

AN ANALYSIS OF THE DIFFERENT THEORIES ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF THE PASHTOONS

History

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ABSTRACT

The Pashtoons is an ancient race, nation or tribe on this earth having its own identity, specific values, norms and traditions and a peculiar charm since thousands of years. To trace the origin of the Pashtoons various theories have been presented by renowned scholars in different periods. In these theories, the theory of Israelies and the theory of Arian Tribes became very hot and famous for academic discussions among the historians and researchers.

In this paper along with other miscellaneous theories, these two famous theories have been discussed with references and evidences. At the end the conclusion has been given and the most acceptable theory has been pointed out.

INTRODUCTION

The topic is under discussion since very long that who are the Pashtoons and what is the origin of the Pashtoons? To trace to origin of the pashtoons various theories have been presented by some eminent scholars, researchers, historian and linguist. But this question has not been answered yet scientifically with proved evidences. However some theories came under discussion in this respect. In these the most popular theories are as under

1. The Pashtoons are from semitic races and belong to the Israelies.
2. The Pashtoons are the descendents of Qatora, the wife of Hazrat Ibrahim (P.B.U.H).
3. The Pashtoons are basically from Greek races.
4. The Pashtoons are from Arian tribes.

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Some other theories have also been presented and analyzed but the following two theories became most popular and always remain under discussions of researchers in different times.

1. the theories of Bani-Israelis
2. the theories of Arians

In this discussion we will try to analyze these two major theories and to trace the most acceptable theory about the origin of the Pashtoons.

The Theory of Bani Israelis

The first famous and old theory about the genealogy of the Pashtoons is that they are Bani Israel. We find this theory for the first time in Makhzan-e-Afghani written by Niamat Ullah Harvi, a scholar at the court of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. He has completed his research about 1612 A.D. Most of the other historians and writers in their books and writings followed this theory, which was presented by Niamat Ullah Harvi. In these historians and writers the most popular Pashtoon writer Afzal Khan Khattak, the grandson of Khushal Khan Khattak in his Pashto book Taareekh-e-Murrassa, and Hafiz Rahmat Khan in his history book, containing the genealogies of the Pashtoons, Khulaasat-ul-Ansaab, followed and accepted this theory without any analysis and criticism and made this theory as the base and fundamental evidence of their writings. Famous orientalist and historian Olaf Caroe repeats the story in his book *the Pathans*. In the words of Olaf Caroe.

"The Afghan historiographers maintain that Saul had a son named Irmia (Jeremiah) who again had a son named Afghana, neither of course known to the Hebrew Scriptures. Irmia, dying about the time of Saul's death, his son Afghana was brought up by David, and in due course in Solomon's reign, was promoted to the chief command of the army. There follows a gap of some four centuries to the time of the captivity. Since Bakhtunnasar is mentioned, one must presume that the reference is to the second captivity early in the sixth century B.C, that of Judah from Jerusalem, and not the first captivity over one hundred years earlier, that of Israel by Shalmaneser the Assyrian, from Samaria, If this is so, it rules out any suggestion, often made, that the Bani Israel, the sons of Afghana, are in any way connected with the lost ten tribes. Nevertheless the theory of the ten tribes has had its notable supporters. In its aid it was suggested, originally by Sir,

William Jones, pioneer of oriental studies in Warren Hastings, time that the Afghans are the lost ten tribes of Israel mentioned by the prophet Esdras as having escaped from captivity and taken refuge in the country of Arsarath, supposed by that elegant scholar as identical with the modern Hazarajat, the Ghor of the Afghan historians. But the reference in the afghan chronicles to Nebuchadnezzar makes nonsense of any identification with the ten tribes. The truth is that Muslims commentators of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not well up in the history of the Hebrews. They make no distinction between Israel and Judah, and do not seem even to be aware that there were two captivities." (**Caroe:1958:5**)

Olaf Caroe also quotes Raverty who was an excellent scholar of Pashto literature as well as the history of the Pashtoons. Caroe admitted him as the last pleader of this theory in English writers. He narrates about the concept of Roverty as:-

"The last pleader for the Bani Israel tradition in English is the redoubtable Raverty. Referring to Cyrus, the first of the Persian Achaemenids, he notes that it was customary for the great King to transport a whole tribe, and sometimes even a whole nation, from one country to another. The Jews were even a stiff-necked race, and he asks form credence to the possibility that the most troublesome among them had been moved to the thinly peopled satrapies of the Persian Empire where they would be too far away to give trouble. It is not possible he asks, that those Jew who could make their escape might have fled eastward, preferring a wandering life in a mountainous country with independence to the grinding tyranny of Cyrus successors and their satraps? In facts there was no other direction in which they could have fled"(**Caroe:1958:6-7**)

Our scholars linked the historical background of this theory, related to *Hazrat Suleman, Saul, Talut, Armia and Barkhia and Afghana*, to *Hazrat Khalid Bin Walid* and *Qais Abdur-Rasheed*, who is considered as the old grandfather of Pashtoon tribes, Saraban, Ghorghashts, and Beetan. Sir Olaf Caroe writes about this historical background in the following words.

"The Afghan chroniclers would have it that Khalid Bin Walid, the most famous of the Prophet's Ansar (companions) and the first great Arab conqueror, belonged to the tribe of the descendants of Afghana resident near Mecca. (All other Muslims tradition states him to have been an Arab of the Makhsum family of the prophet's tribe of Quraish.) On conversion to Islam, while the Prophet was still alive and before Khalid's conquest of Syria and Iraq, Khalid either proceeded in person, or sent a letter, to his kinsmen of the Bani Israel settled in Ghor, to bring them tidings of the new faith and an invitation to join the Prophet's standard there resulted a deputation of a number of representatives of the Afghans of Gohar, led by one Qais, which proceeded to meet the prophet at Medina. This Qais is said to be descended from Saul in the thirty-seventh generation, an under-generous allowance for a period of some seventeen hundred years. This Qais and his comrades then waged war most gallantly on the Prophet's behalf. The chronicle proceeds:

The Prophet lavished all sorts of blessing upon them; and having ascertained the name of each individual, and remarked that Qais was a Hebrew name, whereas they themselves were Arabs, he gave Qais the name of Abdur Rashid and observed further to the rest that, they being the posterity of Malik Talut, it was quite proper and just that they should be called Malik likewise... and the prophet predicted that God would make the issue of Qais so numerous that they would outvie all other people, that their attachment to the faith would in strength be like the wood upon which they lay the keel when constructing a ship which seamen call Pathan; on this account he conferred upon Abdur Rashid the title of Pathan also." (**Caroe:1958:7-8**)

Renowned historian and researcher Sayyed Bahadur Shah Zaffar Kakakhel also narrated this background in his Pashto book *Pukhtana da Tareekh pa Rana kay* (The Pashtoons in the perspective of history). He explained the story of Qais Abdur Rasheed and also criticized the theories of Bani-Israel at the end. Bahadur Shah Zaffar explains that

"All the Pashtoons got entered into Islam. The Holy prophet Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) prayed for them and changed the name of their leader Qais into Abdur Rasheed. Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) gave him the title of Bathan. It means the leader of the boat of his

nation. Hazrat Khalid bin Walid married his daughter Sara Bibi with Abdur-Rasheed than Qais came back to his own area and in his area he started to preach Islam. He died in 41 Hijri at the age of 77 during a war. He had three sons, the eldest Saraban, the second Beetan, and the third Ghurghasht. These three being the ancestors of the various branches of the Pashtoons" (**Kakakhail: 1981:32-33**)

Criticism on this theory

As mentioned earlier that along with Bahadur Shah Zafar Kakakhel some other historians and writers presented this theory that Pashtoons are from Semitic races and they are Israelies. But a number of scholars rejected this theory with new evidences and authentic sources. First of all we must quote Sayyed Bahadur Shah Zafar Kakakhel who are of the opinion that

"There is no solid proof to accept this theory, even in Arabian history or in Islamic history"(**Kakakhail: 1981: 35**).

An another scholar Dr. Abdur-Raheem author of the Afghans in India, wrote about this theory

"The theory of the Semitic origin of the Afghan does not stand the serious analysis. The resemblances in features cannot be considered as providing scientific criterion for grouping different peoples into one race. The Sumerian resemble the Aryans in features through they are not considered to have any affiliation with Aryan people. The portraits of the koshan kings found their coin has the same type of feature but they are certainly neither Afghans nor Semitic" (**Abdur-Raheem: 1969: 43**)

Similarly the author of "History of Afghanistan" Sir Percy Cycks also criticized the theory of Bani Israel in the following words.

"A protest must here be made against the erroneus view that the Afghans are members of lost tribes of Israel, which various writers including Bellew and Holdich advocated. Actually this theory is of purely literary origin and is merely an example of the wide spread customs among Muslims of claiming descent from some personage mentioned in the Quran or some other sacred work. In the case of the Afghan they claim Malik Talat or king Savl their ancestor. Among the reasons advanced in support of this claim are noticably curved noses of the Afghan but this peculiarity is equally striking in the portraits of the koshan

monarch of the first century A.D who had no Hebrew blood in their veins." **(Percy: 1973:78)**

Renowned orientalist James.W. Spain quoted some other European scholars who had been discussed in their writings that Pashtoons are basically belonged to Semitic races. He narrates that

"The idea that the Pathans were descended from the nation of Israel was encouraged by their tight tribal structure, their stark code of behaviour, their strikingly Semitic features, their bearded patriarchal appearances, and their predilection for biblical names (acquired from the Holy Quran): Adam, Ibrahim, Musa, Daud, Suleiman, Yaqub, Yousaf, Esa, and the rest. It was a favourite subject of speculation by British soldiers, administrators, and missionaries, and persisted in memoirs and travel books well into the twentieth century.

The only trouble is that it was not true. I feel something of a coward saying this here in a book written half a world away from the Frontier, when I know that I would never have the courage to say it to a Pathan. Nevertheless, we must face the facts, although, happily, the facts about the Pathans are anything but prosaic. The myth of the Semitic origins of the Pathans was debunked more than a hundred years ago by Bernhard Dorn, Professor of Oriental Literature at the Russian University of Kharkov, in a book with the interesting title, A Chrestomathy of the Pashto or Afghan language, which was published by the Imperial Academy in Saint Petersburg in 1847. The most recent and comprehensive treatment of the subject appears in the Pathans by Sir Olaf Caroe, a former British governor of the North West Frontier Province " **(Spain:1972:28-29)**

James .W. Spain further says that in the connection of the Pashtoons to Semitic races, the tale of the Qais is not authentic. This story is based on mythical traditions. He wrote

"This is not to say that the genealogies should be ignored or taken lightly. They were first set down by Persian speaking chroniclers at the court of the Moghul emperors in the early part of the seventeenth century. The sophisticated Moghul historians, possibly impressed by the same outward signs of Semitic

connections that misled the British two hundred years later, apparently made up the descent of the border tribes from the mythical Qais and improvised a connection for Qais with Saul of Israel" (**Spain:1972: 29**)

In the same way English writer G.P Tate also argues that this so-called genealogy of the Pathans was compiled under the religious influence on the Pathans, which has no historical evidence. He writes in his book, the Kingdom of Afghanistan in the following words:-

"The origin of the tribes who call themselves Afghans has attracted a great deal of attention, owing to the fact that they claim to be the descendants of Jews, who had settled in Ghor; and the various clans refer their origin to some one of the three sons of Qais, the chieftain of that community, who is said to have been the 37th in descent from Saul, king of Israel, Owing to intercourse with the Jews settled in Arabia, so the story goes, Qais was induced to visit the Prophet Muhammad, who won the Jewish Chief to Islam, and bestowed on him to the name of Abdur Rashid, and the title of Pathan. This last is a mysterious word which cannot be traced to an origin in any known language, but it is believed to mean either or both, the rudder, or the mast of a ship. So say those who have committed the genealogy of the Afghans to paper. The conversion of Qais is not mentioned in the history of Islam. The so-called genealogy of the Afghans was compiled at a time when all the races of Mankind were believed to have been the offspring of the first man and woman created by the Almighty and the eponymous ancestor of every tribe appears at some stage in the genealogy, which there seems every reason to believe was concocted in the 15th century A.D., probably when the Afghans began to attain to power in India. The main feature in it is the alleged Jewish ancestry of all the tribes, and this belief must have been very strong for the retention of the legend, when the tables of descent were compiled. All that can be said at present is that the legend has preserved the memory of a fact which has dropped out of history. It is not improbable that there may have been a Hebrew community in Ghor." (**Tate:1973:10**)

We have seen in the above mentioned references that the theory of Bani Israel about the origin of the Pashtoons is not reliable and nor it is based on

authentic evidences. But this theory remained under discussion for a long time among the scholars of Pashtoon history. However at the mid decades of 20th century (AD) a new theory has been presented by some scholars of Afghanistan, Pakistan as well as some orientalists. This Theory was that Pashtoons are from Arian races or Pashtoons are Arians in origin.

Are Pashtoons Arians?

As mentioned earlier with quoting a few references that the theory of Bani Israelies has been criticized by some eminent scholars and historians. Thus this theory has been rejected by presentation of the theory of Arians put forward by some orientalists and some Afghan writers and historians. In orientalists Morgan Strine and Dr. Trump were in favour of this theory. In Afghan writers Professor Abdul Hai Habibi and Bahadur Shah Zaffar in Pakistani historians accepted and explained the theory of Arians in detail.

According to this theory the Pashtoons is the branch of the Arian tribes which are known in history as Indo Arian tribes. Actually the Indic_branch is divided in two major parts named Indo European and Indo Arian and then the Indo Arian branch is divided in two sub branches named Indo Iranian and Indo Arian. Pashtoons are belonged to the branch of Indo Iranian. This theory is based on the words "Pashtoon" (name of nation or tribe) and Pashto (name of the language of that tribe or nation). The scholars and historians of Indus civilization have found these words in Vedic literature especially in Rig-Veda, the Holy Book of Arian tribes and Hindus. According to Bahadar Shah Zafar

"In Rig-Veda the word phakt or phakta were used for the geographical surrounding of the Pashtoons. "Phaktheen" was used for Pashtoon. Initially Phakthean was converted into Pashteen and than into Pashtoon. It is also mentioned in Rig-Veda that Pashtoons used to stay in Bactria (Bakhtar) the old name of Pashtoon area and the present Afghanistan for so many years. In Bactria the Pashtoons are known as the inhabitants of Bakhd. After that the city of Balkh in the present Afghanistan became famous because of these Pashtoons as stated by some Greek historians they were known as *pakteen and pashteen*, and these words resembled with word Pashtoon and Pashtoonkhwa. So for the first time Mr. Lasan accept the resemblance between the words paktnees and Pashtoon. Keeping in view all these facts it became believable that the Pashtoon nation was a branch of the

Arian tribes and their languages was one of the languages of Arian stock"**(Kakakhail:1981:33)**

We have seen in the above mentioned references that the scholars of modern era emphasized that the theory of Bani Israelis loses its authenticity and the theory of Arians can be considered comparatively authentic with solid evidences. Although some contemporary scholars are inclined to declare that Pashtoons are related to Greeks. In these scholars a Pashtoon intellectual Ghani Khan argues in his book *The Pathan A Sketch* that

"The oldest relics, you see are of distinctly pre-Greek period. They are the same in conception and style as those of the united provinces or Orissa, e.g. the features of dolls and gods two things the humanity has of mixing up are most unlike those of Pathans of today. But when we came to Buddhist and the features of the dolls Budhas and Kings and saints take the likeness of those of the Pathans of today. The great ferocity of the Pathan will be a reaction to a rather long dose of Buddhist non-violence"
(Khan: 1990:4)

But in the presence of Arians theory and the availability of supporting evidences the theory of Greeks also could not be accepted. As a whole a majority of scholars, researchers and linguists are stressing to prove that Pashtoons are from Arian tribes.

CONCLUSION

Although it has been explained in detail the historical references and the validity of evidences proved that Pashtoons can be considered from Arian races. However it is also mandatory and should make it clear that the Pashtoon tribes have their own peculiar charm and specific values. On the base of these peculiarities we can consider the Pashtoons as an individual tribe or nation in Arian tribes or a specific tribe of South Asian nations.

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