Silent Divide: State Sanctioned Reinforcement and Reproduction of Caste in Pakistan

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Abstract

Recent scholarship in India posits the telling of history through the centering of caste. This history is in stark contrast to both state and popular narratives of the nation. Within this history, caste is the omnipresent factor that shapes an everyday life of exclusion, exploitation, and violence. Moments of resistance to this oppression then form the key to narrating history. Whilst such trends are emergent and significant in India, Pakistan by contrast has popularized the exceptionalist narrative whereby that caste is a distinctive Indian phenomenon, and with the coming of Islam caste is eradicated. This narrative persists in religious, academic, and popular discourse - by tying caste to religion, as a Muslim-majority country, caste is absent.

This study shows that despite the Chrisrian's community attempt to inscribe oneself into another social history, the state and wider society reproduce caste in both formal and informal processes of discrimination. The processes of caste-based discrimination include the deployment of everyday derogatory terms of identification evoking their untouchable background to economic marginalization (for example in the employment that is available only to their community), mob riots, and state-enforced legal mechanisms such as blasphemy laws used disproportionately against Dalit Christian communities.

For my grandmother, Amma, Maryam Bibi who kept appearing in my dreams whenever I needed her.

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Content

Introduction

Recent scholarship on India posits the telling of history through the centering of caste. This is a form of history that is in stark contrast to both state and popular narratives of the nation. Within this history, caste is the omnipresent factor that shapes an everyday life of exclusion, exploitation, and violence. Moments of resistance to this oppression then form the key to narrating history. Whilst such trends are emergent and significant in India, Pakistan by contrast has popularized the exceptionalist narrative whereby that caste is a distinctive Indian phenomenon, and with the coming of Islam caste is eradicated. This narrative persists in religious, academic, and popular discourse - by tying caste to religion, as a Muslim-majority country, caste is absent (Ahmed, 1967; Gazdar, 2007; Butt, 2019; Gautier and Levesque, 2020).

Zaat, Qoum, Biradri - the terms reflective of caste empirically - are colloquially used particularly in Punjab. For instance, in Punjab “What is your caste”? is an inevitable query. The introduction is incomplete without disclosing the caste identity. This kind of encounter involves what I call “benevolent coercion”. Simply put, disclosing your caste background is a precondition to fully integrating and building a better relationship with any group of people, especially in Punjab. But what function does it serve to ask the caste background question?

For those considered upper castes, making caste background public within the given cultural settings brings a sense of pride, power, and cultural capital and helps determine one’s social hierarchical placing, while for the lower castes, it causes shame, anxiety, and renders them vulnerable to be treated with less respect, and this is the reason that within these social settings, the lower castes often find themselves

reluctant to reveal their castes. However, reluctance does not always warrant an escape from revealing your caste identity.

Despite the denial of caste amongst Muslims, the empirical example above shows the functioning of caste particularly amongst Muslims particularly on the interpersonal scale. This dissertation examines the range of quotidian mechanisms and processes by which caste sustains and reproduces itself both on interpersonal and institutional scales, with similar effects of discrimination and segregation, material inequality, destitution, and violence. This dissertation examines the continuities and changes in the processes through which caste sustains and gets reproduced. This will allow us to both understand caste in Pakistan but also to explore the need to step away from hegemonic history telling in the service of nation-building. Instead, this dissertation will steer us towards the histories that are specific to the dynamics of societies in Pakistan in particular, and South Asia in general.

In order to do so, I will trace caste in the history of Dalit Christians in Punjab because the most significant re-articulation of caste in Punjab is found in the history of these communities in Pakistan. My dissertation examines the articulation of caste through what I call Dalit Christians - Dalit communities who converted to Christianity to escape caste oppression. The dissertation argues that despite the attempt of the Christian communities to inscribe themselves into another social history, the Muslim state, and wider society reproduce caste through both formal and informal processes of discrimination. The processes of caste-based discrimination include the deployment of everyday derogatory terms of identification evoking their untouchable background to economic marginalization (for example in the employment that is available only to their community), mob riots, and state-enforced legal mechanisms such as blasphemy laws used disproportionately against Dalit Christian communities.

The dissertation centers caste while explaining the experiences of Dalit Christians living in a Muslim-dominated state. The caste aspect becomes clearer when we attend to the history of conversions of non-caste Hindus to Christianity in the sub-continent. The Christians living both in India and Pakistan were lower-caste Hindus who converted to Christianity under colonialism. It is worth noting that the majority of these conversions were an attempt to escape caste oppression and violence (Singha, 2015). However, this dissertation argues that conversion as a strategy did not help these communities by demonstrating the dire straits in which Christians communities live in Pakistan. For instance, most of the Christians in Pakistan are forced to do sanitation work, a work that essentially reinforces caste.

The Christians involved in sanitation work in Pakistan and called Chuhras, a casteist slur, are said to have descended from a Dalit caste in Punjab (Singha, 2015; Butt, 2017). Historically, for being on the lowest rung of the caste society, they were subject to degradation, ostracization, and social discrimination mainly because of their association with ignominious occupations including sweeping, cleaning, and manual scavenging, and thus formed a significant part of the population of pariah (Viswanath 2014) in Punjab and elsewhere in the subcontinent. A scholar of Dalit Christians in Pakistan, Sara Singh (2015) notes that Chuhras had already become the largest untouchable caste in British Indian Punjab in the nineteenth century and because of their occupation they were considered outcastes. While explaining religious conversions - starting in the 1870s in Punjab - to Christianity by the Dalits, she further notes that by the end of the 1930s, almost the entire Chuhra caste had converted to Christianity. After the partition, all these converts formed a huge part of the population of protestant Christians in independent Pakistan. Most of the Punjabi

Christians live in cities like Faisalabad, Sialkot, etc which became significant sites for Chuhra's conversion to Christianity.

The large-scale conversions of the lowest caste Hindus or Chuhras to Christianity were marked as significant in the colonial history of the Subcontinent in general and the Punjab region in particular. The colonial ethnographies mention Chuhras as those involved in sanitary work such as sweeping and manual scavenging and thus "outcaste" social category (Butt, 2017). This kind of social categorization of diverse populations of the sub-continent was part of the parcel of colonial rule. For instance, this social organization and categorization brought up by colonial ethnographies enabled colonial rule, especially in the domain of land management, settlements, canal colonization, and general legal and bureaucratic administration (Gilmartin 2003; Butt, 2017).

Additionally, in the post-colonial context in Pakistan, we see a similar trend of the state rendering the historically marginalized groups such as Dalit Christians subjected to the colonial form of governance. This form of governance can be seen in practice in the place where I conducted my ethnographic research. This is a settlement of a cluster of Christian villages called Derekabad named after Father Derek Misquitta, the minister of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's cabinet in the 1970s when the settlement was built. The Christians from across urban centers of Pakistan were encouraged to settle in these newly built villages that represented the departure from the past fraught with caste inequalities and oppression. However, the grounds of the establishment of these villages took their cues from colonial forms of land management devised during British rule. The land on which the settlements were built belonged to the state, and forest department primarily as these were large swathes of communal land spreading across thousands of acres historically used by pastoralist

communities for rearing livestock. But with the passage of time, from the 1980s onwards, when the military took over the state, land allotments to retired military officials gradually started, especially in the areas like Thal where Derekabad is located.

Discussed in the later chapter, the politics of land allotment and consequent resistance by the villagers of Derekabad provides a useful articulation of the continuities of caste in Pakistan. This dissertation argues that the marginalization of Dalit Christians spans across fields, ranging from the right to own land and acquiring quality education and employment. Settling Christians away from the cities and in the vast Thal desert provided an opportunity for them to leave behind their stigmatized occupations. However, the state's land management policies are the major hindrance for Dalit Christians attempting to improve their lives because the claims to land have been historically associated with caste privileges and the state uses the law to deny access to land ownership to Dalit Christians in the settlements of the Thal desert.

Methodological consideration

The dissertation is based on ethnographic observations. I conducted my fieldwork both in the urban spaces and the villages. A significant part of this dissertation is the outcome of the fieldwork I undertook in the Christian neighborhood called Joseph Colony in Lahore and a cluster of Christian villages established in the far-flung desert area in Thal, District Muzaffargarh, South Punjab. As a student activist, I have been engaged in Joseph Colony in different capacities ranging from organizing informal schools as well as occasionally organizing medical camps. Chapter 2 of the dissertation is mainly the outcome of my organizing experience in

the Joseph Colony. However, in the summer of 2022 when I formally initiated my fieldwork, I started it from the place I have known for years, Joseph Colony.

During the summer of 2022, I immersed myself in Joseph more as an anthropologist than as an organizer or an activist. I draw this distinction because of the approaches. Because I believe, as activists, we are more interested in the political ends while doing anthropology we ask ourselves whether those political ends can be met and if yes what do those political ends mean to the communities themselves. During my time in Joseph Colony, I focused my energies on tracing the secret, yet pronounced ways through which caste functioned. Because as I understand without tracing and articulating these secret features of caste, meeting the political end - *The annihilation of caste* - will remain elusive.

The purpose of doing fieldwork in the urban spaces was to explore the intersections of caste and the life of the poor of the poorest - Dalit Christians - especially in a city like Lahore which is considered one of the most developed cities in Pakistan. In order to supplement my research subject, I conducted 5 in-depth unstructured interviews with residents of Joseph colony, most of them were youngsters from age 18 - 30 years old. Particularly for my research, apart from these interviews, I would sometime stroll around the locality with my friends from Joseph colony, and sometimes take a bike ride with them in the city. Because in my experience, the stories that come out when you travel with someone are the stories that remain untold otherwise. During my bike rides with the youth of Joseph Colony, I would get a sense of their experiences of the city.

Similarly, I undertook fieldwork in the Christian villages - Derekabad, a place 400 kilometers away from Lahore. This place is hardly 40 minutes away from my hometown and I entered the field as a native anthropologist. The purpose behind

conducting ethnography both in the urban space and the village was to understand different caste dynamics that unfolded in Derekabad. The Derekabad residents migrated from the urban centers of Pakistan and settled in the far-flung villages to escape caste-driven violence and discrimination which is widespread in cities. Not only this, the Christians here were given farmland under the land reform scheme in the 1970s. I chose Derekabad as a site to conduct ethnography to see whether Dalit's relationship with the land helped them escape caste. I conducted 8 unstructured interviews with the residents of Derekabad from ages, as old as 99 years, and, as young as 20 years.

I spoke to my interlocutors such as Sufi Sardar in great detail about the history of Derekabad and their experience of living in the places they lived before settling in in the Thal desert. For me, It was extremely useful to have conducted fieldwork in the urban spaces and be familiar with the everydayness of Dalit Christians based in a city like Lahore. Life in Derekabad was in stark difference from the experiences of Dalits living in cities.

Along with the ethnographic observations in Derekabad, I did some archival research as well. I looked at the archives, especially the court petitions and the documents from the Government departments. Sufi Sardar was instrumental in helping me locate these documents because all such documents the residents of Derakabad kept in their homes. I was the first person ever who was doing research on Derekabad and people there were not used to accommodating researchers like me. I spent a couple of weeks explaining to them the whats and whys of my research. Initially, the residents of Derakabad would perceive me as a Journalist. However, after spending more time in Derekabad, I managed to establish my own identity as an anthropologist interested in long-term engagement with the people of Derekabad.

As Sufi Sardar would mention to me time and again during my fieldwork in Derekabad that I was the first one to study the history of these communities, my research will be instrumental in amplifying the voices of Dalit Christians living in the far-flung villages of Derekabad.

Chapters outline

The dissertation is divided into 3 chapters. Chapter 1 of the dissertation focuses on the post-partition history of Pakistan and how during this period particularly right after the partition of Pakistan the rhetoric of the creation of Pakistan in the name of Islam was deployed to erase caste and other marginalized identities. I argue in this chapter that Muslim nationalism which was a driving force behind the creation of Pakistan was weaponized to invisibilize caste and instead of caste the term religion minorities was used in the constitution of Pakistan. After drawing relevance of caste to Pakistani society, I further argue that such erasure of caste reinvented caste perse with its peculiar manifestations in the context of Pakistan, for instance in the form of creating out of Dalit Christain communities the 'other' and consequent nationalist violence against these communities.

Then I move to Chapter 2 which deals in depth with the experiences of Dalit communities while living in these urban centers. Based on my ethnographic observations in Joseph Colony and empirical data, this chapter focuses on the material conditions in which Christian youth particularly live. For example, I demonstrate the ways through which the state and the market limit their access to quality life by restricting them to degrading occupations such as sanitary work that inscribes caste onto these communities.

The dissertation is built around the urban and rural divide vis a vis caste practices. Thus, Chapter 3 of the dissertation is the ethnography of Dalit Christian communities settled in the Thal region of South Punjab where they were allotted farmland in the 1970s under a land redistribution scheme. As the land reform minister of this scheme argued in one of his reports that the purpose of this scheme was to empower the communities that have been historically marginalized in terms of their access to their land. In this chapter, I focus on the community's struggle for their land rights. In the early 1970s, around 900 families were settled in the Thal desert through a notification awarding 12.5 acres of land to each family on a permanent lease. However, after prime minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the main proponent of the land reform scheme, was hanged and the dictatorship was imposed in 1979, the scheme was suspended. From this period onward, the communities have been struggling to gain legal rights to this land. They filed petitions to the courts and courts issued orders in their favor but state bureaucracy is a major hindrance. This chapter argues that Derekabad which was seen as a 'zone of potential' (Li, 2014) is being turned into a 'zone of dispossession' (Fanon, 1967; Grosfoguel, 2016). This chapter empirically demonstrates that the state through extending zones of dispossession reinforces and reproduces caste.

I conclude my dissertation by systematically analyzing my ethnographic experience. Emerging from a specific context, in the concluding part of my dissertation I hint at my own theoretical musings that I think will open up many questions for the researchers interested in studying caste dynamics of South Asia.

Chapter 1 Unveiling the Veils: The Creation of Cultural Other

Asia Bibi, a Christian convert from the lowest caste Hindu background, was charged with blasphemy in 2009. In Pakistan, blasphemy according to the Pakistani penal code is a punishable offense and punishments range from a few years imprisonment to fine, life imprisonment, and in certain cases mandatory death. The Christians mainly are considered, in the words of Fanon (1967), the wretched population given their caste origins that determine one's social placing in a Muslim-majority country Pakistan.

The case of Asia Bibi became a national issue mainly for two reasons. Firstly, she was alleged to have committed blasphemy and dishonored the prophet, which is an extraordinary event per se, mobilizing all sections of the society to condemn this act of blasphemy, to vow for protecting the honor of the prophet as well as demand punishment for the accused. Secondly, the crime was allegedly committed by a Dalit Christian. When a non-Muslims like Asia Bibi, a Christian Dalit is accused of such a crime, it triggers a reaction by the mobs that sometimes involves lynchings of the accused as we have seen on different occasions. However, this is not to suggest that Muslim accused are forgiven. The reaction is reflective of deep-seated anxiety and fear of minorities both in India and Pakistan because the identity of the minorities for instance, Muslims in India, and Christians and Hindus in Pakistan, are not considered to be linked with the identity of these "nations" (Appadurai, 2006).

Such was the hype of this case that a sitting Governor of mainland Pakistan, Punjab, one of the largest provinces, was killed by his own bodyguard. The Governor of Punjab then, Salman Taseer, held a press conference, condemning the misuse of blasphemy law after the investigation reports found out that Asia Bibi did not commit

blasphemy. The act of condemnation of misuse of blasphemy law became blasphemy itself. The report revealed that Asia engaged in an altercation with a Muslim woman in her village. Basically, she fetched water for her co-worker and three Muslim women accused her of polluting the water. Later, the incident escalated into Asia being accused of committing blasphemy.

This chapter argues that such forms of conflicts are rooted in caste and untouchability because the primary accusation of polluting the water by touching it is historically speaks of caste rather than religion (Devji, 2018; Gurmani, 2019). However, when discussing the issue of blasphemy and the consequent clashes between minorities and majorities, caste is erased. In the context of Pakistan, the Muslim majority state, there is a reluctance towards acknowledging the presence of caste as a socio-cultural and political phenomenon. Caste is deemed to be a feature of the Hindu religion alone and it is argued that with the coming of Islam caste is absent. However, in this chapter, I demonstrate the ways to trace caste amongst Pakistanis.

In doing so, the first section of the chapter critically engages with Talal Assad's (2009) conception of "discursive tradition" and Shahab Ahmad's (2015) conceptualization of Islam. The recent literature on caste among Muslims in the sub-continent explores whether Talal Asad's formulation of "discursive tradition" can be used to situate caste within Muslim societies (Levesque, 2020). I argue in this section that as much as the conception of discursive tradition is useful to think through caste and draw its relevance to Muslim society, the conceptualization of Islam as a discursive tradition both as 'prescriptive authority' as argued by Asad (2009) and 'exploratory authority' explained by Shahab Ahmad (2015) have their own limitations. For instance, first, these ideas have the potential to be hijacked by Muslim-majority states like Pakistan and secondly, such theoretical conceptions

inadvertently rely on the caste-based figures of authority, in Muslim-dominated societies. I attempt to demonstrate the so-called Sufi or the spiritual authority that also became a political authority under colonialism creates specific caste dynamics in Pakistan.

After establishing the relevance of caste in Muslim-majority countries, the second section engages with the idea of political Islam, the ideological core of Pakistan. This section shows how the idea was used to erase caste from Pakistan. I argue that by deploying the notion that Pakistan was made in the name of Islam caste was rendered invisible.

The third section of this chapter examines the cultural construction of the "other" out of the Christian population of Pakistan. I argue that the construction of the "other" enables violence against Dalits such as Asia Bibi.

1.1 Unraveling caste within Islamic Discourse

Talal Asad (2009, p. 10) in his illuminating essay titled "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam" provides a lens to analyze Islam:

> "Islam as the object of anthropological understanding should be approached as a discursive tradition that connects variously with the formation of moral selves, the manipulation of populations (or resistance to it), and the production of appropriate knowledges".

While explaining the 'tradition' Asad (2009) argues that it comprises of discourses that 'instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history'. Criticizing the anthropologists' varied interpretations of Muslims' (p.20) diverse ways of being and Muslim's continuations or, as Asad puts it, 'imitations' of the past practices as

Islamic, Asad argues that Islamic discursive tradition would mean 'a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present'(p,20). As I understand, the practice can only be categorized as Islamic practice when it exists in the present and makes temporal sense both in past and future terms. Asad does not stop here but he also lays out the framework through which these practices are learned essentially through "discourses" involving methods of knowledge production and its dissemination. Islamic practices are the result of a rigorous pedagogical process. Islamic practices have a 'correct model' an orthodoxy that Asad (2009) complains, is often ignored by the anthropologist of Islam, and that particular 'model' authorized in tradition is instructed by the authorities including 'aalim, a khatib, a Sufi shaykh' (p.21) using the orthodox doctrine as a correct process of teaching.

Asad's explication of what is Islamic and the qualifiers for something to be Islamic, including a present practice that can be historicized in Muslim traditions of discourse, and has relevance in the future as well, as it was learned through 'orthodox doctrine' provides me a useful analytical frame to think through caste among Muslims. Caste is considered a distinctive Hindu phenomenon and despite its manifestations in a Muslim-dominated society like Pakistan, it is denied by the dominant elites whether they are politicians or scholars. The counterargument always involves statements, for example, unlike Hinduism, there is no mention of caste in the foundational Islamic scriptures like Quran and Hadith and Islamic scriptures espouse the concept of egalitarian Muslim society that is not divided along the lines of caste, color, and creed. Therefore, caste is refuted as un-Islamic based on the assumption that Muslim societies are founded on models laid in the Islamic scripture. I don't want to make the universal claim that Muslim societies across the globe are caste-based

societies, however, I argue that historically South Asian Muslims have been involved in caste practices.

What constitutes a Muslim society, particularly in the context of Pakistan? This is essentially a society formed along the lines of Islamic principles as reflected in the idea that Muslims are a distinct nation from Hindus which is behind the creation of Pakistan. However, along with that, it's a society that has its own cultural attributes that are produced and reproduced over time. I differentiate between ideological formation and material cultural formation or the practical ways in which a Muslim society functions. Pakistani society which is a Muslim-majority society is formed along the lines of caste, class, and kinship division which we will see as we move forward through the chapter.

Asad argues that within the discursive tradition, the discourses are carried out and essentially authorized by so-called authority figures, teachers in general terms because that is only when a certain practice qualifies as an Islamic practice. However, I argue that the reliance upon authority which instructs about the practice, creates hierarchies among Muslims. These authorities have a history and not everyone can become an authority until they come from a certain background of respectability which is determined by their caste.

To start with how caste has been institutionalized through discursive tradition, I look at the interpretation of marriage in Islamic jurisprudence. To argue that caste is present among Muslims, I use the interpretation of one of the Islamic principles of 'nikah' or marriage, Kufu or as loosely translated equality in marriage by Ashraf Ali Thanvi[1] also known as *hakim ul-ummat* or "the sage of the Muslim community"

[1] Thanvi was a late 19th century sunni scholar, jurist and one of the proponents of Pakistan movement

associated with Dar ul-Uloom Deoband.[2] Thanvi suggests that while deciding the equality in marriage, it is important to consider "nasb" lineage or more generally caste of the couple getting married. According to Thanvi's interpretation, in order for Nikah to take place, compatibility that includes lineage, piety, and occupation among other things is necessary (Sikand, 2011).

Although Thanvi has been a controversial figure because of his parochial interpretations of Islamic principles but the compatibility practice is a common on the ground. For instance, most of the marriages are either within similar castes or if upper castes, they would certainly consider matching the caste status in case the marriage is outside their own caste. Endogamy, essentially the origin of the mechanics of caste as Ambedkar points out, is widespread among Muslims as well. Zat, biraadri, Qoum – key components of compatibility - or more generally social status becomes a vital concern before taking a marriage decision. In order for a marriage to take place, it is important to choose a bride from the same caste and if a family tries to move out of one's own kin or caste group, there are so many challenges that the families have to overcome. Most of the time, it involves demanding more dowry. It is demanded because there is a reluctance to marry outside the family or one's caste which is mostly because of the pressure by the members of the respective kin group. In order to counter this sort of social pressure, the families seek to spend more than the usual amount of resources both on dowry and exchanging extravagant gifts. The more extravagant the marriage celebrations, the more sense of pride, essentially caste pride, it brings to the bride's families. Among certain castes, there are possibilities of arranging a marriage outside one's caste. However, among Syed, particularly rural

[2] Darul Uloom is an Islamic seminary in which Islamic traditional sunni movement began in the late 19th century.

Syed families, it becomes even harder. The Syed families don't marry their daughters unless the male bride is Syed himself while for the male bride, it's possible to marry a woman from outside the Syed family. It's mostly the reason that in rural areas particularly, the Syed women would spend life without marrying rather than marrying someone non-Syed.

1.2 Caste and explorative authority

Shahab Ahmad (2015, p. 274) another influential scholar of Islam sums up Asad's argument as follows: "Asad's conceptualization of Islam as a discursive tradition is to present Islam as a tradition which, for all of its variety, is constituted by an overriding concern to institute orthodoxy. Thus, authoritative, prescriptive, and exclusivist discourse—including authoritative, prescriptive, and exclusivist reasoning—becomes, by definition, (more) Islam/ic than is non-authoritative, non-prescriptive, and non-exclusivist discourse/reasoning."

Shahab does not deny the orthodoxizing trajectory in Islamic history, however, he warns against such a framework of conceptualizing Islam that he thinks pertains to Asad only. Drawing on mainly the work of Ottoman historian Katip Celepi and some poets belonging to so-called Muslim mystic tradition, Shahab points towards the limitation of Asad's discursive tradition and its overemphasis on "prescriptive" authority. He argues that such conceptualization of Islam is limited because it takes into account only "authority" and "orthodoxy" and ignores other forms that he thinks are not just prescriptive but also what he calls 'explorative authority' whose bearers are 'licensed to explore' unlike the bearers of prescriptive authority who are 'licensed to prescribe to other'. Shahab, in his conceptualization of Islam, suggests the

'epistemological authority' that particularly Muslim philosophers have historically associated with or as Sufis in Islamic history cultivated. As he puts it, 'And while Sufism operates in society through the social organization of ṭarīqahs which are the domain for the exercise and enactment of the spiritual authority of the shaykhs over their disciples, its ultimate conceptual and experiential goal is the freeing of the individual from the bonds of prescriptive authority/orthodoxy—as Rūmī said, "We have become gold and are delivered from the theory and practice of alchemy: we are God's freedmen." (p. 284). The common theme between both Asad and Shahab Ahmed is the 'authority' regardless of it being prescriptive or exploratory. Both conceptions, in certain but subtle ways, speak of the hierarchies among Muslims which I discuss in this sub-section.

The sociological and ethnographic research on social stratification among Muslims identifies three castes among Muslims. Ghaus Ansari (1960), an Indian Muslim sociologist, was the first one among thinkers in the post-colonial context of India, who explicitly used the term "caste" to explain existing stratification among Muslims in India. Although drawing on colonial archives, he was of the view that the system of caste also functioned among Muslims. He said:

"Caste attitude and behavior among the Ashraf castes can only be analysed in relation to the Muslim community as a whole. […] If we once accept the fact that the Indian Muslims in general have a caste system, however, modified, we must come to the conclusion that the Ashraf constitute the highest stratum within this structure.."

According to the caste schema outlined by Ansari, there were three broad categories among Muslims. On the top, there was Ashraf, the superior castes who either descended from Arab or belong to a superior lineage, for example, Sayyad who are considered Prophet's kinsfolks. The second category was Ajlaf, the occupational castes

among Muslims. The lowest category was comprised of untouchables who are indigenous to the subcontinent (Levesque, 2020).

Ashraf equivalent of Brahmans, Ajlaf, the commoners who converted to Islam from Hindu castes, and then on the lowest are Arzal who converted to Islam from Dalit or untouchable background. Under Ashraf come Syeds, Hashmis, Qureshis, and Sajjada Nashin (descendants and caretakers of Sufi shrines) in Sindh and Punjab mostly.

This section is concerned with Ashraf and among Ashraf particularly the phenomenon of Syedism. Syed as a caste is subject to reverence, mainly for being the prophet's kinsfolk, and this, as a result, translates into certain religious privileges and political power. Since there is not enough caste discourse in Pakistan and caste is hardly seen as a problem, it's not surprising that equal-to-nothing research has been carried out on the current phenomenon especially the research dealing with Syedism, particularly through the caste lens.

Syeds' dominance extends to multiple spheres: they dominate as spiritual leaders - the caretakers of Sufi Shrines, SajjadaNashins - in certain specific cases and as political leaders in different parts of the country. Historically the role of Sajjada Nashins has changed from what it had until the 19th century. In the current situation, they are no longer just spiritual leaders but also now hold political and economic power, and these powers further supplement their caste privileges. Colonialism too, played a part in reinforcing the hierarchies, although existed earlier as well but in different forms. For example, in the case of Sajjada Nashins, speaking in the context of Multan, the Historian Diego Abenante (2008) while referring to communal riots of 1881-1882 in Punjab and specifically in Multan, notes that the social functions of caretakers of Muslim saints' shrines changed under colonial rule. He says:

"In 1881 and 1882 serious riots broke out in Multan city. Of course, the emergence of communal violence in the late 19th century was not unique to Multan nor to Punjab. However, the peculiarity of these events was the presence of the sajjada nashins at the centre of the stage. Even more significant was the fact that, before this period, there was no evidence of the sajjada nashins in Multan acting as leaders of a single, unified religious community, given that the common popular religious culture of the shrines involved both Muslims and Hindus."

The riots then led to the demolition and destruction of mosques and temples across Punjab, and Multan was not safe either from any of such destruction. The destruction of the Prahalad temple is the most prominent. The Prahalad is the old name of Multan and according to some myths, the Hindu festival originated in this place. On the one hand, there were pandits, and on the other SajjadaNashins. What the colonial administration did was to expand the influence of SajjadaNashins beyond the spiritual sphere. They become politically more active and turned out to be representatives of Muslim identity.

In today's context, we see the continuation of the same process that has roots in the colonial period. The spiritual authority which also became a political authority under colonialism continues to wield its power in the post-colonial state. For example, Shah Mahmood Qureshi who in the past decade has served as a foreign minister of Pakistan twice and remained assigned to crucial ministries in the past. At the same time, he is the hereditary caretaker of the shrine of Bahaudin Zakariya, a 13th century Muslim mystic and the founder of the Suhrawardiya Sufi order. One of the many examples, Shah Mahmood Qureshi is the representation of religious and temporal authority in Pakistan.

2 Muslim Nationalism and the erasure of caste

The Pakistan movement was based on a founding principle of the two nations theory according to which Muslims and Hindus in the subcontinent are two nations with distinct religions, cultures, and identities. In the early days of the movement for the creation of Pakistan, the Muslim League, the political party that campaigned for the partition of India into two countries India and Pakistan, actively propagated this idea of distinction between Muslim and Hindu nations (Toor, 2011). It is fundamentally through this idea that a cultural other whether it was Hindu, Christian, Sikh, etc was created which haunts Pakistan vis a vis its relation to the religious minorities even after more than seven decades of partition from India. As much as it haunts Pakistan, India also continues to grapple with the challenge of cultural other, which in the case of the Hindu majority state of India, are Muslim.

The project for the Pakistan movement and its constituent narratives can be best explained by using theoretical approaches, particularly primordialist approach, dominant in nationalism studies. Umut Özkırımlı (2010) charts four approaches to understanding primordialism which include nationalist, socio-biological, culturist, and perennialist approaches. However, this chapter focuses on the nationalist approach and attempts to situate the Pakistan movement within that. Drawing on the work of British historian Elie Kedourie, Özkırımlı (2010) puts together five dominant themes of nationalist thesis; a) antiquity of the nation b) golden age c) superiority of the particular national culture d) the period of awakening e) and finally the national hero.

Using these frames the nationalists, both the political and intellectual elites have argued against anything outside the themes, particularly the superiority of national culture as explained in Ozikirimili's formulation. Although widely contested

these themes are, as Özkırımlı also points out especially the idea of givenness or naturalness of any particular nation, they continue to be effectively utilized by the political elites, especially in a situations where their hegemony is under threat. Sometimes it is this burden of nationalist elites to maintain primordiality that gives rise to conflicts among different ethnic groups. Although limited in its conception, it is intriguing how 'primordialism' has held sway, particularly among nations like Pakistan and India. In the context of Pakistan, the logic that nationalist elites deployed can be best summarized as primordial. The 'primordial' embodied in the narrative of Muslim nationalism in Pakistan was and continues to be utilized in denying and erasing caste in Pakistan. This can be illustrated through the politics of registering the scheduled caste in the objective resolution of 1949, the primary source of the constitution of Pakistan (Ghazal, 2019).

In the constitution of Pakistan, the term schedule caste is only reserved for Hindu castes while the others who formerly belonged to the untouchables background can not be termed as scheduled castes, instead, the term religious minorities is used to characterize the experiences of other lower castes who converted to Christianity and Islam. Prem Hari Barma member of the first national assembly of Pakistan and a member of the scheduled Hindu caste from Bengal was the first political leader after the partition who demanded that in the resolution of Pakistan the term 'scheduled caste' should be incorporated instead of depressing classes. He argued that the incorporation of scheduled caste would guarantee the minority rights protection including the right to representation in political affairs. However, the scheduled caste was reserved only for Hindu castes. What followed then was interesting because Barma's point was meant to foreground caste as a significant component in the newly-born country (Javed; Martin, 2020). Barma's argument became a stepping

stone for future debates. Needless to say, recognizing caste emerged as a dilemma in the post-colonial state. It was contradictory to recognize caste for a Muslim-majority country, built on the notion that Muslims were different than Hindus in terms of their culture, religion, language, etc. and thus they needed a separate country. The country did not want to inherit what was thought to be a cause of the great divide and immense suffering and inequalities in Indian society - the caste system. The law of Islam was to be a guiding principle that prohibits division and hierarchy based on caste (Javid; Martin, 2020).

3 The cultural construction of the other

Brubaker and Laitin (2004) both explain the rise of ethnic and nationalist violence as a symptom of new world disorder. They point toward the features that contributed to the proliferation of ethnic and nationalist violence or more precisely the ethnicization of conflicts. One of such features, which I find quite relevant to my dissertation topic, includes the decline of Weberian states, the state lacking empirical attributes. As I understand, the empricity of the state essentially means, among others, cohesion among its diverse population. Cohesion in the states like Pakistan is prevented by the dominant groups (religious, caste, ethnic) in order to keep intact the hegemony of political, cultural, and caste elites.

While in the process of maintaining the hegemony of these groups, the discrimination, violence, and otherization of minorities who are predominantly Hindus and Christians in Pakistan are often justified by throwing a primordialist

argument: the country was made in the name of Islam, the antiquity of the Muslim as a dominant nation, and superiority of their culture among others.

The process of maintaining hegemony and the constitutive violence against religious minorities can further be understood through a constructivist framework that uses a culturalist approach to analyze nationalist and ethnic violence. According to this analysis, ethnic violence is "meaningful, culturally constructed, discursively mediated, symbolically saturated and ritually regulated." Pakistani textbooks, dominant history-telling projects, and media propagate that the nation that Hindus and Muslims were the two distinct nations, Hindus and Christians are enemies of Islam, and Pakistan was made in order to protect the honor of Islam.

I now return to the case of Asia Bibi. If a lower caste Christian woman is charged with blasphemy in Pakistan, for the majority it is equally blasphemous to even doubt the veracity of the charges because her being a Christian and Dalit is sufficient evidence that she might have committed blasphemy. While on the contrary the investigation report denied those claims and she was released by the court after having spent almost a decade in jail. She spent almost a decade in jail mainly because of the low progress in the investigation and even if the investigation was complete, the judges would be scared to give a verdict in her favour given the street strength of the religious elements whose entire politics is dependent on this single issue of blasphemy. Such mass mobilisation requires consensus that is essentially created through the cultural construction of fear against religious minorities specifically Dalit Christians in Pakistan.

In Pakistan, such cultural construction is carried out by locating allegiances of religious minorities to somewhere but not Pakistan. it is more often India or the West generally where religious minorities, particularly Christians are alleged to have their

loyalties with. It is one of the reasons that right after the war on terror and subsequent invasion of Afghanistan - a fellow Muslim country - by the USA and NATO, as figures suggest, the targeting of Christians increased massively because at times the expression of fear requires a moment and the invasion of Afghanistan was the right moment.

Chapter 2 The Intersection of Caste and Urban Life

"Why don't you pursue further education?" I asked Waqas, 18 years old resident of Joseph Colony, a Christian locality in one of the most polluted areas of Lahore city. I first met Waqas in the summer of 2016 when we, as a group of students and community organizers influenced by the civil rights activists such as Malcolm X, went to Joseph Colony for the first time. Considering the fact that the Christian population was the most marginalized in terms of access to education, employment, and healthcare, we mobilized the young students from some private universities and colleges, and with the help of these young students, we established a summer school in Joseph Colony. The purpose behind organizing such a school was to build a solidarity network with the community. Waqas, concerned about his siblings and cousins, participated as an organizer who would facilitate us in setting up a school.

As we established this informal school and the students part of our group started teaching kids from ages 8- 15, I would ask Waqas repeatedly to use this school as an opportunity and continue his education. He would always distract me when the conversation involving his education came up. During our time in Joseph Colony when most of my friends were busy teaching the kids, I would roam around the locality along with Waqas and his friends. Joseph Colony, a Christian ghetto, is surrounded by steel and metal scrap warehouses and markets, which pollute the entire area. Initially, the residents of Joseph Colony would look at me with suspicion because lately they were not used to seeing outsiders within the premises of the

locality. However, as soon as the people in the locality realized that I was one of the summer school organizers, they became comfortable with my presence.

The local's suspicion of me stemmed from the fact that just 3 years before we first went to Joseph colony and established a school, the entire neighborhood was burnt to ashes by a mob of Muslims. The youngsters like Waqas and his friends who had memories of this tragic incident would often refrain from talking about what actually happened. However, with the passage of time when I developed trust with them, they would recall the event that led to the burning of the entire locality. As my friends in Joseph Colony narrated, initially there was an altercation between a Christian resident from Joseph Colony and a Muslim guy who was drinking together somewhere in the neighborhood which escalated into blasphemy allegations against the resident of Joseph Colony. Another rumor circulated among the community members that neighboring market owners who wanted the community to evacuate the locality used blasphemy to instigate the mob that eventually burned down the entire residential area where Christians lived. It was only during the time when Waqas and his friends talked about the burning incident that I came to know that educational certificates of Waqas were also burnt when his house was put on fire.

In this chapter, based on my ethnographic experience in Joseph Colony and wider engagement with the Christian communities in other parts of Lahore, I argue that caste is central to conflicts, violence, and marginalization of Dalit Christians, especially in the field of health, education, and employment in the urban centers of Pakistan such as Lahore. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that mob violence against Dalit Christians especially in the case of Asia Bibi is the consequence of the cultural construction of the "other". In that chapter, I elucidated the processes through which what I call the "cultural other" is created out of Dalit Christians and I

demonstrated the ways through which being cultural other leaves Dalit Christians vulnerable to violence by Muslim mobs.

While in this chapter, I focus on the everydayness of Dalit Christians in urban spaces. I argue that urban disparities both economic and social are representative of caste in Pakistan by foregrounding the experiences of Christian youth vis a vis their attempt to gain respectable jobs and further analyzing some statistics highlighting the disadvantages such as limited access to quality education, health, and employment Dalit Christians, especially the residents of the Joseph colony are subjected to. The so-called merit that determines the profession one enters into is driven by caste.

Suraj Yengde (2019) in his seminal work "caste matters" argues that merit is the social and cultural capital of the privileged, meaning the upper castes. Those who lack such social and cultural capital are judged against their "predetermined merit" (p. 7). While indicating towards the attitudes of upper castes who deploy "merit" as a justification for their social and professional positioning, Yengde argues that "in a competitive, unjust world, merit becomes an excuse for the historically privileged and dominant groups to rally against welfare measures that are oriented towards addressing inbred social inequalities" (p.7).

Similarly, Ajantha Subramanian (2019) while disentangling the relationship between caste and merit argues that both terms may appear antithetical because caste is a hierarchical system that has historically kept people entrapped in graded inequalities, however, merit is understood as something based on democratic principles that ensure equal access both for the privileged and disadvantaged. Based on the analysis of the education system of India, Subramanian (2019) argues that "caste and merit appear far more proximate, even intimate" (p. 3)

Drawing on the research that deals with the complex relationship between caste and merit, the first section of this chapter demonstrates the material conditions that make Dalit Christians "low merit" candidates because of limited access to education. I argue in this section that education does not necessarily guarantee any kind of incentive to Christian youth from the market. The urban market does not just acknowledge and reproduce caste power but it also creates conditions of untouchability for the Christian youth. The second section of this chapter focuses on the systematic exclusion of Christian youth from education. This section demonstrates that lack of education and employment leads to acute poverty and living conditions that also involve poor health amongst Dalit Christians.

Barriers of caste

During my interaction with people in Joseph Colony, I encountered many youngsters who were either uneducated or if educated they were unemployed. One of the main reasons, as they told, everywhere the educated young folks went for a job, they did not get it. Instead, they were offered menial jobs most of the time. It is not that these youngsters never accepted those jobs. Some of them had an experience of working as a cleaner in corporate offices but while being there, they experienced the worst form of discrimination. For instance, one guy named Patras, 21 years old, who had the experience of working in a corporate office told me that initially when he applied, he applied for a designation as an office boy, doing routine tasks that did not require much skills. But he was denied that job and instead was appointed as a cleaner. While he worked as a cleaner, he had to reach the office before anyone from the normal staff got there and had to stay till everyone had left. He was mainly

responsible for cleaning the floor and toilets throughout the day and the entire month. He was given a corner in the office and was asked to keep checking the floor and toilets. Since it was quite a big office and dozens of people worked there, he had to clean the floor and toilets almost every hour.

Patras stayed in that office despite all hardships for months until one of the employees at the office scolded him for using kitchen utensils during the lunch hour. As he noted, this episode was extremely humiliating for him as he was disallowed from touching kitchen utensils as he would pollute them. This particular incident is emblematic of caste and unveils the processes through which caste functions in urban middle-class spaces. As Patras notes, "every time we apply for a job other than sweeping and cleaning, but as soon as it appears we are Christians, we become unsuitable for that job".

I have often come across advertisements that exclusively require Dalit Christians. Sanitation work is commonly associated with Dalit Christians. In fact, as a social and religious identity, the term Christian and sanitation laborer (*Khakrob*) are used synonymously. Christians are commonly referred to as Chuhra – originally the name of a Dalit caste but now predominantly used as a derogatory epithet for street sweepers and gutter cleaners. In Lahore the capital city of Pakistan's largest province with a population of 11 million, an overwhelming number of the sanitation workforce are Dalit Christians despite comprising only 5% of the city's population. According to a recent study of the two departments responsible for sanitation in the city, at the Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA), 1609 out of the 2204 sanitation workers are Christians, while at the Lahore Waste Management Company (LWMC) all 9,000 workers hail from the Christian community. Sanitary labor is particularly organized

along caste lines (Butt, 2020). This is not labor by choice, but the Christian communities are forced to perform this labor.

For being on the lowest rung of the society and out of the caste order of Hinduism, these communities have been historically associated with a profession that is considered dirty and thus degrading. This profession essentially services the reproduction of untouchability as the case of Patras shows. He was humiliated for touching kitchen utensils because, as upper-caste Muslim middle classes would perceive it, Patras polluted the utensils with his hands that clean the toilets. It was very common in Joseph colony that youngsters were not so keen on pursuing education because they had this realization that they would not get a respectable job, and in order to be a cleaner they needed no literacy. This was the main reason many of the youngsters preferred to be street hustlers than pursue education.

The lack of education points towards the material conditions of living in urban spaces. First, the system does not create the conditions that allow the learning and growth of Christian youth, and second, even if there are some people who have managed to gain literacy, there is no incentive for them in the market. The youth like Waqas and Patras are entrapped in the viciousness of caste and its entanglements with the market and the system of governance. I speak more about the system, particularly the education system, that discourages Christians from pursuing education in the following section.

Untangling inequality

The dismal trend of lack of education among Christian youth in Pakistan

should be seen in the broader context of the precarious conditions in which Christians live in Pakistan. According to a 2014 report, 6% of Christians have primary education, 4% have a high school education, while the percentage of those who complete college education is even more disappointing as only 1% of students who have Christian background can complete a college education in Pakistan while half of 1% hold professional degrees (Saleem, 2014). Yet another report, specific to Lahore though where 0.7m Christians live shows that the literacy rate amongst Christians is 28.78% according to the standard in which one can read and write after completing the high school education. Further analysis reveals that out of the total Christian literate population in Lahore, 0.38% have PhDs, 3% Masters, while only 9% are graduate individuals (Saleem, 2014).

So far as the labor force is concerned, the Christian community in Lahore has 71% population as a labor force, while the employment rate amongst Christians is 37.1% which unfortunately leaves 62.9% of the population behind the employment race. The majority of those employed serve as workers doing menial and degraded jobs in different fields citing the poor literacy rate as a prime reason (Saleem, 2014).

Given the alarming figures of education and employment, I Spoke to a Lahore-based educationist, Iqra Fazli, who's been teaching underprivileged children in Christian neighborhoods of Lahore in order to seek her observation on the educational disparity rate amongst Christians. She explained from her experience of being at both Public and private schools in Lahore that state-run/ public schools had a lack of suitable arrangements for the students of dissimilar non-muslim communities to be provided instructions in their respective religions. Instead, it was mandatory for them to take a course of Islamic studies like the rest of the Muslim students. She analyzed lessons in the official textbooks that necessarily discriminated against

religious minorities and the dynamics developing thereby leaving most of the students dispirited and disgruntled. She further notes that the learning environment in the classroom is discouraging for Children from marginalized backgrounds. While explaining the causes of persisting discouragement amongst marginalized students, she remarks that most of the issues arising in classes are mainly because of the lack of pedagogical training among teachers.

The conditions that discourage Christian students and keep them out of school then translate into dismal employment rate amongst lower-caste Christians in Lahore and elsewhere. However, as I learned through my observations in the Joseph Colony, and as argued in the previous section, being educated did not guarantee respectable employment opportunities for the Christian youth. Admittedly from my limited interaction with the parents, I learned that most of them were disappointed in their adults for the reason that they were not doing any jobs which worsened their economic problems. A study (2015) based on the data from 2015 shows that the average income of a Christian family comprising of 5 members was approximately 12,000 Rs and the average per capita income is less than even 1$ that eventually pushing them below the poverty line as defined by the world bank. These figures unveil the relationship between caste and poverty.

The other important component, after education and employment, is health. Along with a school camp in Joseph Colony, we held a couple of medical camps in this small settlement in which we sought help from young doctors and medical students who were invited to hold a day-long camp within the settlement so that it was easier for the residents, who had otherwise no access to healthcare facilities in normal circumstances. The presence of heavy metal factories and scrap warehouses in the neighborhood and the residents' exposure to toxicity mainly because of their

occupation i.e., manual scavenging, had some considerably damaging effects on the local environment and groundwater. I learned during my interview with one of the doctors who did checkups of the residents that the people there were permanently suffering from common diseases caused by poor hygiene practices and the use of contaminated water. The doctors, through their observation and the data of the number of patients they checked, found that there were a lot of skin diseases the people were suffering from; allergies and inflammatory skin conditions including eczema in all age groups. Secondly, there was a high incidence of GIT issues that mostly followed the same pattern; Peptic Ulcer diseases along with diarrhea and inflammatory lesions in mouths observed in some patients. While poor diet and hygiene plays a major role in the above observation, we couldn't help but wonder if these issues were linked to the heavy presence of traffic, factories, and warehouses nearby, the doctor notes. High levels of silicon and asbestos in the groundwater might be an important prognostic factor in both observed conditions. She further notes that they also saw a high incidence of hepatitis (serotypes B and C) which would be an alarming situation. Given the high transmissibility and poor prognosis, it would be medical negligence on the part of the government to jot this area as a hotspot for Hepatitis.

There is a circular relationship between caste and quality life. As demonstrated in the case of residents of the Joseph colony, lower caste status, precarity in itself, reinforces precarity in other realms of living such as education and health.

Chapter 3 Reinforcing caste: State-Driven Marginalization and Expansion of Zones of Dispossession

On an extremely hot day in July 2022 in the deserts of Thal when the temperature normally crosses 45℃, I picked up Sufi Sardar, as he is known locally, from his home. That day we had planed to visit Sufi's 99 years old friend named Baba Lahoriya who lived a couple of kilometers away from Sufi's home in the desert. I first learned about Baba Lahoriya through a newspaper article. Sufi asked me a day before that to print the article so that he could read it aloud to Baba Lahoriya. As our vehicle swept through the desert's thick sand while on our way to Baba Lahoriya, Sufi Sardar started telling me how he, Baba Lahoriya, and a few others were the first ones to settle in the region in the early 1970s. As he told me the story of his community members moving to a new place, Sufi kept pointing his hand toward the small patches of land that he and his friends claimed. Thoughts of him and his community members having a land somehow powered his voice but in the next moment, there was disappointment in his voice. The fact that communities do not have legal ownership of the land despite having lived there for almost half a century made Sufi disappointed.

After 30 or so minutes of difficult driving, we finally reached Baba Lahoriya's home. It was a surprise visit, neither Baba himself nor his family was informed. Baba's 60 years old son and his grandsons greeted us and were excited to see Sufi at their home. Some other community members also joined as they heard Sufi was there. While I was meeting everyone, Sufi separated from us for a moment and went to the

other corner of the house to meet the women of Baba's family. He came back and told them about me, and that I had to meet Baba Lahoriya.

The elder grandson of Baba quickly pulled charpoys - traditional beds - under the tree and his younger brother served water to each one of us present there. While Baba joined us, I was surprised that despite being old, he walked himself without any help. While he was trying to sit on the charpoy, Sufi cracked a joke at his age that Baba is 100 years old and still healthy. Baba contradicted Sufi saying that he was 99 years old not 100. There was back and forth between him and 76 years Sufi Sardar while everyone was laughing. Sufi, after he introduced me to Baba and mentioned my research on Derekabad. Sufi told him that I was doing research on the history of Derekabad and how the Government has not given them formal land ownership titles despite living here for approximately 50 years. Sufi asked Baba's grandson to read aloud the article, especially the part that mentioned Baba speaking about the vulnerable situation of the residents of Derekabad.

After his grandson finished reading the article, Baba would repeat the same story again. The article mentioned Baba Lahoriya explaining the precarious situation and looming threats of displacement the Dalit Christians in Derekabad were subjected to. As he spoke about the issue, his voice would shake. While Baba had not finished speaking his son intervened and said:

"My father was the first generation who came to this place and I am the second and I have my children who will soon be married. We are three generations past and still have not been given land ownership. I feel, my father and his friends who decided to come here made a big mistake. Over the past 50 years, since we have settled here, we have been working so hard to level the sand dunes and made the land cultivable. Now that when the land is leveled and perfect for agriculture, we have this

constant threat that powerful people will take over the land as we do not have legal ownership. It was a mistake. I do not know why we chose to settle here."

Baba listened to him patiently and responded by saying in a high-pitched voice, "It was not a mistake. Yes, we don't have legal ownership but this land is everything to us. The land is our honor." His son tried to interrupt him again and Baba got furious. He started speaking loudly and while he was speaking, he got a coughing fit. His grandson offered him water. Everyone was silent while Baba took a breath. Baba started speaking again and reminded his son of their relatives living in cities including Lahore, Faisalabad, and Okara, and told him that they are still landless. Since they are landless, they don't have honor. They are called *Kammis* - a derogatory term for lower caste servants - but here at least we have 36 acres of land and we are called farmers, says Baba. As the back and forth continued between Baba and his son, Baba kept repeating one thing again and again while looking at me that today's generation will never grasp what a piece of land means to those like him whose forefathers died landless. Baba was remarkably bold and mentioned that he hailed from an untouchable background. While he spoke about his untouchable background, he offered tribute to Derek Misquitta who mobilized these communities to settle in the desert area.

While his son might agree with this tribute, the two of them were conflicted over different ideas on how land, honor, and caste were interlinked. Baba's son inscribed monetary value on land while Baba would perceive land as a gift that guarantees him honor and social status. While his son complained about the high prices of diesel to run tube wells and the low returns of farming, Baba would celebrate the fact that they had land just, whether it was cultivable or barren. Baba would

simply cherish the idea of his family owning the land even informally, and he was least concerned with the monetary returns of the land. It is not the formal or legal ownership title or monetary returns that matter to Baba Lahoriya but it is simply the fact there is a landscape Baba Lahoriya could associate with and draw value of his being and peace of soul from that.

I opened with the story of Sufi Sardar and Baba Lahoriya in order to center land, its sociocultural value, and its relationship with caste. This vignette illustrates the role of land in determining the social and cultural status of a community. The land in this context is a source of independence from the shackles of caste as Baba Lahoriya suggests. Bhim Rao Ambedkar was one of the first Dalit leaders and a politician who advocated for land redistribution amongst the lower castes in post-partition India. According to the planning commission report 1953, there were 93 million acres of wasteland available in India. Ambedkar advocated that the land should be made available to scheduled castes or former untouchables. According to Ambedkar, the ownership of land will lead to the emancipation of Dalits (Kumar, 2020).

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how the erasure of caste reinvents caste per se with its peculiar manifestations pertaining to the context of Pakistan, for instance in the form of creating the "other" out of Dalit Christain communities and consequent nationalist violence against these communities mostly in the urban centers of Pakistan. I further argued that the state reinscribes caste onto Christian communities by limiting their access to quality life, and by restricting them to degrading occupations such as sanitary work.

In this chapter, I make two sets of arguments. First, I present Derekabad, a Christian village in the deserts of Thal, as a 'zone of potential' to borrow the phrase

from Tania Li. What makes Derekabad, a site of potential is the fact that the place provided an opportunity for Dalit Christians based in the urban centers of Pakistan to escape degrading occupations that stamped untouchability onto them. Contrary to Gandhi's conception of a 'village idyll', which Shaj Mohan argues is 'the village of the privileged upper caste', Ambedkar viewed villages as 'a sink of localism and a den of ignorance' and exploitative sites mainly because of unequal distribution of land resources that perpetuate caste and slavery (Vankar, 2020). Therefore, Ambedkar encouraged Dalits to move to the cities where lower castes had better employment opportunities. This chapter, however, focuses on the Dalit community's reverse journey from cities or urban towns to the villages of Derekabad for their social uplifting because of access to land.

Second, I empirically show that despite Dalit Christians' attempts to escape caste by moving to villages where they have lived as farmers, not *Kammis,* and having an opportunity to socially and culturally uplift themselves, the state through its bureaucracy imposing conditions of caste onto the residents of Derekabad. The conditions include, first and foremost, threats of displacement and forcing communities into the 'zone of dispossession' (Fanon 1967, Grosfoguel, 2016). Drawing on the work of Frantz Fanon and Santos, Grosfoguel (2016) defines racism in relation to zones of being and zones of non-being (oppression, dispossession). I don't intend to suggest that race and caste are similar but locating caste-oppressed communities with zones of nonbeing helps articulate the mechanics of caste. I argue that the state reproduces caste by essentially pushing Dalit communities to zones of non-being.

Derekabad as a zone of potential

"Not a single person from Derekabad works as a *Khaakrob* (sweeper)," Sufi Sardar responded when I asked him what kind of jobs do people of Derekabad normally have except farming. With the growth of family members and inflation, it has become harder to sustain for the small-scale farmers in marginalized areas like Thal. People are mostly involved in seasonal occupations either in industrial areas or some other work such as livestock farming in their respective villages and towns. It is more or less a similar trend amongst Christain communities as well, especially youth. However, as it is covered in the previous chapter, the Christian communities in urban areas are forced to do the jobs such as sweeping and life-threatening labor of manual scavenging, the communities of Derekabad abandoned this occupation long ago.

Sufi Sardar explained to me that there is a consensus amongst the residents of Derekabad that none of them will ever perform degrading labor. "For us, no work is degrading. We are born to be toilers but we can not do this work anymore", said Sufi Sardar. Ambedkar (1936) famously remarked that "In India, a man is not a scavenger because of his work. He is a scavenger because of his birth irrespective of the question whether he does scavenging or not." Ambedkar viewed the life-threatening work of manual scavenging as a labor enforced upon untouchable communities rather than simply a work that one chooses to perform by will. The former untouchables or Dalits were expected to do the work that no one else was willing to perform. Sufi Sardar also made a similar argument that as Christians they are assumed to be taking jobs that most members of the majority community would not take up. Therefore, the

generation of Sufi Sardar saw an opportunity in moving to the far-flung desert area which they named Derekabad because this place guaranteed not only livelihood but respectability in essence because of land awarded to them under the land reform scheme in Pakistan.

It was in the early 1970s after Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto became the prime minister of Pakistan the land reform scheme was introduced, and as reported by the land reform minister then, there were two broader aims of this scheme: firstly, minimize the influence of feudal and redistribute their lands amongst the downtrodden masses who mostly lived in villages, secondly and most importantly boost agricultural production in Pakistan (Rashid, 1985). Under the scheme, the toiling tenants who never owned land and were always subjected to whimsical ejections by the feudal lords were allotted land so they could sustain their families. The land reforms minister Shaikh Muhammad Rashid who was called *Baba E Socialism* (Father of Socialism) notes that the land is a symbol of prestige in the subcontinent and the land reforms have ensured that land proprietary rights are transferred to those communities which had never experienced this dignity. The communities will not only enjoy this prestige but also they will work hard in the fields, and that will guarantee economic benefits to Pakistan (Rashid, 1985).

Derek Misquitta, Christian by background, was also a minister in Bhutto's cabinet. He could see the positive outcomes of the land reform scheme. As Sufi Sardar narrated, he along with Derek Misquitta met Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and the Governor of Punjab then Mustafa Khar, and convinced them to allow Christian communities based in urban centers of Pakistan to benefit from this scheme. Both the Prime Minister and the Governor agreed to their demand. After their approval, Derek Misquitta and Sufi Sardar traveled across Pakistan and mobilized Christian

communities to settle in the Thal region of South Punjab where most of the land was categorized as common land and owned by the state. 6600 acres of land in Thal was reserved for Derekabad - a place named after Derek Misquitta - where Christian communities are settled now. It was a vast tract of land with no facilities like electricity, roads, school, or hospital. Yet, these communities decided to settle there.

Sufi Sardar notes that before meeting the prime minister and the governor, Derek Misquitta, Sardar himself, and other community organizers had done their homework. They conducted surveys on their own and mapped the land where they planned to settle their communities. As soon as the plan was approved and the community was allowed to get state land on lease, they started settling in 1975. In the initial few years, there were mostly men from the community who shifted and they were working day and night to level the sand dunes and build houses for their families. It was only in 1980, as Sardar recalls that people brought women and children of their families. It was Sufi Sardar who had the map and he would determine for families to get which part of the land. Each married couple was given 12.5 acres of land.

The desert area is a promising frontier both for the state and migrants primarily because of its wilderness. Tania Li (2014) argues that some frontiers become desirable for migrants because of the economic prosperity they guarantee. Similarly, Dalit Christians who initially arrived in this area saw it as a promising land that would liberate them from the shackles of caste slavery. Over the past decades, hundreds of thousands of acres have been allotted to the military and individuals from civil bureaucracy. Apparently, this is a desert area, however, what makes it a promising frontier is the fact that this has underground water reserves, making it suitable for different kinds of cash crops such as wheat and rice.

Derekabad as a zone of dispossession

During my fieldwork in Derekabad, I met Irfan, 23 years old who recently graduated in English Literature from the local college. The first day I went to Derekabad for my research, I was hosted by Irfan's father who is associated with Church and mainly responsible for philanthropic work that the Church undertakes. Concerned about his educated son, Irfan's father told me that over the years the situation in Derekaba has become difficult vis a vis the economic security of Christian communities. "Irfan wants to pursue MA in the same subject but I am forcing him to find a Job in the city," said Irfan's father. Irfan, quite disturbed by his father's choice, told it is not that he did not want to do a job but most of the jobs available to him are degrading which he did not want to do. Irfan mentioned there was a vacancy in a Govt office in Lahore and when he went there to submit his application, the staff discouraged him even though he met the eligibility criteria. The staff advised him to apply for a vacancy for sanitary work in the same Govt department. Irfan returned back to his village with disappointment.

Irfan with his remarkable driving and navigation skills often accompanied me during my fieldwork in the desert. He would often mention about the tension at his home. Irfan appeared to be more passionate about continuing his studies and do farming simultaneously while living in Derekabad. However, his father's concerns were also legitimate. The communities in Derekabad do not have legal ownership of

the land they have and there are constant attempts by the revenue department and local landlords to occupy the land of Derekabad and displace Christian communities. There are various cases of Derekabad residents who have been displaced in recent years.

The threat of being displaced is not recent. As Sufi Sardar recalls, it was in the early 1980s, the community faced its first challenge after settling in Derekabad. In 1979 Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was hanged after the dictatorship was imposed. The new ruler suspended many schemes and reforms introduced by Bhutto's government and the land redistribution scheme was one of such. The Christian settlers were threatened to be displaced from these settlements as they had no proprietary documents except the document notifying that the communities should be awarded state land on lease and binding communities to pay a certain amount as the lease. Sardar notes that it was only at this moment that they realized they needed documents of ownership. I am unable to comment on whether at this critical juncture, the earlier notification had a legal value especially when the previous schemes were being reversed by the dictator. The notification per se suggests that the bureaucracy deliberately wanted the ambiguity vis a vis the guidelines on the matter of the community's proprietary rights. While commenting on the effective implementation of the land reform scheme, the land reform minister notes that feudalism dominated Pakistan's political landscape. The provincial governments which were exclusively responsible for the implementation of land reform schemes on the ground had been dominated by feudal lords. The Chief ministers and governors were either feudal lords or Nawabs themselves and it was not in their favor to distribute land to the downtrodden masses (Rashid, 1985).

From the 1980s onwards Sufi Sardar has spent more than 40 years in the struggle of gaining proprietary rights and over the past four decades what he has gotten includes a bunch of court orders, and a pile of notifications from the Governors' secretariat and provincial and district authorities. The court refers him to the Governor, the Governor refers him to the revenue department, the revenue department refers him to the district authority and the district authority refers him to the local authority. Sufi Saradr has remained trapped in this vicious cycle. Sufi has an archive of notifications from each authority. The first notification he showed me dates back to 1983. It is from the Governer Secretariat (1983) observing that "800/900 families "settled" by one Father Miskita in MuzafarGargh should not be ousted for no fault of theirs. They should instead be asked to pay for their plots at market rates." Sufi took it to the provincial authority first then the district, and finally the local authority. A notification takes a couple of years, particularly in matters such as this, to reach local authorities. Throughout this period Sufi so travels with this piece of paper and once it reaches the local, the local authorities express 'ignorance' of the rules and laws under which the settlements were built and therefore avoid regulating them on the ground. It is not clear whether the local authorities are actually ignorant or as Nikhil Anand suggests, they 'deploy ignorance as a technique of government' (Anad, 2011. P. 552). The local authorities direct him back to where he came from - the national authority. Sufi has been lingering in a space that is neither local nor national for the past forty years. Every court order and notification which have been issued since 1983 states that the Christian communities should be given proprietary rights in one way or the other and the matter is then deferred to the provincial, district, and local authorities respectively, for implementation on the ground. But that never happens.

Sufi Sardar, Baba Lahoriya, and their contemporaries continue to fight for proprietary rights because they had experienced what it means to be landless. As Sufi mentioned, it is true I do not have legal ownership, yet I am referred to as a farmer, not *Kammi*. My name is Sardar *Masih* - named after Christ - but people call me Sufi Sardar. Sufi was given this title by the neighboring Muslim communities because of his struggle for the rights of his fellow Christians. Beyond mystical dimensions, Sufi is also attributed to individuals who are selfless in their characters.

In recent years, the residents of Derekabad have started moving out of these villages because of uncertainty and the looming threats of displacement. While there is resistance against land grabbing, the local landlords have forced some of the residents of Derekabad to take some small amount of money and leave the land that the communities have spent a generation to make it cultivable. Sufi Sardar anticipates that those who have left Derekabad and moving to the cities will be forced to become sweepers in the upcoming years. Sufi Saradar's apprehension about residents of Derekabad becoming sweepers after moving to the cities supplements the main argument of this dissertation and as demonstrated in this chapter as well as the previous chapter that Dalit Christians have acess to respectable life while living in the villages. In the developing world, the cities seem to have more attraction because of the industry and the infrastructure necessary for living a quality life. However, for the Dalit Christian, as the ethnographic dynamics unfolded in this chapter, the villages have more attraction because of the prestige - land - that upper castes have enjoyed through the history.

Conclusion

I now return to the tension I posed at the beginning of the dissertation that the popular discourse and the state narrative ties caste to Hinduism, and since Islam is the dominant religion, caste is absent in Pakistan. Throughout the dissertation, I have attempted to draw the persaviness of caste to the Pakistani context. In each chapter of my dissertation, both empirically and theoretically, I have demonstrated that the state and its institutions reinforce caste. Moving away from the classical understanding of caste that intimately links caste to Hinduism, my dissertation relied on Ambedkar's theoretical framework. Ambedkar argued that it is difficult to trace the origin of caste. Instead, Ambedkar attempts to "trace the origins of the mechanics of caste". Drawing on Ambedkar's idea of caste, the dissertation focused on highlighting the mechanisms through which caste functions particularly in a Muslim-dominated society like Pakistan that does not recognize caste.

While in the process of writing and structuring the dissertation, I have struggled with establishing the link between caste in Islam, and the caste practices in Muslim dominant society. It is because most of the scholarship views these communities as "religious minorities", invisibilizing caste, however, I wanted to use the framework of caste to describe the processes of discrimination, violence and dispession. Therefore, the dissertation begins with a history-telling project through centering of caste while analyzing the processes of state formation. After establishing the link, I shifted my focus to the Christian communities and tried to see how state reproduces caste and marginalise the Christian communities in terms of accessing education, health an dother basic necessasities. Without drawing the relevance of caste to the Pakistani state, I found it difficult to map caste onto Dalit Christians.

Each chapter, particularly Chapters 2 and 3, of this dissertation, is based on the analysis of my ethnographic experience, and while in the process of analyzing what I gathered during my field engagement, I came to some theoretical reflections that bring ethnography in conversation with the literature. For me, it seems useful now to conclude the discussion of this dissertation by organizing the analysis that I have made in the chapters in a more systematic form, one that emerges from the specific context yet corresponds to larger questions and processes.

Without making a universal claim, this dissertation does two main things: first it attempts to establish the link between caste and Pakistani state and society essentially by tracing caste within a Muslim society, and second as demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3, it unveils specific caste dynamics unfolding in both urban and rural spaces.

Ambedkar urged Dalits to leave the countryside and move to cities in order to start a new life and free themselves of the shackles of caste that according to his observation were more rigid in villages. Ambedkar saw potential in the cities because his understanding was that industrialization would guarantee economic independence as opposed to the village economy that kept them slaves. However, from my specific context, we see the opposite. In the urban spaces in Pakistan, Dalits seem to be more oppressed and subjected to everyday caste-driven violence.

Similarly, as demonstrated particularly in Chapter 3, this dissertation shows that Dalit Christians, at least the generation Sufi Sardar and Baba Lahoriya belonged to, saw more potential in the villages, in opposition to Ambedkar's idea of freedom that cities guaranteed, mainly because of access to land and escaping degrading occupations that are most of the time enforced on Dalits, particularly in cities. Hence, this dissertation's main contribution to the scholarship on caste is essentially this

ethnographic analysis and theoretical reflections on ‘villages as sites of potential’ where Dalits have the opportunity to live a respectable life. I do not want to intend to develop a formal theory that can be applied in other contexts. However, I propose to expand my observations to provide a starting point for future research that examines similar dynamics in South Asia, approving or contradicting such claims.

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