

Central Asia under the Mongols

G.D. Gulati

DEV BOOKS

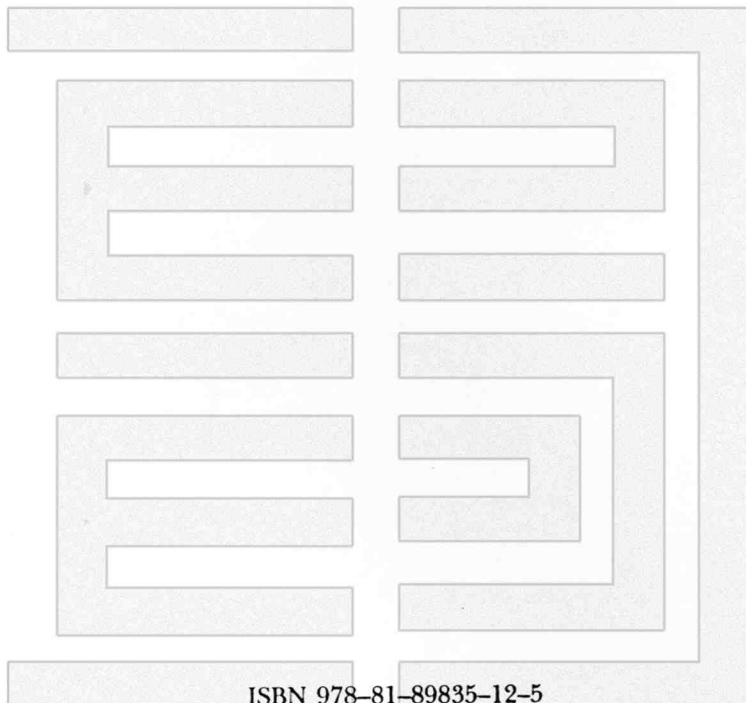
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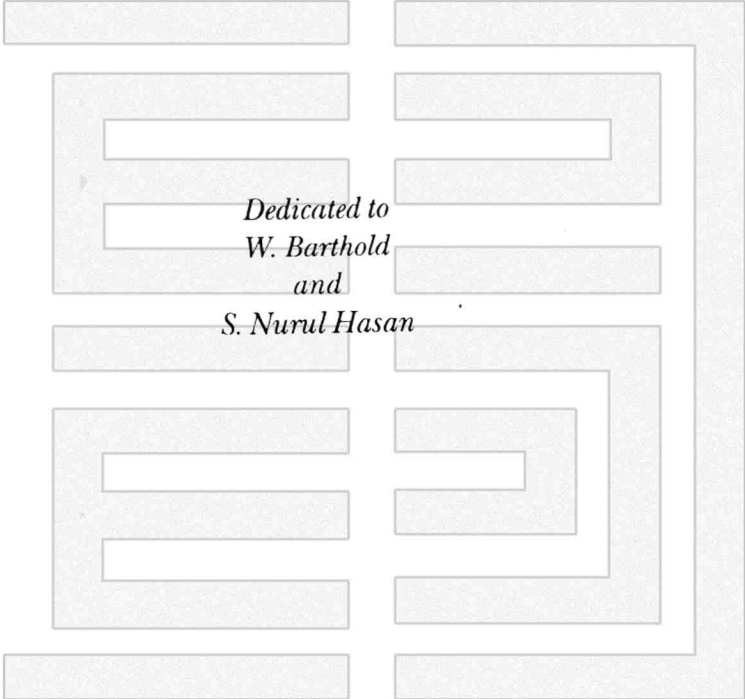
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*Dedicated to
W. Barthold
and
S. Nurul Hasan*

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Preface

THE IDEA OF THE subject came to my mind long ago when I was working for my Ph.D. thesis at University of Delhi on India's North-West Frontier during thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. While researching on this subject I had to discuss the Mongol invasions from the North West frontier and to study the Central Asian politics of that period. In this context it is necessary to mention that it was Prof. S. Nurul Hasan who advised me to take up a separate project on the Mongols in Central Asia. I began working on this and with the further support from Prof. I.H. Siddiqui from Aligarh Muslim University, the project took a definite shape.

Scholars have already done some significant work on the rise of the Mongols and their expansion in different countries of Asia and Europe. Mostly, they have dealt either with the Mongols in general or have written biographies of the Mongol emperors. Some of these studies deal with region or focus on countries such as China, Russia, Iran, Central or Inner Asia etc. Among these scholars, one can name Thomas T. Allsen, Reuven Amitai Presiss, W. Barthold, Michal Biran, J.A. Boyle, Peter Brent, J. Curtin, Richard C. Foltz, Ralph Fox, Herbert Frank, Danis Twitchett, Mansura Haidar, Gavin Hambly, Leo de Hartog, Erik Hildinger, H.H. Howorth, Peter Jackson, Linda Komaroff, Harold Lamb, George Lane, R.P. Lister, H. Desmond Martin, Beatrice F. Manz, David O. Morgan, E.D. Phillip, Michael Prawdin, Paul Ratchuevsky, Morris Rossabi, J.J. Saunders, Bertold Spular, G.Le Strange,

James D. Tracy, George Vernadsky, B.Ya Vladimirstov, Jack Weatherford, and Henry Yule. These scholars have touched different aspects of the life of the Mongols. Some have dealt with the socio-cultural and commercial aspects of the Mongols while others have referred the destructive aspects of their invasions. Yet, I feel that there were number of question regarding them, which could be further explored. Central Asia under the Mongols saw the rise of the rivalries with China and other kingdoms. Being the meeting land between Asia and Europe, the region played an important role in the contemporary commercial networks. It also played a significant role in the political conditions and the policies of the rulers in the neighbouring countries.

An attempt is made to define the region 'Central Asia' in the introductory chapter. It is evident that the meaning went on changing from time to time due to its interaction with the regions around it or domination of the ruling classes. There has been no unanimity among the scholars about the space called 'Central Asia' however, I have included Mawarnnahr, Kashgharia, Semirechie and much of Jungaria for the purpose of the present study. The ecological features of 'Central Asia' had been important and decisive to influence the life of its people throughout history. Therefore, a brief survey has been made to highlight these features such as: mountain-system, river-system, steppe and deserts.

The next chapter takes into account the historical background of the Mongols and how Chingiz Khan unified the different tribes of Mongolia and later extended his control over China, West Asia and Central Asia. His sons and successors too conquered distant lands and created a vast empire from Korea to Hungary. It has also been discussed in this chapter, the division of the vast empire into different Khanates (kingdoms) among the sons of the great Khan.

The third chapter contains a discussion on 'Chaghatai Khanate' founded by Chaghatai, the second son of Chingiz. It included most of the Central Asian lands i.e Transoxiana,

Kashgharia, Badakshan, Balkh and Ghazni without any precise borders. The Chaghatais were the true nomadic vision of the Mongol empire and always at war with their co-brothers in Persia and China. The Khanate survived more than a hundred years under the Chaghatai-Kaidu alliance and their successors till the emergence of the Barlas Turks as power under Timur.

The relations between the Chaghatai Khanate and China under the title 'Relations with China' are examined in the fourth chapter. As noted in earlier chapter, Qaidu with Chaghatai had openly defied the imperial authority in China. They went at a continuous war for four-five years (1260-1264). Marco Polo assigns the cause of war the share of these conquests which the great Khan Qubilai had denied to Qaidu unless he paid homage at the court. He had captured Karakorum with the support of the Mongol chieftains who resented Qubilai's policy of sinification. Qubilai was ultimately compelled to accept Qaidu as the *defacto* ruler of those regions.

This is followed by a detailed discussion of the Indian Campaigns from Central Asia from time to time in the fifth chapter. The political conditions of Central Asia had always influenced the neighbouring regions. After making control over Afghanistan the Mongols of Central Asia threatened the borders of the Sultans of Delhi where the Turks had established themselves in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Mongols had entered the frontier of India in Chinghiz Khan's own life time and their pressure remained over there throughout the thirteenth and first quarter of the fourteenth century. The Sultans were compelled to take certain measures to meet this challenge. A detailed survey of the campaigns and why they could not succeed in their mission in India have been dealt in the end of chapter.

The penultimate chapter provides the account of commercial networks and activities that were going on in Central Asia. The formation of caravans, construction of

caravansarais or *khans*, check-posts, various trade routes, trading-centers all are parts of this chapter. It has been shown that how the Mongols in Central Asia created conditions for the smooth flow to the trading activities throughout its cities and markets and how under their rule the silk-road revived. It was the globalization of its own time which brought the East and West together.

The 'conclusion' shows how the geo-polity of 'Central Asia' has played a pivotal role in its history. Despite constant wars with their co-brothers, the Chaghatais contributed in the world-commerce in the middle ages. It were they who could send expeditions into the distant places in India and had great impact on her polity, economy and society. The disintegration of the Mongols in Central Asia gave way to its ruling agents to emerge as new empires in the coming days. The best examples are the Uzbeks, Mughals and the Ottomans.

In the end I wish to mention that by and large I have consulted sources in India from Persian and English records. However, for literature available in other languages I have generally depended upon the translated works which exist on Central Asia. As far as the spellings of names and places are concerned I have followed A.J. Boyle's translation of *Tarikh-i-Jahan-i-Gusha*. However the original spellings are retained in case of quoted passages from other sources.

At the outset I must say that my greatest debt remains to late Prof. S. Nurul Hasan who had inspired me to undertake this work. Thanks are also due to the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi for providing me sufficient funds to visit several libraries and research institutions located in Delhi, Kolkata, Aligarh and Shimla and to avail their facilities. I am deeply obliged to late Professor S.P. Gupta of Aligarh Muslim University who offered me twice visiting fellowship at the Centre of Advanced Studies, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University. This enabled me to collect material available there for my present book. Most

considerable debts are to Professor I.H. Siddiqui, from whom I have learnt a lot about the Mongols in Central Asia. I also thank Professor B.L. Bhadani, Professor R.K. Trivedi and Professor Mansura Haider of the same Centre. I am highly obliged to my friends Surjit Singh and to Shri P.N. Sahai former Librarian I.C.H.R. for his help in preparing the index. Indeed I am deeply thankful to my friend Bhagwan Josh of Jawahar Lal Nehru University for going through the whole text and making valuable suggestions.

I am thankful to Professor K. L. Tuteja of Kurushetra University, Professor Azizuddin, Dr. R.P. Bahuguna of Jamia Millia Islamia, Professor G.S.L. Devra of Kota Open University and Professor Jigar Muhammad of Jammu University for their continuous encouragement and also to thank my friend Mr. Vinod Kapoor for giving me the computer assistance. In the end I thank Mr. Pankaj D. Jain of Dev Books for the publication of this book.

G.D. GULATI

11th June 2010
New Delhi

Introduction

FRONTIERS OF ANY region are unstable and vary from age to age, shifting according to the balance of power between its own population and that of the surroundings. In the course of history the definition of a region also changes due to its interaction with the regions around it or the domination of the ruling class. 'Central Asia' had been ruled by different ethnic dynasties since ancient times hence the definitions went on changing from time to time.

Though, it is assumed to be clearly defined, there has been no unanimity among the scholars about the space called 'Central Asia'. We have to trace out the extent of the territory which the different states and 'nations' of Asia have held at different times and the different meanings in which the same name has been used. Different historians and social scientists have given different terms and definitions of 'Central Asia' on the basis of their scope for studying various aspects of its history.

The latest edition of *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* in its 15th volume enters 'Central Asia' as a separate subject. It deals with the region, history and countries of Central Asia. In the introduction it reads that the Central Asian region is located in the centre of the Eurasian land mass and extends from the Caspian Sea in the west to the border of Western China

in the east. To north lies Russia, and to the south are Iran, Afghanistan and China. Central Asia consists of the republics of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These states all former republics of the Soviet Union, became independent in 1991. The basic idea behind the definition is to give an account of the five republics as mentioned. Hence, the 'Central Asia' at present is the region comprising of five republics of the Soviet Russia.¹

It seems to be very narrow definition as far the historical geography is concerned. In terms of historical geography a more precisely delineated 'Central Asian heartland' consisted of three adjacent regions, collectively referred to by nineteenth century explorers and geographers as Russian and Chinese Turkestan. The first of these regions, known to the ancient Greeks as Transoxiana and to the Arabs as *Ma wara an-Nahr* (That Which Lies Beyond the River), consists of the area between the Amu Darya (the Oxus River of the Greeks and the Jayhun of the Arabs) and Syr Darya (The Jaxartes River of the Greeks and the Sayhun of the Arabs). It is an arid, semi-desert country where, before the development of large-scale irrigation projects in the 20th century, the sedentary population maintained itself by intensive cultivation of the fertile tracts bordering the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya or by cultivation of the oases, in which were situated the major urban centers such as Bukhara and Samarkand.

The second, predominantly steppe, region extends northward from the upper reaches of the Syr Darya to the valley of the Ili River and to the foothills of the ranges lying between the Altai mountains and the Tien-Shan. Bounded on the south by the line of the Tien-Shan and to the north by Lake Balkhash, this area was known to the Turks as the *Yeti Su*, the "Land of the Seven Rivers", hence its Russian name of Semirechye.

The third region, centering on the Takla Makan Desert, is bounded on the north by the Tien Shan, on the west by

the Pamirs, on the south by the Kunlun Mountains, and the north east by the Dzungarian (Jungarian) Basin. Often referred to as Kashgaria, from its principal urban centre, Kashgar (K'a-Shih), the region is characterized by small oasis settlements lying between the desert and the surrounding ranges, such as Khotan (Ho-t'ien), Yarkand, Kashgar itself, and Aksu (A-k'o-su), which served as way stations on the famous Silk Road between China and the West. The map pertaining to the middle ages shown in the volume 15 concerns the present study is much relevant to us as it shows the regions of Khwarizm, Pamirs, Tianshan-Tarim Basin, Altai mountains bordering the great wall of China though it needs more explanation.²

In a modern study 'Central Asia' has been defined as the centre of the continent of Asia between Mongolia or China proper in the east; India, Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan in the south; Iran and Caspian Sea in the west and the Ural range of mountains or Russia in the north. It consists of almost two equal parts—East Central Asia (Tibet and Xinjiang) and West Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan). According to the author there are several concepts of 'Central Asia', especially the Chinese, Indian and Iranian concepts. The Chinese concept comprehends it as Hsi Yu, the land west of China proper. China was the first country to appear in East Central Asia in the time of the first Han dynasty. According to the Indian concept, Central Asia is the land north of Himalayan and Hindukush mountains. Ladakh, although it is political part of India, is geographically part of East Central Asia. According to the Iranian concept, it is the land north of Khurasan. With the advance of Russia eastwards in the seventeenth century, there also has been the Russian and Western concepts of Central Asia as the land east of the Caspian Sea, Balkh though politically part of Afghanistan, geographically is a part of West Central Asia.³

Some scholars equate 'Central Asia' with 'Inner Asia' which

is the expanse of steppes, deserts and mountains that extend across Eurasia from the Caspian Sea and the Ural Mountains to Manchuria. Whereas the term 'Inner Asia' has been applied to the region which includes seven countries—the five former states of Soviet, Sinkiang and Mongolia. Basically, the five ex-Soviet Asian Republics—Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kirghiztan etc. represent a region formally known as Soviet Central Asia and now according to the scholars simply 'Central Asia'. Though this term has often been used to describe generally the Asian interior has now been agreed upon.

In medieval period if we divide the Chingized Empire, the Chaghatai Khanate comprised Mawarnnahr, Kashgharia, Semirechie and much of Jungaria, which is the main focus of our study. In another work the term 'Central Asia' has been used in a more broader terms. The editors have used the term of 'Central Asia' to describe the area comprising Kazakh, Kirghyz, Tajik, Turkmen and Uzbek (Ex Soviet Republics of USSR), the Mongolian's People's Republic and the three dependencies of China known today as the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, Sinkiang-Uighur Autonomous Region and the Tibet Autonomous Region.⁴

An identical term for 'Central Asia' has been used in yet another work and it gives a broad definition. "The geographical scope of 'Central Asia' is confined to the former Soviet Central Asian Republics of Tadjikistan, Kyrghizia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkemenia; Xinjiang and Tibet, Autonomous region of People's Republic of China, Mongolia and Afghanistan."⁵

'Central Asia' or 'Shredne Asia' in Russian language, is widely known as 'Middle Asia' to the Russians.⁶ At another place it reads: "From the steppes of Kazakhstan to the Arabian sea and from the Caspian to the north of the Indus, this vast stretch of Asian heartland is one cultural zone where people have common religion and ethnic history. For many centuries it is this 'Central Asian land', which served as the great Silk

Road, over which passed traders and businessmen, scholars and missionaries and artists and artisans. The entire area from the Aral to the Arabian sea has actually been one great economic zone which was characterized by free trade and free movement of people. All over this region from Lahore to Kazan on the Volga and from Baku to Multan one can witness the presence of caravanserais that lined the old trade routes and facilitated large scale business."⁷

'Central Asia' as understood in restricted sense rightly should be 'Asia-i-Miana' i.e. 'Middle Asia'. It is the land that lies between China and South Asia on the east and the Ural mountain and the Caspian Sea on the west and between the Siberian forest on the north and Iran-Afghan plateau on the south i.e. the southern Oxus river-line and the Kopet Dagh range on the south."⁸

Historically, this vast area which separates from the Urals to the Pamirs from the shores of the Caspian Sea to the Altai mountain was a single entity, even though its name differed (Turan, Mawarannahr, Desht-i-Kipchak, Turkestan]. During the pre-Soviet period the Central Asian Cultural Space comprised not only the aforementioned territory but also northern Iran, Afghanistan and some regions of Western China.⁹

In a recent historical study on Central Asia, the author uses the term Central Asia in his work referring the area encompassing Transoxiana and Turkistan, from the Oxus to the Altai mountains and the eastern figures of modern Xinjiang.¹⁰ Another scholar refers to three different geographical definitions while distinct from one another, partly overlap. The first term, 'Central Asia' refers to the territories that are today occupied by the Muslim republics of former Soviet Union, along with nearby areas of Asiatic Russia, and parts of north-west China. In short, this is the area north and north-east of the province of Khurasan. The second term, 'Inner Asia' (sometimes referred to as Inner Eurasia) is employed in a wider sense, designating the vast

area covered by the countries of 'Central Asia', as well as Mongolia, north-western and north-eastern China, Afghanistan and Tibet. The area referred to by third term—the Eurasian Steppes—is bordered by western Hungary in the west, Manchuria in the east, and the Siberian forest belt in the north.¹¹

Yet another writer divides the region into four regions: the steppe in the north, both left and right of the middle Syr Darya; the semi-desert on the lower Syr Darya; the desert, which on the left bank of the Amu Darya is called Kara Kum (the Black Sand), and on the right bank Kyzyl Kum (the Red Sand), with occasional patches in the Farghana valley and east of the Zarafshan; and the mountains, of which the main chains are the Tien-Shan, the Alai and Trensalai, and the Pamirs, with the minor ranges along the upper Zarafshan and south of Samarqand.¹²

ECOLOGICAL FEATURES

Mountain system

Many features which include mountain-system, rivers, deserts and steppes, had always influenced the life of the inhabitants throughout its history. Among the mountains the southern border of Central Asia is marked by an almost unbroken chains of mountain ranges, nearly four thousand miles long which run from China to the Black Sea and which restricted access in the direction of South East Asia, the Indian sub-continent and the Middle East. From East to West these ranges are the Nan Shan, the Altyn Tagh, the Kun Lun, the Karakorum, the Hindu Kush, the Paropamisus, the Elburz and the Caucasus. In other words if we see the whole plateau, in sharp somewhat of an irregular rhomboid, it is completely enclosed by six grand ranges of mountains, namely the Himalayas looking south towards India, the Pamir looking west towards Central Asia, the Altai looking north towards Siberia, the Yablonoi looking north-east towards Eastern Siberia, the

Yun-ling and the Inshan looking towards China.¹³

Its highest mountain peaks are in the Pamir region. The term Pamir which has the roof of the world, means 'pasture' in the Tajik language. Its great lakes are the Issyk Kul in Kyrgyzstan and Balkhash in Kazakhstan. The vast Issyk Kul, the warm water lake situated in a fold of the Tianshan range, is an inland sea. It is believed that Kyrgyzes built their first settlement there in the fourteenth century.¹⁴ Marco Polo gives an eye witness account of the Pamir and its surroundings. He writes "traveller goes three days' journey towards the north-east, through mountains all the time, climbing so high that this is said to be the highest place, he finds a plain between two mountains, with a lake from which flows a very fine river (he does not give the name of the river). Here is the best pasturage in the world; for a lean beast grows fat here in ten days. . . . There are great quantities of wild sheep of huge size from the horns of these sheep people make bowls from which they feed . . . there are also innumerable wolves. . . . This plain whose name is Pamir, extends fully twelve days journey. In all these twelve days there is no inhabitation or shelter, but travellers must take their provision with them. No birds fly here because of the height and the cold. And I assure you that because of this great cold fire is not so bright here nor of the same colour as elsewhere and food does not cook well. At the end of this twelve days' journey, the traveller must ride fully forty days more east west east, always over mountains and along hillsides and gorges, traversing many rivers and many deserts. And in all, this journey he finds no habitation or shelter, but must carry his stock of provision. This country is called Belor (Kafiristan). The inhabitants live very high up in the mountains. They are idolaters and utter savages living entirely by the chase and dressed in the skins of beasts. They are out and out bad."¹⁵

Separating the Tarimbasin from the basins of Amu Darya and Syr-Darya, the Pamirs are approached from the north