



AFGHAN

AFGHAN (*afġān*), in current political usage, any citizen of Afghanistan, whatever his ethnic, tribal, or religious affiliation. According to the 1977 constitution of the Republic of Afghanistan (1973-78), all Afghans are equal in rights and obligations before the law. In an attempt to alleviate the inevitable tensions and conflicts of an ethnically diverse state, the republic discouraged reference to ethnic or tribal origin and prohibited the use of personal names that evoke an ethnic group (such as Afrīdī, Aḡmadzay, Ōrmuṛ, Nūrzay, Pōpalzay, Wardak, etc.).

From a more limited, ethnological point of view, “Afġān” is the term by which the Persian-speakers of Afghanistan (and the non-Paštō-speaking ethnic groups generally) designate the Paštūn. The equation Afghans = Paštūn has been propagated all the more, both in and beyond Afghanistan, because the Paštūn tribal confederation is by far the most important in the country, numerically and politically. The Afghans or Paštūn are characterized by: (1) Their language, Paštō, the most important Iranian language of the east, with a remarkably rich literature. (2) Their clan structure, which clearly distinguishes them from the Tajik of Afghanistan who generally have none at all (see Paštūn). (3) Their social code, *paštūnwalī* (see Paštūn) or simply *paštō*, that governs relations among some Paštūn, as a code of honor, and defines the essential principles of the individual ethic and the national virtues. (4) Certain characteristics, both social and cultural, extinct or living, (e.g., *wēš*, the periodic redistribution of lands; nomadism, etc.). The term “Afġān” has probably designated the Paštūn since ancient times. Under the form Avagāṇa,



this ethnic group is first mentioned by the Indian astronomer Varāha Mihira in the beginning of the 6th century A.D. in his *Brhat-saṃhitā*.

See Afghanistan: [iv. Ethnography](#); [v. Languages](#).

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