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Ethnic Diversity and National Integration in Pakistan

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Abstract

This research examines the challenges of ethnic diversity in Pakistan and its impact on national unity. It explores the historical roots of ethnic divisions and highlights ongoing issues such as unequal resource distribution, marginalization of regional languages, and lack of political representation for ethnic minorities. Proposing solutions this research emphasizes the need for interethnic dialogue, fair resource allocation and inclusive political systems. It advocates for educational and media reforms to promote mutual respect, understanding and a unified national identity that transcends ethnic boundaries, aiming for a cohesive and prosperous society.

Keywords: Ethnic Diversity, National Integration, Pakistan, Ethnic Politics

Introduction

Ethnic diversity is a defining feature of many nations, and its impact on national unity and integration is particularly significant in countries with complex demographic compositions. Pakistan is home to different ethnic groups, languages, and cultures. The main ethnic groups in Pakistan include Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Baloch, and Mohajirs, along with smaller groups like the Hazaras, Brahuis, and others. This diversity, while contributing to the country's cultural richness, also presents challenges to national integration and unity.

Since its creation in 1947, Pakistan has struggled to strike a balance between celebrating ethnic diversity and fostering a cohesive national identity. The various ethnic communities often identify more strongly with their regional, linguistic, or cultural affiliations than with a common national identity, which has sometimes led to tensions and conflicts. Issues such as resource distribution, political representation, language policies, and historical grievances have further complicated the process of national integration.

This paper aims to explore the complex relationship between ethnic diversity and national integration in Pakistan. It will examine how the country's ethnic composition has influenced its social and political fabric, the role of ethnic identity in shaping national policies, and the challenges faced by the state in promoting unity among its diverse peoples. By understanding these dynamics, this paper will also explore potential strategies for fostering stronger national integration while respecting and preserving Pakistan's ethnic diversity.

Review of Literature

Ahmed and Khan (2019) discussed the ethnic factor as the main factor influencing Pakistan's political situation and the difficulties it poses to the integration process. They asserted that the ethnic politics in Pakistan is a resource, power and recognition politics. The ethnic groups in some provinces such as Balochistan and Sindh have always felt neglected because of the slow rate of economic growth hence leading to some form of secessionism and even more feelings of isolation. Their study establishes that resource disequilibrium and authoritarian central politics have deepened ethnic polarisation in Pakistan. The authors also pointed out that many of the ethnic tensions are due to past lack of attention and discrimination by the government. For instance, the Baloch insurgency and Sindhi-Muhajir conflict, all pointed out that these policies are a hindrance to the process of achieving national integration. They suggested decentralizing political power and demanding proportional representation are two important conflict-solving measures regarding ethnicity issues. Their work shows that in order to foster unity and address socioeconomic factors that compromise it, there is a need to have good policies that are fair for all.

Hussain (2021) discussed the subject of multiculturalism and integration in Pakistan with a focus on the advantages and the issues of diverse ethnicity. Although he noted that ethnic diversity is a strength of the country's cultural landscape he argued that if not well addressed it can lead to social breakup. Hussain also talked about the importance of education to improve tolerance between different ethnic groups and to make people respect each other; thus, he proposed to introduce multicultural education into schools and universities to prepare people for a society that promotes consolidation and diversity at the same time. Hussain also elaborated on the aspects of political representation and governance in relation to ethnic questions. He pointed out that people at the receiving end complain of being left out of the decision-making process and hence agitate for self-rule. His research called for encouraging ethnic relations and making them equal to encourage ethnic harmony. From the work of Hussain, it is necessary to conclude that only with the help of systemic changes, is it possible to expect the increase of unity and stability of the nation and the enhancement of its political factors.

Jaffrelot (2016) investigated the historical and political factors that are linked to ethnic diversity and nationalism in Pakistan. He pointed out that many people try to establish a national identity of Muslim nations without taking into consideration the ethnically charged split of the country. Thus, by showing how the Bengali language movement and secession of East Pakistan led to disastrous effects, Jaffrelot explained the price one pays when one's language and culture are suppressed. He stressed embracing these identities to prevent the experiences from recurring in the society in future. Jaffrelot also explained how political centralization has excluded ethnic groups in Pakistan. He argued that attempts at making a single nation have always elicited hostility from various ethnic groups. His study calls for an inclusive nationalism that recognises Pakistan's multi-lingual and multi-cultural realities. Jaffrelot's research is actually helpful in understanding how ethnic diversities affect national politics and how diversity has to be embraced for unity.

Rais (2017) explained the ethnic Politics of Pakistan to understand how ethnic identities are related to political activity and government. He noted that ethnic identity is a key determinant of electoral, political and policy behaviours resulting in a polarized political system. Rais pointed out that this fragmentation hampers the achievement of common ground on some of the most

important national concerns. He also indicated that political parties use ethnicity as a tool to mobilize supporters during election periods hence perpetuating ethnic differences within society at large. Rais also expounded on how this ethnic-based political system affects governance and development. He pointed out that the failure to incorporate representation leads to policies that do not cater for the ethnic groups' needs hence deepening mistrust and alienation. In order to resolve these problems, Rais suggested political changes in terms of representation and political institutions to increase fairness. His work also gives a clear perspective on the problems that ethnic diversity has brought in Pakistan and how the political system needs to be reformed so as to improve the cohesiveness of the nation.

Ethnic Diversity and Its Historical Impact on National Integration in Pakistan

Ethnic diversification in Pakistan has historical antecedents from the early pre-partition period of history when different ethnic, cultural and lingual groups had their own distinct identity and culture under different ruling dynasties. When Pakistan was created in 1947, people belonging to different ethnic groups with different languages, cultures and histories came together to form a nation which could be said to be woven from diverse threads. Despite this diversity being considered as one of the cultural strengths, the issue has been a thorn in the realisation of national unity. After gaining independence Pakistan had the task of unifying such diverse people and it did so often neglecting the role of ethnic diversity. This failure resulted in tension and dissatisfaction, especially in East Pakistan, Sindh and Balochistan province (Talbot, 2009). The second major experience that directed focus on ethnic diversity's effect on Pakistan's unity was the Bangla language movement of the 1950s and 1960s in East Pakistan. The act of declaring Urdu as the sole national language of the country did not consider the linguistic and cultural sentiments of the majority of the Bengali-speaking population of East Pakistan which was aggrieving for the central government. This alienation led to a lot of protest and most significantly political instabilities that were evident in most nations. The denial of state language for Bengali also heightened the feeling of frustration and at the same time highlighted the inability of the state to handle ethnic pluralism. The fact about this movement was that linguistic recognition was central to the establishment of national unity (Ahmed, 2013). These ethnic groups have remained divided ever since the colonial period leaving a mark on the ethnic groups

in Pakistan. The British colonial authority entrenched ethnic demarcation by using a divide-and-rule system, whereby they divided the population along ethnic and tribal lines. All these divisions existed even after the split of India into two separate countries. The colonialism exacerbation of resource distribution in ethnic groups' favour was maintained during the independent Pakistan. Historical injustices compounded ethnic sentiments through which it became hard to accomplish national integration (Sayeed, 1995). The post-independence governance has posed another challenge to the existing interaction between ethnic diversity and the formation of national unity. Centralization of power made the smaller provinces and ethnic groups develop feelings of being neglected. For instance, Balochistan – the largest province in terms of the area of Pakistan has always demanded more independence and control over its resources. Likewise, the Sindhis have complained that the Urdu-speaking Muhajirs have taken over cities like Karachi. These continued problems point to the fact that, over the years, different governments have not been able to adequately respond to ethnic needs (Harrison, 1981). Attempts to develop the concept of national unity through religion did not take into account the ethnic factor in Pakistan. Islam was the religion of the country and acted as some sort of glue that did not hold the people together since the country was ethnically diverse and had many different languages. Religious nationalism was dominant which tended to suppress ethnic diversity and therefore the state was in conflict with different ethnic groups. This approach was detrimental to the multicultural policy of Pakistan and led to the loss of East Pakistan in 1971. The events of this period provide valuable lessons teaching us the importance of ethnic diversity which is needed as much as unity of the nation (Shaikh, 2009). To mitigate the historical effects of ethnic diversity on national integration, there is a need to develop policies that advance the principles of governance and development. The policy of cultural diversities and the policy of equal rights for all ethnic groups are the policies that can lead towards the enhancement of unity throughout Pakistan. Furthermore, acknowledging and redressing all the injustices done to minority groups is a critical step towards healing and social integration. It means that Pakistan, having recognized its multicultural roots, can turn ethnic diversity into an opportunity to enhance the social and political development of the country (Alavi, 1991).

The Role of Unequal Economic Development in Exacerbating Ethnic Grievances

Inequalities in economic growth have remained one of the biggest sources of ethnic tension in Pakistan for a long time. Some regions like Balochistan and Sindh are less developed as compared to Punjab which had a privileged position in both political and economic affairs. The ethnic groups in these provinces have felt marginalized economically, and do not feel that their contribution to the national economy is valued adequately. The lack of investment in infrastructure, healthcare and education in these regions has only aggravated the divide, and also there is resentment and distrust towards the central Government (Siddiqui, 2012). The province of Balochistan sitting on enormous deposits of natural gas is one such example. While the province contributes to over 60 per cent of Pakistan's natural gas production, it is among the least developed provinces in terms of Human Development Index. The local people often complain that their resources are being taken without much being invested back into the development of the area's facilities and amenities. There are few jobs, bad roads and almost no educational facilities to support the Baloch people making them feel left out of the community. This feeling of economic abandonment has led to occasional rebellions and a continuous demand for more decentralization. Economic marginalization has not only intensified ethnic complaints but has also promoted separatism in Balochistan (Mezzer & Aftab, 2009). Sindh has been bearing ethnic as well as economic cleavages along the urban-rural axis which have been persistent for years. This is true in the case of Karachi, which is a large metropolitan city having a fairly large concentration of Muhajir Urdu speakers than the other rural areas of Sindh which is dominated by the Sindhi language. This has resulted in what many Sindhi communities believe is exclusion from the fruits of economic development. Secondly, the competition for resources especially water has increased conflict between the Sindhi and the Muhajir people. These economic disparities have led to increased ethnic polarisation and hence hinder the unity process in the country (Gazdar, 2005). Even the centralization of governance and economic policies in the hands of a few in Pakistan has aggravated these regional rivalries. The power of resource mobilization in the hands of the central government is considered as being prejudiced in favour of Punjab and thus leads to the underdevelopment of the smaller provinces. The major transport and industrial sectors have been developed mainly in Punjab, while a few provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan are still in the developmental stage. These perceptions have in turn birthed calls for more decentralization, especially within the provincial systems, as well as

more rational ways of dividing the revenues. Such issues raise the question of the need for a more open and decentralised economic policy to redress regional imbalances (Zaidi, 2015). The economic inequity which is also evident in Pakistan has also major repercussions on the security and stability of the country. In these areas, therefore, there is likely to be ethnic militancy due to these socio-economic disparities. The followers of separatism or regionalism base it on the reasons such as economic exploitation and marginalization. For instance, the Baloch insurgency has more or less intensified, primarily because of the non-employment of locals in the economic policies. Therefore, solving these economic issues is important in minimising the anger and instability that may be achieved in the nation (Naseer, 2019). Due to the ethnic-based resentment owing to economic disparity, Pakistan needs to implement policies that can rectify the economic imbalance and bring development in the least developed provinces. Each province needs to feel that their needs are being met and to achieve this, fair funding must be made in education, healthcare and infrastructure. Economic decisions can also be decentralized and local governments can also be empowered to reduce the disparities across the country and make everyone feel like they are a part of the larger society. Waseem (2018) also pointed out that if Pakistan wants to address the ethnic issues that have been leading to the marginalization of the economy then it can easily do so to make the nation united and strong.

The Political Dimension of Ethnic Challenges in Pakistan

The political system of the country has not been in a position to address the demands of the various ethnic groups and this has caused political diversification. The ethnic factor has always come into play with the Punjabi and Pashtun ethnic groups, Sindi and Baloch voters, and their preferred political parties. Votes are often sought from ethnic groups and often the political parties affiliated with specific ethnic groups. This ethnicity-based political strategy erodes national cohesion and does not allow for the creation of any large, cross-ethnic political solidarity (Rais, 2017). This is a quite sensitive factor in Pakistan's ethnic structure where the question of political representation has been a point of debate several times. Most ethnic groups have called for more political say to redress their grievances. For instance, the Baloch people have always complained of marginalization in terms of representation in the national government. The increased representation from Punjab both in terms of population and political

power has caused provocation of provincial estrangement in the smaller provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These political marginalizations have led to calls for greater decentralisation and fair political representation that would allow these provinces a louder say in the decision-making of the country (Sayeed, 2010). Ethnic considerations play a massive role in determining political relations in Pakistan. For example, the PPP party has been known to garner most of its support from Sindh while the PML-N has been associated with most of its support from Punjab. Likewise, pro-ethnic parties such as the ANP are for the Pashtun ethnic group while the Baloch nationalist parties are for the Baloch ethnic group. Such alliances result in political regionalism where regional interests supersede national ones (Shams, 2014). Ethnic-based political parties are a source of numerous problems to national leadership especially in the formulation of policies. This has made it very difficult for the government to devise rational national policies since each ethnic group seeks policies that will benefit its particular community. When ethnic considerations are introduced, the key questions related to power and resources as well as broader questions of development and provision of basic needs including education and health care, become problematic. This leads to political stagnation and it becomes hard to arrive at a consensus on important matters of national concern and deepens ethnic tension which poses a threat to social cohesion (Hussain, 2011). Even though the federal system is not properly practiced in Pakistan it is an attempt to provide greater autonomy to provinces. It might be possible for regional governments to devise policies that would be more appropriate for the ethnic groups in question. For instance, Balochistan demands more autonomy in its affairs and control over its resources, which are issues that can be rectified by the decentralization of governance. However, in the case of federalism, the success in reducing ethnic tensions is contingent on the willingness to implement the reforms and give equal representation to every ethnic group (Hussain, 2015). However, there are chances to overcome the ethnic divide in the political structure as well in Pakistan. One possible solution is the formation of a multicultural political climate in the country. National leaders and political parties should shift from ethnic appeals that are relevant to just a particular ethnic group to those issues that are of national interest such as economic development, education, and security. Perhaps, if Pakistan managed to build up a nationalism that would include all ethnic groups in the country's political system, the situation would change. Moreover, ethnic grievances could be better addressed by policies that

ensure all ethnic groups are provided for, resources are fairly distributed, and the ethnic groups are granted political independence which could help foster national integration in the country (Rais, 2017).

The Linguistic Factor in National Disintegration and Integration

Language has also contributed a lot in defining the national identity in the case of Pakistan. A major language policy decision after the formation of the new country in 1947 was to make Urdu the official language. Though Urdu was adopted as the link language that connected migrants from different states of undivided India, it was not the language which was native to the majority of the people of Pakistan who spoke Punjabi, Pashto, Sindi and Baluchi among others. Favouring Urdu over regional languages led to feelings of separation and overturned the cultural identities of many groups hence causing divisions. This failure to officially recognize regional languages as national languages was especially painful to the Bengali-speaking people of East Pakistan now Bangladesh, leading to protests (Hussain, 2021). Language problem reached its climax during the Bengali Language Movement in the fifties. The central government decided that Urdu would be the only national language of Pakistan, which was again opposed vigorously by the East Pakistani people who preferred Bengali as their language. Dhaka is perhaps most famous for the protests that took place in 1952, which led to several deaths and are now considered some of the most important in the history of Pakistan. Denial of official language status to Bengali served not only the increase in linguistic conflict but also the consolidation of political and cultural exclusion. This event reminds us that language policies can either promote unity or compound division, with profound political implications (Sayeed, 2000). Even in other provinces of Pakistan such as Balochistan and Sindh the position of linguistic minorities also testifies to the secessionist policies of Pakistan regarding languages. Balochi is spoken in Balochistan and Sindhi in the Sindh province of the country. But in both provinces Urdu has been imposed at the provincial level, education and other official and media affairs. This policy of centralizing language use has isolated these people, since their identity is not recognized, let alone valued, but rather drowned in a putative national language. Besides, the lack of moves to encourage the use of regional languages in schools and governmental organizations has led to educational polarization as children are taught in a language they do not understand initially, worsening

social injustice (Akhtar, 2013). The linguistic problem is not just a source of conflict, but a barrier to integration in Pakistan. When a state fails to promote regional languages then it has done a disservice to the nation's cultural palate and has set the country up for problems in the long run as far as maintaining unity is concerned. Regional languages are not used in official and education sectors and this has limited the ethnic minorities in their political and social lives in the country. This feeling of marginalization has usually given rise to rebellion and secessionism, especially in Balochistan where, protesters demand independence on both economic and linguistic basis (Hussain, 2018). Since the state seeks to cultivate national solidarity on which it relies to stay relevant, Pakistan must have a more representative language policy. It would be beneficial if the linguistic diversity at this level could be more effectively identified and encouraged, since the use of Urdu and omitting the regional languages would mean undermining the cultures of smaller communities. Incorporation of regional languages in schools, media and government would not only empower these regions but also bring cultural dignity and togetherness. Instead of regarding linguistic diversity as a threat to one's nation's identity, this should be seen as an opportunity. The use of multilingualism can act as a bonding factor to reduce ethnic diversity and promote integration in society (Siddiqui, 2016). The paper concludes that it is high time that Pakistan adopted a policy of linguistic sensitivity to foster a sense of integration within the country's population where every ethnicity would be given equal importance. When regional languages are not only acknowledged but also treated as equals in public life then ethnic tensions will be minimized and national integration encouraged. It is also noted that having a system where diversity is respected and valued can be instrumental in beginning a process of assuming past wounds and establishing a tolerant and positively integrated society in the future (Rais, 2006).

Strategies for Promoting National Integration Amidst Ethnic Diversity

The problem of national integration in a multi-ethnic state like Pakistan calls for political, economic and social solutions. As one of the steps towards integration, the focus should be made on interethnic communication, which can contribute to the improvement of relations between different ethnic groups. Ethnic tension is usually a result of past injustices and perceived or actual prejudices. Encouraging ethnic leaders to talk to their people directly and also encouraging

people to interact with the leaders of other tribes will help to eliminate prejudice and promote a healthy understanding of each other as one nation. National and provincial leaders should endorse social interrelated activities such as cultural fairs, public projects educational schemes and student exchange to foster interaction (Khan, 2014). Another important process of eliminating ethnic tensions is the equitable allocation of resources. There are different feelings of neglect in the past, mainly due to resource inequality issues and mainly in provinces such as Balochistan and Sindh. To solve these problems, the redesign of the resource allocation system is required in the first place. Such a policy of resource distribution was fair and would take into account the population size as well as the needs of the different regions. Providing provincial governments with more autonomy over the resources would reduce feelings of being exploited and help communities to spearhead their development (Naseem, 2016). Inclusive governance is important in the formation of unity within a country. Pakistan has had a weak polity whereby most of the parties have been ethnographically based thereby tending to divide the country rather than unify it. To overcome this, Pakistan requires a governance system that ensures the equality of all ethnic groups inclusive of the house of the national and provincial parliaments. The government can increase the authority of local governments and involve ethnic minorities directly in politics to guarantee they will be heard and their problems will be solved (Shah, 2019). Education is also a strong factor in the realization of the national integration. It is established that education fosters attitudes towards ethnic relations and that teaching respect for diversity and tolerance will assist in the formation of the views of the future generation on ethnic relations. It is recommended that schools and universities should have their curriculum to ensure the diversification of cultures and languages in Pakistan so that students can learn about its ethnic values. Interethnic activities, for instance, group projects and exchange programs will also foster friendship and mutual understanding among students of different origins. Education should not only aim at creating socially intelligent and academically qualified citizens but also harmonious and united citizens of a nation (Ali, 2015). Media is one of the most influential determinants of attitudes towards ethnic diversity. Ethnic minorities are also in need of positive portrayal in the media and this can only be done if ethnic minorities are given fair and accurate representation by the media. Programs and advertisements that tell positive stories of people working together, facing similar challenges and having similar objectives can contribute toward

the establishment of a new narrative for the nation that is one of togetherness. Regardless of the type of media, state and private, both should focus on the diverse culture of Pakistan and at the same time emphasize unity if Pakistan is to progress (Rahman, 2017). Last but not least ethnic divisions call for legal and constitutional reforms. There is a need for a change of the legal framework in Pakistan as much as the ethnic minority groups in the country are concerned especially in matters concerning language, culture as well as political participation. Allowing regional languages alongside Urdu as an official language may bring stronger ethnic group representation and increased ethnic identity awareness. Other reforms that would ensure that all ethnic groups are accorded a fair chance in the local and provincial polls would also help in creating political stability and ethnicity. Legal changes are essential for developing a society that will make each ethnic group feel valued within the society (Shams, 2020).

Conclusion

The main issues and concerns generated by ethnic diversity in Pakistan cannot be addressed by a single line of action. Ethnic and cultural diversity is one of the great strengths of the country and yet it has been the root of conflict in many significant aspects of the country's life, for instance, political, economic, and even linguistic. These problems have split the country's national cohesion since ethnic factions tend to focus more on regional interests. But if Pakistan wants to move on the right track, it should at least try to take some steps that may be good for the country and the people of Pakistan and it is that Pakistan should work for the rights of all and should work for the support of all the sectors of the society and the government that will pave the way towards a united Pakistan. An important process of narrowing these gaps is the formation of a new model of an ethnic state, which would recognize ethnic differences as a valuable resource rather than a threat. The Baloch, Sindhi, and Pashtun groups must be recognized as discontented minorities because of historical injustices to make a positive change and achieve a new understanding of what caused conflict. Building a culture of ethnic relations, fair distribution of resources and accentuating ethnocultural management are equally important for healing the divisions that previous policies have created. To this end, these efforts have to be backed by an education system which fosters tolerance and unity in the country as the future generation will be the foundation of sustainable national integration. That means the equitable distribution of

resources and better representation of ethnic minorities in the political decision-making process are the keys to tackling the economic and political imbalances that foster ethnic strife. Balochistan and Sindh, in particular, have long accused the centre of political and economic marginalisation. To address these disparities, Pakistan needs to implement measures that will ensure resource equity and decentralised governance of the country's regions. This means that ethnic groups would be allowed to sort out their problems on their own without feeling neglected and unwanted as is usually the case with such feelings as separatism. The media and the education systems are also crucial factors towards the achievement of national integration. Both can be used as effective instruments in the development of the feeling of togetherness based on the ethnic minorities as part of the nation contributing to its further development. The ethnic communities are presented as a cooperative force with shared goals through the media and the breakdown of ethnic division is achieved. In the same way, the curriculum in the education system should depict the ethnic type of the country and ensure that the future generation embraces pluralism as an advantage rather than a disadvantage. In conclusion, it can be said that as the task of bringing Pakistan together at the time of its ethnic divide is not an easy one, it is possible. It means that Pakistan can take the path to a more integrated future by addressing the economic, political, and social factors that have deepened ethnic tensions and by adopting policies that promote a pluralist and communicative model of development. This transformation is going to be possible only if the government and society continue to work together for many years. It has been argued here that the ethnic question in Pakistan can be resolved if only the state has the right policies and if the people of the country hold a common vision of oneness.

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