

HISTORY OF CENTRAL ASIA

BRONZE AGE (2000 B.C.) TO CHENGIZ KHAN (1227 A.D.)

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Mahapaṇḍita Rāhula had the long career of a restless seeker of truth. Central Asia had always a peculiar fascination for him. For, from a hoary pre-historic antiquity, this had been the source of great race-movements and cultural diffusion and had largely to contribute to the eventual shaping of history in Europe and Asia. But, in spite of the pioneering works of Auriel Stein and others, much of this magnificent chapter in the story of mankind remained long buried under earth and are only recently dug up by the spades of the Soviet archaeologists. Rāhula was immediately drawn to this, and he was about the only scholar who could interpret and understand the new archaeological materials in the general background of a vast knowledge of varied languages and literatures. He could moreover combine everything with the personal experience of travelling extensively through this region and examining the relics first-hand.

The result is his monumental work on the history of Central Asia, immediately acclaimed with an academy-award by our Sahitya Academy. Rāhula wrote the book in Hindi and this was only to be expected of a passionate patriot like him, who always gave the highest priority to writing in one's own vernacular. Howevermuch invaluable this might have been for the development of our national languages, an English translation of such a scholarly work will always enhance the cause of international academic communication. We are grateful to Sri Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya for initially suggesting to us the idea of bringing out the book in English and to Sri Jollymohan Kaul for doing the English rendering. Dr. Mahadev Saha, an intimate associate of Rāhula himself and Sri P. N. Shastri have kindly edited the work for purposes of the present English edition under the direction of Rāhula. We take this opportunity of expressing our grateful thanks also to Mrs. Marion Barwell, and Sri Nihar Dasgupta for being kindly associated in various capacities with this work. With his own sound knowledge of the subject, Sri S. N. Khanna has rendered many a technical help. We express our thanks also to the Bihar Rastrabhasa Parisad for their kind cooperation in the present venture.

The work of translation was taken up long ago and Rāhula himself saw its completion ; but it took quite a long time to publish the book and his untimely death deprived us of the great privilege and honour of reaching him a copy of the present English edition.

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P R E F A C E

During my travels in Russia and Central Asia I came in direct contact with the peoples there. I wrote and translated a number of works concerning them. Then I thought of reviewing the contemporary events in their historical perspective. I realised that the history of Central Asia is closely related to our own. The Dravids, who founded Mohenjodaro and Harappa, the magnificent cities and the glorious culture of the Indus valley, had a link with Central Asia. Recent archaeological researches reveal that the Aryans had their first encounter with the Dravids in Khwarezm and not in the Indus valley. Aryans defeated them first there and only then they headed towards India. Without deserting their conquered territories, the Aryans expanded further to far off ends in all directions. That is why Indian Aryans do not refer much to their traditions and the forsaken lands. Waves after waves of Aryans merged into one in India. Then came the Greeks from Bactria, and they ruled over some portions of Bharat (India). The Shakas and Kushans followed their footsteps. Then the so called Huns or Hephtal cast their covetous eyes on India and the Turks and Muslims did the same. They all took almost the same route and they all had their roots in Central Asia. Without a knowledge of their history and culture, we do not understand our own. This idea inspired me to write this book.

I could have confined this work only to Central Asia, that is, the land bounded by China, India-Afghanistan, Iran, Asiatic Russia and the Caspian Sea. But I could not do so. History, like the river, flows in its own way, and takes a zigzag course. Therefore, I had to wander into the border lands to grasp the subject well. Well-laid-out conventions about pronouncing foreign names have not yet been established in Hindi, especially about those names, which are introduced to Indians, for the first time, through this work. The English and their pronunciation are the worst. I have particularly avoided that. The Germans are better in this respect and the Russians are the best because of their phonetic language. But even they cannot be adequate for the peculiarities of the original languages. The Mongol script has hardly one and half dozen letters. There is no difference in 'K' (क) 'G' (ग) and 'H' (ह) in that script. Kagan, Khagan, Hagan, Hakan all can be one and the same "khan", which we now use. The same difficulty arises when one pronounces the Chinese names. Besides, the printing of this book (the original, in Hindi) was interrupted for years because of unforeseen reasons and uncontrollable factors. Hence, I have not been able to spell the

names uniformly. However, for this and other inaccuracies, the index should be treated as the only corrective, the author could provide at this stage.

Most of the materials used in this book were collected by me during my two years' sojourn (1945-47) in Russia. There is no doubt that Russia and the Russian language are the richest sources for a history of Central Asia. Historical and archaeological research is done in Russia almost with a devotion. As a result, new materials are discovered every year. I am sorry for not going there after 1947. But Professor Tolstoff and Dr. Bernshtom have been very kind to me. In my reconstruction of the old events in Central Asia, they have helped me immensely. Prof. Tolstoff has been the leader of many an excavatory excursion into Central Asia. His knowledge of Khwarezm, Karakum and Kijilkum is profound and astounding. About Saptanada Dr. Bernshtom's knowledge is very deep. Whenever I met or discussed with them, they never cared for their time and labour; they wholeheartedly gave me a chance to take full advantage of their vast knowledge. I have often referred this in my *Twentyfive months in Russia*. In fact, some of my ideas were formulated as a result of my discussion with them and they have often provided substance to my imagination. Only the Soviet Historians and Archaeologists are the proper authorities to deal with this subject but they are still occupied with their researches into different areas and parts of Central Asian history. No one knows when they would write their *magnum opus* about Central Asia, in the form of a chronological history. So long it is not published and available to my people this effort will have its value.

One of the weighty reasons for my coming back to India was my desire to shape the huge mass of materials collected into this book. There in Russia I gathered about four to five hundred pounds of books. In addition to this, I made extensive notes from all the books read in the two years. My past experience raised all the doubts about publishing this book, had I continued my stay there. For the safety of the books I abandoned the shorter route to India through Afghanistan and came here *via* England.

Mussoorie
4. 6. 1956.

Rahula Sankrityayana