

AIPS Short Term Research and Lecturing Fellowship  
Final Report

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Project Title: N. M. Rashed and Modernism in Urdu Poetry

I completed thirty days of very successful research in Pakistan on March 10, 2011. I arrived in February in order to participate in a conference organized at LUMS (Lahore University of Management Science) commemorating the birth centenary of the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz. I delivered a lecture entitled “N. M. Rashed, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, and the Discursive Field of Modern Urdu Verse,” which was very well received. A revised version will be published in an English-language book on Faiz edited by Yasmeen Hameed as well as in the Urdu and English research journal *Bunyaad*, which is published out of LUMS. Participating in this conference, which included many of Pakistan’s most prominent literary critics and writers, also allowed me to make personal connections and reconnections that facilitated my research.

My institutional affiliation was at the department of Humanities and Social Science at LUMS, and in particular with Dr. Nomanul Haq, whom I had met as a graduate student at Columbia University. I had a very good experience working there. I was provided with an office, and the campus was very close to the AIPS guesthouse. The new Gurmani Center, which supports education in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic, has helped to establish LUMS as an excellent site for humanities research, and a number of prominent Urdu critics and scholars from other local institutions, such as Government College University and Oriental College, also teach occasional classes there. I greatly benefitted from meeting Dr. Nomanul Haq’s teaching assistant, a young poet by the name of Ahmad Atta, who guided me through Lahore’s literary scene. I gave two additional lectures at LUMS, one entitled “In the Mirror of Ghalib: Postcolonial Reflections of Indo-Muslim Selfhood” and a second more general lecture on “Humanities and Social Science Research and Higher Education in the United States.” The latter talk was directed towards undergraduate and post-graduate students.

My research included interviews with writers and scholars and gathering materials for my book project. In Lahore, I met with scholars and writers including Intizar Hussain, Salimur Rahman, Ziya ul-Hasan, Tehsin Firaqi, Saadat Sa’id, Khwaja M. Zakaria, Yasmeen Hameed, and Ghulam Hussain Sajid, as well as with a number of younger researchers and graduate students. I made a short trip to Islamabad, where I met with Iftikhar Arif, Kishwar Naheed, Fateh Muhammad Malik, and Haris Khalique.

The amount of material I was able to gather was astonishing. 2010 was the birth centenary of N. M. Rashed, and so there were a great number of new publications. I

collected three dedicated journals, three edited volumes, six new book-length monographs, six poetry and criticism collections, and two books of letters. The most staggering piece of new material was a previously unpublished one hundred-page interview with the poet conducted by a graduate student at Oriental College. She planned to write her Ph.D. thesis on N. M. Rashed in the late 1960s, but was forbidden to write on a living poet by the (possibly jealous) principal, also a poet. This interview includes new biographical information, including a list of the location and date of composition of all of the poet's works until 1967. I also collected newly published bibliographies. Critic and poet Ghulam Hussain Sajid, who has the largest Urdu journal collection in Lahore, personally went through his collection and retrieved many articles for me to photograph. So just when I thought I had read everything, I found twenty new articles that I had never seen before. I also shipped back forty-five kilograms of other Urdu literary materials.

As a result of this research, I am in a very good position to complete my book manuscript. My original plan for this research was to gather materials for an epilogue considering the cultural afterlife of N. M. Rashed. My time in Pakistan has convinced me that the more interesting issues stem from Rashed's continuing status as a controversial figure, particularly because of the sexual content of his poetry, his relationship to the Khaksar party and, especially, his cremation, which casts doubt upon his relationship to Islam. At a centennial conference held at LUMS last year, Rashed's daughter had a statement read—a print and photographed version of which was also recently published—that blamed his European second wife for the poet's cremation, even though it was allegedly stipulated by his will. Overall, there has been a move to recuperate Rashed as a pious Muslim, a Pakistani nationalist, a Sufi, and the only true follower of Iqbal in the modern age. This reading of Rashed contrasts substantially with my own reading of his poetry as anti-identitarian, concerned with breaking with any form of collective representation, directly critical of the mystical withdrawal of Sufism, and in a highly intertextual but contentious relationship with Iqbal.