

# **THE GENOCIDE OF THE HAZARAS**

## **Descendants of Genghis Khan Fight for Survival in Afghanistan and Pakistan**

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*Hazaras are not Muslim, they are Shia. They are kuffar [infidels].*  
—Mullah Manan Niazi, Taliban Governor

*All Shias are liable to be killed. We will rid Pakistan of [this] impure people.  
Pakistan means land of the pure, and the Shia have no right to live here.*  
—The Chief of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi in Pakistan

The most widely known reference to the Hazaras is from the best-selling novel *The Kite Runner*. One day the protagonist Amir, who has a Hazara friend Hassan, takes a book on Afghan history to school. After pointing out a chapter on the Hazaras to his teacher, “he skimmed through a couple of pages, snickered, handed the book back. ‘That’s the one thing Shia people do well,’ he said, picking up his papers, ‘passing themselves as martyrs.’ He wrinkled his nose when he said the word Shia, like it was some kind of disease.” This gesture expresses the brunt of the Hazaras’ burden and their long and tragic history.

### **Recent Attacks on Hazaras in Afghanistan and Pakistan**

During the first part of 2015 attacks on the Hazaras were frequent in Afghanistan. The Taliban beheaded a total of 24 Hazaras and many were kidnapped. On February 24, 2015, 32 Hazaras were kidnapped, and 31 are still missing. The Islamic State, rather than the Taliban, are suspect in this attack. On March 15, 2015, ten Hazaras were kidnapped in Ghazni (Hazarajat), and one is still missing after the others were released. On March 17, 2015, along the Herat-Farah Highway, 12 Hazaras were kidnapped and 6 are still missing. The Hazaras have organized public protests about what they rightly perceive to be local police and national government indifference to their plight.

Hazaras are regularly targeted on the Herat-Farah Highway, the main road into

Hazarajat. For Hazaras it is now called “The Road of Death.” Families are afraid to travel from work and school in Kabul to their families back home. Supplies to Hazaras in the mountains have been cut off, and the construction of schools and clinics has ceased. In an interview with the Hazara Sultan (one name is common in Afghanistan), he stated: “If it were safe, I would go back. Life is good in my village. There is fresh water, and the weather is good.” Sultan is one of 1.8 million Hazaras who live in Dasht-e-Barchi, Kabul’s largest ghetto. As in Hazarajat itself, this urban area has far fewer paved roads, clinics, and schools. In 2011 a suicide bombing, most likely executed by the Taliban, killed over 70 Hazaras. Interviewed by the Associated Press about the Road of Death, Haji Ramazan Hussainzada, a major Hazara leader, declares that his fellow Hazaras are treated like third class citizens.

Over the past 10 years, there have been 183 attacks on Harazas in Pakistan, a Sunni majority nation. Seeking refuge primarily in Iran and Pakistan, the Hazaras’ ancestors fled Afghanistan after Amir Abdur Rahman’s armies reduced their population by 60 percent from 1884-1905. About 2,000, mostly in the city of Quetta, have died, 4,000 have been injured, and 200,000 have attempted to flee the country. Sadly, the new government of Australia has begun deportation of some of the Hazaras who have reached its shores. Some of the Hazaras attempting to leave Pakistan have been arrested, since they are the only Pakistani citizens who need government permission to leave their home cities.

Pakistani police rarely intervene in attacks on the Hazaras; on the contrary, they are accused of being Iranian trained terrorists, even though it is well known that currently all the jihadis in Afghanistan and Pakistan are Sunni not Shia. The Hazara Democratic Party has held protests in front of the Balochistan Provincial Assembly insisting they are peaceful people suffering persecution from Sunni militants and the government. Balochistan’s Chief Minister Aslam Raisani Baloch made light of the 29 Hazaras killed execution style on a highway in Quetta on September 20, 2011. He said that “of the millions who live in Balochistan, [it] is not a big deal. I will send a truckload of tissue papers to the bereaved families. I’d send tobacco if I weren’t a politician.”

Here is a chronology of the most recent attacks in Quetta. On February 16, 2013, the Al Qaeda-affiliated Lashkar-e Jhangvi (LEJ) set off a napalm bomb in the Hazara section of Quetta and a mushroom cloud hundreds of feet high rose high above the city. Ninety-four school children were killed and 190 injured. (It is widely known that the LEJ has ties to Pakistani military intelligence.) On October 4, 2014, a suicide attack by Saudi-affiliated Wahhabi militants caused the death of seven Hazaras with 23 injured. On October 23, 2014, eight Hazaras were killed and one critically wounded by Al Qaeda-affiliated militants. There is one incident that causes me to choke up every time I speak about it. In November 2014 6-year-old Hazara Sahar Batool was abducted, raped, and

killed by Al Qaeda. Already in February of 2013, the Asian Human Rights Commission issued a report declaring that a religiously motivated genocide against the Hazaras of Quetta was being carried out.

On April 27, 2015, three Hazaras were shot by Al Qaeda militants on a bus, and the one survivor was arrested by police for leaving Quetta without permission. On May 12, 2015, three more Hazaras were shot and four were wounded. Witnesses heard the assailants chant “Long Live the Lashkar-e Jhangvi,” who were responsible for the 2008 attack on Mumbai, India, in which 164 died and 308 were wounded. The LEJ has vowed to make Pakistan the “graveyard of the Hazaras.” In late May and early June, 2015, there were four attacks, primarily on shop owners, and 11 Hazaras were killed, two only 20 meters from a police station.

### **The Origin of the Hazaras**

The number of Hazaras world-wide is unknown, but estimates range from 5 to 8 million. In 2014 there were 6,864,056 Hazaras in Afghanistan with 1.8 million living in the capital Kabul. As Afghanistan’s third largest ethnic group, a sizable majority are Shia Muslims with some Sunnis and Ismailis, the latter affiliated with the Aga Khan. Iran has the second largest number of Hazaras at 1,534,000 (1993 figure), and in 2012 the United Nations estimated that 1.5 million lived in Pakistan, mostly in the city of Quetta. In 2013 about 10,000 resided in Australia, 4,300 in Canada, and 3,800 in Indonesia. As Shia Muslims, one would expect that the Hazaras in Shia Iran would be treated humanely. Many Iranians, however, persecute them as “barbari,” a Persian word carrying the memories of ancient Mongol invaders. (Their Mongol origin is discussed below.) In 1998 the Iranian military killed more than 630 refugees, mostly Hazaras, in the Safed Sang Camp detention center.

The Hazaras speak a dialect of Farsi with added Turkish and Mongol words. They claim to have descended from Mongol troops, who were left behind in present-day Afghanistan as the Mongols retreated from their failed invasion of India (1296-1301). They were first mentioned by the name “Hazaras” by Tamerlane, when he engaged them militarily in the 1390s. In 1506 the records of the first Indian Mughal Emperor Babur mention attacks on “Hazaras” in the mountains west of Kabul, a 45,000 square mile area called Hazarajat. Over the centuries Tajiks and Arabic Sayeds joined the original Mongols through intermarriage.

Although some scholars initially disputed the Mongol descent theory, linguistic, blood type, and genetic evidence is strong. The Mongol army was organized on the basis of ten, and “Hazara” is Persian for the Mongol word for 1,000. Two Hazara tribal names—Besud and Tulai Khan—are Mongolian. (Tolui Khan was the youngest son of

Genghis Khan.) The Hazara blood types are also distinct from Afghans, Tajiks, and Uzbeks. Finally, gene research supports the Mongol descent theory in spades. Today Genghis Khan's genes are carried by about 16 million men, eight percent of Asia males. Incredibly enough, two-thirds of Hazara males carry Genghis Khan's Y-chromosome. This is significantly more than the men now living either in the Republic of Mongolia or China's Inner Mongolia.

### **The Hazaras as Caretakers of the Bamiyan Buddhas**

Only two scholars, based solely on the claim that Alexander the Great encountered them, mistakenly believe that the Hazaras were indigenous to their mountain homeland. The supposition that, because of this alleged early origin, they were Kushan Buddhists has also been rejected. During the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Centuries C.E. the Kushans created the world-famous Buddhas in the Bamiyan Valley of Harazajat. The 179-foot-high Vairocana Buddha and the 124-foot Shakyamuni Buddha awed pilgrims for centuries. In the 1880s Emir Abdul Rahman, in a liquidation campaign against the Hazaras, blew off their faces with artillery fire. Not satisfied with this partial desecration, the Taliban, after several previous attempts, destroyed the two Buddhas completely on March 2, 2001. Only the cavernous niches remain, although smaller statues and cave frescoes are still intact. In 2008 an Afghan archeologist discovered a 62-foot reclining Buddha in the valley, but his team covered it up for fear of Taliban retaliation.

In conversations with the Hazaras I met at the 2014 annual Chinggis Khaan Memorial Ceremony celebrated by the Mongol-American Cultural Association, I learned that the Hazaras are heart-broken about the Taliban's act of desecration. They told me that they consider themselves the caretakers of the Bamiyan Buddhas, because they revered them as their "ancestors." (They call the smaller one the "Queen Mother.") This remarkable fact reminded me that in 1192 Saladin, already aware of the Christian sects vying for power in Jerusalem, gave the Muslim Nuseibeh family keys to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which they still keep today. In Mysore in South India, Hindu sects had fought over a shrine for centuries, and they finally put Sufi Muslims in charge. Even today the service is a mixture of Arabic and Sanskrit. In each example we have non-Muslim sacred sites being controlled (or revered in the case of the Hazaras) by Muslims themselves.

### **The Great Blue Sky: Early Mongol Religion**

The earliest Hazaras would have worshipped the Sky God Il-Tengri and the Earth God Natigay. (Still thriving in Turkey and Central Asia today it is called Tengrism.) The theodicy of this religion is summed up succinctly in this statement: "The Blue Sky alone

knows how the issue between us will be resolved.” (This is the reason why Mongolian Buddhists offer blue hospitality scarves rather than the white ones guests receive in Tibet and Bhutan.) Although his grandsons and their wives became Buddhists or Christians, Genghis Khan, while tolerating all faiths, was known to seek refuge in the mountains to discern the will of the Great Sky. Shamans are the Tengri religious leaders, and during my 2006 visit to Mongolia, hill-top shamanistic rock oboos were accompanied by the Tibetan Buddhist “Om Mani Padme Hum” in Mongolian script on white painted rocks.

In a religious debate at the Mongol capital Karakorum in 1254, the Franciscan monk William Rubruck recorded a proclamation of Mongke Khan, which might be called the Creed of Tengrism: “We believe that there is only one God, by whom we live and by whom we die, and for whom we have an upright heart. But as God gives us the different fingers of the hand, so he gives to men diverse ways to approach Him.” Within the walls of Karakorum one could find churches, mosques, and temples for both Buddhists and Daoists. There was also a large Buddhist stupa and a huge sculpted tree of silver with fruit made of gold.

Genghis Khan did not take Tengri into battle nor did he justify his successes by divine will, but Arghun Khan (1258-1291) claimed that he was the incarnation of Tengri. Arghun, the fourth ruler of the Ilkhanate Mongols, was a Buddhist but tolerant of all religions. In a letter to the French king Philip the Fair in 1289, Arghun acknowledges that an alliance the Mongols and the Franks had been formed against the Muslims. Arghun writes: “Now, if, being true to your words, you send your soldiers at the appointed time and, worshipping Tengri, we conquer those citizens of Damascus together, we will give you Jerusalem.” In a letter to Pope Nicholas I in 1290 Arghun discusses the papal offer of baptism for the Mongol people. Keeping with a central tenant of Tengrism, Arghun replies that “whether some receive baptism or some do not, that is only for Eternal Tengri to decide.” Arghun, however, does offer his own opinion: “But if one prays to Eternal Tengri and carries righteous thoughts, it is as much as if he had received baptism.”

### **The Hazaras Convert to Shia Islam late 13<sup>th</sup> Century**

There is some dispute about when and how the Hazaras were converted to Shia Islam. Most scholars agree that it happened under the Ilkhanid Mongols of Persia at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. As the Ilkhanid’s seventh ruler, Ghazan Khan (1271-1304) was baptized a Nestorian Christian, the faith of many Mongols, including the Ilkhanid Queen Doquz Khatun (d. 1265). She was the wife of Hulagu, the Ilkhanid founder and grandson of Genghis Khan. In 1295, as a condition for an alliance with Muslim Mongol emir Nawruz, the entire court of Ghazan Khan converted to Shia Islam. Ghazan Khan sent

Sayed missionaries to all Mongols, including those in Hazarajat. The Sayeds claim that they are descendants of Ali, the first Shia Imam, and Sayed is a common surname among the Hazaras.

Initially, the Hazaras practiced a rudimentary form of Islam, simply switching worship of the Great Sky to Allah. There was no formal worship, no mosques, and only three daily prayers. The Sayeds replaced the shamans, and shamanistic ovoos and Buddhist temples were destroyed. (The highly revered Bamiyan Buddhas of course remained in place.) The Hazaras celebrated Ramadan and the assassination of third imam Hussain, but there were no self-flagellations as practiced by today's Iraqi Shias. There was a tendency among some Hazaras to deify Ali, the first imam, and to believe that he was sinless. During the early years their confession of faith was: "There is only One God; Muhammad is his Prophet; and Ali is his Wali [representative]." Sunnis have many and arguably baseless reasons to reject Shias as true Muslims, but the accusation of "Ali worshippers" for the Hazaras made them a special target for persecution.

### **The Genocide of the Hazaras: 1884-1905**

In the early 1880s Amir Abdur Rahman unified the Psthuns of Afghanistan, and he attacked the Hazaras as infidels not worthy of citizenship. The Hazaras rallied and won some of the initial battles. Rahman's response was to play one tribe off against another, and the Besudis and others sided with the Amir. Raids and counter-raids continued throughout the 1880s. In August 1890 an exasperated Rahman, with the aid of British military advisers, ordered up 40,000 infantry, 10,000 cavalry, 100 cannons, and invaded Hazarajat, making his main base in the Bamiyan Valley. Each side called the other "kafirs" (unbelievers), and the battle cry of the Amir's troops was "Kill or Enslave the Hazaras." By September 1893, the Hazaras were facing total defeat. Tens of thousands were enslaved and 30 mule loads of severed heads were sent to Kabul. It is estimated that 60 percent of the Hazaras were killed in the Amir's brutal campaign, and thousands of Hazaras went into exile, primarily in Iran and Pakistan. Even today some Afghans anathemize Shias and Hazaras with the following curse: "Those who deny the caliphs [i. e., Shias] are worse than a bear, a pig, or the Jews of Khaiber."

### **The Slave Trade Shifts from West Africa to Afghanistan**

The Qur'an and the New Testament do not call for the abolition of slavery. They do insist, however, that slaves must be treated humanely and they have a right to purchase their freedom. In both scriptures the free and the unfree, although their earthly status is decidedly different, are spiritually equal. The enslavement of a freeborn Muslim was strictly prohibited. Muhammad followed the traditional policy that only non-Muslim war captives may be enslaved, and it is recorded that Muhammad's family and friends liberated 32,237 slaves. The first four caliphs followed the Qur'an and Muhammad's restriction to war captives. The Umayyids and Abbasids, however, made

the buying and selling of slaves legal. The enslavement of Shias was permitted, and it was only natural that the Shia imams always preached against slavery.

With the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the focus of buying and selling slaves shifted to the Muslim world. Amir Rahman legalized the trade with Turkmans, Afghans, and Uzbeks dominating it, and the practice was not abolished until 1920. (Sadly, it was still legal in Saudi Arabia and Yemen until 1962.) It was an act of religious merit to sell a Hazara into slavery, and Sunni mullahs became enthusiastic slavers and rich Hazaras could pay their taxes in slaves. Ironically, in early Islam it was considered an act of great merit to pay for the manumission of a slave. Pious Muslims thought that this was the best method to end slavery altogether.

### **The Constitution of 1931 Excludes Hazaras**

Discrimination against the Hazaras continued even after the Afghan Constitution of 1931. The king had to be a Sunni and he was obligated to follow the Hanafi school of Islamic law, the most liberal. There was religious freedom for all citizens except the Shias. Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians could celebrate their holy days, but Shia holidays were banned. The relations between the Sunnis and the Shias were certainly not improved when Abdul Khaliq Hazara assassinated King Mohammed Nadir Khan in 1933. In pre-Taliban Afghanistan the worst atrocity against the Hazaras occurred in 1993. On February 11, at 1 o'clock in the morning, over 1,000 were killed in a raid in West Kabul by direct orders of President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

After the Taliban were pushed out of Kabul in 2001, the Constitution of 2004 stipulates that Afghanistan is an Islam Republic, and that "followers of other faiths shall be free within the bounds of law in the exercise and performance of their religious rights." But discrimination against and liquidation of Hazaras, as I reported above, continues today in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Even though some of the killing has been at the hands of the Taliban, other Sunnis have kept the animas against the Hazaras alive in speech and action. Afghan and Pakistani police have done little to stop this violence.

### **Hazaras Join the Northern Alliance against the Taliban**

With the rise of the Taliban the Hazaras joined the Northern Alliance in armed resistance against them. In May 1997 Hazaras joined Uzbeks in executing 2,000 Taliban prisoners. In August 1998 the Taliban retaliated by killing 2,000 Hazaras in Mazar-I Sharif, in the northern part of Hazarajat, after taking over the region. When the Taliban attacked and gained control over the Bamiyan Valley in September 1998, 500 Hazaras were liquidated. In January 2001 a Taliban military sweep caused the loss of hundreds of Hazara lives. While political issues are at play here, the main motivation is religious: the Taliban are even more emphatic that as Shia the Hazaras are not true Muslims. This report from Hazara.net is typical: "Baqar Fahimi, university student from Ghor province [Hazarajat], was killed because he was a Hazara."

As we have learned, Hazaras are regularly targeted on the Hearat-Farah Highway, the main road into Hazarajat. For Hazaras it now called "The Road of Death." Families are afraid to travel from work and school in Kabul to their families back home. Supplies to Hazaras in the mountains have been cut off, and the construction of schools and clinics has ceased. In an interview with the Hazara Sultan (one name is common in Afghanistan), he stated: "If it were safe, I would go back. Life is good in my village. There is fresh water, and the weather is good." Sultan is one of 1.8 million Hazaras who live in Dasht-e-Barchi, Kabul's largest ghetto. As in Hazarajat itself, this urban area has far fewer paved roads, clinics, and schools. In 2011 a suicide bombing, most likely executed by the Taliban, killed over 70 Hazaras. Interviewed by the Associated Press about the Road of Death, Haji Ramazan Hussainzada, a major Hazara leader, declares that his fellow Hazaras are treated like third class citizens.

### **Hazaras Succeed in Education and Politics**

The Hazaras pride themselves in emphasizing education, and even though many opportunities are blocked to them, they have achieved remarkable results. The Afghan Ministry of Higher Education has named a Hazara student, Mohammad Qasim, as the highest scorer in the 2015 Kankor Examination. Qasim scored 354 out of possible 360 marks from among 219,145 students. On December 14, 2013, 358 students (55 were women) graduated from four faculties of Bamiyan University with BS degrees. In 2004 the Hazara Karim Khalil was elected Afghanistan's Vice-President, and Hazaras serve as provincial governors and government ministers. There are currently 61 Hazaras in the National Assembly, making up 25 percent of the total.

To top off these laudable achievements, I wish to conclude with a note about winter sports in Afghanistan. For several years running the Hazaras of Bamiyan have sponsored an international ski competition. On March 1-2, 2013, in the absence of any ski lifts, 30 men and 8 women from Afghanistan, Finland, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and USA participated. In 2012 one of the Silver Medal winners was Hazara Ali Shah Farhang, a local potato farmer. He has given up a dream of becoming an engineer to become a local ski guide.

It is important that the plight of these brave and resourceful people should be more widely known, and the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan should do much more to protect their rights and stop the brutal attacks on their persons. The conflicts between the Sunnis and the Shias offer a rough parallel to the long history of interfaith violence between Protestants and Catholics. The U. S. invasion of Iraq gave the Shias there an opportunity to work out decades of resentment from Sunni minority rule initiated by the British. Sadly, Sunni militants in the Middle East and South Asia are now fighting back with a vengeance.