

The Yusufzais Before Their Expulsion from the Kabul Valley

Abdur Rahman and Fazal Sher

Abstract: This research is related to the history of the Yusufzai branch of the Pakhtun or Pushtun tribe, who once occupied the Kabul Valley in Afghanistan. Currently they occupy a large tract of land in the plain of modern Peshawar valley but they were originally expelled from Afghanistan. Their original place and subsequent occupation of different regions have been thoroughly discussed here.

Keywords: Yusufzai, Kabul, Khakhay, Mohmands

The genealogical table given by Ni ‘mat Ullah Harwi shows that Qais, the alleged progenitor of the Afghān race, had four sons, namely, Sarbanr, Bitan, Ghurghusht and Karrān or Karlānr. With respect to the last, the Harwi remarks, that he was not the real son of Qais but was looked upon as such (see Harwi 1978: 416). Sarbanr, the eldest son, had two sons named Sharkhbūn (in some other records Sharkbūn, Shakarbūn or Sharjyūn) and Kharshbūn (or Krishyūn). The western Afghāns are believed to have descended from Sharkhbūn, and the Eastern Afghāns from Kharshbūn. Whatever the value of this genealogical table, the un-Islamic form of these names is strikingly explicit, but, what particular language they have been derived is difficult to say. Bellew (1880: 23) suggested a Rājput origin for them but the evidence to support this view is lacking.

As the genealogical table goes, Kharshbūn had three sons: Kand, Zamand and Kāsi. Kand’s sons, Ghoriah and Khakhay or Khashay became progenitors of two great tribes – the Ghoriah Khel and Khakhay Khel. They are first noticed in the tracts from the Koh – Pāyah or hill skirts, immediately east of Ghazni, to the eastern slopes of the range of Mihtar Sulīmān or Koh-i Siyāh – the *Pusht* or Pukht, also called Koh Shuāl – the original home of the *Pushtūns* or Pakhtūns. Their descendants can be traced in the living tribes. Ghoriah had four sons, namely, Khalīl, Dā

‘udzais, Mohmands and Chamkanīs, of which the last was an adopted son. The Khalīls, Dā ‘udzais and Mohmands presently live in Peshāwar and the adjacent territories, whereas the Chamkanis live in Kurram and on the right bank of the Bārah river near Peshāwar.

Khakhay had three sons known as Mand, Muk and Tarklanri. Of these the last are presently found in Bājaur. Muk’s descendants, the Gagiānīs, occupy the Doābah of which Shabqadar is the main town. Mand had two sons, namely Yūsuf and ‘Umr. ‘Umr’s descendants are called Mandanrs, and presently occupy Mardān and Swābi, while Yūsuf’s offspring known as Yusufzais live mainly in Dīr, Swāt and Buner, and partly in Mardān and Swābi.

With the growth of population, the *Pusht* of the Sulīmān Range became insufficient to accommodate all the sundry tribes, internecine fights were the upshot. From here on the Tawārīkh Ḥāfīz Raḥmat Khāni will be our main guide. The original writer of this work, Khwājū, tells us that the Yūsufzais had settled at Ghāra and Nūshki, and the Ghoriah Khel, particularly, the Khalīls, at Tarnak, Muqur and Qarah Bāgh. Then something went wrong and fighting flared up between the two great septes. The Ghoriah Khels defeated the Yūsufzais and forcibly seized their territory. Khwājū is on the whole borne out by the Akhūnd, Darwezah (1960: 89-90), who, however, gives a more detailed but somewhat

different account. He says:

When the Afghāns divided the country of Qandahār (apparently the entire tract of land extending from Qandahār to the pusht of the mountain is meant) among themselves, the share of the Tarīn tribe fell in between those of Kand and Zamand, cutting the two brothers off to be able to share the grief and happiness of each other. Of the two sections of the Kand (viz. Ghoria and Khakhay), the Khakhay, who lived on the banks of the river Arghastān, were the nearest to the boundaries of the Tarīns. It so happened that enmity sprang up between the Khakhay and the Tarīns. Daily skirmishes eventually developed into a well contested battle in which the Tarīns carried the day. A number of the Khakhays were slain while the rest were dispossessed of their lands; none of their cousins, the Ghoria and the Zamand, came to their help. Having been thrown out of Arghastān, the Khakhay besought the Ghorikhels for a piece of land. They were treated as the rich treat the beggars and given a barren tract of land. But later on when the Ghorikhels were themselves hit by a severe drought, they took up arms and ousted the Khakhay from the lands allotted to them. Having been evicted the Khakhay shifted to a place called "Karobantky", (obviously a clerical error for Gāra and Neshki). With the lapse of time they had to abandon that place as well, and slowly drifted to the environs of Kābul where they became allies of the Utmānkhels and wandered with them to Tānk and Gomāl. In their new habitat they found fertile grazing grounds for their cattle and made rapid increase in their numbers. They grew rich and powerful and looked down upon other less powerful people. Of these

Khakhays, the Yusufzai and Mandanr branches were in the forefront in creating tumult and lawlessness in the city of Kābul and in misappropriating properties belonging to the citizens of Kābul.

The rest of the story is nicely summarized by Elphinstone (1992: ii, 8-11). This is what he writes (The spellings of place names are changed by us to harmonize them with the modern practice):

The original seats of the Yūsufzais were about Gāra and Noshki, the last of which places at least is on the borders of the Dasht-i Lūt (or Great Salt Desert)... their numbers at the time must have been very inferior to what they are now, as they only formed a branch of the tribe of Khakhay; the other branches of which were the Gagiānis, the Tarklānris, and the Muḥammadzais. They were expelled from Gāra and Noshki, about the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century of the Christian era, and soon after settled in the neighbourhood of Kābul. Before they had been long there, they afforded their protection to Mirzā Ulugh Beg, the son of Mirzā Abu Sa'īd, of the house of Tīmūr, and were very instrumental in raising him to the throne of Kābul, which had before been held by his ancestors, but which probably was lost in consequence of the calamities which befell the house of Tīmūr, on the death of Mirzā Abū Sa'īd. Ulugh Beg, on his first accession, treated the Yūsufzais with the greatest distinction; he was indeed dependent on their assistance for the support of his throne; but the turbulent independence of the Yūsufzais was not suited to an intimate connection with a sovereign, and their insolence increasing with their prosperity, they insulted Ulugh

Beg's authority, plundered his villages, and even filled his capital with tumult and confusion. Ulugh Beg whose power was now strengthened by the accession of many Mughals, who flocked to his standard, resolved to rid himself of his troublesome allies; he began by fomenting dissensions between the Yūsufzais and Gagiānis and soon after attacked them at the head of that tribe (Gagiānis) and his own army at Ghwara Marghah. He was defeated at first, but having cut off the chiefs of the tribe at a banquet, during an insidious peace which he had the art to conclude with them, he plundered the Yūsufzais of all their possessions, and drove them out of Kābul.

Elphinstone follows Khwāju; Akhūnd Darwezah's account (pp. 91-95) is somewhat different. When the Yūsufzais and Mandanrs had crossed all limits of violence, he records, the prince Mirzā Quli Beg (same as Ulugh Beg of Khwāju; Ulugh, correctly Aūlūgh, meaning "tall", being a nickname), resolved to take up arms against them. Consequently, a few of them were killed and (the settlements of) some others were invaded and plundered. The Yūsufzais took flight and went to one of the valleys of Kābul. Whether the Akhūnd has toned down the battle of Ghwara Marghah or Khwāju has blown it up, is hard to say. As an expedient way of tackling the problem, the Akhūnd tells us, the Mirzā thought of treating the Afghāns with kindness and compunction and distributed clothes and a variety of eatables among the Afghān Sardārs (Chiefs) and told them to take food and drinks any time they were in need of and wanted to have them. The Afghāns liked it very much and began visiting the Mirzā in increasing numbers. One day 900 of them according, to the Akhūnd, (Khwāju says 700) came expecting rich presents. They were all without arms and weapons. One of them

named Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad Chagharzai succeeded in bringing a knife (kārd) hidden in his shoe and told his companions that, if they thought it was in their interest, he was in a position to kill the king. But nobody agreed with him thinking that it was against the laws of hospitality. Even the Mirzā, the Akhūnd says, did not intend to do them any harm. But Janki, the Gagiāni, who was not a well-wisher of the Yūsufzais, prevailed upon the Mirzā not to let the opportunity slip from his hands, for, the Yūsufzais, he argued, were not likely to assemble again in such large numbers, and to kill the whole lot. The Mirzā at last agreed to avail himself of the opportunity and did as advised. One by one the Yūsufzais were blind-folded and murdered. (Khwāju says that the Yūsufzais were invited to partake of a banquet, then disarmed and blind-folded, and handed over to Gagiāni chiefs who were present at this occasion).

It so happened, Khwāju says, that during the time when preparations were being made for the enactment of this tragic scene, five individuals of the Rānizai section of the Yūsufzais including the Mullāh Ḥusain Utmānzai's son Kauthar, unknowing of what was going to happen, entered the court of the Mirzā, and were put together with the condemned lot. The hands of all these individuals were tied at the back, except the Malik, Sulīmān Shah, son of the Malik, Tāj ad-Din, who had been playing the role of a guardian when the Mirzā was still a child (Khwāju).

After the Mirzā had massacred the Yūsufzai chiefs including Malik Sulimān Shah, he commanded that their bodies be taken outside the city of Kābul and buried. In accordance with this command, the corpses were interred at a place about two or three arrow-flights distant from the city, in the direction of north-east and near the village of Siyāh Sang. That burying ground is called the *Khatirāh* (graveyard) of the *Shahidān* or Martyrs. There also may be seen the tomb of

the Shaikh. Uthmān, son of Mūti, the Malizai, Yūsufzai, one of their holy men, who was included in the number above mentioned, and to whose resting place pilgrimages are made. Masson says in one of his volumes respecting Kābul, that, leaving the gate of Shāh-i Shahidin, “we passed the eminence and ziārat of Siyāh Sang on our left, overlooking the ‘Idgāh”, etc.

After the massacre of the Yūsufzai chiefs, the Mughal army plundered their settlements but without molesting the women folk. Only the five Rānizais (who entered the Mirzā’s court unknowingly) in addition to the young Aḥmad, had been spared to tell the gory details of the said incident. Having learnt what had happened to their chiefs, the Yūsufzai *Jirgah* immediately got together to decide what to do next. It was unanimously decided to move away, for, that country (under the Mirzā’s control) was not the right place for them to live. The *Jirgah* also confirmed the nomination of Aḥmad as the next *malik* and approached some Mashāikh (saintly persons) to enquire as to what should the Yūsufzai do and which territory belonged to them. Shaikh Zangi, son of Mullā Khalīl, Rānizai addressed them thus: “O Yūsufzais, Swāt is our country, go (and get it), God will bestow it upon us. Keep the Dheri (mound) of the ravine at the village Bādwan in Swāt (now in Dīr District) for me as thanks giving.” When the *Jirgah* approached Mullā Ḥusain, Rānizai Utmānzai another widely revered saint — he immediately got up and brought the twig of a tree, which he handed over to Aḥmad with the words: “I have made you the *malik* (chief) of your people, congratulation”. Hearing this other members of the *Jirgah* also got up and congratulated Aḥmad, now Malik Ahman, and prayed for the welfare (of everyone).

After this the Yūsufzai *Jirgah* decided to move to Peshāwar and request the Dilazāks for a piece of land to settle down, as Khwāju puts it. But the

Akhūnd, Darweza (pp-93-94) appears to be more well-informed on the subject and says that after the murder of their chiefs, the rest of the Yūsufzais moved to Nangarhārs, and the Tarklanris to Lamghān. After some time a guerrel arose between the Yūsufzais and Mohmands resulting in a well-contested battle at Hiṣarak in which the Yūsufzias emerged successful. But according to an Afghān tradition, the Akhūnd says, when two brothers fight each other, the vanquished is left behind, while the victor moves away to some other place, the Yūsufzais accordingly left Nangarhār with the Mohmands, and migrated to Bājaur where they occupied some territory for a while but at heart did not like it and therefore returned. Then they invited to Dilazāk chiefs to meet at Safed Sang (a place east of Tahtarah) and held a conference. When they came the Yūsufzai and Mandanr chiefs solicited lands from the Dilazāks out of their territory, but in the meantime, on very slight provocation, a fight ensued between them, and a number of the Yūsufzais and Mandanr fell. On this they returned again and took up their quarters in the hills about Tahtarah and Shalmān, But subsequently they made up matters with the Dilazāks, and gained a footing within Peshāwar boundary; and the Dilazāks treated them with great generosity and consideration. Some of the grey beards of the Yūsufzai, however, state that the fugitives came into the Peshāwar district by the Khyber route and were desirous of obtaining possession of the lands dependent on the “Bar-bar” or “Barér” rivulet but this the Shalmānis refused. In any case the Dilazāk *Jirgah* allotted the entire Doābah, in which the town of Shabqadar stands prominently at present, to the Yūsufzais who slowly and gradually, family by family, moved from the Kābul valley to their new homeland. Some of them who could not support the journey were helped by Mūsa, a rich Yūsufzai chief, who had luckily escaped the plundering raid of the Mughal army. He became the ancestor

of the Mūsa Khel now living in Koṭa, Aboha and Nawikalay in Swāt.

References

Darweza, A. (1960). *Tazkira tal-Abrār wa al-Ashrār*, Peshawar.

Elphinstone M. (1815). *Kingdom of Caubul*, first publ. John Murray, Karachi, repr. 1992.

Ni‘amat Ullah (1978). *Tārīkh Khān Jahāni wa Makhzan-i Afghāni*, Urdu trans. by Dr. Muḥammad Bashīr Husain, Central Urdu Board, Gulberg, Lahore

Shah, Pīr Muāzzam. (1977). *Tawārīkh Hāfiz Raḥmat Khāni*, an abridgement of Khwājū’s *Tārīkh-i Afāghana* Urdu trans. by Maulvi Muhammad Israel, Pushto Academy, Peshawar

Khan, R. (ed.) (1977). *Tawārīkh Hāfiz Raḥmat Khāni*, Urdu trans., with prodigious notes, *Pushto Academy*, Peshawar.