Evolution and Development of Hazara Identity in Quetta City

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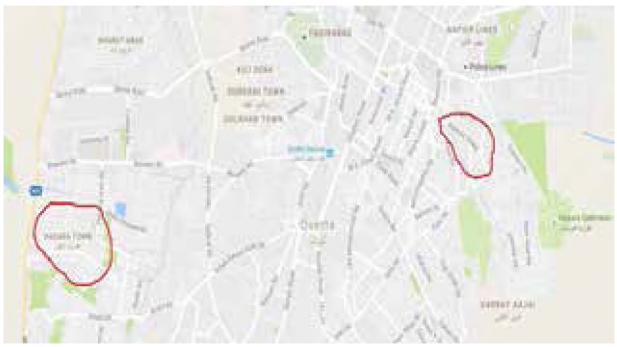
Introduction

The Hazara community of Quetta, Balochistan has been impacted by violence and migration for decades but in the past decade, violence against the community became unbearable and has roused fears of an existential threat to the community. The repressive policies of Afghan rulers forced the Hazara to migrate to Quetta in 1894.[1] At this point, the British rulers of India welcomed them for two reasons: first, the Afghan-British India government relations were hostile; second, the British India government provided refuge and protection but took advantage of Hazara migrants' plight and began to recruit them in the British India Army to combat the Afghans.[2] The Hazara adapted themselves well to the Quetta environment and began to seek government jobs and moved into trade, commerce, and other professions.

Upon their arrival in 1894, the Hazaras began to settle in the northeast of the city, adjacent to Kohi Muhardar Mountains. This area had been a temporary abode of the Marri tribe and came to be called "Marriabad". As their population grew, Hazara moved into lower Marriabad areas known as Hajiabad, Theyl Godown, Camp (named after the camps set up for the 1935 earthquake survivors), and adjacent places[3]. All these places were connected by a main road, which was later named the Alamdar Road. Alamdar Road by its very nature sounds sectarian, as the word Alamdar stands for the one who carries the "Alam", a religious flag that was carried by Imam Hussain's brother, Abbas ibn Ali in the battle of Karbala. The next big wave of Hazara migrants came from Afghanistan in the wake of the Soviet invasion and subsequent civil war of the 1990s, and these migrants settled in what came to be called Hazara Town, a few kilometers away from Alamdar Road.



Source: Google Maps (n.d).

A feeling of persecution coupled with migration, linguistic, religious, and cultural affinity infused strong communal sentiments among the Hazara of Quetta, leading it to become a cohesive and well-knit group, that is conscious of its identity.

Tools of Violence Used

The Taliban and the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), a Sunni terrorist group, had developed a nexus in Afghanistan during the 1990s civil war when they fought against the Northern Alliance, which included the Hizbe Wahdat, a Hazara Shia militant group. As these groups settled in Pakistan after the US invasion of Afghanistan and the fall of the Taliban government in 2001, the LeJ took serious note of the Hazara, regarding them as hostile to the Taliban. This led the Taliban and like minded groups to target the Hazara in Quetta.

The targeting of Hazara has a pattern. Between 2001 and 2004, there were sporadic and isolated events of target killings. During this period, the Ashura procession of 10th Muharram, Friday prayers, a van carrying the Hazara police cadets, and other vans carrying passengers from Alamdar Road to Hazara Town were targeted. However, the frequency of these killings rose in 2008-2009, particularly, following the killing of Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti by the security forces. This created an environment of violence and anger in and around Quetta and Balochistan. It is pertinent to note

[1] Muhammad Owtadolajam, *The Hazara Tribe in Balochistan; An analysis of Socio-cultural change* (Quetta: Hazaragi Academy, 2006): 437.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Altaf Qadir, "Reforming the Pukhtuns and Resisting the British: An Appraisal of the Haji Sahib Turangzai's Movement, *National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research,* 2015.

that Saryab Road and adjacent areas have a heavy concentration of Baloch population and it is also an area where government offices are located. Many Hazara being employees of the Balochistan government had to routinely travel to office and back on Saryab Road and became easy targets. Recognizing that Saryab Road had made them an easy target, the Hazara adopted Sabzal Road for travel between Hazara Town and Alamdar Road. However, they were targeted in the commercial markets or other parts of the city as individuals or as a group. The method varied from target killings to suicide bombings. Invariably these target killings were driven by sectarian motives. This forced the Hazara to live in isolation, disrupting their social cohesion while aggravating social, political, and economic problems for the community.

Research Objective, Question & Methodology

This study aims to understand how violence has transformed the Hazara identity and constrained their mobility, socio-economic well-being and other opportunities. Literature on identity and conflict suggests that when a group thinks it is a target, changes occur in the way it sees itself in the community of people. This study attempts to understand the everyday ethnic identity of the Hazara through participant observation as the researcher is a Hazara and has been brought up in the community. Further, to explore how perpetual conflict has impacted the community, data collection was done through focused group discussions and interviews. Interviews were conducted with political figures, intellectuals, and historians of the Hazara while focus groups were conducted informally at a local café visited by members of the community.

Formation of Hazara Identity

Identity has been defined as membership in a group, which is determined by a belief held by both "insiders" and "outsiders". Beyond a collective belief in kinship, a multitude of other features such as language, religion, race, cultural traits, a sense of shared history, and powerful symbols associated with the group can serve to reinforce and perpetuate a subjective feeling of belonging.[4] The idea of everyday ethnic identity refers to the ways in which daily activities can have an ethnic element in almost every aspect. It starts with behaviors based on particular patterns, which keep intact a set of rules while performing all other tasks, and also includes but is not limited to having friends from the same group, marrying within the group, feelings of obligation towards the group, etc.

Owradolajam (1975), conducting an ethnographic study of the Hazara community of Quetta, observed that the Hazara since their migration from Afghanistan in 1894 have continued to lead an independent and exclusive life within a segregated and special circle of their own.[5] Owtadolajam pointed out that although Hazara worked with the Baloch living in the vicinity and enjoyed all the privileges that the people of Balochistan had, yet there was little or no social interaction with the Baloch. It remained an exclusive and isolated community. Following on the footsteps of the pioneering study by Owtadolajam, this research explores to what extent the isolation of the Hazara in Quetta led to their target killings? and were the Hazara ethnically conscious because of their bitter memories of Afghanistan which did not let them intermingle with others around Quetta?

Common Religious Identity

The ethnic identity of Hazaras would be incomplete without their religious identity. The Hazara in Quetta are predominantly Shia, and though there were rumors of Sunni Hazara living in Kharotabad and other areas of Quetta, it was not possible to get in touch with them during fieldwork. The month of Muharram in the Islamic calendar, which marks the martyrdom of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) grandson, Imam Hussain along with family members at Karabala, is an important part of the identity of Hazara, who mourn the whole month, as they believe that Hussain was innocent and did not deserve to be killed. Like the Shias, the Hazara receive Muharram with gloom. Men,

[4] Erik H.Cohen, "Components and Symbols of Ethnic Identity: A Case Study in Informal Education and Identity Formation in Diaspora,"*Applied Psychology* 53, no. 1 (2004): 87-112.
[5] Mohammad Owtadolajam, *The Hazara Tribe in Balochistan; An analysis of Socio-cultural change* (Quetta: Hazaragi Academy, 2006): 11.

women, and children wear black color clothing; Alam (a religious flag) is raised on the rooftops; Nohas (lamentation) are played at Imam Bargahs (a separate place in mosques for religious sermons, chest-beating and mourning) and homes. Women mostly remain busy with preparing the Niaz (meal meant to be eaten by mourners and the needy) while men mostly constitute the mourners. Religious gatherings on the streets are led by men, whereas, women participate in mourning at the Takia Khana (a separate place either at the Imam Bargah or at home). This religious zeal in the community is met with the abandonment of daily activities i.e. business, education, etc. and life goes back to normal after the Ashura (the 10th day of Muharram).

Feeling of Obligation Towards the Group

Hazara community members in Quetta also feel obliged to follow certain obligations towards other group members. This norm is of utmost importance as one's loyalty is primarily judged by one's actions towards the community. No matter where one is or what one does, one is obligated to listen to and try their level best to address an issue forwarded by a fellow community member. Otherwise one would have to listen to taunts in various gatherings later on. This is especially the case with the Hazara who are government servants. A general feeling is that whatever may be the position or designation of a Hazara official, they are bound to leave their entire task and listen to what their fellow Hazara have brought to them. In Baloch tradition and Quetta's cultural environment, solidarity with one's ethnic group is a respected practice: the Pashtuns will show similar affinity with their group and so will the Baloch. Further, persecution syndrome has led the Hazara to believe that they are not treated fairly by other ethnic groups; therefore, for the resolution of their grievances, they must cling to a Hazara official.

This sense of a close-knitted identity is reiterated by a common language, Hazaragi; Hazara belong to an altogether different race and their features differ markedly from their counterparts in the city. Further, the group identity is reinforced by community-based organizations through political gatherings and publications that reiterate Hazara's shared history of persecution in Afghanistan, starting with Ameer Abdur Rehman's era in the 1880s to the Taliban rule in the 1990s.

Aspects of Identity Most Affected By Violence

Structurally inspired anthropological analysis of war and war-related violence has primarily focused on the inherent potential of violence and war to create identities. The line of reasoning suggests that identity is built on difference and becomes threatened when differences become too small. Violence instead recreates or reinforces differences.[6] Simon Harrison states that violence has a structural function, that is, groups do not create war, but war creates groups.[7] It is not violence that is creative, but rather people's reactions to violence that constitutes the creative element.[8] For example, in the case of Stolac, a town in Bosnia and Herzegovina, violence has unmistakably created potential for unambiguous identities by politically ethnifying all aspects of everyday life.[9] Thus, Muslim nationalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina grew not because it had been lying dormant throughout the years, but because the (nationalist) logic of war created it.[10]

However, the case of Hazara is slightly different as the previous section suggests that they already had a pronounced everyday ethnic identity. Thus, violence while not creating their identity, still impacted it. When individuals or collectivities perceive themselves as "addressed" by an act of violence and recognize (or misrecognize) themselves as its intended recipient, they not only mobilize towards a "defensive" reciprocation but also "via a process analogous to their own generic identification with the actual victims of violence, de-individuate the agency of the literal agents of violence to make it the violence of a collectivized 'Other'".[11]

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[6] Bronislaw Malinowski, *An anthropological analysis of war,* 521-550.
[7] Torsten Kolind, *Post-War Identification: Everyday Muslim Counterdiscourse in Bosnia Herzegovina,* (Aarhus: Aarhus Univ. Press, 2008).
[8] Ibid.
[9] Torsten Kolind, "Violence and Identification in a Bosnian Town: An Empirical Critique of Structural Theories of Violence." *Warfare and Society: Archaeological and Social Anthropological Perspectives* (2006): 447-468.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Glenn Bowman, "Violence before Identity: An Analysis of Identity Politics", *The Sociological Review,* vol. 62, Issue 2, (2014): 152–165. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12195

Collectivization of the Other

Hazaras' perceive that their targeting was not a sudden spate of terror but a well-chalked-out plan against them. They were first killed in the surroundings of the city, then in the city center, and lastly confined to their neighborhood, which had now become an open jail for the community with its segregated lifestyle. The results of being cut off from the rest of the city were numerous. One, the younger generation mostly has friends from the same community. There are some professional friendships but these are rare. Generally, it was observed that contact with the outside world had almost finished. Those who had relations in earlier times are carrying on with them, but the youth was not able to develop relationships with other communities. "Chances of socializing are no more there", says Ibrar Hussain.[12] "There was a time when we used to go to Burma Hotel, Saryab Road just to have a cup of tea in the evening. That would also allow us to exchange thoughts with our Baloch counterparts", but such events of inter-ethnic interactions are now only a part of history.

Government servants had to leave their jobs; students had to abandon schools, colleges, and universities; while businessmen incurred losses or left the main bazaars, the chances of exposure to the outside world and getting to know them are meager, which has resulted in the Hazara simply believing what they hear or read about other communities. Fida Gulzari opines that "non-Hazara exploit the vulnerability of Hazara for being a soft target of terrorism" citing the example of his wife, who used to teach in Pak-Turk School in Quetta. She won the Best Teacher's Award but had to leave her job later because the colleagues with whom she used to travel to school feared that Fatima (being a Hazara) was a moving target and refused to have her on the van[13]. Constant fear and target killings have pushed Hazara to think of themselves as victims and of all non-Hazara (i.e. Baloch and Pashtuns) the collectivized 'Other', as a sense prevails that all non-Hazara form a group that is indifferent to the problems of the Hazara. Thus, it was found through discussions with various Hazaras that migration is yet another phenomenon of the overall situation as many have left Quetta to settle in Karachi, Lahore or Islamabad. But these are the wealthier families or those with government jobs, while the bulk of migration has been to Australia and Europe. Although it has helped some families through remittances, the problematic part is that now everyone wants to move outside Pakistan to escape death, live a better life, and help those left behind in Quetta.

As part of defensive reciprocation to target killings, the community considers it important to be united against an invisible enemy and have a representative to raise their voice in the assembly. Thus, every effort is made to ensure that a Hazara wins the elections. This race for representation has resulted in the division of Hazara society into two poles. On one side are the ethno-nationalists and on the other are religious groups. Hitherto, both groups are busy trying to win the confidence of the people and for this purpose, they use all tools available to them.

Surge in Religious Identity

There is a growing and strong sentiment among the Hazara that they are being targeted because of their faith, Shiaism. Other factors need further research but Shiaism appears the most visible. Yet, the incidents and tactics of terrorists are interpreted differently by various segments of Hazara society. While ethno-nationalist groups such as the Hazara Democratic Party term the killings as 'Hazara Genocide',[14] religious groups such as Majlis Wahdatul Muslimeen insist that Hazara killings are directly linked to Shia killings across the country.[15]

Violence, terrorist attacks, and migration have further energized religious sentiment amongst the Hazara community. For example, previously, it was only the month of Muharram that constituted religious zeal and expression, but now Ayyamay Fatimiyah (the twenty days signifying the death of Fatima Zehra, daughter of the Prophet and wife of Ali ibn Abi Talib - the first Imam of the Shias), and also birthdays of religious figures are commemorated with ever-

[14] *The Express Tribune,* "Balochistan violence: Hazara Democratic Party protests against targeted killings", November 12, 2012. https://tribune.com.pk/story/464342/balochistan-violence-hazara-democratic-party-protests-targeted-killings

[15] Syed Ali Shah, "Countrywide protests against Mastung Bloodbath", *The Express Tribune,* January 22, 2014. https://www.dawn.com/news/1081977

growing zeal. Religious groups have changed their strategy; there was a time when they used to deliver sermons in pure Persian language, which most of the attendants especially the youngsters could not understand. But now they talk in plain Hazaragi. They have also glamorized religion as they call on the masses to celebrate the birthday of Ali as Father's Day, have named the birthday of Fatima Zehra as Mother's Day, that of Imam Hussain as Brother's Day, and so on.

Further, the pilgrimage to holy sites in Iran, Iraq, and Syria has been named as "Safar-e-Ishq" (Journey of Love). In the past, this journey was made in November and December (due to school winter holidays) but now it is considered a must for Ashura, the tenth day of Muharram, or for Chehlum (Arbayeen), which commemorates the fortieth day of the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, in the form of a large gathering. One can see posters and Facebook posts with appeals to Shias to take part in these two grand gatherings in order to pay tribute to Imam Hussain. In the past, one could listen to music in the month of Muharram, between Ashura and Chehlum, but now no one dares to do that.

Conclusion

This research points out that the Hazara community has been facing constant violence in the form of target killings and suicide bombings, which has led to the community's isolation. Their locality has been walled and there is an embargo on their movement beyond those boundaries. Practically, the community finds itself trapped in two neighborhoods of Hazara Town and Marriabad of Quetta city. The feelings of obligation towards the group have resulted in the establishment of a number of community-based organizations, which range from welfare to education and healthcare, catering to the needs of the deprived members of the community.

However, violence against the community and resulting isolation of one and half decades have increased vulnerability among the Hazara, not only in terms of security but also traditions, culture, and language. This has resulted in radicalization along two different tangents. One, violence meted out to the community in the name of faith has made it easy for religious groups to invoke the religious sentiments of community members, and get them involved ever more in religious activities as a gesture of showing resentment towards the perpetrators of violence. Further, the pilgrimage to holy sites, which was once voluntary, has acquired the overtones of religious duty. Two, the nationalist propaganda has led the Hazara to fancy a separate land in the form of Hazaristan, as some groups consider a separate homeland (going back to Hazarajat, the historical home of the Hazara in central Afghanistan) as the only alternative to the current helplessness.[16] A growing sense of victimhood and helplessness has ignited religious zeal and ethnic consciousness. Ethnic politics is currently at its peak with its torch-bearers representing themselves as the only saviors against the community's current isolation through the use of their connections outside the community.

Recommendations

- **Show Zero Tolerance Towards Hate Speech:** The government in coordination with Pashtun and Baloch communities should make sure that those preaching hatred against the Shia or Hazara are dealt with according to law while educating the people about the consequences of hate speech.
- **Set Goals to Demolish Walls Built around Hazara Neighborhoods:** Instead of concentrating on the security of the Hazara community within secluded neighborhoods, the state should make all efforts to dismantle terrorist networks.
- **Initiate Activities for People-to-People Contact in Quetta City:** Government should initiate strategies for people-to-people contact beyond the walls built around Hazara neighborhoods in the form of political, social, religious, and literary festivals consisting of all ethnic groups of the city. This will help diminish misunderstandings and rumors concerning each group. Rebuilding of trust among the Hazara, Baloch, and Pashtuns of Quetta is impera-

[16] Farha Sameen, "The Hazaras of the Afghanistan in Mughal Times", *JSTOR*, vol. 70, (2009).

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