



BANGAŠ

BANGAŠ, one of the least-known Pashtun tribes in the Solaymān range, Pakistan, and one of the few that are not named after eponymous ancestors. The origin of the name is obscure since, as Raverty (p. 387 n.) pointed out, the folk etymology from *bon-kaš* (Persian for “root-drawer”) is not acceptable.

The tribe is a combination of lineages from various origins. Evidence of this comes from both the lineage names (e.g., Laḡmānī and Jamšēdī) and the mythical descent of the tribe from a man named Esmāʿīl, who moved from Persia to the Solaymān mountains but whose eleventh-generation ancestor was the famous Arab general Kāled b. Walīd and whose wife was a Formolī (a local Iranian ethnic group; Š.-M. Khan, pp. 311f.). At this point, nothing—apart from distant kinship through the same Arab ancestor—relates the Bangaš to the Pashtun genealogical megastructure, wherein they are nowadays incorporated through the Karlāni branch, which comprises several Solaymāni tribes that have been genealogically adopted and more or less culturally pashtunized. This incorporation, which is never clearly formulated in terms of filiation or even of adoption, may have originated in a military alliance between the Bangaš and Kaṭak (q.v.) in the 9th/15th century.

The tribe is formed around two fractions Gār(ī) and Sāmel(zī), whose names supposedly derive from those of Esmāʿīl’s two sons. Interestingly, Gār and Sāmel also designate the two rival political leagues between which the Solaymāni tribes have been traditionally divided. Following M.-Ḥ. Khan (p. 297), some authors have concluded that this pan-Pashtun political cleavage



first took place among the Bangaš and then gradually passed among neighboring tribes. According to another hypothesis (Bellew, p. 106), the Bangaš's genealogy metaphorically transposes a long-standing political (or other) duality that existed before the tribe was formed. In any case, the decomposition of traditional political structures since, at least, the last century has generated much discordance between the genealogical status of lineages and their declared political affiliations (see [Table 24](#)).

The Bangaš also stand out among the Pashtun because the majority are Shi'ite and a minority Sunni. It has often been said (e.g., Caroe, pp. 202ff.) that Shi'ism among the Pashtun—in fact only among the Bangaš, the Tūrī (q.v.), and a small part of the Ōrakzī (q.v.)—is but the modern avatar of religious dissent going back to the Rōšānī heresy (q.v.). As regards the Bangaš, Bellew (p. 105) has suggested that the tribe, given the name of its putative ancestor, might have formed around the preaching of Isma'ili missionaries. Surprisingly, the details of Bangaš myths fit in with this hypothesis in ways that had not previously been suspected. Before settling in the Solaymān range, Esmā'īl, it is said, abode in Mūltān, a town over which he was appointed governor (*Gazetteer*, p. 30). Using his genealogy to make a quick calculation, this event can be placed in the 4th/10th century (and not in the 7th/13th as indicated in the *Gazetteer*), in other words, during the very period when Mūltān was the center of a short-lived Isma'ili state. The ultimate episode in the myth, which has to do with Esmā'īl's arrival in the Solaymān mountains (specifically in the Gardīz region which was then an active center of the Kharijite movement), is historically grounded in the religious persecution that followed the Mūltān takeover by Sultan Maḥmūd of Ġaznī (on three successive occasions during 396-401/1006-10; A. N. Khan, pp. 44ff.). All evidence leads to considering Esmā'īl to be a metaphor for either a *dā'ī* or a small Isma'ili community and to seeking for the origins of Shi'ism among the Pashtun in the Isma'ili *da'wa* activities in Khorasan during the early centuries of the emergence of the sect. This conclusion is reinforced by Raverty's remark (p. 389) that the Pashtun Shi'ites recognize the Agha Khan's authority.

The ethnogenesis of the Bangaš, therefore, seems both to be religious and to be located in the Gardīz region during the Ghaznavid period. The myth has transposed these origins in terms of Esmā'īl's marriage with a woman from Formol (= Orgūn), a district just south of Gardīz. Later on the Bangaš, who were then expelled from their mountain den by the Ġelzī during Timūr's invasions, crossed the Paywār pass and progressively moved into the upper



Korram basin on the eastern slopes of the Solaymān mountains. There they met the hostility of the Ōrakzī who were eventually, owing to the Bangaš's tactical alliance with the Kaṭak who were moving into the same area, pushed back into the Safīdkūh (Spīnḡar) foothills. The Bangaš, could then occupy the whole area that, just south of the Safīdkūh, was called the Bangaš district in the 10th/16th century (Beveridge, p. 220), whence the name. Even today, they are mainly settled along the major route between Afghanistan and India that passes through the Mīrānzay and Kōhāt valleys. Though forced to cede most of the upper Korram valley to the Tūrī in the 12th/18th century, the Bangaš still have a few isolated villages there, in particular Šalozān which, near the Afghanistan border, is the westernmost point that they still inhabit.

Like the other tribes in the Solaymān range, the Bangaš have provided mercenaries to India during the Mughal and British periods. In the early 14th/20th century, about 1,500 Bangaš were serving in the Indian army and militias (Ridgway, pp. 76f.). In 1125/1713, one of these mercenaries, a member of the Sāmēlzay lineage, managed to be granted an important principality in the Gangetic Doab and founded the dynasty of the nawabs of Farroḡābād, from the name of the capital he built there (Irvine, 1878, pp. 259-383; 1879, pp. 49-170; Rašīd, I, pp. 272ff.). The last Bangaš nawab was exiled to Mecca in 1859 because of his involvement in the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 (Raverty, p. 387 n.).

The number of Bangaš in the Northwest Frontier Province was estimated at 7,925 men in the 1901 census (Ridgway). Although they apparently used to lead a seminomadic life (*Gazetteer*, p. 31), they are now settled farmers (Dichter, p. 125). In the late 13th/19th century, there were still indications that *wēš* (the periodic redistribution of land) was practiced (*Gazetteer*, pp. 85ff.). The Bangaš have a few matrimonial customs peculiar to themselves with, it seems, traces of matrilocality (Rose, II, pp. 58ff.).

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without adding much information. Only those providing original information are cited here. The most detailed accounts of the tribe's lineage structure are found in Š.-M. Khan and M.-Ḥ. Khan; the latter, however contains errors in transcriptions. The fullest reports about the geographical distribution of lineages and sublineages are given in Ridgway and *Frontier*. Ẓahīr-al-Dīn Bābor, *Bābor-nāma*, tr. A. S. Beveridge, *The Bābur-nāma in English*, London, 1922, repr. London, 1969.

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