

My experience as an afghan essay sample



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My name is Irfan Khan. I am a 20 years old Afghan Citizen and belong to Pushtun ethnic group. Who body in this world does not know about my country after September 2001 attacks? I illustrate a narrative of my country myself. My country is situated in south-western Asia that is situated on a landlocked plateau between Iran, Pakistan, China, and several countries in Central Asia. The Official name is “ Islamic State of Afghanistan”. The Capital is Kābul while some of the major cities are Herat, Kandahar. The area is about 652, 225 sq km. The Population has been estimated to be 29, 928, 987 in 2005 while the growth rate 4. 77%. Urban distribution share 23% & rural share 77%. The literacy is about 36. 3%. My country is unluckily an awfully destitute country, one of the world’s poorest and least economies with 4, 708 million GDP in US\$. (Shroder, Afghanistan) The Soviet abandonment from my country was observed as an ideological victory in the US, which had backed the Mujahideen, the Islamic fighters, through three US presidential administrations.

The USSR kept on supporting President Najibullah until his end in 1992. Fighting continued among the various Mujahideen factions, eventually giving rise to a state of warlordism. The most serious fighting during this growing civil conflict occurred in 1994, when over 10, 000 people were killed in Kabul. The chaos and corruption that dominated post-Soviet Afghanistan in turn spawned the rise of the Taliban, who were mostly Pashtuns (my ethnic group) from the Helmand and Kandahar region. Your Last Name (2) The Taliban developed as a politico-religious force, and eventually seized Kabul in 1996. By the end of 2000, the Taliban were able to capture 95% of the country, aside from the opposition (Afghan Northern Alliance) strongholds

primarily found in the northeast corner of Badakhshan Province. The Taliban sought to impose a strict interpretation of Islamic Sharia law and were later implicated as supporters of terrorists, most notably by harbouring Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network. During the Taliban's seven-year rule, much of the population experienced restrictions on their freedom and violations of their human rights. Women were banned from jobs, girls forbidden to attend schools or universities.

Those who resisted were punished instantly. Communists were systematically eradicated and thieves were punished by amputating one of their hands or feet. Meanwhile, the Taliban managed to nearly eradicate the majority of the opium production by 2001. After the September 11, 2001 attacks, the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom, a military campaign to destroy the Al-Qaeda terrorist network operating in Afghanistan and overthrow their host (the Taliban government). The US made common cause with the Afghan Northern Alliance to achieve its ends. After a nationwide Loya Jirga in 2002, Karzai was chosen by the representatives to assume the title as Interim President of Afghanistan. In 2003, the country convened a Constitutional Loya Jirga (Council of Elders) and ratified a new constitution the following year. Hamid Karzai was elected President in a nationwide election in October 2004. Legislative elections were held in September 2005.

The National Assembly (congregated in 2005) is the first liberally elected legislature in Afghanistan since 1973. My place has a convoluted pattern of different ethnic groups, languages and Your Last Name (3) other heritages. J. Feiser of Asia Times argues: On a functional level, Afghanistan can not be <https://assignbuster.com/my-experience-as-an-afghan-essay-sample/>

subjectively examined under the Western Conception of either a state or a nation. The country simply does not operate in any sense of either definition at this time. Both a limited security apparatus and stalled international support has done little to cultivate ancient division based on ethnic and religious elements. (49) Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Turkmen, Baluchi, Uzbek groups are some of the major ethnic belongings here. They speak diverse languages: Pashto, Dari, Uzbek, Turkmen, Pashai, Baluchi etc.

However, many people are multilingual and religion is the sanctuary union among the ethnic belongings. About 84% population is Sunnite Muslim while 15% are Shiite Muslims. Percentage review was estimated as follows: Ethnic groups Pashtun 38 percent Tajik 25 percent Hazara 19 percent Minor ethnic groups (Chahar Aimaks, Turkmen, Baluchi, Nuristani, and others) 12 percent Uzbek 6 percent Languages Afghan Persian (Dari) 50 percent Pashto 35 percent Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen) 11 percent 30 minor languages (primarily Balochi and Pashai) 4 percent (Shroder, Afghanistan) We, Pashtuns have conventionally been the dominant ethnic group. Their homeland lies south of the Hindu Kush, but Pashtun groups live in all parts of the country and are usually farmers, though a large number of them are nomads, living in tents made of black goat hair.

Males of our tribe live by ancient tribal code called Pashtunwali, which stresses courage, personal honor, resolution, self-reliance, and hospitality. The Pashtuns speak Pashto, which is an Indo-European language and one of the two official languages of Afghanistan. The Tajiks (Tadzhiks) , are the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. They live in the valleys north of Kabul and in Badakhshan. They are farmers, artisans, Your Last Name (4)

and merchants. The Tajiks speak Dari (Afghan Persian), also an Indo-European Language and the other official language of Afghanistan. Dari is more widely spoken than our language, Pashto in most of the cities. The Tajiks are closely related to the people of Tajikistan. In the central ranges live the Hazaras. Although their ancestors came from the Xinjiang region of northwestern China, the Hazaras speak an archaic Persian. Most are farmers and shepherders.

The Hazaras have been discriminated against for a long time, in part because they are minority Shiites (followers of Shia Islam) within a dominant Sunni Muslim population. In the east, north of the Kabul River, is an isolated wooded mountainous region known as Noristan. The Noristani people who live there speak a wide variety of Indo-European dialects. In the far south live the Baluchi, whose Indo-European language (called Baluchi) is also spoken in southwestern Pakistan and southeastern Iran. To the north of the Hindu Kush, on the steppes near the Amu Darya, live several groups who speak Turkic languages. The Uzbeks are the largest of these groups, which also include Turkmen and, in the extreme northeast Vakhn Corridor, the Kyrgyz people. The Kyrgyz were mostly driven out by the Soviet invasion and largely emigrated to Turkey. All of these groups are settled farmers, merchants, and seminomadic shepherders.

The nomads live in yurts, or round, felt-covered tents of the Mongolian or Central Asian type. Prior to the war important political positions were distributed almost equally among ethnic groups. This kept ethnic tensions and violence to a minimum, though the Pashtuns in Kabul were always the politically dominant group. In the mid- 1990s attempts have been made to

re-establish shared rule; however, many of the Your Last Name (5) ethnic groups have sought a greater share of power than they had before the war, and violence is a common result of the disputes. Because to most Afghans all the war parties are equally hated. Also the ethnic problematic for them is of no importance. It goes wholly into oblivion that for the Afghani population, not the ethnic group, but rather, as before, the family, the clan and the village create the essential identity reference. Even the relevance of ethnicity as a military-political peg remains limited in the Afghan war; Innumerable commanders and battle units change fronts out of political opportunism and economic incentives independent of ethnic category. (Schetter 5)

Though, ethnicity was never a strong factor in Afghan politics before the Saur revolution of 1978. Junior military officers in support of Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) launched the April 1978 coup. In the next few years, the military structure was destroyed by purges, desertions and mutinies. Any group seen as threat to the regime regardless of its ethnic or social origin was brutally suppressed. The list included Islamists, army officers, religious families (Mujaddadi), Hazara, Nuristanis and even rival communists (Parchamis). PDPA was divided into two main factions, Khalq (Masses) and Parcham (Banner). The close look at the social makeup of these two groups gives an interesting insight into how the power dynamics worked in Afghanistan.

The members of Parcham faction were more urban based and belonged to middle and upper middle class. We were the dominant group in Parcham but non-Pushtuns were also represented in cadres. Its leader Babrak Karmal was <https://assignbuster.com/my-experience-as-an-afghan-essay-sample/>

Persian speaking Pushtun of Kakar tribe. His father General Muhammad Hussain Khan has served as governor of Paktia province. Like the old royal court, in Parcham different groups were linked through marriage. Anahita Ratibzad's (the most prominent female communist member) daughter was married to Babrak Karmal's brother Mahmud Baryalai. Sulaiman Laiq's one sister was married to Mir Akbar Khaiber (a leading Parchami ideologue whose murder in 1978 started the coup) while other sister was married to Sibghatullah Mujaddadi. Dr. Muhammad Najibullah, an Ahmadzai was married to a Muhammadzai. Parchami officers had helped Daud in his 1973 coup but later sidelined by Daud.

The Khalq faction was more tribal in structure and dominated by Pushtu speaking Pushtuns. Most of them were Ghilzai or Paktia Pushtuns. Most Khalqis married women from their own tribes and within the party; there were networks of tribes and clans. Their appeal was to lower and lower middle class of Pushtuns with tones of tribal resentments. Seeing the success of Parchamis in infiltrating the armed forces, Khalqis under Amin made inroads in the army. Despite the ideological rhetoric, the two groups acted more like tribal rivals full with some times party meetings ending in shootouts. The first large-scale rebellion against the central government occurred in early October 1978 in Nuristan. A large tribal force (composed of three main tribes, Kom, Muno & Ksto) belonging to Landay Sin Valley overran the government post. The Kati tribesmen joined them and the area became effectively independent.

The central government enlisted the support of other tribes hostile to Nuristanis. Kunar Kohistanis, Gujars and Mishwanis formed tribal militias,

which were led by Gul Muhammad. Nuristanis fought the government forces and these rival militias. After widespread looting, the tribal irregulars retreated and government forces were kept in check. In November 1979, Brigadier Abdul Rauf stationed at Asmar garrison revolted. Nuristanis made a loose alliance with their neighbours, which were led by Syed Shamsuddin Majrooh. There was much internal conflict between different groups. Your Last Name (7) In the last two centuries, Afghanistan has been involved in a low level perennial struggle between the central government based in Kabul and large cities and the local influence of village, ethnic, tribal and clan authority. The ten-year intense war during Soviet occupation and later more than a decade of constant strife resulted in initial gradual erosion and then total collapse of the institutions, which are the hallmark of a nation state.

In this process, several state and non-state actors emerged on the scene totally changing the ground realities. Sharpening of ethnic boundaries is the result of the long and devastating civil war. Ethnicity is not the cause of the conflict, but the consequence of political and military mobilization'. The result of this dramatic change is that classic and generally accepted models of conflict resolution and various definitions are very hard to apply in present day Afghanistan. Understanding of this change is critically important for all those who are involved in any way in present day Afghanistan. Wrong assumptions will lead to wrong conclusions and faulty decisions. Ethnic factor is only one of many complex factors operating in Afghanistan, which include social, economic, strategic, religious and off course vested.

Though we Pushtuns are proud of our historic and linguistic heritage, our immediate allegiance is to the clan. Certain tribes and clans are more

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represented in north. Ishaqzai (various clans), Barakzai, Popalzai, Alizai and Nurzai of Durrani stock and Hotaki, Tukhi, Taraki of Ghilzai stock as well as some Mohmand and Wardak are the our main groups settled in north. At social level, we are divided into two strata; Nang (Honour bound) and Qalang (Tax bound). Nang Pushtuns are members of tribes who are relatively free of domination by others. Most of these Pushtuns belong to tribes residing in mountainous areas on both sides of the Durand Line (boundary line Your Last Name (8) between Afghanistan and Pakistan). Qalang Pushtuns are subjects or rulers of state and either they pay or collect taxes. In any one region, one group may be at different social level. In Kandahar area, both local landlords and tenants are mostly Durrani.

In contrast, in the northern plains, due to direct government patronage, Pushtun landlords had non-Pushtun tenants and labourers, and ‘ landlordism constituted a form of ethnic rule over conquered non-Pushtun populations’. After the Soviet invasion in 1979, the tribal Pushtuns fighting to protect their autonomy against an expanding central government influenced by an alien ideology became staunch antagonists of their ethnic kin who were ruling from Kabul. The overwhelming majority of the refugee population of Afghanistan is Pushtun. In addition, in the civil war in 1990s and ethnic massacres resulted in migration of large number of Pushtuns from northern Afghanistan to east and south. The group called Tajiks is also not a homogeneous one. They have no specific social structure of their own and Tajik of one region may be quite different from the one residing in another region. Majority of them speak Dari and most of them are Sunni Muslims.

The educated elite was concentrated in Kabul, therefore a large number of them were working in different government departments. In Kabul, Parwan and Herat, Tajiks are mainly skilled artisans and traders. In contrast, Tajiks living in northeastern mountains and adjacent valleys are farmers and economically poor. Majority of Tajiks are Sunni but some are Imami Shia. Some Tajiks especially those living in mountainous areas like Shughni, Zibaki and Wakhi are Ismaili Shia. Farsiwan, a Dari speaking Imami Shia group live near Iranian border in Herat and southern and western towns. They are mainly agriculturists. Another Persian speaking Imami Shia group is Qazilbash. They are literate, urban and were professionals and Your Last Name (9) government bureaucrats. Not all Shias are Persian speaking. Pushtu speaking Khalilis live in Kandahar area. Hazaras have mongoloid features and live in the inhospitable central mountainous area of Afghanistan, where they are involved in herding and some agriculture. Some Hazaras moved to Kabul and were performing menial jobs with lower socio-economic status.

Most of them are Shia (mostly Imami but some Ismaili) and speak a dialect of Dari. Hazara have been sufficiently alienated from the Pushtun dominated central government due to widespread discrimination and were one of the first groups to fight the central government in 1978-79. They liberated their area in early part of the struggle and later used their success in negotiating better deal with governments in Kabul. There is a small concentration of Ismaili Shias in Bamiyan (Kayan & Shughnan areas). Uzbeks are concentrated in areas north of Hindu Kush mountains. The ancestors of many Uzbeks migrated to Afghanistan in 1920s when Soviet Union expanded into

Central Asia and there was widespread suppression of local communities of Central Asia.

They are divided into many tribes such as Haraki, Kamaki, Mangit and Ming but their tribal structure is not as rigid as of Pushtuns. Turkemans are at the southern bank of Amu Darya and involved in agriculture and trade. They are mainly involved in husbandry raising famous Karakul sheep and horses. Kirghiz are nomads residing in the Wakhan corridor where they share the land with another group of mountain farmers called Pamiri. The major Pamiri groups are Wakhi (Ismaili Shia), Parachi and Ormuri. Nuristanis (the name is reflective of a regional group rather than a distinct ethnic group) live in the mountainous region in northeast, which constitutes areas of Your Last Name (10) Kunar and Laghman provinces. This area was inhabited by pagan tribes and was called Kafiristan, which had their own language. It was conquered in 1896 and the region was Islamized and re-named Nuristan. Afghan rulers have encouraged these mountain warriors to enlist in army and many Nuristanis rose up in the ranks. Nuristanis share their land with other diverse groups such as Pashai, Kohistani, Gujar and Safi tribe of Pushtuns.

Aimaqs live in the area bordered by Bamiyan, Herat and Mazar Sharif. They speak a dialect of Dari with strong Turkic influence. Firozkohi, Taimuri and Jamshedi are sub-groups of Aimaqs. Baluchs are nomads and semi- nomads residing in the southern desert areas of Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz and Farah. Baluch are divided into many sub-groups such as Rakhshani, Sanjarani, Miangul, Salarzai and Sumarzai. The traditional role of Mullah was limited to leading prayers and educating young boys in Islamic teachings. While the advice of a more learned scholar may be asked occasionally but <https://assignbuster.com/my-experience-as-an-afghan-essay-sample/>

majority of decisions about social life were dealt according to the traditional norms and values.

This was the general trend in Pushtun and non- Pushtun areas and among Sunnis and Shias. Historically, one exception to the role of Mullah was to utilize him to legitimize a struggle against a foreign invader or rally a tribal lashkar (tribal force consisting of able body males gathered for a specific expedition) under the banner of Jihad. There are two major Sufi Tariqas (orders) in Afghanistan. Gilani family heads the Qadiriyya order and current leader is Syed Ahmad Gilani. Gilani family has followers in many Pushtun tribes and is linked by marriage to ruling Muhammadzai clan. Hazrat of Shor Bazar based in Kabul has headed Naqshbandiya order. The last Hazrat along with almost all male members was executed in February 1979. Now Sibghatullah Mujaddadi, the nephew of last Hazrat, Your Last Name (11) heads the order. (Hussain) The war in Afghanistan has largely altered the traditional balance of power among the ethnic groups. Non-Pashtun minorities are more powerful today than they were 20 years back. Three factors have contributed to their empowerment. First was the Soviet policy of divide and rule.

Most of the resistance to the Kabul-Soviet forces came from the Pashtun areas. Therefore, they remained the main targets of the Soviet policy of eviction, bombardment and destruction of infrastructure. They adopted a different approach in the non-Pashtun areas, particularly in the Uzbek region. The Soviets launched development projects and kept pouring in aid to reward the co- operation of Uzbeks. They accepted some degree of autonomy and trained them to fight against the Mujahideen if they intruded

into their areas. Their militia was also used in different war related activities. For the first time in the history of Afghanistan, save during periods of anarchy and rebellion, the Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazaras exercised full administrative and political autonomy. The Uzbeks negotiated their autonomy implicit in their overall relationship with the Kabul regime. The Tajiks under Ahmad Shah Masud had liberated large parts of their territory. The Hazaras were left alone in the central region of the country. There is no evidence of the Soviets physically entering their areas or conducting aerial bombardment.

There are two reasons for this. The Hazaras did not venture out of their strongholds to attack the Kabul-Soviet forces. Second, it is believed, that on their behalf, Iran negotiated a deal with the Soviets, which left them free on the condition that they would stay cool. With Iranian money and advice the Hazaras built their own local political institutions. In recent years, the civil war in Afghanistan has taken an ethnic character, and all the non-Pashtun minorities are Your Last Name (12) pitted against the more powerful and numerous Pashtuns. The Tajiks are the only group holding on to territory, contiguous with Tajikistan. They have established airbases there and get most of their military equipment from diverse sources through Tajikistan. Uzbekistan supports its co-ethnic groups across the border, mainly the Uzbek militia led by Rashid Dostum. But none of the Central Asian states wants a redrawing of the state boundaries along ethnic lines because that would threaten their own territorial integrity.

They are interested in the question of ethnic rights but their prime motivation lies in securing the southern borders and promoting moderate

Afghans. (Baksh 2) Afghan society is based on small-scale communities and is characterized by a series of overlapping obligations of solidarity. This means that groups are formed less along interests but more along family and kinship networks. However we have to be aware that the social structures of communities in Afghanistan are extremely heterogeneous, thus social systems are changing from place to place: Village or valley communities, clans, tribes and religiously defined communities (e. g. Sufi orders) form the most important reference points of political identity and action and today constitute the basis for modern forms of clientelism.

The problem arises when a peace seeking afghan citizen like I become the victim of ethnicity. Like my father strictly prohibits me to make relation or friendship with a non Pushtun guy from my childhood. All ethnic groups equally hate one another and especially in our city, Helmand , a multiethnic city, the problem goes worse. Even in the worst situation of war, we could not oblige each other for help due to ethnic hostility. The minorities suffered poorly in civil war in our region. I remember when I was just 6, a Hazara girl had a love affair with a boy from Your Last Name (13) our tribe. When our tribal chief acquainted with the situation, you won't believe what happened. The total of 23 men lost their lives and were murdered mostly Hazara, because they were in minority. That really shocked me and it was the very first time I saw human blood and it had a very bad effect on my mind. Because of the dominance of clientelism one of the most crucial problems of the political reconstruction process is that our country lacks a viable civil society and political parties that can address, in a credible way, matters which concern Afghan people the most.

Today, collective action seems to be short-lived without a long-term orientation. The permanent conditions of war as well as the heightened insecurity emphasized the need to stick together in small communities that can best be described as clientelistic organized ‘ survival networks’. The necessity for such ‘ survival networks’ grew stronger as the war began to polarize Afghans due to ideological, sectarian and ethnic based recruitment by the political movements and warlords. Distrust grew to an extent that clientelism spread into almost every sphere of Afghan society: politics, economy, education, and even the formation of so-called civil society organizations as NGOs, social and cultural associations and interest groups.

This is why ministries, NGOs or political organizations are today usually occupied by one clientelistic group only. (Schetter 5) I am akin to creative, anticipative, aspiring comments from an American- Afghan, Hameed Mainayar from the debate “ Talking point: Can the Loya Jirga deliver?” Conducted by BBC Online: My dream is to see an Afghanistan respectful of its ethnicity and united and in charge of its future.

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