

Ethnic Conflict in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Study of Abaseen Movement in Hazara Division

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Received: July 10, 2025
Accepted: Aug 15, 2025

Abstract

Ethnonationalism, a political ideology rooted in shared ethnicity, culture, and historical experience, has been a driving force in shaping the socio-political landscape of many regions. In Pakistan, the Hazara region in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has seen a growing wave of ethnonationalist sentiment, which has expedited the ethnic conflict and disturbed the regional peace, particularly in the context of the Abaseen Movement for separate division. This research examines the origins, development, and implications of ethnic conflict in this region, analyzing how socio-political marginalization, economic disparities, and state policies have fueled the demand for a separate Hazara Province and its counter-demand for Abaseen Division. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, this study examines local narratives, state responses, and historical antecedents that contribute to the Abaseen movement.

Keywords: Ethnic Conflict, Hazarawal, Abaseen Division, Regional Peace, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Political Identity, Separatism, Abaseen Movement.

1. Introduction

Ethnonationalism in the Hazara region, particularly in the Abaseen region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has emerged as a significant political discourse in Pakistan's federal structure. Rooted in distinct linguistic, cultural, and historical identities, the Hazarawal have long felt politically marginalized and socioeconomically disadvantaged in comparison to the dominant Pashtun ethnic group of the province. The demand for a separate Hazara Province has gained momentum over the decades, reflecting the increasing desire for recognition, autonomy, and equitable resource distribution. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).

The Abaseen Movement is primarily a demand for the creation of a separate administrative division carved out of the existing Hazara Division in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The movement originates from the sense of marginalization felt by the people living in the upper parts of Hazara, commonly referred to as the Abaseen region. The population of this area is largely non-Hindko and non-Pashtun, consisting mainly of Kohistani and other indigenous communities who believe that their socio-economic needs and cultural identity have been overlooked by the divisional administration centered in Abbottabad. The Hazara Division currently comprises nine districts, including Abbottabad, Haripur, Mansehra, Battagram, Allai, Torghar, Kolai-Palas, Upper Kohistan, and Lower Kohistan. Among these, the Abaseen Movement is particularly active in the districts of Battagram, Kolai-Palas, Allai, and the Kohistan region, where the people share a distinct cultural, linguistic, and geographical identity. They argue that a new Abaseen Division would ensure more equitable distribution of resources, effective governance, and greater administrative accessibility for remote mountainous areas. However, this demand has also triggered ethnic tensions within

the broader Hazara Division, as various groups hold differing views regarding regional identity, representation, and the future administrative structure of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The objective of the present study is to investigate and elaborate on the Abaseen Movement and the factors of this ethnic conflict in the Hazara region between Hindko and non-Hindko speakers. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).

Administratively, there are seven administrative units of Pakistan, including Baluchistan, Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Islamabad Capital Territory, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, and Gilgit Baltistan. Pakistan is a diverse state in the regard of religious sects, tradition, ethnicity and linguistic composition. While the administrative construction of Pakistan is divided into union councils, tehsils, districts, provinces, and the capital. Pakistan is a multi-ethnic country based on language, sects, caste, customs, traditions, and creed. All the major and minor provinces have their own tradition and cultures, as Sindh have Sindhi, Punjab have Punjabi, Balochistan have Balochi, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have Pashtun and Hindko. In addition to major provincial identities Sindhi, Punjabi, Pashtun, and Balochi etc., there are numerous sub provincial identities in provinces such as, Saraiki in the Multan Division of Punjab, Hazarawal in the Hazara Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Mohajir in the Karachi. These regions' identities alleged marginalization during budget allocations, and in respect of development works and employment opportunities. (Ahmed and Sarbi, 2021).

With the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment in the constitution of Pakistan, which gave autonomy to provinces, the demand for the creation of new provinces has also increased. The politics of new provinces has been a historical issue, especially in Abbottabad, Karachi, and in South Punjab. In the South Punjab and Hazara Division, the major stakeholders and political elites politicized the ethnic

movements. Nevertheless, these ethnic movements are converted into violent conflict between political leaders and the government after the elections in 2013 or 2018. This study highlights that people are demanding more divisions and provinces due to economic and political marginalization. (Ahmed and Sarbi, 2021).

The budget allocation in the 7th National Finance Award is based on population and geography. In 2010, with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, the ethnopolitical conflict has been started as the issue emerged on unequal distribution of resources between cities and provinces. Henceforth, their political, ethnic, and cultural rights are being demanded by the regional and provincial minorities for their development. Likewise, the movement for a separate province has been launched by the Hazarawal. The demand is comprised of nine districts, including Abbottabad, Haripur, Mansehra, Torghar, Battagram, Lower Kohistan, Upper Kohistan, Allai, and Kolai Palas in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Similarly, the people of the Seraiki region also founded a movement for a separate province in South Punjab includes Vehari, Multan, Bakhar, Khanewal, and Mianwali. Mohajir Province is another demand started by the Mohajir community living in Karachi. They demand for the province based on Karachi, i.e., East, South, Central, Korangi, and Malir. Ethnic, cultural, political, economic, and administrative factors are responsible for the new province. The isolation feeling depends on language, ethnic identity, and unequal distribution of resources and budget allocation. Unequal distribution of resources, administrative issues, and further consideration of geographic and population factors. Similarly, the inadequate budget allocation and unequal distribution of resources lead to language and economic factors, and ethnicity emerges as a cultural factor. Moreover, political rhetoric and bad governance are the political reasons behind such demands.

(Ahmed and Sarbi, 2021).

After the renaming of the former NWFP as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the people of the Hazara Division have started a series of protests and are demanding for creation a new Hazara Province. Some political analysts believe the movement for Seraiki Province is similar to the Hazara Province Movement. Furthermore, the people from the Pashtun ethnic group living in the Hazara Division are demanding for separate Abaseen Division. The renaming of NWFP as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa expedited the ethnic conflict in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).

2. Historical Background of the Hazara Region

The Hazara region has a rich and complex history dating back to pre-colonial times, with a unique cultural and linguistic identity predominantly represented by Hindko speakers. Under British rule, Hazara was administratively distinct from other regions of what later became the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Post-independence, the incorporation of Hazara into a Pashtun-majority province set the stage for long-term grievances regarding political underrepresentation, economic neglect, and cultural marginalization.

The Hazara Province Movement was initially started in 1957 by the regional lawyers Mufti Mahmood and Abdul Khaliq. After two decades, the voice for the Hazara Province again restarted in 1987 by advocate Asif Malik by initiating Hazara Qaumi Mahaz. Later on, Hazara Qaumi Mahaz was converted into a registered political party as Hazara Qaumi Mahaz Pakistan and contested both national and provincial elections. After the renaming of NWFP as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2010 by the Eighteenth Amendment, the Hazarawal started a protest and demanded the creation of a new province in the Hazara region. (Zia U Rehman, 2021). The mainstream political parties present

resolutions in National and Provincial Assemblies for the creation of various provinces in Pakistan. Muttahida Qaumi Movement tabled a resolution in the national assembly for a constitutional amendment to facilitate the creation of new provinces, which received a mixed response in the Hazara Division. The leader of the Tehreek-e-Suba Hazara Pakistan, Sardar Baba Haider Zaman, said except for MQM, all the mainstream political parties have been playing politics and not supporting the aspirations and wishes of Hazarawal by bringing that resolution in the parliament. On the other hand, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly called MQM's support a conspiracy for the Hazara Province and condemned the resolution. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).

Mian Iftikhar Hussain, "the provincial information minister of Awami National Party (ANP), waited for 63 years to change the name of the province", but followed proper procedure. The MQM has violated Article 239 Clause 4 of the Constitution by bringing a resolution in to National Assembly. (Hussain, 2025).

Qalander Lodhi of PML-N, Javed Abbasi of PML-N, Mufti Kifayatullah of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam- Fazl (JUI-F), and "all elected members of the provincial Assembly from Hazara Division also condemned the MQM move and termed it against the law. Additionally, the MQM wants to create a new province consisting of Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sindh. The political leader of PML-N and lawmakers also said, the MQM wants to divide the Sindh Province but could not say it openly, fearing strong public resentment in Sindh, and also wanted to get political support from the people who want new provinces in Punjab and Sindh. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).

Eventually, along with all these developments, the ethnic conflict based on language and culture became more obvious between Hindko and non-Hindko speakers in the Hazara region. The increasing political awareness and demand for equitable representation further intensified the linguistic and cultural divide. Hindko-

speaking communities, who have long considered themselves the dominant cultural group of Hazara, began to feel that their linguistic identity and administrative influence were being challenged. On the other hand, the non-Hindko-speaking populations, including Pashto and Kohistani speakers, expressed their concerns about being marginalized within the existing administrative setup of the Hazara Division. This growing sense of alienation gave rise to new identity-based movements aimed at achieving recognition and autonomy.

The Abaseen Movement for a separate division emerged as a prominent example of this ethnic and linguistic division within the Hazara. The supporters of the Abaseen Division, mainly from Pashtun and Kohistani communities, argued that their cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic interests were not being adequately addressed under the current system. They demanded a separate administrative unit that could ensure fair development and political participation. Consequently, this movement not only reflected the diversity of the Hazara region but also highlighted the deep-seated ethnic and linguistic complexities that shape its modern political landscape. (Hussain, 2025).

2.1 The Emergence of Ethnonationalist Sentiment in Hazara Division

Ethnonationalism in the Hazara region is not a sudden or isolated phenomenon; rather, it has gradually evolved over several decades as a result of deep-rooted political, economic, and cultural grievances. The people of Hazara have long felt marginalized within the broader structure of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, both in terms of resource allocation and political representation. This persistent neglect in developmental planning has created a sense of deprivation and alienation among the local population. Despite contributing significantly to the province's economy and education, the Hazara region has often been overlooked when it comes to infrastructural projects, healthcare facilities, and higher education

institutions. Such uneven development has fueled a collective perception of injustice, which later transformed into a more organized form of ethnonationalism.

Another key dimension of Hazara's ethnonational identity revolves around issues of governance and representation. Historically, decision-making processes within the provincial setup have been dominated by groups belonging to other ethnic backgrounds, particularly Pashtuns. Consequently, the Hindko-speaking Hazarawal have often found themselves underrepresented in provincial institutions, bureaucracy, and policymaking circles. This imbalance in power distribution reinforced the belief that the region's political voice was being systematically silenced. Over time, the absence of adequate representation and the dominance of a particular ethnic narrative in provincial politics led the Hazarawal to question the legitimacy of their inclusion within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The cultural dimension of this struggle is equally significant. Hazara possesses a distinct linguistic and cultural identity, primarily shaped by its Hindko-speaking population, which differs considerably from the Pashto-speaking majority of the province. The imposition of a dominant cultural narrative that prioritizes Pashtun identity, language, and traditions has been perceived by the Hazarawal as an attempt to assimilate their unique cultural heritage. This perceived cultural suppression intensified feelings of exclusion and gave birth to a desire for recognition and preservation of the region's own identity. Cultural institutions, writers, and political activists from Hazara increasingly began to articulate the need for autonomy as a means of safeguarding their linguistic and cultural distinctiveness. (Khan, 2022).

The turning point in this ethnonational awakening came in 2010, when the name of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) was officially changed to "Khyber Pakhtunkhwa." While this change was

meant to reflect the Pashtun majority's cultural and historical identity, it was met with strong opposition in Hazara. Many locals perceived the new name as an act of erasure, an attempt to redefine the province in purely ethnic terms that excluded them. The renaming sparked massive protests across the region, with demonstrators demanding either the restoration of the old name or the creation of a separate administrative unit for Hazara. These protests marked a watershed moment in the region's political history.

The 2010 movement, often referred to as the Hazara Province Movement, became the rallying point for the articulation of Hazara's ethnonationalist ideology. It transcended the issue of nomenclature and evolved into a broader demand for political and administrative autonomy. The movement's leaders emphasized that only a separate province could ensure fair representation, equitable development, and the preservation of Hazara's cultural identity. Thus, ethnonationalism in Hazara emerged as a response to prolonged marginalization and became a powerful expression of the region's struggle for recognition, equality, and self-determination. (Hussain, 2025).

3. A Movement for Abaseen Division: An Emerging Sub-Regional Identity

The Abaseen Division, encompassing districts like Battagram, Kohistan, and Torghar, has emerged as a focal point within the Hazara ethnonationalist discourse. Historically isolated and underdeveloped, the Abaseen area suffers from poor infrastructure, limited access to education and healthcare, and minimal political representation. These socio-economic challenges have deepened the sense of exclusion and strengthened the call for inclusion within a separate Hazara Province. (Khan, 2022). A young scholar, Asad Khan, resident of Battagram, talking about the current Hazara Province Movement, said, the Hazarawal who are living in the Hazara region showed an act of discrimination

against non-Hindko speakers. He further said, most of the people from Torgahr, Kolai Palas, Battagram, and Allai Districts are not in favor of Hazara as a separate province and are demanding that the Abaseen as a separate division from Hazara, consisting of Battagram, Torghar, Kolai Palas, and Allai. He further argued that the people who are in favor of Hazara as a separate province are living only in three districts, Abbottabad, Haripur, and Mansehra, and the rest of the districts were demanding Abaseen Division. He also said that all the main leaders from the Hazara region remained in power in all formats in the Senate, National Assembly, and Provincial Assembly and failed to create a full-fledged province in Hazara. (Khan, 2022).

3.1 Key Drivers of Ethnonationalism in the Abaseen Region

Abaseen or Abasin Division is a proposed division in the Hazara region, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. The initial proposal for the establishment of Abaseen Division comprises some districts from the Hazara and Malakand Divisions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The proposed Abaseen division comprises seven districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including Battagram, Allai, Kolai-Palas, Upper Kohistan, Lower Kohistan, Shangla, and Torgahr. The geographical landscape is located on both sides of the Indus River. Pashto is a major language spoken in the area along with Hindko, Kohistani, and Abaseen. It is declared that either Battagram or a town at the eastern end of Shangla District will become the headquarters of Abaseen Division. (Zia U Rehman, 2021). There are many factors responsible for the Abaseen movement of the new division, some of them are,

1. Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity

The Hazara Division is home to multiple ethnic and linguistic groups, including Hindko, Pashto, and Kohistani speakers. The increasing assertion of Hindko-

speaking identity and the perceived dominance of Hindko culture and language in administrative affairs created tensions among non-Hindko groups, particularly Pashtun and Kohistani populations. These groups began advocating for a separate Abaseen Division as a means to achieve equal representation and preserve their distinct linguistic and cultural identity. Moreover, the cultural and linguistic identity of the people of Abaseen Division is a major reason. The Hindko language, central to Hazara's identity, is underrepresented in the provincial media and educational institutions. The cultural policies of the province are often viewed as promoting Pashtun heritage at the expense of others, reinforcing the ethnonationalist narrative. The repressive state policies and the centralization of power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's provincial capital, Peshawar, are seen as a form of ethnic domination. State responses to protests and movements in Hazara have often been dismissive, if not repressive, which has further alienated the local population. (Ahmed and Sabri, 2021).

2. Perceived Administrative Neglect

The eastern and northern parts of Hazara Division, including Battagram, Kohistan, Kolai-Palas, and Torghar districts, have long suffered from poor infrastructure, weak governance, and limited access to education and healthcare. Locals believe that the Abbottabad-centric administration has failed to ensure balanced development across all districts. The demand for Abaseen Division thus emerged as a movement for administrative efficiency and regional equity.

3. Unequal Resource Distribution

The concentration of resources, government offices, and developmental projects in southern Hazara districts such as Abbottabad, Haripur, and Mansehra created resentment among people in the upper areas. Residents of Kohistan and Battagram districts argue that they have been historically deprived of their fair share in

provincial and federal development budgets. The Abaseen Division demand reflects a call for more localized control over resource allocation. The lack of development projects, insufficient infrastructure, and minimal government investment in the Abaseen Division have created stark economic disparities. The perception that resources are disproportionately allocated to other regions fuels resentment. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).

4. Political Representation and Identity Politics

Political representation is a key factor behind the movement. Non-Hindko-speaking communities often feel underrepresented in provincial and divisional institutions, where Hindko-speaking elites dominate leadership positions. The Abaseen Division idea gained traction as a political strategy to enhance representation for Pashtun and Kohistani groups in local governance structures and legislative assemblies. First, the political marginalization is the leading cause behind the Abaseen Division. The people of Abaseen Division feel sidelined in provincial decision-making processes. Political offices are predominantly held by individuals from the more dominant Pashtun belt of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, leaving Abaseen residents with little voice in legislative matters. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).

5. Geographic and Administrative Challenges

The Hazara Division covers a vast and mountainous region with complex geography, making governance and coordination difficult. Many residents of remote areas face challenges in accessing administrative services centered in Abbottabad. The creation of the Abaseen Division is viewed as a practical administrative solution to improve governance by bringing government institutions closer to people.

6. Reaction to the Hazara Province Movement

The Hazara Province Movement, which seeks a separate province for the entire Hazara Division, indirectly triggered counter-narratives. While Hindko-speaking groups led the Hazara Province demand, non-Hindko communities saw the Abaseen Division as an alternative path that recognizes intra-regional diversity rather than merging all ethnicities under one identity. Thus, Abaseen Division became both a response and a counterbalance to Hazara Province activism.

7. Local Leadership and Grassroots Mobilization

Local leaders, tribal elders, and political activists from the upper Hazara districts have played a major role in mobilizing public opinion in favor of Abaseen Division. These leaders argue that decentralization will empower local communities, reduce ethnic polarization, and ensure inclusive development. Their campaigns have helped institutionalize the idea at both social and political levels.

8. Provincial and National Political Dynamics

At the provincial level, political parties have sometimes used the Abaseen Division demand as a bargaining tool to gain support from the upper Hazara electorate. Similarly, at the national level, decentralization and the creation of new administrative units have become popular political agendas. The provincial government's consideration of new divisions has encouraged local actors to formally press their demand for the Abaseen Division. (Ahmed and Sabri, 2021).

3.2 The Voice for the Abaseen Division

Moreover, Sajjadullah Khan, an elected parliamentarian from Kohistan, stated that the intention is not to oppose the formation of Hazara Province, but to establish a

separate division comprising three backward and underprivileged districts. Nationalist activists and residents of the Abaseen region also express support for creating a separate division in the Pashtun-dominated areas, referred to as the Abaseen Division. MPAs from Battagram and Kohistan have already submitted resolutions for a separate division. They claimed that the Kohistan, Battagram, and newly established Torghar districts have been ignored in development, and the people of these areas find it difficult to travel to the divisional headquarters in Abbottabad to resolve their problems. The provincial government has completed all the spadework for the proposed new division, administrative departments, and arrangement of revenue. (Khan, 2025). The population of Hazara Division is divided over the issue of renaming the province to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. “The Hindko-speaking population feels that the province has been given an ethnocentric name that excludes them”. (Shah, 2024).

The creation of the Abaseen Division may help ease the sense of alienation among local communities. The linguistic differences between the Hindko-speaking population of Abbottabad and the Pashtun communities of Hazara’s upper districts have been a significant barrier to communication. During the tenures of political leaders from Abbottabad and Haripur, local activists expressed concerns that the Pashtun areas of Hazara were often neglected. But some analysts and activists believe the creation of the new division would hurt the movement for the Hazara Province. The PML-N has a stronghold in the Hazara Division, and after this, it will also make the ANP more popular in the areas. MPAs from Battagram, Kohistan, and Torghar either won on ANP tickets or joined the party after winning the elections. (Rehman, 2022).

The former opposition leader of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly and the leader of the Hazara Province Movement, Shehzada Gastasap Khan, said we are not

opposing the creation of Abaseen Division. We are strong supporters of the creation of more districts, tehsils, divisions, and provinces in the country and decentralizing power. He concluded that the creation of the Abaseen Division is aimed at dividing the people of Hazara. He argued that, if the Hazara region can be divided into two separate divisions, why not Khyber Pakhtunkhwa be divided into two separate provinces? (Rehman, 2022).

Haider Khan Hoti, the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, announced the formation of Abaseen Division during a speech on June 18, 2011, but it was not approved because of a lack of consensus. Similarly, Chief Minister Mehmood Khan also made a similar kind of speech on December 2, 2021. “A grand Jirga of the elders of Kolai Palas, Upper Kohistan, and Lower Kohistan in December 2021 opposed the move and warned the government against the split of the current Hazara Division and alternatively proposed a separate Kohistan Division comprising the three districts”. (Amanat, 2021).

The Hazara Province Movement, which reigned after the province’s renaming in 2010, has gained increasing support among the residents of Abaseen. Local leaders from Battagram, Torghar, and Kohistan have echoed demands for a new province, emphasizing administrative efficiency, cultural preservation, and equitable resource distribution as key motivations. Support for the movement has been mobilized through demonstrations, rallies, and political lobbying (Rehman, 2022). However, the federal and provincial governments have largely maintained a status quo stance on the issue. Although the concerns of Hazara residents have been acknowledged, substantive actions remain limited. Tokenistic measures such as promises of development and greater representation have failed to address the growing demand for autonomy (Khan, 2022).

3.3 Challenges and Policy Implications

Conducting field research in the Abaseen region presented a series of methodological and contextual challenges. Many respondents exhibited reluctance to provide candid responses due to concerns about political repercussions. In districts such as Kohistan and Battagram, prevailing patriarchal norms further restricted access to female participants, thereby limiting the representativeness of the data. Notwithstanding these constraints, the study was able to obtain a diverse array of perspectives through sustained engagement, trust-building, and active community involvement. The ongoing conflict over ethnonationalism between the Hazara and Abaseen regions reflects deep-rooted structural disparities that contribute to social alienation and potential instability. Policymakers must consider provincial restructuring, constitutional reforms, and inclusive development strategies while ensuring cultural representation in public institutions to foster harmony and equitable governance.

The theoretical framework of this study draws on the concept of consociational democracy, which encompasses four core features: grand coalition, segmental autonomy, proportionality, and mutual veto (Adeney, 2003; Noor, 2005). These principles allow diverse groups to participate equitably in governance, exercise autonomy in cultural matters, and safeguard their vital interests through veto rights.

In explaining the dynamics of ethnonationalism, Horowitz (2000) views ethnicity as a political instrument employed by elites to pursue specific goals, suggesting that ethnic identity serves as a means to achieve material or political ends. Ernest Gellner (1983), adopting a modernist perspective, argues that nationalism is a product of modern industrial society. As societies industrialize, the need for cultural homogeneity intensifies, leading to the alignment of political and cultural

boundaries to sustain mass education, communication, and economic efficiency. In this view, nationalism constructs nations to fulfill the requirements of modernization and bureaucratic centralization. Fredrik Barth (1998) emphasizes the persistence of ethnic groups through social boundaries and cultural distinctiveness. He argues that ethnic identity is maintained through both social organization and geographical separation, which reinforce cultural diversity.

The theory of ethnonationalism, advanced by scholars such as Anthony D. Smith and Walker Connor, further elucidates that political movements emerge when ethnic groups seek recognition, autonomy, or independence grounded in shared cultural, linguistic, or historical identities. Ethnonationalism evolves when collective identity transforms into political consciousness, driving groups to mobilize for rights, representation, or territorial autonomy within or beyond existing state structures.

4. Conclusion

A recent voice has re-emerged for the new Abaseen Division from the Abaseen area of Hazara Division in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It is also an important combination of socio-political exclusion, historical resentment, and identity formation. The demand for provincial autonomy is not just a matter of administrative reforms but a desire for self-respect, fair representation, and visibility in the state machinery. These issues need to be addressed through communication, policy adjustments and representation in the national unity and democratic development are to be achieved in Pakistan.

The Abaseen movement in the Hazara Division is multifaceted and an important aspect of provincial politics in Pakistan. It is based on cultural identity, historical grievances, and administrative marginalization. The movement has developed into an insistent demand for rights, including political recognition, autonomy, and eventually the formation of a

distinct Abaseen Division. This demand emerged after the demand of Hazarawal for the new province in Hazara Division after the renaming of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2010. This movement underlined the long-standing linguistic and ethnic distinctions that continue to exist among Pakistan's multicultural population.

The central motives of the movement are the sense of cultural and political marginalization. The Pashtun community is ethnically separated from the Hazarawal in the Hazara Division, which is predominantly Hindko-speaking. They are traditionally felt to be underrepresented in the provincial affairs. The renaming was done without serious consultation with the Hazara community, which further spreads the feelings of alienation and found expression in mass protests. Unfortunately, the violent repression, like the infamous Abbottabad riots were occurred where 10 people were killed and more than 200 were injured. These protests and strikes energized the Hazarawal, which further urgency to their calls for administrative acknowledgment and increased political autonomy.

Despite resistance from provincial governments and major political parties, the movement has kept up momentum through civil society, local leadership, and diaspora activism. The demand for the Abaseen Division is usually argued based on cultural protection, administrative effectiveness and resource allocation. This demand is also a response to the demand of Hazarawal for Hazara on the basis of administration and opposed the ethnic considerations which may enhance governance and render services more accessible to the people. Some opponents of the movement took it as a danger to the national unity and additional calls for ethnic based administration or provinces which already delicate the federal setup. At the same time, the Hazara Province Movement, through largely non-violent also highlights some larger issues of

multicultural and nation-building. Lack of open, accountable mechanisms and political discourse of governance aggravates such identity-based movements. The provincial and federal governments need to interact constructively with Hazara and Pashtun leadership and meet their demands through democratic means. This may involve more provincial institutions, more representation, fair distribution, protection of cultural heritage, and severe national debate regarding provincial reorganization.

The state is also responsible for such movement. Suppressing and denying such movements has the potential to lead to instability and greater alienation. Thus, the state must adopt an inclusive and progressive strategy that regards the aspirations of all ethnic groups. The national unity can be achieved through accommodating and admiring states' policies and respecting the rich fabrics of ethnic and regional identities.

Likewise, the voice for Abaseen Division was suggested new administrative division in Hazara Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which reflects an emerging local desire for more equitable distribution of resources, increased administrative autonomy, and acknowledgment of cultural identity. The Abaseen is the name of Indus River which runs for Indus River, which runs through this area. "Abaseen" is a name for the Indus River, which runs through this area, signifying the geographic and oneness significance. The main supporters and leaders of the movement would assist the enhancing the infrastructure, health care, and education in remote and hilly areas. The proponents of the movement claim that these areas remained underdeveloped than the major cities of Haripur and Abbottabad. The new administrative structure may help for equitable distribute the provincial resources. The inhabitants of the Abaseen region have different cultural and tribal identities and believe they are a marginalized ethnic group. The nationalists and activists of the Hazara Province Movement fear that the subdivision of the Hazara Division could dilute the

overall movement for Hazara Province. The infrastructural and financial issues in setting up a new division, such as personnel and infrastructure, can slow down the process. Similarly, there is also intra-district competition for the prospect of divisional headquarters with Besham, Battagram, and Dasu being among the likely candidates. The idea was deliberated at provincial levels as the local protest and resolution calling for the formation of Abaseen Division no concrete administrative steps have been initiated up to mid-2025.

To address ethnic conflict in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly the Abaseen Movement in Hazara Division, policymakers should promote inclusive governance, ensuring fair representation of all ethnic groups in provincial institutions. Development projects must be equitably distributed across districts to reduce regional disparities. Establishing inter-ethnic dialogue forums can foster mutual understanding and cultural respect. The government should recognize linguistic and cultural diversity through educational and media inclusion. Decentralizing administrative structures and creating locally empowered divisions like Abaseen may improve governance and reduce tensions. Transparent resource allocation, participatory planning, and conflict-sensitive policymaking can build long-term stability and social cohesion in the region.

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