

A Glimpse at the History of Pashto and Pashtunkhwa

Abdul Hai Habibi

Even though the history of our country is extensive and praiseworthy it has not been properly documented and most of it remains in the dark. By studying our history I have managed to gather some information which highlights certain aspects of our language and history of our country and reveals some of its unknown aspects. I present them now to Pashtuns so they may be preserved in the annals of Tolo. (Tolo-e Afghan is the first newspaper of Kandahar).

(Habibi)

1. Aryana Veja:

In the ancient book of the Aryans, Avesta, which was written 3000 years ago the land of the Aryans has been documented as Aryana Veja (Aryana Vaaj). This word has been interpreted to mean 'love of the people'. This land is part of the 16 provinces which have been mentioned in Avesta. Dr. Wilhelm Geiger, the famous German orientalist, states that this parcel of land was a sacred province of the Aryans.¹ It was watered by the Oxus and Zarafshan² rivers. Its terrain was mountainous with impassable passes. The famous explorer, Charles Masson, in his Narrative of Journeys in Baluchistan, Afghanistan and the Punjab (vol. 1, p. 244) and Dr. Frederick von Spiegel in his book Eastern Asia (vol. 1, p. 397) have mentioned this land. These scholars write they saw relics of Avestian characteristics and morals among the people of the land.³

Veja is an ancient word which is from the common language of the Aryans and has been used in Avesta. The old word is in use in Pashto language until the present time. It is part of the common conversation in Kandahar. When someone is not allowed to go anywhere he will say that "they will not let me go to God's Aveja". This word is in use in its former meaning in Pashto vocabulary and is prevalent in common conversation. From the use of this word we can say that Pashto is an old language with ancient roots.

2. Arwa, Argun, Ruh:

From the sixteen provinces mentioned in Avesta one is Awru or Arwa. The famous German

orientalist and linguist, Geiger, considers Awru to be present day Urgun of the Logar Valley where the Parmali people live. He states:

"The Pseen valley lies where the fable of the famous strongman, Kersaspa, of the Avestan time, is believed to have taken place. This valley is a part of Arwa province. It is located in the southern part of the land of Aryans. The Suleiman mountain range passes through this territory. It is the parcel of land where on the Afghan side Avesta was their religious book and the Indian side's holy book was Rigveda.⁴ It was in the Urgun land where the adversaries of this famous strongman were subdued."⁵ The author of Ancient Iran states that Awru is present day Ghazni. Old historians from India and Afghanistan write that the lands where Pashtuns lived were known as Ruh. They write that Ruhila were the inhabitants of this land, which means the people of Ruh. It is possible that the word *ruh* has been derived from the ancient word *arwa* of Avesta. Ruh has been regularly mentioned in Pashto literature. Ashraf Khan, son of Khushal Khan, writes:

It has been a while since messengers from Ruh have arrived

The wind brings their greetings, their praise may remain.

(Gulshan-e Ruh)

In a similar fashion Kazem Khan Sheida (1135 H) states:

With Indian coquetry she deceived me

I am a simple Sheida from Afghan Ruh.

The word Run which was considered by historians as the land of the Pashtuns takes its roots from the 3000 years old book of Avesta.

3. Kandahar:

Proper and convincing information has not been gathered, as yet, regarding the name of Kandahar. This is because many cities have been named Kandahar in historical books, hence it is not possible to come to a convincing conclusion regarding this name. Despite that we have the following information regarding this name: The ancient root of Kandahar may be Kandaro or Kandaharwa. This name has been mentioned in Rigveda, the ancient Indian collection of Vedic hymns. The name was mentioned three thousand years ago in an old fable.

Geiger states that the word has also been mentioned as Kandaro in Yasht section, chapter

19, part 31 of Avesta. It was the name of a tribe of Indian Aryans⁶ who were defeated by Karsaspa. It can be compared with the Greek word Kertarpot.⁷

Another old book which mentions the name of Kandahar is the Indian book of bravery and war fables, Mahabharat. It was written after Avesta and Rigveda. It is considered to be a very old book and is the second oldest book of the Sanskrit language. After Rigveda this book provides an insight into the historical wars of Aryan princes.⁸ One of these princes was named Koro whose mother was the daughter of Raja Gandahar. This raja was a famous king of the time who has been mentioned in Mahabharat.⁹

The third ancient relic in which the name of Gandahara has been mentioned is the inscription of Darius, the Achaemenid king. He was the ruler from 521 to 489 BCE. In the inscription, etched at the base of a mountain, he considers Gandara among his 30 countries. Historians believe this includes the lands of Peshawar, Nangarhar and Kabul.¹⁰ The famous Greek historian, Herodotus, writes that Gandari was one tribe among the four Pashtun tribes.¹¹

In describing the old writings of Sanskrit, Encyclopaedia Britannica, states that inscriptions from the time of Ashoka, the famous emperor of the Maurya Dynasty (272-233 BCE), were written in Gandaharian letters. It is clear from these inscriptions that before Christ and until the time of the advent of Islam, the word Gandahara was in existence and from the time of the Achaemenids the area of Peshawar, Nangarhar and Kabul was given this name. These books and inscriptions go back three thousand years. From that time until the emergence of Islam the name of Kandahar has been mentioned in these documents. Now we will analyze how this name was used during the Islamic period and which lands and cities were named as such? And how Islamic historians have written this name?

Information provided by Islamic historians

Ibn-e Khordadba is a famous Arab historian whose book, Al-Maselek wa al-Mamalek (The Book of Roads and Kingdoms), was edited and printed by the famous orientalist, M. De Goeje, in London in 1889 BC. In 250 H (864 CE) Ibn-e Khordadba mentions Kandahar as a famous city.¹²

The eminent Middle Eastern historian of his age, Ahmad bin Yahya Baladhuri, who wrote Futuh al-Baladan (Book of the Conquests of Lands), five years after Ibn-e Khordadba in 255 H (869 CE), writes about the conquest of Kandahar by the Moslems in their foray of Sind.¹³

Ebad bin Siyad, nephew of Hazrat Ma'awiya, in 44 H (664 CE) marched on Kash (present day Keshk-e Nakhud) by way of the Sena river, Kehz (present day Qala-e Gaz) and the Helmand river. He captured Kandahar and named it Ebadiya. Tall hats worn by men, which Baladhuri describes in his book, were in fashion until the beginning of the 20th century. They are called *taesh* in Pashto. After the conquest of Kandahar Baladhuri writes: Ebad bin Ziyad sent Mandar bin al-Jarood al-Abdi, to the conquest of India and he captured Boqan and Qaiqan (?) also and took over Qasdar, which is a city in present day Baluchistan. It is clear from Baladhuri's description that the city of Kandahar lay after Kash (Keshk-e Nakhud), and was on the way to Qasdar, Sind and Baluchistan. Most likely it is present day Kandahar.

In page 55 of his book Baladhuri considers Kandahar to be a city in Sind but in page 68 he considers Kandahar to be a famous city in India rivalling Kashmir. From this narration and from the writings of other historians it is evident that beside the present day Kandahar, another city by the name of Kandahar, existed in southern India. The famous Arab historian and explorer, Abu al-Hassan Ali Masudi, in 332 H (944 CE) writes: " And Kandahar is in the al-Rahbuth country."¹⁴ Rahbuth is the present day Rajput of India. Abu al-Fadl, historian of the Mughul period, states that Kandahar is a coastal city of India, close to Bahruch.¹⁵

Ibn-e Battuta, the famous Moroccan explorer (779 H, 1378 CE), had travelled to Kandahar with the fleet of Ibrahim Mangi.¹⁶

Shari Maqdasi, the historian of Arab geography, while mentioning Multan, writes that the Fatemi monarchs minted coins, however, *qanharyat* were more common there.¹⁷ Stralite, the author of History of Sind, considers this word to be *qandahariyat* and mentions that these coins were minted in Kandahar. Even during the second decade of the 20th century coins by the name of *qandaharei* were in use in Kandahar. I have personally seen many coins with this name. These coins were minted in Multan during the reign of Ahmad Shah Baba. Because of this we can say that the Maqdasi's *qanhari* was the *qandaharei* coin. This tradition has been in place since the time past until recently.¹⁸

The historian Abu-al-Feda, author of Taqweem-al-Baldan, in page 275 writes that Waihind is a city in the valley of Sind which is considered to be the capital of Gandahar. Abdul Hai Gardezi, the 5th century historian, has written that Sultan Mahmud Zabuli conquered this city after capturing Peshawar in 393 H (1003 CE).¹⁹

Smith in his book, the History of India, writes that after the Moslems captured Kabul, the

center of the Kabulshah's was Awhind, which was located by the bank of the river.²⁰

In the History of Seistan, which is an ancient book of history of the Persian language dating between 1054 to 1325 CE, it has been stated that Ebad bin Zeyad went to Kabul by way of Seistan then to Kandahar and from there he went to India around 53 H (673 CE).²¹ This statement is corroborated by Baladhuri.

Results:

From the writings of famous historians of the past we can conclude there were three places with the name of Kandahar.

a) The province of Gandahara, which stretched from Peshawar to the east as far as Kabul, which has been mentioned in Darius' inscription, Herodotus' history and Taqweem al-Baladan of Abu al-Feda.

b) The city of Gandahar in southern India described by Ibn-e Khordadba in Al-Maselek wa al-Mamalek, Masudi in Murawaj Al-Dahb and by Ibn-e Battuta in his Sayahat Nama (Book of Travels).

c) The present day city of Kandahar mentioned by Ibn-e Khordadba as a separate city of Sind, Baladhuri in the conquest of Sind and Bashari Maqdasi in Ahsan-al-Taqaaseem. In his writings Elliott talks about the Kandaharei coin.

From historical research we know that this city existed during the time of advent of Islam. Later it was sometimes declared to be in Sind, Zabulistan, Rakj or Rakhd.

Dr. Geiger suggests that this city was first established by Laharasp which in Avesta has been recorded as Ardat Aspa.²² Geiger considers Frazer's opinion as proof for his position.²³ Another German scholar, Hertsfeld, states during the time of Ashtani monarchs (253 to 224 BCE) there were a number of rulers in Kandahar who were known as Gondofer. Hertsfeld adds that Rustam from Zabul was from this lineage. These are some historical statements which we have in our possession regarding Kandahar.

4. Kote:

This word has been in use from the beginning in Pashto literature and speech. It means a fort even though some people have considered it to mean a village. But it is clear from literary documents that *kote* means a fort in Pashto such as Pashto Kot meaning the fort of Pashtuns,

Omar Kot meaning the fort of Omar. Khushal Khan says:

No matter how much you may indulge in worldly delight

You will destroy fortresses with your army.

Geiger provides a detail of the life of people during the time of Avesta. He states that these people erected fortified forts in appropriate locations and built deep moats around the citadels. They also had strong fortifications around their graveyards.²⁴ The names of these forts have been mentioned in Vendidad, which is a part of Avesta, as Kata.²⁵

The building of fortresses is the tradition of Pashtuns up to this day. The root of the word Kot is the Kata of Avesta which has been preserved in literature for several centuries. It has been mentioned in Vendidad on several occasions.

5. Research into other words and their roots:

Heywad has been in use in Pashto meaning a country, abode and inn. It is occasionally seen in the vocabulary of mountain people. Khushal Khan says:

I remember friends from my country (*heywad*)

When I dream about them I feel tearful.

Pir Mohammad Kakar, teacher of Ahmad Shah Baba's family, writes:

We are the parrots from another country (*heywad*)

Enslaved by destiny, we shall eventually leave.

The root of this word is *hud*, which in Sanskrit is *sud*. In the Gathu section of Avesta it has been considered to be a sitting place. It has been mentioned several times in Visperad of Avesta. This word is derived from the root of *hud*.²⁶ Its other form in Pashto is *heywad* (nation), which until this day is used with the same meaning.

The word *karal*, which means to sow, has been derived from *karsh*²⁷ of Avesta. In old Hindi *karshati* or *charshati* also has the same meaning. In Pashto *karana* or *karhana* has the same connotation. The five tribes of ancient Aryans were called Kaerashti²⁸ and in Avesta *karshiyot* has been used to mean a farmer.

Similarly in the Yasht section of Avesta *khastaw*²⁹ appears to mean a fighter, strong and fearful person. The Pashto word *ghashtelei*, with the same meaning, is close to this word. Other

words which have similarities to Pashto are: *mehr*³⁰ meaning death is close to Pashto *murr*. *Zyar* of *zeem*³¹ meaning winter, *sindhwa* meaning a river (mentioned in Rigveda) is close to the Pashto *sind*, *mazgaha* mentioned in Avesta is close to the Pashto *maaghza* (brain), *wahuni* of Avesta is close to *wenie* (blood), *ayenika* (Avesta) and *aynka* (Sanskrit) are close to the Pashto word *wanengi* (forehead).³²

The Avesta *gawusha* is close to *ghwazh* (ear) of Pashto. The linguist, W. Thomaschek, in his book *Pamir languages* (p. 50) states it is called *ghokh*. In today's usage a claypot oven is called *paja*. This word appears in Avesta together with *khumbey*.³³ However now the meaning of *khumbey* has changed and it means a *kando*, a large earthen vessel to store grain. This is because Pashtuns shape a *kando* just like an oven.

In the Yasht section of Avesta, chapter 62, part 10, *khashpana* has been used meaning night. In Pashto *shpa* (night) is used until the present time. Dr. Zamar states³⁴ that the Aryans relied on nighttime in relaying time of the day. Indians and Germans follow the same pattern of usage. Pashtuns, until the present time, refer to the night in stating the passage of time. For example they will say how many nights did you spend on the road? The car will reach Kabul in two nights.

The word *auj* which in astronomy means a very high place is *auch* in Sanskrit. Khwarezmi in *Mafateh al-Oloom*³⁵ and Adasi in *Old Persian Words* have written this word as *aug*. In Pashto *auchat* is used to mean an elevated place. This word has a very ancient root. The Arabized form of this word is *auj*, it is *aug* in Persian and *auch* in Hindi. Since Afghanistan was the center of ancient Aryan civilization and it was also the epicenter of their old language we can conclude that the *auchat* of Pashto remains from that time.

Bata is a kind of cooked rice. This word is frequently used in Pashto. In *Mafateh-al-Oloom*, Khwarezmi considers this word to be Hindi and he states that *bahta* is its Arabized form.³⁶ In Hindi *baharat* is a form of this word. From this we see that in the pure Aryan language its root was the same.³⁷

6. Stupa, puut:

Stupa means a half circular building. In Europe terminals are built in this shape. Stupas are part of the important historical relics in Afghanistan. One such stupa exists in Sanji of India until the present time. It was built by Ashoka, the famous emperor of Afghanistan in 300 BCE.³⁸

Sayed Suleiman Nadwi provides the following explanation of this word.³⁹

Yaqt calls the dome of Nawbahar temple of Balkh an *astan*.⁴⁰ Ibn al-Faqiya Hamdani has written it as *asbat*.⁴¹ The famous researcher De Gogi, who is a publisher of Arabic works, has provided the following forms of this words from inscriptions: *astan*, *ast*, *asbat* the correct form of which is *astab*. It is considered to be the Arabized form of the word stupa. Stupa is a Buddhist word. Those temples where they stored the ashes of their religious leaders were called stupas.

Such structures which were built on top of high mounds abound in Afghanistan. Many explanations of these buildings have been provided in Kabul Magazine on numerous occasions. In Pashto these structures are called *toop*. Remnants of one such structure remain near the Tanni bridge of Jalalabad and Pashtuns call it Shyesta Toop. The root of the word *toop* is also very ancient and is close to the Buddhist word stupa.

7. Baladhuri and the cities of Afghanistan:

Before and after Islam the northern regions of our country, Helmand and Seistan had a vibrant civilization and there were a large number of buildings. This place was the the cradle of Aryan civilization. Later large cities were built in this area. Geiger writes there are numerous ruins around Grishk and signs of development can be seen on both sides of the Helmand river which are remnants of large cities. This place was prosperous during the time of Alexander⁴² Similarly Ebeid states that old Farah was inhabited before Alexander⁴³ and when the Arab army came here from Iran they saw large cities under the domain of the Kabulshahs. The famous Arab historian, Baladhuri has written extensively about this area. Here I present a summary of his writing:

"In the year 30 H (651 CE) Rabi son of Zeyad son of Anas Haresi, came to Seistan and Fahraj. From there he went to Zaleq, which is 75 parsangs from Fahraj. The distance between Zaleq and Seistan is five parsangs and it has a fort. Later he went to the Karkoya village, which lies five miles from Zaleq and the people of the area surrendered without a fight. Later he conquered Hasyun also."

References:

1. Ancient Iran, vol. 1, p. 11.
2. Perhaps this may be the Kokcha river which flows through Kataghan.

3. Aryan Civilization by Dr. W. Geiger, p. 74-75.
4. Aryan Civilization, vol. 1, p. 70-108, 81-113.
5. Yasht of Avesta, chapter 19, part 41.
6. In present day Baluchistan, to the south of Peshawar and Kakar area, southeast of Quetta, lies a land at an elevation of 6 to 8 thousand feet. This place is still known as Kandahar. It is the abode of Much and Haiderzai people. The Maghreb, Khalo, Torghar and Shaban mountains lie to the east of this area.
7. East Aryan Civilization, vol. 1, p. 107-208.
8. History of India by Marsden, vol. 1, p. 36-37.
9. Hayat-e Afghani, p. 33.
10. History of Ancient Iran, vol. 1, p. 110.
11. Kabul, vol. 1, issue 9.
12. Al-Maselek wa al-Mamalek of Ibn-e Khordadba, p. 55.
13. Futuh-al-Baladan of Baladhuri, p. 440.
14. Murawaj-al-Dahab of Masudi, vol. 1, p. 372.
15. Ayeen-e Akbari.
16. Ajayeb-al-Safar of Ibn-e Battuta, vol. 2.
17. Ahsan-al-Taqaseem, p. 482.
18. According to old Kandahar monetary value a qandaharei was 24 paisa, 6 misqal and 3 abasei.
19. Zein-al-Akhbar, p. 66.
20. History of India, vol. 1, p. 245.
21. Tarekh-e Seistan, p. 95.
22. Civilization of Aryans, vol. 1, p. 275.
23. Frazer's Journeys, p. 132.
24. Aryan Civilization, vol. 1, p. 252-260-268.
25. Vendidad, chapter 5 part 10, chapter 8 part 103.
26. Aryan Civilization by Geiger, vol. 1, p. 444.
27. Yasna, chapter 2, part 2.
28. Aryan Civilization.
29. Avesta, chapter 13, part 37-38.
30. Aryan Civilization.
31. Aryan Civilization.
32. Journal of the Eastern Association of Germany, vol. 34, p. 419.
33. Vendidad, chapter 8, part 84, 85.
34. Ancient India, p. 36.
35. Page 221, Leiden Press.
36. Mafateh-al-Oloom, p. 177.
37. Taloqat-e Hind wa Arab of Sayed Suleiman Nadwi.
38. Indian Civilization by Gustave le Bon, p. 358.
39. Taloqat-e Hind wa Arab, p. 120.

40. Ma'jam-al-Baladan, vol. 8 p. 321.
41. Kitab al-Baladan, p. 323.
42. Aryan Civilization, vol. 1 p. 257.
43. Ebeid, vol. 2, p. 178-279.