

Religious Differences versus Social Oneness: Analyzing Dr. Asim's Concept for "Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan"

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This study has no aim to hurt any ideological or social segment but is purely based on academic purposes.

Abstract

While analyzing the religious differences in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, this study explores the significance of promoting social oneness in the context of these three states. This paper examines the religiosity and religious demographics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, highlighting the diverse religious groups present in each nation, aiming to address the following questions: Can the jointly administrative market between these three states facilitate social integration, solidarity, and a shared sense of belonging? Can it contribute to the development of positive relationships and equal opportunities for individuals from different backgrounds? How can engaged theory and structural functionalism be applied to promote social cohesion and stability in the region?

By investigating the Dr. Asim's concept of social oneness, which emphasizes a shared vision, inclusive communities, equal opportunities and supportive relationships, this paper argues that the jointly administrative market has the potential to foster these principles. Despite historical conflicts and religious differences, this paper contends that engaging all social segments in the region can lead to a shared prosperous future. By analyzing engaged theory and structural functionalism, the study explores the possibility of achieving unity and cooperation among the Afghanis, Iranians and Pakistanis. It also examines the potential economic, political and strategic implications of such a market, envisioning social integration, interfaith harmony and collective culture. Moreover, this study acknowledges criticisms of the proposal as utopian and politically challenging, but it emphasizes the importance of engaging different social segments to overcome conflicts and social exclusion. By examining the demographic and religious diversity in the region, this paper suggests that a jointly administrative market could lead to socio-cultural unification, shared objectives and structural cohesion.

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Introduction

The concept of social oneness and its significance in diverse societies has garnered considerable attention in academic discourse. In the context of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, where religious differences have

historically shaped societal dynamics, the notion of social oneness becomes particularly compelling. Dr. Asim, in his book “Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan: A Region through the lens of Resistive Economy”, proposes a jointly administrative market as a means to promote social relationships and shared prosperity among the Afghanis, Iranians and Pakistanis. Under the sheds of this concept, this study aims to critically analyze his concept, examining its potential implications and addressing key research questions regarding religiosity, religious demographics, and the feasibility of achieving social oneness in the region (Asim, 2023).

The significance of this topic lies in its potential to foster unity and cooperation in a region that has long grappled with religious tensions and social conflicts. By exploring the principles of social oneness as outlined by Dr. Asim, which include a shared vision, inclusion of diverse backgrounds, equal opportunities, and supportive relationships, this paper seeks to understand how the proposed jointly administrative market can contribute to these ideals. It also investigates the criticisms leveled against the concept, particularly the political challenges and the perceived utopian nature of achieving social oneness in such a complex context.

To provide a comprehensive analysis, the research begins by examining the religious demographics in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. These countries are home to a diverse range of religious groups, including Sunnis, Shias, Ismailis, Zikris, Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and others. Understanding the religious landscape is crucial for discerning the complexities that arise from religious differences and their potential impact on social integration and oneness. For this purpose, the works of various scholars, including Anthony Giddens, Carol J. Adams, John Hinkson, Geoff Sharp and Simon Cooper have been considered to analyze engaged theory and its applicability in societies characterized by ethnic diversity. It also explores the concept of structural functionalism to understand the potential for cooperation and stability within the proposed jointly administrative market. While conflict theorists and other critics argue against the feasibility of achieving social oneness in ethnically divided regions, this paper maintains that the proposal holds promise for fostering cohesion, harmony, and collective culture.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes a theoretical framework that encompasses engaged theory and structural functionalism to analyze the concept of social oneness and its feasibility in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. By drawing on the works of various scholars, including Anthony Giddens, Carol J. Adams, John Hinkson, Geoff Sharp and Simon Cooper, this study aims to examine the potential for unity, cooperation, and stability within the proposed jointly administrative market (Asghar, 2023).

Engaged theory, as conceptualized by Anthony Giddens, emphasizes the importance of active engagement and participation in social processes. Giddens argues that individuals have the capacity to shape and transform their social realities through intentional action. In the context of achieving social oneness, engaged theory provides a framework for understanding the role of individuals and communities in fostering social integration and collective culture. By actively participating in the jointly administrative market, individuals can contribute to building relationships, promoting inclusion, and fostering a sense of shared purpose and belonging (Asghar, 2023).

Furthermore, Carol J. Adams’ work on engaged theory and social justice adds another dimension to the analysis. Adams emphasizes the need for recognizing and challenging oppressive systems and structures that perpetuate social divisions. Her feminist perspective highlights the importance of dismantling

patriarchal norms and power imbalances, which are often intertwined with religious and cultural dynamics in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. By incorporating Adams' insights, this study seeks to explore how the proposed jointly administrative market can address and mitigate oppressive structures, thereby contributing to social oneness (Asghar, 2023).

Structural functionalism, as a sociological theory, provides another lens through which to analyze the potential for cooperation and stability within the proposed jointly administrative market. This theory, originally developed by scholars such as Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons, examines how social institutions and structures contribute to the overall functioning and equilibrium of a society. In the context of this study, structural functionalism offers insights into how the jointly administrative market can provide a framework for coordination, collaboration, and social order among diverse religious and ethnic groups. It explores the potential for the market to serve as a unifying force, promoting economic development, and shared prosperity while ensuring social stability (Asghar, 2023).

John Hinkson's critique of structural functionalism provides a critical perspective that acknowledges the limitations of the theory. Hinkson argues that structural functionalism tends to downplay conflicts and power struggles within societies, thereby obscuring the complexities and challenges of achieving social oneness. By incorporating Hinkson's critique, this study aims to provide a balanced analysis that recognizes both the potential benefits and limitations of the proposed jointly administrative market (Asghar, 2023).

Geoff Sharp and Simon Cooper, in their respective works on social integration and multiculturalism, contribute to the theoretical framework by examining the dynamics of diverse societies. They explore the complexities of managing cultural diversity, addressing the tensions that arise from religious differences, and proposing strategies for fostering social cohesion. By incorporating their insights, this research seeks to understand how the proposed jointly administrative market can navigate the complexities of religious diversity, promote social integration, and contribute to the collective well-being of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan (Asghar, 2023).

In fact, this theoretical framework combines engaged theory and structural functionalism to analyze the concept of social oneness in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. By drawing on the works of scholars such as Anthony Giddens, Carol J. Adams, John Hinkson, Geoff Sharp and Simon Cooper, this research aims to explore the potential for unity, cooperation and stability within the proposed jointly administrative market. By considering the insights and critiques of these scholars, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis that examines the possibilities and challenges of achieving social oneness in a region characterized by religious diversity (Asghar, 2023).

Religious Demographics in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, the religious landscape is primarily dominated by Islam. The majority of the population follows Sunni Islam, with approximately 80-85% of Afghans adhering to this branch of the religion. Within Sunni Islam, the Hanafi school of thought is the most prevalent. Additionally, a significant minority of the Afghan population, roughly 10-19%, practices Shia Islam, primarily belonging to the Twelver Shia branch. The Shia population is mainly concentrated in regions such as Herat, Kabul and Bamyan. Other religious

minority groups, including Sikhs, Hindus, and Christians, constitute a small percentage of the population (Nourani, 2023).

Iran

Iran is predominantly an Islamic country, with the majority of its population adhering to Shia Islam. Approximately 90-95% of Iranians are Shia Muslims, primarily following the Twelver Shia branch, which is the official state religion. Iran is home to numerous important Shia religious sites and institutions, including the holy cities of Qom and Mashhad. In addition to Shia Islam, there are small communities of Sunni Muslims, primarily residing in regions near the border with Afghanistan and Pakistan. Iran also has religious minority groups such as Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Baha'is, although they represent a minority percentage of the population (Naqvi, 2023).

Pakistan

Islam is the dominant religion in Pakistan, with the majority of the population identifying as Muslims. Approximately 85-90% of Pakistanis follow Islam, with the majority being Sunni Muslims. Within Sunni Islam, various schools of thought, including Hanafi, Shafi'i, and Deobandi, are represented in the country. A significant minority, comprising around 10-15% of the population, practices Shia Islam. The Shia population is mainly concentrated in regions such as Gilgit-Baltistan, Skardu, and parts of Karachi. Pakistan also has religious minority communities, including Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Ahmadis, and Parsis, among others (Sheikh, 2023).

What is the Dr. Asim's Concept of "Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan"?

Dr. Asim's concept of "Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan" revolves around the idea of promoting social oneness and fostering positive relationships among the people of these three countries. According to Dr. Asim, social oneness refers to the presence of a shared vision, inclusive communities with diverse backgrounds, equal opportunities, and supportive relationships. It aims to create a sense of belonging and coordination among the Afghans, Iranians and Pakistanis, leading to a shared prosperous future (Asim, 2023).

The concept of social oneness was introduced in the UK after the 2001 England riots and has since been refined by various scholars globally. However, it has faced criticism for being perceived as political in nature and difficult to implement. Dr. Asim argues that the jointly administrative market between Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan has the potential to execute the principles of social oneness, particularly in the face of external sanctions and restrictions imposed by international bodies. Moreover, by establishing a jointly administrative market, Dr. Asim believes that it can lead to social integration, solidarity, and the formation of a regional group among the Afghans, Iranians and Pakistanis. It is expected to undermine social conflicts and exclusions, foster a sense of belonging, and promote coordination and shared emotions. Furthermore, this market can contribute to structural cohesion by aligning Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan within the global economic, political and strategic frameworks. While some skeptics argue that social oneness in this context may be a utopian idea, Dr. Asim emphasizes the importance of engaging social segments, embracing multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, and striving for a shared vision of unity and prosperity. By examining engaged theory and ensuring structural functionalism, the concept aims to overcome ethnic differences, promote social engagement, and envision a collective future for the region (Asim, 2023).

Overcoming Religious Differences by Romanticizing?

To harmonize the theocratic, extremist, or militant nature of certain socio-religious segments, this concept suggests engaging social segments through shared economic endeavors and regional cooperation. By creating opportunities for economic integration and interdependence, it is believed that individuals and communities will be motivated to prioritize their shared interests and objectives over religious differences. While specific surveys focusing on this concept are limited, there are studies and examples that highlight the potential for religious harmony and normalization in the region. For instance, studies on interfaith dialogue initiatives, peace-building efforts, and community engagement programs have shown positive outcomes in reducing religious tensions and promoting peaceful coexistence. Additionally, historical examples such as the Indus Valley civilization and the rich cultural heritage of the region demonstrate a history of religious diversity and pluralism. These examples can serve as inspiration for fostering mutual respect, tolerance, and understanding among different religious communities (Asim, 2023).

This is universally recognized within the social sciences academia that overcoming religious differences and promoting harmony requires a multi-faceted approach. This includes educational initiatives that promote religious tolerance, interfaith dialogue platforms, and policies that protect religious freedom and ensure equal rights for all citizens. While the concept of “Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan” does not provide a comprehensive roadmap for addressing religious differences, critically it emphasizes the significance of social engagement, economic integration, and a shared vision of progress and prosperity. By focusing on commonalities, fostering dialogue and providing platforms for inclusive participation, it aims to create an environment conducive to peace, progress, and the harmonization of religious differences among the inhabitants of the three states (Asim, 2023).

Facilitating Social Integration, Solidarity, and a Shared Sense of Belonging?

The jointly administrative market between Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan has the potential to facilitate social integration, solidarity, and a shared sense of belonging among the inhabitants of these three states. When examining the religious demographics in these countries, it becomes evident that while there are religious differences, there is also a significant presence of diverse religious communities. This diversity provides an opportunity for the jointly administrative market to promote inclusivity and foster a sense of unity among the various socio-religious segments (Asim, 2023).

In Afghanistan, religious demographics include Sunni-Hanafi, Twelver-Shia, Ismaili-Shia, Wahabi or Salafi, Hindu, Sikh, Christian, and other religious communities (Nourani, 2023). Similarly, Iran is home to Twelver-Shia, Sunni-Hanafi, Sunni-Shafi, Wahabi or Salafi, Zikris, Zoroastrians, Armenian Catholic Christians, Georgian Orthodox Christians, Bahai, Yarsani, Mendeans, and other religious groups (Naqvi, 2023). Pakistan, on the other hand, represents Sunni-Hanafi, Twelver-Shia, Ismaili-Shia, Zikris, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Russian Orthodox Christians, Zoroastrians, Sikhs, Hindus, and other communities (Sheikh, 2023).

The presence of diverse religious communities in these three states presents an opportunity for the jointly administrative market to foster social integration. By creating an environment that appreciates and values the diversity of people’s different religious backgrounds, the market can promote a sense of belonging and inclusivity among the inhabitants. It can encourage interactions, dialogue, and cooperation among individuals from different religious communities, leading to a shared vision and common goals. Moreover,

the jointly administrative market can contribute to the development of social solidarity by generating awareness about unity and shared commonalities among the inhabitants. By providing equal opportunities for socio-economic engagement, the market can bridge divides and foster positive relationships between people from different religious backgrounds. Additionally, the jointly administrative market can play a crucial role in harmonizing the theocratic, extremist, or militant nature that exists in certain socio-religious segments within these three countries. Through its inclusive and participatory nature, the market can provide a platform for dialogue and collaboration, enabling individuals and communities to address their differences peacefully and work towards a shared vision of peace, progress, and prosperity (Asim, 2023).

To support this perspective, several surveys and studies have highlighted the potential of economic integration in promoting social cohesion and reducing religious tensions. For example, a survey conducted by Pak-Iran Intellectuals Forum (Islamabad and Qom) in 2020 revealed that a significant percentage of respondents from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan believed that increased economic cooperation among the three countries could positively impact social integration and interfaith understanding. The survey emphasized the importance of cross-border trade, investment and people-to-people exchanges in fostering mutual respect and trust among religiously diverse communities (Noor-ul-Ain, 2023).

Furthermore, research conducted by the students of Shaanxi University (China) in 2019 explored the role of economic interdependence in reducing religious extremism in the region. The study found that regions with higher levels of economic integration tend to have lower incidences of religious conflict and radicalization. It highlighted the potential of economic collaboration and joint ventures to create shared economic interests that transcend religious divisions and promote a sense of collective identity and mutual benefit (Saeed, 2023).

Therefore, it has been examined that the jointly administrative market between Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan holds the potential to facilitate social integration, solidarity, and a shared sense of belonging. By recognizing and appreciating the religious diversity within these countries, the market can serve as a catalyst for overcoming religious differences, harmonizing socio-religious segments, and promoting peace, progress and prosperity. Through surveys and studies, it is evident that economic integration can contribute significantly to reducing religious tensions and fostering interfaith understanding. The jointly administrative market can serve as a platform for dialogue, cooperation, and normalization, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and harmonious society in the three states.

Developing Positive Relationships and Equal Opportunities for Individuals from Different Backgrounds in the Three States?

The concept of “Romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan” by a proposed jointly administrative market has the potential to contribute to the development of positive relationships and equal opportunities for individuals from different backgrounds. By promoting economic cooperation and integration, the market can create a conducive environment that encourages collaboration, mutual understanding, and respect among individuals belonging to diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

- 1) Firstly, the market can facilitate increased economic interactions, trade, and investments among Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. This can lead to the establishment of business partnerships, joint ventures, and cross-border employment opportunities. Such economic integration can create a

shared economic space where individuals from different backgrounds can work together, fostering social interactions, and promoting a sense of interdependence and common interests (Asim, 2023).

- 2) Secondly, the jointly administrative market can help address economic disparities and inequalities among the three countries. By providing equal opportunities for individuals to participate in economic activities, access resources, and benefit from economic growth, it can contribute to reducing socioeconomic disparities that often intersect with religious, ethnic, or cultural divisions. This can lead to a more inclusive and equitable society, where individuals have a fair chance to succeed and thrive, irrespective of their background (Asim, 2023).

Moreover, the market can serve as a platform for promoting dialogue, cultural exchange, and collaboration. Through various initiatives such as business forums, trade exhibitions, and cultural festivals, individuals from different backgrounds can come together, share their experiences, learn from each other, and build trust and understanding. Such interactions can help break down stereotypes, challenge biases, and foster positive relationships based on mutual respect and appreciation for diversity. Additionally, the concept of the jointly administrative market can promote the development of common frameworks, policies, and regulations that ensure equal opportunities and protect the rights of individuals from different backgrounds. This can include measures to address discrimination, promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace, and provide access to education, healthcare, and social services for all (Asim, 2023).

Applying Engaged Theory and Structural Functionalism regarding Promoting Social Cohesion and Stability in the Region?

To apply engaged theory and structural functionalism in promoting social cohesion and stability in the region, the following strategies can be considered;

- **Encouraging active civic engagement**
Promote platforms for open dialogue, citizen participation, and community involvement in decision-making processes. This can include town hall meetings, community forums, and participatory initiatives that allow individuals to voice their concerns, contribute ideas, and actively shape policies and practices (Umm-e-Zahra, 2023).
- **Addressing social inequalities**
Identify and address structural barriers, such as socioeconomic disparities, access to resources, and unequal distribution of power. Implement policies and programs that aim to reduce inequality, ensure equal opportunities, and promote social mobility for all individuals in the region (Umm-e-Zahra, 2023).
- **Promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding**
Facilitate cultural exchanges, educational programs, and initiatives that foster understanding, respect, and appreciation for diverse cultures, religions, and traditions. This can help bridge gaps, break down stereotypes, and promote a sense of shared identity and belonging (Umm-e-Zahra, 2023).
- **Strengthening social institutions**
Focus on strengthening key social institutions such as education, healthcare, and justice systems. Ensure these institutions are accessible, inclusive, and capable of meeting the needs of all

individuals, irrespective of their background. This can help build trust, legitimacy, and a sense of security within society (Umm-e-Zahra, 2023).

- **Building social networks and community resilience**

Foster the development of social networks and community-based organizations that promote social cohesion, cooperation, and mutual support. Encourage collaboration and collective action to address common challenges and promote shared goals (Umm-e-Zahra, 2023).

By applying engaged theory and structural functionalism in these ways, it is possible to promote social cohesion and stability in the region. These approaches recognize the importance of active engagement, addressing structural barriers, and fostering a sense of belonging and collective well-being. Through these efforts, individuals and communities can work together to create a more harmonious and stable social environment.

Expected Critics on Dr. Asim's Concept

Possible criticisms of the concept of "romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan" through establishing a jointly administrative market can be analyzed from different perspectives. Some scholars have argued that these countries, or at least one or two of them, have been associated with war economies and illicit activities. They perceive them as hubs for illegal trade, smuggling, and the exploitation of natural resources in conflict zones (Asghar, 2023).

One scholar who has discussed the concept of war economies is Paul Collier, an economist and author known for his work on the economic causes and consequences of civil war. In his book "The Bottom Billion," Collier argues that countries affected by conflict, such as Afghanistan, can become trapped in a cycle of violence and economic exploitation, where resources are controlled by armed groups and contribute to further instability (Asghar, 2023).

Similarly, some scholars have criticized Iran and Pakistan for their alleged support or tolerance of militant groups. For instance, Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid has extensively written about the rise of militant groups in Pakistan and their connection to the state's security apparatus. He argues that Pakistan's policy of using militants as proxies for its regional interests has fueled extremism and undermined efforts to establish peace and stability (Asghar, 2023).

Regarding Iran, scholar Vali Nasr has analyzed the influence of Iran's theocratic regime and its role in promoting a conservative agenda both domestically and regionally. Nasr argues that Iran's support for militant groups, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, has contributed to sectarian tensions and destabilized the region (Asghar, 2023).

These criticisms highlight concerns about the potential challenges and obstacles that may arise when attempting to establish a jointly administrative market among Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. They raise questions about the feasibility of collaboration and economic integration in the presence of deep-rooted socio-political issues, including war economies, militancy and conservatism. However, they underscore the need for careful consideration of the complex dynamics and challenges that may arise when seeking to promote economic cooperation and stability in the region. By acknowledging these concerns and addressing them proactively, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards mitigating the risks and fostering an environment conducive to positive change, peace and progress.

Concluding Remarks

“Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict - alternatives to passive or aggressive responses, alternatives to violence”.

(Dorothy Thompson)

During writing this research paper that is based on book review, the concept of “romanticizing Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan” through the establishment of a jointly administrative market has been examined from various angles, taking into account religious demographics, social integration, and the potential for positive relationships and equal opportunities. While it holds promise for fostering social cohesion, stability, and shared prosperity in the region, it is crucial to address and overcome the criticisms and challenges that may arise (Asghar, 2023).

Through a comprehensive understanding of the religious demographics in these three states, we have recognized the diversity and complexity of the populations, their beliefs, and their practices. By acknowledging these differences and promoting a culture of tolerance, respect, and inclusivity, the jointly administrative market can contribute to the development of positive relationships and a sense of shared belonging among individuals from different backgrounds. However, it is important to be mindful of the socio-political realities and potential obstacles that may hinder progress. Scholars like Paul Collier, Ahmed Rashid, and Vali Nasr have highlighted the presence of war economies, the association of these countries with militancy, and the influence of conservatism. These factors require careful consideration and proactive measures to ensure that the establishment of a jointly administrative market does not inadvertently support or perpetuate these negative dynamics (Asghar, 2023).

To promote social cohesion and stability in the region, engaged theory and structural functionalism offer valuable frameworks. By addressing systemic inequalities, promoting social justice, and fostering inclusive institutions, these theories can help overcome religious differences, harmonize the extremist elements, and normalize the socio-religious segments. Such efforts can pave the way for a more peaceful, progressive, and prosperous future. However, it is crucial to engage all stakeholders, including governments, civil society organizations, religious leaders and the international community, in collaborative efforts to address the criticisms and challenges that have been raised. By recognizing the potential risks and working collectively to mitigate them, we can create an enabling environment for positive change and transformation (Asghar, 2023).

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