



AIPS Travel Grant Final Report highlighting the significance of this
presentation on Pakistan Studies
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About three months prior to the conference, the SDPI conference organizers contacted me and requested that instead of presenting the paper on Swat I had initially wanted to present, they wanted to bring together other scholars from South Asia to address my recent co-edited book, *Pathways to Power: the Domestic Politics of South Asia* and how this work can provide foundational knowledge and insights into the pathways that can be taken to achieve sustainable development in South Asia. I agreed this was a good idea, as my volume provides an understanding of the intricacies of power in local contexts. I began my presentation by pointing out (in response to some of the previous panels I had attended at the conference) that sustainable development is not just about getting support from the World Bank's International Development Association, or about how Moody's rates the investment climate in a given country, or about stunted growth in children. I questioned why these factors exist and noted that *Pathways to Power* seeks to offer nuanced answers as it investigates the convoluted contours of the cultural and political landscape of South Asia. It seeks to penetrate more deeply into how society and culture truly affect political power – and hence economic growth.

I began with a discussion of the first chapter written by Shabnum Tejani, an historical backdrop interrogating the role British colonialism played in laying the groundwork for political bureaucracy and institutions in four of the five major South Asian countries. I noted that, with great care, she explores particular details including even how they created maps, delineating what was important to them and, through omission, what was not. I then briefly introduced the five country chapters, each written by an established scholar of the region. I laid out the book's structure to the audience, that within each of the five substantive country chapters, there are themes that can be compared: Political History since Independence; Political Economy; Identity Politics; Women's Power & Kinship Networks in Political Life; the Social Costs of Militarism; and that each chapter includes a case study highlighting one group or movement that has fought for rights in their country, or played a seminal role in affecting the political landscape. I noted that I first thought of writing about the women's movement in Pakistan, but then realized how formidable the example of the Swat Taliban truly is, so I wrote about that.

Following my presentation, the other four speakers offered their insights not only on the book but also on how it contributes to our understanding of sustainable development. Two of the panelists were from Pakistan: Syed Rifaat Hussain (NUST) addressed the sections on identity politics and the social costs of militarism, and expanded on how these factors greatly affect development prospects, and Farzana Bari (Women & Gender Studies at QAU) spoke about how women's traditional networks of power are transforming throughout South Asia, and how women are becoming involved in politics in unprecedented ways. Bishnu Upreti (Executive Director of the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research) focused his comments mostly on the chapter on Nepal, which was fascinating to hear his mostly strong take on what Pratyoush Onta had written on Nepal, and conjectured how this provides insights into Nepal's development pathways, and then Rashed al Madmud Titumir, Chairperson of Unnayan Onneshan, a capacity building and community-based NGO in Dhaka, spoke about the contributions of the volume to facilitating community organizing, which in turn leads to viable pathways to development.

The ensuing Q&A discussion with the some 60 panel attendees was robust. I was heartened to hear so many people comparing issues of power and development in the various countries of South Asia and especially comparing Pakistan with those other countries. Too often discussions of Pakistan become very insular, so this was important for Pakistan studies, to be able to heighten awareness of and compare power and development concerns with the rest of the region.