

Pakistan : Identity Politics and Economic Deprivation



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Introduction

- ① Identity has remained a contentious issue in Pakistan. The state primes its citizens for an overarching national identity which demands near deletion of all subnational identities. This is hugely problematic.
- ① The common political strands of identity politics, state formation processes and Islamic radicalism have caused the marginalization of religious minorities, sectarian tendencies among Muslims and contributed to a wider problem of structured intolerance at the social level.

The Mohajir : Identity and Politics in Multi-ethnic Pakistan

- ◎ Upon the creation of Pakistan in 1947, millions of refugees and migrants from India made Karachi their new home, settling alongside the native Sindhi population.
- ◎ They identified themselves as Mohajirs and have been part of the long process of assimilation into Pakistan's multiethnic, multilingual, Islamic Republic.
- ◎ The political mobilisation of the group has led to the formation of various Mohajir parties, the strongest of which remains the Muttahida Quami Movement(MQM).

- ① The stirrings of a Mohajir consciousness began in the early 1970s, prompted by the government policies that negatively affected their education and employment opportunities in Sindh.
- ① The 1990s started off with sporadic episodes of violence between the Mohajirs, Sindhis and Pashtuns.
- ① In 1992, under the PPP government, the Pakistan Army launched “Operation Clean-Up” to cleanse the city of militias and anti-state elements.
- ① It specifically targeted the MQM and its followers, declaring top leaders as offenders and forcing them to exile.

- ① Over the years, demographic changes, ethno-political conflicts, militant and sectarian groups, and vested political interest groups coloured the Mohajirs' view of their place in Pakistan.
- ① The MQM emerged as a party that claimed to represent Mohajir grievances but soon became a criminal enterprise, diluting the legitimacy of the Mohajir cause.
- ① As the boundaries of what constitutes Mohajir identity continue to unfold, it remains to be seen whether the community will hold on to its Mohajir identity(as descendants of migrants from India) or begin to identify as Pakistanis, assimilating into the nation-state.

Pashtun Nationalism

- Pakistan's second largest ethnic group, the Pashtuns, reside primarily in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan and in Pakistan's northwest region.
- The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) - formerly the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) - has historic ties to Afghanistan, and both Pakistan and Afghanistan continue to dispute the Durand Line, the border between the two countries.
- The inequitable distribution of water resources and a diminished share of provincial resources aggravated Pashtun grievances against the center and encouraged regional identity politics.

Baloch Secessionism

- Balochistan is Pakistan's largest and least populated province, and its culture is diverse.
- The literacy rate in Balochistan remains devastatingly low compared to that of other provinces, and its number of development projects is negligible due to political instability in the province.
- The center has failed to enact policies that can help the Balochs to develop and advance their circumstances.
- Demanding greater provincial autonomy, Balochs share minimal allegiance to the Pakistani state and broadly reject a national identity.

Punjabi Elitism

- Punjab's influence on the federation and the perception of exploitative policies towards the other provinces is often termed by Pakistanis as "Punjabi elitism".
- Punjab's infrastructure, road and railway networks, canal system, educational institutions and hospitals are better funded and deliver a high quality of services.
- Punjab's influential military, bureaucratic, and economic roles in Pakistan contributed to the perception, by other provinces, of Punjab as an oppressor.

Army Dominance and Ethnic Fractionalism

- ⦿ Economic policies set by Ayub Khan's administration created discriminatory economic opportunities between the East and West, further marginalizing East Pakistan and fomenting a Bengali ethnic national identity.
- ⦿ Pakistan's series of military rulers fostered the rise of ethnic politics by ignoring concerns of the federating units in the policies they enacted, specifically the use of force on numerous occasions in smaller provinces.
- ⦿ This diminished the potential for a national Pakistan identity by fueling anti-government sentiments within the smaller provinces that internally rallied around sub-national identities.

Determining Resource Distribution and Resentment towards Punjab

- In Pakistan, allocation of federal financial resources to the provinces takes place through awards determined by the National Finance Commission(NFC).
- In utilizing the population - based allocation system, Pakistan's federal government arguably failed to meet its constitutionally - mandated commitment to treat all provinces equally.
- Punjab's receipt of a majority of funds has stirred resentment against Punjab and weakened citizens' sense of allegiance to the national government.

Economic Status

- ① Economy and economic condition can be source of ethnic identity.
- ① It is the economic condition that give rise to privileged and deprived class.
- ① Ethnic loyalties reflect, and are maintained by the underlying socio-economic interests of group members.

Challenges to Economic Development

Despite being blessed with fertile agriculture land, abundance of minerals and sound industrial base, economic development in Pakistan is not as progressing as it should. The major challenges in achieving economic development are :

- Energy crisis
- Terrorism
- Wealth concentration
- Corruption
- Youth unemployment
- Lack in quality education

- ⦿ Poor health facilities
- ⦿ Tax evasion
- ⦿ Lack of good governance
- ⦿ Political instability
- ⦿ Non transparency in resource allocation
- ⦿ Environmental Degradation
- ⦿ Weak Public Sector Capacity
- ⦿ Inadequate access to Justice

Way Forward

- Pakistan is facing the twin challenges of reviving growth and reducing poverty.
- It is necessary for the state to create an environment conducive for private economic activity, and encourage domestic and foreign investments.
- The state should understand what endangers identity politics along ethnic and other lines and take corrective measures. It is mainly peoples' sufferings that spawn identity politics.
- It is not too late to restore the dignity of citizens by acceding to what they want within the ambit of law of the land.
- Doing so may help dilute sub-nationalistic sentiments, treating as something antithetical to national identity.

Conclusion

- ⦿ Pakistan has never exhibited a monolithic national identity.
- ⦿ Constitutional reforms alone will not satisfy Pakistan's marginalized provinces and ethnic groups.
- ⦿ Pakistan can achieve a shared national identity if all provinces believe that they are equally valued by the center.
- ⦿ For that, the center must prioritize an alternative and sustainable division of financial resources and political autonomy.

Thank you...