

January 23th, 2016

American Institute of Pakistani Studies (AIPS)

Re: Final Narrative Report

In 2015 I was awarded a short term Research Fellowship with the American Institute of Pakistan Studies. The support provided by AIPS was instrumental in getting my project off the ground and I can confidently state that the time spent in Pakistan after September 2016 was extremely productive for me, both personally and professionally.

My graduate studies are in the field of Sociocultural Anthropology at the Arizona State University. My research focuses on the social and cultural structures of Pakistani society related to women doctors' work, sexuality and gender. It also explores women doctors' own active negotiation of their identities and subjectivities through their lived, embodied experiences, attitudes and practices within these structures. Within this context, I am trying to better understand the links between the cultural discourses related to women's work, women doctors' own experiences and practices and the potential to change the existing structures through these practices. I hope that this project will provide better understanding of the challenges faced by educated women in Pakistan on one hand and on the other, contribute to anthropological discussions on how complex subjectivities are formed within the dynamics of unequal power relations.

One of the major challenges that I continue to face during my research is the time bind faced by my participants. Because of this, my project progressed at a much slower pace than I expected. Still, I was able to retain all the key features of my project. My field work consisted of formal and informal interviews with female Pakistani doctors, their families as well as stake holders and policy makers. My participants were gracious enough to share their time and details of their professional and personal life with me. During the course of my visits to various departments in major hospitals in Lahore, I was able to socialize informally with many doctors, women and men at various stages of their career. This way I was able to better understand the micro-social norms associated with women's work in Pakistani society. So far, I have conducted detailed interviews (lasting 60 – 90 minutes) with 30 women doctors and 3 interviews with hospital managers. Through these interviews, I have uncovered a considerable amount of data not only about women doctors but also about the experience of being a woman in Pakistani society. Over the course of next 4-5 months, I will conduct more interviews with hospital managers, government officials and policy makers as well as the family members of doctors that I have already interviewed. I would also interview more women doctors, especially those who have opted not to work professionally.

Although this is an ongoing research project, one thing has been clear from the start. The narrative created by national and international media that most women after graduating from medical college do not work at all, thus resulting in a considerable loss to Pakistan's health economy, is far from reality. Though the career pathways of women doctors were often not straightforward or traditional, and they did opt for specialties and career paths more suitable to their individual and family need, most doctors do work after graduating in one capacity or the other. The fact that such a narrative existed, and resulted in invisibility of women doctors' work is of extreme theoretical importance and I intend to explore it in detail in my dissertation.

Another thing that I have observed thus far is that in Pakistani society there exists a clear separation of public and private sphere. Even though number of women working outside their homes is on the rise, the work inside the house remains primarily women's responsibility. Through gender role socialization at home and in society, this unequal distribution of work continue to remain. Without challenging this status quo, it is very difficult to improve the working environment for Pakistani women.

I am extremely grateful for the opportunity provided by the AIPS as well as my participants to explore such an important issue that continues to affect the lives of countless educated Pakistani women. I hope that results from this research will not only contribute to the academic literature on women in Pakistan but also pave way for future research on Pakistani women scientists.

Sincerely,

Ayesha Masood.
Doctoral Candidate,
Sociocultural Anthropology,
Arizona State University.