

## ***Two-day National Conference on “Pakistani Culture” (08-09 June 2006)***

**Syed Umar Hayat\***

A two-day National Conference on “Pakistani Culture” under the auspices of National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research (NIHCR), Centre of Excellence and Chair on Quaid-i-Azam and Freedom Movement , National Institute of Pakistan Studies (NIPS), Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU), Islamabad, was held on 08-09 June 2006, at Hotel Margalla, Islamabad. It was one of the biggest scholarly Conferences of its kind in the history of Pakistan. Professor Dr. Riaz Ahmad (TI), Director, NIHCR and Professor, Chair on Quaid-i-Azam, NIPS, QAU, Islamabad, took the initiative for organizing the Conference. He was also the Chairman of the Conference Organizing Committee and its Secretary was Syed Umar Hayat, Senior Research Fellow of the NIHCR.

Scholars from all over Pakistan, besides those based in Islamabad-Rawalpindi who presented research papers, not only highlighted the different aspects of Pakistani Culture but also called for cultural assimilation. The Inaugural was also attended by a large number of intellectuals, academic and social elites based in Islamabad.

The inaugural session was held on 08 June 2006. Prof. Dr. Riaz Ahmad introduced the Themes and Objectives of the Conference. He said that prime objective of the Conference was to provide a forum for the Pakistani scholars to present their respective viewpoints on aspects of Pakistani Culture. He felt that the Pakistani Culture exemplifies the concept of “Unity in Diversity”. He hoped that during the two-day deliberations, the scholars would also discuss the modalities of research on topics concerning culture. He pointed out that the NIHCR was making all possible efforts for the advancement of research in social sciences, particularly in the specific areas of history and culture. He said that besides publishing research articles in its

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two bi-annual journals (in English and Urdu) regularly, the institute had published over 200 research works, covering Pakistani history and culture. The Institute was also coordinating research efforts in these fields, he added.

In his welcome Address Prof. Dr. M. Qasim Jan, Vice Chancellor of the Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, said "With the fact of more than 90 percent of the people of Pakistan having a balanced and modern approach in their lives, both religiously and socially, especially the western media is surprised to learn the real facets of the Pakistani culture. He was of the view that Pakistani culture has evolved throughout centuries. Though presently the main aspect of Pakistani culture remains to be Islamic but it does not mean that it has not absorbed influences from ancient civilizations which appeared on this land like Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Taxila and Gandhara. Though Pakistani culture has changed tremendously from the previous one but this change has occurred not with the total break from the past". He further added, "Pakistani culture is a burning topic in today's multi-cultural world especially in the international media. It becomes sometime difficult to defend the aspects of Pakistani culture and its phases as manifested in various provinces and regions of Pakistan. For me this is not a problem but uniqueness of the Pakistani culture with its rich variety and diversity, which makes it a beautiful whole known as Pakistan's identity in the whole world".

Next S.K.Tressler, former Federal Minister for Culture, presented the Keynote Address. He focused on the relevance of the Conference in the present day scenario with particular reference to the cultural development requirements of Pakistan. He said: "We talk of democracy and many other issues but nobody has ever given a serious thought to develop the national character and specific culture of our people. We have to develop a culture of tolerance because that is the main order of our Creator and develop a culture of respect for each other's faith".

In his Presidential Address, Lt.Gen. (R) Javed Ashraf Qazi, appreciated the holding of the Conference and felicitated the organizers for arranging such a large gathering of scholars and researchers from all over Pakistan, to discuss and deliberate upon the various aspects of Pakistani culture. He said,

The basic identity of Pakistani culture remains to be Muslim but it does not mean that it does not or can not represent other cultures. Our Pakistani culture is being promoted not at the cost of other cultures. Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan, North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) and Northern Areas have their own identity but at the same time they have a lot of resemblance with each other in Arts, Sciences, Architecture, Literature, Language and Traditions. They can be rightly termed as parts of Pakistani culture. It is like a garden where flowers of various colours are available but all have something common with each other.

Mr. Qazi pointed out that the purpose of the government is to promote diversity of Pakistani culture but with a sense of unity so that at the international level Pakistani culture is introduced to various regions of the world. It is for this purpose that this government has adopted a free media policy, but, on the other hand, it is the responsibility of the media to present a true picture of our culture and the positive side to the international world, he added. While answering some questions, he said, "We must keep taking pride in Pakistan, it is our key to survive".

The First Academic Session was presided over by Col. S.K.Tressler, while the discussant was Dr. Hafizur Rahman, Chairman, Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. Scholars who presented Papers were: Mr. Shakir Hussain, Dr. Mansoor Akbar Kundi. Dr. Tahir Kamran, Ms. Farhat Iftikhar Gill and Dr. Sohail Insha. The scholars highlighted numerous aspects of Pakistani culture and explained the philosophy of culture from different thoughtful angles. Dr. Mansoor Akbar Kundi was of the view that, the "Society in Pakistan is based unfortunately on a number of practices which are highly based on vanity fair, thus ignoring the basic principles of religion. Such trends exist in the upper and middle classes of society where the ratio of education is higher, with wealth and affluence considered as a source of prestige and fame".

The Second Academic Session was chaired by Dr. Ghazanfar Mehdi, while the discussant was Dr. Humaira Arif Dasti, Chairperson, Department of History, Bahauddin Zakariyya University, Multan. Five Papers were presented in the session by the following Scholars: Dr. Hasan Askari Rizvi, Dr. Syed Islam Shah, Dr. M. Yakub Mughal, M Hanif Khalil and Prof. Dr. Deedar Hussain Shah. They stressed upon the uniqueness of Pakistani culture and highlighted some of its important issues connected with Pakistani culture.

The Third Academic Session was held on 09 June with Prof. Dr. Hyder Sindhi, Director, National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad in the Chair. The discussant was Dr. Mohammad Shafique. Four Papers were presented by Dr. Mohammad Sadiq Ali Gill, Dr. Z.A. Qureshi, Dr. M Ashraf Chaudhary and Dr. Zeenat Sana. Dr. Z.A. Qureshi, spoke on: "Nationalism & Pakistani culture". Dr.M. Ashraf Chaudhary said that three sources of a culture are: Religion, History and Nature. He delineated Pakistani culture in terms of these sources.

The Fourth Academic Session was presided over by Prof. Sharif al-Mujahid, while Mr. Abdur Razzak Shahid was the discussant. Five papers were presented in the session by Mr. Abdul Waheed Khan, Mr. Sibtain Raza, Prof. Dr. Asif Ali Rizvi, Dr. Mian Mushtaq and Mr. Gul Rahim Khan. Most of them dilated on the Saraiki and Balochi culture, and their presentations were extremely informative in terms of evaluating the Saraiki

and Balochi edges of the Pakistani culture. Their presentations also underlined the “unity in diversity” dimension of the Pakistani culture.

The Fifth Academic Session was chaired by Dr. Tahir Kamran, Chairman, Department of History, Government College University, Lahore. Papers were presented by Mr. Yar Mohammad Badini, Dr. Inamul Haq Kausar, Dr. Riaz Ahmad, Dr. Abdus Saboor, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Sajid and Dr. Abdul Ghafur Muslim. In his paper on, “Cultural basis of Pakistan Movement”, Prof. Dr. Riaz Ahmad delineated the cultural edge of the Pakistan Movement, and said, “Culture means ideas, customs, skills, arts etc. of people or a group that are transferred, communicated or passed along from generation to generation”. Finally he observed that Quaid-i-Azam comprehensively explained that the Muslim civilization was separate from that of the Hindus. He thus paved the way for Pakistan as the symbol of Muslim culture and civilization in South Asia.

The Concluding Session was presided over by Prof. Dr. Riaz Ahmad. Senator Mushahid Hussain Saiyed, Chairman Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Secretary General of Pakistan Muslim League, was the Chief Guest. The speakers were: Dr. Humaira Asif Dasti, Dr. Shoaib Ahmad, Muhammad Jaffar Shigri, Dr. Ghazanfar Mehdi, Prof. Sharif al-Mujahid, Prof. Dr. Riaz Ahmad, Mr. Wahid Bakhsh Buzdar, and Dr. Abdul Latif Tunio.

Senator Mushahid Hussain Saiyed pointed out that the Conference was the need of the hour and hoped that its deliberations as well as the Papers would contribute a good deal in the Government’s efforts directed towards cultural enrichment. He observed that the present Government had a special concern for the development of culture and adequate funds were being provided for that purpose. These efforts were directed towards bringing the country at par with other countries with a rich culture, he added.

Prof. Sharif al-Mujahid spoke on the taxonomy of Pakistan’s political culture, its strength and weaknesses. He also presented a report on the Conference’s deliberations and resolutions. One of the resolutions commended the NIHCR on its ongoing project on the comprehensive History of Pakistan and called upon it to concentrate on its completion within the next few years. Finally, Prof. Dr. Riaz Ahmad thanked the distinguished guests, scholars, and other participants for gracing the occasion, and hoped that the array of ideas generated and discussed in the Conference would be further deliberated upon with a view to delineating and defining Pakistani culture in its broad characteristic of “unity in diversity”.