# Human Needs Theory: A Significant Approach to Manage Ethnic Conflicts in Pakistan

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**Abstract**

*Ethnic conflicts constitute a major source of violence in most of the developing countries of the world. Ethnicity has been the most crucial concept of the modern world. Pakistan being no exception suffers from ethnic conflicts. The ethnic groups have been existing almost in every part of the world and ethnicity itself is not the cause of conflicts. In reality the states are plural societies with many national, sub-national, religious, professional, racial, linguistic and geographic identities. The apparent and pre-dominant cause of conflict among ethnic identities is politico-economic imbalance. For example, the monopolization of power by West Pakistan before 1971 disintegrated Pakistan and lead to the creation of Bangladesh. Ethnic identities come into conflict when their grievances are not addressed properly by the political system. According to various analysts human beings have certain basic and universal needs such as: identity, security, autonomy, recognition, creativity, self-esteem, a sense of affiliation and belongingness. These needs are very important for the growth of an individual and a society. Denial of these needs will become a major reason of violent behavior among individuals. It is essential to avoid violent behavior among individuals that political system has ability to identify those needs which are becoming source of tension and initiate various strategies to accommodate those needs. In this paper researcher will examine different aspects of Human Needs Theory and briefly discuss the root causes of ethnic conflicts and delineate various possible options to resolve ethnic conflicts in Pakistan with special reference of Human Needs Theory.*

**Key Words:** Politico-economic imbalance, self-esteem, violent behavior, sub-national.

**Introduction**

Hardly any state can be found in the world which is not ethnically plural. Developed states of the world with their stable political systems devise policies to manage different cultural identities successfully while on the other hand most of the developing polities remain unable to place various ethnic

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identities into their appropriate places and ethnic pluralism becomes a major source to give birth ethnic violence. Ethnic communities may have amicable relationship with each other if they are managed properly by the political system. The society of Pakistan is culturally plural society. Pakistan came into being on the name of Islam and ideology of Pakistan was a prominent force to create sense of oneness among Muslims of Sub-Continent. During freedom movement this motivating force provided a guide line to Muslim for protecting their specific Islamic identity. Soon after 1947 this ideological fervor could not be managed properly by the ruling elites of Pakistan. Religion could not be implemented in the true sense rather it was exploited by both military and civilian rulers **(**Jalalzai, 1993, p.164). Feelings of regionalism started to emerge more forcefully on the soil of newly born state of Pakistan. Pakistan was a bifurcated state divided into two parts namely East and West Pakistan. Eastern wing of Pakistan was homogeneous. Bengalis were in majority in that wing with common culture, traditions and language. In Western wing there were different cultural identities such as Punjabis, Pathans, Sindhis and Baloch. To manage these ethnic identities in an appropriate way was an important task for the policy makers of Pakistan. In most of the state of the world there are more than two ethnic groups. Sometimes state is consisting of ranked or unranked divided ethnic system. In a ranked ethnic system one ethnic group is super ordinate and other ethnic group is subordinate. In such societies subordinate group try to increase its influence and make efforts to come on better position than the super ordinate group. The chances of collision between two such groups are maximum in such societies. Sometimes it can happen that subordinate group do not deny the legitimacy of hierarchy and make efforts to improve its position. In unranked system different ethnic groups live peacefully with each other and do not come into conflict until and unless they are triggered to do so ;(E. Lobell and Mauceri, 2004, p.2).One important function of modern state is to maintain internal order and security (political, economic and physical). Internal conflicts among different ethnicities can deteriorate infrastructure and undermine the ability of state to ensure security. Weak institutional structures remain unable to satisfy vulnerable ethnic groups. Under such conditions ethnic groups will become fearful regarding their survival and start to think to use different mechanism available at their disposal to protect themselves against the "others". Ethnicities with this negative attitude start to pose potential threat to the integrity of the state and sometimes disintegrate the existing state with the help of some external actors

(E. Lobell and Mauceri, 2004, p.4). Stable political system manages ethnicities at their appropriate places and provide them opportunities to participate in the political system and system accommodate their demands.

**Conceptual Frame Work**

Before going into detail it is necessary here to explain the concept of ethnicity, conflict and Human Needs theory. Ethnicity is sense of oneness among a group of people on the basis of various variables such as language, caste, territory, race, culture and religion. Ethnic identities live peacefully. They come into conflict with each other on the basis of economic, social and political injustice. Soon after 1947 rulers of Pakistan because of different issues could not maintain a balance among different ethnic identities of Pakistan. Particularly people from East Pakistan started to resist against the policies of federal government. Federal government remained unable to formulate policies according to the expectations of people of East Pakistan. Their basic needs were not met by the government.

Cambridge Encyclopedia describes ethnicity as a group of people who can be identified on the basis of different variables such as Language, region, race, profession and colour (Crystal, 1991, p.421). Furnivall explains the concept of ethnicity as ethnic groups live side by side but do not intermingle with each other and try to preserve their core identity (Furnivall, 1984, p.23-45**).** Ethnic groups do not pose any threat to the stability of system or integrity of state. But ethnic identities do not show any flexibility in their attitude when there is threat for their survival. They use all means at their disposal to preserve their specific identity. Under such circumstances these ethnic identities comes into conflicting situation with those ethnic identities by whom they feel threat. Simply one can state that ethnicity is a feeling of oneness among a group of people.

After defining ethnicity it is pertinent here to define the term conflict. The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations has explained conflict as: conflict emerges when two or more than two states purse incompatible goals (Ahmar, 2014, p. XXX).Conflict takes place among different group of people because of incompatibility of interests. One can state in simple words that conflict is highest degree of area of disagreement between different groups of individuals having divergent goals and divergent perceptions. Incompatible

values and positions become a source to give birth conflicting situation. Ethnic conflict closely associates with psychology and emotions of individuals. Ethnic identities show serious concerns regarding their identity, recognition and survival. Ethnic identities do not make compromise regarding their core. Sometimes conflicting situation becomes very complicated and this type of situation cannot be resolved easily. After lowering the intensity of conflict, transformation process can be started to resolve the actual issue. Ethnic conflicts in Pakistan are difficult to manage because of non-constructive attitude of various governments and societal actors to create an environment of mutual understanding, cooperation and trust. Ethno nationalist movement are fuelled by fear of assimilation into dominant ethnic group, denial of equal opportunities in political and economic sphere of life, loss of their core identity, refusal of equal employment and educational opportunities and most important inequitable division of resources(Yasmin-Basim, 2005, p.105). Ethnic identities express their accumulated anger against government through violent behavior which can disturb the existing law and order situation in state. Ethnic identities come into conflict when their grievances are not addressed properly and they face discriminatory treatment persistently. Sometimes explosive violence including extensive brutality emerges among ethnic identities. Ethnic identities start killing each other and destroy property and business of each other. Majority ethnic group under the feelings of "other" give justification to destroy the minority ethnic group (J. Esman, 2004, p.71). Ethnic identities though have potential to contribute positively in the development of state but become violent and destructive under certain circumstances. Whenever their identity has been offended by the others, their response would be high intensity for the protection of their specific identity. The people of East Pakistan agitated upon declaration of Urdu as national language of Pakistan. They felt serious threat regarding survival of their culture and justified their resistance. When government in   Khartoum made an effort to impose Arabic language and Islamic Penal Code to the non-Muslim people of Sothern Sudan. They felt it as an insult of their specific culture and they resisted against this attempt (J. Esman, 2004, p.72).Ethnic identities come into conflict when they remain unable to secure vital interests of their community. One root cause of ethnic conflict is to gain power over economic resources. The people of Balochistan since the creation of Pakistan has been communicating that resources of their province are not in their hands. The grievances of the people of Balochistan can be addressed through proper economic growth of

their province. Political discontents of the people of Balochistan can be minimized through economic wellbeing. In a plural society respect for different cultures is vital for stability of a state. An individual can realize his personality through his specific culture and individuals show respect for their cultural differences. Ethnic identities participate in political system for the sake of survival of their specific culture. On can observe that people of one ethnic community cast their vote in favour of their own ethnicity. They show serious concerns regarding survival of their cultural identity (Finlay, 2011, p.38).

There are various writers who have written in an organized way related to the concept of human needs. Researcher has explained different theorists and their human needs models.

It is appropriate here now to explain the Human Needs Theory. This theory was developed during 1970s and 1980s. The basic hypothesis of this theory is that all humans have certain basic needs of life and they expect that their needs should be met through appropriate policies by the government. If their needs are not met their resistance against the system will be justified and if system fails to respond them positively then they will pose a threat to the stability of system through their violent resistance. Conflicting situation among different segments of society takes place because of inappropriate institutions and social norms. If social norms and institutions are being adjusted according to the needs of people then there will be less chances that issues are escalating into violent conflicting situation. (Burton, n.d). There should be proper mechanism of priority fixation regarding needs of the people on the part of the political system.

**John Burton Hunan Needs Theory.**

He explains Human Needs and conflicting situation in an organized way. He did aptly highlight identity, recognition, development and security as basic needs of human beings. (Danesh, n.d). Individuals make struggle to gain power in a society to preserve these specific needs. If their struggle will be curbed then chance is there that violence in society will increase. When the needs of the individuals are not fulfilled by the system then they will be frustrated and under this frustration they will behave aggressively. This situation subsequently has potential to escalate into violent conflicting situation. In multiethnic societies when government do not perform its

functions according to the principles of justice and equality, some of the segments of society become successful to gain maximum benefits at expense of other ethnic groups. Deprived ethnic groups start resistance and become a source to create instability and violence in society.

**Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Model.**

Abraham Maslow presented this model in 1940-50s. Hierarchy of Needs model is considered a significant tool to understand human motivation. Maslow has given five stages of Hierarchy of Needs model. The detail of model has been given below;

1- Biological and physiological needs.
2- Safety needs.
3- Belongingness and love needs
4- Esteem needs
5- Self-Actualization needs (Poston, 2009).

Maslow argues that some needs are most important than the other needs. He has arranged human needs in a specific hierarchy in terms of their potential. Human beings make efforts to satisfy their most urgent needs then move on for securing the other needs. Food and shelter are the basic needs of humanity after fulfilling these needs individuals will ask for security, belongingness and love, self-esteem and self-actualization. Maslow has discussed comprehensively various needs of individuals which if remain unmet have potential to create violent conflicting situation in a given system.

**Max-Neef's Human Needs and Human- Scale Development Approach**

Human needs are perceived interrelated and interactive and hierarchy of needs does not exist in Max- Neef arguments. Human Scale Development and peaceful co-existence depends upon the level of satisfaction of fundamental human needs. Max- Neef has made an effort to make distinction between needs and satisfiers. Max- Neef has presented nine human needs. In Max's argument no need is superior to other.  (Max-Neef, n.d). The nine needs by Max-Neef have been identified such as, Protection, Subsistence, Understanding, Affectation, Identity, Freedom, Participation, Creation and Leisure  (Max-Neef, n.d).

People come into conflicting situation when they remain unable to satisfy various needs. According to Max-Neef approach conflict can be resolvable through focusing on needs of people. Sometimes it becomes difficult to show flexibility regarding position of conflicting parties but if parties through discussion make clear their concerning needs, solution of issue can be acquired. (Kok, n.d).

## Marshall Rosenberg's Approach

According to this approach human needs are universal and to fulfill these needs is perceived necessary for the welfare and survival of human beings. He says we remain unable to connect ourselves with our real needs because of education and culture. According to Rosenberg through nonviolent communication we can have awareness about our own needs and needs of others as well. Nonviolent communication can be a helping tool to resolve conflicts. Through amicable methods most of the issues can be addressed in an appropriate way. (Kok, n.d).

Researcher has applied Human Needs Theory to resolve ethnic conflicting situation in Pakistan, because this theory recognizes needs of various ethnic groups of an area on equal basis. This theory promotes that needs of all concerned ethnic groups of a state should be met. The sense which is necessary to create among different ethnic groups through constructive initiatives by the authorities that all concerning ethnic groups would be able to satisfy their different needs such as security, recognition, identity and development. In case of Pakistan it can be observed that since 1947 intentionally or unintentionally discriminatory policies has been formulated and implemented among different segments of society. As a result of such policies few of the ethnic groups became more dominant. Particularly in case of East and West Pakistan one can observe that Bengalis were unable to take advantage from most of the policies of federal government. They started to feel as they have been marginalized intentionally by the federal government. This realization created a sense of alienation among Bengalis and with gradual passage of time they started to feel themselves as they are outsiders. The situation in West Pakistan was also not very positive because Baloch, Pakhtuns, Sindhis were showing their resentment against the dominant position of Punjabis at the helm of the affairs. Through applying Human Needs Theory ethnic conflicts in Pakistan can be managed in an organized way.

## Causes of Ethnic Conflicts in Pakistan

It is significant here to mention briefly different causes of ethnic conflicts in Pakistan. After highlighting these causes it will be easy for researcher to apply Human Needs Theory for resolving ethnic conflicts. There are different causes of emergence of ethnic conflicts such as

a, Strained relations among dominant and dominated ethnic groups.

b, Economic injustice

c, Lack of Equal Opportunities

d, Role of External actors

## Strained Relations among Dominant and Dominated Ethnic Groups

Since 1947 in Pakistan it has been observed that few ethnic groups have been dominating the political scenario of Pakistan. The dominant ethnic groups intentionally or unintentionally follow such policies which are perceived discriminatory by rest of the ethnic groups. Under such kind of environment the ultimate outcome is hatred, antagonism and conflict. The deprived ethnic groups decide to go for coercive methods to achieve their specific interests. One of the glaring examples of strained relationship among ethnicities is Bengalis of East Pakistan and multi-cultural ethnicities of West Pakistan. Bengalis were in majority in East Pakistan but did not have proper representation in various departments of governments. Intentionally or unintentionally the doors of power parlour were kept closed on them. In West Pakistan Punjabi-Muhajir dominance during fifties and sixties faced challenges regarding their dominance by the Bengali Majority in East Pakistan and Baloch, Pashtun and Sindhi in West Pakistan. Punjabi dominated armed forces got an opportunity because of weak political institutions to take over political power and promoted centralized authoritarian military rule. This military rule established dominance of one ethnic group and escalated ethnic tension in different parts of Pakistan(Harrison, 1987, p.267). After separation of East Pakistan strained relationship was observed among remaining ethnicities of Pakistan. Baloch, Sindhis and Pthans were not happy with political system of Pakistan. The emergence of Baloch nationalism could not be managed properly by the various rulers of Pakistan. Ever since the

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departure of British,the Baloch have been engaged in different insurgent movements. The insurgency of 1973 is considered most brutal confrontation between Pakistani troops and Baloch separatists. Sindhi ethnic identity have also potential to pose threat to the integrity of Pakistan through demanding a sovereign SindhuDesh. Pathans soon after creation of Pakistan demanded for Pashtunistan but later on they adopted a moderate stance and asked for regional autonomy (Harrison, 1987, p.287-289).

## Economic Injustice

One of the major reasons of disintegration of Pakistan in 1971 was economic injustice among different ethnic identities. The rulers of Pakistan soon after 1947 particularly after the death of Quai-E-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Khan Liaquat Ali Khan, had this perception that through religion sense of oneness can be created among various ethnic identities. Policy makers ignored the basic necessities of life of people. Different rulers either civilian or military remained unable to realize that it is important to provide all ethnic identities according to their pressing needs. Some of the ethnic groups got an opportunity to monopolize the most of the economic resources of state. Most of the developmental projects were initiated by the federal government in western wing at the expense of eastern wing of Pakistan. The people of East Pakistan resisted against the unequal distribution of economic resources by the federal government. Rulers did not address properly the grievances of the people of East Pakistan and result was separation of East Pakistan **(**Yasmin-Basim, 2005, p 100**).**The leaders of Pakistan did not learn the lesson from the bitter reality of history of Pakistan and continued with same policies in rest of the Pakistan.  Since 1971 the rulers of Pakistan have been facing major problems in the province of Balochistan. Baloch nationalists have been posing a major threat to the integrity of Pakistan through initiating various insurgent movements. These insurgencies have been widening the exist mistrust between the people of Balochistan and federal government (Breseej, 2004, p.326). Baloch nationalists have various grievances such as; the resources of the province of Balochistan are being utilized by the federal government on development of other provinces of Pakistan They say they have been marginalized by the federal government. They have not been given even the basic amenities of life. They have deep sense of deprivation. The province of Balochistan is poorest than all other provinces of Pakistan not because of lack

of adequate natural resources but because inadequate use of its natural resources by the federal government (Malik, 2013, p.130).

**Lack of Equal Opportunities**

Imbalance among ethnic identities becomes a major reason of conflicting situation. In case of Pakistan lack of political stability is a dominant factor to give birth different problems. Military intervention in Pakistan's politics is also one reason of political instability. Legitimate political system enjoy public support. Policy makers should distribute economic resources among different ethnic identities according to the principle of equality. All they can feel they are part of main stream and have authority to resolve their problems themselves and system is capable to fulfill their basic needs of life. Ethnic identities assert themselves when they feel their survival, identity and recognition is endanger. Bengalis became highly negative towards system when they realized that their survival is endanger(Ahmad, 1999, p.129). Under this environment they started agitation. Government remained unable to respond them positively. Bengalis were asking for equal opportunities as these were given to the people of West Pakistan. Federal government did not take them into confidence regarding various issues. Bengalis and their issues were neglected by the federal government. Economically they were not well off. Bengalis started to feel as they have been deprived of their legitimate rights. The government of General Ayoub Khan tried to introduce various development projects in both wings of Pakistan but these were adhoc arrangements in case of East Pakistan so did not create any fruitful results. They felt as they have been kept outside the administrative setup so they could not do anything in the best interests of the people of East Pakistan. They felt as they have been alienated. Since Pakistan came into being and Balochistan merge into Pakistan, the people of Balochistan have been demanding for ownership of their indigenous natural resources. They have been demanding for equal opportunities with other provinces of Pakistan. They are backward and underdeveloped because of policies of federal government (Malik, 2013, p.174)

**Role of External Actors**

Role of external actors cannot be neglected in ethnic conflicting situation of Pakistan. Pakistan came into being on the name of Islam. It was the

perception in minds of policy makers of Pakistan that Islam will be a binding factors among different ethnic identities. But the force of religion could not be implemented in the true sense. Pakistani society is a plural society with different major and minor ethnic identities. At the time of creation of Pakistan, there were two wings of it. In Eastern Wing Bengalis were in majority with their specific cultural identity. Federal government did not realize the importance of their language and culture. In 1948 Bengalis agitated on the declaration of Urdu as national language of Pakistan (Syed, 1995, p. 128). Father of nation realized the gravity of the issue and took into them confidence. For the time being issue was diffused. After the death of Quaid issue was reemerged. In this issue the role of external actor was the dominant. India did not want to see a stable Pakistan. India supported the stance of Bengalis in the whole issue. Later on when Bengalis started to react violently on different issues, they enjoyed support from the Indian side. Another example of external interference is case of Baloch ethnic identity. Baloch nationalists have been resisting against the federal government violently. Baloch also enjoyed support of some external forces. The 1973 constitution provided provincial autonomy but it could not be materialized in true sense by policy makers (Chaudhary, 1998, p.187).

## Recommendations and Conclusion

As it has been mentioned above by the researcher that Human Needs Theory is most appropriate mechanism which can be applied in Pakistan to resolve ethnic conflicts. Policy makers should avoid to play on ethnic differences for the protection of their personal interests. Policy makers should try to mitigate differences among ethnicities through empowering ethnicities and by integrating them with each other. Pakistan was disintegrated in 1971 and major reason of this disintegration was sense of deprivation in the minds of Bengalis and this deprivation was because their needs were not met by the federal government. Bengalis resisted against the policies of government but government did not took them into confidence and remained unable to formulate those policies which could satisfy the basic needs of the people of East Pakistan. Bengalis asked for maximum internal autonomy so that they would be able to resolve their problems themselves. They started to have this realization that their identity is endanger. Under these feelings they started to become more negative towards federal government and its policies. This issue was very sensitive but federal government did not feel its importance in

an appropriate way. If federal government felt their needs timely and took adequate steps according to the expectations of people of East Pakistan then chance was there that dismemberment of Pakistan can be avoided. Most of the ethnic identities in present day Pakistan asserting themselves for securing their specific objectives and to fulfill their basic needs. Needs of different ethnic identities should be fulfilled by the government for establishing a stable political system.

There are different factors which can be helpful to resolve conflicts in Pakistan. The political will is a significant factor to initiate negotiation to resolve ethnic conflict among different ethnic groups. Ethnicities have to show flexibility in their attitude regarding issues for their amicable solution. Another very important step to lower the intensity of conflict is to hold purposeful discussion and to overcome stalemate in the discussion process. By adopting this approach concerning parties would be able to move forward. Concerning parties for mitigating the conflict should build trust upon each other and this trust will give them space to understand each other's concern regarding the issue (Ahmar, 2014, p.XXXIV). A sustainable governance system have ability to create friendly and cooperative environment among various ethnic identities of a plural state. A sustainable governance can be ensured with legitimacy. Maximum public support becomes a major source to strengthen a political system internally as well as externally. A stable political system can ensure equitable distribution of resources among different ethnic identities of state. Government has to promote coordination and harmony among ethnic identities through media and NGOs. Cultural identities should have mutual understanding and to show flexible attitude regarding different issues. There should be regular communication between ethnic identities so they can discuss their common issues and can share mutual benefits. It should be the policy of the government to enhance people to people contact. Ethnic identities through their mutual understanding can build consensus on different issues. There should be proper socialization of different ethnic identities. Socialization is a learning process about the role of individual, awareness about political system and participation of individuals in political system. In Pakistan there is a lack of proper political socialization. In the province of Balochistan common people do not have awareness. They depend upon Sardars. There is need of proper socialization through various sources. There is a wider gap of communication between federal government and common

people of different regions of Pakistan. There is trust deficit among ethnic identities. Baloch ethnicity hold responsible to Punjabis for their deprivation. Ethnic identities should show flexibility to accommodate each other. According to Human Needs Theory security, identity, recognition, development and self-esteem are the most important needs of individuals. In a multiethnic state like Pakistan to fulfill the above mentioned needs of people is crucial. Provision of equal opportunities and judicious distribution of resources are key factors to establish a stable multiethnic state. Pakistan had faced disintegration because of discriminatory attitude of ruling authority regarding ethnic identities. Bengali ethnicity felt itself insecure in Pakistan and they started violent resistance against system. Weak institutional structure remained unable to sustain. In contemporary Pakistan different ethnic identities are feeling the same sense of insecurity. They are feeling threat regarding their survival and identity. This should be the immediate task of the government of Pakistan to take them into confidence and to address their actual grievances through constitutional arrangements.

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