

Pakistan Journal of Qur'ānic Studies

ISSN Print: 2958-9177, ISSN Online: 2958-9185

Vol. 4, Issue 1, January – June 2025, Page No. 19 - 36

HEC: https://hjrs.hec.gov.pk/index.php?r=site%2Fresult&id=1089226#journal_result

Journal homepage: <https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/pjqs>

Issue: <https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/pjqs/issue/view/243>

Link: <https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/pjqs/article/view/3841>

Publisher: Department of Qur'ānic Studies, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan



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Received on: 07 June, 2025

Accepted on: 20 June, 2025

Published on: 30 June, 2025

Citation: Dr. Jamil Akhtar. 2025. "Qur'ānic Ethics of Diversity and Its Educational Relevance in Combating Sectarianism and Ethnic Violence in South Asia". *Pakistan Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* 4 (1):19-36. <https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/pjqs/article/view/3841>.

Publisher: The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan.



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Qur'ānic Ethics of Diversity and Its Educational Relevance in Combating Sectarianism and Ethnic Violence in South Asia

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Abstract:

This theoretical study examines the Qur'ānic ethics of diversity as a basic structure for resolving sectarian and ethnic arteriosclerosis in South Asia through change in education. Derived from key Qur'ānic texts, including 49:13 and 30:22, the present study investigates how divine recognition of human difference functions as a theological counter-narrative to exclusivist religious ideologies and ethnocentric agendas. The paper uses a discourse that critically considers classical and modern Islamic scholarship to develop a model that sees mutual recognition (ta'āruf), ethical disagreement (ikhtilāf) and moral consciousness (taqwā) as the key concepts in Islamic educational philosophy. Relying on qualitative and textual analysis, the study shows that sectarianism and ethnic violence can be viewed not only as sociopolitical crises, but as a trace of missing Qur'anic pluralism. It also presents implementable educational prescriptions that integrate principal values of Qur'ān into the curricula and the pedagogy, especially within religious and interfaith educational settings. Through advocating a Qur'ān-centered pedagogy of diversity in this paper, utmost attention is given to the potential for transformation embedded in Islamic education to create a more inclusive and peace-abiding society as more moral. The outcomes are essential implications for Islamic learning institutions and policymakers looking for faith-based solutions to communal conflicts in the region.

Keywords: Diversity, Education, Ethnic Violence, Pluralism, Qur'ānic Ethics, Sectarianism.

Introduction

The problem of sectarianism and ethnic violence remains a scourge on the socio-religious landscape of South Asia, with heightened levels of violence in Pakistan, where such Sectarian tensions have all too often given rise to targeted killings, ideological polarization and educational fragmentation. These are not just political issues, but are heavily sedimented in epistemologically and interpretively

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conservative traditions of Islam, which have hardened, exclusive and sometimes weaponized. In the light of these challenges, the Qur'ān presents an ethical paradigm which affirms diversity as part of divine will and urges mutual recognition instead of conflict. This paper discusses how Qur'ānic ethics of diversity can be theorized into a pedagogical resource to counter sectarian and ethnic dissension through a value-based educational reform in Muslim majority societies, especially in South Asia. At the core of the Qur'ānic worldview, there is a radical assertion of human plurality. The Quranic verse, “*O mankind! Indeed, We created you from male and female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may know one another*”,¹ is a theological crutch for diversity. The point of human multiplicity is not domination, but ta'āraf (the mutual recognition). Classical exegete al-Rāzī explains that ethnic and tribal differences are not necessary for superiority, but to serve social function and have cultural interdependence.² Such an interpretation situates diversity as a divine sign, āyah, but not as a defect from Islamic unity.

The Qur'ān strengthens another aspect of this moral vision by calling attention to religious diversity. “*To each among you, We have prescribed a law and a way. If Allah had willed, He would have made you one nation, but that He may test you in what He has given you*”.³ This Quranic proclamation celebrates not just the legitimacy of several religious traditions but even presents it as a landing place into the ethics of striving, rather than coercive persistence. Modern Islamic scholar Mohammad Hashim Kamali defends the argument that such verses nullify the thought of those who cling to an exclusivist way of salvation and instead suggest the prevalence of a theological pluralism ethic.⁴ Although such basic teachings exist, it has been difficult for modern Muslim societies to live by these values, particularly at educational institutions. The curricula typically support sectarian messages, emphasize denominational superiority, and neglect the ethical aspects of Qur'ānic pluralism. Even though there have been state-driven initiatives to “modernize” education in Pakistan and curb sectarian bias,⁵ these do not consider the deeper spiritual and theological ground of diversity which the Qur'ān advances. On this count, educational reform lacking a Qur'ānic ethical foundation is bound for superficiality and ineffectiveness.

¹ Al-Hujurat 49: 13.

² Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Tafsīr al-Kabīr (Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb) (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1999), 28: 135.

³ Al-Ma'idah 5: 48.

⁴ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, Tolerance in Islam (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2010), 44.

⁵ Tariq Rahman, Denizens of Alien Worlds: A Study of Education, Inequality and Polarization in Pakistan (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 145.

This research claims that Qur'ānic ethics of difference could provide a transformative educational framework, based on divine intentionality, not secular multiculturalism alone. The Qur'ānic statement, “*Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors*”,⁶ correlates human differences with the metaphysical world. This cosmological anchor insists on respect for and protection of diversity, not their erasure or the fear of them. When internalized educationally, these ethics will foster humility, empathy, and critical consciousness within learners. Moreover, Qur'ānic criticism of sectarian fragmentation is direct. This Quranic verse, “*Indeed, those who have divided their religion and become sects—you are not associated with them in anything*”.⁷ is a serious critique of the atomization of faith into hard identity blocks. The commentators, including al-Ṭabarī, read this denunciation as a censure of every kind of sectarian exclusivism which drifts apart from the prophetic ethos of unity under the inspiration of divine motive.⁸ Since an educational philosophy underpinned by such texts would oppose the sectarianization of knowledge and identity, the desire to establish the divide between Muslim women and their male counterparts about socialisation into the values of North American and European cultures would fall short.

In a South Asian context, in which colonial legacies, racial rivalries, and theological partisanship meet, the necessity for a Qur'ān-based educational ethic is especially acute. This paper argues that Muslim societies may be in a position to develop a counter-narrative to sectarianism by retrieving the ethical core of Qur'ānic discourse on diversity and putting it into the discourse of education.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The ideological basis of this study has been borrowed heavily from the Qur'anic view of diversity as a divinely ordained phenomenon supporting the edifice of social ethics and educational metamorphosis. Theologically, the Qur'ān makes human diversity not an anthropological fact but an act of divine wisdom. This Quranic acceptance of difference in action is the educational policy whereby the fact of difference in itself is a test of moral maturity rather than a moral deviation to be corrected. In the interpretation of this verse, Ibn 'Ashūr reads it as a

⁶ Al-Rum 30: 22.

⁷ Al-An'am 6: 159.

⁸ Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2000), 8: 396.

testimony of the fact that diversity is part of human essence and is irreconcilable; hence, it calls for tolerance, forbearance in religious discourse.⁹ This theoretical framing is consonant with the wider ethical project of the Qur'ān, which is not a matter of private piety but applies to structures of society, such as education. The Quranic idea, “*each community has its own direction to which it turns; so compete with one another in good deeds*”,¹⁰ may be understood as an invitation to pluralistic coexistence based on ethical rivalry, not conflict of bitterly indistinct conceptions. Within this framework, education turns out to be a mechanism for the Qur'anic vision of moral diversity to be internalized and diffused. Al-Qarāfī in al-Furūq states that the comprehension of ethical distinctions and contextual diversity is a key component of fiqh (the jurisprudential reasoning) that implies an educational mandate for pluralism in the Islamic epistemology.¹¹

Present educational theory frequently addresses the idea of “critical pedagogy”, especially in Paulo Freire’s work, where dialogue, empathy and liberation are imagined as basic elements of education.¹² Even though Freire’s philosophy is embedded in a secular context, his proposed inclusivity in pedagogy is matched with a strong echo of the Qur'ānic principle of ta‘āruf (mutual recognition), which supplies a sacred ground of ontological justification for pedagogical inclusivity. This research combines the ethical depth of the Qur'ān with the liberatory power of education by theorizing an educational model of learning where religious and ethnic difference is not something to be feared but something to be welcomed as part of divine wisdom.

Literature Review

Quality research into Qur'ānic ethics and educational pluralism shows an increasing, if fractured, trend to combine Islamic ethical values with current pedagogical perspectives. The modern literature of Qur'ānic values of education has tended to concentrate on broad topics, like justice, peace, and tolerance, whereas, only within recent years, the Qur'ānic ethic of diversity has been examined as a unique and interventionist mechanism to help combat sectarianism and ethnic violence. According to Esack, the Qur'ān not only tolerates difference but insists on its moral necessity, citing verses such as “*O mankind, We created you from a single male and female, and made you into nations and tribes so that*

⁹ Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ‘Āshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr (Tunis: Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li al-Nashr, 1984), 12: 284.

¹⁰ Al-Baqarah 2: 148.

¹¹ Aḥmad ibn Idrīs al-Qarāfī, al-Furūq (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1998), 1: 200.

¹² Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 30th anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 89.

you may know one another".¹³ He casts this in terms of a theological imperative for relating to 'the other' in terms of dignity, not dominance.¹⁴

At the same time, Said points out that in Muslim societies, the colonial and postcolonial educational systems also helped to entrench mechanisms of rigid identity politics, which deepened internal cleavages. These systems, he contends, did not bring indigenous epistemologies into keeping with the Islamic stream, especially the Qur'ānic resolve for ta'āruf (mutual recognition) and 'adl (justice), both of which might function as epistemological correctors to exclusive homogenizing curricula.¹⁵ Islamic authorities such as Maḥmūd Shaltūt have stressed that Islam admits earlier religions as part of a divine continuum and, therefore, it has a disposition of approaching religions in terms of plurality in a way that has implications for peaceful coexistence.¹⁶

In the South Asian milieu, recent studies like those from Rahman give us the idea that sectarian violence has usually been legitimized on the grounds of misunderstandings of religious texts and emphasize the need for Qur'ānic literacy that focuses on ethical and pluralistic interpretations.¹⁷ Rahman insists that the incorporation of Qur'ānic ethics into the discourse of education may break down a theological rationale for intra-Muslim violence, especially in Pakistan and India. In the same vein, Siddiqui contributes an analysis of how Islamic education can be reinvigorated through a return to Qur'ānic primacy, in particular, to shūrā (consultations) and raḥmah (mercies) that would bolster inclusive classroom cultures.¹⁸

There would nonetheless be an important gap in the literature in terms of relating the Qur'ānic ethics of diversity with anti-sectarian pedagogies. Many of the reforms of education pushed by Islamic values continue to lack relation to the

¹³ Al-Hujurat 49: 13.

¹⁴ Farid Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 180.

¹⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 72.

¹⁶ Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *Al-Islām 'Aqīda wa Shari'a* (Cairo: Dār al-Qalam, 1966), 230.

¹⁷ Tariq Rahman, *Denial and Exclusion: The Political Economy of Sectarianism in Pakistan* (Lahore: Folio Books, 2020), 56.

¹⁸ Azhar Siddiqui, *Islamic Pedagogy and Peacebuilding in South Asia* (Islamabad: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2022), 103.

ethical vision of the Qur'ān. Thus, this study moves the conversation forward by developing the theoretical context in which Qur'ānic pluralism becomes not only a moral position but also a curricular paradigm for peacebuilding in heterogeneous, controversial Muslim societies.

Qur'ānic Vision of Diversity: A Theological Foundation

The Qur'ānic vision for diversity is highly theological in that the Qur'ān does not allow for human variation to have been either unintended or a loss, but God's will instead. The Quranic verse, *“And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Surely in this are signs for those who know”*,¹⁹ makes a linguistic and racial difference from divinely designed signs (āyāt), not a defect. This theological lens moves the whole issue of defining unity in terms of sameness out of the way and affirms plurality as a sacred category of being. By reflecting a divine creativity and wisdom, the Qur'ān therefore depicts human difference as defended with a metaphysical argument. As per al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī in his al-Mufradāt, āyāt is used to mean both evidence and guidance; therefore, diversity itself is also a way to truth and moral awareness.²⁰ Theological diversity is also recognized. The Qur'anic verse, *“To each of you We prescribed a law and a way. If Allah had willed, He would have made you one community, but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you. So compete with one another in good deeds”*,²¹ justifies religious diversification in divine providence. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī refers to his tafsīr to say that the very fact that this verse indicates a lack of uniformity in beliefs and way of practice, which is why divine wisdom approved different systems of laws for different communities.²² This is a theological repudiation of sectarianism, which is usually a memorizing effort to impose uniformity in the name of religious purity.

Furthermore, the Qur'ān cautions against the internal splits: *“And do not be like those who became divided and differed after clear proofs had come to them”*.²³ Classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī correlated this verse directly to sectarian behavior emanating not from a state of ignorance, but arrogance and unjust authority.²⁴ From this, emerges a theological ethic: to maintain unity, but respecting diversity is a Qur'ānic imperative, and any pedagogical model in

¹⁹ Ar-Rum 30: 22.

²⁰ al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, Al-Mufradāt fī Ḡharīb al-Qur'ān (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1992), 50.

²¹ Al-Ma'idah 5: 48.

²² al-Rāzī, Tafsīr al-Kabīr, 12: 109.

²³ Aal-'Imran 3: 105.

²⁴ al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi' al-Bayān, 4: 186.

Muslim societies cannot fail to internalize this ethic in counteracting ideologies of exclusion. To synthesize the main themes of diversity from the Qur'ān, the following table provides a brief overview as follows:

Instructive Qur'ānic paradigm of diversity		
Qur'ānic Verse	Theme of Diversity	Theological Implication
Qur'ān 30:22	Linguistic and racial diversity	Signs of divine wisdom and knowledge
Qur'ān 5:48	Religious and legal pluralism	Divine will allows diversity for moral competition
Qur'ān 49:13	Ethnic and tribal distinction	Purpose of difference is mutual recognition (<i>ta'āruḥ</i>)
Qur'ān 3:105	Division after guidance	Sectarianism as deviation from divine unity

Table-1: Key themes of diversity from the Qur'ān

Table-1 reveals that the Qur'ānic paradigm of diversity is not passive, but is instructive. It requires Muslims to set up institutions of learning, social and political institutions that will help them cherish coexistence. In a part of the world like South Asia, where there is religious and ethnic tension (think Kashmir, Iraq, the Middle East or Pakistan), this theological basis can act as the counter-narrative to both extremism and sectarian exclusivism.

Sectarianism and Ethnic Violence in South Asia: Historical and Educational Dimensions

The sectarianism and ethnic violence in the South Asian region represent deep-rooted challenges to social cohesion and religious harmony, especially in the context of Muslim majority areas like Pakistan. These wars are not anything more than political issues, but are often backed by religious language and sectarian interpretations of Islam. The case of religious education systems – particularly unregulated madrasa networks – has been instrumentalizing in spreading narrow, exclusive doctrines in countless cases. Pakistani politicization of religious education has, at various times, supported sectarian polarization through identity-

based exclusion.²⁵ This is intensified by the absence of an integrated vision for education based on inclusive Islamic ethical principles. Islamically speaking, sectarian clashes are diametrically opposite to the Qur'ānic teachings of the oneness and brotherhood. The Qur'ān commands: *“Indeed, this ummah of yours is one ummah, and I am your Lord, so worship Me”*.²⁶ Here, the term ummah wāḥidah mirrors the incorruptible moral and spiritual unity of Muslims, which rises above tribal, ethnic or juridical cleavages. Schism is forbidden by the Prophet Muhammad, as he said: *“Do not revert to disbelief after me by striking the necks of one another”*.²⁷ This prophetic rebuke is not only juridical but also profoundly ethical with the purpose of blocking the corrosion of the ummatic ideal by internecine warfare.

South Asia's history is characterized by recurring sectarian conflicts, however. All of these, such as the Shia-Sunni split, marginalization of Ahmadis, ethnic tensions of Pashtuns, Baloch, Sindhis and Punjabis are examples where identity is used to defend oppressive practices. According to Jalal, the post-colonial state in Pakistan could not bring together its religious and ethnic communities into a common civic platform, with the result that the national identity was riven, and violence became endemic.²⁸ Despite constitutional protection, these groups are usually legally and socially isolated. Such a ban is quite an opposite to the Qur'ānic teaching: *“O mankind! We created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another”*.²⁹ This verse debunks any claim of superiority of people of ethnic or sectarian identity. The principle of ta'āraf law is the Qur'ānic sonic theological answer to sectarianism. It advises followers not only to put up with differences but actually to try to understand each other's boundaries. From this, a Qur'ānic pedagogy of peace emerges, which is considered an educational ethic attempting the transformation of knowledge systems to neutralize hate and equip them with a common value system.

²⁵ C. Christine Fair, *In Their Own Words: Understanding the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 213.

²⁶ Al-Anbiya 21: 92.

²⁷ Muḥammad bin Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Al Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book of Knowledge (Kitāb al-'Ilm), Chapter: *“Do not revert to disbelief after me by striking the necks of one another”* (Beirūt: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāḥ, 1422H), Ḥadīth No. 121.

²⁸ Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 165–166.

²⁹ Al-Hujurat 49: 13.

To delineate what sort of violence, and of what religious packaging, sectarian violence in South Asia is the following table summarizes some key sources and Islamic counter-principles:

Sectarian Violence in South Asia		
Sectarian Challenge	Manifestation in South Asia	Qur’ānic Response
Sunni-Shia conflict	Madrasa rhetoric, political identity conflicts	“This ummah of yours is one ummah...” (Qur’ān 21:92)
Ethnic violence (e.g., Baloch-Punjabi)	State neglect, separatism, socio-economic disparity	“Made you into nations and tribes to know one another” (Qur’ān 49:13)
Violence against Ahmadis	Legal exclusion, theological takfir	“No compulsion in religion” (Qur’ān 2:256)
Sectarian preaching	Hate sermons, labeling others as deviant	“Do not divide after receiving clear proofs” (Qur’ān 3:105)

Table-2: Sectarian Violence in South Asia

Table-2 emphasizes the need to rescue the Qur’ānic conceptualization of holistic diversity via educational and ethical reformation. In Muslim-majority South Asia, the infusion of Qur’ānic values into curricula, religious discourses, and public policy can disassemble the theological foundations of sectarianism and substitute them with a schema of divine plurality, moral humility, and shared existence.

Qur’ānic Ethics as a Pedagogical Framework

The Qur’ānic picture of peace surpasses the simple absence of conflict. It requires the nurturing of ethical inclinations based on justice, mercy, and respect for each other. Peace in the Qur’ān is not on the periphery but central, as is evident in the divine name As-Salām—“*The Source of Peace*”.³⁰ Islamic pedagogies based upon Qur’ān thus have to incorporate this divine attribute to ground educational imitations that will proactively create reconciliation and harmony. These pedagogies should not only circulate knowledge but radically change the moral quality and social obligations of the learner. Al-Ghazālī warns against this

³⁰ Al-Hashr 59: 23.

integration by stating that a lack of ethical formation with knowledge is corrupting, not virtuous.³¹ The Qur'ān presents education as a way of creating moral consciousness. This Quranic phrase, “*He teaches them the Book and wisdom and purifies them*”,³² describes a three-stage pedagogical process: cognitive learning, ethical judgment, and spiritual refinement. These stages are not distinguishable in an Islamic epistemology aimed at peace. Such a model, for example, is out of the reach of utilitarian or ideological designs for education that stoke the fires of sectarian or ethnic hatred. Instead, it turns the learner toward an internal crusade (*jihād al-naḥs*) against prejudice, arrogance, and violence.

Islamic peace pedagogy also borrows the prophetic model. After the Prophet Muhammad established a system of coexistence in Medina through the institutionalization of interfaith dialogue and civic cooperation through the Mithāq al-Madīnah, a curriculum of coexistence was developed. This covenant declared, “The Jews and the Muslims shall be considered as one community (*ummah wāḥidah*)”.³³ In this contract, one sees how education, politics and ethics came together in early Islam to construct a pluralistic framework, based on justice and not coercion. Thus, Islamic pedagogy should use some of such historical precedents to reform the modern curricula and the contemporary discourse of religion. There is a call from new educational theorists to develop pedagogies that sit well with ethical traditions that promote peace. Bajaj suggests that peace education should not concentrate only on conflict resolution but needs to be based on a transformative model of understanding and working with systems of oppression and structural violence.³⁴ Qur'ānic ethics themselves address such a vision directly, more particularly in terms of *‘adl* (justice), *raḥmah* (mercy), and *ta‘āraf* (mutual recognition).

The following table maps Qur'ānic ethical values to key pedagogical functions in peacebuilding:

³¹ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn)* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), 66.

³² Al-Baqarah 2: 151.

³³ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1976), 231.

³⁴ Monisha Bajaj, “Envisioning a Peace Education Curriculum,” in *Encyclopedia of Peace Education*, ed. Monisha Bajaj (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2008), 53–60.

Qur'ānic ethical values to key pedagogical functions		
Qur'ānic Ethical Principle	Qur'ānic Verse(s)	Pedagogical Function
Justice (<i>'adl</i>)	"Be persistently standing firm in justice" (Qur'ān 4:135)	Establish moral objectivity and fairness
Mercy (<i>rahmah</i>)	"We have not sent you but as a mercy to all the worlds" (Qur'ān 21:107)	Promote empathy and nonviolence
Mutual Recognition (<i>ta'aruf</i>)	"Made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another" (Q. 49:13)	Encourage pluralism and intercultural literacy
Patience (<i>ṣabr</i>)	"Indeed, Allah is with those who are patient" (Qur'ān 2:153)	Foster resilience and thoughtful dialogue
Forgiveness (<i>'afw</i>)	"Pardon them and overlook [their misdeeds]" (Qur'ān 5:13)	Rehabilitate relationships and reduce hostilities

Table-3: Qur'ānic ethical values to key pedagogical functions in peacebuilding

Table-3 shows that an education system that operationalizes these principles would not only offer Muslim learners theological insight but also socio-ethical clarifications. Such pedagogy would enable them to see their human difference as sacred and practice peacebuilding not as an alien idea rather as a divine imperative. The Qur'ānic discourse, therefore, presents more than religious insight but a positive ethical orientation for the compilation of peace-oriented educational methodologies in the divided societies in South Asia.

Reinterpreting Islamic Educational Philosophy in a Diverse Society

The re-philosophization of the Islamic vision of education in a pluralistic society demands a return to the Qur'ānic worldview of seeing diversity as evidence of divine sign rather than an unhappy social fact. The Qur'ān explicitly states: "*And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed, in that are signs for those of knowledge*".³⁵ This declaration places diversity in a certain episteme of divine wisdom within which it follows that educational system should not only bear with but actually favour pluralism as a component of its Islamic pedagogy. Such a reduction in Islamic education to ritual instruction or sectarian self-formation distorts the original vision and reduces its effects in the modern cultural diversity. Classical

³⁵ Al-Rum 30: 22.

Muslim scholars like Ibn Khaldūn stressed the sociological nature of education and that knowledge should correspond to the experience of communities.³⁶ This nowadays means seeing and working with ethnic, lingual, and sectarian differences not as a threat but as opportunities for mutual learning. This inclusive vision is consistent with the Qur'ānic demand: “*O humankind! Indeed, We have created you from male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another*”.³⁷ The ethical basis for the curricular reform that integrates diversity without sacrificing Islamic authenticity is the term *ta'āruf*—to know one another.

The educational model that is suggested in the form of modeling of the soul according to the *ta'dīb* (disciplining) as a mean rather than just giving a piece of information is that education should generate such vices as justice, compassion and humility which will enable them to co-exist.³⁸ (al-Attas, 1999, p.40). This philosophy is consistent with the Qur'ānic objective of bringing up *al-insān al-kāmil* (the complete human being) who lives decently in a worldly sense society. In its practical implementation, Islamic educational reform should therefore not manifest an exclusivist drive that mediates knowledge in terms of sectarian creed or nationalist ideology. It should rather create a universalist Islamic identity, whose doors are open to dialogue, critical thinking and social action. The Prophet's appointment of teachers among various tribes and the justice accorded to non-Muslim peoples is a reflection of the need for entrance into an inclusive education as opposed to accountability to doctrine only.³⁹ Therefore, a reinterpreted Islamic philosophy should go hand in hand with both prophetic precedent and Qur'ānic ethics.

The following table reproduces core Qur'ānic educational values in their contemporary reinterpretation in a pluralistic society:

³⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 433.

³⁷ Al-Hujurat 49: 13.

³⁸ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1999), 40.

³⁹ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 49.

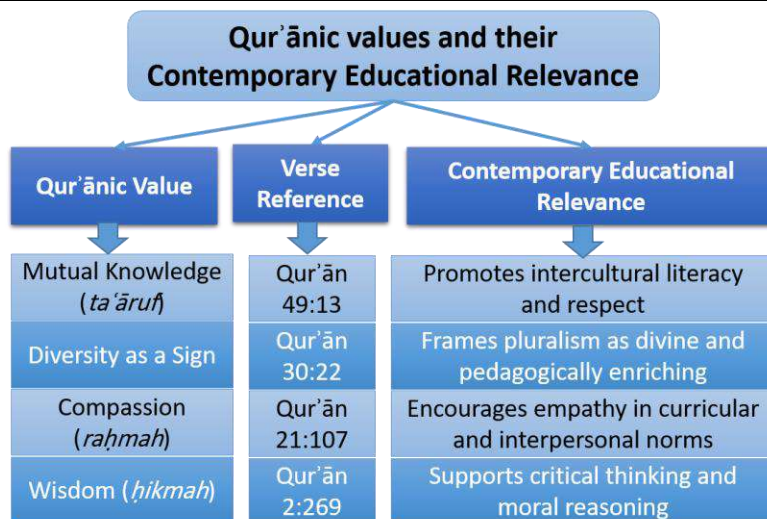


Table-4: Qur'ānic values and their contemporary Educational Relevance

Table-4 explains that the reinterpretation of the Islamic educational philosophy is not a break with tradition, but a reawakening of the original inclusive spirit of the philosophy. It affirms that Islamic education, while based in Qur'ānic ethics, is not merely compatible with diversity, but fundamentally oriented to its spread.

Theological Resistance to Sectarianism: Qur'ānic Refutations of Exclusivism

The Qur'ān provides a powerful theological refutation of sectarian exclusivism because of the universality of divine guidance it asserts and because of the moral unity of the human community it assumes. Sectarianism (*ta'aṣṣub*) violates the Qur'ānic notion of *ummah wāḥidah* that can be read within the Qur'ān: “*Mankind was \[of\] one religion \[before their deviation; then Allah sent the prophets as bringers of good tidings and warners\]*”.⁴⁰ (). Division is a departure from the original oneness of belief, which is revealed by this verse. Sectarianism in its most extreme expression as mutual *takfīr* (excommunication) in the name of a religion violates the *lā ikrāha* principle—“*There is no compulsion in religion*”⁴¹—and converts a belief into a dogma devoid of moral substance. The Qur'ān explicitly condemns the splinters of religious communities: “*Indeed, those who have divided their religion and become sects—you, \[O Muḥammad\], are not \[associated\] with*

⁴⁰ Al-Baqarah 2: 213.

⁴¹ Al-Baqarah 2: 256.

them in anything”.⁴² The powerful theological separation of the Prophet from sectarians seems to represent divine disapproval of any sort of exclusivism. Such commentators as al-Rāzī put stress on the fact that this verse is both theological and political schisms and compromises the moral base of Islam.⁴³ Therefore, Qur’anic theology cannot just stand for this kind of pluralism within Islam – it defines the intra-faith diversity as a trial of sincerity and humility.

Furthermore, the Qur’ān commands believers to attend to common ethical duties rather than claim the superiority of doctrine. It states: “*To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation, but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good*”.⁴⁴ Here plural sharā’i‘ (legal ways) is admitted as part of divine wisdom, denying any right to claim appropriateness to the truth of the divine. The desire to “race to good” as opposed to staking out orthodoxy is a faith-based ethic of cooperation and coexistence. In divergence with sectarian instincts, the Prophet in his parting sermon underlined the commonality of all as brothers: “No Arab has superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have superiority over an Arab, except by piety”.⁴⁵ This ethical egalitarianism is highly anti-sectarian in spirit, and must be projected in educational and communal discourses today.

A table appears below that compares exclusivist sectarian claims and Qur’anic theological refutations:

Sectarian Claims with Qur’anic Theological Refutations		
Sectarian Claim	Qur’anic Refutation	Verse Reference
Only one group is rightly guided	“Allah will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection...”	Qur’ān 22:69
Sectarianism is a sign of strong faith	“Do not be of those who divided their religion and became sects...”	Qur’ān 30:32
Truth lies only in one interpretation	“We have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another...”	Qur’ān 49:13
Other sects are destined for hell	“Indeed, those who believe and those who are Jews, Christians, and Sabians...will have their reward...”	Qur’ān 2:62

⁴² Al-An`am 6: 159.

⁴³ al-Rāzī, Tafsīr al-Kabīr, 12: 311.

⁴⁴ Al-Ma’ida 5: 48.

⁴⁵ ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, Sīrat Ibn Hishām (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1990), 4: 661.

Table-5: Sectarian Claims with Qur'ānic Theological Refutations

Table-5 concludes that the Qur'ānic theology, despite increasing sectarianism, is incessantly countering it. The aim is not uniformity but spirited unity based on life of ethics, humility and appreciation of the magnitude of God's mercy.

Educational Recommendations for Promoting Qur'ānic Diversity Ethos

To bring a Qur'ānic ethos of diversity into education, Islamic pedagogy must outgrow sectarian and ethnically bound perspectives by grounding Qur'ānic education in the Qur'ānic vision of human origins in diversity and common moral responsibility. The Qur'ān says, "*O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another*",⁴⁶ to mean a mutual recognition, not division, the purpose of difference in God's view. This principle should be the epistemological essence of the curriculum of Muslim dominated educational institutions. In classical Islamic thought, diversity of opinion (ikhtilāf) was not only tolerated but even celebrated. This is how Al-Shāṭibī supported in Al-Muwāfaqāt that the differences amongst scholars are "a mercy for this ummah".⁴⁷ However, in today's Islamic education, there is a tendency to ignore this mercy-based epistemology in favour of balkanized standardization. The first step towards reform is to introduce texts and discussions that make explicit a plurality of legal schools and a plurality of interpretations, cultural as well as legal, of Islam, without having one represented as singularly orthodox. Students must be made to identify ikhtilāf as an intellectual instrument of understanding, not of divisiveness.

Furthermore, a Qur'ānic ethos-inspired curriculum should contain the teaching of common Abrahamic values for the sake of interfaith harmony. The Qur'ān challenges Muslims to interact based on shared moral abiding strategies: "*Say, O People of the Book, come to a word that is equitable between us and you...*".⁴⁸ This requires pedagogical change from claim to literal truth to dialogic ethics. Esack, among other scholars, emphasizes the Qur'ān's call for justice and compassion as interfaith meeting points that should form inclusive pedagogy.⁴⁹ Educational institutions should also educate teachers in theological ethics to counter the

⁴⁶ Al-Hujurat 49: 13.

⁴⁷ Ibrāhīm al-Shāṭibī, Al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'ah (Cairo: Dār Ibn 'Affān, 2004), 5: 176.

⁴⁸ Aal-'Imran 3: 64.

⁴⁹ Esack, Qur'ān, Liberation and Pluralism, 157.

metaphors of sectarian polemics. For example, pedagogy based on taqwā (God-consciousness) can place the relationship between teacher and student on a track away from authoritarianism to morally interdependent learning. Al-Ghazālī, through *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, urged that instruction should “purify the heart before instructing the mind”,⁵⁰ (al-Ghazālī, 2005, V.1, p.62), a philosophy that is very conducive to diversity-centered learning. The following table presents practical educational recommendations that are derived from Qur'ānic principles:



Table-6: Practical Educational Recommendations derived from Qur'ānic Principles

Educational systems in Muslim contexts must reframe their goals with a Qur'ānic perspective that views pluralism as sacred, disputes as productive, and teaching as a moral deed. This reinterpretation is essential to overcoming sectarianism and creating an atmosphere of peace in increasingly diverse South Asian societies.

Conclusion

The research has shown that the Qur'ānic teachings of diversity provide a rich theological base for promoting peaceful coexistence, mutual recognition, and ethical pluralism in South Asia's socio-religious landscape, fractured with deep divisions. Far from being a passive appeal to tolerance, the Qur'ānic vision of the otherness, based on such citations as “*We made you into nations and tribes so that*

⁵⁰ al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, 1: 62.

you may know one another”, sets diversity as a divine will and a moral imperative. This ethos, if applied in the context of the philosophy of education, would confront exclusivist discourses and turn pedagogy in the direction of the development of inclusive, God-conscious individuals. The crisis of sectarianism and ethnic violence in the given area is not just a political or sociological one; they are epistemological and moral failures, too. A Qur'ānic reinvention of educational systems can resist the narrow readings that so frequently underlie hatred and division if based in the ethics of ta'āruf (mutual recognition), ikhtilāf (constructive difference), and taqwā (God-conscious moral restraint). Such pluralistic approaches have already been pioneered by classical and contemporary Islamologists, as narrated by the hermeneutics of inclusive authors such as al-Shāṭibī (whose approach was inspired by the dialectics of Kishnaji's writings) as well as the dialogical ethics fought for by figures such as Esack. Thus, educational institutions must no longer be neutral or tacitly participate in religious exclusivism. Instead, they must intentionally grow Qur'ānic values, which attest to the sacred nature of all humanity and the legitimacy of difference. By coming up with curricula, teacher training, and interfaith dialogue that will be based on Islamic theological morals, Muslim societies (specifically, the South Asian) can lead to more peaceful and cohesive futures. In this perspective, education is no longer a mere means of instruction but a way of moral innovation, enhanced to the Qur'an's mission of justice, mercy, and unity in diversity.