

A Short History of Hazaras in Iran

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Historians familiar with the Hazara history now agree that prior to the Genghiz Khan era, several Turk and Mongol tribes living in the present day Afghanistan played a key role in the shaping of today's Hazaras ethnically and linguistically. These tribes included La-Cheen (Turk), Khulj (Turk), Besud (Mongol), etc. and those that came after the arrival of Genghiz Khan, such as, Dai-Chopan (Mongol), Dai-Berka (Mongol), and Turkman (Turk) etc. For this reason, historians identify Hazaras as a Turko-Mongol people. The presence of a huge vocabulary of Turkic and Mongolian words in the Hazaragi language proves this fact. Therefore we can say that the Hazara's ancestors, together with other tribes, maintained neighborly relations with the Persian Empire (today's Iran) prior to Genghiz Khan's arrival in the region. When the Mongol armies swept Asia, the Persian Empire too came under Genghiz Khan's rule, which later his grandson – Hulagu Khan – formed as new empire in 1256 under the name of Ilkhanid (Young Khan in Mongolian) dynasty, thus changing the entire nature of the Mongol relationship with the Persians (Iranians).

The Mongol King Oljeitu¹, the 8th Ilkhanid ruler in Iran from 1304-1316 and great-grandson of Ilkhanid founder, Hulagu Khan, converted to Sunni Islam and came to be known as Sultan Ahmad Khudabundeh. Later he converted to Shia Islam in 1310 and became a driving force for conversion of a large number of Hazara Mongol's as well as Iranians to this faith. It is interesting to note that Iranians priding themselves in their Shia identity cannot seem to hide their hatred of the Mongols including that of Hazaras (Iranians use derogatory term 'Berberis' i.e. Barbaric, to refer to Hazaras).

¹ He was the son of the Ilkhan ruler [Arghun](#), brother and successor of [Mahmud Ghazan](#), and great-grandson of the Ilkhanate founder [Hulagu](#).
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oljeitu>

The Ilkhanid dynasty ended in 1335, though smaller areas remained under their rule. Historians believe this period – 14th and 15th century – as the time the current Hazaras emerged as a new nation where text references in Iran, Sub-Continent (current India, Pakistan, Bangladesh), and Khurasan (which current Afghanistan was a part of) clearly mentions the Hazaras including the “Jermaan Hazara” and “Aughan Hazara.” According to Iranian sources, the current day Sheraz and Kirman (in Iran) came under their rule [Uruzgani, 61]. Probably this time coincides with the rise of the Safavi dynasty in 1502, and with their rise started the decline of the Hazara rule, and their mention started disappearing from historical texts. Later in 1625, during the Safavi Shia rule in 1625, Qandahar came under their control from the Mughal (Mongol) dynasty of Delhi. The Safavi appointed the Gurjistani Governor, Gurgin Khan, who forced thousands of Hazaras from the plain irrigated fields of Qandahar by sword and settled Afghan tribes in their place instead [Yazdani, 59]. This marked another beginning of the decline of the Hazara nation, however, the details are well beyond the scope of this article.

Modern history reveals that, King Nader Shah Afshar, ruler of Iran, after having occupied Afghanistan, took away with him a number of efficient Hazara cultivators of Badghis region of Afghanistan to Asfareen in Iran and granted them fertile lands for cultivation. But these Hazaras did not stay there and came to live around Meshad mostly in Khanabad and Kana-Gosheh (Khana Goshi) [Owtadolajam, 144].

Kava Bayat also refers to this fact, and writes about the importance of the Hazara tribes living in and around Herat (Afghanistan) as:

Prior to the genocide of 1880, present day Herat and North West of Afghanistan which was under Iran, were majority Hazara areas, and anyone wanting to rule Herat needed the blessings of the Hazara [army] commanders. There is no doubt that the Hazaras were in the position to tilt the power position for or against anyone [Bayat, 18].

It is important to note that there is little information available about the religious beliefs of the Hazara-e Jarman and Hazara-e Aughan. However, Hazara tribes such as Hazara-e Daizenee or Hazara-e Chahar Aimaq, consisting of sub-tribes: Jamshadi, Ferozkohi, Taimuri and Taimini, are identified with Sunni sect of Islam. As for the Shia Hazaras, those fortunate to escape the genocide (1880-1901) by the forces of Amir-e Kabul, Abdur Rahman Khan², moved out to the sub-continent (mainly in Pakistan), Central Asia, and Iran. In Iran, the Hazara population centers are in and around the central city of Meshad in Khurasan province. Unfortunately it is impossible to ascertain their correct population figures and their ways of living. In reality, it is that fear in the hearts and minds of the ruling elites of Iran that allowing

² <http://www.hazara.net/hazara/history/history.html>

the masses to identify themselves with their ethnic identity may endanger their rule. For this reason, since the Safavi dynasty to the secular time of the Shah of Iran, and from the Islamic Revolution to today's government in Iran, the official religion remained Shia Islam, and religious identity were always enforced at the expense of ethnic identity of the minorities living in Iran. With Hazaras, due to their Mongol identity, the use of racial slur such as "Barbari" (i.e. Barbaric) as their ethnic identification leaves no doubt about the extreme prejudice towards Hazaras for years [Owtadolajam, 145; Poladi, 259]. The account of how Hazaras came to be known as "Khawaris" is also interesting. Poladi in his book, "The Hazaras" writes:

For all these years, the Hazaras in Iran were known as Barbari, which they resented very much. They wanted to be called by the name Hazaras or another appropriate term. Finally, they appealed to the Raza Shah, the Great, who granted them the name of Khawari through a Firman (decree), and since then, the name Barbari has been abandoned [Poladi, 259].

Dr. Owtadolajam agrees with Poladi's conclusion and writes that the petition was submitted by a young Hazara student of Military College named Mr. Mohammad Yousuf Abghari in 1316 A.H. (1937) [Owtadolajam, 145]. It is surprising to note that while Shia Hazaras are identified with such nonsensical words such as Khawari (i.e. Eastern), the same Iranian rulers identify Sunni Hazaras correctly as "Hazaras" which, writers such as Jalal Ohidi concludes, is used to create animosity between the Hazaras towards each other [Risala Deedgah Nasle Nau, 8].

As stated, for centuries the Iranian regimes have used religion as a necessary tool for a strong central government. Therefore, it is impossible to find accurate figures for the different linguistic and ethnic groups living in Iran, including those of Hazaras. Dr. Monsutti writes about the loss of this national identity as:

Without a marked identity of their own, they soon merged into a local population whose language and religion they shared... The Hazara community of Meshad is more "Iranianized" [Monsutti, 126].

But despite all these problems, clear Mongoloid facial features and Hazara characteristics, the Iranian Hazaras could be identified in a glimpse.

According to research by Dr. Owtadolajam (1974-1976) a big majority of Hazaras in Iran live in cities such as Meshad, Turbat-e Jam, Dara-e Gaz, Bajnord, Asfareen, Nishaboore, Faramin, and in the 750 adjacent villages to these cities where their population is estimated to be between 10% and 100% [Owtadolajam, 144]. Making this the base of his research, Dr. Owtadolajam writes that until 1956, around 20,000 Hazara families lived in

and around the province Khurasan which later grew up to 70,000 families or close to 300,000 Hazaras [Owtadolajam, 143 - 144]. He also concludes that such increase in migration to the holy city of Meshad (in Khurasan) has also been on "account of faith they had in Hazrat Imam Reza (8th Shia Holy Imam) and their aspiration to be close to the holy shrine." [Owtadolajam, 144] On the basis of this growth, Dr. Mousavi approximates the Hazara population in Iran close to half a million (in 1997) [Mousavi, 151].

It is important to point out that the Hazara population figures given by Dr. Mousavi and Dr. Owtadolajam are only for the Irani Shia Hazaras, and there is only a cursory mention of the Irani Sunni Hazaras. In this regards, Jalal Ohadi talks about Irani Hazara analyst, Taqi Khawari in reference to Shia and Sunni Hazaras, "Daizeeni (Sunni Hazara) and other (Shia Hazaras) together made up around 3 million in 1978" [Risala Deedgah Nasle Nau, 8].

The population figures mentioned above by Kava Bayat (in his book "Saulat-ul Saltanat Hazara") and Taqi Khawari, (in his book "The Hazaras and Khurasan-e-Buzurg") which together represent both the Irani Sunni Hazaras and Irani Shia Hazaras, appear factual and proves the authenticity of the above figures to some extent. As for the Hazara refugee in Iran, regrettably there are no official figures available.

Dr. Monsutti quotes unofficial UNCHR sources estimating that a third to a half of all Afghans in Iran are Hazaras [Monsutti, 128]. This figure is also supported by Dr. Mousavi who has written that:

In 1992, when plans were drawn for their repatriation, the total number of refugees was estimated at around 2.8 to 3 million, of which by far the biggest majority were Hazaras [Mousavi, 152].

From figures presented in this document, we can conclude without any doubt that the Hazara refugee population in Iran is at least 1.5 million.

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