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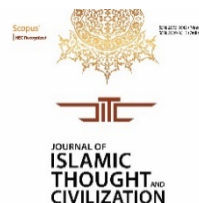
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## Religion and Belonging: Voices of Lahore's *Khawajasira*'s Community

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### Abstract

A phenomenological study was conducted to understand religious practices of *khawajasiras*, with an emphasis on instances where Islam provides a historically-rooted identity and offers belonging, and to highlight the challenges faced by them in exercising their fundamental rights. Six in-depth interviews were conducted from Lahore's *khawajasira* community. Theoretically, the study utilized the theory of marginality for the refinements of its findings. The study was divided into two phases. The first one offered an overview of organization and rights of *khawajasira* people globally, in Pakistan, and within Islamic thought. The second phase dealt with the study's empirical findings in the domains of preferred gender identity, societal discrimination, and appeal and challenges of religious affinity. The findings indicated that most participants wanted to articulate a feminine identity. Additionally, five of them had been abandoned by their birth families in early childhoods. Then, broader *khawajasira* community and civil society organizations were instrumental in sustaining their survival. With respect to religion, all participants identified themselves as the practicing Muslims – where religion was a source of personal comfort, its social practice was found to evoke a negative response as well because Islam has also guided the majority of the participants to seek *halāl* work. On the basis of the study findings, it is argued that the status of *khawajasira* community should be restored in the light of Islamic teachings and that the restoration of their historical and religious belonging along with the assurance of equal citizenship rights.

**Keywords:** *Khawajasira*, Community, Islam, Religion, Discrimination

### Introduction

The current phenomenological study aimed to understand how religion figures in the *khawajasira* community practiced religion; more broadly it focused on how social marginalization and identity impacted their practice of religion. An extensive literature review was conducted to understand the historical trajectory of *khawajasira* rights and identity in Islam and south Asia while empirical research was conducted to understand their lived experiences of practicing their gender identity and faith in Lahore, Pakistan. Gender was understood to be existing on a spectrum, subverting the male-female binary identity. More importantly, it was conceptualized as a 'performance,' with an individual's assertion of identity being perpetually mediated by societal

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perceptions and gender norms.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, an Islamic standpoint was utilized to frame the specificity of *khawajasira* identity in the sub-continent in particular, which is rarely captured through a rights-based, secular lens. This is essential not just in terms of historicizing *khawajasira* existence, but is also key to understanding current legislation for gender inclusion in Pakistan, which has been achieved through a culturally and religiously vibrant movement.<sup>2</sup> The first phase of the study briefly investigates the status of *khawajasiras* in Pakistan, with a focus on nomenclature and social categorizations as well as the Islamic conception of *khawajasira* rights and their subsequent legal adoption, while the second phase draws on empirical findings to elucidate religion in practice.

### 1.1 Conceptualizing *Khawajasira* Identities and Social Status

It is generally implicated that there are two sexual categories: male and female, which are then deemed to be naturally giving rise to the two genders. Accommodations made in this regard gave rise to the idea of the 'third sex', which was to encompass all 'deviant' expressions of gender identity. However, this is neither historically accurate nor does it take the lived realities of gender non-conformist people into account. Similarly, the term transgender is found to be lacking in capturing the multifaceted *khawajasira* experience.<sup>3</sup> In Pakistan, *khawajasiras* are often identified as people who cannot reproduce on account of some biological disorder.<sup>4</sup> The identity is regarded to be an outcome of individual preference or birth traits, with the latter being informed by biological categorizations like 'intersex'.<sup>5</sup> However, as has been revealed in the empirical phase of the study, these markers are rarely this straightforward -- an identity rooted in absence of something deemed intrinsic, procreation in this case, is limiting to say the least. More importantly, this so-called fact of reproduction does not hold true.

The individuals who are perceived by others to be of an intermediate sex are termed as *hijras*; they are said to pursue the culturally prescribed occupation of dancing and taking *vadhai* (*grant*) on the occasions of weddings and birth of sons. About 1% of the whole *hijra* community is hermaphrodite according to Tabassum and Jamil.<sup>6</sup> The decision to transition is informed by a feeling of disjunction between the soul and the body. *Khawajasiras* form a unique sub-culture and some undertake surgery to fully transition biologically while others assert their identity by adopting certain behaviors, modes of dressing, pronouns, and so on. The act of joining the *hijra* community and establishing a new family is called '*nirban*', a word that expresses emancipation.<sup>7</sup> *Zenanais* a term

<sup>1</sup>Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* Vol. 40, no. 4 (1988): 519-531.

<sup>2</sup>Muhammad Moiz and Firdous Gaewala, "Asserting Indigenous Citizenship through Post-Secularity: A Queer Analysis of Pakistan's Transgender Legislative Reform," *Szabist Law Journal* 2.0 (2021): 59-70.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Aneela Sultana, and Muhammad Khan Kalyani, "Femaling Males: Anthropological Analysis of the Transgender Community in Pakistan," *The Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol. 20, no. 1 (2012): 93.

<sup>5</sup>K. A. M. R. A. N Saddique, Sindhu Mirbehar, Hassa Batool, Intikhab Ahmad, and Chen Gang, "Transgender Issues in Pakistani Community," *European Academic Research* Vol. 4, no. 10 (2017): 9048-9057.

<sup>6</sup>Shahla Tabassum and Sadia Jamil, "Plight of Marginalized: Educational Issues of Transgender Community in Pakistan," *Review of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (2014): 107-119.

<sup>7</sup>Hina Amin, and Muhammad Saeed, "A Phenomenological Study to Understand the Religious Belief and Socio-Cultural Practices of Transgender in Urban Lahore," *Journal of Secondary Education and Research*, Vol. 2, no. 1 (2004): 1-17.

used for individuals who refuse to undergo biological transition; they usually assert their feminine identity in particular circumstances and are rarely seen engaging in the practice of taking *vadhai*.

According to literature, different nomenclatures are used to explicate the broader category of *khawajasiras*, some of which are historically tied to gender expression and occupation and hence adopted by the community while others are pejorative.<sup>8</sup> For example, in the Mughal era many *khawajasira*'s guarded women in palaces and functioned as intermediaries between the *mardana* and the *zenana*.<sup>9</sup> Their social identification is further rooted in appearance; for example, *aqwa* refers to those with female souls and male bodies. Among them, those whose ancestors belong to *khawajasira* families are called *khandani hijras*. *Khandani hijras* enjoy better status in their community in comparison to the others.<sup>10</sup> On account of societal discrimination and to better express their identity as well as for camaraderie, many choose to join the broader *khawajasira* community, which is highly organized and hierarchical, with its own norms and values. The organization is made by designating roles of *chowdher*, *maha guru*, *dada guru*, *guru*, and *chela*. *Gurus* tend to be more stable economically and lead community life and help their *chelas* financially and emotionally.<sup>11</sup>

The total *hijra* population of Pakistan, as reported in the sixth Population and Housing Census, is estimated to be 10,418. It is further reported that 7,651 of them live in urban areas while 2,767 live in villages.<sup>12</sup> Apart from the dated data, it is imperative to note that the move to legally recognize *khawajasira* identity by the state is a fairly recent one; so, the numbers cannot be taken at face-value. On account of absence of formal educational and employment opportunities as well as safety nets, *khawajasiras* are often pushed into sex work and begging. More concerning is the fact that despite such a small number, *hijras* are disproportionately victim to crimes of gender violence.<sup>13</sup>

## 1.2 Insights from across the Globe

*Khawajasira* population has visibly existed globally even though correct estimates of numbers are difficult to come by. The United Nations Organization (UNO) recognizes a global need to improve *khawajasira* status systematically, especially in terms of economic and social elevation.<sup>14</sup> Despite this, the community is facing an array of problems even in the developed world, especially discrimination in healthcare. USA is a prominent example in this regard, where

<sup>8</sup>Saad Ali Khan, "Transgender Community in Pakistan: From Marginalized "aliens/others" to Empowered "Citizens"?" *Progressive* Vol. 2, no. 2 (2020).

<sup>9</sup>Hina Amin and Muhammad Saeed, "A Phenomenological Study to Understand the Religious Belief and Socio-Cultural Practices of Transgender in Urban Lahore," *Journal of Secondary Education and Research* Vol. 2, no. 1 (2004): 1-17.

<sup>10</sup>Humaira Jami, "Condition and Status of Hijras (Transgender, transvestites etc.) in Pakistan: Country Report," (2011).

<sup>11</sup>Ancela Sultana, and Muhammad Khan Kalyani, "Femaling Males: Anthropological Analysis of the Transgender Community in Pakistan," *The Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 20, no. 1 (2012): 93

<sup>12</sup>6<sup>th</sup> Population and housing survey Pakistan retrieved from Dawn, 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2017 Accessed at google from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1354039> (Accessed at 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2019).

<sup>13</sup>Sonia Omer, Sadia Jabeen, and Syeda Narjis Sherazi, "Historical Context and Situational Analysis of Rife Socio-economic Manifestations of Transgender Community in Lahore City," *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society* 34, no. 01 (2021).

<sup>14</sup>K. A. M. R. A. N Saddique., Sindhu Mirbehar, Hassa Batool, Intikhab Ahmad, and Chen Gang, "Transgender issues in Pakistani Community," *European Academic Research* Vol. 4, no. 10 (2017): 9048-9057.

institutional discrimination and hate crimes continue to persist.<sup>15</sup> According to a report, some twenty eight percent of its transgender participants had faced harassment in a clinic setting and two percent had faced harassment as well as physical abuse; this thwarts any meaningful access to care. These attitudes impede lifesaving care in extreme cases; according to Deutsch et al. (2013) culturally sensitive practices greatly influence the linkage to a variety of healthcare services, especially for low income HIV positive individuals.<sup>16</sup>

### 1.3 Reflections from the Subcontinent

*Hijra* existence has been acknowledged in ancient Hindu scriptures. *khawajasira* individuals were viewed as the institutionalized third sex, which was associated with Bachura Mata. It was believed that the goddess had blessed them with the power of blessing others with fertility. They were also well-integrated in the Muslim societies, especially during Mughal era. Jaffrey (1996) found that they were appointed as key advisors and servants in the homes of nobility.<sup>17</sup> *Khawajasiras* were completely excluded from the mainstream society under British colonial rule. Two major laws proscribed their existence and limited their inheritance and other rights. These laws included Criminal Tribes Act (1871) and the Dramatic Performance Act (1876) that greatly limited their income and gave rise to issues of respectability. The imprint of this violent colonial oppression persists to-date.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.4 Islamic Commandments

It is usually assumed that Islam does not cater to sex and gender identities other than the socially approved dichotomous categories. However, this perception is inaccurate. The Islamic stance and approach to *khawajasira* existence has been discussed in the light of Islamic teachings as follows. In Islamic sources the words “*Mukhannathun, Khuntha, Inin, Khassi, Majbūband* some other words are used for different shades of *khawajasira*.” These words are used with the meanings effeminate ones (“ones who resemble women”) and singular *mukhannath* were terms used in Classical Arabic to refer to effeminate men or people of ambiguous sex characteristics who appeared feminine or functioned socially in roles typically carried out by women.<sup>19</sup> The Islamic teachings about *Mukhannath* or *Khuntha* can be divided into two categories: Direct Commandments and Inferred or Derived Commandments. The Prophetic Traditions (*SAW*) that are directly about *khawajasira* are as under:

<sup>15</sup>Munawar Hussain Soomro. “Barriers to Transgender Health Care in Pakistan,” *Gomal Journal of Medical Sciences* Vol. 16, no. 2 (2018): 33-34.

<sup>16</sup>Madeline B Deutsch, Jamison Green, Joanne Keatley, Gal Mayer, Jennifer Hastings, Alexandra M. Hall, Madeline B. Deutsch et al, “Electronic Medical Records and the Transgender Patient: Recommendations from the World Professional Association for Transgender Health EMR Working Group,” *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association*, Vol. 20, no. 4 (2013): 700-703.

<sup>17</sup>Zia Jaffrey, *The Invisibles: A tale of the Eunuchs of India* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996).

<sup>18</sup>Shahla Tabassum, and Sadia Jamil, “Plight of Marginalized: Educational Issues of Transgender Community in Pakistan,” *Review of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (2014): 107-119.

<sup>19</sup>Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (Ed’s.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 2, (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 1998), 548.

1. Holy Prophet (*SAW*) was asked about the inheritance of *Khuntha*. He replied that it will depend upon the sex organs. If the person passes urine from male organ, he will be given male portion of inheritance and if pisses from vulva, she will be giving female portion.<sup>20</sup>

2. The witness of transgender will be accepted as Omar (*RA*) accepted alqama al-Khassi as witness.<sup>21</sup>

The inferred and indirect Islamic teachings about *khawajasira* indicate that they must be treated as human beings without any discrimination and bestow all basic human rights, such as right to live, right of respect, tolerance for them in social settings, educational rights, right to practice a religion of their own choice, right to employment, protection and security, personal liberty, justice and property rights. These rights are framed within Qur'anic verses as well. Allah says in Surah Al-Maedah:

For that cause, We decreed for the Children of Israel that whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whoso saveth the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind. Our messengers came unto them of old with clear proofs (of Allah's Sovereignty), but afterward lo! Many of them became prodigals on the earth."<sup>22</sup>

Elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an it is said: "And there is life for you in retaliation, O men of understanding that ye may ward off (evil)."<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, as Muslims we cannot discriminate them; they are also the creation of Allah and represent the dignity of al-Mighty Allah, who has the power to create all human being, so *khawajasira* people have equal rights in religion and society. Allah *ta'ala* says in the Holy Qur'an: "To Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. He creates whatsoever He wills, bestows daughters on whomsoever He will, and gives sons to whom He chooses. On some, He bestows both sons and daughters and some He leaves issueless. He is all-knowing and all-powerful."<sup>24</sup> At another instance it is said:

Allah forbiddeth you, not those who warred not against you on account of religion and drove you not out from your homes, that ye should show them kindness and deal justly with them. Lo! Allah loveth the just dealers. Allah forbiddeth you only those who warred against you on account of religion and have driven you out from your homes and helped to drive you out, that ye make friends of them. Whosoever maketh friends of them – (All) such are wrong-doers.<sup>25</sup>

Demanding knowledge is the right of every Muslim whether it be children, men, women, elderly and even *khawajasira* people. Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) said in his hadith that every person should read, "*Demanding knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim.*" *Khawajasira* has the right to choose religion according to his conscience. In the Holy Qur'an Allah says: "There is no compulsion in

<sup>20</sup>Ibn e Adi, *Al-Kamil fi Du'afa al-Rijal*, Adil Ahmad Abdul Maujood, Ali Muhammad (Ed's.), vol. 7, (Beirut: al-Kutub al Ilmiyyah,1997), 282.

<sup>21</sup>Al-Babarti, Muhammad bin Muhammad, *al-Inayah Sharh al-Hidayah*, vol. 7 (Beirut:Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 422.

<sup>22</sup>Al-Maida 5:32.

<sup>23</sup>Al Baqarah 2:179.

<sup>24</sup>Al Shura 49-50.

<sup>25</sup>Al Mumtahina 60:8-9.

religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And he who rejecteth false deities and believeth in Allah hath grasped a firm handhold which will never break. Allah is Hearer, Knower.”<sup>26</sup>

In other verse Allah *ta'ala* says in the Holy Qur'ān, “And argue not with the People of the Scripture unless it be in (a way) that is better, save with such of them as doing wrong; and say: We believe in that which hath been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our Allah and your Allah is One, and unto Him we surrender.”<sup>27</sup> Another verse in the Holy Qur'ān deals with the right of every Muslim to work and get the basic needs of a decent life, Allah *ta'ala* says in the Holy Qur'ān, “And when the prayers is ended, then disperse in the land and seek of Allah's bounty, and remember Allah much, that ye may be successful.”<sup>28</sup>

Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) also says in his hadīth about rights to employment, “There is no better food that a person consumes than the food produced from his own hands.”<sup>29</sup>

In Islamic law, while working there are rights about employment wages that our Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) emphasized in the following hadith, “Give the worker his wages before drying his sweat.”<sup>30</sup> In the Holy Qur'ān has also been said, as the Lord said, “Will I seek others from God for God when He is Lord of all things? Every soul only gets on its own account, nor does anyone bear any other burden. Then to your Lord come back and He will tell you where you are different.”<sup>31</sup>

Apart from the aforementioned teachings, two other verses from the Holy Qur'ān further enlighten us about the need to treat all human beings equally regardless of gender. It is said: “Allah enjoins that you render to the owners what is held in trust with you, and that when you judge among the people do so equitably. Noble are the counsels of Allah, and Allah hears all and sees everything.”<sup>32</sup> “Allah loveth not the utterance of harsh speech saves by one who hath been wronged. Allah is ever Hearer, Knower.”<sup>33</sup> In another verse of the Holy Qur'ān, Allah says, “Those who follow the messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write, whom they will find described in the Torah and the Gospel (which are) with them. He will enjoin on them that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong. He will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit for them only the bad things, and he will relieve them of their burden and the fetters that they used to wear. Then those who believe in him, and honor him, and help him, and follow the light which is sent down to him: they are successful.”<sup>34</sup>

All these Qur'ānic injunctions highlight that Allah refers to his subjects as humankind, with little reference to gender identity. The same goes for the rights of people discussed in the selected hadiths. Hence, treatment of *khawajasiras* in Islamic societies should be in line with these teachings and free of discrimination based on gender. The approval of the 2018 Transgender Rights Bill by Pakistan's Council of Islamic Ideology further reflects the acceptance of *khawajasira* rights in the discourses within the broader Muslim community and scholars. In the light of these, it is pertinent to

<sup>26</sup>Al Baqarah 2:256.

<sup>27</sup>Al Ankabut 29:46.

<sup>28</sup>Al Juma'a 62:10.

<sup>29</sup>Muhammad b Ismail Bukhari, *Al Jami as Sahih*, “Book of Food, Meals,” Chapter: Eat of the lawful things that We have provided you with..., hadith no. 5373.

<sup>30</sup>Muhammad ibn Yazīd Ibn Majah, *Al-Sunan*, “Book of the Chapters on Pawning,” Chapter: Wages of Workers. Hadith 2443.

<sup>31</sup>Al Ana'am 6:164.

<sup>32</sup>Al Nisa 4:58.

<sup>33</sup>Al Nisa 4: 148

<sup>34</sup>Al Ara'af 7:157

note that as free, conscious beings Islam permits *khawajasiras* to openly profess their religion and engage in associated practices of worship and so on.

### 1.5 Status of *Khawajasiras* in Pakistan: An Overview of Governmental Initiatives

On account of its patriarchal and heteronormative make-up, the Pakistani society exhibits extremely discriminatory attitudes towards *khawajasiras*.<sup>35</sup> In 2009, the then Chief Justice of Pakistan ordered that *khawajasira* community should be provided with an identity as citizens of Pakistan. The Supreme Court then directed NADRA to initiate their registration in state records. In 2013, it ruled that *khawajasiras* have equal rights as citizens of Pakistan and must be given all rights, including education, employment and inheritance<sup>36</sup>. During this period *khawajasiras* got the opportunity to work as they got Country National Identity Cards (CNICs) for the first time; they were also granted the right to vote and five *khawajasiras* contested their first election in 2013.<sup>37</sup> In Pakistan, recognition of their legal status has provided *khawajasiras* much needed protection and also generated public discourse around their rights, with trans-rights activism, research, and push for structural change gaining prominence.<sup>38</sup> These efforts led to the landmark Transgender Rights Bill (2018), which was also approved by the Council of Islamic Ideology.<sup>39</sup>

A research conducted in district Chiniot used five dimensions to measure wellbeing of *khawajasiras*; these included social, political, psychological, religious factors as well as individual adjustment. The study found that many of its participants felt that they faced abuse in childhood due to their perceived 'femaleness'. Seventy-four percent of the study participants agreed that feminine transgender identity was still more socially acceptable. Eighty-nine percent wanted separate schools. Similarly, eighty-four percent wanted better working conditions. If analyzed, these are all the demands for the basic dignity.

## 2. Research Methodology

The current research was philosophically rooted in interpretive paradigm and believed in the supremacy and multiplicity of human experience;<sup>40</sup> so, pure qualitative methods were utilized. A Lahore based organization was targeted to recruit the study participants. Six *khawajasiras* employed in the organization were selected through purposive sampling technique. All ethical considerations were followed throughout the study processes, including design cycle, ethnographic cycle and analytical cycle.<sup>41</sup> Free and voluntary informed consent was acquired after the disclosure of study objectives, utility and time frame. Data were gathered through an in-depth interview guide. The guide

<sup>35</sup>K. A. M. R. A. NSaddique., Mirbehar Sindhu, Hassa Batool, Intikhab Ahmad, and Chen Gang, "Transgender Issues in Pakistani Community," *European Academic Research* Vol. 4, no. 10 (2017): 9048-9057

<sup>36</sup> Iram Rubab. "Women's rights of inheritance: practices and challenges in Punjab." PhD diss., (University of the Punjab (2019).

<sup>37</sup>Naila Nazir, and Aqsa Yasir, "Education, Employability and Shift of Occupation of Transgender in Pakistan: A Case Study of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa." *Dialogue (Pakistan)* Vol. 11, no. 2 (2016).

<sup>38</sup>A. Faris Khan, "Khawajasira: Culture, Identity Politics, and" Transgender" Activism in Pakistan," PhD diss., (Syracuse University, 2014).

<sup>39</sup>Muhammad Moiz, Firdous Gaewala, "Asserting Indigenous Citizenship through post-Secularity: A Queer Analysis of Pakistan's Transgender Legislative Reform," *Szabist Law Journal* 2.0 (2021): 59-70.

<sup>40</sup>Thomas P. Wilson, "Normative and Interpretive Paradigms in Sociology," In *Everyday Life* (Routledge, 2017), 57-79.

<sup>41</sup>Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter, and Ajay Bailey, *Qualitative Research Methods* (Sage, 2020).



was made by following set research guidelines. While posing questions, emotional and psychological wellbeing of the participants was a key priority. Fictitious identities were allocated to the study participants for the sake of confidentiality of the data and privacy of the study participants.<sup>42</sup> Data were initially coded on the basis of information attained through interviews that were recorded through field notes. None of the interviews were digitally recorded owing to the participants' refusal. Initial codes were thematically organized after categorization. The findings of the research were then shared with the study participants to ensure validity.<sup>43</sup> A brief profile of the participants is illustrated in the table below:

Table 1. Profile of Study Participants

Participants	Preferred Identity	Official Identity	Age	Nature of Work	Relationship with Family	Monthly income	Religious Affiliation
1.	Female	Male	40	Cloth Collector	Abandoned	18000PKR	Practicing Muslim
2.	Female	Male	45	Cloth cleaner	Abandoned	16000 PKR	Practicing Muslim
3.	Female	Male	50	Cloth cleaner	Occasionally in contact	16000 PKR	Practicing Muslim
4.	Female	Male	48	Packing	Abandoned	15000 PKR	Practicing Muslim
5.	Female	Male	35	Packing	Abandoned	15000 PKR	Practicing Muslim
6.	Female	Male	38	Cloth Distributor	Abandoned	20000 PKR	Practicing Muslim

### 3. Findings

The findings were organized under three themes emerging out of the field data. These have been discussed as follows.

#### 3.1 Preferred Gender Identity

**Codes:** Want to be female, gender identification by law, physical appearance, identity at workplace

All the participants of the study were assigned male identity at birth (AMAB), and expressed a feminine identity. Their identity cards reflected their status as transgender, but most had male names and a more masculine physical appearance, which meant they asserted masculine identities at work.

<sup>42</sup>Tony Rees, "Ethical Issues," In *Handbook for Research Students in the Social Sciences* (Routledge, 2020), 40-151.

<sup>43</sup>Jessica Nina Lester, Cho Yonjoo, and R Chad Lochmiller, "Learning to do Qualitative Data Analysis: A Starting Point," *Human Resource Development Review* 19, no. 1 (2020): 94-106.

This was not due to a lack of trying, but more due to social discrimination where mis-gendering is common. Then it was easier to interact on society's terms. Only one study participant openly expressed their *khawajasira* identity at work; the observations of the participants in this regard are recorded as follows:

**Participant 1:** Personally, I want to be female as I find inner satisfaction in that, but in workplace my registered name is male and because biologically I look masculine, I have to stick to that identity at work.

**Participant 2:** I want to be female but in CNIC my registered name is male and only the gender portion mentions transgender.

**Participant 3:** I do dress in an effeminate manner but people at work still see me as a man.

**Participant 4:** I always use cosmetics and clothes to assert my female identity within the community, but in office I wear formal and masculine clothes.

**Participant 5:** I am transgender and that is my identity in my CNIC. In seeking work, I am clear about my transgender identity. I want to be neither male nor female and identify as such.

**Participant 6:** I am *khawajasira* but I consider myself to be female as my thinking process and preferred dressing is closer to that of women. My physical look is masculine but I want to be more effeminate and have hence registered as transgender with the state.

Most of the participants asserted that they wanted to adopt a female identity because it was central to their inner satisfaction. They wanted to dress like women and used cosmetics for these purposes. They used male names and identities at work, but in personal life they had their female names that helped them articulate their gender identities more authentically.

### 3.2 Societal Discrimination: Relationship with Family, Misgendering, Abuse, and Employment

**Codes:** Abusive languages, Harassment, Financial issues, Discrimination, Denial of fundamental rights

All the participants of the study reported a severe kind of societal discrimination, which was noticed by them since their early childhoods. Most of them starkly remembered the instances, where their parents were mocked and abused for their inability to give birth to the children within the domain of socially acceptable gender binaries. This hostile attitude of relatives, neighbors and societal pressure lead the parents to eventually abandon them. Once they were abandoned by their families, they were increasingly exposed to other cruelties of society. These bitter experiences included financial hardships, physical and emotional abuse, instances of misgendering and difficulty in attaining suitable employment. Most of the people around them harassed them and some offered them a small amount of money for the assigned sex work. To attain respectable work then was an arduous undertaking. The responses of the participants have been recorded as follows:

**Participant 1:** My family disowned me and I left my home at a very young age. I started beggary to meet my basic needs. People used abusive language and passed vulgar comments on my physical appearance.

**Participant 2:** My family disowned me and I was physically and sexually harassed by men around me due to my effeminate build and comportment.

**Participant 3:** I lived with my family in childhood and faced a lot of abuse there. My father and brother used to beat me on the complaints of relatives and neighbors. At school, I had no friends. I left my home and joined a *khawajasira* group to get emotional and social support.

**Participant 4:** I used to live with my family but at the age of 12 I left my home due to their bad behavior, my brother wanted to get rid of me as I was a source of social embarrassment for them. When I was at home, they used abusive language and hit me like an animal; when I left, I started begging and people taunted and abused me there as well. Only after joining my current organization have, I received respect from others.

**Participant 5:** I left my family at the age of 14 due to inhumane treatment by my father and brother. I faced extreme financial difficulty and often slept with an empty stomach at road sides. Extreme poverty and hunger along with social exclusion broke me. Later on, a civil society organization approached me and worked for my rehabilitation and helped me attain a respectable job. I am much more satisfied with my life now.

**Participant 6:** My family disowned me in my childhood. But I still remember the love and affection my birth mother had for me. She helped me get in touch with a *khawajasira* group that lived in our village. I learned a lot there but after the death of my *Guru* I abandoned that group as well. I have faced many hardships throughout my life and have come to realize that it is hard to survive with a fluid gender identity.

The data revealed that all the participants had faced familial and societal discrimination in their childhoods, which significantly limited the educational and other opportunities available to them. Most families voluntarily abandoned their gender fluid children. Then, the study participants were very much engaged in ensuring their basic survival and subsistence from a young age. They flitted from one informal and precarious occupation to another and had only been able to find respectable work, companionship, and housing either through informal *khawajasira* networks or civil society organizations.

### 3.3 Religious Identity: Belonging and Challenges

**Codes:** Basic religious belief, participating in religious activities, emotional attachment toward religion

All the participants were very clear about their religious identity. All of them were practicing Muslims and proud of their religious identity. They all emphasized that religious belonging was a great source of satisfaction and emotional gratification during adverse circumstances. Attachment with Allah and his Prophet (*SAW*) was an ultimate source of inner peace and encouragement. All of them had faced hostile attitude of people while offering prayers at mosque; however, some instances of support from a few people were also shared. The participants' responses have been recorded as follows:

**Participant 1:** I am a Muslim and believe in Allah and Rasool (*SAW*) and I want to do all the things ordered by Allah. For the sake of Allah, I quit dancing and have only engaged in halal economic activity since. I also regularly perform my prayers and recite the Holy Qur'an.

**Participant 2:** I am a practicing Muslim. I used to beg previously due to poor circumstances, however, I quit begging on the same day I got a proper job. I offer my prayers at home, as I cannot bear the derogatory remarks of people at the mosque.

**Participant 3:** I am a Muslim, but people have not been kind about my presence at the mosque. In a few particular instances, my fellow Muslims asked the relevant authorities to kick me out from the mosque premises; they said I was a sex worker and hence an unholy person.

**Participant 4:** I am a *Hafiz e Qur'an* and spend most of my time in my local mosque. Luckily, *Qari sahib* and the mosque management has been very supportive. I regularly offer my daily prayers at the mosque and so far, most people have been accepting my religious identity.

**Participant 5:** Whenever I go to the mosque, I face negative attitudes of people -- they taunt me and tell me that I have no place in the mosque and will never be entered into heaven.

**Participant 6:** I am a practicing Muslim. We arrange religious gatherings in our community, especially during *Ramzan*. We arrange *namaz-e-taraweeh*, *iftār* gatherings and *Eid* prayers for our community. We believe that we are Allah's creation. Allah loves us and we do not need permission of any other Muslim or government to engage with Allah Almighty.

All the participants agreed that the religious activities were a source of personal satisfaction for them. Many a time, religion could be seen as playing the role of a coping mechanism; it helped the participants reconcile with their identities and dire circumstances. However, they faced immense social pressures in articulating their Muslim identities overtly; with the exception of one participant, all reported having a negative relationship with religious practice on a social level. Then, practicing religion and engaging with its ritualistic aspects also acquired a characteristic of resistance; this is particularly illustrated through Participant 6's quote.

#### 4. Discussion

The major purpose of the study was to see how religious belonging influenced Lahore's *khawajasira* community. What kind of challenges *khawajasira* faces in religious practices and how *khawajasira* use religion as coping mechanism in time of adversary? In order to address research questions and to achieve the research objectives, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews from the *khawajasira* community that are currently working at a local organization. In the light of results of in-depth interviews and related literature following debate was generated.

The first objective of this research was to understand religious belonging of *khawajasira* community. According to the participants of current research, all the participants were Muslims and followed the basic principles of Islam. They all were practicing religious activities and they all were interested to find legal and halal way of earning so when a local Foundation offered them jobs, they all accepted their offer and the major motivation was to halal way of living and also, they wanted to find Allah's happiness. A research held in 2019 by Hilton and Anderson indicated that self-identifying as with either being religious was associated with increased discriminated treatment relative to being non-religious and found consistent evidence that certain forms of religiosity were also related to Trans prejudice.<sup>44</sup>

The second objective of this research to highlight the challenges faced by *khawajasira* in exercise of religion/religious practice according to the research participants they all had consensus with the point that good and bad people are available at everywhere so if they find negative comments and negative attitude some good people take stand in favor of them show their support and motivation to the *khawajasira*. According to another research that was held in 2018 respondents had a wide range of experiences in trust neighborhood and facing with both responses that are supportive and discriminatory from other people of society. But they indicated that they keep their faith beliefs and religious feelings and faith even when they experience rejection from faith communities but they still maintain their beliefs regarding religion.<sup>45</sup>

The third objective of this research to explore the use of religion as a coping mechanism by *khawajasira* community in facing adversary the participants of current study revealed that all

<sup>44</sup>Marianne Campbell, Jordan DX Hinton, and Joel R. Anderson, "A Systematic Review of the Relationship between Religion and Attitudes toward Transgender and Gender-variant People," *International Journal of Transgenderism* Vol. 20, no. 1 (2019): 21-38.

<sup>45</sup>K. Benson, E. Westerfield, and B. van Eeden-Moorefield, "Transgender People's Reflections on Identity, Faith, and Christian Faith Communities in the US," *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 33(4), (2018): 395-420.

participants agreed that while in religious activities they find personal satisfaction and internal relief and satisfaction and religion is like a coping mechanism for releasing stress. They find them as the servants of Allah and considering themselves among the fortunate people of the world while practicing religious activities. According to another research held in 2019 religion, spirituality, faith believes are the factors that are playing important role in the enhancement of mental health like psychological, cognitive and social functioning and influencing learner performance in the academic field.<sup>46</sup>

The researchers used the conceptual framework of D'Costa and used the theory of marginalization. Marginalization is a very difficult and complex conception and is connected with financial and political flaw or inability. It is a social status which is connected to particular marginalized and discriminated people or social groups. Marginalization is also linked to two other practices that are segregation and discrimination. It is the most leading structure of exclusionary practice by states or social group<sup>47</sup>. In current study the researchers used this theory on highly deprived *khawajasira* community that are rejected by the society and do not receive their basic fundamentals rights because society does not accepts their social identity and does not treat them as respectable citizens. They are normally economically unstable and they do not have political participation and they have lack of power. They are segregated from the society till their birth. Their families dishonor them and give them to *khawajasira* community violated their rights. So these people feel discrimination from their families and society and they become depressed and stressed. The participants of the research pointed out that their family disowned them and did not protect their basic fundamental rights. All the participants faced discrimination and the attitude of people was very bad. They all faced exploitation of their basic fundamental rights and people hurt their self-respect. Maximum participants pointed out that they had been harassed by different people and all the participants faced financial issues and at that time a local organization offered them job to meet their expenses.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This phenomenological study has come up with the following conclusions and recommendations on the basis of the study findings:

- The Pakistani Government and the society at large need to recognize *khawajasira* identity in its multifaceted manifestations. Islam plays a significant role in their indigenous identity and it should be recognized as such.
- The colonial attitudes and laws that undermined *khawajasira* social status need to be effectively discouraged and disbanded. These practices have given rise to social disintegration of *hijras* and led to disproportionate levels of violence against them in urban areas.
- Islam uses the word 'human' for its believers and Islamic injunctions clearly highlight rights of *khawajasiras*. This discourse needs to be mainstreamed and adopted at the state level.
- The state has failed to provide sufficient educational and employment opportunities to *khawajasiras*. This deprivation has led them to be involved in precarious work. This needs

<sup>46</sup>Selin Philip, Anita A. Neuer Colburn, Lee Underwood, and Hannah Bayne, "The Impact of Religion/Spirituality on Acculturative Stress among International Students," *Journal of College Counseling* Vol. 22, no. 1 (2019): 27-40.

<sup>47</sup>Bina D'Costa, "Marginalized Identity: New Frontiers of research for IR?" *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, Brooke Ackerly, Maria Stern and Jacqui True (Ed's.), (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 129-152.

to be worked upon on a systematic level, with *khawajasira* community as a key stakeholder in relevant decision-making.

### Conflict of Interest

Author(s) declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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