

Pluralist Society and Civic Responsibility in Pakistan: Politics and the Promise of 18th Amendment

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Abstract

Pakistan was born as a pluralist society and, in reality, continues to be vibrant and diverse—ethnically, linguistically, culturally and in terms of the understanding of these aspects. Yet, over the past four decades, security imperatives of the state and governing elites have attempted to change this reality into a monolithic society. This has created a constant schism between state building and nation building processes. Increasingly, the proponents of monolithic ideologies have captured the state. Resultantly, pluralist dimensions of the society are not being shored up by the state. The paper will examine how the decisions of governing elites have shrunk pluralist space in Pakistan and continue to threaten its pluralist character. Yet the society is changing and becoming more diverse and multi cultural and the governing elites appear hesitant in recognizing and comprehending the scale of this change. The role of the state in constructing knowledge and narrative is widely recognized. Given this context, the paper will argue that the 18th Amendment offers a tremendous opportunity to reshape and revive pluralist character and articulate responsible citizenship through civic education in Pakistan. Would the governing elites seize the moment and realign monist state to Pakistan's pluralist reality?

This paper is divided into four parts. In the first part, I would like to provide a conceptual framework of the Pluralist Society and its key components. In the second part I will examine, analyse and contend that Pakistan was born as a Pluralist Society and in reality continues to be vibrant and diverse-- ethnically, linguistically, culturally and in terms of understanding of all these aspects. Yet over the decades, security imperatives of the State and the governing elites have been venturing to change this reality into a monolithic society. This has created a constant schism between the state building and the nation building processes. While the schism persists, the proponents of monolithic ideologies have captured the state and the pluralist dimensions of the society are curbed and not nurtured by the state. In the third part I will identify and briefly explain ten decisions, which over the years have shrunk pluralist space in Pakistan and continue to threaten its pluralist character. This interplay and propensity for monolithic ideology and Pluralism has adversely impacted the process of education in general and particularly led to the construction of an intellectual narrative that promotes state building over nation building. The governing elites have favoured, pursued and adopted policies that exclude plurality and encourage monolithic narrative about Pakistani state and society. It is in this context that I find that over the last four decades the civic education and civic virtues, which are critical responsibility of the state and are being guided and driven by ideological considerations.

Finally in the light of these observations and analysis, I tend to see 18th amendment as a tremendous opportunity to reshape and revive pluralist character of Pakistan and in that context make a case for responsible citizenship through civic education in Pakistan.

Pakistan: Pluralist Society and Monist State?

In recent decades a growing consensus has emerged among scholars on defining and projecting the evolution of democracy built around two central concepts;

liberalism and constitutionalism.¹ I will put the third, pluralism as an equally important contributor in building democracy. The meanings and understanding about these two concepts continues to be debated and offers varying interpretations. For purposes of this paper, liberalism implies, upholding the values of tolerance, protecting minority rights, freedom of expression and association, while, constitutionalism conveys respect for law, equal and fair rule of law that ensures justice and equal rights for all—irrespective of caste, class, colour and religious creed. Upholding and pursuing these ideals also heightens tension between majority rule and protection of individual rights; between the government and the opposition; between competition and inclusiveness, thus modern democracy and states making transitions to democracy have inherent paradoxes that need to be steered carefully. I would argue that pluralism needs to be understood in the context of these twin pillars of liberalism and constitutionalism.

In a literal sense, pluralism means “manyness”; it is opposite of “monism” or oneness. According to Plattner, pluralism clearly means, “a multiplicity or diversity of groups that exert influence within a polity.”² Robert Dahl, an eminent American political theorist has been much more vigorous in articulating that in democracies power is dispersed among a number of competing economic, social and ideological pressure groups and not held by a single elite or group³. Today, theoretically, conceptually and empirically, pluralism has acquired a much wider meaning, whereby ethnic, cultural and religious groups are seen exerting for influence, space, resources and sharing of power in a society and its political system.

At one level, that is religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and socio-economic inequalities, most post-colonial states and societies could be described as pluralist. However, at another level, that is liberalism and constitutionalism they

¹ See for example, Marc F. Plattner, “Populism, Pluralism and Liberal Democracy” *Journal of Democracy*, No 1, Vol.20, January 2010. PP81-92 and also in the same issue, Francis Fukuyama, “Transitions to The Rule of Law”, pp.33-34. It is the 20th anniversary special issue of the Journal

². Plattner p. 89.

³ . Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1971) pp. 17-32.

would immediately fall in Fareed Zakaria's apt conceptualization as "illiberal democracies"—where elections are held, political parties do exist and in some cases peaceful transfer of power also occurs yet democratic norms remain weak, corruption and crony capitalism⁴ reigns. This raises a set of critical questions; is Pakistan a pluralist or a monist society? Has aspiration for ideological unity weakened or roused pluralism in the country? Is it possible to celebrate cultural diversity and preserve national unity?

Context: Tension between Pluralist Inheritance and Monist Ideology

In 1947 Pakistan was born as multi-lingual, multi- ethnic and multi-cultural society and state. It inherited a pluralist society, where East Bengal had its own language and history, similarly, in West Pakistan, Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, NWFP (Khyber Pakhtun Khwa), each had its rich linguistic and cultural diversity. These multi-ethnic and multi-lingual groups banded together to create one nation, however, the movement for Pakistan was not led by, to borrow, Shahid Javed Burki's formulation by the 'insiders' but by the 'outsiders'—those who belonged to Muslim minority provinces in undivided India.⁵ Religion played a key role in binding them together and shaping their group identity. During the critical phase of Pakistan movement (1937-47) and immediately after independence Islam as a belief system and Muslim as group identity came to be used interchangeably, this obliterated the evolution of pluralist structures and society in Pakistan. The cultural heritage of Pakistan was pluralist but not liberal, in the sense of freedom of individual choice and the freedom of dissent was also limited. For the leaders, policy makers and intelligentsia, preserving the State and its security, rather than protecting and promoting the pluralist nature of the Nation became the key concern. Thus, after gaining independence an imbalance emerged between the state building and nation building processes, which acquired the overtones of 'Oneness' vs. 'Pluralism', which continues to persist and haunt Pakistan even today.

⁴. Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy" Foreign Affairs (No76, November/December, 1997) pp 22-43.

⁵. Shahid Javed Burki, Pakistan Under Bhutto: 1971-77 (London: The MacMillan Press, 1980) pp.11-35.

Ten Decisions that Enhanced State over Nation

In the past six and half decades, I would argue the pluralist inheritance and character of Pakistan has been constantly undermined. It has not been allowed to flourish and grow. In this paper I will draw attention to ten decisions or policy actions that have obliterated the growth of a pluralist Pakistan.

1. In 1948, when the Bengalis demanded that their language should also be given the status of National language the state's response was unitary and imposition of Urdu as the national language.
2. Objectives Resolution 1949, which declared that Sovereignty shall rest with Allah and the minorities shall have the right of Protection to practice their faith, these twin pillars defined the ideological direction of Pakistani state. This clearly meant that the state would allow them to 'practice their faith' but not guarantee them the right of equal citizenship. Thus state constricted its civic responsibility of ensuring fairness, justice and equal rights to all citizens.
3. Creation of 'One Unit' in 1955—as result of which all the four provinces of West Pakistan were unified, without consultation or consent from the provinces. Thus provincial autonomy was usurped and pluralist Pakistan disrupted. North West Frontier Province (now KPK), Sindh and Baluchistan, all had a strong linguistic and cultural identity and sense of their history, while in Punjab (population wise the largest 58%), the linguistic identity was relatively weak. Therefore, the small provinces resented the formation of 'One Unit'. The One Unit was broken up in 1970, restoring all the four provinces.
4. Legal Framework Order (LFO) 1970, which introduced Islamic ideology, specifying political parties not to challenge it and curbing demands for provincial autonomy.
5. Break up of Pakistan in 1971; psychological loss increasing insecurity of the state and the structural collapse – military and the bureaucracy, the two key were institutions discredited. Since the state building was the preferred policy choice, its failure was portrayed as failure in nation

building. The reality was that the proponents of monist ideology had punctured the pluralist spirit and character of the nation.

6. Grand Compromise of the 1973 Constitution; which revived the federal spirit, recognizing the principle of power sharing and provincial autonomy, yet strengthened the ideological tilt of Pakistani state by declaring, “ *Whereas the sovereignty over the entire Universe belongs to Almighty Allah alone, and the authority to be exercised by the people of Pakistan within the limits prescribed by Him as a sacred trust...Wherein the Muslims shall be enabled to order their lives in the individual and collective spheres in accordance with the teachings and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy Quran and Sunnah;*”
7. In 1978 Pakistan Studies and Islamic Studies were introduced as compulsory subjects at the high school and college level. The curriculum and teaching of these subjects encouraged ideas of oneness and imposition of ideological unity, thus striking at the very roots of pluralist thinking and vision about Pakistan.
8. The Eighth Amendment; known as the Revival of Constitutional Order (RCO) March 1985, this included all acts, ordinances, orders that General Zia-ul Haq passed as Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA) between 1977-85 could not be challenged or reversed under any court or act of parliament. These included all the Shariah Acts, including Federal Shariat Court. It clearly showed the ideological and centralizing characteristics of Pakistani state.
9. The Local Government Order (LGO) 2001, despite focusing on devolution, decentralization and de-concentration of administration, totally bypassed the provinces, undermined the pluralist spirit and the provinces never owned it.
10. The Seventeenth Amendment enhanced the power of the president; allowing him to hold the office of chief of army staff as well as the president; gave him the power to dissolve the national assembly and Governor to dissolve the provincial assembly, thus enhancing the centralizing features of the state, further weakening the pluralist dimensions of Pakistani society.

In each decade a combination of centralizing and ideological responses and policy choices from the leaders and policy makers who have been concerned with security and state has kept the tension between monist/centrist and pluralists in Pakistani nation building process. Over the past four decades forces of globalization, manifested in the form of Internet, satellite and cellular technology have unleashed contradictory process of change where ideological unity and pluralist aspirations have emerged as parallel currents. Is a synthesis between these competing visions possible? Is it possible to build a shared vision as the monist and pluralist schism persists?

As noted above after gaining independence little effort was made to develop intellectual and cultural linkages among the different regions of Pakistan. Historical and cultural heritage of the territories comprising Pakistan was thought insufficient to glue the nation. Instead of building harmony among different ethnic and linguistic groups and weaving a multi-cultural heritage, the emphasis was laid on imposing unity through Islamic ideology. The civic education curriculum (projected through Pakistan and Islamic Studies) in government schools paradoxically emphasized the construction of a monist Islamic state identity while glossing over the transmission of universal democratic values such as individual liberty, gender equality, critical thinking, and respect for religious and cultural diversity. The failing to recognize the utility and advantages of the basic principles of liberal democratic model of civic education, Pakistan, in the early years of history, suffered irreparable loss which eventually caused the breakup of Pakistan in 1971. In the post 1971, the making of 1973 constitution laid the federalist principles and recognized the provincial autonomy, yet, the centralizing tendencies and preoccupation with imposing Islamic ideology as an instrument of education and governance persisted.

An analysis of these ten policies and decisions reveals that these contributed enormously in developing a narrative for State building rather than paying attention to the complexities and challenges of Nation building. In the formative phase the preoccupation with state security and state building kept university education and academia excluded from the policy process. Thus state and academia grew not as partners but as adversaries. This is particularly the case

how social sciences remained peripheral in promoting a better understanding of the societal changes and pressures that confronted the state. It was further complicated and compromised as the state in the late 1970's systematically pursued ideology as the sole unifier of Pakistani nationhood and intellectual, cultural and political discourse was made subservient to it. Assessing and critiquing the BJP' government's education policy of propagating Hindutva in India during the 1990s, eminent Indian anthropologist Andre Beteille perceptively observed; "*The free development of knowledge is harmed when a government or a party uses the institutions of education and research to promote its own ideology. This is true irrespective of the nature of the ideology, whether it is conservative or radical, of the right or of the left.*"⁶ In a similar way education and research in Pakistan was 'harmed' in the decade of 1970's and 1980's although the process was unleashed in the early 1950's.

Analysing the history of education development in Pakistan it becomes obvious that in different phases one or a combination of the ten identified decisions shaped not only the intellectual discourse but also the curriculum formation and education policy makers' vision of civic education. The other equally potent factor has been the persistent and prolonged military rule. In the eyes of many Pakistanis besides Islamic ideology the military is guarantor of state security and key unifier among diverse ethnic and linguistic groups.⁷ The proponents of this view equate pluralist character of the nation and society with disharmony and divisiveness, which can be averted by relying on the twin pillars of ideology and the military as preservers of monist state. Thus, in the post 1977 phase the military has assumed the role of defender and protector of Pakistan's 'territorial and ideological frontiers'.⁸ The military has emerged as the dominant power elite. The interplay of monist ideology and military has considerably influenced

⁶. Andre Beteille, *Ideology and Social Science* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006) Chapter 6 *Wages of Partisanship*, p.29

⁷. For a detailed discussion on this point and competing points view, see Saeed Shafqat, "Politics of Islamization: The Ideological Debate on Pakistan's Political System". *Asian Profile*, Vol 15, No 5, October , 1987. Also see, Asaf Hussain, Elite Politics in an Ideological State (London: Islamic Foundation, 1979). Pp 162-168

⁸ . On July 5th 1977, after the military coup, General Zia ul Haq stated that the military will defend the 'ideological and territorial frontiers of Pakistan' and General Pervez Ashraf Kayani, while addressing the cadets at the Pakistan Military Academy on 13th August 2013 echoed the same sentiments.

the shaping of intellectual and cultural discourse in the country. The military values of conformity, regimentation, and masculinity are underscored in society in general and in the educational institutions in particular. In this role the military has been skilful in building considerable support and influence at the societal level. These tendencies over a long period have hampered the free speech, dissent and critical thinking.

In the 1980's the privatization of education and the emergence of middle class increased the demand for English medium schools. This led to commoditization of education. The Cambridge and Oxford driven O and A level schools emerged. This commercialized education and mushrooming of private English medium schools spread across the country. The public sector education was almost abandoned, civic virtues as public good lost value. At the high school level, where it mattered most to provide civic education and promote linkages between national and regional histories, was completely ignored. Thus education was equated with performance in grade achievement and not on investing in producing good and productive citizens.

Privatization also accelerated the pace of opening and expanding religious educational institutions—the Madaris. The Madaris have been an important source of education in Pakistan and South Asia.⁹ Given Afghan Jihad and revolution in Iran, the Madaris have been increasingly linked with militancy and extremism. The overall impact of privatization of education has been multiple systems of education, where curriculum design, quality and content of teaching material and marginalization of civic education have emerged as key challenges.

Driven by monist ideology the state was least prepared to comprehend the challenges that were thrown up by the forces of globalization and privatization of education in particular. Instead of mediating and designing an effective regulatory framework to accommodate and absorb the impact of these forces, the state ventured to impose monist ideology, thus education was commoditized and civic education on which the edifice of peace and harmony is built in any

⁹.M.Q.Zaman, “*Religious Education and the Rhetoric of Reform: The Madrasa in British India and Pakistan*” Comparative Studies in Society and History(No41, Vol:2,1999) Pp 294-323

society became marginalized. It is in this context that the 2008 elections and their outcome need to be understood and interpreted. I would argue that since 1970 elections, electoral process and outcome of each election has demonstrated the pluralist character of Pakistani culture and society. The 2008 elections reinforced the plurality of Pakistani politics and culture by bringing to power a multi-party coalition led by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) at the federal level and coalitions at the provincial levels. This transition to democracy and its sustenance (2008-2013) provided the political leadership an opportunity to revive and energize the pluralist resilience of Pakistani society. Seizing this opportunity the political parties embarked on a process to redefine the parameters of federation- province relations and set the stage in 2009, when the parliament constituted parliamentary committee for initiating and instituting constitutional reforms. Thus the parliament embarked on a process of mutual consultation lasting over a year that paved the way for adopting the 18th Constitutional Amendment.

The 18th Constitutional Amendment: Reviving Pluralism and Strengthening Federation

The 18th Constitutional Amendment provides us with a fresh opportunity to restore the pluralist character of Pakistan and taking cognizance of the reality that unity lies in recognizing that diversity is strength.¹⁰ It also signals a paradigm shift in governance—paving the way for decentralized, devolved administrative set up and citizens empowered by the local government. Power sharing entails all levels; federal, provincial and local; and legitimizing ethnicity, language and culture as indelible rights of a representative government would encourage all to harmonize diversity and recognize plurality and that in turn would strengthen both the nation and the federation. The Amendment has opened new vistas for a pluralist Pakistan in at least seven ways. First, by removing the 17th Amendment, it has laid to rest, the presidential discretion to

¹⁰. The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan -1973 consists of 12 parts, 27 chapters, 280 articles, five schedules and one annexure. The 18th Constitutional Amendment was passed by the National Assembly on April 8th, 2010 and by the Senate of Pakistan on April 15th and assented by the President of Pakistan on April 19th, 2010. The Amendment changed almost 100 articles. It deleted Concurrent List from the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution.

dissolve the national and provincial assemblies and remove the prime minister. Thus, 18th Amendment has laid the foundations of executive restrain in dealing with the parliamentary and democratic processes. It has tilted balance of power in favour of the prime minster and the chief ministers of the provinces. Second, the 18th Amendment has restored, revived and enhanced the provincial autonomy. It has re-defined the federation- province relationship, by doing away with the Concurrent List. The federation has devolved 17 ministries, dealing with social sector to the provinces (such as education, health, housing, population, women, human rights etc), this has added both the civic responsibility and offers provinces an opportunity to build their capacity for improving governance and delivery of services. Third, and most importantly, the 18th Amendment ensures, protects and advances the provinces control over their natural and economic resources—this implies not political autonomy alone but control and ownership of their economic sources of power, thus reinvigorating the federation- province relationship in the true federal spirit of power sharing. Fourth, this has led to fiscal decentralization as the 7th National Finance Commission has radically redefined the terms of allocation fiscal resources, enhancing the share and role of provinces and reducing the share and role of the federation. Fifth, it has energized the Council of Common Interest (CCI) as a body, which must meet after every three months and where the chief minsters of the provinces are equally represented to resolve issues amicably between the federation and the provinces. Sixth, it has made local government as third tier of the federation, so both administrative and political power has been devolved at the lowest level, empowering people. It mandated holding of Local government election by the provincial governments, however, the provinces have been reluctant to call for the local government elections. All the provincial governments have formulated and passed local government Acts, which are adopted by the provincial legislatures. Most of these Local Government Acts rely heavily on the Commissionerate system rather than devolving powers to the local government. Finally, education has been declared right and the provinces through their legislatures are empowered to ‘indigenize’ education. It needs to be built as vehicle to promote social, cultural and political harmony. The Amendment also provided for an Implementation Commission to oversee the smooth transfer of

power to the provinces, following the abolition of Concurrent List. However, the Implementation Commission has been faced with hiccups and its performance has been less than satisfactory.

All these provisions if appropriately implemented would strengthen both the pluralist dimensions of Pakistani nation and also energize and consolidate the federation. We need to learn to celebrate diversity, to promote a culture of peace, tolerance and accommodation. It will also help in developing a shared vision, in which each religious, ethnic, linguistic group and region has an equal stake. Today's Pakistan is a compact territorial entity; it is confronted with the challenges of recognizing the realities of pluralist society where diversity implies transparent and equal rules for all, social justice and religious tolerance, respecting dissent, protecting minorities, building trust and reconciliation among diverse communities. One way to achieve that would be by promoting civic education, protecting citizen rights, creating a sense of ownership in the social and economic policies that impact them and thus paving a way for civic responsibility.

Concluding thoughts: Civic Education at the Level of Higher Education in Pakistan

The 21st Century ushered in globally by giving a new boost to higher education. Like a number of other developing countries it opened up a window of opportunity for Pakistan. In the post 2001 globalization led the way for privatization of higher education. Pakistan embraced and welcomed the opportunity, not imaginatively and with any clarity of purpose but rather hurriedly. At the moment Pakistan has more than 150 universities both public and private. Most of these universities deal with fields of science and engineering while very little emphasis is given to the Social Sciences and particularly civic education. It has mostly been integrated into the social studies/Pakistan studies and is taught in schools from grades four to fourteen. In Pakistani schools and colleges great stress is laid on science and technology and little value is ascribed to the social sciences and the humanities and thus to civic education which is a part of the social sciences.

We need to rethink the relevance, salience and significance of social sciences and its relationship with the policy process for supporting and cultivating an informed citizenry. There is a commonly held belief among the bureaucrats, politicians, businessmen and other policy influential that the social sciences do not require conceptual understanding therefore it can be learnt by rote and anyone can teach it. Even less importance is given to civic education in universities. Universities have a number of departments that are related to the field of civic education, for example, women/gender studies, political science, journalism/media studies, Islamic studies and now the emerging public policy centre's/schools. However, teaching in most of these departments is focused on knowledge acquisition rather than understanding of key concepts and issues in society. The critical question is: would civic education help in promoting tolerance, respect for the 'other', encourage change in attitude and help develop civic responsibility? The evidence and literature on the subject shows that civic education does trigger positive change in the, behaviour, norms, values and political culture of people and their attitude towards civic responsibility¹¹.

Besides Schools, colleges and universities a number of civil society organizations (CSOs) are also involved in imparting civic education. Changing national and local conditions such as the increase in the number of seats and the reinstatement of reserved seats for women in the National Assembly, the installation of local government in Pakistan in 2001, and the realization that parliamentarians (national, provincial) and members of local government are not well prepared for their role had resulted in many CSOs working to educate legislators in general and women legislators in particular with the intention of building and strengthening democratic institutions in Pakistan. The CSOs provide civic education while providing services (education, health, microfinance). They also provide opportunities for citizens to become members or volunteer in activities they undertake. Studies undertaken by CSOs on different issues make information available to citizens that they can use individually or in groups to redress similar issues. They also serve to promote

¹¹. See for example, Steven E. Finkel and Amy Erica Smith, "Civic Education, Political Discussion, and the Social Transmission of Democratic Knowledge and Values in New Democracy: Kenya 2002" *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 55, No. 2, April 2011, Pp. 417-435

and practice human rights, promote peace and harmony between different groups in society and advocate for change in discriminatory laws and practices and for framing of laws based on human rights. By promoting mechanisms of collaboration among academia, research community, CSOs and the public sector we could help improve level of trust between the citizens and government. Thus, contribute in energizing the pluralist character of Pakistan, where harmony is celebrated by tolerating diversity. Are our universities, academia and research communities willing to lead and assume that role and responsibility?

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