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# THE HAZARA CULTURE: A SUB CULTURE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF PAKISTANI CULTURE (AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF HAZARAS OF QUETTA)

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## Abstract

*The paper is mainly focused on highlighting the culture of Hazaras as a "subculture of Balochistan" Pakistan. Indeed, Balochistan is "unfortunately" not rich in terms of peace and tranquility but had never been so as far as its biodiversity; resources such as mineral, natural, physical and coastal sides are concerned. The province, so far been faced with ill-fated fortune, as she hasn't yet received proper and humane attention from federal government and International community towards its socio-economic development as per the will and priorities of its inhabitants. Drawing upon a conceptual framework based on an anthropological definition of culture, which describes it into tangible and intangible aspects including two more concepts such as "ideal and real" culture are also part of culture related studies. An effort is being made to study Hazara culture as a subculture of Balochistan, within the broader national culture of Pakistan. Ideal and real culture of any culture is never aligned with each other, which is no odd as it is persistent almost in all spheres of human life. Nonetheless, it matters when the gulf gets widened. The same gets fit to Hazara culture as well, however, it is not by choice and within one's own control but forcefully imposed through and by external forces including human biases and behaviors. Both the reasons have raised serious queries as none is Hazara culture friendly, therefore, questions arise why not analyze the situation critically and scientifically. Apparently, the community is well cherished with human values of honesty, trustworthiness, gender sensitized, inclined towards education, sports, social harmony, and peaceful coexistence. But situation of real culture reveals profound disjuncture shaped by sectarian violence, systemic discrimination, and identity-based exclusion. Despite these challenges, the Hazara community has demonstrated extraordinary resilience; maintained distinct cultural practices while cultivating qualities of educational attainment, peacefulness, sportsmanship, honesty, gender sensitivity, cleanliness, and friendliness that distinguish it within Balochistan and Pakistan's multiethnic landscape.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Anthropologically speaking, the best definition of culture does cover almost everything that an individual possess internally or deals with externally in his/her immediate surroundings including cloths, the house and belongingness, the language, the belief system, the custom he/she is bond to follow and other components of life both tangibly and intangibly including norms, traditions and beyond all the value system. Culture is basically an energetic force that motivates and guides humankind individually or as a large group, community or nation to think, behaves and act accordingly in matters associated with daily living. Culture constitutes the complex whole of knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and other capabilities acquired by human beings as members of society (OpenStax, 2022). Sociologists such as (Matsumoto 1996) say the word culture refers to a set of attitude, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next. These broad definitions encompass both material and immaterial aspects of any culture which is being termed by many sociologists as the "blueprint" of how to live one's life in a society, which is socially endorse and acceptable by majority members. Sociologists in general conclude that culture in its entirety is the outcomes of collective efforts of mankind irrespective of their races, socio-economic status and geographical positioning of inhabitance. Culture as driving force, indeed, is not confining to traditions, norms and value systems of present era, but of the pastas well and expectedly in upcoming eras of future. Therefore, mankind is called, apart from being a "social animal", a "cultural animal "too. Distant from material aspects that surround individual and facilitate him to survive and enjoy life, the immaterial aspects of culture are due "*group expectations*" as named by many sociologists, which gauge personality and manners and deeds of individuals in daily affairs of life. Combination of these two aspects is basically called culture, and the best part is that it is never stagnant or dormant but keeps changing as the day passes.

Among the biodiversity in terms of ethnicity and sectarian belief system, the country Pakistan is also rich while exploring, sub cultural diversity through predominantly influenced by one province on the basis of demographical statistic based on population, the uniqueness and peculiarity of many sub culture is rather colorful and presentable materialistically like Kelash culture and others belonging to Northern areas and of Hazaras inhabiting in Quetta, Balochistan province of Pakistan. And the sub culture of Hazara community within national context of culture presents a compelling case study of such subculture dynamics.

As an ethnic and sectarian community, the Hazaras of Pakistan, particularly of Quetta had since long been maintaining a rich cultural heritage while navigating the complex sociopolitical landscape of contemporary Pakistan in one hand, coping with both ever changing happenings within the culture and with Hazara community residing across continents. This situation, though challenging, poses few basic questions to be answered logically by investigating the matter scientifically

- How Hazaragi culture is dissimilar in its totality from others as Hazara Culture and how should it be understood as a subculture within Pakistani national culture?
- What are the material and immaterial dimensions of Hazara culture, including its folkways, mores, laws, and technicways
- What gaps do exist between the ideal culture and real culture keeping in view both the reasons of 'choices and imposition' by external forces towards the gap?

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By addressing these questions, it is hoped that it may contribute towards an identity which is both ethnic and sectarian in an ever changing phenomenon with the ethnic diversity that exists around the world, particularly, in South Asia including Pakistan while providing a comprehensive cultural portrait of a community whose resilience in the face of systematic persecution warrants scholarly attention.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Without culture, human beings will remain sluggish and just a living organism, despite separating them on any ground including race, socio-economic and inhabiting status. As a living organism, he/she couldn't and expectedly would not even move purposefully, speak to express his thoughts, feeling and opinions, opt for any choice and ultimately will remain bear footed, nude, without shelter and even at high risk to become extinct due to harshness of weather or by powerful, barbaric, inhuman and powerful vested interests group or other living creatures including his counterparts human.

Categorizing culture into certain types such as ideal, real, sub culture and many others have come to intellectual discourse after politicization of human societies. Culture is being studied now as a discipline beneath the umbrella of a major subject of Sociology, which covers other elements of society including culture. In other cases, apart from philosophy, none can be categorized as inclusive, as far as its grasps and scope pertaining to "human friendly" is gauged. Other subjects may it be sciences and arts are, for the most part, not multi focused, but single focused that may benefit one or few fields of human life to sustain

Ideal and real culture as a gap between what is proclaimed about certain phenomenon and what is happening as ground realities does exist across various culture. The lesser the gap, the better is the situation, when the gulf widens between the two; it harms culture in its totality or a sub culture of a specific ethnic nation/community. The wider gap also impacts personality negatively by replacing trustworthiness into deceptions. In such case the value systems including norms and traditions and ingredient of culture get somewhat vague and indistinguishable.

As a nation, Hazara is easily identifiable among many due to two basic reasons. First, his facial Turko- Mongoloid features resembling, for the most parts, with mongoloid race sharing much with Central Asian Nations like ,Turkmens, Uzbeks and Mongols of Magnolia with relatively fair-kin, straight hairs, round shaped head, relatively short heights and seemingly physically fit. Fascinatingly, majority of Muslim citizens of those states, which were earlier part of former "USSR" do follow Sunni sect, Hazaras, on the other hand do not, but Shia sect almost everywhere including Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran/Iraq/Syria, while a smaller, proportionately, segment of Hazaras are either Sunni Muslim or Ismailese dwelling both in Afghanistan, Pakistan and worldwide. The title, Agha Khan, is primarily associated to them headed by a living "Imam" as the predecessor of Hazarat Ismail, the eldest son of Imam "Jafar Sadiq".

The language being spoken by all sects of Hazaras is called Hazaragi, which sometime is said to be Persian and a dialect of Dari Persian. However, Hazaragi does qualify for a specific language, as far as constituents of language are concerned, but the grammar got influenced by Persian. This uniqueness also adds into peculiarity of them as altogether a different culture around the world and as a sub culture in the context of Balochistan and national culture of Pakistan.

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Currently, the population of Hazara is roughly estimated to be between 650,000 to 900,000 individuals, concentrated primarily in Quetta the provincial capital of Balochistan, with minor groups settled in Loralai, Duki, Harnaia and Mach Bolan district, Hyderabad and Sanghar in Sindh province, and Para Chinar, KPK and GB, the Northern areas of Pakistan. (Abbasi, 2023). Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad are now the second home after displacement as a result of absence of peace in Quetta.

Holding / observing "Hazara Culture Day" worldwide on May 19th is a good initiative being taken by not only Hazaras, but all those nations/ communities who are faced with problems of being at risk becoming extinct for whatsoever reasons. Lots of appreciation is due on all whosoever may be especially the educated individuals/ groups/ communities and Government who support them in their efforts pertaining to ensure their survival, identity, language and culture as a whole.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is the outcome of relevant "review papers" and pertinent literatures, thus is purely qualitative in nature. A series of key informant interviews were conducted to collect information as data both from Pakistan and Hazaras living abroad. Additionally, lots of available literatures such as research reports, books, journals and websites were explored for mustering information as secondary data. Based on the findings of all such data and information plus observations this research paper is being produced, reviewed by experts of culture and concerned Hazara intellectuals followed by editing and fine tuning to give its readers adequately unbiased write up to be studied and be used as reference for further in-depth insights and research

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Like many cultures, Hazara culture too is in the phase of changing forms and dimensions. Sociologically speaking, this is a good sign; however, there are two reasons. The first one is humane as it is a process of civilization. No nation, community or subculture must remain dormant and unchanged. If it happens through a process of peaceful mutual transaction such as higher level of education, new inventions/ discoveries and adaptation of relatively more convenient ways and comforts of life from fellow communities and even internationally. The ever changing scenario in cultural practices will definitely result better, not only for the concerned community/nation, but for the entire region and world community too.

The second reason is not justifiable as it is a forced change. This besides jeopardizing peace situation is inhumane too. In the case of subculture of Hazaras the second reason is more outstandingly pertinent. In the homeland (Hazarajat) they are forced either to leave their ethnic and sectarian identify, and fertile lands and whatever means of livelihood they have or leave the town and country almost by all Afghan regimes, particularly by radical Taliban. Indeed, this is a serious threat to Hazara, his culture including language and belief system. Iran is no exception, where Hazaras are faced with prejudices; consequently, all aspect of subculture is at high risk including language to become extinct. There are restrictions at policy and institutional levels that stops many well qualified Hazaras to reach to any rank of higher ups position, but at the cost of compromising their ethnic identity.

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Pakistan, since its inception has always been a Hazara friendly country, but the last two and half decades, she remains no more the same. Apart from genocidal attacks, targeted killings and bomb blast, that costs killings of thousands innocent men, women and children, lots loses in terms of economic activity that accompanies social and psychological impacts also impacted. Displacement and migration became a daily routine and beyond all safety and security as "protective shield" have been taken away. Prejudices, political and social exclusion is still underway. These and many others might further add into efforts of projecting and promoting Hazara culture and as a subculture of Balochistan-Pakistan. The following paragraph beautifully depicts threats to Hazaras and their subculture in Pakistan

The Hazara community's ideal culture embodies the values that define their moral universe. These include but limited to below points;

- Equality and justice: Hazaras were drawn to Pakistan's creation based on Jinnah's promise of a non-sectarian state where all faiths would peacefully coexist (The Muslim Times, 2022, Para. 41-45). The community aspires to equal citizenship, political representation, and access to resources.
- Educational attainment: Hazaras idealize education as a fundamental human right and the primary pathway to social mobility. This ideal is reflected in the community's educational achievements despite formidable barriers.
- Peace and non-violence: Hazara culture is characterized by a love of peace, as evidenced by the community's commitment to civil resistance and the transformation of male-dominated violent protests into female-led peaceful sit-ins (SWGI, n.d., para. 15-21).
- Honesty and trustworthiness: The Hazara are consistently described as trustworthy, hardworking, and committed values that have paradoxically made them targets of exploitation as domestic servants but also sources of pride (CCCowe, n.d., para. 10-14).
- Cleanliness and hygiene: The Hazara nation is noted for cleanliness as one of its "best qualities," maintaining high standards of health and hygiene even in precarious living conditions (Ecency, 2022, Para. 26-28).
- Friendliness and sociability: The Hazara are described as "sociable, friendly, gregarious, affable and hospitable"—qualities that facilitate community cohesion and intercultural relations (The Balochistan Point, 2017, para. 33-35).
- Gender sensitivity: Unlike many traditional Afghan and Pakistani communities, Hazara women have historically enjoyed greater social freedom, with the right to work, farm, and receive education—values that have produced remarkable female achievements (Joshua Project, n.d., para. 37-38).
- Sportsmanship: Hazara youth excel in sports including soccer, karate, cricket, boxing, and martial arts, representing Pakistan on national and international stages (Al Jazeera, 2018; Al Jazeera, 2021; APP, 2025).

**Real Culture: Confronting Violence, Marginalization, and Exclusion**

The real culture experienced by the Hazara community diverges dramatically from the above discussed ideals:

- ***Physical Insecurity and Targeted Violence.*** Since 2005, nearly 2,000 Hazaras have been killed in protracted sectarian violence in Pakistan, with at least 509 killed in Quetta alone since 2013 (Al Jazeera, 2018, para. 20-22; Al Jazeera, 2021, para. 18-20). The community lives under the constant threat of being identified by their distinctive features—as Quddus Mirza

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(2025) writes, "the features of their faces not only reveal their ethnicity but also mark them as belonging to the Shiite sect," making their faces a "curse" that places them at "perpetual—if not permanent—risk" (para. 12-18).

- ***Systemic Discrimination and Exclusion.*** Hazaras face multiple layers of discrimination: as Shi'a Muslims in a predominantly Sunni nation, as an ethnically distinct minority, and as a community whose members experience denial of CNIC registration, exclusion from service provision, and relegation to low-income settlements such as Karachi's Hazara Goth (Dawn, 2021, para. 25-30). As Dawn (2021) reports, "social and political exclusion based on religious and ethnic identity is complicating any attempt to make Karachi an inclusive, integrated city" (para. 29-31).
- ***Identity Crisis and Belonging.*** The Hazara community experiences what Abbasi (2023) terms as "identity crisis". Fatima Atif, a Hazara social activist, notes: "The first thing people ask when they meet us is, 'Are you Chinese, Japanese, Korean?' We are mistaken for others as though we don't have an identity of our own" (Dawn, 2018, para. 26-29).
- ***Gender Inequality within the Community.*** Despite Hazara women's relative freedom compared to other Muslim groups, patriarchy persists within the community. Research by Ashrafi (2025) identifies three powerful narratives constraining Hazara women's choices: traditional gender roles framed as natural and biologically determined, the positioning of cultural preservation against women's freedom, and depictions of women's lives as incomplete without marriage and motherhood (para. 12-16). Similarly, research from LUMS reveals that while Hazara women lead peaceful protests and make protests successful, they remain excluded from decision-making spaces inside their community and homes (SWGI, n.d., para. 24-27).
- ***Cleansing of Cultural Expression.*** In Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, Hazara culture faces systematic erasure. The Taliban have evicted Hazara communities from ancestral lands, excluded them from the judiciary and government, and diverted humanitarian aid from Hazara-majority provinces (New York Times, 2026, para. 24-28). Hazara artists in exile, such as Khadim Ali, create work without human faces—reflecting the need to conceal physical identity (The News, 2025, para. 45-50).

Despite these profound challenges, the Hazara community has cultivated qualities that merit recognition and pride.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, there are some very realistic hopes. To begin with, the Hazaras of Quetta had since been making efforts and were somewhat successful too to safeguard their individual ethnic and sectarian identity despite of various local and foreign funded interventions as major challenges. For instances, the pro-Iranian groups i.e. religious parties did not understand, so far, a very simple formula, which is proven fact, that ethnic identity is by default, which cannot be changed by any political and social force. Hazaras are born Hazaras by default. While, as Hazara nation has already certain sectarian identity such as Sunni Muslim or Ismailis is basically a choice, which is not limited to these two branches of Islam, which can be more too. Ideologies, belief systems and sects can be altered as per socio-economic and political needs of the time and space. Hazaras as a nation/community has its own characteristics, which is natural, not manmade can't.

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Hazara culture represents a distinctive subculture within Pakistan—one characterized by unique material expressions (attire, cuisine, architecture, handicrafts) and nonmaterial norms (folkways, mores, laws, technicways) that distinguish it from dominant Pakistani cultural patterns. The gap between the community's ideal culture of equality, education, and peace and its real culture of violence, discrimination, and exclusion is profound and persistent. Yet, in the face of these challenges, the Hazara community has demonstrated extraordinary resilience, preserving its cultural heritage while cultivating qualities of educational excellence, peacefulness, sportsmanship, honesty, gender sensitivity, cleanliness, and friendliness that merit recognition and pride. Understanding Hazaragi culture as a subculture within Pakistan requires acknowledgment both of its distinctiveness and of the structural forces that have shaped its contemporary condition—forces that continue to test but have not yet broken the Hazaras

Following are few pragmatic suggestions for all stakeholders including individuals, groups, political parties, media and other actors of civil society

1. The gap between ideal n real culture among Hazaras are widening, which is not a good sign altogether. Inclination towards Education, honesty, trustworthiness, peace lovers n fond of cleanliness, sportsmanship, gender sensitized and hygienic in life style. However, the deeds n actions of people do seldom match with the soft image/ standards of ideal culture of Hazaras. Honesty replaced by dishonesty, inclination towards education is at high risk as youth have other preferences. Sportsmanship seems to compromise with drug addiction and other anti-social deeds.
2. Secondly, the goods, useable items such as watch, clothing's, mobile n computer/ laptop that we use on daily basis as material aspects of our culture are invented or discovered n made by other advanced nations of the world, in which, we have least or zero contribution.
3. Thirdly, the standards being set by old generations of Hazaras of Quetta-Pak got somewhat vanished among material and immaterial aspect of Cultural identity of Hazaras of Hazaraistan / hazarajat, therefore Hazaras of Quetta seems to have lost interest to actively participate and display Quetta specific items both material and immaterial such as bravery, brotherhood, proud to be Hazara including hardship to sustain a respectable life and livelihood. This immaterial aspect of Hazaras of Quetta must be widely projected / displayed and showcased wherever Hazara Culture Day is being observed / celebrated or any other events are organized ranging from reading to writing as there is two academy named Hazara Academy plus many other groups and organizations mandated to do so.

Formally speaking, the Four major bookish aspects of immaterial culture such as Folkways, Technicways, Mores and Law both formal and conventional as customary laws also called "group expectations" have already been covered in result and discussions portion.

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