

Religious Transformation and Development among the Pakhtuns: A Historical and Analytical Study

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Like their inaccessible hilly terrain hidden away in huge mountains the origin of the Pakhtuns is also shrouded in mystery. There are various theories put forward by different scholars and historians regarding their origin. The first theory, which was propounded by Niamatullah in *Makhzan-i-Afghani*, was that, the Pakhtuns are the descendants of Hazrat Yaqub (A.S), which means they are of Bani Israelite origin. It goes on to say that the Pakhtuns collectively embraced Islam on the invitation of Hazrat Khalid bin Walid during the lifetime of Hazrat Muhammad (SAW).¹ The proponents of the Bani Israelite theory considered Khalid bin Walid a descendant of that Jewish community who migrated from Babul to Medina. Another theory regarding the origin of the Pakhtuns is that they belong to those Aryans who laid the foundation of an advanced culture at about 1500 B.C. It has been stated that the Aryans, on account of natural calamities, left their original homeland Central Asia and settled in the area of Bakhtar in Afghanistan in the shape of different tribes. In the fields of Bakhtar they spent their days and nights. After some time with increase in their population, the area remained not helpful and productive for them. Therefore, they started migrating from Bakhtar in groups in different phases. After the migration of two main branches from Bakhtar, the remaining Aryans left behind, decided of permanent settlement in Bakhtar. They are known as the 'Aryans of Bakhtar' or the 'Central Aryans'. These Central Aryans, according to

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1 Sardar Sher Muhammad Gandapur, *Tarikh-i-Khurshid Jahan* [Urdu] Tr. by Siraj Ahmad Alvi (Karachi: Sheikh Shawkat Ali and Sons, 1991), p.187.

various accounts are the ancestors of the Pakhtuns. They had settled in the areas of Herat, Kabul and Gandhara.² Gandhara literally means perfumed. It was the name of a great civilization and kingdom in northern Pakistan. It was located in the Valley of Peshawar, the Potohar plateau, Taxila and on the northern side of the river Kabul. Its main cities were Peshawar and Taxila.

There is no ambiguity or uncertainty in the religious history of the Pakhtuns as far as the Bani Israelite theory goes. The theory straight away mentioned them as Jews who accepted Islam when a number of tribal *maliks* under Qais visited Medina and met Hazrat Muhammad.³ So far, the proponents of the Aryan theory did not produce any work to explain the religious transformation, which took place among the Pakhtuns. There are a number of questions striking the mind of every interested reader about different religions, which played important roles in the Pakhtun history. The purpose of this paper is to highlight this aspect of their history, which has not yet attracted the attention of the scholars. What was the religion of those Aryans who were supposed to be the predecessors of the Pakhtuns? How, why and when the transformation from one religion to another took place? Under what circumstances different religions penetrated into the Pakhtun society? Who were their principal religious reformers? Had they accepted Islam *en mass*? Were they converted by force or by their free will? In addition, how these developments in society affected their lives in the course of history? These and a number of other questions and issues are the subject matter of discussion in this paper.

Before the advent of the Aryans in South Asia, India was inhabited by people of different races. That heterogeneous society was called the *Vedic* society and it was going through different stages of culture. The *Vedic* society was rural and agriculturist. The coming of the Aryan to the *Vedic* society ensued a racial war between the Aryans and the non-Aryans. The conflict changed the existing social structure and the people stressed the need for fortifying tribal settlement.⁴ Unfortunately, very little record is available about the life-style of the *Vedic* people. About the sources of ancient Indian history al-Beruni recorded that “the Hindus do not pay much attention to the historical order of things, they are very careless in relating the chronological succession of their kings, and when

2 Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, *Pukhtana da Tarikh pa Ranra Ke* [Pashto], (Peshawar: University Book Agency, 1999), p.68.

3 Sardar Sher Muhammad Gandapur, p.187.

4 V. D. Mahajan, *Advanced History of India* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Co., 1990), p.14.

they are pressed for information, they not knowing what to say, they invariably like to tale-telling.”⁵

The *Rig-Veda* is the oldest Hindu religious book in which one finds some information about the religious life of the Aryans. Regarding its date and composition, there is no unanimity of opinion among the scholars. The opinions differ not to the extent of centuries but to the extent of thousands of years. Some lay down the year 1000 B.C. as the earliest limit while other fixed it between 3000 and 2500 B.C.⁶

When the Aryans migrated to Indo-Pak subcontinent, they did not understand the language of the local population. The local people did not perform sacrifices as the Aryans did. They worshiped the *Phallus*, which the Aryans did not like. They used to live in fortified houses like forts and the Aryans had to struggle very hard to subdue them. Owing to their tough resistance, the Aryans prayed to the gods for help. Help was sought from Indra.⁷ Indra, a chief god was considered as the “breaker of forts”. When they faced the dark skinned, indigenous inhabitants of Indo-Pak subcontinent, Agni, the fire god was also called.⁸

The Aryans worshipped a large number of gods, like Prithvi, Soma, Agni, Indra, Vayu, Marutas, Parjanya, Varuna, Dyaus, Ashvin, Surya, Savithri, Mitra, Pushan and Vishnu. They placed these gods and goddesses in the form of the phenomena of nature. They offered prayers to the gods and made sacrifices from which they wanted favours. The *Rig Vedic* Aryans believed that god and goddesses behaved like human beings. They eat, drink, and had feelings and emotions like the ordinary human beings. They believed some gods were big and others were small. Indra and Varuna were considered the biggest deities. They could not understand the power behind the natural phenomena; therefore, they developed self-made stories and myths about the realities of the universe. They were men of vigour and activity and viewed life with hope and ambition. Although there were variety of gods among them but at the same time the unity of God was not ignored. They had faith in life after death.⁹

5 Al-Beruni, *Kitab-al-Hind*, English Tr. by Dr Edward C. Sachau, (Lahore: Ferozsons Ltd., 1962), p.15.

6 V.D. Mahajan, p.46.

7 *Ibid.*, p.49.

8 Ilhan Niaz, *An Inquiry into the Culture of Power of the Subcontinent* (Islamabad: Alhamra Publishing, 2006), p.29.

9 V.D. Mahajan, p.51.

It may be assumed from the above facts that the Aryans were religious and superstitious people. Religion played an important part in their lives as in the case of many other ancient nations of the world. After the *Vedic* period, transformation took place with the appearance of new faiths brought about by the new ruling dynasties. The process was continued with the assumption of numerous forms and expressions up to the appearance of Islam in the eleventh century A.D. These changes were very often brought about by some intellectual thinkers.¹⁰ Important changes took place in religious field in the time of *Epics*. The *Vedic* gods were superseded by Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.¹¹

In the process there emerged some prominent religious reformers who could rightly be regarded the most profound thinkers of ancient Indo-Pak subcontinent. These religious reformers brought about reforms in the domain of religions, which affected the lives of every community of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent including the Pakhtuns. They laid down the lines of action to be followed by the successive religious reformers. The religious movements started by the persons like Buddha and Mahavira in about the middle of the first millennium BC brought revolutionary changes in society. Several other teachers flourished who were also connected with such movements. The creed preached by some of them contained elements that were not in keeping with the *Vedic* tradition and they ignored the infallibility and supernatural origin of the *Vedas*. It is to be mentioned here that the religious leaders including the Sakyamuni Buddha and Vardhamana Mahavira were not the original founders of their movements but these might have been developed from earlier time.¹²

The surge of Jainism¹³ was the first such movement, which brought about changes in the Indo-Pakistan society. Jain philosophy was founded in about sixth century B.C. by Vardhamana Mahavira. Mahavira means 'great hero'. He was an elder contemporary of the Siddhartha Gauthama

10 P.N. Chopra, Ed. *India, Society Religion and Literature in Ancient and Medieval Periods* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1990), p.14.

11 V. D. Mahajan, p.71.

12 P.N. Chopra, p.16.

13 The birth of Jainism took place in protest against the orthodox *Vedic* (early Hindus) ritualistic cult of the period. Its earliest proponents may have belonged to a sect that rebelled against the idea of taking life prevalent in the *Vedic* animal sacrifice. The traditional founder of Jainism was Rsapha, who was the first *Tirthankara* (Ford makers) of the line of Jainism. The actual and historical founder of Jainism was Mehavira who was born in 599 BC in Bihar (India). His father was a ruling Kshtrya chief of the Nata clan.

Buddha and is referred to in Buddhist writings as Nataputra (son of the Nata). When he was 28 years of age he took up the life of an ascetic. After years of hardship and meditation, he attained enlightenment. There after he preached Jainism for about 30 years and died at Pava (Bihar). *Dewali* the Hindus' New Year festival is a day of great pilgrimage for Mahavira.¹⁴ The history of Jainism is chiefly contained in legends concerning preachers and teachers of this religion. Some of these information also mentioned in old Jain inscriptions of the 2nd century B.C. found at Mathura. After the sixth Patriarch, a great expansion of Jainism took place in the north and north-western parts of Indo-Pakistan subcontinent.¹⁵ The rapid expansion of Jainism found a fertile ground in the Pakhtuns' heartland. Albeit, its impact was not so deep but it is possible that it made a number of followers among the Pakhtuns and other northern Indian people.

Almost simultaneously with the appearance of religions of non-theistic nature, creeds of a definitely theistic character came to evolve the life and culture of the northern Indo-Pakistan people. The central figures around which they grew up were not primarily *Vedic* gods and deities but come from unorthodox sources. Pre-*Vedic* and Post-*Vedic* folk elements were more conspicuous in their origin. There were also the followers of some other religious sect like Vaisnavism¹⁶, Saivism¹⁷ and Saktism.¹⁸ It also had a significant impact in course of time on the popular form of Buddhism and Jainism.

14 *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol.VI, p.473.

15 *Ibid.*, Vol.VII, p.473.

16 Vaisnavism is applied to that Hindu sect the members of which worshipped in a special way Vishnu as contrasted with two other great sects of Saivism and Saktism. See *Encyclopaedia of Ethics and Religions*, Vol.XII, p.570.

17 Saivism means that in orthodox Hinduism, the religious instructor (*guru*) bestows consecration on his disciple by informing him of the name of the deity to be worshipped. The name of the deity is given to the disciple in the root formula (*mulamantra*). If the root formula contains the name of Vasudeva or Narayana, he is a Vaisnava. If it contains the name of Siva he is a Siva and belongs to Saivism. See *Encyclopaedia of Ethics and Religions* Vol.XI, p.91.

18 The name of Sakti refers to the female personification of energy. Their worship is not to be confounded with the orthodox worship paid by the higher class of Hindus to Vishnu or their individual patron deity.

Panini¹⁹, the famous Sanskrit grammarian, refers to the worshippers of Vasudeva (Krishna) and Shiva in the north-western Indo-Pak subcontinent in the fifth century BC. Panini for the first time gives us an idea of the growth of Savism as a religious movement.²⁰ The emergence of the theistic creeds, unorthodoxy and the evolution of different sects is important because there existed a gap between different classes on religious grounds. This was an important element of the *Vedic* society. Latter the spread of Jainism, Buddhism and the development of new sects proved the flexible attitude of the people towards religious matters. The element of sectarianism still exists and it is regarded as a common feature of the Pakhtun society.

Buddhism²¹, founded by Gautama, was also called Siddhartha. Buddhism produced a great culture throughout southern and eastern Asia.²² During the sixth and fifth century B.C., the religions of Buddhism and Jainism symbolized the revolt of Kshatriyas against the leadership and dominance of Brahmins. Panini and the Greek writers tell us that people in the north-western Indo-Pak subcontinent worshipped Indra and Parjanya. New gods like Kumara or Kartikeya were also worshipped. During that time, the worship of images also became popular.²³ The transformation from orthodox Hinduism to Buddhism shows the people's exhaustion with the monopoly of the Brahmins on religion. They wanted to replace it with more egalitarian setup, which the new faith offered to them. Probably that was the reason that Buddhism made almost the whole north-western Indo-Pak subcontinent as its great center.

According to various accounts, the ancestors of the Pakhtuns, whom they called the 'Central Aryans', occupied the areas of Balkh, Herat, Kabul and some parts of Gandhara. These areas along with Afghanistan came under the rule of the Achaemenians of Persia. Cyrus I who ruled

19 Panini, the famous Sanskrit grammarian was born in the town of Lahor (also called *Chota* or Small Lahor) in 350 B.C. At present, it is situated in Swabi district of the North-West Frontier Province in Pakistan. It was in this town that a big Buddhist monastery was constructed on the order of Ashoka in 256 B.C, which have also been referred by Hiun Tsang. See, Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, p.159.

20 P.N. Chopra, p.19.

21 Buddhism, a great religion was founded by Gautma also called Siddhartha. It produced rich culture through much of southern and eastern Asia. Buddha meaning "awakened one" or "enlightened one". It is a title not a proper name. He was the son of the ruler of the kingdom of the Sakyas and was a member of the Ksatrya or warrior caste. According to V.D. Mahajan he was born in 567 B.C. See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Vol.II, p.602.

22 V.D. Mahajan, p.102.

23 Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, p.137. See also V.D. Mahajan, p.102.

from 558 to 530 B.C. founded the Achaemenian Empire. However, it was not until the third sovereign of the dynasty Darius I (r. 533-486 B.C.) who brought a large Indo-Pak territory under his rule. His inscriptions throw some light on the relations between Indo-Pak subcontinent and Persia. In the Bahistan rock inscription, Gaudhara is mentioned in the list of his subject countries. The Persepolis inscription clearly mentioned the Punjab as a part of the Achaemenian Empire. On the other hand his *Nakshi Rostam* inscription also refers to the Punjab as his conquered territory. So it is clear that Indus Valley along with Afghanistan was conquered by Darius I. Herodotus also mentioned that out of the twenty satrapies of Darius I, the twentieth division was in Indo-Pak subcontinent. Moreover, he tells that Darius maintained a special force, belonged to Indo-Pak subcontinent, which took part in the wars against the Persian and Greeks.²⁴

During the rule of Xerxes, Gaudhara and Sindh are mentioned as his satrapies. He too contained a contingent of Indo-Pak troop in his army, which took part in many battles. The control of Indo-Pak satrapies continued up to the time of Darius III but after that it had grown weak and the whole of north-western Indo-Pakistan was parcelled out into a large number of kingdoms. For over two hundreds years the Achaemenians ruled over these areas, which affected every walk of life of local people. Zoroastrianism which had been developed and propagated under the Achaemenians, made some impact on the Mahayana school of Buddhism in Indo-Pak subcontinent. Zoroastrianism was the state religion of the Achaemenian Kings, They also patronized its propagation in their subcontinental satrapies. Quoting Herodotus, Bahadar Shah Kaka Khel is of the view that the sign of fire-temples has been excavated in different part of Gandhara. Alexander, the Great, during his campaign in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, also observed a large number of fire temples in this area. On the face of these new findings, it is to be mention that some Pakhtun tribes also practiced Zoroastrian religion under Achaemenian Kings. The archaeologists have also found the signs of fire-temples in Peshawar and Charssadda. At the time of Alexander's invasion, the people had ignored the spirit and teaching of *Avesta*. From that onwards Buddhist thoughts influenced the philosophic and religious tendencies of the people of Gandhara. This

24 Olaf Caroe mentioned the name of the eastern satrapies of Darius. It included Aria (Herat), Bactria (Balkh), Corasmia (Khwarezm or Khiva), Sattagydia (uncertain), Sogdiana (between the Oxus and Jaxartes), Arachosia (Kandahar), Gandhara (Peshawar Valley), and India. See Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans*, (London: Macmillan and Co Ltd, 1964), p.27. See also Bahadur Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, p.129. V.D. Mahajan, p.100.

fresh wave of Buddhism weakened Zoroastrianism but it could not be completely wiped out from the area. As a result the people of Gandhara including the Pakhtuns took interest in the teachings of the Buddha. Buddhist religious philosophy found a fertile ground in the Pakhtun's territory.²⁵

During the Greeco-Bactrian rulers there were mainly three religious philosophies followed and practiced by the people of Gandhara, Afghanistan and the surrounding area i.e., (i) Greek religion (ii) Zoroastrianism and (iii) Buddhism.²⁶ After that under the Mauryan dynasty, the national life began to develop. Art also made wonderful progress. For the first time the barriers between the Aryans and non-Aryans had broken and there was a culmination of the subcontinent social system in this period. Chandragupta Maurya extended the empire after undertaking various military campaigns against different rulers. It included Kabul, Herat, Gandhara, and Baluchistan, which he conquered from Seleucus, a Greeco-Bactrian ruler in about 305 or 307 B.C.²⁷

Among the Mauryan Emperors Ashoka (273-236 B.C.) will be remembered for his love and propagation of Buddhism. After the death of Bindusara (299-273 B.C.), Ashoka captured the throne. In the thirteenth year of his reign, he conquered Kalinga. According to V.A. Smith "Ashoka Empire comprised Afghanistan, Kashmir, the Swat Valley with tribal territory, Baluchistan, Makran, Sindh, Nepal, the whole of India and Chinese Turkistan."²⁸ After the Kalinga war, he gave up military conquests and was so much full of remorse that he dedicated the whole of his life to the cause of *Dhamma* or law of piety.²⁹

Before his conversion to Buddhism, Shiva seems to have been Ashoka's favourite deity. However, after the Kalinga war, he converted to Buddhism. For the spread of Buddhism, he appointed certain officers. He himself undertook a tour of the country. Besides, he sent missionaries to various parts of the world. Majjhantika or Maddhantika was sent towards Kashmir and the people living in Gandhara.³⁰ It is clear that he remained

25 Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, p.137.

26 *Ibid.*, p.166.

27. V.D. Mahajan, p.115.

28 Vincent A. Smith, *The oxford History of India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), Vol.III, p.127.

29 Ashoka's *Dhamma* or law of piety includes mastery of senses, purity of thought, gratitude, steadfastness of devotion, kindness, charity, purity, truthfulness, service of the human beings and reverence. See V.A. Smith, p.119. V.D. Mahajan, p.115.

30 V.D. Mahajan, p.115.

extremely successful in the propagation of Buddhism among the Pakhtuns. Buddhism spread among the people of Purashapura (Peshawar), Pushkalvati (Charsadda), Nagarahara (Nangarhar), Lampaka (Lamghan), Kabul and Kapisa. Buddhism further reached to the north of the Hindu Kush. It should be mentioned here that the propagation of Buddhism in Gandhara started from the town of Lahor (NWFP), which was a great learning center of Buddhism.³¹ Besides Lahor Shahbaz Garhi and Yaqubi³² were other important places where Buddhism flourished. The Greeco-Bactrian rulers were unable to stop it due to the zeal of the people and devotions of its followers. Zoroastrianism was further pushed to the extreme north-eastern region and was practiced there until Islam reached to that part of the world.³³

In second century B.C., the end of the Maurya rule in Gandhara was precipitated by another Greek invasion from Bactria. They were called the Bactrian Greeks. They ruled over the territories of Gandhara, central and southern Afghanistan and Pakistan. One of its rulers Menander also converted to Buddhism. The dominions of Menander appear to have comprised the central parts of Afghanistan, NWFP, the Punjab, Sindh, Rajputana, Kathiawar and Western Uttar Pradesh.³⁴ During this period the worships of Vishnu was widespread. Vishnu was regarded as the basis of the creation and the sources of all that exists. There is also much evidence that the worship of Shiva flourished in Pakistan and northern India immediately before the coming of the Kushans. For example, a group of coins of the Indian Saka ruler Mauves bears the image of Shiva. On the other hand, in Sirkap (Taxila), in a stratum corresponding to approximately the 1st century A.D., a bronze seal has been discovered bearing the image of Shiva with an inscription in Brahmi and Kharoshti.³⁵ It is easy to assume that after the end of the Maurya rule, the official patronage of Buddhism decreased under the Greeco-Bactrians. Therefore, the old religion of Hinduism re-emerged among some Pakhtun tribes. During this period, they started worshipping a number of Hindu deities.

31 Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, p.167.

32 Yaqubi is a small town in district Swabi in NWFP. Many Buddhist and Hindu relics have been found in this village. But the formal excavation have not been conducted so far. There is a mound called Ramzo Khan Dheri which is believed is full of ancient remaining. The author himself hails from this village.

33 Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, pp.160-61.

34 V.D. Mahajan, p.138.

35 B.A. Litvinsky, Zhang Guang-Da, R. Shabani Samghabadi, *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol.III, (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers, 1999), p.427.

The worship of Shiva also spread to Afghanistan and touched the bank of Amu River (Oxus). In Sozma Kala, near Balkh, a stone slab was discovered bearing the name of the three-headed standing Shiva with a trident and other attributers, which strongly resembles Hercules. Many works of Shivite and Hindu art dating back to between the 5th and 8th century has been discovered in Afghanistan.³⁶ Therefore, one may say that Brahmanism as a religion prevailed among the people of Afghanistan in early medieval times. Individual Brahmanic images even penetrated into Buddhist circles and can be found in Buddhist sties. On the face of these facts, it is clear that some Pakhtun tribes adopted Hinduism as a religion and the later development proved it beyond any doubts. The signs of the fire-worshippers have also been found among the Pakhtuns. The celebration of the New Year, mourning the dead once a year and offering of the food and drink to those who had died are some traditions strongly resembling with the fire-worshippers. Sources relating to the Arab conquests mention fire-temples and idol temples. They were richly decorated and contained many precious objects. Firdosi, a great poet of medieval Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, also mentions fire-temples in Bukhara and Paikent in his famous collection entitled *Shahnama*.³⁷ The existence of the fire-temples in the area inhabited by the Pakhtuns indicates the presence of fire-worshippers. The re-emergence of the competitor religions would have been a direct cause of the fall of Buddhism. The fall also created a vacuum, which was filled by the preachers of other faiths through making new recruits.

The cultural, religious, commercial and political contacts for nearly two centuries between the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent and Greeks molded and affected the lives of both the people. The religious ideas and ideals of both the people were adopted by each others. A large number of Greeks were converted to Buddhism and Hinduism.³⁸ From Greek coins, one learns about the beautiful portraits of kings, which depicts not only western god and goddesses but also city goddesses of Pushkalavati (Charssadda), Peshawar, Kapisa and a few other local deities. In the first century B.C, the Greek rule was swept away in the new wave of invasions by the Scythians and the Parthians. During this time, more and more local deities appeared on the coins. Besides large numbers of inscriptions speak of the erection of Buddhist monasteries in Gandhara and thus attested to the popularization of the faith again among the masses. It has been stated that Kujie Kadphises laid the foundation of a

36 *Ibid.*, p.427.

37 *Ibid.*, p.428.

38 V. D. Mahajan, p.139.

monastery and stupa at Peshawar. It was another golden age of Buddhist culture in the region. The earlier period of conflicts and feuds made way to an atmosphere of peace in which Buddhism flourished, brought about a revolutionary change in the society.³⁹

The religion of Zoroastrianism was again flourished under the Sassanian rulers and propagated widely by one of its outstanding religious leader called the *mobad* (high priest) Kartir (Kirder). He was appointed by Shapur's successor Hoimized I (272-273 A.D.), as 'Magupat of Ohrmazd. It was a title that was used for the supreme god. He benefited from the favour of the Kings who not only authorized him to have inscription carved out but also included him among the royal dignitaries.

In Bactria, Sassanian Zoroastrianism had to compete with Buddhism, Hinduism and the worshippers of Shiva. Besides there is an inscription of the time of Shapur I in which the name of Peshawar has been mentioned as Peshkabur. While the word Afghan as Abgan has been mentioned in the sixth part of this inscription. The historians and archeologist believe that Vindaparan Abgan Rismaud was a distinguished noble in the Sassanian court. Therefore, it is clear that some Pakhtun elders were the noble men in the Sassanian court who probably were the followers of Zoroastrianism.⁴⁰

The period of the Kushans had started with its new capital Purushapura i.e. Peshawar. They were also called Siao-Yue-Chi. Kushan kings nourished Buddhism and erected stupas and monasteries in the vicinity of the city of Peshawar. It was the winter capital of Kanishka and a great centre of Buddhism. At that time, the world's largest Buddha monastery was situated at Peshawar. A Chinese pilgrim Sunk Yan (520 A.D) also attested the presence of this huge monastery. It was one of the finest and magnificent buildings in Indo-Pak subcontinent during the Kushan era. It is a matter of controversy whether or not the Kushan rulers adopted Buddhism as a state religion? However, about Kanishka it has been stated that he converted to Buddhism in the middle of his reign. A large number of Buddhist monasteries, inscriptions and coins have been excavated from different part of Afghanistan and North-Western Frontier Province of Pakistan. A number of Buddhist scholars and teachers also hailed from these areas. Some famous Buddhist who are

39 Ahmad Hasan Dani, *Peshawar: Historic City of the Frontier* (Peshawar: Khyber Mail Press, 1969), p.44.

40 Fazal Rahim Marwat, Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, Ed., *Afghanistan and the Frontier* (Peshawar: 1993), p.160.

said to have been of Pakhtun's origin were Matanga, Gobharana, Sang Heuci and Dharma Kala. This area also played an important role in the propagation of this great religion. It was regarded a main route to China, Turkistan, Mongolia, Ceylon and South-east Asia.⁴¹

A Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang visited Gandhara in 640 A.D. He stated about its people that their disposition is timid and soft, they love literature, most of them belonged to heretical schools and a few believe in the true law. From old time until now this borderland of Pakistan has produced many authors of Sastras i.e., Narayanadeva, Asanga Bodhisattva, Vasubandhu, Dharmatrata, Manorhita, Parsva, the noble and so on. There are about 1000 sangharamas (monasteries) which are deserted and in ruins... The stupas are mostly decayed. The heretical temples, to the number of about 100, are occupied pell-mell by heretics. Hiuen Tsang found Buddhism in vain and Brahmanism in the ascendant. He stated this after two years of the decisive victory, which the Muslim army won over the Sassanian ruler of Persia at Nihavand. From his writing, one cannot find any sign of the presence of Islam among the Pakhtuns.

Hiuen Tsang further stated about the *pepal* trees in the city. At present, a market by the name of *Pepal Mandi* (Pepal Market) is situated. There are a number of *pepal* trees still standing there. He stated that the four past Buddhas used to sit beneath this tree. He further stated that the Buddhist communities used to assemble here for their religious ceremonies. Owing to the increased number of the devotees, the first Yue-Chi conqueror, probably Kujie Kadphises built another stupa and monastery for greater accommodation. In this way, Peshawar got importance for Buddhist religious communities.⁴²

The spread and propagation of Buddhism in the Pakhtun's territory covers a lengthy time span, from the Kushan period to the Muslim conquest. It is attested by many inscriptions left by Buddhist pilgrims, Chinese travelers, and by the discovery of other important inscriptions from Bajaur, Tirah, Swat, Gilgit, Hunza, Mardan and Swabi written in Kharosthi and Brahmi scripts. In the first millennium B.C., Buddhist pilgrims, merchants and traders traveling between Central Asia, Pakistan and East Turkistan crossed Gilgit and Hunza. The numerous findings of Buddhist relics have been also found in Wardak, Bagram and Gul Dara (all near Kabul) and Tor Dheri (Balochistan). Manuscript in Brahmi and

41 Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, p.205.

42 Ahmad Hasan Dani, p.37. See also Olafe Caroe, p.94.

Kharosthi character have also been found in Bamiyan, Bimaran, Hadda, Jalalabad and Basawal all in Afghanistan.⁴³

The Kushan dynasty was deposed and replaced by another line of kings who were called the Sakas. They recognized the suzerainty of the Sassanians. During this time, new Persian elements were introduced in the area. In fourth century A.D. little Kushan occupied Gandhara. They were also called Kidar Kushans. It is doubtful whether they were Buddhists or not? However, under their rule *Kharoshthi* script gave way to Gupta (Brahimi) script. Side by side, Buddhism declined and some other religion gained ground.⁴⁴

In 455 A.D, the Huns defeated the Guptas and in 465 A.D, they captured Gandhara, Pakistan, and the surrounding area nowadays inhabited by the Pakhtuns. They followed their own religions such as Tengri, Nestorian, Christianity and Manichaeism. After the capture of Gandhara, they pushed on into Gangetic plains in India. In their onwards march they dislocated the locals and persecuted Buddhist community. One of their kings Lacliha was barbaric, did not believe in the law of Buddha but loved to worship demons. Another king Mihirkula suppressed Buddhism destroying monasteries everywhere in Indo-Pak subcontinent.⁴⁵ At that time majority of the people belonged to Brahman caste. They had great respect for the Law of Buddha. During this reign we hear the existence of a number of Buddhist monasteries in the Pakhtun area.

Al-Beruni recorded that in the mountains, which form the frontier of India towards the west, there were tribes of the Hindus, or of people like them. They were rebellious and savage people, which extended as far as the further-most frontiers of the Hindu race.⁴⁶

Arrival of Islam

With the commencement of the eighth century A.D, the Muslim armies had penetrated as far as the western confines of Pakistan and reduced Makran and the surrounding areas of the present day Baluchistan in Pakistan. However, it was not until 712 that Muhammad bin Qasim besieged the town of Debul. The Brahmans and the non-Muslim population were invited to accept Islam. The siege lasted for three days.

43 *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol.III, p.438.

44 Ahmad Hasan Dani, p.50.

45 Alexander Berzin *Historical Sketches of Buddhism and Islam in Afghanistan*, November 2001. Online article accessed January 3, 2007.

46 Al-Beruni, p.266.

Muhammad bin Qasim retained 4000 Arab soldiers in a newly built colony reserved only for Muslims.⁴⁷ After the occupation of Sindh, governors were regularly appointed first by the Umayyads and then by their successors the Abbasids until Basher son of Daud rebelled against al-Mamun (813-33). After that, the hold of the Caliphs on Sindh was relaxed. The authority of the Caliphs virtually waned in 871, when two Arab chiefs established independent principalities at Multan and Sindh.⁴⁸

The Arabs never carried the standard of Islam beyond the Indus. The attack of Muhammad bin Qasim had just introduced Islam to Pakistan without being accepted by majority of the Hindu population. Those Muslim armies who afterwards dominated the greater part of India entered through the north-western frontier, the heartland of the Pakhtuns. It is important to discuss it in proper historical context for it may be easy to better understand the coming of Islam to the Pakhtuns' heartland.

In September 636 A.D, a decisive battle was fought between the Sassanians and Muslims armies at a place named Qadsiyah. The Sassanian King Yazidgard fled toward Nehavand where the same fate awaited him at the hands of the Muslims in 642 A.D. After the battle at Qadsiyah the whole of Persia, Khurasan and other Central Asian principalities came under the Muslim rule.

In 31 A.H. (650-51 A.D) Abdullah Ibn. Amir was appointed the governor of Khurasan by the Caliph Hadrat Usman. He made Nishapur a base of his military expeditions that were sent towards Herat, Merv, Balkh, Ghazni and Helmand. For the time being, the Muslims defeated and subdued the Buddhist chiefs of the towns. However, the Muslims faced a lot many difficulties in the proper administration of these areas.⁴⁹

In the light of the foregoing, it is easy to argue that at the time of the arrival of the winds of Islam to the Pakistan and Afghanistan the Pakhtuns were Buddhist. Besides some of the tribes had also adopted their old religion i.e. Hinduism. It is attested by the writings of Hiuen Tsang and al-Beroni.

Under Ameer Muawiya, (661-680) Abd al-Rahman Ibn Samura consolidated his rule in Zabul and reached Kabul, whose ruler was obliged to pay tribute to the Arabs. A number of Muslim colonies were

47 Wolsely Haig, *The Cambridge History of India* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Co., 1965), Vol.III, p.3.

48 *Ibid.*, p.9.

49 Dr. Hamid-ud-Din, *Tarikh-i-Islam*, [Urdu] (Lahore: Ferozsons, N.D.), p.152. Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, p.239. Also see Mazhar-ul-Haq, *A Short History of Islam* (Lahore: Bookland, 1999), p.302.

erected and some Arab settlers and traders permanently settled in these colonies.⁵⁰ After that, another person Mohallab Ibn Abi Safra entered Kabul and Zabul via Marv. He waged war against the non-Muslim population of Pakistan and Afghanistan, captured 10 to 12 thousands slaves and concubines, and forced them to embrace Islam.⁵¹

At that time, the ruler of Kabul was called Kabul Shah. Abdur Rahman Ibn Samura dispatched a huge force in 652 A.D and waged war against the ruler of Kabul and reduced the surrounding areas. Further, he also reached Bannu and Lahor in 664 A.D.⁵² This state of affairs did not remain for long. Because the ruler of Kabul soon drove the Arabs from his land. Another Arab expedition against Kabul was repulsed in 697-98 A.D.⁵³

In 63 A.H. Yazid Ibn Muawya sent Yazid Ibn Ziad to subdue the ruler of Kabul. But the ruler of Kabul defeated the Muslim army. Then another expedition was sent under Muslim Ibn Ziad, which consisted of the residents of Ghor and Badghis. He took Kabul Shah on a surprise attack and drove him from his capital. He appointed Khalid bin Abdullah as its governor. Khalid bin Abdullah according to some, was descended from Khalid Bin Walid. When relieved from his duties he settled somewhere around Koh-i-Sulaiman. He also married his daughter to a Muslim Pakhtun. It is stated that the Suri and Lodhi tribes are the descendents of that Pukhtun and his Arab wife.⁵⁴

A century later, the Muslims successfully invaded Zabul in 795 A.D and went on to Kabul. In the subsequent eastern campaign under the Caliph al-Mamun, (813-833) the Hindu ruler of Kabul was captured and converted to Islam. The Arabs succeeded in gaining a firm hold of the region only in 870 A.D when the founder of the Saffarids dynasty of Seistan invaded Kabul through Balkh and Bamiyan. The remote area of Ghur, on the upper reaches of the river Farah, remained beyond the reach of the Muslims for many decades. The Muslims only succeeded in establishing themselves there in the tenth century, by which time most of the inhabitants had converted to Islam.

The Arab conquests brought some social and political changes, yet in the far-flung areas of the Sassanian Empire, the pre-Islamic

50 Muhammad Kasim Farishta, *Tarikh-i-Farishta*, Urdu Tr. by Abdul Hai Khwaja (Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali and Sons Pub., 1974), p.80.

51 Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, pp.243-44.

52 *Ibid.*

53 Muhammad Kasim Farishta, p.80. Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, p.245.

54 Ahmad Hasan Dani, p.64.

civilization was preserved. It underwent no radical change until several decades later with the process of Islamization and the emergence of new social and economic conditions. Around that time in central Afghanistan and in the areas north of the Hindu Kush, ancient Kushan culture continued and the premier religion was Buddhism. In Bamiyan in the 7th century, there were more than ten Buddhist monasteries and over 1000 monks. Kabul and its surrounding area also had many buildings devoted to Buddhist and Hindu cults. Further evidence of the strength of pre-Islamic civilizations in this area in the seventh and eighth centuries is attested by different coins with legends in Palavi, Kufic and Bactrian script.⁵⁵

Some Arab historians also mentioned that the Arabs entered Pakistan from two sides. A Muslim contingent under the command of Muhallab subdued Kabul and then entered Pakistan through Khyber Pass from its north-western side. Another contingent under Manzar raided Makran and Sindh. It has also been stated that al-Qandahar was captured during these campaigns in 676 A.D.⁵⁶ Here the al-Qandahar of the Arabs should not be confused with the present day Qandahar. The city of Qandahar was not founded at that time. Here al-Qandahar means Gandhara with Hund as its capital. All these Arab incursions proved abortive but it did introduce Islam in Gandhara and among the Pakhtuns in Pakistan. Earlier in the year 44 A.H. (664 A.D.) Al-Muhallab Ibn Abi Sufra raided as far as Bannu and al-Ahwar town (Lahor in NWFP) between Al-Multan and Kabul. Again, in 53 A.H. (672 A.D.) another Arab governor Abbas Ibn Ziad raided the frontier of Al-Hind and crossed the desert of al-Qandahar. At the time the Pakhtun area was under the Kashatriya ruler of Kapisa i.e. Ratbil, the Kabul Shah⁵⁷ of Arab chronicles. Quoting Tabari and Al-Baladhuri, Ahmad Hasan Dani states that the action of Muhallab bin Abi Sufra was a planned and determined military campaign against Kabul Shah.⁵⁸

These expeditions were partly responsible for the spread of Islam among the Pakhtuns. The foregoing statement about the settling of

55 *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol.III, p.472.

56 Dr Hamid-ud-Din, p.202. See also Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, p.245. Ahmad Hasan Dani, p.64.

57 In the history's books the Hindu Shahi dynasty appears under many names i.e. Kabul Shahs, Hindu Shahis of Waihind and Ratbil Shahs. Al-Beruni even called them Tibetans. Anyhow, it was the last non-Muslim dynasty, which ruled over Gandhara and Peshawar Valley. They were strong and maintained great splendour and dignity until the arrival of Islam. Olaf Caroe, p.108.

58 Ahmad Hasan Dani, p.64.

Khalid bin Abdullah among the Pakhtuns seems reliable. Khalid bin Abdullah was an immigrant settler and his case is a strong corrective of the Pakhtuns' tradition according to which they thought Khalid bin Walid impressed upon their ancestors to embrace Islam. In this connection, the Pakhtuns confused Khalid bin Abdullah with Khalid bin Walid without any strong historical evidence. Ahmad Hasan Dani's statement that the Pakhtuns were Buddhist and converted to Islam because of the Arab activities in Sijistan, Zabul and the Pakistan border may not be accepted as the whole truth.⁵⁹ They were the subject of the Hindu Shahi rulers, who ruled them for a very long time first from Kabul then from Hund and Bathinda. All the Pakhtun tribes are not supposed to be the followers of Buddhism. There must have been Hindu tribes among them who provided support to their Hindu rulers. The presence of the Hindu tribes is evident from the signs of a temple found at Logar, which was built by the Hindu Shahis. It was regarded a great Hindu temple in Afghanistan. Besides, al-Beruni recorded some of the Pakhtun tribes scattered from river Kabul up to Kabul were the followers of Hinduism.⁶⁰ Besides the conversion did not occurred *en mass*. Pakhtuns accepted Islam individually some time through the hands of Arab missionaries, some time by force and some time by their free will. In North Waziristan the presence of the *Dargah* (shrine) of Malik Azdar, is a strong argument of the activities of the Arab missionaries among the Pakhtuns.⁶¹ Malik Azdar came along with other Arab soldiers earlier and after taking part in various campaigns, settled in North Waziristan.

The situations remained the same until the rise of the Samanids in the ninth century A.D. They extended their dominion over Transoxiana, Persia and the present day Afghanistan. The penetration of the Muslims in the neighboring territory alarmed the rulers of Kabul therefore, they shifted their capital from Kabul to Hund. Owing to the weak position of the ruler of Kabul, Yaqub-al-Lais Safar, a strong ruler of the Safarid dynasty, raided Kabul and occupied it in 870 A.D. He founded the city of Gazni and destroyed a number of idols and a huge statute of a deity was sent to the Abbasid ruler. Yaqub took great interest in the propagation of Islam among the heathens and pagans of Afghanistan. During his reign, Islam spread in the areas around Ghazni and Kabul. The rapid spread of Islam proved to be a cause in the downfall of the Hindu Shahi dynasty, which ruled over Kabul and the areas south of the Hindu Kush from sixth to eleventh century A.D. During the Samanid dynasty, a large number of

59 *Ibid.*, p.64.

60 *Ibid.*, p.65.

61 *Ibid.*

people converted to Islam from different religion i.e. Hinduism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism etc. The emergence of the Pakhtuns had also been started around this time. The Samanids and the Hindu Shahis in their armies recruited them.

During the later half of the tenth century, new development took place in the Pakhtuns' area. In 960 A.D, Alaptgin ousted Abu Bakr Lawaik, the ruler of Zabul and Kabul on behalf of the Samanid, from Ghazni. Alaptgin was an able Samanid commander. The change of power in Ghazni forced Kabul Shah to shift his capital once again from Hund to Bathinda. It was a fort on the bank of the river Sutlej. Jaipala, a Hindu Shahi ruler, wanted to exploit the strategic location of the Pakhtun's area. He then established friendly relations with them to block further Muslim incursion on his territory. Shaikh Hamid Lodi was chosen to serve this purpose. He was given the authority over a large track of land stretching from Multan to Lamghan.⁶² Shaikh Hamid Lodi was a leading and influential Pakhtun *malik* of the Lodi tribe.

According to *Tarikh-i-Farishta* Subaktagin ascended the throne of Ghazni in 977 A.D. He started his Pakistan and Indian conquests in the year 367 A.H (986-87) A.D. He acted like a champion of the faith whose chief occupation was the propagation of Islam among the Hindus. At that time a fair chunk of the area inhibited by the Pakhtun was under Jaipala. Subaktagin won the support of a number of Pakhtun tribes against his Hindu rivals by delivering emotional speeches and promises of war booty for them. It is noteworthy that a large number of Muslim Pakhtuns stood behind him. He also apprised them of the benefits of jihad in the life hereafter. For the first time Peshawar, Lamghan and the territory up to River Kabul came under Muslim rule. Subaktagin made arrangement for the consolidation of the area. Then he also subdued the surrounding Pakhtuns and Khaljis. In *Tarikh-al-Hind*, al-Beruni recorded that in the mountains to the west of India there lived various Pakhtun tribes, which extended up to the valley of Sindh. He distinguished these tribes as Hindus. Therefore, it is clear that in 1000 A.D., some Pakhtun tribes had not yet converted to Islam.⁶³

In the year 392 A.H. (1001 A.D) a battle was fought between Mahmood of Ghazna and Raja Jaipal. Mahmood of Ghazna defeated Raja Jaipal with his 10,000 strong force. In this battle, Mahmood also took up arms against the non-Muslim population of the area. He subdued rebellious and recalcitrant Pakhtuns, took some of them to Ghazni and

62 Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, p.277.

63 Al-Beruni, p.265.

retained them as slaves.⁶⁴ The fort of Waihind, Ohind, Und or Pahind⁶⁵ was also raided by Mahmood. It was made the capital of the Hindu Shahi rulers after the Ghaznavide reduced their dominion

In 395 A.H. (1004 A.D.) Mahmood defeated Bajra, the ruler of Uch. He stayed there for some time, made arrangement for the permanent annexation of the area and the conversion of its inhabitants. On his way back from Uch Mahmood was caught by flood in the river Indus. It was something difficult to cross the river with his soldiers and horses. In this hour of trial, Abul Fatah Daud, the successor of Shaikh Hamid Lodi in Multan, attacked him and inflicted a considerable loss to Mahmood's army.⁶⁶ However, Mahmood escaped to Ghazni. In 396 A.H. (1005 A.D.) Mahmood marched against him. Despite Anandpal's help, Daud was arrested and taken to Ghazni. He died in imprisonment in the fort of Ghur. In 412 A.H (1021 A.D) Mahmood made an unsuccessful attempt to subdue, the fort of Loh Kot (Lokote) situated in Kashmir. On his way back, he invaded Lahore and occupied it from the son of Anandpal probably Trilochanpala. Thereafter, the city was entrusted to Shaikh Ayaz, one of his ablest lieutenant, with the instruction that *sikka* should be struck and *khutba* should be read in his name.⁶⁷

Here it is very clear that Daud and the Hindu Shahi rulers enjoyed friendly relations at the time of Mahmood's Pakistan campaigns. Both the Hindus and some Pakhtun tribe helped each other against the Muslim forces. Besides the predecessor of Daud, Shaikh Hamid Lodhi also protected the interests of the Hindu Shahi family by blocking the intrusions of the Muslims from the west. Therefore, it may be argued that owing to their alliance with the Hindu Shahis, a number of Pakhtun tribes even at the dawn of the eleventh century were either Hindus or Buddhist.

Mahmood fought the next battle against Anandpal somewhere near Peshawar⁶⁸ or between Hund and Peshawar or the in the town

64 Muhammad Kasim Farishta, p.104.

65 This place has been discussed by different scholars due to its strategic importance. It was given different names but at present the place is called Hund. It is situated on the right bank of the river Indus. About seventeen miles away from district Attock. See Minhaj-al-Siraj, *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, Urdu Tr. by Ghulam Rasul Mehar (Lahore: Urdu Science Board, 2004), p.415.

66 Wolsley Haig, p.14.

67 Muhammad Kasim Farishta, p.110.

68 Woseley Haig, p.16.

of Jalbai Jalsai near Lahor in NWFP.⁶⁹ In this battle the Hindus were defeated. A large number were perished and thousands of them were arrested. They were then converted to Islam. Bahadar Shah believed that they were the non-Muslim Pakhtuns of the districts Swabi, Mardan and the surroundings. Olafe Caroe also supports this view. He states that the vanquished were the dwellers of the Peshawar Valley and they were the unconverted Pukhtuns who sided with the Hindu Shahi kings.⁷⁰ Probably those Pakhtun tribes left Kabul with the Hindu Shahis and settled with them in Hund. They supported them against the Muslims and rendered great services to their old Hindu masters.

The process of conversion of the Pakhtuns to Islam continued during Mahmood's time. Many Pakhtun tribes recognized him as their national leader. His army comprised a huge contingent of the Pakhtuns. For the first time he infused the concept of jihad into their hearts. Some of the Pakhtun commanders who fought from his side were Malik Arif, Malik Daud, Malik Mahmud, Malik Yahya, Malik Ghazi, Malik Shahu, Malik Khano and Malik Ahmad. His troops fought with the valour, which the religion inspires. As a result, Islam as a cultural and political force rapidly penetrated into the Pakhtun areas yet there were some Pakhtun tribes who had not yet accepted Islam. Those non-Muslim Pakhtuns were the supporters of Jaipala and Daud.⁷¹

The Hindu Shahi kings of Kabul and Gandhara (Pakistan) lost their dominance over the area completely at the time of Mahmood of Ghazna. They were the rulers of Buddhist, Zoroastrian and Hindu population. They did not persecute their subjects on religious grounds. They were the patrons of numerous faiths and cultures. Various artifacts and coins of their time have been found displaying their multicultural domain

In 599 A.H. during the time of Muhammad Ghori, the Kahkars of Punjab and the non-Muslim Pakhtuns of the Tirah valley revolted. Sultan himself came to Lahore and sent Qutb-ud-Din

69 Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, p.284.

70 *Ibid.*, p.285. See also Olafe Caroe, p.121.

71 *Ibid.*, p.282.

Aibak against the rebellious tribes. They were subjugated and many of them were forcibly converted to Islam.⁷²

Conclusion

Religious transformation, revival and development were common phenomena of the Pakhtun's society prior to their conversion to Islam. Their predecessors witnessed the zenith of great religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and the spread of Islam. The spread and progress of a particular religion among the Pakhtuns depended on the official patronage from a strong dynasty. Therefore, one finds the progress and development of Zoroastrianism under the Achaemenians and Sassanians and Buddhism under the Mauryans and Kushans. For a brief period, there also emerged the concept of Greek religion among the Pakhtuns under the Greco-Bactrians.

There are many reasons behind frequent transformation, conversion and revival of different religions among the Pakhtuns. Their ancestors, the Aryans rebelled against the predominant position of Brahmans in Hinduism. As a result, the Buddhist philosophy of peace, equality and service of human being found a fertile ground in their area. Besides, some of the ruling dynasties also provided unqualified support to their respective religions. They facilitated every individual to preach it in the nook and corner of India.

About Islam, it is very clear that it spread not only among the Pakhtuns but also throughout Pakistan as a result of the Arab activities in Central Asia and the surrounding areas. The zeal and vigor of the new converts provided a boost to this great religion. Another important point is the tribal nature of the Pakhtun society, which is very much like early Arab tribal settlement. Culturally both the societies resembled each other. Therefore, Islam found a fertile ground in this part of India. Besides, Pakhtuns did not accept Islam in its doctrinal form. Rather they strictly followed their social traditions while adopted some principles of Islam. Whenever the two disagree in matter of details, traditions usually win over Islam. Pakhtuns fought battles against the non-Muslims

72 *Ibid.*, p.310.

rulers of different principalities and reduced them to submission. Other factors through which the Pakhtuns saw their destiny in accepting Islam were its concept of equality, rule of law, unity and the economic opportunities it provided to the new converts.

Another important point to be mentioned here is that on the face of these facts the authenticity of the Bani Israelite theory of the origin of the Pakhtuns becomes very weak. It is also evident that the Pakhtuns' conversion to Islam took place individually. It would have been possible that a tribal chief decided about the conversion of a whole tribe. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the Pakhtuns collectively converted to Islam. Anyhow, they are now predominantly Sunni Muslims, most of them followers of the *Hanfite* branch of the Sunni Islam. There is a small minority of *Ithna Asharia* Shia Pakhtuns largely concentrated in Hangu, Kurram Agency and various parts of Afghanistan. Most of the Pakhtun consider themselves members of the larger Muslim Ummah, as the belief of Qais Abd-al-Rashid, who is purported to have been the first convert to Islam, is still popular among them.