

Katherine Blank

AIPS Junior Fellowship Research Narrative

My research considers women's involvement in the discourse surrounding women's health in colonial India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by looking at women's magazines from that same period. Using the AIPS Junior Research Fellowship, I was able to visit the British Library in London and utilize their vast set of resources in Urdu. Previous scholarship on this topic presents women as passive actors who were "reformed" and educated by men. However these magazines demonstrate that women actively sought to educate one another particularly pertaining to matters of health. It is important to reconfigure our historical understanding of women's participation in the public discourse, as our culture is heavily shaped by our perception of the past. Therefore, it is tantamount to underline women's contribution and involvement in creation of the public discussion about women's health and how to improve each other's physical and mental health.

My research contributes to Pakistan studies by underlining Muslim women's involvement in political and social reform movements, many of which continued to exist well after Partition. Historically, women's involvement in such movements has been downplayed or even ignored by historians due to lack of textual evidence. While many historians knew that these women's magazines existed and had a wide readership, many had written them off as merely educational in nature and lacking in-depth articles about social and political change. However, my research demonstrates that these magazines were hugely important in that they provided newly-literate Muslim women across colonial South Asia to interact with one another and have serious discussions about the nationalist movement, Partition, and how they wanted Muslim society to change.

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