

Final Report for AIPS Short-term Research Grant 2019

Project: Life and Poetry of Jaun Elia

The grant provided by the American Institute for Pakistan Studies funded my return travel to Karachi, Pakistan during Summer of 2019 where I found an intellectual home at Habib University and was able to visit and interview several friends and family members of the contemporary Urdu poet, Jaun Elia. I conducted over 15 in-depth interviews with individuals as well as received access to Ismaili Tariqah Board library which Jaun used to frequent and which also houses two translations that he did for the library. The grant covered the cost of travel to Pakistan and travel within the city of Karachi.

The kind of reception and circulation Jaun Elia's work has been receiving as of late warrants serious intellectual engagement and this research which is geared towards my PhD dissertation writing aims to consider, amongst other things, the transformations within the culture of the spaces (both literary and geographical i.e. modern Urdu poetics and the city of Karachi) that Jaun occupied and continues to significantly shape today. Some of the interviews that I conducted were with other Urdu critics as well as with his family of writers and intellectuals from whom I was able to get significant details about the dynamic landscape of the poetic culture of Karachi. The other two of my very important interviews were with his publisher and a student from whom I was able to learn about Jaun, the genius individual and Jaun, the tormented artist for whom poetry was such an intimate experience of the soul that often times he would wake up from sleep composing a poem. Traditionally, literature from Pakistan is studied mostly through the exhaustive lenses of either Postcolonial studies or ideological bents however with this research my aim is to offer theoretical analysis of linguistic and cultural creations with frameworks that are established locally and from within and which then go outward towards more common Western interpretative methodologies and discourses. This summer grant has enabled to consider a much-needed perspective of the ways contemporary Urdu poetry from Pakistan has shaped and is dynamically shaping the present cultural milieu as it sees a newfound resurgence in popularity of native cultural forms and objects. I believe engaging with Jaun Elia's works will allow to explore and comprehend the literary Urdu scene of the city of Karachi itself and will also, I hope, prove to be a valuable contribution to the lineage of Urdu poetics. I am grateful to have received the AIPS grant for starting my preliminary research on Jaun's life and poetics.