

## **Sarah Ahmed - Travel Grant Narrative Report - November 2015**

What is agency in the South Asian context? Agency, as defined by notions of Western Feminism, means little to South Asian women, especially in rural areas. What, then, does women's agency in South Asia look like?

Theoretical ideas of agency must contend with the lived experiences of women. In this talk, I discussed participant observations and interviews conducted in small rural villages across Southern Punjab, Pakistan, wherein women express ideas of agency radically different from the Western context. I contend that agency for women in these areas is transforming, given the changes occurring as a result of socio-economic factors: including the changing pattern of men's employment, and WHO's polio campaigns. Consequently, I argue that agency, as we recognize, needs to be re-conceptualized to enable us in seeing and understanding agency in every day activities in places where we think it unlikely so, such as rural villages in Southern Punjab, Pakistan.

This is particularly a timely presentation that problematizes existing notions of the cultural and religious contentions posed at Pakistan largely both my academic as well as mainstream media, and hence challenges claims by contextualizing how we understand as 'agency' and 'empowerment.'