

## **From *talib* to *shaheed*: Contemporary Tarana Production in Pakistan**

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The *tarana* (lit. ‘anthem’) is an unaccompanied vocal genre popular across Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the early 2000s, the Taliban benefitted from a rise in *tarana* cassette recordings performed by both men and women who celebrated them. Often taking the form of martyrdom songs, these taranas commemorated the sacrifice and devotion of the *talib*, a long-recognized symbol of antistructural resistance upon which the Taliban originally constructed their image (Caron 2012). This stands much in contrast to the contemporary Taliban: well-funded, well-networked political groups that have become structure-creating actors themselves. As *tarana* production and consumption has diffused throughout Pakistan over the past two decades, the genre has incorporated new symbols, languages, and musical traditions. Taranas are no longer merely performed by admirers, but their production has begun to be tightly linked to political rallies and fundraising events. This paper considers the ways in which contemporary Taliban groups and adjacent political organizations continue to negotiate their identity through the use of *tarana*. Specifically, it considers the image of the martyr, or *shaheed*, as a mechanism to recall earlier anti-colonial and anti-imperial movements. While this paper focuses on the *tarana*, it also endeavors to make insights into the ways musical composition and consumption continue to shift under Taliban control more broadly.

### **Panel Abstract:**

#### **The Commemoration of Warriors and Martyrs in South Asia**

This panel will explore how narratives of bravery and sacrifice have been used to commemorate warrior communities and martyrs in South Asia. These stories are central to the reproduction of the identities of various ethnic, religious, and national communities, which have continually fashioned and refashioned their pasts in response to dramatic social and political transformations in the region. In particular, memories of warfare, rebellion and conquest are fundamental to how many groups in South Asia imagine themselves. Many of these memory-making traditions have engaged with the complicated legacy of empire and resistance in the subcontinent, such as through tales of resistance against the colonial state during the rebellion of 1857-58. Other traditions that emphasize moments of sacrifice have allowed minority groups such as Syrian Christians to maintain a sense of purpose and uniqueness. This panel will engage with forms of memorialization across South Asia, including Afghanistan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, featuring scholars working in multiple disciplines and engaging with a variety of media types, from material culture to music and print. These five papers also tie into important conversations going on today. For instance, efforts to articulate a national warrior ethos, as seen in popular films and political campaigns, have an important role in India’s quest to establish itself as a world military power. These five papers also give us a window into the ways South Asia’s diverse ethnic and

religious minorities have made a sense of their place in a rapidly changing world, from the nineteenth century to the present day.