
Sectarian Conflicts in Pakistan

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Abstract

The history of sectarian conflict in Pakistan is as old as the existence of this country. Yet, the intensification of sectarian divide in Pakistan was observed during late 1970s and early 1980s because of domestic political changes and the implications of Islamic revolution in Iran and the subsequent adverse reaction in some Arab countries to the assumption of power by clergy operating from the holy city of Qum. The military regime of General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, which seized power on July 5, 1977 pursued a policy of 'Islamization' resulting into the deepening of sectarian divide between Sunnis and Shiites on the one hand and among different Sunni groups on the other. This paper attempts to analytically examine the dynamics of sectarian conflict in Pakistan by responding to following issues: The background of sectarian divide in Pakistan and how sectarian polarization between the Sunni and Shitte communities impacted on state and society; the phenomenon of religious extremism and intolerance led to the emergence of sectarian violence in Pakistan; the state of Pakistan failed to curb sectarian conflict and polarization at the societal level promoted the forces of religious extremism; the role of external factors in augmenting sectarian divide in Pakistan and foreign forces got a free hand to launch their proxy war in Pakistan on sectarian grounds; and strategies should be formulated to deal with the challenge of sectarian violence in Pakistan.

1. Introduction

Sectarian issue in Pakistan is a major destabilizing factor in the country's political, social, religious and security order. While causing unrest, disorder and violence in society, the sectarian conflict in Pakistan for the last 27 years resulted into thousands of deaths from suicide attacks, bomb blasts, assassinations and other terrorist acts. The state actors, instead of seeking the management and resolution of a conflict, which has divided Muslims on sectarian grounds, tried to exploit the issue for political objectives. Regardless of scattered events of Shia-Sunni discord, sectarian harmony in Pakistan was a model of tolerance and brotherhood amongst different sects in the religion of Islam.

While Shias constitute roughly 15-20% of the population of Sunni dominated Pakistan, that community lived in harmony and peace until early 1980s when a series of events triggered sectarian violence. If viewed historically, the Shia community struggled side by side with the Sunni majority in the anti-Ahmadi movement of 1974. While the Ahmadis were declared as non-Muslims by the Parliament of Pakistan, the Shia community observed with eagerness the central role played by the clergy of Iran in the massive popular uprising against the Shah. The Islamic Revolution of February 1979 was a watershed in mobilizing the Shias of Pakistan for an assertive role in state and society.

From any standpoint, the history of sectarian conflict in Pakistan is as old as the existence of this country. Yet, the intensification of sectarian divide in Pakistan was observed during late 1970s and early 1980s because of domestic political changes and the implications of Islamic revolution in Iran and the subsequent adverse reaction in some Arab countries to the assumption of power by clergy operating from the holy city of Qom. The military regime of General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, which seized power on July 5, 1977 pursued a policy of using religion for political purposes by unleashing a process of 'Islamization' resulting into the deepening of sectarian divide between Sunnis and Shiites on the one hand and among different Sunni groups on the other. As rightly argued by an analyst on conflict and dispute resolution, "he (Zia) followed a policy of Sunni sectarianism, which witnessed mushrooming of madrassas all over Pakistan. In 1984 when the Saudi Arabian government demanded that the Pakistani army replace Shia soldiers in Pakistani army units based in Saudi Arabia with Sunni soldiers, General Zia-ul-Haq

decided to withdraw the entire contingent of Pakistani troops from that country".¹ Yet despite almost two decades of the post-Zia era, there is no end to sectarian polemics and hatred, which under the state patronage of Zia-ul-Haq weakened the national unity of Pakistan.

This paper attempts to analytically examine the important dynamics of sectarian conflict in Pakistan by responding to following questions:-

1. *What is Sectarian conflict and how it has permeated in Pakistani society?*
2. *What is the background of sectarian divide in Pakistan and how sectarian polarization between the Sunni and Shitte communities impacted on state and society?*
3. *How the phenomenon of religious extremism and intolerance led to the emergence of sectarian violence in Pakistan?*
4. *Why the state of Pakistan failed to curb sectarian conflict and how polarization at the societal level promoted the forces of religious extremism?*
5. *What is the role of external factors in augmenting sectarian divide in Pakistan and why foreign forces got a free hand to launch their proxy war in Pakistan on sectarian grounds?*
6. *What plausible strategies should be formulated to deal with the challenge of sectarian violence in Pakistan?*

Pakistan as the second largest Muslim country of the world is facing an uphill task of curbing intolerance, hate, extremism and violence targeting Shia or Sunni communities. Sunni population in Pakistan is 75-80% of the total population while the Shia population is roughly 20%. Since early 1980s, when sectarian violence got an impetus in Pakistan till today, thousands of people have been killed in sectarian violence in different parts of the country. Countless

suicide attacks at the religious sites of Sunnis and Shiites not only deepened religious schism but also led to the assassination of hundreds of professionals from the two sides. Sectarian groups, which emerged during 1980s and early 1990s, pursued a policy of annihilating each other. The worst part of sectarian violence in Pakistan is periodic attack on each other's mosques and religious schools by various extremist Shia and Sunni groups. By late 1980s, as a result of sustained violence against each other, a stage came when some Sunni and Shia groups began to declare each other as non-Muslims. By attacking each other's religious beliefs, various Sunni and Shiite leaders augmented instability and crisis at the societal level.

According to the Brussels based International Crisis Group (IGC), "sectarian conflict in Pakistan is the direct consequence of state policies of Islamization and the marginalization of secular democratic forces. Instead of empowering liberal, democratic voices, the government has co-opted the religious right and continues to rely on it to counter civilian opposition. The political use of Islam by the state promotes an aggressive competition for official patronage between and within the many variations of Sunni and Shia Islam, with the clerical elite of major sects and sub-sects striving to build up their political parties, raise *jihadi* militias, expand madrassa networks and, as has happened on Musharraf's watch, become a part of the government."² According to the IGC report, "like all other Pakistani military governments, the Musharraf administration has also weakened secular and democratic political forces. Administrative and legal action against militant organizations has failed to dismantle a well-entrenched and widely spread terror infrastructure. All banned extremist groups persist with new labels, although old names are also still in use. The *jihadi* media is flourishing, and the leading figures of extremist Sunni organizations are free to preach their *jihadi* ideologies. The banned groups such as the *Lashkar-e-Taiba*, the *Siphae Sahaba* and the *Jash-e-Mohammad* appear to enjoy virtual immunity from the law. They have gained new avenues to propagate their militant ideas since the chief patrons of *jihad*, the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam* (JUI) and the *Jamaat-e-Islami*, have acquired prominent and powerful roles in Musharraf's political structure."³ The IGC report blaming the state of Pakistan of promoting sectarian violence is contrary to the claims made by Islamabad that the Musharraf regime is deadly against sectarianism and has taken numerous measures to cut various sectarian groups to their size. Particularly since September 11,

2001, the government has launched a massive crackdown on various religious extremist groups, including sectarian groups and is pursuing a policy of 'enlightened moderation.' Have the policy makers of Pakistan took any notice of the findings of IGC's report was its deliberations were ignored by them because to a large extent the state structures of this country are not receptive to ideas and suggestions which can bring qualitative change in the society. Following a policy of divide and rule is their age-old practice and any deviation from such type of an approach is considered by the people at the helm of affairs as detrimental to their interests.

External factors like the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Saudi role of promoting Wahabi sect of Islam and the involvement of hard-line religious groups of Afghanistan in Pakistan's internal politics further complicated the sectarian conflict. The support rendered by Iran, Saudi Arabia and some other Muslim countries to various Shiite and Sunni groups of Pakistan resulted into the outbreak of sectarian proxy war. One needs to contemplate *how* the menace of sectarian polarization and violence in Pakistan could be tactfully handled and *why the* fault lines in sectarian conflict have not been properly dealt so far? If the state of Pakistan and its apparatus seriously try to weed out the terrorist and violent elements from various Sunni and Shiite groups and curb external hand in fanning sectarian feelings, much can be done to sort out things which cause and promote sectarian violence in the country. Why the state of Pakistan couldn't redeem the ramifications of its Afghan policy during the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan when hundreds of thousands of local and foreign *Jihadis* following strict Sunni teaching were given a free hand. The post-Soviet military withdrawal period in Afghanistan witnessed the mushrooming of various Wahabi groups who preached hatred against Shiias not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan.

II. Dynamics of Sectarian Divide

Internal dynamics

According to a well-researched study on Sectarian conflict in Pakistan with a case study of Jhang district in the province of Pakistan, Mutktar Ahmed argues that the, "nature of Shia-Sunni violence under the British was radically different than it had been under the earlier Muslim empires or caliphates. Previously, it was always a conflict either between the established Sunni authorities

and anti-status quo Shia denomination (that is Ummayeds/ Abbasides vs. followers of Fatimid dynasties) or between the Sunni-Shia dynasties or caliphates (that is, Mughals vs. the Shia dynasties of Deccan and Abbasides vs. Fatmides in Egypt). Unlike the alien rule of the British, the conflict declined to communities' level, involving the general public and theologians alike in sectarian violence. The role of the government was limited to that of arbiter, enforcer of law or manipulator, if so required, in the larger colonial interests. However, the state was secular and largely unrepresentative and, therefore, the use of sectarian idiom was limited to the purpose of self-identification"⁴ But, after the creation of Pakistan on August 14, 1947, the Shia-Sunni relations were not ideal but shrouded with mistrust and suspicion against each other. Muslims from India, who migrated to Pakistan after the partition of August 1947 brought with them the baggage of sectarian bias and hatred. Yet the two communities lived side by side and there were very few incidents of sectarian violence causing physical casualties of the two sides.

It was only after the controversial process of Islamization unleashed by the military ruler of Pakistan, General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq that sectarian conflict took a violent turn. Zia's policy to introduce Islamic Sharia, which is termed as a radical brand of Sunni Hanifi system of jurisprudence, shattered the bond of unity between Shias and Sunni communities. The imposition of Zakat in Pakistan by the regime of Zia-ul-Haq in 1980 was vehemently resisted by Shia leader. An important Shia cleric, Mufti Jaafar Husain (1916-1983) argued that if Pakistan was to have Islamic law, the Shi'a should be allowed to follow their own jurisprudence known as Jaafariya *fiqh* after the sixth Shi'a imam Jafar al-Sadiq.⁵ The sectarian lines were clearly drawn as the Shias in Pakistan inspired by the Iranian Islamic revolution refused to subscribe to the Sunni based Shariah laws and demanded that their identity as a separate sect in Islam must be recognized.

The Shia-Sunni conflict in Pakistan has more economic rationale than religious or political. Particularly in the district of Jhang of Punjab, the worse phase of sectarian bloodshed was the outcome of grievances held by the peasants belonging to the Sunni sect and the feudal landlords belonging to the Shia sect. The economy of Jhang was primarily controlled by the feudal Shias. "The primary economic move against the Shias assumed sectarian and cultural dimensions when entrepreneurs of Sunni movement of Haq Nawaz Jhangvi emphasized on the cultural differences between

the Sunnis and Shias. *The Sipha-e-Sahaba Pakistan* (SSP), Army of the companions of last Prophet (PBUH) which was formed in reaction to *Thereek-e-Fiq-e-Jafariya* (Movement for the Implementation of Shia law) in early 1980s demanded that Shias should be declared as non-Muslims. Another Shia organization called as *Sipah-e-Muhammadi Pakistan* (SMP) was formed which also pursued a militant course against the Sunni community. *Laskhar-e-Jhangvi* (LJ) an anti-Shia militant Sunni organization with its base in Jhang was formed in 1995 as a break-away faction of SSP.”⁶

Prior to that, on September 6, 1985, Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, a Deobandi alim (scholar) of *Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam* (JUI) (F) founded *Anjuman Sipha-i-Sahaba Pakistan* (ASSP) later renamed as *Siphah-I-Sahaba Pakistan* (SSP) in Jhang. It was the first organized Sunni Party with an overt objective to defend the honor of Sahaba and counter what Maulana Jhangvi perceived as the increasing Shia activism under the impact of the Iranian revolution. He formally demanded the Pakistan government to declare Shias non-Muslims. He also asserted that Pakistan, with majority Sunni population, be declared a Sunni State, as, Shias with Shia majority Iran was a Shia State. He resented that, while in Iran no Sunni was allowed under the constitution to hold key state officer, no such restriction was placed on Shias in Pakistan.”⁷ According to Dr. Mohammad Waseem, a Pakistani political scientist, “the social base of sectarian conflict has significantly expanded because of the following factors:

1. The use of print media.
2. Accessibility to the means of electronic communications.
3. Better transport services which have increased mobility of sectarian activists. It helps people from district areas to join sectarian networks, generate funds and plan concerted political activities at the provincial and national levels.”⁸

With substantial motivation, funding, training and networking various sectarian groups in Pakistan were set for a show down. Incidents of sectarian killings became a common feature in Pakistan since mid-1980s. Those killed in Shia-Sunni violence in Pakistan

included, religious leaders, prominent personalities, lawyers, doctors and even small children.⁹ A Deobandi cleric, Maulana Saleemullah Khan, founded *Sawad-e-Azam Ahle-Sunni* (Greater Unity of the Sunnis) in 1980, demanding that Pakistan be declared a Sunni state and that the Shi'a be declared non-Muslims.¹⁰ Soon after, sectarian riots broke out in Karachi and *Sawad-e-Azam* followers attacked Shi'a houses and religious gatherings. The *Sawad-e-Azam* created a major Sunni Sectarian group, *Anjuman-e-Sipah-e-Sahaba* (ASS) or Society of the Army of the Prophet's Companions.¹¹ SSP centered its struggle to confront with Shias and to declare them a non-Muslim minority like the Ahmadis. General Zia's regime saw the SSP as a check on the rise of Shia influence and gave it a free hand. Soon covert links were established between SSP and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) which managed official Pakistani support of Jihadi operations in Afghanistan and Indian-controlled Kashmir.¹² Therefore, the deepening of Shia-Sunni polemics had taken place during the initial and middle era of Zia's material law but it can also be argued that if Shia militancy in Pakistan was the outcome of Zia's controversial policy of Islamization, the Sunni militancy was in reaction to Shia assertion backed by Iran. Yet, one cannot exonerate the faulty approach of the regimes of Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif and Pervez Musharraf as all the three instead of establishing the writ of the state in areas badly affected because of sectarian violence, tried to cover up things. Predictably, sectarian groups crossed the thin line between political struggle and terrorism and resorted to worst kind of killings and various terrorist acts.

External Dynamics

The assertion of militant Sunni and Shia Islam is also the outcome of external factors. Iran and Saudi Arabia were held responsible for fighting their proxy sectarian war in Pakistan. The imposition of *Fiqah-i-Jafria* in Iran by Ayotullah Khomeini and the fear of a revolution spillover in the neighboring countries led the Arab world, particularly Iraq and Saudi Arabia, to a confrontational path with Tehran. This perceived fear engaged Iran and Saudi Arabia in a proxy war for religio-political influence and clout in Pakistan, Afghanistan and the newly independent Muslim republics of Central Asia.¹³ In 1998, a new sectarian group called as *Sunni Tehrik* (movement) was established in Karachi under the leadership of Maulana Saleem Qadri. It needs to be mentioned that in a deadly

suicide attack in Karachi in a religious gathering organized by the Sunni Tehrik on April 11, 2006, its entire leadership was wiped out. According to a Pakistani analyst now based in the United States,

The Iranians were, most likely, assisting Pakistani's Shi'a with money and Ziaul Haq invited the Saudis to help Sunni sectarian groups. The Afghan *Jihad* had already resulted in the free flow of arms and military training for Sunni Islamists. Soon, some of these Sunni militants were attacking the Shia'a in an effort to purify Pakistan of their heterodoxy. Shi'a militias emerged to fight the Sunni extremists with similar tactics. During the last twenty-five years, nearly two thousand people have been killed, and thousands more maimed, in attacks by zealots of the rival sects in Pakistan. Between 1989 and 2004, 688 people were killed in 1,837 reported incidents of sectarian conflicts. In 2005, sixty-two incidents resulted in 160 deaths, and in the first three months of 2006, six incidents occurred in which 136 people were reportedly killed.¹⁴

Therefore, the two external events, which had a substantial role in shaping the dynamics of sectarian conflict in Pakistan were the anti-Soviet *Jihad* launched by a conglomeration of Afghan Mujahideen groups and second the Iranian revolution which overthrew monarchy but established a Shi'a ideological state. Nevertheless, "the Iranian revolution had a multifold impact. The first seizure of power by an avowedly Islamist group in an Islamic revolution brought Iran's Shi'a clergy to power and energized Shi'a all over the Middle East, particularly those in the Gulf states. Saudi Arabia's monarchy was wedded to Wahabism, and the Sunni rulers of all the Gulf states had suppressed their Shi'a minorities since the emergence of the modern Middle East."¹⁵ Furthermore, "the Iranian government threatened the Saudis and their allies with its rhetoric of exporting the Iranian revolution. The Iranians also provided overt and covert assistance to Shi'a organizations and movements. The Gulf states retaliated by emphasizing the heresy of Shi'ism in an effort to mobilize their Sunni and Wahabi base. When Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussain invaded Iran, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf

monarchies supported him as a defender of Sunni Arab interests in the face of Shi'a Persian threats. Sunni Islamist groups in the Gulf forgave Hussein's past attacks on Islamic observance and his repression of such groups as the Muslim Brotherhood."¹⁶ Iran challenged Saudi Arabia's pre-eminent position and status in the Muslim world. This led to large-scale pan-Islamization attempts by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, as well as by Libya and Iraq, to export Sunni-Wahabi Islamism to other parts of the Muslim world. Pakistan was called as a main battleground in Iran-Saudi battle.¹⁷

In 1984, the Deobandi scholar Muhammad Manzur Numani wrote a tract asserting that the excesses of the Iranian revolution proved that Shiism was un-Islamic. The preface to his work was written by Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi, rector of the Nadwatul Ulema and recipient of Saudi Arabia's King Faisal Prize for Service to Islam. Another pro-Saudi religious leader in Pakistan, Asrar Ahmed went so far as to argue that Shiism, which originated soon after the demise of Prophet Mohammad, was part of an early Jewish conspiracy against Islam."¹⁸ Unfortunately, Iran and Saudi Arabia, the two Muslim countries, but following different sects of Islam, failed to understand that their political confrontation would create instability in other Muslim countries and endanger the sectarian harmony. Iran-Iraq war, which continued for eight long years further, weakened the position of Muslim countries and inducted an element of sectarianism. The fallout of the Iran-Iraq war was also to be seen in Pakistan, which became a battleground of Sunni-dominated regime of Saddam Hussain and the Shiite state of Iran. Both countries were able to fund their proxies in Pakistan who used sectarian card so as to accomplish their vested interests. Furthermore, Pakistan became an easy battleground of Iran and Saudi Arabia of supporting their respective sectarian groups with money and political indoctrination while the state of Pakistan miserably failed to prevent foreign intervention resulting into the outbreak of sectarian violence in the country.

The Shi'a clergy of Iran and Pakistan were linked historically, but these links became politicized only after the Iranian revolution of 1179. The changing role of the Shi'a Imamia Student's Organization (ISO) provides an example of the new reality. Before 1979, the group began offering scholarships to Shi'a students to study in Iran. The increased contacts between Pakistani Shi'a students and clergy and their Iranian counterparts created a cadre of politicized Shi'a leaders. TNFJ founder, Jaafar Husain, was

succeeded as the leader of the Pakistani Shi'a by Allama Arif Hussan al-Husani (1947-88), who had studied at Shia's academies in Najaf, Iraq and Qom, Iran. Husaini had come into close contact with Ayatollah Khomeini in both places. When Sunni sectarian terrorism began during the 1980s, Iranian diplomats in Pakistan were among its targets. In the minds of Sunni sectarian militants, Pakistan's Shi'a groups and Iran were closely linked.¹⁹ The end of Iran-Iraq war in 1988, the Soviet military withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989, the internal power struggle in Afghanistan following the Soviet withdrawal, the emergence of hardcore Wahabi Taliban and their seizure of power in 1996 and other subsequent events transformed the sectarian conflict in Pakistan. The level of polarization at the sectarian level augmented with the rise of splinter groups of various Shia and Sunni religious organizations. External factor is still relevant as far as sectarian violence in Pakistan is concerned, but its intensity has decreased. In the recent past, Iraq has emerged as a major battleground of Shia and Sunni communities with the alleged involvement of Iran in support of Iraqi Arab Shia groups growing with the passage of time.

The new paradigms of sectarian conflicts

Since 1980s onwards, Pakistan has experienced sustained sectarian violence resulting into the killing and injury of thousands of people. Four important flashpoints, which emerged since 1980s in the context of sectarian violence in Pakistan are:-

1. Karachi
2. Jhang
3. Quetta
4. Lahore

Some of the facts discussed below may provide shocking information about the havoc played by the menace of sectarian violence in Pakistan.

- In March 2005, 43 Shias were killed in a bomb blast in Fatehpur. On May 27, 2005, twenty people were killed in a suicide bombing in Pakistan targeting the

Sufi Shrine of Bari Imam, Islamabad.²⁰ In May 2005, six employees of a fast-food restaurant were burnt to death in Karachi during a riot that followed a suicide attack on a mosque. Shiites set on fire the restaurant after the mosque attack in which at least five people were killed.

- The year 2004 was one of the bloodiest on record in terms of sectarian violence in Pakistan with more than 200 killings. 15 people were killed in a Karachi Shia mosque attack in May 2004. On May 30 in Karachi an elderly Sunni cleric Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai was shot dead; 30 people were killed in a suicide attack on a Shia mosque in Sialkot in October 2004. A car bomb killed 40 Sunnis in Multan in October 2004.²¹ On October 10, a Shia mosque in Lahore was the target of a terrorist attack. A bomb was blasted at the entrance of the Husaini Hall mosque when a suicidal bomber detonated a device as people had gathered for evening prayer. The incident killed two security guards and four others including a boy of 13 years old. On May 14, six members of a Shia family were shot dead.²²
- July 4, 2003 in Quetta, Balochistan, fifty-four Shias were killed in an Imambargah in Quetta. In October 2003, Islamabad faced a spell of violence when a prominent Sunni leader, Maulana Azam Tariq, the leader of Milat-e-Islamiya was gunned down. Around 100 people were killed in Sectarian violence during the year 2003.

According to the BBC news report of September 28, 2005, around 4,000 people have been killed in the past 25 years of sectarian violence in Pakistan.

Major players in the Sectarian conflict

S. No	Name of Player	Type	Role
01	STATE	Neutral but sometimes taking sides	Blamed of not controlling the sectarian violence
02	MILLAT-E-ISLAMIQUE PAKISTAN (MIP) previously known as Sipah-Sahaba-Pakistan banned by the Musharraf regime	Sunni	Held responsible for fanning sectarian conflict
03	LASKHAR-E-JHANGVI	Sunni (Banned by the Musharraf regime)	Involved in targeting Shias
04	ISLAMI TAHRIK-E-PAKISTAN (ITP) previously known as Tehrik-I-Jaffaria-Pakistan	Shiite	Militant Shia organization held responsible for targeting Sunnis
05	SIPAH-E-MUHAMMADI PAKISTAN (SMP)	Shiite (Banned)	Militant Shia organization
06	SIPHAH-I-SAHABA PAKISTAN	Sunni (Banned)	Militant Sunni organization
07	SUNNI TEHRİK	Brelvi Sunni	To counter the influence of Deobandi and Wahabi Sunni groups

III. The Way Out?

It seems the sectarian divide in Pakistan cannot be removed without pursuing a policy of pragmatic realism. A policy of peaceful coexistence and reconciliation is essential so as to manage, if not resolve, sectarian conflicts in Pakistan. What strategies should be formulated and adopted in order to deal with sectarian violence in Pakistan and to bridge the gap between the two major Muslim

groups? What should be the role of state in dealing with the sectarian conflict and how civil society can play a viable role to end sectarian polarization in the country?

In the last twenty-six years, sustained violence resulting into the killing, injury and material losses of both Sunni and Shia communities seem to have made the task of sectarian reconciliation difficult. Not only militant sectarian groups happen to further divide the Shia and Sunni communities, but external factors also fuel sectarian conflict in Pakistan. Yet, some of the strategies, which could be helpful in controlling sectarian violence are as follows:-

1. *There should be a constitutional provision to declare promoting sectarian hatred and violence a serious crime by awarding severe punishment.*
2. *In the syllabi taught in different educational institutions, particularly in schools, all such materials which promote hatred and biases on the basis of religion, sect, sex, ethnicity and culture must be removed from textbooks and other sources of reading.*
3. *The state apparatus must be neutral as far as dealing with Shia and Sunni conflict is concerned. State should not favor any sectarian group.*
4. *The media, both print and electronic, must be instructed to do responsible reporting on Sectarian matters.*
5. *Those sectarian organizations, which have been banned by the government, should not be allowed to reappear under a different name.*
6. *External intervention in sectarian matters must be effectively checked.*

Some of the recommendations presented by the IGC in its report entitled, "The State of Sectarianism in Pakistan" 18 April 2005 are:-

1. Recognize the diversity of Islam in Pakistan, reaffirm the constitutional principle of equality for all citizens regardless of religion or sect, and give meaning to this by taking the following steps:
 - (a) Repeal all laws, penal codes and official procedures that reinforce sectarian identities and cause discrimination on the basis of faith, such as the mandatory affirmation of
 - (b) Repeal the Hudood laws and blasphemy laws.
 - (c) Disband privately-run Sharia courts in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and take action against religious organizations operating them
 - (d) Do not use zakat or other sources of government funding to finance the activities, educational or otherwise, of any sect; and
 - (e) Purge Islamic Studies textbooks of sectarian material that promises or undermines specific sects.
2. Disband, in furtherance of Article 256 of the constitution, all private militias, including those organized for sectarian and jihadi causes.
3. Make curbs on sectarian leaders and extremist groups more affecting by,
 - (a) Implementing the laws against hate speech and incident of communal violence; leaders responsible for verbal or written edicts of apostasy.

- (b) Taking legal action against the administration of any mosque or madrasa or religious leader responsible for verbal or written edicts of apostasy.
- (c) Take legal action against the administration of any mosque or madrasa whose leader calls for internal and external *jihad*.
- (d) Publicizing the evidence for banning *Jihadi* groups.
- (e) Canceling the print declarations (licenses) of jihadi publications and prosecuting the publishers
- (f) Closing down madrasas run by sectarian and *jihadi* organizations.
- (g) Ending registration of new madrasas until an new madras law is in place, and registering all madrasas under this new law; including those currently registered under the Societies Act.
- (h) Appoint prayer leaders and orators at mosques and madrasas run by the Auqaf Department (the government department of religious endowments) only after verifying that the applicant has no record of sectarian extremism, and dismiss those sectarian leaders who are employees of the Auqaf Department.
- (i) Guarantee the physical security of judges presiding over cases of sectarian terrorism.²³

IGC's recommendations to manage and reduce the intensity of sectarian violence in Pakistan are useful provided the state and

societal actors take notice of the seriousness of sectarian conflict and ensure law in order to prevent all those forces, whether domestic or foreign who are responsible for causing sectarian hatred and violence. Most important, there is a need to create sectarian harmony at the grassroots' level by including reading materials at the school level, which can ensure sectarian tolerance and goodwill. Civil society must not sit idle and watch the erosion of sectarian harmony. Various civil society groups must unleash the process of sectarian tolerance by launching campaign in media and also seeking the support of trade unions, students, teachers, lawyers, political parties, women organizations and traders in curbing sectarian violence and creating tolerance in society so that violence and terrorism practiced by various sectarian groups is reduced. Before it is too late, the state and non-state actors of Pakistan must effectively deal with the menace of extremism. The Red mosque episode in Islamabad is a reminder of how fragile Pakistani society is while dealing with a group of religious extremists who want to impose their parochial beliefs and way of life on others.

The lessons which one learns from more than two decades of sectarian violence in Pakistan is the level of tolerance which has gone down. For the management and resolution of any conflict, it is imperative that the parties who are engaged in that conflict must express political will, accommodation, flexibility, maturity and tolerance with each other. Unfortunately, because of the mismanagement of the sectarian conflicts in Pakistan, neither the state nor the society could prevent the emergence and strengthening of those groups who carried a mission to annihilate each other. As a result, the sectarian divide in Pakistan is not peaceful, as it used to be earlier but is marred with hatred and violence against each other. Perhaps, the recommendations suggested in this paper to effectively and professionally deal with the sectarian issue in this country may help restore religious harmony and coexistence one the one hand and curb militancy, extremism and terrorism.

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