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ISSUES OF MINORITY WITHIN MINORITY IN A MULTICULTURAL FRAMEWORK: A PLIGHT OF SHIA MINORITY VIS-À-VIS SUNNI MAJORITY IN INDIA

– Abstract –

Multiculturalism is a philosophy that looks upon an individual with specific reference to his cultural, religious, ethnic, and other such identities. It challenges the inequalities, discriminations, and atrocities faced by an individual due to his different identities on account of religion, culture, ethnicity, gender, etc, which is non-dominant (numerically or in terms of powerlessness). Multiculturalism seeks to ensure equal rights as well as equal powersharing of all stakeholders.

However, multiculturalism is often criticized for ignoring the rights of groups/minorities within the minorities, i.e., the others' of "other". Multiculturalism recognizes and values the diversities within the society but fails to acknowledge the stratifications within the group. It often leads to the denial of egalitarian treatment to minorities within a minority. It acknowledges the "other" but ignores the "others within the other". The claims of minorities against the majority for protection against discrimination become a dilemma when a minority claims the same within the minority.

This study first describes and understands the nature and concept of multiculturalism, followed by a critical appraisal of the context of marginalized groups within minorities. The second part of this study will explore the claims of Shias as a religious minority within muslim minority in India.

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Introduction

Multiculturalism as a philosophical doctrine has immensely captured the academicians' interest. For one, the concept is new in the annals of cultural studies, and for another, the term offers a wide range of options available to advocates of cultural pluralism. Unlike other concepts dealing with this situation of a plurality of cultures, multiculturalism does not narrow down the application of this doctrine to only a particular set of things. Rather, it provides a broader perspective within which to study cultural pluralism in societies while not falling into the trap that the theories of cultural pluralism could not avoid. Multiculturalism is a more dynamic concept that explores cultures as they exist in active interaction with each other, borrowing from different cultures while at the same time sharing some of their finer points with other cultures. Thus, the term includes a wide variety, from the way every unique culture strives to carve out space for itself in a society it considers alien but wants to make its own to the entire gamut of politics involved in this whole process of usurping and conceding rights. Thus, multiculturalism as a process witnesses the dynamics involved in the culturization of politics and politicization of cultures.

A multicultural perspective is based on the idea that no particular culture explains the whole truth of human existence; neither is it the only way to organize human life. Therefore, every culture is important and has something worth preserving. It also means that cultures are neither commensurable nor collapsible into one. Multiculturalism is a philosophy that entertains diversity, respects diversity for its worth, and gives all unique cultures/ stakeholders a fair chance to participate as equal partners in national policymaking. The ethnic groups sharing a common state shall be recognized publicly through minority rights so that no person is marginalized or forced to assimilate.

With the growing awareness of democratic rights amongst these historically oppressed groups, the governments are facing protestations for

a more inclusive and representative policy with the purpose of accommodating these culturally deviant groups. Responding positively to the demands of these culturally deviant groups, the state incorporated the same set of rights to all citizens with special cultural and ethnic rights to these minority groups. Thereby acknowledging and protecting diversity. Going a step ahead, multicultural states are also ensuring a fair representation of diverse cultural groups in the state legislature.[1]

The Problem of Intra-Group

Minority and majority concepts based on culture are not watertight compartments. Any "cultural group" consists of humans who are not same on various criteria, which has an impact on the collective cultural identity of these groups. But, the groups are not homogeneous. They are highly stratified; for example, muslims are a minority group in India but not a homogeneous group.[2] The same applies to many religious-ethnic groups who may have collective cultural identity with diversity within. Yet, the cultural identity of these groups is often led by the elites within these groups, which may not be representative of the minorities within.[3]

This situation causes dissatisfaction amongst the other members who feel marginalised by the elitist representation of their cultural groups, and it emerges as a challenge to the ideology of multiculturalism.[4]

The big issue facing the ideology of multiculturalism is how to strike a balance between "inter-group diversity" and "intra-group inequality". This causes a conflict between the "minority" and the "state" regarding the right to autonomy of the minority and the responsibility of the state to ensure the right to equality for each.

Multiculturalism in Indian Political System

Applying the multiculturalism theory in India, a multi-religious,

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[1] Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, Palgrave Publications, New York, 2000, pp. 336-338.
[2] India has stratified groups (Sub-sects) amongst Muslim population comprising various sects, such as Sunni, Shia, and others, each with its own set of beliefs, rituals, and practices.
[3] C.W. Watson, *Multiculturalism*, Open University Press, 2000.
[4] Michael Walzer, *Multiculturalism and Individualism*, "Dissent", no. 41, 1994, pp. 185–191.

multi-linguistic and multicultural state, one may find that multiculturalism has never been an officially declared policy of any ruler/ emperor/ government of India but has been in practice for centuries. Many religions coexisted for centuries in India. The biggest reason is the dominance of Sanathan Dharma[5], which believes in tolerance, mutual respect and coexistence of different faiths, beliefs and practices. Indian society has always adhered to the Sanatani Principle of Sarva Dharma Sambhava, i.e., the coexistence of all religions. The legacy continued in the post-independence era, too, when the Indian constitution incorporated the same principle of mutual respect and mutual coexistence of all religions. Tolerance and equality are the pillars of Indian secularism.[6] Indian secularism is different from Western secularism. Unlike the British system, the Indian state does not declare any religion as state religion; therefore, India is not a theocratic state. Unlike the American system, there is no strict separation between state and religion. The Indian state is, thus, neither religious nor antireligious, rather a religious.[7]

Indian constitution adopted a liberal democratic model based on the explicit principle of Equality for all and implicitly on multiculturalism. All religious communities enjoy legal and constitutional equality and are entitled to same set of fundamental rights. Any kind of discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, sex, and religion is legally prohibited. The Right to Equality (Sex, gender, caste, religion based) is a fundamental right. All citizens are equal and entitled to equal treatment and status.[8] Besides, Freedom of Religion has also been given to all people as a fundamental

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[5] Sanatan Dharma, often referred to as Hinduism, is an ancient religious and philosophical tradition rooted in the Indian subcontinent. "Sanatan" means eternal, and "Dharma" signifies duty or righteousness. Sanatan Dharma encompasses a diverse range of beliefs, rituals, and practices, emphasizing the pursuit of spiritual knowledge and the cyclical nature of existence. It doesn't have a single founder or scripture, allowing for a rich tapestry of traditions and philosophies to coexist. The core principles include karma (action), dharma (duty), and moksha (liberation), contributing to the profound spiritual heritage of Hinduism.

[6] Kanan Gahrana, *Right to Freedom of Religion*, *South Asian Publisher*, South Asian Publisher, New Delhi, 1992.

[7] Ibidem.

[8] Parvinrai Mulwantrai Bakshi and Subhash C Kashyap, *The Constitution of India*, Universal Law Publishing, 1982.

right.[9]

Despite such provisions ensuring equality and justice, there are groups within who suffer inequality, oppression and injustice. These historically subjugated subgroups within groups are women, Dalits, sects and subsects within religious groups like Shias, Bohras, Ahmidiyas, etc. LGBT groups are now getting acknowledgement in terms of the social and economic exploitation they face because of "being different". Lots of work has been done in the last few decades on the injustice and inequality faced by women in each group or community on account of their subordinate status. Denial of property and power is grave despite legal equality and sex-based equality as a fundamental right. Practices like parda, denial of full maintenance in case of divorce, triple talaq in one instance, halala, and child marriages have all denied women full and free exercise of their rights. They continue to be marginalised. With low representation in state legislatures, women's issues have never been a priority for the government except in recent years.[10]

Similarly, Dalits have suffered grave injustice and discrimination through centuries-old practices of caste-based discrimination and untouchability. Though the Constitution of India bans Untouchability through Article 17 and also provides for affirmative action for socially and economically backward sections of society. Caste-based reservations in job and educational institutions have been in vogue for last so many decades.[11]

Still, one can not say that the status of women, Dalits, and other sub-sects within a group are that of equality and empowerment. These groups are still the most disempowered sections of society in India.

The question arises to what extent these subgroups or "others" within the "other" can be denied access to basic/fundamental rights, otherwise available to all, in the name of traditions and cultural insularity.

Undemocratic or inhuman practices and even those against universal human rights are just not acceptable. Democratic principles of

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[9] Durga Das Basu et al., *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, LexisNexis, Gurgaon, 2015.

[10] Rachana Kaushal, *Religious Freedom and Human Rights in India: Conflicts and Reconciliation*, "Danubius", no. 32, Supplement, 2014, pp. 225–235.

[11] Basu et al., *op.cit.*

equality, liberty, and justice can't be compromised in the name of cultural autonomy.[12]

State intervention is needed to protect these vulnerable subgroups against elitism and the hegemony of the leaders of their respective groups.[13] The Indian state has, on many occasions, intervened in the religious matters of both majority as well as minority communities to ensure equality and justice for all. Temple entry reform; Hindu Code bill; banning triple talaq in one instance etc., to guarantee caste-based equality or sex-based equality in the matters of personal law that covers marriage, divorce, property, and inheritance within its purview. However, this intervention should be rational/logical and in harmony with the universal principles human rights.[14]

Shias in India

The term "Shia" holds both lexical and terminological meanings, and its contemporary usage predominantly refers to Shia Ithna Ashari or Twelver Shias. Lexically, in Arabic, "Shia" (شيعة) denotes followership, obedience, assistance, coordination of action and speech. Arabic dictionaries offer insights into its multifaceted meanings: Firoza Badi defines Shia as a follower and supporter, applicable to groups or individuals. Ibn Manzoor describes it as a gathering of individuals agreeing on a common matter, while Ibn Aseer traces its origins to the act of accompanying or following someone. Examining these lexical meanings reveals that "Shia" is associated with following and obeying, helping and accompanying, and being in accordance with others. In terminological terms, the most widely recognized usage pertains to a group that acknowledges Imam Ali (a.s) as Prophet Mohammad's (SAW) immediate successor. Firouzabadi notes that this name was initially applied to anyone

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[12] J. Spinner-Halev, *Feminism, Multiculturalism, Oppression, and the State*, "Ethics", no. 112 (1), 2001, p. 92.

[13] C. Kukathas, *Is Feminism Bad for Multiculturalism?*, "Public Affairs Quarterly", no. 5 (2), 2001, p. 88.

[14] G. Mahajan, "Can Intra-Group Equality Co-Exist with Cultural Diversity? Re-Examining Multicultural Frameworks of Accommodation," in A. Eisenberg & J. Spinner-Halev (Eds.),

following Ali (a.s) and his Household, evolving into a distinctive label for this group.[15]

Terminologically, "Shia" also refers to one of the two main branches of Islam, comprising about a tenth of Muslims, especially prevalent in Iran. Rejecting the first three Sunni caliphs, this branch considers Ali, the fourth caliph, as Muhammad's first true successor, as per the Oxford Dictionary. Syed Sharif Jurjani defines Shias as those who follow Ali (a.s), asserting that he is the rightful successor after the Holy Prophet (SAW). They believe in the exclusivity of the Imamate to Ali (a.s) and his descendants, the eleven subsequent Imams being the children of Prophet's daughter Lady Fatimah (s.a).[16]

In essence, "Shia" or "Shiite", particularly in the context of Shia Ithna Ashari, designates a Muslim sect recognizing Ali (a.s) as the immediate successor to the Holy Prophet (SAW), and subsequently, the Imamate is exclusive to Ali's family and the eleven Imams who follow him.[17]

The Indian Shia population is the world's second-largest after Iran. This fact was publicly acclaimed by the ex-Indian prime minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, in 2005.[18] India has about three to four crores of Shia Muslims. Twenty per cent of Muslims are Shias.[19] The Muslim community has around seventy-two firqas (factions), shias being one of them and the rest being Sunnis.[20]

Lucknow holds a special place for the Shias, mainly because of the

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Minorities Within Minorities: Equality, Rights and Diversity, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 95.

[15] Syed Ali and Abbas Rizvi, *Population of Shia Ithna Ashri Community in India ; Case Study of Lucknow*, vol. 22, no. 9, 2017, pp. 16–21, https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2209031621.

[16] Ibidem.

[17] Ibidem.

[18] Washington Post, "Interview of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh with Washington Post," Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2021, https://www.mea.gov.in/interviews.htm?dtl/4538/Interview+of+Prime+Minister+Dr+Manmohan+Singh+with+Washington+Post.

[19] Ali and Rizvi, *op.cit*.

[20] Ronald Geaves, "Sectarianism in Sunnī Islam," in *Handbook of Islamic Sects and Movements*, Brill, 2021, pp. 25-48.

reason that the Shias ruled Awadh for more than two hundred years. Then, Shias were not considered a minority amongst Muslims but the ruling society that gave culture, literature, architecture, and especially "Ganga-Jamni Tehzeeb" and a secular aspect of togetherness.

Data Compilation & Observations

Lucknow has historically been the seat of Shia rulers, like the Nawab of Awadh. Because of this, there was/is a concentration of Muslims in Lucknow and within that of Shia. It is estimated that there are around three lakh Shias in Lucknow.[21] It has always been a multicultural city. Courtly manners, beautiful gardens, poetry, music, and fine cuisine patronized by the Persian-loving Shia Nawabs of the city are well known.

Due to its cosmopolitan character and as one of the pivots of Shia socio-political and cultural life, Lucknow holds a special place in any study on Shias in North India. Lucknow has also been the site of Shia-Sunni conflicts and, therefore, has been selected for this study.[22]

Lucknow has been surveyed with the **Questionnaire** (Questionnaire in Appendix I) with a random sample size of 300 households, selected cross-sectionally with a ratio of 50 households to every lakh of the Shia population residing in Lucknow. The Cross-sectional selection is socio-economic in nature. The collected data is provided in tabular form and as a pie chart. Qualitative interviews with prominent Shia community leaders living in Lucknow were also conducted to gain insights into the Shia community.

A **Central hypothesis (CH)** was postulated, i.e., Minority within minority is deprived of the benefits of multiculturalism like equal power sharing and equal sharing of the benefits of development.

There are two **Subsidiary Hypotheses (SH):**

SH (1) Shias, as a group within the muslim minority, feel marginalized**.**

SH (2) The State doesn't addresses the plight of minorities within

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[21] Ali and Rizvi, *op.cit*.
[22] Theodore P Wright, The Politics of Muslim Sectarian Conflict in India, "*Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*", vol. 3, no. 3, 1980, p. 67.

the minority in the name of cultural autonomy.

In the matter of practicing religion, it has been observed that the Shia Muslims feel less threatened by the non-muslim majority than the Muslim majority, i.e., Sunni Muslims. The following data substantiate this (Refer to Table 1.1)

Table 1.1: Practicing religion amongst Sunnis

	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	112	37.3	37.3	37.3
No	135	45.0	45.0	82.3
No Reply	53	17.7	17.7	100
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The above table shows that out of the 300 respondents, 112 reported practicing religion among Sunnis, 135 respondents didn't practice religious practices among Sunnis, and 53 respondents didn't reply to the question. Hence, it can be said that the majority of the Shia community, 45%, feels no discrimination at all, while only 37.33% of Shia feel discriminated against. At the same time, 17.7% of Shia remain silent on this issue.

Figure 1.1
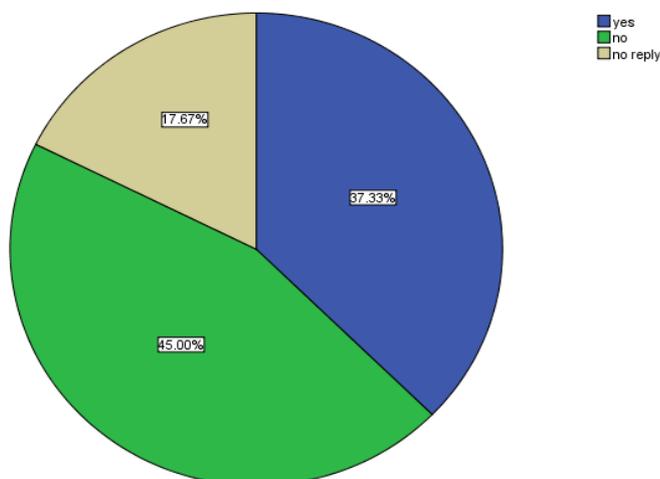
practicing religion amongst sunnis

Table 1.2: Practicing religion amongst Hindus

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	59	19.7	19.7	19.7
No	241	80.3	80.3	100
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The Shia community was asked if they felt any type of discrimination while practicing their religion amongst the Hindu community. As seen from the above table (Refer to Table 1.2), out of the 300 respondents, 59 reported not practicing religion amongst Hindus, and 241 respondents reported that they don't have any discrimination/fear of practising religion amongst Hindus. Hence, it can be said that 80.3% of the Shia community has no fear of practicing religion amongst Hindus, while only 19.7% of the Shia community fears practicing religion amongst the Hindus.

Figure 1.2
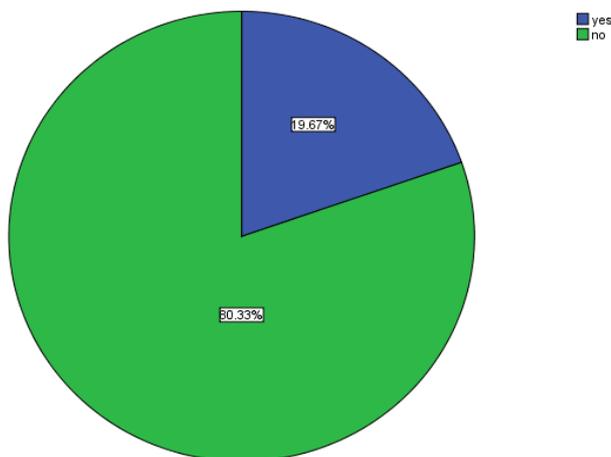
practicing religion amongst hindus

Table: 1.3 Feeling safe among a Sunni majority

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	100	33.3	33.3	33.3
No	200	66.7	66.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The above table (table 1.3) showed that out of the 300 respondents, 200 reported not practicing religious practices among Sunnis, and 100 respondents reported that they did practice religious practices among Sunnis. Hence it can be said that 66.7% of Shias didn't practice religious practices in the presence of Sunni Muslims as they didn't feel safe, whereas 33.3% of Shias practiced the same in their presence. In terms of the general safety of life and property, the Shia Muslims feel safer amongst the Hindus than the Sunni majority. Below is the graphical representation of the same (figure 1.3).

A large part of the Shia population (66.67%) feels threatened by their own religious majority (Sunni).

Figure 1.3
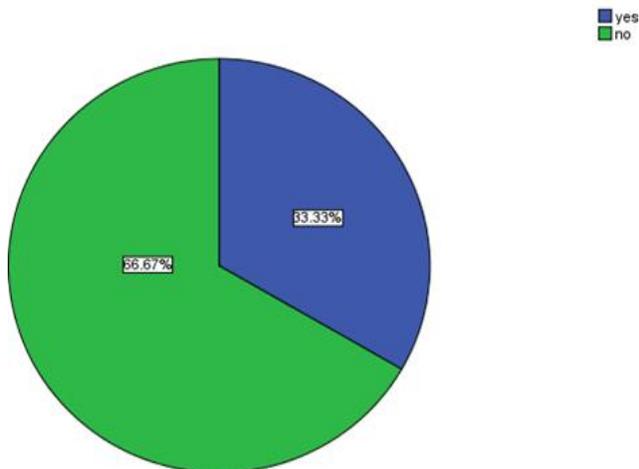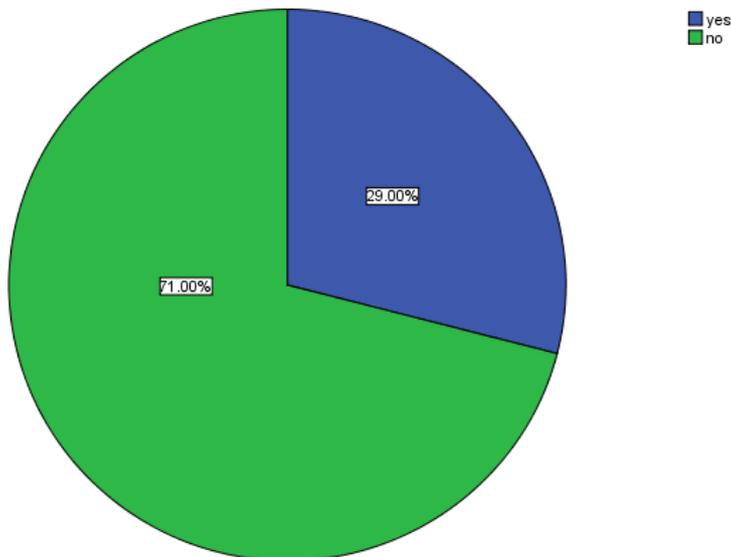feeling safe among minorities majority

Table 1.4: Culture threatened by Hindus

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	87	29	29	29
No	213	71.0	71.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The above table (Refer to Table 1.4) showed that out of the 300 respondents, 213 reported not experiencing cultural threats by the Hindu Community[23], whereas 87 reported that they faced cultural threats. Hence, it can be said that the majority of the Shia's (71%) didn't face any threat from the Hindu community.
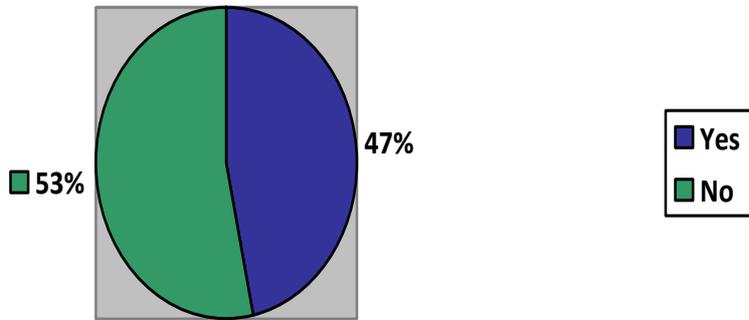
Figure 1.4
culture threatned by hindus

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[23] Hindus are the majority religious group in Lucknow, India, making up approximately 75% of the city's population. The Hindu community in Lucknow is diverse, with members from a variety of castes, sub-castes, and linguistic groups. Some of the most common Hindu castes in Lucknow include Brahmins, Kayasthas, Vaishyas, and Kshatriyas. The most common languages spoken by Hindus in Lucknow are Hindi and Urdu.

Table 1.5 shows that out of the 300 respondents, 160 reported experiencing cultural threats by the sunni community, whereas 140 reported that they didn't face cultural threats from the same. Hence, it can be said that the majority of the Shia (53.3%) didn't face any threat from the sunni community.

Table 1.5: Culture Threatened by Sunnis

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	140	46.7	46.7	46.7
No	160	53.3	53.3	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1.5

Both the figure 1.4 & 1.5 collectively reflect that Shia community do not feel culturally threatened by the Hindu community but by the sunni majority of their own community. The two figures reflect cultural threat more from the Sunni majority rather than the Hindu majority. While in Figure 1.4, 71% of Shia deny any kind of cultural threat from Hindus, and

Figure 1.5 shows that only 53% of Shia deny any threat from the Sunni majority.

Culturally, Shias feel safe in a Hindu-dominant multicultural state of India that justifies multicultural nature of Indian democracy.

Table 1.6: Special schemes for Shias by the Government of India

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	169	56.3	56.3	56.3
No	131	43.7	43.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The above table (table 1.6) revealed that out of the 300 respondents, 169 reported that they were not provided any special scheme by the government, and 131 respondents reported that they were provided the same. In terms of percentage analysis, it can be said that 56.3% of Shias reported that they were not provided any special scheme by the government, whereas 43.7% of Shias reported that the government provided them.

The majority of the Shia community (56.3%) says that they need special schemes on the part of the government, indicating that the government schemes made for minorities are not reaching minorities within a minority.

The government should address the economic marginalization and underdevelopment of smaller groups like Shias through special welfare and development schemes. Most schemes launched by government for the minorities have benefited the numerically dominant group within the minority, thus, the government welfare schemes for the muslims have benefited the sunnis.
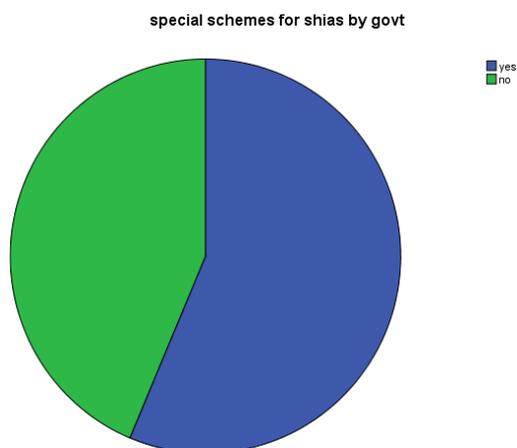
Figure 1.6

special schemes for shias by govt

Table 1.7: Special category

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	208	69.3	69.3	69.3
No	92	30.7	30.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The above table (Refer to Table no. 1.7) and below figure (Refer to Figure no. 1.7) revealed that out of the 300 respondents, 208 participants demanded a special category. In contrast, only 92 reported that they didn't need a special category. Hence, in terms of percentage analysis, it can be said that 69.3% of the respondents were demanding a special category. Shias, as a minority within the minority, feel alienated from the mainstream and, therefore, want recognition as a differentiated group within the Muslim community.

69.33% of the Shia population demanding special status highlights the fact that Shias regard themselves as a distinct group within the Muslim community. There is a clear-cut perception of discrimination and marginalization, due to which they demand special treatment.
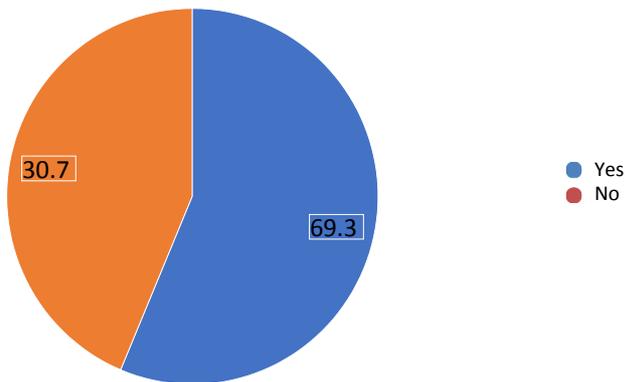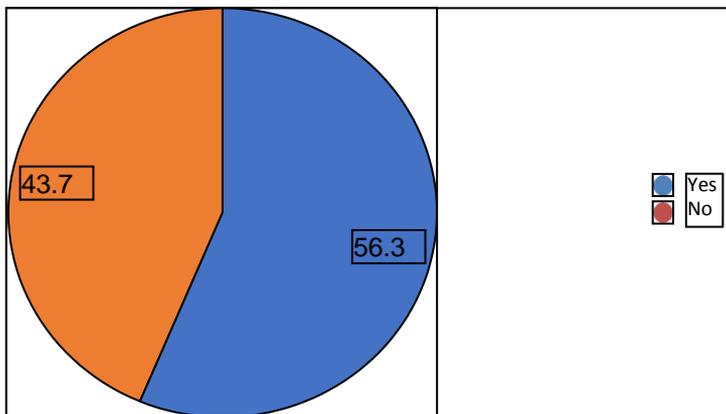
Figure 1.7: Special Category

Table 1.8: Special schemes for Shias by the Government of India

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	169	56.3	56.3	56.3
No	131	43.7	43.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1.8 Special schemes for Shias by the Government of India

The above table (Refer to Table 1.8) showed that out of the 300 respondents, 169 demanded special schemes for them, whereas 131 didn't. Hence, it can be said that most respondents demand special schemes for their community. The majority of the Shia community (56.3%) says that they need special schemes on the part of the government, which indicates that the government schemes made for the minorities are not reaching the minorities within minority.
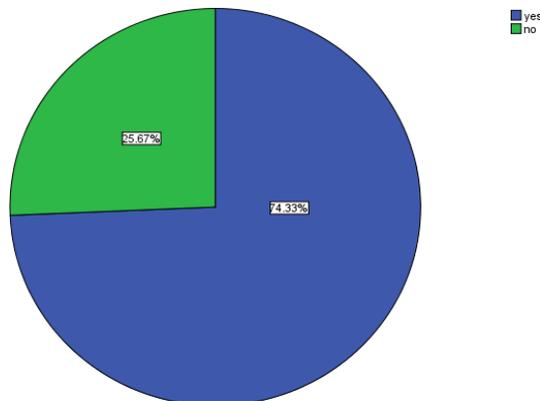
Table 1.9: Government provisions for Muslim as a minority

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	223	74.3	74.3	74.3
No	77	25.7	25.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Shia minority feels that the majority of government schemes have benefitted the "majority" within the Muslim community, i.e., the Sunni Muslims. The development benefits do not trickle down to the smaller groups within the Muslim community. Therefore, a feeling of marginalization exists. The above table 1.9 shows that out of the 300 respondents, 74.3% of the Shias felt this marginality, whereas 25.7% did not.

Figure 1.9

govt provisions for sunnis

One of the objectives of the survey was also to know the feelings of Shias with regard to the multicultural credentials of the Indian State, i.e., whether they also feel discriminated against not only by the Sunnis but also by the State. And also to learn about their feelings and experiences in multicultural States. Data has been collected on the experiences of Shias with the public services/utilities like hospitals, Educational institutions, and Law and order authorities.

Table 1.10: Discrimination in employment

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	83	27.7	27.7	27.7
No	217	72.3	72.3	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The above table (Refer to Table 1.10) showed that out of the 300 respondents, 217 reported that they were not discriminated against in employment, whereas 83 reported that they faced discrimination. Hence, it can be said that the majority of the Shia (72.3%) didn't face any discrimination in terms of employment.

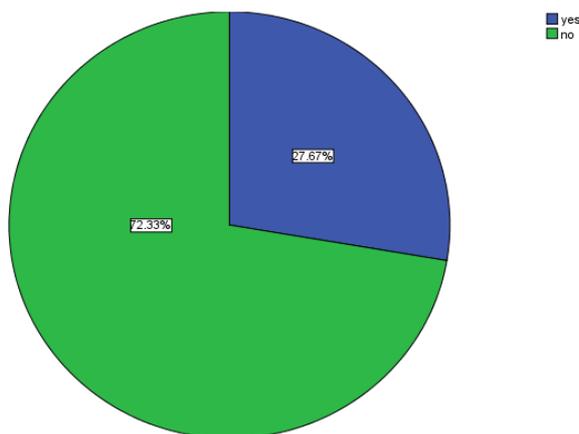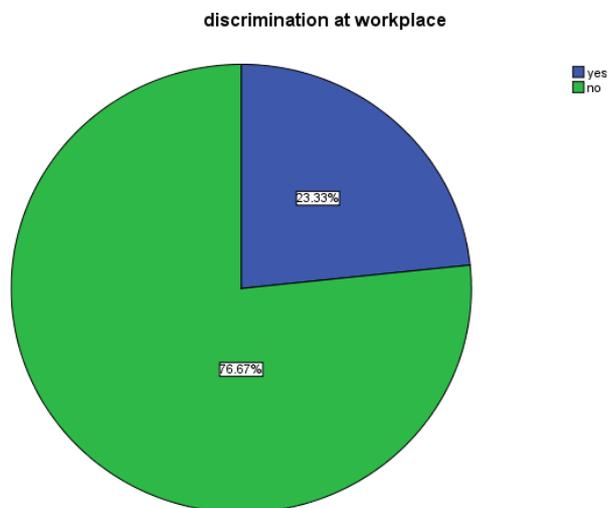**Figure 1.10**

discrimnation im employment

yes
no

27.67%

72.33%

Table 1.11: Discrimination at workplace

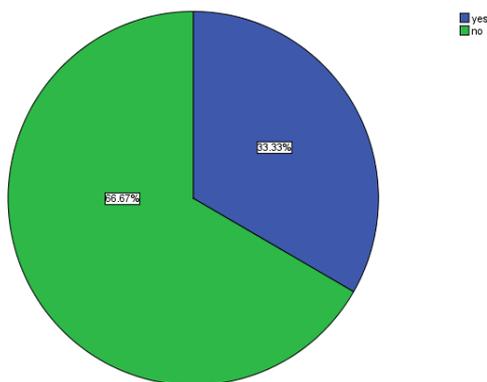|	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	70	23.3	23.3	23.3
No	230	76.7	76.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The above table (Refer to Table 1.11) shows that out of the 300 respondents, 230 reported that they were not discriminated against at workplaces, whereas 70 reported that they faced discrimination.

Figure 1.11

discrimination at workplace

Table 1.12: Discrimination at education institutions

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	100	33.3	33.3	33.3
No	200	66.7	66.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1.12

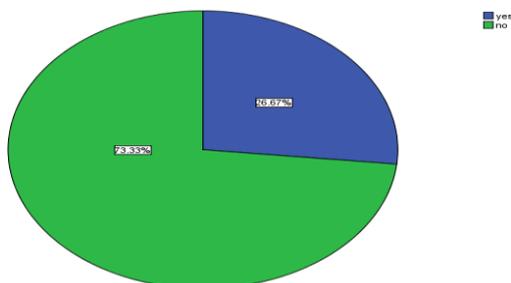discrimination at education institutions

From the above table (Refer to Table 1.12), it is evident that most Shias feel no discrimination at educational institutions. The table shows that 66.67% of Shias do not feel discrimination at educational institutions. In comparison, only 33.3% of Shia feel discriminated against at educational institutions.

Table 1.13: Discrimination at public place

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	80	26.7	26.7	26.7
No	220	73.3	73.3	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1.13
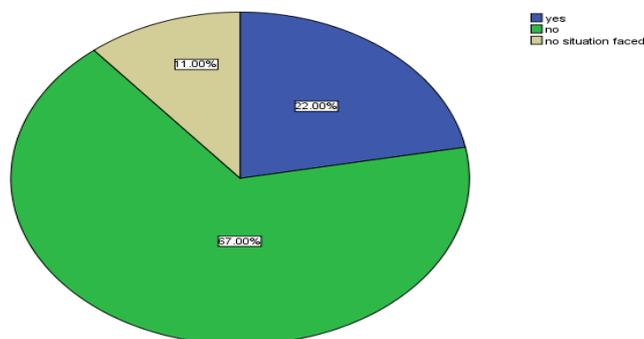
discrimination at public places

In the case of discrimination in public spaces (Refer to Table 1.13), 73.33% of respondents specified that they do not feel discriminated against, while 26.67% stated that there is discrimination regarding the Shia population.

Table 1.14 Police help in sectarian violence

Frequency		Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	66	22.0	22.0	22.0
No	201	67.0	67.0	89.0
No situation faced	33	11.0	11.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1.14

police help in sectarian voilence

While responding, 67.00% of Shias said that they had never faced such a situation, but on the other hand, 22.00% of Shias gave a positive response with respect to the helpful/positive response of the police. (Refer to Table 1.14)

67% say that no such situation faced is also reflective of the fact that Shia Sunni violence, which was otherwise quite frequent in the initial days of the post-independence era, is now declining and is almost negligible. And if any such situation arises, then the role of the police is positive.

Table 1.15: Harassment by police

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	60	20.0	20.0	20.0
No	174	58.0	58.0	78.0
No such situation faced	66	22.0	22.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The above table (Refer to Table 1.15) showed that out of the 300 respondents, 174 reported that the police did not harass them, whereas 60 reported that they faced harassment, and 66 didn't face any such situation. Hence, it can be said that most of the Shia (58%) didn't face harassment by the police. (Refer to Figure 1.15)
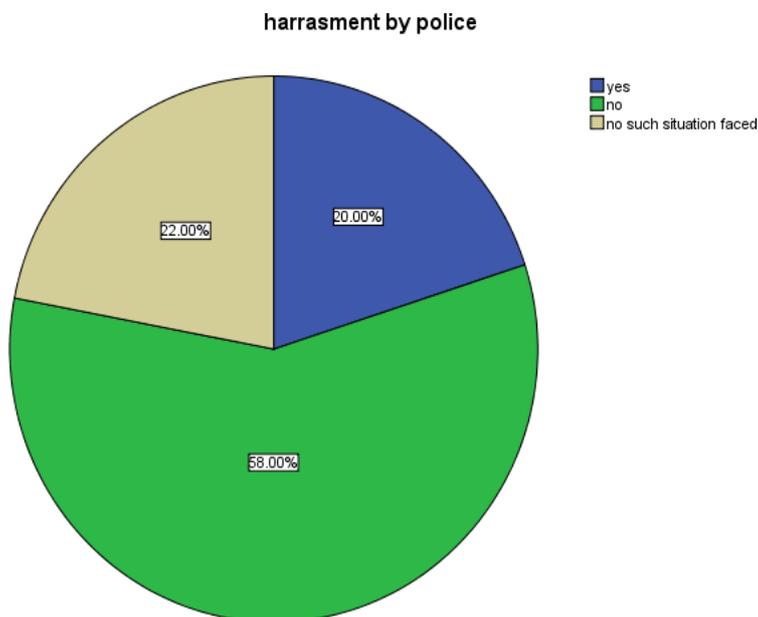
Figure 1.15

harrasment by police

Table 1.16: Are Hospital staff helpful?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	137	45.7	45.7	45.7
No	161	53.7	53.7	99.3
No situation faced	2	.7	.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The above table (1.16) shows that out of the 300 respondents, 137 reported that the hospital staff was helpful and cooperative, whereas 161 reported that the hospital staff was not helpful, and two respondents didn't face any such situation. Hence, it can be said that the majority of the Shias, around 53.67% (Refer to Figure 1.16), said that the staff was not cooperative with them. It is for the government to look into the grievances of Shias as they are a religious minority within the minority community.
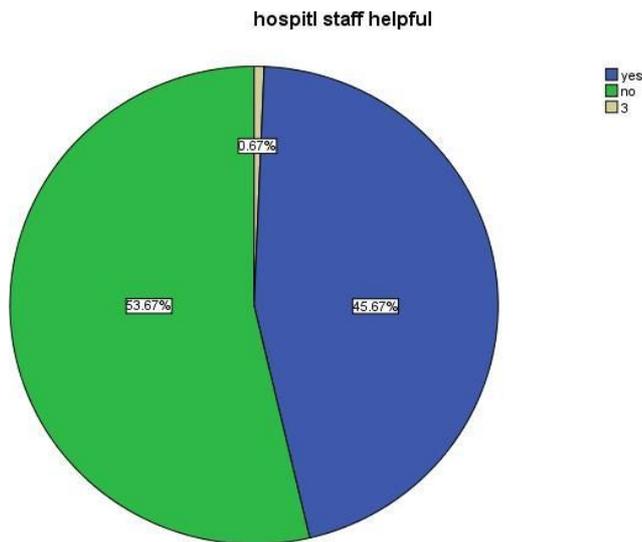
Figure 1.16

hospitl staff helpful

Table 1.17: Culture threatened by others

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	85	28.3	28.3	28.3
No	215	71.7	71.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The above table (Refer to Table 1.17) shows that out of the 300 respondents, 215 reported that they did not face any cultural threat from other communities, whereas 85 reported that they faced a cultural threat from other communities. Hence, it can be said that there is meagre perception of threat by the Shias from other cultural groups in the society, as 71.5 % of the respondents refered that there is no threat to their culture from others. (Refer to Figure 1.17)

Culturally, Shias feel safe, except from the Sunnis. That also justifies the multicultural nature of Indian democracy where Shias, as a minority within a minority, largely feel safe culturally.

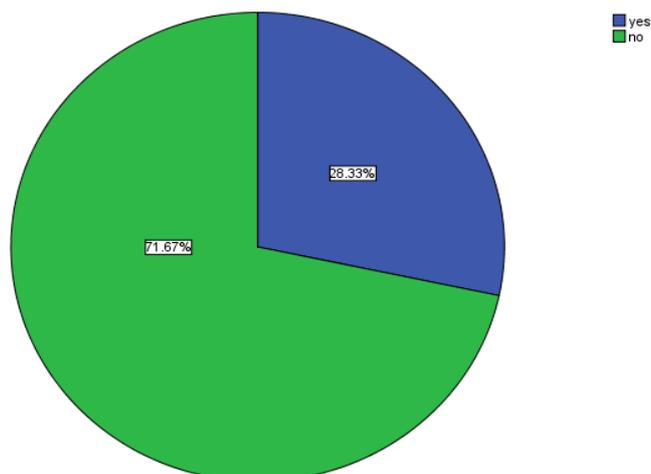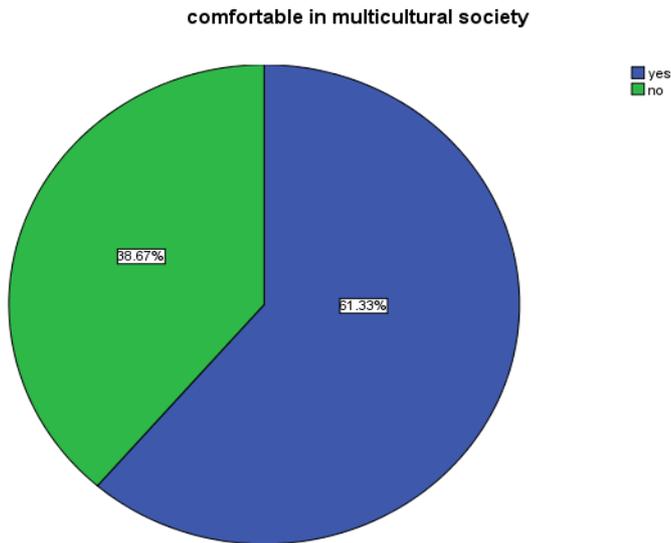**Figure 1.17**

culture threatned by others

yes
no

28.33%

71.67%

Table 1.18: Comfortable living in multicultural society

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	184	61.33	61.33	61.33
No	116	38.7	38.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1.18

comfortable in multicultural society

The tabulated data (See Table 1.18) indicates that out of the 300 respondents surveyed, 184 expressed comfort with living in a multicultural society, while 116 reported discomfort. Consequently, it can be inferred that the predominant sentiment among Shias, amounting to 61.33% (Refer to Figure 1.18), is a belief in their comfortable coexistence within a multicultural society in India.
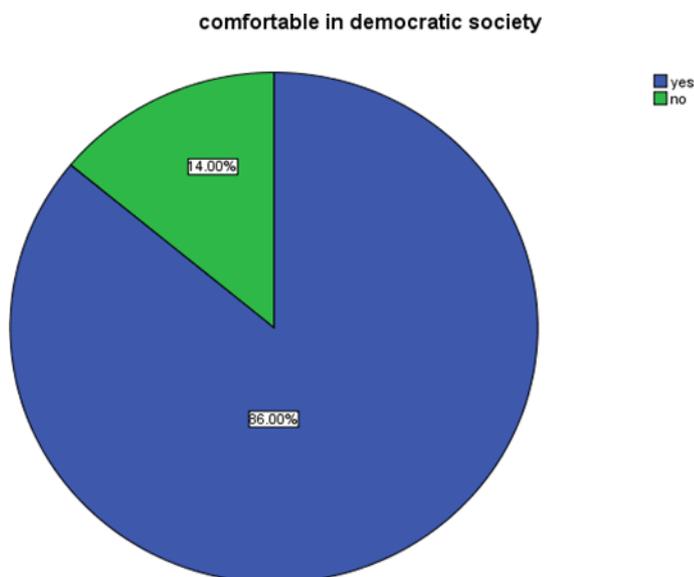
Democracy is a prerequisite for a multicultural society, or multiculturalism is a step ahead of democracy. Both democracy and multiculturalism try to ensure equal rights and opportunities to all the stakeholders, further guaranteeing equal power sharing of all the groups and communities or the stakeholders. Both democracy and

multiculturalism aims to create social condition wherein different cultural groups coexist.[24]

Table 1.19: Comfortable in a democratic society

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	258	86.0	86.0	86.0
No	42	14.0	14.0	100.0
Tot	300	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1.19

comfortable in democratic society

The Shias have demonstrated their confidence in Indian democracy. As per the data presented in Table 1.19, out of the 300 respondents surveyed, 258 expressed comfort with a democratic society, while 42 reported discomfort. Consequently, it can be asserted that a majority of

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[24] Timothy B Fuchs, *Towards a Just Community: An Examination of the Development of Cultural Citizenship Rights in Canada from a Communitarian Perspective*, 2005.
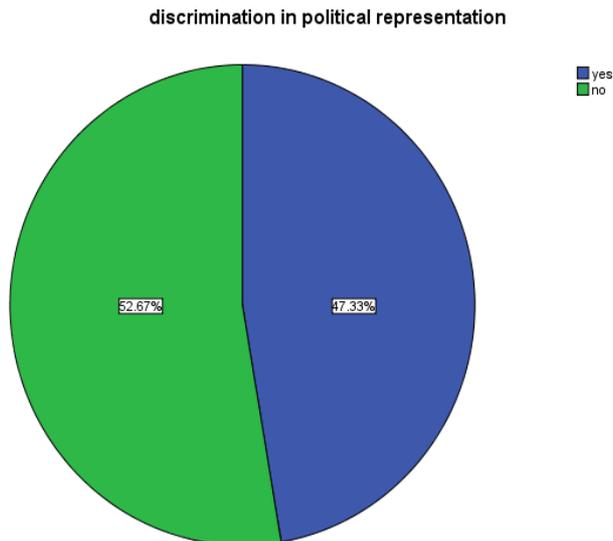
Shias in India hold faith in the democratic structure of the country (Refer to Fig 1.19). Despite perceptions of marginalization and cultural challenges stemming from the Sunni majority, the Shias maintain their trust in the democratic principles upheld by the Indian State. Their comfort level is well evident from the Table 1.19.

Table 1.20: Discrimination in political representation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	142	47.3	47.3	47.3
No	158	52.7	52.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The above table (Refer to Table 1.20) showed that out of the 300 respondents, 142 reported that they were discriminated against in political representation, whereas 158 reported that they were not discriminated against in political representation. Hence, most Shia (52.7%) didn't face any discrimination in political representation (Refer to Fig. 1.20).

Figure 1.20

discrimination in political representation

Interview Findings: Insights and Perspectives

According to Ammar Rizvi[25], Shias feel secure and happy living in India in the post-independence era.[26] There is no sense or perception of threat as it is in other countries, including Pakistan, where Shias feel insecure and threatened even though Pakistan is an Islamic state, and Shias are first and foremost Muslims than anything else. But as of now, Shias feel greatly ignored and sidelined. They believe the present and past governments have been unfair to Shias. There is resentment amongst the Shia community, which has reached dangerous levels. According to Ammar Rizvi, Ex-Chief Minister (acting) of Uttar Pradesh[27], they are now making Shias a political force. Shias believe that though they are not numerically enough to ensure the victory of a political party, at least they can ensure defeat by voting en-masse for a particular candidate. According to an article written by Eram Agha on 20 June, "Decoding the BJP-Shia Political Alignment in Uttar Pradesh", in the 2017 elections, Shia clerics started an alliance with the Sufis and campaigned against the Samajwadi Party, thus benefitting the BJP.[28]

However, Professor Nadeem Hasnain[29] believes that Shias can't

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[25] Ex-Chief Minister (acting) of Uttar Pradesh, India. Uttar Pradesh (lit. "Northern Province"), abbreviated as UP, is a state in North India. It is the most populous state in India and has the seventh-largest sub-national population in the world. As of 2023, Uttar Pradesh has over 240 million inhabitants. The state capital is Lucknow.

[26] When Imam Husain was facing the Yazeed army or the Yazid army was facing Imam Husain, Imam Husain said that he did not want to fight, he wanted to go somewhere, where he could live in peace. The generals of the yazids army asked, which place do you want to go? He said, India, Hind or Sind, i.e., he preferred India to other parts of the world. Even to the Arabia, he preferred India.

[27] Uttar Pradesh (lit. "Northern Province"), abbreviated as UP, is a state in North India. It is the most populous state in India and has the seventh-largest sub-national population in the world. As of 2023, Uttar Pradesh has over 240 million inhabitants. The state capital is Lucknow.

[28] Eram Agha, *Decoding the BJP-Shia Political Alignment in Uttar Pradesh*, "News", no. 18, June 20, 2018, https://www.news18.com/news/india/decoding-the-bjp-shia-political-alignment-in-uttar-pradesh-1783003.html.

[29] Nadeem Hasnain, a prominent figure in Shia Community, is a Professor of Social Anthropology at University of Lucknow. He did his PhD from Lucknow University & he is the person who has elevated the name of Lucknow at International levels in Anthropology. He is also Editor of The Eastern Anthropologist and heads a multi disciplinary research organization, Centre for Social Action and Development devoted to research and advocacy of the weaker sections of the Indian Society and elsewhere. His areas of interests are disadvantaged sections of Indian population especially the scheduled tribes, scheduled

influence the political process because of their small numbers. Their problems, like the problem of any small minority, can be solved only when they enjoy goodwill and friendship with the majority. If these relations are not good, then the majority's will may result in majoritarianism and will be against the spirit of democracy. So cordial relations are important if Shias want their voice to be heard and given due consideration.

Professor Hasnain further said that, like Jews and Brahmins, they can become a force only through striving for excellence in education and skill development. Shias should go in for excellence-educational excellence, skill development, and economic prosperity. He also believes that waves of change have been sweeping the Shias in the last three or four decades, especially after Ayatollah Khomeini's emergence, which profoundly impacted the Shias.

Professor Hasnain has noticed changes in the community since the emergence of Ayatollah Khomeini[30]. Women became more visible, and the politicization of the community. Women gave up the burqa and instead adopted Chadar, their faces are now not covered. This provided a lot of space for mobility, and women now went to many places and meetings without any inhibition. They started participating in demonstrations and other things that had never happened before. Changes on the part of the community are also quite visible, like they became more politicized. This happened after the Islamic Revolution[31] because Khomeini put a lot of emphasis on the educational and economic development of Muslims. He

castes, other backward classes and the minorities. A well known teacher researcher & activist, he is also involved with mass media writing in popular magazines & newspapers. He is a regular participant in panel discussion on various TV channels. He has published more than a dozen books (Tribal India, Indian Anthropology, Indian Society & Culture, Islam and Muslim Communities in South Asia, Shia Islam in India, etc) and several research papers internationally.

[30] Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (17 May 1900 – 3 June 1989) was an Iranian Islamic revolutionary, politician, and religious leader who served as the first Supreme Leader of Iran from 1979 until his death. He was the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the leader of the Iranian Revolution, which overthrew Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and ended the Iranian monarchy.

[31] The Iranian Revolution, also known as the Islamic Revolution, was a series of events that took place from January 1978 to February 1979. The revolution resulted in the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty and the establishment of an Islamic republic.

never spoke of Shias alone, instead for all Muslims, but Shias were directly influenced as he was a Shia leader. Shia generation that grew up after 1979, after the Iranian revolution, in their thirties (30s), nowhere different. Shias were never a business community except for Khojas and Bohras[32], but they have taken to business. The mainstream Shias looked upon business/trade very contemptuously, and most were going either to government service or the educational sector to become teachers. Thus, Shias can see new prosperity with this changed outlook toward business/trade. They have developed their own colonies.

Children go to the best schools in Lucknow. But equally striking is the increased religiosity amongst Shias. Before the Iranian revolution of 1979, Shias were not going in large numbers in mosques. Even in Friday prayers, their numbers hardly touch four-five hundred in the main mosque of Lucknow. But post-revolution, the crowd swelled to thousands. Shias were never so religious. Khomeini's speech did a miracle. He once said that first, you become Muslim. How can you be Shia or Sunni if you are not a Muslim? Professor Hasnain further noted that their number going to Namaz[33] and Hajj[34] increased tremendously. Earlier, many of them were going only for Ziyarat[35] and not for Hajj. But now, first, they go to Hajj

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[32] Shias have also subsects like Khojas and Bohras.

[33] Namaz, an essential pillar of Islam, embodies spiritual connection and discipline. It's a ritual prayer performed five times daily, fostering a profound link between the individual and the divine. Each prayer, from Fajr at dawn to Isha after nightfall, signifies reverence, gratitude, and submission to Allah. Namaz involves physical postures-standing, bowing, prostrating-symbolizing humility and devotion. Beyond its structured form, Namaz cultivates mindfulness, instills discipline, and fosters inner peace. It's a moment for introspection, seeking forgiveness, and seeking guidance. Through Namaz, Muslims transcend the mundane, finding solace and communion, nurturing their faith and fostering a sense of unity within the global Muslim community.

[34] Hajj stands as the pinnacle of a Muslim's spiritual journey, a pilgrimage to Mecca, embodying unity, devotion, and humility. This sacred obligation, one of the five pillars of Islam, draws millions annually, transcending boundaries of nationality and culture. The rituals symbolize the shared identity and equality of all believers before God, as pilgrims don simple garments and perform acts dating back to Prophet Abraham. The profound experience fosters spiritual renewal, offering a profound sense of community, forgiveness, and submission. Hajj embodies the essence of Islam, uniting the faithful in a profound testament to faith, equality, and the diversity of humanity.

[35] Ziyarat, an Arabic term meaning "visit", holds profound significance in Islamic traditions. It refers to pilgrimages made to sites revered by Muslims, such as the tombs of religious

and then only visit all these places for Ziyarat. There is also a change in their appearance. Many of the Shia youths can now be seen with beards. Credit goes to the Iranian Revolution for giving confidence to this community in India and worldwide. However, this growing religiosity never paved the way for fundamentalism as Shias, a small community, cannot afford to be fundamental. It never resulted in hostility towards others. According to Prof. Hasnain, to be aggressive is the prerogative of the majority community because if the majority community takes up communalism, it is in a position to hide its communalism behind the façade of nationalism, the minority cannot do so.[36] In a multi-religious society, a minority cannot afford to be communal. Thus, Shias, who are a minority within a minority, due to their small numbers and powerlessness in terms of their inability to influence Indian society or politics, cannot afford to be fundamental or communal.

In assessing the dynamics between the Shia community and the predominant groups in India, a comprehensive examination involves considering two distinct entities: the proximate majority, namely the Sunnis, and the broader majoritarian segment encompassing the Hindu community. The Shia-Sunni relationship has to be examined in terms of changing power equations.

Shias ruled Awadh for about two hundred years.[37] After the rule of Shia Nawabs[38] ended, they lost power and became a normal minority from

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figures, sacred locations, or shrines. These visits are imbued with spiritual devotion, often involving prayers, reflection, and seeking blessings. Ziyarat symbolizes a connection to religious heritage, fostering a deep spiritual experience and a sense of unity within the Islamic community. It serves as a means of seeking inspiration, guidance, and proximity to revered personalities, reinforcing faith and cultural ties while offering a profound spiritual journey for those who undertake these visits.

[36] This text segment was excerpted from an interview conducted for the research project.

[37] The Shia Nawabs of Awadh ruled for about two hundred years, from the late 18th century to the mid-19th century. During this time, they made Lucknow, the capital of Awadh, a center of Shia culture and learning. They built many mosques, madrasas, and other religious institutions, and they patronized Shia scholars and poets.

[38] "Nawab" - originally used to refer to a Muslim ruler, often of a princely state. It is derived from the Arabic word "nawaab", meaning "deputy" or "governor". Nawabs were typically appointed by the Mughal emperor, but they often became hereditary rulers, passing down their titles to their sons.

a ruling class.[39] In the post-independence era, the majority, i.e., the Sunnis, started asserting themselves democratically. As has often happened, the majority does not always assert itself as illogical and unjustness. However, once assured of controlling power, the majority itself starts giving space to the minority, which is what happened in the context of the Shia-Sunni relationship. But equally important is that Shias, as a minority within, have always been astute enough to be close to the centre (s) of power. One of the Sunni interviewed during the project revealed that in the post-independence era, Shias, in large numbers, adopted communism to be close to the ruling regime, i.e., the Congress government.

Political and religious factors exist for whatever tensions exist between the Shias and Sunnis. According to Ammar Rizvi, religious preachers on both sides thrive on the disunity between the two communities. But religious differences also often result in violent clashes between the two communities. Many Shia-Sunni issues, such as the Muslim Personal Law Board, came up openly. According to Professor Nadeem Hasnain[40], three main issues are responsible for the demand for a separate personal Law board that resulted in a separate Shia Personal Law Board in 2005. The First was that Shias were underrepresented in Muslim Personal Law Board. But that was also true that the Muslim Personal Law Board had always reserved the office of vice-chairman for a person from the Shia community. Upon the emergence of this demand, the Muslim Personal Law Board expanded its representation, integrating a larger contingent from the Shia community. However, the selection of the vice-chairman and the co-option of members solely from a specific faction within the Shia community, initially led by Maulana Kalbe Abid and subsequently Maulana Kalbe Sadiq, elicited considerable discontent among other Shia ulema, notably Maulana Mirza Mohd Athar, founder of the Shia Personal Law Board. Though this discontent was not directly expressed to the Muslim Personal Law Board's leadership, it was a prevalent sentiment within the community, questioning the rationale behind the exclusive representation of individuals from a particular family

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[39] Madhu Trivedi, *The Making of the Awadh Culture*, Primus Books, 2010.
[40] This observation is based on the interview conducted as part of the Research Project.

or faction. Concurrently, these leaders sought recognition within the influential Muslim Personal Law Board, recognizing its representative significance. However, their aspiration was challenged by leaders from Nadhwa, who prominently endorsed individuals known for their impartiality, moderation, and resistance to extremist sectarian ideologies.

So obviously, the leader of the Muslim Personal Law Board found this family/group more compatible and palatable because they were not taking an extreme stand in terms of Shia-Sunni relations or in terms of theological differences. That is why this group was preferred regarding the representation of Shias in the Muslim Personal Law board. The fourth reason may be that in Lucknow, there are more than a hundred/hundred ten *matami-anjumans*[41] registered who perform *noha-i-matam*[42] during all those mourning months of Muharram, which in Lucknow continues for about two months and eight days. So, there are a number of *matami-anjumans*– more than a hundred and ten anujumans are registered, out of which around 80-90 are active and functional. Except for the Five to six anjumans, the rest of the anjumans owe their loyalty to Maulana Kalbe Jawwad[43] groups.

According to Professor Hasnain, Kalbe Jawwad happens to be the nephew of Kalbe Sadiqu[44], so again, he is in the same family. This family

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[41] Matami anjumans are Shia Muslim organizations that organize and conduct majalis and matam processions during the mourning period of Muharram. Majalis are gatherings where religious scholars recite elegies and sermons about the martyrdom of Imam Hussain and his companions. Matam is a physical expression of grief, such as chest-beating and self-flagellation.

[42] Noha-i-matam is a form of Shia Muslim poetry that is recited during the month of Muharram to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain and his companions at the Battle of Karbala. Noha-i-matam poems are typically about the suffering and sacrifice of Imam Hussain and his family, and they are often used to evoke emotions of sadness and grief.

[43] Maulana Kalbe Jawad is a Shia Muslim cleric from Lucknow, India. He is a prominent figure in the Shia community in India and is known for his moderate and inclusive views. He is also a vocal advocate for interfaith dialogue and understanding.

[44] Maulana Kalbe Sadiq (1939-2020) was a renowned Shia Islamic scholar, educationist, and philanthropist from India. He was born in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, to a family of religious scholars. He received a traditional Islamic education and became a respected Shi'a cleric. Sadiq was a passionate advocate for interfaith dialogue and understanding. He believed that

has exercised enormous respect among the Shias for the last three to four generations. And these, whose members are generally the young Shias, especially *Zari Workers*[45] or doing petty jobs. These *Anjumans*[46] may also be utilized as the muscle power in factional politics, and Maulana Kalbe Jawwad exercises a lot of influence on these *Anjumans*. Except for four to Five, most of the other *Anjumans* (eighty to ninety) are behind Maulana Kalbe Jawwad, and Five thousand to ten thousand persons can be mobilized on very short notice. This was also a reason for jealousy between these two factions. Once another group realised that they could never be an exemplar before their own community and that Maulana Kalbe Sadiq group exercised a lot of influence and commanded a lot of respect they thought that it is the right time to demand separate Shia Personal Law Board that finally came into being in 2005.

Professor Hasnain further argued that another issue that became a bone of contention between Shia and Sunni was to set up a separate Waqf Board[47]. Shias believe there should be separate shia/sunni waqf board for the nature of both the properties is different, and most of the properties of the Shia community are devoted to the celebration of Muharram and Majlis. Shias have an objection to persons with an ideology of Wahabis

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all religions shared common values, such as peace, compassion, and justice. He worked tirelessly to promote harmony and tolerance between different religious communities.

[45] Zari workers are skilled artisans who produce zari, a metallic thread used in embroidery and weaving. Zari is made by twisting thin strips of gold or silver around a silk or cotton core. It is a delicate and time-consuming process, and zari workers must have a high level of skill and precision.

[46] "Anjumans" refer to associations or organizations in various cultural contexts, particularly in South Asia and the Middle East. These are social or religious groups formed to serve specific community needs or functions. Anjumans often cater to diverse purposes, such as social welfare, education, religious practices, or communal gatherings. They can range from small local groups focused on a specific cause to larger, more comprehensive organizations that serve a broader spectrum of needs within a particular community. The term "Anjuman" is often associated with fostering a sense of community, shared values, and collective responsibility among its members.

[47] A waqf board is a statutory body that is responsible for managing and administering waqf properties. Waqf properties are those properties that have been donated to religious or charitable purposes under Islamic law.

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becoming the Ministers of Auqaf. The Wahabi cult does not approve and believes in *Imambaras*[48] or *azadari*[49], in the *nazr-o-niyaz*[50] and the *Khanqahas*[51]. People with different religious ideologies becoming Ministers of Auqaf or the trust is not acceptable to Shias. Shias and Sunni

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[48] Imambaras are significant structures in Shia Islam, serving as places of congregation, prayer, and commemoration. These buildings hold cultural and religious importance, particularly for Shia Muslims, and are often used for gatherings, particularly during religious events like Muharram. Imambaras house spaces for religious ceremonies, particularly commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. These spaces may include halls for rituals, processions, and emotional recounting of the events of Karbala. Imambaras vary in size and architectural significance, ranging from small community centers to grand structures, each contributing to the preservation of Shia traditions and the dissemination of religious teachings.

[49] Azadari is a significant practice within Shia Islam, particularly observed during the month of Muharram. It involves mourning, grieving, and commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, and his companions in the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD. Azadari includes a range of rituals and expressions of grief such as processions, recitations of elegies (marsiyas), and passion plays (majlis) depicting the events of Karbala. These ceremonies serve to evoke and sustain the memory of the sacrifices made by Imam Hussain, fostering a sense of empathy, social justice, and resistance against oppression within the Shia community. Azadari is a deeply emotional and communal practice, reinforcing spiritual and moral teachings.

[50] Nazr-o-Niyaz is a practice in various cultural and religious traditions, particularly in South Asian and Middle Eastern contexts, where devotees offer food, money, or services as a form of religious vow or devotion. "Nazr" typically refers to a vow or an offering made to a deity or a spiritual figure as an act of supplication, gratitude, or seeking blessings. "Niyaz" generally pertains to the distribution of food or charity, often in the name of a spiritual or religious cause, symbolizing generosity and the sharing of blessings. Both practices, "nazr" and "niyaz" represent acts of devotion and charity within various cultural and religious ceremonies, expressing reverence and commitment to faith or spiritual beliefs.

[51] "Khanqah" or "Khanqah-e-Kubra" refers to a building or institution in Islamic culture and Sufi tradition, serving as a spiritual retreat, a center for religious learning, and a place for Sufi gatherings and practices. It's a place where Sufi disciples gather under the guidance of a spiritual mentor or a Sufi master, fostering spiritual development through teachings, prayers, meditation, and communal rituals. Khanqahs often hold a special significance in the history of Sufism, providing a space for inner reflection, spiritual growth, and the dissemination of Sufi teachings and practices.

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Waqf Boards are ideologically totally different. Shia Waqf board has tremendous properties in Lucknow and other places in Uttar Pradesh. Right from the beginning, the Shia waqf board has a separate identity, and except in Uttar Pradesh, no other state has a separate waqf board.

There are many more differences between the two sects on religious issues that may even culminate into violence and stone pelting. Regarding religious differences and conflicts, they are 1400 years old and did not originate in India. The religious differences between Shias and Sunnis are worldwide. A kind of economic interdependence exists between Shias-Sunnis and Hindus that can be called rather symbiotic. Like most of the Zardozy workers are Shias, and the majority of traders are Sunnis or Hindus. So, despite all the differences, they must maintain a cordial relationship for economic reasons. Especially with Hindus, Shias have no clash of interest as even the religious difference that exists between Shias and Sunnis is not there in the case of Hindus. Shias also believe that a Hindu ruler is preferable to a Sunni ruler as the former would not curb their religious rights.[52]

Conclusion

Cultural heterogeneity is a reality of the present world. No country is monocultural. Globalization has further intensified the movement of people. Multiculturalism is a rider on democracy as the latter acknowledges cultural diversity and guarantees them special rights, but multiculturalism demands equal participation of all stakeholders in national policymaking. Thus, heterogeneity and diversity, emphasising equal participation in governance and equal sharing of resources, is the pivot around which the notion of Multiculturalism revolves.

Even though India has not adopted multiculturalism as its official doctrine, as it is in Canada and Australia, multiculturalism as a social value has historically been part of the ethos of governance in India.[53]

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[52] Above observations are based on interviews conducted for this Research project.
[53] Ratna Ghosh, *Multiculturalism in a Comparative Perspective: Australia, Canada and India*, "Canadian Ethnic Studies", vol. 50, no. 1, 2018, pp. 15–36.

Multiculturalism is the essence of Sanatan Dharma[54], as "Sarva Dharma Sambhava"[55] (mutual coexistence of all religions) is one of its core values.[56] India is the only country home to every religion in the world. The reason is the multicultural ethos of Sanatana dharma that respects all ways of worshipping God and considers every religion as equally good.[57] Nowhere does it preach to the followers that only Hindu Gods and Goddesses are worth worshipping.

Our constitution accommodates diversity and plurality of all kinds.[58] While the term "multiculturalism" itself is not expressly stated in the Indian Constitution, the political principle regarding diverse religious faiths has been comprehended through the language of equality, non-discrimination, and maintaining an equal distance from all religions by the State. This is regarded as a necessary condition to ensure the equality of all religious communities as entrusted in the Indian Constitution.

Though minorities have been given special status and rights under the Indian constitution, there is no provision to address the diversity within the groups.[59] The idea is that just like society is not a homogeneous entity, no cultural group is homogeneous. There is diversity and stratification within the group, which must be accommodated within the group. In the

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[54] Sanatan Dharma, often referred to as Hinduism, is one of the world's oldest and diverse religious traditions. Rooted in ancient Indian philosophy, it encompasses a rich tapestry of beliefs, rituals, and spiritual practices. Emphasizing the eternal principles governing existence, Sanatan Dharma encourages self-realization and harmonious coexistence with the universe.

[55] The principle of Sarva Dharma Sambhava is the cardinal principle of Indian secularism. Based on this principal Indian state, through Indian constitution, ensures the healthy co-existence of all the religion and faiths through the institutions of constitutional and legal equality to all irrespective of caste, creed, sex and religious identity and tolerance for each other. One of the prominent advocates of Sarva Dharma Sambhava was Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the Indian independence movement against British rule. Gandhi was a staunch proponent of religious harmony and believed in the essential unity of all religions. He envisioned a society where people of different faiths could coexist peacefully and work together for the common good.

[56] Deepa Nag Haksar, *The Brahmo Dharma Debate: Part 1*, "Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research", no. 35, 2018, pp. 513–548.

[57] Stephen Knapp, *The Power of the Dharma: An Introduction to Hinduism and Vedic Culture*, iUniverse, 2006.

[58] Basu, *op.cit.*

[59] Ibidem.

name of "minority rights", the rights of subgroups or "minorities within" cannot be ignored. However, this acknowledgement is largely missing in our constitution and political parlance.

This study looked into one such kind of stratification on religio-cultural lines within a religious community, i.e., Shias, a religious minority within the dominant religious minority in India, i.e., the Muslims. The study clearly shows a marked similarity in the marginalised status of inner minorities of a minority. The findings show that "others within the other" are not equal stakeholders regarding power sharing and the benefits of development. The numerically dominant group within the minority hegemonises.

Indian constitution guarantees freedom of religion and equal rights to all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation. But one can see a denial of equal status of the subgroups within a group by its own majority. Shias in India are equal legal entities like any other citizen; therefore, the community has full faith in the democratic and multicultural nature of Indian society. However, they have apprehensions and insecurities vis-à-vis the Sunni majority within the Muslim community. They are free to practice their religion, establish religious institutions, and participate in public life.

In the context of India, multiculturalism means that the government should respect and promote the diversity of Indian culture, including the culture of minorities within a minority. This implies that the government should not interfere in the religious affairs of any community, including Shias, except for the purpose of social reform or to maintain public order, health and morality.

However, the reality of multiculturalism in India is often more complex. There have been instances of discrimination against minorities within minority like Shias. Though Shias have no conflicts with the Hindu majority, but they do have against the Sunni majority of the Muslim community.

Despite these challenges, the status of Shias in India has improved in recent years partly because of the work of Shia activists and partly because of the government of India that has taken the concerns of Shias like

creating separate Shia Muslim Personal Law Board and Shia Waqf Board and ensuring peace and at the time of Muharram.

India is a land of diverse cultures and religions, with minorities within minorities. To ensure inclusive democracy, the Indian state must work to protect and promote the rights of both minorities as well as minorities within minorities. This can be done in a number of ways, like-enacting and enforcing laws that prohibit discrimination against minorities within minorities. This includes laws that protect minorities from discrimination in employment, education, housing, and other areas of public life. Providing affirmative action programs and other forms of support to minorities within minorities. This can help address the historical and ongoing disadvantages these groups face. Promoting awareness and understanding of the cultures and religions of minorities within minorities can also help strengthen the multicultural fabric of the country. It will also help in reducing prejudice and discrimination against these groups. Encouraging minorities within a minority to participate in public life and decision-making will help to ensure that their voices are heard and needs are taken into account. Indian state can further ensure, especially in the case of Shias, an inclusive democracy by providing financial assistance to Shia educational institutions, increasing the representation of Shias in government and public institutions, and launching public awareness campaigns to promote understanding of Shia culture and religion.

The present work is seminal on the issues and problems of a minority within a religious minority in India.