**In Search of National Integration**

[Dr Zafar Khan Safdar](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/dr-zafar-khan-safdar/" \o "More Articles by Dr Zafar Khan Safdar)

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Pakistan’s history can be seen as a succession of initiatives towards achieving socio-political and national unity. The idea of a separate, independent state for the Muslims started to take root in India during the 1930s. It was believed that the establishment of an Islamic state would retain a cohesive Muslim society with a centre and that Islam would unite the multiethnic and multilingual Muslim community. The Muslim nationalism movement underwent a significant transformation after the Lahore resolution in 1940. All India Muslim League quickly organised the Muslim community for a “separate homeland for Muslims,” offering a country where Muslims could live freely and according to the teachings based on Islamic principles. Pre-independence sloganeers like “Pakistan ka Matlab Kia,” “Laa ilaaha illal-laah” “Muslim Ummah,” “Islamic constitution,” “Islamic state,” “Islamic ideology” and “Islamic government” were effectively used to muster a large number of people in support of Pakistan, but no one understood the connotations.

To create a practical economic, political, sociocultural, and religious organisation for the state of Pakistan, the Muslim elite did not make a significant attempt.

Two separate regions made up the new independent state of Pakistan. East Bengal, which became part of a newly created state, had a populace of 55 per cent, which outnumbered 45 per cent of West Pakistan’s all four regions, leading to the phenomenon known as the “one-province dominates-all paradox.”

This caused the federation to have a great deal of trouble creating a constitution in the years that followed. It was later realized that the majority of the tribal regions and the then North-West Frontier Province (today’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), including Balochistan, were less developed than the Punjab and Sindh. Variances in per capita income, quality of life, jobs and industries, and education were a few indicators that led to disparities, which were politicised at different points in time. As a result, it widened the gaps and created numerous differences. The one-province rule was still in effect when the state was further divided in 1971. Apart from the social cohesion and national integration that was required between East and West Pakistan after the birth of the new state in 1947, the geographic and ethnic secession alarmed the unity of the state. The political instability brought Pakistan to the edge where Sindh nationalists demanded Sindu-desh and the Pakhtoons of erstwhile FATA and N-W.F.P called for independent Pakhtoonistan.

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Pakistan, with the passage of time, fell prey to instability, incompetence and a vicious circle of power that further divided the nation-state, and weakened national integration. This was the time when the people started to say that Pakistan was not a model fit for the Western notion of a nation-state. The national integration further suffered in the face of post-independence strata when the pundits of national reigns couldn’t compact a socio-cultural environment with multilingual territorial and economic units.

During the period of such a hyper-nationalistic approach, the Indian Muslims emphasised their own culture as distinct from Hindus throughout their quest for freedom. It is said that the leadership did not make any effort to foster a feeling of Pakistani nationality among its inhabitants after the birth of Pakistan. It is important to note that Muslims residing in the subcontinent were referred to as the second nation, but this description ignored the diverse characteristics including ethnicity, linguistics, culture, and geographical and economic features of Muslims in different regions of the country.

The secession of the eastern part of Pakistan was not thwarted by the Islamic slogan and ideology of brotherhood, and the argument that religion can prevent Pakistan from further disintegration is debatable. The emergence of a new state for the Muslims led them from being a minority in India to a majority in Pakistan, with Sunnis making up the vast majority of about 80 per cent of the total population. The country quickly became controlled by religious-majority nationalism, which ultimately sparked sectarian conflicts. The resurgence movements of the 19th century were solely based on religiosity and never played any important role in the pre-Pakistan movement, despite being thought of as the fundamental motivating factor for Muslim nationalism. The ulema and Muslim scholars did not favour the ideals of the Muslim League, which led to divisions among the subjects right from inception, and despite Islam appearing to be the country’s foundation, it was unable to ensure the creation of a national identity. In the banner of Islamic ideology, Pakistan was founded, but the death of Muhammad Ali Jinnah in the early years left the question of ideology vague and unresolved to the Ulemas, Secularists, and Democrats, leading to the steadfast pursuit of political aims. The nation, in search of its identity, remained unsure of whether it should be an Islamic state or a Western-style secular republic. Due to this identification dilemma, the first constitution was delayed for eleven years. The constitution of 1962, with the removal of the term “Islamic” by replacing it with the Republic of Pakistan, wired the minds of many with the basic ideology of the country.

With a culturally diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and pluralistic sociopolitical milieu, the leaders failed to nurture the democratic roots and to instil these into the people. The National Security Policy, while accepting the importance of culture as a determinant of national integration, has envisioned a secure and economically strong Pakistan empowered by the diversity of cultures with a sense of pride and national esteem. Pakistan has been a federation since its establishment, and as such, it has long-standing issues with center-province relations, like perceived disparities in the distribution of financial resources and the degree of political autonomy. The demand for new provinces, the rise in periphery politics, and separatist and violent revolts are the crises which take their roots from the regional, ethnic and religious-politico citadels. Today, violent behaviour and different types of criminal activity have increased to such a level that they undermine not only the legitimacy of political institutions but also raise the question of whether central state-based governance is even possible. Fostering national cohesion is a complex and long-term process that requires the commitment of government institutions, civil society, religious leaders, and the general population. It is essential for Pakistan’s stability and progress, and efforts in this direction should be ongoing and adaptive to the evolving challenges the country faces.

*The writer is a PhD in Political Science, and visiting faculty at QAU Islamabad. His area of specialization is political development and social change. He can be reached at zafarkhansafdar@yahoo.com and tweet@zafarkhansafdar*