

CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN PAKISTAN AND STRATEGIC RESPONSE

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Abstract

National integration is the pursuit for harmony within the State. Irrespective of religion, race, creed, ethnic background and language, national integration binds every segment of society for a unified cause of serving and development of a nation state; therefore, it has great relevance and a direct bearing on national security. Integration is also a consistent development in which diverse sections of society are provided with identical prospects and equal rights to enjoy several amenities devoid of any discrimination. The process of national integration will be strengthened on the precondition that governance at national level should be able to provide strong sense of national identity and national pride by equal development and ensuring equal rights for all communities, regions and the federating units. The significant task confronted by the leaders of most of the post-colonial countries is to generate national identity out of varied linguistic, regional and cultural identities¹. A number of developing nations particularly in Africa and Asia are confronted with problems of national integration and Pakistan is no exception. This research article sketches out the theoretical aspects related to national integration and draws its relevance by identifying challenges and implications for Pakistan. In the last part, suggestions in the form of recommendations have been proffered for enhancing national integration in the country.

Keywords: National Integration, National Security, Nationalism, National Development

Introduction

The struggle launched by Muslims of India for a separate homeland under the banner of All India Muslim League and the charismatic leadership of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah succeeded on 14 August 1947 in the shape of a sovereign country, Pakistan, appearing on the world map.

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However, Pakistan commenced its life from infancy in an extremely challenging environment demanding enormous struggle for consolidation and survival. The task of nation building remained relegated and later on, driven by evolving circumstances, proved to be a very difficult process. Early deaths of the central leadership, financial and administrative difficulties in the 1950s, political instability and crises pulling the military in power, Indian aggressions of 1948 and 1965 and finally the dismemberment of the country in 1971; complicated the national integration process manifold and generated several issues, which later on pushed the nation into identity crises. On the internal front, sub-nationalist tendencies sponsored by foreign powers, socio-economic disparities, impact of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and revolution in Iran were some of the regional factors which kept the governments distracted from core focus on internal issues through deliberate consultative and negotiated settlements. While national identity challenges as an Islamic state, moderate state, socialist state etc have also been contributory factors, socio-economic inequalities, political instability and rising trends of terrorism extremism are also additional deviators affecting the national integration in Pakistan.

Significance of Research Article

In the contemporary national and regional environment, Pakistan will be in a far better position to confront the challenges of the evolving strategic landscape if internal cohesion and harmony are capitalized for synergetic responses. Security forces and other state institutions with full support of the nation have responded to existing and emerging challenges in a befitting manner, however, many unaddressed socio-political and socio-economic factors have generated a degree of concern among the masses which needs to be addressed at priority for enhancing national integration and denying space to anti-state elements using the fissures as an excuse. This article is an effort to highlight existing challenges of national integration with suggested course of action for enhancing national harmony and integration. The article has been constructed by addressing following question:-

- What are the theoretical and conceptual aspects related to national integration for common understanding and comprehension of the subject at hand?
- What are the challenges of national integration in Pakistan from historical to contemporary times?
- What should be Pakistan's strategic response towards enhancing national integration?

Core Concepts Related to National Integration

To discuss the subject of national integration, it is pertinent to define related concepts which include nation, integrate and national integration.

Nation. The nation is described as a collection of people, sharing common traditions, customs, values and feelings and pursue shared objectives of national development². The nation is referred to an entity that has cultural and social underpinnings instead of legalistic insinuations³.

Integration. Integration means diverse collections within a dominion that are privileged by law with similar rights irrespective of their financial, social and educational background or regional associations. Integration is the process, under which all state institutions are struggling to provide uniform and equal attention to the residents of the state irrespective of their race, creed, and origin.⁴ Integration is therefore a continuously evolving process aimed at reinvigorating national rejuvenation and pride by establishing norms and commitment to pattern of political behavior⁵.

National Integration. National Integration is the determination of the people aimed at living together sharing traditions, ideals, culture, history, religion, language and customs etc.⁶ National integration can, therefore, be summarized as a sea containing rivers of diverse cultures and backgrounds blended together for a supreme cause of national harmony, unity and pride.

National Integration Models According to Different Sociological Perspectives

Assimilation Model. It is founded on social integration. Distinguishing cultures are blended to be incorporated with the national culture through a process of assimilation. The assimilation can be accomplished through socialization and abandoning of Socio-political cultural loyalties of various small ethnic groups, with their absorption into the major / dominant group. In an orderly transition, some willingly accept and adopt dominant culture, while others revolt if imposed forcefully by the state or dominant group. The overriding criteria remains the willing absorption and acceptance of assimilation process with the bigger aim of integrating into mainstream economic, political and social affairs in the country for even development and creating a harmonized society.

Differentialist Model. This is based on the perception to curtail the acquaintances with ethnic minorities. In this model, the conflicts are coped and resolved through a procedure of eradication of ethnic minorities⁷. Its manifestation has been witnessed during genocide in Rwanda, where 800,000 people were killed moreover apartheid policies in South Africa and segregation policy against African American in USA and to some extent post 9/11 policies against Muslim immigrants are few examples.

Pluralist Model. A pluralist society is described as a social order comprising segregated cultural groups living together, yet without blending in one political unit. One segment dominates the power and controls state institutions⁸. State practices are generally geared to accommodate the interests of the main ethnic groups.

Federalism Modal. This is another system which appreciates diversity within the federal structure of state and the federating units. The governments of federating units and the central government are acknowledged as legitimate and supreme establishments within respective jurisdictions. The common pronouncement of federalism is unity with diversity. Pakistan, Australia, India and Nepal are some of the examples of federalism.

Factors Affecting National Integration

Culture. Culture is described as "a way of life, especially the beliefs and customs of specific group of people at a particular time". National integration in multi-cultural societies has been an attempt to forge "*unity in diversity*", pursuing to minimize socio-cultural differences and implementing uniformity despite cultural diversity of even a complex nature.

Language. In multilingual civilizations and societies, language is an extremely important tool which has inbuilt paradox of unifying the nation by promoting national consciousness and unity or disintegrating the fabrics of society by creating a sense of alienation and marginalization. The traumatic incident of separation of East-Pakistan as Bangladesh had its origins in the language riots, which later transformed into full-fledged rebellion against the West Pakistan.

Religion. Religious harmony with interfaith dialogue and accommodation is an essential requirement for furthering national integration. Enduring harmony and sustainable national solidarity can only be built on ethical values which protect human dignity. Religious freedom is right of every citizen and earnest obligation of every government. This freedom must be ensured and respected, as it has enormous potential for national integration therefore; mutual respect and religious freedom have enormous potential for enhancing national integration.

Ethnicity. Ethnicity is a challenging factor, whose character is conflictual instead of being consensual. It is a conscious conduct established on identity or loyalty, which is aimed at advancing the interests of the group or the individuals. One example can be quoted from the United States, where diverse ethnic groups and nationalities of different backgrounds are blended together to form one American identity and shared values of enjoying equal democratic rights.

Challenges of National Integration for Pakistan

Having discussed the background and theoretical aspects of national integration, the stage is now set for the core subject, which relates to the challenges of national integration for Pakistan. This part comprehensively analyzes these challenges as they are presented as a result of strategic scan of domestic, regional and international environments.

Language Riots

After promulgation of Urdu as a national language of then united Pakistan, East Pakistanis strongly protested demanding Bengali as an official language for East Pakistan. This eventually became a political movement in 1952, however, its subsequent handling led to violent conflicts with security forces and ultimately triggered sequential events, which resulted in the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971. The years between 1947 and 1971 were traumatic and highly destabilizing for the integration of federation. However the subsequent years were devoted towards consolidating the West Pakistan.

Regional Identities

Growing inclination towards regional identities instead of united Pakistan was another challenge. Pushtonistan in erstwhile Frontier Province, Sindhu Desh in Sindh Province and several sub-nationalist groups were operating in Balochistan. All such elements were supported by India, Afghanistan and other international agencies with the aim of keeping Pakistan in perpetual state of destabilization. While Pushtonistan and Sindhu Desh issues have been handled pragmatically by each successive government in Pakistan, however, sporadic incidents of attacks on innocent civilian and government installations in Balochistan are still going on at a low scale. While several political initiatives by the governments are appreciable, however, more efforts are required to take the reconciliation process to a logical conclusion.

Sub Nationalist Tendencies

Since the inception of Pakistan, the federation could not amicably settle issues of language or provincial status, which set the stage of sub nationalism in Pakistan. In due course, perceived oppressed nationalities and neglected provinces gave birth to a number of sub nationalist movements, which continued to appear on the national scene. Prolonged negligence, parochial political interests, tribal culture and weak governance, exploited by anti - state elements and abetted by their foreign supporters has given rise to sub - nationalism and a militant culture that thrive on vandalism and brutality threaten the social fabrics and national integration process in the country. The security force's operations since 2001 in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Raddul Fasad inside mainland Pakistan are cases in point, where the menace of terrorism is being persistently handled with full support of Pakistani nation.

Ideological Identity

After 68 years of independence, voices are still resounding that revolve around political and ideological construct of the State and the role that Islam has to play in it. As per Stephen P Cohen,

“The most significant struggle in Pakistan is not a civilizational clash between Muslims and non-Muslims but a clatter between diverse conceptions and interpretations of Islam, predominantly how Pakistan should implement Islamic identity in State's outlook”.

Unfortunately, the historical precedence empirically proves that Islamic ideology as founding father's vision, socialism during era of 1970s, Islamization during 1980s and moderate Islam during years 1999 onwards have kept us debating on the very fundamentals of our identity. As a result the policy makers remained embroiled in the issues which have become very sensitive, heatedly debated and have made the society intolerant, while distracting from other core issues affecting socio -economic prosperity and development. However Pakistan's ideology remains firmly rooted in its Islamic identity, such debates have invariably cast negativity and have been

a sources of persistent friction in the society and have kept the nation divided along religious-ethnic lines.

Sectarianism and Extremism

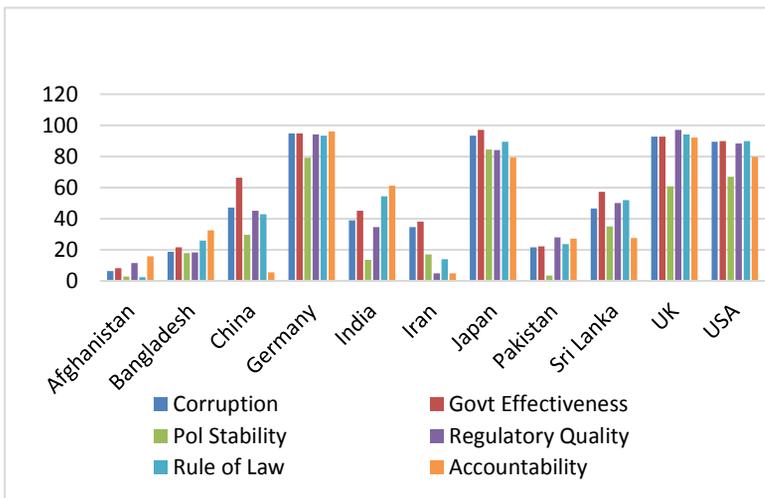
The underlying issue in Pakistan has been delegation of religious interpretation to *madrassa* trained clergy, which provided them the exclusivity and monopoly over religious issues. Matters worsened in post Afghan Jihad scenario, when due to indulgence of external players the religiously divisive forces thrived. Over a period of time, sectarianism has evolved as the most intricate challenge to Pakistan's security and stability. Seeds of conflict were sown when various religious denominations gave divergent interpretations of Islam and insisted on the sole validity of their respective understanding of faith. Instead of serving as a unifying force such myopic religious discourse has acted as a constituent of division and disharmony in Pakistani society⁹. Religion itself is not dogmatic and anti-innovation, however, discerning interpretations and extremist tendencies in individual behavior sharpened due to the West's attempt to brand Islam and post 9/11 interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Subsequent developments resulted in promoting extremism, militancy, terrorism and hatred within Pakistan further complicating the integration process.

Governance and Economic Development

Weak governance in Pakistan is reflected in precarious law and order situation, social deficit, lack of equal opportunities for progress, development and disillusionment among the people.¹⁰ The situation has become even serious due to ongoing incidents of terrorism, though controlled to a large extent, yet sneaking opportunities are exploited by terrorists, which have affected the fabrics of society and have repeatedly generated heated media debates pointing fingers on the efficacy of security arrangements thus adding to frustration in the society. Delayed justice, inefficient institutions, rampant corruption and lack of accountability are some of the major contributory factors to the overall prevalent demoralization in the society creating breeding grounds for religious schisms and space for provincial and ethnic sentiments affecting the

harmony and integration. Additionally, imbalanced provision of resources, uneven infrastructural and industrial developments and lack of employment opportunities. All this resulted in uneven development, disparity in economic well-being of people and the created space was exploited by sub-nationalists sponsored by their foreign abettors. At the same time failure to address water distribution and energy resources coupled with demands for the right to royalty has further exacerbated the prosperity and integration of the country. Moreover, the disproportionate growth in population vis-à-vis national resources has unfavourable effects for economic development and gives rise to a number of social ills. The lack of development especially in Balochistan and Tribal Areas, which are the poorest regions with under-developed infrastructure and lack of economic opportunities, therefore, poverty levels are highest in these areas. Thus lackadaisical approach by successive governments has generated alienation among the population and triggered militancy with serious consequences and repercussions affecting national integration.

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World Bank - Worldwide Governance Indicators

Socio –Cultural Dimensions

Pakistan's national integration predicament has to take into account both macro and micro level politico-economic and social dimensions, which are disproportionate and unevenly distributed. Disparity between rich and poor, misuse of power, lawlessness, selective application of law and multiplicity of administrative mechanisms such as in FATA, PATA, FRs and Cat B Areas in Balochistan are breeding a culture of negativism in Pakistan. Heterogeneity in social, cultural and ethnic outlook are the main attributes of society in Pakistan. Ethnic divide in Pakistan has grown due to non-acceptance of cultural and linguistic heterogeneity, power struggle between dominant and non-dominant groups and problematic relations between center and provinces are major areas of concern. Moreover, Pakistani social life is further fragmented around family and kin. In certain traditional aspects, kinship forms the fundamental source of identity especially in remote regions across all the federating units in Pakistan, resulting in relegating the primacy of national interests.

International Dimensions

India has consistently sought to fan separatist tendencies and overt support to secessionist elements in Pakistan. The capture of Kalboshan from Balochistan and asylum request by Baramdagh Bugti and Harbiyar Murri for stay in India are testimony to Indian involvement in fueling sub nationalist propensities in Pakistan. The ongoing sectarian fissures in Islamic World is also casting negative aberrations affecting Pakistan's religious harmony. Moreover, delicate balancing between international alliances and sectarian management within the country is the need of time, which warrants extraordinary pragmatism in management of this religiously sensitive and politically explosive environment.

Concluding Reflections

The prevalent sectarianism and extremism exploited by external players has affected internal stability. If kept unchecked, it can tear apart the fabric of national cohesion even further. Self-serving interest groups based on

ethnic, social and cultural affinities are causing fragmentation in the society. Mismanagement in the governance has resulted in dysfunctional institutions leading to socio-economic disparities and prevalent sense of deprivation amongst neglected segments. Population growth and disproportionate economic opportunities are leading to despair and rise in social ills. In the absence of standardized judicial and administrative system, tribal and feudal culture has thrived.

Strategies for Enhancing National Integration

National Identity and Nationalism

There is no denying that Pakistan was created on the basis of Islam and Pakistani constitution respects religious freedom for all communities living here. The debate of form of Islam appropriate for the country should be discouraged and more focus should be given to development and socio-economic prosperity instead of embroiling into endless discussions. Every citizen should feel honoured in his love and affection for Pakistan, which must be generated through national songs, historical documentaries and instilling pride in being Pakistani. This warrants hectic activities, inclusive policies, across the board development and equal opportunities for all. It is recommended that all educational institutions from schools to universities must make comprehensive plans to rejuvenate the young generation and instill nationalism and national pride through curricular and co-curricular activities.

The relevant departments need to evolve a religious narrative against the sectarian and extremist interpretations.

Religious Harmony

Religious scholars should present Islam in true spirit and discourage sectarian sentiments. The relevant departments need to evolve a religious narrative against the sectarian and extremist interpretations. It is also recommended that extensive media programs should be organized, where religious scholars from across all sects and backgrounds should educate on

religious harmony, tolerance and instill integration rather than division on religious lines.

Political Stability

Democracy is the best form of governance and best type of the government for Pakistan. Political stability must continue at all costs. While the distribution of resources and the share in federal governance is presently tilted in favour of Punjab due to obvious reason of 60 % of population, however, the likely political impact has to be evaluated correctly by keeping the interests of smaller provinces at par. Though 18th Amendment has taken care of this issue to a greater satisfaction, yet it requires magnanimity and pragmatism on part of Punjab for the sake of national cohesion to sacrifice for under developed federating units. Extraordinary focus on Balochistan and Tribal Areas is required for poverty alleviation and removing past injustices to the people by granting special developmental packages. The most important aspect here is political reconciliation through two pronged approach i.e., dialogue and development. Substantial special development programs are to be started (despite NFC award, CPEC and Aghaz-e-Haqooq Balochistan) to uplift people's standards. Quota of Balochistan in Civil Service ensures a sense of participation in decision making but it has also proved to be a problem as the number of officers needed in Balochistan is not available on the basis of quota. Lateral entry on merit may be allowed to fill vacancies by the local residents. The province may also be given partial ownership in some federally administered enterprises like NSGP, PPL, Gwadar port etc.

Governance Issues

The Government working should include results oriented, incentivization of behaviour, development of guidelines for performance, ongoing accountability of all departments, devolved and decentralize powers, capacity building and changing the culture of bureaucracy. Further emphasis should be on delivery of basic services, provision of justice, and increasing efficiency. Many Reform Commissions reports on good governance are available; however, the overarching issues of political will

and capacity to implement reforms need to be addressed. It is also felt that the judicial system especially the lower judiciary should be revamped as provision of justice is fundamental pillar of national integration. Relegated and deprived segments of society should be given especial incentives for their eventual mainstreaming aimed at enhancing national integration of state. Social action programs for women empowerment, population control, health etc. are need of the hour. Problems of rising unemployment need to be tackled prudently and at priority.

Economic Development

Economic development eventually creates all sorts of prosperity for the nation. The consistent rise in GDP growth rate not only boosts trade etc, but also creates job markets, which ultimately absorb every segment of society through respectable employment opportunities. It is, therefore, necessary that we should bridge gap between various classes, areas and provinces through

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equitable resource mobilization and distribution. Mega projects like CPEC should instead enhance national integration provided they are managed through pragmatic way. Secondly, the present taxation system needs complete overhauling. It has to be just, progressive, transparent and simple. And lastly, the tax to GDP ratio has to be increased by all international standards by implementation of friendly policies instead of regressive regime.

Reviving the Role of Media

Media should play more enhanced and effective role in cultural amalgamation. A strong counter sectarian and terrorism narratives have to be broadcasted. It may promote communal peace; counter the foreign media influence and promote the real soft image of Pakistan. Media code of conduct is in the right direction, but we should move towards legal framework to make it more accountable.

Conclusion

There are some serious challenges like sectarianism and governance issues. We need to give immediate attention to our education system and madrassa reforms. Balochistan is another weak area and needs dialogue and development to bring it back completely in the mainstream. However, despite many challenges, the centrifugal forces are weakening. We have taken a number of steps for provincial autonomy and economic development. We don't hear slogans of 'Sindhu Desh' and 'Pashtunistan' any more. We are moving in the right direction and hopeful for a better Pakistan. National Integration is not a one-time exercise, rather it is a continuous slow process and achieved over a long period of time. Dedicated efforts towards prosperity, sense of pride, harmony and national integration is the need of time, which must be pursued vigorously as a supreme national cause.

NOTES

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