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The Poetics and Politics of Urdu Journal Culture in Pakistan

The journal form has historically been an outsider to both literary theory and history, especially in South Asia, where its integral contribution to Urdu literary culture has been severely understudied. This underappreciation of the constitutive role of journals within twentieth century South Asian literary culture reflects troubling tendencies within contemporary scholarship on vernacular literary formations. Especially in the case of Urdu writing, this neglect emerges because of a predominant focus on the pre-twentieth century period and a concomitant lack of investment in sociological understandings of literary production, reception, and dissemination. With the support of the AIPS Short-Term Research Grant, and in close collaboration with various universities, libraries, and state institutions across Pakistan, I hope to lay the foundation for a dissertation project that demonstrates the intellectual significance and practical indispensability of Urdu literary journals for our understanding of vernacular and world literatures in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The research I propose will be conducted from June to August 2020. It consists equally of archival work and interviews with key Pakistani literary institutions. Focusing on literary organizations such as the Pakistan Progressive Writers' Association, the Pakistan Society of Letters, and the *Majlis-e Taraqqi-e Urdu Adab*, these interviews will investigate the significance of specific literary journals for each organization's history and present work. In picturing how journals such as *Shāhrāh*, *Aurāq*, and *Nizām* functioned within a complex literary field of shifting political and poetic allegiances, these interviews will help recreate the dynamism of Pakistani Urdu journal culture in both its diachronic and synchronic dimensions across the seventy-two years of the country's history. Key to this project will be conceptualizing the myriad roles journals performed in Pakistan's cultural sphere: how were *Aurāq*'s literary commitments, for example, shaped by its deep investment in the nationalist project after 1947? In what way did journals like *Shāhrāh* both resist forms of autocracy and imagine alternative collectivities within the context of the Cold War? Additionally, how did journals like *Nizām* influence and enable the development of writers like Intezar Hussain, in whose rise to national and then global importance the journal played a crucial part? Whether one considers the macro-politics of the country's literary field or the aesthetic and professional development of individual authors, it is clear that Urdu journals prove a crucial node for understanding Pakistan's literary history and cultural politics. It is precisely this multifaceted history my project will investigate and reveal.

In addition to the archival and interview work conducted at the above-mentioned institutions, this project will also involve me with the Punjab Public Library, the Quaid-e Azam Library, and the Naqoosh Collection at the GCU Library, all based in Lahore. In approaching and utilizing these collections, I hope to use my professional connections to establish institutional affiliation with either Government College University or the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). Overall, however, the feasibility of this project relies heavily on prospective support from the AIPS Short-Term Research Grant. This funding will be crucial for investigating the intellectual and literary significance of Pakistani Urdu journal culture, doubly marginalized as it is in contemporary research on World Literature given the latter's disinvestment in the journal form and in vernacular literatures from South Asia more broadly.