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PAKISTAN : ETHNIC CONFLICT AND THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION

INTRODUCTION

The orgy of ethnic violence which took over Sindh in early 1990, reinstated the commonly held view of the Pakistani province as one of "permanent crisis". The number of those killed during the first four months of the year, was around 376 people.¹ Furthermore, at least 110 people were slaughtered during 27-28 May alone.² Law and order situation in the province, particularly in the major cities like Karachi and Hyderabad deteriorated to the extent of lawlessness. Worst victim of the situation is definitely Karachi—Pakistan's largest city with 10 million population and its single-most important industrial centre and the gateway to international trade. With belligerent ethnic groups and burgeoning warlords involved in gang warfare, kidnappings and endless carnage Karachi looks like a Beirut in the making.

While Sindhi-Muhajir conflict became more prominent, the scenario of internal strife is much more complex. Each group in the city seems to be at war with all others. Sindhis versus Muhajirs, Pashtuns versus Muhajirs and Sindhis. The Punjabis also do not remain in the sideline. To this is added so-called heroin and Kalashnikov culture as well as professional gangsterism. By late

1. *India Today*, (June 15, 1990), p. 40.

2. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, (June 7, 1990), p. 22.

May, the metropolis appeared to be waging a war on itself which compelled the then *de facto* ruling *troika* in Pakistan—President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and the army chief General Mirza Aslam Beg—to bring in the army to restore law and order in Sindh, following earlier unsuccessful attempts to contain the situation with paramilitary forces.

The induction of troops into Sindh's two major cities, Karachi and Hyderabad, seems to have contained the crisis, while the solution of the underlying problems is nowhere in sight. Violence in Sindh is just the tip of an iceberg. Pakistan's ethnic problems and resultant conflicts are much more deep-rooted, multi-dimensional and complex than could be resolved by mere law enforcement measures. As a matter of fact, the most ineluctable dilemma facing the country since its creation in 1947, has been to create a viable national identity out of diverse ethno-linguistic and regional loyalties. Pakistan's failure to resolve the dilemma is monumental. More frustrating is the fact that the parochial ruling elite has learned very little, if anything, from sustained ethnic conflicts, recurrent crises and a catastrophe suffered by the country. Most of the lessons of 1971 has been mislearned. Only a handful of politicians and intellectuals view the ethnic problems as rooted in the historical past as well as the current dynamics of socio-economic and politico-cultural development of the country. The most dominant sections of the ruling elite still tend to view them as just deterioration in the law and order situation and seek solution accordingly. Meanwhile, Pakistan is moving towards the brink of a civil war. The fragile civilian government under Benazir favoured a political settlement to the ethnic problems of the the country, but lacked both constitutional means and adequate parliamentary support to assert its authority. The dismissal of Benazir government and the return of the politics of palace intrigue in Pakistan have certainly not been a rational response to the problems of national integration. Their implications, however, remain less clear.

The present paper is an attempt to initiate some fresh discussions on the ethnic problems in Pakistan and the question of national integration. It begins with a brief retrospective overview of ethnic relations in Pakistan. Part II is an attempt to identify the roots of ethnic conflict in the country. Part III is designed to reveal the dynamics of inter-ethnic relations both in terms of conflict and cooperation. Finally, an attempt is made to indicate some possible directions that the concerned parties may be moving in.

I. ETHNIC RELATIONS IN PAKISTAN : A RETROSPECTIVE OVERVIEW

Controversy Around the National Question

The national question in the Third World states needs to be weighed in the backdrop of some inherent weaknesses of the national liberation movement itself and the states and nations it created on the one hand, and the post-colonial process of nation-building on the other. Unlike European states, which experienced centuries of nation building, new states, their organs and political institutions are the product of a relatively brief historical period and the alien rule. Moreover, the national liberation movements in most cases represented a united front of extremely heterogeneous forces. Diverse—often contradictory to one another—ethnic, linguistic and other sub-national groups, religious communities and geographical regions united themselves against colonial subjugation for national independence considering it as a means to achieve economic, political, socio-cultural emancipation and religious freedom. The nationalist movement represented passionate anti-colonialism which has been the starting point of its endeavours. On the part of its participants, high degree of emotion was involved in the movement, while from the very beginning it was suffering from inner-contradictions primarily due to its heterogeneity. That is why Rupert Emerson

has referred to the Third world nations as "peoples which are not yet nations in being but nations in hope".³

In the process of nation-building, the most ineluctable dilemma facing the newly independent states has been how to create a viable national identity out of diverse religious, ethno-linguistic and regional loyalties. This task became a too complicated one due to the fact that the very process of nation-building created beneficiaries and losers generating or aggravating the unevenness in the level of socio-economic and politico-cultural development of different sub-national groups. In the circumstances, deliberate economic exploitation and politico-cultural suppression of one or a combination of sub-national groups by the others have over a period of time induced a sense of insecurity amongst the latter and gave rise to the fear of internal colonialism.⁴ Subjugated groups came out to the political arena with demands for equal participation in the process of national development and nation building and in desperate cases, set off in quest of national identity which is different from that of the dominating group. Thus, with the end of colonialism, the passionate anti-colonialism began to wane. Even people who considered that they have a common heritage, with the emergence of internal colonialism could not envision a common destiny for the future. Consequently, a good number of countries began to suffer from crisis of national identity.

Pakistan since its emergence, along with the common problems faced by the newly independent countries in resolving the national question, was also facing a host of specific problems born out of the specific realities. The movement for Pakistan as a part of the national liberation movement of the people of British India against colonialism was also a movement of the relatively under-privileged minority Muslim community against the numerical

3. Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples*, (Scientific Book Agency, Calcutta, 1970), p. 94.

4. For details on internal colonialism, see, Rounaq Japan, *Bangladesh Politics: Problems and Issues*, (UPL, Dhaka, 1980), p. 63.

majority and economically, politically and culturally dominating Hindu community for a separate homeland of its own. The movement for Pakistan united diverse ethnic groups of British India solely on religious ground. The unity, however, was more apparent than real. As it was subsequently proved, xenophobia and fear of alien culture is a powerful political force but a poor material for nation building. While Muslim nationalism was successful in justifying the partition of India, it has remained in a state of permanent legitimacy crisis in its cherished land Pakistan.

As it appears, the crisis of Muslim nationalism may have been apprehended by the founding father of Pakistan Mohammad Ali Jinnah. He was of the notion that the Muslim nationalism was the product of a particular historical period which has lost its relevance in the post-1947 period. Instead, he emphasized on the creation of national identity in Pakistan out of diverse religious loyalties. As he stated, "You may belong to any religion, cast or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the State... We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state."⁵ While Jinnah clearly realized the need for a viable national identity of the people of Pakistan, he also miserably failed to understand the changed reality. Old conflict of the British period between the Hindus and the Muslims for supremacy of the former and survival of the later was now a matter of the past. The new conflict that was developing in Pakistan was that between its diverse ethnic groups. As his stand on the state language issue demonstrates, he was completely unaware of the gathering storm.

Jinnah's successors, however, considered the 'secular stamp' given by him as antithetical to the very foundation of Pakistan. Nonetheless, they have debated whether Pakistan has been established to fulfil the material needs of its people or to create an orthodox

5. S. K. Chakrabarti, *The Evolution of Politics in Bangladesh : 1947-1978*, (Associated Publishing House, New Delhi, 1978), p. 36.

theocratic state. None of them were prepared to accept anything less than Muslim nationalism. Even the petty bourgeois version of socialism as advocated by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Pakistan became 'Islamic socialism'. As it would be discussed elsewhere in the paper, in Pakistan, within a very short period since its emergence, politico-administrative and economic power was concentrated in the hands of the representatives of the ethnic groups who constituted less than one-fourth of the population of pre-1971 Pakistan and around half of post-1971 Pakistan. Suppression of ethnic grievances and for that matter ethnic identities was vital to their interests. Therefore, it is not surprising that the ruling elite in Pakistan needed to make the Muslim nationalism a fetish of that was to resolve all the complexities pertaining to the national question. In this regard, no sincere attempt was ever made in Pakistan to implement the principles of Islamic justice to redress the genuine grievances of deprived ethnic groups. Instead, Muslim nationalism served as a weapon of ideological manipulation, and political suppression with a view to sustaining the socio-economic and cultural deprivation of the underprivileged social strata and ethnic groups. As a consequence, Muslim nationalism, once a mighty political force, lost its popular appeal. The people of Pakistan were becoming more and more conscious about the fact that the Muslims of Pakistan have twin identity. They are Muslims but they are also Bengalis, Panjabis, Sindhis, Pashtuns and Baluchis. The very fact that relative socio-economic and politico-cultural deprivation of the Muslim community *vis-a-vis* the Hindus served as the *raison d'être* of Pakistan itself provided a powerful argument in favour of political agitation against ethnic deprivation.

Ethnic grievances and multi-religious composition of the population apart, there are at least two reasons why Muslim nationalism was misfit in serving as a shield against the rising tide of ethnic nationalism. First of all, Islamic solidarity or brotherhood recognizes no regional, ethnic, linguistic, national or state boundary. It

encompasses each and every Muslim of the world on the ground of common faith irrespective of any and all other loyalties to create the Islamic Ummah (Community). Universal and internationalist appeal of the doctrine itself undermines the role of Islamic solidarity as a form of national identity in the modern nation-state system. More important, there is nothing in the tenets of Islam that is against the assertion of ethnic identity. Even the Holy Quran itself recognized the ethnic identities of the Muslims when it said, "Men, We have created you from a male and a female and divided you into nations and tribes that you might get to know one another"⁶. In the circumstances, assertion of ethnic identity could very well be in conformity with both the tenets of Islam and affinity to the community.

Against this backdrop, Pakistani politics with regard to the national question came to be dominated by the confrontation of two concepts—Muslim nationalism and ethnic nationalism. In practice, it became a confrontation between the Panjabi-Muhajir dominated ruling elite on the one hand and the deprived ethnic groups on the other. While during the pre-1971 period, the Bengalis have been in the forefront of ethnically oriented nationalist movement, following the independence of Bangladesh, the Baluchis and the Sindhis successively came to the forefront of similar movements. Despite a catastrophe and numerous crises suffered by the country, its ruling elite remains as parochial as ever. The crisis this time, however, is more acute than ever since the emergence of Bangladesh. It is in this background that an attempt would be made below to study Pakistan's ethnic conflict and the problems of national integration.

East-West Divide and the Independence of Bangladesh

Political development of the territory which constituted Pakistan was characterized by numerous contradictions and asymmetries. The

6. *Holy Qur'an Sura XXXIX*, verse 13, translated by N. J. Dawood, (Penguin Books, London, 1961), p. 267.

then East Pakistan with its populist and broad-based nationalist movement, strong student, youth and trade union movements and relatively high degree of consciousness became politically the most developed region in the country. In West Pakistan, on the other hand, political life has been deeply influenced by the feudal structure of the society and the feudal interests. Both, political consciousness and participation have been under the deep influence of feudal prejudices.

Meanwhile, the elite that came to power in the country consisted of a small group of people with a narrow support base. Most of them either belonged to or settled in West Pakistan. The Bengalis, however, constituted 55 per cent of the total population of the country. It made the ruling elite reluctant either to broaden their base or risk an election. Consequently they became overwhelmingly dependent on the Punjabi-Muhajir dominated civil-military bureaucracy of the country where the Bengalis were almost non-represented. Even in 1955, Bengali representation in the higher ranks of the Central Secretariat was below 8 per cent. In the army, the number of Bengali officers was 14 as against 494.7 Capitalist class also belonged to the West. Only 2.5 per cent of the total industrial assets of the country belonged to the Bengali Muslims.⁸ The ruling elite in Pakistan, therefore, faced little difficulty in establishing and continuing West Pakistan's economic domination over the East. They have formulated and executed development policies that were designed to enrich West Pakistan at the expense of the East. For instance, during the fiscal years 1950/51-1954/55, 80 per cent of the total development expenditure was spent in the West.⁹ Such economic deprivation was further supplemented by the suppression of Bengali language and culture. In the face of severe protest, Urdu was declared as the state

7. Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan : Failure in National Integration*, (Oxford University Press, Dhaka, 1973), pp. 25-26.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

language of Pakistan giving birth to a cultural movement that was to have far reaching impact on the politico-cultural life of the country.

Unevenness in the level of socio-economic development of the two wings of Pakistan has been further exacerbated during the military regime of Ayub Khan. The regime itself came to power suppressing the verdict given by the Bengalis in the 1954 Election in favour of equal participation of the two wings in the overall development of the country. The development efforts under Ayub Khan turned to be a deliberate process of economic development of West Pakistan at the expense of the East. West Pakistan, while providing 40 per cent of the total revenue of the Government, received 75 per cent of its expenditure. The ratio of the development expenditure between the East and the West has been 77 and 23 respectively. West Pakistan's contribution to the total foreign exchange earnings was 41 per cent but it received 70 per cent of these earnings.¹⁰ Similarly, the West was also allocated a highly disproportionate share of the foreign aid. An estimate shows that between 1951 and 1961, only 18 per cent of the total foreign economic assistance was allocated to the Eastern wing. After 1961, the situation did not change.¹¹

Development strategy during Ayub regime have had disastrous effect on the economic development of the East and generated severe unevenness between the level of economic development of the two wings. Growth rate per annum in West Pakistan during the 1960-1965 has been 7.4 per cent as against 4.6 in the East, during

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9. M. Rashiduzzaman, "East-West Conflict in Pakistan: Bengali Regionalism, 1947-1970", in A. Jeyaratnam Wilson and Dennis Dalton (edd.) *The States in South Asia: Problems of National Integration*, (Vikas Publishing House, 1982), p. 119.
 10. S.K. Chakrabati, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
 11. Ataur Rahman, *Pakistan and America: Dependency Relations*, (Young Asia Publications, New Delhi, 1982), p. 43.

1965-1970 it was 7.4 and 3.3 respectively.¹² As a consequence, per capita income in West Pakistan rose from Rs. 355 in 1960 to Rs. 492 in 1970 while that in the East rose from Rs. 269 in 1960 to only Rs. 308 in 1970.¹³

Uneven development in Pakistan, however, have had a specific feature. Economic deprivation had a disastrous impact on the economic development of the Eastern Wing and it stood far behind the West. Nonetheless, despite economic discrimination and politico-cultural suppression, the Bengalis politically and culturally remained much more advanced than their West Pakistani counterparts. As a matter of fact, internal colonialism itself gave rise to a broad-based democratic movement. Not only the middle class of the city, student community and the workers, but also the peasants gradually became highly politicised. Their level of political consciousness also had been significantly higher than their counterparts in West Pakistan. Culturally as well, the Bengalis have been more advanced. Bengali language and literature remain richer than those of West Pakistan. Despite relative poverty, literacy rate also continued to be higher. More important, the Eastern part was blessed with a strong cultural movement with progressive political undertone.

As a consequence of the deep-rooted cleavage generated by the uneven development of the two wings of Pakistan, Muslim nationalism was in the wane. The most conscious segment of Bengali intelligentsia began to emphasize the ethno-linguistic identity of the people which separate them from the West Pakistanis as against their religious identity which united them with the later. Bengali grievances in a synthesized form were first reflected in the 21 points of the United Front that was formed on the eve of 1954 election.

12. Indra Nath Mukherjee, "Economic Growth and Social Justice in South Asia: Interpretation of Empirical Evidence", *India Quarterly*, (Vol. xxxvii, No. 3, 1981), p. 390.

13. S.K. Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

Demands for provincial autonomy and the equal participation in the politico-economic processes of the country were rather modest and were being far from unduly weakening the centre.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the ruling elite in Pakistan was far from prepared to bring such issues in the agenda.

Such a pattern of behaviour has been one of the characteristic features of the conflict. Six points of the Awami League, student movement of 1968-1969 on the basis of 11 points correctly reflected the genuine demands of the Bengalis. These also offered the ruling elite of Pakistan an opportunity to resolve the political crisis amicably. It, however, preferred to use brute force to suppress the movement for provincial autonomy. Subsequently, the movement transformed into a full-fledged nationalist movement with a viable programme, veritable symbols and passionate antipathy towards the dominating sub-national group.

The ruling elite in Pakistan did not consider it useful to seek a peaceful settlement to the conflict that would give the Bengalis their legitimate share in the developmental process of Pakistan. Instead, on March 25, 1971 it opted for a military adventure that set off the worst genocide and exodus in the post-War history, thus, virtually compelling the Bengali leadership to declare independence. The case of Pakistan remains also unique in the sense that it has been the only post-War state to be dismembered.

Ethnic Relations in Post-1971 Pakistan

Post-1971 Pakistan as well was characterized by sharp unevenness in the level of socio-economic and politico-cultural development of ethno-linguistic groups and geographical regions. As we have discussed earlier, ruling elite included the Panjabis and the Urdu-speaking Muhajirs from India, while the Sindhis, Baluchis and the Pashtuns occupied a subordinate position in the nation building

14. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

process. East-West conflict during the pre-1971 period, however, overshadowed and contained the consequences of uneven development along ethnic line within West Pakistan. Following the emergence of Bangladesh, ethnic conflicts in Pakistan was being exposed in a politically more meaningful way.

While the experience of 1971 has generated a degree of awareness, particularly among certain sections of politicians and intellectuals, with regard to the uneven socio-economic and politico-cultural development of Pakistan's ethnic groups and resultant conflicts, it has not resulted in a viable policy. The policy adopted by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in dealing with the ethnic problems of the country has been a combination of both carrots and sticks while Zia-ul Huq opted for fundamentalist romanticism accompanied by shrewd manipulation and suppression.

Restoration of the provinces to the pre-1955 administrative status has been an important gesture of Bhutto government. It was followed by the appointment of prominent regional leaders like Ghaus Baksh Bizenjo and Arbad Sikandar as Governors of Baluchistan and NWFP respectively. Though, himself a Sindhi feudal and a seemingly petty bourgeois socialist by conviction, Bhutto's freedom of action was seriously circumscribed by the Punjabi dominated civil-military bureaucracy and the business interests. Moreover, he always judged it to be prudent to play politics with Punjabi rules and did little for the Sindhis. Nonetheless, the Sindhis were proud of his political stature.

Bhutto's progressive socio-economic reforms in and generous development funds to the aggrieved provinces were supplemented by the attempts to consolidate day to day administrative control over them by the Central government which aroused sharp resistance from Baluchistan and NWFP and finally, he had to resort to the use of brute force.¹⁵ By 1977, when Bhutto was ousted from power by a

15. Ataur Rahman, *Pakistan and America : Dependency Relations*, (Young Asia Publications, New Delhi, 1982), pp. 83-111.

military *coup d'état* led by General Zia-ul Huq, NWFP was seriously aggrieved and Baluchistan entered a civil war like situation.

Zia's vision of Pakistan was that of a theocratic state. In terms of fundamentalist pronouncements he has over-shadowed all his predecessors. His Islamisation process and Pan-Islamic pronouncements were, among others, also designed to revitalize the national identity on the basis of religious loyalty. Thus, he stressed that in Pakistan sovereignty did not belong to the people but to Allah and all are His servants. According to him, Pakistan is an Islamic and ideological state, it did not come into being for the fulfillment of the material needs of the people.¹⁶ Thus, Islamic fervor of his pronouncements developed to the extent of fundamentalist romanticism. However, romanticism of any kind was antithetical to Zia's character. Instead, he was a shrewd manipulator. As it has subsequently been proved, to Zia Islam was an instrument, probably the most convenient one, of political manipulation. In Baluchistan and NWFP, along with religious sentiments he also sought to capitalize on anti-Bhutto feelings. In the broader perspective, however, the Baluchis did not fare better during Zia than during Bhutto and they remain as hostile to the central government as ever. In the backdrop of Afghan war, the Pashtuns who along with the Muhajirs have already been a junior partner of the Punjabis, could further improve their overall position in the country. Under Zia, the Sindhis became the worst victim not only of ethnic discrimination and deprivation, but also of political repression. Victim of of two-way exploitation—on the part of the Centre as well as the Muhajirs—the Sindhis were gradually being marginalized due to the repression unleashed by the military regime and the increasing Muhajir militancy. Since 1983, there has not been a single year when Sindh did not witness ethnic violence with large-scale loss of lives. While the Afghan War let Zia-ul Huq contain the ethnic

16. Aatur Rahman, "Pakistan: Unity or Further Divisions?" in A. Jeyaratnam Wilson and Dennis Dalton (edd.) *The States in South Asia: Problems of National Integration*. (Vikas Publishing House, 1982), p. 205.

problems to a tolerable limit, during the last years of his rule, and particularly since his death, the national question once again came to the forefront of Pakistani politics with Sindh being in the state of permanent crisis.

II. THE ROOTS OF ETHNIC CONFLICT

Pakistan's ethnic conflict and its permanent crisis of identity and integration are rooted in the historical past, both pre-colonial and post-colonial, as well as current dynamics of socio-economic and politico-cultural development of the country. As discussed earlier, fear of Hindu domination served as the *raison d'être* of the movement for Pakistan which united heterogeneous ethnic groups of British India under the fold of Muslim nationalism. To a certain extent, therefore, the crisis of identity was inherent. With the fear of Hindu domination subsided, ethnicity was bound to re-assert itself as a potent political force. Jinnah's quasi-secular approach was a meaningful gesture, but an insufficient instrument for bridging the gap. What Pakistan needed was a synthesis between waning Muslim nationalism and the rising tide of ethnic nationalism. However, the parochial ruling elite lacked both wisdom and vision for such an accomplishment. Instead, it decided to cling to ideological orthodoxy. Concentrating all political, economic and administrative power in its hands, the ruling elite has formulated and executed development strategies to the benefit of the vested interests which generated the phenomenon of uneven development along ethnic line. The narrow support-base of the ruling elite compelled it to destroy inherited democratic institutions and culture and resort to authoritarianism leaving little room for constitutional solution to the ethnic problems. All these have landed the country to a permanent crisis of integration. While past is certainly relevant, current dynamics of socio-economic and politico-cultural development of the country including foreign policy would

serve as a key to the understanding of Pakistan's ethnic conflict. For the convenience of our analysis, we would discuss following three issues : uneven development along ethnic line ; lack of democratic institutions and culture and the resultant political instability; and the aftermath of Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan conflict.

Uneven Development Along Ethnic Line

The ethnic mosaic of Pakistan features four distinct ethno-linguistic groups viz. Punjabis, Sindhis, Pashtuns and Baluchis comprising the majority in the four provinces of the country : Panjab, Sindh, NWFP and Baluchistan respectively. Besides, there is a large group of people with substantial real power in Pakistani society who call themselves Muhajirs (a term used by the followers of the Holy Prophet who fled with him to Medina from Mecca partly to avoid persecution and partly in search of an ideal). While all of them are refugees from India, not all the refugees are termed as Muhajirs. For instance, Panjabi, Sindhi and Pashtun refugees from India have mostly settled in the respective provinces and assimilated with their Pakistani counterparts. Muhajirs are the refugees without any ethnic roots in Pakistan. They are a heterogeneous group who came from different parts of India. Urdu-speaking people from North India were the dominating ones. They came to their cherished homeland with full of idealism and high hopes. Lack of ethnic roots in Pakistan and resultant identity crisis, an inherent superiority complex coupled with their resettlement in compact areas contribute to their refusal of integrating and assimilating themselves into the local population. In the wake of partition, nearly 90 per cent of the Hindu population from Karachi and virtually all from Hyderabad and Sukkur fled to India following an officially orchestrated communal riot. As it appears, a major Hindu migration from Sindh was needed in order to settle the incoming Indian refugees. It was also a deliberate attempt on the part of Liaqat Ali Khan to create a political

constituency for himself in the indigenous Pakistani territory.¹⁷ The Hindus lived in compact areas and these were taken over by the Muhajirs who converted them into a kind of ghettos. They made Urdu their *lingua franca* and continued to pursue the same life-style that they have left behind. In the socio-economic and politico-cultural life of Pakistan, they acted as a single interest group and thus, in course of time developed themselves as a distinct group in Pakistani society. The fact that they have settled primarily in Sindh and assumed the commanding heights of the economy of the province brought them into the inevitable conflict with the 'sons of the soil'.

The roots of ethnic conflict in Pakistan lie essentially in the process of socio-economic and politico-cultural development of the country. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that Panjab for a historically long period has been developed at the expense of rest of the Sub-continent. During the British rule Punjab was the most important centre of army recruitment. Following the loyal service rendered by the Punjabis, including the Punjabi Muslims, to the British Raj during the Great Uprising of 1857 the colonial administration came to further prefer the Punjabis for recruitment in the army and civil bureaucracy. As a consequence, in Pakistan, the Punjabis came to control the armed forces and much of the bureaucratic apparatus inherited from the British. Soon after the emergence of Pakistan, the Punjabi elite formed an alliance with upper echelon of the Muhajirs who are either those descendants of the pre-colonial Muslim aristocracy that was able to retain the economic and political power acquired during the centuries of Muslim rule over India or acquired those powers during the colonial rule. This unholy alliance was directed against the rest of the people of Pakistan. Within a very short period since the emergence of Pakistan, this minority elite through palace intrigues and military intervention

17. Aftab A. Kazi, "Ethnic Nationalism and Superpower in South Asia : Sindhis and Baluchis", *Strategic Analysis*, (Vol. XII, No. 1, April 1988), p. 35.

in politics concentrated in its hands all economic, political and administrative power in the country, formulated and executed development strategies to the benefit of vested interests with the exclusion of the rest.

To grasp the reasons and the magnitude of the current problems of Pakistan's national integration, it is imperative to look at the development strategies implemented by its rulers and the resultant unevenness in the level of development of different ethno-linguistic groups. To avoid lengthy discussions and repetitions, we would concentrate our attention primarily on where do these five groups viz, the Punjabis, Sindhis, Pashtuns, Baluchis and the Muhajirs stand in the developmental process of the country.

As available data suggest, Punjabi-Muhajir domination of the civil-military bureaucracy has further been crystalized. In the Federal Government Secretariat and related departments, Punjab has around 56 per cent of the posts, approximately equal to its share of the national population. Rural Sindh has only around 3 per cent as against its 13 per cent share of the total population. In stark contrast, urban Sindh (comprising mainly Muhajirs and Punjabis) as against its 10 per cent share of national population has almost 25 per cent of the posts, thus, raising the Punjabi-Muhajir representation in the Federal Government and related departments up to around 81 per cent of the posts. The representation of the NWFP in the similar posts is around 11 per cent while that of Baluchistan is only around 2.5 per cent. A survey of the government sector corporations also reveal a similar picture. Punjabi representation in the middle and senior level posts in those institutions is 41 per cent and that of urban Sindh 47 per cent which make the combined Punjabi-Muhajir representation an incredible 88 per cent of the total posts, while rural Sindh has only around 3.5 per cent. The representation of NWFP in those posts is around 6 per cent and that of Baluchistan only around 1 per cent. Even these statistics understate Punjabi and Mohajir representation in such

institutions as they were compiled on the basis of domicile certificates which do not indicate an individual's real ethnic background.¹⁸ In the armed forces, Punjabi domination is similarly overwhelming. Here, however, the Pashtuns have replaced the Muhajirs as the junior partners of the Punjabis. Sindhi representation in the army is almost non-existent and that of Baluchistan is less than 1 per cent.¹⁹

Data on the level of industrial development of the provinces are highly misleading. Along with the cities of Punjab, Karachi, Hyderabad, Peshawar and Quetta, particularly, the cities of Sindh have a substantial industrial base. But, Karachi, Hyderabad and many more prosperous cities in Sindh have a non-Sindhi predominance. Most of the productive assets (in industry, commerce and real estate) in these areas are controlled by the non-Sindhis, primarily the Punjabis and the Muhajirs. In this regard, however, while the Pashtuns have lost the control over their native Peshawar to the Punjabis, they have achieved a dominating position in the Baluch city of Quetta.²⁰

In Pakistan, Baluchis and the Sindhis are the worst victims of uneven development. While agriculturally, along with Punjab, Sindh is as well developed, most of its fertile land belongs to either the Muhajirs or the Punjabis. It is the result of a long-standing and well-planned policy of the ruling elite. Disregarding the demand by the Sindh Assembly to return the evacuee property to the original Sindhi owners, this land was allotted to the Muhajirs. Then came the allotments of barrage lands (Sukkur, Guddu, and Ghulam Muhammad) to non-Sindhi civil-military bureaucrats. The policy

18. Figures are taken from Charles H. Kennedy, "Politics of Ethnic Preference in Pakistan", *Asian Survey*, (Vol. xxiv, No. 6., June 1984), Table 1; and Shahid Kardar, *Political Economy of Pakistan*, (Progressive Publishers, Lahore, 1987), pp. 11 and 44.

19. Aftab A. Kazi, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

20. Shahid Kardar, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

of the allotments of Sindhi lands to the Punjabis and the Muhajirs continued to be implemented as late as during Zia's rule.²¹

Natural resources of Sindh are being depleted for the benefit of the Punjabi-Muhajir elite. Recently discovered oil and other energy resources in the province are also likely to benefit the Punjabi-Muhajir elite as the project lacks even a minimum representation of the Sindhis. Almost all positions, from management to non-skilled labour are filled by the non-Sindhis, while the number of jobless in the province is ever increasing. According to one estimate, some 5600 medical doctors, 3750 engineers, 3000 agriculturists, 1800 science graduates and 30,000 arts and social science graduates are unemployed in Sindh.²² In the interior Sindh, over 70 per cent of the graduates remain jobless.²³

Baluchistan is the worst victim of uneven development. It remains out of the mainstream of political and economic activities and known mainly by its northern tribes—Zehris, Mengals, Marris and Bugtis. Being extremely unrepresented in the civil-military bureaucracy and the entrepreneur class, the Baluchis never felt themselves integrated to the Pakistani society. In Baluchistan, the Pashtuns serve as the junior partners of the Punjabis in extending their domination over the province. They dominate the civil service and control trade and commerce of the province. Industries in the province are concentrated exclusively in Quetta and Hub—both non-Baluch cities. Practically all the industrial enterprises are owned by non-Baluchis. Baluchistan was also not benefited from the exploitation of its natural resources. The province which provided 80 per cent of the requirements of the nation in natural gas lacks even a minimum level of electrification.²⁴ Most of the development projects in the province undertaken by the

21. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

22. Aftab A. Kazi, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

23. Shahid Kardar, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

central government are seen as being ill-motivated. For instance, PAT Feeder Canal is viewed by the Baluchis as aid to the settlement of civil and military bureaucrats in the virgin and fertile lands of the Kachchi plains.²⁵ For fear of becoming a minority in their own province, Baluchis are vehemently opposed to the increasing migration of non-Baluchis into the province, but they could do little to change the trend.

It is clear, therefore, that the nation building process in Pakistan generated high degree of unevenness in the level of development of different ethnic groups, polarized the polity along ethnic line and created a fertile ground for violent conflicts. Economic deprivation of Sindh and Baluchistan is primarily responsible for the recent deterioration of ethnic relations in Sindh and secessionist movement in Baluchistan. For the Panjabi-Muhajir ruling elite it is a struggle for retaining the supremacy, while for the Sindhis and the Baluchis it is a struggle for survival and emancipation. The position of the Pashtuns are complicated. They have a sizable representation in the civil and military services, business circles and in informal services sectors. Unlike the Sindhis and the Baluchis, they have been benefited from the Middle East bonanza. The ever flourishing black economy is also under their control. These coupled with the Afghan crisis split the Pashtun mind between their present benefits and nostalgia for Pakhtunistan. They, at least for the time being, have a stake in the *status quo*.

Lack of Democratic Institutions and Culture

The ethno-linguistic heterogeneity, uneven development of different ethnic groups and geographical regions and consequential problems of national integration in Pakistan are nothing unique. As it was indicated earlier, these are common problems suffered by most of the Third World states. Similar problems faced by

25. Aabha Dixit, "Ethnic and Regional Tensions in Pakistan", *Strategic Analysis*, (Vol. XII, No. 12, March 1989), pp. 1465-1466.

neighbouring India are even much more complex and multi-dimensional. What generated the present state of permanent crisis of integrity in Pakistan is not merely the magnitude and the complexity of the problems themselves but also the lack of democratic institutions and culture which could facilitate the creation of a mechanism of conflict management and resolution with regard to the inter-ethnic relations.

From the very beginning, Pakistan's politics was characterized by a host of contradictions and paradoxes. Bengalis being the worst victim of Hindu domination have been the most enthusiastic participants of the movement for Pakistan. However, all popular Bengali leaders were kept out of Pakistan's power politics. While West Pakistan became the centre of Pakistan's, power politics, most of the leaders of the country, including Jinnah and Liaqat, were Muhajirs from India without constituencies of their own and with unstable influence in the provinces. From the very outset, therefore, a cleavage developed between the popular vernacular leaders from the provinces and the non-representative politicians in control of the central government.²⁶ It proved to be a major obstacle to the development of both democracy and federalism in Pakistan.

First severe blow to the development of inherited democratic institutions, culture and federalism in Pakistan came from none other than its founding father Jinnah. Highly ambitious and to a certain extent authoritarian Jinnah was also a long time proponent of parliamentary system on the Westminster model in which all executive power belongs to the Prime Minister, while according to the protocol, the Head of State with his largely ceremonial responsibilities remains the number one person in the administration. It created an inevitable conflict between Jinnah's ambition of becoming, at the same time, the Head of State and the chief executive

26. Gowher Rizvi, "Pakistan: The Domestic Dimension of Security", in Barry Buzan and Gowher Rizvi (edd.), *South Asian Insecurity and the Great Powers*, (The Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1986), p. 67.

of the country on the one hand, and the development of democratic institutions and practice on the other. Jinnah failed to subdue his personal ambitions. He assumed the responsibility of the Head of State and by appointing loyal Liaquat as Prime Minister, also concentrated all executive powers in his own hands. Thus, the seeds of authoritarianism were sown. He also did another great disservice to the development of a democratic system in Pakistan by his contempt for the politicians including his own party people and undue reliance on the bureaucracy. The extent of Jinnah's disdain for his fellow politicians could be gauged from the fact that near the end of his life, when someone praised the contribution of the Muslim League in winning Pakistan, Jinnah replied : "Don't talk to me about the Muslim League. I and my stenographer created Pakistan."²⁷ In the circumstances, the hold of bureaucracy over the administration began to increase unduly and the process continued unabated. In addition to civil service, gradually the army also became a claimant to power in Pakistan.

Following the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951, the civil-military bureaucracy came to dominate the political stage of the country. Palace intrigue became the only effective means of the transfer of power. While initially, civil bureaucracy have had a preponderance over its military counterpart, the situation soon reversed. A clique of civil-military bureaucrats headed by Ghulam Mohammed, Iskander Mirza and Ayub Khan assumed *de facto* control over the country. They interfered with the workings of Parliament, by-passed the ministers and gave direct orders to civil servants, sacked cabinets and even appointed their own Prime Ministers thus, making an utter mockery of parliamentary democracy.²⁸ The process reached its culmination with the *coup* staged by Ayub in October 1958. Since then, out of 32 years,

27. Hugh Tinker, "South Asia at Independence : India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka" in A. Jeyaratnam Wilson and Dennis Dalton (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 22.

28. Gowher Rizvi, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

Pakistan has been under military rule with or without civilian facade for 24 years. Military rule had destroyed the democratic institutions to the extent that it was virtually impossible to restore their authority even under democratically elected civilian governments. Neither Z.A. Bhutto's flamboyance and assertiveness *vis-a-vis* the civil-military bureaucracy nor Benazir's compromise under compulsion could save their regimes from the onslaught of Pakistan's omnipotent civil-military oligarchy.

As it was discussed, uneven socio-economic and politico-cultural development of different ethnic groups in Pakistan with Punjabi-Muhajir ruling elite being in the most privileged position has been primarily responsible for endemic ethnic conflicts in the country. However, what made these conflicts almost insoluble and what generated such a deep crisis of national integration is certainly the destruction of democratic institutions, lack of democratic practice and denial of popular participation in the affairs of state. As the ruling elite in Pakistan was composed exclusively of privileged ethnic groups, suppression of broader democratic movement went parallel with the suppression of ethnic grievances. Cynical demagoguery about the creation of an Islamic society has been designed not only to bolster support for the tottering autocratic regimes but also to deceive the deprived ethnic groups. While it failed to arouse popular response, it has successfully bolstered the self-image of the ruling elite as the sole defender of faith and the integrity of the nation. Dissent of any kind—be it demand for free elections and free media or that for the equal participation in the process of nation building by the deprived nationalities—has been viewed by the ruling coterie as either directed against Islam or the state.

Another significant factor which accelerated the division of Pakistani society along ethnic line is the disdain of its non-representative rulers for the political parties, politicians and free politics. They viewed the politicians as divisive, inept, incompetent, lethargic and corrupt. Popular politicians were often portrayed as the enemies of

Islam and the integrity of the state and not seldom, as foreign agents. Political parties were projected as organized threat to the peace and tranquillity in the society. Political difficulties and occasional crises suffered by the country typical to most of the Third world societies, have been viewed by the civil-military bureaucracy as chaos resulted from the free politics itself. They have never allowed the politicians to face crises, go through it without military intervention in politics and thus, gain experience. Whenever, usually following some sorts of upheavals, political parties have had the chance of asserting themselves, they made persistent attempts to gain legitimacy by projecting the ideas and performance of their top leaders. It has as well contributed to the lack of institutionalized political parties and institutionalized political process.

Being the captive of narrow self-interests, inherent weaknesses and prejudices, the ruling elite could not think of decentralizing economic and political power and allow a sort of *glasnost* of its own with a view to bringing aggrieved social strata and ethnic groups to the national mainstream. It was, perhaps, never appreciated by the ruling circles that democracy and federalism were vital for the very existence of the state. They also remained far from realizing that in denying themselves popular legitimacy, they were eroding the legitimacy of Pakistani state.

Pakistan's failure to create political and social institutions like free legislature, free judiciary and free media and to introduce genuine federalism has resulted in the crisis of national integration. In the absence of a coherent political system and a successful pluralistic and competitive, popularly supported and respected political process, parochial forms of political expression have surfaced and ethnic conflict is certainly the most worrisome one. The lack of democratic institutions and culture not only made the solution of ethnic conflicts virtually impossible but also rendered the expression of ethnic grievances highly difficult and not seldom, risky undertaking. It has brought comparatively radical elements of deprived

nationalities to the forefront of ethnic politics isolating the moderate ones. Coercive measures led even relatively moderate sections to resort to violent means. While reacting to the strong-armed methods of central authority, once NAP leader Wali Khan expressed the feelings of deprived and oppressed nationalities as follows: If you want to settle it bullet by bullet, you will find people who will meet your bullet, with their bullet. You can't stop it. If you have legitimate means of political agitation here, people will go to legitimate means. But if you stop all conventional and traditional methods of constitutional and legal agitation, people will pick up unconstitutional and illegal methods for furthering their political cause. It is so very simple."²⁹ Such voices could never impress Pakistani rulers. Instead, faced with ethnic problems, the ruling elite of Pakistan almost invariably responded by strengthening and using the coercive power of the state to preserve the interests of the regime and the dominant ethnic groups *vis-a-vis* resurgent sub-nationalism. This compelled the deprived nationalities to react violently. Such practices for decades have shaped the cult of violence in Pakistani politics.

The Fallout of War in Afghanistan

The short term gains that Pakistan achieved by involving herself in the war in Afghanistan, though in a rather indirect manner, have been more than offset by the consequential disastrous impact on the economy, polity, and society at large. Most disastrous, however, has been so-called heroin and Kalashnikov culture which threatens to destroy the already fragile fabric of the society.

Pakistan's drug problem is closely linked with its involvement in Afghan conflict and it was particularly exacerbated by the influx of millions of Afghan refugees. Afghanistan is one of the largest poppy producers in the world which, according to one estimate, produces 1500 to 2000 metric tons of poppy every year. Most of it

29. Aabha Dixit, (1989), p. 1465.

finds its way into Pakistan to be refined into heroin for export to the West Europe and the US. Most crop areas are under the control of the Mujahideens and reports suggest that they are now controlling the drug trade in the border areas.³⁰

The illicit traffic in drugs is now the most profitable business in Pakistan fetching for its dealers as revenue of over US\$ 8 billion, almost one-fifth of the country's annual GDP of US\$ 40 billion.³¹ Such enormous profits have enabled Pakistan's drug barons to create an organized drug syndicate having links with the ruling elite, the law enforcement agencies, and the international underworld and run a parallel economy and a sort of parallel government. The drug mafia has created an empire of its own that counted as its citizens people from almost every strata of society including the armed forces. The extent to which the drug mafia has infiltrated the armed forces could be gauged from the fact that 16 army officers were arrested in 1986 alone for involvement in the drug trade.³²

Along with drug came the Kalashnikov culture which is also an enduring legacy of Zia's Afghan policy. While it is true that the tribal areas of NWFP and Baluchistan have traditionally been involved in arms manufacture since the early years of the twentieth century, it is also equally true that the Afghan war brought radical change in the quality and quantity of the arms and ammunition produced in these areas, in their trade and their broader implications. For decades, the society has learned to live with the pre-1980 production of and traffic in arms. However, the society was quite unprepared to handle the post-1980 situation. With the sharp increase in the quality and quantity of the arms produced, the tribal craftsmen also became able to reduce the price significantly within a very short period. For instance, in the early 1980s, Kalashnikov AK-47s were

30. Zahid Hussain, "Narco Power: Pakistan's Parallel Government?", *Strategic Digest*, (Vol. XX, No. 6, June 1990), p. 2494.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 2496.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 2494-2495.

priced between Rs. 30,000 to 40,000 but by 1988, the price skidded to between Rs. 16,000 to 18,000.³³

During the initial periods of the Afghan war, capacity to produce arms increased drastically with the increase in demands. Following a considerable period, the demand stagnated and then decreased significantly which led the arms barons to move into the hinterland in search of markets. Such a situation coupled with the already mentioned heroin culture and black money, deterioration in the law and order situation, gangsterism, political instability, legitimacy crisis of the dictatorial regime and most importantly, the ever deteriorating ethnic relations in the country, particularly in Sindh, created a fertile ground where Kalashnikov culture could flourish.

Zia's Afghan policy and resultant heroin and Kalashnikov culture have severely contaminated Pakistani society and significantly contributed to the present perilous state of its politics in general and ethnic relations in particular. Narco mafia thrived under military rule, with several influential members of the ruling clique reportedly patronizing and providing protection to the illicit trade. One of the international drug barons operating in Pakistan Hiayoshi Maruyama has reportedly been close to even Zia's family.³⁴ Following the death of Zia, it was the turn of the politicians to patronage the drug barons. Benazir has repeatedly charged that over 194 million rupees of drug money had been paid to the MNAs to vote against her in the no-confidence move. While the exact amount contributed by the narco mafia to the no-confidence venture remains a subject of speculation, there is little doubt about the transaction itself. Reason behind the involvement of drug money against Benazir in the recent political horse-trading is rather simple. With her anti-drug drive, she severely alienated Pakistan's drug barons and their foreign patrons. However, PPP also, as some reports

33. Aabha Dixit, "Pakistan After a Year of Benazir Rule", *Strategic Studies*, (Vol. XIII, No. 2, May 1990), p. 204-205.

34. Zahid Hussain, *op. cit.*, p. 2492.

suggest, could not remain in the sideline. According to a report, one of Benazir's ministers Tariq Rahim made efforts to enlist the support of four MNAs from the tribal areas through Anwar Khattak, who was in prison on a charge of drug trafficking.³⁵

Drug trafficking is flourishing on the Karachi-Peshawar axis with Karachi being the transit point for onward shipment of heroin, brown sugar and other drugs. It has significantly contributed to the existence of large number of tightly-organized gangs. Outlaws estimated to number anywhere between 5 and 20 thousand are operating in Sindh who in addition to drug trafficking, are also involved in abductions, bank robberies and not seldom act as mercenaries. During the last years of Zia's rule, the ranks of the outlaws swelled, as traditional bandits were joined by many politically alienated Sindhis. Zia has further complicated the situation by encouraging loyal Sindhi landlords to form private military bands to assert control over the rural areas, resulting in a complex mix of underground ethnic and party politics and feudal rivalries.³⁶ Prior to Afghan war, gun has been unknown to Sindh campuses. Now, it is a part of campus life. Today, Sindh has become one of world's largest underground markets for firearms, and it is the students and young political activists, who dominate the business. There are reports that whenever spasm of ethnic violence hit Sindh, the price of the AK-47 shows an upward trend.³⁷ Thus, the Afghan war and the influx of millions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan along with the resultant heroin and Kalashnikov culture have significantly added to the high degree of violence and instability in Pakistani politics.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 2492-2493.

36. *See, Far Eastern Economic Review*, (June 7, 1990), p. 22.

37. Aabha Dixit, (1990), p. 205.

III. DYNAMICS OF ETHNIC POLITICS

The Legacy of Zia : Sharp Polarization and Internecine Warfare

Benazir's persistent assertion that the current disarray in inter-ethnic relations and the ever-flourishing Kalashnikov culture are the legacies of Zia's decade-plus rule deserves serious attention.³⁸ As we have discussed, ethnic divisions and conflicts are as old as the Pakistani state is. Therefore, Zia inherited a divided nation. Nonetheless, his policies accelerated the process of divisions which aggravated the conflicts and significantly contributed to their violent manifestation. His iron rule, contempt for political parties, politicians and democratic institutions compounded the problems. Suppression led to parochial forms of political expression manifested largely in the form of assertion of narrow ethnic identity. The ethnic conflicts that followed have been the most dangerous element in politics threatening the very foundation of Pakistani state.

Under Zia, Sindh turned to be the most serious hot-bed of ethnic conflict. Before going to that, we would discuss briefly the situation in Baluchistan and NWFP. Fierce tribes of the NWFP and Baluchistan have traditionally asserted high degree of independence of action from both the British and Pakistani rulers. Over the years, the situation in NWFP has undergone a radical change. Along with the Muhajirs, the Pashtuns also became a junior partner of the ruling Panjabi elite. They are well represented in the civil-military bureaucracy, particularly in the armed forces. Generals like Ayub, Azam, Khattak and Afridi have been the standard-bears of the ruling elite of the country. Even the lower strata of the Pashtun society is privileged. Hard working Pashtuns through their petty enterprises have moved in to all areas of the country. In Karachi alone there are over one and a half million of them. They

38. See, Kamran Khan, "A Survey of Ethnic Situation in Sindh", in Asgar Ali Engineer (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 155; Mahnaz Ispahani, *Pakistan: Dimensions of Security*, (*Adelphi Papers*, Winter 1989/90), p. 24; Aabha Dixit (1990), p. 204.

virtually control the road transport and haulage. They have also been benefited from the Afghan war. Influx of refugees has increased the numerical strength of the Pashtuns. Most of the lucrative arms and drug trade is under their control. Unlike Sindh and Baluchistan, they have also benefited from the oil bonanza. Therefore, as an ethnic group they can not but have a stake in the *status quo*. This stake is, however, based on convenience rather than conviction and therefore, vulnerable to any change in their position in Pakistani society. Another important factor is that by now the Pashtuns have severely alienated not only the Sindhis and Baluchis but also the Muhajirs rendering themselves vulnerable. On the other hand, while fierce Pashtun opposition to the centre is a matter of the past, provincialist forces still command a sizable support. Whether they could pose a challenge to the centre remains an open question.

Baluchistan, very rich in natural and mineral resources, remains the most backward province of the country and the Baluchis the most deprived nationality. As we have indicated earlier, their grievances are not only against Punjab, but also against the Pashtuns for their influence in the economy of the province and against Sindh, particularly because of repression unleashed by Bhutto against the Baluchis during his rule. With a view to capitalizing on anti-Bhutto sentiments, initially, Zia assumed an apparently flexible approach toward the Baluch problem by declaring a general amnesty for the insurgents and releasing the top Baluch leadership. His normalization efforts also included financial support on the part of the centre to accelerate Baluchistan's economic development.³⁹ In the broader perspective, however, the Baluchis did not fare better under Zia than under Bhutto. In contrast to the Pashtuns, the Baluchis became the worst losers of the Afghan war. Influx of Afghan refugees to Baluchistan further increased Baluch

39. Ataur Rahman, "Pakistan: Unity or Further Divisions?" in A. Jayaratnam Wilson and Dennis Dalton (eds.) *The States in South Asia: Problems of National Integration*, (Vikas Publishing House, 1982), p. 201.

fear of turning to be a minority in their own land. Zia's carrots were as well followed by substantially bigger sticks. With a view to displaying his toughness and inducing fear in Baluch mind, Zia ordered the execution of a popular Baluch student leader, Hamid Baluch in 1981.⁴⁰ In fact initial rapport built between Zia and the Baluch leadership was short-lived. Most powerful Baluch leaders like Ghaus Baksh Bizenjo, Khair Baksh Marri, Ataullah Khan Mengal and Nawab Bugti remain as apathetic to the centre as ever. More important, the youth in Baluchistan was becoming increasingly politicised, radicalized and to a significant extent militant. They were challenging apparently conciliatory policies of more polished leaders like Bizenjo and turning into an important pressure group.

Sindh is the province that was most polarized along ethnic line under Zia. Bhutto, while in power played politics with Punjabi rules, nonetheless, the Sindhis witnessed an era of political opportunities for them. The restoration of Sindhi as the official language of the province was a moral booster for them. Efforts were also made to change the depressing conditions of the Sindhis by facilitating job opportunities for them in the provincial and federal administration. Under PPP rule, Sindh witnessed rapid spread of educational facilities, communication system and rural electrification. Soon a feeling developed that the Sindhis could protect their interests and the province could shape its own destiny within the framework of united Pakistan. Sindhi nationalists like G.M. Syed seemed irrelevant to the present context. Another feature of the PPP era was the independence granted to women who later on were mobilized in large numbers. One may argue with some justifications that what Bhutto did for Sindh is not much significant in comparison with what the province needed to overcome its century-old backwardness. Nonetheless, the Sindhis were proud

40. Selig S. Harison, "Fanning The Flames In South Asia", *Foreign Policy* (No. 45, Winter 1981-82), p. 90.

of his political stature and felt honoured that he was one of them. His overthrow and execution increased their sense of deprivation, further alienated them from the national mainstream and fueled deep rooted Sindhi nationalism. Muhaiirs, alienated by some of the measures undertaken by Bhutto designed to redress some of genuine grievances of Sindh, also began to organize themselves under Martial Law with blessings from the regime. In June 1978, the All Pakistan Muhajir Students Organization (APMSO) a forerunner of Muhajir Qaumi Mahaj (MQM) was formed with Altaf Hussain as its Chairman.

Ethnic relations in the province, however, began to deteriorate to the extent of internecine warfare following the brutal suppression of the Sindhi dominated Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) in 1983. Army even used helicopter gunships and nearly 400 people were killed.⁴¹ When Sindhis in the village were suffering, Muhajirs in the cities stayed aloof. This was followed by the establishment of the Muhajir Qaumi Mahaj (MQM) headed by same Altaf Hnssain in 1984. Allegations of the involvement of Inter-Service Intelligence Directorate (ISI) in the formation of the MQM could very well be right as the army wanted to control the situation in PPP dominated Sindh.⁴²

Sindi frustrations have fueled radical Sindi nationalist parties directed against not only the centre and the Muhajirs, but also the Punjabis and the Pashtuns who along with the Muhajirs occupied the cities. During the 1980s, numerous regional and ethnic-based parties flourished. These included: Jiye Sindh Mahaj led by veteran politician G. M. Syed, Palejo faction of the Awami National Party (ANP) previously known as Sindhi-Awami Tahrik, Qaumi-Mahaj-Azadi of Mairaj Muhammad Khan, Panjabi-Pathan Ittehad and a number of others. In May, 1988, an umbrella organization, the Sindh National Alliance was also formed to

41. Mahnaz Ispahani, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

42. *Times of India*, (May 11, 1990).

promote the struggle for the restoration of political and economic rights of Sindh.⁴³ In the broader spectrum of Pakistani politics, two organizations came to propagate the regionalist, provincialist and/or confederationist ideas of the representatives of aggrieved nationalities. In July 1986, Awami National Party (ANP) was formed with Wali Khan as its principal leader partly to promote the interests of the provincialists in Sindh, Baluchistan and NWFP. An amalgam of predominantly but not exclusively left radicals, ANP resembles the old National Awami Party in policy and outlook.⁴⁴ Its non-Marxist counterpart became the confederationist party Sindh Baluch and Pakhtun Front (SBPF) under the leadership of Mumtaz Bhutto, Abdul Hafiz Pirzada and Ataulah Khan Mengal.⁴⁵

In the absence of democratic political environment, these parties with their affiliated mass organizations and armed cadres came to promote platforms ranging from a looser constitutional restructuring of centre-province relations, to autonomy, confederation and outright secession. Such political platforms like Jiye Sindh Mahaj and Sindhi Awami Tahrik acted as the main vehicles through which militant Sindhi nationalism were expressed. G. M. Syed reinvigorated his demand for "Sindhu Desh". Highly politicized and publicized celebration of his 84th birthday, dramatic appearance of SBPF leader Pirzada in it and his disappearance after delivering a hard-hitting speech against army and Punjab, and the heavy-handed approach of the authority to deal with the situation brought Syed, once again, to the forefront of separatist movement in the

43. For details, see, Aabha Dixit (1989), pp. 1473-1474; Mahnaz Ispahani, *op. cit.*, p. 23; M. H. Askari, "The Aftermath of Sohrab Goth", in Asgar Ali Engineer (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict in South Asia*, (Ajanta Publications, Deihl, 1987), p. 141; and Lawrence Ziring, "Public policy Dilemmas and Pakistan's Nationality Problem : The Legacy of Zia-ul-Haq", *Asian Survey*, (Vol. XXVIII, No. 8, August 1988), pp. 804-106.

44. Lawrence Ziring, *op. cit.*, p. 805.

45. Aftab A. Kazi, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

province.⁴⁶ Another Sindhi nationalist, Qaumi-Mahaj-Azadi leader Mairaj Muhammad Khan, proposed five measures to secure true autonomy for the provinces with only defence, foreign affairs, finance and communications with the center. A Pakistani columnist, compared his five measures with the Six Points Programme of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.⁴⁷ SBPF, which includes Mumtaz Bhutto, even envisages a secular Pakistan with a limited power with the central government (mainly defence, foreign affairs, and currency).⁴⁸

Not only in Sindh, parties with concern for regional interests and promoting demands ranging from maximum regional autonomy to confederation and even secession also were operative in other provinces. In NWFP, along with Wali Khan's ANP, Pakhtoon Liberation Front (PLF) came to propagate regional cause. The PLF not only demands "maximum autonomy" for the province, but also presses for a change in the name of NWFP to Pakhtunistan.⁴⁹ Afghan War, reasonable representation in the civil-military bureaucracy and informal services, lucrative arms and drug business, Middle East bonanza *en bloc* have, however, remarkably pacified the Pashtuns.

In Baluchistan, popular leaders like Bizenjo, Mengal, Marri and Bugti remained as hostile to Panjabi-Pashtun domination as ever. Disgruntled with countless broken promises, decades of exploitation and deprivation, systematic repression unleashed by successive governments, these leaders tend to insist on maximum autonomy. Marri, for instance, demand autonomy in all spheres except defence, foreign affairs and currency.⁵⁰ Occasionally, some of them responded to the pressures from the centre with veil threats of secession. However, careful reading of their statements on the centre-province

46. Kamran Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-154.

47. Nasser Brohi, "Sohrab Goth—The Untold Story", in Asgar Ali Engineer (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 141-142.

48. Aftab A. Kazi, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

49. Lawrence Ziring, *op. cit.*, p. 806.

50. Aabha Dixit (1989), pp. 1467.

relations reveals that they are prepared to settle the problems within the framework of united Pakistan, while achieving maximum autonomy for the province within the realm of possibility.⁵¹

However, the youth is becoming increasingly politicised, radicalized and to a significant extent militant. They are challenging the apparently conciliatory policies of more polished leaders like Bizenjo and turning into an important pressure group. Militant organizations like, Baluchi Peoples Liberation Front (BPLF) and Popular Front of Armed Resistance, who during the Afghan War, conducted armed operations in the hope that Afghanistan would support their demand for an independent "Greater Baluchistan", are now trying to secure their survival operating on the militancy of the youth. Under Zia, however, Baluchistan could not pose any kind of real challenge to the centre. Moreover, he could keep the Baluchis under control without resorting to high degree of force as done by Bhutto. Primary reason may be the fact that the Baluchis were sharply divided among themselves with regard to the concrete programme of action *vis-a-vis* the centre. Another reason could be the fact that influx of Pashtuns and Afghan refugees has diverted their concern.

One of the most significant phenomena in Sindh politics and for that matter in the politics of Pakistan has been the emergence of MQM. Since its inception, the new party has concentrated its efforts on creating a separate ethnic consciousness for the Muhajirs. A host of reasons worked in its favour. The Muhajirs, who following partition occupied the commanding heights of the economy, politics and administration of the major cities of Sindh including Karachi and Hyderabad, found their vested interests under threat from a number of sources. The Punjabis, mostly representatives of business community and other privileged strata were increasingly being settled in Karachi. The Muhajirs, however, felt themselves more threatened by the influx of large number of Pashtuns from

51. See, *Ibid.*, pp. 1463-1468.

NWFP to the area. With the Afghan war simmering on, the ethnic problem in Sindh veered in a critical direction. Great number of Afghan refugees entered the metropolitan areas of Sindh who along with their Pashtun brethren were competing with the relatively lower strata of the Muhajirs for preponderance in informal jobs, petty business and the like which vitiated ethnic relations at the grass-root level. Finally, sizable number of young educated Sindhis followed by odd-job seekers began to come to the cities. They, long ignored by Islamabad and sneered at by the Muhajirs, wanted all past wrongs redressed immediately.

In the face of all these, the Muhajirs, a highly privileged community in Pakistani society, found their vested interests in jeopardy and gradually developed a sense of being squeezed out by all other ethnic communities in Sindh cities. MQM and its supremo Altaf decided to capitalize on Muhajir community's sense of isolation and deprivation—real or imaginary. In this regard, the party could rely on the blessing of Zia regime which wanted to curtail the power and influence of Muhajir dominated Islamic fundamentalist parties with questionable loyalty, promote religious-sectarian and ethnic divide in PPP dominated Sindh and to obviate the traditional role played by Karachi in opposition politics.

With Muhajir nationalism at its heart, the MQM under its charismatic leader Altaf Hussain began to draw followers in Karachi and Hyderabad ranging from educated youths and students to workers, unemployed and even stalwarts of the underworld. Relying on perceived grievances of the Muhajirs, Altaf embarked upon a path of deliberate and undue politicisation of ethnic distinctions and affiliations in the politically torrid climate of Sindh. As he later explained his vision, "All nationalities are asserting their identities. The Muhajirs have been forced to think in terms of a *fifth-nationality* (emphasis added) because objective conditions so dictate. Everywhere the Muhajirs find the doors of employment, education, and other opportunities closed to them. All that the MQM has done

is to give them a sense of direction and leadership".⁵² Relying on the rising tide of Muhajir chauvinism, highly organized militant cadres, his organizing ability and charisma, within a very short period, Altaf could successfully mobilize the community around him and his party. By 1985-1986, Altaf and his MQM emerged virtually as the sole representative of the Muhajirs. While not all the Muhajirs supported him and some religious parties abhorred him, presiding over an organized militant cadres, Altaf could silence all opposition to him from within the community through demagoguery, intimidation and the use of force when it was necessary.

Interestingly enough, while conflict of interests between the Sindhis and the Muhajirs remained the most dominant feature of inter-ethnic relations in the province. Altaf carefully avoided any show of force with them. Instead, MQM's target became the Pashtuns and to the surprise of many, the Punjabis. The reasons were not tactical alone. For the moment, Muhajirs were facing a greater challenge from the Pashtuns and more so, from the influx of large number of Afghan refugees into Karachi who were competing with them for informal jobs and petty business. This resulted in a conflict of interests between the two communities at the grass-roots level. The reasons behind Panjabi-Muhajir conflict are little bit complicated. The dominant Panjabi-Muhajir alliance which is ruling Pakistan is confined to the upper echelon of the two communities which kept the alliance intact. But its ability to exert influence on inter-ethnic relations has decreased significantly. The bulk of the Muhajirs were lumpen proletariat topped by an aristocratic and educated elite. The later commanded unquestionable allegiance of the former. During the four-plus decades, lower strata of the Muhajirs underwent a process of socio-economic and cultural transformation. By now, a middle and lower middle educated class has emerged whose

52. Quoted in, Muhammad Ali Siddiqi, "Altaf Explains MQM Objectives", in Asgar Ali Engineer (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 159.

economic interests and social outlook are quite different from those of their parents and grand parents. While they still have a stake in the Punjabi-Muhajir alliance at the top, their greater interests in the cities like Karachi and Hyderabad came to an inevitable conflict with those of the Punjabis settled in these cities. They are to compete with the Punjabis for limited jobs, seats in educational institutions and business opportunities, and finally, this shaped their approach toward the Punjabis.

By 1985-1986 ethnic polarization in Sindh cities took a more or less clear shape. Conflict among them appeared to revolve around three points: Sindhis versus Muhajirs, Muhajirs versus Punjabi-Pashtun combine and Sindhis versus Punjabi-Pashtun combine. By late 1986, conflict between the Muhajirs on the one hand and the Pashtun-Punjabi combine on the other overshadowed all other ethnic conflicts.

As It was indicated earlier, following the Shia-Sunni riots of 1983 caused by Zia's imposition of compulsory *zakat* collection unacceptable to the Shias—Karachi turned to be a hot-bed of sectarian and ethnic tension and violence with large-scale loss of lives. It did not witness even a single year of uninterrupted peace. Apart from the severe deterioration in inter-ethnic relations, heroin and Kalashnikov culture, professional gangsterism, inept and highly corrupt law and order enforcement agencies all contributed to the creation of virtual lawlessness in the major cities in Sindh and the highways connecting them with the cities of NWFP. Karachi and Hyderabad went rapidly from being melting pots to powder kegs. In such circumstances, when MQM aggressively espousing a doctrine of struggle against the Pashtuns and the Panjabis came to assert itself in the cities, it was destined to further deteriorate the situation. MQM's much publicized October march to Hyderabad and subsequent firing, riots, deaths and

curfew gave the final boost to the conflict which continued to develop and culminated in the carnage of 14-15 December.⁵³ Pashtun Muhajir riot of 1986 was regarded even by conservative government spokesmen as the worst such fighting since 1947.⁵⁴

During this period of worst internecine warfare between the Muhajirs and the Pashtuns, a strange Sindhi-Muhajir truce or even a quasi-alliance came to exist and, for some times, remained more or less operative. The Muhajirs tended to identify themselves with the native Sindhis and even consider themselves as "another dimension of Sindhi demography and destiny".⁵⁵ Thus, the Sindhis were placed on a favourable footing in domestic politics as the Muhajirs preferred to influence them on their side. The Sindhi nationalist organizations also extended the olive branch to the MQM. Altaf has been impressed with the Sindhi attitude toward the Muhajirs and that led him to assert, "Wherever in Sindh we staged rallies and organized processions, the Sindhi people supported us".⁵⁶ Even an unusually close personal relationship gradually took shape between Altaf and G. M. Syed—people of two opposite poles. Syed—the most hard-line Sindhi nationalist—even sent a cap and a lungi to Altaf following his release from jail what the later has characterized as a "token of friendship between Sindhi and Muhajir people".⁵⁷ Such an alliance, however, could not survive in the absence of counterpoint. Moreover, Sindhi Muhajir contradictions are the single-most dominant feature in the ethnic politics of the province. Therefore, their interests were destined to come into collusion.

The approach and practical policy of Sindhi dominated PPP toward increasing polarization of Pakistani society along ethnic line is of significant importance. Throughout the entire period of Zia's

54. Lawrence Ziring, *op. cit.*, p. 808.

55. *Ibid.*,

56. Muhammad Ali Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-161.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

rule, the PPP has been the worst victim of persecution and repression. As a matter of fact, the dictator had valid reasons to consider the PPP as the single-most potent threat to his rule and acted accordingly. Its charismatic leader Z. A. Bhutto was imprisoned and then executed. Many PPP workers suffered imprisonment, flogging and death at the hands of the military rulers. During much of this period, Benazir Bhutto, who became the *de facto* leader of the party, herself was imprisoned or held under house arrest. In 1984, she was released and allowed to go into exile, in part for medical reasons.⁵⁸ All these coupled with the lack of able leadership remarkably weakened the party and narrowed down its support base. Nonetheless, it still remained the most popular party in the country.

While at the national level PPP continued to be the largest party, interior Sindh remained its most reliable strong-hold. More important, Sindhi nationalism was gaining respectability among the ranks and file of the party which all along championed the national cause. This, in the backdrop of ever increasing ethnic polarization of politics in Sindh, put the party face an ineluctable dilemma: how to retain national character of the party and its support base nationwide while, keeping its strongholds in rural Sindh by working for it. With Benazir in exile, party's position on this and a number of other issues remained confusing and divided. Nonetheless, the PPP workers continued to play the most visible and most meaningful role in the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy.

The return of Benazir Bhutto from exile in April, 1986, provided the PPP with an opportunity to revitalize its campaign against Zia and his Prime Minister Mohammad Khan Junejo—a politician-turned-barrack-associate—and to take a more clear stand on the burning issues of national politics. Encouraged by PPP enthusiasm and tumultuous crowds to greet her in almost all over Pakistan, Benazir led the party in a series of protest movements demanding new elec-

58. William L. Richter, "Pakistan under Benazir Bhutto", *Current History*, (December 1989), p. 433.

tions which subsequently led to her arrest in August the same year. After her release following a few weeks, she shifted to less agitational strategy of rebuilding support.⁵⁹

While formulating party's stand on major national issues, including the ethnic conflict, she displayed high degree of caution, flexibility and political realism, simultaneously, she had to take a number of rather courageous decisions. Despite tremendous pressures from powerful leaders within her own party who represent rural Sindh and radical Sindhi nationalist parties, she carefully avoided championing Sindhi nationalism. Instead, she decided to bolster the image of PPP as the only national party with sufficient support base nationwide. At the same time, she made persistent efforts to maintain and enlarge the support base of the party in the rural Sindh. As a matter of fact, the message the PPP tried to convey to the rural Sindh was that it has once given the Sindhis a sense of dignity and only it could do the same again.

While recognizing the potentials of leftist parties like ANP and its numerous factions in the struggle against Zia regime, she did not hesitate to declare that her party rejected both communism and Marxist ideology. In this regard, they neither could seduce nor compel her to succumb to threats of non-cooperation. Instead, she displayed high degree of political realism. Benazir clearly realized that without a minimum degree of support in Punjab—the bastion of power in Pakistan—her long-term political goals would always remain beyond reach. Hence, she decided to court traditionally conservative forces in Panjab. For her, it was not a choice but a necessity.

PPP stand on ethnic issue and its broader strategy aimed at rebuilding strength at the national level came under attack from a number of sources and that also included some disgruntled elements within the party. Radical left factions within the ANP who, by and large, were also provincialists, remained hostile to PPP's new found

59. *Ibid.*, p. 434.

moderation on ideological and ethnic issues. Benazir's failure to champion Sindhi nationalism and her attempts to court Punjab even irritated Mumtaz Bhutto—a cousin and close political associate of Benazir's father. He even predicted that Benazir was programmed to lose on both the Sindh and Punjab fronts.⁶⁰

For Benazir, power in Islamabad was the ultimate goal. Therefore, she had to remain firm on her position of not championing Sindhi nationalism. It was not a matter of convenience alone, like her father, she was also committed to maintain the unity of post-1971 Pakistan. At the same time, she also carefully avoided war of words with her provincialist critiques who were also in the movement against Zia-Junejo system of civilianized military rule. Instead, she made persistent attempts to link the ethnic conflict and fratricide with military rule, prolonged disenfranchisement of the people, ban on political parties, degeneration of the political process and non-party polls. Thus, following the worst ethnic violence between the Muhajirs and the Pashtuns in late 1986—early 1987, PPP held the Martial Law and the non-party polls responsible for creating such a situation. Benazir and the PPP also held the view that “there is still some time left before the situation reaches a point of no return in Sindh” and “the solution lies in immediate polls on party basis”⁶¹

Benazir's strategy paid dividends. Contrary to Mumtaz Bhutto's prediction, she has re-established rural Sindh as bastion of PPP's support base. She was also gradually rebuilding PPP's organizational infrastructure and enlarging its support base in other provinces, including Punjab. Notably, her approach toward the ethnic issue has been shared by influential circles in Pakistan who were not necessarily pro-PPP elements. Pakistani media which regained certain degree of freedom and credibility was one of them. Some of them even expressed views strikingly similar

60. Lawrence Ziring, *op. cit.*, p. 804-805

61. Kamran Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

to those expressed by Benazir. Thus, in an editorial, influential daily *The Muslim* assessed the situation in Karachi as follows: "Karachi with its ethnic mosaic of inhabitants, is truly reaping the whirlwind of long years of de-politicisation under Marshal Law. De-politicisation and disenfranchisement tend, as our own history amply illustrates, to result in a reassertion of ethnic identities." ⁶²

Meanwhile, Pakistani society continued to face the twin problem of military rule and ethnic conflict. The Zia-Junejo regime, while introduced limited political freedom, remained far from being transformed into a process of democratization. More important, Zia could not reconcile with limited political freedom as much as a more circumscribed freedom of action occasionally displayed by his Prime Minister. On May 29, 1988, he dismissed the Junejo Government and dissolved the Parliament. Politicians and observers remained confused about his future plan of action.

Internecine warfare continued unabated wherein both the sides displayed unprecedented ruthlessness. In 1987, the army had to be called upon to quell each disturbance. Nonetheless, there was no let-up in the clashes and the bloodletting continued into 1988. The same year, it was reported that casualty figures had reached a staggering 500 dead and over 2000 injured. ⁶³

Amidst confusion in national politics and sustained crisis in inter-ethnic relations in Pakistan, on August 17, 1988, Zia and his leading associates along with US Ambassador to Pakistan Arnold Raphel were killed in a mysterious air crash. With Zia, the longest military rule in Pakistan came to a rather abrupt end. Reaction to Zia's death in the country was mixed. Politician-turned-barrack-associates developed a genuine sense of being orphaned. For Benazir, the insurmountable obstacle in her way to power was removed. Bitter

62. *The Muslim*, May 10, 1988

63. Aabha Dixit (1990), p. 205.

memories of the past and the new found opportunities tempted her to declare, "I do not regret the death of Zia."⁶⁴

Prospects for the return of democracy in Pakistan appeared in many ways realistic. 'Beheaded' ruling civil-military bureaucracy was suffering from indecisiveness and lack of confidence. Civil bureaucracy was incapable of taking any independent initiative. It was left to the army. But the army was as well incapable of taking any bold step. With Zia, a good number of top-ranking army officers were also killed. It was virtually devoid of a decision making authority. The new Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Mirza Aslam Beg, a Muhajir himself, clearly realized that filling the vacuum created by the decapitation of country's military high command would not be easy. He needed time for consolidating his position within the army and striking a new balance within its hierarchy. All these have circumscribed army's ability to challenge the civilian aspirants for power. In this regard, foreign, more precisely, US influence also played an important role. Pakistan-US alliance under Zia flourished on the assumption that the Soviets would never withdraw from Afghanistan. The US strategy was designed "to inflict increasing costs on the Soviet Union to delay a Soviet consolidation, to deter further Soviet expansion, and to gain time to improve United States capability and relations with Pakistan and other states in Southwest Asia."⁶⁵ In the circumstances, as viewed from Washington, Zia was indispensable and the return of democracy to Pakistan—a threat to US interests in Southwest Asia.⁶⁶ Following the emergence of Gorbachev and subsequent changes, including Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, neither military rule was indispensable nor return to democracy in the country a threat to US interests. Moreover, the US could

64. *The Economist*, (August 20, 1988), p. 27.

65. Zalmay Khalilzad, "The United States in South Asia", *Current History*, (December, 1989), p. 418.

66. S. D. Muni, "Internal Political Problems", *World Focus*, (Vol. 10, No. 7, July 1989), p. 7.

at least expect that a democratic regime would show some kind of restraints in the nuclear field. Therefore, the US decided to encourage a process of democratization in post-Zia Pakistan. The policy making elite in the US have, however, been divided on the issue. Zbigniew Brzezinski, for instance, advocated that "Pakistanis should not be pressurized by outsiders to move precipitously toward democracy. Instead, he advised the West to be sympathetic to Pakistan's efforts to strike a new internal political balance".⁶⁷ The US, in any case, rendered a rather publicized support in favour of the return of democracy to Pakistan.

In the circumstances, Senate President Ghulam Ishaq Khan—a Punjabi bureaucrat—became the President of Pakistan in accordance with the existing constitutional provisions. With much publicized support from General Beg, Ishaq Khan declared that the elections would be held on November 16 as scheduled. During this critical moment, two personalities—General Beg and Ishaq Khan—representatives of military and civil bureaucracy respectively, became the key players in Pakistan's power politics. It had more than symbolic value. It was clear assertion on the part of these two institutions that even after democratic elections they are to be taken into account in any future equation.

Ethnic Conflict under Benazir : Democracy was Denied a Chance

The 1988 elections has been seen as a contest between the myths and memories of two personalites—Zia and Bhutto. The former was represented by IJI and the latter by PPP, These two personalities, as we have discussed earlier, represented main rival elements of Pakistan's political culture.

Elections were held duly. Despite tacit support of the establishment toward the IJI, the elections were among the fairest in the history of the country. The PPP emerged as the largest party

67. Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Help Pakistan Stay on Course", *The Washington Post*, August, 26, 1988.

nationally, with 93 of the 205 contested Muslim seats in the National Assembly as against the IJI's 55. The third largest winner, with 13 seats, was the MQM. The remaining seats were divided among smaller parties and independents.⁶⁸ The provincial elections, held on November 19, yielded more mixed results. The PPP won only in Sindh, but ran second to the IJI in Punjab and NWFP and secured only 3 seats out of 40 in Baluchistan.⁶⁹

The 1988 elections results revealed some paradoxes too. With overwhelming support only in rural Sindh, the PPP emerged as the largest party nationally, though short of absolute majority in the National Assembly. No less paradoxical was the fact that with overwhelming support in Punjab—the bastion of power in Pakistan—IJI's authority remain confined to the province alone. Similarly, MQM with its support base only in urban Sindh emerged as the third largest party nationally.

The elections revealed sharp divisions along ethnic line that Pakistani society was suffering from. Rural Sindh voted overwhelmingly for Benzir, while urban Sindh for Altaf's MQM. Punjab voted IJI to power. Confused Pashtuns failed to rally around a single party. The Baluchis voted provincialist Bugti to power.

The Elections put all the parties to face difficult situation. Benazir had to forge an uneasy coalition with the MQM based on a 59-point accord. The accord constituted a major concession to the Muhajir demands . . . price that Benazir was compelled to pay to buy MQM in forming a government at the Centre.⁷⁰ PPP-MQM accord made Benazir's bid for power irresistible. It was clear to civil-military bureaucracy that Pakistan's democratic credential could be established if only Benazir became the Prime Minister. Nonetheless, they kept Benazir under pressure and confusion.

68. William L. Richter, *op. cit.*, p. 435.

69. *Ibid.*

70. For details see, Aabha, Dixit (1989), p. 1476-1477 and Mahnaz Ispahani *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Finally, she had to reach a deal with the civil-military bureaucracy. The truce was extremely fragile and, at the same time, costly for Benazir. She had to accept an army-sanctioned bureaucrat Ghulam Ishaq Khan as President and a retired General and former luminary of Zia regime Shahabzada Yaqub Khan as Foreign Minister. She had to promise not to interfere with Pakistan's military interests or with the broader thrust of Pakistani foreign policy.

More important, although never stated clearly, it was understood by all the parties concerned that the army holds veto power in politics. At each step it can decide whether to allow democratic politics to proceed or not. In this regard, the civil-military bureaucracy possessed a legal weapon in the form of controversial article 58 of the Constitution introduced by Zia which empowered the President to dismiss the elected government and dissolve the Parliament. In addition, a large army of political opportunists with no chance of fulfilling their ambitions in a democratic set-up were determined to oust her by any means. Benazir also encountered a unique challenge—her right as a woman to govern a Muslim state. All these have circumscribed her own policy goals. Therefore, it is not surprising that she now claims, "From day one, we were subverted."⁷¹

She was, thus, facing problems of gigantic proportions. The polity was fractured by uncertainties about the future of democracy, civil-military and centre-province relations and by unruly competition between political elites. Ethnic conflicts and internecine warfare, disputes about the appropriate relationship between religion and state, ever flourishing heroin and Kalashnikov culture, wide-spread corruption and the incredible size of black economy all posed formidable challenges to Benazir. Above all, she had to safeguard her position as Prime Minister from predators and at the same time fight for increasing her power both *de facto* and *de*

71. *India Today*, (August 31, 1990), p. 24.

jure which she considered to be indispensable for establishing civilian supremacy.

Pakistan's march towards democracy under Benazir was, therefore, a period of political transformation with potential turmoils and chaos. In Pakistan, power has seldom been shared; rather, it has been concentrated in the hands of the Governor General, the President or the Prime Minister. Similarly, whoever held power in Pakistan's central government also controlled the provinces, particularly, Punjab. Therefore, the most difficult task faced by the new political set-up which came into being following the election of 1988 was that of power-sharing among the President, the Prime Minister, the Chief Ministers as well as the COAS who for understandable reasons became one of the pillars of power. In addition, the opposition also needed a befitting place in power politics as well as in decision making. The country, however, have had no experience of working out a viable power-sharing arrangement. Unruly competition among the civil, military and political elites made such an arrangement virtually impossible. President Ghulam Ishaq Khan with more constitutional powers in his hands (thanks to Zia's controversial Eighth Amendment to the Constitution) and overt support on the part of the COAS General Aslam Beg made persistent attempts to undermine the office of the Prime Minister. Benazir, on her part, made several attempts to increase the power of her office, the most direct of them was an unsuccessful move to repeal the Eighth Amendment. Despite failure, she continued to assert herself *vis-a-vis* the President and the army. One of her major moves was the removal of General Hamid Gul from the highly sensitive post of chief of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). While the decision has been criticized both by the opposition and the army, it did not lead to any major reaction.⁷²

Subsequently, however, Benazir's attempts to interfere in the military affairs have been vehemently challenged by Ishaq. When

72. William L. Richter, *op. cit.*, p. 436.

the Prime Minister announced in early August that Admiral Sirohey, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff committee, would be retired on August 14 at the end of his term as Admiral, it alerted the military circles of a possible trend that threatened to encroach on their close preserve. Ishaq responded with a public announcement that only the President had the authority to appoint the services chiefs. It created a constitutional crisis, although the President, the Prime Minister and the COAS arrived at a compromise shortly that Admiral Sirohey would be retired as Benazir has announced, but his successor would be appointed by Ishaq. The Sirohey episode has irreparably damaged Benazir's relations with both Ishaq and Aslam Beg.

Centre-province relations also were suffering from deep mistrust and almost irreconcilable conflict of interests. While PPP leader Aftab Sherpao retained the Chief Ministership of the NWFP, the PPP ANP alliance in the province was in a disarray. PPP's amateurish political adventurism in Baluchistan made province's Chief Minister Akbar Bugti an implacable foe of Benazir. The most formidable challenge faced by Benazir was that from Punjab's Chief Minister and IJI leader Nawaz Sharif--a standard-bearer of Zia legates. With substantial support base in Punjab, support from all sorts of anti-PPP forces and overt blessing of civil-military bureaucracy, Nawaz Sharif emerged as the arch foe of Benazir in Pakistan's politics. Benazir's failure to evolve a viable policy of handling centre-province relations may be attributed to two sets of reasons. First, civil-military bureaucracy and the political legates of Zia concentrated their all efforts in discrediting Benazir and creating more problems for her than she could handle with the ultimate goal of ousting her from power by any means. The process of liberalization which began following the death of Zia took a more concrete shape following the assumption of power by Benazir. Democratic freedom, including freedom of speech, free press and the freedom of political agitation were restored. Along with the

traditional weapons from their arsenal, Zia legatees have also used the newly-acquired political freedom unscrupulously against the democratically elected government of Benazir. Second, Benazir has been unable to identify her potential allies and woo them accordingly. Similarly, she often failed to display tactical flexibility in dealing with the adversaries. For the same reasons, she was unable to take the advantages of internal feuds in the camp of her adversaries. Instead, by opening too many fronts at a time, she has united most of her enemies against herself. In the circumstances, political situation in the country remained permanently tense.

The advent of a freely elected government in Pakistan and an environment of relative political freedom, therefore, could contribute very little, if anything, in creating favourable conditions for the settlement of politico-security problems generated by the uneven development along ethnic line. Her Sindh policy brought mixed success. In 1988, casualty figures were 500 dead and over 2000 injured. Due to the eight months of relative peace between the Sindhis and the Muhajirs following the PPP-MQM accord, the figures of deaths was reduced to about 200.⁷³ Nonetheless, the accord was perilous for a number of reasons. Such provisions envisaged by the accord as the repatriation of Pakistanis living abroad, i. e. Biharis living in Bangladesh and the new criteria for university admissions, police recruitment and employment coupled with the long list of Muhajir demands seriously aggrieved the Sindhi nationalists. Although they were abandoned by the voters for the PPP in 1988, support for the radical Sindhi nationalist parties revived following their successful attacks on PPP's efforts to make concessions to the MQM. Moreover, a powerful section of PPP leadership representing rural Sindh was quite unhappy with the generous concessions made by the Party in the accord. Similarly, the MQM was being quite disappointed by PPP's failure to adhere to the accord. For Benazir, fulfilling such obligations like the

73. Aabha Dixit (1990), p. 205.

repatriation of Biharis was virtually impossible, and such attempts, politically suicidal. At a time of high Sindhi unemployment and growing fears about being overwhelmed by the non-Sindhis, the repatriation of the Biharis would certainly create a highly explosive situation in Sindh and no other province would share the burden. As a matter of fact, the accord was riven with almost irreconcilable contradictions and inconsistencies and the parties had very little in common. The PPP required the MQM to stake a claim to form the government. Subsequently, however, Benazir became unable to pay the price that was necessary to sustain the accord.

The initiative to dissolve the accord was undertaken by the MQM. On 18 September 1989, the MQM deserted Benazir and made a secret agreement with the IJI by whom it had been wooed periodically. While the collapse of the accord gave the PPP some respite from its Sindhi extremist critics, it also had severely complicated political atmosphere in the country. Soon after the formation IJI-MQM alliance, the ethnic relations in Sindh began to deteriorate. The situation, as seen by the IJI leader Nawaz Sharif, his political allies in the opposition and patrons in the establishment, was ripe for ousting Benazir from power through a constitutional *coup d'etat*. Accordingly, in November 1989, they moved an MQM supported motion of no-confidence against Benazir in the National Assembly.

While Benazir successfully overcame the vote of no-confidence, the repercussions of the collapse of PPP-MQM alliance proved to be grave for the inter-ethnic relations in Sindh. The defection of the MQM was viewed by the ethnic Sindhis as a conspiratorial act on the part of the Muhajirs and old bitterness, mistrust and animosity in their relations began to crop up afresh. The MQM, for its part, began to show greater accommodation for the Punjabis and Pashtuns settled in the province and concentrated all efforts against 'the sons of the soil'.

The dissolution of the PPP-MQM alliance was damaging for both the parties. It was not realized that in the long run, Sindhis and Muhajirs, the PPP and the MQM, must survive in Sindh if they are to survive at all. The dilemma faced by the PPP is that while it must act as a national party, it must also work for rural Sindh. At a certain stage, the party failed to recononcile its two competitive tasks. The main problem with the Muhajirs is that like the Biharis in Bangladesh, they are unconscious captives of historical memories, living in the past, less aware of the current realities and incapable of looking at the future without prejudices.

The collapse of PPP-MQM alliance has severely sharpened the political and ethnic divide in Sindh which revived internecine warfare in the cities and villages alike with unprecedented degree of violence. Private armies, drug gangs and ethnic militias came to operate at will. Kidnapping, indiscriminate shootings and armed robbery became commonplace. According to one estimate, 635 people died in the conflict between Sindhis and Muhajirs since the dissolution of PPP-MQM accord.⁷⁴

The PPP government was increasingly failing to cope with the situation in Karachi and violent agitation was assuming the nature of an anti-government movement. The police was being vehemently criticized by the opposition for alleged ruthlessness and anti-Muhajir bias. The combined opposition was taking the advantage of widespread ethnic riots to initiate a breakdown of law and order situation in the province so that political pressure could be mounted for the dismissal of Benazir government. The ethnic trouble in Sindh, the only province where Benazir won a landslide victory had seriously discredited her government. With the embattled Muhajirs seeking the intervention of the President and the protection of the army, her prestige and authority were being seriously undermined. By using the discretionary power vested in his office by the Eight Amendment, the President assumed an important role

74. *Time*, (August 20, 1990), p. 30.

in crisis management. He publicly blamed the PPP administration for its lapses, thus, implicitly endorsing the demand made by the opposition for putting the state under President's rule. Though the President refused the opposition's demand to suspend civil rights pointing out that some effective measures would be initiated under a plan to be put into operation by the Sindh government and the army, the damage to the credibility of the government was already done. Following failures to contain the situation with paramilitary forces, in late May it was decided to bring in the army to restore law and order in Sindh. While the crackdown brought temporary respite in ethnic violence, it further complicated civil-military relations. Extreme distrust of each other's dealing with the Sindh crisis is apparent in the impasse over the terms of the army's deployment to restore law and order. Benazir agreed to invoke the article 147 of the constitution under which the military is called in aid of the civilian government, but she was not willing to invoke article 275 of the constitution which would invest power in the army to curtail civil rights in the province.

As has been seen, the PPP government has been lurching from one crisis to another ever since its assumption of power in November 1988. However, no solution could be found as it lacked both constitutional means and adequate parliamentary support to assert its authority. In the circumstances, political situation in Pakistan stalemated.

Amidst crises and confusion, on August 6, 1990, Pakistan's President Ghulam Ishaq Khan dissolved the National Assembly and dismissed the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. He also declared a state of emergency. The presidential decree appointed Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi—a maverick in Pakistani politics with no real support base—as interim Prime Minister. In follow-up measures, Bhutto-appointed governors were dismissed. PPP-dominated provincial assemblies in Sindh and

NWFP were dissolved, while Punjab Chief Minister Nawaz Sharif—arch foe of Bhutto—himself resigned. Baluchistan's Assembly was likewise dissolved. In a national broadcast the President justified his actions by blaming Bhutto for corruption, nepotism, ineptness, crippling of constitutional and institutional rights, in short, for all the crimes that were heaped upon all the civilian governments deposed in the past by Pakistan's civil-military cliques. Legal cover was given to Ishaq's measures by invoking controversial Article 58 of the constitution introduced by its former military ruler Zia-ul-Huq with a view to keeping the real power with himself under a civilian facade. Thus, democracy was denied the chance of facing the crisis, go through it and gain experience.

The question whether the army compelled the President to undertake the action or he himself initiated it after being assured of army's support still remains to be answered. Nonetheless, it remains amply clear that a consensus between the two made possible what Benazir characterized as a constitutional *coup d'etat*. General Aslam Beg's claim that "We are not involved in politics. We have never been in politics. We are not going to get involved in politics" became an object of caricature in international media.⁷⁵

With the ouster of Benazir Bhutto from power and subsequent developments Pakistan has lurched towards yet another one of the political crises that have characterized its history.

The claim on the part of certain circles both within and outside Pakistan about a possible US involvement in the *coup* could very well be exaggerated. Prior to August 2, the US could not have any reason to back such a *coup* and in between August 2 and 6 it was too busy with the Gulf crisis to initiate such a venture. Nonetheless, Pakistan's civil-military clique frustrated with their previous attempts to oust Benazir through *parliamentary coup*

75. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, (16 August, 1990), p. 8.

certainly has taken the opportunity offered by the Gulf crisis to stage the *constitutional coup*. With the eruption of Gulf crisis, Pakistan army must have realized that its value to the US in Washington's Middle-East policy has certainly increased. So is Pakistan's bargaining capability *vis-a-vis* the US. As judged by the *coup* planners, it would let them put the US to face a *fait accompli* with impunity. Recent US position on its aid to Pakistan, harsh comments made by the US Ambassador to Pakistan with regard to the ability of the caretaker government to arrange a free and fair election in the country could very well be designed to convey the message of Washington's disapproval of the *coup de grace* in Pakistan to the parties concerned. A number of observers, however, claim that while the US has been against the ouster of Benazir, it had to accept it as a *quid pro quo* for Pakistan's support to the US in the Gulf.

Benazir's performance as Prime Minister remains to be evaluated. The people who ousted Benazir accused her of almost all the sins usual to Third World leaders in power. Benazir's self-impression is mixed, while for most of her failures, she blamed non-cooperation, conspiracy and sabotage on the part of civil-military bureaucracy and her political foes. Even neutral observers are divided on her achievements. Some wonder how she could survive so long against so many odds. Others believe that many things could be done despite her constraints and remain critical of her failures. Even her critiques fall apart on what should have been done and how. Some consider that Benazir should have been more flexible and accommodative with the President and the military. Others blame her for not being assertive enough. Nonetheless, most of her non-partisan critics agree that her dismissal was not an answer to the problems that Pakistan was facing. It further complicated their solution.

True to its policy of avoiding direct military intervention, the ruling coterie relied primarily on the campaign of defamation,

intimidation, manipulation and blackmail. At the same time, defections from PPP ranks were engineered. Criminal processes were initiated against Benazir, her husband and family-members, ministers and important PPP leaders with charges varying from abuse of power to corruption which could put them behind bar and disqualify to contest any election for up to seven years. Special courts, or as Benazir characterized them, kangaroo courts were created. It was obvious to even an average Pakistani that the arrests and courtroom sensations were solely designed to harass, intimidate and blackmail Benazir and her party but not to root out corruption. A number of members from Benazir's cabinet were inducted into the Jatoi's one. Simultaneously, a deal was reportedly offered by the caretaker government and the army to Benazir, and some times over her head to the PPP leadership, under which charges of corruption against her would be dropped if she left the country and permanently retired from politics.

The ruling clique made persistent efforts to intimidate and blackmail not only the PPP and its leadership, but also the common people of the country. Rumors were constantly spread that by voting Benazir people would lose whatever civil rights they still have as the army would forestall her return to power by declaring Martial Law. All these *en bloc* made the people highly apathetic to politics and they also came to view the scheduled election with myriad of nightmares. As a matter of fact, most remarkable success of the ruling civil-military clique was that it could frighten not only the PPP, but also the people. Most of them just did not go to the polls. Voter turn-out in the October election was very low, probably the lowest in the history of the country. In such an environment of confusion and fear, it was easy for the ruling coterie, by the use of state machinery, to manipulate the election results. It was, however, as the observers from Paris-based International Federation of Human Rights mentioned, "highly sophisticated fraud."⁷⁶ In the

76. *The Bangladesh Observer*, (October 31, 1990).

face of the passiveness of the mass, the PPP failed to master enough support that was necessary to challenge the ruling circles. Therefore, from the elections Benazir did not emerge as a hero nonetheless, at home and abroad, her adversaries have certainly emerged as villains in Pakistani politics.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The lack of viable democratic institutions and democratic practice coupled with the fact that the ruling civil-military bureaucracy also represented particular ethnic groups generated a twin conflict in Pakistani society—conflict between dictatorial rule versus democratic aspirations of the people on the one hand and that between the representatives of privileged ethnic groups in power at the centre versus deprived nationalities in the provinces on the other. While Pakistani society was characterized by a host of other divisions and conflicts, for understandable reasons, these two types of conflict have persistently dominated the socio-economic and politico-cultural life of the country since its birth in 1947. Lack of a viable mechanism of management and resolution coupled with the heavy-handed dealings on the part of its parochial rulers, these divisions and conflicts intensified and aggravated. Numerous crises and a catastrophe suffered by the country could not influence the pattern of behaviour of its ruling elite. The fate of Benazir government and the subsequent developments are just another illustrated example of this.

With the ouster of Benazir Bhutto from power and subsequent developments, Pakistan has entered into yet another of the political crises that have characterized its history. Politics in the country has returned to its rather usual course wherein palace intrigue and military intervention are the most effective means of the transfer of power. The present crisis is more similar to one suffered by Pakistan in between the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951 and the *coup d'etat* staged by Ayub Khan in 1958 than than any other crisis suffered by the country. In both the cases, a clique of civil-military

bureaucrats assumed the *de facto* control over the country. While they have formally allowed the continuation of the constitutional political process, by their interference in the politics through palace intrigues, blackmail, sabotages, shrewd manipulation, bribery and the threat to use and occasional use of force, they have made an utter mockery of parliamentary democracy. They have crippled not only the democratic rights of the people in general, but also the rights of deprived ethnic groups in particular. Thus, the new rulers of Pakistan have severely aggravated both types of conflict which have characterized the societal development. Crisis this time, however, is more acute than ever since the emergence of Bangladesh.

Recent developments in Pakistan have put forward two questions in the forefront of national life: first, would the democratic process initiated following the demise of Zia survive? Second, in what direction the present ethnic conflict in the country would move?

Answer to these questions, provided by the post-*coup* developments including the general election of October 24, remains unclear. While accusing the government of foul play in the elections, Benazir did not go for a mass movement. Instead, she has finally accepted the election results. It was motivated by a combination of the fear of political isolation, repression and direct military rule as well as the hope that popular support could still be mobilized acting within the present political framework.

The IJI government is unlikely to be a stable one. It is a combination of mutually feuding personalities with competing ambitions. Common hatred to the PPP and the patronage and pressure on the part of civil-military bureaucracy are the main factors that unite them. Even unitedly, they are incapable of fighting Benazir without the backing of the establishment, more precisely the army. The Army on its part, needs these politicians as political counter-balance to Benazir. If they rely too much on the army and more so on the use of brute force against the PPP, these politicians would not be of much use to the civil-military establishment.

In such circumstances, the scope of military's control over the politics of the country would widen further. Such a scenario would continue to circumscribe severely Benazir's freedom of action. The dilemma faced by her is that if she goes for a mass movement her success could bring Martial Law instead of democracy. But, if she remains non-resistant to the IJI regime the army would continue to rule the country under the civilian facade while she will be discredited in the eyes of the people. It is the greatest irony in Pakistan's politics and the greatest political challenge for Benazir.

Current ruling coterie in Pakistan is composed exclusively of privileged ethnic groups. The President is a Punjabi and the COAS is a Muhajir. The newly appointed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif—a favorite of the army—is again a Punjabi. Newly appointed Speaker of the Parliament, Gowher Ayub—the son of the country's first military dictator—is a Punjabized Pashtun. Such a composition of ruling coterie would ensure that the suppression of broader democratic movement would go parallel with the suppression of ethnic grievances. Sindh has been deprived of the post of Prime Minister for the first time since the dismemberment of the country in 1971. This has been vehemently resented by even anti-PPP forces. Threat by Sindh National Alliance leader and a Minister of the province's caretaker government Hamida Khurro that the selection of Sharif as Prime Minister would create a situation similar to what existed during the emergence of Bangladesh⁷⁷ may be an overstatement, but Sindh is certain to resist the exclusively Punjabi-Muhajir ruling coterie which is now ruling the country. Exploitation of Baluchistan is certain to persist under the new regime. So is Baluchistan's sense of deprivation and Baluch resistance to the centre.

In these circumstances, the future of both democracy and national integration remains highly uncertain. Only certain thing may be that the nation building process of the country would go through

77. See, *The Daily Ittefaq*, (November 3, 1990).

recurrent conflicts and endemic crises. In the past, ruling civil-military bureaucracy persistently failed to respond to the difficulties, conflicts and crises rationally. Only exception may have been its decision to give democracy a chance following Zia's death. Such a rational behaviour is highly unlikely in the foreseeable future unless there are inescapable compulsions. To date such compulsions are invisible and it provides the army with a free hand in its dealings with the movements for democracy and greater provincial autonomy. If the army continues to march in the direction it has chosen, Pakistan may plunge into chaos with unpredictable consequences and its twin conflict may take even a more dangerous shape.