



Narrative Building for Comprehensive National Security of Pakistan



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Abstract

The debate about building a national narrative for the state of Pakistan could be seen among academia, think tanks and media personnel for the last few years. It is believed that 'national narratives' help project the world-view of a nation, which is considered important in the contemporary world. The paper in hand pleads that narrative-building is a delicate exercise, which needs a major intellectual effort. Narratives encompass the ideological, historical, socio-economic and cultural perspectives of any nation. Pakistan is a State which had the narrative beforehand the inception of the state. The paper argues that there is a need to constitute a 'Committee of top academics, intellectuals and religious scholars of the country', who should deliberate and build a comprehensive national narrative, all-inclusive in approach and leaving out no segment of the society. Meanwhile, the paper presents a few recommendations, which proffer some measures to address the prevailing security concerns.

Key Words: Narrative, National Security, Pakistan

Introduction

Pakistan, since its independence, has been facing immense challenges in attempting to build a comprehensive national narrative that could bring national stability and bind the entire nation together for social resilience and harmony in the country. The fact remains that Pakistan's narrative kept on changing with every civil and military regime. At present, Pakistan is confronted with national security issues, both traditional and nontraditional, which are continuously posing enormous challenges, including political uncertainty, terrorism, corruption, poor legislation, mal-administration, weakened institutional framework and, above all, ill-governance.

Some historical reasons behind such a disturbing socio-political environment include the loss of visionary guidance of top leadership, poor institutional structure and

absence of consensus over the Constitution of Pakistan ([Memon et al., 2018](#)). Moreover, frail administration and bureaucracy, impulsive and irresponsible political leadership, weak political parties with limited vision and corrupt practices proved to be stumbling blocks in the comprehensive construction of national narrative to smoothly run the state machinery and build a lasting social structure. Pakistan is a multilingual society composed of diverse ethnic groups, which makes it easy for the politicians and legislators to misguide for their vested interests. This situation leaves limited space for constructing a coherent opinion to project our national narrative, Pakistan being a peaceful, peace-loving and progressive nation. As such, a comprehensive national narrative for Pakistan remains long due to its changing political and security landscape.

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Three recent documents have also highlighted the need for Pakistan to formulate a comprehensive national narrative to conquer the internal susceptibilities. These documents include: (a) 21st Century and Pakistan's New Narrative for National Stability ([Cheema & Shamil, 2017](#)), (b) Pakistan's National Narrative ([Ahmed, 2020](#)), and (c) Post-Conference Report of National Conference on Actualization of National Narrative, held on 28 March 2019 ([Javed, 2019](#)).

The purpose of this paper is to suggest the need and a way forward for building an all-inclusive national narrative of Pakistan, with the objective to document Pakistan's continuous struggle for its well-recognized national identity so far and also analyze the fault-lines occurring in the process.

Defining Narrative

A narrative is a global form of expression. *"Narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there is nowhere nor has there been a people without narrative"* ([Hazel, 2007](#)). The narrative serves as a subjective interpretation of an ideology for a nation; therefore, it is the "representation of reality with a particular outlook, whereby, a fact or reality may be reconstructed to comprehend and express the meanings of those values, which are socially and faithfully constructed" ([Barthes, 1975](#)). Narrative-theorists study how narratives or ideologies facilitate people in making an understanding of the global world, meanwhile, analyzing and comprehending various perspectives related to it ([Hazel, 2007](#)). The process of narrative-construction is subjective, and is constituted with certain components to be communicated or disseminated for the larger public.

Etymologically, the meaning of the word 'Narrative' is 'storytelling' or 'sequencing the events in a historical manner. Paul Hazel describes that 'narrative is considered as a primary way of expression and comprehension of our experience of the events that are changing over time' ([Hazel, 2007](#)). Moreover, the term narrative means "the framework or an ideology in which a nation-state wants to convey her viewpoint on a certain issue to other states or persons, in order to convince them

regarding the validity and usefulness of that idea." *Narrative and ideology are primarily viewed as how we perceive the ideas and actions happening around us; the same goes correct at the international level as well, wherein, States formulate their narratives and ideas based upon international, geopolitical and strategic milieu*" ([Sterling, 2013](#)). A narrative, therefore, communicates one's vision, mission, and functioning according to the values of the community as a whole. As such, the study of narrative is multi-disciplinary, employs discursive approaches and traces its roots into History, International Relations, Political Science, Diplomacy, Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, Cultural Studies, Literature, Epistemology, Philosophy, Development Studies and Critical Studies ([Graef & Hebert, 2018](#)).

Significance of Narrative for Nation-Building

The narrative serves as the visionary guidelines for nations ([Graef & Hebert, 2018](#)). Narrative usually plays two constructive roles; one, the 'long-term narrative' and another the 'short-term narrative', which is issue or strategy-based. Long-term narrative functions as an enduring ideology for a nation. It basically revolves around the central idea or ideology on which the basis of which foundation of a nation is constructed, whereas, short-term narratives, comparatively, are time-bound. Short-term narratives reflect an outlook of the policy-led decision-making over a national issue.

The Concept of Security

The concept of security often remains debatable, owing to its changing nature. It has emerged as a multifaceted subject, involving not only military, but also political, cultural, social, environmental and ecological aspects and human rights. Hitherto, national security was confined to the military and security aspects, but with the development of strategic ideology, national security has become more inclusive to secure the process of comprehensive national action in political, economic, social, scientific, ideological, military and security fields. This is now known as 'comprehensive national security' ([Snow, 2015](#)). Accordingly, National Security is said to be based on several pillars, such as, social

cohesion and solidarity, economic stability and prosperity, and political unity and stability. Thus, the evolving hybrid nature of security threats forms a direct connection with the components of national narrative.

Today, Pakistan is confronted with multi-dimensional threats (international, regional and domestic) to its physical security. Major challenges posed to national security are the increasing burden of foreign debts, undocumented fragile economy, weak social contract, political instability, irresponsible media and war-mongering and hostile neighborhood. The external threats result from its history of relations with regional and extra-regional powers, such as Indian hegemonic design and unrealistic demands of do-more in the GWOT. Furthermore, Pakistan's administrative decisions, political uncertainty and ongoing difficult relations with neighboring countries also increase its security vulnerabilities.

Towards Proper Definition of Pakistan's National Security Problem

Many of the undesirable features of the polity and society of Pakistan, which are considered as risks to the national security and for which rectification is sought, may mainly be symptoms of the major underlying problems. For example, corruption and ill-governance on the part of elected and non-elected personnel are symptoms; the problem is a lack of integrity. The solution will lie in the promotion of integrity among people in power, besides the general public, at suitable levels and suitable points in a person's life, involving the role of both parents and educational institutions as well as training and incentives on the part of the government. Political instability is a symptom, partly due to integrity and partly ill-design of institutions, i.e., institutions being non-congruent to prevalent values. Search for well-designed institutions/constitutions, congruent with values of the community is an uphill task and needs thorough attention and careful thought. The point is that the long list that we often produce regarding problems has to be reduced to critical real problems rather than simply symptoms.

One way to comprehend and enumerate major problems of society like Pakistan is to look at the support enjoyed by the political system. A deeply rooted set of predispositions is a helpful state of mind. When an individual is loyal to his group or party, devoted to democracy and has a strong sense of patriotism, and when the state also feels on the part of its inhabitants, it builds a positive attitude and further paves way for a better course of actions.

The deep-seated sense of loyalty is also anticipated to succeed even in the face of untoward happenings. There are three categories as objects of people's attitude to public institutions: -

The Political Community

This refers to the country, a nation as a whole. This means that a certain population resides in a territory and it feels happy to be there, live their life in that place and be ready to enter into sacrifice, if there is some threat to that entity. This is also referred to as National Unity.

The Regime

Regime in a country refers to those arrangements that regulate the way the members are to conduct themselves to the decisions that are usually made and put into effect. Regime means the rules of the game or, more technically, the constitutional principles and procedures.

The Government

This is the organ with personnel usually created under the regime/constitution. It undertakes concrete tasks, facilitating the members/citizens in carrying out their activities smoothly, without friction with other members and settlement of frictions, if and when some might happen. The government may have branches to carry out legislative, executive and judicial functions ([Easton, 1957](#)).

Looking at the situation in Pakistan, people's support for the three aspects/levels of public life differs in each case. Generally, people exhibit more respect for the political community, less for the regime and even less for the government. Pakistan, created as a political entity in 1947, suffered dismemberment and a split into two in 1971.

Since then, by and large, people have exhibited a positive attitude towards the political community, the entity Pakistan. This attitude comes out whenever there is a threat to Pakistan's existence as a country. Of course, the political community is composed of federating units, wherein, there are pockets that behave otherwise, but such pockets have been contained. They assume seriousness mainly because of sabotage activities and the hostile attitude of the neighbor, namely, India. The population professes Islam as a religion, which has great potential for sympathy to the political community. The large majority supports Pakistan as a country in which they live. In that sense, there is patriotism.

With regard to the regime, there happen to be a number of issues. Firstly, the language and terminology of the constitution are based on Western models. Whenever a constitution is promulgated, it is published in the English language. People who are not fluent in English cannot understand it. The translated version presents alien terminology and, as such, is not read or understood among people at large, as most of the population is constitution-illiterate. Bereft of knowledge, not to speak of understanding, of the constitution, not many come to the rescue of the constitution, whenever it is breached, put in abeyance, or even abrogated altogether.

Further, among the constitution-literate population, there is the issue of content, liberal or Islamists. The major effort for a harmonious content was made in the form of Objectives Resolution, but without any worthwhile contribution from the Islamists (fuller discussion will come later).

With regard to the government, matters have been even worse. All branches of government, with the exception of a few individuals, have indulged in corruption to the extent that to get a birth certificate or a death certificate, one has to grease the palm of the personnel concerned, apart from the official fee. The public at large has no sympathy for governmental institutions and have developed their mechanisms to get their work done through *sifarish*, money and sometimes use of socio-political pressures and coercive methods.

Analyzing the Nature of Pakistan's Security Problems

This analysis helps us identify the following major problems for which there is a need to seek solutions through a National Narrative: -

- a. Diversity in languages and customs of people in various provinces.
- b. Provincialist-inspired criticism regarding socio-economic justice.
- c. Constitution/Institutions being incongruent with values of the society.
- d. The problem of integrity among governmental personnel, both elected and appointed by selection.
- e. Inadequate awareness about the original narrative of Pakistan.

The paper highlights some policies, which need to be addressed for improving governance practices, the dispensation of justice and human well-being of people, which would, in turn, contribute towards the improvement of comprehensive security of the state of Pakistan: -

Diversity in Language and Customs

- (1) Linguistic diversity is primarily the diversity in the medium of expression; there is nothing unusual in it. It is not diversity in ideas, emotions, or in our traditions. Further development of various languages will improve the expression of such ideas. The ideas, emotions and traditions originate from the teachings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and of the Holy Quran. They, in fact, represent a 'unity in diversity' in many ways. Arrangements are already there to cater to such unity translations of highly prized literary compositions into Urdu, and other provincial languages are often available. There is a need to make suitable incorporation of pieces on common themes into school and college syllabi. Similarly, customs are usually taken from Islamic sources. Items of wear of one province are prized in the other provinces as luxury items. They may be subsidized/patronized for use in other provinces, mainly through the encouragement of the private sector.
- (2) Similarly, the diversity of sub-cultures is required to be interpreted as a great

asset in different parts of the state. Subcultures need not only to be preserved but promoted with conscientious efforts. The most interesting question about ethnic entities in the context of national security relates to centrifugal tendencies, threatening secession from the country, who are otherwise indulging in subversive activities. There is a history of rising and decline of ethnic movements in Pakistan. An important lesson derived from such history is that ethnicity should not be considered as something given, bound to be politicized with the passage of time. On the other hand, such history in Pakistan illustrates that the policy of the state is the primary factor in changing the course of ethnic entities. Power-sharing with ethnic groups will assure the decline of ethnonational movements.

Inter-Provincial Disparities

- (1) This continues to be an important topic. Much of the objectionable aspects relate to intra-province situations rather than inter-provincial ones. Whenever it is inter-provincial, there is a forum called the Council of Common Interests. In the case of intra-province situations, important measures are to do with the *Jagirdari* system. Reforms are needed in that regard, which should be affected after proper/genuine research into ownerships and the deserving folk.
- (2) Another way to end intra-provincial and, thereby, perceived inter-provincial injustice is to strengthen local government. Constitutionally, Local Government has become the third tier of government. However, this constitutional provision has yet to be adopted in full letter and spirit. The elite political class does not seem to favor an arrangement where local people could run their own affairs, take the initiative in planning and oversee the execution of matters that immediately affect their lives.
- (3) Additionally, a well-functioning local government can solve many problems related to governance and dispute resolution. The latter can relieve the

burden on the courts and eliminate the highly obnoxious disease of litigation often promoted by the lawyer class. Institution of a Local Government Management Service would reduce central and provincial government bureaucratic entanglements and exploitative practices. Most of the research on local government institutions is all praise for the functioning of *Masalehati* committees ([Shaheen, 2013](#)). A well worked out system of local government can highly minimize injustice among the population.

- (4) Local government institutions can play a vital role in social justice, i.e., minimization/elimination of poverty. Particularly, the institution of village/neighborhood councils can be vitally useful in the identification of *Mustahiqeen* (deserving people). The council members with the help of knowledgeable persons in the village, or any other feasible method, may prepare lists under such categories as the destitute, the poor, middling, well-off, rich or some similar standards. This will give a profile of the village with regard to vulnerability or otherwise of households to shocks and disasters. The list should be revised in the month of *Sha'ban al-Moazzam* every year. This month precedes the month of *Ramzan-ul-Mubarak* and, otherwise, carries importance in spiritual/providential terms.

Congruence of Constitutional Provisions and Practices

- (1) Pakistan has been able to formulate a consensus Constitution, which by and large meets all the needs of an Islamic Welfare State. However, the first forty articles have never been implemented in letter and spirit. This part of the constitution deals with Islamic provisions, education and the general well-being of the people. Many of the provisions of the constitution are similar to those of the Islamic *Sharia*. Indeed, the general tenor of constitutional development has been towards

Islamization, with some failures either in the formulation or implementation of provisions. The constitution does contain two important sets of Islamic provisions that show the importance of Islam in the country's polity. First, a substantive function, inter alia, of the Council of Islamic ideology to forward commendations to the legislatures as to the means through which Muslims of Pakistan can be encouraged to direct their lives as per the teachings and concepts of Islam, Sunnah and Holy Quran. This is a comprehensive task, but one does not see much activity in this regard on the part of those whose function it has been set to be.

- (2) The other set of Islamic provisions is contained in chapter two of the constitution. Article-31 has the sub-heading "*Islamic way of life*" and is almost a repetition of the above-mentioned function of the Council of Islamic Ideology. Articles 37 and 38 carry the subheadings: "*Promotion of social justice and eradication of social evils*" and the "*Promotion of social and economic well-being of the people*" ([Rabasa, 2005](#)).
- (3) Some laws for implementation of social justice and welfare measures have come into existence, but there is the insidious problem of identification of *Mustahiqeen*. Such identification has started receiving attention from the government, but the procedure, usually being bureaucratic, is not without faults. It can be made sound through local government organs like Village/Neighborhood councils that would be much more knowledgeable about the socio-economic conditions of households in their area.
- (4) Connected with the Islamic nature of the constitution is a major question regarding identity. Are people in Pakistan Muslims or Pakistanis, and what would be the status of non-Muslims? Fortunately, tolerance, justice and fair play to non-Muslim communities have been the hallmark of Muslim states, wherever they were, as elucidated in his speeches on 11th and 14th

August of 1947 by Quaid-i-Azam. The dispute between Pakistani nationhood and Muslim nationhood is not a contest between the Islamic and anti-Islamic sides.

According to Allama Muhammad Iqbal: -

"It is not the unity of language or country or the identity of interests that constitute the basic principle of Muslims' nationality. It is because we all believe in a certain view of the universe... that we are members of the society founded by the Prophet of Islam. Islam abhors all material limitations, and bases its nationality on purely abstract ideas objectified in a potentially expansive group of concrete personalities ([Shakoor, 1990](#)).

- (5) Several other provisions in the Constitution and Legislative Acts are in consonance with Islamic tenets. However, they are not shown to flow from the *Sharia*. Such can be done and should be done. In this connection, the institution of *Ijtihad* needs to be formulated, bringing all the stakeholders together. There should be dialogue to resolve the problems; debates should be shunned, e.g., the Ministry of Education has been able to negotiate with *Madaris* regarding the curriculum.

Integrity Among Appointed Personnel

- (1) One of the main issues is not only in the public sector but in the population as a whole. Indeed, problems of Pakistan as a nation have come to be of moral nature rather than other factors. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the country has sustained and flourished so far, because of the commitment of several 'unknown moral warriors' who, so to say, turn up early for their duty and work till late.
- (2) Some short-term solutions that could be experimented would include oath of office, which could be renewed just before beginning one's daily work. Some spare time is given to individuals for reflection on one's work, for group reflection and then submission, on their

part, of suggestions for improvement, etc.

- (3) Some long-term measures would relate to education, the education including recruitment, moral training and proper incentives for teachers. Curricula should cater the education of an entire man, i.e., physical-material and the moral-spiritual expansion starting with primary-elementary to the highest levels of general and professional education. Education of the 'whole man' can become a sub-narrative in the education sector. Something similar already exists in the defence sector, i.e., Faith, Unity, Discipline, *Jihad-fi-Sabeel-Allah*.
- (4) In a number of sectors, oaths do exist, but they do not seem to have a proper impact. For one thing, they are in English and fail to create a suitable emotional impact. Secondly, they are taken at the time of award of professional degrees and are seldom renewed. Moreover, they are administered/taken in an impersonal atmosphere, without involving a person's nearest kith and kin, e.g., grandparents, parents, wife, brothers/sisters and sons/daughters. An important sector that comes to mind in this connection is that of justice. Personnel of subordinate courts, both judges and lawyers, should start their work with a daily oath apart from their professional oath and oath of office, which is usually a one-time thing. This is all the more necessary because the common persons involved in court procedures have to take an oath that they speak the truth, the whole truth. The same needs to be applied to court personnel-both judges, and lawyers. The judicial system, otherwise, needs major overhauling.

Awareness about Original Narrative of Pakistan

It has generally been observed that students even of undergraduate and postgraduate level do not have much understanding about foundational thoughts of Pakistan Movement, particularly the period from the 1930s to 1947 and formative years after independence. It is, therefore, strongly realized that the book

recently compiled by ISPR, 'The Foundational Thoughts in Pakistan Movement', should receive wide circulation ([Abbasi, 2020](#)). Similarly, the chronicles of the First Educational Conference in Karachi from 27th November to 1st December of the year 1947 need to be published in the form of a booklet, besides wide circulation of books of first two Ministers of Pakistan, Mr Fazul-ur-Rahman and Dr I. H. Qureshi. These are primary documents on the philosophy/ideology of Pakistan, as envisioned by Quaid-i-Azam and Allama Iqbal, besides Iqbal's own literature. Without a deeper understanding of such material, the narrative building exercise may not prove worthwhile.

Constructing the National Narrative

This paper, in agreement with similar literature on the subject, affirms the view that a Committee for Building National Narrative needs to be constituted to work out a national narrative after study of various narratives, particularly Malaysia, Turkey, Iran, Brazil, Cuba and China. However, with the above analysis in view, some suggestions for the National Narrative may be hazarded. Pakistan's National Anthem is a kind of National Narrative, which states:

- a. Pakistan that exists under the kindly shield of God represents the realization of a monumental will and determination, her polity built on the strength of people's brotherhood.
- b. A prosperous and durable Pakistan built on the citizen's strength of brotherhood under the kindly shield of Allah, the Almighty, and the Creator of mankind.
- c. Humankind is the Vicegerent on Earth of Allah, the Almighty, the Creator, and the most Gracious.

Recommendations

This paper extends some short-term recommendations concerned mainly with the list of problems discussed earlier: -

- a. A committee of academics, intellectuals, top-level religious scholars and well-read media persons should be constituted to build the national Narrative of Pakistan.

- b. Several provisions in the constitution related to social and economic Justice needs to be operationalized. Rather first 40 articles of the Constitution, practically defunct at present, maybe activated through appropriate amendments in the constitution.
- c. Local Government organs, particularly the village/neighbourhood councils should be entrusted with the task of producing and annually revising lists of *Mustahiqeen*.
- d. The institution of *Ijtihad* in Islamic Jurisprudence may be formalized. Allama Iqbal suggested the inclusion of a board of *Ulema* in the Parliament to give expert opinion about the *Quran* and *Sunnah* during the legislation, which needs to be studied.
- e. Oaths by public functionaries, particularly in the judicial system, should be arranged in a manner that presents an emotional atmosphere.

Conclusion

Building a national narrative holds great importance in both the policymaking and academic worlds. The long-term national narrative reflects the attitude of a nation philosophically and ideologically. It has to be all-encompassing, presenting some total of values, ideals and the world-view of the state and her nation. Whereas the short term narratives are built about certain strategic

concerns, keeping in view the contemporary geopolitical and social-economic environment. Pakistan is one of only a few countries whose narrative was built earlier, even before the creation of the country itself. Allama Iqbal, Quaid-i-Azam, leaders of All Indian Muslim League, Muslim League, the affiliates of the Constituent Assembly and the Cabinet of Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan were the architects of the original narrative of Pakistan. The subsequent national narratives, built by different regimes, were specific to their own tenures of governance and could not survive beyond their rule. The paper in hand contains a detailed review of the history of these narratives in Pakistan. It has also been highlighted in this paper that the concept of 'National Security' has evolved enormously over the years. The contemporary safety calculus is said to be based on several pillars, such as social cohesion and solidarity, economic stability and prosperity, and political unity and harmony, besides the kinetic considerations. Thus, the evolving hybrid nature of security threats forms a direct connection with the components of the national narrative. The paper, therefore, posits that there is a definite need of building a long-term narrative of Pakistan, for which a national level committee may be constituted. Meanwhile, the paper has also highlighted certain issues, which need to come on the policy agenda for improving the governance practices, the dispensation of justice and devising the policies for the well-being of the people of Pakistan.

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