

AIPS Workshop Report

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Cinema and Transnationalism in Pakistan and South Asia:

Regional Histories

LUMS, Lahore, Pakistan. September 1 and 2, 2016

Under the sponsorship of the American Institute of Pakistan Studies, the Workshop on “Cinema and Transnationalism in Pakistan and South Asia: Regional Histories” was co-organized by Dr. Esha Niyogi De (UCLA) and Dr. Ali Khan (LUMS). The two-day-long event—hosted by the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at LUMS—brought to Pakistan the South Asian Regional Media Studies Network (SARMSNet). This cross-border initiative fosters collaborative scholarship on the histories of cinema and media shared by Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh.

The Workshop at LUMS used the critical lens of the “transnational” to study how film cultures in South Asia that presuppose national boundaries at the same time are porous and hybrid. Considering the histories of cinema in Pakistan and the Subcontinent, a number of presentations examined the regional travels of images, artists, and industrial resources, and how traditions and their cultural influences intertwine on one another. While participants were deeply concerned with the politics of nation, ethnicity, and gender born of specific geopolitical conditions in the Subcontinent, they explored the role film and media networks have played also in destabilizing divisive identities. Some papers studied how popular cinemas illuminate everyday practices of same-sex friendship and cross-ethnic solidarity, whereas some others discussed gendered imaginations of justice and human rights in films on conflict, war, and terror. Historically specific readings of Pakistani Cinema (Urdu, Punjabi) were complemented by analyses of transregional flows which emphasized the historical linkage between film industries and urban landscapes across South Asia.

The Workshop convened four scholarly sessions spread out over two days: “Cinema in Pakistan: Colony, State, and Industry”; “Histories, Networks, and

Crossings: Pakistan, Bangladesh, India”; “Gender and Aesthetic Economies of Cinema in Pakistan”; “Trans-Asian Cinema: Questions of Landscapes, Margins, and Ethics.” The program also included one presentation on the “Celluloid Courtesan” by Lahore film industry expert Dr. Omer Adil and a slide show on Pakistani megastar Shamim Ara’s industrial career as a filmmaker presented by Esha Niyogi De. Each day’s events were rounded out with screenings of rare Pakistani films, respectively, *Jago Hua Savera* (1959); *Zinda Laash* (1967); and *Pakistan’s Taliban Generation* (2009).

The panel of participants and attendees included scholars from a number of Pakistani and international universities. We were joined by Drs. Rahat Imran and Imran Munir from the University of the Punjab, Dr. Naveen Zehra Minai from IBA Karachi; Dr. Tariq Rahman from Beaconhouse National University, and Drs. Ali Khan, Sadaf Ahmad, Nida Kirmani, and several other faculty members from LUMS. Participants from the United States included Dr. Elora Halim Chowdhury (University of Massachusetts at Boston); Dr. Kamran Asdar Ali; Gwendolyn Kirk (University of Texas at Austin); Dr. Joel Gordon (University of Arkansas); Dr. Karen Leonard (University of California at Irvine); Dr. Sanaa Riaz (State University of Colorado at Denver); and Dr. Esha Niyogi De (UCLA). Dr. Nasreen Rehman (Cambridge University) came to us from the United Kingdom.

Beyond those physically present at the Workshop were three distinguished presenters who joined the Workshop via Skype: Dr. Iftikhar Dadi (Cornell University); Dr. Madhuja Mukherjee (Jadavpur University, India); and Dr. Abhijit Roy (Jadavpur University, India).

The generous support from the American Institute of Pakistan Studies in a number of ways was crucial to the success of this event and its border-crossing vision. It enabled the travel to Lahore of selected invitees from the United States and from elsewhere in Pakistan; it supported the workshop at LUMS; and it helped LUMS to facilitate the virtual participation of speakers whose physical presence was not a possibility.