# The Culture Of Pakistan Essay Research Paper

The Culture of Pakistan: An Interview with Sohail Shah. Introduction to Sociology, MTW 10am Mrs. Linda Cook February 15, 1995

I am always fascinated with other people’s cultures. The New York or Californian culture always amazes me although these states are in the United States. These areas of the nation seem very different than Texas. I do not have any friends that have recently moved here from another culture so, I set out to my neighborhood Stop N Go. The clerks at this convenience store are all from other countries. One clerk whom I have talked to many times, named Sohail Shah, always spoke of Pakistan. I often listened to his stories of being in the Karachi police force or of Pakistan’s different customs. Sohail Shah, a thirty year old male clerk at the Stop N Go located on North Braeswood near Chimney Rock, has been in the United States for four years. He moved here with his wife and two children to “escape punishment”. Sohail claims he was in the secret police protecting the president when many governmental changes were made. Many of his co-workers were put in jail for many years for reasons he would not openly discuss. He has to work two jobs because his wife does not work. According to Mr. Shah, she will never work. In Pakistan, women are to stay home and raise children. Currently, Sohail is observing the holy month of fasting called Ramadan. This is observed during the ninth month of the Islamic year and is ordained by the Koran, the Islam holy book. The fasting begins every morning at dawn and ends immediately at sunset. Muslims cannot eat, drink or smoke at all. In the evening, regular activities resume. The Islam driven culture of Pakistan shapes everyday life. Each day, all Muslims pray five times. The first is before sunrise, the second around noon, the third in the late afternoon, the fourth immediately after sunset, and the fifth before retiring and before midnight. They face the Kaaba, which is a small box in Mecca. No matter where a Muslim is, he will pause, face the East, and pray when it is time. When Sohail lived in Pakistan, he lived in a house with his whole family. As an adult, he lived with his parents and siblings as well as his wife and children. The house was large enough to accommodate over fourteen people. All the women stayed home to keep up the house and prepare meals. If the women were to go to the market, they would completely cover themselves except for their eyes. Women were not to be seen in public without covers. Also, the wives wait for their husbands to come home before eating. The Koran approves of polygamy, allowing up to four wives. If a Pakistani decides to marry a second wife, his first wife must approve of her. Shah says polygamy is not very common in Pakistan. A typical day in Pakistan for Shah was to wake up before sunrise and pray. His wife would prepare breakfast for him before he left for work. He would leave for his police work when an armored truck stopped at his house. He was an officer in the police force before being promoted to the secret police. Shah rode around Karachi, the largest city in Pakistan, in the truck with twelve other rifle carrying policemen the entire day. Although there is nearly zero crime in Pakistan, the threat of terrorism keeps the police busy. The crime situation is based on severe punishments such as amputation of a hand for stealing. In addition, the people of Pakistan have a very strong conscience. People leave their homes and businesses unlocked while away. When Sohail returned home, his wife would have dinner already made for him and his entire family would eat when all the men returned from work. While the men are away, the women take care of the children, bake bread, and make pottery or baskets to sell at the market. His large family would then discuss different topics of interest before retiring. I found that the funeral arrangements are somewhat strange. First, women may go to the wake when a person dies but may not enter the cemetery. When a person is buried, he or she is dressed in white and wrapped in a woven mat made of long leaves or blades of grass. Then mat is then tied at each end which looks like a giant sausage when finished. A type of perfume is sprayed on the resulting package to keep the decomposing body’s smell in check. The Pakistanis do not embalm the deceased. The body is then, if money allows, placed in a casket. If the family can’t afford a casket, the corpse is buried in the grass mat. The financial status of the body’s family also affects the depth of the hole the body will placed in. Some people are buried on level ground with a concrete slab constructed around them, some are six feet down. I believe Pakistan has very good points in their culture. I enjoy hearing of the nearly nil crime rate. After seeing Houston’s crime rate rise year after year, it would be nice to live in a society free of crime. I also like the idea that the family is very close. I don’t know if my entire family could live under one roof, though. During the holidays, tensions build when my whole family is together(grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins). The situation of the wife staying home to keep up the home, prepare meals and take care of children is a positive characteristic. When my parents were young, their mothers stayed home to do the same tasks. I believe if the economy in the U.S. improved, the mothers would stay home, if they were still married. The way of conducting funerals is sort of peculiar. Wrapping the body in a grass mat that is tied shut at the ends is bizarre by my standards. I would prefer the casket approach to funerals. My feelings towards the Pakistani culture could be defined as xenocentric. I feel that the United Stated was once family focused and crime free. I would like to live in a culture such as Pakistan’s but without such extreme religious influence. I do not agree that women should be covered up in public or that they are not allowed into cemeteries. For Pakistan to be my ideal culture, it would have somewhat the same norms but freedom of religion and equality for women.