. The king Zahir Shah who was holidaying in Rome was deposed in July 1973 by cousin Daoud. And, he invited Karmal-led Parchamis to join government.
- Daoud found it difficult to handle the growing Soviet influence and decided to seek closeness with the US. The April 1978 sees departure of Daoud in a bloody palace coup, which saw the release of Taraki (later as President) and Karmal.

# Soviet Advent and Departure

- The motorized rifle division arrived in November 1979 after Amin requested protection from Soviet Union. The things went against him and December 1979 witnessed the Presidency of Babrak Karmal with Soviet forces on ground by January 1980.
- The minorities rejoiced as they believed that the ethno-political balance would be tilted in their favour.
- The intelligentsia believed new political freedoms would arrive.
- The religious forces aligned with the forces of ethno-nationalism by 1985 and the resistance grew bigger with the US and others aiding the mujahideen across Durand line.
- The Soviet left as agreed in the Geneva accord with Najibullah to fend for himself and he made sincere attempts to create national unit government. All such attempts were thwarted by the US and Pakistani policymakers.

# The 9/11 Departure

- The Question arises if at all Osama bin Laden was hiding in Pakistan then why Afghanistan went through such ordeal and suffering post-9/11.
- The answer lies globalisation treats all nations as given entities and the uniformity in economic and political culture that treated Afghanistan as an adversary in the wake of international norms.

# Justice for Farkhunda

- The incident became a hallmark for striking the sense of polity that plagues the Afghans.



Thanks!