

November 4, 2024

My name is Saleem Gill, a 54-year-old Christian from Lahore, Pakistan. I'm the second oldest brother of five siblings.

I'm detailing below the information of my family members:

1. Saleem Gill - March 17, 1970 - (Father)
2. Rubina Rahmat - December 23, 1973 – (Mother)
3. Dawood Gill - October 19, 1999 – (Son)
4. Salman Saleem - May 29, 2002 – (Son)
5. Kinza Saleem - January 14, 2006 – (Daughter)

September 1989: I completed high school in science at Aamir Public School, Lahore.

October 1989: I began learning ladies tailoring at Shariff Gill Tailors. And worked on this shop for more than six years. Later, in 1995, I joined BG Boutique's stylists' team, which was working with the film industry in Lahore, Pakistan.

September 1997: As a new profession, it required a few months to study and learn the canteen's procedures. I worked at my father's canteen for over seven years.

November 16, 1998: I married Rubina Rahmat, a Lahore resident and born Christian. My wife completed her middle school education at Saint Mary School in Nishad Colony, Lahore.

August 30, 2004: I received a Cafeteria contract at a well-reputed and well-known School called "Lahore College of Art and Sciences" (Lacas School) in Johar town F-Block, of Lahore. It is a private English-medium school, and the school uses modern ways of study, which is why it charges a monthly price higher than other schools in the neighborhood. Mostly, students from wealthy families obtain an education from this school.

I began cooking and serving meals, eatables, drinks, tea, and coffee. And my wife Rubina assisted me in the cafeteria's kitchen. Afterward, I engaged two chefs to manage the workload. I used to buy vegetables, chicken, and other materials at the market, and my wife and two chefs would wash, cut, and cook various sorts of food frequently so that it could be sold to over 100 school personnel and thousands of children.

The cafeteria featured ten tables and six seats that permitted 60 people to sit and dine in the small dining area. Only school staff members were permitted to sit and eat in the hall; they ordered whatever they wanted, and my staff served it accordingly. For students, we used to wrap the food in lunch boxes and sell it from the institute's side of the cafeteria window counter.

April 9, 2006: We purchased a 240 Square Meters piece of land. My wife and I worked hard, served students carefully, and treated them respectfully. Everyone in the school regards us with respect and devotion. With the Lord Jesus's grace, he blessed us with a nice monthly income.

October 8, 2007: We were blessed with the capacity to purchase an affordable vehicle for family and work. Our living standards rapidly improved, and we saved a large amount each month in my bank account. Over nine years, I was able to construct a home and started to live in it.

February 2008: Sana Ullah, an Islamic studies teacher, was freshly hired at the institution. He was accustomed to visiting my cafeteria for lunch with his friends (co-teachers), typically accompanied by Shoaib Mohamad and Anwar-ul-Haq. Sana Ullah ultimately learnt from numerous school personnel that I and my colleagues are Christians. I saw that Sana Ulla, Shoaib Mohamad, and Anwar-ul-Haq stopped taking lunch at my café.

After a few weeks, Sana Ullah contacted me and said, I'm a member of Tehreek-e-Labbaik (Islamic influencers), and I wanted to know, "Are you a Christian?" I said, "Yes, sir, I am." Then he queried, "How long have you owned this cafeteria?" I informed him I had been serving here for nine years. He told me then, "I discovered some of the students in my class who became ill after eating lunch in your cafeteria."

He continued discriminating against me and my colleagues as Christians, for many years every day.

January 2013: After a month-long winter holiday, one day in the morning, Sana Ullah visited the canteen, he saw that I was reading the Bible. He stood and gazed over the kitchen's equipment for a period of time and queried me, "Is it a Bible in your hand?" I answered, "Yes". I figured it was a typical visit when he arrived to complain about the food and returned.

Over the next few weeks, I observed that my income wasn't the same as it used to be. This is because some teachers told me that Sana Ullah, Shoaib Mohammad, and Anwaar-ul-Haq were trying to encourage students and other school employees to avoid eating meals from the cafeteria. After all, it was cooked by Christians. Every day, I used to cook meals for 150 staff members and 1000 kids, but after a few weeks, only 200 to 300 food boxes and other products remained owing to a lack of sales.

April 15, 2013: After a few days, Sana Ullah and Shoaib Mohammad approached me and offered to accept Islam; in response to their offer, I questioned how it would be possible for me. Shoaib Mohammad told me that if you convert to Islam, you can continue to run this café, as long as you are Christian (unclean), we don't let anyone eat food cooked by your hands.

This began dominating my thoughts. I was afraid, so I sought to persuade them by arguing that I was a poor guy who made a living from this business, and that I was born into a Christian household, therefore I couldn't join Islam. I request them to allow me to continue my work here at school.

Rubina and I began praying with my family that God would pave the route and teach us how to solve the problem. I was so anxious that a great disaster could come to my family in the following days. Therefore, I decided to visit the CEO, Mrs. Nazi Quraeshi, in the hopes that she might help me in avoiding these dangerous situations.

April 19, 2013: I alerted Mrs. Nazi Quraishi that Sana Ullah was producing huge problems in my business income. I stated, "I have been serving for the previous 9 years, and there has been no complaint against me or the canteen's services. But today, Sana Ullah, Shoaib Mohammad, and Anwaar-ul-Haq, all are teachers, urging me on to join Islam."

And because I refused to accept Islam, they are now threatening me, saying, "If you do not accept Islam, you will not be allowed to continue working in the cafeteria."

I told her that the teachers generated enmity in the minds of other students and staff members for us

and my staff. And then they said that because I am a Christian and cook with my wife and Christian crew, no one should eat anything cooked or served by Christians.

I requested support from Mrs. Nazi for handling this situation. She urged me not to worry about it and to keep working. She responded I will check into this situation and figure out why they are making things difficult for us. And I will do everything I can to fix these concerns for you while also deterring students from bringing up religious things at school.

April 22, 2013: Probably at 8:00 p.m. I received a call from Shoaib Mohammad, he began threatening and harassing me, stating how dare you to lodge a complaint about me with the CEO.

April 26, 2013: Approximately 3:00 p.m. On my way home, Sana Ullah, Shoaib Mohammad, and Anwar-ul-Haq, along with 6-7 Islamic radicals from Jamaia Aqsa Mosque, stopped me in the school parking area. Shoaib Mohammad began accusing me; how dare you go to the CEO with a complaint against us? Sana Ullah quickly ordered that I convert to Islam or leave the cafeteria. I was under severe strain owing to a combination of negative thoughts and the expectation of hostile conduct from these individuals after declining their conversion requests.

After gaining courage, I stated that I would continue to work in the cafeteria owing to a documented arrangement with the school administration. The school administration accepted the agreement contract, which permitted me to work in the cafeteria. The school administration, students, and staff have no problems to taking meals made by me or my crew. I told them that only school executives could terminate the arrangement and ban me from working. Suddenly, Sana Ullah slapped my face. Shoaib and Anwar gripped my hands, shoved my shoulders on the ground, and threw me down. Everyone began hitting me in the middle of the road, face down, with punches, knees, and foot strikes.

Suddenly Sana Ullah started to shout, chanting alleging that I had thrown the Quran on the ground, which I couldn't understand at that point. Following Sana Ullah, others also started screaming, over and over, saying that I fell the Quran onto the ground below. All were saying, a blasphemer to me. Someone hit me with an iron rod on my head. Meanwhile, I was fortunate that some security personnel and gatekeepers came over and helped me escape the near-death encounter.

I assumed they were away and had no idea what had happened. Instead of wasting time being consoled by the security officers, I drove home in my car.

My wife gave emergency care, and we packed our possessions, including whatever jewelry and cash we had. My wife and I left the house to secure our children's safety at her aunt's home in Muridke.

After a few days, my wife's cousin, Shahzad Masih, informed me that he had learnt from a contact that Sohail, a Christian human rights activist known for granting shelter to blasphemy victims. I requested Shahzad to contact Sohail to see if he could help. Shahzad informed us that Sohail wanted to wait for a call from Pastor Zulfiqar.

However, a few minutes later, Pastor Zulfiqar called and invited us to his home in Gojra.

May 3, 2013: To guarantee my family's safety, we went from Muridke to Gojra. We began living with Zulfiqar's family at Pastor's house.

May 14, 2013: Pastor Zulfiqar received information from a friend in Lahore that I had been charged with blasphemy by the authorities. He learnt that Muslims had organized the protests against me. The Tehreek-e-Labbaik organization has erected anti-your posters throughout Lahore and is actively seeking you out. I was worried since it is relatively easy for such organizations in Pakistan to find and kill us.

We chose to leave Pakistan as soon as possible due to limited possibilities. Pastor Zulfiqar assisted in preparing passports for us.

June 9, 2013: I escaped Pakistan and headed to Bangkok.

February 22, 2014: While at the conclusion of hiding for months, my wife Rubina and children were also successfully escaped from Pakistan finally.

My Family's Struggle for Survival and Freedom in Bangkok, Thailand:

August 14, 2014: It was a day that shattered our sense of safety. My wife, Rubina, and our two younger children, Dawood (14) and Kinza (8), were at home in our apartment while my eldest son, Salman, and I went out to buy food. Around 10:00 a.m., the police raided our home. The reason? A Thai neighbor had complained about the aroma of Pakistani food we were cooking. My family was taken to the police station, where they were interrogated about their visas and UNHCR registration. After three agonizing hours, immigration officers arrived and took them to the Paknam Samut Prakan Immigration Office.

My brave 8-year-old daughter, Kinza, tried to call the UNHCR for help but couldn't reach them. In her innocence and desperation, she contacted a Thai lady Pastor, Windy Buranasiri, who rushed to the immigration office and negotiated for their release. Pastor Windy informed me of the situation and suggested paying 10,000 Thai Baht to secure their freedom. For six long days, I struggled to gather the money – a monumental task, as I had no job or income. I am forever grateful to the church members who came to our aid. After this traumatic ordeal, we moved to Sreerongrueng Apartment, where many Pakistani families lived, hoping to avoid further complaints about the smells of our cooking.

December 19, 2019: Life dealt us another cruel blow. Early in the morning, at around 6:45 a.m., police, army officers, and immigration officials stormed our building. They searched our room and forced us, along with other Pakistani residents, into the courtyard. My children – Dawood (19), Salman (17), and Kinza (13) – were taken with us to the International Detention Center. We were accused of living in Thailand without valid visas and being overstayers. From there, we were handed over to Samrong Police Station for processing. The judge ordered us to prison.

My family was torn apart. My wife, Rubina, and daughter, Kinza, were detained at the Royal Thai Police Sports Club, while Dawood and Salman were held in a separate building of the same facility. I was sent to Suan Phlu Prison. The conditions were inhumane. My wife and daughter were traumatized, living without basic necessities like beds, pillows, or blankets. Rubina prayed endlessly, terrified of being deported to Pakistan, where we faced persecution from extremist groups. Kinza, just 13 years old, was deeply frightened by the police's harsh behavior and the grim reality of jail life. Yet, amidst the despair, they found solace in an Urdu Bible and began daily Bible studies and prayers with fellow detainees.

After two months, a glimmer of hope appeared. Teacher Marcia, who ran the school my children attended, visited Rubina. She provided financial support for our bail – 50,000 THB – and hired a lawyer to file the necessary paperwork.

March 4, 2020: After 2 months and 17 days in detention, Rubina, Kinza, and Salman were released. But our relief was short-lived. While they were imprisoned, our home had been looted. Rubina felt helpless, unable to report the theft to the police.

Pastor Windy visited my wife and saw the devastation. She promised to provide food packages and cover our monthly rent. She also came to see me in prison, where I was suffering from a severe skin fungal infection and injuries from a fall in the washroom. I was in constant pain, unable to afford medication or proper treatment. I felt like an animal, neglected and forgotten. Pastor Windy encouraged me, promising to arrange a lawyer and raise funds for my bail. Her kindness gave me a flicker of hope in the darkness.

December 24, 2020: After a year of suffering, I was finally released on bail, thanks to Pastor Windy and her church.

May 24, 2021: My struggle continued as I fought for Dawood's release. After 17 long months, he too was granted bail. We are now living together in Bangkok, in the same building where we were arrested. But the scars remain. My children have grown up confined to a single room, deprived of proper education and opportunities. It breaks my heart to see them lose their golden years, their futures uncertain.

January 2024: Thailand's immigration authorities introduced the NSM program in collaboration with the UNHCR, issuing us an NSM book valid for three years. However, they demanded re-bails for all asylum seekers and refugees.

June 20, 2024: My sons, Dawood and Salman, had to return to the detention center for over two weeks to secure their re-bails. The conditions there have worsened—food is scarce, visits are prohibited, and the environment is filthy and dehumanizing. It is unbearable to see my children treated like animals.

August 1, 2024: We moved from Samrong to Bearing, hoping for a fresh start. But the reality remains: Thailand does not recognize refugees or asylum seekers as legal migrants. We are labeled as illegal, denied the right to work, and left to fend for ourselves in a constant state of fear and uncertainty.

February 17, 2025: A new wave of persecution began when Shoaib Akhtar, a Pakistani Muslim, ordered food from our nephew's *legal* Foodpanda restaurant. After confirming our address, he likely reported us to immigration.

February 28, 2025: Samut Prakan immigration police arrived, investigating a complaint about an online restaurant. We clarified that my nephew legally operated the business, not us, but the officers warned against our involvement, echoing the religious discrimination we fled in Pakistan. The complainant, Akbar Dhaba's owner (a Muslim competitor), weaponized immigration to target us, proving that even in Thailand, we are not free from bigotry.

I am grateful to God for strengthening our faith through these trials. We fled Pakistan because of persecution for our Christian faith, leaving behind our home, business, family, and friends. The pain of missing my father's funeral and being unable to say goodbye to my younger brother weighs heavily on my heart.

Please help us find a way out of this endless cycle of suffering. Pray for us, that God may provide for our daily needs, protect us under His mighty wings, and open the doors to a third country where we can rebuild our lives in peace and freedom.

With heartfelt gratitude,
Saleem Gill