CHAPTER 6
CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In the post-independence period, the colonies-turned-states embarked upon the task of nation-formation through the instrument of the state. However, the process of nation-building ended up causing frustrations and a sense of insecurity among the ethnic groups that caused widespread political instability in many of the post-colonial states. It is found that the colonial subjugation had an all pervasive impact on the post-colonial states. Cumulative effect of the colonial legacy and post-colonial socio-political structure was that the minority cultural groups in the states got marginalized in socio-cultural and politico-economic terms. This led to genesis of ethno-nationalism in these post-colonial countries, which have taken particularly violent forms. This has provided setback to not only the efforts of newly independent multiethnic states at various stages of nation-building and state-building, but also to the territorial integrity of these countries. Violent upsurge of ethno-nationalism is indicative of ideological bankruptcy of these states. Actually, the anti-colonial nationalism that aimed at creating an independent sovereign state did not provide a rock foundation for building a nation in the post-independence period. Reason being that the colonies constituted of disparate socio-cultural entities, which had joined the struggle for independence in the hope of a better politico-economic set-up in the future. Thus as far as the nature of anti-colonial nationalism is concerned, it was evolved as a result of colonial intervention, rather than by social engineering. Anyhow, the post-colonial states did not differ, in terms of its character, than that of the colonial ones. The entire edifice of the state-structure was built on the colonial structure as well as attitudes. Only the Western alien powers were replaced by the local dominant communities, who were better placed in the pre-independence period also.

The state structures that most of the post-colonial states inherited from the departing colonial masters were inflicted with a plethora of problems. These range from the illogical and arbitrary demarcation of national boundaries, the legitimacy crisis and above all, lack of national identity acceptable to the whole population. In such a situation, the primary task before the ruling elite of these countries was to unify and integrate the diverse groups into a newly created national system, for which they
tended to homogenize and assimilate and even marginalize the otherwise diverse ethnically fractured population into the nationally projected mainstream. But, these states failed to inculcate the feeling of oneness and unity among these diverse peoples, which could have been brought by building a civic-democratic and participative nation, where all the constituent groups could get an equal opportunity to run their public affairs and air their grievances. Further, the state should have restructured itself in a way so as to redress promptly these grievances. After all, these diverse communities had shared nothing more than anti-colonial feelings in their struggle for independence and a common desire to have a better share in the future political dispensation. Thus, the unity once evolved in the colonial context could not provide a single myth of origin that includes common symbols around which citizens of the state belonging to diverse communities could identify themselves. On the contrary, the Western model of nation-state that the third world countries tried to emulate had been the result of a long term evolution of sense of unity and oneness among the people from below. Recently, even in these Western countries, the constituent ethnic groups have asserted their separate identity, but the state system have tried to accommodate their aspirations and the elite have followed the approach of negotiation, dialogue and consociationalism with these asserting ethnic groups. But the third world states have attempted to pursue nation-building from top, without taking into consideration the aspirations of the constituent groups and by negating even their separate identity. These states have played prominent and proactive role in defining identity structures of their respective societies. Those who remained on the sidelines of these national identity structures adopted extremist stance in a highly centralized and hegemonic state, whereas the state tended to impose its version of identity in an authoritarian and despotic manner in a compressed time frame. Actually, the process of nation-building is a psychological and time taking process that invariably seeks to dent existing parochial mental blocks of the people towards a particular direction. In order to build a nation, constitutional structure of the state should be such that it may politically integrate and accommodate the interests and aspirations of the constituent minority groups. Moreover, it should be able to develop a stake in the survival and progress of the state and do not tend to secede. Also in the process of formation of a ‘national identity’ instead of suppressing and ignoring the heterogeneous identities, an effort should be made to construct multiple and complementary identities, in which there is sufficient scope for both the national as
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well as respective ethnic group identities to exist and flourish. In the absence of such politico-constitutional and integrative models of nation-building, the post-colonial states would end up in failure of their endeavour of nation-building.

Meanwhile, in the cases where ethnic ties spread across the borders, it is found that the ethno-secessionists also appeal for support, recognition and publicity, particularly, from ethnic kin-state. The ethnic kin-states often intervene in the secessionist conflict of adjoining states involving their co-ethnics. This has further complicated the internal situations of the countries facing ethnic assertions of the torn communities. Thus the countries that are engulfed in ethno-national assertions of these torn communities presume threat from such outside interventions and observe strict vigil across the borders. They tend to respond sternly and strongly to any ethnic assertions in their border areas. Mistrust and suspicion between the neighbouring states often lead to the souring of the bilateral relations. Another dimension of the ethnic kin-state intervention is that they sometimes tend to help the inflicted state to suppress the ethnic assertions within the latter’s boundaries as it may arouse the ethnic sentiments and aspirations within the territorial bounds of the kin-state.

Indeed, nation-building should be perceived as a historical and time taking process. The existing ethnic turmoil in Pakistan can be attributed to the lack of this understanding among the powers that be. Rather the state elite tended to impose a uniform national identity in the country on the sole basis of Islam and Urdu without realizing and recognizing the reality of ethnic heterogeneity of its society. Moreover, the imbalance and flawed process of state-formation did not provide any institutional mechanism for addressing the socio-economic and political concerns of various ethnic groups, as only the Punjabis and the Mohajirs, dominated the centralized state structure. Hence along with the identity crisis of ethnic groups, failure on the part of the state to provide opportunities of participation to the members of different ethnic groups have undermined the national integration. It is therefore, high time that Pakistan state rectify its approach to nation-building as explosive situation exists in case of ethnic crisis in Balochistan.

National integration connotes overarching process of state-building and nation-building. In Pakistan, it was seen that the ruling elite in the post-independence period resorted to bureaucratization and centralization, in a vertically and horizontally fragmented society. The state had inherited a colonial state structure that was geared for law and order purpose. The state machinery was shaped with an attitude of distrust
and disbelief towards the subject society. Same structure was carried forward in the post-independence period, with the only difference that the state in the post-colonial period was dominated by two of the minorities in the country at the time of independence, namely Mohajirs and Punjabis. The socio-economic policies that were adopted and the state structure that was built up by the ruling elite were biased, imbalanced, disproportionate and selectively developed to the advantage of the Punjabis and the migrants. Hence the uneven economic and political growth of various constituent geographical and popular units, which were inherited from the colonial past, was continued, rather reinforced in the post-independence period. Meanwhile, the state ideology, which was based on the “rational ideological” Islam and Urdu, and was upheld by largely the Muslims of the minority provinces of erstwhile British India, became the agenda of the nation-building in the post-colonial period. Thus, national integration could not be attained as the terms of state-building and nation-building were prejudiced in favour of the Punjabis and the migrants only. Rest of the ethnic communities in the country remained economically depressed, politically marginalized and identity-deprived. These communities have had their own experiences of political, economic and cultural autonomy in the pre-colonial and even in the colonial period. During the Pakistan movement, the Muslim majority provinces were either not interested or reluctant to join the new state. Also while joining the new state, the elite and the masses of these majority provinces hoped that in the new polity, they would get a better and just share in the economic prosperity and the political structure of the new state that was created in the name of Islam. But, the concentration of political power was employed for appropriating natural resources from the ethnic-minority provinces and unfair distribution of the benefits from the economic development, in favour of the Punjabis and Mohajirs, and against the ethnic minorities.

While pursuing nation-building, the elite tended to foist an imported Islamic ideology, following the ideas and precepts of the migrants. Urdu was chosen as national language, which was spoken by the migrants. The authority was used to discourage the principal regional languages, which was a regressive approach. In such a hegemonic state structure and with a super-imposed homogenizing national ideology and national language, it was quite likely that the constituent ethnic groups would resort to ethnicity for asserting their politico-cultural demands and autonomy. Instead of rectifying their colonial approach and quasi-colonial style of running the
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state affairs, the post-colonial rulers resorted to repressive methods to deal with the countrywide phenomenon of ethno-nationalism. Hence, resentment of the minority ethnic groups about the unfair ethnic composition of the law and order machinery that included army, police, judiciary and bureaucracy, becomes particularly acute. A representative governance system, in which all the constituent groups would be able to articulate and express their views and demands, would have been the best way of binding diverse peoples with different interests. But on the contrary, the country has, for most of its years in the post-independence period, been ruled by military dictators due to which the democratic process has experienced setback. As the state power was taken over by the military rulers, it led to ‘irresponsible’ governance in the country, and in order to legitimize their rule, the former resorted to Islamic idiom. Clearly, they invoked and promoted Islamic orthodoxy for legitimizing and prolonging their rule, which in turn helped extremism to flourish. It can be concluded that the approaches that the Pakistani state adopted were unsuitable, unviable and incommensurate with the ground realities and could not dilute the local-ethnic attachments, and replace them with the ‘national’ feelings.

Pakistan when created was an uneasy and volatile conglomerate of various cultural nationalities, which had their own sense of shared history, common descent, common culture, common language, historical association with a specific territory. As the immediate and imminent concern of the rulers in post-independence period was survival and security of the incipient state, little attention was paid on reforming and rectifying the imbalances in politico-economic structure. Moreover, such demands of the constituent peoples were suppressed and/or rubbished in the name of national security. Hence, there were no attempts towards building a civic-participative nation. Witnessing the failure of these approaches and strategies that resulted in the secession of East Pakistan in 1971, the elite should have changed these approaches and adopted alternative methods of nation-building, but they did not change their colonial mindset. Instead, they continued to look with suspicion and reacted sharply against any resistance from their own countrymen towards the authoritarian and hegemonic approaches as adopted by the state. This further created wedge between the state and the ethnic communities in the country. The problem of nation-building in Pakistan is indeed that of the overarching process of national integration. Clearly, state-building in the country was not done along democratic lines, which could have
institutionalized participation of different communities and politically integrated them into a single whole nation-state.

For the nation-building exclusivist approach was adopted, as national identity was defined on Sunni-Hanafi Islamic precepts. The ideological failure of the state can be attributed to their ignorance of the fact that religion can provide a sound basis of nation-building only in contrast and in opposition to ‘other’ religion. Thus in the pre-independence period, Muslim league could project and mobilize Muslims of South Asia as a separate nation in contrast to Hindus. But, once the fear of Hindu domination dissipated and the state of Pakistan was created for the Muslims of Indian sub-continent, the ethnic-linguistic identities of the respective constituent groups superseded the religious identity and Islam ceased to be a unifying bond. Generally, the identity, which is organically related to one’s way of life and daily customs and rituals, provides a long-lasting sense of unity. Hence cultural and linguistic identities of the ethnic groups of Pakistan could not be displaced by the state promoted religious ‘national’ identity.

It is in this backdrop that Baloch ethnic upsurge can be analysed properly. The Baloch areas that were divided between Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, by the colonial rulers had traditional Sandeman or Sardari system in the colonial period. They wanted their independent sovereign state at the time of partition of the Indian subcontinent, and were forcefully annexed by the Pakistani army in 1948. Subsequently, they were not only deprived of a representative government in their province, but were deprived of the benefits of their own natural resources. It is found that there is a strong sense of irredentism in the Baloch people. The Baloch identity has its roots in hundreds of years of collective existence on a particular territory, distinct language, culture, values, ethnos, dress code, customs etc., but Pakistan state sought to obliterate it with one Islamic stroke. History of Balochs as a nation can be traced back to centuries, whereas the Pakistani identity that the state wants to impose upon them is just over half a century old. Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti once said that:

I have been a Baloch for several centuries, I have been a Muslim for 1400 years, (and) I have been a Pakistani for just over fifty (Bansal, 2006:7).

The natural resources that constitute of huge natural gas reserves were extracted from the province for the consumption and utility of the other provinces, particularly the Punjabis. Due to their continued ‘colonization’, Balochs have not stopped feeling alienated from the centralized Pakistani set up. They continue to view the Punjabis as
outsiders, who have colonized their province, which is the cause of their miseries. Consciousness of this fact has ceaselessly fuelled the nationalist sentiments among the Baloch people and added to their bitterness towards the Punjabi-dominated state. Whatever development was carried out in the province, was centralised and selective, hence could not win over the Baloch people. Moreover these policies proved to be mere eyewash and did not address the root cause of the problem, which is the lack of participation and representation in the decision-making process and the governance in the province. As the Baloch nationalists became more and more assertive of their political and economic rights, army, which was predominantly Punjabi and Pashtun in composition, was despatched to put down the insurgency in the province. The mayhem that was caused by this armed action of the state, provided fillip to the Baloch solidarity and the ethnic group became more cohesive as the Baloch Sardars came together forgetting their past rivalries. Historically speaking, members of various Baloch tribes have united to counter any ‘outside’ intrusion in their provincial areas; though, they have reverted to their tribal identities, once the outside threat is overcome. Thus it can be inferred that where on the one hand, past historical structures as well as irredentism of the Balochs came in the way of their integration in the Pakistani system, on the other hand, the Pakistani state itself contributed in the reinforcement of the ethnicity of the group. The Baloch nationalism in the post-colonial period is actually a reaction to the over-centralizing tendencies of the state of Pakistan, which has displayed a stark contempt for decentralization and devolution of power.

The strategic location of the province enhances its importance as a conduit between Middle East, Central Asia and the sea route of Arabian Sea. The province is rich in natural resources and gas. Therefore, Pakistan is ruthless to any attempts of secessionism of the Baloch nationalists. It is also found that as the province of Balochistan, is at the political, ‘national’, and geographical fringe, the state has been particularly sensitive and hostile to the Baloch ethnic assertion. Hard-frozen and closely guarded borders are characteristic feature of a nation-state. Therefore, Pakistan is particularly sensitive about defending its western borders, which are, however, not coterminus with the ethnic boundaries. For the Baloch as well as Pashtuns, the international boundaries, being artificial, are unacceptable. Frequent demands of Greater Balochistan, are indicative of the fact that Baloch nationalists have not accepted their division across three countries, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, as final. Thus, even the state of Iran has been anxious of the ethnic nationalism
of the Balochs in Pakistan lest it might arouse the political expectations and aspirations of its own Baloch population. But the state elite in Pakistan forgot the fact that by military suppression they can temporarily suppress the Baloch movement, but can never win the hearts of the masses in the province, which is a major obstacle in achieving the objective of nation-building. Superficial solutions to the deep-rooted alienation of the Balochs have failed to integrate the community in the national mainstream. The state of Pakistan has invoked the methods of political maneuvering, coercion and economic concessions to deal with the problem of Baloch ethnic nationalism. The central government attempted to reduce the Balochs to a minority in their own province by encouraging influx of other ethnic groups in the province. So much so that the opposition to the construction and development of Gwadar Port in Balochistan is resented by the locals on this ground itself. But, the attempts of the state to keep a firm control over the province, by establishing military cantonments in the geo-strategically significant and vulnerable Baloch areas and constructing roads for facilitating mobility of the army, infuriated the Balochs. They already have a consciousness of being colonized and deprived.

The Balochs have been historically opposing and fighting against the ‘outsiders’ and oppressors, and if they are to be integrated in the nation of Pakistan, some political solution should be sought and resorted to. The utility of democratic and political solutions was demonstrated when after installation of governments formed by regional-ethnic party in the province; the Baloch leaders displayed an integrationist stance in the early 1970s and during the decade of democracy (of 1990s). Thus in spite of the fact that Balochistan is strategically important, the Balochs are deprived and are not integrated in the state of Pakistan. On the contrary, it can also be argued that perhaps it is because of the strategic importance of the province that the state of Pakistan is skeptic and over-cautious in terms of devolution of powers to the province.

Meanwhile, any prospective Baloch secessionism, like successful Bangla nationalism would put the state ideology, which is based on religious idioms, in limbo. Clearly, the fallacy of the view that the religion is a sufficient basis of binding ethnically and linguistically diverse peoples into a nation would further be exposed, which would be a setback to the nation-building endeavour of the state elites. Actually, it is found that there are some contradictions of the state ideology, as a reason of which, the ideology failed to cause national integration. Thus, the national ideology, which propagated Islamic brotherhood, was referred to deny any recognition to the cultural
and ethnic diversities on the one hand but was not invoked to provide just share to the deprived constituent groups in the socio-economic development of the country, on the other. After disintegration of the country in 1971, the state ideology and the constitution of Pakistan incorporated territorial-geographic element along with the bedrock of Islamic ideology, but overall, there was reluctance on the part of the elite to recognize the cultural diversity and ethnic reality of the ‘Muslim nation’. Pakistani state, particularly the military regimes, has failed to either accommodate or eliminate the ethnic diversities. Rather the military rulers have sought to bring about the unification and homogenisation of the peoples by reinforcing Islamic identity. As mentioned earlier, the exclusive Islamic identity, which derived its symbolic paraphernalia from a particular creed of Sunni Hanafi idioms of Islam, and promoted by Zia’s military regime created niche for the extremism in the country. As a result, the country has now even divided along sectarian lines. Hence, the military dictators either depended on the policy of coercion and suppression of dissenting groups or appeasement of one or the other religious and ethnic group by patronizing it. They manipulated and used Islamic idioms to not only spread extremism within the country and legitimize their regimes in the name of Islam, but also to pursue their foreign policies in the region. Hence, supporting Taliban in the civil war in Afghanistan spurred and strengthened the extremist-fundamentalist elements in the region. They have now developed into strong and autonomous pressure groups, who now are challenging the state authority of Pakistan and even its ideology and foreign policy decisions that it is pursuing under the influence of the West, particularly, America’s ‘war on terror’. This has further complicated the Islamic – ethnic discourse and added to the volatility of the situation in the border provinces. In Balochistan, the people comprehend that in the garb of Islamism, the state of Pakistan wants to dilute and digress the Baloch nationalists’ agenda. Thus even Islam could not stop asserting the ethnicity as far as Balochs are concerned. Even in the times of hyped Islamic fundamentalist agenda, the province of Balochistan witnessed a strong insurgency in 2005-6. Hence, one can conclude that with the kind of mindset and approach the nation-building process was pursued in Pakistan, an inclusive nation was not possible to build.

Meanwhile, there are weaknesses in the Baloch national movement also, that has come in the way of successful culmination of the Baloch nationalist agenda. The foremost among them is the inter-tribal rivalry. Divisions among the Baloch nationalists regarding objectives and ultimate goals of the nationalist struggle as well
as regarding the means of attaining them also came in the way of successful culmination of the Baloch movement. Thus there is disagreement over achieving outright secession and creation of greater Balochistan including Baloch areas of Iran and Afghanistan or to attain provincial autonomy within Pakistani federation. Also there are hardliner militants, who adopt violent struggle against the state as their modus operandi, on the one hand, whereas there are moderate nationalists, on the other, who want to abstain from such militant methods. This made easier for the elite of Pakistan to create and exploit the divisions among the Baloch ranks and defeat the nationalist movement. Moreover, it is found that there is very low level of literacy among the community and the evolution of middle class is dampened. Thus the Baloch movement is primarily led by tribal sardars and a mass movement could not be developed. Also over the years Balochs have emigrated from the province of Balochistan to other areas in and outside Pakistan for earning their livelihood

The external involvement in the nationalist movement of the Balochs is a crucial aspect of the political conundrum in Balochistan. The region is strategically located and attracts attention of various regional and world powers for securing their respective national interests. The scope for external involvement has particularly widened in the wake of political vacuum created in the Central Asian region, after the demise of erstwhile Soviet Union. Balochistan can be a potential sea outlet to the landlocked Central Asian countries, which are also rich in natural resources. The US sponsored war on terrorism and presence of US troops in Afghanistan and the growing Islamic fundamentalism and extremism in Pakistan and the ensuing anarchy in the region are other factors that have provided fillip to external aspect of the Baloch problem. However, with the kind of heavy weapons, like rockets, that the Baloch rebels have been using any external mentor would require to have access to the province through contiguous borders. In all, the political analysts and strategic experts have predicted the involvement of countries like, Afghanistan, Iran, India, Russia and even America in the Baloch crisis. However, there are no concrete evidences whatsoever to prove these theoretical possibilities. It is thus seen that there has been no consistent and substantial support to the Baloch movement from outside, at least, for its secession from Pakistan. Though the planned and intense guerilla warfare indicate some external mentor of the Baloch rebels, but it can safely be said that the external involvement in the Baloch ethnic upsurge is ‘exaggerated’ and ‘blown out of proportion’ by the Pakistani state and the media, in order to justify the military
operations in the province and rob the Baloch nationalists of the public sympathy as well as the empathy of the world community.

From its inception as an independent state, Pakistan has adopted hegemonic homogenization as an approach to address to pluralities of the country, to create a nation. Resistance or opposition to this project of the Pakistani state from ethnic groups was sought to be put down with military might. Political problems cannot be solved with military means. Statesmanship requires political solutions to political problems and it is here that successive regimes – both military as well as civilians – have floundered. Pakistan’s efforts at building a national identity by obliterating ethnic identities have backfired, first, with the emergence of Bangladesh and now in the remnant state, by the formation and assertions of PONM (Pakistan Oppressed Nations’ Movement). In the end, it can be said that until and unless the mindset of the ruling elite, which is shrouded by doubts, distrust and apprehensions towards the demands and aspirations of the constituent groups change, no real solution to the ethnic conundrum in the country, in general and Baloch problem, in particular, can be sought. Also the approaches of the state need to be rectified, which more often addresses the superficial symptoms and manifestations instead of routing the root causes of the conflicts between provincial and central leadership.