Minority, Marginality and Modernity

The Ismaili Community of Behsud, Wardak Province, in Afghanistan’s Polity

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Abstract

Ismailis are a minority community within the larger world of Sunni and Shia Muslims and were persecuted by conservative Muslim religious and political leaders. They were marginalised in the social, cultural and political arena and were forced to dissimulate their faith in order to avoid adversarial confrontation by hostile forces. Scholars and writers in the Muslim world avoided any objective and candid discussions of the community fearing that they might encounter severe reprisal by their own dogmatic and biased leaders. In Afghanistan, the Hazara Ismailis experienced discrimination, marginalisation and repression because of their ethnicity and religious beliefs. They endured years of political, social, cultural and economic deprivation. However, their situation improved after the downfall of the Taliban rule in late 2001. Although Ismailis, for the most part, were treated as footnotes in most historical literature, they became the main topic of historical and development literature after their spiritual leader, His Highness the Aga Khan IV and present Imam of the Ismailis worldwide, got involved in the reconstruction of Afghanistan’s war-torn infrastructures. Parallel to this endeavour, the Aga Khan also abolished the hereditary system of leadership in the Ismaili community, established modern institutions and appointed a new generation of leaders to guide the community.

Keywords

Ismailis – political repression – marginalisation – dissimulation – dissident movements – reform and modernity
1 Introduction

Minority communities are subjected to a multitude of direct and indirect repression, persecution, marginalisation, and they are forced to adapt themselves to their environment and submit to the draconian measures to ensure their very survival. The development and expansion of telecommunication and social media in the 21st century, which connects regions in remote corners of the world, enabled minority communities to communicate with each other and learn from each other’s experiences. Such solidarity internationally emboldened minority communities to further their struggle for social justice, equality and civil rights. Minority groups begin to form associations and mobilise their resources to fight for their equality, and whenever they encounter challenges, they are more likely to set aside their own differences and form a coalition to defend their rights and liberties. To counter efforts by the aggrieved social and cultural groups, the repressive state machinery is more likely to resort to violence and repression as opposed to compromise and negotiations.

Repression breeds violence. The assumption that rebellious measures by aggrieved social groups against the ruling class is spontaneous by nature is nothing but a romantic narrative. Deprivation and marginalisation generate disenchantment and pave the road to mass rebellion; however, most rebellions do not lead to victory because marginalised communities lack associations and clear strategies to mobilise people toward achieving their objectives – equality and justice for all. Without a well-articulated strategy for action, communitarian feelings do not lead to transformation of the status quo.

Leadership plays a significant role in mobilisation for change because it provides direction for the movement. To be successful in mobilising a community for change, leaders must have access to resources and effectively use these resources to leverage the movement for change. The leadership must also establish links with members of the diaspora community abroad and use their connection and resources to further advance their struggle for societal justice. There are two types of leadership, traditional and radical, which affect the outcome of the movement for change. Traditional leaders view critical thinking as a menace to stability and order and initiate cosmetic reforms to placate social dissent and maintain stability. Radical leaders view the old ways of doing business as impediments to development and modernity, and they fight to initiate fundamental reforms.

Traditional leaders regard themselves as the sole authority for understanding and interpreting religious scriptures. They use their knowledge of religious
precepts to persuade their followers to resist changes that do not conform to their interpretation of religious texts. They argue that modernity is associated with Western civilisation and does not fit into the Muslim cultural milieu as it encroaches upon the mental sphere of the *Umma* (Community of believers). Radical leaders argue that the Muslim world is stagnated and this violates the very principle of Islamic doctrine – adaptation to the changing world. In order to rid society of stagnation, these leaders argue that their adaptation of new ideas and ways of life associated with modern industrial and technological development is not an aberration from the Islamic way of life. They maintain that Muslims can embrace such lifestyles without seriously compromising their way of life and belief system.

This article examines the contention between the traditional leaders determined to defend the status quo and the radical leaders advocating modernity and change in the Ismaili community of the Behsud district of Wardak province in Afghanistan in the post-World War II period. It explores how repressive social, cultural, political and economic policies and practices of the ruling class caused members of the community to dissimulate their faith over a long period to ensure their survival, and it also explores how modern education and communication with the outside world caused the elite and enlightened clerics and liberal tribal chiefs to welcome changes. The article also studies how migration to urban centres contributed to the modernisation of the community and exposed it to different ideological currents, inspiring the educated strata to mobilise members of the community to fight for societal justice as well as for reform in the leadership structure of the community. The paper further discusses factors that helped the forces of modernity to prevail in the struggle for change despite meagre resources.

2 Minority Communities of Afghanistan

Afghanistan is home to a number of ethno-linguistic communities, but political power remained the sole monopoly of the Pashtun ethnic group since the rise of Ahmad Shah Abdali to power in 1747. The Pashtun ruling elite subjected other ethno-linguistic communities to their rule and treated them as inferior stocks. The country is also home to scores of faith-based communities, e.g., the Abrahamic traditions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam and
non-Abrahamic traditions such as Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and Sikhism.\textsuperscript{1} The majority of people are Muslims (Islam is divided into two major sects, Sunnis and Shias) and the ruling class belonged to the dominant Sunni sect and subjugated the Shias to the Sunni legal system. The Shias also are divided into several branches, including Ismailis, who are mistreated by the Sunnis and fellow Shias alike. The Shia leaders never apologized for their mistreatment of the Ismailis to demonstrate their honesty and integrity for reconciliation and unity of the Shia Hazaras.

3 Human Geography: Behsud, Wardak

Geography was not an advantage for the Ismailis. Ismailis lived in mountainous regions and geographic distances caused them to remain disconnected and unaware of developments in their neighbouring communities and hindered their efforts to work together to mitigate threats against them. History also was not on their side; historians of the Sunni and Shia schools of thought remained biased toward them; their writings were intended to invalidate their faith. Politics also negatively affected freedom and security of the Ismailis. Political leaders worked to deprive Ismailis of the freedom to travel abroad for business or pleasure purposes or to study at Ismaili religious institutions and did not allow them to form their own cultural, social and political associations. The Sunni-dominated state worked to inculcate the younger generation of Ismailis with the ruling ideology and politics. Ismailis were forced to read history books and literatures about their own community written by writers and historians associated with the biased Sunni ruling class. In the cultural arena, biased religious leaders accused Ismailis of heresy and viewed them as Munafiq, Heretics who deviated from the right path of Islam according to their interpretation of Islamic scriptures. Growing social, political and cultural repression and persecution caused Ismailis to seek refuge in the safety of remote and mountainous regions.\textsuperscript{2} Lack of roads, transportation and communications made it difficult


for ethno-tribal groups to venture frequently outside their own villages and towns.

Wardak is one of 34 provinces of Afghanistan with a small Ismaili population. The province is one of the country’s less developed regions. In 2003, there were 553 civil service personnel of which there were 8 female employees.\(^3\) Residents of the province are Pashtuns of Ghilzais and Pashtuns of Duranis and live primarily in the south while the Shia and Ismaili Hazaras reside in the northern and western parts of the province. In the same year (2003) there were 3 hospitals and 7 clinics in the province; these existing facilities remained understaffed.\(^4\) Total number of schools in Wardak in the same year was 184 and the number of students was estimated to be 74,784 male and 17,510 female. The number of male teachers was 2,243 and that of female 151 persons.\(^5\) Table 1 shows estimated population figures of the eight provincial districts in 2002–2003.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
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<td>20</td>
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<tr>
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<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>201</strong></td>
<td><strong>212</strong></td>
<td><strong>410</strong></td>
<td><strong>200</strong></td>
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</table>

**SOURCE:** AFGHANISTAN STATISTICAL YEARBOOK, KABUL: GOVERNMENT OF AFGHANISTAN, CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE, 1382/2003.


\(^4\) Ibid. p. 131.

\(^5\) Ibid. p. 117.
The Ismailis

Hazara residents of Behsud are primarily Shias; only a small number are Ismailis. After the destruction of the Ismaili headquarters (Alamut) in Persia (Iran) by the Mongols in the 13th century, the Ismaili Imams remained hidden from the public, appointing trusted representatives, known by the title of Pir and later Mukhi (a Gujarati term commonly used in the Khoja Ismaili communities and refers to one who directs religious services at Jamatkhana, communal house of worship) to lead the community. In the late 18th century, the Ismailis emerged from years of obscurity in Iran when their spiritual leader (Imam) began to reassert his role in the public arena. Hasan Ali Shah Aga Khan I led two unsuccessful rebellions against the Shah of Iran and was forced to seek refuge in British-held India in 1841. Shah Karim al-Husaini, Aga Khan IV is the 49th and present Imam of the worldwide Ismaili community.

The Ismailis of Behsud maintain that their ancestors had previously lived in a region called Pushtah-e-Qandahar, northern part of Qandahar province. Hostility to their faith by conservative Sunni religious leaders and their followers caused them to leave the region. They settled in villages in Hisah-e-Awal and Hisah-e-Duh-e-Behsud, in Wardak (see table 2), and practiced their faith in Taqiyya, blending with their neighbours to avoid harassment and violent confrontations. They were subjected to the Sunni legal system and were forced to attend the Sunni mosques to recite the five daily prayers according to the Sunni tradition.

State bureaucratic officials who were mainly Sunni in their religious orientation disdained Ismailis and did not appropriate state funds for development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<tr>
<td>Band-e-Joy</td>
<td>Hisah-e-Awal Behsud</td>
<td>242</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hisar</td>
<td>Hisah-e-Du-e Behsud</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kohi Buro</td>
<td>Hisah-e-Du-e Behsud</td>
<td>113</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sar-e-Eskar</td>
<td>Hisah-e-Du-e Behsud</td>
<td>97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talah Deh</td>
<td>Hisah-e-Du-e Behsud</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Population</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>532</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Discussions with knowledgeable Ismailis from Behsud, Wardak. Kabul, 2017.
projects in the region to improve peoples’ standards of living. Local Ismaili religious and tribal chiefs lacked strategic business perspective to persuade their subjects to raise funds for investment in trade and financial sectors of the economy to learn and experience new ways of doing business. There was no school and basic health centre in the Ismaili-populated villages; students had to walk long distances to attend school at another village. Harsh geographical environment and lack of basic service facilities were factors that caused most residents of the region to migrate to Kabul and other metropolitan areas in search of a better life for themselves and their children.

5 Leadership and Social Governance

Ismailis submitted to the leadership of a powerful tribal chief, Abdul Hadi of the Kayan Valley, Baghlan province, after he seized the leadership of the community in the early 19th century. To legitimize his leadership Hadi claimed to be a Sayyed. The word Sayyed, plural Sadat, means lord, chief or master. However, in the Islamic tradition it came to refer to any descendant of Fatima, daughter of the Prophet Muhammad. During the Arab conquests of the region centuries earlier, the Arabs installed themselves as chiefs of the conquered territories and were recognized as such by the local population. But with the rise of anti-Arab sentiments, especially following the end of Arab rule, people despised Arabs and their descendants through their local wives. To circumvent public hatred, these strata claimed Sayyed ancestry. But their claims are fraudulent and dubious: there is no evidence to prove the validity of their assertions. After Abdul Hadi’s death, his descendants controlled every aspect of community affairs.6 Nadir Shah Kayani, a powerful tribal chief and direct descendant of Hadi, rose to prominence in the 1920s and single-handedly ruled the community. Ismailis addressed Kayani and his successor with the title of Pir or Mukhi. Kayani and his successors never directed religious services; they believed that such task was beneath their status, so they delegated this responsibility to clerics who sought his guidance from time to time.

Kayani directed social, cultural, civic and administrative affairs of the community and consolidated his power base by relying on trusted aides and appointing them Khalifah (representative) to Ismaili villages to supervise community affairs on his behalf. Well-known representatives included figures such as Akhund Mohammad Safi, Zargham and Sarwar who enjoyed support

of people in Kalu of Bamiyan and Behsud of Wardak provinces. However, at a later time these tribal chiefs developed differences with Kayani, deplored his methods of leadership and in 1927 they submitted a petition to the Aga Khan III (grandfather of the present Aga Khan IV) to restrain Kayani from interfering in the internal affairs of their communities. Since Kayani had the support of the ruling elite in the state bureaucracy he managed to subjugate recalcitrant tribal chiefs and clerics to his authority, marginalised others who had differences with him and compromised with others in order to further consolidate his influence and authority over the Ismailis of Behsud.

Ismaili tribal chiefs and clerics had remained obedient to the ruling class since the rise of Pashtun aristocracy and formation of Afghanistan as a national state in 1747. They collected and delivered taxes to the state treasury and helped the government in drafting men to compulsory service in the army. Despite being submissive to the ruling elite and good citizens of the country, the Ismailis were treated as second class citizen. However, the status of Ismailis improved considerably after Afghanistan gained its independence from British rule in 1919. Ismaili leaders pledged allegiance to King Amanullah (1919–1929) because he initiated far reaching social, political, economic and cultural reforms – a gargantuan task set to modernize the country over a short period.

One of his major political reforms included the abolishment of slavery, which led to freedom for thousands of Shia Hazaras throughout the country. After Habibullah (known by the derogatory name Bacha-e-Saqaw (Water carrier’s son)) from Kalakan overthrew Amanullah in 1929 and ruled for nine months, the Hazaras did not pledge allegiance to him and allied with pro-Amanullah forces trying to topple him and restore Amanullah to the throne. The Ismaili community experienced internal strife after the death of its leader Sayed Timoor in 1924–1925. Shuja, known as Shir Agha, succeeded his father; the Ismailis submitted to his leadership. However, Shuja’s uncle Kayani maneuvered to marginalise him and seized leadership of the community. During the civil strife in 1929 Kayani supported pro-Amanullah forces while his nephew Shuja who held a grievance against Kayani, supported the anti-Amanullah rebellion. Thereafter, the relationship between Shuja and Kayani remained tense. Shuja joined anti-Amanullah forces with the hope of re-establishing his leadership over the community. Kayani was forced to leave his hometown.

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Kayan and sought refuge in Behsud where he stayed at the house of Mullah Eid Mohammad, a close relative of Akhund Safi.8

Ismailis in Behsud supported Kayani and remained loyal to him. Kayani stayed in Behsud until the collapse of Habibullah's rule by the British-backed Mohammad Nadir, former defence minister and Afghanistan's ambassador to France. After defeating and capturing Habibullah and executing him, Nadir declared himself king. Kayani submitted to Nadir's leadership (1929–1933) and mobilised his men and fought remnants of the rebellion in the northern regions of the country. In exchange for his services, the king promoted some of his men to army positions of brigadiers and colonels and provided financial compensation to Kayani for the damages he incurred while fighting Habibullah and his men.

After Nadir's assassination, Kayani pledged allegiance to his son Mohammad Zahir who ruled the country until his nephew Mohammad Daoud, former prime minister, staged a coup, seized power and declared Afghanistan a Republic in July 1973. After consolidating his leadership and forging closer ties with the Pashtun ruling class, Kayani ruled the Ismaili community with an iron-fist. He marginalised influential Ismaili tribal chiefs because he viewed them as a thorn in his side. For example, Safi was not on good terms with Kayani who accused the former of misusing his authority and the religious taxes (that belonged to the Ismaili Imam) for his personal use. To discredit Safi, Kayani orchestrated a character defamation campaign calling Safi by the name of Mulhid (Misguided). The tenuous relationship between Kayani and Safi continued until Safi died in 1947 and Safi's son Akhund Abdul Ali succeeded him. Abdul Ali later reconciled his differences with Kayani. After Abdul Ali's death his son Abdul Qayum supervised community affairs until he was mysteriously murdered in the 1980s.

A significant number of Ismailis in Behsud are loyal to a prominent tribal chief Mohammad Hasan Kazimi of the Turkman Valley of Parwan province (Hazaras residing in the Turkman Valley are believed to be descendants of Turkmani and Daikalan of Sheikh Ali and of Andarab who are part of Hazara-e-Daikalan). Unlike Kayani who was a narcissist and authoritarian man, Kazimi was a decent man, accessible to people who needed him and sought his advice – a personality trait that made him popular among people in Turkman and Behsud communities. Kayani was not happy with Kazimi's popularity and was determined to eliminate his influence over the community; he worked

to smear his reputation to the extent that he and his men referred to Kazimi as *Munafiq*. To this end, they hatched a plot to get him into trouble with law enforcement officials. For example, a few individuals with malicious intent accused Kazimi of heresy calling him *Qadiani* (the word refers to the follower of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian (1835–1908), founder of the Ahmadiyya faith in the Indian subcontinent. The word “Qadian” has been used as a convenient tool by Kazimi’s opponent to discredit him. It is suggested that after Kazimi came into conflict with Kayani, some of Kayani’s trusted men resorted to the infamous scheme of defamation of character and accused Kazimi of abandoning Islam and the Ismaili faith and embracing the Qadiani tradition.\(^9\) They submitted a petition to the *Alaqadar* (Sub-district governor) stating that Kazimi had converted to the Qadiani faith and demanded the government to punish and try him in a court of Islamic Sharia law. In early 1930 the *Alaqadar* summoned residents of Khidri and Ali Khani villages to inquire about this issue. Kazimi’s supporters and others who knew him well signed a sworn statement to the effect that Kazimi was a bona fide Muslim and that there was no iota of truth in the charges against Kazimi which were fabricated by individuals with malicious intention. The sworn statement convinced the *Alaqadar* to drop charges against him.\(^10\)

6 Dissident Movements and Struggle for Change

Kayani worked to expand and consolidate his leadership over the Hazara Ismaili communities. He decided that it was in his best interest to reconcile his differences with Kazimi and his supporters – a policy that he vigorously pursued after Kazimi’s death. Kayani improved relations with Kazimi’s son Mansoor Kazimi and appointed him *Khalifah*, his representative in the Turkmen Valley – a relationship that lasted several years. After Kayani’s sons grew older and were able to travel to the Ismaili villages and collect *Mal-e-Wajibat* (Religious taxes) he no longer needed the service of *Khalifah* to collect taxes and deliver them to his treasury. Kayani dismissed Kazimi and other *Khalifah* from their posts; they no longer suited his interests and this factor paved the road for dissent in communities in Parwan, Bamiyan and Wardak provinces and among residents of these provinces who had settled in Kabul.


\(^10\) “*Wasiqa Khat-e Sharei*.” [Legal Letter of Pledge], A 5-page statement of testimony (with signatures and thumb prints of witnesses) submitted to the office of *Alaqadar*, district governor in defence of Mohammad Hasan Kazimi dated on 18 Hut 1308 [9 March 1930].
In 1963, Kazimi split from Kayani and accused him of corruption and mismanagement of public funds and authoritarian methods of governance. Hostility between Kayani and Kazimi caused naive Hazara Ismailis to become divided into supporters of Kayani and Kazimi respectively. Ismailis were exploited, mistreated and abused by their own fellow tribal chiefs and religious leaders who often claimed to be Sayyed but had nothing in common with the Hazaras. However, politically and socially the naive Hazaras often fought each other to protect and defend their master's interest. Kayani and his supporters reviled Kazimi and his men calling them by a derogatory name Mansukhi (Misguided) and in a similar vein, Kazimi's men used similar nomenclature when addressing Kayani and his supporters. Tensions between Kayani and Kazimi negatively affected unity of the Ismailis to the extent that many individuals with family ties to either group abruptly ended their working relationship and even individuals divorced their wives who belonged to the family of their opponents.

Kazimi had the support of well-known senior Ismaili cleric Ramazan Ashuri from Behsud. Prior to Kazimi's split Kayani had appointed Ashuri as Mullah (Religious teacher) to teach children in the Ghorbandak valley, Shibar district of Bamiyan province. People in the region donated land and money to Ashuri to enable him to lead a comfortable life. After Ashuri declared his loyalty to Kazimi the people of Shibar disdained him, harassed and intimidated him causing him to leave the region; after his departure from the region people confiscated his landed properties. In 1968, Ashuri returned to Shibar and demanded the return of his land and monetary compensation for the crops. During an arbitration session a well-known tribal chief, Mir Ghulam Hasan, offered Ashuri the sum of Afn 18,000 (U.S. $235) for the land price but he refused the offer, arguing that the value of the land's yields (crops) in four years were equal to the amount of money they proposed to pay him, let alone the price of the land. Several other tribal chiefs such as Mir Ali Ahmad and Shah Ghulam Hossein of Birgilich, a Shia in his religious persuasion, also tried to negotiate a settlement but failed to do so. The land dispute remained a source of tension between Ashuri and the people of Shibar that affected relations between supporters and followers of Kayani and Kazimi.

Reformist Ismailis were not happy with the status quo and exerted pressures on Kazimi to work toward unity of the Ismailis. This factor caused Kazimi to approach Kayani for reconciliation; a number of his men visited Kayani at his residence to repent and seek his forgiveness. It is claimed that Kayani was misinformed of the intention of Kazimi and his men believing that they are ready to physically harm Kayani. Kayani's sons called the Kabul Police Department for protection. Kazimi supporters had no clue of what was transpiring and
waited in the courtyard of Kayani’s residence for Kayani to come out and meet with them. However, to their surprise, police officers entered the premise, arrested them on charges of trespassing and intention to harm Kayani – they remained in jail for a few days. Police officers in charge of the investigation freed them as they did not find any evidence to implicate them for trumped up charges. Kazimi’s men were furious and regarded Kayani’s behavior as unacceptable, condemned it and rallied in support of their own tribal chief.

Kayani suffered greater public humiliation when one of his family members, Manuchehr with close ties to Kazimi filed a lawsuit in the local government agency demanding inheritance rights. Accusation and counter accusations were made and a probe by government authorities in February 1966 found Kayani’s sons and tribal chiefs loyal to them guilty and imprisoned them for about two years. Kazimi was elated that his arch opponent Kayani’s sons were behind bars. He began to project his image as a spiritual leader and built a Jamatkhana in Taimani, Kabul, that became known as Jamatkhana-e-Nakhustin (First Jamatkhana). Kazimi sent a petition to the Aga Khan’s office informing him of the situation and requesting him to appoint him Mukhi of the communities of the Turkman valley and Behsud on the grounds that people are pleased with his leadership. In 1968, the Aga Khan had appointed him Kamadia (Assistant to Mukhi) to direct religious, cultural and social affairs of Turkman and Behsud communities. To deflect public criticism and counter the barrage of derisive comments by his opponents, in 1969 Kayani’s son Nasir Naderi purchased a plot of land and built a Jamatkhana that became known as Jamatkhana-e-Omumi (Central Jamatkhana) and appointed Shaikh Ghulam Ali, a well-known cleric, to supervise religious services.

Modernisation and Reform

Economic difficulties in the post-World War II forced many people to leave Behsud and settle in Kabul where some of them established small businesses, others worked as laborers and disadvantaged families worked as maids in the houses of affluent Sunni families as well as seeking living quarters in the houses of Hindu and Sikh business and merchant families in exchange for performing domestic services. They did not seek living quarters with Shia Hazara families residing in Kabul because a) most Shia Hazaras were poor and b) Ismailis did not feel comfortable staying with them because they too discriminated against the Ismailis, referring to them as heretics. Senior Sunni and Shia civil service officers in the state bureaucracy harboured ill-feelings toward junior Ismaili civil service officers and did not approve their promotion to higher ranks. This
state of affairs continued unchanged. However, Ismailis received a new lease of life after the promulgation of the 1964 Constitution.

The constitution guaranteed freedom of expression and of associations and, among others, freedom to form political parties and cultural associations. Hazaras were allowed to travel outside the country for visiting religious sites in Iran and Iraq and for business-related activities. Ismaili businessmen availed themselves of the opportunity and visited Pakistan and India to import materials for domestic consumption – construction materials, cloths, etc. In so doing they also established contacts with the Ismailis in the Indian subcontinent and strengthened trading and commercial ties with their counterparts in the region. Table 3 lists well-known tribal chiefs of the community.

The Ismaili chief Kayani died in February 1971 and was succeeded by his son Nasir Naderi. The Ismaili spiritual leader, the Aga Khan, had appointed him Mukhi for two years. Kayani’s sons’ social standing eroded after the monarchy was overthrown in July 1973 and Mohammad Daoud declared Afghanistan a republic. Daoud was propelled to power with the help of the pro-Soviet Hizb-e-Demokratik-e-Khalq-e-Afghanistan (the Peoples’ Democratic Party of Afghanistan, the PDPA). Ismailis with pro-Soviet orientation hailed Daoud’s seizure of power and rallied in support of the regime; Mahram Ali Ahmadi was appointed head of the inspection department of the Kabul Municipality. Nasir Naderi suffered public humiliation after one of his avid supporters accused him of deflowering his fiancé and filed a lawsuit against him. The government expanded its investigation against Nasir Naderi and his brothers and reopened

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rank/Title</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Residence/Status</th>
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<tr>
<td>Kalb Ali</td>
<td>Tribal chief</td>
<td>Talah Deh</td>
<td>Deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barat known as Haji</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>Qol-e-Khaish</td>
<td>Canada</td>
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the old files, found them guilty and imprisoned them on charges levelled against them.

Ismaili businessmen associated with Kazimi ventured into trade and business activities and increased their ties with the Ismailis of the Indian subcontinent who helped the followers of Kazimi to learn more about the Ismaili system of leadership, community development projects and social welfare programs. Inspired by these developments, they initiated fund raising to sponsor economic development projects. They implemented religious rites and ceremonies in the jamatkhanah – rites and rituals practiced by the Khoja Ismailis of the Indian subcontinent. Similarly, growing nationalism in the 1960s in Afghanistan and the emergence of social and political groups espousing Hazara nationalism aimed at ending domination and leadership of Sayyeds over the Shia Hazaras, impacted developments in the Hazara Ismaili community. These factors provided a fertile ground for tribal chiefs and entrepreneur strata in the Ismaili community of Behsud to further engage in business and trade activities in order to become self-sufficient and contribute funds for social and welfare programs. They viewed Kazimi as a man who was not interested in the welfare and prosperity of the Ismailis. They split from him, accusing him of building his own cults of personality, misusing his authority and forsaking the pledges he had made to the people to sponsor welfare programs and other schemes to improve peoples’ standards of living.

Cleric Ramazan Ashuri, aided by his close aide Mahram Ali Ahmadi, a card-carrying member of the Parcham (Banner) faction of the PDPA, was at the forefront of the anti-Kazimi movement. On 21 April 1976 they built a jamatkhanah in Taimani, Kabul, that became known as Jamatkhanah-e-Jadid (New Jamatkhanah). The struggle to break away from the fold of the Sayyed strata had proved to be a pyrrhic victory for the Hazaras when it ended their years of servility to leaders who had treated them as beasts of burden. Although liberal-minded elite and enlightened tribal chiefs welcomed the split in the community, Ahmadi exploited this development to his party’s advantage and worked to expand the pro-Soviet party’s base of support among the educated strata of the splintered community. Supporters of Naderi and Kazimi often addressed people associated with Jamatkhanah-e-Jadid by a derogatory term, Ghulam Shahis, a reference to Ashuri’s father Ghulam Shah. Table 4 lists well-known clerics from Behsud.

The Ismaili community remained fractious; each pledged loyalty to its own tribal chief and accused the other of treason and deviation from the right path of the Ismaili Tariqah. Leaders did not work to reconcile their difference and unite the community out of fear that they would lose their authority and influences over the community of followers. The Ismaili spiritual leader, the Aga Khan, was aware of the existing rift in the community and sent his representative Jafar Ali Lakhani to Kabul in August 1973 to mediate among the leaders of the three groups: the main group associated with Jamatkhanah-e-Omumi headed by Naderi, the group associated with Jamatkhanah-e-Nakhustin headed by Kazimi, and those affiliated with Jamatkhanah-e-Jadid led by Ashuri.

Lakhani’s visit to Afghanistan did not produce tangible results. In 1976 the Aga Khan sent his estate agent Captain Varas Amir Ali Karim (1910–1978) to Kabul to resume the failed mediatory efforts. Varas Karim initially made some progress toward resolving the differences among the divided communities and persuaded their tribal chiefs to attend a meeting with the Aga Khan in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 20 November 1977. Naderi was in jail and sent his representatives Abdul Hussein, a businessman and Nazir Hussein and Dad Ali to the meeting while Kazimi and Ashuri and their associates attended the meeting. At the meeting participants promised to resolve their differences and submit

### Table 4: List of Ismaili Mullahs, Clerics from Behsud, Wardak.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Residence/Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ali Juma</td>
<td>Katah Khak</td>
<td>Private religious education</td>
<td>Kabul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashuri, Ramazan</td>
<td>Qol-e-Khaish</td>
<td>Private religious education</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Junior)</td>
<td>Qol-e-Khaish</td>
<td>Private religious education</td>
<td>Deceased, 1990s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashuri, Ramazan</td>
<td>Qol-e-Khaish</td>
<td>Private religious education</td>
<td>Deceased, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Senior)</td>
<td>Qol-e-Khaish</td>
<td>Private religious education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakemy, Khaliqdad</td>
<td>Qol-e-Khaish</td>
<td>Private religious education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaikh, Ghulam Ali</td>
<td>Siyasang</td>
<td>Private religious education</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sultani, Suhrab</td>
<td>Behsud</td>
<td>Private religious education</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

to the leadership of whomever the Aga Khan would appoint as a leader. It is believed that supporters of Naderi and Kazimi sabotaged every effort toward unity that caused the Aga Khan to send Karim to Kabul on 4 March 1978 to resume the discussion concerning unity of the communities. Further discussions could not be arranged after army officers loyal to the PDPA toppled the Republican regime of Daoud through a military coup, seized power and declared Afghanistan a democratic republic on 27 April 1978. Noor Mohammad Taraki, head of the Khalq (Masses) faction of the PDPA, became president and Babrak Karmal, head of the Parcham faction, became prime minister.

8 Repression and Migration

The Soviet-backed leaders characterized the regime as democratic and nationalist despite the fact that senior leaders of the party including Taraki and Karmal and others prior to seizing power were recruited as agents by the KGB and received monthly stipends to carry out their political activities. The puppet regime resorted to coercive policies to build a socialist society based on the Soviet model and murdered anyone it suspected of working against the regime. The regime imprisoned the Ismaili chief Nasir Naderi, his brothers and Ismaili tribal chiefs loyal to them. The pro-Soviet Ismailis welcomed the regime change and seizure of power by the PDPA and called upon their fellow Ismailis to support the regime. Ahmadi and his associates proscribed Ismaili tribal leaders, clerics and intellectuals and commoners who did not support the Soviet-backed regime as reactionaries and enemies of the April Coup (dubbed the April Revolution) Ahmadi worked feverishly to rally Ismailis in support of the puppet regime and at any government-organized rally he and his associates used to shout the phrase, Hooray (a victory cheer) after every political slogan, e.g. “Long-live communism,” “death to enemies of the April Revolution,” etc. When the Khalq faction of the PDPA dismissed senior leaders of the Parcham faction from key posts in the state and party apparatuses, Ismailis also fell from grace with the ruling party; Ahmadi was dismissed from his post, was imprisoned but was freed after a few months. Internal party struggle emasculated the ruling party’s resolve as each faction was plotting to establish its domination over the party and the country.

The *Khalq* faction prevailed and exiled Karmal and his associates to diplomatic posts in Afghanistan embassies abroad. Soon differences between Taraki and his prime minister Hafizullah Amin escalated over policy matters. Taraki tried to remove Amin but failed to do so. Amin murdered Taraki and declared himself head of the state and the party. The leadership was not in a position to unite the rank-and-file members of the ruling party to beat the insurgency – a factor that caused the worried Soviet leaders to intervene by deploying a contingent of the Red Army to Afghanistan to stabilise the situation. The Soviet occupation army invaded the country in December 1979, killed Amin, brought Karmal to Kabul and installed him as head of the state and the party (1979–1986).

Pro-Soviet Ismailis hailed the Soviet occupation of the country, called upon Ismailis to support the puppet regime and some of these men were promoted to junior posts in the bureaucracy. For example, Ahmadi held junior post in the state bureaucracy and worked to enlist Ismailis as members of the newly state-founded institution – *Jabha-e-Milli-e-PadarWatan* (the National Fatherland Front) to fight the Islamic insurgency (he sent his son to the battlefield where he was killed during an armed confrontation with Islamic militants). Another well-known pro-Soviet activist is Ewaz Ali Rabin, son of Zamin. The Kabul regime appointed him district governor in the Ismaili-settled region of Wardak with the intention that he would use his affiliation with his tribal community to rally people in support of the regime. Islamic fundamentalists active in the region intensified their attacks on PDPA members and government officials and murdered Rabin’s father, Zamin. The murder of his father did not weaken Rabin’s resolve and he continued to condemn people who opposed and challenged the regime as anti-revolutionaries. Rabin was murdered by Mohammad Asif, a teacher and a member of the PDPA due to personal grudges Asif had against him. Another card-carrying member of the PDPA is Bostan Ali and he too played a significant role in enlisting Ismailis in support of the puppet regime.

Escalation of armed struggle against the Soviet-backed government in Wardak forced some Ismaili families to abandon their homes and properties and settle in Kabul. However, a small number of illiterate and semi-literate individuals continued to serve the regime. Karim Bakhsh Hashuri [Ashuri] and others joined the state’s notorious intelligence agency known by its acronym AGSA, KAM and later KHAD and provided the agency with information on dissidents. Hashuri graduated from Estiqlal Highschool in Kabul and it is suggested that he had a hand in the arrest and disappearance of a number of Ismailis during the time he worked for the state intelligence agency – a charge that he steadfastly refutes. Ismailis and radical individuals who survived investigation and terror by the security agency maintain that Hashuri was responsible for the disappearance of Hafizullah from the Turkman valley of Parwan province. After the death
of his father, Hafizullah and his mother settled in Kabul where he completed his studies at the Habibiya Highschool. He was a member of Sazman-e-Azadi Bakhsh-e-Mardom-e-Afghanistan or SAMA (Peoples’ Liberation Organisation of Afghanistan), an underground revolutionary organisation that opposed and fought the Soviet-backed government before and during the Soviet occupation of the country. Hafizullah had adopted the alias name of Shafi and was known as Shafi among his comrades. It is reported that Hashuri also harassed cleric Khaliqdad Hakemy for not supporting the Soviet-backed government and threatened him with imprisonment that caused him to leave Kabul and settle in Rawalpindi and later to migrate to Canada. After the collapse of the Soviet-backed regime in 1992, Hashuri settled in Canada and returned to Kabul and worked as staff member of the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board (ITREB) after the Aga Khan established modern institutions in 2003 and appointed new leaders from the rank-and-file of people to lead the community. Hashuri presented himself as a new-born Ismaili man.

Following the Soviet occupation of the country Nasir Naderi and his brother Mansoor Naderi were freed from prison (his other three brothers had been executed by Taraki-Amin regime). Nasir Naderi and Mansoor Naderi survived the onslaught of the Taraki-Amin regime due to criminal cases pending against them. The two brothers submitted to Karmal and encouraged tribal leaders of the Ismaili communities to support the Soviet-backed government. In 1981, Nasir Naderi settled in London, England and designated his brother Mansoor Naderi as his representative to look after the welfare of the Ismailis. Mansoor Naderi returned to Kayan, established his power base there and mobilised

15 Tawfiq Azar. “Charik-e-Wadi-e Ragbar.”[The guerrilla of the valley of volleys], and writings of Nasim Rahraw on Hafizullah. https://www.goftaman.com. Visited on 31 October 2011. Azar writes that he and his friends used to play football in the Shahr-e-Naw Park in Kabul with three several young fellow Hazara Ismailis, that included Rahm Ali, Karim Bakhsh Hashuri and Hafizullah from the Taimani county. After the game ended there were serious discussions on faith, theology and socio-political issues. Rahm Ali and Hashuri often argued and defended the Soviet Union and its policies and Hafizullah often narrated the heroic struggle by a local fellow Ismaili, Siya Baig from the northern region of the country and the Ismaili ruler of Alamut Hasan Sabbah of Persia. The Soviet cliental regime promoted Rahm Ali and Hashuri, for their services, to junior posts and cowardly murdered Hafizullah who fought for liberation of the country and freedom and justice for all. Azar reports that the cliental regime tortured Hafizullah and executed him. He writes that he briefly saw Hafizullah when security forces took him away and he (Hafizullah) requested him to inform Karim Bakhsh Hashuri that if he (Hafizullah) were to disclose a word about him (Karim Baksh), his grave will be next to mine. Nasim Rahraw writes that Hafizullah under suffocating political environment did not disclose identities of his comrades and he proved to be a true hero to the cause of revolution.

16 Discussions with late Mullah Khaliqdad Hakemy, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, 1996.
Ismailis to fight Islamic warriors waging war on the puppet government. The Kabul regime provided Naderi with substantial weaponry and political support that enabled him to form tribal brigades that were later elevated to an army division in Baghlan, the 80th Army Division – a factor that led to the rise of Mansoor Naderi as a powerful figure in the Ismaili community.

Naderi used his political connections and influence in Baghlan and appointed his sons and immediate family members to key posts in the local government institutions and used the army under his command to intimidate rival Ismaili tribal chiefs including those of Behsud and Turkman Valley to submit to his leadership. Ismaili tribal chiefs who despised Naderi had no option but to submit to his authority and recognize him as leader of the Ismaili communities. A number of other tribal chiefs who did not agree with Naderi’s politics avoided any confrontation with him; subsequently they left the country and settled in Pakistan and India. Ashuri (Jr.) left Kabul, settled in Rawalpindi, Pakistan and later migrated to the United States and afterwards to Canada. While in Pakistan, Ashuri convinced the Ismaili leadership in Karachi to provide scholarships to a number of students affiliated with his faction to study in the Ismaili religious institutions in Karachi to be trained as Waez (Missionary). The leadership in Karachi supported religious education programs for several young men that included Ashuri’s son and other immediate family members who later abandoned their studies and settled in Europe and North America. Table 5 lists Ismailis graduated from institutions of higher education.

The Soviet-backed leader Karmal failed to stabilise the country. The Soviet leaders were displeased with his performance, exiled him to Moscow and installed the head of the country’s notorious intelligence agency, Najibullah, as head of the party and the state. Najibullah was known as Najib-e-Gaw – the Bull. His unbridled rule (1986–1992) collapsed soon after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Islamic warriors collectively known as Mujahidin seized power in April 1992 and declared Afghanistan an Islamic state. Sebghatullah Mojaddadi, head of Jabhah-e-Milli-e-Nijat-e-Afghanistan (National Liberation Front of Afghanistan), became head of state for short time and was succeeded by Burhanuddin Rabbani, head of the fundamentalist Islamic party, Jamiat-e-Islami of Afghanistan.

Islamic warriors fought each other trying to establish their total domination over the country’s politics. A brutal civil war that ensued throughout the country forced many Ismailis to leave their homes and seek refuge in cities of Peshawar, Islamabad and Karachi in Pakistan as well as in India. With the help of Ismaili institutions, FOCUS Humanitarian Assistance, an affiliate of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), a significant number of these people were repatriated to Canada. In Pakistan, the Behsudis received preferential treatment by the Khoja Ismaili leadership because since the 1960s they
had cultivated good working relationship with them. Pro-Soviet Ismaili individuals like Ahmadi and other members of the Parcham faction of the PDPA who could not leave Afghanistan settled in Baghlan where some of their party friends were still in power. The Ismaili warlord Naderi welcomed Ahmadi and his associates and supported them. These men used their administrative experience and writing skills to consolidate Naderi’s power base and popularize his image as that of a saint.

As armed conflict among Islamic groups continued more people left the country. People were exhausted by the war and the call for peace was resonating louder inside and outside the country. It is during this time that a new group of warriors – the Taliban – emerged in Qandahar and their political slogan was to put an end to the war. In 1994, they fought rival groups in Qandahar, defeated them and established their headquarters there. The Taliban defeated rival Islamic parties and seized Kabul in 1996. The nominal government of Rabbani

<table>
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<th>Name</th>
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<th>Degree</th>
<th>Rank/Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbasi, Chaman Ali</td>
<td>Teacher Training School</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>Settled in</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ahmadi, Mahram Ali</td>
<td>College of Literature, Kabul University</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Member, PDPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bostan Ali</td>
<td>College of Engineering, Kabul University</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Member, PDPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakimi, Karim Dad</td>
<td>Post-graduate degree, Russia</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>Settled in</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hussain Ali</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>GDE</td>
<td>Settled in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabin, Ewaz Ali</td>
<td>Public Administration High School</td>
<td>GDE</td>
<td>Member, PDPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safdar Ali Barat Ali</td>
<td>College of Engineering, Kabul University</td>
<td>BS</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahraei, Nazir Hussain</td>
<td>College of Literature, Kabul University</td>
<td>BA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and his commander Ahmad Shah Masoud of Panjshir abandoned Kabul and transferred the seat of the state to the northern region of the country.

In 1998, the Taliban controlled most parts of the country and ruled the country with an iron fist. Taliban’s repressive administrative measures caused more people to leave the country and settle in the neighboring countries. After the Taliban defeated Naderi and seized control of Baghlan in 1998, many Ismailis left the region for Pakistan. Pro-Soviet individuals such as Ahmadi and others settled in Rawalpindi, Pakistan; Ahmadi was engaged in menial jobs and relied on remittance from relatives in the Western countries to make ends meet. Whenever Ahmadi attended jamatkhanah during religious services and cultural gatherings, his opponents often ridiculed him referring to him as Munafiq.

Continuing armed struggle caused a significant number of Ismailis of the PDPA backgrounds and others to abandon their homes and seek refuge in Moscow, Russia. After a few years of staying in Moscow, FOCUS Humanitarian Assistance signed an agreement with the Russian government and repatriated them to Canada. The two decades of civil war had destroyed much of the social, cultural and civic institutions in Behsud and forced people to leave the country; those who were too helpless and could not leave the country remained at the mercy of warlords and criminal gangs who had no regard for human lives.

The Taliban brutalised the Shia and Ismaili Hazaras, labelling them infidels. They provided sanctuaries to the notorious leader of al-Qaeda organisation, Osama Bin Laden and his fighters. The U.S. supported the Taliban but later developed differences with them and accused them of sheltering Bin Laden. The U.S. condemned Bin Laden for masterminding the attacks on the U.S. interests in Africa and demanded the Taliban to hand him over to the U.S. for trial. Taliban’s refusal to acquiesce to the U.S. demands led to deterioration of U.S. relations with them. When several Arab nationals affiliated with al-Qaeda attacked the Twin Tower buildings in New York and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001, the U.S. seized this opportunity, mobilised a coalition of international force, launched military offensives and liberated Afghanistan from the Taliban rule. A number of international organisations participated in the rebuilding of country’s infrastructures. Agencies that were engaged in the rebuilding of Wardak’s infrastructures included Afghan Bureau for Consultancy (ABC), CARE International, Cooperation Centre for Afghanistan (CCA), Coordination of Afghan Relief (CoAR), and Shuhada Organisation (SO).\(^{17}\)

\(^{17}\) Anne Evans, et al, op. cit., p. 242.
Soon after the Taliban rule collapsed, the U.S. installed long-time CIA associate Hamid Karzai as head of the interim administration. Although the government appointed Shia Hazara leaders in senior posts in the bureaucracy – vice-president, members of the cabinet, and governors – the status of common Hazaras remained unchanged. Although Shia Hazara leaders often deplored discrimination against Hazaras by the Pashtuns, they themselves discriminated against their own Sunni and Ismaili Hazara counterparts and did not involve them in senior and junior posts in the government.

Although the Ismaili spiritual leader, the Aga Khan, had good working relationship with Afghanistan’s neighbouring countries of Pakistan and India, the Sunni dominated state in Afghanistan since the country’s independence in 1919 did not establish ties with the Ismaili Imamat because it feared a backlash from conservative religious leaders and clerics who still viewed Ismailis as infidels. The political situation in Afghanistan was not conducive for the Aga Khan to visit the country and grant an audience to his followers; he waited until the situation was ready for such a visit in the future. The opportunity presented the Ismaili Imamat to engage in Afghanistan during the height of civil war in the mid-1990s. The Aga Khan instructed Focus Humanitarian Assistance to provide emergency aid to the internally displaced people and intensified his involvement in the rebuilding of Afghanistan after the collapse of the Taliban rogue regime. He strengthened ties with the Karzai government and provided Afghanistan with substantial amount of economic aid to help the process of rebuilding the country’s infrastructures.

Parallel to these endeavours, the Aga Khan also established modern Ismaili Institutions to provide much-needed help to modernize the Ismaili community. Prior to establishing modern institutions and appointing institutional leaders, the Aga Khan sent a delegation composed of two Ismaili compatriots and a Canadian Khoja Ismaili to Pakistan and Afghanistan to identify qualified individuals to be appointed leaders and staff members of the Ismaili National Council for Afghanistan, INCA. After a lengthy deliberation the team selected Ahmadi as head of the INCA despite strong objection to Ahmadi’s nomination by one of the team members. The team then submitted names of individuals to the Aga Khan for approval and he graciously endorsed the appointment of the head of the INCA and other institutional leaders in July 2002. Ismailis who earlier had split from the Ismaili chief welcomed Ahmadi’s appointment to such a position arguing that they had been right from the very beginning that Ahmadi’s appointment to the leadership post was affirmation that they had been right to dissent against the corrupt leadership. Ahmadi was secular and
socialist in his orientation and disdained religious beliefs. Although he occasionally attended religious services at the Jamatkhanah to demonstrate that he was a religious man and to avoid ostracisation by clerics and devout Ismailis, people regarded him as pantomime villain.

Ahmadi was chosen for the job from among other candidates because of his years of experience in various government agencies. It was expected that with such a background Ahmadi would be able to provide sound leadership to the community and move forward the INCA’s agendas. But his flaccid leadership proved to be a sheer tragedy and utter disappointment to the people. He lacked charisma, strategic vision, courage and determination to move the council’s agendas forward and rally Ismailis in support of the institutions. He was a man of the past and with his outdated views he was not able to chart a new course of action to face challenges ahead.

During his tenure, Ahmadi failed to unite the divided community. When meeting Ismaili dignitaries in Kabul, instead of discussing strategies to rally them in support of the institutions, Ahmadi often bragged about his own activities in the past often exaggerating his role and his achievements. He never publicly criticized Naderi who challenged the newly appointed leaders because Ahmadi did not wish to betray the friendship he had with Naderi since the Soviet occupation period (both were members of the state intelligence agency and members of the ruling party). Favouritism and cronyism clouded Ahmadi’s vision to the extent that after his tenure ended he nominated a high school graduate from among his own tribal clan to succeed him in 2005 – an individual who lacked integrity, public recognition, respect and was despised by majority of people as he was in pursuit of maximizing his business interests.18 Ahmadi died on 11 September 2018 in a car accident in the wee hours of the morning when he exited the Jamatkhanah.

Since 2002, individuals from Behsud tribal community have been in charge of the Ismaili communities except for a short time during which Mir Ahmad Joyenda from Baghlan was appointed head of the INCA in July 2015. Head of the INCA, Shair Baz (he claimed that he graduated from Habibiya High School in Kabul but people who know him state that he did not complete his studies there) and his team (lacking qualification, public recognition and public support), presented themselves as anti-Naderi heroes but never challenged him and they blithely and cavalierly ignored the interest of the people – instead of empowering people they empowered and enriched themselves by engaging

in shady business activities. Joyenda was a member of the Parcham faction of the PDPA party, became Naderi’s trusted aide and did not promote the INCA’s agendas. After his tenure ended in July 2019 Amir Baig Dada Baig from Turkman Valley was appointed head of the INCA.

Baig graduated from a high school in Kabul and settled in Canada where he ran his jewellery store. He lacks basic knowledge of the social, cultural and political affairs of the community and the country and is unable to articulate his views on simple issues in meeting with staff and people visiting him. He vacillates in his haphazard and eclectic views and due to his lackluster performance and desolation he became the butt of jokes in the community as people regard him as an imbecile. Fearing for his life and lacking vision Baig pleased Naderi and supported his men and distanced himself from anti-Naderis. People wrote letters to the leadership to the effect that Baig was a deranged man who did not fit such a position and must be removed from the INCA but the leadership behaving like a colonial master dismissed the peoples’ complaints on the grounds that they knew better than them and Ismaulis must submit to whom-ever they endorsed his leadership. Ismaulis were dismayed by the leadership’s condescending attitude and this factor caused the disgruntled strata to establish their own councils and associations to look after peoples’ interest. Baig and his two companions, Noor Ahmad Ahmadi, and Dawlat Mohammad Shirdel, head of the Ismaili Regional Committee for Badakhshan died when their vehicle plunged into the Oxus River on 15 September 2022. However, the driver survived the incident causing people to believe that their death was planned in advance by adversaries.

A major aspect of political development in the post-Taliban period is peoples’ participation in the parliamentary elections. During the parliamentary election held on 18 September 2005 the INCA leadership nominated individuals of their own choice and of their own tribe to contest the election as candidates from Kabul but these candidates did not prevail because they lacked public recognition and trust and people did not support them; only their immediate family members were obligated by tribal codes of conduct and cast their ballots for them (See table 6).

Ismailis remained divided and failed to resolve their difference and rallied in support of the two candidates, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah during the presidential election in 2014. The election was marred by massive corruption causing the U.S. to intervene reaching a compromise solution that installed Ghani as president and Abdullah as Chief Executive of the State. The

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19 Mohammad Saleh Jahesh. _Rohahi dar Naqsh-e Shaitan_. op. cit.
U.S. did not respect peoples’ vote and unilaterally decided the outcome of the purported election. Although Ismailis favoured Ghani over his rival Abdullah, an overwhelming majority had cast their ballots in favour of Abdullah because of their disgust for Naderi who supported and allied with Ghani. Abdullah promised to support Ismailis and appoint a few individuals to senior posts in the government, but after the election he simply did not deliver the promises he made – a policy that eroded his support among the Ismailis.

During the parliamentary election in 2015 Naderi made false promises to the Ismailis to win support for his candidacy and his family members, and used his wealth to buy votes. He was elected as deputy from Baghlan, his nephew Daoud Naderi as deputy from Qunduz, his daughter Farkhunda as deputy from Kabul and his avid supporter Ramazan Jumazadah as deputy from Kabul. Naderi projected himself as representative of the Ismailis and Ghani rewarded him for his support and appointed his son Sadat Naderi as Minister of Urban Development and Housing and his daughter Farkhunda as his advisor to the United Nations Affairs. Naderi also used his influence and connections with corrupt senior government officials who appointed several members of his immediate family members to diplomatic posts abroad.

During the parliamentary election on 20 October 2018 the Naderis did not contest the election because the Human Rights Commission had disqualified Naderi and his sons from running for seats in the parliament due to petition by Ismailis and non-Ismailis accusing them of murder and assassination of their family members. Naderi was determined that if he and his family members could not participate in the parliamentary election, then no Hazara Ismaili must be elected to the National Assembly. Naderi encouraged several Ismaili candidates to contest the elections and provided them with cash money – a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>No. of Seats</th>
<th>No. of Registered Voters</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>No. of Votes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Kabul</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1,206,540</td>
<td>Ahmadi, Mahram Ali, Shirzad, Zargham Ali</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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policy that effectively divided Ismailis in support of several candidates. Naderi believed on the false notion that he and his family members have the sole right to represent the Ismaili community.  

The relationship between Ghani and Naderi deteriorated at a later time. Ghani knew that Naderi had lost the support of Ismailis and presented himself as their friend with the intention to gain their votes in the presidential election. Ghani distanced himself from Naderi and dismissed Naderi’s son Sadat (Minister of Urban Development and Housing) on 12 June 2018 and his daughter Farkhunda (advisor on the United Nations Affairs) on 24 November 2018. Ismailis hailed Ghani for his decision and supported him during the presidential election in September 2019 because they were disillusioned with Abdullah who did not honour the promises he had made to the community in the past. Naderi allied with Abdullah, mobilised his supporters to cast their ballots for him. There were 9.6 million registered votes and turnout on the day of election was low compared to 2014 presidential election.

Public disenchantment with presidential candidates was the main reason that majority of people boycotted the election; only about one and a half million people cast their ballots. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced the final result of the presidential election on 18 February 2020 and declared Ghani the winner amid claims of widespread vote rigging. Ghani received 923,592 or 50.64 percent of the votes cast while his challenger Abdullah received 720,841 or 39.52 percent of the votes cast. Former United States Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo said that Ghani stole the election and was more skilled in stealing votes than his challenger, Abdullah. The Ismaili warlord was not happy with the news. He realised that his spheres of influence had eroded. He supported the call by Abdullah and his allies to not accept the IEC’s decision, and they declared that they would form a government of their own.

Public dismay was palpable with the election result as people viewed Ghani and Abdullah as politicians corrupt to the core. Ghani and Abdullah did not resolve their differences and on 9 March 2020 both held separate swearing-in
ceremonies, each claiming to be the legitimate head of the state. The international community supported Ghani and their resident ambassadors participated in his swearing in ceremony at the presidential palace. Abdullah called upon his supporters to not recognize Ghani as president and appointed governors to a few provinces in the northern regions.

Under pressure by the U.S. and its allies, Ghani and Abdullah agreed to resolve their differences and signed an agreement on sharing power on 17 May 2020 that put an end to months-long stalemate that had plunged the country into a political crisis. Abdullah agreed to be Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation. Their compromise did not evoke passionate hosanna from the disenchanted public as they viewed the scheme as subterfuge on the part of the two men who no longer cared and had forsaken the same people who voted for them. Naderi always relied on the coercive state machinery for defending his fiefdom and suppressing his subjects and was determined to do whatever he could to have his son in the government to demonstrate to the Ismaili opponents that he was a powerful figure beyond their reach. He is believed to have paid U.S. $1 million to Abdullah, who appointed his son Sadat Naderi as State Minister for Peace on 31 August 2020. Although this development helped Naderi to project his image as a strong man, he is no longer in a position to win public trust and his shady dealings in the political arena have contributed to the erosion of his dwindling power base in the Ismaili community – a factor that heralds the end of his unbridled rule and domination of the community.

Naderi and his family fled the country after Ghani’s fascist and corrupt regime surrendered power to the Taliban and enabled them to enter Kabul on 15 August 2021. The Taliban seized power and declared Afghanistan an Islamic Emirate. Whereas international aid agencies closed down their offices and left the country, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) remained in Afghanistan and the Khoja Ismailis running the Ismaili Imamat facilitated appointment of a fellow Pakistani Ismaili, Akbar Ali Pesnani as AKDN’s Resident Representative for Afghanistan. Since establishment of the AKDN agencies in Afghanistan AKDN’s Resident Representatives were Khoja Ismailis who lacked rudimentary knowledge of the Ismaili community and of the country’s culture and politics and the leadership did not consider appointing a Hazara or Tajik Ismaili expatriate to such a position. The Taliban leadership expressed appreciation for the Ismaili Imamat’s continued engagement in the rebuilding of Afghanistan and provisioning of emergency humanitarian aid to the people of the country.
Ismailis endured years of persecution, religious bigotry and socio-political marginalisation perpetrated by the Sunni and Shia religious and political leaders and exploitation and repression by their own local authoritarian and despotic religious and political leaders. Migration to urban centres provided them with economic opportunities and time to reflect on problems the community encountered in the past. Although the community was small, members bonded together to help each other and sought ways and means to further improve their standards of living. Economic opportunities enabled migrant families in urban centres to send their children to school while the well-to-do families supported further education of their children at institutions of higher education at home and outside the country.

In Kabul and other major urban centres, migrant families came into contact with others and were exposed to other cultures and way of life, which broadened their perspective. Rising Hazara nationalism in the 1960s influenced Hazara Ismaili tribal chiefs, clerics and educated strata to oppose subjugation of Hazara Ismailis to individuals of Sayyed background. The new generation of Ismailis, especially those who received modern education, became members of political parties agitating for social justice and began the fight to reform the rigid social governance system. Struggle for change and modernity by liberal and enlightened tribal leaders and educated strata, despite political repression, significantly contributed to social and political awareness and paved the road to social, cultural and political transformation and modernisation of the community.

The establishment of modern institutions by the Ismaili spiritual leader, the Aga Khan, was a step forward in modernizing the Ismaili community. It liberated Ismailis from tyrannical hereditary religious leaders and influential tribal chiefs who ruled the community with iron-fists. The decadent system of leadership had stifled innovation, critical thinking and freedom of expressions and had transformed people into mechanical robots whose sole responsibility was to do whatever they were instructed to do so. The establishment of modern institutions by the Aga Khan put an end to the primitive system of leadership and provided opportunities for people of all walks of life to play a role in leading the community. The Aga Khan often stated that the system of leadership in future would be based on meritocracy and individuals with the right credentials would lead the community.

Modernisation process during the U.S. occupation enabled Ismailis to play a significant role in the rebuilding of Afghanistan through the Ismaili Imamat institutions, which provided substantial amount of economic and technical
aid to rebuild the country’s shattered infrastructures. Ismailis who had been mistreated and marginalised, and who had been treated as footnotes in the country’s historical literature now have become part of the main text. The status of the community is elevated from being marginal to that of being an integral part of Afghanistan’s socio-economic, cultural and political fabrics.

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