South Asia

The World Humanities Report

The Humanities in Pakistan (1990–2020)

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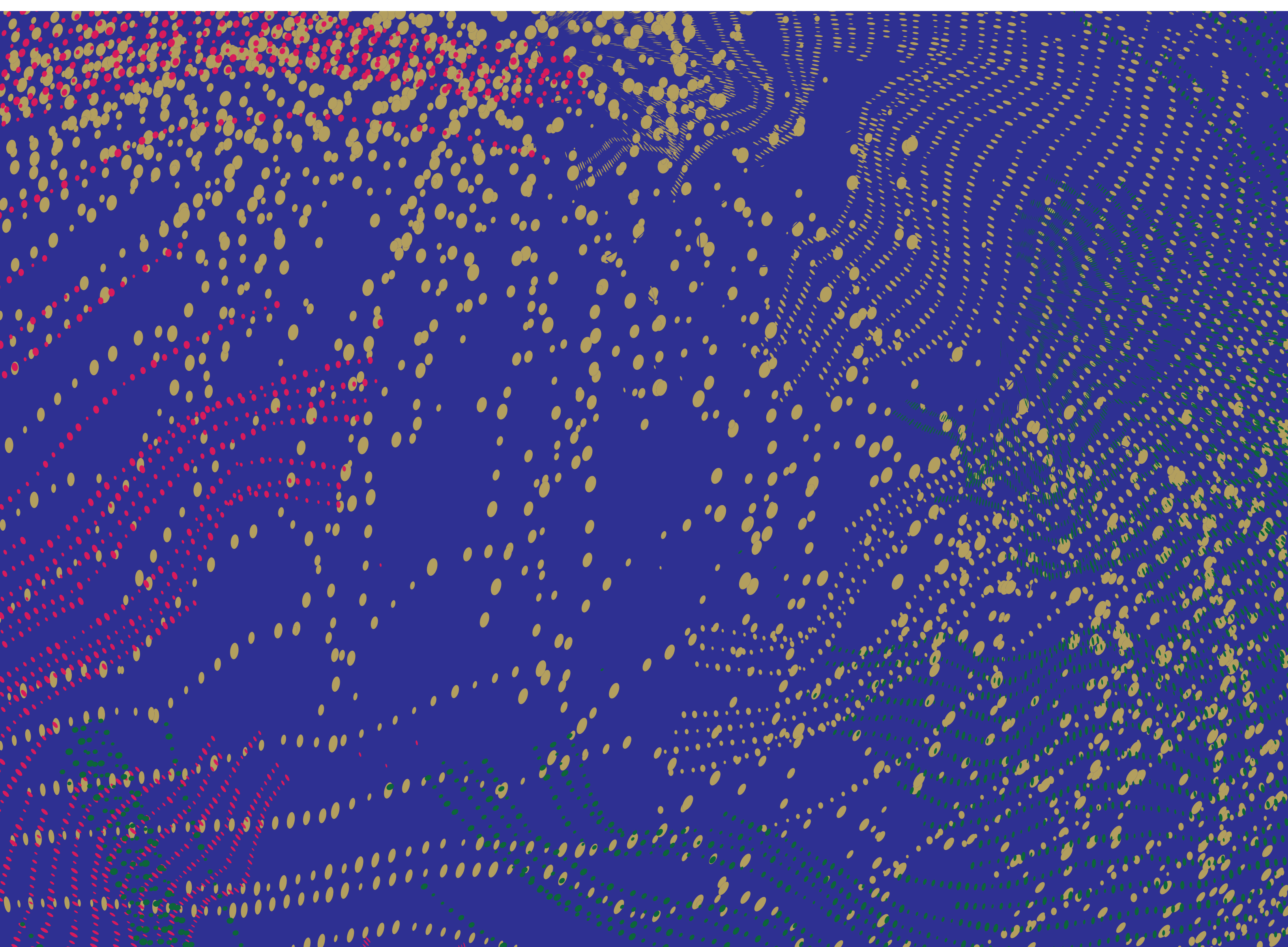

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The Humanities in Pakistan (1990–2020)

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In many respects, the state of the humanities in Pakistan is bleak. Syed Nomanul Haq laments, not unjustifiably, that "with some three generations thrown into applied and vocational fields, and the killing of the languages, Pakistani society has been barred from access to its primary textual sources. What is the result? Pakistanis cannot explain themselves."[1] The inability to express oneself—both individually and as a nation—has led to a complicated identity politics that is disseminated vertically, from state to society, rather than horizontally, within society itself. Although Haq's critique is confined to the role that the institutions of higher education play, many share his general apprehension. The academic sphere in Pakistan, especially the universities supervised by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), has mistreated the humanities because the HEC micromanages higher education institutions in a manner that undercuts the significance of the humanities. Educational policies are skewed in favor of the applied and vocational disciplines, to the detriment of the humanities. In the project of "development" conceived by the state (mostly physical or economic development and not human development), the arts and humanities are considered frivolous or as providing few practical returns. Sadly, the indifference demonstrated by the institutions of higher learning and those authorized to formulate policy for them has steadily percolated down to the general public's perception of the "usefulness" and relevance of the humanities. The decline in the importance of the humanities for the citizenry at large is today irrefutable. In this essay, I analyze the state of the humanities in Pakistan over the last three decades, looking at significant developments that have taken place from 1990 to 2020. I argue that the neglect of the humanities has contributed to a confusion in the identity of the citizens because the humanities have been the site for developing a pluralistic ethos of citizenship that also retains the autochthonous elements of identity. Presenting a history of Pakistan through the humanities, particularly through literature, this essay proposes a roadmap for recording the social and cultural history of Pakistan, which so far has had very few exponents. Through this literary history, following Haq, I find Pakistanis explaining themselves.

[1] Syed Nomanul Haq, "Narratives and Legacy: The Humanities Crisis in Pakistan," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, no. 1 (2017): 166.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines the humanities as "those branches of knowledge that concern themselves with human beings and their culture or with analytic and critical methods of inquiry derived from an appreciation of human values and of the unique ability of the human spirit to express itself. As a group of educational disciplines, the humanities are distinguished in content and method from the physical and biological sciences and, somewhat less decisively, from the social sciences. The humanities include the study of all languages and literatures, the arts, history, and philosophy."[2] However, this definition of the humanities seems unsuited to the academy in Pakistan. For one, the term "humanities" is not commonly used in Pakistani discourse. Instead, the humanities, social sciences, and languages are all lumped together under the vague title "the arts." The binary characterization of "arts versus science" is still prevalent in Pakistan, with the result that the arts are misconstrued as inferior to the sciences, and this false belief plagues the way that the humanities are taught. In most universities, language and literature departments are combined and placed under the faculty of arts, while subjects like history and philosophy are considered "social sciences." Students opt to study literature, history, and philosophy not to become scholars in these disciplines, but to pursue careers outside academia. In fact, in Pakistan most students who enroll in these departments do so with a view to scoring well on civil service entrance examinations, which allows them to enter the state bureaucracy. Students in the sciences and in finance, on the other hand, are much clearer about wanting to pursue careers in their chosen academic fields. Unlike in the United States and United Kingdom, the humanities are neither clearly articulated nor well organized in Pakistan's academic institutions. Even though humanities departments exist in almost all the 220-odd universities in Pakistan, in many places their teaching is limited to such "compulsory" subjects as functional English, Pakistan studies, and *Islamiyat* (Islamic studies, with focus on the fundamentals of Islam).

If the decline in the humanities reflects social decline over the past three decades, as I believe it does, it also represents the simultaneous decline in the university. Since the presidential reign of military dictator General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (1977–88),[3] Pakistani universities have seen a continuing decline in

[2] *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v."humanities," accessed November 13, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/humanities.

[3] Zia (1924–1988) seized power from Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in a bloodless coup on July 5, 1977, and became chief martial-law administrator while retaining his position as army chief of staff. After assuming the presidency, Zia had Bhutto executed, suspended political parties, banned labor strikes, imposed strict censorship on the press, and declared martial law. After the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, he expanded the country's military with support from the United States. For details see Tahir Kamran, *Democracy and Governance in Pakistan* (Lahore: South Asia Partnership, 2008), 104–27.

their quality. When compared to India and Bangladesh, graduates from Pakistani universities rarely find jobs in Western academia; if Pakistani students want to find acceptance in the West, they must seek their degrees elsewhere. Similarly, the quality of research produced and published locally remains highly questionable. With the establishment and empowerment of federal and provincial HECs in 2002 under General Pervez Musharraf's military-led government, Pakistani universities witnessed an influx of new scholars both from within Pakistan and without. The HEC threw unprecedented money into education and offered enormous perks and privileges for the university sector, leading to a quick expansion in the number of public and private universities. Lucrative packages were offered to visiting scholars from foreign universities, and local science faculty particularly benefited from a premium placed on the number of research publications done by faculty. They produced and continue to produce local research that does not hold any international relevance or merit. A tenure-track system with lucrative salary packages was introduced, and this brought a lot of young researchers into universities. The urgent demand for PhD students to fill these positions led to local PhD programs compromising on quality. With these scholars becoming part of the Pakistani higher education scene, one might have expected university education to become more rigorous and competitive than in the past, with a focus on new courses, new knowledge, cutting-edge research, and high merit. However, the federal HEC has always been led by someone with a degree and career in the sciences, and its policies have favored the sciences. As a result, the policymaking bodies in Pakistan have not addressed the specific needs and problems of the humanities. Instead, standards set for the sciences faculty have been indiscriminately applied to humanities and social sciences faculty.[4] As a result, the HEC recognizes more journals in the sciences than in the humanities, and science faculty are able to publish in more places. Scientists also regularly publish multiauthored articles, which remains rare in the humanities, giving scientists much longer publication records. Consequently, within the universities, the science faculty are promoted much faster than their counterparts in the humanities. Together, the structure of the universities and the policies government agencies make discourage the growth of the humanities in Pakistan.

The decline of the humanities accompanies a decline in the social prestige accorded to those with training in literature, history, philosophy, and other humanities disciplines. One of the main concerns in the teaching of the human-

[4] Tahir Kamran, "Woes of Higher Education," *The News on Sunday*, October 20, 2019, https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/568731-woes-higher-education.

ities in Pakistan is the division between studying the humanities as a discipline and using them as an instrument of social change. Certain values associated with the humanities in the social sphere are pluralistic in their ethos. Those with training in the humanities are expected to have cultivated, liberal, pluralistic, civilized, polite, and cultured personalities, and the humanities are expected to encourage critical thinking among members of society to produce better citizens. In Pakistan these values are often understood as an effeminate element in an otherwise patriarchal and hypermasculine state and society. Thus, the humanities have lost their social capital as well as their academic relevance.

The humanities have been the site for developing a pluralistic ethos of citizenship that also retains the autochthonous elements of identity.

Writer-critic Aamer Hussein makes an important observation that points to another explanation for Pakistan's indifference toward the humanities. Discussing Urdu poetry, Hussein observes that "the poetry produced in the subcontinent wasn't at all what the English colonizers had expected, and it might have in many ways become a tool for resistance against colonization."[5] The colonizers were skeptical of Urdu poetry's potential to be subversive. This attitude often resulted in a suspicion of all art and artists. The prevalent indifference toward humanities in Pakistan could be read as the postcolonial state's inherited skepticism of the humanities as encouraging dissent, resistance, and rebellion.

Syed Nomanul Haq criticizes the lumping together of the humanities with the social sciences, which too is a legitimate concern of those who are cognizant of the role that the humanities play in the development of human sensibility. Even within that combining of disciplines, the humanities are relegated to an inferior, secondary status, vis-à-vis the social sciences.[6] This is a continuation of the inherited suspicion of art and artists, as previously highlighted.

Most of what Haq says is true but like in many other places in the world, in Pakistan most creative production takes place outside the domain of academia, even if universities do much to disseminate knowledge of arts and literature. Very few of the first generation of laureates who were active at the time of Partition and had been educated and trained during the pre-Partition days (i.e., before 1947), such as Patras Bokhari, Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum, Qayyum

[5] Mushtaq Bilal, *Writing Pakistan: Conversations on Identity, Nationhood and Fiction* (Noida: Harper Collins, 2016), 98.

[6] See Haq, "Narratives and Legacy," 162–65.

Nazar, and Gilani Kamran,[7] were academics, even if they may have taught literature in various institutions. In contrast, "academic laureates"—an expression that found wide currency after the partition and used to refer particularly to scholars working at the Oriental College of the University of the Punjab—had primarily engaged in literary criticism or literary history, instead of investing their faculties in exploring creative avenues. Intizar Hussain, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Munir Niazi, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Saadat Hasan Manto—to name a few of the best-known laureates—were not academics. Intizar Hussain and Faiz Ahmad Faiz were journalists, Munir Niazi offered his services to television, and Saadat Hasan Manto was engaged in scriptwriting for films. In fact, many of them, including Noon Meem Rashid (World Bank official), Majeed Amjad (civil servant), Mushtaq Ahmed Yusufi (banker), Mukhtar Masood (civil servant), and Shafiq-ur-Rahman (major general in Pakistani army), belonged to professions that had hardly any connection with literature or the arts. So, the production of the humanities was not limited to academic spheres. In fact, poets, writers, and critics operated mainly outside these spheres.

Despite all the obstacles impeding the humanities in Pakistan, there are encouraging trends on several fronts, both in academia and in the wider society. During the last three decades, a new generation of writers and poets has entered the field of literary production, bringing with them new themes and forms of articulation. The number of new books in the humanities and social sciences appearing on bookstore and library shelves each year has remained encouragingly stable and may even be increasing. Older books are being reprinted, and the publication business, now functioning in accordance with international copyright and export laws, is flourishing.

The Origins of Pakistani Identity

The generation of Pakistani literary artists who began to publish just after Partition includes poets Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Noon Meem Rashid, Nasir Kazmi, and Munir Niazi, and writers Intizar Hussain, Ashfaq Ahmed, Abdullah Hussain, and Khadija Mastoor. These authors were deeply embedded in a cross-cultur-

[7] Syed Ahmed Shah (1989–1958), commonly known as Patras Bokhari, was a Pakistani humorist, writer, broadcaster, and diplomat; Tabassum (1899–1978) was a poet and translator; Khwaja Abdul Qayyum (1914–1989) was a poet who wrote under the penname Nazar. Kamran (1926–2003) was an academic, poet, critic, and translator.

al literary ethos that had crystallized in pre-Partition India.[8] Ahmed's 1953 masterpiece, a short story titled "Gadariya" (The shepherd), is to many one of the best representations of its genre.[9] It depicts plurality and humanism in Muslim Sufism through the protagonist *Gadariya*, a Hindu teacher who teaches Persian to a Muslim boy, is respectful of the tenets of the Quran, and holds the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) in high esteem. Ahmed's novel *Khel Tamasha* (Games and spectacle) shares the same cross-cultural ethos.[10] Its story begins in a village of East Punjab just before Partition and concludes in 1980s Afghanistan, where the main protagonist dies and is buried.

At the same time, another group of writers prompted a different reading of Partition. The Anjuman Taraqqi Pasand Musannifeen (Progressive Writers' Association),[11] through its magazine *Savera*, published from Lahore, depicted the heightened communal hatred that Partition unleashed and that led to massacres, pogroms, and displacement instead of celebrating it as an event that marked an end to the colonial era. Anti-imperialism was the bedrock of progressive ideology, and these writers reckoned that the partition of united India was an imperialist ploy. Therefore, their literary impulse was imbued with a sense of dissatisfaction at the emergence of Pakistan, which they claimed had weakened the people of the subcontinent by dividing them. For some progressives, though, it was a price that the Indian people had to pay for freedom. Members of the progressive writers' movement who thought favorably of Partition included stalwarts like Faiz, but they were horrified by the violence that accompanied it. His famous poem "Subh-i-Azadi" (The dawn of freedom) was the expression of deep frustration at the bloodshed that the birth of Pakistan witnessed in August 1947.[12]

Critics of the progressive movement included writers Muhammad Hasan Askari and Intizar Hussain, even though they regarded India's partition with ambivalence. Even renowned writer Saadat Hasan Manto, who is considered one of the greatest Urdu short story writers of the twentieth century and whose

[8] For a detailed discussion of these figures, see Khawaja Zakariya, *Chand Aham Jadeed Shair* [A few important past poets] (Faisalabad: Misaal Publishers, 2020), and Zahid Munir Amir, *On the Wings of Poesy: Prof. Ghulam Jilani Asghar on Modern Urdu Poetry* (Lahore: Urdu Academy, 2007).

[9] Ashfaq Ahmed, *Gadariya* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1995).

[10] Ashfaq Ahmed, *Khel Tamasha* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2013). The protagonist of this novel and his characterization are uncannily reminiscent of the figure of Dao ji from his short story "Gadariya."

[11] For details see Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light: The History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[12] Faiz Ahmad Faiz, "Dast-i-Saba" [Hand of morning breeze], in *Nuskha Hai Wafa* [Prescriptions of fidelity] (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Karwan, 1985), 20–22.

short stories were a scathing criticism of the logic of Partition and the violence it engendered, kept himself apart from the progressive writers. Muhammad Hasan Askari celebrated the birth of a new country and disapproved of progressive writers linking the birth of Pakistan to imperialist machinations. He also tried to delineate a distinct identity for Pakistani literature, but sadly for him he could not adequately define it. Askari's desire for a truly Pakistani literature resulted, oddly, in the assertion of a geographically unbound Muslim identity being articulated as a distinctly Pakistani identity. The most prominent and popular exponent of this *Islamic* Pakistani identity was Naseem Hijazi, who wrote fictional narratives glorifying Muslim conquerors. Although Qudratullah Shahab, Jamil-ud Din Aali, and, most importantly, Hafeez Jalandhari came close to what Askari had proposed, they cannot be seen as his followers. Sadly, Askari could not leave behind a legacy that could have had a lasting impact on the literary tradition of Pakistan. Critic, academic, and poet Khawaja Muhammad Zakariya maintains that this happened because Askari, despite his erudition and impressive body of scholarship, kept changing his position regarding the contours of Pakistani literature.[13] Therefore, an independent identity of Pakistani literature could hardly be established. His antipathetic posture toward the West and Western knowledge systems made his thoughts and ideas quite elusive, and they started to reek of cynicism. Aamer Hussein makes a very perceptive point about Askari: "He was asking for some kind of imaginary nativist view or some kind of magic realism, but very few people tried to follow that."[14]

Intizar Hussain's case was different. He emerged as the most influential Urdu laureate in fiction, with both the novel and short story forms being his forte. His work is particularly important for its profound questioning of Partition and the galvanizing impact his writing had on the literary consciousness of later Pakistani writers. Hussain is widely believed to have engaged, throughout his literary career, with a nostalgia that transcended temporal as well as spatial boundaries. Some regard that nostalgia as the central trait of his fiction. He invoked the traditions of *daastan* (a long, narrative story), mythological tales, and magic realism, and tried to synthesize these divergent literary streams to make a literary genre of his own.

This convergence of myriad sociocultural strands constitutes the South Asian Muslim consciousness, which is fundamentally different from the rest of the Muslim world. Although the work of playwrights Imtiaz Ali Taj, Rafi Peer, and Shaukat Siddiqi were not as profound as that of Intizar Hussain, they were all so

[13] Khawaja Muhammad Zakariya, interviewed by author, Lahore, May 11, 2020.
[14] Bilal, *Writing Pakistan*, 100.

engrossed in the effects of Partition that their exploratory focus failed to address sociocultural themes of local relevance. In his conversation with Umar Memon, Intizar Hussain revealed the importance of Partition for him and other literary artists. He equated Partition with the Prophet's *hijrat* (the migration that he undertook from Mecca to Medina to create a new state and society). The *hijrat*, in the widest possible sense of the term, has a place all its own in the history of the Muslims. According to Hussain, it was "a recurrent phenomenon, which through a long and arduous process of suffering experienced both on external and internal planes [of the self,] succeeds in transforming itself eventually into a major creative experience." Thus conceived, the *hijrat* could be seen as a progression from an external event to an intense, internal spiritual "experience." Partition was thus a creative moment for Hussain, in which the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina was reenacted, with all the concomitant freedom to give direction to an encapsulated creative force. He goes on to say, "It was not simply a question of migrating from one region to another, rather, it was one of migrating from an old to a new country."[15]

Mushtaq Ahmed Yusufi, by far the most acclaimed humorist of the past fifty years, also connected Partition with contemporary Pakistan throughout his writing. His magnum opus, the novel *Aab-i-Gum* (Disappeared water), was published in 1990, which places him on the cusp of the period under review in this study.[16] The book depicts nostalgia as the driving force behind the lives of those who experienced the partition and casts a melancholic spell over the reader. The soul-searching experience of nostalgia, along with the agony it causes the main protagonist, makes *Aab-i-Gum* one of the most lasting contributions to Urdu literature. Even though his autobiographical final book, *Shaam-e-Shair-e-Yaaraan* (Evening with poet friends), was widely considered his weakest,[17] Ahmad spent the 1990s and 2000s reading prose pieces at various public events. (Recordings of most of these readings are now available on YouTube, which serves as a reminder of how good prose manages to find an audience regardless of its medium.) Mukhtar Masood (1926–2017) wrote important books which were partly autobiographical but mostly dealing in nostalgia of Muslim past, like *Awaz-i-Dost* (The voice of a friend), *Safar-i-Naseeb* (Destiny's journey), and

[15] Muhammad Umar Memon, "Partition Literature: A Study of Intizar Hussain," *Modern Asian Studies* 14, no. 3 (1980): 378–79.

[16] Mushtaq Ahmed Yusufi, *Aab-i-Gum* (Karachi: Maktabah Danyal, 1990) (translated by Matt Reeck and Aftab Ahmad as *Mirages of the Mind* [Noida: Random House India, 2014]). See also Mehr Afshan Farooqi, "Ab-e gum, or 'Disappeared Water' as a Metaphor for Language, Location, and Loss," *Critical Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (2010): 78.

[17] Mushtaq Ahmed Yusufi, *Shaam-e-Shair-e-Yaaraan* (Lahore: Jahangir Book Depot, 2014).

Loh-i-Ayam (A record of ages gone by), but his last book *Harf-i-Shauq* (Word of fondness), published posthumously, deals with his pre-Partition memories of Aligarh University where he was a student and therefore epitomizes the nostalgia for pre-Partition days.[18]

Autochthony and Pluralism

This nostalgia underscored pluralistic values, which for many scholars began to be questioned soon after the religion-based Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947.[19] Over the past three decades, the pluralistic nature of Pakistani humanities has incorporated various identities that I describe as autochthonous. In Greek mythology, the "autochthones" were mortals who had been born of the soil, rocks, and trees and whose belonging was entirely rooted in the land. Thus, autochthony is the grounded relationship that people of an ethnic identity have with their geographical location and historical background. By definition, the concept would seem to exclude "the other." In contrast to autochthony, pluralism implies a more varied acceptance of various ethnicities and cultures. Thus, an autochthonous ethos would be discouraging of pluralistic discourse. In Pakistan, however, the autochthonous assertion of ethnic identity in literature emphasizes the inclusion of "the other" in a Punjabi-dominated, masculine state and society.

Intizar Hussain's 1992 novel *Aagey Samundar Hai* (*The Sea Lies Ahead*) provides an appropriate site for exploring the duality of autochthony and pluralism, especially from the perspective of the Urdu-speaking migrants who contested the Punjabi-dominated identity of Pakistan.[20] The novel begins with Partition and the migration that it put in motion, but its main locus is contemporary Karachi and the insecurity of its Muhajir population. Muhajirs are Muslim immigrants from India who settled in Karachi after Partition and now form an overwhelming majority of its population. The largest city in Pakistan and capital of the Sindh province, Karachi has retained its cosmopolitanism

In Pakistan, the autochthonous assertion of ethnic identity in literature emphasizes the inclusion of "the other" in a Punjabi-dominated, masculine state and society.

[18] Mukhtar Masood, *Harf-i-Shauq* (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Tameer-i-Insaniyat, 2017).

[19] For a discussion of this turn, see Umber Bin Ibad, *Sufi Shrines and the Pakistani State: The End of Religious Pluralism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019).

[20] Intizar Hussain, *Aagey Samundar Hai* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1992) (translated by Rakhshanda Jalil as *The Sea Lies Ahead* [New Delhi: Harper Perennial, 2015]).

by attracting migrants not only from within the country (Pakhtuns and Punjabis) but also from other parts of the wider region (Bengalis and Sri Lankans).[21] The city's multiethnic demography has resulted in violence, which in the 1990s and early 2000s assumed the garb of sectarian militancy.[22] Despite this, and because it is the country's only seaport, Karachi remains a major financial hub, contributing almost 65 percent of the state's revenue.[23] Its status as a land of opportunities for people across Pakistan and beyond has been firmly established. Karachi has also become a leading site for literary production and culture in the last three decades, with literary festivals and *mushairas* (poetry competitions) being recurrent events in its calendar; only Lahore competes with Karachi on the scales of cultural and literary activity and production.

Ethnic strife had an initial tryst with Karachi in the early 1970s over the question of language when chief minister of the Sindh province, Mumtaz Bhutto, called for official status to be granted to the Sindhi language. Most Urdu-speaking migrants had settled in Karachi and laid claim to the city as a center for Urdu culture. The Sindhis believed that the minority Muhajirs were taking over not only resources but also the representation of the entire Sindh province. The Muhajirs felt threatened by the Sindh government's aggressive move and expressed their anger on the streets of Karachi. An additional dynamic was occurring at the national level. East Pakistan had just seceded from Pakistan to become Bangladesh in 1971, and Pakistan feared that other ethnic nationalisms threatened further secessions. After all, one of the major rallying cries in the movement for Bangladeshi independence had been the language movement that demanded that Bengali be recognized as national language alongside Urdu. The assertion of Sindhi identity and their resort to the Sindhi language were major concerns for the Pakistani government.[24] Clashes ensued, many lives were lost, and even after the turbulence ended, ethnic fissures continued to widen.

Both state and society in Pakistan have used violence as a tool to discourage the expression of autochthonous identities. Such violence arises from the state narrative that both assumes and insists on the unification of diverse and

[21] For details see Laurent Gayer, *Karachi: Ordered Disorder and the Struggle for the City* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2014); Marcello Balbo, ed., *International Migrants and the City: Bangkok, Berlin, Dakar, Karachi, Johannesburg, Naples, São Paulo, Tijuana, Vancouver, Vladivostok* (Venice: UN-HABITAT, 2005), 151–85.

[22] For a full perspective on this, see Oskar Verkaaik, *A People of Migrants: Ethnicity, State and Religion in Karachi* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994).

[23] See Waleed Tariq, "The Importance of Karachi," *Express Tribune*, October 12, 2015, https://tribune.com.pk/story/971188/the-importance-of-karachi.

[24] Alyssa Ayres, *Speaking Like a State: Language and Nationalism in Pakistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

plural identities and does not leave room for the expression of autochthony as an agent of pluralism. In 1984, with the establishment of the political party Muhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM)—ostensibly at the behest of Zia-ul-Haq's military regime—militancy became a salient tool of self-expression for the Muhajirs, spearheaded by MQM's founding leader, Altaf Hussain.[25] Concurrent with the surging realization among the Muhajirs that they were a distinct *qaum*, or nationality, Karachi became the logistical hub for sending supplies and armaments to Afghanistan. Arms originally meant for the mujahideen, who were then locked in a struggle to oust the Soviets from Afghanistan, were smuggled into Karachi and to various ethnic groups, including the MQM, and perhaps with the connivance of the powers that be. By 1988–89, violence became starkly visible as a political tool in Karachi and Hyderabad (the other major city in the Sindh province). The MQM brought Muhajirs of disparate geographical origin together into one political faction with a tangible nuisance value, especially when trying to form a government from the center.[26] The MQM also strengthened the diasporic sensibility among the Muhajirs of Karachi and Hyderabad, which further widened the schism between diasporic and autochthonous identities.

Intizar Hussain highlights this aspect of Muhajir sensibility in *The Sea Lies Ahead*. Two inferences usually drawn from the novel are the diasporic sensibility of its immigrant characters and their nostalgic feeling for the towns and cities of their origin but not for India itself, which is seen as an archenemy of the Pakistani state. In his novel, therefore, Hussain serves to unravel what MQM politics tried to cobble together. He deconstructed the myth of Muhajirs being a single *qaum* and tried to pluralize the identities of Karachi's Muhajirs. His choice of settling permanently in Lahore is an example of how the Muhajir question came to be articulated differently inside Karachi and outside it.

The novel also presents a dialectical relationship between the various other migrant communities in Karachi. First, there were the migrants who arrived in the city after Partition in 1947 from other parts of the subcontinent, a majority of whom later became exclusively identified as Muhajirs and their politics became inextricable from the MQM. Migrations from various other parts of the country after Partition also occurred, mainly of people seeking employment

[25] Later, it changed its nomenclature. In July 1997 a festive rally was held in Karachi to "announce" the party's new name, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, or United Nationalist Movement. Tahir Naqvi, "What Endures after the Muttahida Qaumi Movement?," in *Pakistan's Political Parties: Surviving between Dictatorship and Democracy*, ed. Mariam Mufti, Sahar Shafqat, and Niloufer Siddiqui (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020).

[26] Farhat Haq, "Rise of the MQM in Pakistan: Politics of Ethnic Mobilization," *Asian Survey* 35, no. 11 (1995): 990–1004.

in Karachi. This internal migration has resulted in the emergence of a sizeable Pashtun, Punjabi, and Baloch presence in the city. The Pashtuns in particular have become an organized entity capable of political violence in the city and have been a counterpoint to the MQM from its very inception. In fact, Karachi has the largest urban concentration of Pashtuns in the world, who have mounted a formidable challenge to Muhajir supremacy in the city. These different levels of migration have served to create a palimpsest of cultural, linguistic, and literary influences in Karachi, which further explains the vibrancy of literary production in the city.

The centrality of Karachi to the question of literary visibility may also be judged by the fact that over the past thirty years much of the critical impetus in Urdu studies has come from Karachi-based journals and critics. The two most vibrant and relevant literary journals of this period, *Aaj* and *Dunyazad*, are published in Karachi. To that end, one must commend their respective editors, Ajmal Kamal and Asif Farrukhi (d. 2020), for creating a literary and academic forum for Urdu literary studies and for bringing Urdu literary sensibilities into focus. Similarly, Karachi-based critics Mushfiq Khwaja, Shan-ul-Haq Haqqi, Aslam Farrukhi, Muhammad Ali Siddiqi, and Farman Fatehpuri have become more prominent than their counterparts in the rest of the country (with the notable exceptions of Saleem-ur-Rehman and Nasir Abbas Nayyar from Lahore). Critics active in Punjab over these three decades include Khawaja Muhammad Zakariya, Zahid Munir Aamir, Aamir Sohail, Anwaar Ahmed, and Ahtisham Ali. Khursheed-ul-Hassan Rizvi, laureate and scholar of Arabic language and literature, wrote an excellent book in Urdu on the history of Arabic literature before Islam and a collection of poetry titled *Yakja*.[27] Another notable work is the Persian dictionary being prepared at the Department of Persian at the Government College University, Lahore, under the stewardship of Iqbal Shahid.

The Humanities' Role in Representing Pakistani Identity

Given the complex relationships among the various identities that form Pakistani society, the humanities play an important role in responding to restrictive

[27] Khursheed-ul-Hassan Rizvi, *Arabi Qabal az Islam* [Arabic literature before Islam], part 1 (Lahore: Idara-i-Islamiya, 2010); Rizvi, *Yakja* [Togetherness] (Lahore: Al-Hamand Publictions, 2011). *Yakja* is a compendium of four books of Rizvi's poetry, namely *Shakh-i-Tanha* [Lone branch], *Sarabon ki Sadaf* [Pearl of illusions], *Guman* [Assumption], and *Imkan* [Possibility].

definitions of Pakistan, especially those provided by the West. The terrorist attacks of 9/11, which led to a realignment of the world into being "with us or against us," were a turning point in Pakistani literature and, especially, its visibility to the West.[28] With the West's perspective becoming decidedly Islamophobic since 2001, Pakistani literature has been trying to distance itself from violence by condemning it. With a gun culture lingering since the Soviet Afghan War Zia-era policies and the state's support of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen in Kashmir, violence had become endemic to Pakistani society in the 1990s. Omar Shahid Hamid's novels especially highlight the ethnic violence perpetuated by the MQM in Karachi. In *The Prisoner* and *Party Worker*, he caricatures characters of the city's politics and details the violence and militancy that had become a part of everyday life.[29] Similarly, Fahmida Riaz's novel *Hum Log* (We, the people) depicts the ethnic violence in Karachi and relates it to the longer course of history, drawing a connection with the politics of Bengali separation in 1971 especially.[30]

In the case of Karachi, both in its political representation in the legislatures and in its cultural representation in literature and media, the migrant presence, considered foreign at the time of Partition, has since outstripped the native Sindhi presence in the city. The new Karachi literature is "writing back" to the native, autochthonous tradition as well as to the Islamophobic representation of Pakistan in global media. The predominance of writers from Karachi among English-language writers (most of whom are now based either in the US or UK) is an index of the city's urban centeredness and the availability of an educational infrastructure. Karachi was also the site of the country's first international literary festival in 2010. Since its inception, annual literary festivals have been instituted in Lahore and Islamabad as well, and the Lahore literary festival travels now to London and New York.

Post-9/11 international pressure made it necessary for Pakistan to revise its alliances and this resulted in a need to discontinue the glorification of its past violent culture. Pakistani literature in English has been struggling to present a picture of Pakistan as a nonviolent society. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* traces the radicalization of a young westernized Pakistani man, Changez, who returns home to Lahore from the United States after his life there is upturned by global events.[31] The novel's ambiguous ending leaves unan-

[28] Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 201.

[29] Omar Shahid Hamid, *The Prisoner* (Delhi: Pan Macmillan, 2013); Hamid, *The Party Worker* (Delhi: Pan Macmillan, 2017).

[30] Fahmida Riaz, *Hum Log* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[31] Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

swered the question of whether Pakistani society is violent or not. At the end of the novel, it appears possible that Changez may intend violence toward the American to whom he has narrated his life story just as it appears possible that the American intends violence toward Changez. Meanwhile, violence takes a different form in Mohammed Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*.[32] It shifts the focus from war violence and religious violence to violence against women and minorities. Similarly, in Kanza Javed's novel *Ashes, Wine and Dust*, a suicide blast underscores how Pakistan has been the victim of violence rather than its perpetrator,[33] with violence brought to a nonviolent Lahore from outside. This literature that counters Islamophobic depictions of Pakistan is a Pakistani literature in the truest sense. It represents the pluralistic and tolerant ways in which Pakistani society exists and the internal resistance against extremism and terrorism that is essential to the identities of the majority of the citizens of Pakistan. Islamophobic portrayals of the country depict every Pakistani as an anti-West, religious fanatic driven by extremist and regressive thoughts. By showing the many layers of Pakistani life and beliefs, these novels showcase the tolerant aspects of society that stop it from imploding on itself.

Given the complex relationships among the various identities that form Pakistani society, the humanities play an important role in responding to restrictive definitions of Pakistan, especially those provided by the West.

One aspect of the global interaction of ideas is that writers can now transcend geographical boundaries despite the hurdles created by the state. Pakistan's state policy regarding India, for instance, has undergone several changes over the past thirty years. Overall, however, the state has underscored and reinforced its definition and identity as "anti-India." This has become even more pronounced since the rise of organized anti-Muslim action under Narendra Modi, India's prime minister since 2014. Nevertheless, several influences from India have helped shape Pakistani literary sensibilities over these three decades. For starters, several Pakistani English-language writers who have found local and global popularity have been published by Indian publishing houses. In addition, Urdu novels and nonfiction written by Indian authors like Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (1935–2020) have been republished in Pakistan. Asif Farrukhi's publishing house

[32] Mohammed Hanif, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011).
[33] Kanza Javed, *Ashes, Wine and Dust* (New Delhi: Tara Research Press, 2015).

Shahrazad published Faruqi's *Kayi Chaand Thay Sar-e-Asmaan*, which is perhaps the greatest novel in Urdu of the last two decades.[34] This kind of interaction between feuding neighbors is important for understanding the tendencies in Pakistani literary history.

Humanities in the English Language

The largest area of positive change in the humanities is in English-language publications. The post-9/11 rise in Pakistani writing in English—fiction as well as nonfiction—and its international reception have been widely documented. Recent works on the history of Pakistani Anglophone literature, including the reprint of Tariq Rahman's *A History of Pakistani Literature in English*,[35] Muneeza Shamsie's *Hybrid Tapestries*,[36] and the *Routledge Companion to Pakistani Anglophone Writing* edited by Aroosa Kanwal and Saiyma Aslam,[37] are evidence of the critical mass generated by the humanities in Pakistan. Works by Uzma Aslam Khan (*The Geometry of God* and *Trespassing*), Mohsin Hamid (*Moth Smoke*, *Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, and *Exit West*), Kamila Shamsie (*Kartography*, *Salt and Saffron*, *Burnt Shadows*, and *Home Fire*), Nadeem Aslam (*Maps for Lost Lovers*, *The Wasted Vigil*, and *The Blind Man's Garden*), Mohammed Hanif (*A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, and *Red Birds*), Bilal Tanweer (*The Scatter Here Is Too Great*), Aamer Hussain (*Another Gulmohar Tree*), and Daniyal Mueenuddin (*In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*) have found an audience, both local and global, wider than any of the earlier Pakistani writers. Their work has not only been critically acclaimed but also translated into various languages and taught in international universities. The decolonizing and indigenizing of the English language and of English-language literature have helped create a more dialectical dialogue between "us" and "them," promoting a more global sense for the humanities in Pakistan. The generation of millennials, whose understanding of and identification with global culture have led to their appropriation of its

[34] Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, *Kayi Chaand Thay Sar-e-Asmaan* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1998). The work was translated into English by Faruqi himself, under the title *The Mirror of Beauty* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2013).

[35] Tariq Rahman, *A History of Pakistani Literature in English 1947–1988* (Lahore: Vanguard Publishers, 1990).

[36] Muneeza Shamsie, *Hybrid Tapestries: The Development of Pakistani Literature in English* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[37] Aroosa Kanwal and Saiyma Aslam, eds., *Routledge Companion to Pakistani Anglophone Writing* (London: Routledge, 2019).

practices and vocabulary, dominates social media. Compared to previous generations, the youth of today is much more in sync with an international culture of humanities-led social reform and social justice. Given that the ever-expanding reach of the internet has been the single most important development of the past three decades, it makes sense that a generation brought up on the interconnected culture of this era is more attuned to wide-ranging global influences in literature, music, and ideas.

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One of the assumptions about English writing in Pakistan is that it is the domain of a liberal elite that has always been circumspect about the ideological roots of a Muslim nation-state, even questioning the logic of Pakistan's creation. However, as Cara Cilano points out, writers like Bapsi Sidhwa, Mohammed Hanif, Kamila Shamsie, Uzma Aslam Khan, and Ali Sethi challenge the notion that Pakistan "as an idea or a nation or a state" has failed or that the idea of Pakistan was insufficiently thought through.[38] This important observation suggests that the privilege afforded by an elite education and access to English, which had previously been perceived as the source of anti-Pakistan agendas, is now accepted as an important tool for defending Pakistan. These fiction writers, however, do not necessarily challenge the notion that the nation-state is a failure; rather, their focus is on the success of Pakistani society. They may want the policies of the Pakistani state to have greater resonance with Pakistani society, but they are not averse to the idea of Pakistan.

In line with this theme, the mythology and tradition of Muslim Spain (earlier traced in Intizar Hussain) also surfaces in Tariq Ali's Islam Quintet.[39] Claire Chambers notes that this novel series is about Muslim societies in decline.[40] A repressive Catholic society replaces the tolerant, pluralistic society of Moorish

[38] For Cara Cilano's comment, see Bilal, *Writing Pakistan*, 19.

[39] A series of historical novels that treat the history of the long encounter between Islam and the West. Tariq Ali, *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree; The Book of Saladin; The Stone Woman; A Sultan in Palermo; Night of the Golden Butterfly* (London: Verso Books, 1992–2010).

[40] Claire Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 37.

al-Andalus.[41] In the second novel of the quintet, *The Book of Saladin*, Ali presents a counter-history of the Crusades, demystifying the Western portrayal of Salah-ud-din Ayubi (1138–1193), or Saladin, as villain.[42] The short-lived reclamation of Jerusalem at the climax of the novel is precisely the return to a tolerant and inclusive Islamicate empire that, for Intizar Hussain, connects the dots in the continuum of history from Moorish Spain to Mughal India.

Sara Suleri Goodyear shot to literary prominence in 1989 with *Meatless Days*, a delightful memoir of life in Pakistan before it became radicalized.[43] Suleri was one of six children born to Mair Jones, a Welsh-English professor who found herself "living in someone else's history" once she accompanied her new husband, Pakistani journalist Ziauddin Ahmad Suleri (1913–1999), back to his homeland. Sara was born in Pakistan and spent some part of her childhood in London, but for most of her childhood and adolescence, the Suleri family lived in Lahore.[44] The most intriguing part of the book is how geography "slips and slides" because Sara's memories of cities are bound up with her mental images of certain people in her life. "Shahid looks like London now, in the curious pull with which London can remind: 'I, also, was your home,'" she writes. "And it is still difficult to think of Ifat [her sister who died] without remembering her peculiar congruence with Lahore, a place that gave her pleasure."[45] Throughout the novel, Suleri invokes loss—the loss of relations, words, culture, history, audience, and geography. "Our congregation in Lahore was brief, and then we swiftly returned to a more geographic reality. 'We're lost Sara,' Shahid said to me on the phone from England. 'Yes Shahid, we're lost.'"[46]

The Importance of Urdu after 9/11

Even if English-language fiction has helped articulate a new identity for Pakistani literature and for Pakistanis by challenging Western Islamophobia, Urdu

[41] Tariq Ali, *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (London: Verso, 1993).

[42] Tariq Ali, *The Book of Saladin* (London: Verso, 1998).

[43] Sara Suleri Goodyear, *Meatless Days* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[44] Later, as an adult, Suleri moved to the United States, where, after receiving her PhD in 1983, she taught at Yale.

[45] Lucy Scholes, "Meatless Days: A Bewitching Memoir about Growing Up in Newly Created Pakistan," *The National*, February 12, 2018, https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/meatless-days-a-bewitching-memoir-about-growing-up-in-newly-created-pakistan-1.703719.

[46] Hira Shah, "'Meatless Days'—A Saga of Personal Loss and Political Turmoil," *Daily Times*, September 11, 2018, https://dailytimes.com.pk/295878/meatless-days-a-saga-of-personal-loss-and-political-turmoil/.

nevertheless remains deeply relevant. Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* provides a compelling case in point.[47] The novel was originally written in English, and, when published in 2008, it found both local and international praise. Its cult status has only been cemented with the passage of time, and Hanif has become a public intellectual. The book satirizes Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorial era and takes several personal digs at the late dictator. Its criticism of Zia attracted readers, especially among English-reading audiences, who are generally thought to be liberal. However, after the novel was translated into Urdu and republished in 2019 by Maktabah Danyal with the title *Phattay Aamon Ka Case*, a controversy ensued when the author accused the state of pressuring the publisher to withdraw the book from circulation. The book was never banned during its initial English iteration, and the state's resistance to its Urdu version shows that it assumes Urdu-reading audiences will not accept a satirical portrayal of the military-cleric nexus. The state, rather, is convinced that the wider audience of Pakistanis who read Urdu are predominantly in favor of the theocratic foundations of a militarized nation-state. This presumption suggests that state functionaries believe the English-reading audience is so small that they do not matter while the Urdu-reading audiences, who form the core of society, carry far more importance in determining state policy.

In a similar ideological vein, the Urdu novel that has had the longest-lasting impact on society since 9/11 is Umera Ahmed's *Pir-i-Kamil* (The perfect spiritual mentor), a polemical work that presents a certain kind of Islamic identity as the true identity of a Pakistani citizen and asserts the state is justified in the denial of Ahmadiyya rights.[48] The novel made Ahmed a household name, and she soon cashed in on the private television boom by becoming a popular TV-serial writer. In fact, one of the ways in which Urdu literature remains relevant as well as deeply reflective of patriarchal and pro-state rhetoric is through television serials and novellas serialized in Urdu digests.

While it might be true that the production of quality Urdu fiction and poetry and other genres has decreased over the past ten years, the large number of Urdu television channels and radio stations that have emerged since 9/11 is a sign that the production of content in the humanities is meeting the rising demand

[47] Mohammed Hanif, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (New Delhi: Penguin Random House, 2009).

[48] Umera Ahmed, *Pir-i-Kamil* (Lahore: Ferozesons, 2004). The Ahmadi community originated in 1889 in the Punjab, with Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as its self-declared prophet. Pakistan declared Ahmadis to be non-Muslim in 1974. See Tahir Kamran, "The Making of a Minority: Ahmadi Exclusion through Constitutional Amendment, 1974," *Pakistan Journal of Historical Studies* 4, nos. 1–2 (2019): 55–84.

for such content. The representation of social hierarchies, gender issues, and state narratives in privately owned media reflects how unrealized the ideal of an independent media is. The controversial content of *Meray Paas Tum Ho* (You are with me), a drama serial about a woman leaving her husband for another man, prompted responses from social activists who pointed out that women in this society do not survive accusations of cheating and that a society sanctioning violence against women cannot depict men as victims in such situations. Likewise, military-sponsored *Ehd-e-Wafa* (Vow of loyalty), where all politicians are shown as inherently corrupt, is an indication of how the state polices are thought about. Similarly, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media and public relations wing of Pakistan Army, went on to sponsor the production of such movies as *Waar* (Strike) and *Yalghaar* (Charge) in 2013 and 2017, respectively, to enhance the image of the armed forces given the geostrategic location of Pakistan. Later, in 2018, the same sort of venture was undertaken by Pakistan's Air Force when the movie *Parwaaz Hai Junoon* (Passion is soaring) was released, in which the importance of the Air Force was amplified. However, the vigorous critique on social media shows that there are some democratizing spaces available to Pakistani society even in a climate of repression. I view this counternarrative on social media as a necessary corollary to the acceptability and popularity of the humanities.

Apart from Intizar Hussain, who has been discussed above, Pakistan's most popular and prolific Urdu writer in the past thirty years has been Mustansar Hussain Tarar (b. 1939). In his novel *Bahao* (The flow), he locates an autochthonous link between the cultural roots of Punjab and Sindh, even finding some of the roots of Punjabi traditions in the culture of the Sindh Valley, a truly adventurous undertaking.[49] Similarly, *Raakh* (Ashes) takes as its canvas the entire history of the country up until its publication in 2003.[50] Abdullah Husain, who was already a widely revered author with his 1964 novel *Udaas Naslain* (The weary generations), wrote *Nadaar Log* (Deprived peoples) in 1996.[51] The novel

The visibility of the humanities as a tool for demanding representation and voicing resistance has been greatly amplified since 9/11. The more polarized society becomes, the greater the role that the humanities must play.

[49] Mustansar Hussain Tarar, *Bahaao* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1992).

[50] Mustansar Hussain Tarar, *Raakh* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2003).

[51] Abdullah Hussain, *Udaas Naslain* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2015); Hussain, *Nadaar Log* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1996).

posits that had the new state found proper leadership and a public willing to be honest and committed to state building, the country would not have failed to protect its destitute. This was a starkly postcolonial novel, scathingly critical of the postcolonial state's failure to become a nation.

A young writer who has found a great deal of relevance in the last decade among Urdu-reading audiences is Ali Akbar Natiq. His 2014 novel *Nau Lakhi Kothi* (The bungalow worth nine lakhs) is a story that connects the Raj era with post-Partition Pakistan.[52] However, Natiq does not find autochthonous links and does not even allude to local anti-colonial heroes of his region, such as Ahmed Khan Kharal (1785–1857),[53] who are important to the decolonizing strain of recent scholarship. In Pakistan, the idea of decolonization had existed in the local literature articulated through oral tradition; however, the university academics, trained on and influenced by the Western discourses, opted not to engage with these literary strains. Starting in the late 1990s, through various courses in postcolonial studies at the Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistani academics began to take interest in the decolonizing discourses.[54] Thus, decolonization has been borrowed from the West instead of germinating in Pakistani academia internally. As a result, revisions in the literary/historical understanding of decolonization transpiring in the West remain impervious to the indigenous sensibility. The dominant thematic structures are stuck in colonial context: any theme or character adversarial to colonialist perceptions fails to find acceptability. Kharal was one such local hero who resisted the British in armed combat but was not recognized as a hero by mainstream scholarship.[55]

Humanities and Minorities

Minorities in Pakistan complain of widespread discrimination and oppression, with Zia-era anti-blasphemy laws being misused with impunity by a hyper-conservative state. Those who speak in favor of minority populations invite threat. The forced conversions of minor Christian and Hindu girls along with their forced marriage to much older men and the continued denial of basic citizenship rights to the Ahmadiyya community especially are two examples

[52] Ali Akbar Natiq, *Nau Lakhi Kothi* (Lahore: Sanjh Publications, 2014).

[53] Shahid Siddiqui, "Ahmed Khan Kharal and the Raj," *International News*, October 17, 2016, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/157720-Ahmed-Khan-Kharal-and-the-Raj.

[54] Mehboob Ahmed, Lecturer, Department of English Language and Literature, Government College University, Lahore, personal communication, August 3, 2022.

[55] Turab ul Hassan Sargana, *Punjab and the War of Independence 1857–1858: From Collaboration to Resistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

that show how the minorities of Pakistan live in a state of perpetual fear. Two literary expressions of solidarity with the minorities stand out as exceptions to this situation. Mohammed Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) is a rare representation of the Christian community in Pakistan. The novel shows the peculiar violence perpetrated against Christians and women in the country, and, as such, it also highlights the lack of representation of minorities in the mainstream. Ikramullah's 2015 novella "Aankh Ojhal" (Out of sight) represents the state of the Ahmadiyya community, which otherwise finds no voice in mainstream media.[56]

In nonfiction, however, developments in the representation of minorities are truly heartening. Most of this work has come from historians. Ali Usman Qasmi has written a book-length study of the Ahmadiyya community,[57] while Anushay Malik has researched Christian laborers in Pakistan.[58] Emmanuel Zafar wrote *A Concise History of Pakistani Christians*, which provides an overview of Christian life in an Islamic state.[59] These works show that academia is beginning to engage with the historical erasure of minorities from the popular imagination. Another strain of minority discourse within mainstream Islam pertains to shrine culture. Social and cultural historians Hussain Ahmad Khan and Umber Bin Ibad have initiated very important work on the Sufi shrine as a secular space within the larger context of Islamic thought in Pakistan.[60] Although the shrine is an essentially religious space, it also incorporates a plurality of influences that makes it less committed to one ideology and more open to accepting women, transgender people, and minorities. Thus, historians have joined writers and literary critics in the move to humanize the previously dehumanized "other." Ayesha Jalal is another historian whose work on Pakistani history and society represents alternative discourses, especially *Self and Sovereignty* and *The Pity of*

[56] Ikramullah, "Aankh Ojhal," in *Bār-e Digar* (Lahore: Fiction House, 2005), 62–159 (translated by Faruq Hassan and Muhammad Umer Memon as *Out of Sight* [Delhi: Penguin India, 2015]).

[57] Ali Usman Qasmi, *The Ahmadis and the Politics of Religious Exclusion in Pakistan* (London: Anthem Press, 2014).

[58] Anushay Malik, "The Urban Poor and Their Religion: Class and Christianity in the City of Lahore," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* (forthcoming).

[59] Emmanuel Zafar, *A Concise History of Pakistani Christians* (Lahore: Humshakoon Publishers, 2007).

[60] Hussain Ahmad Khan, *Artisans, Sufis, Shrines: Colonial Architecture in Nineteenth-Century Punjab* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014); Umber Bin Ibad, *Sufi Shrines and the Pakistani State: The End of Religious Pluralism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019).

Partition: Manto's Life, Times, and Work across the India-Pakistan Divide.[61] Azfar Moin's *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* and Manan Ahmed Asif's *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* are two other significant recent studies of the region's history and the role of Islam in defining identity in Pakistan today.[62]

Autochthony as a Literary Impulse

In the Punjab, where post-Partition migration involved mostly Punjabis, strong differences of opinion among people regarding the ownership of resources did not arise. Possessed with a shared cultural heritage, the Punjabis were able to find common ground and to coexist. Among Punjabi writers, Asif Khan stands out for the range of genres in which he worked until his death in 2000. He collected *waars* (heroic odes or ballads that narrate the martial exploits of a warrior and his ancestors), wrote on the history of Punjabi literature, and critically analyzed classical Punjabi poets. Academic, critic, and author Saeed Bhutta, too, has contributed immensely to Punjabi literature. He has collected a trove of Punjabi folk tales and compiled them into several books.[63] Bhutta's outstanding contribution has been not only collecting but also rewriting Punjabi folk tales. These stories contain themes of valor, honor, friendship, resistance against oppression, the nature of power, and the machinations of those in power, along with a constant engagement with history. By converting an ancient oral tradition into a modern form, Bhutta has challenged the long-held notion that the Punjabi literary tradition is spasmodic and weak. Since the mainstream literary tradition of Pakistan is in Urdu, regional languages and literary traditions have been widely ignored. This neglect is exacerbated in the case of the Punjabi language. Since the ruling elite of Pakistan is mostly Punjabi and state power is perceived as dominated by Punjabis, it is expected that Punjabi language would be in a dominant position. However, middle-class, urban Punjabis have embraced and appropriated Urdu as their first language, thus suppressing Punjabi in homes and offices in urban centers like Lahore. Thus, it is ironic that the rest of the country

[61] Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); Jalal, *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times, and Work across the India-Pakistan Divide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[62] Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Manan Ahmed Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[63] Saeed Bhutta, *Kamal Kahani* [Story of Kamal]; *Bar Kahani* [Story of Bar]; *Raj Kahani* [Story of Raj]; *Nabar Kahani* [Story of Nabar] (Lahore: Sanjh, 2006–2017).

thinks of Punjabi as the language of the oppressors, while within Punjab its native speakers consider it inferior.[64] As it has diminished the importance of the Punjabi language, the Punjabi elite has invested a lot in cultivating the traditions of Urdu and English. Thus, recovering rich Punjabi literary folk tradition and presenting it to the world are considerable achievements on Bhutta's part.

Another Punjabi writer from this period who has argued for an autochthonous literary affiliation is the poet and novelist Zahid Hassan. In his *Tassi Dharti* (Thirsty land), set in rural Punjab, Hassan attempts to link together historical events across two centuries into one continuous narrative.[65] As a native son of the Sandal Bar region—located between the rivers Chenab and Ravi and considered by local residents to be the heart of Punjab—he has, like Bhutta, brought into prominence the idioms and stories of the *bar*. Rooting stories in this region has been an important step in creating a space for Punjabi literature in the wider domain of world literature. Thus, following in the footsteps of the literary festivals in Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, and Faisalabad, what started as a Punjabi literary gathering has now expanded into an annual literary festival that includes other languages as well. Similarly, the publishing house Punjabi Adabi Board and Punjab Institute of Language and Culture have been quite active in trying to revive Punjabi literature by publishing classical works of poetry and convening seminars and conferences. Mushtaq Soofi's regular English-language column on Punjabi culture and literature in the daily Karachi newspaper *Dawn* and Iqbal Qaiser's Khoj Garh (a research and archival institute located in Lallyani, Kasur) have been at the forefront of generating a critical interest in Punjab over the past two decades.

In Punjabi poetry, the major voice since Partition has been that of Najam Hossein Syed, who, along with Afzal Tauseef, Shafqat Tanveer Mirza, and later Mushtaq Soofi and Iqbal Qaiser, may be credited with starting something akin to a unified movement of literary analysis focused specifically on Punjabi literature. Syed, Mirza, and Soofi have been particularly influential in bringing Punjabi studies to English-reading audiences. Syed, both a poet and dramatist, is rooted in the locale and traditions of Punjab. Similarly, UK-based poet Mazhar Tirmazi has imbibed several international influences, but his Punjabi poetry has remained grounded in a Punjabi ethos. His book *Adh* (Half) addresses a variety of themes and images and is the seminal work of contemporary Punjabi poetry.[66] Tirmazi is best known for his poem "Umraan langiyan pabban paar" (A

[64] Tariq Rahman, *Language, Ideology and Power: Language-Learning among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[65] Zahid Hassan, *Tassi Dharti* (Lahore: Punjabi Adabi Board, 2016).

[66] Mazhar Tirmazi, *Adh* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2015).

lifetime spent on tiptoe), an elegy for Partition. His poetry laments the breaking apart of Punjab, and as a London-based poet he constantly incorporates the shared cultural heritage and vocabulary of the two Punjabs, highlighting how diaspora writing acquires autochthonous undertones in international spaces.

A central concern for Punjabi academics and laureates, which follows naturally from the autochthonous absorption of migrant cultures in the Punjab, has been to engage in a dialogue with the state's language policies. This dialogue has occurred not just in academic contexts but also through the translation of world literatures into Punjabi and Punjabi literature into world languages. Writers such as Saeed Bhutta and Zahid Hassan have found widespread acclaim for their translations into Punjabi. Poets Mazhar Tirmazi, Nasreen Anjum Bhatti, Afzal Saahir, Rai Nasir, and Baba Najmi, too, have found international readerships in translation as well as through interactions with world literary movements. With other regional languages and literatures, too, students and teachers from various regions have come together in major cultural centers such as Lahore and Karachi to create shared spaces where regional and ethnic identities find acceptance as part of the national mainstream. Nain Sukh's *Dharti Panj Daryai* (Land of five rivers), an important recent book on the history of the Punjab, shows an evolution in Punjabi understanding of its relationship with its colonial heritage.[67]

Thus, despite the active resistance and/or general indifference on the part of policy makers (including senior university administrators and the HEC), young and mostly foreign-educated faculty members at Pakistan's major universities have been trying to decolonize and indigenize the humanities by arguing for the teaching of local literatures, both in English and in regional vernaculars. Postcolonial literature from Latin America and Africa is being taught in various universities, serving as models for young writers who are looking for ways to discover their own indigenous and autochthonous ways of writing.

This autochthony or the primacy of native inhabitants over migrants was not visible in pre-Partition Karachi, where a relatively small number of native Sindhi Muslim landlords controlled the predominantly Hindu native Sindhi population. As mentioned earlier, the arrival of non-Sindhi migrants in Karachi and Hyderabad in 1947 created schisms. Punjabis, Balochis, Pathans, and Beharis all moved to Karachi, the industrial and the erstwhile administrative capital of the country, which resulted in violent conflicts between locals and "foreigners." Thereafter, since the formation of the MQM, Karachi has been at the center of violent politics in Pakistan. As noted earlier, this violence has been a major theme in Pakistani literature in the last thirty years; it formed the

[67] Nain Sukh, *Dharti Panj Daryai* (Lahore: New Line Publishers, 2019).

source material for writers like Kamila Shamsie, Omar Shahid Hamid, Fahmida Riaz, Intizar Hussain, and H. M. Naqvi, among others. It is thus notable that at no point do these writers articulate a Sindhi autochthony. It is as though the literature of Muhajir Karachi has absorbed within itself the voices of Sindhi nationalism.[68]

In contrast, Lahore's cultural autochthony is strong precisely because it absorbed migrants well. While Karachi produced a strong diaspora culture where ethnic communities insisted on their individual identities,[69] Lahori culture absorbed all influences while retaining its own individual identity. Kanza Javed's novel *Ashes, Wine and Dust* (2015) meanders from and returns to Lahore as the site of action, absorbing both the rural background of a village and the global expanse of an international existence. Mirza Athar Baig, a professor of philosophy, has written books set around Lahore that represent a truly new strain of the Urdu novel. His *Ghulam Bagh* (The slave garden, 2007) and *Hassan Ki Soorat-e-Haal: Khaali Jaghein Pur Karo* (Hassan's state of affairs: Fill in the blanks, 2014) both present a fragmented philosophical type of narrative that is a stark break from the traditional Urdu novel.[70] His work thematizes the identity of contemporary Pakistanis who have been exposed to a Western education. Baig has garnered a huge following, especially among younger audiences, who appreciate the global concerns articulated in his work.

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[68] This is an expansion of the ideas on the Sindhi Language Movement presented by Tariq Rahman, "Language and Politics in a Pakistan Province: The Sindhi Language Movement," *Asian Survey* 35, no. 11 (1995): 1005–16.

[69] This is particularly visible in novels like Intizar Hussain's *Aagey Samundar Hai* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002). See Priya Kumar, "Muhajirs as a Diaspora in Intizar Hussain's *The Sea Lies Ahead* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39, no. 4 (2016): 855–72.

[70] Mirza Athar Baig, *Ghulam Bagh* (Lahore: Sanjh Publications, 2007); Baig, *Hassan Ki Soorat-e-Haal: Khaali Jaghein Pur Karo* (Lahore: Sanjh Publications, 2014).

Literary Representation of Feminism

Gender studies, in line with global trends, is a recent phenomenon in Pakistan that has led to increased focus on women writers, particularly those with a feminist orientation in their work. Urdu poets Kishwar Naheed, Fahmida Riaz, Zehra Nigah, Ishrat Aafreen, and Neelma Sarwar,[71] and Punjabi poet Nasreen Anjum Bhatti have been particularly influential in highlighting women's issues, something that earlier female writers like Bano Qudsia, Razia Butt, and Bushra Rehman did not do despite presenting ostensibly strong feminist characters. Established in Karachi in 1981, the Women's Action Forum became an important conduit for the foregrounding of feminist voices that resisted traditions embedded in patriarchy and other forms of male dominance.[72] Women's awareness of their sexuality, individuality, and the desire to rebel against the "domestic" stereotype was at the core of their poetry, and they have highlighted the ways in which social structures have perpetuated the denial of women's spaces, voices, and rights. Since women's rights movements globally have aligned themselves with movements for other rights, particularly labor movements, feminist poetry in Pakistan also reflects an alignment with the issues of workers' rights, peasants' rights, and climate crisis. This alignment has also placed contemporary Pakistani poetry in line with international thematic concerns.

A recent controversy affords an important opportunity to understand how the rise of the women's rights movement has exposed deep fissures in Pakistani society. The Aurat March (Women's march) of 2020 raised the slogan "mera jism meri marzi," which is the Urdu translation from English of the reproductive rights slogan "my body, my choice." Both social and traditional media erupted in protest. To the conventionally patriarchal mindset, women demanding their rights on the streets is a threat to the very fabric of society. So, the religious and patriarchal media criticized the Aurat March for spreading a "Western agenda" of "obscenity and promiscuity," which, in their understanding, is a "revolt against Islam." Their trivialization of the March and its slogan reveals a current of thought in Pakistan: that women are not free the way men are, that the Pakistani citizenry is male, Sunni Muslim, and essentially Punjabi, with anybody falling outside of these parameters not being deemed an authentic Pakistani. But the country's founders had not claimed a free country only for men. Indeed, women like Fatima Jinnah, Jehanara Shahnawaz, Begum Salma Tasadduq Hussain, and Raana Liaquat Ali Khan were prominent activists for

[71] For insightful analysis see Anita Anantharam, "Engendering the Nation: Women, Islam, and Poetry in Pakistan," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 11, no. 1 (2009): 208–24.

[72] For details see Afiya S. Zia, *Faith and Feminism in Pakistan: Religious Agency or Secular Autonomy* (Sussex: Academic Press, 2018).

independence and stood next to the men who created a new nation.

Those who have done a critical reading of women's rights in Islam earnestly believe that a fresh consensual understanding needs to be developed with reference to the status of women in Islam. The common refrain among critics of the Aurat March is that it has been supported and funded by the West, specifically America. This amounts to a denigration of Pakistani women, suggesting that they are not capable of articulating their rights on their own. The women's rights movement is a prominent example of how Pakistani literature, society, humanities, and social sciences are all in tune with global trends and pressures.

Conclusion

As a field, the humanities remain out of favor in Pakistan, both in the public imagination and in academia, but evidence from the last three decades indicates that, despite the decline in status, interest in the humanities has been rising. With a boom in the number of PhDs, foreign-educated academics, and authors writing about Pakistan from home and abroad, the humanities have been enriched by cutting-edge research and innovative literary works. The main areas that this work has helped address are the ethnic imbalance in society, the disparity of access to power between the genders, the state's absence in its duties toward minorities, and Western Islamophobic representations of Pakistan.

These trends show that the state of the humanities in Pakistan is complicated. While the overall trend is one of decline, institutional and market demands have ensured that the humanities cannot be altogether ignored. In fact, the visibility of the humanities as a tool for demanding representation and voicing resistance has been greatly amplified since 9/11. The more polarized society becomes, the greater the role that the humanities must play. Yet, no government seems cognizant of the part that the humanities can play in the reformation, reconfiguration, and reorientation of Pakistani society. No government has presented a vision to channel the humanities as a social project. The relative growth of the humanities indicates, however, that there is space for the disciplines of the humanities to grow and find greater acceptance in Pakistan.

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