THE INDIAN WAHABI MOVEMENT
(1826-1871): APPROACHES TO ITS STUDY AND ANALYSIS

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Abstract

So far this movement, has been studied, analysed and interpreted primarily from two viewpoints, the narrower and the broader: any research work with its focus on the narrower perspective naturally possesses the merits and demerits of a micro study, but obviously deprives it of all the corresponding advantages and disadvantages attributed to a macro level analysis, and vice versa. Besides the above two perspectives, the colonials, nationalists, political economists, radical historians, post-British era state-oriented writers, ‘subaltern’ historiographers, post-colonial narrators, post-1947 Pakistani ideologues and Marxist scholars’ narratives differ from each other, substantially, since they analyse and interpret the same historical events and political movements from widely different perspectives.

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This subject, like any else one, can appropriately be understood mainly from two perspectives, the narrower and the broader.

The Indian Subcontinent shows many variations. It has fertile river valleys, high plateaus, populous plains, waterless deserts and impenetrable jungles. These differences in land formations helped to develop variations in the attitudes, customs, and life styles of its inhabitants. Each of its many regions is a fascinating ‘world’ by itself, distinguished by one or more unique characteristics.

Two of these zones are the focal points of this movement: the high plateaus in the northwest, and the middle Ganges Valley with Chota Nagpur plateau in the northeast. The former comprises the tribal areas¹ of northwestern Pakistan (or southeastern Afghanistan), and the latter the State of Bihar in the Indian Union.²

The distinguishing characteristics of the first of the above two zones are tribal fealty, warmongering, and a keen predilection for acquisitions and booty. Distinguishing features of the second zone are a disposition to rebel against the established order, a nonconformist attitude towards prevailing system, a knack for organisation, and a penchant for cabal and secrecy. Religious extremism and extremist mindset are common to both. The respective peculiarities of the two zones have had full play throughout history.

Among the conquering hordes that have poured down through the openings in the northwest plateaus to overwhelm and plunder the Subcontinent one after the other since times immemorial were the Aryans,³ Scythians or the Saka-Massagetai tribes’ confederacy, Greeks, Parthians, Kushans or Kushana-Tukharian tribes’ confederacy, Hunas or Chionite-Ephthalite (including Gujar) tribes’ confederacy, Turko-Afghan Ghaznavids, Ghorids, Moghuls, Abdalis (originally Ephthalites) renamed Durrans (pearls), and countless others including the unsuccessful Mongol incursions in the 13th and 14th centuries CE and the successful raids of Tamerlane, the Mongol ruler of Samarkand.
(r. 1369-1404) and Nadir Shah (scourge of central Asia and India), a bandit chief turned the ruler of Persia (r. 1736-47), the former in 1398-99 and the latter in 1739. “Although it was the Sikh power” (1799-1849), notes Sir Olaf Caroe, “which brought to an end long centuries of invasion from the north-west, it was left to others to build where they had ravaged, and for their ultimate successors to found a Muslim state, not based on war or feudalism but on new ways that had been learned in the century which succeeded to the Sikhashahi.”

Bihar consists of three regions, whose history could be traced to at least 6th century BCE. First of these, Videha (or Mithila, Tirhut), was a favourite haunt of Mahavir (c. 6th-5th century BCE), who was born just north of present-day Patna, at Kundargama, which later became a centre of Jainism. Second was Vaishali, near present-day Basarah, which was capital of a large ‘republican’ state of the Lichchavi or Lachhvi tribe or clan. Third was Magadha, originally the seat of the Magadha tribe, which rose to unquestioned prominence in the 4th century BCE as one of the earliest organised states in the Subcontinent, its renowned ancient kings Bimbisara (r. c. 544-493 BCE) and his successor and son Ajatasatru (r. c. 493-468 BCE) were patrons of both Mahavir and Buddha (6th-5th century BCE), and close to a millennium the history of Magadha was the history of Hindustan (northern India). Three Hindi/Urdu dialects – Bhojpuri, Maithali, and Magadhi – developed from the Prakrit, which was spoken at the times of late Guptas, also indicate these three ancient cultural and linguistic regions of Bihar. ‘Bihar’, a variation of ‘Vihar’, came to be known as name of a region, in the 12th or 13th century of the Common Era, during the invasions of Turko-Afghan conquerors, who, struck by the profusion of flourishing Buddhist Vihars (monasteries) in this middle Ganges region, began to formally call it by that name. In some colloquial dialects spoken in and around Bihar, the Hindi/Urdu letter ‘vao’ (= ‘v’ or ‘w’ in English) is changed to ‘bae’ (= ‘b’) or vice versa as in the case of Vande Mataram, Vajpayee, and Vanjara which are often changed into Bande Mataram, Bajpayee, and Banjara.
respectively. The same appears to have been the reason for change of ‘Vihar’ to ‘Bihar’.

The period from c. 800 to 200 BCE, was termed the ‘Axial Age’ by the German existentialist theologian, Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), because it proved to be pivotal in the spiritual development of humanity.\(^9\) It marks the beginning of religion as we know it. New religions and philosophical systems emerged. Although the debate over their exact respective period(s) is still inconclusive, it was most probably this age that saw the emergence of Zoroastrianism in Iran, Confucianism and Taoism in China, Jainism and Buddhism as well as the beginning of the religion that we now call Hinduism (as a result of the composition of *Upanisads*, also called *Vedanta*) in India, monotheism in the Middle East, and Greek ‘rationalism’ in Europe. These axial traditions were associated with such men as the great Hebrew prophets of the eighth, seventh and sixth centuries BCE; with Zoroaster (c. sixth century BCE) in Persia; with the sages of the *Upanisads* (the genre of texts which end or complete the Vedic body of literature), and Vardhamana Mahavir (540-468 BCE), and the Gautama Buddha (c. 563-483 BCE) in India; with Confucius (551-479 BCE), Laotzu or Lao-tse (an older contemporary of Confucius; some contend he never existed, and the book ascribed to him is an anthology compiled by various authors), and the author of the *Dao De Jung* (or *Tao Te Ching*, the most famous and influential Taoist text, traditionally attributed to Laotzu) in China; and with the fifth-century tragedians, and the distinguished trio of ancient philosophers – Socrates (c. 469-399 BCE), Plato (c. 427-347 BCE) and Aristotle (c. 384-322 BCE) – in Greece.

The Indian movement of nonconformism and resistance to established order were especially active in the northeastern/midnorthern Ganges Valley now known as Bihar.\(^10\) The zone or a sizeable portion of its territories, apart from being the site of the Lachhvi tribe’s ‘republican’ state (6th century BCE), came under the sway of such great dynasties as the Saisunagas (c. 642-362 BCE),\(^11\) the Nandas (c. 362-321 BCE), the Mauryas (c. 321-180 BCE), the Guptas
(c. 320-547 CE), the Palas of eastern India or Bengal (c. 750-1185 CE),
the Sultanate of Delhi (1206-1526 CE), and the Moghuls (1526-1764
CE). It came under the British rule after the battle of Buxer or Buxer in
1764 and remained so up to 15th August 1947, when it became part of
the Indian Union. Its present-day capital, Patna, has been in
continuous existence for more than 27 centuries and figured
prominently in Indian history from time to time under different names
(Mansingh, pp. 71, 239, 276, 316-17, 319-20), e.g., Girivraja (Garhi +
Raja), Rajagriha (Raja + Grah, now known as Rajgir), Pataliputra
(Pataalii + Putra), Kusumapura, Nalanda, Patna, and Azimabad
(renamed by prince Azim, favourite grandson of Aurangzeb, when he
was subahdar there). The commercial and strategic importance of
Patna site, at the confluence of the rivers Ganges and Sona, was
acknowledged by the Pala rulers of eastern India in the 8th century
CE. They restored the city when it was still known as Pataliputra and
made endowment to its great Buddhist University (Vihar) of Nalanda.
Sher Shah Suri also gave due importance to it during his six-year rule
from 1539-1545 CE. The city was captured by Akbar the Great in 1574
when he personally commanded a campaign to takeover wealthy middle
and lower Gangetic Valley. He made Bihar a subah or a major province
of his empire in 1582. Henceforth, Patna became the administrative
seat of the Moghul subahdar or subedar (governor) of the province
and grew up as a commercial, educational and political centre. The
population of the city was estimated at 200,000 in mid-17th century.
(Mansingh, p. 320.) It continued to thrive during the twilight of
Moghuls but was eclipsed by Calcutta (present-day Kolkata) when
Bihar was merged into Bengal province by the British in mid-1760s.
The annulment of the merger in 1912 restored Patna to its previous
position as a metropolis.

The above referred to second zone, particularly its chief city
Patna, according to the narrower view, resurged into making the first
zone, the northwest frontier of the Subcontinent, a flash point first
against the Sikh and then against the British rulers for about half a
century (1826-1871 CE).
The broader view provides another perspective. It shows that
the first zone had already been a flash point as a vital part of the
century-long (1807-1907) geopolitical ‘Great Game’
played mainly
by the Tsarist Russian Empire and the British Empire, in which activists
of the so-called Indian Wahabi Movement acted as ‘the unconscious
tools of history’. “The vast chessboard on which this shadowy
struggle for political ascendancy took place started from the Caucasus
in the west, . . . to Chinese Turkestan and Tibet in the east.” (Hopkirk,
p. 2.) The ultimate prize was British India – ‘the greatest of all imperial
prizes’. The term used by some Russian scholars for ‘Great Game’ is
Bolshaya Igra. (Ibid., p. 7.)

It all began in the early years of the 19th century, when Russian
troops started to fight their way southwards through the Caucasus
towards northern Persia. (Ibid., p. 2.) At first this did not seem to pose
a serious threat to British interests, but the situation was drastically
changed after the ill-fated invasion of Russia by Napoleon Bonaparte
(r. 1804-1814) in which he was driven back by the Russians with terrible
losses.15 This success made the Russians, brim with self-confidence
and ambition, pose a serious threat, which did not go away till 1907.
Long before this, the Russian Tsars who did cast covetous eyes on
India include Peter I or Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725), Catherine II or
Catherine the Great (r. 1762-1796), and her son and successor Paul I (r.
1796-1801). (Ibid., pp. 2, 15, 20-21.) Joint invasion of India by Russia
and France was also offered by Paul I to Napoleon and by the latter to
Paul’s son and successor Alexander I (r. 1801-1825), but it fell through
on both occasions for want of serious interest on both sides. (Ibid.,
pp. 2-3, 26-28.)

Whatever historians may say with hindsight today, the Russian
threat to India seemed real enough at that time.16(Ibid., p. 5.) The
Russian Empire had been steadily expanding at the rate of some 55
square miles a day, or 20,000 square miles a year. At the beginning of the
19th century, more than 2,000 miles separated the Russian and
British realms in Asia. By the end of the century, the distance had shrunk to a few hundred miles and in parts of the Pamir region to less than twenty miles.\(^{17}\) (Ibid.) During his first 16 years on the Russian throne (1801-1817), Alexander I added 200,000 square miles to his empire together with 13 million new subjects, and increased his army from “only 80,000 strong . . . to 640,000, not including second-line troops, militia, Tartar cavalry, and so on.” (Ibid., p. 61, quoting General Sir Robert Wilson.) He was succeeded by his brother Nicholas I (r. 1825-1855), who embarked on the second Russo-Turkish War (1828-1829). Treaty of Adrianople (1829) ended the war giving Russia substantial territorial gains in Asia Minor including control over northeastern Armenia. The reigns of two succeeding Tsars, Alexander II (r. 1855-1881) and Alexander III (r. 1881-1894), saw the fulfilment of the long standing desire of the Tsars to conquer and annex all Central Asian Muslim countries/khanates – Kazan, Astrakhan, the Crimea, Tashkent, Samarkand and present-day Uzbekistan comprising the khanates of Bokhara, Khiva and Kokand, the last named to fall last in 1876 – that lay between the Russian Empire and Persia and Afghanistan. To be brief, all the three countries bordering Afghanistan on its northern side, namely, present-day Tajikistan was conquered in 1868, present-day Turkmenistan in 1869 and present-day Uzbekistan was repeatedly attacked from 1717 until its last khanate of Kokand’s annexation in 1876. The last Russian emperor Tsar Nicholas II (r. 1894-1917), who succeeded Alexander III, found neither time nor expediency to conquer Afghanistan and/or come into armed confrontation with the British Indian Empire. In fact, Russian weakness after its humiliating defeat by Japan in 1904-05 and the Russian Revolution of 1905, the forerunner of the later successful Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 which ended for ever the Tsarist rule in Russia, eventually forced him to sign an agreement with the Britain in 1907, which finally brought an end to the Anglo-Russian rivalry and the ‘Great Game’.\(^{18}\)

The British conquest of the Indian Subcontinent from Bengal in the east, during the 18\(^{th}\) century, to Sindh, the Punjab and its the then
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northwest frontier region, and the Northern Areas (consisting of what was later known as the Gilgit Agency, with its dependencies of Hunza, Nagar and the principalities of Swat and Chitral at the northern end of the famous Durand Line) in the west, northwest and north, during the 19th century (the former two in 1843 and 1849 respectively and the latter in 1890s), matched the Russian advance in the south and east Central Asia from their heartlands to warm waters of the Indian Ocean. Each of them raised the bogey of the other’s expansion to press on further and further till they stopped on either side of Afghanistan, which by the beginning of the 20th century became the buffer between the two empires. (Sarila, p.17.)

Alarmed at the imminent Russian influence in Afghanistan, Britain fought a costly war in Afghanistan, known as the First Anglo-Afghan War (1838-1842), to replace the then Afghan ruler Dost Muhammad Khan (r. 1826-1839, 1843-1863) with pro-British chieftain Shah Shuja al-Mulk (r. 1803-1809, 1839-1842). The replacement, however, did not last long, for the ousted Amir regained his throne four years later (1843) by getting his claim to it recognised by the British. It was he who established for the first time the territorial outlines of present-day Afghanistan by his control of Kandhar (1855), northern Afghanistan (1850-59) and Herat (1863). (Isaacs et al. eds., p.181.) Friendly relations between him and the British continued till his son and successor, Sher Ali’s (r.1863-1865,1869-1878) refusal (1878) to admit a British Resident, which resulted in the launch of the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1881) by the British in November 1878. Sher Ali died in February 1879, and three months later his son Yakub Khan signed the Treaty of Gandamak with the British by which he was recognised as Amir in exchange for British control over his foreign policy and stationing of a British Resident at Kabul, besides, ceding not only the Khyber and Kurram but also Sibi, Pishin, Loralai and the Pathan territories north and east of Quetta, needed by the British to round off the new province of Balochistan.

In the aftermath of the two Anglo-Afghan wars, the British
wrested Sindh from Talpur Mirs in 1843 and the Punjab, along with present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, from the Sikhs in 1849;

in 1847, handed over, of course, under their paramountcy, Kashmir and the adjacent northern hill-territories to Gulab Singh, the chief of Jamu, the founder of Kashmir’s Dogra dynasty, who was later on helped by the British to extend his rule into Kashmir right up to the Sinkiang border; (Caroe, pp. 310, 323; and Sarila, p.16.)

annexed a number of Indian princely states, under the ‘Doctrine of Lapse’, adopted by the then Governor General Lord Dalhousie (1848-1856), like Satara in 1848, Baghat, Jaitpur and Sambalpur in 1850, Udaipur in 1852, Jhansi in 1853, Nagpur in 1854, and Karauli in 1855, while the charge of mismanagement was used to force Nizam of Hyderabad Deccan to cede required territory and to seize absolutely the rich lands of the ever loyal Nawab of Awadh in 1856; (Mansingh, p.115.)

suppressed ruthlessly the Great Indian Mutiny or Revolt of 1857, now called the War of Independence, resulting to heighten “British fears of rebellion, conspiracies, whole wars and possible foreign provocations” (among the likely foreign culprits in the 1860s there being but a single important suspect, the Russian Empire);\(^{20}\) (Meyer and Brysac, quoted in Sarila, p.16.)

transferred control of the Indian Empire from the East India Company directly to the British Crown in 1858 and vested the Company’s powers in the Secretary of State for India at London;
• initiated for the first time, significant constitutional reforms under the Government of India Act, 1861 (with second instalment in 1891);

• established the official summer capital of the Government of India (from 1864 to 1947) at Simla (in the Punjab), a hill-town in the Himalayan foothills, where, later on, the headquarters of the newly formed Indian Intelligence Department were also located, as the town “was a good deal closer to the areas of Russian activity than Calcutta”; (Hopkirk, p. 422; and Mansingh, p. 384.)

• crushed effectively the Indian Wahabi Movement, within a decade and a half of the crushing of the Great Indian Mutiny and a decade of the introduction of the constitutional reforms, with the help of effective military expeditions in 1858, 1863, and 1868 followed by severe convictions of the ’traitors’ through court proceedings like the Ambala Trial of 1864, Patna Trial of 1865, Maldah Trial of September 1870, Rajmahal Trial of October 1870, and ’the great’ trial of 1871;

• dissolved the East India Company in 1873, and proclaimed British Queen Victoria (r. 1837-1901) as the Empress of India in 1876;

• secured Quetta from the Khan of Kalat under the treaty of Jacobabad (1876), which in fact was the extension of the treaty of 1854, to make it a military base, and transferred the overall supervision and control of Balochistan from the Sindh authorities to a separate Balochistan Agency, formally constituted in February 1877, under the Agent to the Governor General of India, with headquarters at Quetta; (Channa, pp.139-44.)
completed railway line between Sindh and the Punjab in 1879, which was subsequently extended up to Peshawar in 1881 (later on, Attock bridge was also built);

- treated the northwest frontier of India as the most sensitive of all frontiers of their vast Indian empire; it was here that the pick of the British Indian army was quartered (where, incidentally, Winston Churchill, who later became the British Prime Minister from 1940-1945 and 1951-1955, served with the Malakand Field Force in 1898), and for the army’s convenience, subsequently, built a railway network to the Bolan Pass, like the earlier one to the Khyber Pass, both leading to Afghanistan;

- constructed a road from Gilgit in Hunza (in the then northern Kashmir) through the 13,000-feet-high Mintaka Pass in the Karakoram mountains to Kashgar in Sinkiang, and posted agents there to monitor activities across the border in present-day Uzbekistan and the Pamirs; (Sarila, p. 16.) and finally

- began to replace the practice of dealing with the tribal tracts and conducting the relations with the tribesmen through the deputy commissioners of the six ‘settled districts’ of Peshawar, Bannu, Kohat, Hazara, Dera Ismail Khan and Dera Ghazi Khan with the system of establishing political agencies for the western border tracts. \(^{23}\) (Channa, p. 45.) (Later on, a separate province, the North-West Frontier Province, was established in November 1901, that is, nearly six years before the formal end of the Anglo-Russian rivalry in 1907.)

Any research work with its focus wholly on the narrower perspective possesses all the merits and demerits of a micro level study of any subject, and by completely ignoring the broader perspective deprives it of or saves it from all the corresponding
advantages and disadvantages attributed to a macro level analysis of any issue. And that is the case with most of the researches so far done on the subject.

However, besides the above two important perspectives, “differing historical perspectives have [also] scrutinized the late nineteenth century non-western and South Asian contact with European imperialism and the British empire. The nature of indigenous resistance to foreign domination has been continuously analysed. Colonial narratives dismissed various suppressed uprisings as the triumph of order over anarchy. Nationalist chronologies, on the other hand, appropriated disparate revolts as events anticipating the day the people would come into their own. Political economists and radical historians traced conflict to changing structures of class, caste and economy. Post-independence, state oriented scholars wrote modernizing teleologies in which resistance developed as consolidating governments confronted and absorbed traditional societies and cultures. More recently, ‘subaltern’ [or national resistance to imperial authority] and post-colonial narratives interpreted colonial era unrest as continuing conflict between domineering western knowledge-power and communitarian consciousness and agency.” (Nichols, p. 221.)

In Pakistan, post-1947 historical scholarship on anti-colonial politics and resistance strives to analyse the ‘emerging nationalism, especially in relation to Islamic identities’.

Lastly, one of the most significant modern approaches is the scientific perspective of historical materialism, or materialist interpretation of history, generally adopted by the Marxist scholars/historians, who interpret this movement, along with such other movements, launched against the British, in the nineteenth century,— like Faraizi movement (1830-1857), 24 Parganas (1831-1832), Thar Sindh (1846), Santal Pargana (1855), Nagarparkar Sindh (1859), Indigo districts (1859-1861), Tuskhali (1872-1875), Pabna (1873), Chhagalnaiya
The Indian Wahabi Movement (1826-1871) ... as peasants revolts often fought under the guise of religion and/or patriotism.

Notes

1. According to Sir Olaf Caroe, “The continued political freedom of the tribal belt is mainly owing to the love of liberty of the tribesman, his readiness to defend it, and his capacity as a fighter on his own ground.” (Caroe, p. 321.)

2. Agriculture is the main source of employment in Bihar, which presently accounts for about 40% of India’s mineral production and hosts industries based on minerals, steel and heavy engineering. Despite this, Bihar falls below the national average in terms of literacy rates and other indices of socio-economic development. (Mansingh, pp. 69-70.)

3. Because of their link to the horse, these tribal peoples (proto-Indo-Aryans) are said to have come from the steppe land located somewhere in Central Asia and settled in Iran and India (possibly beginning as early as 3500 BCE). This view is opposed by others, including Indian scholars, who argue that there is no solid evidence to suggest the Indo-Aryans came from outside and that the astronomy, and the associated mathematics, show that the Indo-Aryans were indigenous to northwest India. This debate is still inconclusive, there are number of intellectual flaws in both the viewpoints. (Watson, pp. 139-40; also, Benedict, p. 38.)

4. But soon the Sikhs had “to arrive at the conviction that the British Government were intriguing with an enemy [Afghans] they had once defeated to encircle and to weaken them. By every process of reasoning they believed themselves threatened, and they resorted to war. ... In a very real sense it led to the Sikh Wars.” (Caroe, p. 323.) According to Peter Hopkirk, Afghanistan and the Punjab, “two countries were [are] to serve as a protecting shield for [former] British India.” (Hopkirk, p. 190.)
5. Mahavir, a scion of the Jnatrika from father’s side and Lichchavi from mother’s side, died at Pava in the present-day Patna district. Modern scholarship suggests his period from 549 to 477 BCE. (Bowker ed., p. 352.)

6. The Lichchavis governed through an assembly of dignitaries of tribe or clan with an elected chief (nayaka) from among themselves for several hundred years. This ‘republican’ (in fact, a variant of aristocratic or oligarchic) form contrasted with that of hereditary kingship adopted by many neighbouring peoples around 6th century BCE. (Mansingh, p. 230.) The Lichchavis played a prominent part in Indian legend and history for more than a thousand years. There are good reasons to believe that they were of the Scythian or Saka origin. The Malla tribesmen of Pava Kusinagara were also akin to Lichchavis. Similarly, Mahavir was also of Scythian or Saka origin. “It seems to me,” says Vincent A. Smith, “that the Saisunagas, Lichchavis, and several other ruling families or clans in or near Magadha were not Indo-Aryan by blood.” (Smith, p. 75.)

7. Gautama Buddha was son of a Sakya or Saka (Scythian) chieftain of Kapilavastu, a dependency of Kosala (ancient name of a region/state in the central-eastern Ganges subsequently known as Awadh or Oudh), in what is now Nepal’s Terai area, a southern sub-montane belt which merges with the Indian Terai, now forming part of the Basti district of Uttar Pradesh and of the adjacent state of Bihar. (Mansingh, pp. 80, 289.)

8. In fact, this region was known as Bihar before the end of 12th century of the Common Era: “The Muslim general [Muhammad Bakhtyar Khalji] acting independently, after completing several successful plundering expeditions, seized the fort of Bihar in 1193, by an audacious move, and thus mastered the capital of the Province of that name. . . . he was informed that the whole city and fortress were considered to be a college, which the name Bihar [Vihar] signifies.” (Smith, p. 235.)

9. Karl Jaspers characterised this relatively short period as a time when “we meet with the most deep cut dividing line in history. Man, as we know him today, came into being… The most extraordinary
events are concentrated in this period. Confucius and Lao-tse were living in China, all the schools of Chinese philosophy came into being, including those of Mo-Ti, Chuang-tse, Leh-tsu and a host of others; India produced Upanishads and Buddha and, like China, ran the gamut of philosophical possibilities down to scepticism, to materialism, sophism and nihilism; in Iran Zarathustra taught a challenging view of the world as a struggle between good and evil; in Palestine the prophets made their appearance, from Elijah, by way of Isaiah and Jeremiah to Deutero-Isaiah; Greece witnessed the appearance of Homer, of the philosophers – Parmenides, Heraclitus and Plato – of the tragedians, Thucydides and Archimedes. Everything implied by these names developed during these few centuries almost simultaneously in China, India, and the West, with out any one of these regions knowing of the others.” (Jaspers, p. 2.) During the period, approximately from 750 to 350 BCE, the world underwent a great intellectual sea-change, and most of the world’s great faiths came into being. However, “Not all the faiths created were, strictly speaking, monotheisms, but they did all centre around one individual, whether that man (always a man) was a god, or the person through whom god spoke, or else someone who had a particular vision or approach to life which appealed to vast numbers of people.” (Watson, p. 145.)

10. The Indian nonconformist movement was especially active in Magadha and the neighbouring regions where the Hinduising of the population was yet incomplete and distinctions of race were clearly marked. The racial distinction between the Brahmans and rest of the population necessarily evoked and encouraged the growth of independent views on philosophy and religion. The enlightened men of the upper classes rebelled against the Brahmans’ claim to the exclusive possession of the knowledge and key to the door to salvation. Consequently, a number of sects and schools of thought emerged and flourished, holding very diverse viewpoints on various important issues. However, in due course of time, almost all of them died out except the Jainism and Buddhism. Both, as historical religions, originated in or around Magadha kingdom. Both did not come into
existence independently; in fact, their doctrines were based on the teachings of earlier oracles. Mahavir commenced his religious life as a twenty-fourth reformer or *tirthankara* of an ancient ascetic order previously propagated by Parsva or Parsvanath, the twenty-third *tirthankara*, two and a half centuries earlier. Gautama Buddha’s preaching was related to the ancient cult of the ‘former Buddhas’, whose clairvoyant at that time was Devadatta, Gautama’s cousin. Thus, the nonconformist tendency and resistance to the established (dominant) practice was an age-old tradition in and around Magadha region, much prior to Mahavir and Gautama Buddha.

11. The Saisunaga dynasty of Magadha kingdom was established by Sisunaga (or Shishu + Naga), originally a chieftain of Kasi (present-day Benares), in or around 642 BCE. His capital, located in the hills of present-day Gaya district, was known as Girivraja (Garhi + Raja), also known as old Rajagriha (Raja + Garh). Being situated at the confluence of the rivers Ganges and Sona, it was mythical place of pilgrimage since time immemorial, like that of Prayag (now known as Allahabad) at the *sangum* of rivers Ganges and Yamuna.

12. In-between the rebel Sher Khan, better known as Sher Shah Suri (r. 1539-1545), a jagirdar in Jaunpur (Bihar), not only consolidated his power in Bihar but also defeated and drove out of India Humayun, son of Babur (r. 1526-1530), the founder of the Moghul empire in India. Thus, Sher Shah re-established Afghan power in India by declaring himself as the emperor of India. He was succeeded by his son Jalal Khan, better known as Islam Shah and/or Salim Shah Suri (r. 1545-1554), who in his turn was succeeded by his cousin Adil Shah Suri (r. 1554-1556); the latter’s forces under General Hemu, a capable Hindu minister, were defeated by Humayun’s son, Akbar the Great (r. 1556-1605), at the second battle of Panipat in 1556. (Mansingh, pp. 396-97.)

13. W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, and some other scholars give account of the movement up to 1871 only.

14. Actually, it was Captain Arthur Conolly (1807-1842), an archetypal Great Game player and later beheaded in Bokhara, who first coined the phrase “the Great Game” in his letter to a friend, although it was Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), an English writer born in Bombay,
who immortalised it many years later in his novel, *Kim*, first published in 1901. In the same year another Great Game novel, *The Half-Hearted*, written by John Buchan, was also published. (Hopkirk, pp. 1, 123, 450.) Count K. [Karl Robert] V. Nesselrode (1780-1862), Russian diplomat, who gained the confidence of the emperor Tsar Alexander I (r. 1801-1825) and later became Foreign Minister to Tsar Nicholas (r. 1825-1855), named it “tournament of shadows” because there was no direct Anglo-Russian clash of arms. (Ibid., p. 5.) Colonel Algernon Durand (son of Lieutenant Henry Durand and ‘brother of ‘Durand Line’ famed Sir Mortimer Durand), the then Political Officer Gilgit, termed it “the Game.” (Ibid., p. 451.) George (later Lord, and Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905) Curzon called it “the Central Asian Game.” (Ibid., p. 446.) Michael Edwardes, *Playing the Great Game: A Victorian Cold War*, calls it “Cold War,” as subtitle of his book explicitly indicates. (Edwardes, title page.)

15. In the Baltic town of Vilnius (present-day capital of Lithuania state), there stands a simple monument bearing two plaques. Together they tell the whole story of French troops march to their doom in the summer of 1812. On the side with its back towards Moscow is written: ‘Napoleon Bonaparte passed this way in 1812 with 400,000 men’. On the other side are the words: ‘Napoleon Bonaparte passed this way in 1812 with 9,000 men’. (Hopkirk, p. 27.)


17. Ibid., p. 5. This shrinkage was also a result of the northwest expansion of the British Indian Empire. The in-between, 200 miles long, pincer-shaped narrow strip of terra firma, better known as Wakhan corridor (once part of the famous Silk Road – Marco Polo passed through this area in the first half of the 1270s – now cut off from the world) was also a political creation of the Great Game, as it purposefully came into being when the two great powers found it expedient to create it, through a series of treaties between 1873 and 1895, as a buffer zone, a sort of geographical shock absorber, preventing Tsarist Russia from touching British India. Actually, the
British authorities prompted and paid Afghanistan to annex this high altitude, almost uninhabited area, with population of about 1000 individuals of Kyrgyz ethnicity (perhaps the distant descendants of the infamous ancient Kyrgyz, who roamed for centuries all over Central Asia for raiding Silk Road caravans, trapped in this remote ‘corridor to nowhere’ but survived for almost 2000 years), but not a single person of Afghan, Pathan, Tajik or Uzbek origin had ever lived in this tract since the complete desertion of the ‘Silk Route’, perviously belonging to no one, stretching eastwards from eastern Afghanistan as far as the Chinese frontiers, wedged in between Tajikistan (then under the Russian control) to the north and South Asia’s Gilgit Agency and the principality of Chitral (then under the British control) to the south, with a view to prevent British India and Tsarist Russia from sharing a border.

18. “Some would argue that the Great Game has never really ceased, and that it was merely the forerunner of” the new phase of Great Game, better known as “the Cold War [1945-1989] of our own times, fuelled by the same fears, suspicions and misunderstandings.” (Hopkirk, pp. 7-8.) The period from 1917, the year which witnessed the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, to 1944, which saw the end of the Second World War, may be deemed as a prelude to the Cold War, which was declared ended in December 1989 at the Malta summit meeting between the heads of the United States and the then Soviet Union. But with sudden and dramatic dissolution of the Soviet Union, in the very next year (1990), there sprang up almost overnight five entirely new countries, eight if the Caucasus region is included, with fabulous oil and gas reserves, rich hoards of gold, silver, copper, zinc, lead and iron ore, besides crucial pipe-line routes, in Central Asia, giving birth to what is termed by Peter Hopkirk, the ‘new Great Game’. According to Hopkirk, “Besides the Americans and Russians, other regional powers, notably China, India and Pakistan” are the ‘powerful players in the ‘new Great game’. Both, the United States and Russia, the prominent players, are “anxious to keep Central Asia in a peaceful and cooperative state in order to preserve their access to its rich gas and oil supplies.” So, “the collapse of Russian rule in Central Asia has
tossed the area back into the melting pot of history. Almost anything could happen there now and only a brave or foolish man would predict its future." (Hopkirk, pp. xiii-xvii.)

19. The war “cost the British in India fifteen million pounds sterling and 20,000 lives in four years of military disasters.” (Mansingh, p. 38.)

20. According to renowned British strategist Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (Director of the East India Company 1856, Member British Parliament 1858 and 1865-68, Member of the Council of India 1858-59 and held the latter’s lifetime membership from 1868 to 1895), “If the Czar’s officers acquire a foothold in Kabul the disquieting effect will be prodigious. Every native ruler throughout northern India who either has, or fancies he has, grievance, or is even cramped or incommoded by our orderly Government, will begin intriguing with the Russians; worse, Afghanistan possesses a machinery of agitation singularly adapted for acting on the seething, fermenting, festering, mass of Muslim hostility in India.” (Rawlinson, pp. 279-80, quoted in Sarila, p. 17.)

21. W.W. Hunter has this to say further on the matter: “During the past seven years [since 1864], one traitor after another has been convicted and transported for life. Indeed each of the fanatic wars on our Frontier has produced its corresponding State Trial within our territory. At this moment [in 1871] a large body of prisoners, drawn from widely distant Districts, are suffering for their common crimes or waiting for trials.” And he concludes, “the whole Press of British India has been discussing the probabilities of another Afghan War; and should any such trial be in store for us, it will be no small danger averted if the Wahabi conspiracy within our territory can be first stamped out.” (Hunter, pp. 75, 97, 99.)

22. “The British then launched a number of prosecutions against the leaders, workers and supporters of the Movement. The police was successful in unearthing a good deal of information and no important worker was left without being brought to face a trial; some accused turned crown witnesses; where sufficient evidence was not available to ensure a conviction, it is alleged, it was fabricated. . . .

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The sentences were generally severe; long terms of imprisonment or transportation to the Andamans were awarded to many; the properties of the main leaders were confiscated and sold at ridiculous prices. The entire complex of buildings at Sadiqpur was razed to the ground.” (Qureshi, p. 172.)

23. In 1878, during the Second Anglo-Afghan War, a special officer was appointed for the Khyber. Kurram became an agency in 1892, while the three remaining agencies of Malakand, Tochi, and Wana were created between 1895 and 1896. (Channa, p. 45.)

References


