

## **AIPS Travel Grant Final Report**

Project Title: “From *Talib* to *Shahīd*: Contemporary *Tarāna* Production in Pakistan”

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Conference: AAS-in-Asia (Association for Asian Studies in Asia) Annual Conference

Location: Kyungpook National University, Daegu, South Korea

Dates: June 24-27, 2023

### 1. Significance to Pakistan Studies

This research traced the development of the unaccompanied vocal genre of *tarāna* at the beginning of the Taliban movement to its role in the negotiation of the Taliban identity and its rapid incorporation of disparate groups across Pakistan including the Punjab. Because the tarana falls outside of the Taliban “ban” on music, it has thus become one of the few spaces for public negotiation of the Taliban image. This presentation then, endeavored to shed light on the role that public performance, whether condoned or condemned as music or not, may continue to play within the Taliban movement as it continues to incorporate diverse groups across Pakistan. I focused on the ways in which public culture has served as a zone for contestation, and the ways that tarana recordings, and their melodies in particular, have transformed alongside changing conceptions of “taliban.” The expansion of the tarana to include motifs of martyrdom and well as Bollywood melodies is indicative of the changing role of the talib in the social imagination, which, I argue, has been continuously negotiated in public culture through tarana production and performance in Pakistan. This research is significant not only because the tarana one of the few shared performance genres across such a large swath of Pakistan and Afghanistan, but it also challenges the ever-pervasive idea that the Taliban are still backed by a purely ethno-nationalist movement.

### 2. Key Outcomes and Deliverables

The AIPS travel grant allowed me to attend my first international conference and present my developing research to a diverse audience that I would otherwise not have access to at a local or national conference in the United States. This was key to get the insight of scholars who should have initially been prioritized by the regular AAS meeting. Further, this opportunity to present was especially developmental for me as a young scholar because it was also my first

experience participating in a panel with other colleagues. This sparked many discussions because we were working on similar themes of martyrdom, violence, and transborder exchange in South Asia. I also got feedback from other scholars who attended my presentation, which will allow me to further improve my research. Particularly helpful were reading suggestions for specific scholarship on *jihad*. Once these suggestions have been incorporated, I hope to submit this research for publication. Outside of our panel, I was also attended theoretically interesting panels on ethnomusicology and on Pakistan and South Asia. I was also able to connect (and in some cases, reconnect) with scholars in person rather than virtually, and networking is also very important at conferences with scholars working within so many different disciplines.