

Ethnicity and Power Structure in Afghanistan

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Abstract

The paper attempts to explain Afghanistan history and throws light on the Afghanistan geo physical location. Defines Afghanistan as a land of stark and rugged beauty of snow-covered mountains, barren desserts and rolling steppe lands. Situated at the eastern end of Iranian plateau. It covers some 250,000 square meters. Several mountains are among the highest in the world. Afghanistan is a land locked country, with frontiers that were mostly demarcated towards the end of the nineteenth century. To the north its borders with the Republic of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and to Turkmenistan run for some thirteen miles, westwards from the Pamir, along the Amu Darya and then across country to the Hari Rud, the river that marks the northern end of its frontier with Iran. In the northeast is a border with China which run the so called Durand Line, the frontier that divides the Afghanistan from the Pakistan. The Afghan Iranian borders runs north wards, until it meets the Hari Rud. The paper also explains the origin of the people who inhabit in this high country and diverse, as they are often obscure. Although there has been much intermingling over the centuries, they still have disturbed ethnic, physical and linguistic differences. Recent estimates suggest Afghanistan population as twenty million divided into twenty or so many ethnic groups. However these groups have got divided themselves into clans and tribes numbering in thousands. Each tribe is based on patrilineality and often is localized to various degrees. However, there are certain tribes that remain scattered or are folk; bound living in different areas of Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan , Ethnicity , Power , History , Geophysical , Taliban , Afghan Society , 9- 11.

Introduction

Afghanistan has well been situated at the cross roads of Asia, it is bounded on the South and East by the Indian Sub-continent, on the west by the deserts and plateaus of Iran, and on the North by the great island drainage basin of Central Asia of the Oxus and the Jaxarates (the states of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). Throughout the known past these three major cultural areas have nourished their own traditions, civilizations arising and declining at different times in each of them, and through Afghanistan has passed much of the cultural and commercial traffic between these areas and more distantly between China, India, the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean world. Afghanistan has been both a meeting place and the meeting pot of cultural influences and movements of men and ideas. The broad geographical and cultural region of which Afghanistan forms the heart stretches from the Oxus to the Indus, and yet within the bounds of the modern state is marked diversity both of physical and the human geography.

The country has variety of landscapes which range from the icy pinnacles of the Hindu Kush to the blazing wastes of the Dasht-i-Marg,, from dry dusty steppe-lands to oases and terraced valleys. This variety of the landscape is easily matched by the variety of peoples, Greeks, Mongols, Indians, Iranians and Turks who settled there during the historic period alone. Many of these different groups can still be distinguished in the population today, Afghanistan remained in the possession of the Achaemenids, Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, Indo-Greeks, Kushans, Arabs, Mongols, Ghaznavides, etc. But these alien forces never made Afghanistan a political entity. In fact Afghanistan was formed a political entity by the far sighted ambition of the Durrani dynasty. Ahmad Shah Durrani, in 1747 who hammered out the nation state by welding several centripetal and powerful elements. Governance having a central lay out



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was given to the country to enable her to live independency. However, with his death the tendency to fall away from the central axis re-emerged and as a result various warlords and tribal chiefs ruled in their areas of dominance having their own laws, rules, customs, traditions, taboos etc. What however was great about the Afghans that they fought with valour against imperialistic forces, showing solidarity and oneness which lead them victorious against the foreign forces for the independence in the early 20th century.

Since then Afghanistan has tried to grow as a nation; Durrani's remained in power till the annihilation of Dawood, in 1979, when a force of young educated communists seized the opportunity to rule the country that was soon followed by Soviet occupation. Russian imperils carried forward their legacy of imposing ideology and a system that was distinct from the Islamic ideology and age old culture of the country, and it thus allowed to erupt a struggle against the Soviets lasting for more than a decade. After the Soviet were driven out of the country, Afghanistan remained plunged into dreadful civil war for power control. The country was as such was plagued with lawlessness, loot, plunder, arson, kidnapping, killings, etc. The result was that no unified power structure existed in the country and fragmented warlords and chieftains of different ethno-tribal groups remained engaged in wars and clashes. These forces, under the banner of Mujahedin, who claimed the country from the Soviets, could not provide a regime that would lead the country irrespective of their ethnic and tribal allegiances. They thus offered an opportunity to young but most powerful and dedicated group of students of Madrassas to assume the reigns of government in 1994. Named as Taliban they engaged themselves in a noble mission of ensuring peace and protection to the war-weary people of Afghanistan and to provide a centralized political system and uniform code of conduct in terms of governance, taxation, law, justice etc. The control of northern areas but remained with many warlords who got support to rule those areas from aboard. The incident of 9/11 in USA initiated a massive military operation in Afghanistan by the US and the west, to eliminate the Taliban and form of a new government, under Pashtun leader, Hamid Karzai, in 2001. It is claimed that his government has support of most of the tribal chiefs yet there are also reports that many other chiefs clash with Karzai forces giving agony and discomfort to most of the Afghans.

Ethnic Composition of Afghan Society

By and large, the history of this nation-state exhibits a sorry state of periodic clashes and wars than peace or order. It has not been a homogeneous nation but a collection of disparate groups divided along ethnic, linguistic and racial lines. Even though 99.9% of Afghans are Muslim, yet they also have religious differences forces by ethnic and racial compulsions. In the recent past ethnicity is the most important factor that has created most problems than solving them. The present population has not shown a sign of oneness as it is a complex mixture of the people, having around 40-50 distinct ethenic groups.

The two largest population groups are the Pushtuns and Tajiks who both speak Iranian languages.

The Pushtuns are dominant group in the south of the Hindu Kush while Tajiks are found mainly in the northeast. Like the Pushtuns they are Sunni Muslims, with a small minority of Israelis and Shiites but they remain culturally, socially and politically together. Tajiks also are better educated, more affluent, traditionally influential or retaining powerful positions in administration, public service, commerce and trade. On the other hand the Pushtuns are subdivided into thousands of tribes along the geographical charter which they use a basis of unity and solidarity as well as fission and conflict.

The other major linguistic group is Turkic and is spoken largely by people of Mongol descent (Uzbeks) who are found in the northern plains. Most pursue agriculture and sedentary animal husbandry. Unlike them Hazaras are Mongols of the central mountainous also speak an Iranian language, Hazars, and are concentrated in the area called Hazarajat as well as in Kabul. Most of them form spiritual and political elites. These are also a number of other ethnic or linguistic groups whose number varies between 40-50 like Nurstani, Aimak, Baluch, etc.

All these ethnic groups have lived in the country for centuries now, often in their own areas of concentration. However these groups have got divided themselves into clans and tribes numbering in thousands. Each tribe is based on patrilineality and often is localized to various degrees. However, there are certain tribes that remain scattered or are folk; bound living in different areas of Afghanistan. As such belonging to a tribe means access to the land of the tribe or they own common and undivided property as well. Each of the tribe has its own customs, traditions, laws, or law enforcing militia to take care of the affairs of a tribal society. Mostly the tribes are not political entities but they have worked like institutions. For example they have community councils, called jirga where a community decides about important matters or adheres to the decisions. Jirga is usually without a chairman but strong men emerge as leaders who have either charisma or have support of stronger people. As such tribes or their divisions are more dependable than the tribal leadership which depends upon personal qualities, like resource building, security of followers, controlling of tenants, gallantry in war or conflict, etc. tribal system as such provides stability, resilience, legal security, social orientation to Afghan people where tribal system has functioned smoothly, which a case is generally found in the country. A centralized leadership is thus not thrown by the system to lead the country.

As the tribes have not been found on the basis of any political system or order they have but built political alliances which have lead the political units to become multi-tribal. Many political units in Afghanistan have therefore such social structural elements that are based on locality, economy, and sectarianism, religious schools, and religious parties, and so on. Political units have as such forged alliances of various tribes or ethnic groups yet many

times the tribal leaders have changed their allegiances in order to gain supremacy or power.

The political leadership that emerged in the country during past hundred years was a product of the tribes or ethnic groups that were dominant within their own boundaries or managed to have control on various clans or tribes within an ethnic group. Many times the groups were enemies of each other's but in times of war they have fought together, as against the imperialistic forces. For the governance of state they however have not been able to forge such a stable alliance that could have allowed that Afghans to live peaceful lives. The most striking example is the period of political turmoil in the country after the Soviet withdrawal, when tribalism and ethnicity were the causes of political cleavages and conflicts, often violent. At times socio-political coalitions were made for the harmonious union of creating one Afghan nation yet got them their conflicts, inherent or a political divided into numerous hostile factions with the result there were unstable conditions in the country after the people, who fought against Soviets got a chance to govern the state, control the communities or provide a stable power structure based on equality and harmony. Called Mujahedin, they failed together with the result a situation of anarchy was their in the country where war-lords shifted and continued to shift their allegiance with one faction, ethnic group or tribal leaders. The non-coherent system provided a chance to outside powers, be them international or regional, to play their role as well as seeking to unite the loose knots of the systems for bringing stability in the country. Most of the times they failed and US backed Karzai government is one such attempt to force a unity among the war-lords. It is not an attempt to end tribalism or ethnicity that has deep roots in psychological frame work of the people.

Peace or tranquility in Afghanistan in guarantee to stability of the region- Central Asia and South Asia. But the current situation, where anti Karzai forces still operate Afghans are therefore still forced to countless mesiers, insecurity, militant activities, desertions, illiteracy, malnutrition, poor health conditions, poverty, etc The given scenario of power structure in the country, where social, religious, administrative, political and judicial order, is under stress as a result of the ethnic and tribal complexities and needs therefore to be studied in order to find a

way out for better governance and stability in the country.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to highlight the fact that Afghanistan had no independent political identity and was always part of one or the other major empires in the world, in the form of Achaemenids, Greeks, Murayans, Kushans, Indo- Greeks, Mongols, Gaznavides , Ghours etc . The intervening period saw the occurrence of recurring in fighting and war's sometimes amongst the indigenous tribal groups and at times with outside forces. However the foreign rule had one silver lining. It transferred Afghanistan into a centre of hybrid culture of par excellence on the one hand and the settlement of diverse ethnic groups in the country on the other.

Conclusion

In short, for the greater part of the conquered history, Afghanistan had independent political identity and was a part of one or other major empire of the Achaemenids, Greeks, Maryans, Khushans ,indo-greeks, Ghaznvides etc'It was only towards 18th century that Ahammad Shah Durrani evolved first nation state .The intervening periods saw the occurrence of recurring infighting and wars sometimes amongst the indigenous these tribal groups and at times with outside forces.All this transformed Afghanistan into a land of cross culture par excellence on one hand and the settlement of diverse ethnice groups in the country on other .

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