

# Crisis of National Integration and Way Forward:

## 1- Introduction:

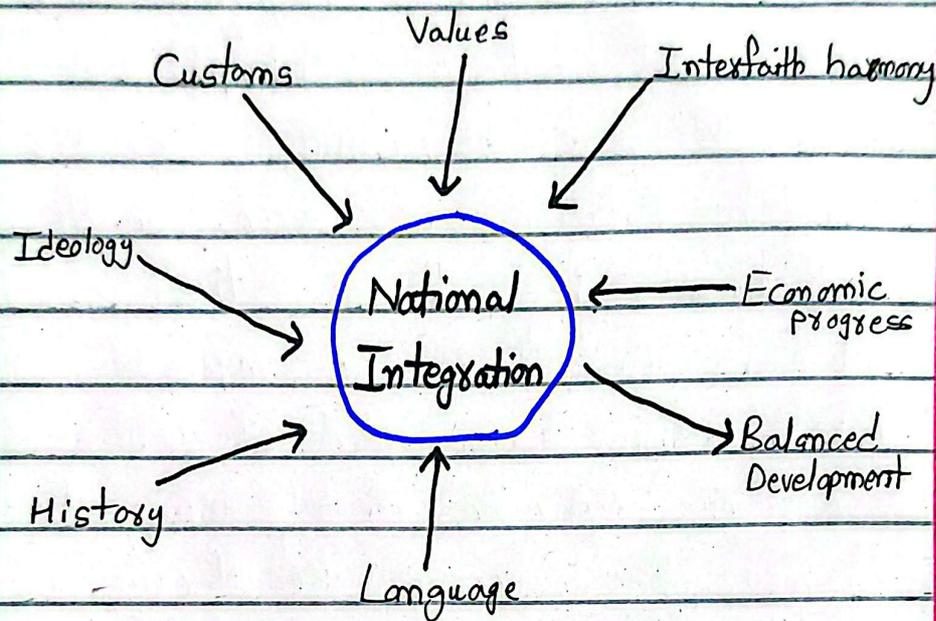
"A house divided against itself cannot stand." (Abraham Lincoln)

The national integration is not an event but a social process that evolves with the nation. Since its inception, Pakistan has been unable to tread the path of effective nation-building. There are myriad reasons ranging from ethno-linguistic, socioeconomic deprivation, digital divide to waves of insurgency. Resultantly, there is a lack of trust and consensus among provinces as well as the public. Inclusive governance, socioeconomic uplift, justice and provision of constitutional rights can bring a cohesion and harmony among various factions. Pakistanis still retain a high sense of patriotism and it can be channelled towards national integration.

## 2- Understanding National Integration:

It refers to the cohesive

force that binds the nation. Moreover, the mutual trust among provinces and federal government also reflects a well-bonded nation. Following are some of the factors influencing national integration:



### 3- Crisis of National Integration in Pakistan:

Historical Context:

As the country emerged on the global map, there were a plethora of problems which demanded efficient management and good governance. However, the successive governments were unable to respond effectively. This led to tensions between Eastern and

Western wings of the nation. Consequently, the debate of East Pakistan jolted the nation. After that, a consensual social contract emerged in the form of 1973 Constitution. Still, the challenges of implementation remain a hindrance to progress.

## Challenges to National Integration:

### 1- Ethno-linguistic issues:

The diverse linguistic and ethnic landscape of the country has been a challenge throughout its history. These variations birthed a sense of confrontation with some conflicts of language. Earlier, it was Urdu vs Bengali, while presently, there are various differences across almost all provinces.

### 2- Pol. Polarization:

The very nature of politics in Pakistan has remained fragmented. Thus, the instability and divisions led to sub-national political narratives at the cost of unity. The emergence of ethnic political parties is a testament to this.

### 3- Socioeconomic Inequality:

A massive developmental gap continues to persist among various regions. This is exacerbated by the urban-rural divide which results in unbalanced development. As per 2023 Census, 61 pc of population lives in rural areas. Thus, the backwardness led to grievances and a sense of exploitation.

### 4- Digital Divide:

The connectivity issues have led to a communication gap between various parts of the country. Moreover, internet shutdowns make people feel excluded from the national mainstream.

### 5- Weak Leadership:

A crisis of statesmanship has long engulfed the nation. After Quaid left, the vacuum was too large and it still remains to be filled. This hindered nation-building big time.

### 6- Religious and Sectarian Polarization:

The extremist religious ideologies forged a seemingly unbridgeable divide among the nation. Religious and sectarian minorities have been targeted across the country. The attack on Mishal Khan for blasphemy is one such case.

## 7- Educational Gaps:

The dysfunctional education system is one of the main problem. Pakistan has 3 parallel education systems: government schools, private institutions and madrassahs prevent uniform curriculum and promote varying ideologies

## 8- Role of Media:

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is of social media dominance, which has further divided the country. The propaganda and narrative wars have fractured the national cohesion.

## 4- Towards National Integration:

"Pakistan is one of the most over-diagnosed countries. Its problems are well-known and so are its solutions."

(Maleeha Lodhi)

### 1- Fair Federalism:

Although the course has been laid by 18<sup>th</sup> amendment, the implementation has lacked. The political as well as fiscal devolution has not been backed practically. The conflicts on NFC must be resolved effectively to forge cooperation.

### 2- Strengthening Local Governments:

The grassroot empowerment is the key towards inclusive governance.

A-140(A) of the constitution has laid the way for effective devolution. The government needs to decentralize by clearly outlining the roles.

### 3- Socio-economic Uplift:

The backward areas must be given equal footing to uplift them. This can be done by inclusion of locals in mega-projects like Baloch youth quota in CPEC

### 4- Positive Role of Media:

An effective strategy must be devised to curb hate speech and cyber violence. This must be balanced with preserving freedom of speech.

### 5- National Dialogue:

A widespread national dialogue must be held to build ownership of state policies. The role of Council of Common Interest can forge inter-provincial harmony.

### 6- Inclusive Education Policies

Firstly, madrasahs should be mainstreamed. Additionally, a single national curriculum along with civic education must be imparted.

### 7- Interfaith harmony

The cohesion would be incomplete without religious parties making

peace. Here, the role of prominent clerics can be enhanced towards building interfaith co-existence.

### 8- Digital Expansion:

The Public-Private Partnership can extend networks across the country. This will lead to inclusive frameworks a sense of belonging among the nation.

### 5- Conclusion:

The challenges as well as the solutions of national integration are well known. However, the implementation is the key towards finally achieving the elusive goals. The countrymen still own the patriotic identities with willingness to fight; effective and inclusive governance can bind the nation in an unbreakable bond.