HAZARAS

PRONUNCIATION: huh-ZAH-ruhz
LOCATION: Afghanistan
POPULATION: 6–7 million
LANGUAGE: Dari (Khorasani Persian); Pastu; Baluchi; Turkic
RELIGION: Islam (Shia Muslim)

1 INTRODUCTION
The Hazaras are one of the many different ethnolinguistic communities living in Afghanistan. Some of the other major ethnic groups include the Tajik, Pashtun (or Pushtun), Uzbek, Turkmen, Baluch, and Nuristani. The Hazaras, with strong Mongolid features, consider themselves to be Moghuls (descendants of the Turko-Mongol tribes of Inner Asia). Local legends and some native historians trace their ancestry to the biblical figure Yafith (or Japheth), the son of Noah. Their ethnic origins and the exact time and historical circumstances of their appearance in Afghanistan, however, remain little understood.

Although there appears to have been considerable curiosity about the Hazaras among foreign researchers, especially during the decades preceding Soviet intervention and the civil war, a systemic and comprehensive study of their history and ethnography is yet to be attempted. For political reasons, most historians writing about Afghanistan have left out any discussion of the Hazaras in their works. Similarly, the government of Afghanistan has neglected the Hazara regions as targets for economic development and social change. It is important to note that Hazaras (excluding those in central Afghanistan) live amid a variety of different ethnolinguistic communities in the country. Hence, their cultures display some variations reflecting adaptation to local conditions and ways of living.

The Hazaras are for the most part a tribally organized society. The names of some of their major tribes and tribal units are Shaikh All, Turkuman, Qarluq, Kahgadai, Qarabatur, Daymirdad, Behsoud, Jaghoori, Daychoopan, Daykhiita, Aymaq, Khawjameri, Nayman, Chaichka, Daykandi, Dayzangi, Tatar, and Fooladi Hazaras.

2 LOCATION AND HOMELAND
The exact number of Hazaras, like other ethnic communities in Afghanistan, is not known due to the fact that no complete national census has ever been taken in that country. The estimates of Hazara population in Afghanistan range from about 7% (or 1,519,000 people) to well over 20% (or 6,000,000–7,000,000 people) of the total Afghan population of 31 million people. Spatially, the Hazaras are more concentrated in central mountainous regions of Afghanistan, but they are also found in smaller numbers scattered in other areas of the country. In addition, a population of Hazaras dwell in Baluchistan, Pakistan. Many Hazaras have also moved to Kabul to seek a better life and today comprise about half of the population of that city.

The central portion of Afghanistan in which a high population of Hazaras live is called Hazarajat. Hazaras can be found in many different provinces. Major locations of the Hazaras include Bamyan, Ghazni, Uruzgan, Ghoor, and Zabul. Other major areas with somewhat lower Hazara populations include Kabul, Badghees, Logar, Parwan, and Samangan. Helmand, Qandahar, Baghlan, and Joozjan are also populated with Hazaras to a lesser degree. Small populations of Hazaras can also be found in other provinces of the country. The location of the Hazaras can be found in a geographical circle in central Afghanistan and an area extending west of the circle as well. The territories inhabited by the Hazaras lie completely within Afghanistan and do not share borders with any neighboring countries.

Hazarajat generally has a cold climate, and snow lasts long on the mountains. Because Hazaras raise animals, they must prepare and store food during the summer to meet their necessities for the cold winters. Until recently, the major means of transportation among Hazaras were donkeys and horses. Motor vehicles have only recently become common in their region.

3 LANGUAGE
Most Hazaras today speak Persian (known as Dari in Afghanistan). Because of the importance of Persian for communication, economic, and educational reasons in Afghanistan, Hazaras were influenced by the language and began speaking it. In addition to Persian, some Hazaras also speak Pashtu (or Pushtu) and Baluchi. The traditional Turkic language is also used in some areas. Professor Shah Ali Akbar Shahrustani, a well-known scholar of Hazaras, wrote a book comparing Turkic and Mongolian languages. He found 1,400 Turkic and Mongolian words that were used in Hazaran Persian. Of these,
more than 1,000 were pure Turkic words. The Persian spoken by Hazaras is known as Khorasani Persian.

4 FOLKLORE
Hazaras historically have less formal education than people from other parts of the country. Hazaras believe in the superstitions that are common in the country. Some beliefs include the evil eye, ghosts, and several other superstitions about animals and nighttime.

Storytelling is a traditional Hazara habit. They tell stories of their history, their ancestors, and their heroes. Music is commonly used with poetry, epics, and love stories. The dambura is used to provide music. This is a bowl lute with a long neck and two strings that are plucked.

Hazaras’ customs and traditions are unique. They have many different dubaitis (which are sung). An example of a dubaiti is:

The stars shone and I lay awake
I was behind the broken wall
As the damned cock began to crow
I was still waiting for my love.

Hazaras also have many proverbs. Examples include:

If your father owns the mill, you still must wait your turn to grind your flour.
Mirrors are not necessary at a meeting of the blind.
Don’t make plans for your life on the advice of false astrologers.
The sons of wolves will be wolves.
Two people are afraid of an empty rifle: the one with the rifle, and the one without it.

5 RELIGION
The Islamic religion has two major sects, the Sunni and the Shia sects. Sunnis recognize the four khalifs that followed Prophet Muhammad and believe in four imams: Abu Hanifa, Malik, Shafi, and Hanbal. The Shias give more significance to the fourth khalif, Ali, and his family. The Hazaras are Shia Muslims. During the beginning of Islam in Afghanistan, the Shias were divided into three different groups: the followers of the 12 imams, the Ismaili Shias, and the Zaidi Shias. Because the Zaidi Shias were very close to the Sunni sect of Islam, they are no longer present in modern-day Afghanistan. The Shias following the 12 imams exist throughout the country.

In the past, the Sunnis and Shias of Afghanistan had very good relations with each other, including marriages between sects. Recently, however, politics have stressed their differences.
and have divided the two to a greater extent. During Afghanistan's civil war years (1992–1996) and the preceding years of the Soviet invasion, Hazara resistance groups were generally not allied with those of Sunni background. Hazaras were supported by Shia Iran while other Sunni groups were supported by Sunni Pakistan, and the politics involved served to further drive apart Shia Hazara and Sunni groups in Afghanistan. The majority of Muslims in the world are Sunnis, considerably outnumbering the number of Shias.

6 MAJOR HOLIDAYS

As Shia Muslims, Hazaras celebrate the two major Islamic holidays: Ayd-Al-Fitr, a three day holiday following Ramadan, the month of fasting; and Ayd-Al-Adha, a festival (at the time of pilgrimage) in which animals (usually goats, sheep, cattle, or camels) are sacrificed in the name of God. 'Ashura celebrations also take place among the Hazaras. One other holiday celebrated among Hazaras is Nawruz, the Afghani New Year traditionally celebrated throughout most of the Turkic-Persian world. This holiday has developed into a religious one since the advent of Islam in the country. For example, people in Mazar-i-Sharif celebrate Nawruz at the place in which the tomb of Ali is believed to be located. In Kabul, the celebration takes place around an area called Sakhi. Trees are also planted on this day.

7 RITES OF PASSAGE

Little girls wear bright colors and are free to go outside while they are young, but as they mature and reach puberty, they are required to cover their hair with scarves. They are also required to stay in the house more often. There are also special celebrations and practices during weddings, times of circumcision for young boys, and funerals.

8 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The Hazara people are very hospitable and friendly to guests. They prepare special food for their guests, and the guests are honored with the best place to sit. Most of the Hazaras in Kabul and the countryside eat with their hands, rarely using utensils such as forks and knives. Hazara women perform many household tasks, including sewing, cooking, milking animals, cleaning, and raising children. They also perform some outside tasks with the husband as well. Women are respected among men and the Hazara community, and the men are respected by Hazara women.

9 LIVING CONDITIONS

The living conditions of Hazaras vary considerably depending on their locations. Those living in cold climates have more difficulties than those living in warm areas. In cold areas, more clothing is necessary, there is more of a need for wood to keep warm, travel is more difficult, and agriculture is poor. (Fruits are not common in some parts of Hazarajat. They also lack vegetables as well.) Generally speaking, Hazaras are poor people, and there is little business interaction among them. In Kabul, they usually have low-paying, menial jobs such as janitorial work and are relegated to living on the outskirts of the city, with less access to clean water and electricity and other amenities than other groups.

10 FAMILY LIFE

It is customary for entire Hazara families to live together in one house. This includes grandparents and women married to the sons of the household. Daughters-in-law contribute to the household work when they move in, easing the workload of their mothers-in-law. Newborn babies are usually named by the older people of the household. Grandparents show much interest in the raising of their grandchildren. Fathers and grandfathers teach boys male tasks, while mothers and grandmothers teach girls the tasks assigned to females. Marriages are arranged, and when a daughter is married, she moves in with her husband's family. After the death of the grandparents, especially the grandfather, the sons usually begin living independently.

11 CLOTHING

The most common clothing among the Hazaras is perahan-u-tunban, a type of clothing somewhat resembling the Western world's pajamas. Women's designs differ from those of the men. Men wear turbans, vests, overcoats, and sweaters over their perahan-u-tunbans. Their clothing is usually made from wool and/or cotton. Unlike the men, who wear simply colored clothes, the women usually wear clothes with varying bright colors and designs. The women usually wear lighter-weight clothes because they remain indoors more often. Hazaras do not have a large quantity of clothes.

12 FOOD

The Hazaras' diet includes a large proportion of high-protein food such as meat and dairy products. They use plenty of oil when cooking. They usually eat only one type of food during a meal, not having wide selections of food at once. Exceptions are among the wealthy and at times when guests are visiting.

13 EDUCATION

Hazaras have two systems of education. The first one is the traditional system, which includes religious studies at mosques, education by family members at home in gender-appropriate tasks, and learning basic reading and writing skills from the local religious leaders of the villages. The second system is official education, in which the schools are administered by the Ministry of Education (from the capital of the country). After the sixth grade, only the best students are sent to Kabul to continue their education. Afghanistan has a centralized system of education.

In the years of rebuilding Afghanistan since 2001, Hazaras are often more likely to take advantage of educational opportunities that other groups in Afghanistan. Nearly all Hazaras attend school, including girls, and the literacy rate among this group is growing and is thought to be higher than the national average. Bamian State University is operating in Hazarajat, after being closed until 2004. However, marginalization does continue to exist and entrance to esteemed universities such as Kabul State University is difficult and uncommon for Hazaras.

14 CULTURAL HERITAGE

In times of celebration, Hazaras have social gatherings during which music is played and dancing takes place. Women and men dance separately, each having different styles. Poetry is read and damburas (lutes) are played.
Many Hazaras are proud of their cultural links to Mongols and Genghis Khan. In fact, the word Hazara comes from the Persian meaning “one thousand” and is thought to be derived from Genghis Khan’s division of troops into groupings of this number. However this same heritage also creates some tensions with other Afghans of different background.

One of the most notable features of Hazarajat were the giant Buddha statues located at Bamian, constructed 1,500 years ago by the Kushan Empire. Although the Hazara of today may not be direct descendents of those that created the Buddhas, the Buddhas for many years dominated the landscape of the homeland of the Hazaras. In 2001 the Buddhas were destroyed by the Taliban due to the fundamental Islamist proscription against idols in the human form.

15 WORK
Excluding housework, men are held responsible for managing and financially supporting the household. They work in the fields growing crops. Because of their low standard of living, Hazaras are required to perform more laborious jobs to support their families. This is apparent in Kabul, where many Hazaras have migrated and taken up menial jobs. It is common for Hazara labor migrants also to migrate to nearby countries such as Pakistan and Iran and send remittances home to support their families.

16 SPORTS
In some Hazara areas such as Bamyan, Samangan, and the northern parts of Afghanistan, buzzkashi takes place. This is a game in which horse-riders attempt to carry a dead goat into the opposing teams goal, a marked circle on the ground. Hunting, wrestling, archery, horse-races, and a variety of children’s games also take place in some areas. Because of little spare time from work, Hazaras do not spend a great deal of time playing sports.

17 ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION
During the winters, when they do not have as much work to do, Hazaras have some time for entertainment and recreation. They tell stories, visit with each other, and drink tea in the evenings.

18 FOLK ART, CRAFTS, AND HOBBIES
Hazaras are very well known for making handicrafts such as coats, overcoats, sweaters, jackets, shoes, hats, gloves, and scarves. Embroidery is common. These are mostly made by the women and are sold in shops in Kabul and other cities.

19 SOCIAL PROBLEMS
Despite being very social among themselves, Hazaras have many social problems in the country. Because of the level of marginalization experienced by Hazaras, they are generally not socially involved with other groups. Despite being a native group of Afghanistan, Hazaras have some differences from the other ethnic groups of the country. As Shia Muslims, they are in the minority in the largely Sunni population of Afghanistan. The Hazaras are also generally poorer and less educated than other Afghans. These differences create tensions between the Hazaras and other Afghans, and also limit the progress Hazaras can make in improving their standard of living.

20 GENDER ISSUES
In many ways, Hazara women are able to achieve many more rights than women in other parts of Afghanistan. While nationwide numbers of girls who attend school remains low, among Hazaras the number is as high as 80%. Hazara women are not subject to the strict social mores of Pashtun and other ethnicities, and are not required to practice seclusion. As a result, they have been more likely to join the workforce and to take up farming. The first female governor in Afghanistan, Habiba Sarobi, was a Hazara and was appointed in 2005.

21 BIBLIOGRAPHY

—revised by M. Kerr