

People of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: An Historical Perspective

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Abstract

The present paper is thoroughly devoted to the history and origin of the people living in the present day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. A comprehensive analysis has been embodied inside it by presenting a variety of arguments that focuses upon the ethnic and tribal structure of the people inhabited in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since time immemorial. All these arguments have been taken either from primary source materials or from the monumental works of renowned scholars and historians having firm standing in their respective academic fields across the board. It also highlights the significance of Central Asia for the whole South Asian region in general and for the present day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in particular. The connection of the people of across the border and their cultural, linguistic and socio-economic relationship cannot be ignored even in this digital era. An impartial and unbiased approach has been adopted to analyse different notions and ideas regarding the human population living the aforesaid province.

Keywords:

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, People, Ethnicity, Tribes, Culture, History

Historical Backdrop

In ancient period there was no other source to identify various races till the Āryans confronted the indigenous people and in such a collision one race in enmity portrayed the other race in bad words. While saturated with self-praise, they despised the natives, their culture and religion. For natives the Āryans used two similar sounding words i.e. *Dasyus* and *Dāsas*. *Dāsa* and *Dasyu* have been defined in many ways by scholars of different aptitudes and options. Singhal says, “if *Dāsa* and *Dasyu* are derived from *Das*, in the sense of “lay waste” as Whitney suggests the original meaning would have been devastator, ravager and thus also equated with enemy. Muslim gypsies of Balkans call Christian gypsies *Das*” (Singhal, 1966, 39). But there are many other connotations of the word *Dasyu*. Meyer and Hillebrandt identified the *Dasyus* with Dahae, a tribe nearly akin to the Iranian in Kirghiz Turkman steppe which extends from Caspian sea beyond Jaxartes now Syr Daryā (Prakash, 1976, 94-116). The *Dāsa* is mentioned alongwith *Dasyu* signifying the same people. Buddha Prakash says this word has entered into Finno-ugrian languages as a result of the contact of their speakers with Indo-Iranian groups. In Vogel’s opinion belonging to this group the word *Dāsa* has become *Tas* meaning ‘stranger’ (Burrow, 1955, 35). Finally we come to the conclusion that the words *Dasyu* and *Dāsa* have been defined as enemy, stranger and alien (Teepu, 2008, 18).

These characteristics are further supported by the passages in the *Rigveda*, which clearly defined *Dasyus* as black skinned, lawless, noseless, fiend-voiced and phallus worshippers. In Vedas, *Dāsas* are considered to be less hostile than *Dasyus*. In any case *Dāsas* and *Dasyus* were the aboriginal inhabitants of Pakistan at the time of Āryan

arrival. The actual term Dravidian was first employed by Robert A. Caldwell, who introduced the Sanskrit word *Dravida* (which in a seventh century text obviously implied *Tāmil*) into his fine work, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages* (1856). Here we must distinguish between Dravidian Language and Dravidian race as some scholars seem to have used them as identical phenomena. Max Muller protested against this unholy alliance of the two sciences of ethnology and philology. It will be wrong to ascertain that, a group of people speaking Dravidian language also belongs to Dravidian race, like *Brāhui* whose language belongs to Dravidian group of languages but they themselves belong to Turko-Iranian origin. To be more specific, H. H. Risley defines Dravidians in these words, “In typical specimens the stature is short or below mean; the complexion very dark approaching black; hair plentiful with an occasional tendency to curl; eyes dark; head long; nose very broad, sometimes depressed at the root, but not so as to make the face appear flat.” (Risley, 1908, 33).

Some ethnologists are of the view that Dravidian group of anthropological types came into being due to mixing of the Negro-Australoid type with Europoid in Mesolithic period. Later on we find many sub-types like, *Scytho-Dravidian* and *Āryo-Dravidian* which developed in Pakistan. There is another view about inhabitants of Indus valley which perceives that “the true Mediterranean or European type, taller and fairer than palaeo-Mediterranean occurs in the Panjāb and upper Gangetic valley and is supposed to represent the civilized pre-Āryan Dravidian people of Northern India.” (Chatterji, 1988, 145). However, there is a general consensus among the ethnologists, also supported by

the skeletons found in Harappa and Mohenjodaro that the people of Indus valley were of the Proto-Australoid and Mediterranean races mixed with Alpine and Mongoloids.

The Advent of Āryans

The coming of the Āryans in waves after waves during the second millennium BC changed the history of Pakistan. The Indus valley culture, which was, perhaps, dying its natural death, only needed a big push to be replaced by the Vedic culture. The people who brought it, though less civilised, but more aggressive to possess the vast expanses of Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, were the Āryans. As already discussed, the confrontation between indigenous people and the Āryans created a situation where opportunities for the two people for elimination or assimilation ran parallel. The later history tells us that after much bloodshed they learned to live together.

Ethnologists, etymologists and anthropologists are still very active in finding the meaning of the word Ārya alongwith the origin of the Āryan, their homeland and their language. Like *Dasyu* it has many meanings. Every definition seems to be as meaningful as the previous one. It seems that etymologists are engaged in the game of guessing about the origins of this word. For example, Buddha Prakash says, “the word *ārya* is derived from the root, ‘r’ meaning to move. It therefore signifies a nomad or traveller. Some scholars hold that this term denotes a linguistic unit only” (Prakash, 1970, 21).

At another place it is mentioned that it is derived from the Sanskrit root *ri-ar*, to plough, coming quite closer to the Latin word *aratrum*, a plough, and area and open space. On this theory, Will Durant comments, “the word *aryan* originally meant not nobleman but peasant” (Durant, 1954, 227). In Brahmanical literature the word *ārya* is used as a race which came into the Panjāb from beyond the borders of India.

L. M. Joshi and Fauja Singh say, “in old Pali texts the word *arya* or *ariya* (variants are *ayya* and *ayira*) is used at least in three meanings, occasionally in racial sense, an Āryan opposed to non-Āryan, in social sense an Āryan or a noble by birth as distinguished from a *Dāsa* or slave and in moral sense, good, righteous, sublime” (Joshi & Singh, 1977, 11). The Nazis of Germany used the word in notorious ethnological sense, a Nordic or Caucasian of non-Jewish descent.

Margaret and James Stutley say, “Its early significance is retained in the Welsh *ar-glwydd* (lord or overlord), meaning ‘before’, ‘above’, implying precedence; *glwydd* meaning lord especially of land and implicitly of cattle, a significance apparent in the Welsh translation of the Old Testament and in the hereditary title of Welsh nobility” (Margaret & Stutley, 1977, 20). But Russian writers paint a different picture. According to Gankovsky, the most probable is the interpretation suggested by R. Thieme: *Ari* — a stranger, newcomer, foreigner, alien; from *ari* — Ārya — relating to newcomer benevolent to new comers, hospitable; hence *arya* (Āryan) meant originally ‘hospitable’ (Gankovsky, 1971, 46). M. Mayhofer and V. I. Abaev have supported R. Thieme's interpretation and adduced an additional argument based on the data of other Indo-European languages in favour of his conclusions.

Though it is an unending debate, most scholars agree that Āryans were a people who came to Pakistan through North-Western passes sometimes around the 2nd millennium BC; and continued their movement eastward. But now another debate about their original homeland starts and gradually they have reached the same conclusion except those who still think that the original homeland of the Āryans was Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. This conclusion is contrary to what the *Rigveda* says about conflict

between the Āryans and *Dasyus* and settlement of the Āryans in the land of Sapta-Sindhu.

Any deviation from such a mood seems to be unrealistic and stretching a wrong argument too far. The Āryan connections with Asia Minor and North Persia has been proved through many evidences. Winckler's notable discovery in 1906 at Boghaz-köi, the old Hittite capital in Asia Minor, of a cuneiform inscription (1400 BC) containing names of Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa and Nāsatya was interpreted as a landmark of the Āryan advance eastward. The names of the same gods we find in the *Rigveda*.

The question of the Āryan homeland did not get any support from archaeological and anthropological evidence. Most of the arguments have been built on the linguistic evidence only. It was in 1890 that Otto Schrader put forward the influential suggestion that the appropriate homeland for the Proto-Indo-European might be the South Russian Steppes from the Carpathians to Central Asia, where nomad pastoralism was known to have been practised.

In my view the best description of the Āryan pastoralism has been presented by Fairservis, “The story has been repeated for millennia, sung in temples, chanted in halls told by word and action of how a warrior people came out of the vastness of minor Asia through the passes of the Northwest to fall upon the fortified cities of India and to conquer; riding horse drawn chariots, driving herds of cattle, sheep and goat worshipping cosmic deities like Indra of the thunder and Agni of the fire, sacrificing, quarrelling, gambling, drinking, singing, dancing — the Rigveda account of the Āryan tribes is one of the oldest epics in the world” (Fairservis, 1975, 345).

There are several opinions, mostly, conjectural, about the original homeland of the Āryans, but the most acceptable, though also based on sound hypothetical ground, is the view which locates them in the steppes of South Russia. This view has been further supported by Marija Gimbutas of the University of California at Los Angeles, who since 1970 has published a series of papers in which she locates the Indo-European homeland in the steppes of South Russia very much as Childe did earlier. Based on archaeological evidence she calls it Kurgān culture (referring to prehistoric burial mounds used in this area).

Ethnologically the Āryan belongs to Europeoid race and are grouped in Nordic type. S. K. Chatterji says, “Nordic elements are strong in parts of N.W.F.P. particularly along the upper reaches of the Indus along its tributaries — the Swāt, the Panjkora, the Kunaṛ (Prakash, 1976, 94-116). and Chitrāl river and in the South of the Hindū Kush range and the Panjāb. The original Nordic type is supposed to have been tall, fair skinned, yellow or golden haired and blue eyed” (Bridget & Alchin, 1982, 187). But he admits that owing to miscegenation and climatic conditions the complexion of the body and colour of the hair and eye have been modified or eliminated by natural selection to light-brown or brown and to black (for the hair and eye). Nesturkh defines Europeoid great race (Āryans) in these words:

“The colour of the skin varies from light to dark, even brown, with reddish or pinkish tones on the face; The hair on the head is soft and wavy (or straight) and varying the colour from light to dark; The tertiary hair on the body shows strong or medium development and that of the face is often highly developed; The forehead is straight or slightly sloping”(Nesturkh, 1966, 23).

People of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: An Historical Overview

Like all other nationalities, the origin of the Pukhtūns is shrouded in mystery. The problem of the origin of Pukhtūns or Pushtūns is approached in two ways, i.e., through Pukhtūn folklore and the historical method. The tradition takes them back to the pre-Islamic days and they end up with the Jewish ancestry, though there is a strong hatred in them for the Jews. The tradition as mentioned by Caroe and others is mostly based on two books entitled; *Makhzan-i Afghāni* written by Nematullah and *Khulāsat al-Ansāb*. The Afghān historiographers mention that Saul (or Tālūt) had a son named Irmia (Jeremiah) who again had a son, Afghāna, who was brought up by David. As the tradition goes some of the Afghāns went to Mecca and to Ghūr (Hazārājāt in Afghānistān) and settled there. In Ghur there was a man, Qais, who was invited to Mecca and met Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and was blessed by him. He was renamed as ‘Abd ar-Rashīd. He had three sons named Sarban, Batan and Ghurghusht. From these three sons other tribes are traced. H. W. Bellew gives a detailed account in these words:

The Afghāns Proper — the Bani Israil, as they call themselves in special distinction to all other divisions of the nation — class themselves as the descendants of Saraban through his two sons, Sharjyun and Khrishyun. From Sharjyun there sprung five clans, the principal of which is called Sheorani. From Khrishyun there sprung three clans, namely, Kand, Zamand and Kansi. The Kand was divided into the Khakhi and Ghori and included the Mandanr and Yusufzai clans. They are all now settled in the Peshawar valley (Bellew, 1880, 19)

The above mentioned tradition has no substantial argument to prove the origin of the Pukhtūn in the Jewish tradition. There is no historical evidence to prove this story. It

is all hypothetical and there are many historical errors. Olaf Caroe has refuted the tradition historically while quoting Muslim sources. He says, “Even the story of the early conversion of Qais and his companions can be disproved, we shall see, from reliable Muslim sources, including the traveller al-Bīrūnī and the courtier al-‘Utbī, both writing in the time of Maḥmūd of Ghazna early in the eleventh century AD. These accounts establish that, four centuries later than the time of Qais, the province of Kābul had not been Islamized, and this was only achieved under the Ghaznavids. The Hindū (correctly Oḍi) Śahi kingdom of Jayapāla extended almost to Kābul, and Maḥmūd had to fight against infidel Afghāns of the Sulaiman mountains”. Even later than this, in the second battle of Tarāin (AD 1192) between Mu‘iz ad-Dīn Muḥammad Ghūri bin Sām and Pṛithvirāja, the Hindū ruler, there were Afghāns fighting on both sides (Caroe, 1957, 25).

The historical approach is equally shaky. It does not tell us about the origin of Pukhtūns but only verifies their existence in ancient period. The follow up is not equally convincing and due to the paucity of information we do not come to a sound conclusion. Herodotus also mentions about the people who lived in the north. I quote two passages:

There are other Indians further north round the city of Caspatyrus and in the country of Pactyica, who in their mode of life resemble the Bactrians. (Herodotus: The Histories III. 102)

The greater part of Asia was discovered by Darius. He wanted to find out where the Indus joins the sea — The Indus is the only river other than Nile where crocodiles are found — and for this purpose sent off an expedition down the river a number of men whose word he could trust led by a Caryandian named Scylax.

The expedition sailed from Caspatyrus in the district of Pactyica. (Herodotus: The Histories IV. 44)

The city of Kaspaturus (Caspatyrus) as mentioned by Herodotus was identified with Peshawar by Olaf Caroe. Before proceeding further and locating the origin of Pukhtūn or Pushtun, it seems pertinent to mention Herodotus once again:

The nations above mentioned use cavalry, but for this expedition only the following provided it: first the Persians — armed in the same way as their infantry, except that some of them wore devices of hammered bronze or iron on their heads. Secondly, a nomad tribe called Sagartians, a people who speak Persian and dress in a manner half Persian, half Pactyan; these furnished a contingent of 8000 strong. (Herodotus. 'The Histories' Book 7, 85)

Most of the scholars accept similarity of Paktuikē or Pactyan with modern Pukhtūn but on the contrary as mentioned by Caroe, Professor Bailey of Cambridge and Morgenstierne of Oslo rejected this similarity on purely philological grounds, only depending upon and paying much attention to the pronunciation. Later on, it was proved that their conclusions are not founded on solid grounds. Herodotus also mentioned four nations inhabiting the country of Paktuikē or Gandhāra i.e., Gandari, Aparutai, Sattagudai and Dadicae. The Aparutai are identified even by Grierson and Stein with the Afrīdīs. The Afridis themselves pronounce it as Aparidai. Bellew identified Sattagudai with Khattaks and Dadikae with nearly extinct tribe of Dadi, which dwelt amongst the Kākaṛ. He says that it is curious to find these very nations now, after a lapse of more than two thousand years, retaining the identical names and the same positions as those assigned to

them by the ancient Greek author, who is justly styled the “Father of History” (Bellew, 1880, 33). We close this discussion with the following passage of Bellew:

In Western Afghānistan, the harsh (kh) is changed into the soft (sh) and the Pukhtun becomes Pushtun, Pukhtu becomes Pushtu, and so on. By some Pukhtun tribes — the Afridi notably — Pukhtun, Pukhtu, &c, are pronounced Pakhtūn, Pakhtu, &c, and this brings the words near to the Pakhtues of Herodotus. In short the Pakhtūn or Pukhtu of today, we may take it, is identical in race and position with the Pactiyan of the Greek historian (Nesturkh, 1966, 26).

After Alexander the remnants of the Greek civilization were quickly taken over by Hindū turned Buddhist Mauryan culture which gave birth to the Graeco-Buddhist culture known as Gandhāra. The Macedonian influence on ethnological structure was minimal as compared to the Central Asian, which left deep marks on the population of Pakistan in the 1st millennium BC. The foundation of various ethnic and tribal groups seen today, was laid during that period. As mentioned by Spain, for the next thousand years there is little history beyond the lists of Central Asian tribes —the Sakas, the Parthians, the Yueh-chis and White Huns or Ephthalites who poured down upon the frontiers.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Central Asian Tribal Connection

It is not possible to comprehend the race movement and ethnological structure of NWFP without mentioning the role played by the tribes who came from Central Asia and contributed significantly in shaping the its ethnology, language and culture.

In this context, the most prominent people were the Sakas who intruded not only in the NWFP but in the Panjāb and in other provinces of Pakistan and India. Herodotus again comes to our rescue and locates them in Xerxes army in these words:

The Sacae (a Scythian people) wore trousers and tall pointed hats upright on their heads and were armed with bows of their country, daggers and sagaris or battle axes. "Sacae" is the name the Persians give to all Scythian tribes: these were Amyrgian Scythians (Herodotus, 1972, 64).

It is beyond doubt that during the latter half of the first millennium BC the Persians appointed both the Sakas and the Parthians as governors or *satraps* of their provinces in the areas now included in N.W.F.P. The Achaemenian inscriptions, both of Darius and Xerxes, testify to the existence of Amurgians or Amyrgians who dwelt on Amu Daryā. Risley has given a brief history of the Sakas collected from Chinese annals which tells us how the Sse (Sakas) were originally located in Southern China and occupied Sogdiana and Transoxiana at the time of the establishment of the Graeco-Bactrian rule. Dislodged from these regions by the Yueh-chis who had themselves been put to flight by the Huns, the Sakas invaded Bactria, and after they were driven out of Bactria they finally settled in the country called after them, Sakastān comprising Segistān, Arachosia and Drangiana. A body of the Sakas then immigrated eastward and founded a kingdom in the western portion of Panjāb. It is generally assumed that the Sakas were fair skinned Caucasians. According to some writers, they were nomadic pastoral people who may have originated beyond either the Aral and the Caspian lakes. The Chinese knew them as Se, the Persians as the Sakas and the Greek and Roman as Sacae, but they have also been termed as Scythians. Margaret and Stutley believe that in

the course of their expansion they had acquired Kapiśa in Afghānistān, Taxila in Western Panjāb, Ujjain in Mālwā and Nāsik in upper Deccan over which they ruled for three hundred years. Among the towns they developed was Sākala, modern Sialkot. It was a Saka ruler, Chandravarman, who in 325 AD erected the famous iron pillar regarded as a masterpiece of engineering since re-erected at Mehruī (Delhi). Caroe, following and quoting Morgenstierne reaches the conclusion that the Sakas had not only influenced the ethnological structure or people of NWFP but they also had significant role in determining the language. Olaf Caroe further says that while “Pakhtu and Pashtu” owe much to the Sakas, it has been argued that there may well be earlier East Iranian influence in its rootstock (Caroe, 1957, 67). Przyluski has pointed out that the name of the capital of the Madras, Sākala, and that of the region between the Rāvī and Chenāb, Sākaladvīpa, are based on the word Saka and indicative of the Saka invasion.

The origin of Yueh-chis, Sakas, Kushans, Chionites — Ephthalites or the White Huns is so obscure that sometimes it becomes almost difficult to differentiate among the various tribes hailing from Central Asia. The ethnic mixing is so intricate that except for Ephthalites all other tribes seem to have originated from the same stock.

S. Konow identifies the Yueh-chis with Massagetae, regarding them as the union of East-Iranian tribes. He contends that the ethnic name Ta Yueh-chi (great Yueh-chi) in the Chinese chronicles and Massagetae in the ancient authors descends from a single origin as being the rendering of the ethnic name, Great Sakas (S. Konow, “On the nationalities of the Kushāna”) (Gankovsky, 1971, 51). S. M. Latif in the *History of the Panjāb* discusses the settlement of Scythians in Panjāb. He confirms that a portion of the settlers, the descendants of Massagetae, were called the Getes, from whom sprang the

modern Jats. (Latif, 1997, 57). Olaf Caroe, while contradicting the view that Kushāns had any affinity with Huns or Turks, supports the view of Ghirshman and Mcgovern and holds them to be yet another horde of Scythians and, therefore, akin both to the Sakas and the Parthians. They are known to Chinese records as the Yueh-chi, of whom the Guei-Shang or Kushān were the leading clan. The Kushāns were overthrown by the Ephthalites or Chionites who took over northwestern part of Pakistan in fifth century AD.

Conclusion

In the above discussion, an effort is made to summarise the debate about the origin of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Pashtun (also spelled Pushtun, Pakhtun, Pashtoon, Pathan) are a people who live in south-eastern Afghanistan and the north-western province of Pakistan. They are one of the largest ethnic groups in Afghanistan. There is no true written history of the Pashtun in their own land. Pashtun are traditionally pastoral nomads (herders who move frequently to find grazing land) with a strong tribal organization. Each tribe is divided into clans, sub-clans, and patriarchal families. Pashtun have lived for centuries between Khurasan and the Indian subcontinent, at the crossroads of great civilizations. However, it is necessary to know about the racial structure and formation of racial groups in the present day Pakistan. Most of the tribes of that era have been identified with the major portions of the population now living in Pakistan.

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