

The Places in between – Rory Stewart

The New Civil Service

It has been two weeks since Usama Bin Laden and others had escaped, and the old regime had been toppled. The new administration was found exactly two weeks ago by US and UN. He saw some men coming to the lobby and asked me to follow them. From their look, it was certain that they were the members of secret service. They questioned him and asked him to join them in a car. They took him to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He did not have a visa and was the only tourist here. He said to Yuzufi that he was walking across the country for peace and research and was introduced by the sons of the Minister of Social Welfare but lost the true copy. Yuzufi said he would only allow him to walk if he took his two men as escorts.

Tanks into Sticks

The men that had interviewed him were not new ones; they were trained and experienced. It was surprising how two-week-old administration was running this branch effectively. When the author was walking in other countries, he used to have a stick called 'dang'. However, he did not bring it when he came to Afghanistan. So, he went around asking where to find the stick. The children laughed when asked and the bazaars had no such things. Finally, he found a shop where he could find a stick, but the end is a sharp one. So, he went on to buy the metal ball from another shop. Finally, he had the stick to walk on.

WHETHER ON THE SHORES OF ASIA

Before he embarked on his walking journey, he read some passages of Babur. He was an honest observer who recorded what he saw without any emotion. He was one of the descendants of Genghis Khan but was modest. His passages reflect the medieval times of Afghanistan. He did not want to read such things; he wanted to see the contemporary Afghanistan. But it was good to read. His plan was to walk from Herat to Kabul.

Part One

Herat → Kabul

CHICAGO AND PARIS

While he was waiting at the lobby, he saw correspondents from Chicago and Paris, mostly they are war correspondents. Rory did not want to get up in that morning, as

it was cold outside, even though he was sleeping in his Nepali sleeping bag. Outside, he can see the marvel of Afghan traffic police, which had caught the eyes of everyone for over seventy years.

HUMA

When he arrived at the office of Yuzufi, other journalists came in as well, but they did not acknowledge him. Yuzufi answered their questions and told them there is nothing to worry and all will be fine. After they left, a soldier came in and greeted him. He was to be an escort for Rory for his walk to Kabul. The escort told him that a car was waiting outside. But Rory told him that he will only walk. Yuzufi was in favor of the walk as he thought it would be a symbol to walk under a united country.

FARE FORWARD

When Rory left the government building, he started his journey. It was a group of three, Qasim and Abu. Qasim was the older one. He seemed calm and was neat with his Afghan dress. When he started walking, he was greeted and asked to be interviewed by a journalist, who had let him use his satellite phone before. He answered his questions and told him that Afghan is the missing piece of his journey, and he needed to walk across this. After some time, he only saw the desert, there were no traces of humans. Then there was a sound of explosion, but they had no place to use as a cover. Two hours later, they reached a bazaar. Qasim demanded that they should stop here as there will only be deserts ahead. Rory wanted to keep walking as there were two hours of day light ahead and wanted to finish his walk in six months. He wanted to get rid of Qasim and gave him some money to buy food and told him that he will get more if he would let him walk alone. Qasim did not say anything.

THESE BOOTS

In the bazaar, Qasim told him that his cousin, Azzin, wanted to join the walk. And we became a group of four. Qasim wanted to buy some boots, so he went around the bazaar to find the boots. Most of the boots are supplied by the CIA and the one that Qasim chose does not seem to work for him. It would hurt his feet in the long walk. Rory also went around the market, and nobody seemed to notice him as everyone is the stranger in the bazaar. Then they took him to the cemetery. A thought came into his mind; nobody would notice if they killed him here. But they only came here to show some tombs and smoke cannabis.

Part Two

Day 1—Herat to Herat Sha'ede
Day 2—Herat Sha'ede to Turon
Day 3—Turon to Buriabaf
Day 4—Buriabaf to Dideros
Day 5—Dideros to Rakwaje
Day 6—Rakwaje to Chist-e-Sharif

QASIM

They stayed at the village head's house for the night and continued their journey. After some walk, they rested their day at Haji Mumtaz's. Qasim asked Rory to enter first, but he refused. So, Qasim entered first. In Iran and Afghan, the order one enters, where one sits, and how one greets show one's status. Qasim, being the oldest service member, sat at the furthest from the door. Abdul sat at the junior position. Rory who only had a letter from Emir sat beside Qasim. Qasim made preposterous stories about Rory, him being a Ukrainian, and a doctor. Rory was a historian and from the Scotland. They ate with their hand with nan bread and salted mutton. Even though they were saying that they were poor, the feast did not look like they were poor.

IMPERSONAL PRONOUN

They left Haji Mumtaz's and continued their journey. The walking was hard, Rory passed other and continued at the front. He had not exercised for months and was feeling tired. There was nothing around them, only the gravel deserts. They saw an old man and Aziz asked where he was going. Qasim loved his rifle and grenades and sometimes used them as fireworks. They stopped at a shop after walking four hours straight and then walked more for two hours. He wrote some proses as thinking of Babur and his advisor, Qasim.

A TAJIK VILLAGE

When they reached a Tajik village after their afternoon walk, they found an old man. Aziz told him that they were the members of secret service and asked for food. The old man brought the big bread Nan and other foods. The old man was gazing at Aziz, admiring his youth. Nearly all the young people in the village had gone to Iran for work. There were no electricity, clinic, nor public services. He paid no taxes and received none from the government. The only public building in the village was the mosque built of mud.

THE EMIR OF THE WEST

Ismail Khan was the most powerful man in the Afghan. Rory went to meet him on his last day in Herat to get some protection from the secret service. There were many other people including journalists who are waiting to interview him and the villagers who are trying to petition him. After a while, he came out and was interviewed by a swarm of worn-out journalists. Yuzufi was beside him as well. He asked the journalists to use 'His Excellency' when they referred to Ismail Khan. Those journalists had been here for some time and worn out from the pressure from their editors about the information related to Bin La Din. The interview was a formal one. But the views of Ismail Khan about Islam is as severe as the Taliban, though he allowed women for study. Rory explained his journey for a minute and but stopped when he saw the sign from Yuzufi. Ismail Khan was supportive of his journey.

CARA V ANSERAI, WHOSE PORTALS...

In the deserts, Yuzufi, Ismail Khan, and Herat, they all seemed to be remote. Qasima, Aziz, and Abdul, all found it hard to walk across the desert. They kept suggestion travelling by bus. When there is a shortcut across the field, Qasim lied to Rory that they should keep the road among the village as it is not a shortcut. When they arrived a village, they saw a house that had been a caravanserai in the silk roads. When they walked in there was no one. But Qasim aimed their rifle at the walls. They knew that someone was there. Indeed, the people were hiding behind the walls from them. Qasim scolded them for not being hospital. The villagers were afraid of their guns. They moved to another village and stayed at a house.

TO A BLIND MAN'S EYE

The host's son had been dead from the tank shells, and his picture can be found on the wall. Rory went outside to relieve himself. It was clear that they did not invest much in latrine. In the morning, the village elders accompanied them to the road for two hours and left. The central route was largely unexplored and unpopular among the westerners. So, it was largely intact and remains to be explored. Rory asked Qasim again to stop walking with him but to no avail. They stopped for water and learnt that it was the place where Qasim got ambushed a few years ago. Most of this place were controlled by the Taliban. However, most of the locals agree that the Taliban were good, but the Al-Quade foreigners were bad. Then they stopped for the night at a village. Qasim did not like it as he did not know anyone in the village.

GENEALOGIES

A villager led them to the headman's house. The headman was a young man with incomplete beard. Qasim introduced Rory as the international assistance giver and asked the villagers what they need. Rory went out in the village to observe,

accompanied by Azziz, who was too sick these days. There were no parks, gardens, nor public places, except the mosque. There was nothing much to observe. When he arrived back to the village's headman, they asked him about a new road and a new mosque. Rory played his role and told them that he would put good words about the need. Qasim also lied that their car had broken down. They continued their walk in the morning.

LEST HE RETURNING CHIDE

They saw a boy carrying water and Abdul made him cried. It was the place where he got nearly killed. Qasim and others went into the water, and they danced and sang on the shore. After the bath, they rested at a house. Then they heard the radio station announcing that the walking Rory would be paid for two million for the development. Qasim tried to ask Rory for more money as he was given two hundred dollars at the start. But Rory had no intention to pay more unless they leave him alone. After a while, they all left. Rory went out to see the village. He saw tombs among the fields. Some believe that they are holy and dependents of the Prophets. But the traveler, Babur, was skeptical about them and wrote about a tomb that was staged to be moving. But villagers continued to believe in holy tombs.

CROWN JEWELS

When he came back, the villagers asked him about weird questions about being a spy and so on. Fortunately, the arrival of food had cut the conversation. They ate food with a tint of mutton for the flavor. After the eating, they all tried to ask questions about the currency, the monarch in England, and Australia. Then they asked about the Koh-I-Noor diamond, which was taken by the Babur and then to Iran and then to Iran. Finally, Rajih in India took hold of it and gave it to the East English Company for the indemnity for the Shik wars. When the Queen was presented by the diamond, she cut it to make it brighter losing the historical shape. The Village headmen was talkative compared to other headmen, which frightened Qasim and others. They advised that Rory should travel to Obey by vehicle. But Rory was determinant to travel only by walking. So, Qasim asked the headmen to accompany them to the Obey. Aziz's coughs sounded more tubercular. They started their fifth day of walking and were 140 miles east of Herat.

BREAD AND WATER

Abdul walked beside Rory. He talked about his life without any exaggerating. He runs away to Iran when Herat was captured by the Taliban. Later, he was arrested and jailed in a small cell. But he raised enough money to secure his release. And

fought the Taliban and arrested again. He was waiting for his execution when Ismail Khan's forces captured Herat and freed him.

When they arrived near a bazaar, they got stopped and detained by a group of armed men. When Qasim and Abdul told them that they were the men of Ismail Khan, they did not believe them. The radio and all other sorts made them the men of Ismail Khan, but his authority here is not so much. Qasim told Rory that the roads ahead were dangerous and got released because of one of the locals who accompanied them to the Obey. Rory refused to take car to Saraybul and continued to walk on with Abdul. Qasim and Azziz will go there by car and wait for them.

THE FIGHTING MAN SHALL

It was raining hard. Abdul and Rory kept walking. They looked around for any signs of danger but there were none. It started raining and the rain soaked their feet. When they passed the mountains, all were silent. Abdul shot at the top of the hill to scare away anything that was up there. When Abdul saw a vehicle, he persuaded Rory to go the appointed place as they were two hours late. Rory unwillingly agreed.

A NOTHING MAN

When they arrived, Azziz told Rory that he was leaving him, and Abdul and Qasim will also leave him the next day. He asked for money, saying he was sick. Rory gave him one hundred dollars. The next day, Abdul and Qasim left but asked for the money. He gave the one hundred and fifty dollars each. They were not glad. Abdul got mad when he learnt that Azziz got one hundred and swore to kill the nothing man when he met him. Rory started walking alone from Chist.

Part Three

Day 7—Chist-e-Sharif to Shir Haj

Day 8—Shir Haj to Dahan-e-Rezak

Day 9—Dahan-e-Rezak to Kamenj

Day 10—Kamenj to Garmao

Day 11—Garmao to Jam

HIGHLAND BUILDINGS

Before they met with Qasim at the appointed place, they passed through the mountains. It was the place of Ghor before Chist. It was where all the glories intertwined. Rory brooded that if the arrow messenger of Genghis Khan took the same time, they travelled from the Herat to here, they would have been to their

desire place already. Ghor served as a defense around the mountain and was the center of the glory of Ghorid Empire before they got invaded by the Genghis Khan in 1216. The host's name was 'His Excellency', not because he had power, just because all the villagers called him that name. Both his sons were killed in action. The puppy tried to bite Abdul, and he ran around the tent.

THE MISSIONARY DANCE

There was a dome that used to be a dancing sect. Police chief and many Afghan men gathered around and watched a VCR about a dance. A woman was filmed dancing by unsteady hands. Sometimes, they zoomed into her chest, not focusing on her footwork. However, these dances had been stopped by Ismail Khan and his alliance.

MIRRORED CAT'S-EYE SHADES

During the last days with Abdul, he behaved like he used to. He lost ways and they got shot at. Finally, they arrived at an inn, where they were approached by the military commanders. He tried to provide five men to walk with Rory. But Rory asked Abdul to interfere. He did it successfully by telling them that Rory needs to walk alone for his book. The military commander agreed and provided an introduction letter.

MARRYING A MUSLIM

The introduction letter was to a veteranian doctor. Rory gave him the letter. He changed his clothes and accompanied him to the next village. According to UN agencies, these villages were starving. But they did not seem to be starving as they have some nan bread to eat. The villagers called him doctors because he finished a course in veteranian in Herat. He shows him the ford built by the European community. It was regarded as an impassable during the conflict. He asked Rory about his religion and the marriage. Rory was a Christian and told him that he would not marry his cousins. But in Islam, they mostly married their first cousins.

WAR DOG

The doctor shows him a dog that looks strong but with some missing teeth. It was to kill wolves. In Afghan and Islam, dogs are regarded as dirty and decrepit. One villager said that they are not to touch a dog according to the Koran, but when Rory asked where it is in the passage, he cannot identify it. The villagers are to memorize every passage of Koran, but they do not understand the meaning of some passages. Rory was hesitant to take the dog with him as it had to walk at least 35 kilometers a day to Kabul. But he decided to take it with him. On the way, one Afghan man tried to

fight him with his dog. Dogs are to kill wolves and fight each other for bets in those villages.

COMMANDANT HAJI (MOALEM) MOHSIN KHAN OF KAMENJ

After walking four hours, Rory reached the compound of Commandant Haji. Rory presented his letter of introduction and Haji Mohsin kept it. When Rory asked it back, he said that he would write another letter. Haji Mohsin had many followers, some of them prepared his water pipe with cannabis. Later, Rory learnt that he was against the Ismail Khan's party and once killed two of his commanders. However, he still provided some meals for Rory during his stay. The snow was falling and then it was one meter thick. Haji asked if England still was building ships and other questions. Rory did not want to be trapped here for two months. So, he left with his dogs, Babur, and Wazir, one of the servants from Haji Mohsin. On the way, the strays tried to bite the Babur. But Wazir and Rory threw stones at them.

COUSINS

The host's name was Seyyed Umar. He was richer than Haji Mohsin. He treated Rory with a whole chicken, which is considered as a delicacy here. Rory gave Babur four loaves of bread. The host did not greet Wazir, which showed that the leaders are divided here, and one did not recognize each other, straining the Muslim hospitality from by-gone ages. Rory had been walking ten days straight and his knees were taking the strain of up hills. He had used all his introduction letters. The one written by Haji Mohsin was pocketed by Seyyed Umar, since he was an illiterate, he could not write another one for him.

PART FOUR

Day 12—Jam to Ghar

Day 13—Ghar to Chesme Sakina

Day 14—Chesme Sakina to Barra Khana

Day 15—Barra Khana to Chaghcharan

Days 16 & 17—Chaghcharan

Day 18—Chaghcharan to Badgah

Day 19—Badgah to Daulatyar

THE MINARET OF JAM

It was snowing all night. When Rory left in the morning with Babur and Seyyed Umor on a horse, the snow was a foot thick. They climbed some hills and passed some valleys. Babur had been marking every territory with his urine and sniffs.

Seyyed Umor wanted to join Rory all the way but refused to go further if he kept the dog. Rory kept the dog, so he took his leave. After some walks, Rory found an ancient tower of Jam. It was one of the standing cultural heritages of the war-torn Afghan. He went inside and checked the interior. Everything was dark and the stairs were steep. When he came out, he saw a man named 'Bushire', a commander of this region. He invited him to his house. He explained about the digging happening around the tower. Many people had moved here to dig. And they found the ancient place called 'Turquoise Mountain'.

TRACES IN THE GROUND

Bushire showed him around the digging areas. They had done what other archeologists had failed to do. Instead of digging inch by inch, they dug a lot with manpower. Nobody controls this place; there was no government. Everyone is free to dig. Rory believed that the digging should be supervised by an archeologist, and this place should be protected. It was the place that was destroyed thrice by the Genghis Khan, hail, and the digging. The digger only got one dollar or two dollar a piece. The dealer was from the United States, UK, and others.

BETWEEN JAM AND CHAGHCHARAN

Rory and Bubur lived on dry bread after parting ways with Seyyed. Rory wanted to reach Chaghcharan and met a UK aid mission and rest at there for a day. Even though he was taking antibiotic; his stomach was still weak. He then remembered the shapes of the mountains described in Himalayas. They are described by their relationship with Gods, like it was the place where the god of something danced. But here in Afghan, the places were described by the violence or conflict, for example, it was the place where the commander of some battalion was ambushed. Along the way, he met another veteranian doctor, who provided him a guide.

DAWN PRAYERS

Rory and his guide reached a mud house of a village, where he was treated with dry bread and water with sugar in it. The floor was shared by eight people. At dawn, the village headman woke up, and others followed him, rolling back their blankets and started following the recital by the headman. Most of them do not understand much of the prayers in Arabic. After the prayers, the sun started to rise, Rory and his guide went on. The day was too bright that Rory and the guide had to wear sunglasses and took more than two hours than usual.

LITTLE LORD

The only lord that Rory encountered when he walked from Jam to Chaghcharan was a twelve-year old boy who was visiting his father from Pakistan. He was related to Haji Mohsin and his people. They talked about Afghan and Pakistan. Along the way, two men with AK-47 asked Rory to give up his dogs to them but Rory resisted and told them that the dogs belonged to Bismillah.

FROGS

Rory reached Chaghcharan in the morning and met Irish people and some Germans. Some of them were soldiers and some were NGO workers from ICRC. People from ICRC even let him stay at their compounds against their office policy. Rory could not get rest as he expected. He had to leap from one tea house to another with Babur, and he had to wake up early in both days. He heard that there was going to be a Loya Jirga Assembly to form a new government, and some are even suggesting that there will be women representatives. Rory thought about someone running against people like Haji Mohsin must be brave enough. Before he left, he fixed his iron pole.

THE WINDY PLACE

After leaving Chaghcharan, the snow fell deeper. However, Rory got more fortunate than the emperor Babur. Babur got lost and his armies stood still in the snow for some time. Rory and Babur reached Daulatyar and took shelter at one of the Commander in the region. Rory sketched a picture of him, and he asked for it. The relationship between Rory and Babur was developing, at first, Babur did not trust Rory. Later, they got close. When he woke up, Babur was lying in his vomit with pus filling eye. Rory did not want to leave Babur behind. So, he waited.

PART FIVE

Day 20—Daulatyar to Sang-i-zard

Day 21—Sang-i-zard

Day 22—Sang-i-zard to Katlish

Day 23—Katlish to Qala-e-Nau

Day 24—Qala-e-Nau to Siar Chesme

Day 25—Siar Chesme to Yakawlang

NAME NAVIGATION

Babur recovered four hours later. And the local assured that he could walk for a short day. So, they walked on. Rory was invited to a mosque for the first time in Afghan. It was the village of Shia and Hazara. Shia was more relaxed towards women and education and was targeted by the Taliban during their rein. Taliban were Sunni

and stricter and forced people of Hazara into Iran. People of Hazara came from Mongolian and with Genghis Khan. Rory asked them who the important people around these areas. Then so as not to forget, he made a song of the-places-in-between as follows:

Day one: Commandant Maududi in Badgah. Day two: Abdul Rauf Ghafuri in Daulatyar. Day three: Bushire Khan in Sang-i-zard. Day four: Mir Ali Hussein Beg of Katlish. Day five: Haji Nasir-i-Yazdani Beg of Qala-e-Nau. Day six: Seyyed Kerbalahi of Siar Chesme...

THE GREETING OF STRANGERS

Aimaq complained about the hospitality of Hazara. On the road, Rory was hit by a stone in the back, thrown by a boy. They feared his dogs and a group of them threw the stones at Rory and Babur. An old man was sitting nearby, watching. Rory asked him why he did not stop him. He answered it was the fault of Rory who brought the dog. It was the second Haraza village. After leaving a small bazar, Rory met a group of three men, and they walked together. Rory did not stay at their village and went on walking towards another.

LEAVES ON THE CEILING

The snow was falling hard, and when he reached another village, he was put up at a mosque. Even though he had an introduction letter, the host, the husband, was away. Finally, he got invited by another man. His clothes were wet, and his diarrhea was getting worse. He stared at the ceiling. Then he was woken up by a man and a woman asking for medicine. He gave them Ibuprofen and a course of antibiotic for diarrhea, reluctantly. It was the first village where he was allowed to be in the place near a woman. They asked him to write down their land yields and aids they needed.

FLAMES

That night Bushire's old uncle slept with him and snored through the night. When Rory woke up, he went talking with the host. Then he learned that the villages had been fighting each other for years after the Russian's attack. When Rory asked who the feudal lords in this valley are, the host mentioned that they were once the lord but got attacked and lost all their lands. The snow was falling hard and Rory wanted to visit a feudal lord to get a letter of introduction and some foods. So, they kept walking till dark to reach the castle.

ZIA OF KATLISH

They reached the castle after the dark. Zia, the son of the feudal lord of Katlish, provided them some place in a mosque to stay. The mosque had been a religious place, a dining hall, and a conference room. Zia explained further about the fight between the villagers and how he was pleased with the American intervention. Rory was grateful for the food and the protein. Though he wanted to feed some meat to the dog, it would anger the host as the meat was precious in this area. Hussein accompanied them to another castle.

THE SACRED GUEST

After coming down a cliff and crossing a wooden bridge, they reached the castle of Qala-e-Nau and Hussein had left. He went to find Nasir, but nobody cared to answer his questions. Finally, a man told him that he should look for him at the mosque. Rory found him at the mosque and showed him the letter of introduction. But he did not seem to satisfy. After much persuasion, he provided him a place to sleep and a shelter where he could put Babur. The hospitality that the Persians, Iranians, Afghans were once proud of was not the one experienced by the Rory. He was fortunate enough to be given a place of sleep and something to eat during these hard times.

THE CAVE OF ZARIN

The snow had stopped for a while. Rory was thinking how he was fortunate compared to the Emperor Babur. Babur had been caught up near the cave of Zarin pass during a harsh snowstorm. Some of his men and horses went into the cave to avoid the cold. But Babur remained outside to show support for the remaining soldiers. After climbing a cliff and passing by the cave, Rory reached a village. He showed a letter of introduction to Seyyed Kerbalahi. He too was hesitant like others, but after some talks, he let Rory in.

DEVOTIONS

Seyyed Kerbalahi's guest room was large with expensive carpets. He was fed with soup with rotten meat and bread. Then the host started praying and talking in-between. After reading through the Koran, he asked about the photographs. Rory showed his family's photo, Seyyed did not seem to like it. Seyyed's wife talked to Rory about her family for five minutes. Even though she was already a grandma, she was not comfortable being in a room with a stranger male. In the morning Rory left with two people who will accompany him for some miles.

THE DEFILES OF THE VALLEY

The guys left after walking with him for a few hours. On the way, he met a person who assisted him with two precious guides to finally pass through the Zarin pass. The snow was falling hard. They could not see anything in their surroundings. The guides used the texture of the surrounding to pass through. Finally, Rory was able to pass through the Zarin Valley. The guides left him, and he reached Yakawlang. Babur the emperor once wrote about the warm welcomes of the warm houses of Yakawlang. Rory knocked the doors one after another. Finally, the fifth one opened and told him to go to MSF office in the edge. MSF office treated him well; there was an Australian male nurse. Babur was fed. They stayed there for one day and left.

PART SIX

Day 26—Yakawlang to Band-e-Amir

Day 27—Band-e-Amir to Ghorak

Day 28—Ghorak to Shaidan

Day 29—Shaidan to Bamiyan

THE INTERMEDIATE STAGES OF DEATH

Babur started faster than Rory. But Babur slowed after some minutes. Rory looked back at the Yakawlang and saw the charred houses. After walking two hours, they saw a group of men carrying an old man who was in the stage of intermediate decay stage. Rory saw death people but had never seen a corpse that is in the stage of intermediate decay stage. It was an Eid festival, and the old man was trying to cross the plain from Bamiyan to Yakawlang but could not. These men scarified their festival to carry the old man to the headquarters. Rory walked on to the frozen plains that the old man was trying to cross.

WINGED FOOTPRINTS

It was snowing hard, and Babur did not want to walk anymore. So, Rory went to the near-by village and rented a room at an Inn that has been empty for twelve years. It was near the frozen lake. They continued walking across it. Rory tried to break some parts of thin ice in the lake to provide some water for Babur. He wanted Babur to drink from it, but Babur was hesitant at first. Then he drank. They started walking across the frozen lake, and Rory wanted Babur to walk till Bamiyan and then transport it to a vet in Kabul.

BLAIR AND THE KORAN

At nightfall, they reached Ghorak and met Ali, who was the son of the 80-year-old village headman. The headman apologized for being sick and that he could not welcome him better. Then they showed him that the Taliban had burned the Koran when they burned down all their houses. It was accidental but they deemed it blasphemous. They had never watched TV in their life, but when they saw an international traveler, they talked of the burning of Koran but not the deaths of their loved ones, as they understood that the westerners would not care their deaths. They would care for things like the Buddha statue of Bamiyan being burnt down. Rory went on thinking about the aftermaths of September 11, and how George Bush and Tony Blair used the passage from the Koran to pose the Islam as a religion is peaceful. They were other controversial views as well.

SALT GROUND AND SPIKENARD

There were mines along the road. So, Rory put a light leash on Babur. They reached a pass where Babur's armies faced resistance from the locals. The locals put up a great defense, but Babur marched ahead motivating the troops and capturing the pass and making prisoners of the villagers.

PALE CIRCLES IN WALLS

Rory and Babur continued up to the Shaidan pass. They found mortars and shells along the pass. It was used as a strategic place to pound the villages of Hazara. The village in Saidah was ghosted, and a year ago, eighty people were killed by the Taliban, and the village was torched sometimes after. In Kabul, the media were saying that the Northern Alliance Intervention in Afghan were just a replacement of one crook after another. But here in Hazara, things were much better after American occupation.

@afghangov.org

I checked my email address back in Kabul and only one mail was received. After the intervention, there was a general thing that emails would not work here. But after UN agencies and other non-government organizations arrived, some electronic mailing addresses were created. UN agencies mentioned that Afghans have been fighting for human rights, or food is the most essential need, or they have been suffered from PTSD. It was hard to say whether these things are true. People like Ali did not worry about his next meal, Seyyed never talked about education for women, and when Rory asked them who should be their next president. They do not care that much.

WHILE THE NOTE LASTS

Rory and Babur stopped at the outskirts of the town, a place that had been converted to a barrack. Rory shared bed with the soldiers. They were wearing the American blankets that is for moderate cold. But the weather is clearly under minus degree Celsius. Rory got diarrhea and had to go out several times to relieve himself. One of the soldiers played a flute for them. It was the first time he heard music since he started the walk. The soldiers fed him some pastries, and he ate 15 of them, making them laugh as it was usually for children. Rory continued his walk, and the presence of teashops and caravans suggested that he was closer to Bamiyan. Finally, he reached the niches curved around the cliff, that hosted the statues of Buddha for fourteen hundred years.

Part Seven

Days 30 & 31—Bamiyan

Day 32—Bamiyan to Kalu

Day 33—Kalu to Dahan-e-Siar Sang

Day 34—Dahan-e-Siar Sang to Siahak

Day 35—Siahak to Maidan Shahr

Day 36—Maidan Shahr to Kabul

FOOTPRINTS ON THE CEILING

The religion like caravans seemed to avoid the mountain. It took several decades for the Buddhism to reach places over the mountain. Rory climbed into the chambers in the ceiling of the empty niches. He then brooded over the reach of Buddhism and the change of its form in meeting different places. He asked a villager whether they sensed anything strange after seeing decades of giant statues. The villager replied that there are many things that matter more to us.

I AM THE ZOOM

Bamiyan was swarmed with an air strip and many international organizations. Rory went around to find if he could find any way to transport Babur to Kabul. He was warmly welcomed by the people of MSF again. One of them is going to Kabul in a few days and he agreed to take Babur. Many of the journalist used 'Zoom' in Afghan and the MSF guy told Rory that he was his Zoom.

KARAMAN

There was a game in Bamiyan, the new governor, Khalili is there as well. It was a horse game and one of the first game every held after Taliban banned all sports. It was nice to watch, the crowds shouted 'Karama', when he performed. After the game, Rory took Babur for a walk and tied it to a post in MSF compound after confirming that the MSF guy can take him to Kabul.

KHALILI'S TROOPS

It was the first time he was walking alone after he met Babur. At a check point in the outskirts of Bamiyan, Rory was stopped by soldiers of Khalili's. They demanded who he is, but Rory was fed up with them and did not show the letter and tried to walk on. But the commander run up to him and punched him in the face. Other soldiers run up to them, and a crowd was gathering near them. Fortunately, he saw an interpreter from MSF and took out his letter from Khalili. The commander replied why he did not show them the letter earlier. Rory threatened to report him to Khalili and walk on. Rory was a bit worried that he would send a radio message to other posts. But he was ok in other check points but had to show them the letter. The last check points tried to take him back to Bamiyan for further questioning, but Rory refused and talked his way out of them.

AND I HAVE MINE

Then he reached a village and welcomed by an old man named 'Nasir-i-Yazdani'. He let Rory stayed at his house instead of the mosque. The old man dried his socks and provided him some foods. Then he asked his name and what he is doing. After learning that Rory was walking alone, he asked his nephew to accompany him to the next pass. Rory experienced the destruction at Yakawlang, the kindness of the old man, and the brutality of the soldiers from Hazara.

THE SCHEME OF GENERATION

The old man's nephew accompanied him in the morning. They crossed the high pass. Rory walked faster without Babur. He had not had shower for a long time, his nails are long, and his clothes had not been washed for three weeks. It was understandable why he was not offered a bed in some places.

THE SOURCE OF THE KABUL RIVER

After passing Unai pass, he reached the final fortress of Hazara. The commander in that region was showing off his armies and passing around pills. He urged Rory not

to walk to Kabul for two days as there were many Taliban strongholds between here and Kabul. It is two-hour drive from here to Kabul. Rory also thought that it would be foolish to be killed after nineteenth months of walking. But he decided to walk to Kabul. The commander provided two young escorts to accompany him. But after passing through the first checkpoint, where they were told to get back to their Hazara territory, the escorts went back.

TALIBAN

Rory reached Wardak, an early stronghold of Taliban. It was still commanded by one of the ex-ministers of the Taliban. In the bazar, Rory was approached by three men asking for his passports. Rory greeted them but they did not reply to the greeting, so he greeted again, asking if they understand his language. They replied instantly that time. However, when they shook hand, the guy did not release the hand. The group of Taliban asked him where he was from and where he was going. Rory said that he was a professor in History from Indonesia. Then they asked things about Indonesia. They tried to follow him, but their commanders called him halfway. One of them told Rory that he could be killed if he went down to the river as they suggested. The conversation had left a muted feeling in Rory.

TOES

At dusk, Rory reached the barracks of Maidan Shahr and banged at the gate. From their appearance, Rory thought that they were in favor of the current government. First, they asked many questions, and Rory tried to answer them all. Finally, a commander was sent for, and he was invited in. They told him that he looked like someone from Al-Qaeda with a backpack and a stare. One of their soldiers had his toes cut off by the Taliban. They treated him with warm foots and a nice place to share. It was the first time Rory felt that he belonged here. In the morning, Rory took his last day of walk. He could not express how he felt when walking the last miles of his walk.

MARBLE

Rory reached Kabul after crossing a ridge. Near the Kabul Internation Hotel, Rory was stopped by a man. He asked him to hide as he thought Rory was an Arab and American troops are coming in this way. Rory said that he is British. Rory went on to visit a hill where the Emperor the Babur was buried. The emperor asked specifically to bury in the open sky. Rory met Babur near the former house of the third wife of Usma Bin Laden. Babur seemed well rested and alive and gave his stomach for Rory to scratch.

Epilogue

The flight to London was arranged. Babur was taken to Pakistan to prepare for vaccination and vet's certificate. Rory went back to London first, and he walked twenty miles to his home. There was no one to greet him as they did not hear any car sounds. One day later, Rory got a call and learnt that Babur passed away as the host fed him a bone and it punctured his stomach. Babur had been eating bread his whole life. Rory cried and wanted to walk the last miles together. Rory wrote the book in his hometown, Perthshire.

This summary was written by Thura Htoo.
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