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Final Report

AIPS Junior Research Fellowship supported my dissertation research “Ontic Flows: Rivers in the Making of Modern Punjab,” in Pakistan. The project seeks to understand the material and aesthetic transformation of nature-culture articulations in Punjab as a result of colonial intervention in India. Focusing on the capture, transformation, control, and management of the Indus rivers, the project traces the co-constitutive relations between the rivers and the communities therein since the introduction and implementation of a modern irrigation infrastructure in the last quarter of nineteenth and early twentieth century. Combining archival and ethnographic research with literary and textual analyses, the research seeks to demonstrate that nature and the native are simultaneously captured and collected in colonial and national discourses and practices both materially and aesthetically.

This project includes two distinct but closely connected archival components. One component maps the aesthetic transformation in literary representations of the nature-culture binary in the colonial context through critical readings of the literature produced by the “*Na ī Shā ‘irī kī Tahrik*” (New Poetry Movement) under colonial patronage. It explores the workings of pastoral ideology and aesthetic sublime in the literature of New Poetry Movement initiated by the *Anjuman-e-Punjab* in Lahore. The Movement’s emphasis on nature poetry and the use of *Nazam* as a literary form materialized the aestheticized nature which invoked a modern subjectivity. The second component explores the state’s relationship with water and space. The nature-culture binary in literature has a corollary in materialization of colonial hydrology in the capture, control, and management of the Indus rivers.

AIPS Junior Research Fellowship allowed me to spend six months in the Punjab Civil Secretariat for archival research. The Punjab Archives, and the Library of the Archives contain a variety of archival sources and materials including district, canal colony, and provincial gazetteers, settlement reports, revenue reports, and reports of irrigation and public works departments. These documents were really helpful in understanding the transformation of the Indus rivers, setting up of different canal colonies, and then mapping the local communities onto the cultivable lands made available by the control and distribution of water in different parts of Punjab. While in Lahore, I also consulted the Punjab Public Library, Government College University Library, and Oriental College Library. These libraries contained valuable information on the twists and turns in the fate of *Anjuman-e-Punjab*.

Currently, I am doing my ethnographic work in two canal colony villages in Punjab. Having spent some time in the archive has better prepared me for my ethnographic work. Access to the colonial reports which documented the reasons and objectives of the multiple projects around water and rivers that transformed the Punjabi *Doabs* entirely, has helped me understand the entanglements between land ownership and water distribution in contemporary Punjab. My ethnographic research will complement my archival research for a better understanding of the simultaneous aesthetic, social, and material transformation of Punjabi landscape.