

Date: 10 October 2010  
To: J. Mark Kenoyer  
From: Matthew J. Nelson  
Re: AIPS Senior Research Fellowship Report

I am writing to report on my trip to Malaysia with financial support from the American Institute of Pakistan Studies (AIPS) during the summer of 2010.

The papers of Pakistani philosopher Fazlur Rahman—for many years a professor at the University of Chicago—are housed at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC). Located very close to the centre of KL, ISTAC is affiliated within the International Islamic University in Malaysia (IIUM).

Initially, I was planning to visit ISTAC in 2009. But the head archivist at ISTAC noted that Fazlur Rahman Collection had not yet been catalogued. In 2010, I wrote again, mentioning that I had been alerted to the existence of the Rahman Collection by several colleagues in the US (including Ebrahim Moosa at Duke and John Esposito at Georgetown). And, this time, the Dean of ISTAC, Professor Ibrahim Zein, intervened to ensure that I would be able to see the relevant papers.

(In this context, the Chief Librarian of IIUM, Nooraini Ismail, as well as Dr. Rosnani Hashim, from the Department of Education at IIUM, were particularly helpful.)

In fact, with the exception of the head archivist at ISTAC, all of the library staff members were extremely helpful. The PA of the Dean, Salmah Ahmad, arranged to have me collected from the airport in KL. And, thereafter, she invited me to stay in one of the ISTAC faculty/student apartments. The apartment was very comfortable. And, during my stay, I was also ferried around to the supermarket for provisions and provided with a television and a microwave.

Needless to say, I was very privileged to be among the first international scholars to view the Fazlur Rahman Collection. The head archivist made it very clear that she was not happy about my visit. But, after expressing her position (within the partisan politics of ISTAC), she did not inhibit my work in any way.

The archive itself consists of several hundred books and perhaps 60-70 boxes of manuscripts and personal papers. The personal papers are restricted to Rahman's years at the University of Chicago, however.

This was extremely disappointing, as I was hoping to gather papers from Professor Rahman's time in Pakistan during the 1960s. However, I will have to see if these earlier papers might be available somewhere else. (Because the Fazlur Rahman archive is still not catalogued, and

because few if any scholars have visited ISTAC to use the archive, it was impossible to determine the full content of the archive before arriving in KL.)

In any case, I was able to gather a number of extremely useful items, including copies of two government reports regarding education in Pakistan (one from 1959 and one from 1965) as well as several official policy documents from the 1970s. In addition, I was able to find several papers labelled 'confidential' in which Fazlur Rahman comments on policy matters for various organizations including the PPP.

Some of the most interesting papers, however, were reports prepared by others with detailed marginalia prepared by Fazlur Rahman—marginalia with comments like 'Yes! Exactly!' or 'Not at all!' Together with Rahman's published work, these marginalia help to illuminate his thinking in a number of helpful ways.

The most tantalizing document in the archive (for me) was a simple three-page document entitled 'Why I Left Pakistan.' In fact, one evening, when I was chatting with some of the ISTAC faculty members during an *iftar* dinner, one of them noted that he was also very curious about this document, having seen the first page several years ago. I located the remainder of the document and made extra copies. Unfortunately, this document refers to the frustrations that Rahman encountered with groups like the Jama'at-e-Islami in a very oblique way. It is clear that scholars will have to look beyond the ISTAC archive for papers that will illuminate Rahman's experience during the 1960s in greater detail.

Beyond ISTAC, however, I took advantage of my time in KL to meet with other faculty members in the area, including Osman Bakar at the International Institute for the Advanced Study of Islam (IAIS). In the past, Professor Bakar and his chief collaborator, Professor Hashim Kemali, were affiliated with ISTAC. But, since then, institutional politics led them to form their own institution.

Like Professor Zein at ISTAC, both Professor Bakar and Professor Kemali have been involved in a project regarding 'Islam and democracy' with The Asia Foundation (TAF). I have longstanding ties with The Asia Foundation, and these ties were very helpful in providing me with a chance to meet these senior figures.

I am grateful to AIPS for providing me with an opportunity to visit the Fazlur Rahman Collection in KL. The documents that I was able to gather will advance my book project in a number of important ways (even if my search for Rahman's papers from the 1960s will have to continue). I look forward to sharing what I learned about the Fazlur Rahman Collection, ISTAC, IAIS, and the study of Islam and democracy in South and Southeast Asia with scholars around the world—and, especially, in both Pakistan and the United States.