

# Hazara community of Afghanistan

August 20, 2021

**In news-** Recently, Taliban militants have vandalised and blown up a statue of Shiite militia leader Abdul Ali Mazari in the province of Bamiyan, the unofficial capital of the Hazara ethnic group. He is widely known as a champion of the Hazaras.

## About Hazaras-

- The Hazaras are an **ethnic and religious minority group largely found in the rugged and mountainous central Afghan region of Hazarajat.**
- They are believed to be **descendants of the founder of the Mongol empire, Genghis Khan**, and his army that overran the entire region during the 13th century.
- The Hazaras have long faced violent persecution from the Taliban and Islamic State for their ethnicity and religious beliefs.
- They are targeted by the Taliban because they are primarily Shia Muslims, as opposed to most Afghans who follow the Sunni branch of Islam.
- Their distinct Asiatic features and use of a Persian dialect called Hazaragi (which is mutually intelligible with Dari, one of the two official languages of Afghanistan).
- The vast majority follow the Shi'a sect (Twelver Imami) of Islam.
- Within Afghan culture, Hazaras are famous for their music and poetry and the proverbs from which their poetry stems.
- The poetry and music are mainly folkloric having been passed down orally through the generations.

## Their population

- The Hazaras are one of Afghanistan's largest ethnic minorities, accounting for about 10-12 per cent of the country's 38-million strong population.
- But they were once even larger, constituting approximately 67 per cent of Afghanistan's total population.
- Since then, primarily due to violence, oppression and targeted massacres, that number has come down drastically.

### **The region of Hazarajat as their home**

- The mountainous region of Hazarajat in modern-day central Afghanistan was annexed and made a part of the territories of the Afghan Empire under Pashtun ruler Ahmad Shah Durrani in the 1770s.
- The Sunni Muslim majority under the Pashtun ruler resulted in marginalisation of the Shiite Hazara community, to the extent that in the 18th and 19th century, they were forced to leave fertile lowlands in central Afghanistan and make the arid mountainous landscape their new home.
- Other areas such as Bamiyan, which are primarily occupied by this ethnic group, are some of the country's most backward, often lacking basic facilities such as running water and power.

### **History of oppression of the community-**

- The Hazaras' brutal history of repression has been traced back to the mid-19th century.
- During that century more than half their population was either killed or forced into exile by the then-Pashtun King Amir Abdul Rahman who had ordered the mass execution of all Shias after he invaded their homeland in Central Afghanistan.
- In the decades that followed, the discrimination continued, with Hazaras being sold as slaves as late as

the 19th century.

- During the country's civil war in the 1990s and the Taliban's first reign of terror in Afghanistan, thousands of Hazara people were massacred.
- In the mid-1990s, Taliban commander Maulawai Mohammed Hanif is believed to have once said, "Hazaras are not Muslims, you can kill them."
- In 1998, thousands of Hazaras were executed in the city of Mazar-i-Sharif.
- But even after the US invaded Afghanistan and ended the Taliban's rule in 2001, atrocities against the ethnic minority group continued.
- They have been the victims of rising violence by Taliban fighters as well as ISIS militants, who have targeted their mosques, schools and hospitals.

**Constitutional protection to Hazaras-** In 2004, the Afghanistan constitution granted them equal rights and they were even well-represented in the Afghan administration.