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Significance of Presentation for Pakistan Studies

The title of this conference was “Remembering Voices Lost,” and the call for papers highlighted the necessity for reclaiming voices that have been buried, forgotten, marginalized or othered. As my project closely reads the extant vernacular literature of the Khudai Khidmatgars, a nonviolent resistance movement started by Abdul Ghaffar Khan in 1928 and forcibly disbanded by the Pakistani state in the 1950’s, it was a fitting venue in which to present my research that reclaims these lost and shunned voices.

Because this massively popular, anticolonial resistance “army,” based in the North-West Frontier Province of British India (now called Khyber-Pukhtunkhwa in Pakistan), was allied with the All India Congress Committee and were against the partitioning of India, they were classified as traitors to the emergent postcolonial nation-state of Pakistan and the history and literature of the movement distorted, destroyed and disappeared. However, since democratic governments have been allowed to flourish in Pakistan this lost history has reemerged as has some of its extant vernacular literature. As such, it is crucially important that these alternative voices are now heard, not only for the inherent value of reclaiming lost histories but also to enable a plurality of perspectives to flourish. As the latter is the keystone for real democracy, my presentation and research more broadly is an attempt that these alternative narratives become more mainstream in both Pakistan Studies as well as also globally.