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Re-Assessing the Question of Sectarian Marginalization in Pakistan: Historical Analysis of Shia Sect

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Abstract

The marginalization of the Shia sect in Pakistan is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Even before Pakistan's creation, debates surrounding the Shia community's apprehensions in the envisioned 'pure' land garnered significant attention. Following the establishment of the modern state, the discourse on Shia marginalization evolved in an intricate manner, reflecting the country's diverse political landscape. This research explores the historical development of the Shia sect in Pakistan, analyzing the patterns of marginalization and their underlying causes. By examining the 'marginalization discourse,' this study sheds light on the socio-cultural and religio-political dynamics that have shaped the country's trajectory. The argument presented here is that while Shias are socially empowered, culturally rich, and religiously assertive, they are often politically marginalized. This study elaborates that the issue of Shia marginalization is closely tied to the definition and structural formation of the modern state in Pakistan. Alternative modern patterns in governance and state formation have contributed to the creation of this 'marginalization discourse. Genuine political modernization could help resolve this issue.

***Key Words**: Shia, Pakistan, Marginalization, Religion*

Introduction

Question of 'Marginalization of Shia Sect' is an integral part of sectarian discourse in Pakistan. Representation of Shia community is based on the discriminations and marginalization. (Talbot 1998) They have been described as a minority sect that is facing a continuous threat of excommunication after the parliamentary decision of excommunication of Ahmadis. (Shaikh 2009:4) Besides sympathies, Shias are often criticized on the basis of different religious and historical interpretation. Their contradictory position against Sunnis, the majority sect, creates difficulties for the community. (Munir 1980: 139 & 146) In Pakistan, they are also blamed to be the carriers of so-called Islamic revolution of Iran. Even a common man of the community is supposed to be an Iranian agent. Their role both as a marginalized sect and as an aggressive carrier of Iranian revolution bearing Middle Eastern Shia impressions is exaggerated. These reductionist positions misrepresent their actual position as an active citizen in Pakistan. These kind of approaches require serious reconsiderations. Their sectarian treatment is not an exception and their role as an outsider is not exclusive as similar trends can be found in the matter of rest of sects and religious denominations. (Ishtiaq Ahmad 1991:183) This study brings only one aspect that deals with the question of marginalization into analysis.

Marginalization is a multifaceted, multi-dimensional process through which specific individuals, social groups, or communities are pushed to the margins of society. Academically it is perceived as a dynamic process of social development that systematically prevents affected people from fully participating in the

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economic, political, social, and cultural life of their broader society. This exclusion limits access to resources, power, and rights, effectively reducing human agency and strengthening existing patterns of inequalities. Iris Marion Young (1990) narrates that 'marginals' are people whom the system of labor cannot or will not use. This can be termed as Economic marginalization that deprives individuals of material resources, secure livings, and access to basic services like housing, healthcare, and quality education. Social scientists like Amartya Sen (2000) identifies that social exclusion deprives individuals of interactive abilities, limits political agency, rights, and voice. Marginalized groups are underrepresented in decision-making bodies and policy design, leaving them unable to influence the structural conditions that govern their lives. Erving Goffman (1963) highlighted how society builds "stigma" to disqualify particular groups from full social acceptance. Cultural marginalization occurs when dominant norms, values, and narratives devalue, erase, or criminalize the identity, history, and traditions of minority groups. Structurally, marginalization is maintained through official policies, legal structures, and routine social practices. Beyond material and political deprivation, it appears in the shape of feelings of alienation, powerlessness, and internalized stigma among affected communities. Ultimately, defining marginalization requires examining not merely individual outcomes, but the broader historical, political, and institutional arrangements that continuously reproduce inequality and exclusion.

This phenomenon becomes interesting in the sense that contemporary state structures not only control political and institutional developments but also focus on historical narratives and historical developments. (Nicolas Martin 2016:145-46) Modern state is based on the essential politicization of major aspects of human life. Social, cultural and religious issues go through essential political translation in a state with modern political structures. Socio-cultural sphere is the most significant space that enables the viewing of historical evolution in a particular state and society. So the question of Shia marginalization requires a historical and socio-cultural narration. This kind of narration can help to enhance political visibility.

1. Literature Review

Contemporary literature addressing the Social, political and religious status of Shia community can be divided into two main categories. First category of the academic works focusses solely on the Shia sect. Second category describes the plight of Shia community while addressing sectarianism, extremism and terrorism in Pakistan. Focused works include Andreas T. Reick's "The Shias of Pakistan: An Assertive and Beleaguered Minority", Simon Wolfgang Fuchs's "In a Pure Muslim Land: Shi'ism between Pakistan and the Middle East" and "Shia Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism" by Justine Jones.

The Shias of Pakistan: An Assertive and Beleaguered Minority by Adreas T. Rieck is published by Hurst in 2018. This is no doubt a remarkable contribution and can be categorized as a reference book for Shias of Pakistan. It begins with the question of communal identities in Colonial period. Rieck rightly narrated the apprehensions of Shia community regarding the question of so-called Muslim identity. After going through the colonial period it narrates the struggle of Shia sect in Pakistan in reflecting constitutional and political issues. He seems to argue that initially sectarian discourse owes its existence to the 'Islamic' intentions of the state. He examines the creation of various parties, personalities and trends in Shia community and their continuous engagement with the state. Author does not ignore the element of foreign involvement and rightly brings Iran, Saudi Arab and the West in the discussion, particularly after Iranian Revolution and advent of Afghan Jihad.

Simon Wolfgang Fuchs's "In a Pure Muslim Land: Shi'ism between Pakistan and the Middle East" is significant in the sense that it blends extra-territorial aspects of the development of Shia sect in Pakistan with internally contextualized historical evolution of the sect in South Asia. Author explains the cultural patterns of migration, as a result of partition of India, and the impact of these patterns on the development of Shia sectarian trends. He also analyzed the role of modern literary tradition by focusing on the particularity of modern genre in creation of sectarian narratives. He argues for the essential position of textual performance in the shaping of Shia sectarian narratives.

Shia Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism" by Justine Jones analyzes the development of Shia religious tradition in the colonial context. He explains the Shiite reflections and responses to modernity and narrates the resultant patterns in the development of Shia practices and communal structures. It is an important work regarding Shias in South Asia. Most of the studies addressing sectarian discourse in Pakistan ignore the colonial impressions. This study facilitates the textual understanding of modern Shia discourse in Pakistan.

Second category of literature describes the question of Shia identity, status of community and their religio-sectarian development by placing these into the popular discourse about extremism and sectarianism. Their representation in these works is limited to a sectarian character. These sectarian characters are follow certain deterministic scripts. There is an extended list of such sources. *Extremism and Counter-Extremism Narratives in Pakistan: An Analysis of Narrative Building* by Sadia Nasir published by Routledge in 2023. It throws light on the construction of religious and socio-cultural identities in the context of the extremism discourse in the country. *Countering Violent Extremism in Pakistan: Local Actions, Local Voices* by Anita M. Weiss, is published by Oxford University Press Pakistan in 2020. This identifies and analyzes the impact of the various ways in which local people are responding, taking stands, recapturing their culture, and saying 'stop' to the violent extremism that has manifested over the past decade (even longer) in Pakistan. *Pakistan Under Siege: Extremism, Society, and The State* by Madiha Afzal published by Brookings Institution Press in 2018. It narrates that the extremism discourse has overwhelmed the question of Pakistan's identity as state. Pakistani state seems to be in continuous struggle against the terrorists. *Religion, Extremism and Violence in South Asia* edited by Imran Ahmed, Zahid Shahab Ahmed, Howard Brasted, Shahram Akbarzadeh is published by Palgrave as a part of series, politics in South Asia. It analyzes religiously motivated extremism and violence in South Asia that is not only affecting the regional peace but also posing existential threats to the global security. *Islam and Sectarian Violence in Pakistan: The Terror Within* by Eamon Murphy published by Routledge in 2019. It narrates the development of sectarian-based terrorist violence in Pakistan. Author argues that sectarian issues in the Muslim world, particularly in Pakistan, have considerable impacts on the global security. *Faith-Based Violence and Deobandi Militancy in Pakistan* edited by Jawad Syed, Edwina Pio, Tahir Kamran, Abbas Zaidi is published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2016. It describes the Deobandi dimension of extremism and its impacts on faith-based violence and terrorism.

Reviewing the above-mentioned sources not only reveals different angles of academic treatment of Shia sectarian question but at the same time hints about the futuristic possibilities of academic inquiries in the field. The first category of literature explains the historical development and role of colonization and modernity on the evolution of the Shia tradition but it leaves space for the socio-cultural understanding of this evolutionary process. As far as the question of marginalization of Shia community is concerned, they either ignore or confine the question of marginality to the visible political sphere. In the second category of literature question of marginalization is translated into persecution and violent acts of extremism. It is also noticed that the question of Marginalization of Shia community is taken for granted.

2. Description of Research and Research methods

This study is based on the hypothesis that the issue of Shia marginalization is closely tied to the definition and structural formation of the modern state in Pakistan. 'Alternative' modern patterns in governance and state formation have contributed to the creation of this 'marginalization discourse. It argues that Shias are socially empowered, culturally rich, and religiously assertive, they are often politically marginalized. Even this political marginalization is not essential but situational in nature. In the light of the hypothesis and basic argument this study intends to answer the following questions.

- How to define the question of 'marginalization' of a religious sect in a state with modern political structure?
- What is the role of socio-cultural structures and developments in the historical understanding of political issues like marginalization?

- To what extent the question of 'Shia marginalization' in Pakistan is real (in the light of answering the above questions)?

This study answers these questions by dividing main discussion into two parts. First part describes and analyzes the social status of the Shia community in Pakistan by focusing on the existing patterns of social strata. Their presence in elite social structures and their progressive resonances in the emerging middle classes, initially validate their strong social presence. This part also focuses on 'Culture' as a depository of social meanings that contains historical agency. It extends the argument that Shia sect is not only present in the tradition cultural script but at the same time playing and active role in the development and ongoing process of generation of 'social meanings'. Their strong social representation reflects itself in the cultural domain. Second part explains Shia's political status in modern state based on 'Islamic' principles. It relates the question of marginalization with the religious character of a modern state and also points out the limitation of state and governance patterns to reflect the real socio-cultural development in political affairs. Modern state essentially reflects the historical and socio-cultural realities in political issue. In this way, question of marginalization of a sect and community can be resolved with maturity of political tradition and political stability. 'Marginalization' do not represents mal-intention of a state or a government but it reflects political instability in a modern state.

This study combines different research methods. Dialectical method is essential as it engages different academic opinions and understandings held by existing academic literature. It also follows historical research method that helps in narrating and blending 'facts' and creating a sequence in different trends and events in a particular time and space. Historical method also helps in narrating the social structures and also in the 'procedural' treatment of culture. Cultural aspects also require qualitative content analysis and hermeneutical understandings. Phenomenological methods appear in the shape of interviews and also in narration by the author as a cultural insider.

3. **Social and Cultural Position of Shia Community**:

Modern state and society are integrated in a sense that whatever is social comes directly or indirectly under political influence and whatever is political is primarily based on 'social'. (Furuta et al. 2024) Electoral and participatory aspects of modern politics bring it close to social structures. Electoral behavior in particular society reflects different forms of social bonding and consensus development. (Lucas. J. 2024) Social structures and scripts have not been demolished in the wake of modernity. They are either reformed or re-structured according to the political models. This angle of social development helps in proper understanding of the 'historical' trends that are involved in the social existence of a particular community or a sect. Description of social position of Shia community in Pakistan require two steps of social understanding. At first, it is necessary to know about the traditional script of social structures. Secondly one requires to examine the process of social development that contains the social compromises on the part of traditional structures and pragmatic position of certain popular trends.

Pakistan society is comprised of multiple traditions of social structuring ranging from tribalism to birādarīsm. (Baloch 2022) Baloch, Pashtun and Sindhi society is dominantly tribal as compared to strict birādarīsm of Punjab. Region plays a dominant role in the establishment of these identities. In case of Baloch, Tribal structure of Baluchistan and Sindh converts itself into a 'birādarī', entering the boundaries of Punjab province. Same is the case with Pashtuns living in Multan and other parts of South Punjab. They have converted their tribal identities into the local birādarī structures. Migrated clans from Punjab acquire semi-tribal identity in the geographical boundaries of Sindh province. Although these strict social structures are negotiating their structural formations and agency in the wake of rapid urbanization and also with the impact of 'globalized urbanity' in the village life, yet they play an important role. (Ali 2022) This negotiation is different in metropolitan cities from the patterns of small cities and villages. Raising number of emerging middle classes and new patterns in urban management i.e. gated communities are laying the basis of certain new standards for the future social structures. (Nadeem et al. 2023) In traditional and popular aspects of 'social', Shia community has a significant presence and a well-balanced social role to play in Pakistani society.

Punjab with majority of the population exhibits the variety of social structures and this varsity is also evident in the construction of popular social trends. Considerable number of traditional social elite in major cities of Punjab belong to Shia sect. Most prominent among this traditional elite are Qazalbāsh and Sheikh from Lahore, Gerdaizi, Quraishis and Langahs from Multan, Syed, Sials and Quraishis of Jhang, Bhatti from Hafiz Abad, Raja and Syeds of Faisalabad, Syeds of Chiniot. Besides these, there is a long list of Shia feudal elite that have been assigned prominent social and political role in the British period. Their social position has a history of political influence throughout the history of Pakistan. They enjoyed huge land ceilings and also represented their constituencies at provincial and National level. List of the prominent Shia political personalities belonging from the traditional social elite is considerably large. Needless to mention that majority of the social traditional elite of Shia community remained aloof from the politics but had been playing and active social life. In traditional cities they also share the religio-spiritual capital with the traditional Sufi elite. Pakistani society is unique in the sense that it presents Shia Sufi elite. Sufism and Shia sect represents different ideologies in Arab, Turkish and Persian worlds.

Traditional Social structures in Sind province present three major patterns. Tribe, ethnic affiliation and religious identities shape the social strata. Traditional form of social division in local population is tribe. Their tribal experience is different from that of existing in Baluchistan, KPK and in some areas in Punjab. They are lacking the rigidity of Baloch tribes and resisting the patterns of birādarīsm of Punjab. Those clans which are considered menials in the social script of Punjab, identify themselves in a tribal structure in Sind. Migrant in the urban localities of Karachi and Haiderabad identify themselves on the basis of their clans and also on the basis of region of their origin in India. Third major component of the Sind's society is the Hindu population living in so-called 'interior Sind'. Sind served as the first asylum for Shia migrants from the Arab during Ummayyad and Abbasids rule. Shia individuals and groups who were resisting the political supremacy of these dynasties took refuge in Sindh and Makran. (Quraishi 1998, 33) Historical development in this region maintained Shiʿite presence throughout the preceding centuries after the advent of Islam in India. (Aslam 1996, 29) This historical impression is present in traditional social structures. Talpur family (Sindhi speaking Balochs) of Khairpur state patronized Shia traditions in Sind and South Punjab from eighteenth century till recent times. (Reick 2015) Other Baloch tribes with Shiite identity include Chandio, Rind, Lashari, Zardari and Jamali. Among the Sindis, Syeds and different other tribes of the province contain a considerable number of Shia individuals. Representation of Sufi-Shiism, as mentioned in the case of Punjab, consolidated itself in the premises of Sind province. Shrines of Shahbaz Qalandar, Abdullah Shah Ghazi and Shah Abdul Latif Bhatai played their role in strengthening Shia tradition in a significant way. Shiʿite impressions of local social structures reflected themselves in the urban centers of Karachi and Haiderabad after the 1947 partition and the large-scale migration of Shia migrant from different parts of India to Karachi and Haiderabad. (Reick 2015) According to sources Shia population represents one-third of the total population of Karachi. Karachi not only became a strong center of the community but in many respects, it led to overshadow the local traditions and adopted the role of a trend setter Shia space. The role of urban Sindh in the consolidation of social development of Shias in Sindh is extraordinary. Their impact is cross-cultural and their religious resonance can be felt throughout the country. So, both in rural and urban Sindh Shia have a significant social recognition and are an active segment of society.

Shia social position is a bit compromised in two provinces, KPK and Baluchistan. They are represented in the tribal belt with leading tribes, Turis, Bangash and Orakzai. Major concentration of the population is in Kurram agency. Para Chinar, Hangu and Kohat in this area inhibit Shia population. (Abou Zahab 2010) After Afghan war this area has been a center of sectarian clashes with major death tolls. Peshawar inhibits a prominent number of the Shia residents. Qazalbāsh clan is leading the Shia communal life in the city. The number of Shia residents in the provincial capital is also on rise in the wake of sectarian clashes in the agencies and neighboring areas. (Sadeque 2012) Third main center of the sect is Dera Ismail Khan. It is not only a major center but also distinct due to its Saraiki culture. Peaceful culture of Dera Ismail Khan has been affected by the neighboring insurgencies and target killing has affected the Shia population. Hazara Division also bears visible and considerable number of Shia residents. Baluchistan inhibits the least number of the Shia population

and their presence is combined with an ethnic 'Hazara' identity. Hazara Shia in Quetta represents the major community of Shias and is most-persecuted among the Shia segments. (Awan and Shifa 2025)

As narrated earlier, Social development does not solely depend on the 'traditional' structures but it shares agency with certain popular social trends. Vibrant societies continuously present changing patterns of social bonding and social identity. These popular trends are more relevant to social existence as compared to the traditional ones. They pave way for the futuristic existence of any community. These kind of trends are very much visible in the social development in Punjab and Sind. Partition of subcontinent and migration of Hindu-Muslim refugees across the borders laid the basis of genesis of popular trends in the newly born state of Pakistan. Emerging classes and affected strata usually revisit their former scripts and in doing so they also negotiate with their traditional belief structures. This also happened in Pakistan and Shia sect got the remarkable share in these transitions. Consecutive land reforms in Punjab and emergence of educational and industrial elite in Sind appeared in the shape of diverse social structuring. This trend owes its existence to two main factors i.e. cultural dominance of traditional Shia elite and socio-cultural engagements of the Shia community throughout the yearly calendar. Traditional script of social manifestation of superiority included many Shiʿite practices. This aspect is being challenged by the rising number of neo-sufi trends that are trying to defuse Shiʿite position in this regard.

Description of traditional and popular social trends and active position of Shia community helps to examine and analyze the cultural position. For cultural understanding of the Shiite social position, one requires to detach culture from the 'social' to deals it as a system of meanings that both in traditional and popular sense represent the social development (Barker 2005, 7). Culture is not a stagnant entity but works in the shape of discourse while creating, validating, negating and negotiating social meanings (Reckwitz 2002). It is major social agent that works in a different and sometimes in an unpredictable way. It contains a central place in the management of any kind of 'power', authority and agency in a society (Miller 2001, 2). So it detaches itself from the 'recent' social process and links past, present and future of social development in a discursive manner. It keeps both traditional and popular patterns of social development (Patten 2011). In this way culture also provides an angle to analyze the issue of sectarian marginalization. Cultural analysis of Pakistani society validates the argument of active participation of Shia social segments. It provides different means to approach this question that are described in this part.

As described in the above portion, Shia have considerable share in the social elites in Punjab and Sindh, it creates significant impact on the cultural strength of community. This cultural resonance is evident from the presence of different discursive positions. Political and social participation of Sunni population in the areas with Shia (Elite's) political hegemony appeared as a resistance movement (Kamran 2009). This happened in central Punjab and interior Sindh. This social and political resentment against Shia political elite gave birth to sectarian violence and clashes. District Jhang, Khanewal and Sargodha represent these patterns. Similar trend can be found in interior Sindh as well. This local phenomenon also got reflected in the national politics and Sunni religious and religio-political parties started blaming the over-representation of Shia sect in political and bureaucratic elite cadres (Athir 1997, 201). Extreme right wing used it as a symbol of threat and accused the 'establishment' of being in secret ties with a minority sect. In a country, where, personalization of politics has been a popular trend, presence of Shia personalities with dominant portfolios threatened the extreme right wing Sunni organization.

Shia presence in elite social cadres and a hegemonic cultural description of this presence is supported by some other cultural expressions as well. At one end Shia feudal and land owning classes represent elites and on the other hand Shia scripts engages with the most marginalized communities in Pakistani society. Shia script is highly detachable and carries all the strata together (Ali et al. 2018). It provides pride to high culture and sympathy and affection for the lower strata and marginalized communities. Majority of the transgender, nomadic people like Sheedis, Bagris and Pakhiwas, menials like sewer man and bards and other communities who share a feeling of marginalization are attracted towards Shia sect. The members of these communities are either announced Shia or they are inclined towards Shia practices and love to assemble with Shias. (Ali and Nawaz, 2019) Ayām-i-ʿazādārī and Majlis-i-ʿazā provide the time and space for social interaction and

inclusion not only for the Shias but also with other sectarian and social communities. Socio-cultural content and an egalitarian commencement of these rituals offer a comfort 'time and space' zone to the marginalized communities. (Ali et al. 2018) It is an interesting aspect that Shia community has surpassed Sufism in marketing or even in materializing the efforts for socio-cultural inclusion. Shia calendar offers the most engaging events throughout the year. Their celebrations do not have any social requirement and are usually open to all cadres of society. These include, Majālis, religious processions, sacred journeys and most popular Langars.

Shia belief and practices are culturally detachable in Pakistani context. This detachability provides them opportunities to grow in social and cultural life. They bestow central position to the Family of Prophet and follow the legacy of Imams. (Al Haq 1998) Their Imams are also among the 'spiritual elders' in different Sufi traditions. All the Sufi orders, except Naqshbandīs, confirm spiritual authority from Ali. Ali is central figure in both Shia and Sufi traditions. (Ibid) Imam Zain-al-ʿAbidin and Imam Muhammad Bāqir are also mentioned by Sufi sources as the spiritual personalities who laid the basis of early Sufism in Islam (Ibid). These two traditions are not only different from each other but are considered as rivals. Shia scholars reject Sufim on the basis of religious epistemology of Imams (Hasni 2008, 70-72). Similarly Sufi orders contest sectarian trends in Islam with their particular understanding of the teachings of Imams. Besides these foundational differences, they have benefitted much from each other in Pakistani context. Especially Shia tradition has benefitted enormously from Sufis. Sufism paved way for the Shia preaching and helped them in converting a bulk of Sunni population. It is evident from the fact that majority of traditional Sufi families began to adopt Shia beliefs in the history of this regions. The conversion of elite Sufi families facilitated the similar patterns in the follower ranks. Family of Laʿl Karor ʿisan, forefather of Bahauddin Zakariya, Suhrawardīs of Uch Shareef, Gerdaizīs from Multan are prominent in this regard (Gull 2023, 33). Qureshis and Gilanis also show remarkable trends of conversion to Shia tradition. Pakistani society provides opportunities to various ideological traditions to interact and negotiate their particular meaning with each other. These cultural venues reflect themselves in social sense as well.

Above discussion views that Shia sect not only has a significant position in the traditional forms of culture but also contains requisite social power to engage itself in the various venues of creation of popular cultures. Shia tradition offers a diverse script that contains reflexivity and detachability.

4. Political aspects of Shia Marginalization in Pakistan

The most important sphere regarding gauging the marginalization of any community is the political space. Political aspect of marginalization had been significant from the early periods of establishment of political institutions but has become most important after the advent and establishment of modern state (Raleigh 2010, 69-86). Any state with modern political structure and electoral and representative forms of government ensures politicization of all aspects of human life (Hislope and Mughan 2012, 2). Even in the secular states 'religious existence' is managed by the political rules and regulations (Ahmad 2008). It is evident from the religious development in India in Colonial period. Reflecting the political management of Colonial government religious traditions in India went through rigorous transformations (Menon 2002). This becomes more complex with a modern state with religious intentions. This happened in the post-colonial period that newly emerging Muslim states including Pakistan adopted modern state structures by blending these with their particular understanding of religion. This trend has created various confusions regarding the role of state, government and on the other hand regarding the religious authority of religious traditions and personalities. Religious communities in this context are trying either to gain political agency on one end and on other hand in diffusing the political power in religious matters. Muslims in India support secular state. Similar brand of Muslims in Pakistan demand religious orientation of state. Similar pattern of political discourse prevails within different sects in a Muslim modern state like Pakistan.

Pakistani state from the very beginning showed religious intentions. Objectives resolution laid the basis of Islamic orientation of state and blending of Islam with modernity (Raza 2017). Authority of Allah and utilization of the sacred trust of authority by the people is the model of this blending. It is unique and

evolutionary step in Islamic political thought as well. Before the advent of modernity, divine essence of political authority has been the part of Muslim political philosophy. Local ruler requested 'letters of manumission' from the Caliph. Akbar bestowed Islamic essence to so-called 'Divine right of monarchy' and introduced the concept of 'Sultan-i-ʿĀdil'. 'Sultan-i-ʿĀdil' was supposed to be the shadow of God on earth (Ali 2019). All these models conferred divine authority to monarchs or and in some cases to councils of ruling elite. It was for the first time in history of Muslim political development that divine authority was being conferring upon the people of a newly born Muslim state. It can be regarded as democratization of sacred divine trust.

This democratization of sacred trust gave birth to sectarian discourse that was centered on the issue of materialization of this sacred trust. This sacred trust is differently modeled on sectarian basis. Sunni world could accommodate this new democratic orientation of sacred trust but its materialization in Shia sect is complex. Essential role of Imam in Shia polity makes Shias conscious in this regard. So, Shias in Pakistan had to face two main issues. First they had concerns with the legitimacy of democratization of divine authority. At second, they were confused in reflecting the deterministic role of Sunni majority in Pakistan under new political circumstances. In this context, Pakistani state became more comfortable with the so-called majority sect(s). So the constitutional development and question of religion proved to be a first step towards marginalization of Shia sect in Pakistan. Onwards every attempt to modernize the governance and Islamization of state proved challenging for the community. Circumstances favored the majority Sunni population and they managed the excommunication of Ahmadis by the parliament. Similar attempts have been made by extremist Sunni religious organizations against Shia sect as well. Although no effort in case of Shias could gain significant attention but still, in a country with Sunni majority, this works as a constant threat. They have been faced with two kinds of political challenges. Extremist religious groups have been demanding their excommunication besides presenting the Bills like '*Tauhīn-i-Saḥābā wa Ahl-al-Bait*' and 'Taḥafuz-i-bunyād-i-Islam Bill' to limit the social and cultural development of the sect in Pakistan. About seventy percent cases under blasphemy laws (Penal code: 295-298) have been registered against Shia community. These cases that carry death penalty are based against the Shiʿite interpretation of history. Taḥafuz-i-bunyād-i-Islam Bill (2020), passed by Punjab Assembly also extended the spirit of blasphemy laws against Shia sect. At the same time their separate sectarian identity has also been accepted through different legislative measures. Their protest against Zakat ordinance proved successful. Proposed amendments in Muslim Family Law ordinances and certain new proposed legislations (2019, 2020, 2021) permitted Shia personal laws to be implemented through courts.

Shias had to face severe political challenges in the wake of Islamization of Pakistan by Zia regime. They not only showed their concerns on many steps by the state but also went into processions and protests. Their famous protest was against Zakat ordinance. Community feels that Zia regime not only challenged their political existence in state but laid basis for their future persecution as well. Zia regime's political intentions reflected themselves in the shape of violent sectarian clashes that in different ways are surviving till recent times. Islamic revolution in Iran also added to the miseries of Shia in Pakistan (Nasr 1999, 314). Shias were considered to be the carriers of Iranian revolution in Pakistan. They were denied of any significant political role in the country. This was a period of psychological disillusion of the community and they were facing a social suspicion of the majority Sunni population (Ibid). State sponsored religious question compelled them to gradually distance from different factions of Pakistan Muslim League and they took refuge in the Pakistan People's party, after the establishment of Party. Pakistan People's Party strengthened its electoral base by attracting Shia voters. Shia community took a sigh of relief during the so-called 'Era of Enlightened Moderation'. Politically, this period benefitted the religious minorities and marginalized groups. Post-Musharraf era witnessed three rising trends in Pakistan's religious and political sphere. Rise of PTI and its assumption of power, establishment of TLP and emergence of MWM as a representative of Shia community (Batool et al. 2023). PTI attracted the Shia electoral base of PPP, and moderate right wing Sunni population. TLP in some ways replaced the Deobandi extremist groups in threating the minority sects and rest of marginalized communities. They also engaged in sectarian entanglement with Shias. MWM adopted pro-establishment behavior and negotiated well in political domain. They have been close ally of PTI and recently

head of the organization Senator Raja Nasir Abbas is nominated as opposition leader in Senate on behalf of PTI. This is claimed to be the most significant political achievement of any Shia religio-political organization. Recent developments in Pakistani politics also witness certain structural compromises on behalf of Shia religio-political leadership on the centrality of Imamate and on the question of authority of *'Wilāyat-al-Faqīh'*.

Examining political status of Shia community in Pakistan requires discursive analysis. This discursive analysis involves certain questions, whose answers are debated. Answers related to the role of religion in modern state, sectarian trends in constitutional development and legislation, parliamentary representation of sects and sectarian resonances in a political culture. Shia community has maintained a reasonable parliamentary representations and prominent parliamentarian belong to this sect. Shiʿite beliefs and practices have significant electoral resonance and these are utilized by Sunni candidates as well (Ali and Shafique 2019). Issue of their marginalization is more attached with the question of modern state and role of religion and is to lesser extent with some controversial legislation. At third comes the political management that combines 'situations' with the above mentioned factors. This situational aspect is evident from the difference 'historical' conditions for Shia community under different political regimes. From 1973 onward, their constitutional and legislative treatment depended on the changing governing patterns. Historical development shows both progressive and retrogressive trends in this regard.

Conclusion

The issue of marginalized communities in modern world has attracted much academic analysis. Modern states with democratic electoral process and parliamentary representations have paved way for a continuous discourse regarding the appropriate representation of all the segment of the population in the political and overall development of human life. This discourse and institutionalization of modern advocacy are among the major progressive tools that differentiate modern states from the traditional forms of political structures. As mentioned above modern state has brought all the aspects of human life in the political fold. From individual social needs to the complicated level of community engagement, issues are either being directly managed by the state or being facilitated through governance. So major agent remains the politics but this agent deterministically reflects the social, cultural and religious aspects, for example. Modern political discourse compels a necessitated negotiation between what is termed as 'political' and 'social', 'cultural', 'religious', 'economic' and 'regional'. Essential politicization of all aspects of life has brought true sense of representation of common man in a modern state. Above discussion regarding the issue of marginalization of Shia community has been structured under this pattern. Social, cultural and religious aspects show encouraging trends regarding the position and status of Shia community in Pakistan. They possess respectable social recognition, actively taking part in cultural development and having religious liberty. Whatever is termed as 'marginalization' is emanating from the 'political' end. It is partly because of the 'alternative' modernization of state and partly because of the communal intentions of different regimes. Even if they are struggling for political safeguard, they are not alone. There are other religious minorities, gender groups and regional elements, who are doing the same thing. Shia's condition is far better than the other so-called 'marginalized' groups in Pakistan. Sooner or later, their social, cultural and religious optimistic position would definitely be reflected in the politics structures and process.

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