

Pashtun, Southern in Afghanistan



Photo: COMIBAM / Sepal



Map: Joshua Project / Global Mapping Intl

"Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

People Name	Pashtun, Southern
Country	Afghanistan
Status	Unengaged Unreached
Population	5,400,000
Language	Southern Pashto
Religion	Islam - Sunni
Written Scripture	Yes
Oral Scripture	No
Jesus Film	No
Gospel Recordings	Yes
Christ Followers	No
Churches	No
Workers Needed	108
Workers Reported	0

BACKGROUND

Passionate is a word that well describes much about the Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan. They are said to love or hate with equal intensity, displaying fierce loyalty to friends, yet defending the right of badal - revenge or blood feuds where enemies are concerned. An old proverb reveals much, "He is no Pashtun who does not give a blow for a punch." Thus, it is no surprise that the Taliban fighters originated among the Pashtun. But that presents an unfairly sensational - and lopsided - view of Afghanistan's largest people group.

Ethic researchers have identified them with the Indo-Iranian Affinity Bloc, the Pashtun People Cluster and variously call them Pashtun, Pakhtun or Pushtun.

Traditional Pashtun territory lies in the southern and eastern mountains where extended families dwell in tents or mud houses, amid typically unsanitary conditions due to lack of safe water sources. Such circumstances, coupled with lack of health care, contribute to limited life expectancy - about 46 years. Nomads may live in valleys during winter and move to mountain pastures during summer months - a harsh lifestyle either way on war-torn, landmine-pocked landscapes. In one of the world's poorest countries, many depend on raising livestock, limited farming and cultivating

the notorious opium poppy for income. Though some urban Pashtun are educated, most adults are illiterate, particularly women.

WHAT ARE THEIR LIVES LIKE?

Pashtun culture adheres to a rigid, unwritten "code of ethics" - the Pushtunwali (the way of the Pashtun). Behavior expected without question includes hospitality and protection for guests, provision of refuge to a fugitive and acceptance of a sincere offer of peace, bravery, steadfastness, persistence, defense of property and family honor and protection of female relatives - values for which death is not too high a price to pay.

Clothing is simple. Men wear long-sleeved cotton shirts over loose pants with sleeveless vests, and turbans wound in a particular way with the end hanging to the shoulder. In some areas weapons complete this costume. Women must observe Purdah (meaning curtain) which requires wearing a full-length garment known as the burka that features a mesh opening over the eyes for navigation.

Living a limited life, women neither inherit property, appear publicly without a male escort nor expect advanced education. Her identity is linked to a male member of her family, that is, as the wife of (her husband)

or the mother of (her eldest son). With increased exposure to the world beyond, however, and a new democratic-style government some Pashtun customs may eventually change.

WHAT ARE THEIR BELIEFS?

Converts to Christianity will more than likely be banished from their families. Consequently, there has been very little growth of Christianity among the Pashtun. Most of the work by various missions agencies has ended due to unrest in the country. More recently, some of the "freedom fighters" have attacked Western relief agencies, causing them to flee from Afghanistan. Christian radio and television broadcasts are strictly forbidden by the government.

PRAYER ITEMS

- * Pray for peace in the land of the Pashtun peoples.
- * Ask God to call those who are willing to go to Afghanistan and share Christ with the Pashtun.
- * Pray that God will encourage and protect the small number of Pashtun believers.
- * Ask God to soften the hearts of the Pashtun towards Christians so that they will be open to the Gospel.
- * Ask God to once again open the doors for Christian agencies desiring to work among the Pashtun.