

town" of my present quest had to be reached from where the river dies away in the sand. Its course proved almost as winding as that of the Keriya Darya, but its volume far smaller. Just like the river of Keriya, the Niya stream gathers water from springs and marshes a short distance below the town. This is, of course, the water that has been absorbed higher up by irrigation channels, and comes again to the surface lower down. Very soon after losing sight of the cultivated area we were in a broad belt of jungle land covered with luxuriant Kumush and forest vegetation. The sands receded to more than two miles from the left river-bank, and nearly as much from the right. The route, owing to the large number of pilgrims who annually frequent Imam Jafar's Mazar in the autumn, had the well-trodden look of a high-road. On the first day it touched again and again the bank of the stream, now a glittering sheet of ice. Its breadth was there usually 30-35 yards, its depth as far as I could ascertain from holes that had been cut into the thick ice, nowhere more than about 3 feet. As the banks were only about 2-3 feet above the surface of the ice, it is probable that during the time of the melting snows a good deal of overflow must occur. This may account for the luxuriance of the jungle growth that distinguishes the riverine belt. The grazing-grounds of the Niya shepherds begin, therefore, close below the little oasis, and evidently maintain a considerable number of flocks. They are said to be divided among ten shepherd stations, and all belong to 'Bais' of Niya.

The thought that all this fertile stretch of ground might well be brought under cultivation had occupied me as I rode along. It was, therefore, a pleasant sight to me when a little below Nagara-khana, the shepherd's hut where my first night's camp had been pitched, I came upon the head of a canal begun only two years previously under the Amban's orders. From this point, which is about nineteen miles distant from Niya Bazar, the fertile belt of soil widened considerably, and the ridges of the desert sand disappeared from view. The river winds away on the eastern side, while the route led through the central part of what looked like a small tract of