

The Pushtun: A Tough People in a Hard Land

by Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse

Nine-year-old Yacub hardly flinches when rockets and 100mm tank shells whistle overhead, slamming into a mountain less than a mile away. His streets are filled with Mujaahadeen (Islamic freedom fighters). MIG-21 jets, loyal to a Tajik faction, frequently bomb the city of Kabul. Targets are rarely hit because the planes must fly at 30,000 feet in order to avoid U.S. provided stinger anti-aircraft missiles.

Yacub has not attended school for two years since eight displaced families began living in the structure. At the local mosque, children's Koran classes are no longer taught due to the current internal fighting.

Soviet Invasion

Moving to Kabul in 1981, Yacub's family sought protection after their village was leveled by MIG's and armored helicopters. Their water supply was even poisoned. These events caused many from their village to flee to Pakistan.

Shortly after Yacub's family arrived in Kabul, his older brother was forced into the Communist military and died in battle. Their father's explanation—"It was God's will"—never really comforted Yacub.

The boy's family will have a difficult time surviving through the sub-zero

winter without their farm income. They have been forced to rely solely on an uncle's \$11 per month government job. These are economically hard times in Afghanistan, with a 360% annual inflation rate. No longer are the Mujaahadeen leaders heroes, these who promised peace and prosperity with the establishment of the present Islamic government in April 1992.

After a decade of Soviet occupation, 1.5 million lives have been lost. In February 1989, the 120,000 Soviet soldiers pulled out of Afghanistan, leaving 30 million unmapped landmines. The once golden wheat fields farmed by Yacub's father are now barren, as are most other fields, due to the hidden landmines.

The different Mujaahadeen factions claim their struggle is still "jihad" (holy war), even though they are killing their own Muslim brothers and sisters. Yacub remembers well the time his home was robbed and his father beaten by Uzbeks (ethnic Turks from northern Afghanistan). Yacub's father says he believes in God, but is now disillusioned. He is often heard saying "If this present jihad is Islam, I want nothing to do with it."

Proud and Unruly

The name *Afghan* was given to the Pushtun by their Persian neighbors and means "unruliness" or "upheaval". The Pushtun are extremely individualistic, proud, hot tempered, bold, fearless, and resistant to change.

Pushtun culture is expressed in the "Push-tunwali" (code of honor), which includes generous hospitality and the obligation to give mercy and asylum to an enemy if humbly requested. However, this code of honor also includes defense of property as well as blood revenge.

Although no one would admit it, the Pushtun are fearful of curses and the "evil eye" (evil spirits). Amulets and charms are worn for protection. Superstition permeates every aspect of their daily lives.

The land of the Pushtun is the birthplace of two major religions: Hinduism and Zoroastrianism. Prior to Islam, Buddhism was dominant. Throughout their history, the homeland of this people has been exposed to foreign armies. Invaders have always paid a high price for their conquests. The Pushtun people were the most difficult opponent faced by Alexander the Great. It took six major crusades of Arabs to impose Islam in the 8th century. After three military campaigns, the British were never successful in subduing the Pushtun. They were only successful in weakening the Pushtun by dividing them when they formed the Durand Line of Demarcation, now the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Pushtun Facts

Religion: Hanafi Sunni Islam
Population: 25,040,000
 Afghanistan: 10,738,000
 Pakistan: 14,302,000
Language: Pukhtu (northern)
 Pashtu (southern)
Diet: Whole wheat bread, rice, lamb, beef, melons, grapes, dried fruit and nuts.
Health Care: Extremely poor, few doctors; medicines are scarce, high infant mortality; life expectancy is 43 years.
Literacy: 7-14%
Urbanization: Mostly rural and semi-nomadic
Products: Opium (largest export), hand-woven carpets, wool, cotton, Karakul pelts, dried fruit and nuts.
Christian Churches: None
Mosques: 48,000

The Pakistani government has found it difficult to control the Pushtun who are referred to as Pathan by the British. The government has little choice but to permit self-rule and interferes little in Pathan affairs and territories.

An “Adoptable” People

Most Pushtun respect Christians because of their humanitarian service, yet the Good News of the Gospel has never been heard by the vast majority of these proud people. The Pushtuns also feel a kindred spirit with Christians because they have “The Book” (Bible), and they know that Christians are not like the godless Soviets that came to destroy them with tanks and helicopters. Today the Pushtun are more receptive to the Gospel than in any time in history, however, sadly to say, few Christians are working among them.

God loves the Pushtun and will raise up many to experience His grace and give Him glory as promised in Revelation 7:9. Since they have no church, our responsibility is to pray and work for them to become a disciplined people. (Matt. 28:19 and 20)

Pray for the Pushtun!

***Pray** that the grief, tears, and blood shed in the name of *jihad*, may cause Islamic disillusionment.

***Pray** that the curse of innocent bloodshed will be broken. It is not uncommon for brothers to kill brothers. (Gen. 4:9-11)

***Pray** that strongholds of Islam, fear, mistrust, and prejudice—will be broken as well as the dominant sins of greed, pride, violence and revenge.

***Pray** for the translation of the Pushtu Old Testament, and for the effective distribution of literature, Scripture recordings, radio programs, and effective use of *The Jesus Film*.

***Pray** that the hundreds of secret believers will be unified to do the will of God in Christ their Lord and Saviour.

***Pray** for the Pushtun to be set free from their bondage to superstition and black magic.

***Pray** for the millions of refugees in Pakistan and Iran, and for all those displaced and suffering in their own country.

***Pray** that Christian aid organizations will persevere, have favor with unstable governments and recruit many workers.

***Pray** for a culturally sensitive church-planting outreach to the Pushtun that will result in a thriving, reproducing truly Christian church movement.

For Further Study

- * *Muslim Peoples*. Weeks, Richard. London, Greenwood press. 1978.
- * *The Pathans 550 BC-AD1957*. Caroe, Olaf. Macmillian. 1958.
- * *Guardians of the North West Frontier: The Pathans*. Singger, Andre. Amsterdam. Time-Life Books 1982.
- * “Among Afghanistan’s War-torn Frontier.” *National Geographic*, June 1985.
- * “Afghanistan’s Uneasy Peace.” *National Geographic*. June 1985.
- * *Afghanistan*. Dupree, Louis. Princeton University Press. 1980.

For additional information on Prayer Cards on this and other unreached peoples, write: Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse P.O. Box 17490 Colorado Springs, CO 80935