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Cultural Conflicts and the Politics of Identity: A Case of Ismaili Ethnic Struggles in Chitral

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ABSTRACT

The Ismaili community in Chitral, Pakistan, faces significant and multifaceted challenges related to cultural preservation, ethnic identity formation, and political marginalization. As a religious and cultural minority within the broader socio-political landscape of Chitral, the Ismailis constantly navigate pressures of assimilation while striving to maintain their distinct traditions and communal values. This study investigates the complex interplay between cultural conflicts and the politics of identity, focusing on how these dynamics shape the lived experiences of the Ismaili community and contribute to their ongoing ethnic struggles. Adopting a qualitative research approach, the study utilized a snowball sampling technique to identify and engage participants who could provide rich insights into intergenerational cultural change and community interactions. A total of 13 in-depth interviews were conducted with male and female participants aged 50 and above in Lower Chitral. The collected data were rigorously examined using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and underlying socio-political influences. The findings reveal that cultural preservation efforts, ethnic tensions, the role of religious institutions, political representation, and the transmission of cultural knowledge across generations are key elements affecting Ismaili identity in the region. These issues intersect to form a complex social and political environment that shapes the community's vulnerabilities as well as its strengths. Despite challenges of marginalization and limited political voice, the study highlights the resilience of the Ismaili community,

demonstrating how strong cultural and religious practices act as vital resources in maintaining their identity and fostering social cohesion amidst change.

Keywords: Ismaili; Identity; Ethnic Struggles; Marginalization

1. Introduction

The Ismaili community in Chitral has long been recognized for its unique cultural identity and its ability to navigate the complex social and political landscape of the region. Situated in a diverse, multi-ethnic society that includes other non-Ismaili groups, the Ismailis face particular challenges in maintaining their cultural heritage and religious practices amidst ongoing ethnic tensions and shifting political dynamics. Understanding these tensions is essential for grasping the broader implications of cultural identity and ethnic relations in a region marked by historical conflicts and diversity [1,2]. While the Ismaili community has been a subject of some sociological inquiry, particularly in relation to its transnational connections [3,4], there remains a significant gap in our understanding of how ethnic conflicts affect their identity formation and community cohesion.

Existing studies have examined inter-ethnic relations in Chitral, primarily focusing on non-Ismaili communities; however, the specific lived experiences of the Ismaili minority remain insufficiently explored [1,5,6]. While Social Identity Theory [7] provides essential insights into how minority groups construct and maintain identity under conditions of intergroup differentiation, its application to the Ismaili community in Chitral has been largely overlooked. Similarly, Bhabha's [8] concept of cultural hybridity offers a valuable lens to understand how Ismailis negotiate their ethnic and religious identity within a multi-ethnic environment, yet current research rarely engages with this perspective. The cultural and political struggles faced by the Ismaili population, including challenges around political representation, religious autonomy, and social inclusion, thus remain underexamined in sociological literature. Addressing this gap is crucial to understanding how ethnic identity is continuously negotiated within the broader dynamics of multiculturalism and social integration in Chitral.

The aim of this paper is to address the existing research gap by investigating the cultural conflicts and politics of identity within the Ismaili community of Chitral, focusing specifically on how ethnic struggles shape their sense of self and their interactions with other communities. This study explores the sociological mechanisms that influence Ismaili identity in the context of ethnic tensions and social change. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions: How do cultural and political dynamics in Chitral influence the construction and negotiation of Ismaili identity? And in what ways does the Ismaili community employ strategies of adaptation, inclusion, and resistance to navigate inter-ethnic relations? By answering these questions, the paper contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the intersection between culture, politics, and identity, offering insights that can inform both local policy development and broader sociological discussions on ethnic integration in multi-ethnic societies.

2. Research Design and Paradigm

This study employed a Descriptive Qualitative research design to explore the ethnic struggles and cultural identity of the Ismaili community in Chitral. Qualitative descriptive studies are well-suited for providing a detailed understanding of complex social phenomena, particularly when exploring personal experiences and community dynamics [9]. Given the focus on ethnic identity and the lived experiences of individuals within a multicultural context, the interpretive paradigm was adopted as it allows for an in-depth exploration of how Ismailis experience cultural conflicts and identity negotiations in Chitral [10]. The interpretive approach emphasizes understanding participants' perspectives in their own terms, which aligns with the goal of examining Ismaili cultural identity within the broader ethnic tensions of Chitral.

2.1. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews using an interview guide. The guide contained 12 open-ended questions focused on four key thematic areas: (a) ethnic tensions in Chitral and their

impact on Ismaili identity; (b) cultural identity formation within the Ismaili community; (c) the role of inter-community relations; and (d) local governance and its influence on ethnic identity. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for flexibility, enabling participants to share their experiences in detail while also allowing the researcher to probe deeper into specific topics [11]. Interviews were conducted by the lead researcher to ensure consistency, and all interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. In addition to the recordings, field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and any other relevant contextual information.

2.2. Sampling and Participant Recruitment

The study employed snowball sampling to recruit participants from the Ismaili community in Lower Chitral. Snowball sampling is particularly effective in qualitative research when studying hidden or hard-to-reach populations [12]. The study began with a key informant from the Ismaili community, who assisted in recruiting additional participants through referrals. A total of 13 in-depth interviews (5 females & 8 males) were conducted with individuals aged 50 and above, as this age group was considered ideal due to their extensive knowledge of the community's cultural history, social dynamics, and local transitions they have personally experienced. Participants were selected to ensure that insights were drawn from those with lived experience of the socio-cultural and political changes in the area, providing rich contextual understanding. Prior to the interviews, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring ethical compliance and voluntary participation. The interviews were conducted at the participants' homes, allowing them to feel comfortable and speak freely in their local language. All interviews were subsequently translated into English manually to maintain the accuracy and nuance of the original responses. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, which occurred by the 13th interview, indicating that additional interviews were unlikely to yield new themes or insights, thus justifying the sample size. Given the cultural norms and gender roles in the region, male and female participants were included to capture diverse perspectives on ethnic identity and inter-community relations.

Eligibility criteria for participants included being a permanent resident of Chitral, aged 50 and above, and self-identifying as part of the Ismaili community. Participants also needed to be willing to engage in interviews, including the audio recording of their responses. Exclusion criteria included individuals under 50 years old and those who were not members of the Ismaili community. Prior to the main data collection, pilot interviews were conducted with three participants who had similar demographic characteristics to the study participants. These pilot interviews helped to ensure the clarity of the interview guide and the feasibility of the interview process.

2.3. Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy of participants' responses and maintain the integrity of their perspectives. For data analysis, thematic analysis was employed, which is a widely used method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data [13]. Thematic analysis allows for a detailed and nuanced understanding of participants' experiences and meanings in relation to the research questions, and it aligns well with the interpretive paradigm, which emphasizes understanding the world from the participants' viewpoints.

The data analysis process began with the researcher becoming thoroughly familiar with the data by reviewing the interview transcripts and listening to the audio recordings multiple times. Initial codes were generated to identify significant features of the data that related to the research questions. These codes captured recurring patterns and meaningful segments within the participants' responses. Following the initial coding, the researcher organized the codes into potential themes by grouping related codes together. Each theme was reviewed and refined to ensure it accurately represented the data and aligned with the research objectives. Finally, the themes were clearly defined and named, with each theme thoroughly analyzed to understand its relevance to the research focus. The findings were then presented in a coherent narrative form, supported by direct quotes from the interviews that illustrated the key themes and insights.

The analysis was supported by the use of MAXQDA 24 software, a tool commonly used for qualitative data coding and analysis [14]. The software allowed for system-

atic coding, organizing, and analyzing the qualitative data, ensuring that the analysis was rigorous and efficient.

3. Findings

The data analysis reveals a complex set of factors influencing the ethnic identity and cultural struggles faced by the Ismaili community in Chitral. The study participants, aged between 50 and 80 years, had a wealth of experience and historical knowledge about their community's cultural practices and challenges. The thematic analysis highlighted five main themes that reflect the intersection of ethnic tensions, identity formation, and cultural preservation. These themes emerged across the data from all 13 participants, showing that they were key to understanding the lived experiences of the Ismaili community in the context of Chitral's diverse ethnic landscape.

1.   Cultural Preservation and Identity Negotiation
2.   Ethnic Tensions and Social Cohesion
3.   The Role of Religion in Shaping Ismaili Identity
4.   Political Representation and Marginalization
5.   Intergenerational Cultural Transmission

3.1. Theme 1: Cultural Preservation and Identity Negotiation

The preservation of cultural traditions while negotiating modern influences is a core concern for the Ismaili community in Chitral. Many participants highlighted the challenge of maintaining Ismaili cultural practices in a society where ethnic diversity and external pressures are increasing. Exposure to diverse cultural values from neighboring ethnic groups often creates cultural conflict, leading to a delicate balance between tradition and adaptation. One participant described the generational divide in cultural practices:

> *"Our elders always emphasize the importance of following our Ismaili traditions, but younger people in the community are more inclined to adopt the practices of our neighbors (non-Ismailis) because it seems modern. The community is slowly losing its unique identity."*

This sentiment was echoed by another participant who described how younger generations are increasingly influenced by urbanization and globalization, leading them to question traditional customs:

> *"In my youth, we would always participate in Ismaili festivals and rituals. Now, my children are more interested in things like social media and global fashion trends. They don't see the value in the old customs anymore."*

The study participants emphasized the role of elders in upholding cultural traditions, with some noting that the community's older generation serves as a critical anchor in maintaining cultural continuity. However, there was a strong recognition that younger members of the Ismaili community often view these practices as outdated or irrelevant in the modern world. One participant mentioned:

> *"Our elders are always talking about how our traditions are important, but I see my children and their friends moving away from those ideas. They want to blend in with everyone else, especially the non-Ismaili youth. They are ashamed of some of our older traditions."*

This shift towards cultural hybridity is particularly evident in the fashion and social behaviors of younger generations, where Ismaili youth often feel the pressure to adopt mainstream cultural practices that conflict with traditional values. As one older participant shared:

> *"When I was young, we wore the traditional Ismaili attire during our festivals. Now, the youth prefer Western clothes, and they don't even wear our special garments during community events anymore. It's troubling to see."*

These findings indicate a cultural transformation within the Ismaili community, where identity negotiation is increasingly influenced by external social pressures and a desire to fit in with the wider Chitrali society. The shift towards cultural blending suggests a redefinition of Ismaili identity that is increasingly influenced by the forces of modernity and urbanization rather than a purely traditionalist framework.

3.2. Theme 2: Ethnic Tensions and Social Cohesion

Ethnic tensions between the Ismaili community and other ethnic groups in Chitral, particularly the non-Ismaili, have been a significant source of stress and division for many participants. While some Ismailis report peaceful coexistence with neighboring groups, the data suggest that these relations are often fraught with undercurrents of cultural misunderstanding and political marginalization. A common theme across interviews was the challenge of maintaining social cohesion while navigating these ethnic boundaries. One participant shared:

> *"We live in a town where the non-Ismaili are the majority, and they always look down on us. They don't understand our practices, and sometimes they question our loyalty. It's tough, especially when we need to come together as a community."*

This sense of ethnic division was echoed by another participant, who described how Ismailis are often treated as outsiders despite being long-standing residents of Chitral:

> *"When we try to work with non-Ismailis, they treat us as though we don't belong. We've been here for centuries, but still, we're looked at differently. It's this invisible wall that separates us."*

However, some participants highlighted how shared religious values and community events have allowed the Ismailis to maintain social cohesion despite the ethnic divides. One participant mentioned:

> *"At the end of the day, we all share a belief in the Imam (A.S) leadership. This helps bring us together. But, outside of that, ethnic tensions are always there, especially when it comes to sharing resources or political power."*

The ethnic tension also surfaced in the political sphere, with many participants noting how the Ismaili community struggles to gain representation and voice in local governance, where non-Ismailis dominate. One older participant explained:

> *"We never feel like we are part of the decision-making process. Non-Ismailis control the local politics, and Ismailis rarely have a seat at the table. This exclusion makes it hard for us to feel equal."*

The sense of ethnic marginalization is particularly acute when it comes to land disputes and resource allocation, where non-Ismailis dominance in the region results in unequal distribution of resources. As one Ismaili participant put it:

> *"Non-Ismailis landowners get the best agricultural resources, while Ismailis struggle to maintain their farms. There's always this sense that we're not entitled to the same opportunities."*

Despite these challenges, the Ismaili community continues to find ways to adapt and assert its identity. The theme of social cohesion amid ethnic division highlights the resilience of the Ismaili community, with several participants emphasizing their commitment to maintaining cultural unity and social solidarity in the face of adversity. One participant concluded:

> *"We may be different, but we are all Chitralis at the end of the day. Ethnic divisions may persist, but we continue to stand by each other and keep our traditions alive."*

3.3. Theme 3: The Role of Religion in Shaping Ismaili Identity

Religion plays a fundamental role in the formation and reinforcement of Ismaili identity within Chitral. Across all interviews, participants emphasized the strong connection between Ismaili religious beliefs and their cultural practices, illustrating how religion is not only a matter of personal faith but also a key defining feature of their collective identity. One participant stated:

> *"Being Ismaili is not just about attending the Jamatkhana; it's about the teachings of the Imam (A.S). It's how we live our lives and interact with others. Our faith shapes everything we do; from the way we dress to how we help our neighbors."*

The influence of religious leadership was also high-lighted, with many participants noting the importance of the Imam (A.S) in guiding both their spiritual and cultural practices. One participant explained:

"The Imam (A.S) guidance helps us remain united. No matter the ethnic tension, his teachings remind us of who we are and what we stand for as Ismailis. This has been essential in helping us maintain our identity in Chitral, especially when others look at us as outsiders."

However, participants also described how religion sometimes intersects with ethnic tensions, as the Ismaili community's distinct religious practices make them stand apart from the non-Ismailis populations. One Ismaili participant mentioned:

"There is always a misunderstanding. Non-Ismailis see our religious practices as different from theirs, and some Kalash people don't understand the significance of our prayers and rituals. But we try to explain that our faith is what unites us, even if others don't accept us fully."

The Jamatkhana, the Ismaili prayer hall, was described as a central institution where both religion and community converge. It serves as a space not only for spiritual practice but also for socialization, education, and cultural reinforcement. As one participant shared:

"Jamatkhana is where we come together as one. It's not just for prayers; it's where we learn about our heritage, our faith, and how to live by the teachings of the Imam (A.S). It's the foundation of our community's unity."

This centrality of religion is further reflected in the Ismaili community's response to external pressures. Despite the challenges of ethnic conflict, participants pointed out how religion provides a source of strength and resilience in maintaining Ismaili identity. One participant emphasized:

"No matter how much pressure we face from the outside, our faith and religious practices help us stay grounded. We continue to follow the path set by the Imam (A.S) and keep our

traditions alive because our faith tells us who we are and where we come from."

This theme underscores the integral role that religion plays not only as a spiritual guide but also as a powerful force in shaping the Ismaili community's ethnic identity and sense of belonging in a complex and sometimes challenging cultural environment.

3.4. Theme 4: Political Representation and Marginalization

The theme of political representation and marginalization highlights the struggles the Ismaili community faces in gaining equal representation in the political structures of Chitral. Despite being an integral part of the region, Ismailis often feel politically excluded and marginalized by the dominant non-Ismailis political establishment. Participants frequently spoke about the challenges of being underrepresented in local governance and political decision-making. One participant shared:

"We have been living in Chitral for centuries, but our voices are rarely heard in local politics. The non-Ismailis leaders control everything, and we are left out of decisions that directly affect our community. This exclusion makes us feel like second-class citizens in our own homeland."

Another participant expressed similar sentiments, emphasizing how ethnic politics often lead to the marginalization of Ismailis, even in areas where they are the minority.

"Whenever there are political discussions or elections, it's always about non-Ismailis interests. We never get the chance to express our needs, and even when we do, no one listens. This marginalization affects us, especially when it comes to access to government resources and services."

In addition to the political exclusion, participants noted that the non-Ismailis dominance in local governance also results in cultural marginalization. The Ismaili community, while striving to preserve its distinct identity, finds itself often overshadowed by the non-Ismailis-dominated cultural narrative. One participant explained:

"In schools, we are taught non-Ismailis history, and our own Ismaili traditions are not given importance. It feels like we don't even exist in the broader narrative of Chitral's history, even though we've been here for so long."

The frustration regarding political representation was compounded by resource allocation. Participants discussed how non-Ismailis-majority areas often receive preferential treatment in terms of infrastructure development, public services, and education opportunities, further deepening the sense of ethnic inequality. One interviewee pointed out:

"Our village, which is predominantly Ismaili, is always left out when it comes to new infrastructure projects. We see non-Ismailis areas getting better roads, schools, and healthcare centers, while we struggle to get basic amenities."

Despite these challenges, the Ismaili community continues to find ways to assert its identity and demand equal treatment. Some participants expressed hope that religious unity, under the guidance of the Aga Khan, would provide a pathway for greater social and political advocacy in the future. As one participant put it:

"While we may not have political power, our community is united under the Aga Khan, and that gives us strength. We have to keep pushing for our rights and find ways to make our voices heard, even if the political system doesn't always listen."

This theme emphasizes the persistent political marginalization of the Ismaili community in Chitral and the disparities in resource allocation and governance. Despite these challenges, there remains a strong sense of resilience within the community, driven by religious solidarity and the collective desire for social equality.

3.5. Theme 5: Intergenerational Cultural Transmission

The theme of intergenerational cultural transmission explores how the Ismaili community in Chitral navigates the challenges of preserving its cultural identity and traditions across generations. Participants frequently discussed the critical role of elders in transmitting cultural knowledge, religious values, and historical narratives to younger members of the community. The importance of elders in preserving the community's heritage was highlighted by one participant:

"Our elders are the custodians of our culture. They pass down stories about our history, the significance of our religious rituals, and the values that define us as Ismailis. Without them, we wouldn't know who we are or where we come from."

Many participants emphasized that oral history, traditional stories, and religious teachings play an essential role in the cultural education of younger generations. As one participant noted:

"We gather at the Jamatkhana, and our elders tell us stories of our ancestors, their struggles, and the importance of staying united. It's through these stories that we learn the values of patience, respect, and faith."

However, there was also a recognition of the growing disconnect between younger Ismailis and their traditional practices. Several participants pointed out that younger generations, particularly those who are more exposed to modern education and global influences, often struggle to engage with traditional teachings. One participant shared:

"The younger generation doesn't seem interested in learning about our old ways. They're more focused on their phones, their education, and what's happening outside of Chitral. They don't see the value in the old practices, and that worries me."

The theme of cultural transmission also extended to the Ismaili community's evolving relationship with religion. Participants noted that while religious practices remain central to community life, there is a shift in how younger Ismailis engage with their faith. One participant observed:

"In the past, we would spend hours in the Jamatkhana, learning about our faith and tradi-

tions. Now, the youth are more focused on their social lives and less interested in the religious gatherings. They think it's outdated."*

Despite these concerns, many participants expressed hope that religious institutions like the Jamatkhana and the Imam (A.S) Development Network would continue to play a role in bridging the gap between the older and younger generations. One participant shared:

"The Imam (A.S) initiatives bring us together, even if our younger people don't see the value in our old customs. His teachings help remind us of the importance of our culture and our faith, and I believe that will keep us united as a community."

This theme reveals the ongoing struggle within the Ismaili community to preserve and transmit its cultural identity while adapting to modern pressures. The balance between traditional cultural practices and the influence of globalization and modern education represents a critical issue for the Ismaili community, as they strive to ensure that their heritage continues to thrive across generations.

4. Discussion

This study offers a comprehensive exploration of the complex social dynamics that shape the ethnic identity and cultural struggles of the Ismaili community in Chitral. The study's findings reveal a multifaceted understanding of how ethnic tensions, political marginalization, and cultural preservation impact the Ismaili community's sense of self and their interactions with neighboring ethnic groups. The results uncover a network of social, cultural, and political factors that contribute to the identity negotiations of Ismailis in a diverse, multi-ethnic region.

One of the central findings of this study is the role of religious and cultural values in maintaining Ismaili identity amidst external ethnic pressures. The data indicate that, despite the increasing ethnic conflicts with groups like the non-Ismailis, the Ismaili community relies heavily on its religious beliefs and institutional practices to preserve its cultural identity. Many participants highlighted that their faith in the Imam (A.S) and participation in Jamatkhana (prayer halls) are essential for strengthening community bonds and preserving their distinct cultural practices. This finding aligns with research by Hall and Jenkins [15,16], who suggest that religion plays a critical role in both defining and reinforcing cultural identity, particularly in marginalized communities.

The ethnic tensions and social cohesion between the Ismailis and other ethnic groups, particularly the non-Ismailis, emerged as another significant theme. Participants described a pervasive sense of ethnic division and political exclusion, especially with regard to local governance and resource distribution. The Ismaili community often feels sidelined in political decisions, which reinforces their marginalization in the broader Chitrali society. This finding resonates with previous studies on ethnic marginalization and political representation [17–19], which highlighted how minority groups struggle to gain political power and visibility in ethnically divided regions.

Moreover, this study sheds light on the impact of intergenerational cultural transmission in the Ismaili community. Participants emphasized that elders play a crucial role in passing down religious knowledge, cultural traditions, and historical narratives to younger members of the community. However, a growing disconnect between younger Ismailis, and their traditional practices was noted, with younger generations increasingly influenced by modern education and globalization. This finding aligns with research on cultural hybridity [20] and identity formation in the context of globalization, suggesting that younger generations may struggle to reconcile traditional practices with global influences.

Another key finding is the influence of political exclusion and resource disparities on the community's sense of injustice. Participants expressed frustration at the non-Ismailis-dominated political system that often leaves Ismailis without access to basic resources and public services. The Ismaili community's lack of political representation exacerbates feelings of social inequality and cultural alienation. This theme supports existing research on the relationship between ethnic conflicts and resource allocation in multi-ethnic regions [21–23].

Finally, this study contributes to the broader discourse on cultural identity in multi-ethnic societies by highlighting the role of religious leadership in fostering community resilience. Despite facing political and ethnic challenges,

many participants expressed confidence in the Imam (A.S) leadership as a unifying force that helps Ismailis navigate ethnic tensions and continue to assert their cultural identity in a rapidly changing world [24]. This finding underscores the importance of religious unity and leadership in maintaining ethnic solidarity and cultural continuity within marginalized communities [21,25].

This study contributes theoretically by extending Social Identity Theory and Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity to the context of a mountain Muslim minority. It demonstrates how religious institutions, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and socio-political marginalization shape the construction and negotiation of Ismaili identity in Chitral, highlighting that minority identities are maintained not only through social categorization but also through active cultural and religious practices. Practically, these findings suggest concrete implications for local policies and community development: inclusive governance measures, equitable resource distribution, and programs that support cultural preservation can strengthen social cohesion, while the engagement of religious institutions in educational, cultural, and conflict-resolution initiatives can reinforce community resilience and identity continuity.

In conclusion, the findings of this study not only confirm the role of political marginalization, ethnic tensions, and religious practices in shaping Ismaili identity in Chitral but also extend the existing literature by emphasizing the intergenerational transmission of culture and the cultural resilience of the Ismaili community. While previous research has focused on ethnic relations and political struggles, this study highlights the nuanced ways in which religious beliefs and community cohesion help preserve Ismaili identity amidst adversity. The study also provides insights into the ongoing challenges faced by the Ismaili community, offering a deeper understanding of how ethnic conflict and cultural preservation intersect in the region.

5. Implications and Future Research

The findings of this study have significant implications for sociology, ethnic studies, and community development. The research highlights the role of religious institutions, political representation, and intergenerational cultural transmission in preserving Ismaili identity amidst

ethnic tensions in Chitral. Policymakers should prioritize inclusive governance and cultural cohesion efforts to promote ethnic equality and resource sharing. Additionally, religious leaders can play a pivotal role in maintaining community unity and cultural resilience.

Future research should further explore the role of religious institutions in fostering ethnic integration and community cohesion, especially in regions marked by ethnic conflict. Studies should also investigate how globalization and modern education are influencing the cultural identity of younger Ismailis, particularly in relation to traditional practices. Finally, exploring inter-ethnic dialogue and cooperation in Chitral could offer valuable insights into reducing ethnic tensions and promoting a more inclusive society.

6. Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged in this study. One key limitation is the sample size and the specific geographical focus on Chitral. The relatively small sample and localized context limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or ethnic groups. Additionally, this study primarily examines the Ismaili community's ethnic struggles and identity negotiation in relation to ethnic tensions, which may not encompass all factors influencing their experiences. The findings are specifically applicable to the Ismaili community in Chitral and may not extend to other ethnically diverse regions or other minority communities in Pakistan. Furthermore, the study focused on ethnic relations and cultural identity, and did not delve into other potential influences, such as economic factors or external political pressures.

7. Conclusions

The study's findings reveal a complex web of factors that shape and reinforce the ethnic identity and cultural struggles of the Ismaili community in Chitral. By examining the roles of religion, ethnic tensions, political marginalization, intergenerational cultural transmission, and community cohesion, this study highlights how these elements interact to influence the community's sense of self and belonging. The findings underscore the importance of

understanding Ismaili identity as a socially embedded experience, shaped not just by individual choices, but by the broader ethnic, political, and religious contexts that both strengthen and challenge it. Understanding these dynamics is essential for fostering inclusive policies and promoting ethnic harmony in multi-ethnic societies like Chitral.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, R.U. and R.K.; methodology, R.U.; software, R.U.; validation, R.K., R.U. and S.H.; formal analysis, S.H.; investigation, R.K.; resources, R.K.; data curation, R.U.; writing—original draft preparation, S.H.; writing—review and editing, R.U.; visualization, R.K.; supervision, R.U.; project administration, S.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

No Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained for this study. The research was conducted in accordance with standard ethical guidelines, and participants' rights and confidentiality were respected.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw at any time without penalty. All responses were kept confidential and used solely for research purposes.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research.

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