

This summer I conducted a pre-dissertation research study, primarily in Karachi and Rawalpindi-Islamabad, on the changing contours of media in Pakistan.

Specifically, the study builds on my earlier work on Urdu popular fiction and seeks to investigate how these stories have recently been incorporated as television plays in the exploding milieu of multiple TV channels in Pakistan.

Factors such as licensing for private channels, their need to fill airtime and the initial success of televised plays based on narratives in monthly commercial magazines for women (commonly known as digests) has created an expanding niche in the electronic media for digest writers. Thus, digest narratives that previously circulated in print form, in the past decade, have increasingly been adapted for the visual media. Historically digest narratives were discursive sites where middle class women, as writers, could present and critique notions of respectable femininity leading to new kinds of debates in terms of portrayals and performance of women's ethical comportment. Whereas the print form allowed for the readers to use their imagination, the visual form, I argue, has opened up new kinds of spaces to discuss, adhere to or contest notions of propriety, modesty and morality. Partly the visual representations are leading toward new interpretations because the televised form has a larger reach and its audience consists of those who do not read digests (such as the unschooled, the third gender "hijra" community, or the elite English speaking strata). In this way, women digest writers' fiction and the accompanying portrayed notions of how to be a woman in contemporary Pakistan are now also being received and critically evaluated by newly formed publics.

The AIPS travel grant enabled me travel to Pakistan, where I interviewed and interacted with four diverse groups:

- a) the digest community: editors (*Khawateen* and *Pakeeza digest*) decision makers and other employees in publication houses (*Jasoosi* and *Khawateen* digest group of publications) along with writers who have entered the world of television.
- b) electronic media (heads of GEO and Hum) and director, producer, writer, actors and supporting staff for a televised play (*Quddusi Saheb ki Bewa*).
- c) members of the third gender community who regularly engage with plays based on the digest narrative as well as the contrasting carnivalesque genre that QSKB represents.

These interviews helped me explore questions such as: how do writers interact with these new publics; how do they view the financial and travel/mobility changes television script writing entails; how do producers/directors and television channels select one digest narrative over another; how are changes in plotline made; how are decisions regarding the portrayal of characters made and what are the kinds of competing discourses regarding gender performance these portrayals have led to; what relationship, if any, exists between plays based on digest discourse and carnivalesque television plays. Along with interviews I also got the chance to ethnographically participate in myriad activities such as begging with the third gender community and witnessing the television production process.

In addition, the trip also enabled me to renew my professional ties with Quaid e Azam University and Fatima Jinnah Women's University; including the opportunity of external evaluation for three masters level theses at the Gender Studies department at FJWU.