

Asif Akhtar – AIPS Junior Fellowship 2019 Final Report

Significance of AIPS Funded Research for Pakistan Studies

The research conducted during the term of this AIPS Junior Fellowship has culminated in a cohesive dissertation chapter using original archival material and sources. This chapter is a foundational component of the dissertation research, and writing currently underway. It provides the theoretical and historical foundations to develop categories that will be relevant for understanding media, regulations and politics in contemporary Pakistan. The chapter focuses on a genealogy of the concept and practice of *siyasa* (or *siyasat*) as derived from classical Islamic law and administrative theory. While earlier accounts of *siyasa* as a practice of the sovereign suggest that it is associated with an array of meanings ranging from management and administration, to disciplining and exemplary punishment. Though scholars have noted that its meaning has shifted after the fact of modernity to imply politics or the political, this is only a recent phenomenon. These classical meanings are well founded in literature on the history of Islamic law and related fields. To date however, there are no empirical or explanatory accounts of how, or through what means, such an inflection in its meaning from administrative practice to discursive politics takes place. The original archival research conducted, and the chapter subsequently written, over the past six months has made a substantial contribution by providing a compelling analysis of the transformation underway in eighteenth century Bengal regulation code for the Islamic criminal courts superintended by the East India Company.

This chapter shows the various inflections and transformations in the Company jurists and administrators uptake of *siyasa* as a legal device to encode and regulate *sharia* law towards various other means. The chapter provides a detailed reading from original sources where these host of different meanings are encountered. It also provides many examples through reading criminal court records in the early nineteenth century, in which the concept and practice of *siyasat* appears to be changing over the decades. These empirical records provide ample evidence that allows us to develop a cohesive understanding of the means through which such changes began to take place, as well as their legal and political implications. This is highly relevant to Pakistan Studies, as contemporary *siyasat*, conceived as politics, has remarkable bearings on how and through what means the population comes to a consensus on who should govern and through what policies. As the remainder of the dissertation will be analyzing the *siyasat* that takes place on the television news media, the theoretical and empirical underpinnings developed in this chapter provide a solid foundation on which later analysis and interpretation can take shape. As the entire dissertation is conceived as a genealogy of the concept and practice of *siyasat*, this chapter provides a genealogical point which connects premodern or classical *siyasa* to modern or contemporary *siyasat*. The chapter in itself is an original contribution that allows us to understand the history and creation of Pakistan in a whole different light, as *siyasat* of political actors like Jinnah in the twentieth century played a significant role in generating consensus for the idea of Pakistan. Since its creation the practices and discourses of *siyasat* have had major influence throughout the major turning points in the history of the nation. This research thus provides a historical and empirical lens through which to assess the demarcations of Pakistan's political becomings.