

The Lost Tribes of Pakistan

There is a long believed rumor, among Pashtun communities, that they take descent from the lost tribes of the original twelve tribes of Bani Israeel. This is commonly propagated due to the fact that the Pashtuns have colored eyes and curly hair. Their origins remain mysterious. I personally, as an ethnic Pashtun, and as an avid enjoyer of historical origin theories, believe that the Pashtuns are an amalgamation of surrounding peoples, such as the Turks, the Persians and the communities and tribes that passed through the Silk Route. They formulated a tongue common to the area and by way of that tongue developed a culture with its own surrounding mythology. However, currently as the tribes of Bani Israeel experienced throughout history, it seems the Afghans have now been forced to become lost.

The Pakistan government has recently decided to remove over 1.7 million Afghan refugees who have made Pakistan their home since as early as 1979, at the beginning of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The question that comes to mind, is, is this a good decision from the stand points of economics security, social stability and Islam?

The Afghan refugee crisis has been propagated by the current Pakistani government as an attempt to cut back on smuggling and so-called terror-related activities. Simultaneously, they claim this expulsion will help reduce the economic burden faced by the country, due to an excessively large population.

The government claims the Afghan refugees don't pay any tax. Thus, they deserve to be removed from the country. This argument however could also be used against Pakistani business magnates, politicians, informal cottage industry workers, and non-salaried workers generally. In fact, a majority of Pakistan's population either refuses to, or is not able to, pay direct taxes to a corrupt government. The government thus uses a policy of indirect taxation. With any basic understanding of how indirect taxes work, it is realized that even if a worker is an illegal immigrant, or a legal immigrant, they are both bound to pay tax on sales, and utilities. I am sure all 1.7 million Afghans regularly purchase food products and other goods needed for basic survival, such as electricity and gas. They are all indirectly taxed by the government. So, claiming taxation is the issue is not only ridiculous, it is also incredibly hypocritical. Instead, the removal of these refugees results in the loss of skilled labor, an excessively youthful and hardworking community, and astute business people and workers. It is an economic loss by any sensible understanding of the phrase economic loss.

Moving on, from economic factors, we must discuss the issue of the so-called security and smuggling issue. The government propagates that the Afghans are responsible for a majority of the terrorist activity, taking place in Pakistan. This, however, is a major misrepresentation of the actual situation. Many of the individuals involved in terrorist organizations are locally recruited. The Afghans who are participating in this terrorism are usually funded, and provided resources by, said locals, or other interested parties. Simultaneously, this does not dull the resentment in the Afghans and the Pashtuns. In fact, it inflames animosity already present against the Pakistani state. The removal of people who have lived in this country for decades will only give them cause to hate those who removed them. Hatred may even extend to those who remained silent as rights were violated in removing such a large number of people. This is especially considering a large amount of those evicted people are young, and know nothing other than life in Pakistan. It leaves them with no money resource or homes. The Pakistani government is now pushing three generations, of at least 1.7 million Afghan refugees, to hate the Pakistani state and what it

stands for. So, as a move to tackle terrorism this is ultimately a failing, if not an aggravation of the current situation.

Then, we come to the question of smuggling. On that, I have little to say as it is a xenophobic assumption to begin with. If smuggling is indeed taking place through the Afghan refugees, and their contacts in Afghanistan and Iran, why are they not fabulously wealthy and influential, able to prevent their deportation by buying off corrupt government officials? Also is the solution to solving a criminal conspiracy to remove the workers at the bottom of the rung. Or is the solution to remove the people at the top, who are running the show? Those people being Pakistani politicians, industrialists and businessmen. As for the claim that, "The refugee situation has encouraged smuggling and terror-related activities." There is no statistical evidence to support this false claim. In fact, the prosecution data of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province disproves this false notion. Only 134 of 10,549 cases of major crimes involved displaced persons from the neighboring country. According to the Directorate of Prosecution, a total of 11,685 cases were registered during the period, out of which 10,549 were put up in court. Out of these, only 134 involved Afghan refugees. This comes to 1.27 per cent of the total number of cases landing in court. The cases involved 23,007 accused, of which only 300 were Afghan refugees. Thus, the percentage of Afghan refugees accused of the said crimes comes to 1.3pc. (reference: <https://dawn.com/news/1308486>)

The next matter I take issue is the disgusting manner in which these people are being treated. Many of them are in possession of identity cards. Many of them have never seen, much less lived, in Afghanistan. Many of them have families' wealth and entire lives invested into Pakistan. In my opinion, and that of any sensible person, this gives them the full right to stay here. Why should they suffer for the fact that an incompetent government refused to, or was unable to, provide them with the proper avenues to naturalize. Then why is the Pakistani government not deporting the Bohri and Sikh minorities as well? Maybe, it is because there is still an opportunity to use those communities for international aid. It is a chance to boost in Pakistan's standing in the international community.

Incidentally, and significantly, Pakistan has received large sums, over a number of years, in humanitarian assistance from the United States for Afghan refugees previously. The Pakistani government also took massive funds in covert aid as well from American intelligence. It funded and trained young Afghan men to fight the Soviets on behalf of the US. The rulers of Pakistan used this population to their hearts content, in service of the US. When the need for them ran out, they were discarded with contempt. Moreover, by expelling such a large population, the rulers are now fulfilling the US policy of pressuring the Taleban, so they submit to the Western world order completely. They are creating animosity between Muslims, which only benefits the enemies. They are then even using the animosity, which they created, to justify their refusal to mobilize our armed forces in support of Gaza.

Then we come to the idea that formed the basis of the creation of a separate nation state that we now know as Pakistan. The idea of Pakistan itself is unique in its nature in the era of the nation state. The idea is that there is the formation of a country under the premise that citizenship is granted on the basis of religion, not ethnicity, not language, not race and not a common belief in a political system. The removal of this core idea leaves only independent former provinces of an idea by the name of Pakistan. It is an idea that challenged norms, but failed to stand up to ethno-nationalistic sentiments. It seems now that the people, whose ancestors quite recently fought and died for the idea of a non-ethnicity based state. They have fallen prey to what their own blood once fought against. They are now forcing the removal of peoples from land they claim to be theirs on the basis of documentation alone. By that logic, examining race, language and history, these same people should now demand the removal of the Pashtun community in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

Moving on, we should discuss the mandate, the mission statement if you will, for Pakistan, a state formed by Muslims for Muslims, and for other peoples, who wish to live with the Muslims. The Objectives Resolution issued by the founders of Pakistan in fact states in its fourth article, “The Muslims shall be enabled to order their lives in the individual and collective spheres in accordance with the teachings and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy Quran and Sunnah.” The question that I ask then is what the Islamic view on this issue is. Some Pakistanis cite “international law,” which allows for the forced removal of “illegal” refugees, as a justification for removing over a 1.7-million Afghan refugees. However, this law is borrowed from the genocidal Western states, who have exposed the full extent of their inhumanity in these past few weeks over the issue of Gaza. How is this related to the Noble Quran or the Sunnah?

Speaking contextually, we must ask why? Why do the powers that be, with all these obvious realizations prefer divide, prefer xenophobia? The answer is simple. A house divided is a house destroyed. What I mean by that specifically is that it is in the interests of those who hold power, those who hold the authority, to maintain ethnic sectarian and religious divide amongst those they govern. Such division is a distraction so they may continue their exploitation. They may avoid the masses discovering who is truly collaborating with the enemy. In regards to issues of race the Prophet (saw) said in his Farewell Sermon, «يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَلَا إِنَّ رَبَّكُمْ وَاحِدٌ، وَإِنَّ أَبْلَكُمْ وَاحِدٌ، أَلَا لَا فَضْلَ لِعَرَبِيٍّ عَلَى عَجَمِيٍّ، وَلَا لِعَجَمِيٍّ عَلَى عَرَبِيٍّ، وَلَا أَحْمَرَ عَلَى أَسْوَدَ، وَلَا أَسْوَدَ عَلَى أَحْمَرَ، إِلَّا بِالْتَّقْوَى» **“O humankind, indeed your Lord is one, and your original forefather is one. Indeed, neither the Arab has superiority over the non-Arab, nor the non-Arab over the Arab, nor the white over the black, nor the black over the white, except by piety.”** [Ahmad]

It is imperative that it be understood that this action, and any action such as this, is based in prejudice. It is wholly unIslamic. It is wholly based in falsehood and deceit. It is wholly based in what can only be described as the antithesis of our Deen. Now for a level of personal address to those who view this in a positive light. It is an address to those who believe the women, children, men and the old deserve to be removed from a home they have sought refuge in from oppressors, and from war, just on the basis of race and nationalism. Let them remember how the Ansar (ra) behaved towards the Muhajirun (ra). Let them remember how men unrelated by blood, common lineage and land, treated each other as brethren. They did so regardless of ethnicity, origin and social status. This is just because the recipients of those seeking refuge were Muslim. Remember the Prophet Muhammad Mustafa (saw) remember the Sahaba consider what they would do, and consider who they would support, the oppressor or the oppressed? The choice as I see it is simple. Either we can choose to be those from Yathrib, at the time of the Prophet Muhammad Mustafa (saw), who chose brotherhood. Or we can be those who chose betrayal and falsehood on the basis of race. It must be remembered that this issue presents one truth and one falsehood. It is up to each individual as a Muslim to choose the truth.

The Prophet Muhammad (saw) said, «مَنْ رَأَى مِنْكُمْ مُنْكَرًا فَلْيُغَيِّرْهُ بِيَدِهِ، فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِلِسَانِهِ، فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِقَلْبِهِ، وَذَلِكَ أَضْعَفُ الْإِيمَانِ» **“Whoever among you sees evil, let him change it with his hand. If he cannot do so, then with his tongue. If he cannot do so, then with his heart, which is the weakest level of Iman.”** [Muslim]

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Jalal Ud Din – Wilayah Pakistan