PASHTUN

PROGNUNCIATION: PASH-toon
ALTERNATE NAMES: Pushtun, Pakhtun, Pashtoon, Pathan, Afghan
LOCATION: Southeastern Afghanistan; northwestern Pakistan
LANGUAGE: Pashtu
Population: approximately 35 million
RELIGION: Islam (Sunni Muslim)

1 INTRODUCTION
Pashtun (also spelled Pushtun, Pakhtun, Pashtoon) are Pakhtu- or Pashto-speaking people inhabiting southeastern Afghanistan and the northwestern province of Pakistan. Outsiders often referred to them as Pathan or Afghan. Pashtun (Afghan) constitute one of the largest ethnic groups in Afghanistan and the term Afghan until recently referred exclusively to the Pashtun peoples before it came to denote all citizens of Afghanistan.

The Pashtun are traditionally pastoral nomads with a strong tribal organization. Each tribe, consisting of kinsmen who trace descent in male bloodlines from a common tribal ancestor, is divided into clans, subclans, and patriarchal families. Tribal genealogies establish rights of succession and inheritance, the right to use tribal lands, and the right to speak in tribal council. Disputes over property, women, and personal injury often result in blood feuds between families and whole clans; these may be inherited unless settled by the intervention of clan chiefs or by tribal council.

2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND
Pashtun have lived for centuries in the corridors between Khurasan and the Indian subcontinent, at the crossroads of several historically great civilizations. Their mountain homes have been overcome by conquering armies repeatedly, and have been subjected to the rule of great empires including the empire of Alexander the Great and the Persian Empire. However, the Pashtun's story has never been put in perspective. There is no true written history of the Pashtun in their own land. Pashtun traditions assert that they are descended from Afghana, grandson of King Saul of Israel, although most scholars believe it more likely that they arose from an intermingling of ancient Aryans from the north or west with subsequent invaders.

The Pashtun are divided into about 60 tribes of varying size and importance, each of which occupies a particular territory. In Afghanistan, where Pashtun are the predominant ethnic group, the main tribes are the Durrani or Abdali south of Kabul and the Ghilzai east of Kabul.

In Pakistan, the Pashtun predominate north of Quetta between the Sulaiman Ranges and the Indus River. The areas of Pakistan in which Pashtuns are prevalent include the North-west Frontier Province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, or FATA. In the hill areas, the main tribes are, from south to north: the Kakar, Sherani, and Ustarana south of the Gomal River; the Mahsud, Darwsh Khel, Waziri, and Batani, between the Gomal River and Thal; the Turi, Bangash, Orakzay, Afridi, and Shinwari from Thal to the Khyber Pass; and the Mahmood, Uthman Khel, Tarklani, and Yousufzay north and northeast of the Khyber. The settled areas include lowland tribes subject to direct administration by the provincial government. The main tribes there are, from south to north: the Banuchi and Khattak from the Kurram River to Nowshera; and the Khalil and Mandan in the vale of Peshawar.

3 LANGUAGE
Pashtu is language of Pashtun. It belongs to the North-Eastern group within the Iranian branch of Indo-European. It is the language of the major ethnic group of east and south Afghanistan adjacent to Pakistan. Pashtun make up 40 to 60% of the population of Afghanistan, but reliable census figures are not available. Pashtu is one of the two official languages of Afghanistan. It is the language of 12 million Pashtun in Pakistan also, the majority of whom live in the North West Frontier Province and the rest in Baluchistan Province.

Two cities in the Pashtu area are important centers of Pashtu language: Kandahar in Afghanistan and Peshawar in Pakistan. In literary works, the trend is to avoid the dialectal differences and use the form of Pashtu used in the urban centers.

Pashtu has always been written in the Perso-Arabic script, with the addition of consonant phonemes of Pashto. The name of the language, Pashtu, denotes the strong code of customs, morals, and manners of the Pashtun, which is also called Pashtunwali. There is a saying: “A Pashtun is not he who speaks Pashto, but he who has Pashtu.” Hospitality (Milmastia) is important to Pashtu as is a reliance on the tribal council (jirga) for the resolution of disputes and local decision making. Other Pashtu codes include: courageousness (Tureh, which is also the word for sword in Pashtu); the spirit of taking revenge (Badal); protection of honor (Ghayrat); and nanawati, a method of terminating hostility, hatred, and enmity (i.e., when a person, family, or tribe goes to the hostile people through elderly people, they will accept their apology and the feeling of hatred and enmity are dissolved). Important elements of Pashtunwali code are personal authority and freedom. Political leadership is based on personalities rather than structures and ideologies.

It is perhaps the power and leadership of individuals that divides the Pashtun not only into tribes but also into numerous sub-tribes, each isolated within its own boundaries. Interference in each other's affairs has caused conflicts among the different sub-tribes throughout history. Yet any external interference—Russian, British, American, etc.—has resulted in immediate unity of Pashtun tribes.

4 FOLKLORE
Many traditional stories, thoughts, and beliefs exist among the Pashtun. The numerous clans and families that comprise the Pashtun population have specific characteristics. Famous stories, such as “Adamkhani and Durkhani,” are common, and the majority of them are no longer understood by the Pashtun. Pashtun have characteristic folksongs, marriages, and funerals. Certain quatrains, known as matal, are very popular. Chorus singing also exists among the Pashtun.

5 RELIGION
Pashtun tribes are Sunni Muslims, except for a few tribes or parts of tribes on the eastern border near Waziristan. In this region, the Turi tribe is Shia Muslim, as is the Muammad Khel branch of Orakzai. Islam was introduced to the Pashtun in the 8th century, but the rule of Islam within Pashtun traditional culture is different from other Islamic groups, as it is tempered...
by the influence of the Pashtunwali code of conduct. Pashtun believe they are more Pashtun than Muslim. Sufism, particularly of the Naqshbandi order, maintains an influence among some Pashtun groups.

MAJOR HOLIDAYS
As all Pashtun are Muslims, they celebrate the two major festivals of the Islamic lunar calendar year. The first of these is Eid al-Fitr, which is celebrated for three days after the month of Ramadan (the fasting month)—i.e., the first three days of Shawwal, the 10th month of the Islamic calendar. They also celebrate Eid al-Adha, which is on the 10th of Dhu-l-ijja (the 12th month of the Islamic calendar). In addition, they observe the 10th of Muarram, which is the first month of the Islamic calendar, in commemoration of the martyrdom of the grandson of the prophet. Pashtuns also celebrate the traditional Persian new year, Nowruz, a holiday that continues to be observed throughout most of the Persian/Turkic world every March.

RITES OF PASSAGE
Each child of a Muslim family is a Muslim by birth; therefore, all Pashtun are Muslims by birth. After a baby’s birth, Pashtun whisper the call for prayer in the baby’s ear. The male circumcision ceremony used to be held when a boy was seven years old, but now it is held at the age of about one week and is merged with the birth celebration.

Male and female children are taught the prayers at an early age by parents or grandparents. In addition to the profession of faith and the rituals of prayers, preschool children are taught about the other obligations of Islam: charity, fasting, and pilgrimage. Prayers and fasting officially start with sexual maturity, but in practice they begin much earlier.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS
Both tribal society and Islam prescribe the conduct of man to his human environment in so much detail that there is little room for individual variation. Pashtun society is largely communal and attaches tremendous importance to the unwritten tribal code, which defines the way tribesmen should behave lest they endanger the cohesion and therefore the very life of the tribe. So completely is this code transmitted to each child born into the tribe that it becomes an ineradicable structural part of his personality, and to depart from it is almost unthinkable. Pashtunwali (the customs and ethics of the Pashtun), Tureh (courageousness), Nanawati (method of terminating hostility, hatred, and enmity), Badal (the spirit of taking revenge), Mastiya (hospitality), Jirgeh (council of elderly men to decide disputes), liberty, and freedom are some of the characteristics of their interpersonal relationships.

LIVING CONDITIONS
Pashtun belong to different clans and families with varying relationships to each other and differing social statuses. Pashtun migrated to different places during the 18th century due to their increasing population and lack of food, water, and grazing land for their animals. Many Pashtuns of Afghanistan are not big landowners but make a living in agricultural fields despite having low incomes. Many groups of Pashtun along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan live nomadic lifestyles.

Many Pashtuns suffer from a low standard of living, particularly due to the many years of conflict suffered by Afghanistan, beginning with the Soviet invasion in 1979. Many Pashtuns became refugees during these years of conflict and left for neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan where they were accepted by their co-ethnics. Since the removal of the Taliban from power in 2001, many of these Pashtun refugees are encouraged to return to Afghanistan but often find themselves in a worse living situation as the homes they left were destroyed or occupied.

FAMILY LIFE
The Pashtun family is an extended family. The household normally consists of the patriarch and his wife, his unmarried children, and his married sons and their wives and children. It is a patrilineal system in that descent is through the paternal side, and family loyalty is to the paternal line. A married woman must transfer complete allegiance to her husband’s family. Married sons live in their father’s household rather than establishing homes of their own. The eldest male possesses complete authority over the extended family. The preference for marriages is within the extended family or with other close relatives.

Economically, the Pashtun family is a single unit. Wealthy family members contribute to the support of those who are poorer, and the family maintains an appearance of well-being. Old people depend on their children for care and support, and the whole family shares the expense of a child away at school.

Obedience and respect for elders are the main points of an Pashtun child’s upbringing. Almost everything an individual does is a matter of concern to the family, for in Pashtun society the family is judged by the behavior of its individual members.
11 CLOTHING

Traditional Pashtun dress is a somber-colored, loose-fitting shirt worn to the knees (qmis) and full trousers tied at the waist with a string (shalwar). Over the shirt there is usually a vest, and for footwear there are thick leather shoes (chaplay). Most Pashtun farmers and almost all adult males in tribal areas wear turbans (pagray), long lengths of cotton cloth wound around the head and fastened so that one end dangles. They also usually wear a wide, long piece of cloth called a chadar on their shoulders.

Country women wear baggy black or colored trousers, a long shirt belted with a sash, and a length of cotton over the head. City women wear the same type of trousers and long shirt (qmis) and cotton over the head. They also usually wear a veil, a loose garment that covers a woman from the head to below the knees (burqa). Women wear colored clothes printed with flowers and other designs. For footwear, they use sandals, shoes, or embroidered slippers.

12 FOOD

Religious prohibitions prevent Pashtun from eating pork and drinking alcoholic beverages. Staples in their diet include bread, rice, vegetables, milk products, meat, eggs, fruits, and tea. A favorite dish is pulaw, a rice and meat dish flavored with coriander, cinnamon, and cardamom.

13 EDUCATION

Traditionally, education took place in religious institutes and mosque schools (madrassa or maktab). In addition to these institutions, free secular education was available in most villages, at least prior to 2001. In Afghanistan, the entire educational system was disrupted due to Russian invasion in 1978, and since the pullout in 1989 to 1992, due to the civil war. During the period of Taliban control (1996–2001), education was again restricted to religious institutions, and girls were not allowed to attend school. Since the Taliban were removed from power, many schools have been rebuilt, and many girls have returned to school. However, schools that allow girls are often targeted by the Taliban insurgency. These problems tend to affect Pashtuns greatly, as they make up the majority of the population in those areas most threatened by the insurgency.

In the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan and Baluchistan there are boys and girls schools in almost every village and government colleges for boys and girls in every town. (These are affiliated with various universities.)

In 2007, half of Afghan children were thought to attend school. Of those who attended, 35% were girls. Eleven million Afghans were thought to be illiterate.

Higher education and universities were available in Afghanistan but were greatly disrupted due to the many years of conflict and by the strict laws of the Taliban. Since 2001 some
universities have again begun to operate, such as Kabul State University.

14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Pashtun social groups are well-organized. In increasing size, they are: Qabila, Taifa, and Khail. The males are the dominant members of a household. For example, if a husband dies, the widow is required to marry someone within her husband’s family, even if the only person available happens to be only one year old. In this case, it appears that culture is given more weight than religion. Pashtun leaders convene to discuss and to solve major problems in the community. The jirga is the community assembly that is used to solve disputes and problems. The shura is an Islamic council that is also relied upon by Pashtun in Afghanistan for organization. Respect for the elderly is very important to the Pashtun.

15 WORK

Pashtun work at a variety of occupations in agriculture, business, and trade. Women and children also play a role in agricultural work. Generally, the Pashtun of Afghanistan do not have very high living standards. The working conditions of Pashtun in Afghanistan and Pakistan differ, being generally better in Pakistan.

Naiza bazi, a game involving riding horses and throwing spears, is a sport enjoyed among the Pashtun. Some Pashtun also have rock-throwing competitions. Atan is a famous group folkdance of the Pashtun. Pashtun have also adopted some of the sports of Northern Persian speaking Afghan nationals such as buzkashi, a form of polo played with a sheep or goat carcass.

17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Social get-togethers are the major form of entertainment. The Eids, religious holidays occurring twice a year, are also times of celebration and entertainment. Certain card games are played amongst Pashtun as well. Kite flying and pigeon flying were popular among Afghans of many backgrounds including Pashtun. Banned under the Taliban, since 2001 these recreation forms have been revived. One novelistic account of two Afghan boys and their love of kite-flying is Khaled Hosseini’s The Kite Runner (2003) and the film of the same name (2007).

18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES

Pashtun clothes differ from province to province, but they are often highly decorated. The people of Kandahar sew characteristic designs on their clothes and wear small hats made of thread or silk. In Paktia, people generally wear large hats with turbans. Vests are very common among Pashtun, but styles differ from location to location. For example, the people of Nangahar wear vests with bright designs.

19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Because the Pashtun do not all live within one country, they have differing social conditions, although they generally live in societies with tight religious restrictions. Differences among Pashtun clans and families have led to much violence and killing both in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Narcotics, particularly opium, production has become a serious problem in Afghanistan due to the chaos and poverty caused by the years of conflict. Afghanistan was the largest producer of opium in the world in 2005, 2006, and 2007. Much of the production takes place in the predominately Southern Pashtun areas. Use of narcotics has remained minimal among Pashtuns due to religious beliefs.

20 GENDER ISSUES

Women have traditionally had few rights under the strict code of Pashtunwali. Purdah, or separation of men and women, is traditionally practiced. At times throughout history, such as during the years of Communist rule, women were encouraged to take part in society more openly. However, during the years that the Taliban controlled Afghanistan, women were restricted from participating in almost every form of public life, forced to adhere to a strict dress code that included the wearing of the burqa, and were restricted to their homes unless accompanied by a male family member. Since the Taliban were removed from power, such restrictions have been lessened, and some Pashtun women have regained their careers and even hold public office. However, many continue to follow these restrictions due to social pressure or because of their own choice.

21 BIBLIOGRAPHY


—revised by M. Kerr