

Final Report on State, Society and Democracy in Postcolony Conference

Clemson University, in collaboration with the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) and with support from the Lahore College of Women University (LCWU) organized a conference titled *State, Society and Democracy in the Postcolony*. Conference participants who arrived in Lahore early were welcomed at an informal dinner on 4th August at Haveli Restaurant – an establishment in Old Lahore with a stunning view of the Badshahi Mosque and Minar-e-Pakistan. The conference formally began on the morning of 5th August and continued until the evening of 6th August. Both days were packed with exciting presentations.

This conference focused on the impact of neoliberalism on state, society and democracy in the postcolonial world. Most papers focused on Pakistan but several also examined other parts of the Global South, particularly other regions in the Indian subcontinent. We had more than a hundred attendees in addition to the almost forty presenters. A very rich and innovative set of papers was presented by a diverse group of scholars. The scholars ranged from full professors in the United States to graduate students from all over the world. We were also pleased to have a high number of local Pakistan-based scholars present their work.

One of the distinguishing features of the conference was the novelty of approaches adopted to the examination of the state and society in Pakistan. For example, one excellent paper interwove a year of fieldwork in a small Pakistani village and affect theory to assert that the affective is a technology of rule, which undergirds state-society relations. Another outstanding paper examined legal identity construction among *hijras* to show that influential state and social actors, employing the rhetoric of benevolence, create new identity categories that reflect dominant social constructions of minorities. Yet another paper focused on the Pakistani Ahmadi community to explore and theorize the insecurities and suspicion birthed by discourses of Ahmadi deception. The paper examined anxieties over ensuring that Ahmadis are clearly separated from state-endorsed Muslims and used these examinations to comment on the modern state's regulation of religion and religious difference in Pakistan. While such approaches to politics may not be so novel for other parts of the Global South, they certainly represent a new trend in scholarship on Pakistan.

A defining feature of the conference was its focus on the state and society in South Asia through Foucauldian lenses. Examinations of everyday citizens' engagements, imaginations and negotiations with state in South Asian are an emerging trend to which the conference contributed. Pakistan is often peripheral to other such examinations of the South Asian state. In contrast to this dominant trend, our conference situated Pakistan at the heart of its study while also placing it in conversation with its South Asian neighbors, particularly India.

The conference was so well received that it was covered in the media. See:

- <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1157252/rethinking-state-redefine-province-centre-ties-effective-reforms/>
- <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1156663/rights-vs-duties-poor-rarely-get-rights-neo-liberal-regimes/>
- <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1156659/security-sectarianism-violence-public-outrage-aps-attack-facilitated-violent-response/>

We are very grateful for the AIPS support that made this conference possible!