

# Myth of the Monolith: The Challenge of Diversity in Pakistan

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## Abstract

*The paper seeks to study the challenges faced by the Pakistani state from the perspective of its vast ethno-cultural diversity which problematises the process of-nation building attempted by the Pakistani leadership since its very inception. The paper starts with a rudimentary definitional view of the concept of ethnicity and nationalism, and isolates the areas of friction in the way the Pakistani nation has been conceptualised and the way diverse ethno-cultural groups have evolved their identity through history.*

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*Pakistan was an idea before it became a country,  
and whether it is a nation remains doubtful even today.*

*Edward Mortimer<sup>1</sup>*

The paper problematises the ‘monolithisation’ of Pakistani national identity by both the Pakistani nationalist elite and observers outside who tend to view Islamic Pakistan as a nation of people united in their love for Islam. It suggests that the force of centripetal Islamic appeal is offset by the centrifugal pulls of regional, ethnic and linguistic identities. The myopic management of politics of the state by the ruling elite complicates the process of nation-building and contributes to the fragility of the ‘Pakistani’ nationhood.

## **Ethnicity, Nationalism: Domain of the Political**

Beyond all ‘primordialist-constructivist’<sup>2</sup> debates on ethnicity<sup>3</sup> that lay stress on ‘apriority’, ‘ineffability’<sup>4</sup>, ‘affectivity’ at one level and ‘instrumental’, ‘imagined’<sup>5</sup>, ‘invented’<sup>6</sup> and ‘constructed’ identity or consciousness on the other,<sup>7</sup> there is a critical consensus among scholars on ‘ethnicity’, ‘ethno-nationalism’, ‘nationalism’

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that while awareness or self-perception of identity could be a matter of subjectivity and lie in a dormant state across several levels, increasing cultural differentiation from a well-defined 'other', especially in a political context – where the balance of power-relationship seems vulnerable to collective assertion, – helps the manifestation of such ethnic, national or ethno-national collective consciousness to assume a social self-hood, which more often than not translates into national identity of a social group.

The process of self-identification as a member of an ethnic group and external ascription by others gets strengthened especially in a conflictive or competitive context, which accords a sense of legitimacy to such political assertion.<sup>8</sup> It is thus said that conflict or cooperation is the mother of national identity. The 'indissociable relationship' between ethnicity or nationalism and a sense of political legitimacy is emphasised by many scholars. Thus, the origin could be 'primordial' but assertion is usually 'circumstantial'<sup>9</sup> and the process of rationalisation of social and political life leads to a politicised social consciousness that gradually crystallises usually in opposition to a well-defined "other". National identity is, therefore, conceived as "a socially constructed, variable definition of self and other, whose existence and meaning is continuously negotiated, revised and revitalised."<sup>10</sup>

To put it more succinctly, national identity only flourishes in a political context where demonstrable social solidarity, whether predicated through age-old shared ancestry, history, culture, language and territorialised sense of togetherness or through deliberately constructed, imagined – often mythologised – historical and cultural links, holds the promise of power, as the ultimate measure of political legitimacy. It is especially so because all self-differentiating peoples are believed to have the right to rule themselves, especially if they so desire. There is also a consensus that such national consciousness is more often than not midwived by a highly political and ambitious leadership or elite, which rises from within that collectivity, socio-cultural, or ethnic group.

This short theoretical background seeks to provide the tools for understanding the ethno-cultural diversity of Pakistan and at the same time, the conceptual strands that are isolated here are substantiated through the discussion that follows. The terms 'ethnic' and 'national' have been used in this discourse almost interchangeably even if there have been arguments that the term 'nation', unlike 'ethnic', is conceptually disruptive of unity in South Asian states.

## **From Movement to State: Islam as a Binding Force**

The anti-colonial politics in British India generated widespread mass participation in an essentially political movement irrespective of caste, creed, community or religion. However, as the seeds of representative politics were sown, the differences between the elites of the two principal communities, Hindus and Muslims, soon came to the fore. If Indian nationalism grew out of anti-colonial sentiments, its overarching Hindu symbolism was isolated by the Muslim elite to convince themselves that in any future representative system of administration they will be swamped by the numerically preponderant Hindus. They even thought that the British policy of reservations for Muslims, if it survived the British rule, might not be guarantee enough against an oppressive Hindu majority.

During the course of the demand for a separate state, Muslim leaders had sought the greatest possible provincial autonomy while the leaders of the Congress party opposed this for fear of institutionalising fissiparous tendencies. The Muslim League's endorsement of a federal structure for the separate state of Pakistan as envisioned in its Lahore Resolution of 1940 seemed to suggest that its leaders believed in a federal system where the constituent units would even have the power to leave the federation. This idea of a loose federation was, however, not accommodated by the Congress leaders. Scholars like Hamza Alavi argue that the sense of Islamic ethnic identity evolved out of a feeling of frustration and circumstantial advantages that accrued to them in the aftermath of World War II, which offered them a rare opportunity to carve out a Muslim majority state from British India.<sup>11</sup>

## **A Muslim Majority Secular State! Inherent Contradictions**

*“After Pakistan was achieved it stood scorched and nearly dead,  
both the victim and product of a religious fury”*

Wayne A. Wilcox<sup>12</sup>

The Muslim majority state of Pakistan was conceptualised by M.A. Jinnah and other secular Muslim leaders as a state where the Muslims would be free to pursue their religion and promote their culture. The pronouncements of these leaders, including Jinnah, the inimitable *Qaid-e-Azam* (the great leader), however, revealed the complex linkage between Islam and the statecraft that was supposed to emerge. While the leadership understood the symbolic value of Islam, it was clearly opposed to any theocratic system of governance. However, in the process of using the appeal of Islam for ensuring popular support for Pakistan, the leadership had berated the existing secular alternative in political organisations like the Unionist

Party in Punjab and the Krishak Proja Party in Bengal.

Moreover, the top leadership was undecided about the way it would define a secular state raised in the name of Islam. Even Jinnah and Liaqat differed widely with each other over the issue. It was Liaqat who had ordered his secretary Mazid Malik to censor the oft-quoted passage from Jinnah's famous speech of August 11, 1947, where he talked about a system where Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims.<sup>13</sup> Unlike Jinnah, Liaqat's idea of popular sovereignty and democracy was unaccommodative of the principle of equal rights for non-Muslims and he favoured a non-theocratic Pakistan, primarily for the Muslims. Thus, the idea of secular polity that Jinnah and Liaqat supposedly aimed at was a non-starter. It opened up more doors for religious forces to checkmate them every time they swore in the name of Islam than equip them with any unambiguous principle or imbue them with any unshakeable conviction with which they could fight the religious forces.

The *pirs*, *sajda nashins* and the *mullahs*, who had stirred up a huge popular wave of Islam in favour of the dream project called 'Pakistan' and were more rooted in local politics, now sought to take the mantle of Islam further ahead. They were not to be discouraged either by Jinnah's famous interview where he snubbed the interviewer for asking him whether Pakistan would be a theocratic state<sup>14</sup> by saying he did not know what a theocratic state meant, or by Liaqat's statement in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly while passing the Objective Resolution in March 1949, that the people were "the real recipients of power" and the resolution inasmuch as it was drafted by the representatives of the people 'naturally' eliminated "any danger of the establishment of a theocracy."<sup>15</sup>

As the demand for Islamisation grew, the elite in Pakistan thought of co-opting this constituency and a *Talimaat-i-Islamia* was established in April 1949 to recommend Islamic measures for inclusion in the Constitution.<sup>16</sup> The participation of the orthodox *ulema* in this ineffective body suggested their political ambition. However, Islam could not become a 'stimulus for national orientation' mainly because of its inability to produce a national leadership.<sup>17</sup>

Against this backdrop, a Western observer of the Pakistani political scenario in the 1960s, Karl Von Vorys, took note of the rich mosaic of ethnic groups with little sympathy for each other, participating less in common ideals, suspicious of and hostile to each other, and in the absence of any centralising principle, held together only by the might of the state. "It is doubtful that either Islam or threat of an external enemy can generate sufficient cohesion for a national orientation and

the government after all is the most comprehensive organisational structure on a country-wide scale,” he concluded.<sup>18</sup>

### **Islamic Ethnicity and Diversity within Islam**

Post-1971 Pakistan saw the rise of ‘Islamic ethnicity’, a term made popular by Hamza Alavi, in the face of the rising assertion of ethno-linguistic diversity which posed a challenge to the state. The elite, as usual, sought to manage the diversity of Pakistan through overt use of Islamic symbolism.

The separation of East Pakistan and the consequent identity crisis in Pakistan have attracted wide scholarly attention. Much more than a territorial loss, it was deemed to be the failure of an ideology – that Muslims of the subcontinent could constitute a separate nation. Islam proved a weak adhesive and in the event of dissolution of the original ‘Pakistan’ in 1971, the ruling class started reflecting deeply about the identity crisis Pakistan suffered from. As Prof. Wahid-uz-Zaman would say:

(This) self-questioning has assumed the proportions of a compelling necessity...what are the links that bind us? What is our national identity and the peculiar oneness that makes us a nation apart from others?...If we let go the ideology of Islam, we cannot hold together as a nation by any other means...If Arabs, the Turks, the Iranians, God forbid, give up Islam, the Arabs yet remain Arabs, the Turks remain Turks, the Iranians remain Iranians, but what do we remain if we give up Islam?<sup>19</sup>

This attempt to superimpose an Islamic identity upon the ethno-linguistic identities in Pakistan, however, has not quite paid off. The more the ruling elite sought to use Islam as a binding force, the more the fissures. The process of Islamisation (a Sunni-Wahabite version) introduced during Zia-ul-Haq’s rule evoked lot of controversy in Pakistan where the majority were Barelvis and practised a mystical, Sufi, eclectic version of Islam. It also alienated the Shias. The failure of the evolution of an Islamic universalism has affected the nation-building efforts in Pakistan in many ways.<sup>20</sup>

### **‘A Nation Containing Many Elements’— M. A. Jinnah**

Jinnah, was aware of the sub-Islamic diversity of the new state. In his independence day address to the people of Pakistan, after laying emphasis on the ‘Muslim nation’, Jinnah acknowledged that, “the creation of the new State has placed a tremendous responsibility on the citizens of Pakistan” and he added that history had given Pakistanis an opportunity to demonstrate to the world how “a

nation, containing many elements”<sup>21</sup> can “live in peace and amity and work for the betterment of all its citizens, irrespective of caste or creed.” He also had words of comfort for the frontier tribesmen and assured all that the Pakistani state would be sensitive to their concerns.

But Jinnah was a man of many orientations.<sup>22</sup> The acknowledgement that Pakistan was a nation of many elements did not mean the state was going to grant them confederal power as was promised to the units in the Lahore resolution. Jinnah himself delineated the space within which they could operate. In one of his earliest speeches, Jinnah asked all Pakistanis to remember the historical message of Islam and bury their sub-national identities in the common Islamic identity. “Have you forgotten the lesson that was taught to us thirteen hundred years ago? You belong to a nation. You have carved out a territory, a vast territory. It is all yours. It does not belong to a Punjabi, or a Sindhi or a Pathan or a Bengali. It is all yours.”<sup>23</sup>

The fact that Jinnah was a victim of the ruling passion of all liberal democrats of his times, i.e., the myth of a mono-national state, is also borne out by the fact that he used all means at his command during the early days of Pakistan to convince, persuade and even coerce recalcitrant regional leaderships to opt for the Pakistan of his dreams, a secular Muslim state, perhaps secular in form but Islamic in spirit. Jinnah was, in fact, the first of the Pakistani leaders to violate the spirit of federalism he himself championed during the Lahore resolution in 1940 and added Section 92A to the Indian Independence Act 1947, which authorised the Central Government to direct Governors to assume all powers on behalf of the Governor-General. This clause, which was utterly disrespectful of regional autonomy, was retained as Article 193 in the first Constitution in 1956.<sup>24</sup>

The emphasis on Islam and the idea of a monolithic state of Pakistan, which Jinnah in one of his many unguarded expressions called ‘a bulwark of Islam’, disregarded the natural identities that were already recognised in the nomenclature of the provinces during the British period. Rather, the leadership was guided by a fervent hope that the common appeal of Islam could act as a ‘cementing force’ and hold them together. Many Pakistani writers have reflected on the issue of the identity of Pakistan and come out with the above observation.<sup>25</sup> It was inevitable that as the Constituent Assembly continued to debate on ‘Islamic’ issues, the competition for power-sharing between the numerically preponderant Bengalis and the rest of the Pakistanis led to the consolidation of the Bengali ethno-linguistic identity which culminated in the division of Pakistan in 1971.

The Pakistani leadership has, nonetheless, made tentative attempts to melt the diversity of Pakistan into a unified whole over the years. Most of them, except Ayub Khan, made use of Islamic symbols to unify the diversity, without any apparent success. Ayub Khan, who started his rule with a progressive redefinition of Islam, had attempted a secular way of ‘coalescing all divergent linguistic and sectarian social groups into a single whole’ through his Bureau of National Reconstruction which was established in 1959 against the backdrop of army action in Baluchistan in October 1958.<sup>26</sup> By 1962, however, he was completely disillusioned with the functioning of the Bureau and shut it down. No significant step to unify the diversity of Pakistan has been taken on a secular basis ever since.

### **Assertion of Ethno-Linguistic Diversity**

The one unit formula that was advanced in the 1950s and 1960s as a counterpoise to Bengali domination in Pakistan’s National Assembly failed to unite various ethnic groups or nationalities in pre-1971 West Pakistan and instead gave rise to a sense of alienation among Pushtuns,<sup>27</sup> Sindhis and Baluchis. In fact, the temptation of the ruling elite to treat the non-Bengali Pakistani population as ‘one unit’, socially, culturally and politically, led to hardening of ethno-cultural identities. The movements for Sindh Desh (independent Sindh), independent Baluchistan<sup>28</sup> and Pushtunistan<sup>29</sup> began against this backdrop in the 1950s and 1960s. The alienation of these ethno-linguistic groups from the political processes and their helplessness as minorities in West Pakistan politicised them and made them increasingly assertive.<sup>30</sup>

The strength of such regional feelings is sometimes construed as a weakness of the Pakistani nation by the ruling elite<sup>32</sup> and the more it has sought to suppress such identities, the more they have resurfaced with indomitable zeal and enthusiasm.<sup>33</sup> The visible domination of the bureaucracy and military by the Punjabis has provided the logic for assertion of other regional identities.

### **A Cradle of Languages**

Regional identities in Pakistan are inevitably based on language.<sup>34</sup> Language plays an important role in the formation of ethnic identities. One of the most convincing definitions of an ethnic group has been ‘a community in communication with itself’. In fact, without language it is almost impossible to imagine the formation of an ethnic identity.

G.A. Allama calls Pakistan “a cradle of languages and cultures.”<sup>35</sup> As per a survey of the existing linguistic communities in Pakistan in 2003, the people of



Pakistan speak in at least 69 dialects.<sup>36</sup> These separate languages/dialects had given rise to distinct nationalist literatures. The major languages like Sindhi, Punjabi, Seraiki, Brahui, Baluchi, Pushto and Hindko have sought to depict separate national consciousnesses throughout history. In the rural hinterland of Pakistan in Sindh, Punjab, the Seraiki speaking belt in southern Punjab and northern Sindh, the Sarawan and Jhalawan regions of Baluchistan, children grow up learning the highly philosophical verses of local legendary poets like Baba Farid Ganj, Baba Bulleh Shah, Sultan Bahu, Sakhi Sarwar and Gul Khan Naseer. The most popular poets in the Pathan hinterland are Rahman Baba and Khushal Khan Khattak.

**Table-1: Percentage Distribution of Households by Language Usually Spoken and Region/Province, 1998 Census<sup>31</sup>**

Region/Province	Language						
	Urdu	Punjabi	Pushto	Sindhi	Baluchi	Seraiki	Others
Pakistan	7.6	44.1	15.4	14.1	3.6	10.5	4.7
Islamabad	10.1	71.7	9.5	0.6	0	1.1	7
Punjab	4.5	75.2	1.2	0.1	0.7	17.4	0.9
Sindh	21.1	7	4.2	59.7	2.1	1	4.9
NWFP	0.8	1	73.9	-	-	3.9	20.4
Baluchistan	1	2.5	29.6	5.6	54.8	2.4	4.1
FATA	0.2	0.2	99.1	-	-	-	0.5

It is an irony of history that the inherent spirit of these traditional literary works does not match the spirit of Islamic Pakistan that the military-bureaucratic-political elite has sought to champion during the last fifty years or more. For example, Khushal Khan Khattak, whose Pushtu ballads are immensely popular among the Pathans, denigrates the Mughals and national heroes of the Pakistani state as aggressors and urges the Pathans to rise in revolt against them. The Baluchi popular literature by Gul Khan Naseer, Saeed Dad Shah, Sayyad Zahoor Shah and Ghulam Rasool Mullah similarly urges Baluchis to rise in revolt against the Pakistani state.<sup>37</sup>

While the Sindhi sense of resistance was partially mollified by the rise of an ethnic Sindhi leader, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, during the early 1970s, the other two



ethnic groups that performed well in their provinces placed their demands quite assertively after the 1972 elections. Bhutto, even if he talked loudly about federalism, was intolerant of the ethnic elite in other provinces. His stern response to Baluch and Pushtun demands, through commissioning of armed forces to quell an imagined Baluch resistance,<sup>38</sup> showed the deep-seated suspicion among the elite in Pakistan for pursuit of politics in overtly ethnic terms.

### **Islam-Ethnicity-Politics Interface: The Recent Phase**

#### *The Recent Phase in Baluchi, Pushtun and Sindhi Politics*

It is instructive to see a group of Pushtun religious leaders raising the banner of Nizam-e-Islam in Pakistan and reaping a visibly impressive electoral harvest in the controlled elections in 2002. In fact, the particular historical backdrop against which the elections took place – the attack on Afghanistan, search for Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar, who had a substantial following in Pushtun and Baluch dominated areas – seems to have augmented their electoral fortunes. Even then, the hold and appeal of Islam especially in clear opposition to an identifiable enemy – here the US and its Western allies with their determination to weed out Islamic fundamentalism – is clearly visible in Pakistan today.

But such Islamism lacks depth and force, for it has given rise at another level to a resolve among the nationalist parties in Baluchistan to bounce back with appeals to Baluchi national consciousness throughout 2003-04.<sup>39</sup> First, there was the alliance of Baluchi nationalist parties, then the demand for recognition of Baluchi language as a medium for instruction and pitched resistance to the developmental work in and around Gwadar, for they suspect Baluchis will be at the receiving end and cantonments in Gwadar will start the process of Punjabi intrusion into Baluchistan. The military regime is struggling to attenuate the sense of resistance by assuring Baluchis of their demanded share in the national financial allocations.

Baluch ethnicity is, in fact, on the rise in spite of the inherent divisions within, i.e., the Baluch language is divided into six mutually permeable dialects and does not yet have a mutually agreeable script; the Baluchi sardars are traditionally divided into mutually hostile tribal clans – the Mengals, Mazaris, Marris, Bugtis, Jamalis and Talpurs – who are busier seeking political patronage than mobilising Baluch along ethnic lines. Even then, the spark in 1973-74 that doused 5,300 Baluch rebels and 3,300 Pakistani soldiers is visible in the Marri-homeland, i.e., the mountainous district of Kohlu, which, as per Pakistani media reports, is acting as

the nerve-centre for the Baluch rebels. The spread of Baluch resistance to areas like Khuzdar, Kalat, Turbat, Quetta and other areas by late 2004 indicates that the Baluchi assertion has assumed further intensity and a new generation leadership may be leading the movement this time around.

The Pushtuns are also extremely conscious of their identity. However, their grouse against the Pakistani state is less convincing. They have better representation and influence in the Pakistan Army. They also dominate the religious and political matrix in Pakistan. The traditional complaints against Punjabi domination have outlived their importance in the changing political context when Pushtuns seem to be guiding the Islamic wave in the country today. This is not to say that the power of the appeal of Pushtun identity is gone forever. The ethno-centricity of the leaders of the movement is a fact of life and they may be waiting for the right moment to make a comeback with their nationalist agenda.

The Sindhis, who were the first to assert against the Punjabi and Mohajir-dominated Pakistani state, have passed through their own socio-political experience in the meanwhile. The initial resistance in the 1940s centred on Jinnah's decision to change the status of Karachi as a federally administered area. But the shifting of the capital from Karachi to Islamabad in 1962 changed the focus of resistance. The Sindhi resistance against the Punjabi elite is less pronounced than against the continued influence of Mohajirs. The country-wide influence of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and then his daughter Benazir, has salvaged some pride for the Sindhis at one level, while at another level, the Sindhi branch of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party actively promoted a pro-Sindhi agenda. The decision of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to introduce a proportionate quota system in higher government services significantly reduced the sense of disaffection among the minorities including the Sindhis in the early 1970s. However, the fact remains that Sindhis are realigning over the issue of the Kalabagh dam and the prospect of Sindhi ethnic resistance remains, even if it has weakened over time.

### **The Mohajirs**

'Mohajir' is the term used by Muslims who migrated from India to Pakistan in 1947. Seventy per cent of these refugees in (West) Pakistan were Punjabis who settled mainly in (West) Punjab, spoke the same language and were assimilated into the indigenous population, and they shunned the label of Mohajir. However,

the Urdu-speaking refugees from northern India and non-Urdu speaking Muslims from other southern states, who settled in Sindh, mostly in Karachi and Hyderabad, have accepted the term Mohajir as an identification for their group. Interestingly, political mobilisation on the basis of Mohajir identity in the urban areas of Sindh, has also brought many non-Urdu speaking migrants from India and their descendants into the Mohajir fold.

The Mohajir identity crystallised in the 1970s in opposition to the Sindhis and ironically against the Pathans (in the Orangi area) in the early 1980s.<sup>40</sup> In fact, it was the decision of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in 1972 to introduce Sindhi as the only official language at the provincial level that sparked off the language riots and crystallised a strong Mohajir identity that slowly translated into a militant political force, MQM (Mohajir Quami Movement), in 1984. It is quite another thing that politics takes the sting out of historical enmity in the 1990s, a revised MQM (Muttahida Quami Mahaz) and People's Party of Pakistan, known for its dent in the Sindh and its opposition to Mohajirs, were seen to be entering into and walking out of political alliances, giving a permanent character to their 'now-love now-hate' relationship.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Sub-Ethnics and the Neo-Ethnics**

#### *The Seraikis*

Apart from the three major minority ethnic groups, another language-based identity is slowly emerging on the Pakistani political landscape. The much publicised Pakistan Oppressed Nations Movement (PONM),<sup>42</sup> which has brought together the nationalist groups from Baluchistan, NWFP and Sindh against the hegemony of the Punjabi ruling class, has admitted a new important constituent – the Seraiki National Party (SNP) – into its fold.

The Seraikis straddle the less developed southern Punjab comprising Bahawalpur, Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Rahim Yar Khan and have presence in northern Sindh and south-eastern NWFP as well. Seraiki self-identification has grown amongst the intelligentsia, and political mobilisation on the basis of ethnic identification in the late 1990s has consolidated such an identity. In 2003 and early 2004, Abdul Majeed Kanjoo, president of the Seraiki National Party, was seen to be pitching his demands for recognising Seraiki as another important ethnic identity and granting it political autonomy within Pakistan. Seraikis<sup>43</sup> claim they constitute almost 60 per cent of the population of Punjab.<sup>44</sup> In February 2004, the

leader of SNP went so far as to say that only the establishment of Seraikistan in Pakistan “would curb Punjabi expansionism and unify the subcontinent.”<sup>45</sup>

### *Other Identities*

The Hindko-speaking people (2.8 per cent of the entire population of Pakistan and 18.1 per cent of the NWFP population) concentrated in Hazara Division and Kohat and Bannu districts have a strong bond of unity among them. Because of their common biological ancestry, and a history of economic ties and political cooperation, they are regarded by most outsiders as “Pathans”. However, they have the potential to blossom into yet another ethnic group in Pakistan. In fact, the 1981 census had considered Hindko as a separate language.

The Kalash and Khowar-speaking tribals in the northern region of NWFP in Dir and Swat deserve mention as a separate and distinct ethnic group. The tribal identities in Chitral, Gilgit, Hunza, Nagar as well as the Pahari and Kashmiri ethnic identities are comparatively under-discussed in Pakistan because of their negligible influence in Pakistani polity. Yet they are distinct. There are suggestions to include Ahmadis as a group in view of their official isolation as a social group and the consequent ethnicisation. The fact that the group has a territorial presence in Rabwah lends credence to such arguments.

### **The Punjabi Linguistic Identity**

Much has been written about the dominance of Punjabis in Pakistan. As Table 1 suggests they are in majority and, as has often been stated, their demographic, geographical, cultural, economic and sociological predominance is a fact of life in Pakistan. However, there is a strong passion among Punjabi speaking people for the Punjabi language, in spite of the fact that the Punjabi elite have advocated Urdu as the *lingua franca* of Pakistan equally passionately. In fact, as early as in 1954, the advocates of Punjabi language had organised a fair of Shah Hussain (in March 1954) to raise the demand for Punjabi being made an official language. Later, on August 31, 1969, about 500 Punjabi activists presented a memorandum on behalf of 13 pro-Punjabi organisations to General Yahya Khan, when his administration derecognised the Punjabi language.<sup>46</sup> There is tremendous emotion in Punjab in Pakistan in favour of the Punjabi language even if the elite in Punjab favours Urdu. The linguistic affinity between the two Punjabs (in India and the Pakistan) still holds to this day as was borne out by the 9<sup>th</sup> World Punjabi Conference in Lahore in July 2003 and the 11<sup>th</sup> World Punjabi Conference in Patiala in December 2004.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the Punjabi identity is not as monolithic as

it is made out to be.<sup>48</sup>

### **The Prospects**

It is, of course, true that in spite of such internal divisions that threaten to weaken the influence of Punjab, the Punjabi community still has a visible numerical superiority by virtue of which it will continue to dominate and determine the political future of Pakistan. The classic comment by an observer of the Punjabi elite (Ian Talbot) summarises the ethno-political calculus in Pakistan: “Punjabi elite lacks generosity, yet caving in to minority demands may diminish the capability of the Pakistani state.” Zia-ul-Haq’s suggestion that given a chance he would divide Pakistani state into 20 units, “to stamp out the virus of ethnic identity from the map of Pakistan altogether” partially reinforces the above view. If one contrasts it with Khan Abdul Wali Khan’s observation that he has been a Pushtun for six thousand years, a Muslim for one thousand years and a Pakistani for 50 years, one observes the persisting appeal of different levels of identities among the people of Pakistan and the need to accommodate them, rather than seek to fight them or erase them as Zia-ul-Haq had suggested.<sup>49</sup>

In the last National Security Council (NSC) meet in Pakistan on June 24, 2004, President General Pervez Musharraf came out with a realistic assessment of the security environment Pakistan is faced with and said, “If there is threat to Pakistan it is from (the) internal security environment.” The NSC concluded with a resolve to, “take all possible steps for ridding the country of the scourge of terrorism, extremism and sectarianism.”<sup>50</sup> The threat from sectarian quarters seems to have been recognised by Musharraf’s administration. However, the assertion from nationalist quarters has not yet been accepted by the administration. If the ongoing violent Baluchi assertion around Kohlu and the political assertion by Baluchi leaders (around the issue of cantonments in Gwadar) is any indication, the administration has adopted the age-old tactic of ignoring demands from the political leadership on the one hand and suppressing the insurgents with brute force on the other. The assertion by the Sindhis and the Seraikis has also to be dealt with politically. The Pakistani leadership has to prepare itself for the fallout of the ongoing military operations in tribal areas, which might also assume Pushtun nationalist overtones if it drags on and involves more and more tribal groups.

The discussion in the preceding pages suggests that there is still enough scope for the evolution of a Pakistani identity, not necessarily conceived in monolithic terms and mediated by the dominant Punjabi elite. However, the over-centralised state has to develop a tolerance for provincial demands. It has to accommodate

rather than try to assimilate diverse regional and sub-regional identities, adopt a 'consociational approach', foster their growth and development, and stop considering them as competing for influence at the national level. At the same time, the state should take adequate measures to counter the disruptive capacity of the diverse militant Islamic groups vying for influence in the socio-political landscape within Pakistan. The search for an ideological basis of the Pakistani state or nation has to go beyond Islamic universalism and the two-nation theory and look for a non-coercive territorial Pakistani identity born out of the free interplay of diverse ethnic identities that crowd the Pakistani socio-cultural universe.

### References/End Notes

1. Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam*, London, Faber and Faber, 1982. p.191.
2. There can be other ways of generalising the approaches to the study of identity/ethnicity/nationalism. For example, some analysts would reduce the arguments posed by different scholars on the theme to three broad categories like, traditionalists, perennialists and modernists.
3. The term was coined by David Riesman in the 1950s even if sociological investigation into multi-ethnic American society had started in the 1920s by the Chicago School of Sociologists. The metaphor of the melting pot has been increasingly challenged by studies by students of ethnicity ever since.
4. For example, Eller and Reid would argue that primordial attachments form the basis of ethnic identity. Jack Eller and Reed Coughlan, "The Poverty of Primordialism: The demystification of ethnic attachments", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 16 (2), 1993, pp. 199-201.
5. Anderson would argue that nationalism was the result of the fusion between the decline of religion, rise in human diversity, the development of capitalism and the technology of print (which he called 'print-capitalism') that led to an imagined sense of unity among people. See for details, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, 1983.
6. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.
7. The primordialists like Edward Shills, Clifford Geertz, Van den Berghe tend to view nation in terms of 'a historically developed givenness', while instrumentalists like Ernest Gellner, E.J. Hobsbawm, Anthony Giddens, Elie Kedourie and Walker Connors say that the 'nation' is invented and imagined. Anthony D. Smith, a student of Gellner, has sought to bring these two strands together in his formulation 'historical ethno-symbolism', without much success and has often been regarded as an apologist of the primordialist school.
8. One of the leading scholars on ethnicity from South Asia, Dawa Norbu, would say



- 'conflict is the mother of nationalism' and argue that the quest for an 'other' plays an important role in the formation of third-world nationalisms. See his book, *Culture and the Politics of Third World Nationalism*, New York, Routledge, 1992.
9. The circumstantial argument is advanced by B.B. Lal (1983). Paul R Brass and John Breuilly also advance similar arguments. B.B. Lal, "Perspectives on Ethnicity: Old Wine in New Bottles", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 6, (2), 1983, pp.166-7; John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1993; Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, London, Sage, 1991.
  10. Homi Bhabha argues that the national identity is never fixed and static. It is always reconstructed in response to new needs, interests and perceptions, though always within certain limits. Homi Bhabha (Ed.), *Nation and Narration*, New York, Routledge, 1990.
  11. Hamza Alavi advances this argument in his article, "Pakistan and Islam: Ideology and Ethnicity", in Fred Halliday and Hamza Alavi, (Eds), *State and Sociology in the Middle East and Pakistan*, London, Macmillan, 1988.
  12. Wayne A. Wilcox, "Ideological Dilemmas of Pakistan's Political Culture", in Donald Eugene Smith, (Ed.), *South Asian Politics and Religion*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1966, p. 339.
  13. Mohammad Shehzad, "Press Freedom, An Unfulfilled Dream?" *The Friday Times*, Lahore, May 9-16, 2002. It is a well-known fact that the official biography of Jinnah by Hector Bolitho was persuaded by the Pakistani establishment to use an edited version of the speech in his book to blur its explicit secular message.
  14. Question: "Will Pakistan be a secular or theocratic state?"  
M.A. Jinnah: "You are asking me a question that is absurd. I do not know what a theocratic state means." (July 17, 1947 press conference) Quoted in Sharif al Mujahid, "Jinnah's Vision of Pakistan", [http://members.tripod.com/~no\\_nukes\\_sa/chapter\\_5.html](http://members.tripod.com/~no_nukes_sa/chapter_5.html)
  15. See for detailed discussions Hamza Alavi, no. 11.
  16. Freeland Abbot in his book, *Islam and Pakistan*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1968, and Leonard Binder in his book, *Religion and Politics in Pakistan*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1961, analyse the role Islam played in Pakistani politics during the 1950s.
  17. Karl Von Vorys, *Political Development in Pakistan*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1965.
  18. Ibid. p. 27, p. 91.
  19. Waheed-uz-Zaman, in his editorial note, "In Quest of an Identity, Proceedings of the First Congress on the History and Culture of Pakistan", held at University of Islamabad in April 1973, quoted in Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam*, London, Faber and Faber, 1982.
  20. In his recent book on Pakistan Christophe Jaffrelot writes that Pakistan still remains



'an artificial creation' and is still 'in pursuit of a national identity' which can counter the Indian nation. See his book, *A History of Pakistan and Its Origins*, Anthem Press, Paris, 2000, p. 254.

21. "The creation of the new State has placed a tremendous responsibility on the citizens of Pakistan. It gives them an opportunity to demonstrate to the world how can a nation, containing many elements, live in peace and amity and work for the betterment of all its citizens, irrespective of caste or creed."
22. Ayesha Jalal in her book on Jinnah brings out the contradictions in Jinnah in a unique way. See Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985.
23. Quoted in Akbar S. Ahmed, *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin*, London, Routledge, 1997, p. 236.
24. The utterly centralised orientation of the dispensation that ruled between 1947 and 1958 can be gauged from the fact that during those 11 years, the national legislature met for 338 days and passed 160 laws while the Governor-Generals issued 376 ordinances.
25. See for example, Dr. Yusuf Abbas Hashimi, "Pakistani Nation and Islamic History", *Journal of Pakistan Historical Society*, 40, January 1992, Karachi.
26. The Army arrested the Khan of Kalat and led a campaign against the Zehri tribe which defied government orders to surrender their arms. In the attack the Zehri chief, Nauroz Khan was lured into a negotiation and arrested. Two of his sons were sent to the gallows with one tying Koran to his neck, and the old Nauroz died in Kohlu prison serving life imprisonment in 1964.
27. The expression 'Pushtun' used here is same as Pashtun and Pathan.
28. The Baluchis expressed their annoyance over the unitisation plan openly and the military dispensation led by Ayub Khan mistook it for insurgency and the ensuing army action in Baluchistan hardened Baluchi sentiments, who already felt cheated by the politics of the Pakistan state to absorb Baluchistan in 1947-48.
29. Towards the 1990s, the Pushtun leaders demanded renaming of NWFP as Pakhtunkhwa, a climbdown from their earlier demand of Pushtunistan. But even then the Punjabi dominated national legislature reacted strongly against any such nomenclature that remotely lent legitimacy to Pushtun as a nationality.
30. The formulations of Paul R. Brass, John Breuilly, Tom Narain and even to certain extent Homi J. Bhaba are relevant to the discussion on ethno-linguistic-cultural assertions in Pakistan ever since the 1990s.
31. As per data by Population Census Organisation, Pakistan, given in *Pakistan Statistical Year Book, 2003*, Islamabad, Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2003, p. 31.
32. For a more recent account on the theme of ethnicity in Pakistan, see Shireen M. Mazari, "Ethnicity and Political Process: The Pakistani Experience", *Strategic Studies*, Islamabad, 23 (3), Autumn 2003.
33. Feroze Ahmed, a well-known Sindhi leftist intellectual, in his serialised article in

*Dawn* in 1996, 'Ethnicity, State and National Integration', cited the case of intolerance of the ruling class to accommodate regional identities.

34. For example, Tariq Rahman in his writings on the role of language in politics of Pakistan seeks to argue that the Pakistani state with its zeal to promote Urdu as the national language induced fierce linguistic chauvinism among the Bengalis which led to the secession of Bangladesh. See his article, "Language teaching and power in Pakistan", in Joan L. G. Baart and Ghulam Hyder Sindhi, *Pakistani Languages and Society: Problems and Prospects*, National Institute of Linguistic Studies in collaboration with Summer Institute of Linguistics, Islamabad, 2003, p. 19.
35. For details, see *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 14<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2003. Available at <http://www.ethnologue.com>.
36. G.A. Allana, "Pakistani Society and the Problem of Linguistic Plurality", in Joan L. G. Baart and Ghulam Hyder Sindhi, *Pakistani Languages and Society: Problems and Prospects*, National Institute of Linguistic Studies in collaboration with Summer Institute of Linguistics, Islamabad, 2003, p. 19.
37. One of the popular Baluchi writers Zahoor Shah (1926-1977) writes: My heart bleeds/ To wet the barren land for my miserable people in the hope/ that one day these lands will turn green/ and there will grow red flowers. Gather the seeds of those flowers/ Because these are from my blood. (From his *Sistagien Dastunk*)
38. It would require yet another paper to analyse the Baluch and Pushtun resistance that started from the early 1950s and led to violent reactions from the Pakistan state during the 1950s and 1970s. Especially severe was the intervention by the Pakistani army between 1972 and 1976 in Baluchistan and the NWFP.
39. Shireen Mazari goes to the extent of saying that forces of ethnicity are losing their relevance and they have shifted towards a broader national perspective. The more alarming feature of Pakistani politics she would argue is the rise of the MMA, which threatens to affect the body politic of Pakistan in unalterable ways. Shireen M. Mazari, "Ethnicity and Political Process: The Pakistani Experience", *Strategic Studies*, Islamabad, 23 (3), Autumn 2003.
40. For a detailed discussion on how the Mohajir identity was ethnicised, see Iftikar Malik, "Ethno-nationalism in Pakistan: A Commentary on Muhajir Quami Mahaz (MQM) in Sindh", *South Asia*, 17 (2), 1995.
41. For a recent study, see Yunas Samad, "In and Out of Power but not Down and Out: Mohajir Identity Politics", in Christophe Jaffrelot, (Ed.), *Pakistan: Nationalism Without a Nation?* New Delhi, Manohar Books, 2002, pp. 51-62.
42. The PONM founded in 1998 are fighting for the reconstitution of Pakistan on the basis of the all-India resolution agreed on March 23, 1940, which spelled out that the five national groupings – the Sindhis, Pushtuns, Baluchis, Seraikis and Punjabis – should constitute Pakistan on an equal basis.
43. As per SNP's formulation, the state of Multan as in 1818 and the former state of Bahawalpur as on 1953 should be revived with the emergence of Seraikistan in a balanced federation of Pakistan.

44. In an interview to the Green Left, Kanjoo reportedly said, "We are fighting for autonomy, to have the right to be equals to the Punjabis within Pakistan, rather than seeking independence from it." *The Green Left Weekly*, May 15, 2002, Available at <http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/2002/492/492p18b.htm>
45. Speech of Abdul Majeed Kanjoo, president of the Seraiki National Party. Mumbai Resistance 2004. <http://www.antiimperialista.com/en/view.shtml?category=9&id=1076084490>
46. See Tariq Rahman, "Politics of Punjabi Teaching", *The News*, September 8, 1998.
47. Dr. Sitender Noor led a delegation of 150 participants from India. The conference was a huge hit as per Noor's account of it in his interview published in *The News*, July 11, 2003.
48. For a detailed discussion, see Ian Talbot, "The Punjabization of Pakistan: Myth or Reality?" in Christophe Jaffrelot, no. 41, pp. 51-62.
49. In his recent article in the daily *Dawn*, Karachi, July 6, 2004, Javed Burki reaffirms this position and says, in a private conversation with Zia he had suggested dividing the four provinces of Pakistan into about 20 states.
50. Reported in *The News*, June 25, 2004.

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