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HISTORICAL GENESIS OF PAKHTOONS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SEMITIC AND ARYAN THEORIES

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Abstract:

In making history of the subcontinent, Pakhtoons played a very critical role. Disintegration of the USSR and the US invasion in Afghanistan made Pakhtoons an attractive subject throughout the globe. The literary roots of Pashto language could be traced back up to 5000 years. The philologists and historians around the world took interest to identify genesis of Pakhtoons and consequently divergent theories came to fore. This study examines controversy regarding origin of Pakhtoons with special reference to Semitic and Aryan theories and critically investigates a recently conducted DNA study that negates Pakhtoons association with Arabs.

Keywords: Origin of Pakhtoons, controversy about Pakhtoons, historical genesis of Pakhtoons.

Introduction

The demographic and historical importance of Pakhtoons in the subcontinent successfully earned itself an attractive subject for the researcher. The unsuccessful attempts of the USSR and the USA to invade Afghanistan attracted contemporary scholars to contribute literature about Pakhtoons' race. Throughout the history, controversy regarding historical genesis of Pakhtoons and their lingual affiliation with other languages remained unresolved.

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The historians and philologists have divergent opinions regarding Pakhtoons' race: some associated them with the missing tribe of Israel and some linked them with the Aryans. In this regard, a scientific study has also been conducted wherein the DNA test of more than eight thousand Pakhtoons were conducted and the results showed very controversial results, negating Arabs presence in Afghanistan, which challenged the whole historical discourse about the subcontinent. This article critically examines historical genesis of Pakhtoons in the light of Semitic and Aryans theories. It also critically investigates the DNA study whereby Pakhtoons association with Arabs has been denied.

Historical Genesis of Pakhtoons

Like other languages of the world which referred to a nation, area or a country, the term *Pashto/ Pukhto* could be attributed to Pakhtoon tribe. Philologists and historians have contradicted each others on the exact origin of Pakhtoons as origin of this tribe is not really known with exactitude of time. Lingual and historical origin of Pakhtoon tribe can be traced back to *Pakth* and *Bakht* nations as referred to in Rigveda and Osta respectively. Herodotus, a Greek historian, talked about *Pakth* nation in 520BC, which was residing by that time at the coastal of Indus River. Most of the contemporary historians had taken inference from these arguments that the terms *Pakth* and *Bakht* later on changed into *Pakht*, *Bakht*, or *Pasht* and their language was termed as *Pakto* and *Bakhto*. Later on, this nation was termed as Pakhtoons and their language was termed as Pakhto/ Pashto (Abid, 2013).

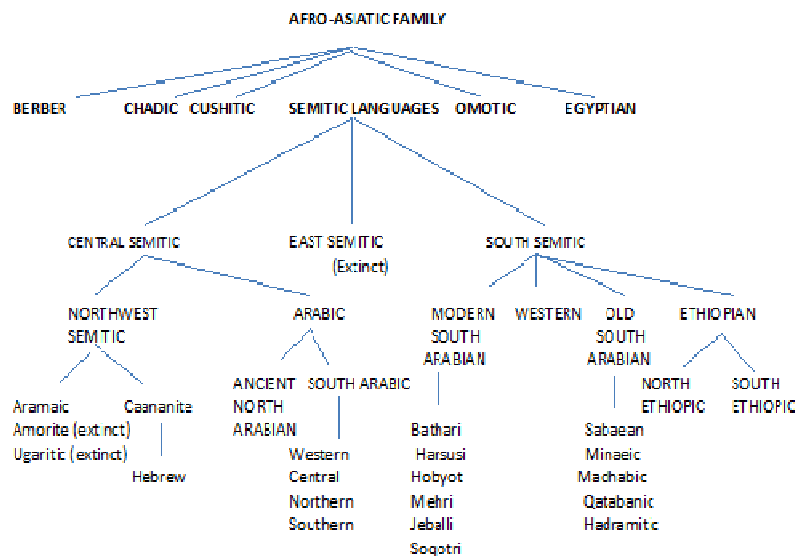
Abdul Hai Habibi, a historian of Pashto language, while investigating the literary traces of Pakhtoons, mentioned about inscribed lexigraphy by the Iranian King, *Dar Yoush Kabir*, in 516BC. The origin of Pakhtoons nation is quite complicated reasoned being the philologists and historians are not at the same page having competing theories and research, supported by arguments and evidence. Despite the fact that there are so many presumptions regarding the historical genesis of Pakhtoons, these theories and research had consequently given birth to two distinct schools of thought: one group of thought holds that they are the missing tribe of Israel. Whereas, the other believes that they are the

subdivision of Aryans. So, both the concepts need to be critically investigated.

The Semitic Theory

Proponents of this theory associate Pakhtoons with the missing tribe of *Israelite* and placed Pashto language in the Semitic group of languages. This theory has been described at length in *Makhzan-i-Afghani*, which has been traditionally used by Afghan scholars as well as non-Afghan orientalist as a reference source to support the Israelite notion of Pakhtoons. The following figure illustrates the contemporary Afro-Asiatic family of languages.

FIGURE 1. AFRO-ASIATIC FAMILY OF LANGUAGES (1)



The Semitic theory on the origin of the Pashtoons has its roots on oral traditions. Pashto originally was not represented with a script. This tradition was later on reflected in *Makhzan-i-Afghani* written by *Niamatullah Herawi* and supposedly the only antique source which addresses the origins of the Pathans (Harvi, 2002). This book traces the roots of this race to the prophet *Abraham* down to *Saul*. Muslim sources as well as the Hebrew scripture traced King *Saul* to 1092 BC in the Palestine area. However, the link after this becomes somehow blurry and difficult to trace. In *Makhzan-i-Afghani* it is explained that Jeremiah, son of *Saul*, in

turn had a son named *Afghana* who had been brought up by *David* after the death of *Saul* who was later on the Chief Commander of King *Solomon's* army (Caroe, 1958).

Keeping in view the demographic and geographic importance of the Pakhtoons regions in the early decades of 19th century, European scholars also took interest to investigate about Pakhtoons' origin consequently giving birth to controversial literature. Some agreed with the Israelite notion, while others considered this theory as an error and in fact, baseless, and are ambassadors of another theory which regards Pakhtoons to be Aryans. Some scholars, philologists and early historians such as *Alexander Burnes* (Burnes, 1834), *Joseph Pierre Ferrier* (Ferrier, 1858), *Sir William Jones* (Jones, 1807), and *George Moore* had subscribed to the Israelite theory (Moore, 1861). In this sense, scholars who favor this theory associates Pashto with the Semitic languages just like Arabic and Hebrew. Some of these views are based on the similarities in aspect of Jewish and Pashtoons, supposed geographical location of the lost Jewish ten tribes, traditions and cultural resemblances, as well as other unreliable facts such as oral traditions and legends passed on from generation to generation. This theory was criticized on the assumption that Pakhtoons, being a missing tribe of Israel, had even earlier traces in Rigved.

This theory, however, faced criticism from historians and philologists. Sir *Percy Sykes* while negating Semitic theory summarized that this theory, being purely of literary origin, is no more than an example of the widespread customs among Muslims for claiming descent from some personage mentioned in the Quran and some other sacred work. In case of Afghan, claiming Malik Talat or King Savi their ancestor. Among other reasons advanced in support of this claim, are noticeably 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. In this regard, Professor *Dr. Abdur Rahim* argues that the theory of the Semitic origin of Afghans does not stand with serious analysis reason being resemblances in features cannot be taken as a scientific criterion for grouping different people into one race for instance *Sumerian* resemble the Aryans in features even

though they are considered to have no affiliation with Aryans. Similarly, portraits of the *Koshan* king found on their coin have the same type of feature, but they are certainly neither Afghans nor Semitic (Sykes, 1940).

Some of the historians, due to presence of some Semitic words, expressions, and names in Pashto language, considered it as a Semitic language. In this regard, Khan Roshan Khan, a popular historian of Pashto language of twentieth century, dedicated a whole chapter in favour of this theory wherein he considered Pashto and Semitic languages of being organs of one body. Pashto language abundantly has words and names of Semitic languages (Khan, 1982). *Abdul Hai Habibi*, a prominent Afghan historian, while negating this theory elaborated that some of the historians associate Pashto language with Semitic and Hebrew languages. Among other reasons, with the emergence of Islam, Arabic language emerged in the region which consequently mixed words and expression from Semitic language with Pashto language. Later on, whoever saw these words and expressions in Pashto language associated it with Semitic family, even though these words and expressions were not permanent, resulting from influence of Arabs (Habibi, 1963). In fact, Semitic theory is based on oral traditional Israelite theory where its chain is historically missing and there seems to be lack of authentic sources, which makes it baseless and erroneous.

The Indo-Aryan Theory

This theory came to the fore when the Britishers took hold of the subcontinent. The Britishers, like other languages, owing to their political and other ends, took interest in Pashto language. The historians and philologists, in the light of modern lingual techniques, investigated that Pashto language has resemblance with Sanskrit language and associated Pakhtoons with Aryans. Those who accepted this notion, relate Pashto to an Indo-European languages group. The proponents of Aryan origin of Pakhtoons considered Pashto culture, values and traditions as a replica of the Aryan culture (Abid, 2013).

Professor *Klaproth* is most probably the first foreigner who considered Pashto as an Aryan language and negates Semitic theory on the assumption that it has no affiliation with the Semitic

languages in the context of words, rules and grammar, hence, purely belongs to the Indo-Germanic languages (Klaproth, 1810). *Elphinstone* investigated two hundred and eighteen words of Pashto language and compared the corresponding ones with different languages including *Persian, Zend, Pehlevec, Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic, Armenian, Georgian, Hebrew* and *Chaldaic*. The research concluded that none of the two hundred and eighteen words has the smallest appearance of being deducible from the *Hebrew* or *Chaldaic, Georgian* or *Armenian* (Elphinstone, 1974). Dr. Bernhard Dorn, associated with the teachings of Semitic and Aryans languages, supported the Aryan theory and refused its affiliation with Hebrew and Chaldaic languages in the context of composition, dictionary and use of grammar rather he argued that Pashto language belongs to Indo Teutonic group(2) (Dom, 1847). Originally Pashto was a dialect of Sanskrit which assumed its present Indo-Persian form due to long continued contact of Indian tribes with the Persians. Wherefrom, a huge number of words came to be used colloquially, without affecting its original grammatical construction, absorbed into this language and underwent modifications as per circumstances (Bellew, 1986). As far as the phylogenetic connection is concerned, *Masica* (3) argues that Indo-Aryan group carries more weightage within Indo-Iranian, territorially as well as in relation to the found records, which are linguistically archaic. For this reason, he is of the opinion that “even if the new arguments for an early date for portions of the original Avesta are accepted, the text, as it now stands, dates only from the *Sasanian* period [third to seventh century AD]” (Masica, 1991, p.33). He further observed that these texts seem to have been more affected during the transmission process than the texts of the Rig Veda for this one is probably older.

Dr. Earnest Trumpp (1828 - 1885) (4), in his work rejected association of Pashto language with the Western Iranian languages group and asserted that Pashto belongs to the Indo-Aryan languages group (Trumpp, 1873). Grierson, while concluding arguments regarding lingual affiliation of Pashto language, highlighted that Afghans claim descent from one Afghana, grandson of Saul, the first king of Israel. This assumption, coupled with accidental coincidences in vocabulary, led people believed

that Pashto language was derived or connected with Hebrew. It has now long been admitted that Pashto language belongs to the Aryan stock but it was for some time remained disputed that whether it belonged to the Iranian or to the Indian group. The former is further divided into Western and Eastern groups. Like Balochi language, Pashto belongs to the Eastern group. Dr. Trumpp, in his Pashto Grammar, strongly maintained that the language did not belong to the Iranian but was a member of the Indo-Aryan family and was closely connected with Sindhi. He added that it was not a true member of the Indian family rather an old independent language, forming the first transition from the Indo-Aryan to the Iranian family. Participating of the characteristics of both but still with predominant Prakrit, i.e., Indian features. M. Darmeteter initially accepted this theory but later on proved conclusively that Pashto must belong to the Eastern group of the Iranian family and that it is derived from Zend or from a dialect closely associated with Zend. It has borrowed largely and freely from North – Western India, but in its essence, it is an Iranian tongue (Grierson, 1927). Keeping in view the geographical survey, Pashto language can be anticipated in between the Iranian and Indian worlds possessing worth-mentioning characteristics of Indian and Iranian languages. Nonetheless, the latter one is more influential (Caroe, 1983).

With the modern research, this theory got impetus consequently historians and philologists across the border at Afghanistan also took interest to investigate about its origin. Professor *Abdul Hai Habibi*, a renowned researcher of Pashto language and literature, concluded that Pashtoon are descended from Aryans who spoke Arik language. Sanskrit is another language of Aryan race, but comparatively Pashto is much closer to it and up to now the original Aryan expressions are survived in Pashto language (Habibi, 1946). *Syed Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khail*, a distinguished researcher, historian and Philologist of Khyber Pakhtonkhwa, who spent more than fifty years to investigate Pashto language and writing about Pakhtoons, writes that thousands years ago, Aryans had been lived in the middle east. They used to speak Arik language. Later on, they spread around the world due to which they started speaking different languages

with substantial similarities of their original language, Arik. He further contradicted with the historians who connected Pashto language with the group of East Iranian languages and argues that Pashto being Aryan language belongs to Indo European Aryan languages (Zafar, 1981).

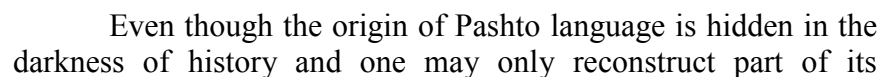
From the research of the philologists and historians, it is concluded that Pashto language does not belong to Semitic group rather this language closely relates to Sanskrit, Avesta (Zend), Persian and due to its structural characteristics this language can be traced back to Aryan language. From the research, it is also obvious that this ancient language has maintained its identity and survives as a liberal and consistent language (Abid, 2013). Pashto is not only the name of a language having rich history but it has deep rooted norms, values, and cultural heritage which successfully preserved to date.

Evolution of Pashto Language According to the Aryan theory

In line with the Aryan theory, Pashto evolved through a series of formative phases. Ancient forms of this language can be founded in the Avesta (Zend). According to Masica, there is textual evidence that the Avesta (Avestan) dates only from the Sasanian period, 3rd to 7th centuries A.D. (Masica, 1991). Among other scholars, the late Norwegian scholar, Georg Morgenstierne, specialized in Indo-Iranian languages, also acknowledges this notion of Pashto origin in his research. However, instead of its relation with Avesta, he considers that Pashto has its origin in Saki (Morgenstierne, 1927). According to the research of Muhammad Afzal Raza, the Pashtoons are Germanic race (Razam 1992). Abdul Hai Habibi asserted that Aryans came and settled at Balghan and later on started fighting each other and thereby divided into ten tribes. Among them, 'Pakht', afterwards termed as 'Pakhtoon' tribe, was the most prominent one. Later on, some of these tribes migrated to Iran and started speaking Persian; some migrated to Hind and started speaking Sanskrit. He considered Pashto a Bactrian language.

Similarly, *Rajwali Shah Khatak*, elucidated about Pashto language and its culture. He contributed to the research on the origin of Aryan language and considers it to be a sister of Sanskrit and Osta languages. Like Abdul Hai Habibi, he believes and traces

FIGURE 2. PASHTO WITHIN THE INDO-EUROPEAN FAMILY OF LANGUAGES(5)



evolution. This language has passed through various phases and its culturally rich patterns are still preserved. However, it is agreed upon that Aryans used to speak a language named Arik wherefrom Pashto language is supposed to have been derived. *Muhammad Younus Khan* points out that at Japanese emperor *Mikado's* library there were many books on the teachings of Buddhism which were simultaneously written in the Pashto language. As a result, the present style of writing Pashto could be traced back 2500 years (Khan, 1964). Many scholars have provided evidentiary proof for supporting a specific theory. Other theories have also made their presence known, such as the theory that states that the Pashtoons descended from the Greek. In this sense, the extensive comparative works of *Sir Olaf Caroe*, titled as, "*The Pathans*" and *Khalil & Iqbal*, titled as, "*An Analysis of the Different Theories about the Origin of the Pashtoons*", cannot be denied. Both of these research concluded that the Aryan theory carries more empirical weightage.

The historical geneses of Pakhtoons, hence, have been proven in great detail by *Caroe*, *Mohammad Afzal Shah Bokawee*, titled as, "*The Pakhtoons*", *James W. Spain*, titled as, "*The Way of the Pathans*" as well as other scholars who throughout the years have been investigated this subject. There have been conflicting opinions of the historians and other concerned, stating that the Pakhtoons are one of the ten lost tribes of Israel. This claim has been denied by *Caroe*. Nevertheless, different authors are still trying to prove scientifically origin of Pakhtoons as well as Pashto language is somehow related to the lost tribes of Israel and with this view in mind a DNA test was carried out with interesting results.

The DNA Study

Due to advancement in philological and historical scientific research, most Afghans as well as foreign scholars are at the same page on associating Pashto language with the North East Aryan branch, a branch of Indo- European languages. Conversely, a study conducted during 2012 by *Haber et al.*, on the DNA of 8, 706 Pakhtoons, although extremely comprehensive and exhaustive in nature, has produced a high level of confusion. The study explores the genetic composition of Afghans, which is compared to historical occurrences and nomadic as well as migratory population

movements. From the research of the historians and philologists, it is evident that the Afghan population converted to Islam as a result of a well-documented Arab invasion in the middle of the 7th century, which spanned more than 200 years (642-870). However, the sample of the study shows some weaker links to be present and a stronger link only present in one individual, denying the Arab presence in Afghanistan. The study reports:

“The Islamic invasion in the 7th century CE left an immense cultural impact on the region, with reports of Arabs settling in Afghanistan and mixing with the local population. However, the genetic signal of this expansion is not clearly evident: some Middle Eastern lineages such as E1b1b1-M35 are present in Afghanistan, but the most prevalent lineage among Arabs (J1-M267) was only found in one Afghan subject. In addition, the three Afghans, who identified their ethnicity as Arabs, had lineages autochthonous to India” (Haber M, Platt DE, Ashrafian Bonab M, Youhanna SC, Soria-Hernanz DF, et al., 2012).

This statement appears to be contradictory with historical events if the samples were randomly taken. In addition, the study seems not to have in consideration the Arabic tribes (the four Arabo-phone communities) living in Afghanistan. The Spanish linguist, *Francisco Marcos Marín*, states that it is undeniable that languages cannot be linked to genes, since a specific population can change linguistically, but not genetically (Marin, 1993). His research concludes that population can chose a language due to various reasons (non-binding option). However, genes cannot be chosen. In this sense, considering historical events, the results of the DNA test and further research do not make much sense.

Conclusion

From the above arguments it can be concluded that although the origin of Pashto language is not known with exactitude of time since there is no reliable source or authentic literature regarding its genesis. From historical references and the validity of evidences, Pakhtoons can be traced back to the further division of Aryans. Similarly, traces of Pashto language are found in some historical and ancient religious books. Linguists and phylo-geneticists have struggled to prove both the Semitic as well as the Aryan theories. Nonetheless, recent scientific studies in linguistics seem to show that scientific proof supporting the Aryan theory has stronger evidence to negate the other assumptions. The

DNA study contemplated in the research seem not to have taken in considerations major historical events as well as the four Arabophone tribes and in this sense a more thorough and impartial study is necessary. More importantly, further research to conceptualize *Pukhtanwali*, being unwritten tribal codes of honor, dignity and self-respect, needs to exonerate Pakhtoons and their language from foreign aggression on the account of war on terror. Despite the fact that several researchers have concluded that Pashto is 5000 years old, more research must be done in order to empirically support this view. Here it is also worth-mentioning that the Pashtoon tribes have their own peculiar norms and specific values. Keeping in view these peculiarities and the instinctive norms, the Pashtoons can be considered as an individual tribe or nation in Arian tribes or may be considered as a specific tribe of South Asian nations.

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- 2- The Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family.
- 3- Professor emeritus in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations and the Department of Linguistics at the University of Chicago.
- 4- A German philologist and missionary to Sindh, Punjab and Peshawar of the then British India before the independence of Pakistan in 1947.
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