

HAZRA PROSECUTION IN PAKISTAN

An Old Sectarian Nerve

*Piyush Singh**

INTRODUCTION

Hazaras, a community known for their notorious fractiousness¹ back during the ancient period have evolved into a strong cohesive group; who despite their sparse numbers and divided populations have managed to often present a united global front against any atrocity committed against their community. Ever-since the beginning of the Afghan-Soviet war, the political consciousness among the Hazaras has only grown stronger. A similar outrage was visible simultaneously across the world in Australia, USA, New Zealand, UK after the recent prosecution of Hazara miners in the Baluchistan province. (Labour, civil society leaders condemn killing of 11 Hazara community miners, 2021) While the realities of the Islamic State of Pakistan (and its origins) claiming responsibility for the attacks is debatable, this event is just a part of a tragic history of this community, native to Afghanistan. Their desperate cry for help is a product of their prosecution that befell during the nineteenth century itself. In the 1890s alone, more than 60 percent of the Hazara population was wiped out from Afghanistan. (Canada, 2020)

The Pashtun rulers of Afghan ensured that this group which was distinct by its ethnicity² and minority by its sect (Shi'ites). Before we trace the brutal atrocities on the community in Pakistan and the corresponding political failures it's important to understand how the Hazara population in Pakistan came to be. It is essential to acknowledge that it hasn't been throughout history that Hazaras have been politically powerless. Moreover, it isn't their complete lack of power that is responsible for the recent resentment against the Hazaras but rather the shifting power dynamics that occurred around the time of the Afghan-Soviet³ confrontation. Situations remain pretty much unchanged for them until the

** The Author is a student at the Jindal School of International Affairs and Research Assistant at the Centre for Security Studies, JSIA.*

¹ The rise of a broadly shared Hazara national consciousness is notable because the Hazaras have been notorious for their fractiousness, at least as travellers through their area have reported it. (Canfield, 2004)

² The Hazaras are said to be descendants of Genghis Khan, the founder of the Mongol empire, and the Mongol soldiers who swept through the region in the 13th century. (Hucal, 2016)

³ Beginning in 1984 the communist government began to take measures to win over the opposition. To win Hazara support the Ministry of Tribal Affairs established a "Hazara Shura" and "published a magazine, 'Gharjstan', which dealt with the history, culture and social conditions of the Hazaras.

“Islamabad-Washington-Riyadh” nexus led the foundation of the Taliban to oppose the Soviet occupation of Kabul. The end of the Soviet occupation meant that the power held by the Hazaras⁴ was no more to be recognized by an over-arching structure. Even though Gorbachev tried his best to offer the Hazaras and a few other minority groups reconciliatory benefits⁵, a new configuration was triggered when the Soviet agreed for a non-interventionist policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan. However, the idea of an independent Hazara-governed province meant that the ethnic identity was to solidify socially and politically. The business communities among the Hazaras, who had experienced a phenomenal growth during the war helped coagulate that identity through initiatives in the domain of education, women rights, trade, economics with one common goal.⁶ This was to sow the seeds for a renewed era of resentment among the traditionally powerful *Pashtuns*, who not only held prominent positions within the Afghan societies but were also constituted the Taliban. A Taliban (with a Sunni ideology) backed by Islamabad, Saudi Arabia and the US, fearing an Iranian dimension of influence in the region gradually gave rise to a never ending sectarian power-struggle in the region.

THE ‘SECTARIAN-RIFT’ IN PAKISTAN

In a country that differentiated its founding principles on the basis of a ‘religious’ identity (that was to be furthered into a national identity), a rift within the two constitutive sects couldn’t have been foreseen. Moreover, the founding father Muhammad Ali Jinnah was himself a Shi’ite who was well aware of the significance of this integrated identity to the foundation of Pakistan. Until the 1970s, the two sects lived under the umbrella of a single Islamic and national identity; prominent positions in the government, military, bureaucracy were shared by both Sunni and Shi’ites. In fact, the PPP (Pakistan’s People Party) was a predominantly Shi’a party and their reign from 1971-77 when its founder Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was the PM was “marked the pinnacle of Shia power in Pakistan and the high point of the promise of inclusive Muslim nationalism.” (Nasr, 2007).

⁴ For the first time the state made Hazara ethnicity politically relevant. The next year, in the interest of bringing reconciliation the communist government began to make clandestine contacts with some of the anti-communist organizations, including the Hazaras.

⁵ In his speech to the group the most prominent Hazara in the government, Sultan Ali *Keshmand*, said the government was going to set up several new provinces in the *Hazarajat* that would be administered by the local inhabitants.

⁶ . The "Kabul Hazara business community [had] started to expand in the seventies, and experienced explosive growth during the war," says Harpviken. Members of the business community, many of them affiliated with the Hazara *Shura*, set up the *Shirkat* as "a joint stock business company ... to run industrial production, import and export," and to establish social projects, such as handicraft activities for the women and courses in business, economics, banking, foreign trade, and English language.

It were however the years of late 1970s after the ousting of PPP that situations began to change drastically.⁷ The rise of a Shi'a – led revolution across its western borders, coupled with Iranian initiatives⁸ to “empower” the Shi'ites of Pakistan through religious initiatives, cultural centres (*Shuras*), propelled at once ‘a new ambition’ among the Pakistani *Shi'ites* and a strong resentment among the Sunnis in Pakistan. The rise of Taliban as a group hell bent on ousting the existing Afghan administration that didn't empower the Pashtun tribes enough was supported by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to keep Tehran's regional ambitions⁹ in check. This strengthening of Taliban immediately resulted in heinous crimes against Shi'as and the Hazaras with their unique ethnic¹⁰ identity and a history of subordination found it rather difficult to survive. They either fled to Western countries or took refuge in cities of Quetta (mainly) and Karachi. The prosecution of Hazaras stems from the ‘apostate’ status given to many non-Sunnis in Pakistan.

This, rather than being an issue of neglect towards the Hazaras in particular is a broader problem of an institutional failure and complicity¹¹ which stems from the nuanced power structures of Pakistan's security elite. Unlike any other state hit with terrorism seeking stability, Pakistan has always classified terrorism into two groups: good and bad. The two most significant security concerns facing the Pakistani establishment are (i) The Baluch Secessionist Movement and (ii) The Kashmir problem. Since Pakistan's defence capabilities continue to mismatch its aspirations in Kashmir vis-à-vis India, proxy-war seems to be the near-perfect alternative. The *jihad* based honour killings that have engulfed thousands of Hazaras' lives now are also a product of this pursuit through the creation of what Jessica

⁷ In the late 1970s, however, three key developments inflamed Shi'ite-Sunni tensions in Pakistan: General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's ascension to power, the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and Pakistan's proxy wars in Afghanistan and Kashmir. (Rubin & Majidyar, 2014)

⁸ The new regime in Tehran, dispatched its revolutionary agents disguised as diplomats and cultural attachés across Pakistan to mobilize and unite the Shi'ite communities. Tehran established cultural centres in Pakistan's largest cities of Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, and Quetta, from which Iranian agents not just distributed Khomeini's work among Pakistani but also offered as many as 4,000 Pakistani Shi'ites scholarships to study Khomeini's concept of Guardianship of the Jurisprudent [*Vilayat-e-Faqih*] in Iran. (Nasr, 2007)

⁹ Iran's growing power in Pakistan enraged both Pakistani Sunni religious groups and Persian Gulf Sunni monarchies. To counter Iranian influence, Saudi Arabia substantially increased financial support for the Pakistani Sunni religious organizations. Pakistani Sunni religious parties, too, saw the Shi'ite political mobilization as an Iranian project, and in 1985, hardliners created Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) in Punjab, which drew support from local Sunni peasants and the government, and launched a series of terrorist attacks against Shi'ite leaders and Iranian diplomats across the country. (Abbas, 1996)

¹⁰ Hazara means ‘thousand’ in Persian but given the Hazaras' typical physical features, current theory supports their descent from Mongol soldiers left behind by Genghis Khan in the 13th century.

¹¹ Hazara leaders allege that the government is either unwilling or unable to crack down on terrorist groups; others accuse the Pakistani spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of complicity: “Police fail to arrest them; the judiciary also refuses to punish them; legislation is not passed in the assemblies; and the secret agencies give them freedom,” complained Sajad Changezi, a local Shi'ite leader. (Rubin & Majidyar, 2014)

Stern calls Jihad International Inc. (Stern, 2000). Organizations such as the Taliban, JeM (Jaish-e-Mohammed), LeT (Lashkar-e-Taiba), Pakistani Taliban, LeJ (Lashkar-e-Jhangwi) are all part of a nexus that recruit their “human resource” from the ‘*madarsas*’ proliferated by Saudi Arabia during and after the Jihad of Soviet’s Afghan occupation and their “capital” from wealthy Arabs and Pakistanis from across the globe.¹²

The average flag-bearer of *Jihad* who is now able to earn more than twice what an average Pakistani can earn, finds it rather impossible to get himself out of this loop and become addicted of this ‘jihad’¹³, which forces him to find another void to fit his interpretation of ‘jihad’. The promotion of this *jihad* in Kashmir and the Taliban in Afghanistan inadvertently overlaps with the promotion of sectarianism on Pakistan’s own soil. Ever since the military dictator Zia-ul-Huq laid down the foundation for sectarianism by promoting the *Sunni* version of Islam and collection of *zakat*,¹⁴ Iran has funded its influence into the Shi’ite¹⁵ community of Pakistan. This heated battle between the clergies of the Sunnis and Shi’ites, rooted in the Iran-Saudi cold war was allowed to openly unfold itself on the Pakistani territory by its establishment. Balancing one group using the another¹⁶ has given rise to Frankenstein’s monsters on all sides of the spectrum.

THE RISE OF LASHKAR-E-JHANGWI AND THE CASE OF QUETTA

Lashkar-e-Jhangwi is undoubtedly the most notorious terrorist group responsible for killing Hazaras and was founded with the sole purpose of wiping out¹⁷ the Shi’ites from Pakistan. The story of Malik

¹² If madrasahs supply the labour for "jihad," then wealthy Pakistanis and Arabs around the world supply the capital. On Eid-ul-Azha, the second most important Muslim holiday of the year, anyone who can afford to sacrifice an animal and gives the hide to charity. Pakistani militant groups solicit such hide donations, which they describe as a significant source of funding for their activities in Kashmir. (Stern, 2000)

¹³ Many irregulars who fought in Afghanistan are now fighting in Kashmir and are likely to continue looking for new "jihads" to fight? even against Pakistan itself. Khalil, who has been a "mujahid" for 19 years and can no longer imagine another life, told me, "A person addicted to heroin can get off it if he really tries, but a mujahid cannot leave the jihad. I am spiritually addicted to jihad."

¹⁴ A practice where involvement of the government is totally against the Shi’ite version of Islam.

¹⁵ The. Iran helped fund the TJP (Tehrik-e-Jafariya-e-Pakistan) to protect the interests of Pakistan's Shi'a Muslims, who felt discriminated against by Zia's implementation of Sunni laws governing the inheritance and collection of *zakat*, probably in hopes of using it as a vehicle for an Iranian-style revolution in Pakistan.

¹⁶ “Hazaras are paying the price for Iran–Saudi Arabia enmity,” said Abdul Khaliq Hazara, the leader of the Hazara Democratic Party. Some also argue that without the government’s complicity, Punjab-based LeJ would not have been able to become influential and effective in Baluchistan. Anti-Shi’ite groups in Baluchistan are also linked with al Qaeda and the TTP (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan) (Rubin & Majidyar, 2014)

¹⁷ According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), from 1989 to 2015, approximately 9,800 civilians, mostly Shi’ite Muslims, have been killed in Pakistan due to sectarian violence. A large number of these deaths are attributed to Ishaq’s group. (Mahmood, 2015)

Ishaq (founder of LeJ) is not only conducive in understanding the nerves of the sectarian rift in Pakistan but also helps trace the inefficacy and gather evidence to ascertain the complicity of the security establishment. Ishaq was an ardent follower of the Sunni extremist cleric Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangwi (the founder of SSP¹⁸) and was greatly inspired by his radical views on Iran's attempt to embolden the *Shi'ites* to challenge Pakistan's *Sunnis*.¹⁹ Despite being named²⁰ in notable high-profile attacks, killing dozens of Shi'ites and delivering hate-speeches, there was a conspicuous web of protection over him inside and outside the prisons. Even while serving his prison-term, he successfully conducted the infamous attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team and three different attacks claiming over hundred Shi'ite lives²¹ in Quetta and Gilgit-Baltistan. Moreover, despite being accused in dozens of cases, Ishaq continued to either be acquitted, saved from prosecution due to lack of evidence, murder and disappearance of witnesses and threats to judges.²²

This not only brings forth the deeply flawed structures within Pakistan's internal security apparatus but also presents a challenge faced by the globe when a state lets terror outfits prosper on its territory in the garb of conspiring against its regional competitors. This problem is most palpable in the numerous tragic incidents of communal violence all across Quetta, the provincial capital and largest city of the Province of Balochistan in Pakistan.

QUETTA: THE HOME OF VIOLENCE AGAINST HAZARAS

¹⁸ Five years later, Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, a Jamaat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) cleric, established the SSP to offset the TJP and to promote the interests of Sunni Muslims. The SSP was funded by both Saudi Arabia and Iraq. (Stern, 2000)

¹⁹ While with SSP, Ishaq participated in violent sectarian campaigns against the Shi'ites. He also immersed himself in religious literature and books written by Islamic scholars, and frequently quoted them in order to assert differences between the Shi'ites and the Sunnis. (Khattak, 2013)

²⁰ In 2011, Ishaq openly claimed responsibility for killing more than 100 Shi'ites (Munawar 2011). In 2014, Ishaq was arrested for delivering hate speeches against Shi'ites in a mosque with close to 1,000 people in attendance. (Mahmood, 2015)

²¹ The attacks include the 2012 shooting of 25 Shi'ites in Gilgit-Baltistan; and the 2013 bombing that killed 67 and injured 167 Hazara Shi'ites in Quetta. Also soon after his release, soon after his release, violent attacks against Shi'ites soared, with LeJ becoming increasingly violent. For example, LeJ members carried out raids on buses carrying passengers, and would check their identity cards to identify Shi'ites before killing them. (Georgy, 2012)

²² During one particular hearing, the judge – fearing the consequences – attempted to conceal his face from Ishaq. Ishaq then mockingly repeated the names of the judge's children. The judge immediately decided to dismiss the case against Ishaq due to the threat implied in Ishaq's statement mentioning the names of the judge's children. (Mahmood, 2015)

Quetta is a city that lies at the loggerheads of sectarian violence, ethnic rifts, communal violence, societal insecurity, ethnic nationalism and infiltration across borders. The Baloch community, Hazaras (fleeing from violence in Afghanistan) and the Pakistani dispensation find themselves in dispute with one another. A rift between Baloch and the Pakistani government originating from secessionist movements led to a vacuum that was filled up by the Hazaras who fled from Afghanistan. They began to occupy valuable positions in the government, bureaucracy deepening the insecurities and resentment among the Baloch.²³ This was a culmination of a series of events through time that had turned Quetta into the hot-bed of proxy warfare among the Saudis and Iran. While Saudi money flowed to *Deobandi* *madrassas* located in the Pashtun belt along the Afghan border, Iran established a cultural centre in Quetta to extend its influence among the growing Shi'ite community comprised of migrant Hazara and local Punjabi ethnic groups. (Dedalus, 2009) .

However with time, as the Taliban's support gained prominence and Saudi-funded *Deobandi*²⁴ *madarsas* expanded, both Hazaras and Baluch nationalist aspirations were to be put down brutally. Hazaras began to be prosecuted by the radical Sunni organizations like SSP and JeM while the Baloch began to be turned in as a scapegoat for the violence against Hazaras. A small minority of the Baloch population was taken in by the LeJ and were used to wage violent attacks²⁵ against Hazaras that would create a never-ending sectarian cleavage within Quetta's society.

CONCLUSION

Citing the situation of Hazaras in Pakistan brings out a fractious picture of the society and the security establishment. The culmination of numerous failed strategies adopted to contain the powers in the neighborhood and selectively strengthening groups in the region has largely backfired from all directions. The perceived advantage of choosing proxy-groups over the conventional strategies to deter potential threats have created disastrous circumstances for the establishment. Measuring the morality of groups driven by fundamentalism has not only inflicted casualties on the Shi'ites and

²³ The increased presence of Hazara bureaucrats in senior positions in turn gave rise to a more prominent Shi'a presence in Balochistan, including the construction of Imam Bargahs in predominantly Sunni areas and even the alleged funneling of financial support to newly converted Baloch families. (Dedalus, 2009)

²⁴ While claiming to implement a universal Islamic vision, Zia promoted a very specific Sunni school of thought. Specifically, he promoted Islamization based on orthodox interpretations of sharia rooted in the Sunni Islamic revivalist teachings of the Deobandi movement. Zia actively courted and gained the support of the Deobandi clerics who ran most of the *madrassas* in Pakistan with this deeply sectarian Islamization program (Stern, 2000)

²⁵ Once L-e-J leaders took refuge in Taliban-governed Afghanistan, a small minority of Baloch youth and Afghan veterans travelled back to Afghanistan to receive military training and ideological support under the tutelage of Riaz Basra. Having received such training, the Baloch militants returned from Afghanistan to Quetta to wage a reign of terror on the Shi'a population, particularly the Hazara community. (Dedalus, 2009)

tipped the balance of power against them but has fundamentally changed the Pakistan society. The dream of a Pakistan that was supposed to be a safe Islamic Republic for Muslims all across the world broke-down before the third decade of its foundation ended. The pursuit of regional hegemony and/or Islamic hegemony has come at a great cost yet to no avail. Even to this day, the society remains fragmented and fractious under the burden of Zia's unilateral Sunni-oriented policies. In this whole picture, Hazaras have suffered the most with the duality of an ethnic distinctive community and a belonging to a minority sect. In the changing international politics of this era, where PM Imran Khan continues to assert an Islamic identity of his nation and grapples with the changing power dynamics in the Islamic world.