Pakistan was born as a pluralist society and, in reality, continues to be vibrant and diverse – ethnically, linguistically and culturally. Yet, since independence, the pluralist foundations of its society have been consistently undermined by security imperatives of the state. Proponents of monolithic ideologies have dominated the national discourse, which treats Islamic ideology as the basis of nationhood. This has created a constant schism between state-building and nation-building processes. Prospects of democracy in the country thus hinge largely on reversing an ideologically grounded state-building process sustained through successive education policies. The Eighteenth Amendment to the 1973 Constitution has made education a provincial subject. Thus, civilian leaders and policy makers now have a rare opportunity to promote civic education in Pakistan and thus revive the pluralist characteristic of its society, on which the edifice of a sustainable democracy can be built.

This chapter begins by defining relevant concepts such as liberalism, constitutionalism and pluralism. It then underlines the persisting tension in post-colonial states between a pluralist society and monist state, especially its relevance to Pakistan. Subsequent discussion narrates how the promotion of monolithic ideologies through state education policies, especially from 1979 onwards, has undermined civic education, and why the Eighteenth Amendment can be a potential driver for bridging the gap between a pluralist society and a monist state.

Post-independence paradox

Liberalism and constitutionalism are generally identified as two crucial components of a democratic system. Although there are varied interpretations of the meaning and understanding of these two concepts, liberalism implies upholding the values of tolerance, protecting minority rights, freedom of expression and association, while constitutionalism means respect for the law, and 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 the majority rule and protection of individual rights, between the government and the opposition, and between competition and
inclusiveness. Thus, modern democracy and states making transitions to democracy have inherent paradoxes that need to be navigated carefully.

Pluralism needs to be understood within the context of the twin pillars of liberalism and constitutionalism. It literally means ‘manyness’ – as opposed to ‘monism’ or oneness. Marc Plattner defines pluralism as “a multiplicity or diversity of groups that exert influence within a polity”.2 According to Robert Dahl, power in democracies is dispersed among a number of competing economic, social and ideological pressure groups and not held by a single elite or group.3 Pluralism has over time 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, there are religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and socio-economic inequalities in most post-colonial states and societies, which could be described as pluralist. At another level, that is liberalism and constitutionalism, such societies would immediately fall in Fareed Zakaria’s apt conceptualization of ‘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, and corruption and crony capitalism reign supreme.4

Applying these concepts to Pakistan, it emerges that the country was indeed born in 1947 as a 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, the four provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and NWFP (now KPK) had 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, 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 the Pakistan Movement (1937–1947) and immediately after independence, Islam as a belief system and Muslim as a group identity came to be used interchangeably. This obliterated the evolution of pluralist values. The cultural heritage of Pakistan was pluralist but not liberal, as the freedom of individual choice and dissent was 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 a major concern. Thus, after gaining independence, an imbalance emerged between state-building and nation-building processes, which acquired the overtones of Oneness vs. Pluralism.

Ten fateful decisions

Since independence, the pluralist inheritance and character of Pakistani society have been constantly undermined by state elites. We can identify ten fateful decisions that hindered the growth of pluralist values and civic culture in the country.
In 1948, when the Bengalis demanded that Bangla should also be given the status of a national language, the state responded by imposing Urdu as the national language.

The Objectives Resolution, passed by the Constituent Assembly in 1949, declared that sovereignty shall rest with Allah and the minorities shall have the right of protection to practice their faith. These twin pillars of the Objectives Resolution defined the ideological direction of the Pakistani state in subsequent decades. This clearly meant that the state would allow minorities to ‘practice their faith’ but not guarantee them the right of equal citizenship. Thus, the state constricted its civic responsibility of ensuring fairness, justice and equal rights to all citizens.

The creation of ‘One Unit’ in 1955 – as result of which all the four provinces of West Pakistan were unified – without the consent of the provinces. Thus, provincial autonomy was usurped and the pluralist character of Pakistan disrupted. The NWFP, Sindh and Balochistan all had strong linguistic and cultural identities and their respective sense of history. On the other hand, in Punjab (population-wise the largest, 58 per cent), linguistic identity was relatively weak. Smaller provinces, therefore, resented the formation of ‘One Unit’. In 1970, One Unit was broken up, restoring all the four provinces in West Pakistan.

The introduction of the Legal Framework Order of 1970, which introduced Islamic ideology, disallowed political parties to challenge its enforcement and curbed demands for provincial autonomy.

The break-up of Pakistan in 1971, which increased state insecurity and discredited the military and civil bureaucracy. Since state building was the preferred policy choice, its failure was portrayed as a failure in nation building. The reality was that the proponents of monist ideology had undermined the pluralist spirit and character of the nation.

The 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 the 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.

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.
The Eighth Amendment, known as the Revival of Constitutional Order March 1985, included all acts, ordinances and orders that General Ziaul Haq passed between 1977 and 1985 and could not be challenged or reversed under any Court or Act of Parliament, including Shariah Acts and the Federal Shariat Court. This clearly showed the ideological and centralizing character of the Pakistani state.

The Local Government Order 2001, which – despite focusing on devolution, decentralization and de-concentration of administration – bypassed the provinces and thus undermined pluralism. No surprise that the provinces never owned it.

The Seventeenth Amendment of 2003 enhanced the power of the president, allowing him to hold the office of chief of army staff as well as the president, empowering him to dissolve the National Assembly and the Governor appointed by him to dissolve the provincial assembly. The consequent centralization of the state further weakened the pluralist dimensions of Pakistani society.

These fateful decisions have contributed to developing a narrative for state building rather than paying attention to the complexities and challenges of nation building. A combination of centralizing and ideological responses and policy choices from the leaders and policy makers – whose primary concern was security of the state – has sustained tension between monists and the pluralists in the nation-building process. Little effort was made post-independence to develop intellectual and cultural linkages among various regions of Pakistan. Historical and cultural heritage of the territories comprising the country 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.

Consequences for civic education

Analysing the history of education development in Pakistan, it becomes obvious that in different phases, one or a combination of the afore-cited decisions shaped not only the intellectual discourse but also the curriculum formation and education policy makers’ vision of civic education. The curriculum in government schools, projected through Pakistan and Islamic Studies, 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 failure to recognize the utility of these basic principles of civic education during the formative years eventually caused the break-up of Pakistan in 1971.

In his critique of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government’s education policy of propagating Hindutuva in India in the 1990s, Andre Beteille writes:
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.

In the same way, the state authorities in Pakistan have deliberately undermined civic education and independent research. 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. That is why social sciences remained peripheral in promoting better understanding of societal changes and pressures that confronted the state. The process was further complicated and compromised, as the state in the late 1970s started systematically promoting Islamic ideology as the sole unifier of Pakistani nationhood, and all other intellectual, cultural and political narratives were considered irrelevant.

Another equally potent factor has been the persistent and prolonged military rules. In the eyes of many Pakistanis, besides Islamic ideology, the military is a guarantor of state security and a key unifier among diverse ethnic and linguistic groups. 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 the monist state. Thus, in the post-1977 phase, the military has assumed the role of a key defender and protector of Pakistan’s “territorial and ideological frontiers.” It constitutes the dominant power elite. The interplay of monist ideology and the military has considerably influenced the shaping of intellectual and cultural discourse in the country. The military values of conformity, regimentation and masculinity are underscored in the society in general and in the educational institutions in particular. In this role, the military has been skillful in building considerable support and influence at the societal level. These tendencies over a long period have hampered free speech, dissent and critical thinking.

During the 1980s, the privatization of education and the emergence of the 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, and civic virtues as a public good lost value. This trend was most visible at the high school level, where civic education is crucial for promoting linkages between national and regional histories. Thus, education was equated with performance in grade achievement and not on investing in producing good and productive citizens. The privatization process also accelerated the pace of opening and expanding the madrassas. Since the Afghan Jihad and revolution in Iran, the madrassas have been increasingly linked with militancy and extremism.

The privatization of education has created multiple systems of education, where curriculum design, quality and content of teaching material and marginalization of civic education have emerged as key challenges. The imposition of
ideology, centralization and militarization has given rise to militancy and extremism in the educational institutions. Competing religious extremist groups became militants, accumulated deadly weapons, organized their parallel armies and engaged in violence. They have created an environment of fear, hostility and intimidation in schools, colleges and universities. How have the national education policies contributed to this malaise?

Review of state education policies

Pakistan has had seven national education policies from 1947 to 2010 – the year when education became a provincial subject under the Eighteenth Amendment. While assessing these policies, we need to look at three aspects: the vision statement in each policy, the role of university education and research, and the role of madrassas.

I 1947 and 1951 education conferences: nebulous and formative

The discussions, deliberations and recommendations of the 1947 and 1951 conference fall in this category, where the primary concern of policy makers was not to disrupt the existing education system inherited from the British colonial rule but to incorporate changes with reference to Islam and nation building that would best suit the needs of Pakistan. Two noticeable shifts are visible in the 1951 conference: First, Urdu is declared as the national and official language; second, for the first time, the phrase ‘Islamic ideology’ is invoked to Islamize the education system. This happens because, in 1949, the Objectives Resolution is adopted, which gives legitimacy to the notion of promoting Islamic ideology in Pakistan and also declares that minorities will have the right to practice their religion. Thus, Islamic ideology and minority rights emerge as a contentious issue, both in education policies and on the national political scene.

II Reform and problem identification: the Sharif report

The 1959 Commission on Education Reform report, prepared by the then Chief Secretary S.M. Sharif, remains perhaps one of the most comprehensive investigations on the problems of education in Pakistan. It touched upon all the major issues confronting teachers’ training, financing and curriculum at all levels. Yet it was not forceful in making concise recommendations. Clearly, the Sharif report was favourably disposed towards utilizing education as a vehicle to promote nation building and espoused liberal and progressive interpretation of Islam. It was ambiguous on the relationship between national and regional languages but visualized Urdu as the national language, though accepting two official languages (Bengali being the other).

The 1966 Commission report was yet another comprehensive exercise in identifying the issues of student unrest, particularly at college and university level. It was also insightful in analysing the problems of teaching community.
This report had an inherent weakness of political commitment, as it came in the wake of the 1965 war and the emerging political discontent on university campuses in East Pakistan. It was also a precursor to the 1967–1969 periods of agitation and protest. Thus, many of the meaningful suggestions on university autonomy, curriculum reform and academic programmes never caught the imagination of decision makers.

III Transition and ideological drift: education policies 1969–1970

The 1969 and 1970 reports reflected the turbulence of the time, when campus revolts were a global phenomenon. The situation was no different in Pakistan. The 1965 war with India and collapse of the Ayub regime in 1969 were the two factors that triggered political upheaval in the country. In the wake of these developments, the debate on Islamic ideology and the role of religion in Pakistani politics acquired a new meaning.

It is worth noting here that between 1947 and 1971, successive governments in Pakistan remained preoccupied with political order, political stability and institutional continuity. Thus, governance through bureaucracy, military and judiciary came to dominate decision-making. Consequently, state building expanded, while nation building was stunted. The formulation of public policy and, particularly, the education policy, could not escape this malaise. Therefore, the general thrust of the policy makers remained on identifying the issues of discontent and, in the light of these, curriculum reform and modernization were to be adopted. However, on the issues of medium of instruction, universalization of primary education, degree and scale of private education, elite educational institutions and the role of religion, the education policy remained muffled.

In 1969, not only in politics but also in education, Pakistan ideology and the role of Islam acquired the centre stage. This was a turning point in the history of education. With the break-up of the Pakistani state in 1971, the nation was in fragments and the challenge was whether the policy makers would be able to provide a vision and framework of an education policy that rejuvenated the nation.

IV 1972 policy: radical and populist

The underlying theme of the educational reform effort from 1947 to 1970 was defining and providing a vision of nation building and national integration in conformity with Islamic culture and values. Education was visualized, like many developing countries, as a nation-building project. However, the policy makers showed infirmities and lack of commitment on the degree and scale of making a clean break from the colonial mode of the prevailing education system and also on the role of Islam in promoting national integration and inculcating a sense of Pakistani citizenship. These ambiguities and anxieties of nation building acquired new salience in post-1971 Pakistan. The break-up of the country was a traumatic event. It shook the very foundation of the idea of Pakistan. Therefore, in the shaping up of ‘new Pakistan’, national education acquired a new meaning.
However, like everything else, the policy makers and people by and large were traumatized and least prepared to face the new emerging realities.

Given that, the 1972 education policy was a radical departure from the past policies. It was sketchy, written in haste; it was populist and aimed at universalization of primary education (without adequately working out the financial costs, teachers’ training and other infrastructure) and nationalization of the entire or most of the education system (without fully comprehending the consequences). The policy led to massive expansion of public sector education in the country. The policy of nationalization led to the burgeoning of public sector education in the country, raised the financial cost, expanded the education department’s bureaucracy and adversely affected the quality of public sector education. The number of teachers, schools, colleges, universities and students increased, but the quality of public education deteriorated. While the 1972 education policy was under the implementation process, Pakistan went through yet another regime change that unleashed social forces and groups to power who were not only opposed to the nationalization of education but also believed that Islamization of education was essential to reform it. The ideology of Pakistan, which is defined as equivalent to Islam, was henceforth introduced into and became a focal concept for Pakistan studies books.10

V 1979 education policy: ideological and Islamist

This education policy put ‘Islamic ideology’, ‘Pakistan ideology’ and its linkage with Islam as the core of all education in Pakistan. The centrality of Islam and Islamization of education become the primary theme of the policy. Simultaneously, the policy embarked on partial de-nationalization, ensuring that there would be no further nationalization, and encouraged privatization in education. Islamization and private sector investment become the benchmarks of the education policy, although the pace on privatization remained slow. The establishment of a Shariah Faculty at the International Islamic University, the introduction of Pakistan studies and Islamic studies as compulsory subjects in secondary/high school and legitimating of madrassa degrees were some of the steps that mainstreamed religion into the Pakistani education system.


The 1992 education policy was a continuation of the 1979 policy, as it expanded the Islamization process and also moved forward on the privatization of education. It clearly reflected that ‘secular’, ‘liberal’ space had shrunk in the social, political and educational domain. The policy re-informed the trend of not only Islamizing the textbooks and curriculum but also emphasized re-orienting the teachers and students on Islam and developing an Islamic worldview. Thus, teachers’ training and Islamization of the curriculum and textbooks that was initiated in 1979 was continued and consolidated. To eradicate illiteracy, the cosmetic notion of ‘Mosque and Mohalla’ non-formal schools was introduced.
VII 1998–2010: fundamentalist and technological

The last national education policy reflects the schizophrenic tendencies of Pakistan’s education system. On the one hand, the policy leans towards Islamization of knowledge, ‘Taliban style’, as it emphatically recommended that nothing repugnant to Sharia and the Holy Quran should be taught. It also propounds to Islamize social sciences and possibly all knowledge and even makes a case for encouraging those sports that are indigenous and close to local culture. On the other, the policy ventures to comprehend the forces of globalization and modernization, emphasizing computer literacy, vocational education, and research in science and technology. The policy document conveys the impression that it is accepting technology out of fear rather than as an instrument of change and modernization. Is it the fear of technological revolution and globalization that causes an excessive emphasis on Islamization of education?

The report correctly points out that past efforts only aimed to expand the educational infrastructure rather than work on the modernization of teaching methods and curriculum. Resultantly, the continual decay of the education system, and quality and type of students that it produced could not rouse much public confidence in the system. However, the report is misdirected in proposing Islamization of the entire education system. Islamizing textbooks and the curriculum constricts the possibility of any reform and innovation. Some new ideas of reform and innovation, such as the introduction of Information Technology, computer literacy, and vocational education included in the report seem completely hostage to Ideology and Islamization. In its vision and objectives, the report is ideological and leaves little space for progressive liberal society, enlightened, modern, democratic, Muslim and forward-looking Pakistan. It projects an ideological education that is subservient to the Quran and Sunnah and does not give importance to notions of exploration, innovation and scepticism, which are the basis of a vibrant and dynamic society.

The review of these policies reflects four persisting trends in the state education policy-making process. First, the ideas of piecemeal reforms, particularly concerning the modernization of the textbook curriculum as propounded in policy documents from 1947–1972, have become distant goals. Second, in the post-1979 period, the Islamization of education has become a central theme of educational reform. Third, liberal, democratic, scientific and technological education has remained peripheral, despite considerable rhetoric to this effect in post-1979 education policies. Fourth, each policy document has been high on promise and low on delivery and monitoring of what it proposed.

The Eighteenth Amendment and after

Since the 1970 elections, the first in Pakistan’s history, the 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 PPP at
the federal level and coalitions at the provincial levels. This transition to democracy and its sustenance provided the political leadership with an opportunity to revive and energize the pluralist resilience of the 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 a parliamentary committee for initiating and instituting constitutional reforms. The committee embarked on a process of mutual consultation lasting over a year that paved the way for the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment Act, 2010, by the National Assembly and Senate, and its subsequent approval by the president, in April 2010. The Act amended 102 articles and devolved 47 subjects to the exclusive legislative and executive domain of the provinces.11

The Eighteenth Amendment decentralized political power by curtailing the oft-abused powers of the presidency as well as empowering the country’s four provinces by transferring federal-level resources and responsibilities to provincial governments. Its passage was termed as “one of the most dramatic deconcentrations of power in Pakistan” since the drafting of the 1973 Constitution, with PPP Senator Raza Rabbani, the amendment’s architect, hailing it as the “most significant restructuring process” since independence.12 Apart from political restructuring, the amendment entailed major implications for the education system, as it made two distinctive changes in the Constitution. First, the inclusion of Article 25 A that ensures the right to education to children from five to 16 years and, second, the exclusion of the Concurrent List, implying that the curriculum, syllabus, planning, policy and standards of education would be devolved and placed under provincial jurisdiction.13

With the mandate of education policy devolved to provinces under the Eighteenth Amendment, we have to see how the four provincial governments have fared in preparing and implementing their respective education policies. The measures adopted for this purpose, for instance, in the case of curriculum reforms, have not been so promising. Following the adoption of the Eighteenth Amendment, new curriculum authorities were formed in all the provinces, which have mostly followed the guidelines contained in the revised National Curriculum of 2006 approved during the Musharraf regime. Meanwhile, Pakistan studies textbooks continue to forge an identity exclusively based on Islam, while textbook review committees (part of the new provincial curriculum authorities) often reject the more tolerant submissions. For example, the Oxford University Press in Pakistan submitted textbooks to a competition in Punjab but was asked by the review committee to reintroduce the word ‘jihad’, even though the curriculum documents do not ask for it to be mentioned.14 In some places where improvements were made, political factors have undone them. For example, the PTI-led government in KPK has reversed many of the revisions in textbooks made by the liberal Awami National Party’s regime in 2012, such as reintroducing mentions of jihad – largely under pressure from its coalition partner, the Jamaat-e-Islami.15

The implementation process of the Eighteenth Amendment’s provisions concerning education and other spheres has indeed faced recurrent obstacles and
proceeded slowly. Yet its overall significance in strengthening the parliamentary system and provincial autonomy cannot be overlooked. The fact that the amendment was passed unanimously by Parliament reflects a rare consensus between all the major political parties. If seen within the context of the ten fateful decisions identified above that marred Pakistan’s democratic fate, it provided a fresh opportunity to political leaders and policy makers to restore the pluralist character of Pakistani polity based on recognition of diversity as the basis of national unity. The amendment also signalled a paradigm shift in governance by paving the way for a decentralized, devolved administrative set-up. Legitimizing ethnicity, language and culture is an as indelible attribute of a representative government as the revolutionary changes entailed in the amendment aim to realize in the long term. In addition to devolving education, the Eighteenth Amendment has opened new vistas for a pluralist Pakistan in six ways:

1. By removing the Seventeenth Amendment, it has laid to rest the presidential discretion to dissolve the national and provincial assemblies and remove the prime minister. Thus, the Eighteenth Amendment has laid the foundations of executive restrain in dealing with the parliamentary and democratic processes. It has tilted the balance of power in favour of the prime minister and the chief ministers of the provinces.

2. The Eighteenth Amendment has restored, revived and enhanced provincial autonomy. It has redefined 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 and human rights. This offers the provinces an opportunity to build their capacity for improving governance and delivery of services.

3. It ensures, protects and advances the provinces’ control over their natural and economic resources – which implies not just political autonomy but also ownership of their economic sources of power, thereby reinvigorating the federation–province relationship.

4. The amendment has paved the way for fiscal decentralization, as the seventh National Finance Commission has radically redefined the terms of allocating fiscal resources, enhancing the share and role of the provinces and reducing the same for the federation.

5. It has energized the Council of Common Interest (CCI) as a body, which must meet every three months and where the chief ministers of the provinces are equally represented to resolve issues amicably between the federation and the provinces.

6. The Eighteenth Amendment has made local government a third tier of the federation by devolving administrative and political power to the district level, thereby empowering people. It mandated the holding of local government elections by the provincial governments. The process of holding these elections has, however, been slow, with the Sindh government having resisted the option for several years.
All of the above provisions of the Eighteenth Amendment, if properly implemented, would strengthen the pluralist dimensions of the Pakistani nation as well as consolidate the federation. This would help in developing a shared national 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 a 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 observations

More recently, the forces of globalization, manifested in the form of cyber, satellite and cellular technologies, have unleashed a contradictory process of change, where ideological unity and pluralist aspirations have emerged as parallel currents. Is any synthesis possible between the two competing visions of monism as denoted by the former trend and pluralism that is characteristic of the latter? Is it possible to build a shared vision for the nation, while the monist and pluralist schism persists?

The globalization process has, for instance, paved the way for privatization of higher education in Pakistan. Currently, it has more than 150 universities, both public and private. Most of these universities deal with fields of science and engineering, while little emphasis is given to social sciences, particularly civic education. It has mostly been integrated into social studies or Pakistan studies disciplines and is taught in schools from grades four to 14. In schools and colleges as well, more emphasis is placed on science and technology and little value is ascribed to social sciences and humanities and, thus, to civic education. There is a common belief among the bureaucrats, politicians, businessmen and other segments of society influencing state policy that social sciences do not require conceptual understanding. Therefore, any social science subject can be learnt by rote and anyone can teach it. Even less importance is given to civic education in universities. The 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 centres. However, teaching in most of these departments is focused on knowledge acquisition rather than understanding of the key concepts and issues in society. This is despite the fact that civic education is widely considered as a crucial factor in triggering positive change in the behaviour, norms, values and political culture of people and their attitude towards civic responsibility. It is evident from the review of state education policies that state authorities have failed to give due priority to civic education. The situation in the aftermath of the Eighteenth Amendment continues to reflect the legacy of post-1979 education policies.
However, a number of civil society organizations have indeed made civic education a priority. For instance, the realization that parliamentarians from both national and provincial assemblies as well as members of the local government are not well prepared for their role has led civil society organizations, such as the Centre for Civic Education and Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development, to educate legislators in general and women legislators in particular with the intention of building and strengthening democratic institutions in Pakistan. Several other civil society organizations are proactively engaged in promoting human rights, peace and harmony between different groups in society or advocating for change in discriminatory laws and practices and framing of laws based on human rights. Greater collaboration among academia, the research community, civil society organizations and the public sector can help improve the level of trust between citizens and the state, thereby laying the foundation of a pluralist Pakistan, where harmony is celebrated by tolerating diversity.

To achieve this, however, the onus of responsibility still lies on state authorities and government functionaries. For it is because of their deliberate policies or inept approaches that regressive trends have become so well entrenched in the society that the task of realizing a pluralist and liberal democratic order in Pakistan still looks next to impossible.

Notes
8 On 5 July 1977, after the military coup, General Ziaul Haq stated that the military would defend the “ideological and territorial frontiers of Pakistan”. Former Army Chief, General Pervez Ashraf Kayani, while addressing the cadets at the Pakistan Military Academy on 13 August 2013, echoed the same sentiments.


