Education and Minority Groups in Afghanistan: The Case of Hazara People

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Abstract

Afghanistan, known for its ancient history and as a centre of knowledge in the past, has seen the rise of great civilizations such as Arya, Bakhtar, and Khorasan. Education in ancient Afghanistan was influenced by the Vedic religion and later the Avestan civilization until the arrival of Islam. Education in Afghanistan is recognized as a fundamental human right that plays a crucial role in alleviating poverty, addressing inequality, and fostering sustainable development. However, the Hazara people, an ethnic and religious minority in Afghanistan, have historically been deprived of this right due to cultural, linguistic, and religious differences with the dominant Pashtun population. Hazaras have faced discrimination, marginalization, and violent persecution throughout Afghan history. They have been systematically denied access to education, employment, and political representation. Despite some progress, the Hazara people continue to face barriers to accessing quality education. Hazara students also face discrimination and harassment from peers and teachers who hold negative stereotypes of them. Moreover, Hazaras have been subjected to targeted attacks by terrorist groups like the Taliban and ISIS, resulting in loss of life and injuries. Nevertheless, Hazaras demonstrated their goodwill. They actively participated in national processes such as elections, civil society strengthening, sports, and education, showcasing their commitment to the new system. This article contributes to the study of the history of education in Afghanistan which lacks adequate analysis of education among minorities in Afghanistan like the Hazara people.

Key Words

Hazara people, discrimination, education in Afghanistan, minority, history

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Introduction

The history of education in Afghanistan is a complex and multifaceted issue for it is shaped by a range of social, political, and cultural factors. A key aspect of this history is the education of the Hazara minority which has a long and rich history that goes back centuries. However, the Hazaras are a historically marginalized group that has faced significant challenges in accessing quality education. Their cultural and religious differences have often led to discrimination and marginalization by those in power. This has had a significant impact on their ability to access education, with Hazara children historically having lower levels of education than other groups in Afghanistan. In recent decades, the Hazaras community has made strides in improving education for its children by creating Hazaras-led educational initiatives and advocacy efforts to promote policies that support educational equity for marginalized groups. Universities and educational centres in Kabul and the Hazara provinces were full of Hazara male and female students who turned to the educational centres with the desire to change and participate in the development process of their homeland. Although they have had a dark history and a tragic life and have suffered from massacres and discrimination for more than two centuries, the Hazara people have always been proud of themselves in all social and cultural fields and have sworn against their enemies with the weapons of science and art. During the last twenty years, they have brought great and important achievements to Afghanistan in the fields of art, music, cinema, sports, and other fields.

This article studies the history of education in Afghanistan focusing on the Hazara minority and how political and social dynamics have affected their educational opportunities over time. Drawing on a range of primary and secondary sources, including government records, scholarly articles, and interviews with educators, policymakers, and members of the Hazaras community, this article examines the evolution of Hazara's education from the late 19th century to the present.

Through this analysis, the purpose of this article is to shed light on the complex dynamics that have shaped the history of education in Afghanistan and the challenges that continue to face the Hazara minority in accessing quality education. It also emphasizes the importance of targeted policies and initiatives to promote educational equity and inclusion for marginalized groups and the need for ongoing research and advocacy to support these efforts. Finally, this study provides important insights into the history of education in Afghanistan and the ongoing struggle for educational equity and inclusion for all.

This study was purported to provide answers to the following questions: How has access to education transformed in the past 20 years in the Hazara provinces? And what ups and downs have the Hazaras of Afghanistan faced in the historical course of education in their provinces?

To do this, this article examines the historical course of education among the Hazara minority through a qualitative research method of case study (Gay et al. 2012; Starman 2013). The use of this method was justified as follows: first, Hazaras are an ethnic minority; second, they are a religious minority with the majority belonging to Islamic Shiism; and third, the Hazara people have always been deprived of social services in every government and have even been the target of attacks by the Taliban and ISIS terrorist groups only because of their status as a religious and ethnic minority (Hussaini 2021:109-162).

This study used the document analysis method for data collection, which calls for data to be studied and interpreted to extract meaning, gain insight, and create empirical knowledge, similar to other analytical techniques in qualitative research (Bowen 2009:27-40; Rapley 2007). All the books, e-books, article journals, newspapers, and magazines related to this study were collected before conducting the necessary data analysis using the document analysis method. According to Rodrigues et al. (2019), skimming (a shallow examination), reading (a detailed examination), and interpretation were all parts of this document analysis. Thematic analysis and content analysis are combined in this iterative procedure, which entailed a document evaluation in which significant and pertinent text or other data portions were found.

There has been a lot of discussion regarding the lack of education in Afghanistan and the state of education in Hazara areas (Baiza 2013, Handayani 2016, Sarmachar 2016, Samady 2013, Hussaini 2021:109-162, and Chiovenda 2014:449-462). This study aims to contribute to this literature by analysing the specific case of education among Hazara people. Its importance lies in the following ways. First, education is a basic human right, and access to education has important consequences for individuals, societies, and nations in general. Therefore, this study provides an understanding of the history of education in Afghanistan to identify the challenges and barriers that have prevented certain groups, such as the Hazara minority, from accessing education.

Second, the Hazara community has historically faced significant discrimination and marginalization in Afghanistan, including limited access to education. Thus, this study gives an understanding of the history of education for the Hazaras minority to see insights into the broader social and political dynamics that have shaped their experiences of marginalization and exclusion.

Third, Afghanistan is a conflict-affected country that has experienced significant political and social changes in the past few decades. The impact of the conflict on education has been particularly devastating, with schools and universities destroyed and disrupted, and students and teachers forced to flee. Therefore, this study provides an understanding of the history of education in Afghanistan and how it has been affected by conflict is critical to developing effective policies and practices to promote access to quality education for all.

The history of education in Afghanistan, especially considering the experiences of the Hazara minority, is an important issue to understand the complex social, political, and economic dynamics that have shaped education in Afghanistan. Research on this issue is important to identify strategies to overcome challenges and barriers to education in Afghanistan and promote access and equity for all Afghan citizens.

The History of Education in Afghanistan

The activity of new schools during the era of Amir Habibullah remained within the limits of the capital city, and even after the implementation of the constitution, there were limitations. During the Amani period, at the same time as the expansion of new schools in the capital city, newstyle schools were established in the provinces, including the provinces of Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Qatghan. All in all, until the end of Amanullah's rule (1928), more than 322 chapters of new government schools were established throughout Afghanistan. According to some statistics, in 1926, the number of primary students across the country was 51.000 and the number of students in developmental and vocational schools was more than three thousand. They said that whenever Afghanistan was moving at this speed, it would not lag behind the caravan of culture and literature, even compared to the neighbouring countries. But after the fall of the Amani government, all schools were closed. At the beginning of Nader Khan's period, twenty years later, that is, in 1946, the number of official schools increased from 223 to 334 chapters. Assuming that no schools were built in 1926-1928, during Nader Khan's rule and even the initial period of Zahir Shah's rule, only 24 new schools were established within 18 years.

Before the Russian coup d'état in 1957, there were 4,198 schools in Afghanistan, 888,800 educated people, and 12,400 teachers and professors. Nearly a thousand students were enrolled in the country's public schools. In all Hazara areas, no more than two or three schools were built, which shows the government's attention to the expansion of education (Khwajamir 2016). The Taliban has caused irreparable damage to Afghanistan's education in both the first and second periods. The Taliban leadership took over the educational system in the middle of 1999 and implemented a rigorous interpretation of Islamic law. During these periods, the schools for girls were completely closed and some schools for boys were open, but there were no teachers to teach. This is because, with the arrival of the Taliban, all secondary schools have been closed to girls, and on the other hand, women, in general, are prohibited from working, going to the market, going to parks, and travelling without a sharia mahram, and this has caused despair among the youth. The period during which this group existed can be described as the "dark age of education" because they were alien enemies with knowledge. In particular, new knowledge never had a place in that regime (Poladi 1989).

According to the statistics of the World Bank in 2012, the population of Afghan children who went to school reached about 7.8 million, and of these, about 2.9 million were girls. However, there were still not enough buildings and facilities for schools, and in many villages, classes were held either under tents or in residential houses, and sometimes under the shade of trees. According to the World Bank, only 180,000 teachers or about half of the teachers in this country, had the necessary training and capabilities, and the rest of them were trained while working. Still, the number of girls who dropped out of school was very high and the illiteracy rate in the country was very high. Only 39% of people over the age of 15 could read and write, which was one of the lowest among countries in the world. In the first days when the Taliban fled from the gates of Kabul and the northern provinces of Afghanistan to the mountains and valleys of the southern provinces in 1996, along with thousands of collapsed and shaky foundations, the educational institutions of Afghanistan were also in a pitiable state. In 2001, there were 3,400 active schools throughout Afghanistan, where 20,000 teachers taught one million students, and the presence of girls among these one million people was close to zero. In 2011, about 14.000 schools were activated all over Afghanistan, and in these schools, there were 8.100.000 students, 38 % of whom were girls, who were taught by 175.000 teachers. Many schools have gotten new buildings or had their old ones renovated in the last ten years.

Among the achievements of the education system in Afghanistan, we can mention the establishment of universities and private schools. According to the Ministry of Higher Education and Education, more than 127 private universities and more than 800 registered private schools are operating in Afghanistan with the official license of these two ministries. Of this, tens of thousands of people are engaged in education and training and thousands have been provided with work fields (Sarmachar 2016:29-31).

In the past fifteen years, the Afghan government, with the support of the international community, has launched extensive efforts to improve the country's education system. Part of these efforts were made to reopen schools and revive the country's collapsed education system. During these years, more than six million students came to school and work was done in the field of improving the curriculum and creating new schools. However, the educational situation in the country did not change as much as expected. Even though the country's education situation has improved in terms of quantity, Afghanistan continues to adhere to traditional structures. The important point here is that this time the citizens of the country also supported education despite all the problems and security threats from the opposition groups. Today, along with thousands of public schools, thousands of private schools are also operating in the country, which should be mentioned as a phenomenon of the years after Talabani because there was no such thing as a private school in the country's education system before that. During the past years, it was a good opportunity to create a modern education infrastructure that supports transformational education in the country. But the existing problems also created enough obstacles to modernize the country's education. In the past thirteen years, the country's education remained within the scope of attracting boys and girls to schools and creating a safe environment for education, and the main challenges of the country's education were given less attention. Education is considered one of the successful fields of reconstruction in the country after the fall of the Taliban. In 2001, there were no schools for girls, and the number of boys who went to school was about one million (Nijat 2015).

The Afghan government established an Independent High Commission of Education in 2002 with the assistance of UNESCO to make policies, objectives, and strategies for the rehabilitation and development of Afghanistan's education system. Strategic development plans for primary, middle and secondary, technical and vocational education and higher education were created by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNESCO and other international organizations (Samady 2013). But

what is remarkable is that the education situation in Afghanistan has not changed significantly. It seems that the lack of security, corruption, lack of importance given to education by certain circles, the remaining traditional structures in Afghanistan's education, and political confrontations are factors why, despite all the help of the international community, Afghanistan's education has not progressed.

The Hazara People as Minority in Afghanistan

Undoubtedly, studying a society necessitates studying the structures that govern that society. Essentially, understanding the reality of the existence of a clear picture of what exists in society is impossible without systematic studies and sufficient information about the structures. These structures are the fabric of social life. Only when the problems can be handed over to analysis can the facts be extracted from them; only then can the chain structures related to life be broken down and studied. In this regard, understanding the issues related to the Hazara people's situation is also based on studies of these structures, including Hazara's geographical structures (Mousavi 2018).

The Hazara people are one of the big ethnic groups in Afghanistan, which have been named by Hazara historians and researchers in some documents as such because they have a thousand streams, valleys and a thousand high mountains. It is said that a thousand fountains came out of the Hazara area, and after Islam, a thousand mosques and a thousand minarets were built. This is also likely related to the time of the old sultans of Zabulistan when the Hazara people paid a thousand horsemen as taxes to the royal army (Mousavi 2018).

Hazaras have suffered from social, cultural, and economic inequalities in every government. Fundamental educational work in Hazara areas has not been done by any government for a variety of reasons, including political inequalities and tribal and religious conflicts. The basic problems in Hazara areas are discrimination among students and teachers (ethnic, sexual, party, religious, regional, etc.) and the lack of teachers, buildings, facilities, books, classes, and learning materials (Ismail 2022:16-32). Hazara people have been subjected to racial and religious discrimination and genocide for many years and every period of the ruling government. Genocide against Hazara people has started since Abdul Rahman's rule, with more than 60% of Hazara people having died in Afghanistan. Hazara people have been subjected to targeted suicide and explosive attacks in schools, mosques, educational centres, and hospitals (Mousavi 2018).

They have frequently been the targets of genocide in Afghanistan over the past 130 years, according to BBC Radio. Hazaras have experienced violence and targeted ethnic massacres under Amir Abdul Rahman's leadership (1901–1980), the Mujahideen era (1992–1996), the first Taliban administration (1996–2001), and the current Taliban administration (August 15, 2021–present). Undoubtedly, one of the most despised social and political phenomena is targeted executions. This discrimination and execution of Hazara people will endure in Afghan history (Rajan 2015).

There are three opinions about the history of the Hazara people. First, the idea of indigenousness of the Hazara people. In the 19th century, the French researcher P. Freire proposed this theory after discovering that thousands of years before Alexander the Great, people lived in the southern regions of the Hindu Kush. Second, according to Vambery (1864), the Hazaras are the survivors of the Mongols. According to this idea, the Hazaras did not migrate from another land; they used to live in their current location a long time ago. Third, mixed Hazaras. According to this idea, Hazaras are not only Turkic and Mongolian survivors but also a mixture of races such as Tajiks, Afghans, etc. (Mousavi 2018).

Education of the Hazara People

Opinions about the beginning of the educational process in Hazaras areas are not very different. What is certain is that the basic education in the lives of the Hazaras started at the same time as they converted to Islam. But this process has always been accompanied by ups and downs under the influence of circumstances. The conditions that caused ups and downs in the development of education can be summarized as a few examples of the challenges facing education for Hazaras (Baiza 2014:151-171).

The history of education in Afghanistan is a complex and multifaceted issue that has been shaped by a wide range of social, political, and cultural factors. Although the current governments of the country have tried to make the country's education go through its evolutionary process, the authorities' approach to cultural development issues has not been consistent and equal. In the meantime, Hazaras have been victims of unbalanced cultural policies and have seen severe losses in the way of promoting social knowledge. This is a cultural isolation that these people have suffered in the two-dimensional process of formal and informal education. These people have been denied access to science and new teaching methods and they have to overcome this with what they have. The path of education in the Hazaras is the subject of discussion in the framework of the epistemology of the Hazara people, which illuminates their hidden angles.

According to the official statistics of Afghanistan in 1961, there were 10 faculties, 31 professional schools, 22 high schools, 52 secondary schools, 533 primary schools, and 788 rural schools, totalling 1436 schools. According to the statistics provided above, ten faculties in Kabul were only in the service of individuals or government officials. They did not exceed the number of fingers. The Hazara people were only provided with a religious national unit. Professional schools did not exist in the Hazara areas. According to the findings, there were no more than five high schools and two hundred rural primary and secondary schools in the Hazara areas during the era of Zahir Khan and after him when public schools were active. The Hazara areas had less than 30,000 students out of a total of 734,261 students across the country in 1974, which is approximately 4%. There were only a few public schools in the Hazara areas in the last half-century. It was surprising how the regimes of that time tried to establish several schools in some areas of the Hazara areas while they were clinging to the lives of these people like leeches sucked their blood. Overall, in the Hazara areas, despite the large population, elementary schools are not enough, and the percentage of people who are literate and have formal education is low.

However, the number of people who have received private education is large. Lately, the government has taken certain measures, including in the rural development program, to address the issue of improving the social, economic, and civic lives of rural people, the growth and development of handicrafts, the prevention and preservation of people's health, and the development of education. In the third five-year plan from 1968 to 1972, in Uruzgan province, the establishment of 16 primary and secondary schools in the Punjab region, the opening of girls' and boys' schools, hospitals, and literacy courses for the elderly was considered (Baiza 2013).

The need to advance gender equality and women's empowerment has been identified by the international community as one of the Millennium Development Goals, and education is expected to play a vital role in achieving these goals. The accomplishment of gender parity and equality in education is viewed as being of the utmost importance in the aims of Education for All (EFA) by 2015 (see, for example, UNESCO, 2003–2004). These factors appear significant for the Hazara people since the empowerment will be extended beyond individuals. The idea of "power" and its absence among the Hazaras are equally crucial to understanding what empowerment means. The disempowerment of Hazaras is seen in both Afghanistan and (Changezi and Biseth 2011:79-89). Hazaras in Afghanistan did not have access to educational institutions in most parts of Afghanistan until the 1950s and 1960s. There were only a few elementary

schools and Hazaras could not enrol in official or non-Hazara schools unless they officially changed their identity to Tajik. The Afghan government sometimes forced the Hazaras to change their ethnic identity. Hazaras, who were able to enter school and later obtain government jobs, adopted Tajik as their ethnic identity. They were not allowed to attend higher education institutions, especially military academies (Baiza 2013). Hazaras in Afghanistan are marginalized in terms of education. In Afghanistan, Hazaras are an ethnic group with a long history of marginalization and even outright persecution, mainly because of their Shia Muslim religion. Only after international intervention in 2001 did socio-economic opportunities open up for the Hazara people. However, Hazaras have a strong perception that they are still second-class citizens and claim that they are neglected by the Afghan government and receive less funding from the international development community.

In addition, Afghanistan's Hazara migrants who travel to neighbouring countries including Pakistan, do not receive primary education there. The Hazaras themselves are responsible for the education of their children. Educational institutions for girls founded by Hazara themselves show that education is indeed considered important. All these are reasons for the commitment and perseverance of Hazara people to education (Changezi and Biseth 2011:79-89). During the reign of Muhammad Daoud, education was highly politicized. Tribal politics which is defined by Pashtun nationalism and a selective approach to education form the overall framework of education. For much of this period, the government barred the admission of Shiites and Hazaras as well as other ethnic minorities, to higher education institutions, military, military schools, diplomatic and political positions. And this ban was eased after Afghanistan's admission to the United Nations (UN) in 1946, as the government had to obey international conventions. Afghanistan's admission to the United Nations also obliged the government to resume girls' education, which began to develop slowly and selectively, especially in the capital city.

Education has been common among the Hazara people since ancient times, but the beginning of new education started when they accepted Islam. Many people became capable of Islamic knowledge and this growth and development of religious knowledge opened the way for opening new schools and reading contemporary sciences. But in the later periods, especially during the period of Abd al-Rahman, the generation of right-seekers and knowledge-seekers of the Hazara was brought to an abyss of destruction. This was the first, biggest, and most fatal death of freedom and knowledge, which could not rise for tens of years due to the severity

of those Hazara. But this action could not destroy the logic of seeking justice. After a long time, the caravan started again on the path of time. Years later, another mishap occurred. There were still effects from the first encounter, and this time Nader blocked the freedom fighters and supporters of Marafet. This time, he avoided Hazaras' awareness and knowledge.

Although education in Afghanistan has faced challenges and problems throughout history, what is noticeable is that the people of Afghanistan have sent their children to school without ignoring all these challenges and problems to continue their education and have a better future. Many factors influence education quality in Afghanistan, including a lack of experienced teachers and effective teaching methods, the absence of a safe and conducive learning environment, and the scarcity of high-quality teaching materials (including textbooks). The classroom atmosphere, the lack of quality education, particularly the quality of teaching, and the students' political and religious conflicts have all had an impact. In addition, teachers rarely address the specific learning needs of each student in the classroom. The education system in Afghanistan has suffered a lot in the past several years due to wars, a lack of sufficient resources and capacities, and the absence of a strategic plan. The only way out of these challenges is with the cooperation of all citizens, by educating the youth, and by creating a capable education system.

The Hazara people have been discriminated against for decades. they have been subjected to political, economic, social, and cultural harassment and even targeted attacks; they are deprived of social services in some areas, and Hazaras have been racially discriminated against many times. They are easily recognizable due to their distinctive facial features and are targeted by Sunni extremist groups such as the Taliban and the Islamic State, which consider them infidels. Although the Hazaras have always been subjected to racial and religious discrimination, systematic massacres, and terrorist attacks, they are on their way to schools and universities with a strong will and determination. They have achieved progress in the field of education. Today, Hazara students are getting high grades in schools, universities, and entrance exams, and some of them have been awarded scholarships to different countries Baiza 2013).

The second article of the law of the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan emphasizes providing equal rights to education for the citizens of Afghanistan through the growth and development of the public education system in a balanced and fair manner. In addition, regardless of social sex (gender), ethnicity, social and political status, or religious affiliation, all

children and adolescents who are of school age will have equal access to quality education to develop knowledge, skills, and values and reveal the necessary methods that are considered necessary for themselves and their country.

However, education has existed as a semi-closed world in the lives of Hazaras. Although the current governments of the country have tried, with the help of the international community and institutions that support education, to make the country's education go through its evolutionary process, in some cases, the authority's approach to cultural development issues has not been consistent and equal for everyone. Hazaras have been victims of unbalanced cultural policies more than other ethnic groups and have seen severe losses in the way of improving knowledge and social services.

Although Hazaras have been denied basic citizenship rights by all governments, they pay serious attention to science and education and understand that the only way out of this impasse is to acquire science and knowledge and develop human resources. This has given hope to the next generation of Hazaras. They realise that racial discrimination and the lack of access to the right to education are not confined to Afghanistan, but also facing religious and ethnic minorities in other countries.

Conclusion

The article has shown that education in Afghanistan has gone through different stages over time and the methods of education have been different in each stage. Afghan education has had its ups and downs in different periods and every regime and government has proposed its political ideologies and theories of the educational system. What can be inferred from the whole of this study is that education has been common among Afghan people since ancient times. Discrimination and inequality started from the time of Abdurrahman, and at first, Abdurrahman's ambush led those who sought justice and knowledge to an abyss of destruction. For tens of years, the Hazara people were unable to advance in terms of freedom and knowledge.

As a new generation of Hazara students attends school in relative safety but is unmotivated to study given the perceived disparities, their success could change Afghanistan's ethnic balance of power. Despite the restoration of the infrastructure and the assistance of the international community, the provinces of the Hazaras remain poor, although they are considered relatively safe, compared to other provinces. The revival of the

Hazara people depends more on education, and this is the capital that they can carry with them during the years of exile. While it is mentioned in the second article of the Law of the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan that "Citizens of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan have equal rights to education without any discrimination", the Hazara people in many Afghan regimes have been deprived of all their basic rights, including the right to education, which is one of the basic rights of every citizen.

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