Chapter II

THE SOVIET-AFGHAN RELATIONS AND THE EMERGENCE OF COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN, 1917-1965

Historical Background

Among the scholars on Afghanistan, it is widely believed that it was in 1747 that Afghanistan became an independent nation state, when Ahmed Shah Durrani united the major tribes into citizens of an organised single state. The history of Afghanistan reveals that there had been human settlements from time immemorial. According to Wilhelm Dietl, the region was once known as Bactria, and a Greek historian described its people as "the most martial Indian tribes." ¹ Dietl continues:

Cyros II and also Alexander the Great led their armies into this wild, mountainous region. Buddhism and Christianity gave rise to a cultural Golden Age which lasted till the 5th century. Then the Huns from Central Asia came looting and killing, followed, for some time during the 13th century, by the Mongols. For the last 1200 years the course of life in Afghanistan has been steered by Islam.²

The strategic importance of Afghanistan dates back to the period of Rigveda. Afghanistan belongs, gene-

2. Ibid.

54
rally, to four important cultural-ecological zones, i.e., the Middle East, South Asia, Central Asia and Far East. For long it had been an open door to the Indian subcontinent and West and Central Asia. The attempt of the super powers later in the Indian ocean and Gulf region confirmed this strategic importance. Because of this strategic importance Afghanistan became a central factor in the Anglo-Russian relations in the nineteenth century. The rivalry over Afghanistan led to three Anglo-Afghan wars.

The policies pursued during the period of 1838 to 1918 expressed the conflicting interests of Czarist Russia, Afghanistan and imperialist Britain. While Afghanistan's major concern was to maintain independence and territorial integrity, Russia was for balancing British advances to South and Central Asia and protecting her borders. Britain was sensitive to protect its colony, India.

When the British directly started to interfere in Afghan affairs, it led to the First Anglo-Afghan War (1838-42). The British aim to install Shah Shura on the throne of Kabul got defeated. However, Britain continued its


policy of advancement, and they invaded again in November 1878, leading to the second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-79). This war ended with the Treaty of Gandomak (1879) which provided that Britain would control external affairs of Afghanistan for increasing mutual trade. After the second Anglo-Afghan war in 1878, Afghanistan became a buffer state between the British India and Czarist Russia. However, conflicts for Afghanistan continued. During the reign of Abdur Rahman, the Durant Line — eastern border of Afghanistan and Pakistan was drawn.

At the end of 1917, when the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia, they wanted to prevent a British penetration and intervention in Central Asia through Afghanistan. Therefore, they encouraged the independence of Afghanistan and an anti-British stance. Lenin's own words reflected this. He thought that "with the complete subjugation of Afghanistan they (British imperialists) have long ago created for themselves not only to expand their colonial possessions and to subjugate nations, but also for..."

5. Ibid.

6. The settlements in this boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan began to be known later as the North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

their assault on Soviet Russia.\textsuperscript{8}

After the assassination of Habibullah Khan at his hunting lodge in Jalalabad on 20 February 1919, his son Amanullah Khan became the king of Afghanistan. The modern age of Afghanistan started with his ascent to the throne. He declared Afghanistan as a sovereign, independent nation. Immediately, the Soviets recognised the independence of Afghanistan, and this was conveyed also in Lenin's reply on 27 May 1919 to Amanullah's letter dated 7 April 1919. And, within a month when the British declared war on Afghanistan (3 May 1919), King Amanullah could defeat British with the help of the Russians and the Third Anglo-Afghan war ended with a ceasefire on 8 August 1919. Thus, Afghanistan became fully independent and this led to the friendly relations between Soviet Union and Afghanistan.

\textbf{Soviet-Afghan Relations till World War II}

It was only after 1917 that the Soviet Union had developed serious diplomatic relations with Afghanistan. Friendly messages were exchanged between Lenin and Amanullah Khan. On 27 March 1919, the Soviet government officially informed Afghanistan government that the

\begin{flushright}
8. Cited in Dietl, N. 1, p 27.
\end{flushright}
Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) would be sending N. Bravin, their envoy, to Afghanistan via Tashkent. On 7 April 1919, Amanullah sent a proposal to Lenin to establish friendly relations. Lenin accepted this proposal and in his reply on 21 May 1919 he mentioned:

The Russian government and Government of High State of Afghanistan have common interests in the East. Both states cherished their independence and freedom for themselves and for all peoples of the East. He continued that friendship between the two countries also existed due to the absence of problems which cause differences between them. He emphasised:

The old imperialist Russia has disappeared forever, and the High State of Afghanistan now has for its northern neighbour the New Soviet Russia that has extended help of friendship to the peoples of the East, and to the Afghan people in the first place... Lenin took the liberty of expressing sympathy and confidence to Amanullah and assured that no one, either by force or cunning, would undermine the independence of Afghanistan.


11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.
Soviet Foreign minister G.V. Chicherin had received a letter from his Afghan counterpart Mahmud Tarzi, in which a desire to develop friendly relations between Russia and Afghanistan had been expressed.  

In the course of Third Anglo-Afghan war an official Afghan mission visited Moscow and on 23 June 1919, Surits, representative of RSFSR in Central Asia, was appointed in Kabul with a duty to strengthen the diplomatic relations with Afghanistan and its neighbours in central Asia.

After the signing the 'Treaty of Rawalpindi' (8 August 1919) which gave Afghanistan full freedom in its external affairs, Muhammad Wali Khan arrived in Moscow in October 1919 to explain the conduct of independent Afghan foreign affairs. Then Lenin told Wali Khan that Surits was given the responsibility of entering into negotiations with the Afghan government for signing a friendship treaty. On 13 September 1920 both sides approved the draft of the Treaty and on 28 February 1921 the first Afghan-Soviet Friendship Treaty was signed in Moscow. Afghanistan


15. Ibid.
interpreted this treaty as the policy of overthrowing imperialism from the whole world and thereby liberating the peoples of the East. But, as a Soviet scholar P. Trainin interpreted, the Soviet motive was "consolidation of ... political influence in the East."  

The 1921 Friendship Treaty provided for Soviet economic and other assistance to Afghanistan. It restricted the signing of treaty with a third power which could be detrimental to the interests of either of them. This treaty recognised the independence of Bukhara and Khiva.

The direct involvement of Russia in Afghanistan was started with the signing of 1921 Treaty of Friendship, and through this Russia could slowly build its hold over Afghanistan. The Soviet Union helped to make the Afghan

16. Among the delegates participated in the Baku 'Congress of the Peoples of the East' held in September 1920, Afghanistan was also there to shout 'Jehad' against British imperialism, when Zinoviev told them "Brothers, we summon you to a Holy War first against British imperialism". See Olga A. Narkiewicz, Marxism and the Reality of Power (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p. 37. During Amanullah's period the Soviet leaders considered Afghanistan as a revolutionary state on the ground that it fought against Muhammadanism and tried to break traditional customs, and brought reforms for modernisation. See F. Borkenau, The Communist International (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., ), p 290.

Royal Air Force. They presented Amanullah a gift of 13 airplanes with pilots, mechanics, transportation specialists and telegraph operators. By 1925, the Air Force came to be fully under the Russian control. There were also rumours that the Soviet Union was providing King Amanullah with an aid grant of half a million dollars a year from 1921 to 1924.

Under Amanullah, Afghanistan followed a nationalist, reformist and anti-imperialist policy. He implemented liberal political reforms like the confiscation of the properties of rich mullahs to reduce their authority, creation of separate courts etc. All these policies were appreciated by the Soviet Union. When they saw that Amanullah's reforms were to break the power of clergy and modernise the country, they considered his reforms progressive and revolutionary. But as the Islam allowed the holding of private property, the mullahs, feudal chieftains and the right wing clergy opposed the reforms.

The entry of Soviet troops into Bukhara and Amanullah's support for anti-Soviet Basmachi movements,

dispute over the Urta Tagai island, etc strained the relations. However, when the Soviet Union concluded a protocol giving Urta Tagai to Afghanistan in 1926, this relaxed tensions between them. After this protocol, the two countries signed a treaty of neutrality and non-aggression in Paghman (Afghanistan) on 31 August 1926. 19 Stalin encouraged Amanullah to pursue his modernisation policies and offered more aid to Afghanistan.

By 1928, a rebellion against Amanullah broke out. People started thinking that the King had turned against God and Islam. Amanullah was forced to leave the country in April 1929 and was in exile in Italy. 20 After the incident, the then Soviet ambassador to Afghanistan F.F. Raskolnikov, in a so called 'obituary' wrote:

Tragedy of Amanullah case lay in the fact that he undertook bourgeois reforms in his country where no national bourgeoisie existed. 21

20. According to some reports King Amanullah was compelled to abdicate and flee to India in January 1929.
21. Dietl, N.1, p 29. Raskolnikov wrote that in Afghanistan there was not even a commercial bourgeoisie. All trade was in the hands of British India. See also Imprecorr, IX 19, April 1929, p 283.
The fall of Amanullah in January 1929 once again strained the improving Soviet-Afghan relations. An Afghan Tajik illiterate highwayman named Habibullah known as Bachai-i-Sagao ("Son of the Water Carrier") who enjoyed British support took over the throne in Afghanistan. Russians believed that Britain had a hand in the overthrow of Amanullah. 22

When Bacha-i-Sagao captured power, the Soviet Union reached with its troops, under the command of Ghulam Nabi Charkhi, the Afghan ambassador to Moscow, to help Amanullah. However, due to Basmachi resistance against the Soviet troops, Ghulam Nabi was forced to stop fighting in June and withdrew troops when he came to know that Amanullah fled from Afghanistan.

The pro-British Bacha-i-Sagao ruled Afghanistan only a few months. During his period the British influence was reestablished. On 13 October 1929, Muhammad Nadir Khan took the throne, after assassinating Bacha-i-Sagao. He was not totally against modernisation. He realised that

---

modernisation should come through a gradual process. Therefore, he followed a policy of neutrality. He tried to develop the country's economy without Soviet or British support.

Afghanistan signed a Treaty of Neutrality and Non-Aggression with the Soviet Union in June 1931. This restored and improved peaceful relations between the two countries. But a few of Nadir Shah's activities seemed 'anti-Soviet' and this invited Soviet disgust to Nadir Shah. For example, the dismissal of Soviet advisors, pilots and engineers who came to Afghanistan by Amanullah's invitation and disposal of Ghulam Nabi, who returned to Kabul from his Central Asian exile. In 1932 Nadir Shah asked Ghulam Nabi to retire from Afghanistan permanently. This provoked Ghulam Nabi and he started subversive activities in Southern Afghanistan.²³

Ghulam Nabi's contacts with Primakov and his courage to revolt against Nadir Shah give grounds to suspect that he has got Soviet backing.²⁴ Inside Afghanistan, political opposition was increasing


²⁴. Anthony Arnold pointed out: "An uncertain but intriguing indicator of possible clandestine Soviet connections with Ghulam Nabi is provided by an Afghan
particularly among the students in Nejat high school where German was taught. Abroad, it was among the Afghan student community in Germany. These student groups had connections with Mrs Mehta (Mitha) Singh, the German wife of "a revolutionary Sikh of the Ghadr Party, who, with Moscow's assistance, had taken up residence in Kabul to plot against British rule in India." 25 Students from the Nejat high school regularly met at Mehta's Shahi Bazaar coffee house and he acted as a communication link between students in Kabul and Ghulam Nabi's family in Germany. 26 Through the Singhs the Soviets must have been getting information about the activities of the student agitators, though, they have not been directly influencing them. 27

Historiography. Shortly after the April 1978 coup, the Kabul Times began a series of articles on Afghan history that was to run at least until the end of the year and was clearly designed to rewrite the historical record according to "correct" ideological precepts. Though Ghulam Nabi features predominantly as a martyr to Nadir Shah's bestiality (Kabul Times, June 21, 22 & 23, 1978) part of his background are strangely obscured; for example, his biography mentions an earlier diplomatic tour in the early 1920s but nothing about his presence in the USSR in 1929, even though he was ambassador here at the time. There is no mention whatsoever of his march into northern Afghanistan, and no effort is made either to deny or to detail the subversive activities for which he was executed. It is almost as if a carefully sanitised dossier had been made available to the propagandist whose duty it was to write the articles." See Anthony Arnold, N. 9, pp 145-46.

26. Ibid.
In November 1933, when Nadir Khan was assassinated, his 19 year old son Zahir Shah assumed the throne. But, according to the Afghan tradition his uncles ran the country in his name till 1963. He became a full monarch only in 1963. He also followed the policy of neutrality and independence with regard to USSR and Britian. Under Zahir Shah (1933-1979), Afghanistan's relations with the USSR improved: a mutual assistance pact and a trade agreement was signed in 1936. As both the countries were interrupted by their own domestic problems, no remarkable changes took place in the relationship between the two countries.

Post-War Soviet-Afghan Relations

During the Second World War Afghanistan followed a strict neutral policy, while Soviet Union joined with United States and Britain against axis powers. Afghanistan established diplomatic relations with United States in 1942. It seems that Zahir Shah followed a West oriented neutrality in his foreign affairs. In 1944 Afghanistan sought military support from America. But they had not received a positive response from them. Then it turned to the Soviet Union for military assistance. Thus in the post war period the Soviet Union got opportunity to pursue more stable forms of penetration in Afghanistan through economic support, military assistance and diplomacy, and since 1965,
through political support for gradual build up of a Leninist model party. 28

The British withdrawal from India in 1947, the rejection of arms support by USA, the border dispute with Pakistan, etc made the Soviet-Afghan relations intimate. The Soviet stand on "Pushtunistan" issue also cemented their relationship. Huge amounts of US economic and military aid to Pakistan, Pakistan's entry into Baghdad Pact (later CENTO), Pakistan's closure of North West Frontier in 1950 etc. led to trade and transit agreements between Afghanistan and Soviet Union.

A new era of Afghan-Soviet friendship and co-operation began with the Prime Ministership of Mohammad Daud (1953-'63). Daud realised the need of a large scale foreign assistance to lead the country out of its underdeveloped status. A major Soviet agreement was signed on 27 January 1954.

Unlike the situation during Stalin, who had not believed in helping neutral nations or giving big loans to nations outside the Soviet bloc, this was a period which

saw major changes in the Soviet policy due to the cold-war between US and Soviet Union. After Stalin's death on 5 March 1953, the Soviet policy towards Third World began to change. Nikita Khrushchev, his successor liberalised Soviet policies. His policies were intended to represent the Soviet Union abroad as the champion of developing nations. He started giving economic and military assistance to the developing countries.\(^{29}\) This policy and leadership change in the Soviet Union also had effects on Soviet Afghan policies; this led to 1954 agreement and other subsequent aid agreements.

Czechoslovakia was made instrumental to the gradual Soviet military assistance programme in Afghanistan. Purchase of arms that cost $3 million by Afghanistan from Czechoslovakia was negotiated in August 1955. After that, Khrushchev and Nikolai Bulganin visited Afghanistan in December 1955.\(^{30}\) After this visit Afghanistan began to get military equipment like MIG-15 fighters, IL-15 Cargo Plane, Mi 4 helicopters, mobile radio

---


units, small arms etc. 31 Soviet loan of $100 million to Afghanistan was signed during this visit. Besides this, the 1931 Afghan-Soviet Treaty of Neutrality and Friendship was renewed. Other Soviet loans followed. In July 1956, a loan worth $32.4 million was agreed with Moscow for military aid. King Zahir Shah visited Moscow in August 1957. 32 Soviet Union offered $15 million for the development of natural gas exports to the Soviet Union.

Soviet projects were introduced all over Afghanistan. The Soviet military schools were started to train the Afghan military officers. Some Afghans were sent to Soviet Union for military training and higher education. 33 Soviet military experts were stationed in Afghan military bases. Kabul's growing military dependence on Soviet Union grew slowly to the extent of threatening Afghanistan's traditional policy of neutrality known as 'bi-tarafi'.

By 1963, Soviet Union became the sole supplier of arms to Afghanistan. Also the country depended heavily for

31. Ibid.
33. The students who had gone to the Soviet Union for military training and higher education had to take lessons of Marxism-Leninism and International Communism as compulsory subjects.
economic aid on Soviet Union. This close ties and dependence on Soviet Union due to Daud's policies created concern among some members of the ruling family, over the 'independence' of Afghanistan. Daud's domestic policies like banning of political parties, private presses etc made some sections of the progressive intelligentsia to agitate against the oppressive policies of the state. From the ruling class also resistance developed against Daud. Moreover, Daud was not ready to compromise on the 'Pushtoonistan' issue at any cost. All these factors forced King Zahir Shah to remove Daud from premiership.

On 9 March 1963 King Zahir Shah replaced Daud and appointed Muhammad Yusuf (1963-65) as Prime Minister. During his time there were mutual visits by leaders of both the countries and a protocol was also signed to extend again the Soviet-Afghan Treaty(1931) for further six years. In this period Zahir Shah started constitutional reforms and he declared a new constitution on October 1964 which provided for a bicameral parliament etc. This new domestic climate led to the formation of few socialist and communist groups.

34. Ram Rahul, N. 10, p 19.
Although the Soviet military aid to Afghanistan and other Third World countries can be assessed positively, it had also an important negative role alongside it. Fred Halliday could portray the situation well when he said:

The Third World countries having good relations with the USSR has to face a kind of political pressure also. There comes the export of the Soviet social system and in particular the Soviet version of the 'vanguard' party. In a score of countries, Soviet advisors have set up ideological schools which teach the Moscow version of Marxism, and young cadres from these countries often spend training periods in the USSR. The Soviet political system involves the reproduction within these Third World countries of a highly centralised political system, 'a dictatorship of the politbureaucracy' as the last German Marxist Rudolf Bahro has called it, in which democratic and autonomous political currents are crushed. 35

The subsequent political developments in Afghanistan substantiate the kind of assessment Halliday makes. The possible natural evolution of the Afghan society driven by the conflicts of its own social forces got deflected by the external political pull and push. Soviet Union had its own interests and cannot be said to have given disinterested support to Afghanistan. In the

words of Rymalov the Soviet assistance to underdeveloped countries is "guided by the principles of proletarian internationalism". Practically, this meant peaceful economic competition with capitalism in the underdeveloped countries.

The question here is whether political pressure was exerted in the case of Afghanistan or not. Besides examining this, we will also see the background of the formation of communist parties as well as the overt and covert Soviet help in the formation of the communist movement in Afghanistan.

Towards a Communist Party in Afghanistan

To understand the political situation in Afghanistan, the contradictions of the Afghan society has to be understood. Afghanistan is a mountainous country with a tribal, ethnic and multi-national society. The freedom loving people of Afghanistan firmly followed the tenets of Islam and even power and authority pattern were also based on Islamic beliefs. Whenever a new reform was introduced, the government had to justify this in terms of Islam which put severe limitations on the government to

36. Louis Dupree, N. 11, p 516.
introduce any progressive change. 37

Two important nationalities are Pushtuns and Tadjiks. Other nationalities are Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmens, Imaqs, Nooristanis, Baluchis, Kirghez etc. There were always conflicts between the Pushtuns and Tadjiks for power.

The tribesmen were reluctant to any form of Central government. Given this context, consolidation of a communist movement in Afghanistan is inconceivable without Soviet help. Besides, almost 90% of the population were illiterate. The progressive ideas attracted only the educated people who stayed in the cities. Nevertheless, the ideology of Marxism influenced only a small section of the intelligentsia. There was no considerable economic development in the country. There was also no industrialisation. The contradiction between a backward social system and an advanced political system and that of a native socio-political power and a foreign power are questions that deserve much attention here in the context of the rise and fall of the communist movement.

The liberal constitutional reforms of Zahir Shah in 1964, which provided freedom for the formation of political parties, the freedom of speech and expression, permission for publication of private newspapers etc. gave opportunity for the emergence of a communist party in Afghanistan in 1965. Though there were individuals with Marxist orientation, it took 48 years since the October Revolution (1917) for a communist party to get organised in Afghanistan. While communist parties were formed and revolutions took place in other countries far away from the Soviet Union, in Afghanistan which has borders with the Soviet Union, not even a communist party was formed before sixties, though Afghan-Soviet relations were welcomed since the 1920s. It seems that Soviet Union had not shown much interest to encourage communist activities in Afghanistan in the beginning. Rather, it took interest to befriend the nation, state and people of Afghanistan in general.

Communist movement in Afghanistan has only a very short history. It was Afghan nationalism for a strong, prosperous and modern Afghan nation that brought this kind of a movement in Afghanistan. The roots of nationalism and values of modernisation can be traced as back as from the days of 'Young Afghan Party' led by Taj Tarzi during Nineteen Tens. Tarzi, through his newspaper _Seraj-ol-Akhbar Afghaniya_ (The lamp of the news of Afghanistan), propagated the need for modernization of Afghanistan and
made at least a section of the people aware of the advantages of modernization and value of education. King Amanullah was greatly influenced by Tarzi and had undertaken his 'Mashruta'\(^{38}\) (constitutional reforms) beginning from 1919. The 'Young Afghans' were influenced by the Russian revolution of 1905-07, the Young Turk Movement, the Persian constitutional movement of 1906, and the writings of such figures as Jamal ud-din Afghani, Muhammad Iqbal etc.\(^{39}\)

After the October Revolution, the Soviet stand against the British imperialism attracted King Amanullah and his followers. Afghanistan supported Soviet call against British imperialism. While the Soviet Union followed a positive attitude of support to national liberation movements or communist movements in countries like Iran, India and Turkey, they followed a different policy towards Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, their policy was limited to making alliance with the Afghan monarchy and

---

\(^{38}\) Luis Dupree has pointed out: "Actually, Amanullah and other Young Afghans belonged to a secret Mashruta (constitutional) group, which met to discuss ways and means of modernizing Afghanistan. The Party disappeared after Amanullah seized power." See Dupree, N. 11, p 437. For details about Afghan nationalism and modernisation, see Vartan Gregorian, "Mahmud Tarzi and Saraj-ol-Akhbar: Ideology of Nationalism and Modernization in Afghanistan", Middle East Journal, Vol 21, No 3, Summer 1967.

signing of friendship treaties and trade agreements. It means that the Soviet policy was just to keep Afghanistan under their own sphere of influence without making it into a communist state. They were very much careful about preventing any chance of Afghanistan's entry into the orbit of western influence.

During the post-War period, the leftist movements in Afghanistan were not active and were insignificant and therefore did not warrant any Soviet protection. The socio-economic backwardness and orthodox Muslim faith of the country made it senseless to introduce Marxist-Leninist Godless theory into Afghanistan. But, the Soviets supported the Pushtuns and the issue of 'Pushtunistan'. The Soviets could influence some liberal nationalists from among the urban elite.

There is little evidence that the Soviets initially made use of the friendly state to state relations to develop local communists. There were a few intellectuals with Marxist convictions among the students and teachers. These people were treated as dangerous

radicals and were easily controlled by Government. Many of them were imprisoned. It was only in 1960s that these people began to be identified as Marxists. Nur Muhammad Taraki, Babrak Karmal and Hafizullah Amin were important among them who later became heads of state of Afghanistan.

Born in 1917 in a Pushtun family of Gazni province of Afghanistan, Taraki completed his primary education. He sought a job in a Pushtun trading company which had its office in Bombay. In British India, Taraki got himself educated till tenth class, and also took English classes. It was at this time that Taraki met communists in India. 41

Taraki came back to Afghanistan in 1932 and worked for government publication agencies during the 1940s. He pursued his writings which attracted the Afghan intellectuals. The Soviets also took notice of his writings. During 1950-'51, he was publishing a radical journal that was later suppressed by the government.

Taraki was appointed as a press attache in Washington. But he resigned in 1952. It was reported that immediately after Taraki came back to Afghanistan, he rang up to Daud to say "I am Nur Muhammad Taraki. I have just arrived. Shall I go home or to the prison?" After coming from abroad, he started a translation bureau that did service to American embassy and other foreign embassies in Kabul. During this time, he got in touch with Soviet embassy in Kabul. In the late '50s he started writing radical fictions about Afghan society's backwardness. Thus he became famous among the intellectuals and could influence many of his friends and convert them as Marxists. Soviet Union was the revolutionary model for this new genre led by Taraki and Soviet policies were seen as the best that Afghanistan should follow. By 1964 he became a contact man for Soviet embassy in Kabul. It was at his house, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan was formed.

Karmal (born in 1929) belonged to a family of Kabul elite. Karmal was sent to the German language school Nejat, and he took degree in 1948. Then he joined Kabul University to study law. There, inspired by the Wish-

43. Ibid.
Zalmayan group, he became leader of student politics. In the liberal student reform movement of the early 1950s he was arrested and jailed. During the years of his stay at jail (1952-'55), he was converted to Marxism. The ideological mentor of Karmal was Mir Akhbar Khyber, a fellow prisoner. After released, he completed his education and became an official in the planning ministry. Karmal was an eloquent orator, and later he remained with the Parcham faction of the PDPA. In the 1965 elections he and four of his colleagues got elected to the parliament.

Amin who became the second communist President of Afghanistan (born in 1920) was also a Pushtun. He got opportunity for better education. Amin received a Master's degree from Columbia University of New York. In the University of Wisconsin, he attended "socialist progressive clubs" in 1958, and became political. 44

Amin was friendly with Taraki. He was attracted by political and revolutionary ideas. During his stay in the United States on a fellowship in 1962-65, he started a progressive organisation of Afghan students in 1963. He told Taraki that this group would be part of Afghan leftist

movement. The US authorities suspected his political activities and conspired with Afghan government to invalidate his student visa. Therefore, he returned to Afghanistan without completing his Ph.D, and he joined the PDPA.

The Soviets directly had not got involved in the movement, but they have long used a foreign communist party to supervise and support another less developed one. 'Which party it is' - is a doubtful question. Until Daud's opening up to the Soviet Union in the mid 1950s, communists were largely isolated. The Afghan-Soviet pact of 1956 brought in advisors who gave encouragement to local communists and helped them facilitate contacts with communist parties elsewhere, especially with Iran's Tudeh Party.

The truth about Soviet help, any way, is unclear. But it is reported that they were propagating communist ideology in Northern part of Afghanistan. The Soviet central affairs were instrumental to this. There were anti-monarchic organisations and parties operating with the Soviet support. The 'Central Committee of Young Revolution'

46. Barry Sclachter, N. 45.
47. Weinbaum, N. 41, p.247.
formed in Bukhara in 1920 was one of them. Their programme goes like this:

The goal of the Committee is to overthrow the existing capitalist regime, to establish a Republican government in accordance with the people's will and thus to liberate the Afghan nation from the despotism of the Emir and Beys and also to pave free roads for science and industry... All Afghans who (are in) favour of a revolution in Afghanistan can be members of the Committee, whether they originate from Afghanistan or are inhabitants of Bukhara, Turkestan or Russia.48

This anti-monarchic organisation was coordinated by Moscow through the channels of Turkestan Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik). As the Soviet historian A.N. Khiefets puts it, the goal of Central Committee of Young Afghan Revolutionaries and other Afghan radical political groups were close to the ideas of Marxism-Leninism.49

The educated intelligentsia came forward with the demand of modernization of the society during the period of Prime Minister Shah Mahmood (1946-52) who introduced

49. Ibid., p. 221.
certain liberal reforms. This period provided an opportunity for the growth of youth and student movement in Afghanistan.

By 1947, a movement called Wekh-i-Zalmayan (Awakened Youth) which supported the modernisation programmes of Amanullah was formed. This movement favoured liberal and progressive ideas like removal of old customs and ideas, granting of legal rights to women, eradication of corruption, development of national industries etc. They were for a Pushtun nationalist orientation. Some of the important members of this movement were Muhammad Rasul, Dr Abdur Rauf Banawa, Abdul Hai Habibi, Gul Pacha Ulfat etc. None of these members were identified as Marxists and there was no Marxist theme in the organisation. 50

In the 1949 elections some of its members fought elections and could come to the parliament. They used the parliament as a platform to propagate their liberal ideas and politicise the people. Some of their demands like policies for economic development, freedom of the press etc. were recognised by the government. As a result, in 1951, press restrictions were somewhat eased.

51. Ibid.
When press restrictions were eased, there emerged several other political groups and publications, in addition to Wekh-i-Zalmayan. The important among these publications were Nida-e-Khalq, Watan and Angar. Nida-e-Khalq was published by Dr Abul Rahman Mahmoodi. Watan was a Persian bi-weekly published by Mir Ghulam Mohammad Ghubar, Abdul Hai Aziz and Mir Muhammad Siddig Farhang. Angar was published by Faiz Muhammad Angar in both Pashto and Persian. All these newspapers were against the regime. They demanded more press freedom, democratic government, more education of the people and denounced the exploitative policies of the government.\footnote{52}

The Nida-e-Khalq formed a political party called Khalq (People) in 1951, and was banned in 1952.\footnote{53} Along with this, the three other newspapers were also banned. But the old copies of these newspapers started in 1951 were secretly available in the market for those who needed it. Louis Dupree has mentioned in his book what an Afghan associated with one of these newspapers told him at the time of its first publication: "When we finished the writing and printing, dawn approached. We had worked all


\footnote{53. Ibid.}
night on the first issue without realising it. I walked home in the early morning chill and watched the moon go down and the sun rise. I felt the sign good. We did have a good day coming in Afghanistan." 54

Prince Daud had formed an organisation, Cloop-i-Melli (National Club), as a cover to ward off other democratic organisations. In the 1952 elections, the other democratic organisations lost their seats. They believed that their defeat was stage-managed by the government. Therefore, they demonstrated against the government and the students from Kabul university also joined the rally. The state suppressed the protest and arrested the leaders. Consequently, Abdul Hay Habibi, a prominent leader of this agitation, left Afghanistan and settled in Pakistan. From there he published the journal 'Azad Afghanistan' (Free Afghanistan) which criticised the ruling elite. Another leader Abdur Rauf Banawa was exiled to India. Dr Abdur Rahman Mahmudi and Mir Ghulam Mohammad Ghubar were respectively given nine and four years of imprisonment. 55

In 1953, through a palace coup Daud became Prime Minister. He pursued modernisation, but he arrested the

54. Louis Dupree, N. 14, p. 496.
55. Emadi, N. 53, p. 36.
remaining members who were still active in the progressive political movement. His suppressive policies laid the seeds of an organised communist movement and its assumption of political power through a revolution. Its members like Nur Muhammad Taraki and Babrak Karmal became the leading members of the communist government.

Though Wekh-i-Zalmayan phase ended with the coming of Daud to power, they did not stop their activities. Given the domestic conditions of Afghanistan at that time, this movement can be explained as revolutionary and progressive. The Soviet historian, Akhramovich writes about the movement:

... the movement at first was more like a trend made up of diverse social views and sentiments; and often the only thing which was common to all of them was the desire to find a way to get rid of the confusion obtaining in the country. The movement became a centre of social ideas, around which began the consolidation or polarization of forces on a class basis. 56

Though the administration did not allow dissent activities openly, there thrived secret study circles, 57


57. There were four or five active study circles during this period. They were Abul Rahman Mahmoodi and Dr Abdul Hadi Mahmoodi circle, Taraki circle, Karmal-Khyber study circle etc. Ibid, pp. 39-40.
which were a place for the intellectuals and members of political parties to meet and discuss their ideas. Thus a few individuals developed later into Marxist ideologues. Important among them were Abul Rahman Mahmoodi, Noor Muhammad Taraki, Shah Wali, Dr Saleh Muhammad Zeary, Karim Misaq, Abdul Muhammed, Ismail Danish, Abdul Rashid Arayan, Dr Muhammad Zahir, Babrak Karmal, Noor Muhammad Noor, Anahita Ratebzad, Mir Ghulam Muhammed, Mir Akhbar Khyber, Tahir Badakhshii, Ghulam Dashtir Panjsheri, Shuruhullah Shahpur, Muhammad Zahir Ofaq etc.

When the progressive movements were underground, Soviet-Afghan state to state relations were friendly and most of the economic development programmes were assisted by Soviet Union. Military assistance were also received considerably. It seems that through economic and military assistance Soviet Union wanted to infiltrate the apex of the state administration to achieve their objective of bringing Afghanistan into the orbit of the Soviet bloc without changing her into a communist state. Soviet Union also watched the progressive movement going on there. There was no evidence that Soviet Union gave any direct assistance to the communists in Afghanistan. But there are reports that a few Afghan Marxists -- for example, Taraki and Karmal -- had contacts with the Soviet Union. Taraki and Karmal were frequent visitors to the Soviet Embassy in Kabul in the late 1950s.
We saw that it was from the jail that Karmal got converted as a Marxist by the influence of Amir Akbar Khyber Khan. Taraki was influenced by Mahmoodi during the days of Wekh-i-Zalmayan. Though Taraki came into contact with the Indian communists in Bombay, it was not clear when and how he became a Marxist. Mahmoodi was in jail till the ouster of Daud from power in 1963. In jail he underwent severe torture by prison authorities. He died a few months after his release.

Daud's great dependence on Soviet Union for economic development, his suppressive rule, agitation against Daud regime, opposition even from the ruling elite etc. forced King Zahir Shah to remove him from Prime Ministership. Following the ouster of Daud from the government, King Zahir Shah introduced constitutional reforms in 1964. Once again, the press law was eased and political parties were permitted to function. This gave a favourable ground for the radicals, who were operating underground, to come out in the open. The activists of the secret study circle, except Mahmoodi circle, felt the need for the formation of a common platform.

Three months after Mahmoodi's death, his brother Abdul Rahim Mahmoodi and his nephew Dr Abdul Hai Mahmoodi formed the first communist party in Afghanistan. Their party was a pro-Chinese one. Mahmoodi was still considered
as a martyr by both the pro-Chinese and pro-Soviet communists of Afghanistan.

The pro-Soviet Marxists assembled in Taraki's house and formed the Hizbe Democratic Khalq Afghanistan (Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan - PDPA) on 1 January 1965. It was a gathering of about thirty men at Taraki's home in the Shah Mina district of Kabul. Nur Muhammad Taraki was elected as Secretary General and Babrak Karmal as First Secretary.

The PDPA declared its objective as bringing, "Great October Revolution in Afghanistan". PDPA's programme was an orthodox communist one for the period, reflecting analyses associated with Khrushchev or Brezhnev.

The Party started its official publication 'Khalq' in 1966. Party programmes and documents were published in this journal. It was published by Taraki and edited by Bariq Shafi, a well-known poet of Afghanistan.

After six issues of its publication, the Khalq was banned by the government, accusing it of being anti-Islam and anti-Constitution. Since then, the 'Khalq' became a clandestine organ.

For the membership in the party one had to complete the probation in the party education. Article 3 of the PDPA Constitution states:

The candidate will spend a probationary period of furthering his party education, raising the level of political and ideological consciousness and broadening his outlook of the party objectives. The candidate, depending on his own class background, will spend between four months and a year on probation... if a probationer... does not show up his worth to be a full member, the relevant official or the party organisation may reject his application or extend his period of probation.60

From the very beginning, there were two factions -- Khalq and Parcham -- in the PDPA. In fact PDPA was the merger of these. Parcham was more influential among the Kabul University students than the Khalq. Later, they were reported to have managed more financial help from the Soviet Union for their activities. They could even get support from prince Daud.61

60. Raja Anwar, N. 57, p 44. Also see the Constitution of PDPA.

Though the function of political parties were allowed, Daud did not take any measures to legalise them. Therefore, the Marxists contested elections in 1965, as independent candidates. Four of the independent candidates supported by PDPA -- Babrak Karmal, Anahita Ratebzad, Nur Muhammad Nur and Faisan -- won the election. It is reported that for supporting the candidates in elections Soviet Union had helped PDPA. On the eve of 1965 elections Taraki and Karmal visited Moscow and during this visit an arrangement was done to publish Taraki's short-stories 'Zindagi-i-Nau' (New Life) in Moscow and smuggle it to Afghanistan.

The differences between Taraki and Karmal on the tactics and strategy of the party furthered rivalry between Khalq and Parcham, though both were confirmed Marxists and pro-Soviet. The Khalqis were more nationalistic and emphasised class warfare in the national context of Afghanistan. But, the Parchamites identified their interests more with those of the interests of the Soviet Union. When the Parchamites started their own newspaper in 1968, that confirmed the split which occurred in 1967. It is widely believed that the Parchamites could start their newspaper due to Soviet influence on the Afghan

62. Raja Anwar, N. 57, p 44.
It is widely understood that the Soviet Union offered ideological help to PDPA through its specialists working in Afghanistan as advisors in different aid projects. The training of Afghan officers in the Soviet military schools and the stationing of military experts at the Afghan military bases provided the Soviets an opportunity for assessing and recruiting individual officers to serve the political aims of PDPA. Moreover, some reports say that Taraki had connections with the communist parties of India, Pakistan etc. It seems that Soviet Union might have used the foreign communist parties instead of any direct involvement to organise a communist movement in Afghanistan due to its primary interest of keeping Afghanistan in its own hold by maintaining friendly state to state relations.

Another thing evident from the study is that the history of the communist movement in Afghanistan prior to the 'April Revolution' in 1978 is not only brief but obscure also. Regarding many of its leaders it is not clear that when and how they got committed to Marxist

63. Anthony Arnold, N. 9, p 52.
cause. Moreover, in the highly traditional Muslim society of Afghanistan, the communists could influence only a small section of the society. The backwardness, illiteracy, tribal fragmentation of Afghanistan and its dependence and proximity to Soviet Union enlarged the influence of the Marxists. The PDPA emerged when there was no serious alternatives to the tribal-monarchical politics of traditional Afghanistan. Only the Soviet model was known and affordable to the revolutionaries, who agitated and wanted to modernise Afghanistan at that time. Therefore, the intelligentsia and the students were attracted by Marxism and USSR's experience. The next chapter will discuss the split in the PDPA and the Soviet policy towards the split.