Vol. 1, No. 3, 2023, 9-20



# EVOLVING A PAKISTANI NATIONAL IDENTITY: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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#### **Abstract**

National integration is a *sine qua non* for national prosperity, peace and harmony. Most of the newly emerged states in the post-World War-II era encountered issues of national integration and unity. The emergence of an identity crisis is normal during the political development. Since Pakistan was carved out of the Asian subcontinent, comprising of areas having diverse nationalities, therefore development of any such crisis was natural. Several ethno-national movements were launched by the different nationalities having diverse ethnic identities. But at the end of all such crises Pakistan had the resilience to emerge stronger than ever. The root cause of these ethno-national movements seems to be deviation from the pristine principles of federalism and denial of provincial autonomy. In this research work qualitative research methods were employed, relying mostly on secondary sources to probe into the problems and prospects of a Pakistani national identity. The key is to redress genuine grievances of all nationalities and communities so that a viable Pakistani national identity could be evolved.

**Key Words:** National integration, national identity, ethnic identity, Pakistani identity, identity crisis, ethno-national movements, federalism

#### Introduction

Most of the Third World countries after achieving independence could not attain the standards required for political stability and greater national integration in the modern world. The colonial rulers had adopted a policy of "Divide and Rule" and took such steps, which discouraged the development of political leadership, and state institutions that might have proved helpful in fostering a national identity (Sarwar, 1986).

The crisis of national identity in the developing countries manifests itself in a number of ways; but the one, which is of particular political importance in recent years is found in those groups, which have refused to submit to the authority of the central government (Cambell, 1972).

#### **Background to the Topic**

Ethnic conflict is one of the most significant problems which have posed formidable threat to the national integration in the country. All the four provinces have not yet evolved such sentiments of nationhood which would transform them into a single entity. They are rather paying heed to their ethnic or sub-national identities. The ethno-national movements in the history of the country stand testimony to this fact that the crisis of national identity still exists. The coercive policies adopted by the ruling elite have further alienated these nationalities from the federal government.

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

This study has deeply probed into the causes which have impeded the fostering of a viable Pakistani national identity and subsequently strengthened the ethnic identities in Pakistan. The research has focused on the rift between the

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central government and the major nationalities of Pakistan. The findings and recommendations may prove vital for policy makers and would result in greater national integration, peace and prosperity in the country.

#### **Objectives**

The present research study has been conducted keeping in focus the following specific objectives.

- i. Highlighting the role of Islam and Urdu language in Pakistan's national identity formation.
- ii. Evaluating the strategies initiated by the ruling elite for nation-building since 1947.
- iii. Probing the causes of schism between the national identity and the ethnic identities.
- iv. Explaining the rise and fall of Ethno-national movements in Pakistan since 1947.

#### **Research Questions**

The various steps of this research work is guided by the following research questions.

- 1. What is the composition of Pakistani national identity?
- 2. What is the composition of diverse ethnic identities in Pakistan?
- 3. Is there a conflict between the ethnic identities and Pakistani identity?
- 4. Has Pakistan evolved a viable Pakistani national identity?
- 5. What factors hamper the evolving of a Pakistani National Identity?

#### **Significance of the Topic**

National integration is inevitable for promotion of national cohesion and unity among diverse groups of Pakistan. Greater national integration in turn enhances political stability which diminishes the potential for ethnic and cultural tensions. Studying the problems faced in evolving a viable national identity would not only result in preservation of rich cultural heritage of diverse ethnic groups but would also pave the way for economic development and prosperity. The importance of the problem can also be established from the perspective of the Pakistani policy makers who fear that the country may further disintegrate as a consequence of the success of the various ethno-national movements in the country. The instability in Balochistan, the terrorist activities in Sindh and the emergence of *Pashtun Tahafuz Movement* all pose a serious threat to the integrity and solidarity of Pakistan. Moreover, the efforts of the ruling elite for nationbuilding have proved less successful because of the fact that Bengali nationalism culminated in the breakup of the country. The Bangladesh debacle continues to trouble the Pakistani policy makers who are perturbed that the several ethnonational movements may ensue the hazardous path of the Bangladesh.

## **Literature Review**

Mainly two aspects of this study were kept in mind while exploring the literature available on the topic. First, all such sources were consulted that provided the theoretical framework of the issue under consideration. Second, most of the literature on the problem of national identity in Pakistan or ethnic conflict was also analysed in order to have an explicit understanding of the issue in question. It would be convenient to mention a few of these books one by one for a brief discussion.

The book "Crises and Sequences in Political Development "by Leonard Binder et al. is an excellent effort in identifying and analysing the various crises that engenders in the process of political development. He along with his colleagues has

attempted to discuss these crises particularly in reference to Afro-Asian world. Although providing enough theory about the crisis of national identity, the book has no direct bearing on the problem as it exists in Pakistan.

Muhammad Sarwar's *Taqabli Wa Tarqivati* Siasat (Comparative and Developmental politics) has also attempted to highlight the issues and problems of political development. He has made some reference to the problem of national identity in the Third World countries. But once again the space provided to the issue in the book is nominal and as a matter of fact, discussing the problem of national identity and Pakhtun identity in reference to Pakistan is not the scope of this book.

Anwar Sayed's Pakistan: Islam, Politics and national solidarity, is a good analysis of Muslim nationhood and Pakistani nationhood in relation to the issue of national identity in Pakistan. He has examined two alternative ideas for building national solidarity Pakistan. i.e. Islam and socialism. However, the book has not specifically elaborated the measures and policies adopted for fostering a national identity and what factors had hampered the way of creating a national identity. The issue of Pakhtunistan is not addressed amply. Moreover, the book cover's particularly two era's one that of Bhutto and another Zia's era.

Rasul Bakhsh Rais ed . State, Society, and Democratic change in Pakistan has two chapters 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> which particularly discuss the problem of national identity in Pakistan. The author has identified and analysed the various strategies adopted for nation - building in Pakistan but in a very brief way. He hasn't dealt the issue in great depth, neither has he mentioned the various ethno national movements present in Pakistan, which are clear indications of the identity crisis in the nation.

Tahir Amin's Ethno-national Movements of Pakistan is a superb analysis of the various ethno-national movements prevalent in Pakistan. He has analysed the various internal and external factors that had a profound effect on the rise and decline of these movements. However, the book covers only the period up to 1988 and has also not mentioned the Bengali separatist movement and Mohajir Qaumi movement, which are of great importance in the political history of Pakistan.

Feroz Ahmad's Ethnicity and Politics in Pakistan examines the theoretical debate about the nationality's question and the Bengalis autonomy movement in the late 1960's, the language issues of the Bhutto era, and the Mohajir Qaumi movement in the 1980s. In fact he has analysed Pakistan's contemporary history from the perspective of divergent ethnic and economic interests competing for their rightful place in the polity and in society. However, the author has not dealt the issue of ethnicity and national identity in a chronological manner. He hasn't enlisted specific strategies, plans and measures adopted by the various regimes for the resolution of the identity problem.

A cursory look at these books proves that exhaustive work has not been done yet to demystify the problems and prospects of a viable Pakistan national identity.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The mode of research adopted is qualitative research. For this purpose Pakistan's national identity and the ethnic identities were studied in detail. The study was exploratory in nature and relied on the use of theoretical knowledge and literature as well as the data to build a fact-based understanding of the 'what' question i.e. what constitutes Pakistan's national identity and what has been the

changes in it over time. In this context, the *how* covers the understanding of nation building process in Pakistan and explaining the ethnic identity conflict in Pakistan.

#### Data

For this study, the secondary sources of data included documents, books, journal articles, research theses, and official government documents.

#### Validity and Reliability

In this study multiple sources of secondary data were used. Use of multiple sources of dataensures validity of data. Moreover, consulting multiple sources is also essential for triangulation data which in turn augments validity.

#### **Data Analysis**

## **Composition of Pakistani National Identity**

The sense of common ethnicity, culture, history and language develops feelings of nationhood among people. The various factors which define Pakistani national identity are briefly described here.

#### i. The Ethnic factor:

Pakistanis are a product of both foreign and local ethnic influences, because for over the last four thousand years or more, a large number of invaders and migrants have come and mingled with the natives. Since both Aryan and Dravidian element is present everywhere in Pakistan, none can call themselves "white" and others "coloured" (Sayed, 1982).

#### ii. The Historical Factor:

A common and shared historical experience –defeat, heroes and villains – could be a uniting bond (Abdullah, 1992). The freedom movement of diverse ethnic groups under the leadership of Quaid-e-Azam M Ali Jinnah is an integral part of Pakistan's national narrative and can prove to be a strong integrating factor.

#### iii. The Cultural Factor:

There are elements of both diversity and unity among regional cultures of Pakistan. For instance, commonality in traditional and modern sports, in folklore and fiction, in poetry and folksongs etc. if properly promoted can be very useful for national integration. There are national symbols like national anthem, national flag, national heroes etc. which can be celebrated together to promote harmony and unity.

### iv. The Language Factor:

There is a dire need of a common national language for enhancing national integration. In Pakistan there are several ethnic groups having their own mother tongue. As per the Pakistan Population and Housing Survey 2017, Punjabis is spoken by 38%, Pashto by 18%, Sindhi by 14%, Saraiki by 12%, Urdu by 7%, and Balochi by 3% population of Pakistan (Pakistan Population and Housing Survey 2017). The majority of Pakistan's languages belong to the Indo-Iranian group of the Indo-European language family. The regional languages can be brought much closer to Urdu, while developing all of them in their own natural way.

#### v. The Religious Factor:

In many cases reference to Divinity has been a potent instrument in welding heterogeneous people into a nation. Islam played an instrumental role in uniting different races, region, and sects etc.

during the freedom movement. But now we see religious division of Pakistani society in many sects and sub-sects. Open dialogue among the sects and agreeing on common Islamic principles can still serve effective in integrating the Pakistani nation.

#### **Ethnnic Identities in Pakistan**

Ever since Pakistan came into being, the country has been facing the dilemma of creating a viable national identity. The perennial problem in Pakistan has been the inability and lack of resolve of the ruling elite to accommodate the regional and political claims of different ethnic groups within a flexible federal framework. It is impossible to think of any country totally homogeneous in the true sense of the word. Natural diversities help civil society in restraining otherwise centralising tendencies in a state. In Pakistan, however, ethnic heterogeneity and cultural pluralism are viewed by the state elite as destablising forces.

In a historical sense, the administrative definition during the British times, with the added element of linguistic differentiation, helped the emergence of regional identities (Rais, 1997). Those ethnic groups which collaborated with the British were exposed to modernization, and hence benefited while other ethnic groups maintained a strong ethnic identity (Jahangir, 2019).

Since the ethnic identities have a great potential for group mobilization, the ethnic political elite succeeded in launching several ethno-national movements in Pakistan. The ethno-national movements were ideological movements that were initiated for a variety of objectives ranging from autonomy to secession to statehood. A brief description of the various ethno-national movements of Pakistan is presented here.

#### a. The Pakhtunistan Movement

The Pakhtuns were divided by the British through the imposition of Durand Line in 1893. (Harison,1987). The anti-British sentiments engendered Pakhtun nationalist movement, *Khudai Khidmatgar* (Servants of God), later transformed into Pakhtunistan movement was banned and their N-WFP ministry dismissed in 1948. (Jansson, 1981). The Pakhtunistan movement passed through various ebb and flow. During the first phase (1947-1970) the leaders of the movement remained confused whether they wanted autonomy or independence. The second phase (1971-1977) of the movement saw a gradual decline in its social support base. In the third phase (1977-1988), the social base of the movement drastically diminished (Amin, 1988).

In retrospect, it is evident that the Pakhtunistan movement received a rude shock from the very start when majority of Pakhtuns (99 % of cast votes) voted in favour of Pakistan in the 1947 referendum. (Jansson, 1981) In a nutshell, the post-independence period, the primary reasons for the failure of the Pakhtunistan movement included greater representation of the Pakhtuns among the state elite, and huge influx of three million Afghan refugees into Pakistan (Amin, 1988).

#### b. The Separatist Movement of Bangladesh:

The Bengali ethno-national movement appeared in the language movements of 1952, but its political strength was demonstrated explicitly in the 1954 provincial elections. Moreover, in addition to the economic disparity, the under representation of Bengalis in military and bureaucracy were significant issues of discord (Sayed, 1982). The

deprived Bengalis asserted their ethnic identity in the shape of Mujib's Six-Points which not only envisaged greater provincial autonomy, effective federalism but had ramifications of complete secession (Choudhury, 1974).

#### c. The Baloch Nationalist Movement:

During the first phase (1947-71), the Baloch movement social base was confined to the traditional tribes and very small educated middle class. However, during the second phase (1971-1977), as a result of the dismissal of the provincial government and coercive policies of the centre, a fierce fight broke out between the Pakistan army and Baloch tribes (Bahadur, 1998). In the third phase (1978-1988), the Baloch and Pakhtun leaders previously united under NAP and NDP parted ways but the social base of the movement expanded.

Both internal external factors influenced the Baloch nationalist movement. The state elites centralizing policies was reciprocated by the ethnic elites secessionist ideologies. The *Aghazi Huqooq e Balochistan Package 2009* did pacify the disgruntled Balochis but a lot is needed to be done.

#### d. The *Jeeya Sindh* Movement:

The Sindhi nationalist movement had its roots in the successful campaign for the separation of Sindh from Bombay during the British rule. (Harrison, 2019)

GM Syed is considered the founder of the Sindhi ethno-nationalist movement in the early sixties. The movement attracted support from both the landed elite and the educated middle class in the first phase (1947-1970) but at the political scene was overshadowed by the PPP.

During the second phase (1971-1977), the movement split into the *Jeeya Sindh Mahaz led* by GM Syed and *Sindh Awami Tehrik* headed by Rasool Bux Paleejo. The third phase (1978-1988) witnessed a partial cooperation and partial confrontation policy of the *Jeeya Sindh Mahaz*. There have been constant fragmentations in the Sindhi nationalist movements. The militant organisations like *Sindudesh* Liberation Army (SLA) and *Sindudesh* Revolutionary Army (SRA) have been declared terrorists organisations by the government of Pakistan (Raja, 2019).

Besides these major ethno-national movements, there were also minor movements in Pakistan such as *Mohajir Qaumi Movement, Saraiki Qaumi Movement*, which are mostly transformed into demands for greater provincial autonomy and economic emancipation.

#### **Prospects of a Secular National Identity**

Pakistan's political history can be divided into three distinct phases, the Liberal Phase (1947-1971), The Socialist Phase (1971-1977), and the Islamic Phase (1977-1988). In the first two phases the ruling elite made concerted efforts to foster a secular national identity for Pakistan. General Ayub Khan deemed a secular Pakistani national identity, in socio-economic terms, indispensable for political development in Pakistan. However the hegemonic policies of the Muslim League in early years and General Ayub's regime further exacerbated the ethnic rift in the country.

ZA Bhutto adopted the "Islamic Socialism" as a strategy for national integration and harmony. In this period a significant step by the Bhutto regime was the introduction of Pakistan Studies as a mandatory subject for reinforcing the

Pakistani national identity. (Jahangir, 2019) However all these policies since 1947 further alienated the diverse ethnic groups and even culminated in the dismemberment of Pakistan. In short secularism as a device to integrate discorded ethnic groups in an ideological state like Pakistan has not worked and is not likely to work in the future.

#### **Prospects of an Islamic National Identity**

The concept of Islam as an ideology had gained significance since the inception of Pakistan, because maintaining distinctiveness from secular India was vital (Ahmad, 2008). However once Pakistan was achieved, the Islamic notion of national identity lost its significance and the ethnic, regional and sectarian differences surfaced (Islam, 1981).

The so called Islamisation drive started with the introduction of Objectives Resolution in 1949 and reached its pinnacle in Zia's Islamisation programme. General Zia ul Haq, soon after his coming to power proceeded with his Islamisation programme in all sectors in the country. He introduced Islamic reforms in education, economy, judiciary, and even media. All these steps proved counterproductive and could not foster an Islamic identity for Pakistan. His period rather witnessed escalation in ethnic and sectarian violence, human rights abuses, Shiites-Sunni schism, MQM emergence, Kalashnikov culture, and heroin culture etc. (Ahmad, 2008).

To conclude, General Zia's Islamisation programme did not last long because he focused on the regulative and punitive aspect of Islam and not on the welfare and egalitarian aspect of Islam.

#### Discussion

This research work has provided deep insights about the national fabric of Pakistan, the ethnic discord among the diverse communities, and flawed policies of the ruling elite. Pakistan faced numerous challenges of nation-building since its very inception in 1947. The first movement to pose a formidable challenge was the Pakhtunistan issue. In response the dismissal of the N-WFP ministry in 1948 further alienated the Pakhtuns. Similarly the language movement of 1952 was a significant event in politicising the Bengali ethnic identity. The coercive response by the state elite to impose Urdu as the *langua franca* further exacerbated the situation (Shaikh, 2009).

This study concludes that the fostering of a cohesive national identity on secular basis also failed. Because the economic, social and educational policies devised by the ruling elite were not inclusive, egalitarian or democratic in nature. General Ayub's policy of *laissez faire*, and Bhuttos Socialism did gain currency among the educated intelligentsia but could not affect the national fabric which was embedded in the religious identity of Islam (Nasr, 1997)

This research has also indicated that the fostering of a national identity based only on Islamic rhetoric has also failed. The obvious reason is the explicit contradiction in divergent interpretations of Islam—the communal, and the Islamist. The Communal discourse which is India specific has been espoused by the state elite for their vested interests, whereas the Islamists version which is radical Islam, is propounded by the religious political parties of Pakistan. These contested versions of Islam has accentuated the problem of national integration (Shaikh, 2009).

The Pakistani rulers also inherited the notion of strong centralising policies for national security and integrity from the British colonialists. Thus soon after

independence the Provincial ministries of NWFP, Sindh, East Bengal were dissolved at intervals. The apparent demands for greater provincial autonomy or accruement of financial resources were dubbed as anti-state and divisive. Such policies by the federal government not only estranged the provinces but also led to several ethno-nationalist movements (Amin, 1988).

From the profound analysis of the ethno-national movements in Pakistan, it is evident that there were both internal and external factors influencing the rise and fall of these movements. The external factors included *Saur* Revolution of Afghanistan in 1978, The Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, and the Indo-Pak Wars to name a few. The internal factors ranged from range from provincial autonomy to Centre's policies of accommodation and inclusivity or otherwise, such as the imposition of one unit in 1955 which antagonised the *Balochis*, the *Sindhis* and the *Pakhtuns*. However, when the ruling elite espoused accommodative, just and participatory policies, there was drastic decline in these ethno-national movements. (Mumtaz, 1999). In short the Ethno-national movements are a manifestation of social, political and economic disparities which can be resolved.

During the several decades of military rule (1958-71, 1977-88, 1999-2008) in Pakistan, rigorous efforts were made for forging a cohesive and resilient Pakistani national identity. General Ayub adopted the economic emancipation and development as the bedrock of his national integration policy, General Zia ul Haq chose Islamisation of all state institutions for unifying the heterogeneous society of Pakistan and General Pervez Musharaf came with the novel narrative of "enlightened moderation" for promotion of national integration (Khan, 2021). The military dictators' ascension to power stands testimony to the fragile democratic institutions of Pakistan. The policies initiated by state elite for promotion of an inclusive and workable national identity were flawed and hence failed.

The study has also proved that federalism under the 1973 constitution, if followed in true spirit, also enhances national unity and integration. The essential elements of federalism such as bicameralism, independent judiciary, devolution of power and a democratic constitution play a crucial role in developing an agreed national identity for all (Adeney, 2000). In this context the introduction of 18<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution of Pakistan has borne positive results. The provinces are now responsible for devising and implementing policies for the socio-economic development of their respective communities which definitely would result in greater national cohesion and harmony (Khan, 2021).

The role of political parties and political leaders is also very important as regards the forging of a national identity and eliminating ethnic discord. Political parties in Pakistan have mostly relied on regional politics and shun from national politics. This factor has resulted in great ethnic conflict and misgivings. The dominance of aristocrats over national political system, and prevalence of dynastic politics, personality cult, and feudalism has kept the masses excluded and alienated (Khan, 2021).

#### Conclusion

Pakistan was created in the name of Islam, however the peculiar mix of religious and secular ideologies in the early stages made the nation-building process very complicated.

## **Key Findings**

The key findings in this study are as under:

- 1. The ruling elite due to their vested interests failed to articulate either secular or Islamic national identity in its true spirit for the task of nation-building.
- 2. Moreover, the Muslim League, being a party lacking in grass-root level support in the masses, failed to perform its due role of inculcating a spirit of loyalty and unity among the people.
- 3. The constitutional deadlock between the East and West wing, the language movement (1952), and the anti-*Ahmadi* movement (1953), exacerbated the national crisis.
- 4. The military-bureaucratic oligarchy till the 1970s had resulted in failure of democracy, increase in regional disparities, and worsened ethnic discord, which culminated in the blood-soaked birth of Bangladesh.
- 5. ZA Bhutto experimented with a blend of Islam and socialism but failed. Resultantly, the gulf between the centre and the province further accentuated.
- 6. The General Zia ul Haq's era is marked with concerted efforts on employing Islamic ideology for nation-building. But a state sponsored version of Islam where stress laid more on punitive measures is not whole heartedly welcomed among diverse range of followers.
- 7. Besides religion, language and culture have also been invoked for evolving a national identity. However, the undue emphasis on a Pakistani national identity by undermining the significance of the rich cultural and linguistic heritage of *Bengalis, Sindhis, Balochis, and Pakhtuns* was propounded on a wrong premise. This flawed policy of the state elite led to the politicisation of the ethnic identities which was manifested in the various ethno-national movements.

The diverse nationalities can be incorporated into a resilient Pakistani national identity, only if their sub-national identity is given due importance, their genuine grievances are remedied, a more inclusive democratic system is introduced, and all sorts of disparities are removed. In reciprocation, all ethnic groups should also transcend their sectarian or regional differences and take pride in their Pakistani national identity.

#### **Suggestions**

The resolution of the identity crisis is fundamental to the establishment of a nation. Since identity crisis is related to matters of national unity and integration, the charisma of national leadership is tested. A few strategies are very effective in dealing with the identity crises ranging from heavy investments in educational systems to a variety of cultural, linguistic, and communication policies. There are two basic ways in which identity crisis based upon ethnic or sub-national groups can be resolved; either by assimilation or by accommodation bases. (Pyes, 1971)

Karl W Deutsh has suggested six factors that determine the level of assimilation; "degree of similarity of communication habits; the level of learning capacity on the one side and teaching capacity on the other side; the frequency of contacts; the material rewards and penalties; the values and desires of both groups; and finally the existence of any social and political symbols and actual barriers to assimilation" (Pyes, 1971, p. 117).

Resolution by accommodation requires not only a degree of tolerance but a belief that shared support of nationhood is more advantageous to each group involved than their separate and competitive existence. (Pyes, 1971) This is why the resolution of identity crisis involves a profound growth of feelings of "blind" trust and loyalty to the entire system so that there is no constant calculation of loss and benefit from mutual association among communities.

In light of the above mentioned strategies, a few suggestions are presented here that may prove instrumental in integrating the diverse nationalities of Pakistan and facilitate the fostering of a viable national identity.

- 1. The survival, strength and solidarity of Pakistan depends on fortifying its ideological framework. It is only with a just, participatory and inclusive political system that true unity could be achieved.
- 2. State institutions like the army and bureaucracy be restructured so as to make them more nationally representative.
- 3. Diversity of language and culture be celebrated and developed so that in turn it bolsters the Pakistani national identity.
- 4. Genuine grievances of all communities and ethnic groups should be redressed so that any cause of ethnic discord, rift and disunity is removed.
- 5. All sorts of economic, social or political disparities must be abolished. All prejudices and skepticism about the loyalties of the *Baloch*, *Pakhtun* or any other communities should be eliminated.
- 6. Pristine principles of federalism be followed and centralising policies of the federal government be relinquished.
- 7. No coercive measures should be adopted for forcible integration or inculcation of sentiments of patriotism.
- 8. Greater provincial autonomy should be granted to provinces. Provinces be restructured as per demand of the populace through referendum.
- 9. The NFC Award must be revised at regular intervals so as to cater for the needs of the under developed regions.
- 10. The print, digital or social media should also play their due role in propagating national cohesion and shun anything derogatory to any community.
- 11. An inclusive and diverse educational curriculum should be formulated which depicts contributions of all communities.
- 12. Promotion of such social programmes which involve collaboration and interaction among the diverse groups can prove effective in enhancing unity, harmony and cooperation.

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