PRESENTED TO THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY, SIMLA

BY

Library IIAS, Shimla
TMP 050.954 52 REC
00016337
INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY
Acc. No. 16377
Date 14.11.66
SIMLA

RECENT SOVIET WRITING ON SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

(Below are reviews of publications received during the period November 1963 to the end of January 1964. For reasons of space only a fraction of the total number can be noticed, but care has been taken to make the selection representative of what has come to hand. This article is contributed by the Central Asian Research Centre in association with the Soviet Affairs Study Group of St. Antony's College, Oxford.)

In a speech at the Stadium in Kabul last October, President Brezhnev produced figures in support of the claim of Soviet Russia to be called the best read country in the world. To be a Soviet citizen, he said, is to love an intelligent book; and he went on to discuss the reading habits of the children, the students, youth generally, and the grown-ups in U.S.S.R. He found that " if you take everybody who studies, then you get a total above 60 million persons ".

Those who do not like the Soviet system may pooh-pooh this figure; they would do better to pray that it is true. They might also reflect that the intelligentsia of modern Russia is usually accepted as being over 20 million, and that the reading public must evidently be wider, and perhaps vastly wider, than the intelligentsia. Be that as it may, there is hardly any doubt that reading has grown into the principal pastime in Russia. The appetite for books is prodigious, and whole editions, it seems, are bought up almost as soon as they are out.

On what other assumption can the mounting flood of Soviet writing in our special field be explained? Each time the heap of fifty or more publications belonging to the preceding twelve weeks is stacked on this table, documentary proof is before our eyes of say, half a million *copies* in the quarter, two million in the year, making their way into the libraries, night schools, clubs, and individual homes. Into how many hands—given a mode of living which is collective and much less private than our own—a single copy of a book will pass, we cannot know. Though, of course, arguing in the opposite direction, neither can we guess how many of these fifty volumes will be studied by one and the same reader.

I. The Borderlands

General

"The English imperialists spare no effort in their propaganda for Pan Islam. In England the centre of Pan Islamic propaganda is the Shah Jehan Mosque outside London."

How many of us could put a date to that gobbet? The date is 1963 and the sentences occur in the opening passage to a recently received book by a respectable writer on Asian history, A. Tursunbayev, which tells of " energetic work intended to revitalize the activities of all counter-revolutionary elements, the Pan Islamists among them, now being carried

on " in our capital and in Berlin. We rub our eyes. However, the author is on very safe ground. Two years ago the formal Programme of the Soviet Communist Party went out of its way to describe Western intrigue at that time. The Imperialists, this document declared, are employing every means at their disposal—colonial wars, military blocs, conspiracy, terror, subversion, economic pressure, bribery—to retain a hold on the countries which have freed themselves and to make their new-won independence into a meaningless label. And hardly more than one year ago (December 12, 1962) Mr. Khrushchev himself detected " a new phase " in the struggle of the oppressed peoples of modern Asia, one in which the former private domains, the *votchina,* of the foreign monopolies would be fighting for genuine (as distinct from fictional) national independence.

No feature of Soviet political writing on South Asia is more constant, or more puzzling in 1964, than this pushing against the open door. One can say that the theoretical and dogmatic quality of Russian socialism encourages a certain absentmindedness, a contempt for the calendar. But the temper of the Kremlin is what matters, and this is pragmatic. For whatever reason it may be, the Kremlin believes it to be useful to its purpose that the totally discreditable image it has for so many years projected of the West should neither be modified nor allowed to fade.

Two books from the pile in front of us fit so exactly into this pattern that they are worth discussing. They are: *The Days of Colonialism are Numbered* (Dni Kolonializma Sochteny. Publishing House of Social-Economic Literature, Moscow, 1963, pp. 132, 20,000 copies) by B. G. Gafurov, and *The Crumbling of Colonialism* (Krusheniye Kolonializma. State Publishing House of Political Literature, Moscow, 1963, pp. 176, 70,000 copies) by I. Z. Mirkina, G. I. Mirskiy and L. V. Stepanov. Both are in cheap editions offered at 19 kopecks and 20 kopecks respectively, or about the price of a tram ride.

In Gafurov's book the first words of the title are scored through as though in red ink, leaving the predicate " Numbered " to catch the eye in great flaming letters. Thus billed, the drama of the disreputable birth, the opportunism, winnings, riotous living and latter-day ill health of imperialism, unfolded in wooden and jerky lines, is carried to the date of the XXII Congress of the Central Committee in 1961; by which date, according to the concluding chapter, it was possible to lay down that " the crash of colonialism is inevitable ". The characters taking the stage are the abstractions of a Morality Play: Portugal, Holland, France, England and now America, " the master footpad of them all ", are merely aliases for Ambidexter, Shift, Fraud, Iniquity and Vice. The players on one side are not simply degenerate but are by definition incapable of any action whatsoever that is not wholly base. On the other side there is sweetness and light, vision and a love of mankind. The British glorified in " lowering to the condition of slaves millions and millions of people " and " in the span of their two hundred years' dominion in the country, so ravaged the erstwhile wealthy India as to turn her into a land of ghastly poverty, starvation and epidemics ". Whereas the Russian socialists,

mindful of the injunction of Lenin " to draw near to Mongols, Persians, Indians, Egyptians and mingle with them ", set the countries of the East on the path to freedom and fair fortune. "Like Prometheus Unbound the peoples of Asia are straightening their mighty shoulders and coming to grips with the task of building a new life. " Communism, concludes Gafurov, in an epilogue borrowed from the 1961 Programme of the Party, is fulfilling its historical mission to deliver the peoples from the horrors of exploitation and war, and is establishing on earth Peace, Labour, Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood and Happiness for the enjoyment of all.

The Crumbling of Colonialism is a study of the same subject in which a quite different technique is employed. It is introduced on the fly-leaf as " a popular illustrated handbook " and it does in fact turn out to be such. It portrays, curtly, and often in tabular form, the beginnings, expansion and heyday of the colonial system; attends rather more amply to the national liberation movement; but saves most of its ammunition for an attack on what the Russians call " contemporary Colonialism ". A final chapter pictures Socialism, as translated into practice by the U.S.S.R., befriending and giving a way of life to the weak. At the end of each of the four chapters, and *illustrating* them—and hence the description on the fly-leaf—is documentation in the shape of extracts from political utterances, the world press, official communiqués, and so on. The publishers have added weight to this illustrative matter by printing it in much bigger and heavier type than that of the chapters themselves. Cecil Rhodes, Lenin, Nehru, Soekarno, Walter Lippman, Muhammad Daud and many others come out with the expected things in the right place; and so does *The Times*.

There is no theatricality this time in the presentation. But the self-righteousness is there just the same, expressed in the claim to know, and to be alone in knowing, what is good for the Asian world of today.

Persia

Persia is under observation this quarter from several unusual angles. Her modern history is focused in an admirable section of a massive chrestomathy covering the principal countries of the world; she features outstandingly in a volume of essays on Russian Orientalism; one of her celebrated nineteenth-century novels is rendered into the language of Pushkin; and the habits of speech of her educated society are faithfully, and divertingly, recorded.

Chrestomathy on Modern History, Vol. I. 1640-1815 (Khrestomatiya po novoy istorii. Tom I. 1640-1815. Publishing House of Social-Economic Literature, Moscow, 1963, pp. 767, 30,000 copies) is primarily a work of reference for senior university students. Two further volumes are to come: Vol. II for the period 1816-1870; and Vol. III for 1871-1917. The title itself is sufficiently arresting. Can it mean that there are other keys to the storehouse of history than the one which Marx discovered? Hope is kindled by the phrasing of a sentence in the Introduction which says that " the pronouncements of the classics of Marxism-Leninism *have been*

included, as also their major assessments both of entire historical epochs and processes, and of individual events". It is somewhat damped by the chillier words into which we run a little later: "in the light of the source material contained in Volume I it is easy to trace the process of consolidation of the capitalist mode of production; the formation of antagonistic capitalist relations; the inescapable logical compulsion of the replacement of a feudal-economic structure by a capitalistic; and the other laws of historical development".

With fingers crossed does one therefore turn to the Section on Persia compiled by A. I. Filina. It is made up of five Parts, each of them sensibly subdivided, devoted respectively to: the decline of the Safavids; Persia in relation to Transcaucasia and Russia; Nader Shah; the rise of the Qajars; the peasantry, agriculture and commerce. This sounds promising enough, particularly Part II where the Russians should be much in their element. Hope revives.

It does not take many minutes to become convinced that the compiler of this Section, anyhow, really knows what a chrestomathy is. The Journal and Letters of Artemiy Volynskiy, Ambassador to Persia, 1715-1718; the Diary of Petros di Sargis during the siege of Isfahan by the Afghans; the writings of another contemporary, Abraam Yerevantsi; the missives exchanged between the Georgian Tsar and Peter the Great; a book by the Katolikos in Echmiadzin, Abraam Kretatsi, entitled (without undue modesty) "My history and the history of Nader Shah the Persian" —these are only some of the items in a colourful and polyglot assortment which is here laid under contribution. With Father Krusinskiy, Procurator of the Jesuits at Isfahan, we are familiar in the West; but on the majority of the sources abundantly tapped in these pages we are quite unaccustomed to draw. Here is yet one more dignitary of a Christian Church, Akop Shemakhetsi, writing in 1743 of the happenings of twenty years before: "Now you must know that at that time, 1170 of the Armenian Era [1721 A.D.], the Afghans invaded from Qandahar in strength and wrested from Shah Sultan Husayn his capital Isfahan, and dominated many other towns in the country. . . . But one of Sultan Hasayn's sons, by name Tamas [Tahmasp], who had escaped from the Afghans at Isfahan was soon to be seen in Khorasan, in Meshed city, where he rallied the local Qizilbashes to his person and cause. To command the troops thus raised he appointed from the Bavart district of Khorasan a man successful, able and courageous—a certain Nader Qoli. Of this name, however, prince Tamas divested his new lieutenant and bestowed on him his own as a mark of personal regard: Tamas-Qoli-Khan. . . . The day came when he sent him with strong forces to Isfahan against the Afghans who were still in occupation. Arrived there, Tamas-Qoli-Khan broke the Afghans under Shah Ashraf and compelled them to evacuate the place, where he then installed himself. This was in 1178 of our Era [1729], on the fourth of November."

Essays on the History of Russian Orientalism. VI (Ocherki po istorii russkogo vostokovedeniya. Sbornik VI. Eastern Literature Publishing House, Moscow, 1963, pp. 348, 1,300 copies) is a collection which ranges

from the Scythian Story, Skifskaya Istoriya, to the Mongolian. But a lot of what comes between traverses our particular territory and nothing in the book, as it happens, is better done than the essay "On the history of the study in Russia of Babism and Baha'ism" by N. A. Kuznetsova.

Russia of course, with England, was immediately concerned, and the diplomats of these two vied with each other from the start in gathering information about this strange vibrant enthusiasm which not only claimed to have burst the bonds of Islam but was militant literally, and likely, as it seemed, to disrupt Persia in the political sense. On the Russian side a whole platoon of First Secretaries and Consuls were hard at it for a couple of years around 1850 gleaning whatever they could. The Ambassador of the day, Prince Dolgorukov, instructs the Consul in Tabriz "to leave no stone unturned in ascertaining the dogma and practice of this doctrine" and his subordinate, answering on July 12, 1850, writes that the Persians appear to be misrepresenting the new teaching but that he hopes "shortly to get hold of an authentic document in the Bab's handwriting from which the main articles of the doctrine may be extracted".

The essayist brings out how all this was to serve academic scholarship in good stead at a later stage. The earliest of the "academics" was the sympathetic Mirza Kazem Bek, a Christian convert. Presently Dorn and Victor Rosen are on the scene; then Tumanskiy, V. I. Ignat'yev, I. G. Grigorovich and G. D. Batyushkov. "You want a few of us with Russian names" puts in Batyushkov with humour—"not, I may say, that these Teutons are much good at speaking German (*pravda, pochti ne govoryat po-nemetski*)". Whether Barthold was among those who couldn't talk German properly is not told; but Madame Kuznetsova more than makes up for this by revealing that he left a typescript on the Babis, now held by the Academy of Sciences, which contributes importantly to the subject. It is, indeed, the burden of her case that whereas there are publications galore, both learned and unlearned, *descriptive* of Babism and Baha'ism, you must still (in 1963) depend on the archives for an interpretation which is untouched by missionary bias. Of singular interest here is what she terms "the personal file of Victor Rosen", in which sixty-four letters from Browne are preserved "whose publication would be of undoubted benefit".

Between Tsarist and Soviet days no dividing line is drawn or felt, nor do those adjectives occur. Only two names in fact belong to the existing régime, viz. M. S. Ivanov and A. M. Arsharuni; but this has to be inferred from the dates in the context.

This altogether engaging essay is not only about Russian Orientalism; it is a worthy example of it.

The story goes that when a translation of Morier's *Hajji Baba* first reached Persia from Constantinople it was acclaimed as an original work. This does not prove—as we might like it to do—that the Englishman's portrait of Persian manners was exact; but it does prove that the Persians of the day (around 1890) were alive to the meaning and use of the art of caricature.

Indeed the possibilities of the satirical novel as an instrument of social

or political reform were much in mind just then, and were being put to the test by a writer whose name was suppressed at the time but disclosed later on as Zayn-ol 'Abedin, Maragha'i. The Travels of Ebrahim Beg read like the real thing. Here was the extraordinarily vivid and often poignant tale of a young Persian, brought up in Cairo, who makes a Sentimental Journey which goes wrong. Ebrahim Beg caught on.

Under the fuller title of *The Diary of Ebrahim Beg's Journey or The Misadventures of a Patriot* (Drevnik puteshestviya Ibrakhim-Beka ili yego zloklyucheniya po prichine fanaticheskogo lyubvi k rodine. U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, Moscow-Leningrad, 1963, pp. 268, 3,000 copies) this modern classic is edited and translated by A. M. Shoytov and G. P. Mikhalevich with all the distinction we are coming to expect of Soviet scholarship in the domain of Persian literature. The translation is remarkable: to the eye it looks like Russian, to the ear it sounds like it. And if the experiment be performed of choosing paragraphs or slices of dialogue at random and comparing these with the original in the Calcutta Edition of 1910, the translator gets full marks for fidelity. The Appendix and the Commentary contain everything the foreign reader will want to know.

One previous translation has seen the light—Dr. Schulz's German version of 1903. Otherwise, outside his own country, Ebrahim Beg has been " recommended reading " for language students and no more. That he deserved more will be the emphatic verdict of the Russian public to which he is now so fittingly introduced.

The Tehran Dialect (Tegeranskiy Dialekt. Published by the Institute of International Relations, Moscow, 1960, pp. 136, 1,200 copies) by L. S. Peysikov is a surprisingly lively treatise under what seems a most inappropriate title. What the author really does is to discuss and describe the everyday habits of educated speech in the country as a whole. Such habits do not add up to a dialect in the accepted sense, nor are they, in an age of quick communication, the radio and so forth, the peculiar mark of any one locality.

It is not implied that the habits here isolated are bad habits or that the speech they result in is incorrect; on the contrary, the author's aim is to investigate and record what is standard.

Probably the thing that strikes most of us foreigners is that spoken Persian stays so close to the written form. The present investigation confirms this. It is mostly a matter of eliding exposed vowels and of dropping a consonant, usually a final consonant in a word where its presence imposes an effort or is felt to interrupt the flow of a sentence as a stone might resist a stream. Under Peysikov's guidance *mā ham* slips into *mām; rāst* becomes *rās;* and *miguyim* is telescoped into *migim*. 'We too speak truth' is then: Mām rās migim. This omission of the final dental is very common, producing '*geref*' for 'he took', '*raf*' for 'he went', and explaining the almost obligatory 'mishe' for mishavad (is). 'The car drove off and didn't return' is thus: Mashin raf o barnagash: and when Hasani went on and on till he came to the river, it is: " Hasani raf, raf tā umad kenāre rutkhune."

India

A few minutes ago we were turning up Persia in the *Chrestomathy on Modern History, Vol. I, 1640-1815*. Now we look up India. India gets some 80 pages compiled by L. B. Alayev and K. Z. Ashrafyan. The Section consists of three Chapters headed: India until the English Conquest; The English Conquest; India the Colony.

The curtain rises on the stagnation of Indian society as observed under the lens of Marx and Engels. These two go on for four pages but are beaten by Ellis, the Collector of Madras at the close of the eighteenth century, who speaks for five. Bernier, W. Logan, Moreland, Tavernier follow in rapid succession; after which the reader is invited to pause in the company of Khwafi Khan (whom some will remember from their Elliot and Dowson). Khwafi Khan wrote his *Muntakhab al-lubab* in Persian and the Russians are here dipping into the orignal.

In chapter two, Berriedale Keith (Speeches and Documents) and C. U. Aitchison (Treaties, Engagements and Sanads) takes complete charge. In chapter three Marx and Engels reappear but only for so long as to even the score with Ellis. They then withdraw for good and make way for: W. W. Hunter (Rural Bengal, 1868), A. D. Campbell (On Land Revenue, 1832), Edmund Burke (Works and Speeches), F. Buchanan (Journey from Madras, 1807), R. Muir (The Making of British India), and two Indian writers of the present day, N. K. Sinha (The Economic History of Bengal, 1956) and A. C. Banerjee (Indian Constitutional Documents, 1948).

India certainly cannot complain of her treatment.

Soviet writing on Asia fights shy of any discussion of the problem of population in terms of an explosion. Where the word *perenaseleniye* (overpopulation) occurs, this seems invariably to be with the narrower meaning of that "relative overpopulation" by which, according to Marxist theory, agriculture under a capitalist system must expect to be bedevilled. *Agrarian Overpopulation* (Agrarnoye perenaseleniye. Publishing House of Social-Economic Literature, Moscow, 1963, pp. 298, 5,000 copies) by L. Afanas'yev, deals with the operation of this law as manifested (*a*) in underdeveloped areas: South and South-east Asia (mainly India); and (*b*) in highly developed capitalist societies: U.S.A. and Europe.

In (*a*) the lesson is that whereas up to 70 per cent. of the given populace will have to subsist on the proceeds of agriculture, "the production of the main items of agricultural produce reckoned per head of the population will be very far from adequate". The author disputes the bourgeois argument that the fragmentation of holdings in India is in consequence of the laws on inheritance which allot equal shares to all the heirs. In actual fact (he maintains) fragmentation is implicit in the economic environment: "The impossibility of finding a use for its manpower in the towns, and the absence of work for hire in other spheres, combine to compel village youth to earn its livelihood by the forms of production traditional to its fathers, and to settle on their soil."

Before taking leave of India there is just room to notice an unpretentious paperback, *Ancient Indian Literature* (Drevneindiyskaya Literatura. Oriental Publishing House, Moscow, 1963, pp. 201, 1,500 copies) from the practised pen of I. D. Serebryakov. The touch is light, the learning unostentatious, the debt to Keith, Winternitz and S. K. De acknowledged with a becoming grace. Because this is not for the Indianists, really, but a wider readership, one looks twice at the *tirage* and wonders why it is no more than fifteen hundred.

II. The Soviet Muslim Republics

General

As a mere matter of book production *The Economic Ties of Russia with Central Asia from the "forties" to the "sixties" of the nineteenth Century* (Economicheskiye Svyazi Rossii so Snedney Aziyey 40-60-ye gody XIX veka. Published by the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 1963, pp. 226, 1,500 copies) by M. K. Rozhkova, is the best of the batch which remains to be sampled. Not only, however for that reason is it to be preferred to many of the others. One would not, goodness knows, wish to find oneself in the shoes of an academic historian in the Soviet Union in 1964, but if so awful a metamorphosis were to take place one would plead to be allowed to specialize in the study of the Turkestan of one hundred years ago. It is not simply that the Russians are alone in having access to the material: it is the feeling that in this particular field of enquiry the technical historian would suffer much less interference than usual and might with any luck be left alone to try to show what was established by the evidence. Russia's forward move to a natural barrier in Central Asia is officially held to have coincided with her civilizing mission, and the Soviet attitude is to that extent one of poise not of heat towards imperialist adventure in this theatre.

Rozhkova's work is a good instance of such technical writing. In her preface she promises that her narrative "will be based on the concrete data" and she keeps to her word. The bibliography is extensive, the references to unpublished archives are even more so. Considerable use has been made of N. A. Khalfin's now standard *Policy of Russia in Central Asia* (of which an abridgment will shortly be brought out by the Central Asian Research Centre), and it is to praise Rozhkova to say that her book is of the same quality of performance.

The same balanced objectivity in recording Tsarist behaviour comes out in a volume called *The Appropriation of the Hungry Steppe* (Osvoyeniye Golodnoy Stepi. Agricultural Literature Publishing House, Moscow, 1963, pp. 136, 2,500 copies) consisting of nine chapters by various hands. Copiously illustrated with fairly good photographs and unburdened by footnotes or any of the paraphernalia of academic scholarship, this is for the casual reader. The mastery of this inhospitable tract which is shared among Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tadzhikistan, and its transformation from an arid waste into a mighty region of cotton cultivation, are of the stuff on which any propaganda department would be

happy to fasten. It is therefore understandable that as the panorama unwinds from 1869 until the present day the comment should lose in objectivity and concern itself increasingly with the congratulatory exchanges between the metropolitan and the republican authorities or between these and the committee chairmen, the " brigadiers " and so forth, out in the field.

But the point worth making is that in explaining to their readers how " the echelons of white gold have been enabled to go forward from day to day " these writers tell of a continuity in endeavour that harks back to the Empire. There were giants in the earth in those days, to judge by the tribute here paid to the early pioneers. Engineer N. Ul'yanov, of General Kaufman's staff, " not only thoroughly explored the area and drew up the first and highly interesting project for its irrigation, but was the popularizer and the propagandist of an undertaking which he tackled with all the fire of the genuine enthusiast ". And years later " it was on the initiative and under the personal sponsorship of a kinsman of the Tsar, Grand Duke Nikolay Konstantinovich, that the digging of a new canal, the Bukhar-Aryk, was accomplished."

Kirgizia

In suggesting, as we have been, that there are moments when Soviet writing is content to abide by the historical evidence we have never meant to disguise the fact that these moments are the exception. We have been proving a rule, and to that rule we now return.

This is that history does not queen it in her own right but capitulates to the outside authority of the party. The XX, XXI, and XXII Party Congresses have been particularly disturbing because they delivered what is described as a bump, shove or jolt (*tolchok*) which woke the professionals up to fresh exertions " in the domain of the study of all periods of history ". With effect from the date of the XX Congress, it was declared, a new stage had opened in the development of Soviet historical science which called for unprecedented creative activity on the part of its practitioners. And to this announcement the captive world of scholarship bowed, and made reply: " The wisdom (*mudrost'*) of the leadership of the Communist Party is a guarantee of the new and increasingly important successes of Soviet historical research."

The History of Kirgizia. Vol I, which advertised itself as a systematic exposition of the historical process in Kirgizia from ancient times until the Great October socialist revolution, came out in 1956. It was a massive survey, the fruit of the labour of Kirgiz scholars in collaboration with those of the Central institutes, and it was signalled as a big event in the cultural life of the Republic. But the Party's interpretation of the march of the ages was on the eve of a change.

In *The History of Kirgizia. Vol I* (Istoriya Kirgizii. Tom I, Kirgiz State Publishing House, Frunze, 1963, pp. 592, 10,000 copies) the whole thing has been done again. Here are the words in which the team of authors clothes its instructions to prepare a revised edition:

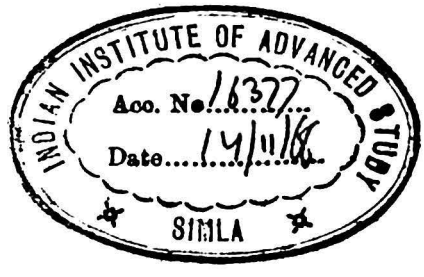
" In the resolutions of the (XX, XXI and XXII) Congresses many positions of Marxist-Leninist theory on the laws of the development

(*razvitiye*) of society, on the different methods of the transition to socialism of individual peoples, on the peaceful coexistence of States exhibiting a variety of social-economic systems, on the averting of wars in the contemporary epoch, have received creative development (*razvitiye* again). . . .

In the resolutions of the XXII Congress primary and noble tasks are set in front of scholars in the field of the social sciences: to eliminate utterly the harmful consequences of the cult of personality in history; to battle against schematization and dogmatism, against the manifestations of a bourgeois ideology and of survivals of the past in people's consciousness; and vigorously to implement the upbringing of man in the new communist society."

These are woolly phrases, coming from a trained body of specialists, but they are not of course invented for this occasion. They are part of the official hand-out which covered the doctoring of the stereotype, as one era of Russian Communism melted into another.

HUBERT EVANS


INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY
Acc. No. 16377
Date 14/11/66
SIMLA