

ETHNIC CRISIS IN PAKISTAN

Dancing around the first is not the solution to any problem. One should try to see beneath the surface in order to grasp an idea about the basic issue. Despite a stream of strong words and announcements and by the government, various non-governmental organizations and political institutions, nothing has been done successfully in order to eliminate the ethnic crises in Pakistan. Rather the situation has taken a quantum leap for the worse.

The struggle for Pakistan was a unique historical experience with few parallels in the annals of history. It transcended ethnic, linguistic, cultural and regional differences and coalesced into a powerful movement culminating in the creation of an independent homeland for the Muslims of the sub-continent. It even defied the geographic compulsions. In essence, it was an experience of a deep Muslim consciousness which was both inspiring and invigorating. However, Pakistan after its creation was, indeed, an ethnically plural society.

Pakistan, these days is passing through a crucial era of multifarious ethnic problems; multi-lingual and regional; problems etc. The province of Punjab has three distinct ethno-linguistic groups i.e. Punjabi, Pothohari and Saraiki speaking. Of late, there has been a nascent rise of Saraiki consciousness with a demand for a separate Saraiki Province comprising of Saraiki speaking areas. In Baluchistan the Baluch, Brohi and Pakhtoons are dominated ethnolinguistic groups. The wide spread nationalist consciousness of Baluchistan has cut across the tribal divisions. In the North-Western Province of Pakistan, apart from Pushtu, Hindku and Saraiki are also spoken in some parts of this province. The Pushtoons as an ethnic group are integrating with the economic life of the rest of the country. The issue of Kalabagh Dam has arisen out of the same ethnic issue and provincial disharmony of Pakistan in the province. Though the proposed dam may play the role of a key factor in the prosperity of the country and may breathe a new life in the agricultural and industrial life of Pakistan. Moreover the ethnic groups of the province also demand regional autonomy and to rename the province as Pakhtoonistan. Similarly the problem of ethnicity in Sindh is very complex. It is a web of discords, clash of interest and the resultant sense of deprivation between the different ethnic groups. Overawed and bewildered conditions, the inhabitants themselves, sometime become bewildered and the frequent outburst of violence creates hysteria among the people which has consequences which are damaging for the peace and harmony of the province and also for the nation as a whole.

Briefly, the issue of ethnicity in Pakistan is closely linked with the social economic and political elements of the state structures. The close linkage makes the problem all the more intricate and complex.

The genesis of the issue can be traced to Mughal era. The Mughal ruled the sub-continent on a feudalistic pattern. When their grip softened ,this gave rise to the tribal chiefs and “Waderas “ to establish their own state. This political milieu gave opportunity to the British to establish their rule through this system and establish links with the “Waderas“ through strong civil services.

Pakistan came into being as a result of a popular struggle and vote , but the Muslim League which came into power was not a political party but a movement with Quaid -e -Azam as a focal point. His early death was a great set-back to the nation and fruit of independence could not reach the populace as in India ,but developed in the hands of landlords pirs and the link. The categories did not have common philosophy for themselves. Seeing this, the civil service assumed by the military and they ruled it directly and indirectly. This created a sense of deprivation and frustration amongst the people of Pakistan in general and in the people of smaller provinces in particular.

Unfortunately the politics of Pakistan has never been placed on some specific philosophy ,program or principle . It has been in a negation of all the ingredients of a true democracy .It has always been confined to prisons and personalities. Every since partition the only motive behind the political alliances has been for personal gain , power and wealth .Political parties are the personal fiefdom of political leaders, scions o f inter-related families of landlords, pirs, nawabs, industrialists, business tycoons and generals. They conspire and intrigue with civil or military bureaucracy to achieve ,retain and perpetuate power. This treacherous act of traditional politicians overlapped the very sense of democracy and brotherhood of motherland.

The political and the administration structure with its highly centralized state power completely failed in providing effective popular governance . It strongly resisted the equitable distribution of power in which the elite protected its own interest .Autocracy and centralized rule practiced by the past rulers both military and civil has damaged democracy, destroyed national institutions and kept a healthy political cultural from flourishing. It has created the sense of deprivation amongst between the masses through the country and has widen the gap between the haves and have-nots.

The power sharing problem has played a vital role in the political scene of the country. The most tragic outcome of this issue is the creation of Bangladesh which has encouraged the sense of regionalism in the smaller provinces as well ethnic groups of the country. The demand for Sindhudesh and the Saraiki province are closely linked with the same ethnic sentiments of the province of Bengal now known as Bangladesh which had been a wing of Pakistan up to its separate in 1971.

Provincial disharmony has risen out of the neglect and deprivation of smaller provinces. The centralization of power has encouraged internal dissension and disharmony. It has weakened the state and aggravated the multidimensional crises the people face in their daily life. This has resulted in deteriorating political and social fabric of the country. All the provinces were devoid of effective power and the centre enjoyed the power in majority of the subjects. Most of these were required to be decentralized and restored to the provinces and from there to grass -roots level. But no concrete effort was made by any military or democratic government of Pakistan.

Prior to partition Hindus dominated urban population, but the partition led to a dramatic change in the demographic structure of the country especially in the province of Sindh. A size able population of Muhajirs started to settle in the big cities. Moreover a high rate of in country migration and from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Iran, to Sindh province balance, has further contributed in changing the already fragile ethnic balance between Sindhi and non-Sindhis.

Before partition, Sindh was a compact province linguistically when both Hindus and the Muslims spoke Sindhi. The demographic changes compelled by the independence shattered the linguistic homogeneity of Sindh. This development hurt local sensitive and gave rise to inflamed feelings among the intelligentsia.

Large scale allotments of barrage land to Punjabis at the cost of landless peasantry of Sindh itself created strong resentment against Punjabi farmers. It should be noted here that one of the reasons for this settlement policy was that a Punjabi farmer, with his tradition of hard work and commitment to land was though to be better equipped to develop the virgin land of Sindh. But the imbalance in allotment of lands led to improper distribution of facilities in agricultural sector. As a result all these factors combined to create strong resentment against.

Ethnicism is not a peculiar phenomenon. It is a trend finding its full bloom and expression in both the advance and the developing countries. As far as the case of Pakistan is

concerned a comprehensive plan need to be devised to bring ethnic politics within the force of mainstream politics. Sustained efforts should be made to cultivate faith in the constitutional means for redress of grievances and fulfillment of basic genuine demands at large scale .

Of late, we witness a new trend , a nexus between ethnicism and the frequent use of weapons. In fact , at times ethnic culture is symbolized with the use of lethal weapons. Snipers and unidentified killers take over the streets at trivial excuse. There is , therefore, a need to completely isolate the criminals from their ethnic moorings. Only an even-handed administration can come up to this serious task.

The role of some foreign powers can' s be glossed over. Our avowed stand on Kashmir and Afghanistan provided all the more reason to take into account counter strategies by outside forces. This should be a high priority item on agenda.

There should be frequent exchange of students of high academic caliber between provinces to provide opportunities to promote friendship and understanding between local and educated young ones , most of them have been caught in the ethnic web of sectarian and terrorist groups . They may be brought back to the track by providing the skilled education and granting small loans for their self- employment.

There is an urgent need to review fiscal, industrial and commercial policies to reverse the present demographic trends. This must be done before the present apprehensions and resentments turn into violent agitation in the rural areas. After making the rural areas economically viable to live the process of migration would slow down. Industrial development within the boundaries of metropolitan cities should be discouraged and the same should be encouraged in the rural areas by offering suitable incentives like establishment of tax free zones.

The devolution of power plan presented by the present military regime sounds well and it is a real effort to minimize the ethnicity in the country. By giving the power to the people where it actually belongs, the further well being ,stability and unity of the nation will be enhanced. It may help the government in strengthening the federation removing disharmony and restoring national cohesion. It will restore real democracy, provide speedy justice, eradicate corruption, ensure law and order and active participation of masses in all tiers of governance. Successful direct government will play a big role and lasting political order in the country .Moreover by dismantling the existed colonial system of authority it has filled a vast gap between the masses and the state authorities at large.

The development plan may be proved as a milestone in shaping an ethnic- free state, Pakistan only if it is implemented in letter and spirit.

So conceived in this way that the processes of migration, political structure and highly centralized state power are various modes responsible for introducing diversity and ethnicity in an otherwise homogeneous society. Ethnicism tends to draw lines between the regions and various social groups. The objective reality should, therefore, be taken into account an important input for further policy formulation. The policy planners should readily accept, recognize and start from this premise so that ethnic variations are not only accounted for but they are moulded in such a cast that they help the nation building process.