

AIPS STRG Abstract- Sharmeen Mehri

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Dr. Dastur Dhalla Library: Mapping Parsi Writing and its Literary Archive in Karachi My dissertation project entitled, *Transcultural Remnants: Collective Memory of the Zoroastrian Community in Parsi Literary Archives* seeks to examine how the South Asian Zoroastrian community documents and preserves their memory in the archives, by particularly investigating the form of the novel in Parsi Gujarati and English. My research also aims to highlight the intellectual and historical significance of Parsi authors in Pakistan as well as the practical implications of documenting libraries and archives that preserve works by Parsi writers. Many academics have extensively studied and documented the Parsis of India, but very little work has been conducted in Pakistan where the population of Parsis is in rapid decline. 1 Parsi writing, especially in its creative form of theatrical plays and novels, has proved to be effective in providing a historical and political understanding of the Partition as well as understanding the crisis of minority status within postcolonial nations. However, the scholarship on Parsi literary history is mainly recognized in relationship to its Indian past. Very few Parsi authors from Pakistan have been published or written about extensively. 2 With the support of the AIPS Short-Term Research Grant, and in close collaboration with Karachi institutions such as Habib University, the Dr. Dastur Dhalla Library, and the Karachi Zarathosti Banu Mandal, I hope to lay out the foundation for my dissertation by joining the conversation on Parsi literary culture. The research I propose will be for a duration of three months in Karachi. Through my personal ties to the community, I will have access to conduct archival research in the Dr. Dastur Dhalla Library as well as private collections of Parsis residing in the Dinshaw Avari Colony, specifically looking for documents from the mid-twentieth century. My research goals are to catalogue and create datasets for texts within these spaces where my fluency in Parsi Gujarati and English will be useful for working with the collection as well as developing relationships with the librarians. If given this opportunity, with my experience of creating a Zoroastrian oral history digital archive, I plan to identify authors of interest, locate their data, and analyze trends. I plan to also conduct ethnographic interviews of Parsi librarians and custodians who take care of the collection, making sure to seek IRB approval from my home institution in order to foster ethical research. The Dr. Dastur Dhalla Library was built and housed in Saddar at Katrak Hall from late 1950s, shortly after Dr. Dhalla's death. It was relocated from its original repository to the Dinshaw Avari Colony in 2000.3 The collection itself contains various books on Zoroastrian theology, history, and creative works. My goal is to create a spreadsheet dataset of the items in the library with the intention of creating a digital catalogue that will serve as a basis for both my research into Karachi Parsi literary culture as well as the research of other scholars seeking to document this disappearing demographic. The texts and interviews collected will provide primary sources for my dissertation on mapping out the literary significance of Pakistani Parsi writing. Furthermore, this funding will be invaluable especially given the urgency to preserve vernacular languages such as Parsi Gujarati in Karachi as well as providing the community with a resource seeking to document their cultural and social history.