

National Integration in Pakistan: Problems and Prospects

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INTRODUCTION

National integration stands as a defining challenge for diverse societies, epitomizing the quest to forge a cohesive identity amidst multifaceted cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Pakistan, a nation ensconced in the complex tapestry of South Asia, grapples with this very challenge. Since its inception in 1947, the country has strived to amalgamate an array of identities into unified whole, harmonizing diverse elements to create a shared sense of belonging. However, this pursuit has been accompanied by a series of formidable hurdles, with the intricate historical, cultural, and political dynamics of the region fostering both complexities and opportunities.

The landscape of Pakistan is a mosaic of intricate diversity, reflecting centuries of historical crossroads and intermingling cultures. The nation's geographic location has positioned it as a historical and cultural crossroads, leading to the coexistence of diverse languages, ethnicities, and religions. The region's ancient history, tracing back to the Indus Valley civilization, is characterized by a rich interplay of Hinduism, Buddhism, and later, Islam. This cultural legacy has left an indelible imprint on the Pakistani identity, shaping its complex mosaic of ethnicities and beliefs.

The partition of British India in 1947, which led to the creation of Pakistan, was intended to provide Muslims with a homeland where they could thrive in an environment aligned with their cultural and religious ethos. Yet, this foundation of religious identity carried the potential for tension and division, as the nation's multi-ethnic and

multi-religious composition continued to define its societal landscape. While Islam was intended to serve as a unifying force, the diversity of religious practices and interpretations within the Muslim community itself introduced nuances that needed to be addressed to forge a strong national fabric.

In the subsequent decades, Pakistan's pursuit of national integration was both shaped and challenged by global and regional dynamics. Economic disparities between the eastern and western wings of the country led to the separation of East Pakistan in 1971, highlighting the need to address issues of governance, representation, and resource allocation. Additionally, the geopolitical complexities of the region, including the Cold War and the Afghan conflict, further influenced the nation's trajectory, occasionally leading to internal tensions and disruptions.

The educational system, a crucial tool for instilling national identity and fostering unity, has presented both challenges and opportunities. The language issue, epitomized by the choice of Urdu as the national language, became a touchstone of identity, sparking debates around linguistic rights and cultural representation. The curriculum and educational policies have at times been criticized for not adequately reflecting the nation's diversity and for perpetuating historical inaccuracies. However, the education system also holds the potential to reshape perceptions and instill values of pluralism, tolerance, and inclusivity.

This academic paper endeavors to provide an in-depth analysis of the complex problem of national

integration in Pakistan, elucidating the historical, cultural, political, and social factors that have both hindered and facilitated this process. By examining the challenges posed by linguistic diversity, ethno-religious tensions, and economic disparities, as well as the prospects offered by education, interfaith dialogue, and inclusive policies, the paper seeks to shed light on the multifaceted nature of national integration in Pakistan.

The challenges it faces are not insurmountable, and opportunities for fostering unity and harmony within diversity abound. By recognizing the complexities inherent in its diverse identity and by addressing these challenges through inclusive policies, educational reforms, and interfaith dialogue, Pakistan can strive towards a more integrated and cohesive national identity that respects and celebrates its myriad constituents. This paper, through a comprehensive exploration of the problems and prospects of national integration, aims to contribute to the understanding of this critical issue in contemporary Pakistan.

Historical Context and the Problem of National Integration in Pakistan:

Pakistan, located at the crossroads of South Asia, boasts a vibrant and intricate mix of diversity, encompassing a variety of people, cultures, languages, religions, and traditions. This rich diversity is deeply woven into the fabric of the nation's history, a product of the complex interplay among historical, cultural, and geopolitical forces. From the times of ancient civilizations to the present-day Pakistani state, this diversity has served as both a source of strength and a challenge, shaping the nation's sense of identity and unity.

Throughout the annals of Pakistan's history, numerous tribes bearing distinct cultural backgrounds and ethnic origins have converged within its borders, giving rise to a complex yet interconnected tapestry of cultures and traditions. The foundations of Pakistan's cultural heritage can be traced back to the era of the Indus civilization, spanning approximately five millennia. Over time, the infusion of Islamic ideology has exerted a significant influence on the evolving cultural dynamics of contemporary Pakistan. These shifts in cultural norms have been influenced by a fusion of Arabic-Persian elements and, more recently, Western cultural influences (Masood, 2022).

The course of Pakistan's historical journey has also been shaped by the intricacies of anti-colonial politics

during the era of British India. A pivotal political movement attracted the participation of individuals regardless of their caste, creed, community, or religious affiliation (Behuria, 2005). However, this inclusive participation was juxtaposed with divisions that emerged between Hindu and Muslim elites within the realm of representative politics. While Muslim leaders championed the cause of provincial autonomy, leaders of the Congress party approached this with trepidation, fearing the perpetuation of divisive tendencies. The endorsement by the Muslim League of a federal framework for Pakistan suggested a loose federation, a proposition not embraced by their counterparts in the Congress party. The aftermath of World War II set the stage for the emergence of an Islamic ethnic identity, driven by both frustration and strategic motives (Behuria, 2005).

The inception of Pakistan was founded upon Jinnah's vision of creating a distinct democratic homeland for Muslims, governed by principles of Islamic social justice and equality. However, the Muslim populace of the subcontinent was riddled with divisions arising from the Aligarh and Deobandi traditions, the pro-Indian National Congress territorial nationalism, the Muslim League's association with a distant Muslim identity, and the resistance from religious factions against establishing a separate Muslim state to protect the Muslim Ummah (Jehanzeb *et al.*, 2013 as cited in Nawaz Khan, 2021).

Jinnah's pronouncements during and after the nation's independence presented a paradoxical duality, simultaneously advocating for plurality and acceptance while enforcing policies of exclusion. The Urdu language, steeped in Islamic culture, was hailed as the primary expression of Islamic identity, sidelining the Bengali language and culture to a secondary position (Siddiqi, 2022). This approach to language policy permeated the fledgling state, with the concept of having two official state languages being seen as detrimental to the process of building a Pakistani national identity. Jinnah's discourse condemned 'provincialism,' underscoring a unified Pakistani identity while overlooking the recognition of multiple ethnic and cultural identities. This stance inadvertently fostered an identity framework rooted in negation, exclusion, and the marginalization of ethnic identities as anti-Pakistani (Siddiqi, 2022).

The initial strategies pursued by the Pakistani state for nation building leaned towards prioritizing a federal structure over addressing the concerns of individual provinces, inadvertently neglecting their unique identities,

economic requirements, and political aspirations. This concentration of power at the central level sowed a sense of estrangement among the provinces, leading to disagreements and discontent. The ruling elite, in their pursuit of uniformity, demonstrated reluctance in embracing the diverse composition of Pakistani society, thereby engendering a sense of marginalization among smaller ethnic groups such as Baluchis, Pathans, Sindhis, and Muhajirs. This tangible discontent presents a multifaceted challenge for the ruling establishment (Kukreja, 2020).

Challenges of Cohesion: Ethnic Diversity and the Path to National Integration in Pakistan:

The ethnic diversity present in Pakistan goes far beyond being a mere coincidence; rather, it mirrors the intricate historical narratives of the region. From the antiquities of the Indus Valley civilization to the modern-day establishment of a sovereign nation, the subcontinent has evolved as a melting pot of diverse cultures, languages, and traditions. The inception of Pakistan in 1947, conceived as a sanctuary for Muslims, aimed to carve out a distinct identity grounded in Islamic principles. However, the challenges of assimilating the manifold ethnic identities within this nascent nation became evident from the very start.

The year 1947 signaled the birth of Pakistan, a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic entity encompassing more than 60 languages, with Urdu as its official language. This nation spans two main wings East and west with the East wing exhibiting a more cohesive language and culture. Nonetheless, the entrenched tribal framework has perpetuated disparities and hindered development within these provinces (Ghani, 2021). The tumultuous history of unification, spanning over two decades, unveils the ethnic complexities Pakistan grapples with. Economic policies skewed toward one wing led to inequalities, fueling secessionist movements in East Pakistan. External powers such as the Soviet Union, the United States, China, and India amplified these tensions, ultimately culminating in the secession of the East wing (Ghani, 2021).

Pakistan's social and political fabric is woven from its multi-lingual and multi-ethnic composition, characterized by five core nationalities – Punjabi, Balochi, Sindhi, Pashtun, and Bengali (Hashmi, 2014). Later additions, including the Mohajirs and Siraikis, further enrich the nation's diversity. The decline of Muslim nationalism post-independence coincided with the rise of

the Bengali nationality movement, centered on linguistic and cultural identity. This movement marked a pivotal juncture in Pakistan's ethnic political landscape (Hashmi, 2014).

The question of federalism in Pakistan is rooted in a history of strained relations between the federal government and the provinces. The Constitutions of 1956 and 1962 faltered in establishing equitable power-sharing arrangements, exacerbating the challenge of accommodating diversity. Despite the 1973 Constitution's emphasis on provincial autonomy, substantial and fair power sharing remains elusive (Kukreja, 2020). The dominant ethno-national group, the Punjabis, have retained political supremacy since the nation's inception. However, post-1971, the perception of Punjab's ascendancy in the military and bureaucracy has spawned feelings of 'Punjabisisation of Pakistan.' This perception has led to grievances among other ethnicities, who perceive an unequal distribution of wealth. Ongoing debates concerning the just allocation of resources between the central government and the provinces continue to exacerbate these tensions (Kukreja, 2020).

Language plays a pivotal role in the pursuit of national integration. Although Urdu was adopted as the national language, it did not reflect the mother tongue of a significant portion of the population (Rahman, 1996). This linguistic diversity created friction, notably pronounced in East Pakistan, where the language movement championed Bengali as the national language. This discord underscored the complexities of identity and highlighted the imperative of reconciling diverse linguistic backgrounds within the broader framework of national unity.

While external crises and threats may often ignite nationalist sentiments, achieving enduring national integration requires consistent endeavors. Ensuring equity in opportunities, representation, and resource allocation across regions can mitigate feelings of marginalization and foster a collective sense of unity. Educational curricula that embrace diversity while emphasizing shared values and historical narratives can contribute to forging a collective sense of identity.

Religious Diversity and National Identity: Challenges and Opportunities for Integration in Pakistan:

Religious pluralism in Pakistan is a multifaceted issue that encompasses a range of opportunities and challenges.

The nation's historical context, characterized by a diverse array of religious beliefs and traditions, has fostered a centuries-long environment of religious interactions and coexistence. While Islam occupies a central role in Pakistan's identity, religious minority communities have cohabited with the Muslim majority for generations, forming a backdrop that lays the groundwork for nurturing religious pluralism and tolerance.

However, despite this historical context, religious pluralism in Pakistan is not devoid of challenges. The misappropriation of blasphemy laws, initially designed to safeguard religious sentiments, has resulted in incidents of violence and prejudice directed towards religious minorities. The Ahmadiyya community, with their distinct interpretation of Islamic teachings, faces legal constraints and societal bias. Additionally, sporadic outbreaks of violence targeting religious minority groups have strained the social fabric, testing the cohesion of the nation.

Pakistan's culture and governance are intricately interwoven with religion, predominantly Islam (Umar RiazAbbasi *et al.*, 2021). Prior to the advent of Islam, the region that is now Pakistan was a melting pot of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. Under Muslim rule, a spirit of mutual respect prevailed among people of different faiths (Umar RiazAbbasi *et al.*, 2021). However, the partition during British rule altered the ethnic and religious dynamics of the region. Muhammad Ali Jinnah's concept of the "two-nation theory" aimed to unite Indian Muslims within the framework of the Pakistani state (Umar RiazAbbasi *et al.*, 2021). Yet, Jinnah's vision of Pakistan as a nation encompassing people of all religions, guided by secular and democratic principles, proved challenging to actualize. This complexity made it difficult to depict Pakistan as a nation embracing diverse religious traditions.

In present-day Pakistan, religious divisions persist not only between Muslims and non-Muslims but also within different factions of each faith. The Muslim community is itself divided into major branches of Sunni and Shia, each with varying interpretations and practices (Umar RiazAbbasi *et al.*, 2021). Within Sunni Islam, there are multiple denominations following different philosophical and cultural approaches (Umar RiazAbbasi *et al.*, 2021).

Fostering religious pluralism necessitates comprehensive educational reforms that cultivate values of tolerance, empathy, and respect for all belief systems. Encouraging interfaith dialogues and collaborative endeavors can foster understanding and bridge gaps

among various religious communities. Concurrently, enacting reforms to rectify discriminatory laws and policies is pivotal to ensuring equitable rights and safeguards for all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliations.

In essence, religious pluralism in Pakistan encompasses a rich historical heritage and a spectrum of challenges that impact the nation's social fabric and unity. The path forward involves fostering understanding, empathy, and respect among diverse religious communities, while concurrently addressing structural inequalities and biases within the legal and social systems. By embracing religious pluralism, Pakistan can navigate these complexities to forge a harmonious and inclusive society.

Prospects of National Integration in Pakistan: Navigating Diversity for Unity:

National integration, the harmonious coalescence of diverse identities into a cohesive whole, remains an enduring aspiration for nations around the world. In the context of Pakistan, a nation marked by its intricate web of cultures, languages, and religions, the pursuit of national integration is a multifaceted endeavor that holds both challenges and significant prospects. As the country traverses its historical trajectory, the prospects of achieving a more unified national identity are influenced by a confluence of factors, including evolving social dynamics, educational reforms, interfaith dialogue, and inclusive policies.

One of the most promising prospects for fostering national integration in Pakistan lies in harnessing the transforming social dynamics of the modern age. The advent of globalization and the proliferation of digital communication platforms have brought people from different backgrounds closer than ever before. Social media and technology have facilitated cross-cultural interactions, allowing individuals to engage with diverse perspectives and experiences. This digital interconnectedness can serve as a catalyst for dismantling stereotypes and prejudices, enabling citizens to transcend ethno-cultural boundaries and embrace a broader sense of belonging.

Educational reforms emerge as a crucial avenue through which Pakistan can nurture a shared national identity. The curriculum and pedagogy wield immense potential in shaping the attitudes and perceptions of the younger generation. By embracing inclusivity and

promoting an accurate and unbiased representation of history, culture, and religion, the education system can foster an appreciation for diversity and interdependence. Embedding lessons of tolerance, empathy, and respect for all cultural and religious groups within the curriculum can pave the way for future generations to celebrate their nation's diversity while recognizing their common bonds.

Interfaith dialogue stands as another promising prospect for enhancing national integration. In a country where religious identity plays a central role, promoting open conversations among different religious communities can foster mutual understanding and tolerance. Such dialogues can dispel misperceptions and promote shared values of compassion, peace, and coexistence. By creating spaces for meaningful interactions and collaborations among diverse religious groups, Pakistan can fortify its societal fabric and demonstrate the richness of its pluralistic heritage.

Inclusive policies that recognize the aspirations of all ethnic and linguistic groups contribute significantly to the prospects of national integration. Addressing historical grievances and ensuring equitable distribution of resources can mitigate feelings of marginalization and enhance citizens' trust in the state. Embracing federalism while safeguarding provincial autonomy can strike a balance between unity and diversity. A decentralized governance structure that empowers local communities can lead to effective representation and participation, fostering a sense of ownership and shared destiny.

Furthermore, cultural initiatives and the arts offer avenues to bridge divides and nurture a collective identity. Literature, music, and visual arts have the power to transcend linguistic barriers and connect people through shared emotions and experiences. Supporting cultural exchanges and initiatives that celebrate Pakistan's diverse heritage can foster a sense of pride in the mosaic of identities that make up the nation.

Tprospects of achieving national integration in Pakistan are not only attainable but also essential for the nation's progress and stability. By tapping into the transformative power of evolving social dynamics, implementing educational reforms, encouraging interfaith dialogue, and enacting inclusive policies, Pakistan can build a more inclusive and harmonious society. This journey requires collective efforts from all segments of society – from policymakers and educators to religious leaders and citizens. By embracing the rich diversity that

defines the nation, Pakistan can move closer to its vision of a unified identity that transcends ethnic, linguistic, and religious boundaries. As the country navigates the complexities of its cultural landscape, the prospects of national integration beckon as a promising path toward a stronger, more cohesive future.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the issue of national integration in Pakistan remains a complex and multifaceted challenge that has persisted throughout the country's history. Despite the visionary words of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah advocating for a unified Pakistani identity, the nation has grappled with linguistic, ethnic, and cultural divisions that have often hindered the development of a cohesive sense of nationhood. The evolution of Pakistan as a state founded on religious grounds further complicated the process of integration.

The journey towards sustained national integration requires a holistic approach that addresses historical grievances, socio-economic disparities, and governance shortcomings. Key factors include the promotion of tolerance, equal opportunities, and social justice, alongside the establishment of a robust educational system that fosters a sense of shared identity and values among citizens. Lessons can be drawn from the experiences of other diverse nations that have successfully managed to maintain unity through democratic governance, inclusive policies, and a commitment to cultural diversity.

Pakistan's potential for a harmonious and integrated future rests on the shoulders of its leadership, institutions, and citizens. By embracing the country's diversity as a source of strength and collectively working towards common goals, Pakistan can transcend its linguistic, ethnic, and regional differences and forge a unified national identity that reflects the vision of its founder and paves the way for a prosperous and cohesive nation.

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