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AIPS Summer Research Grant, Final Report
Georgetown University, Washington, DC

The AIPS Summer Research Grant enabled me to travel to Pakistan for six weeks and conduct ethnographic research for my book on Christianity and caste. Despite the growing field of Dalit studies in South Asia, few scholars focus on caste practices and caste discrimination in Pakistan. How caste is negotiated within the Islamic context and between various Christian denominations is an integral component for understanding Christian ritual, practice, and theology in Pakistan. It is also an illustrative method to understand the marginalization and persecution that is often prevalent in rural areas and urban slums throughout the country. For many low caste Christians, persecution is often punctuated by commensal segregation which serves to differentiate them further from the dominant communities. Such forms of discrimination illuminate ‘caste consciousness’ that is still operative in many parts of Pakistan.

With this grant, I was able to visit multiple Christian (Protestant) communities in Lahore, Faisalabad, and Raiwind in the summer of 2015. During my trip, I was able to conduct in-depth interviews with leaders in the Church of Pakistan (COP). I attended multiple church services in various cities and in local villages and urban slums in Lahore, Raiwind, and Faisalabad. This enabled me to learn about the rituals and practices of the low caste churches in Punjab and engage comparative frameworks to decipher how these are distinct from ‘middle class’ and ‘upper class’ churches. In Martinpur, for example, a Christian village established in 1898 by the Presbyterian Church, the rituals and celebration of calendrical rites differ immensely from middle class Protestant churches in urban centers. In a similar way, the Protestant churches I visited in Faisalabad have Islamized several church practices that are not prevalent in larger churches in Lahore within the same denomination. The variances of Protestant ritual, practice, and theology that I encountered enabled me to create a nuanced view of how urbanization and migration affect both caste and Christian identity. This research contributed substantively to my book on Dalit Christians in Pakistan which will add to the conversation about religious conversion and caste in South Asia.