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Revisiting the Spirals of Silence: The Case of Intra-Faith Discrimination at Work in Two Muslim Majority Countries

Selcuk Uygur[1] | Jawad Syed[2] | Erhan Aydin[3,4,5] | Mustafa Özbilgin[1] | Sercan Hamza Bağlama[6]

[1]Brunel Business School, Brunel University of London, London, UK | [2]Suleman Dawood School of Business, LUMS, Lahore, Pakistan | [3]Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK | [4]IPAG Business School Paris, Paris, France | [5]Malton London Academy, Izmir, Türkiye | [6]Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Çanakkale, Türkiye

Correspondence: Erhan Aydin (erhanaydin.phd@gmail.com; e.aydin@ljmu.ac.uk)

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the spiral of silence theory, this manuscript critically explores a notably under-researched domain: the workplace experiences of individuals belonging to faith-based minority groups who encounter religious discrimination in predominantly Muslim countries, specifically Türkiye and Pakistan. First, we outline the spirals of silence theory and examine intra-faith discrimination as an illustrative case. We locate the identity and agency of individuals from religious minorities at work, reflecting on an escalation of silence in the context of adversity, as suggested by the spirals of silence theory. Building on 38 interviews with individuals from faith-based minority groups in workplaces within Turkey and Pakistan, our analysis reveals intra-faith religious discrimination in two distinct contexts: one, a country grappling with significant pressure on its secular system, and the other, a nation where the implementation of Islamic egalitarian principles, as enshrined in its constitution, is inconsistent. The study reveals that religiously inspired discrimination is a prevalent and pernicious experience among individuals from faith-based minority groups in both countries, which consequently entrenches the spirals of silence.

1 | Introduction

Minoritised faith groups face significant challenges in Turkish and Pakistani societies and organisations, including government-led assimilation policies and proselytisation efforts, as well as employment barriers that hinder their inclusion and professional advancement. For this reason, they may adopt silence as a coping strategy to survive in the workplace and social relations. Noelle-Neumann (1993) developed the spiral of silence theory to account for how public silence is formed by fear of exclusion. The theory posits that individuals refrain from speaking up if their views and identities differ from the values and beliefs held by the majority. From this broader viewpoint, we re-examine the spiral of silence theory within the framework of intra-faith relations, focusing on individuals from minority faith-based groups, particularly the Alevis in Türkiye and the Shias in Pakistan. Additionally, we adopt the superdiversity concept coined by sociologist Steven Vertovec in the early 2000s to describe the changing nature of diversity in contemporary urban settings. It signifies not just a broader diversity among immigrant and ethnic minority groups, but also an increased variety within these groups themselves (Vertovec 2007). Drawing on field studies with members of the Alevi and Shia communities in two Sunni majority countries, we demonstrate how the spiral of silence operates in preventing voice behaviour among faith-based minority groups. Based on 38 qualitative interviews with Alevi and Shia employees in Turkey

and Pakistan, our analysis explores the relationship between the decline of secular and egalitarian values in broader political landscapes and the consequent silencing effects on religious minority groups in the workplace. We begin by introducing the spiral of silence theory, followed by an exploration of religious diversity in the workplace within the contexts of Turkey and Pakistan. We then examine the agency of religious minorities in professional settings, and show how intra-faith struggles for legitimacy and discrimination impose constraints on the agency of minoritised faith-based groups. Our analysis extends the spirals of silence theory by illustrating that even under most adverse and abject conditions, individuals may retain agency and a level of choice and self-expression that transcend hegemonic pressures and discrimination. This study's theoretical contribution is enriched by integrating the Spiral of Silence (SoS) theory with the concept of superdiversity, highlighting the experiences of the Shias in Pakistan and the Alevis in Turkey. Despite being labelled heretical and heterodox by Sunni clerics, it is important to recognise that Shia, Alevi, and Sunni traditions each encompass a wide range of interpretations and practices within their own frameworks. While commonly misconceived as identical, Shia and Alevi groups actually hold distinctly different beliefs and practices. The primary focus of this paper is on their shared experience of oppression under the Sunni majority, which excludes them from the broader Muslim community. Superdiversity theory acknowledges that religious communities are not monolithic and that there can be significant variations in beliefs, rituals, and customs even within a single sect or faith (Vertovec 2023). This recognition can help understand that conflicts are not solely rooted in core theological differences but are also shaped by diverse interpretations and localised religious practices.

2 | Theoretical Lens: The Spiral of Silence and Superdiversity

Noelle-Newmann's (1974) theory of the spiral of silence suggests that the threat of social exclusion and the fear of violence can lead individuals to choose silence over voicing dissent. This theory illuminates how segments of society that are atypical, dissident, or oppositional might seem to conform to dominant discourses, as their silence could be misconstrued as agreement. Moreover, the spiral of silence theory helps explain why individuals and communities outside the mainstream orthodoxy - those diverging from established and dominant perspectives - might suppress their dissent due to the fear of reprisal and the potential for social, economic, or political marginalisation. Applying the spiral of silence theory to the context of confessional differences among believers of a single religion could help account for the silence of historically disenfranchised and excluded groups. Simultaneously, superdiversity theory can provide valuable insights into understanding the conflict between Shia, Alevi and Sunni traditions within the same religion in Muslim societies by offering a framework that accounts for the multifaceted nature of diversity within these communities. In both Türkiye and Pakistan, there is an overarching and strong 'opinion climate', which refers to how individuals perceive, and care about, the collective public opinion in shaping their own views and behavioural responses (Fladmoe and Steen-Johnsen 2017, 81). In such a context, individuals might be unwilling to express their own opinions since it is against the opinion climate. A similar situation exists in other emerging economies, as argued by Hanska et al. (2020) in their research on Iraq, Brazil, and China, where public opinion is shaped by strong hegemonic influences (Camgoz 2024).

Recent explorations of the spiral of silence theory have revealed that marginalised groups are not only passive observers but can actively express opinions and demonstrate agency even under severe discrimination. Chaudry and Gruzd's study (2019) serves as a pivotal example, and challenges the theory's applicability in the age of new media. Their investigation into the dynamics of racist and anti-racist discourses on Facebook showed that both perspectives could effectively break the silence, which indicates that the traditional understanding of the spiral of silence may not fully apply in digital contexts. This revelation indicates the importance of further investigating how discriminatory treatment, especially regarding intra-faith differences, can influence patterns of silencing and voice behaviours across various settings. Our research focuses on the experiences of two distinct faith-based minority communities within the majority-Muslim contexts of two countries, seeking to enhance understanding of these dynamics.

The theoretical paper of Clemente and Roulet (2015) demonstrates that social actors have a tendency to adopt majority views, and that such behaviours ignite a spiral of silence that provides homogenous opinion. Consequently, employees tend to support widely accepted perspectives rather than lesser-supported ones (Shrader 2016). System justification theory (Jost, Banaji, and Nosek 2004) posits that people have a psychological motivation to defend, justify, and uphold existing social, economic, and political systems, even when those systems disadvantage them. In addition, the study of Prouska and Psychogios (2018) on silence in a turbulent context shows that silence has adverse impacts such as demotivation, dissatisfaction, and low commitment. Some other studies (e.g., Beer and Eisentat 2000; Morrison and Milliken 2000) further associate silence with stress, cynicism, and employee disengagement. While academic literature has examined the silence of minorities within majority groups in interfaith contexts, there remains a critical gap in research on the silence of minorities within intra-faith dynamics.

3 | Understanding Religious Diversity and Agency of Religious Minorities at Work

Globalisation has engendered a world with diverse encounters of ideas, cultures, and beliefs among people who were isolated from each other before (Castles 2002). Workforce diversity may be seen as a challenging issue in the world today. Ditomaso et al. (2007) define workforce diversity as heterogeneity in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and other categories of difference in an organisation. To effectively manage workforce diversity, organisations must adopt inclusive practices for all employees and ensure mechanisms that promote employee voice. Employee voice involves a two-way communication between employees and management

(Bryson 2004), allowing employees to express their concerns, even though this may not alter management decisions. This process empowers employees and contributes to management decisions (Dundon and Gollan 2007). However, beyond demographic characteristics and the advantages of employee voice, there are socially constructed minority and majority groups based on backgrounds, such as religion, which is significant in this research context. Some studies (e.g. Cui et al. 2015) demonstrate that majority religious groups can influence the management decision-making process. Particularly in Muslim contexts, the sense of brotherhood and shared beliefs can lead to bias against religious minority groups (Al-Anani 2016). Since religious diversity affects employee attitudes and behaviours, including organisational commitment and job stress (Kutcher et al. 2010), it is crucial to address these dynamics in diversity management strategies.

According to Day (2005), religiously diverse organisations may face interpersonal conflicts and misunderstandings between employees due to biases, stereotypes, and discriminatory beliefs. For that reason, Day stipulates that organisations should consider religious differences to ensure better workplace relations and prevent the negative consequences of religious discrimination.

Religion is one of the most controversial concepts in social science, and there seems to be no consensus on its definition. While Max Weber refused to define religion (Morris 1987), Durkheim framed religion as 'a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, all those who adhere to them' (Durkheim 1964, 37). This definition can be regarded as a functional one that explains what religion does in economic and social life. It is worth noting that Durkheim takes religion as being both a belief and a practice, and considers all religions true in their own fashion. Therefore, believers of any particular religion can be considered as a group of people who share the same set of beliefs. In the nineteenth century, evolutionary thinkers posited religion as a precursor to the development of modern science, law, and politics, predicting its decline in significance with the progression towards industrial society. Contrary to this hypothesis, subsequent developments have demonstrated that religion has maintained its critical role in shaping social and economic lives in advanced societies. As noted by Fox (2000), religious diversity continues to exert both an organising and divisive influence across various aspects of life. Furthermore, religion persists as a source of inspiration for organisational structures and remains a potent catalyst for conflict both in the workplace and in broader social contexts.

Religious diversity takes multiple forms, ranging from broad confessional differences among Muslims, Christians, Jews, agnostics, and non-believers to more nuanced intra-faith and intra-confessional distinctions. These include divisions such as Sunnis and Alevis within Islam, and Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant branches within Christianity, as well as the distinctions among Sephardic Jews in Türkiye. Similarly, in Pakistan, Islamic traditions vary widely, encompassing Barelvi Sunni, Sufi, Deobandi, Salafi/Wahhabi, and Shia communities. The concept of superdiversity provides a valuable framework for advancing the spiral of silence theory, particularly within organisational settings. By incorporating insights from superdiversity, the application and understanding of Neumann's Spiral of Silence theory can be enhanced and broadened in several critical areas:

Enhancing Understanding of Silence Dynamics: Superdiversity, with its emphasis on the complex layers of identity (ethnicity, religion, migration history, etc.), can offer a deeper understanding of why individuals might choose silence over expression within organisations, and highlight the way various identity factors intersect to influence an individual's perception of belonging and fear of isolation, the key components of the Spiral of Silence.

Addressing Cultural and Contextual Sensitivities: Superdiversity can provide a framework for analysing the impact of organisational and national cultures on the Spiral of Silence, and emphasises how cultural norms and values shape individuals' willingness to express dissenting opinions.

Exploring Power Dynamics and Hierarchies: By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of identities, superdiversity can shed light on how power dynamics and hierarchies within diverse organisational contexts affect silence and voice, and help identify how minority status, not only in terms of opinion but also in terms of cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds, influences individuals' experiences of power and marginalisation (Vertovec 2019).

In our investigation, we focus on the dynamics of two prominent faith-based minority groups: the Alevis in Türkiye and the Shias in Pakistan. The Alevis stand as Turkey's most prominent faith-based minority group (Çarkoğlu 2005). Determining their precise numbers is, however, complex, given the identity-neutral nature of Turkish censuses. Nevertheless, a 2012 report commissioned by CHP parliamentarian Sabahat Akkiraz estimated the Alevi population in Turkey at approximately 12,521,000. In Pakistan, the Shia population, making up about 10%–15% of the national demographic, or roughly 20-30 million people, stands as the second-largest Shia community worldwide, second only to Iran. A critical aspect of our study is the acknowledgement that there is not a monolithic understanding or definition of the Alevi faith, which adds a layer of complexity to our analysis. The Alevi identity encompasses a broad spectrum of beliefs and practices, reflecting a rich diversity of religious and cultural expressions. This diversity within the Alevi tradition reveals the challenge of categorising the Alevi faith under a single and unified definition. Significantly, perspectives on the Alevi faith vary widely: some consider it an integral part of Islam, while others view it as distinct from mainstream Islamic traditions. This divergence extends to the perception of Alevi practices: some individuals and scholars regard it as a distinct religion in its own right, whereas others perceive it primarily as a cultural tradition, emphasising its social and communal aspects over theological doctrines. Such variability in understanding the Alevi faith is not merely an academic observation but reflects the lived experiences and self-perceptions of the Alevi community itself.

The Alevis, deeply rooted in Turkish ethnicity, manifest a distinctive and secularised interpretation of Islam, markedly diverging from conventional Sunni practices. It is crucial to acknowledge that such a depiction represents a broad tendency rather than a uniform characteristic across the entire Alevi community. Unlike the traditional Sunni approach, the Alevis conduct their religious observances in Turkish, the native language of the majority of their community members, as opposed to Arabic. This choice not only makes their practices more accessible to the community members but also reflects a broader philosophy of integrating religion with local culture and linguistic identity. Furthermore, the Alevis are distinguished by their progressive views on gender equality within religious contexts. In stark contrast to the more conservative practices of Sunni Islam, where gender roles are rigidly defined and social and religious gatherings are often segregated, Alevism promotes inclusivity, fostering gender equality in religious practices. This inclusiveness is evident in Alevi prayer rituals, where both women and men are permitted to lead prayers, and there is no gender segregation during religious ceremonies. By challenging traditional Islamic norms prevalent in Sunni communities, Alevism emerges as a progressive interpretation of Islam that aligns with contemporary values of gender equality and social justice (Çarkoğlu 2005; Dressler 2008). These distinct practices and beliefs therefore set the Alevi faith apart from the Sunni tradition, which has been historically and currently the dominant religious force in Türkiye. The Sunni sect, representing the orthodox mainstream, has shaped the religious and cultural landscape of Turkey since the times of the Ottoman Empire, wielding significant influence over political and social life.

On the other side, the Shia population in Pakistan, ethnically as diverse as the Sunnis, follows the Jafari or Twelver school of Islamic jurisprudence. This school is one of the largest within Shi'ism and offers its own unique perspectives on Islamic law, theology, and spiritual practice. As the second-largest Muslim group in Pakistan, the Shia community also highlights the pluralistic nature of Islamic faith across different cultural and national contexts, which demonstrates the wide array of interpretations and practices that exist within Islam.

Religion has an important role that gives power to individuals for controlling their destiny (Johnson 1997). However, the term spirituality is used instead of religion due to its more inclusive meaning (Harvey 2001) and the widely held belief that 'religion is institutional, dogmatic and rigid' whereas 'spirituality is personal, emotional and adaptable to an individual's needs' (Hicks 2002, 380). Even though some scholars prefer to use the concept of spirituality, religion remains relevant to the workplace because of the effects that religious beliefs may have on individual participation in organisational life (Bouma et al. 2003). Some notable examples include Hutterites' refusal to drive cars, Muslims refusal to work in casinos, and Catholics refusal to do abortions as doctors and nurses. Religion, therefore, may shape one's limits and parameters of engagement with certain kinds of work under certain conditions. In this regard, some interpretations of Sunni Islam have been radical and exclusionary, preventing the participation of the Alevis and the Shias in social and economic life in Türkiye and Pakistan.

Diversity among workers is often subject to two polarised forms of treatment: prejudice or inclusion. Prejudice can be defined as an improper negative valuation of a group of individuals (Allport 1950). Studies regarding religion and prejudice seem to have inconsistencies. For instance, some studies show that religion is a factor to reduce prejudice, and some other studies claim the opposite that religion may inspire prejudice (Hunsberger and Jackson 2005; Jackson and Hunsberger 1999; Hood et al. 1996; Batson and Burris 1994). Prejudice can be a reason for discrimination. Inclusion in organisations is defined as an act of involving workers in decisions, activities and processes at work (Syed and Ozbilgin 2019). Even if such conflicts exist in the literature, religiously inspired prejudice and religious inclusion can be seen to varying degrees in organisations and across societies (Reimer 2008).

The significance of religious diversity and the need for its management stem from the visibility of religious identities in the workplace and the legitimacy this visibility grants to religious individuals. According to Tanenbaum Factsheet (2011), there are 10 sites in which religious bias and prejudice may be evident: attire, devotion, diet, holidays, icons, network groups, prayers, ridicule, scheduling, and socialising.

Research on work and religion have a long history, dating back almost a century (e.g. Weber 1930; McClelland 1961). The interplay between work and religion is often studied in the context of Protestant Work ethic which 'lay[s] at the root of the development of capitalism and industrial work organisations' (Parboteeah, Seriki, and Hoegl 2014, 121) and the advancement of the modern rational capitalist system (Weber, 1978; Weber, 2004). Such relationships not only exist in Christianity but also in other belief systems such as Islam (Arslan 2001). From a sociological lens, religion is a social institution, which has the power to affect a wide range of social choices through its features of norm-setting and behavioural prescriptions (Parboteeah, Hoegl, and Cullen 2008). These norms create an environment that requires respect for such norms. However, the agency of religious minorities is not always respected, as confessional and intra-faith diversity may lead to discriminatory behaviours against religious minorities, if such behaviours are left unattended. Historically, until the late twentieth century, social sciences considered the secularist paradigm as a possible solution to religious discrimination. The secularist paradigm suggested that religion had a decreasing importance in public life, and that it may disappear in its significance in regulating social and economic life over time (Fox 2000). However, the religious and spiritual beliefs remained powerful in modern organisations, and the resilience they showed led to a reassessment of secularist assumptions (Fox 2013). Resultantly, modern organisations retained a hybrid mixture of secular and spiritual beliefs among workers.

Fox (2000) posits three religious factors that are related to discrimination. The first is that the religious worldview of majorities can be challenged by minority groups. As such, minorities can be recognised as a threat to the beliefs of the majority group. The second is religious legitimacy, which is defined as 'the extent to which it is legitimate to invoke religion in political discourse' (Fox 2000, 427) and may be challenged in a religiously diverse setting. In this respect, even anti-religious

ideologies, such as Marxism and atheism, accept the power of religion. Fox (2000) thus argues that when religious legitimacy increases, this will create legitimacy for discrimination against religious minorities. The third is that religion inflates emotions, and that majority groups may therefore discriminate against religious minorities if their beliefs are fuelled and if discriminatory discourses are presented by their leaders. In this context, it is interesting to study the Alevis and the Shias in two Sunni majority countries to understand their experiences of discrimination and possibilities of agency.

The comparison of Türkiye and Pakistan presents a detailed exploration of the challenges that arise from their distinct approaches to governance and religion within Muslim-majority countries. Turkey is a compelling example where a traditionally secular government system encounters growing religious influences, which manifests how discrimination can manifest in a society that, while unified by faith, is divided by its principles of governance (Yavuz 2003). On the other hand, Pakistan follows an Islamic republic model, which formally embraces Islamic laws but applies them inconsistently. This reveals the complex nature of religious discrimination in a setting where religion is deeply linked with national identity (Mehfooz 2021). The contrast between Turkey's secularism and Pakistan's Islamic governance offers a valuable perspective for analysing the subtleties of religious discrimination and its effects on Muslim minority communities. This comparative study sheds light on how different degrees of secularism and religious governance interact, providing important insights into the experiences of these communities. For this reason, we now turn our discussion to religious diversity in the context of Turkey and Pakistan.

4 | Religious Diversity in Organisations in Türkiye

According to the Pew Research Centre's 2014 report, 98% of Türkiye's population identifies as Muslim, with other religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Judaism representing a minimal presence. Despite the predominance of Islam, there is significant internal diversity within this religious identity, primarily between different sects. The Sunni sect is the mainstream and dominant form of Islam in Turkey, while the Alevis are recognised as a significant but unofficial faith-based minority. This unofficial status stems from the Turkish state's lack of formal recognition of the Alevi faith as a distinct and legitimate branch of Islam. It is important to recognise that within the Alevi community, there exists a diverse spectrum of identities, including individuals who connect with Alevi traditions from a cultural or secular perspective, as well as those who explicitly distance themselves from Islamic religious affiliation. Consequently, the policies and attitudes of major political entities, including the ruling Justice and Development Party and the Nationalist Movement Party, predominantly endorse Sunni Islam, effectively marginalising the Alevi community. As a result, exclusionary mechanisms have been established by creating unfair preferential treatment to the minority Sunni sect based on the policies of the ruling political parties. Furthermore, in general, diversity issues are not a national or political priority in Turkey. Küskü, Aracı, and Özbilgin (2021) consider Turkey as a country where 'institutional structures and organisational discourses of diversity remain anaemic and antagonistic and lag behind its progressive European counterparts'. Also, even though the Constitution of Turkey adopts religious freedom (Yilmaz 2023), there is a lack of representation at the state level for Alevi individuals (Gözaydın 2021). The representation of religious groups is important to protect rights and prevent discrimination. For instance, the Sunnis have the *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* (The Presidency of Religious Affairs), and this presidency demonstrates the power of being the majority by managing all religious facilities in Turkey. Additionally, since it represents the Sunnis, the presidency has the power to contribute to state-level legislation. The Alevis in Turkey practice a form of Islam that is largely shaped by a secular and humanistic understanding of religion, emphasising ethical values, communal solidarity, and individual conscience over formalised rituals and legalistic obligations. Rather than adhering to mosque-centred worship and the five daily prayers, they gather in *cemevis*, which function as cultural and social spaces as much as places of worship. Their rituals, including *cem* ceremonies and the performance of *semah*, incorporate music and poetry, which reflects a tradition that values artistic and philosophical expression alongside spirituality. Unlike orthodox Islamic practices, Alevi worship is not led by state-appointed clergy but by community elders known as dedes, whose authority is based on moral guidance rather than religious law (Bilici 1998; Korkmaz 2000; Yıldırım 2018). Since Alevi people lack representation in the Presidency of Religious Affairs, unlike their Sunni counterparts, they frequently face discrimination in the recruitment process, promotions, and managerial decisions at organisations, as well as in society (Taser-Erdogan 2022). It should, however, also be noted that the Alevi-Bektashi Culture and Cemevi Presidency, established in 2022 as part of the Turkish government's plan to create a new state-run Alevi institution, is not affiliated with the Directorate of Religious Affairs but rather with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. This institutional placement is emblematic of the hegemonic perspective's reluctance to recognise the Alevi faith as a legitimate religious tradition, instead framing it within the realm of cultural heritage rather than religious identity.

Inherited cultural values and political domination of the Sunni sect create organisations that exclude diversity based on religious beliefs. Such hegemonic domination of Sunni religion is particularly prevalent in public sector organisations (Özsemerci 2003). For this reason, organisational leadership is dominated by individuals who support the ruling parties. Such numerical domination allows Sunni leaders greater degree of access to symbolic and cultural power in shaping stereotypes and biases about the Alevis. For instance, the study of Tuğsuz (2021) demonstrates that Alevi individuals are wrongly stereotyped as suspicious, antagonistic, ignorant and heretic. Such baseless perspectives inform the dominant cultural values and attitudes against the Alevis. Infused with these biases and stereotypes, workplaces with Sunni domination offer adversarial and discriminative environments for the Alevis. For this reason, Alevi individuals experience challenges in seeking inclusion, and opportunities for personal and professional growth in Sunni dominant organisations.

The study of Gümüş (2020) shows that Alevi employees face mobbing in many organisations For example, the Alevis may be asked to work during Ramadan time and during Friday Prayers. Based on the scholarly literature, we highlight three mechanisms that create an exclusionary approach to Alevi individuals. The mechanisms are digital identification process, improper assignment selection, and coercively-oriented assigned workloads. Digital identification process refers to checking employees' or applicants' social media accounts for a job. The research of Rahman et al. (2022) demonstrates that many companies get initial ideas regarding applicants, and employers can create fake reasons not to recruit individuals who do not have similar perspectives and beliefs. Improper assignment selection refers to the challenges that cause employees' demotivation by assigning underqualified tasks to qualified employees. Lastly, coercively-oriented assigned workloads include the assignment of arbitrary workloads because of employees' minority status in organisations (Gümüş 2020). The study of Ciuk, Śliwa, and Harzing (2022) also reveals that considering diversity as a problem serves as a barrier to inclusion in organisations, which fits with the case of Alevi inclusion in Turkish organisations.

5 | Religious Diversity in the Pakistani Context

Historically, the Shias in South Asia faced persecution by a few (not all) Sunni rulers and clerics. The Shias in Kashmir faced several massacres in the past few centuries. Plunder, loot and massacres which came to be known as Taarajs virtually devastated the Shia community of Kashmir between the 15th and 19th centuries, during which the Shia habitations were plundered, people were slaughtered, libraries were burnt and their sacred sites were desecrated. Sheikh Ahmad Sarhindi (1564–1624, known as Mujaddid Alf Sani), Shah Waliullah (1703–1762), and Shah Ismail (1779–1831) played a key role in aggravating anti-Shia sentiments in local Sunni rulers and populations in India. Afghanistan's Pashtun ruler Ahmad Shah Durrani Abdali (1722–1772), who invaded India upon the invitation of Shah Waliullah, especially targeted and killed Hindus and Shias. The sectarian sentiments became further institutionalised in the shape of the anti-Shia and anti-Barelvi/Sufi literature, and fatwas (religious decrees) were issued after the establishment of the Darul Uloom Deoband, the first Deobandi madrasa founded in 1866 by Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi. In Saudi Arabia, the anti-Shia and anti-Sunni Sufi sentiments became institutionalised in the shape of the Wahhabi (Salafi) movement of Muhammad ibn abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) and the subsequent ascendance of the Saud family to power. Some of these anti-Shia sentiments were also inherited when Pakistan came into being in August 1947. The founder of Pakistan, although himself a Shia, was denied a state funeral led by a Shia cleric. His state funeral was led by a Deobandi cleric, a Sunni sub-sect that remains vehemently anti-Shia and anti-Sunni Sufi or Barelvi. Although the Shias in Pakistan are scattered throughout the country, there are certain areas where the Shias constitute the majority population, such as Gilgit-Baltistan, Kurram Agency in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and have a significant presence in certain areas of Jhang, D.I. Khan, Quetta and Layyah. The Shias of Pakistan belong to almost all ethnic backgrounds, including but not limited to Punjabi, Pashtun, Sindhi, Baloch, Urdu-speaking Muhajir, Hazara, and Gilgiti communities.

Generally, there is a lack of research and empirical data on the persecution and discrimination of the Shias in Pakistan (Syed 2016; Syed and Ali 2021). Syed and Ali's recent work provides good insight regarding discrimination of the Shia in Pakistan. The study, utilising a 'pyramid of hate' framework, revealed the pervasive bias, discrimination, and violence faced by Shia professionals in Pakistan, which demonstrates a spectrum from subtle biases to blatant hostilities (Syed and Ali 2021). Interviews with 76 participants uncovered experiences of workplace and social discrimination, emphasising the impact of anti-Shia sentiment on their daily lives and careers (Syed and Ali 2021). This research highlights the critical human rights issues within the Pakistani context, and urges for a deeper understanding and mitigation of sectarian-based discrimination and violence. However, there is no reliable statistic regarding the number of Shia employees, which can be attributed to the absence of policies within Pakistani organisations that mandate the declaration of one's religious sect. Furthermore, official surveys and census data fail to disaggregate the Muslim population by sect, neither in terms of overall demographics nor with respect to the division of labour. Consequently, there is a scarcity of information on the organisational experiences of Shia employees. Access to research studies specifically concerning Shia employees in Pakistan is exceedingly difficult, as no comprehensive study - either on a local or international level - has been made available to date.

Anecdotal evidence and media accounts indicate the grim reality that numerous Shia employees have been targeted and killed due to their faith, both en route to their workplaces and within their professional environments. One of the most notable incidents was the assassination of Shaukat Ali Mirza, the managing director of Pakistan State Oil (PSO), who was murdered in Karachi in 2001, according to a BBC report (BBC 2001). In a similarly tragic event in October 2003, seven people from a Shia background were fatally shot, and an additional seven were injured when a bus transporting employees of the Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (Suparco) to Friday prayers was attacked by armed assailants on Hub River Road, as reported by Geocities. These attacks have not been limited to professionals in the public sector; medical doctors, university lecturers, and lawyers have also fallen victim to sectarian targeted killings. Comprehensive details on the targeted violence against the Shias can be sourced from reputable organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. It is important to recognise that the perpetrators, often identified as extremist Takfiri or Khawarij groups, have not only targeted individuals from a Shia background but have also attacked Sufis and moderate Sunnis, underscoring the indiscriminate nature of their violence.

The phenomenon of anti-Shia violence, both within and outside the workplace, presents a disturbing and distinctive challenge in the contemporary landscape. This violence has not only affected civilians but has also targeted security personnel, singled out specifically for their affiliation with the Shia sect of Islam. A

harrowing instance of this occurred in January 2008 when the Taliban captured a Pakistan army post (Frontier Constabulary or FC), leading to the abduction of numerous soldiers. In a particularly gruesome act of sectarian violence, the captors identified the Shia soldiers, subjected them to brutal torture, and executed them, with reports from the *Daily Times* indicating that eight Shia FC personnel were murdered by having their throats slit (Daily Times 2008). This targeted persecution and discrimination underscore the vulnerability of the Shias in Pakistan, identifying them as a minoritised and marginalised group within society. Despite the severity of these incidents, there is a notable gap in research and understanding regarding how such sectarian biases and violence permeate professional environments and impact workplace dynamics and the safety of Shia employees.

6 | Research Methods

The field study is based on 38 interviews that we conducted as part of a study of religious diversity in the context of Türkiye and Pakistan. There are two main reasons for selecting these countries as research contexts. The first reason is to explore the complexities arising from differing governance and religious practices within countries with Muslim-majority populations. For example, Turkey presents a unique case where a secular governance system is increasingly challenged by religious influences. This provides valuable insights into how discrimination within the same faith manifests in a society striving to uphold secular principles amidst growing religious conservatism (Yavuz 2003). Conversely, Pakistan, operating under an Islamic republic framework, offers a contrasting scenario where Islamic principles are constitutionally upheld but inconsistently applied, revealing the nuances of religious discrimination in a context where religion is deeply intertwined with national identity (Mehfooz 2021). Through this comparative analysis, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of how varying levels of secularism and religious governance impact the experiences of minority Muslim communities. The second reason stems from practical considerations. As the authors of this research are from Turkey and Pakistan, studying these countries facilitates the data collection process and offers opportunities to gather rich and contextualised data for our study.

The interviews aimed to show the perspectives of the faith-based minority groups in both countries. In Türkiye, the interviews were conducted with the employees of a wide range of organisations. It was difficult to secure the research participation of the Alevis in Turkey, as the Alevis do not often publicly declare their identity due to the fear of reprisal. Therefore, we used a snowball sampling technique and used personal contacts to secure trust and participation. We firstly communicated with Alevi associations which provided us with research participants. The interviews were conducted with those employees who worked in both private and public organisations. Because of the sensitivity of the issue, the participants did not reveal their workplaces, their occupations and sometimes even their own names during the interviews. The interviews were conducted face to face when possible, and over Skype in two cases. The interview schedule consisted of questions that explored the employees' perspectives regarding their work and careers, and focused on their experiences of religiously inspired discrimination. In order to garner rich insights, we developed probing questions in the interview schedule (Corbin and Strauss 2008) to diagnose existing problems and situations regarding religious minorities and to provide accuracy of knowledge in the Turkish context. The interviews lasted between 30 and 40 min, and were voice recorded and verbatim transcribed.

In Pakistan, the interviews were conducted with 17 Shia employees. In Türkiye, 21 people from an Alevi background participated in the study, including eight female and 13 male participants. The participants' age range spanned from 22 to 51, and all interviewees were from Istanbul and Izmir, the two large industrial cities in Turkey. In terms of education, the attainment levels ranged from a high school diploma to a bachelor's degree. Many of the participants worked in the public sector; however, some worked in the private sector as well. The employees generally worked in lower or middle-level positions.

In Pakistan, the data on age and occupation were not collected. Three out of 17 interviewees were female, and the participants generally had a work experience of between 1 and 20 years.

The findings of our study are structured around two primary themes: firstly, the phenomenon of the intra-faith spiral of silence in workplace settings; and secondly, the exploration of the spiral of silence as spaces for agency among religious minorities. The participants were approached through personal networks of the authors and through social networks such as LinkedIn and Facebook. The interviews were conducted both face to face and online. The online method was helpful in view of the geographical spread of the Shia population and the sensitivity of this topic. Another advantage of the online method was its ability to provide access to individuals who would be difficult, if not impossible, to reach through other channels (Garton, Haythornthwaite, and Wellman 1999; Wellman 1997).

We did not record the names of our participants or their organisations. Any identifiable details from responses were amended to mask individual and organisational identity. Snowball sampling was used, and the participants were asked to spread the word only to Shia acquaintances who met the three parameters: being from a Shia background, possessing formal work experience, and residing in Pakistan. The method adopted proved to be inclusive, allowing a reach across all areas of Pakistan.

NVivo, a qualitative analysis software, was employed for generating codes and formulating themes in both countries. For the analysis of the data, the theoretical sampling approach of Corbin and Strauss (2008) was used. This sampling method adopts a concept-driven approach to data collection, focusing on relevant concepts related to the problems and situations under investigation. Theoretical sampling guided the selection of the interviewees, framing the concepts explored in each interview. A key distinction between snowball sampling and theoretical sampling lies in their respective focal points: snowball sampling pertains to how interviewees were identified and reached, whereas theoretical sampling pertains to how the data were analysed. Following the analysis, we constructed the data structure outlined in Table 1.

TABLE 1 | Data structure.

First order theme	Second order theme	Aggregate theme
Avoiding declaring the origin of religion	Micro- individual level issues	Intra-faith spiral of silence at work
Facing uncomfortable and distrustful social environment		
Avoiding prejudice at work	Meso- organisational level issues	
Legitimate discriminatory approaches of colleagues		
Constrained career opportunities		
Exclusion in social life	Macro- national level issues	
Marginalisation of traditions and rituals		
Ceremonial laws and discourses		
Assimilation policy of the government	Cultural integration and identity in multifaith societies	Spirals of silence: Room for agency for religious minorities
Considering religious place as culture centre		
Dominance of Sunni religious groups in management levels	Religious influence and equity in public sector employment	
Barriers to employment and promotions in state organisations		

To uphold the trustworthiness of our coding procedure, the coding process was divided between two authors based on contextual expertise: the second author was responsible for coding the transcripts related to the Pakistan context, while the third author focused on the Türkiye context. This division ensured that cultural and contextual nuances were accurately captured. As new patterns emerged or adjustments to our coding frameworks were required, we systematically revisited the interviews previously examined to integrate these updates. In adherence to the principles of communicative validity, we relied on joint consensus to verify the robustness of our coding practices and the validity of our analytical interpretations (Sandberg 2005).

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the data, a verification process involving discussions with the interviewees was undertaken when necessary, thereby enhancing the precision of our findings. This iterative approach was meticulously designed to preclude the oversight of implicit phenomena (Lather 1993; Sandberg 2005). Part of this verification process involved actively soliciting feedback from the participants to confirm our interpretations and to consider alternative perspectives. Table 2 demonstrates the methods we implemented to ensure the trustworthiness of our study, specifically focusing on its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

In the next section, we extend the data structure by presenting the findings of the present research.

7 | Findings

In Türkiye, 21 Alevi individuals participated in the study, including eight female and 13 male participants. The participants' age range spanned from 22 to 51, and all interviewees were from Istanbul and Izmir, the two large industrial cities in Turkey. In terms of education, the attainment levels ranged from a high school diploma to a Bachelor's degree. Many of the participants worked in the public sector; however, some worked in the private sector as well. The employees generally worked in lower or middle-level positions.

In Pakistan, the data on age and occupation were not collected. Three out of 17 interviewees were female, and the participants generally had a work experience of between 1 and 20 years.

The findings of our study are structured around two overarching themes. Firstly, we examine the intra-faith spiral of silence within workplace dynamics, focusing on how individuals within the same religious community may feel constrained to conform to prevailing beliefs or opinions. Secondly, we explore the spirals of silence as spaces where religious minorities can assert their agency, disrupt dominant narratives, and actively contribute to broader discourse.

7.1 | The Intra-Faith Spiral of Silence at Work

Based on our field study, we illustrate the intra-faith spiral of silence at work, examining it through three levels of analysis: micro (individual), meso (organisational), and macro (national) issues. These sub-themes offer a framework to classify the participants' experiences within the work context by considering how each level of analysis influences their experiences. The participants discussed invisible barriers in their micro-, meso- and macro-level engagements at work, in and out of their organisations, and across their social and economic lives. Micro-level experiences include interpersonal relations and communications; meso-level experiences include interactions in organisations; and macro-level includes experiences with significant national institutions.

TABLE 2 | Addressing research trustworthiness criteria.

Indicators/criteria	The processes that address each criterion
Credibility	Throughout the examination and evaluation of interview transcripts, coding occurred at various textual levels—ranging from individual words to full paragraphs—to accurately capture the essence of identified categories. Examples that typified these categories were also presented. To ensure participants' statements were accurately represented, 'direct quotes' were used. During the data gathering stage, the organisation and implementation of interviews were effectively managed, with sufficient time allotted for on-site research (prolonged engagement). This phase was not limited to mere data collection; it also included returning to participants for feedback during the analysis and assessment phases and integrating their insights into the research (member checks). At every step, the research team practiced a deep level of critical self-reflection.
Transferability	In qualitative research, transferability refers to the extent to which the results of a study can be extrapolated to other contexts or settings. This concept suggests that the insights and conclusions derived from one research context may have relevance to similar contexts, provided there is sufficient alignment between them. This consideration becomes particularly significant when examining factors like sample size and data saturation within a study. For example, findings from a study conducted in countries with comparable characteristics may have applicability beyond their specific location. Transferability requires the researcher to assess the contextual similarities between different cases or scenarios. It plays a vital role in determining the applicability and significance of qualitative research findings beyond their original scope. Furthermore, these findings have the potential to contribute to various disciplines such as organisational behaviour and sociology of organisations, thereby fostering broader discussions. By ensuring that research outcomes can be applied across different contexts, transferability enhances comprehension and knowledge exchange within comparable fields and disciplines.
Dependability	In qualitative studies, the concept of dependability plays a crucial role in evaluating the research's consistency and stability over time. This involves managing external variables to prevent negative impacts on the study. The significance of dependability lies in its reflection of the researcher's capacity to consistently apply methodologies and interpretations across various investigations. Dependability transcends mere reliability; it encompasses the commitment to transparency and the meticulous recording of any shifts in research approaches and conditions. In our study, the robustness of dependability was elevated through the use of comprehensive interviews and a thorough review of existing literature. Additionally, the incorporation of documents of relevance and the use of qualitative data analysis tools, such as N-VIVO, have augmented the reliability and authenticity of our research. Through effective management of external influences and maintaining a steady research methodology, our study has yielded dependable results that can be replicated in similar contexts, thereby reinforcing the validity and relevance of our findings.
Confirmability	In qualitative studies, confirmability pertains to how much the outcomes are influenced by the participants' actual responses rather than the preconceptions or biases of the researcher. It underscores the necessity of presenting the results in a neutral way, accurately mirroring the input from participants. To attain confirmability, researchers engage in rigorous documentation of each phase of their investigation, including the selection of participants, and the methods of data collection and analysis, as demonstrated in our methodological framework. In our study, meticulous attention was paid to prevent our own perspectives or any external variables from skewing the input from participants. This methodical vigilance, similar to upholding objectivity in quantitative studies, is crucial for validating the credibility of the study's

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

Indicators/criteria	The processes that address each criterion
	outcomes. Confirmability centres on the principle that the derived conclusions should stem directly from the gathered data and evidence, devoid of any influence from the researcher's personal notions or prejudices.

7.1.1 | Micro-Individual Level Issues

The micro-individual level issues encompass the personal experience of individuals at work. For this reason, it demonstrates why religious minorities avoid declaring the origin of religion at work and how they cope with an uncomfortable and distrustful social environment.

Based on the findings, the experiences of the participants indicate that they face a hostile environment at their workplace but are often not in a position to complain about it. Some participants felt uncomfortable when their colleagues asked cynical questions about beliefs and rituals for the Shias in Pakistan and the Alevis in Türkiye. For instance, there was a view that some Sunni colleagues were either ill-informed or insensitive:

> Anti-Shia remarks are more common by frank Sunni colleagues and bosses who are perhaps not ill-meant but are surely insensitive.

Horak and Suseno's research (2022: 17) illustrates that repeated social behaviours play a crucial role in shaping sociocultural norms. When these norms are negatively constructed within society, it often results in social exclusion within the workplace. Consequently, this contributes to the marginalisation of the Shias, as the prevailing perspective tends to be opposed to their beliefs. To avoid being impacted by these unfavourable circumstances, religious minorities usually opt not to disclose their religious background at the micro-level. By refraining from mentioning their religion, they are typically presumed to be from a Sunni background, thus creating a sense of safety and protection within this concealment.

At the micro-level, unfavourable attitudes towards religious minorities also created an uncomfortable and distrustful social environment. Many participants reported difficulties in finding permanent jobs in mainstream professions, outside their own economic enclaves and social connections. Some of them reported discriminatory experiences in the recruitment process. An Alevi officer who was invited for 27 recruitment interviews explained the particular challenges he was exposed to:

> When I applied for this job, some of my friends were not hired, because their names were Ali and Huseyin [1]. This is a basic approach by employers to discriminate against us by our names. Now, everything is still the same. They would not accept us if they knew we are Alevis
>
> (Interviewee 10, Male).

The example provided uncovers how the social environment can erect barriers for religious minorities. At the individual level, members of these minority groups often perceive their surroundings as unwelcoming and untrustworthy, which arises from the broader social context, where prevailing norms and attitudes marginalise their beliefs and identities. Consequently, religious minorities may feel compelled to conceal or downplay their religious affiliation to navigate these challenging social dynamics.

7.1.2 | Meso-Organisational Level Issues

This sub-theme encompasses organisational approaches to religious minority groups in both countries. Based on the findings, the main issues of this level include avoiding prejudice at work, legitimating discriminatory approaches of colleagues, and constrained career opportunities.

In order to address why there is a need for avoiding prejudice at work, some participants highlighted the reason for biassed behaviour. For instance, a 26- year-old Alevi management trainee in the private sector recounted:

> When people learnt that I am an Alevi, they often took a step away from me. They also judged my beliefs harshly. This is obviously a bias. In Türkiye, it is really difficult to live as an Alevi. I feel that I face social exclusion. People are not open-minded
>
> (Interviewee 1, Female).

Such experiences and approaches in organisations cause some participants to fear revealing their Alevi identity. They describe keeping their identity hidden out of fear of reprisal and to evade workplace prejudice. For instance, a 31-year-old Alevi worker in the private sector stated:

> Being an Alevi is regarded as dishonourable by the Sunnis. Therefore, my family taught me that I should not tell my beliefs to anybody when I was a child. They wanted to protect me from physical violence. I do not prefer to tell anybody that I am an Alevi now.
>
> (Interviewee 19, Male)

The findings also highlight the legitimisation of discriminatory practices within organisational contexts. For instance, social media platforms serve as tools for discriminating against certain groups. Rahman et al. (2022) illustrate that during the recruitment process, recruiters frequently scrutinise the social media profiles of applicants. If an applicant's religious identity does not align with that of the employer, recruiters may cite other reasons to justify rejecting candidates from non-conforming demographic backgrounds. Despite the use of social media by

employers or recruitment personnel for such purposes, the discriminatory actions remain largely unverifiable. For that reason, these practices may be perceived as legitimate, as there are no visible or proven violations against existing laws or regulations.

Religious minorities are indeed capable of recognising instances of discrimination against them, primarily due to the existence of legal frameworks theoretically designed to protect their rights. However, in practice, access to such protection is limited. For instance, in our field study, we observed that managers in public organisations frequently exhibited subjective behaviour during hiring and promotion processes, inadvertently creating invisible barriers for religious minorities. Moreover, biases within the workplace can further perpetuate these invisible barriers, particularly concerning limited career advancement opportunities. We use the term 'invisible barriers' because discrimination often manifests subtly and quietly, especially since religious minorities may choose not to disclose their identities. This form of discrimination can significantly impact the experiences and opportunities available to religious minorities within organisational contexts. However, in some circumstances, their sect may be revealed. A 44-year-old Alevi state officer in the public sector recounted:

> In my organisation, my colleagues and upper-level management know me as an Alevi. I did not experience any discrimination. However, even if there is no visible discrimination against me, sometimes I feel that I am excluded. You know, why? Because I work very hard, but always management gives their appreciation to other people. I feel under-appreciated, and I am losing my hope for being promoted soon
>
> (Interviewee 15, Female).

The approaches of managers and colleagues within organisations create constrained career opportunities. For instance, an Alevi female participant explained the discrimination that she faces in her organisation as follows:

> I am a social worker, and I work in a state organisation. Sometimes, there can be some cases that a social worker needs to go with legal authorities at night. Let's say around 2 am. In general, the manager does not call a female social worker that late. It is like a tradition. However, my manager calls me, especially at night, to assign a case. I am the only one to face such a treatment amongst female colleagues. Since there is not a written rule about that tradition, it does not seem like discrimination. However, I feel it.
>
> (Interviewee 20, Female).

The above extract also illustrates the adverse and complex impact of the intersectionality of religion and gender for an Alevi female. These findings demonstrate that the participants have issues such as a perceived lack of promotion, are consciously exposed to adverse attitudes at work, and do not raise any voices or complaints because there is no action against these violations and forms of discrimination. The concept of intersectionality is essential for understanding the complex discrimination faced by an Alevi woman in our study. Her experiences highlight how being both a woman and belonging to the Alevi faith combine to create unique challenges for her at work. Unlike her female coworkers, she frequently finds herself assigned to work late at night more frequently than others. This departure from an informal rule, intended to prioritise the safety of women by avoiding late-night work, appears to stem from a subtle form of bias directed towards her due to her dual identities as both a woman and an Alevi. This kind of bias is particularly harmful because it does not come from just one aspect of her identity (like just her gender or her religion) but from how these identities overlap, making her feel more excluded and facing more discrimination than others might. This shows how intersectionality - how different parts of our identities come together - plays a crucial role in the types of discrimination people can face. For this reason, as Bowen and Blackmon (2003) state, individuals tend to become silent if they believe they will not receive any support when they raise some of their concerns. In the current study, the Alevi participants face a similar challenge, as there are no overt obstacles stemming from employers' negative perceptions or regulations. However, research findings in Türkiye suggest that Alevi individuals are cognisant of these challenges. Despite this awareness, they are mostly hesitant to voice their concerns, fearing that doing so may exacerbate their circumstances and lead to even more adverse conditions.

In Pakistan, the findings indicate the extent to which anti-Shia stereotypes and hostilities permeate in the workplace and result in anti-Shia discrimination. The participants shared examples of discrimination and hostility in their workplace by employers, managers, colleagues or customers due to their Shia beliefs or practices. The majority of the participants faced some kind of discrimination at the workplace; however, most of them faced subtle or refined hostility while some faced blatant anti-Shia remarks.

> My office colleagues often used anti-Shia jokes with me.
>
> (male, Sindh, > 1-year work)

Another participant (a university lecturer) shared his experience where a hostile environment was created for him during the month of Muharram:

> I worked at [name withdrawn] University where University teachers who lived with me in teachers' hostel used to play Haq Nawaz Jhangvi' s [a hardline Deobandi cleric, founder of a banned terrorist outfit Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan or SSP] anti-Shia cassettes during Muharram ... I have been told that all I believe in is rubbish and that I need to be guided to the right path. I have come across people who have made fun of the way I pray.
>
> (male, Punjab, > 7-year work)

7.1.3 | Macro National Level Issues

This sub-theme demonstrates the way the macro environmental context shapes the experiences of religious minorities. Based on the findings, the main issues of this level include (i) exclusion in social life, (ii) marginalisation of traditions and rituals, and (iii) ceremonial laws and discourses.

i. Exclusion in social life: One of the participants recalled a traumatic memory that she had:

> I cooked some food and took it to my workplace. In general, I share my food with my colleagues. When we were eating together, one of my colleagues said, "The food that is cooked by an Alevi can't be eaten". She didn't know I was an Alevi. It was too rude. In such situations, I remain silent because I can't change the perceptions and I do not want to come out as an Alevi.
>
> (Interviewee 21, Female).

The research findings in Türkiye reveal that while organisations may lack explicit policies that discriminate against specific groups, informal networks within the workplace often foster their own exclusionary cultures. These cultural norms and beliefs typically originate from the prevailing traditional and popular Sunni religious ideologies, which influence the dynamics of the workplace environment. In Pakistan, some participants shared their experiences of a hostile environment during the Islamic month of Muharram [mourning period for the Shias]:

> One officemate didn't know that I was a Shia and told me that Shias did wrong things at Sham-e-Ghareeban [the night of mourning on the tenth of Muharram], that's why they switched off lights. That's when I told him that I am a Shia and that he should avoid false allegations.
>
> (Male, Sindh, > 1-year work)

Moreover, since some Alevi individuals face discrimination when they are visible, they prefer not to disclose their religious identity. For instance, an Alevi participant who works in the marketing field comments on this situation as follows:

> I am an Alevi citizen of Türkiye. I experienced discrimination when I stayed at a public dormitory in Elazig. I went there during the month of Ramadan *(the fasting month)* for my job, and I was not fasting. People in the dormitory learnt that I am an Alevi and they ended their friendship with me. I was left alone. And after that experience, I decided not to say that I am Alevi because people in Turkey accept you as a Sunni if you do not state otherwise. However, sometimes I have to bear some moments of indignity when I stay silent.
>
> (Interviewee 13, Male).

ii. Marginalisation of traditions and rituals: Some studies (e.g. Çaha 2004) demonstrate that mass media and certain political groups denigrate the Alevis. Çaha (2004) highlights the significance of populist media in portraying the traditions and rituals of the Alevis in a negative light, thereby influencing public opinion, including within the workplace. This adverse portrayal contributes to the prejudiced attitudes prevalent in society. Consequently, Alevi individuals conceal their identity due to the adverse social construction surrounding their religious affiliation. The research findings indicate that many Alevis opt to remain discreet about their identity to avoid confronting unfavourable opinions in the workplace.

iii. Ceremonial laws and discourses: At the macro level, both nations provide some ceremonial laws and discourses regarding the rights of religious minorities. However, such legal protections and discourses are neither understood nor implemented fully. One Turkish participant explains how this works:

> Discrimination is not related to the government, it is related to the Sunnis. They educate their children as the enemy of religious minorities, so this is all about society. However, when Mr. Erdogan was the Prime Minister of Türkiye, his followers cursed the leader of the main opposition party Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu solely because he is an Alevi. But some other speeches of Mr. Erdogan stressed unitary rather than discriminative behaviours in terms of religious minorities
>
> (Interviewee 18, Female).

Discourses of political or opinion leaders shape the social perspective of individuals for a certain group or belief (Mergen and Ozbilgin 2021). Such discourses encourage individuals to adopt discriminatory behaviours because they can feel that they have support from a political leader.

7.2 | The Spirals of Silence: Room for Agency for Religious Minorities

In the present theme, we mainly focus on two sub-themes that are (i) cultural integration and identity in multifaith societies, and (ii) religious influence and equity in public sector employment.

7.2.1 | Cultural Integration and Identity in Multifaith Societies

Within the context of this sub-theme, we point out the assimilation policy of the government as it considers religious places as cultural centres.

One of the main problems for the Alevis is the house of prayer. For the Alevis, the problem is that the Turkish government considers *cemevi* as a cultural centre, not a house of prayer. Despite this, cemevi is recognised as religious venues among the

Sunni majority public who do not support the state line. A 38-year-old Alevi finance manager mentions the situation as follows.

> Mosque cannot be considered as a house of prayer for the Alevis because it is only for the Sunnis. We (the Alevis) have *cemevi* as a house of prayer. The Turkish government accepts it as a cultural centre. It is wrong, and this mistake will go on.
>
> (Interviewee 9, Male).

In terms of politics, the Alevis and other minority groups have experienced suppression by the government, particularly concerning the recognition of their places of worship. Additionally, they have endured domination by Sunni religious factions.

Another important political approach of the government is to give preference to certain Sunni Islamic groups or circles as an assimilation policy of the government. For instance, the Turkish government gives privileges to those Sunni groups who are their main supporters. Some participants of our study claim that the government tries to influence some Alevi opinion leaders in order to secure support for government policies. Therefore, the Alevis are invited to support the ruling government and yet their inclusion remains contingent. A 26-year-old Alevi participant explains this situation as follows:

> All governments and ruling parties in Türkiye had only one concern, i.e., to be re-elected. Therefore, they make donations to Alevi leaders in order to secure their support. Then, governments try to impose their ideologies on the Alevis through '*dedes*' [socio-religious leaders of the Alevis]
>
> (Interviewee 12, Male).

7.2.2 | Religious Influence in Public Sector Employment

In Pakistan, there exists a discourse promoting unity between Sunni and Shia sects, particularly when addressing violence perpetrated by certain extremist factions within Deobandi and Salafi/Wahhabi communities against Shias, Sufi Sunnis/Barelvis, Christians, and other minority groups. Notably, among the Pakistani Shia participants, there was a prevailing tendency not to assign blame to the Sunnis as a whole. Instead, there was a clear discourse of unity towards the Sunnis while distinguishing extremist or fanatic *Takfiri* and *Khariji* militant groups from the majority of peaceful and tolerant Sunni individuals:

> Sunnis are absolutely brothers to us. Even many Sunnis that I know join the Ashura procession for *mannat* (religious vows) and faith. Only Takfiri Deobandis (SSP or ASWJ) are responsible for this violence. They kill both Shias and Sunnis.

In Pakistan, some participants indicated their coping strategies with religious harassment at work. For example, a female participant from Balochistan said:

> Only because they knew I was capable of answering back, they [hostile Sunni colleagues] refrained from direct remarks.

Even though the Shias generally adopt a positive discourse towards the Sunnis in Pakistan, Sunni groups exert a dominant influence within state organisations in terms of employment, career opportunities, promotions, and the number of employees. Similarly, Turkish state institutions predominantly recruit the Sunnis rather than the Alevis. Moreover, the findings indicate that state organisations create barriers to employment and promotion for religious minority groups. For instance, in Türkiye, the ruling party espouses Sunni ideology and political discourse, leading to preferential treatment in recruitment and promotion for individuals sharing the same beliefs. Notably, at senior management levels such as rectorships, the Sunnis outnumber the Alevis.

The Alevis and the Shias are well known minority groups in Türkiye and Pakistan, respectively. Their inclusion and voice behaviour are shaped by dominant political and cultural beliefs and leadership behaviours which allow only contingent and limited scope for voice and agency to these two groups.

8 | Discussion and Conclusion

Our findings elucidate the manifestations of intra-faith discrimination within Türkiye and Pakistan, emphasising the interplay between social, organisational, and individual levels. This research illuminates the interplay between the spiral of silence and superdiversity, presenting a framework for deciphering the complex dynamics at play. It uncovers the widespread yet diverse manifestations of discrimination that religious minorities encounter, shaped by the overarching sociopolitical milieu and ingrained within workplace cultures. This underscores the urgent need for legal safeguards, heightened awareness, and organisational measures to cultivate inclusive environments. The authors advocate for future studies to embrace a multilevel perspective in non-Western settings, calling for research grounded in primary data to deepen the understanding of religious diversity and inclusion in the workplace. This contribution is pivotal, shedding light on the processes of silence and expression among religious minorities and charting avenues towards a workplace that is more inclusive and just.

Our findings reveal that discrimination based on religious and sectarian differences is a prevalent experience among individuals from faith-based minority groups in the two case study contexts of Türkiye and Pakistan. The countries emerge as compelling case studies for examining intra-religious discrimination—that is, discrimination within a Muslim-

majority country against faith-based minority groups. Despite the constitutional prohibitions against discrimination towards any minority in both Turkey and Pakistan, our research indicates that such discriminatory practices are frequently encountered by the Alevis in Turkey and the Shias in Pakistan. While this study focuses on Turkey and Pakistan, the experiences of religious discrimination may vary significantly in other cultural and religious contexts.

The study demonstrates the covert obstacles confronting faith-based minorities, who are subjected to hate speech, persecution, and violence within the social sphere. Additionally, these groups encounter significant hurdles in accessing employment opportunities and professional circles, along with pervasive hostility in their workplace settings. In response, many opt to conceal their religious identities and partake in political bargaining as a means to avoid retaliation and to improve their circumstances and gain recognition.

Our research critically examines the oversimplified views of intra-faith relations in Muslim-majority nations, revealing what we describe as a 'low road' to religious diversity through the experiences of the Alevi and Shia participants from Türkiye and Pakistan (referenced in Table 3). This 'low road' to intra-religious diversity is characterised by prejudiced attitudes that, in extreme cases, lead to atrocities. We argue that this approach could be shifted towards a 'high road' strategy, wherein intra-religious diversity is leveraged as a cultural asset and a positive force for future generations. Achieving this high road necessitates fostering an inclusive mindset that supports peaceful coexistence. Our findings indicate that the absence of legal safeguards against intra-religious discrimination, a lack of awareness about the detrimental effects of such discrimination, insufficient sensitivity at the broader social (macro) level, a void in organisational strategies (meso-level) to address intra-religious tensions, and a general deficiency in individual (micro-level) competencies for fostering harmonious intra-faith relationships are significant obstacles to transitioning from low to high road practices in religious diversity within both countries.

There are three main contributions to the present research. First, since much research on the spiral of silence theory focuses on western societies in communication studies (Chaudry and Gruzd 2020), the present research contributes to the literature by focusing on intra-faith discrimination and resulting silence in workplaces in two Muslim majority countries. In this context, we demonstrate the micro-individual, meso-organisational and macro-national factors that shape the spiral of silence at work. Even though some studies (e.g. Dalisay 2012) consider ethnicity by adopting the spiral of silence theory, there is a western cultural leaning on the findings of these studies because those groups who do not have a voice were approached based on the characteristics of western culture. However, our study explores a different religio-cultural milieu - Muslims - which are often assumed to be homogeneous and monolithic.

TABLE 3 | Low and high roads to religious diversity.

Low road to religious diversity (spiral of silence)	High road to religious diversity (virtuous cycle)
Biased attitudes	Synchronicity (acausal coexistence)
Acts of bias	Legal and voluntary regulation of inclusion
Discrimination	Multiculturalism
Bias motivated violence	Acts of kindness
Genocide	Inclusive attitudes

The second contribution of the present research is to provide a multilevel exploration of intra-faith discrimination and silence. By adopting a multilevel approach, we demonstrate national, organisational and individual dimensions that can shape the spiral of silence. Studies generally consider individual experiences from minority groups to demonstrate how a spiral of silence can exist in a context. However, it is critical to understand the factors that shape the context for minority groups. For instance, in the present research, we highlight that both countries have constitutions prohibiting discrimination against minority faith groups. Even though there is such legislation, there is no legal protection for these two specific groups. For this reason, whilst the states consider the rights of minority groups, the Alevis and the Shias fall outside the remit of ceremonial legal protections. Thus, our research enriches the spiral of silence theory by broadening its scope from individual (micro) levels to encompass multilevel approaches, which allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how silence spreads across different layers of society.

As a significant third contribution, building upon previous studies that primarily examined intergroup differences leading to spirals of silence, we illuminate how divisions within a single group can also give rise to these spirals. Furthermore, this study highlights that intra-faith discrimination extends beyond a purely religious concern, intersecting with political structures, organisational cultures, and social hierarchies. The findings reveal that minority religious groups experience dual exclusion —not only from the broader society but also within their own religious tradition due to their sectarian identity. This aligns with intersectionality theory, which posits that discrimination is seldom rooted in a singular identity factor but rather emerges at the intersection of multiple marginalised identities.

Additionally, the outcomes of our study offer valuable insights for human resource management (HRM) practices, particularly in dealing with the complexities of diversity in three key ways. Firstly, our research reveals that while organisations might implement policies to kerb discrimination against various diversity strands at work, these protective measures fail to address local blind spots and taboos. It highlights the necessity for HRM professionals to go beyond legal mandates in combating discrimination, recognising that certain forms of prejudice, such as intra-faith discrimination, persist even if not explicitly identified by law as areas of concern. HRM practitioners are encouraged to acknowledge and address locally significant diversity issues, such as the challenges faced by the Alevis and the Shias in Sunni majority countries, treating these as important diversity considerations.

Secondly, the existing literature highlights religious differences when considering minority groups in organisations. However,

since there is a lack of research on intra-faith beliefs and intra-faith discrimination, organisations should be aware that even though some employees come from supposedly the same cultural or religious backgrounds, there can be intra-faith differences, which may present fault lines. For this reason, HR leaders may also consider intra-faith differences in designing organisational interventions, flexibility and accommodation efforts.

Third, this research highlights the need for voice mechanisms. Based on the spiral of silence theory, some minority groups in organisations can prefer to stay silent to comply with the organisational regime and climate. However, such compliant behaviours are silence mechanisms at work. Enlightened HR leaders may wish to encourage voice behaviours, through which individuals could raise their concerns and differences. HR leaders may consider services from diversity consultants to bring external perspectives to organisations for ensuring the efficiency of voice mechanisms (Kirton and Greene 2019), particularly in sophisticated cases such as intra-faith divisions if these are pertinent in their organisations.

To address the implications for relevant stakeholders based on the findings of our study on intra-faith discrimination in Türkiye and Pakistan, our discussion emphasise the following points:

Governments: Governments should strengthen legal frameworks that protect against intra-faith discrimination and promote inclusivity and support the development of policies that recognise the diversity within Muslim communities and ensure equal rights and opportunities.

Organisations: Organisations should implement diversity and inclusion policies that specifically address religious diversity. Training programs on religious sensitivity and inclusivity could help mitigate biases and promote a culture of acceptance and inclusion.

Individuals: For individuals, especially those from faith-based minority groups, the findings underscore the importance of advocacy and self-expression within safe spaces. It is essential for individuals to seek and cultivate supportive networks that empower them to share their experiences and challenges, fostering a sense of belonging and resilience.

Researchers: The study opens new avenues for research in articulating intra-faith discrimination and the application of the spiral of silence theory in diverse settings. Future research could explore intervention strategies that organisations and societies can employ to foster inclusivity and respect for religious diversity. This approach will help contextualise the study's findings within broader social, organisational, and individual frameworks, offering actionable insights for each stakeholder group. For future research, scholars might also focus on multilevel analysis in non-western cultural contexts by adopting primary data-driven research. Furthermore, since studies mainly consider theoretical discussions on the spiral of silence theory, more research is needed in primary data-driven studies. While the study highlights workplace discrimination, a broader institutional perspective—incorporating legal, political, and policy frameworks—could provide a more holistic view of intra-faith marginalisation. Addressing these gaps will enhance theoretical and practical understandings of religious diversity and inform intervention strategies that promote inclusivity at organisational and societal levels.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Research data are not shared.

Endnotes

[1] Ali, Hasan and Huseyin (or Hussain) are the common names used by the Alevis and the Shias.

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