

## STRENGTHENING NATIONAL INTEGRATION AMONG EDUCATED YOUTH

**Dr. Fauzia Saleem Alvi,\* Aaisha Amjad,\*  
Khurram Shahzad\* Dr. Ahmed Usman\***

### Abstract

*Pakistan, since its inception, has been confronting the challenge of national integration due to multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic population residing in the country. These dynamics of the society increase the magnitude of integration related challenges faced by the country. Several intervening internal and external factors tend to create split in social fabric of society thus negatively affecting the process of national integration in Pakistan. Like the other segments of society, the youth of the country is confronted with socio-political and socio-economic issues that tend to affect their feeling of belongingness and cohesiveness. The current situation in Pakistan demands for due involvement of important stakeholders to extend measures for strengthening national integrity among youth. In this regard, the educational institutions can play a significant role in enhancing the cohesion in society in general and youth in particular. Empowerment and morale boosting of youth is pivotal in bringing national harmony in the society. Moreover, it will also equip the youth to cope with the societal problems such as rapidly growing intolerance and schism in the society based on ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences among masses.*

*This paper aims to highlight the youth as a pivotal agent of national cohesion, the factors that generally affecting national cohesion among Pakistani youth and the role of university education in strengthening national cohesion. Along with highlighting the existing policies to strengthen the national integration at university level,*

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- \* Dr Fauzia Saleem Alvi is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Social & Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore.
  - \* Aaisha Amjad is M. Phil in Sociology and a scholar at the Institute of Social & Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore.
  - \* Khurram Shazad is, M.Phil in Sociology and a scholar at the Institute of Social & Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore.
  - \* Dr. Ahmed Usman, Assistant Professor, Institute of Social & Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

*some measures have also been suggested to further reinforce the national cohesion among youth studying in universities.*

**Key Words:** *National cohesion, integration, national identity, polarization, conflict.*

## Introduction

National integration is an essential prerequisite for the survival of a country. It is generally defined as a process of achieving national cohesion, stability, prosperity, strength and feelings of being united as a nation.<sup>1</sup> It may also be explained as a common national consciousness to rigorously stress on establishing a common national identity.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, it refers to the capacity of a nation to ensure the provision of welfare to all its individuals, with a particular focus on reducing the inequalities and polarization in a society.<sup>3</sup> National integration serves as a binding force to develop a strong bondage between the members of society to unite them together. However, the diversity in the ideological, ethnic, religious and cultural fundamentals give rise to the conflict in a society that poses a direct threat to the integrity of a nation. Considering the case of Pakistan, a short glimpse of history reveals that since its existence, the country has been in the disarray due to fragmentation among the divergent multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic population residing in the country. These paradoxical dynamics of society are in flare contradiction to the national interest and increase the magnitude of the challenge to create national cohesion, unity, and integration.<sup>4</sup> Pakistani society is in a state of transition, confronted with several problems at national and international levels. The day-to-day challenges related to security, politics and socio-economic well-being of people aggravate the ever growing need of developing a harmonious and peaceful society.

In such a gloomy environment, youth seems to be a ray of hope for the future. The youth of Pakistan, that makes majority of the population, is being brought up in highly challenging times. There are several factors that tend to create disintegration and disharmony among Pakistani masses in general and youth in particular. These factors can be categorized into socio-political and socio-economic issues. Considering the socio-economic condition of Pakistan, the lack of jobs, unequal opportunities, growing unemployment and absence of a strong industrial base are considered as

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<sup>1</sup> Mirza Muhammad Saleem, "National Integration", *Advance Contemporary Affairs*, Vol.58, no.6, 2008, 424.

<sup>2</sup> Walker Connor, "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?", *World Politics*, Vol.24, no.2, 1972, 319-355.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ijaz Hussain, "The dilemma of national integration in Pakistan", *ISSRA*, VI (2009), 43.

huge challenges. It has been revealed in various studies that youth of an economically downtrodden country is more prone to adopting wrong means and resorting to violence against state to satisfy their needs.<sup>5</sup> Their feeling of patriotism and adherence to the national interest start to blur with the passage of time. Thus, they become a vulnerable target of intriguing elements that can easily exploit them against the state and people. The political instability and lack of deliverance of existing government tend to demotivate and discourage the youth. Owing to the deteriorating security situation and lawlessness, the youth is enthralled in frustrations and fear. All these troubling issues signify that the potential hope of the country i.e. the youth is confronted with a serious challenge to develop a sense of belonging with the state and the nation. Resultantly, youth of today develops the feeling of grudge, disappointment, depression, and confusion regarding their national identity and belongingness to the nation.<sup>6</sup>

Considering this milieu, the due involvement of important stakeholders to extend measures for strengthening national integrity among youth becomes the need of hour. In this regard, the educational institutions can play a significant role in enhancing the national cohesion among youth. Patriotic, enthusiastic and united youth can play a pivotal role in increasing the national harmony in the society by dealing with the problems such as rapidly growing intolerance and schism based on ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences.

This paper aims to highlight the youth as a significant agent of national cohesion, the factors that generally affect national cohesion amongst Pakistani youth and the role of university education in strengthening national cohesion among youth. Along with highlighting the existing policies to strengthen the national integration at university level, some measures have also been suggested to further reinforce the national cohesion among youth studying in universities.

## National integration

National integration refers to developing a strong bondage between the members of society that are being divided on the ideological, ethnic, religious and cultural fundamentals. For developing national cohesion, the formulation of national identity is pivotal. Studies have indicated that people are always reluctant to integrate into a single national identity leaving their regional and ethnical identity if the mode of amalgamation is

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<sup>5</sup> Syed Yasir Mahmood Gillani, Hafez ur Rehman and Abid Rasheed Gill, "Unemployment, Poverty, Inflation and Crime Nexus: Co-integration Causality Analysis of Pakistan", *Pakistan Economic and Social Review*, Vol.47, no.1, Summer 2009: 79-98.

<sup>6</sup> Moeed Yusuf and Arsla Jawaid, "Radicalism Among Youth In Pakistan: Human Development Gone Wrong?" *National Human Development Report*, 2014.

authoritative and not people-oriented.<sup>7</sup> Looking at the examples of countries with diverse ethno-racial population like USA, Canada, Malaysia, the process of national cohesion has always been of a melting-pot approach in which the ethnic and racial loyalties have been melted within the larger interest of state and developed a national identity, with a democratic system of representation for the former.<sup>8</sup>

The foundation of Pakistan took place with a nation composed of a poly ethnic society having diverse cultures, languages and identities. In different eras of Pakistan's history the term of national integration has been moulded into different forms depending upon the political scene of the country. Different regimes have tried to develop national integration in nation with different approaches like during the first decade of the country's history the emphasis was to evolve a national constitutional machinery which could effectively run the matters of the newly emerged state with a strong rivalry being faced from the neighbouring country, India.

During the 1980's the process of national cohesion was embedded in the religious unity which showed a support to the Afghan Jihad against Communism of the Soviet Union. The incidence of terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York on 11 September 2001 became salient moment in history due to which, like many other countries of the world, Pakistan was also thrown into a "war against terror" and the concept of national integration was contemplated with it. So in Pakistan, the process of developing a single national identity and national integration becomes an even complex task with the existing realities related to religious, political, and social ideology.

Additionally, considering the role of elite class in creating stability and cohesion in the society, the Classical Elite theory firstly developed by two Italian sociologists — Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) and Gaetano Mosca (1858-1911) — is of utmost importance. Both these theorists dismissed Karl Marx view of socialism in which he advocated that an equality-based society would lead to progress. Contrarily they were of the view that the elite class prevailed in a society because of their superior personality traits like intelligence, better decision-making ability and more developed organizational skills than the common masses due to which they can play an important role in placing the society in the right direction.<sup>9</sup> Another American theorist C. W. Mills disagreed with Pareto and Mosca regarding the elite having the natural power to rule, rather he

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<sup>7</sup> Rehana Saeed Hashmi, "Ethnic Politics: An overview to National Integration (The Case of Pakistan)", *Research Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol.29, no.1, 2014: 345-361.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Micheal Haralambos & Martin Holborn, *Sociology: Themes & Perspectives*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2000: 601-604.

was of the view that the structures of institutions were so designed that the top positions were mostly attained by the elitists. Certain institutions occupied key positions in society and the elite comprised those who held 'command posts' in those institutions. Mills identified three key institutions including the major corporations, the military and federal government, which can manoeuvre the society towards the required progress. Therefore, according to the above perspective, a democratic process of creating national identity and a more responsible role of the elite class occupying important institutional positions can play a significant role in creating national harmony in Pakistani society.

### **Youth - A pivotal actor of strengthening national cohesion**

Educated youth is considered as a vital agent for playing a pivotal role in the development of Pakistani nation. Being the largest and most influential age group in the country, well-informed youth can determine the destiny of a nation. The founder of Pakistan Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, was always very optimistic about the youth of Pakistan and in his many addresses he had highlighted the fact that in the shape of Pakistan he wanted to ensure a safe and well-guarded homeland for the bright and intelligent future generation of the country. He was a firm believer of the fact that the national cohesion of the country was very much dependent on the active and meaningful participation of youth of this nation.

Presently Pakistan is experiencing its "youth boom" period in which approximately 68 per cent of Pakistani population comprises of youth, the largest in history. However, youth, the dominant population of Pakistan are entangled with several grim issues that include expensive education, lack of job opportunities, poverty, insecurity, increasing inflation and corruption. Young people of today are confronted with the serious challenges to secure a better future for them. There are bleak chances for them of attaining a dream job after graduation. Owing to the deteriorating political, law and order situation, the country had to experience phenomena like "brain drain", in which a large percentage of youth prefers to search for secure and prosperous opportunities elsewhere in the world. Keeping this in view, the incorporation of educated youth is prerequisite in all such activities that are aimed to enhance cohesiveness in society. Youth participation in country's political, social, and economic issues is the need of hour. As mentioned in the 'Malaysian Integrity Plan 2004':

“...the transformation towards a developed nation is not solely based on economic and technological progress. It also

needs progress in social, cultural, intellectual, and spiritual fields....<sup>10</sup>

In this context, the empowerment and morale boosting of youth is crucial in bringing social justice, institutional credibility and national harmony in the society. Moreover, this will also equip the youth to cope with the societal problems such as rapidly growing intolerance and polarization of society based on ethnic, cultural and language differences among masses. Moreover, the significance of youth studying in universities becomes more evident as in near future this segment of population will become a part of the mainstream work force of the country. The level and magnitude of national cohesion existing in this population currently will reflect the future prospects of national cohesion existing in the country.

### **Factors affecting national cohesion among youth in Pakistan**

Over the past half century, Pakistan has faced the deteriorating political, economic and security situation that resulted in the fissures among its social institutions and fragmentation of societal normative structure. On the other hand, several intervening internal and external factors tend to create split in social fabric of society thus negatively affecting the process of social integration in Pakistan. Like the other segments of society, the educated youth of the country has become a victim to these torments. A short glimpse of the socio-political factors that tend to negatively influence national cohesion and integration amongst Pakistani youth as well as affect their growth and development, are discussed below:

#### **Socio-political factors**

- **Sectarianism:** Pakistani people have divisions and sects that mainly include Sunni and Shia, even within these sects there are a number of divisions. Sunni sect includes divisions like Hanafi, Deobandi, Barelvi, Salafi, etc; whereas Shia sect includes Agha Khanis, Bohris, Nusayris and Ahle Tashi. Each sect has their own set of beliefs and considers them right. People abide by the version of their sectarian ideology whereby, the diversity in sectarian creeds gives rise to the intolerance towards divergent sect. Unfortunately, the disintegration based on sectarian affiliation is on the rise. Growing incidences of interfaith disharmony and religious extremism in the name of Islam are amongst the grave issues that tend to create wedge between Pakistani youth on the basis of their sectarian differences. The fanned sectarianism gives

<sup>10</sup> Mohd Tap Salleh, "The National Integrity Plan of Malaysia", *Malaysian Institute of Integrity*, 2007, <<http://www.unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/.../unpan047847>>, accessed March 20, 2015.

rise to feeling of disintegration and disengagement among youth, where it stands confused of their national and religious identity.

- **Madrassa education:** In Pakistan, there are around 12,910 Deeni Madaris, out of which 3% are working in the public and 97% in private sector. Deeni Madaris cater to an enrolment of 1.7 million students of which 67% are males and 38% are females.<sup>11</sup> These Madaris are imparting unchecked extremist perspective to several Madrassa students. They have their own system of education that aims to promote radicalised ideologies amongst youth studying there. Therefore, Madrassas serve as breeding ground for promoting radicalized dogmas that tend to divide the youth on ideological grounds. Considering themselves on the right path, they have the greater tendencies to act violently against their state, people and counterparts. The involvement of the young people in terrorist activities provides inevitable evidences of increasing radicalisation and intolerance in Pakistani youth that pose a threat to national integration.
- **War against Terrorism:** Since 9/11, the threats and challenges for Pakistan have been multiplied. The Pakistani nation has been divided into enlightened and conservative segments. It has further widened the rift among the different segments of the society based on the national stance of favouring the USA or stand against it for attacking Afghanistan. Pakistan's decision to help the USA in war against terrorism gave an opportunity to anti-state/anti-Islam elements that exploited the alliance of Pakistan with USA to justify the terrorist attacks across the country. These terrorist groups preach the radical version of Islam and misinterpret the Holy Quran and Hadiths to provoke people for rising against the state institutions. They allege that Pakistan's fight against terrorism is covertly aimed at obliging the USA and West. Propagation of such baseless allegation creates perplexity in the unified stance of Pakistani masses particularly youth against the issues related to national interest. They become an easy prey of terrorists' brainwashing and act as pawns in their hand. Therefore, the violent activities and terror attacks employed by youth factions and several youth centric organizations are on the rise that evidently displays the disintegrated mindset of Pakistani youth.
- **Bad governance:** Owing to bad governance, the society has become victim of imbalance and discrepancy. Masses have no faith in policies of government and they relate the bad governance with the failure of the state to protect and privilege its inhabitants.

<sup>11</sup> "Madrassa Education: 2014, Challenges, Reforms and Possibilities", *Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency*, 2014, <[www.youthparliamentpakistan.pk](http://www.youthparliamentpakistan.pk)>, accessed March 3, 2015.

UNDP statistics state that about 32% of Pakistani youth is illiterate, 10% unemployed and less than 6% have acquired technical skills. The weak political leadership has often ignored this youth bulge. Resultantly, the youth feels isolated, ideologically confused, disintegrated, face an identity crisis and find no outlet to vent out their frustration. While considering the education system, there exists a massive difference among private and public education sector that tends to produce the youth with varying degree of capabilities and potential to excel. Education system itself creates huge disparities among the youth which eventually disrupts cohesiveness.

**Socio-economic disparities:** Poverty and inflation has resulted into the deep-rooted disparities in the society. Unemployment, besides creating economic imbalance has given rise to the frustration amongst the members of the society, particularly youth. Deteriorating economic condition of country tends to create uncertainty among the youth that appeared to be losing their feeling of patriotism and adherence to the nation and state.

### **Role of university education in national cohesion**

Education strengthens the essential social bonding between members of a society in order to hold them together by emphasising on the existence of normative system that is required to establish harmonious, cooperative, and morally correct society.<sup>12</sup> It enables youth to develop an accommodating culture of tolerance and harmony, where youth is encouraged to resolve their mutual conflicts with the help of negotiation rather than carrying out physical violence against each other. Education can mould the behaviour of the students to make them tolerant and benevolent individuals. The unbiased and non-discriminatory milieu of education system has the potential to impart sense of belongingness and cohesiveness at micro- and macro-level. Through the power of knowledge, even the hostile and radicalised individuals can be turned into harmonised members of the society.<sup>13</sup>

Higher education is a gateway for entering into elite society and it provides a number of opportunities to be a part in upper professions, commerce, industry and civil services.<sup>14</sup> As per John Henry Newman, the universities have always been considered as a hub for imparting higher education and also serve as podium for scholars from different disciplines,

<sup>12</sup> Dr Zafar Qureshi, "National Cohesion through Education." *Dawn News*, November 15, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Naveen Khan. "Education in Pakistan has Negative Impact on the Social Cohesion of Youth", October 2014, <[www.laaltain.com](http://www.laaltain.com)>, accessed April 13, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Chandra Muzaffar, "Political culture and nation building: whither Bangsa Malaysia?" *Malaysian Journal of Social Policy and Society*. 2006: 22-42.

who exchange ideas and thoughts.<sup>15</sup> Julian Betts et.al. explained that to increase the compatibility of students in the labour market after the completion of degree has always been the major role of universities around the world.<sup>16</sup>

Nowadays, the role of university, besides generating and imparting knowledge, also includes its contribution in social and national development. As in the case of Germany, the universities played role in strengthening national identity.<sup>17</sup> Chang while describing role of universities in national integration of Malaysia writes:

University undergraduates are semi-adults who already have their own predispositions and set ways of thinking and doing things. To change their ways is a formidable task, albeit not impossible. Since the idea of promoting ethnic awareness and consciousness, developing positive ethnic relations and achieving national unity are uncertain at young age among the Malaysians, hence if university is to promote healthy inter-ethnic interactions among the undergraduates, their understanding and acceptance of these values will be fortified.<sup>18</sup>

More so, universities encourage greater learner interaction across ethnic, sectarian and social groups. They serve as a platform to impart tolerance for divergent views, reduce the marginalisation of minorities, facilitate behavioural changes and promote loyalty and patriotism among young students. Moreover, the role of teacher is of utmost importance, because he could necessarily be engaged to mould the perception and the pre-existing realities of student to convince them to serve for national interest. Proactive integrative activities among students could play a vital role in strengthening the national integration amongst students belonging to different cultural and social background.

While considering Pakistan, it has been observed that education in Pakistan despite promoting national cohesion is more inclined to erode national unity.<sup>19</sup> The asymmetrical structure, discriminatory curricula and divisive nature of education tend to affect the feelings of shared identity

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<sup>15</sup> John Henry Newman, "What is a university. Essays: English and American". *The Harvard Classics* Vol.28, 1909, <<http://www.bartleby.com/28/1002.html>>, accessed March 17, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Julian Betts, Christopher Ferrall, and Ross Finnie. "The Role of University Characteristics in Determining Post graduation Outcomes: Panel Evidence from three Canadian Cohorts," *Canadian Public Policy*, Vol.39, no.1, May, 2013: 81-106.

<sup>17</sup> Robin Cowan, "Universities and the Knowledge Economy", *Industrial and Corporate Change*, Vol. 9, no.2, 2000: 211-253.

<sup>18</sup> Lee Wei Chang, "National Unity at the university level: Importance of civilization dialogue and way farward", *European Scientific Journal*, Vol.4, December 2013: 173-186.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

and sense of group belongingness. Unequal distribution of educational opportunities and resources, the widening gap of quality of education among private and public sectors and discrimination in job opportunities among the students based on their ethnicity tend to negatively affect their mutual social cohesion.

### **HEC/university policies addressing national integration**

In Pakistan, despite the serious issues creating a threat to the national integration of the country, the role of Higher Education Commission (HEC) has been appreciable in harnessing national cohesion among the youth. To generate a narrative regarding national integration and minimizing ethnic and sectarian conflicts among young adults, although, there has been a lack of clearly defined educational policies at university level. However, indirect measures have contributed in creating the vibe that is required at present. Measures taken by HEC regarding representation of less privileged youth to make them a part of mainstream academia of Pakistan and to positively address the sense of deprivation of the students residing in provinces of Baluchistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa are as under:

- Different scholarship and quotas have been introduced to encourage students from Baluchistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Gilgit-Baltistan to increase their chances for getting higher education.
- In 2002, HEC announced reserved seats for student of Baluchistan and Fata in medical and engineering universities. There are also many other scholarships in which regional and provincial quota are reserved.

### **Conclusion**

National integration is considered as a survival need for every nation. In Pakistan, the process of national cohesion and integration among youth is greatly influenced by several incompatible factors including socio-economic disparities and socio-political factors. The current chaotic situation in Pakistan demands involvement of the important stakeholders for extending measures to strengthen national integrity among youth. In this regard, the educational institutions can play a pivotal role. Public sector universities serve as a platform for educated youth belonging to different socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds to share the parallel space and avail analogous opportunities. Therefore, the higher education institutions in collaboration with HEC need to take serious initiatives to promote national cohesion amongst educated youth.

## **Recommendations**

Following measures may be taken at university level to further strengthen the national cohesion and integration among the educated youth belonging to different ethnic and cultural background:

- Conduct dialogues between the students belonging to different provinces and cultures as it would be a very important tool for strengthening inter-cultural integration and harmony.
- Arrange seminars and workshops stressing the importance of nationalism and national unity for a nation along with highlighting the need for tolerance for divergent religious, sectarian and cultural views.
- Introduce the different courses on national integration, cultural diversities and ethnic relations discussing the models of other multi-cultural countries (like Malaysia and Kenya) to deal with the problem of national disintegration.
- Organizations and national unity cell may be established within universities for promoting activities and suggest policies to increase national integration and unity among university students.
- Conduct different research studies, to analyse the effectiveness of educational policies aimed at reducing the national disintegration. In addition, qualitative and quantitative studies should be conducted to know about students' perception regarding national integration and level of their sense of belongingness respectively.
- Arrange national conference at university level, where the research scholars from all over the country may share the findings of their studies conducted in the area of national integration in Pakistan.

