

## A Tale of Two Journals: The Poetics and Politics of Community in Mid-Century South Asia

Urdu literary culture underwent successive aesthetic and political revolutions in the brief period from 1935 to 1970. These revolutions, for social realism and modernism respectively, were ushered in by the journals *Shāhrāh* (1949-1960) and *Shabkhūn* (1966-2005). Entirely opposed in their aesthetics, politics, and ideology, these journals metonymize contradictory impulses within the Urdu literary formation in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. While the former was the official organ of the Progressive Writers' Association and nurtured deep engagement with a world imagined through socialist connectivity, the latter remained inspired by an individual editor, Shamsurrahman Faruqi, who reinvigorated Urdu literary culture by introducing new developments in art, literature, and science. This paper compares *Shāhrāh* and *Shabkhūn* to reveal the tensions that characterized Urdu literature and Indian national politics at the mid-century. It considers how each conceived its readerly community and relation to the world against an Indian state hostile to socialist politics and Urdu itself. In negotiating communities already embedded within national and global political relations, both *Shāhrāh* and *Shabkhūn* understood their poetics and politics to be dialectically intertwined, co-constitutive of each other and of the broader community from which they sprung. A part of the Counter-Cultural Stream, this paper reveals how *Shāhrāh* and *Shabkhūn* combined their poetics and politics into potent forms of aesthetic activism. Overall, it shows how revolutionary journals negotiated the perspectives of suppressed communities within specific historical contexts, and considers how the journal—as a particular literary form—was uniquely capable of undertaking this role.