

AIPS TRAVEL GRANT: FINAL REPORT

With the support of an AIPS travel grant, I attended a conference on *Law and Governance in Gilgit Pakistan* at the Nantes (France) Institute of Advanced Studies on August 26-27. I presented a paper entitled “Women’s Inheritance and Governance in Muslim South Asia” on April 27. The session on “Inheritance and Governance” was a comparative one, in which the laws and practices of inheritance among the diverse peoples of Gilgit Baltistan were discussed in the wider context of Islamic inheritance practices and modes of governance thereof in other parts of South Asia. My paper focused specifically upon the way that, in South Asia generally, the women’s inheritance rights that are provided under *shari’at*—and particularly the rule that daughters should receive a fixed share of a deceased parent’s estate—are regularly ignored, denied or evaded in practice. Other participants in the conference confirmed that this was the usual situation not only in Gilgit but in other parts of Pakistan as well.

During the discussion of my talk, some of the Pakistani scholars in the audience justified the practice of confining the inheritance of immovable property to the male heirs and explained why—in their view—even women themselves rationalize and accept the practice of excluding female heirs from taking their Qur’anic shares of a parent’s estate. Others indicated that change is underway in recent years and that educated Pakistanis are increasingly using wills, pre-mortem gifts or “family agreements” to ensure that their daughters will receive not only the fixed half-shares that the law accords them, but an amount equal to that enjoyed by their brothers. Examining this issue, which is common to Muslims in all of the countries of South Asia, through a comparative regional perspective made, in my opinion, a distinct contribution to an important aspect of the study of Pakistan society.