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Abstract

Title of Project: **Conflicting Visions: Language, Politics, and Urdu Travel Literature**

Despite enduring popularity in Pakistan, the Urdu travelogue, or safarnama, has never been subject of academic inquiry. This paucity of scholarship belies a surfeit of literary production spanning nearly two centuries. In this project, I propose to interrogate the place of travel and travel writing in the negotiation of socio-political debate and subjectivity in colonial South Asia and contemporary Pakistan. Most safarnamas were originally serialized in newspapers and journals, where they could coexist and interact with commentary from readers. These spaces are loci in which the reflection and self-consciousness inherent in most travel intersects with salient social and political issues at home. I will argue that reading across this corpus will reveal the dynamism of a dialectic that informed the trajectory of South Asian history. This tradition gave rise to modern Pakistani travel writing, which continues to thrive despite setbacks. The first part of this project, for which I seek the support of AIPS, will use archival research in the British Library to establish the nature, dynamics and mechanisms of Urdu travel writing in South Asia, while the second, later portion will consider its manifestation in contemporary Pakistan through both textual and ethnographic data.