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Thoughts of the Hazara Youths on Hazaras Identity: A Case Study at 13th District of Kabul, Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

Every individual and ethnic group in the universe has unique identity based upon their unique personality characteristic. In the past owing to wars in the country there has not been any rigorous study concerning the issue. The main objective of this study is to understand the views of the Hazara youths, in respect of the identity of the Hazara ethnic group. Based on the thoughts of the Hazara youths, the meaning, constituents, concepts and the essence of Hazaras' identity are understood and analyzed. Hazaras are the third largest nationality in Afghanistan and mainly live in central parts of the country, called Hazarajat. Method of interview was an in-depth interview with informants. A total of Twenty eight interviews were conducted with both men and women of the Hazara youths. Data was transcribed and translated from Dari (Persian) language to English and a thematic analysis was done. Data was openly, axially and selectively coded. The findings show that majority of the informants believed that Hazaras identity is defined by their language, pedigree, name, culture and their specific oriental facial features such as pointed cheek bones, Asian eyes, nose and many more Asian physical traits and also by their belief. Religion is a significant part of their identity and history. Gender differences exhibited that the views and thoughts of male and female Hazara youths did not differ significantly in relation to Hazaragi identity.

Key words: Hazara identity, Afghanistan, modernization, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

This study tried to understand the thoughts of the Hazara youths with regard to identity of the Hazara ethnic group, and based on the opinions of the Hazara youths, the meaning, components, notions and the essence of Hazaras' identity is analyzed. Hazaras are the third largest ethnic group in Afghanistan and mainly live in the central parts of the country called Hazarajat. The Hazaras of Afghanistan are distinctive among the country's diverse population. Ethnically, the Hazaras resemble East Asia's Mongols and Turks. They live in the mountainous central region of the country, covering almost 50,000 square km of land, which is known as "Hazarajat" (Mousavi, 1998). Some of them though live scattered in other parts of Afghanistan such as Badghis, Mazzar-e-Sharif, Badakhshan, Sar-e Pol, Jozjan, Panjshir, Samangan, Herat, Helmand, etc. (Ewans, 2002; James, 2004).

After decades of war in Afghanistan, it is a golden time and an opportunity to study about the identity of Hazara ethnic group and to know the perspectives of the younger generation of

Hazaras. Identity and ethnic identity are essential concepts in understanding and recognizing any tribe and nation. At the same time, understanding of identity is important because it helps us to know who we/they are and what we/they stand for in a given situation or society. It is viewed from a sociological and psychological standpoint to make them definable and recognizable (Gull Muhammadi, 2002).

In today's universe it is very significant to recognize oneself with at least one thing (ones nationality, ethnicity, race, faith, or a particular belief). Yet, many people grapple with the concept of identity in many regions, countries, and various ways in order to know, identify or adapt into any other setting (culture, social, economic, political). Individual's identity determines his/her position or situation in a society in which they live. However, the right type of identity can be challenging for many people sometimes because of the obstacles and difficulties they face in the process of selecting and recognizing their alienations (Gull Muhammadi, 2002).

Some people identify themselves as Mongolian, Turkish, Aryan, Irish, Italian, Germans, Ethiopian, Egyptian, Ugandan, Sudanese, and so on. But for many ethnic groups identification is problematic in a sense that they find it consciously or unconsciously hard to distinguish between their own ethnicity and that of others. For instance, the ethnic affiliations are affected by ones cultural attachment (what they have from their bygone life; their language, belief, customs, tradition, etc.). These cultural characteristics act as indicators/determinants of how one looks (physical traits; facial appearance, height, facial features, etc.). Today some youths (both men and women) find themselves absorbed into alien and foreign cultures (due to culture shocks) and therefore, get lost in the way. Then they detect it a little bit challenging to converse their way out of the prevailing culture shock they have inherited/adopted (Chandra, 2006).

Many people recognize themselves with race (Mongolian, Turkish, Caucasoid, Negroid, Aryan, etc.). Even though there is only one strips/race (the human strips/race) many still believe in racism (the process of classifying humans into racial classes). Racism is a social construct (it is socially built and it exists in the minds of those who sense it as main in determining ones or other people's identity in society). Some people receive racism seriously and they do not want to give up the opinion (Mousavi, 1998; Chandra, 2006). With identity (ethnic, racial, national, cultural or religious) come some forms of discriminations and privileges. One's facial features or culture for instance, determines what one gets or not gets in a society (i.e., employment opportunities, qualitative instruction and education, social status, economic privileges, political position/cooptation). Your social position is determined by your facial features and culture on matter how much you feign because your uniqueness and difference can be easily spotted and figured out (you are a visible minority). You can be seen obviously where even you go. Though, you are invisible (your voice can not be heard when you speak to people who are distinctive from you). They will not listen to you because you are distinctive (Chandra, 2006). You can be discriminated against and left out from society (process of alienation (Marx, 2013)).

Identity is a complex and flexible concept (Gilchrist *et al.*, 2010). In recent years, researchers studying in a notable array of social science and humanities disciplines have taken a profound interest in questions of "identity". In social and political sciences, for instance, is found the notion of "identity" at the center of lively discussions in every significant subfield. Identity is related to identification of an ethnic group and it to some extent is synonymous of ethnicity and these two concepts are used as substitutes and also identity plays a crucial role in work on nationalism and ethnic quarrels (Horowitz, 1985; Smith, 1991; Deng, 1995; Laitin, 1999; James, 2004). Deng (1995) said, "Identity is applied in this book to demonstrate the way groups and individuals define

themselves and are defined and identified by others on the basis of ethnicity, race, language, religion and culture (James, 2004). Deng (1995) also believed on malleability and complexity of identity and according to him it can be defined based on diverse concepts and phrases. It evolves and is exhibited according to the changing needs and opportunities faced by communities and individuals. Jenkins (1996) the concept of identity refers to the ways in which collectivities and individuals are identified and distinguished in their social relations with other collectivities and individuals.

Identity is identified by specific phenomena in which an ethnic group is known. Or else the concept of identity is defined by an ethnicity's nationality, culture, language and physical status; and an ethnicity is known by their identity. Also the concept of identity in terms of lexical: identity refers to the quiddity and who they are or who s/he is (who are them), and emanates from human needs to know and be known (Smith, 1991; Laitin, 1999). Furthermore, (Mousavi, 1998) states "the literal meaning of identity refers to nature, temperament, recognition and culture" (p. 176). Moreover, "the intent of identity, sense of belonging to a set of material and spiritual elements that have already been formed, the process of knowingly, accountability individual identity, tribe or nation, the question of his present and his past can also be defined; that who was, where was, what was and what is, in other words, belong to which tribe, nation and race" (Jenkins, 1996; James, 2004; Hogg and Abrams, 1988).

For Horowitz (1985), nationality or ethnicity is an umbrella notion that "Easily hugs groups differentiated by language, color, and religion; it covers nationalities, tribes, races and castes". Many scholars believe that identity is the concept of ethnicity and that ethnicity is known by their identity. For instance, identity is "People's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others" (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). Azad Armaki and Chavshyan (2002) believe, "All features and behaviors that make distinction between us and others, such as belief, language, ethnicity or race, customs, social class and are the components of ethnic identity" (Azad Armaki and Chavshyan, 2002). Consequently, there are many different theories upon identity and its concept. Some scholars have defined the concept of identity based on common culture and tradition of a race or nation, and some have recognized the notion of identity based on common history, common language, common religion and race (Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Jenkins, 1996). The range, intricacy, and differences among these diverse formulations are remarkable. In part, the diversities reflect the various lineages that "identity" has within the academy (Horowitz, 1985; James, 2004).

Of all the constituents in the study of Hazara ethnic group the quest for the real theory of their identity remains to be one of most fishy (James, 2004; Jenkins, 1996). Scholars who have endeavored to compile any research on the Hazara ethnic group have delved into the theme, often making bold new declarations. Some scholars like Ferrier (1857) believe that the Hazara ethnic groups are the primary inhabitants of the region and they have not emigrated from other places to this land but have occupied in this country since the time of the Alexander the Great. He believes that Hazaras are unique and have had their own identity and culture. He has more focused on facial features of that ethnic group, and their identification according to him should be done based on their physical features (Ferrier, 1857). The thoughts of Ferrier are as well accepted by the most famous Afghan researcher and historian (Emadi, 1997). Emadi (1997) and James (2004) stated that reasoning for recognition of Hazara's identity are based on the linguistic findings. He stated that Hazara ethnic group speak their own language and this language is totally different and is a dialect of Indo-Iranian, which shows that these people are the descendants of Indo-Aryans.

According to him one of the specifications of Hazaragi identity is their language. Some scholars like Emadi (1997) believed that the Hazaras are the direct off springs of Gengiz Khan's army and they are of Mongolian origin. But a few authors such as Schurmann (1961), as quoted by Mousavi, (1998) deliberated that the Hazara ethnic group is a blended race of Turks-Mongols.

Emadi (2002) further gave information on identification of the Hazaras and says that this ethnic group has their own physiognomies and they are identified by those specifications and are different from other ethnic groups. Also he says that the name of this ethnic group is unique and to some extent they are known by their name. The Hazaras who have migrated to India (today Pakistan), Iran, central Asia and so on, have common names and they resemble same. A number of scholars and historians like Mousavi (1998), James (2004), Emadi (2002) also have the same perceptions believes that the Hazara ethnic group has been the native residents of Hazarajat (central Afghanistan) and they have not emigrated from other places to this soil. Ali Akbar says that the Hazara people are discerned from other ethnic groups by their particular oriental facial features such as pointed cheek bones, Mongolian eyes, nose and many more Asian physical attributes. Many other authors, historians, and scholars; share a similar thoughts in relation to identification of the Hazara ethnic group based on their culture and facial features and their defined features in the country (Dowlatabadi, 2006; James, 2004; Mousavi, 1998; Bacon, 1951; Schurmann, 1961).

Mousavi (1998) has stated on name of Hazaras and according to him this name (Hazara) is unique and have it in common around the world and also it contains their history, culture, identity, belief and their soil. The term Hazara according Dowlatabadi (2006) is a converted form of second capital of Arcgozia, "Herola" or "Ozola". He interprets the word Hazara as "Celebrated" and "Happy". In addition, some scholars like Bacon (1951) and Mousavi (1998) believe that the Hazara people in Afghanistan are known by their belief as Shi'ite Muslim and because of their belief and facial features they have always been victimized and offended by previous regimes and in most of the cases they were forced to relinquish their soil and homes and migrate to other locations inside the country or outside the country. However, according to those scholars, religion is one of the prominent parts of the Hazaragi identity in the country they are more known by their belief than their race, name and location. And the terms Shia and Hazara have become one in the country, and instead of Hazara, many other ethnic groups call them Shi'ite (Dowlatabadi, 2006).

There are many customs and traditions, which show Hazaragi culture and identity and some of them, are in common with other ethnic groups (Emadi, 2005). Most common clothing among the Hazaras is *Perahan-u-Tunban*. Men wear turbans over their *Perahan-u-Tunbans*, as well as plain vests, overcoats and sweaters. Clothing is made from wool or cotton. The women wear clothes with bright colors and designs. Women don't wear as much as the men because they spend most of the time indoors (Emadi, 2005). Also this ethnic group produces handmade coats, overcoats, sweaters, jackets, shoes, hats, gloves and scarves. These are mostly made by the women and are sold in shops in Kabul and other cities and they all show Hazaragi crafts and mores (Emadi, 2005; Mousavi, 1998).

So, the main objective of this study was to understand the views of the Hazara youths, in respect of the identity of the Hazara ethnic group.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sampling procedure: The informants in this study were chosen to take part in an interview and in choosing them; method of simple random sampling was employed. This study was conducted at

Kateb University which is located at Kabul. The sample was made up of 28 men and women and all of them are youth and studying at Kateb University. The sample size was chosen based on the saturation of data gathered from the informants. Their ages were between 18 and 40. Age was demarcated to 18 to 40 in order that represent and deputize the population of young adults in Kabul who were university students. In Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, the Kateb University was opted for picking out of informant of male and female of the Hazara youth generation, and where the youth population is generally of the upper middle class and the middle class. Also the sampling was based upon their knowledge, understanding, and cognizance about Hazaras' identity, and meanwhile being the same race. According to Moore and McCabe (1989), in a qualitative research, random sampling is eliminates bias by giving all individuals an equal chance to be chosen" (p. 219). And this type of sampling will be representative of the population.

Data collection: Data was collected through in-depth interviews with the informants. Interviews were led by using an interview guide and based upon questions which had already been prepared and considered for this study with the objective of understanding the views of the Hazara youths in relation to Hazaras identity. Interview is a basic method of data collection in most qualitative studies. The data was collected around a period of 2 months in the winter of 2014 (January and February) and each interview lasted forty five minutes to an hour and a half. All interviews were written in the course of interview. Declarations of informants were recognized to clarify the issue and also the original meanings were maintained. In addition, after the classifications and sub classifications were evolved, each written text was then reviewed several times to clarity. Interviews with all the informants were conducted in Hazaragi language. Hazaragi is spoken by Hazaras and is considered a dialect of Persian called Dari in Afghanistan (Dulling, 1973).

Statistical analysis: There are five chains of activity that were carried out by the researcher during the data analysis process. They are as following: (1) Interviews that was recorded with each respondent will be copied and translated into transcript format, (2) Before these transcripts are written or produced, the researcher will listen to the interviews that have been recorded at least twice to ensure no interviews have been omitted or neglected, (3) As soon as the transcription process is completed, each transcript or text will later be reviewed or given reconsideration and rearranged to reflect a brief description of the Hazaras identity, (4) the data are later saved in files using different names, (5) A few jargons in Hazaragi language used by the Hazaras community in their daily lives when making descriptions or narratives about their own identity are maintained in original words and finally (6) The next step that is considered very important in this study is managing the data through the categorization process. In the process, the researcher will develop a matrix table as a way to tabulate the results into a style or way that is more structured and organized. By using themes derived from the continuous comparative analysis, the researcher next tabulates specific excerpts based on the line numbers that appear in the scripts. This is in line with the argument given by Strauss and Corbin (1990) saying that coding is the method and process through which the data are fragmented apart, conceptualized and then reintegrated into theory development (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Origin of hazaras: There was general agreement among all informants that for better understanding of the issue it is needed we focus on paternity of a descent and should be drawn

attention to the past and from that point be extracted the concept of the issue. Some of the participants for recognition of Hazaragi identity gave their views and wanted to link and tie their ideas to race and paternity for better distinguishing identity of them than the other ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Say, Zaki said: "We cannot identify Hazaragi identity sans their origin and therefore the concept of identity is related to paternity and origin of a race, as a result Hazaras are the native inhabited of this country and they are a Turk race and they live there since 5,000 years ago." Homayon and Hazara also shared a similar view to that of Zaki's; they said:

"In terms of Hazaras identification, first of all their physical looks can recognize these people, as they are looking similar to Mongol, Turk, Chinese and many other central Asian countries, they have pointed cheekbones, Asian like eyes, nose and many more Asian physical attributes".

While some informants indicated that understanding of identity is not much easy and it needs more knowledge and studies and without a keen awareness no one is able to give full information in terms of identity of any ethnic groups (Table 1). Tamana said: "I have heard many times from my father and as well as from my teacher, 'The Hazara people are posterities of the Turkish and Mongol'; therefore I can define my identity as Turk or Mongol and we live there (Hazarajat) before Christ." Haidary also stated that realizing the identity of any ethnic groups is not very easygoing but about Hazaragi identity I can say:

"Many scholars have written and as well many people say that the Hazaras are the offspring of Mongol soldiers who came to Afghanistan with Genghis Khan the Great in the 13th century and after staying in the region, they came under the cultural influence of the primary people and gradually converted to Islam and accepted the language of original people.

Furthermore he says:

I was wondered by these fanciful theories, how those scholars have written these theories about origin of the Hazara ethnic group which they are posterities of military garrisons remained by Ghenghis Khan the Great. There are many monuments have been figured out to display the antiquity of the Hazaras' history which they live there before Christ. For instance the two big Buddhas of Bamiyan had about 1800 years old; History and also people say those Buddhas have been built by Hazaras in the Hazarajat and they lived there before and during the time of Alexander the Great".

Table 1: Informants' views about origin of Hazaras ethnic

Hazaras origin	Percentage
The primary inhabitants of Hazarajat	80*
Mongols	60
Turkish	50
Turkish-Mongol	50
Blended race	20

* These numbers show the percentage of the informants who believed about pedigree and origin of the Hazara ethnic group

Some scholars like Emadi (2002) and James (2004) also believe that the Hazara ethnic groups are the ancient inhabitants of the region who lived there during the time of Alexander the Great. They have not migrated from other places to this region. Besides, some informants complained on lack of information and research about Hazaras identity, as Karimi one of the informant for example stated that, “It is a fact that there is no a comprehensive literature and research about identity of Hazara ethnic group but one thing I know that the Hazara people are similar to Mongols; their eyes, nose, height, skin color and even we can find a few Mongolian words in Hazaragi language. These reasons display and knit the relationship between Hazaragi identity and Mongols.” Ali one of the informants echoed opposite to Karimi and said, “It is correct that the Hazaras visage, eyes and nose are similar to Mongols, but it is also correct that the Hazaras eyes, nose, and face are resembling to Turks, Chinese, Mongols, and many more Asian ethnic groups; thus, how one can differentiate and realize that Hazara people belong to this ethnic group or that. Hence, there is needed more research and studies.”

Furthermore, a few participants had similar thoughts with reference to paternity of Hazaras, and they said, “Hazaras are the offspring of the Mongol soldiers who were indwelled there (Hazarajat, land of the Hazaras) by Genghis Khan the Great in 13th century.” But, few informants like Farzam believes that the Hazara ethnic group is “mixed race” as discussed:

“The Hazaras are unique among ethnic groups in the country and have their own culture and creed and above all their physical appearance and physiognomies are analogous and homological to Turks and Mongols. In addition there are some Turkish and Mongolian words in Hazaragi dialect which all of these phenomena display to connect the kinship among these ethnic groups and one can, based on those phenomena emblazon they have the same paternity and are the same clan”

Scholars like Ferrier (1857), Mousavi (1998), Bacon (1951) and Schurmann (1961) also believe that the Hazara ethnic groups are the posterities of Mongols and they came in this country by Genghis Khan the Great. Bacon (1951) believes that the Hazara people are the posterities of Mongols and they have inhabited in these regions gradually between the years 1299 and 1447. But, a few scholars such as Schurmann (1961), as quoted in Mousavi, (1998), states that Hazara people are a blend of Turks and Mongols that slowly integrated with the local people of the area in the latter part of the 13th century. Bernhard Dorn converses that Hazara people are the Turko-Mongol nationality whom as a result of struggles been settled during the rule of Mangu Khan in the years 1284 and 1291 in Hazarajat (Mousavi, 1998). Schurmann (1961) thinks that Hazaras

Table 2: Concepts that define Hazaras identity

Concepts of Hazara identity definition	Percentage
Hazara (name of an ethnic group)	80* ¹
Hazaragi (Hazaras' language)	60
Hazaras' belief	50
Facial feature	60
Culture and custom	50
Others*	20

*Hazaras are known honest, hardworking and peaceful people in Afghanistan by Afghans and international communities, ¹These numbers show the percentage of the informants who believed that Hazaras' identity is defined by these notions

are neither Turks nor the blend of Turks and Mongols but he thinks that they are a blend of different races like Turks-Mongols and Mongols-Tajiks and so on. Finally, these different views exist with regard to Hazaras origin and identity. Majority of the informants believed that Hazaras are the ancient inhabitants of the region and they have not migrated from other places. Also some informants stated that Hazaras are the offspring of Mongols but a few of them thought that Hazaras are mixed race.

Concepts that define Hazaras identity: The Hazaras of Afghanistan are unique among the state's divergent population. Ethnically, this nationality resembles East Asia's Mongols and Turks. They are the third largest ethnic group who live throughout the country and mainly in Hazarajat. Majority of the informants stated that Hazaras are identified by their particular oriental like facial features such as indicated cheek bones, Mongolian like face, nose, eyes and many more Mongolian and Turkish physical properties. In addition, the informants expressed their perceptions about specifications that Hazaras are known in the country, as they said: "The most prominent factors of recognition of Hazaras are the Hazaragi language and Hazaragi facial features; for instance, whenever we talk to someone who belong to other ethnic groups, we are recognized by them at the first moment by our language and our face, visage and shape and they immediately ask us 'are you a Hazara.' In addition, Hazara people are religious and hold strong religious affiliation to Islam. Following both Shi'ite and Sunni sects and following closely the 'Ahlul-Bait' of the prophet of Islam." Many scholars like Dulling (1973), Schurmann (1961) and Chandra (2006) believed that Hazaras are known by their facial features, belief, and their language. Mousavi (1998) also stated that Hazara ethnic group speak their own language and this language is a dialect of Indo-Iranian, which shows that these people are the descendants of Indo-Aryans. Hence, they are identified by these specifications that are listed in Table 2.

Furthermore, some informants like Taheri stated that "Hazaras like other communities possess their own customs and traditions and these customs have been inherited by them from very ancient traditions and since ancient times and then they have kept them alive in spite of the invasion and pressures from those who tried to abolish and put an end to these traditions in order to exterminate Hazaras' identity. These traditions and customs have played a vital role in strengthening Hazaragi identity and their feelings to stay together." These traditions include their belief, customs, norms and specifications of their identity. They also stated about role of Islam on culture and identity of the Hazaras. As Mohammadi said, and his views was similar to Sirat and Zaki:

"Islam has strong role in everyone's life and can be part of their identity and adjusting the culture of Muslim and Hazara people. Islam is infused into almost every aspect of life in the country. The use of Islam includes following five essential duties, also known as the 'Five Pillars of Islam,' 'Shahadah (Testimony), Salat (Prayer), Roza (Fast/Fasting), Zakat (Purification), and Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca)".

These concepts and beliefs are very important to Muslim people and also Hazaras. They know their religion is a large part of their culture, identity and in total their life.

Majority of the informants believed that Hazaras are identified by their name, language, belief, and many more customs and norms. Some scholars like Mousavi (1998), James (2004) and Schurmann (1961) also have the same idea concerning recognition of Hazaras by these concepts. As James (2004) says that Hazaras are identified by their name and this name (Hazara) is unique

and all Hazaras have it in common. According to him, Hazara means “Famous” and “Happy.” At least, ethnically, this people are famous in being honest and hardworking people in this country and as well as the Hazara people are known by the international communities as being the most peace loving and hardworking people in Afghanistan.

CONCLUSION

According to the informants’ views, Hazaras are the original inhabitants of the region and they live there since 5,000 years ago. In terms of their race, majority of the informants believed that Hazaras are of Mongolian origin but some of them stated that they are Turkish race. Also the informants stated that Hazaras are recognized by their specific oriental like facial features, such as pointed cheek bones, Mongolian like eyes, nose and many more Mongolian physical traits, and they are pure Mongols. Also according to a few respondents, Hazaras are not the posterities of Mongols or Turkish, but they are a mixture of Turks and Mongols. At last, based upon the data and preceding literature and theories, Hazaras are the indigenous inhabitants of the Hazarajat and they are of Mongolian and Turkish origin.

The Hazaras of Afghanistan are unique among the state’s divergent population. Ethnically, this group resembles East Asia’s Mongols and Turks. According to informants’ views, the most prominent concepts that define Hazaras identity are Hazaragi (Hazaragi is spoken by Hazaras, is a dialect of Persian called Dari in Afghanistan), their name (Hazara), their belief, facial features and physiognomies. These concepts are fundamental notions to understanding of identity of them. In Afghanistan they are known by these concepts. Furthermore Hazara people are religious and hold strong religious affiliation to Islam. Also the data show that Hazaras are identified by their physical characteristics, culture and customs and many more phenomena that they possess with themselves. Hazara people are famous in being honest and hardworking people in the country and also they are known by international communities as being the most peace wanted and hardworking people in Afghanistan.

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