

My dissertation, *Indians on the Move: Law, Borders, and Freedom in the Twentieth Century*, explores how legal border restrictions influenced the development of new political and legal landscapes among Indians in the early twentieth century. By the turn of the twentieth century, many countries and empires barred Asian immigrants, including Indians, leading to the earliest manifestation of ‘closed’ borders across the world. My research analyzes this historical conjuncture to highlight how the production of legal border controls were intimately linked to new ideas of legal subjecthood and rights in colonial India and among Indian immigrants abroad. More specifically, my dissertation narrates this history through the trajectories of Punjabi labor migrants. It traces the movement of Punjabi labor migrants between colonial India and the United States who not only permanently immigrated to the United States but returned and maintained diasporic relations that altered the landscape of Punjab itself. As Punjabi immigrants arrived on the shores of foreign territories such as the United States, local residents and governments argued that these immigrants represented a threat to free labor practices, citizenship, and European demographics. This project therefore asks: What would it mean to use immigration and borders as critical categories of analysis to transform our imagination of South Asia in the early twentieth century? Moreover, how do scholars situate this history of Punjab and India within a larger historical conjuncture recognized as the earliest manifestation of ‘closed’ borders across the world?

The experiences of Punjabi labor migrants vis-à-vis border restrictions and white nativist politics mapped onto those of other Punjabi, Indian, and Asian migrants across the world in Canada, South Africa, East Africa, Brazil, Argentina, Australia, etc. These experiences also began to redefine the contours of political issues in Punjab, larger parts of India, and across the world as news of their poor treatment made headlines. Punjabi migrants, including students, laborers, and intellectuals, launched campaigns to contest border laws and invoked the language of reciprocity, racial equity, and discrimination as they witnessed the differential treatment between Indian and European immigrants. They also traveled to India, London, and to other local governments to advocate for better legal rights and more equitable immigration policies. Their rallies, writings, protests, and deputations became a pivotal issue of concern not only for the Government of Punjab and Government of India but foreign governments as well. In fact, issues of immigration were at the forefront of the Indian National Congress’ political agenda, the imperial war conferences, and imperial debates in the early twentieth century.

I am currently applying for a summer grant from the American Institute of Pakistan Studies to complete six weeks of archival research for my dissertation before submitting for completion in November 2020. I am interested in researching archival materials in state and national archives in Lahore and Islamabad. I am specifically interested in examining state documents that include Commerce & Industry files related to migration. My research in Punjab (India) has highlighted that these files were partitioned along district lines after 1947. Therefore, it is now imperative that I travel to Pakistan for archival research in order to adequately represent migration histories from the region of Punjab. In addition to state documents, my research plans include visits to Quaid-e-Azam Library, Punjabi University Library, and Dyal Singh Trust Library in Lahore. These libraries are home to a series of immigrant memoirs that offer a window into immigrant lives. I have communicated with archivists and peers in Lahore who have assisted me in tracing these materials. With written and oral competency in Urdu and Punjabi, I am in an ideal position to conduct and complete this research in a timely fashion. Moreover, in order to secure a research visa for Pakistan and entry to state and national archives, I have coordinated with Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) to obtain a research affiliation. I now hope to travel to Pakistan this summer with the assistance of the American Institute of Pakistan Studies to complete archival research for my dissertation.