

Lubna Chaudhry
Short-term Lecturing and Research Fellowship
Narrative Final Report

The fellowship from the American Institute of Pakistan Studies enabled me to collect data on Pakistani Christians living in the Islamabad area. I managed to conduct interviews with 35 research participants drawn from different walks of life. Each interview had two parts. In the first part the research participants were asked to share their life stories. In the second part I asked them more specific questions around discrimination, violence, identity, and citizenship. Interviews were contextualized in ethnographic accounts of neighborhood and family settings.

Perhaps the most salient contribution this data collection made to my research trajectory was that I gained acute insight into the workings of religion, class, and geography in Pakistani society. While only two Christians from my sample said that they had never experienced personal discrimination as Christians, the study highlighted how the experience of discrimination as Christians in a Muslim society varied according to class background and geographical location. The poor Christians living in the slums of Islamabad, for instance, bore the brunt of a sharp structural violence whereby sanitation, clean water, and electricity were being denied to them, but the colonies, as these slums are called, had become a safe haven for them where they interacted only with other Christians like themselves – each colony had its own church and pastor. Whereas the fact that they were relegated to menial low paying jobs was another aspect of the structural violence in their lives, they had few complaints about their employers with their elite capital background. The poor Christians who lived outside the colonies on the other hand had to face discrimination from their Muslim neighbors, and in fact lived in constant fear that someone would use the blasphemy laws¹ against them and send them to jail. Middle class Christians too lived in fear of the blasphemy law and spoke of instances of mob violence against Christians in their neighborhoods, but unlike the poor Christians they could change their residential area if they felt threatened. Christians who worked in governmental institutions ranging from a sanitation worker in a library to a general in the Pakistan army spoke of discrimination when it came to promotion or receiving credit for a job well done. People said they did not speak out against discrimination because they were afraid of further retaliation. Structural violence then operated in different guises against Christians from different classes.

With respect to Pakistan Studies, the fellowship allowed me to explore a topic that has not been given due attention. The existing literature on the topic eschews the lived experiences and perspectives of everyday Christians. The research I undertook because of the AIPS fellowship fills a gap because it generated in-depth situated knowledge about Pakistani Christians' multi-dimensional responses to the insecurity and discrimination in their lives. In addition to gleaning standpoints on

¹ Approximately 1274 people have been charged under the blasphemy law since 1986.

violence and unequal citizenship, the research also focused on the resilience and survival strategies of Pakistani Christians. Finally, the study remains an exemplar of an ethnographic interview study of a particular community that takes into account class and gender.