

Course of identity crisis of people of pakistan history essay



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It will not appear as a shock if one claims that the present day Pakistani is going through an identity crisis. The term as defined by Erik Erikson, "... When an individual loses a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity", truly elucidates the situation of the people of Pakistan. In order to comprehend the crisis, it is necessary to acknowledge that it is not a new phenomenon but in fact traces its root from partition and for some, even before that. The confusion of whether Jinnah envisioned a secular state or a theocratic one, divided opinions ever since. Leaderships' efforts of trying to identify Pakistan as unilingual and a cultural unity had a reverse effect of cultural conflicts both on individual and political level. On top of that, historians attempting to defend the logic for Pakistan by forming vague associations with civilizations led to confusion about the origins, and eventually the 'identity' of the people.

This paper attempts to identify and explore this course, not necessarily in chronological but thematic order, which eventually formed the distorted identities of Pakistanis today.

The creation of Pakistan was based on the idea that the Muslim community was altogether a separate nation than the Hindus of the subcontinent, and not just an ethnic minority. It was believed that they had a distinct identity and culture. The present day Pakistan has been home to one of the most ancient civilization (the Indus valley) and had seen many invasions, mostly by Muslim invaders. The Muslim rule in this area resulted in most of the population of this region acquiring the identity of 'Muslims' which has been recognized by historians to be different in terms of culture from the rest of the subcontinent. This separate identity was put in danger when the British

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colonized India and oppressed Muslims. However this can also be seen as a provocation for the Muslims to realize that they are a separate nation and to demand a separate homeland. Since despite leading a 'distinct' social existence within the host subcontinent, never before the need was felt to have sovereignty over a territory and being identified as a 'nation'. The important thing to understand here is that the Muslim self-awakening movement stressed on "safeguarding rights and aspirations of the minority" (i. e. the Muslims) within an undivided India only. But it was only when they realized that this was not possible in a Hindu-dominated India, they demanded a separate state. This challenges the perception that Pakistan was created on the basis of a flawed theory that just because Hindus and Muslims were fundamentally different from one another, they couldn't coexist and that Pakistan was envisioned to be a strictly theocratic state.

Jinnah and Iqbal both wanted Muslim-majority areas merged together into a state where Muslims and all religious minorities would have equal rights as citizens. The quest for Pakistan has been misinterpreted as a quest for Islam. The slogan: "Pakistan ka matlab kya? La illaha illallah"(what is the meaning of Pakistan? There is no God but Allah) has been misapprehended as intending to put religious institution at the top of the state or to patronize religion-based nationalism. But it simply meant to give a message of peace, tolerance and universalism.

However this perception led to the contradiction over Jinnah's promise of protecting rights of minorities in Pakistan and birth of the fundamentalist call for an 'Islamic' state (which was indeed nothing more than a specific interpretation of Islam and entirely contestable).

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This was the beginning of religious conflict in the state. Then with the 1973 constitution the state taking the definition of ' Muslim-hood' in its hands was a " dangerous and divisive development" with both civilian and militant governments producing their ' Islamic reforms'. Overtime, use of religion to define state ideology created confusion in the minds of ordinary Pakistani and eventually Zia-ul-Haq taking the tinkertoy in his hands and imposing his prescription of Islamic identity pitted the different sects, puritans and folk religionists against each other; created intolerance and extremist views; and hindered the development of a " genuinely unifying national identity".

Other conflicts arose in the form of cultural disputes. Though Muslims were different from Hindus but within the Muslims there are many diverse ethnic groups. This could be understood by the fact that the present day Pakistan is a product of many struggles and invasions in this region. It saw the Arian, Persian as well as Greek invasion; a period of political dominance of Turkish, then Arab Muslims, and then finally the rule of British Raj and its downfall followed by migrations from India in 1947 and Afghan refugees in 1980. Thus the Pakistanis trace back their ethnicity from many different origins such as mongals, Afghan, Persians, Arabs and then Sindhi, Punjabi, Pathan and so on.

Pakistanis are multilingual and have many different cultures and tradition within the domain of Pakistan. The second type of identity crisis set in when Pakistani government decided to make Urdu the national language, which wasn't as widely accepted as was expected. At that time Pakistan was divided into two wings i. e. West Pakistan (present day Pakistan) and East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh). Though Urdu could have served as a means of intra-provincial communication as there were four provinces in <https://assignbuster.com/course-of-identity-crisis-of-people-of-pakistan-history-essay/>

West Pakistan at that time, but it had no roots in East Pakistan as it was a single province of Bengal and led to the feelings of resentment among natives of East Pakistan. After facing protest from East Pakistan it was declared the national language alongside Urdu, engendering anger in other provinces. Secondly the attempt to amalgamate all the provinces in a single unit created further hostility among the ethnic groups as they wanted to maintain their 'distinct' ethnic identity. Rather than bringing the people under an umbrella of a unifying national identity that of a 'Pakistani', these attempts brought the ethnic divide and also led to the independence of East Bengal indicating the lost identity.

The question to be asked here is what drives the strong fidelity of the people towards their own ethnic group more than that for their country? The concepts of superiority and inferiority, race and origins are embedded in the minds of Pakistanis.

Aitzaz Ahsan in his book 'the Indus saga' presents some robust arguments as to why the present day Pakistanis is going through a lack of a single identity that could bind the Pakistanis together. He says: "it is today battered by the intolerant and fratricidal schisms of sectarian, linguistic, and regional groups; brutalized by ostentatious consumerism and corruption; held hostage by the manifest opportunism and inconstancy of its ruling classes".

For Ahsan the identity crisis has resulted from the historian's attempt to make mythical connections with Arabs and other extra territorial connections. While trying to trace back Pakistani's origin to them, the

historians have completely dissociated Pakistanis with the Indians. They were driven by the fear that if any commonality is established between the Muslims and the Hindus, this would jeopardize the logic behind the creation of Pakistan- Muslims being a separate nation. In denying India they denied Indus. He argues that the present day Pakistani is truly the 'Indus person' and upon realizing that, he can rediscover his identity which has always been a distinct, which preceded even the advent of Islam to this region. The blind acceptance of history by the people has led them to fall prey to the dilemma of their identity and unless they read objective accounts about themselves they will " remain victims of the obscurantist explanations about their own strengths and weaknesses". This apparently presents a logical explanation and thus a solution to the identity crisis however even Aitzaz Ahsan has unconsciously done the same thing he condemned. By calling Pakistani 'Indus person' he conveniently ripped out all those Muslims who migrated to the West, in hopes of being part of a state that will protect their rights which they were deprived of, while living in the Hindu majority areas of the subcontinent. He says " there was neither a complete cultural breaking-away, nor a complete cultural reassimilation. These assumptions generate conflict between the ' local' (who has thus ' switched'), and the Mohajir (who continues to recall, and relive, life in his Indian birthplace)", but himself rebuts his argument. This puts a Pakistani in bewilderment once again, as to what is his true identity then?

It is clear that for the people of Pakistan and in fact for most of the people around the world, knowledge and certainty about one's origin is a crucial aspect wherewith he formulates and defines his identity. This notion, well

known to the ruling elite has been their weapon to indoctrinate the masses to support their political party. This type of indoctrination is typically known as 'political indoctrination' whereby positive perceptions about the political party are formed to "create a single minded following among the masses". This is usually done through propaganda. The most typical technique of generating propaganda used by Pakistani politicians is 'Appeal to prejudice' i. e. "The use of sensitive or loaded terms to connect an emotional value or moral goodness to believing the scheme". And that emotional value is the ethnic origin of the people. It cannot be a coincidence that almost everyone who follows a political party, follows the one whose leaders are of the same ethnic background as them. Clearly it has been in the interest of Pakistani politicians to play identity politics i. e. making political alliance consisting exclusively of people from same social backgrounds. Ethnic and provincial leaders began this by calling their provinces "nations" and arguing that their very existence was threatened by the blend into a 'Pakistani identity'. One such example is of Sayid Ghulam Mustafa who writes in his book Sayyed: as we knew him "... Sindh nation, its culture, language and literature cannot co-exist with the above colouring or mould of teachings. If Pakistani Muslims are to be taken as one nation, then their cultures, language and literature have to be levelled ...". Another example is of Altaf Hussain of MQM who on one hand negates the two nation theory by saying that "The idea of Pakistan was dead at its inception, when the majority of Muslims chose to stay back after partition, a truism reiterated in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971" but recommends that restrictions should be imposed on entry into Sindh, even for people of other provinces. Such indoctrination has been successfully propagated by the ruling elite and unquestioningly accepted by

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the followers; widening the divide between ethnic groups, and hindering them to progress towards a common ideology. This can be supported by the finding of a survey conducted on university students (attached in the appendix) showing that 89% of those who support a political party, supported one that belongs to their own ethnic group.

The third phase of identity crisis is the current crisis of the whole nation which is a combination of the religious and cultural crisis discussed above, as well as political and economic identity crisis both at domestic and international level. This is the worst national identity crisis that Pakistanis have faced. The conflict between religious and liberal secular minded people continues to haunt the nation accompanied by the ' culture war'.

Despite having lived more than half a century of their existence together, individuals are unable to find commonalities with their neighbour of a different ethnic group and many are still reluctant to form ties with each other. The smaller communities are strongly knitted together to the extent that they can throw a member out of the community who dares to marry outside the community. A child is indoctrinated in his home, by his parents, from the very beginning to believe that the most significant aspect of their identity is that who his forefathers were. Here I would like to share a futile conversation with a colleague who was eager to enquire whether I was a sheikh with ' e' or a shaikh with ' a' as according the young, educated individual, it meant a lot. This can again be supported by the findings of the survey which revealed that 85% of the sample identify themselves with their ethnic groups completely or to some extent.

However on the other hand the attractive ' western ideology' is a growing source of aspiration among the youth (urban elite) today, for whom it is becoming increasingly difficult to accept " traditional" culture on the whole. They cannot be blamed, as they are not receiving proper guidance on their role in society and are faced with the challenge of encountering contradicting belief systems and being forced to follow one, without logical reasoning at times. According to Rehman Ullah, Saifur in their thesis ' The impact of culture conflict on identity with an emphasis on Pakistan' write: " logically Pakistan needed to develop a culture of its own, based or centred on the ideologies on which Muslims had fought for freedom. There was however a definite increase in the trend towards westernization. This movement was especially noticeable among the middle and upper middle socio-economic groups". Indicating a lack of confidence and clarity about the " national identity" among the youth today, whose development was barred because of multiple fault lines discussed above.

On the international front, Pakistan's image of a ' terrorist country' is leading to growing distress and disorientation among the youth, in other words worsened identity crisis. Ambiguity in state's policy such that on one hand policy makers show commitment to ' Islamic' policies on the other hand aim to satisfy the West. Despite officially declaring " war against terrorism" Pakistan is still the prime suspect of terrorism today. This once again points towards the failure of the state towards developing a strong national identity, which ultimately becomes its image.

So where does the youth, which is the backbone of Pakistan, stands today?

The results of a survey conducted on the urban youth of Karachi showed that 40% of the sample actually negates the two nation theory and also 53% of the population surveyed, thinks that Pakistan was indeed created just on the basis of the belief that Hindus and Muslims were not meant to coexist because of their fundamental differences. Similar confusion was seen over Jinnah's vision with 50% of the sample stating that Jinnah envisioned a theocratic state. However a positive side was seen with 93% of the sample affirming Urdu as the national language and 80% believing that a revolution and true democracy can save Pakistan.

Therefore, the most crucial step towards resolving this identity crisis is to come to a consensus about what ideology must the state hold. It is recommended to have a better understanding of the vision of the founders of this state and most importantly seek the true essence of Islam as Jinnah said " Islam and its idealism have taught us democracy. Islam has taught Equality, Justice and fairplay to everybody...Let us make the constitution of Pakistan. We will make it and we will show it to the world"

We have become prisoners of our past. The generation that has bridged partition to our present will be gone one day, and the generations which were produced and grew in Pakistan, will be left. And as identity is not a fixed entity but progresses with time, our identities must progress as well. An identity that evolves and progresses with time and not blindly accepts what is presented to him as ' facts'. Because if this change is not attempted then the world will continue to think that " the nationhood of Pakistan remains as elusive a chimera as it ever was"