

Agnieszka KUCZKIEWICZ-FRAŚ

Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland

a.kucziewicz-fras@uj.edu.pl

OVER THE KHYBER

AFGHANS AND SOUTH ASIA – HISTORY OF CONTACTS

ABSTRACT

Political, economic and cultural connections between Afghanistan and South Asia have been long-lasting and strong throughout the centuries, not only because of the geographical closeness of the regions, but also due to the genetic relationship of their peoples. In the 21st century, due to rapid geopolitical changes and globalization the mutual relations of these two regions are becoming more and more important, not only on bilateral level, but also from the point of view of the regional and international interests. The aim of this article is to concisely show how the relations between Afghanistan and South Asia developed over the history, with special attention given to the current state of affair.

Keywords: Afghanistan, South Asia, SAARC, Indo-Afghan relations

1. IS AFGHANISTAN A PART OF SOUTH ASIA?

Afghanistan's geopolitical assignment to one of the great regions of Asia remains problematic both for the external observers and for the Afghans themselves. Because of its location on the border of Central Asia, Middle East and South Asia, this historically significant region, situated along important trade routes connecting southern and eastern Asia to Europe and the Middle East, has been variously described as *positioned in the Middle East*, a *recognized geographical region of southwestern Asia* (WorldAtlas¹); *located in the heart of south-central Asia* (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*²), situated in *Central Asia* (*Encyclopaedia Iranica*³; Library of Congress⁴), or in *Southern Asia* (CIA World Factbook⁵). The latter view is becoming especially widespread, probably as a result of a classification of the world regions developed and popularized by the United Nations and its entities. On the map published by the UN official website, the territory of Afghanistan is noticeably included in South Asia (cf. Picture 1). Also, in the UN scheme presenting the composition of geographical regions (cf. Picture 2), Afghanistan is regarded as a part of the South Asian region – quite unexpectedly,⁶ together with Iran (!) (cf. Table 1).

Although the UN website states clearly that “The assignment of countries or areas to specific groupings is for statistical convenience and does not imply any assumption regarding political or other affiliation of countries or territories by the United Nations,”⁷ still this knowledge is quite pervasive, especially on the Internet, including, for example, webpages offering instructions for teachers (of history, geography, international relations, etc.) which are based on the UN divisions.

¹ Cf. ‘Location of Afghanistan,’ WorldAtlas, at <<http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/afghanistan/aflatlog.htm>>, 4 December 2014. On the meaning and scope of the term “Middle East,” and its covering both Afghanistan and Pakistan see: R.H. Davison, ‘Where is the Middle East?’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (1960), pp. 665-675.

² F.R. Allchin, ‘Afghanistan’ in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, at <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/7798/Afghanistan>>, 4 December 2014.

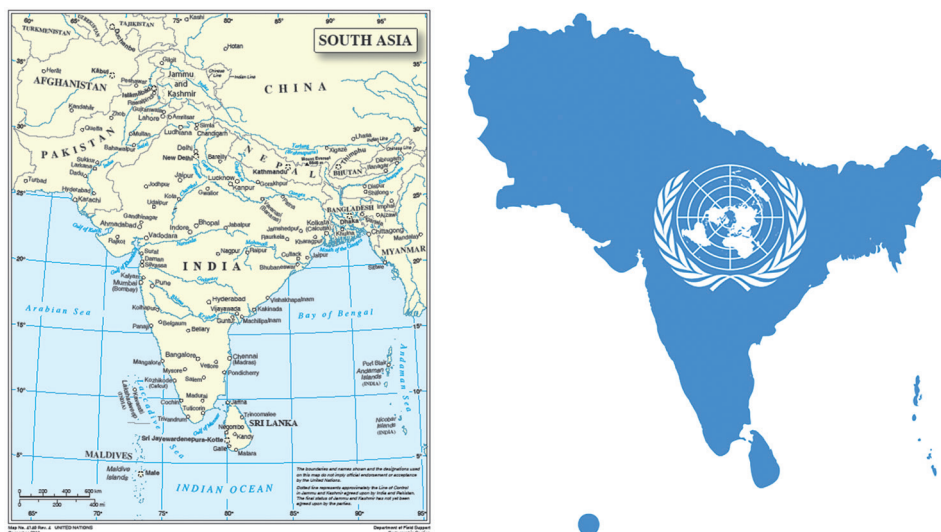
³ ‘Afghanistan’ in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. 1, Fasc. 5-6, at <<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/afghanistan>>, 4 December 2014.

⁴ Library of Congress – Federal Research Division, ‘Country Profile: Afghanistan,’ August 2008, at <<https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>>, 4 December 2014.

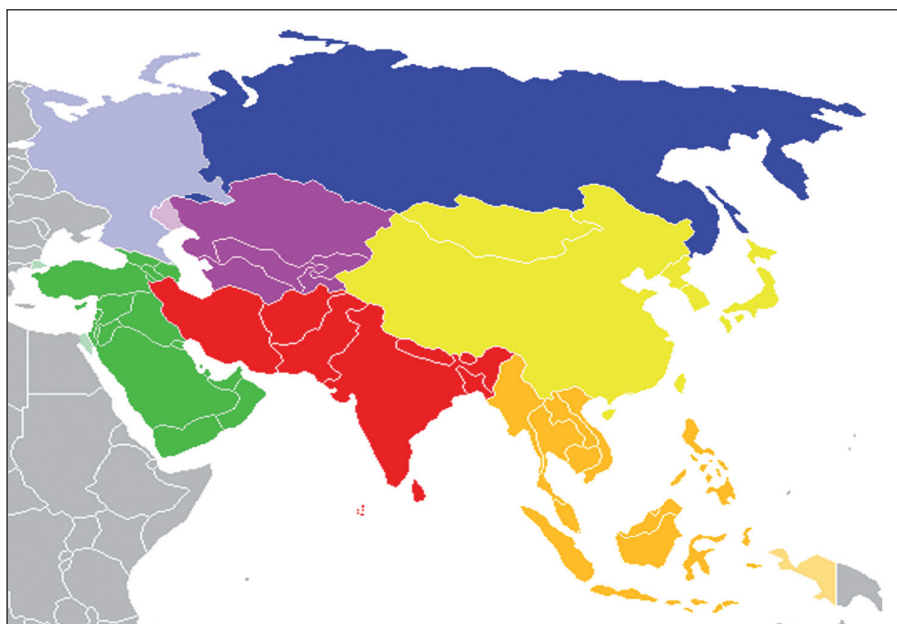
⁵ ‘Afghanistan,’ About.com, at <<http://geography.about.com/library/cia/blcafgghanistan.htm>>, 4 December 2014.

⁶ Although this unexpectedness may be lessen by the fact that since 2008 Iran has remained among the observer members of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and even has applied to become a full-fledged member (unsuccessfully, as far as until now, mostly due to the international clamour over its nuclear program).

⁷ United Nations Statistics Division, ‘Standard country or area codes and geographical regions for statistical use,’ at <<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49.htm>>, 4 December 2014.



Picture 1. Left: the map of South Asia according to the UN (with Afghanistan included). Right: flag map of Southwest Asia (United Nations). Sources: United Nations, Map No. 4140 Rev. 4, 'South Asia,' at <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/Souteast-Asia.pdf>, 14 December 2014; 'Flag map of South-west Asia (United Nations),' Wikipedia Commons, at [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_map_of_South-west_Asia_\(United_Nations\).png](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_map_of_South-west_Asia_(United_Nations).png), 16 December 2014



Picture 2. The United Nations geoscheme for Asia: Blue – North Asia; Pink – Central Asia; Yellow – East Asia; Green – Western Asia; Red – South Asia; Orange – Southeast Asia. Source: 'Geography of Asia,' Wikipedia, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Asia, 16 December 2014

Table 1. Composition of macro geographical (continental) regions, geographical sub-regions, and selected economic and other groupings

Numerical code	Geographical region and composition of each region
034	<i>Southern Asia</i>
004	Afghanistan
050	Bangladesh
064	Bhutan
356	India
364	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
462	Maldives
524	Nepal
586	Pakistan
144	Sri Lanka

Source: United Nations Statistics Division, <<http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>>, 16 December 2014.

2. POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONNECTIONS BETWEEN AFGHANISTAN AND SOUTH ASIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Strong and close relationships between Afghanistan and South Asia were confirmed in 2007, when the country itself opted for being politically and economically included in this region by entering the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). SAARC is an organisation of South Asian nations which was established in 1985, when the governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka formally adopted its charter providing for the promotion of economic and social progress, cultural development within the South Asia region and also for friendship and co-operation with other developing countries. Afghanistan had expressed its desire to join the grouping since 1985 – when SAARC came into being with seven members – but its political instability and civil war kept it isolated for the next over twenty years.

Though Afghanistan was already a member of such groups as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO),⁸ and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC, formerly Organization of the Islamic Conference),⁹ SAARC is the first bloc of contiguous

⁸ Economic Cooperation Organization – intergovernmental regional organization established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey, for the purpose of promoting economic, technical and cultural cooperation among the member states, and expanded in 1992 to include Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

⁹ Organization of Islamic Cooperation – second largest intergovernmental organization after the United Nations with 57 member states spread over four continents. Considered to be the collective voice of the Muslim world, designed to safeguard and protect the interests of Muslims.

countries to which it has been admitted.¹⁰ Welcoming Afghanistan into the SAARC fold, the then Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, remarked that it was *an appropriate recognition of the long-standing ties of culture and history that Afghanistan shares with us*.¹¹ And since presently the region of South Asia is commonly equated with the SAARC countries – especially considering such areas, as industry, trade, international policy or security – Afghanistan, in the natural course of things, is also regarded as belonging to this particular part of the world's biggest continent.¹²

Possibly most Afghans would never consider themselves as South Asians,¹³ yet they realize that in the current geopolitical situation, only the close alliance with the stronger neighbouring countries and successful cooperation in the region can give Afghanistan a chance for economic growth and political stabilization. As a member of SAARC and with support of such allies as India or Pakistan – by which the country is considered to be a viable doorway to the energy resources and markets of the Central Asia – Afghanistan can become a player in the global arena despite its poor economic performance, poverty, and backwardness. Afghanistan also hopes for the support of SAARC in solving pressing social problems – illiteracy, low quality of education, youth unemployment, lack of healthcare, discrimination of women, etc., as well as in addressing common challenges like the threat of terrorism which can only be tackled through joint regional and global efforts.¹⁴

Apart from participation in the SAARC, there are, however, many new initiatives being undertaken in order to link Afghanistan with South Asia. One of the latest is the New Silk Road strategy, supported by the U.S. and first envisioned in 2011 as a means

¹⁰ Recently, also the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) and the World Bank grouping of countries have included Afghanistan to the region of South Asia (previously restricted only to the original seven members of SAARC), cf. The World Bank, 'South Asia', at <<http://data.worldbank.org/region/SAS>>, 4 December 2014; SAARC, 'SAFTA Protocol' at <http://www.saarc-sec.org/areaofcooperation/detail.php?activity_id=36>, 4 December 2014.

¹¹ 'SAARC: Afghanistan Comes in from the Cold', ISN – ETH Zürich, 16 May 2007, at <<http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?ots591=4888CAA0-B3DB-1461-98B9-E20E7B9C13D4&lng=en&id=53216>>, 4 December 2014.

¹² See e.g. the definition given by Christian Wagner (German Institute for International and Security Affairs), an expert in security cooperation in South Asia: *The region South Asia includes the eight member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC): Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka* – Ch. Wagner, 'Security Cooperation in South Asia. Overview, Reasons, Prospects', *SWP Research Paper*, RP 6, June 2014, p. 7, fn. 3, at <http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2014_RP06_wgn.pdf>, 3 January 2015.

¹³ At least several Afghans, living in Afghanistan and abroad (men and women of various backgrounds), whom the author had an opportunity to ask whether they considered themselves South Asians, unambiguously denied, but could not, at the same time, indicate any other regional identity than "Afghani/Afghanistani."

¹⁴ Cf. N.N. Pandey, 'What Can SAARC Offer to Afghanistan?', Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 12 December 2011, at <<http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/what-can-saarc-offer-to-afghanistan-3516.html>>, 17 December 2014. See also the report of the conference "Afghanistan in SAARC: Towards Deeper Engagement," organized by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in May 2013, in Kathmandu, at <http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_35894-1522-1-30.pdf?131030082003>, 17 December 2014.

for Afghanistan to integrate further into the region by resuming traditional trading routes and reconstructing significant infrastructure links broken by decades of conflict. The project is focused on linking Central and South Asia through Afghanistan in four key areas: Regional Energy Markets, Trade and Transport, Customs and Border Operations, Businesses and People-to-People.¹⁵ Another project that started in December 2015, is the 1735-kilometre TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) gas pipeline that will transport Caspian Sea natural gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan into Pakistan and then to India. Although there are many security, financial or political challenges to this scheme, the preliminary works, like determining the source field and mapping the route, have been carried out. All countries involved in the project have signed a gas sale and purchase agreement and, at least by some leaders, the pipeline is believed to be operational already in 2020.¹⁶ The bilateral Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit and Trade Agreement, known also as TTA (with the most recent version signed in October 2010), allows Afghanistan access to the dry port of Lahore, and to a land route to export goods to India.¹⁷ These and similar programmes confirm strong economic relations between Afghanistan and South Asia and the mutual importance of both parties.

3. “TIES OF CULTURE AND HISTORY” BETWEEN AFGHANISTAN AND SOUTH ASIA

The “ties of culture and history” between the regions and peoples of Afghanistan and South Asia, evoked by Manmohan Singh, indeed were long-lasting and strong throughout the centuries.¹⁸ They trace back to the Harappan Civilisation, which flourished in the beginning of the third millennium BC, and extended from what today is northwest Pakistan, northwest India and northeast Afghanistan to the Arabian Sea (cf. Picture 3).

¹⁵ On the main objectives of this initiative see: ‘U.S. Support for the New Silk Road,’ U.S. Department of State, at <<http://www.state.gov/p/sca/ci/af/newsilkroad/>>, 19 July 2015.

¹⁶ Such a hope was expressed by Afghan president Ashraf Ghani during his visit to India in April 2015: ‘TAPI Gas Pipeline Construction to Take 5 Years: Afghan President Ashraf Ghani,’ *The Economic Times*, 29 April 2015, at <http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-04-29/news/61653179_1_tapi-herat-and-kandahar-province-galkynynsh>, 19 July 2015.

¹⁷ It does not, however, allow India to use the land route to export goods to Afghanistan, due to Pakistani regulations. But since Afghanistan warns that it can deny providing equal transit access to Central Asia for Pakistani trucks, the situation is likely to change. Cf. ‘Ghani Presses Pakistan to Open Land Transit Trade from India,’ *Dawn*, 1 May 2015, at <<http://www.dawn.com/news/1179172/ghani-presses-pakistan-to-open-land-transit-trade-from-india>>, 19 July 2015.

¹⁸ Probably not without significance is the fact that nearly three quarters of the over thirty million population of Afghanistan belong ethnically to the Iranian peoples that once, together with Indo-Aryans, formed the great Indo-Iranian (known also as Aryan) linguistic and ethnic community. The Aryan community collapsed some time in the 2nd millennium BC, but the relations between the newly emerged groups remained inevitable, and remnants of this ancient bond are still traceable in their main languages and traditions.

In the second millennium BC the Harappans probably established a colony on the Oxus (Amu Darya) river to trade for lapis lazuli and tin. Shortugai in today's northern Afghanistan is the most northern site with Harappa contacts; moreover, Harappan items were found in other archaeological sites in Afghanistan – such as Shahr-i-Sokhta (now in Iran), Mundigak or Deh Morasi Ghundai.

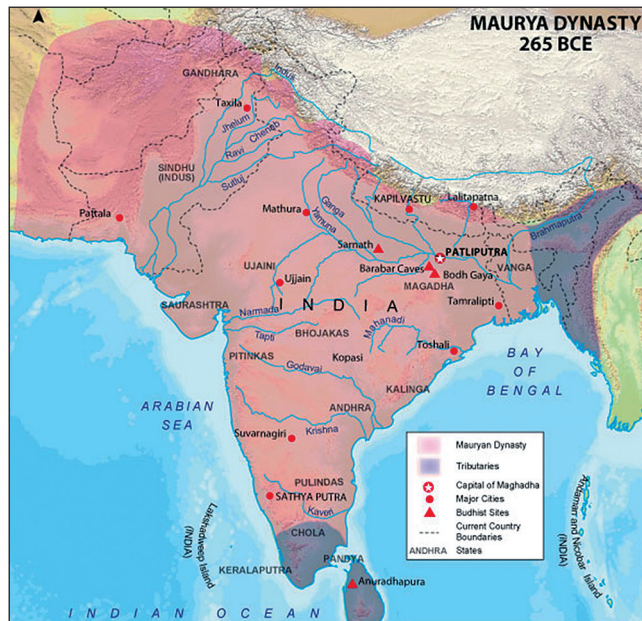


Picture 3. Indus Valley Civilization, Mature Harappan Phase (2600-1900 BC) with contemporary country boundaries shown

A few centuries after the final decline of the Harappan Civilisation, in the beginning of the first millennium BC (early 990 BC), in the Swat and Kabul river valleys in modern-day northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan, the ancient kingdom of Gandhara emerged, with the main cities of Purushapura (modern Peshawar), or the “city of men,” and Takshashila (modern Taxila). Even though until the 4th century BC it remained part of the Achaemenid Empire (which then stretched up to the areas around the Indus river), Gandhara played a prominent role in early Indian¹⁹ history and epic literature. Several centuries later, an interplay of Indian, Persian and Hellenistic influences produced a unique school of Gandhara art and aesthetic appreciation, famous for its artistic representations of Buddha and other themes connected mainly with the Mahayana Buddhism.

¹⁹ When in historical context, the term “India(n)” has been used in this article synonymously with “South Asia(n),” with an older meaning not influenced by the present-day circumstances and divisions in mind.

Since the last decade of the 4th century BC, following Alexander the Great's brief occupation, the region known today as Afghanistan was controlled by the Seleucid Empire, but very soon (in 305 BC) much of it was ceded to the Indian Maurya Empire as a part of an alliance treaty. Thus, in the north of the region, the Maurya Empire extended from Afghanistan to Bengal, via the southern Himalayas. The empire reached its apogee under king Ashoka (273-232 BC), who ruled almost all the territory which today we call South Asia (Picture 4) and is believed to strongly propagate Buddhism throughout the whole of his realm. Ashoka's rock inscriptions have been found all over the region, including the bilingual (Greek and Aramaic) inscription found in Kandahar.



Picture 4. Territorial scope of the Ashoka's empire in the middle of the 3rd century BC, compared to the contemporary country boundaries

Several decades after the Ashoka's rule ended, the Hellenistic reconquest of the region of Afghanistan by the Greco-Bactrians took place. In 180 BC the Greco-Bactrian ruler Demetrius I conquered portions of northwestern India. To commemorate this fact he minted a coin which depicts him wearing an elephant scalp as a token of his Indian conquests (Picture 5).

Again both the territories (North India and Afghanistan) came under the joint rule – first of the Greco-Bactrians and then the Indo-Greek rulers. In the first century AD a branch of the Central Asian nomadic Yueh-chi tribe set up both a dynasty known as Kushan(a) (Picture 6) and an empire which for the first time crossed the mountainous divide between Central Asia and India – extending from the Oxus to the Ganges,

and to Kashmir in the north – and which lasted for about five generations.²⁰ This gradually brought a new awareness of Indian culture further into the west. Buddhism was the prevalent religion of the region from the 2nd century BC up to the early 8th century AD, when the area was conquered by the Arabs.



Picture 5. An obverse of a silver tetradrahm of Demetrius I (ca. 200-185 BC) depicting diademed head of the king facing right, wearing elephant scalp head-dress as a trophy. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

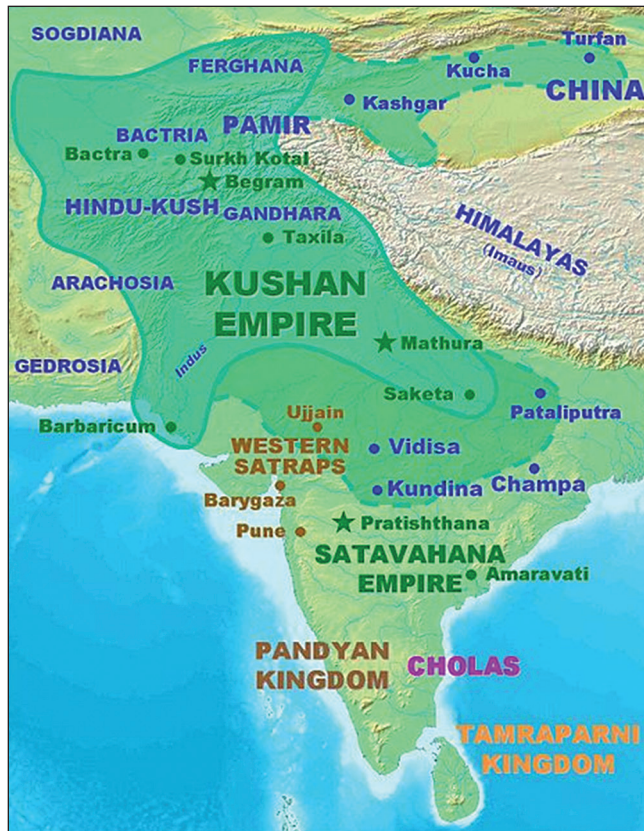
With the coming of Islam, a new era in contacts between Afghans and South Asia started. As a result of repeated invasions undertaken by Mahmud of Ghazna,²¹ a large number of people of Turkic, Persian and Afghan descent were brought to India. Soldiers of fortune, merchants, adventurers, scholars and religious men in Islam, artists and craftsmen – they left their homelands and settled down in the Punjab, around Delhi, and possibly in some areas of Gujarat. As a result of the political stabilization brought by the rule of the Afghan dynasty of Ghurids (r. 1148-1215), who are credited with laying the foundations of Muslim domination in India that lasted for several centuries, these strangers started perceiving India as their own country and helped to enrich the mediaeval culture of the subcontinent. The Afghan ruler who was the first to introduce Muslim rule in South Asia was Muhammad Ghori.²² In 1192 he defeated the Hindu Rajput coalition led by Prithviraj Chauhan, in the so-called second battle of Tarain, which was one of the most decisive battles in Indian history, as it opened the path for the later Muslim conquerors of India. The history of war between an Afghan, Muhammad Ghori, and a Hindu, Prithviraj, has been described in an epic panegyric poem composed by the Chauhan's court poet, Chand Bardai. It is called *Prithvirajraso*, and is

²⁰ A. Wink, *Al-Hind, the Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, Vol. 2: *The Slave Kings and the Islamic Conquest: 11th-13th Centuries*, Leiden 1997, pp. 56-57.

²¹ Yamīn al-Dawlah Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn Sebūktigin, sultan of the kingdom of Ghazna (r. 998-1030), originally comprising what are now Afghanistan and northeastern Iran but, through his conquests, eventually including northwestern India and most of Iran. He transformed his capital, Ghazna, into a cultural centre rivalling Baghdad.

²² Mu'izz al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Sām (1149-1206), sultan of the Ghurid empire along with his brother from 1173 to 1202, and the supreme ruler of the Ghurid empire from 1202 until his assassination in 1206.

believed to be the oldest existing literary text written in early Hindi.²³ After Muhammad Ghori's sudden death in 1206, his empire was divided amongst his trusted and well trained slaves. In India, a Turk Qutb-ud-din Aibak became the ruler of Delhi, establishing the Sultanate of Delhi, which marked the start of the Mamluk (or Slave) dynasty. However, further in the east, Bengal was already conquered by another Afghan ruler, Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji.



Picture 6. The Kushan Empire at its greatest extent under king Kanishka,²⁴ ca. 130 AD

In the 13th century many Afghan refugees from the Ilkhanate arrived and settled in the Delhi Sultanate, trying to flee from the Mongol terror spreading in Central Asia. They were welcomed and bestowed administrative offices and *iqta*-s,²⁵ especially by

²³ This is probably also the earliest known literary text written in Nagari, which contains Persian and Arabic words, cf. S.K. Chatterji, *Indo-Aryan & Hindi: Eight Lectures Originally Delivered in 1940 before the Gujarat Vernacular Society, Ahmedabad*, Calcutta 1960 (repr. 1969), pp. 195-196.

²⁴ Kanishka, Kaniska, (fl. 1st century AD), greatest king of the Kushan dynasty, chiefly remembered as a great patron of Buddhism.

²⁵ *Iqtā'* – a form of an administrative grant, a revenue assignment in lieu of salary.

Balban²⁶ who thus sought to destroy the rebelling Turkic nobility. Among the newcomers there were also the followers and propagators of Sufism, or the Islamic mysticism, especially those belonging to one of the earliest Sufi orders, the Chishtiyya, which originated near Herat in Afghanistan, around the year 930 AD. Four great Islamic mystics from Afghanistan, namely Moinuddin (known as Gharib Nawaz, d. 1233 in Ajmer), Qutbuddin Bahktiyar Kaki (d. 1236 in Delhi), Nizamuddin Auliya (d. 1335 in Delhi) and Fariduddin Ganjshakar (known as Baba Farid, d. 1265 in Pattan, now in Pakistan) arrived in South Asia and established their *khanqah*-s (or Sufi shrines), which quickly attracted a substantial following and nowadays still remain important places of pilgrimage and spiritual retreat for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.²⁷

The task of founding Delhi's first real Muslim dynasty fell to a group of refugees from Afghanistan, namely the Khaljis, who came to power in 1290. The Khaljis were a tribe of disputed Turkic origin. In the 11th century they intermarried with the Pashto-speaking Ghilzay tribe of Afghans and became predominately Afghans, having also adopted many Afghan habits and customs. In the history they are usually described as Turko-Afghan people.²⁸ They were treated as Afghans at Delhi Court and regarded as barbarians by the Turkic nobles. Without a doubt, the second, and considered the most powerful ruler of the dynasty, Alauddin Khalji,²⁹ was among the first real emperors of India. He pushed the boundaries of the sultanate all the way down to the Deccan and for twenty years led a very consistent and effective internal policy, crushing rebellions, strengthening the security (he repeatedly defended his empire against the Mongol invasions), suppressing crime, bringing inflation firmly under control and making his subjects feel secure.³⁰

By introducing administrative, agrarian and economic reforms, Alauddin managed to transform the disintegrating sultanate into a stable and well-functioning empire, but he also left his mark – though indirectly – on the sphere of South Asian literary culture. The legendary account of the sultan's invasion on Chittor in 1303 fuelled by his desire to capture its queen Rani Padmini, and the subsequent story, have been immortalized by Malik Muhammad Jayasi in the long epic poem *Padmavati*, written in 1540. The interesting thing is that Malik Muhammad Jayasi dedicated his epic poem to another great South Asian ruler of Afghan origin, Sher Shah Sur, who was his royal patron. But before that happened, one more Afghan clan imprinted significant mark on the passages of South Asian history.

²⁶ Ġiyās-al-Dīn Balban, the ruler of the Delhi Sultanate from the Slave Dynasty, he controlled the sultanate as a regent (from 1246), and then as a sultan (from 1266 to 1286).

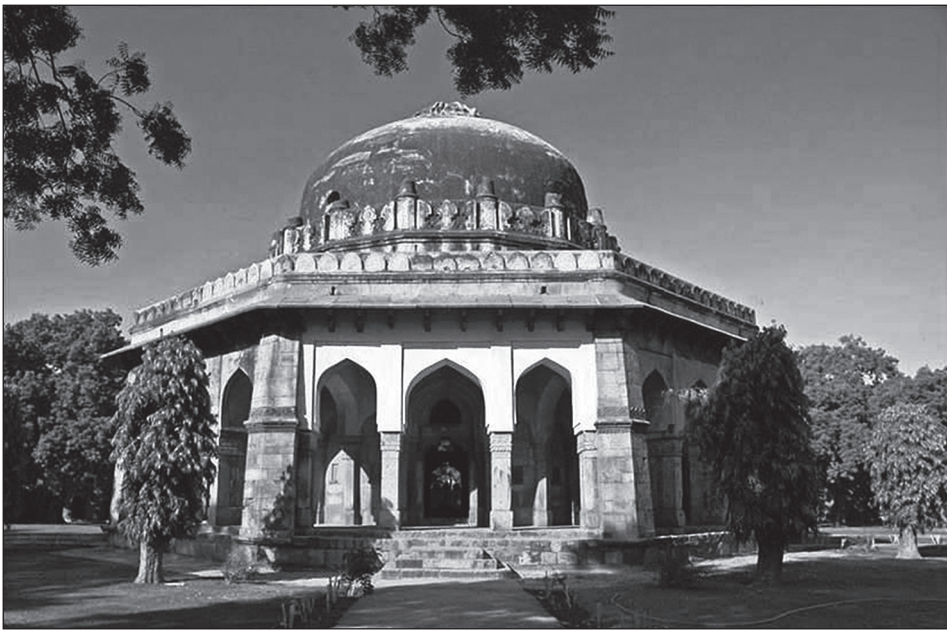
²⁷ C. Markovitz (ed.), *A History of Modern India, 1480-1950*, trans. by N. George, M. Hendry, London 2002, p. 30 (*Anthem South Asian Studies*).

²⁸ Cf. *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol. 3: B.A. Litvinsky (ed.), *The Crossroads of Civilizations: A.D. 250 to 750*, Paris 1996, p. 184 ff. (*Multiple History Series*).

²⁹ 'Alā'-al-Dīn Khaljī (r. 1296-1316), during about 20 years of reign, he expanded his kingdom to a large area, having conquered Gujarat, Ranathambor, Mewar, Malwa, Jalore, Warangal, Mabar and Madurai.

³⁰ The wandering historian of those times, Ferishta, reports that in Ala-ud-din's reign, *The traveller slept secure upon the public highway, and the merchant carried his commodities in safety from the sea of Bengal to the mountains of Kabul and from Tillingana to Kashmir*. Cf. Ferishta's *The History of Hindustan*, originally translated from Persian by Alexander Dow, 1770-72 A.D., ed. B.S. Dahiya, Vol. 1, repr. Delhi 2003, p. 171.

But the Lodhis' influences in South Asia were not only of political nature. The dynasty is credited with developing a new form of Islamic architecture which was later followed by the Mughals (and, ultimately, led to the construction of such architectural pearls like the Humayun's tomb in Delhi or Taj Mahal in Agra). During their times about fifty tombs of various size and dual form were constructed: they were either based on octagonal plan surrounded by arched walkway with one storey in height (these were reserved for the rulers), or on square plan without the walkway with two or three storey in height (these were meant for the nobles of their courts). The common element was a dome with pillars on each side. Several such monuments in quite a good condition, including the tomb of sultan Sikandar Lodhi (cf. Picture 8), can be found in Delhi, in a city park called Lodhi Gardens.



Picture 8. The octagonal, one storey tomb of Sikandar Lodhi, with a dome (Lodhi Gardens, Delhi; photo: A. K.-F.)

During the Mughal empire the connections between Afghanistan and Hindustan³¹ were very close. The empire, at its greatest territorial extent (17th century), spanned from Afghanistan to the Bay of Bengal, and Kabul was one of the most important imperial centres as well as the main trade depot for Hindustan. It was also the favourite city of the first Great Mughal, Babur, who has been buried there after his death in 1530. During the reign of Babur's son and the second Mughal emperor, Humayun, the

³¹ Another term referring especially to the area of northern and central South Asia. It came into common use under the rule of the Mughals who referred to their dominion, centred around Delhi and Agra, as "Hindustan."

Afghans once more took control over Hindustan. In 1540, unable to stand military confrontation with them, Humayun was forced to go into exile for 15 years. The man responsible for this upheaval was Sher Khan, known as Sher Shah (r. 1538-1545), from the mighty historical Pathan tribe Sur, tracing their descent to the Ghurids, born in Sasaram, in the east of the Indian state of Bihar. Sher Shah Suri was an excellent ruler and some of his major institutions were later used by the Mughals to build their empire. He introduced a long-lived bureaucracy responsible directly to the king, and created a carefully calculated fiscal system, making the relationship between the subjects and the ruler systematized and principally cleared of corruption or oppression. Administrative and revenue reforms were accompanied by extensive construction of new roads, *sarai*-s (roadside rest houses), bazaars and postal stations, having both military and economic significance. Sher Shah extended also the Shahi Sarak (renamed later by the British as Grand Trunk Road, which over the centuries remained a major trade route in the region, and facilitated both travel and postal communication, from Chittagong in today's Bangladesh to Kabul in Afghanistan).

Sher Shah ruled only for a short period of seven years and died unexpectedly in 1545 from a gunpowder explosion.³² Had he lived and ruled longer, India's history would have probably adopted a very different course, without Mughals and their splendid cultural tradition. However, after Sher Shah's death, the Sur Sultanat, defeated in the same year by the Rajputs, faced a war of succession, and its gradual decline let the Mughals re-establish their domination over South Asia within the next ten years.

During the Mughal period (which lasted till the mid-19th century) the Afghan immigration to India increased due to political unrest in their regions. They were coming and settling down in Hindustan, mostly as landlords, craftsmen or men of trade. Some of them became quite powerful, and interfered with *tijārat* (commerce), making the Europeans the benefactors.³³ In India, the Afghans were said to create one of the four main social strata belonging to *ashraf* (or respectable Muslim gentry),³⁴ next to the *sayyid*-s (deriving their genealogy from the Prophet Muhammad), *shaikh*-s (claiming descendancy from his companions) and Pathans.³⁵ A large number of Pathan warriors

³² His red sandstone mausoleum in Sasaram, which stands in the middle of an artificial lake, built on the octagonal plan and domed, is yet another very fine example of pre-Mughal Indo-Islamic architecture, referring to the Lodhi sepulchral structures.

³³ The commercial movement, however, was never one-way and the Afghan traders had their counterparts called Hindki, i.e. a diverse community of bankers, merchants, and traders, active in Afghanistan (mostly in the regions of Kabul, Peshawar, and Kandahar) and with social origins in – and economic connections to – various localities in India. Sh.M. Hanifi, *Connecting Histories in Afghanistan. Market Relations and State Formation on a Colonial Frontier*, New York 2011, p. 23 ff.

³⁴ This division is roughly comparable to the division of Hindu society into four *varna*-s, although the Muslim sub-classes of the *ashraf* are characterized by strong professional and ethnic overlapping. More on castes among Muslims, see J. Malik, *Islam in South Asia. A Short History*, New Delhi 2012, pp. 149-155.

³⁵ The ethnic distinction between Afghans and Pathans is not clear and remains a matter of debate. Generally, in South Asia the Pashto-speaking people from the territory of Afghanistan are described as Pathans, while the term Afghans relates to those who speak predominantly Persian (or Dari). Cf. e.g. Sh.M. Hanifi, *Connecting Histories...*, p. 22; W.J. Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, Oxford 2002, p. 18 (*Peoples*

and traders, deriving mainly from Kakar and Yusufzai clans, settled in the Katihar region, in and around the cities, such as Muradabad, Bareilly, Badaun and Rampur, and became known as Rohillas (consequently, the name of the region where they lived has been known as Rohilkhand).³⁶ They were welcomed by the last Great Mughal, Aurangzeb (d. 1707), and subsequent Mughal rulers, who hired them to provide soldiers to the Mughal army fighting the Rajputs and the Marathas.³⁷

Northwestern India experienced another Afghan-rule interlude in the second half of the 18th century, when the kingdom of Afghanistan became independent and powerful under the ruling of Ahmad Shah Durrani.³⁸ While extending the borders of his realm, in 1749 he seized Punjab and Sind from the Mughals, in 1752 he invaded Kashmir, and then, in 1756-1757, his army plundered North India, including Delhi and Agra. The Mughal rulers from Delhi were forced to recognize Durrani's suzerainty over the Punjab, Sindh, and Kashmir (cf. Picture 9). Finally, in 1761, in another battle which had great consequences for the history of South Asia (the so-called third battle of Panipat), Durrani's forces, succoured by the North Indian Rohillas, utterly defeated the Hindu Maratha confederation. However, due to heavy losses in his own ranks, Durrani did not continue his campaign further in the subcontinent. That decision had significant implications for the future of India, preventing the possible conflict between Afghans and British East India Company, and empowering the latter to gradually take control over the subcontinent.

In the times of the British rule in India, which fell on the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, many Afghans actively supported the struggle for independence. Some of them joined the Muslim League in its separatist demand for Pakistan, others, however, opted for the independent and united India. The most famous among them was probably Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (known widely as Bacha Khan),³⁹ one of the prominent leaders of the Indian independence movement, and an active supporter of the Indian National Congress.

of Asia). Some scholars, however, do not distinguish between Afghans and Pathans, and treat them as one, cf.: *those who had entered India with any of the Afghan tribes are the Pathan* – A. Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent*, Lahore 2003, p. 112 (*Handbuch der Orientalistik*).

³⁶ At present, the region known as Rohilkhand is a part of the Indian state Uttar Pradesh, and is bounded by the Ganges river on the south and the west, by Uttarakhand and Nepal on the north, and by the Awadh region to the east. According to the 1901 Census of India, the Pathan population in this region (Bareilly District) was nearly 41 thousands. After the partition, most of them emigrated to Pakistan.

³⁷ As predominantly Sunni Muslims, the Rohillas remained also in the prolonged conflict with the Shi'a nawabs of the neighbouring Awadh and were defeated by them in 1774, in the so-called Rohilla War. After that, with the support of British troops, they created the Rohilla State of Rampur, which remained a pliant state under British protection thereafter. The Rohilla leaders sided with the British also during the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, which enabled them to retain their position in the times of the British Raj.

³⁸ Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī (r. 1747-1772), known also as Aḥmad Khān Abdālī, the king of Afghanistan, the founder of the Durrani dynasty, regarded as the creator of the modern state of Afghanistan. In its peak he controlled a vast region, from Khorasan in the west to Kashmir and North India in the east, and from the Amu Darya in the north to the Arabian Sea in the south.

³⁹ Khān 'Abd-al Ghafār Khān (1890-1988), a Pathan activist, great supporter and friend of Mahatma Gandhi and his non-violence movement. In the 1920s he founded and led a non-violence organization



Picture 9. Durrani's empire compared to the contemporary country boundaries

The legacy of the British rule in South Asia comprise also the issue of Durand Line, the 2640-kilometre long line which according to the treaty of 1893, signed by the British Raj (represented by its foreign secretary, Sir Mortimer Durand) and Afghan leader, Abdur Rahman Khan, was to formalize their respective spheres of influence for the next hundred years.⁴⁰ In 1947, after gaining independence from the British, it eventually became the internationally recognized border between newly created Pakistan and Afghanistan. Afghanistan, however, does not recognise the Durand Line as a legal international boundary and since 1993, when the treaty expired, has refused to renew the Durand Line in spite of Pakistan's several attempts, having instead territorial claims on areas stretching from the Afghan-Pakistan border to the Indus River. At present, the contentious line dividing Afghanistan from South Asia remains one of the most dangerous borders in the world.

4. AFGHAN LEGACY IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH ASIA

In the 20th century, the inflow of Afghan immigrants to South Asia diminished, and also many of them relocated (mostly to the Afghan-Pakistan border) when the parti-

known as Khuda-ye Khidmatkar, that brought together Pathans from the North-West Frontier Province and was directed against the British rule in India.

⁴⁰ The Durand Line cuts through the Pashtun tribal areas and further south through the Balochistan region, politically dividing ethnic Pashtuns (one of the world's largest tribal societies), as well as the Baloch and other ethnic groups, who live on both sides of the border. It demarcates Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan of northern and western Pakistan from the northeastern and southern provinces of Afghanistan.

tion of the subcontinent took place. Today, in the region of South Asia, their biggest agglomeration can be found in Pakistan, where they are the second largest ethnic group after the Punjabis (approx. 15% of population, i.e. ca. 28 million people⁴¹) and have considerable influence in politics, army, business and trade. In India, a group of those who trace their origin to Afghan invaders and settlers comprise about 11,3 million people (over one third of them living in Uttar Pradesh).⁴² And even though most of the Afghans and their descendants have been naturalised, abandoned Pashto or Persian and shifted to Urdu, many of them prides themselves on their Afghan roots. Nevertheless, now only the names like Khan, Rizvi, Durrani or Afridi indicate, more or less clearly, their ancestral Afghan origin.

The Afghan traces were, however, and still are, present in various spheres of South Asian culture, ranging from literature and cinema to clothes and cuisine.⁴³ The story by Rabindranath Tagore about an Afghan pedlar who sells dried fruits in the streets of Calcutta and befriends the narrator's five year old daughter, became a classical piece, included for decades in the Indian school curricula.⁴⁴ Similar status of a classic has been attached to the feature film from 1961, based on this story, with unforgettable creation of Balraj Sahni playing the main hero. Both the representations break the stereotype of an overly proud and prone to violence Afghan, already existing in South Asia, in favor of the somewhat romanticized imagination of the vendors from the far-off land, coming to India to make their living, poor, but characterised with honesty, high moral standards and big-heartedness.⁴⁵

But the newcomers from Afghanistan have appeared not only as protagonists in South Asian literature or movies. Many of those who arrived and settled in the subcontinent attached themselves to Bollywood film making industry – usually either as actors or directors – and became the heroes of flesh and blood. Among them we find both

⁴¹ Population Census Organization, Government of Pakistan (2006), quoted after: V.P. Tyagi, *Martial Races of Undivided India*, Delhi 2009, p. 126.

⁴² According to the data collected by the Joshua Project, the numbers are as follows: Uttar Pradesh – 4,884,000; Maharashtra – 1,165,000; West Bengal – 1,001,000; Rajasthan – 997,000; Madhya Pradesh – 879,000; Karnataka – 593,000; apart from that, over 1,7 million of Pathan descendants live dispersed in other Indian states. Cf. 'Pashtun, Pathan in India,' Joshua Project, at <http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/14256/IN#geography>, 5 January 2015.

⁴³ Restaurants offering the choice of *afghani rasoi* (Afghan cuisine), famous for their variety of kabobs and pulaos and highly appreciated by the connoisseurs, are found across the whole area, ranging from Peshawar on the Af-Pak border to Dhaka in Bangladesh, and from Srinagar in Kashmir to Hyderabad in the Deccan.

⁴⁴ Rabindranath Tagore wrote the *Kabuliwala* probably between 1891 and 1895, and published it in Bengali in his literary magazine *Sādhanā*. The story has been translated into English by Sister Nivedita, as 'The Cabuliwallah,' *The Modern Review*, January 1912 (cf. S.K. Paul, A.N. Prasad (eds.), *Indian Poetry in English. Roots and Blossoms*, Vol. 1, New Delhi 2007, p. 60).

⁴⁵ Afghan/Pathan characters appear in many other stories and movies, among them in the first novel written in Bengali, *Durgeshnandini* (1865) by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. See also an article by Fabrizio Foschini, 'Afghanistan in World Literature (III): Kabuliwalas of the Latter Day,' published on the webpage of the Afghanistan Analysts Network (March 30, 2012), at <<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghanistan-in-world-literature-iii-kabuliwalas-of-the-latter-day/>>, 10 January 2015.

the older masters, who significantly contributed to the establishment and development of the Bombay dream factory – like Zohra Sehgal (1912-2014), Mumtaz Jahan, more popularly known as Madhubala (1933-1969), Amjad Khan (1940-1992), Feroz Khan (1939-2009), or Kader Khan (b. 1937), and the whole host of the younger generation, continuing the best traditions of their grandfathers and fathers, loved and admired over the whole subcontinent, and beyond – like Shahrukh Khan, Salman Khan and Aamir Khan (all born in 1965), or Zarine Khan (b. 1987) – to enumerate only a few most popular. *We are all one nation, actually – says Shahrukh Khan in an interview for Afghan TV. – We are all friends and we have the same culture, we have the same beliefs. And it all binds us together.*⁴⁶ Their lives and careers are permanently linked with India, still they proudly admit to “Pathan origin” and underline their cultural and emotional ties to ancestral homeland.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ‘Afghanistan’ in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. 1, Fasc. 5-6, at <<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/afghanistan>>.
- ‘Afghanistan,’ About.com, at <<http://geography.about.com/library/cia/blcafgghanistan.htm>>.
- Afghanistan in SAARC: Towards Deeper Engagement*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2013, at <http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_35894-1522-1-30.pdf?131030082003>.
- Allchin F.R., ‘Afghanistan’ in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, at <<http://www.britannica.com/EB-checked/topic/7798/Afghanistan>>.
- Chatterji S.K., *Indo-Aryan & Hindi: Eight Lectures Originally Delivered in 1940 before the Gujarat Vernacular Society, Ahmedabad*, Calcutta 1960 (repr. 1969).
- Davison R.H., ‘Where is the Middle East?’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (1960).
- Ferishta M.K., *The History of Hindustan*, originally translated from Persian by Alexander Dow, 1770-72 A.D., ed. B.S. Dahiya, Vol. 1, repr. Delhi 2003.
- Foschini F., ‘Afghanistan in World Literature (III): Kabuliwalas of the Latter Day,’ Afghanistan Analysts Network, 30 March 2012, at <<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghanistan-in-world-literature-iii-kabuliwalas-of-the-latter-day/>>.
- ‘Ghani Presses Pakistan to Open Land Transit Trade from India,’ *Dawn*, 1 May 2015, at <<http://www.dawn.com/news/1179172/ghani-presses-pakistan-to-open-land-transit-trade-from-india>>.
- Hanifi Sh.M., *Connecting Histories in Afghanistan. Market Relations and State Formation on a Colonial Frontier*, New York 2011.
- History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol. 3: B.A. Litvinsky (ed.), *The Crossroads of Civilizations: A.D. 250 to 750*, Paris 1996 (*Multiple History Series*).
- Library of Congress – Federal Research Division, ‘Country Profile: Afghanistan,’ August 2008, at <<https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>>.

⁴⁶ Shahrukh Khan interviewed by Nazir Mardomi, Los Angeles, 14 January 2009, at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cstV2dJRAbk&list=RDcstV2dJRAbk#t=62>>, 15 January 2015.

- 'Location of Afghanistan,' WorldAtlas, at <<http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/afghanistan/aflatlog.htm>>.
- Malik J., *Islam in South Asia. A Short History*, New Delhi 2012.
- Markovitz C. (ed.), *A History of Modern India, 1480-1950*, trans. by N. George, M. Hendry, London 2002 (*Anthem South Asian Studies*).
- Pandey N.N., 'What Can SAARC Offer to Afghanistan?', Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 12 December 2011, at <<http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/what-can-saarc-offer-to-afghanistan-3516.html>>.
- 'Pashtun, Pathan in India,' Joshua Project, at <http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/14256/IN#geography>.
- Paul S.K., Prasad A.N. (eds.), *Indian Poetry in English. Roots and Blossoms*, Vol. 1, New Delhi 2007.
- SAARC, 'SAFTA Protocol' at <http://www.saarc-sec.org/areaofcooperation/detail.php?activity_id=36>.
- 'SAARC: Afghanistan Comes in from the Cold,' ISN – ETH Zürich, 16 May 2007, at <<http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?ots591=4888CAA0-B3DB-1461-98B9-E20E7B9C13D4&lng=en&id=53216>>.
- Schimmel A., *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent*, Lahore 2003 (*Handbuch der Orientalistik*).
- Shahrukh Khan interviewed by Nazir Mardomi, Los Angeles, 14 January 2009, at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cstV2dJRAbk&list=RDcstV2dJRAbk#t=62>>.
- 'TAPI Gas Pipeline Construction to Take 5 Years: Afghan President Ashraf Ghani,' *The Economic Times*, 29 April 2015, at <http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-04-29/news/61653179_1_tapi-herat-and-kandahar-province-galkynysh>.
- Tyagi V.P., *Martial Races of Undivided India*, Delhi 2009.
- United Nations Statistics Division, 'Standard country or area codes and geographical regions for statistical use,' at <<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49.htm>>.
- 'U.S. Support for the New Silk Road,' U.S. Department of State, at <<http://www.state.gov/p/sca/ci/af/newsilkroad/>>.
- Vogelsang W.J., *The Afghans*, Oxford 2002 (*Peoples of Asia*).
- Wagner Ch., 'Security Cooperation in South Asia. Overview, Reasons, Prospects,' *SWP Research Paper*, RP 6, June 2014, at <http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2014_RP06_wgn.pdf>.
- Wink A., *Al-Hind, the Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, Vol. 2: *The Slave Kings and the Islamic Conquest: 11th-13th Centuries*, Leiden 1997.
- The World Bank, 'South Asia,' at <<http://data.worldbank.org/region/SAS>>.

Agnieszka KUCZKIEWICZ-FRAŚ, Ph.D. is Associate Professor at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, specializing in modern South Asian Studies. She authored several books and numerous articles covering a vast range of topics, from socio-linguistics and history to Islamicate traditions and intercultural communication. She also translates from Hindi and Urdu into Polish.