

AIPS Short-Term Research Grant Final Report

Project Title: Governing Crowds: A History of “Unlawful Assembly” in South Asia, c. 1830s-1970s

Author’s Name: Daniel Waqar

Dates for Project: February 2024 to June 2024

Location: Lahore and Islamabad, Pakistan

1. Significance to Pakistan Studies

This project is deeply linked to the historical study of Pakistan and South Asia, broadly defined. Simply put, “unlawful assembly” involves the gathering of a certain number of people in a public place who intend to “disturb the peace,” “public order,” and/or “public tranquillity,” often with violence. This was considered a crime in British colonial India and still remains a chargeable offense across postcolonial South Asia, including in Pakistan. My dissertation examines the history of unlawful assembly (often referred to in its shorthand, “Section 144,” a reference to the British-era Code of Criminal Procedure that is still enforced presently) across a number of different historical periods, including both colonial and postcolonial South Asia. My study of unlawful assembly draws upon its many intersections with key historical challenges and debates across the subcontinent, including the long legacy of legal and bureaucratic authoritarianism, especially after post-1947 independence; the role of law, courts, and police in enforcing and adjudicating questions of unlawful assembly; as well as how the persistence of unlawful assembly impacts debates on decolonization and democratization in South Asian society.

2. Key Outcomes and Deliverables

During this trip, and thanks to the generous support of the American Institute of Pakistan Studies, I was able to visit several archives across Lahore and Islamabad, which I detail below. I used these opportunities to conduct research as well as make connections with fellow researchers, librarians, academics, activists, lawyers, and police officers, all of whom were key to my research journey.

I visited the **Punjab Public Library** in Lahore, which was home to a vast array of colonial and post-independence gazettes, giving me a sense of the broad scope of Section 144 orders across different historical epochs, and showing me how widely and consistently it was used as a tool of repression.

I engaged with **AGHS Legal Aid Cell (Asma Jahangir’s Law Firm)** in Lahore, a human rights law firm which houses an array of Pakistani court case records where unlawful assembly was litigated as a legal question. During this time, I also attended the AGHS-hosted Asma Jahangir Conference in April 2024 entitled “The People’s Mandate: Safeguarding Civil Rights in South Asia,” which is the largest human rights conference in South Asia.

I visited the **Punjab Secretariat** and **Dyal Singh Trust Library**, both in Lahore, to examine their holdings on questions of unlawful assembly, seditious meetings, colonial policing, and riots in both Mughal and British colonial India.

In my personal time, as both an individual and through organized walking tours, I explored several sites across Lahore which feature prominently in questions of unlawful assembly,

seditions meetings, colonial and postcolonial policing, and riots, including the gates of the Walled City of Lahore as well as Bradlaugh Hall.

In Islamabad, I visited the **National Archives of Pakistan**, where I gained access to rare police records on riots and unlawful assemblies in East Pakistan during the 1950s. I also visited the **National Documentation Wing**, which proved helpful in examining federal Pakistani cabinet debates about the use of Section 144.

I drew upon the findings I reached after examining these archives to organize chapters for my dissertation, which I am presently writing. The project has become more detailed and structured thanks to the time I spent in the aforementioned archives, and will include chapters on the following:

- The history of “crowd psychology” as a discipline and how it influenced an emerging colonial philosophy of unlawful assembly;
- Questions of public health, science and technology studies, and the litigation of unlawful assembly in the new Pakistani nation-state;
- A study of the policing of unlawful assembly as a crime through an examination of British colonial and postcolonial South Asian “riot manuals.”

I intend to present portions of these chapters at conferences and submit them as journal articles for publication in fields relevant to my discipline.