

ETHNOGENESIS, LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS, AND
CULTURAL INTERACTIONS OF CERTAIN ETHNIC
GROUPS IN AFGHANISTAN

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Abstract: *This article analyzes the ethnic formation, linguistic characteristics, and cultural interactions of certain ethnic groups living in Afghanistan—namely the Elkhani, Fergana-origin groups, Kazakhs, Tatars, Mirzoyis, Aimaqs, Hazaras, Turkmens, and Jogi communities. The study examines the ethnogenesis of these groups in connection with Turkic-Mongol elements, patterns of bilingualism, and changes in language use and ethnic identity depending on the region of residence. It also highlights the influence of the education system, marital relations, and the social environment on ethnic identification. The article contributes to a better understanding of ethnic and linguistic processes within Afghanistan's multiethnic society.*

Keywords: *Afghanistan, ethnic groups, ethnogenesis, bilingualism, Uzbeks, Turkmens, Hazaras, Tatars, cultural relations.*

Introduction.

Afghanistan has historically been a crossroads where various ethnic groups and cultures have intersected. As a result of its geopolitical location and migration processes, ethnic communities such as Uzbeks, Turkmens, Tatars, Hazaras, Aimaqs, Elkhani, Mirzoyi, and Jogi have taken shape in the country. This article provides a scholarly and theoretical analysis of the ethnic origins of these groups, their linguistic environments, and their mutual cultural influences.

Results and discussion.

The Elkhani people live in Sar-e Pol and Sheberghan, and certain aspects of their language, customs, and traditions resemble those of the Aimaqs. For this reason, Turkic–Mongol elements played an active role in their ethnic formation. Although they communicate in Uzbek in streets and public places, bilingualism within families—Uzbek and Dari—is widespread. Over the past fifty years, intermarriage between Elkhani and Uzbeks has been steadily increasing. In some cases, the Elkhani are also referred to as Ulkhani [1].

Fergana-origin groups. They resided in the city of Kunduz and in the nearby village of Olchin Damshok; however, at present all of them have migrated to Turkey and Saudi Arabia [2].

Kazakhs. Kazakhs live in the areas of Dashti Archi and Imam Sahib.

Tatars. Some of the Tatars living in Takhar and Kunduz provinces consider themselves part of the Uzbek ethnos and speak Uzbek. Uzbek Tatars are characterized by the use of the vowel e (“e-speaking”) and mainly reside in Maymana province. The other half, while identifying themselves as Tatars, speak Dari. According to Mawlavi Khairmuhammad Totori, a 45-year-old resident of Saritangi village in Rui Duab district of Samangan province, the Tatar population in Afghanistan exceeds 200,000. Of these, 20,000 families—approximately 100,000 people—live in the Rui Duab district alone. Tatars reside in the villages of Bolokent, Poyonkent, Surkhqala, Mudirak, Pontangi, Duob, Obkhorak, Khojazohid, Qashqa, Aimaq, Mukhu, Hazorsum, Kalgunba, Navruzho, Begishho, Xolakho, Ketarho, Chorchashma, Javpololi Bolo, and Javpololi Poyon, as well as in Maymana city of Faryab province, Tatarakhona, and the provinces of Takhar, Badakhshan, Ghazni, Baghlan, Bamyān, and Parwan. As noted above, half of them speak Uzbek and the other half speak Persian (Dari). This situation demonstrates that throughout socio-historical development, Tatars have preserved their ethnic unity and ethnonym, while those living in predominantly Uzbek areas regard themselves as a clan of the

Uzbek nation, whereas those residing in areas dominated by Tajiks and Hazaras have adopted the Persian–Tajik language. The stability of this factor in Afghanistan is also explained by the fact that instruction at all levels of madrasas and schools is conducted in Persian–Dari, ensuring that even young children actively acquire this language [3].

Mirzoyis trace their ethnic origin to Shah Rukh Mirza and recognize themselves as his descendants. According to their accounts, a genealogical scroll written on deerskin in the eighteenth century still exists and measures 12.4 meters in length.

Aimaqs, depending on their area of residence, partly identify themselves as Uzbeks and speak Uzbek, while another part considers themselves Persian-speaking and uses Dari. For example, in Maymana province they mainly speak Uzbek, whereas in Kunduz province and the city of Mazar-e Sharif some Aimaqs speak Uzbek and others Dari. In Herat province, Aimaqs speak exclusively Dari [4].

Although the majority of Hazaras speak Dari, they link their ethnogenesis to the Turkic–Mongol peoples, particularly Genghis Khan. Certain terms used among them and their Turkic anthropological features confirm their Turkic–Mongol origin. For instance, the presence of titles such as onboshi (leader of ten), yuzboshi (leader of a hundred), and mingboshi (leader of a thousand) supports this view. While Hazaras recognize a common ethnonym, they are divided according to place of residence into groups such as Hazara Mongols, Hazara Turks, and Hazara Qarluqs, which also indicates the language they speak. For example, in Takhar province more than half speak Uzbek and the rest Dari; in Samangan and Kunduz provinces more than half speak Dari and the remainder Uzbek. Some respondents stated that Hazaras and Aimaqs are closely related, that they were once a single ethnic stratum, and that today Hazaras are divided into twelve branches [5].

Turkmens are divided into Saljuqi, Timurid, and Jamshedli Turkmens. Turkmens also reside in Herat; initially there were about 20,000 families, after which 3,750 families were resettled from the north as migrants. The majority of Afghan Turkmens are Saljuqi and Timurid Turkmens, numbering over 100,000 families. Among Turkmens, a unit of 200–300 soldiers is called an oymaq. According to the testimony of Oysha Bek, a resident of Qala-i-Zal district of Kunduz province, the Turkmen population of Afghanistan exceeds three million, residing mainly in the provinces of Faryab, Balkh, Samangan, Kunduz, Badghis, Herat, and along the Amu Darya riverbanks, where they live in dense settlements. Turkmens are divided into clans such as Yomut, Khatab, Karaja, Surkhi, Akdari, Chalik, Qarin, Ghabirdi, Chakish, and Chatrak [5].

In Faryab province, half of Andkhoy's population consists of Turkmens, with the Ersari, Ulugbek, Saljuqi, and Ulu Tapa clans predominating. Turkmens also live in the villages of Quraysh Topkhona, Taxta, and Chorchangi in Dawlatabad district of Maymana; in the districts of Sheberghan, Aqcha, Qarqin, and Shortepa; in Kaldar district of Balkh province; in Qaysar district of Faryab province; and in most parts of Herat [6].

Ninety percent of the Turkmens living in Andkhoy, Aqcha, and Balkh provinces belong to the Ersari clan, while the remaining ten percent belong to the Teke and Yomut clans. The Ersari clan is spread from Dawlatabad in Faryab to Kunduz, mainly inhabiting the banks of the Amu Darya as well as urban areas. The Teke clan lives in Herat province, and the Yomut clan resides in the Marvichoq area of Badghis province [6].

All Turkmens who migrated from the Karki region are disciples of Eshon Khalifa, widely known as Khalifa Qiziloyoq. Eshon Khalifa was born around 1885 near present-day Karki in Turkmenistan and migrated to Afghanistan between 1920 and 1925. As an ideological leader of the Turkmens, he played a major role in ensuring their unity. He passed away in 1955 at the age of seventy in the village of Qiziloyoq in Sheberghan province. He was survived

by two sons, Siroj Makhdum and Hamid Makhdum, both of whom have since passed away. Their descendants currently live in Afghanistan and Turkey. Love for horses, as an ancestral tradition, takes root in the heart of every Turkmen boy from a young age. Renowned horsemen also emerged among the Turkmens, who hold Malang Polvon in high esteem [7].

Oral literature is also well developed among Turkmens, with the tradition of bakhshi (bardic performance) continuing as a hereditary practice. In the works of famous bakhshis such as Kurbanniyaz Khatab from Andkhoy, the late Muhammadi Chopbosh from Aqcha, and Aziz Bakhshi from Andkhoy, epics from the Goroghli cycle predominated. In addition, the poetic ghazals of Makhtumquli continue to be performed as terma songs [8].

Jogis, or Gypsies, number between twenty and thirty thousand in Afghanistan and engage primarily in begging. During warm seasons, they set up tents near water sources, while in winter, according to local accounts, they rent some houses. Most of them consider themselves Muslims. Jogis living in hilly areas consume gazelle meat and employ distinctive methods for hunting gazelles.

Gazelles are known to feed on plant roots and, during harvest seasons, eat melons and watermelons. Large gazelles can yield around twenty kilograms of meat. When encountering humans, they defend themselves by shooting their horns, likened to spears. Gazelles dwell in caves. Jogis release specially trained dogs into the gazelle's den; if a gazelle is present, the dog emerges and barks persistently toward the den. The Jogis then dig out the den and capture the gazelle.

Conclusion

The formation of ethnic groups residing in Afghanistan is closely connected with complex historical, political, and cultural processes. The results of the study show that Turkic–Mongol elements play a significant role in the ethnogenesis of the Elkhani, Tatars, Aimaqs, Hazaras, and Turkmens, a fact

that has been preserved in their linguistic features, customs, and social structures.

Among the ethnic groups examined in the article, bilingualism is widespread. This phenomenon is primarily explained by the area of residence, interaction with neighboring ethnic groups, and the dominance of the Dari language in the education system. The adoption of another language by certain groups while maintaining their ethnic name demonstrates the flexibility of ethnic identity. At the same time, marital ties and cultural proximity have further strengthened the process of ethnic integration.

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