

AFGHANISTAN

In Afghanistan there are 76 distinct people groups. Following are two of the groups.

Pashtun, Southern



Passionate is a word that well describes much about the Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan. They are said to love or hate with equal intensity, displaying fierce loyalty to friends, yet defending the right of badal - revenge or blood feuds where enemies are concerned. An old proverb reveals much, "He is no Pashtun who does not give a blow for a punch." Thus, it is no surprise that the infamous Taliban fighters originated among the Pashtun. But that presents an unfairly sensational - and lopsided - view of Afghanistan's largest people group. They are not the first to use tradition, disposition and numbers to attempt domination. Each coin has another side.

Interestingly, legend claims they originate from one of Israel's tribes, even descending from King Saul himself. Scholars tend to scoff at this but their "true" origin has not yet been determined. They are part of Central Asia's mystique although ethnic researchers have identified them with the Indo-Iranian Affinity Bloc, the Pashtun People Cluster and variously call them Pashtun, Pakhtun or Pushtun. Comprising less than half of Afghanistan's population, they currently number beyond 10.5 million there; 35.5 million world wide. Pashto is their traditional language, although possibly giving way to Dari (Eastern Farsi), the country's trade language.

Traditional Pashtun territory lies in the southern and eastern mountains where extended families dwell in tents or mud houses, amid typically unsanitary conditions

due to lack of safe water sources. Such circumstances, coupled with lack of health care, contribute to limited life expectancy - about 46 years. Nomads may live in valleys during winter and move to mountain pastures during summer months - a harsh lifestyle either way on war-torn, landmine-pocked landscapes. In one of the world's poorest countries, many depend on raising livestock, limited farming and cultivating the notorious opium poppy for income. Others relocated to Kabul (the capital city) after the 2001 Allied invasion hoping for industry to develop and to supply jobs. Though some urban Pashtun are educated, most adults are illiterate, particularly women.

What are their lives like?

Pashtun culture adheres to a rigid, unwritten "code of ethics" - the Pushtunwali (the way of the Pashtun). Behavior expected without question includes hospitality and protection for guests, provision of refuge to a fugitive and acceptance of a sincere offer of peace, bravery, steadfastness, persistence, defense of property and family honor and protection of female relatives - values for which death is not too high a price to pay.

Hard lives, however, find joy and relaxation in music that includes folk songs or dancing accompanied by stringed instruments and tambourines. Poetry and storytelling have long been favorite pastimes, as are segregated gatherings just to visit or to have pleasant conversation with friends.

Clothing is simple. Men wear long-sleeved cotton shirts over loose pants with sleeveless vests, and turbans wound in a particular way with the end hanging to the shoulder. In some areas weapons complete this costume. Women must observe Purdah (meaning curtain) which requires wearing a full-length garment known as the burka that features a mesh opening over the eyes for navigation.

Women raise the children and prepare meals. The dietary staple is a flat bread called nan. The rare dish containing meat could include curry or garlic, perhaps accompanied by lentils, spinach, or onions, with cheese to complete the meal. Tea is the favored beverage - one always offered to guests. Living a limited life, women neither inherit property, appear publicly without a male escort nor expect advanced education. Her identity is linked to a male member of her family, that is, as the wife of (her husband) or the mother of (her eldest son). With increased exposure to the world beyond, however, and a new democratic-style government some Pashtun customs may eventually change.

What are their beliefs?

Since the time of Alexander the Great, Afghanistan has been the site of both Eastern and Western invasions. As a result, the Pashtun tribes have been influenced by Indian Buddhists as well as African Muslims. However, Islam has been the chief religion of Afghanistan since the 10th century. Presently the Pashtun people are nearly all Muslim.

The Islamic religion is very difficult to influence. Converts to Christianity will more than likely be banished from their families. Consequently, there has been very little growth of Christianity among the Pashtun. Most of the work by various missions agencies has ended due to unrest in the country. More recently, some of the "freedom fighters" have attacked Western relief agencies, causing them to flee from Afghanistan. Christian radio and television broadcasts are strictly forbidden by the government.

Prayer Points

- * Pray for peace in the land of the Pashtun peoples.
- * Ask God to call those who are willing to go to Afghanistan and share Christ with the Pashtun.
- * Pray that God will encourage and protect the small number of Pashtun believers.
- * Ask God to soften the hearts of the Pashtun towards Christians so that they will be open to the Gospel.
- * Pray for the Afghani children who grow up in fear and hatred of outsiders.
- * Ask God to once again open the doors for Christian agencies desiring to work among the Pashtun.
- * Pray for the availability of the Jesus Film in the primary language of this people.



Country: Afghanistan

Continent:Asia

Region: Central Asia

Persecution Rank: 6 (Only top 50 ranked, 1 = highest persecution ranking)

10/40 Window: Yes

Location within Country: Kabul, Kandahar, southern Afghanistan

People Name in Country: Pashtun, Southern

Population in this Country: 12,428,000

Affinity Bloc: Iranian-Median

People Cluster: Pashtun

People Name General: Pashtun, Southern

Primary Language: Pashto, Southern (12,428,000 Speakers)

Primary Religion: Islam

Religion Sub-division: Sunni

Christianity 0.02 % (Evangelical: 0.02 %)

Hazara



The Hazara are a people of distinctions - set apart from fellow Afghans by religion, mixed ethnicity and an independent nature - and they have suffered for them. Persecution has shaped and defined the Hazara, particularly over the last 200 years. They face discrimination as Shi'ite Muslims, a minority among Afghanistan's dominant Sunni Muslims, as well as for ethnic bias.

Pre-second century inhabitants, they are likely Afghanistan's oldest. Their traditional homeland lies in central Afghanistan amid rugged mountains - a wildly beautiful, nearly inaccessible region of craggy peaks and rushing rivers called the Hazarajat. Hazara origins are much debated. Their name is from a Persian word meaning "thousand". Current theory - supported by obvious Asian features - favors descent from Mongol soldiers left behind by Genghis Khan in the 13th century, with considerable Turkish admixture. Their unwritten dialect, Hazaragi, contains regional languages - Arabic, Urdu, Mongol, Turkish and Dari/Farsi, which is now Afghanistan's primary language. Prior to the 19th century, Hazara were 67% of the total population, the largest Afghan ethnic group. More than half were massacred in 1893 when their autonomy was lost as a result of political action. Later fundamentalist governments, including the Taliban, attempted to dismiss them historically, politically and culturally by labeling them a mere religious entity and continued to attack them until they were driven from power. Now, estimates number the Afghan Hazara at around 2.6 million, about one-fifth of the country's population.

What are their lives like?

During the 1978-2001 war years numerous Hazara fled with other Afghans to Pakistan or Iran. While many returning refugees settled in Kabul to work as laborers, market vendors or in service positions, a majority returned to their mountain homelands. Comprised of a half-dozen tribes, the Hazara identify by village location more than by family ties. Marriage is arranged for a price - usually for the groom's economic advantage - and the bride joins her husband's family. Semi-nomadic life is simple and harsh in this arid region which is dependant on October to April snows to water meager grain crops and herds. Sustained drought is not uncommon. Housing varies by location and season. In valleys, shelters are sun-dried bricks plastered with a mud/straw mixture; at higher elevations, homes are stone with timber roofs; in summer tents are used as flocks move to high meadow pastures.

Food is barely adequate, consisting of bread, possibly vegetables and dairy products like buttermilk, yogurt and hard cheese. Rice and tea are obtained by barter. In dry years malnutrition and starvation are common. Health issues are serious, aggravated by geographical isolation, unsanitary conditions and little access to medical care, which is only available at far distances by foot or donkey. Tuberculosis, leprosy, dysentery and eye disease caused by dust storms and smoky living quarters often go untreated.

A talented people, the Hazara truly enjoy poetry, often memorizing it and using it to teach children, as well as storytelling and music that is distinct to their culture. They are expert rug weavers, embroiderers and calligraphers (even though most are illiterate). Wrestling and a baseball-like game are favorite physical pastimes.

Hazara women are honored in legend and folk tales. Shunning burkas, their traditional garb is bright green and red floral dresses, worn without the long under-trousers customary in Afghan culture and accessorized with heavy stockings, fur-lined boots, beaded headgear and heavy, coin strung necklaces. Independent and industrious given opportunity, many pre-Taliban Hazara women were highly educated and entered teaching or medical professions as well as serving in political roles. And, unlike other Afghan women, they fought beside Hazara men in battle.

Adjectives often used to describe the Hazara include brave, hardworking, trustworthy, friendly and committed. Known, too, as superb soldiers, today they proudly fight for equal rights, peace and Afghan unity, hopeful of a kinder future for their children.

What are their beliefs?

The Hazara are Muslims (mostly ImamiShi'ite, otherwise known as "Twelvers", who hold a particular reverence for the son-in-law of the prophet Mohammed). A number of Hazara who have strong ties with the Tajik people are IsmailiShi'ites (also known as "Seveners"). Strong feelings prevail between the two sects, each one often denying they have any ethnic affinity with the other at all.

What are their needs?

The Hazara are in urgent need of basic health care and clean water. Illiteracy is high. Adequate educational opportunities need to be provided for both boys and girls. There are opportunities for missions work, but those involved (mainly medical and humanitarian in nature) are doing so under extreme difficulties. There are no official missionaries working among the Hazara.

Access to the Hazara's homelands is difficult in summer and virtually impossible in the winter. Christian converts are hesitant to meet with other believers for fear that a spy may be present among them. Christians turned in by government informants may face torture and even death unless they renounce their faith in Christ.

Prayer Points

- * Ask the Lord to call people who are willing to share Christ with the Hazara and to help meet their physical needs.
- * Pray that God will call doctors and nurses, construction volunteers, and agriculturists to Afghanistan.
- * Pray that God will send Christian teachers and literacy workers who can minister to the Hazara.

- * Ask God to protect medical and benevolent workers in Afghanistan.
- * Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth laborers into the fields where the Hazara are located.
- * Ask the Lord to help you learn more about the Hazara and what you can do to reach out to them.
- * Pray that the Christians who live near and among the Hazara will be bold in sharing their faith in Jesus.
- * Pray for translation of the Bible to begin in this people group's primary language.



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Continent: Asia

Region: Central Asia

Persecution Rank: 6 (Only top 50 ranked, 1 = highest persecution ranking)

10/40 Window: Yes

Population in this Country:

2,510,000

Largest Provinces: Baghlan, Balkh, Bamian,
Ghazni, Ghowr, Helmand, Oruzgan, Parvan

Samangan, Sar-e Pol

Affinity Bloc: Turkic Peoples

People Cluster: Uyghur

People Name General: Hazara

Primary Language: Hazaragi

Secondary Languages: Farsi, Eastern (Dari) (Unknown)

Primary Religion: Islam

Religion Sub-division: Shia

Christianity 0.03 % (Evangelical: 0.03 %)