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Hidden Histories of Pakistan

Censorship, Urdu literature, Islam, and progressive secular nationalisms in colonial India and Pakistan have a complex, intertwined history. Sarah Waheed offers a timely examination of the role of progressive Muslim intellectuals in the Pakistan movement. She delves into how these left-leaning intellectuals drew from long-standing literary traditions of Islam in a period of great duress and upheaval, complicating our understanding of the relationship between religion and secularism. Rather than seeing "religion" and "the secular" as distinct and oppositional phenomena, this book demonstrates how these concepts themselves were historically produced in South Asia and were deeply interconnected in the cultural politics of the left. Through a detailed analysis of trials for blasphemy, obscenity, and sedition, and feminist writers, Waheed argues that Muslim intellectuals engaged with socialism and communism through their distinctive ethical and cultural past. In so doing, she provides a fresh perspective on the creation of Pakistan and South Asian modernity.

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Censorship, Literature, and Secular Nationalism in Late Colonial India

Sarah Fatima Waheed
Davidson College

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Preface

Hum Dekheñge
We shall see
Surely, we too shall see
The day that has been promised
That has been written on the eternal tablet
When the heavy mountains of injustice and oppression
Will blow away like (fluffed) cotton wool
Under the feet of we, the subdued, the oppressed
This land will thump with a severe shake/rattle
And above the heads of those who rule
The lightening will strike with a clatter
When from the *Ka'ba* of God's world
All the idols will be taken away
When we – the pure ones/those who believe, and those who have been barred from the sacred sanctuary / Mecca (*haram*)
Will be placed on the high cushion (throne)
When all the thrones will be tossed
When all the thrones will be brought down
Only the name of Allah will remain
Who is hidden as well as apparent/present
Who is spectacle as well as spectator
The cry of *ana'l-Haqq* (I am the Truth) will be raised
Which is I as well as you
And God's creation will rule
Which is I as well as you.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz[1]

January 2020. In India, mass protests have been underway for weeks, against the introduction by the ruling BJP government of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and related bills. The legislation strips citizenship rights, targeting in particular the Muslims of India. Just six months after officially annexing Kashmir and further delegitimizing the struggle of Kashmiris for their rights, the Indian state has now proclaimed war on

[1] Taimoor Shahid, "The Politics of Enchantment: Remapping the Precapital in Faiz Ahmad Faiz's Postcolonial Poetry," *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 28 (2013): 228.

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its Muslim citizenry. Initially spurred by young Muslim students at various universities and colleges in northern India, the protests against the citizenship amendment bills acquired the character of a mass national movement involving diverse liberals and leftists across the spectrum of India's various religious communities, with Indian Muslims at the helm. Indeed, the protests against the BJP in early 2020 marked a pivotal moment. These were large-scale agitations by people who refuse to capitulate to the fascism of the Indian state. Urdu poetry reverberated across the protests. In particular, the singing of *Hum Dekheñge*, first composed by the progressive Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz in 1979, became a rallying cry.

Since the early 1980s, singing *Hum Dekheñge* has become a feature of leftist and liberal protests across India as well as Pakistan, whether heard amongst Jawaharlal Nehru University student unions and in Delhi streets, or refashioned by the immensely popular Coke Studio of Pakistan and performed in Lahore's recent women's marches. *Hum Dekheñge* was not widely known, however, until it was first sung by Iqbal Bano under Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship in Pakistan in the 1980s. There, under General Zia's Islamicizing regime, the great glamorous *ghazal* songstress vocalized the poem in melodic immortality, to an audience of hundreds of thousands in a stadium in Lahore. In that first version set to music, one can hear the audience cry out "Inqilab Zindabad!" ("Long Live the Revolution!") as Iqbal Bano's voice reaches its crescendo with the refrain, "And we shall see." Iqbal Bano sang these verses dressed publicly in a sari, when the sari itself was being derogatorily viewed as an "un-Islamic," "Hindu" symbol, banned as a dress for female government employees, a once-familiar South Asian attire seen as "other" to the Islamicizing Sunnification project of the Pakistani state under Zia. This was a period of intense censorship, when newspapers in Zia's Pakistan ran blank white spaces in place of published columns and there were mass government arrests of dissidents. Today, over forty years later, the poem *Hum Dekheñge* has become a source of controversy in India, as dissenters and protestors have been accused of being "anti-national" and "anti-Hindu" for reciting it.

Narendra Modi's second term as prime minister has meant that India's democratic institutions have been increasingly dismantled, crystalizing the state of Hindu fascism. Each day carries with it a fresh horror, particularly, though not exclusively, across India's "Hindi belt," in the north. These horrors have run from mob lynching of minorities, with violence directed against women, Dalits, and Muslims in particular, to state level communitarianism, such as the Supreme Court decision to uphold BJP claims of the Ayodhya Ram Temple over the ruins of Babri

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Masjid, which had been demolished by Hindutva activists in 1992, but whose memory is fast fading, thanks to large-scale national amnesia and spurious legal cases. The horrors have also entailed the dismantling of the constitution, the banning of human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, the rewriting of history, which notably involves the erasure of India's Muslim past, attacks against institutions of higher learning, mass arrests, and detentions of dissidents on fabricated charges. These are but a few of the many injustices of the past six years. Fascism has now swept across India almost triumphantly, through social media and effective government and corporate propaganda. Today, we are witnessing some of the most severe forms of censorship the people of India have faced to date.

What does this state of censorship look, feel, and sound like? Before addressing the attack in India against the progressive poem, *Hum Dekheñge*, a few words on the Urdu language are in order. In this book, I argue that we cannot understand the long history of censoring literature without also considering the past and present of the Urdu language. Urdu has come to be associated with Muslims, though it has been far from an exclusively Muslim language in the South Asian past. Yet, across South Asian nationalisms, Urdu holds a peculiar status. In Pakistan, Urdu is the official and dominant national language, to the exclusion of most people for whom Urdu is not their first tongue. Historically, its adoption by the state worked to marginalize Pakistan's many languages, most notably Bengali, which was, upon the creation of Pakistan in 1947, spoken by a majority of the population. The exclusion of Bengali, together with rampant discrimination against East Pakistanis by the Urdu-speaking Punjabi military and civil authorities who claimed for themselves a monopoly to represent the nation, was one of the major causes of the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, a war waged largely against a civilian population by the West Pakistani military state. In Pakistan, then, Urdu has harnessed statist and majoritarian impulses against ethnic and linguistic minorities.

In India, meanwhile, the Urdu language is bound up with the Muslim minority as well as discriminatory attitudes toward them. Urdu in India has become suspect, insurrectionary even, and, in more extreme cases, those daring to use it in public spaces have even been threatened with arrest, violence, and verbal abuse.[2] Yet, at the same time, Urdu in India

[2] Nandini Majumdar, "RSS Members Threaten Artists Painting Urdu Couplet," *The Wire* online, May 24, 2016, https://thewire.in/the-arts/rss-members-threaten-delhi-i-love-you-artists; see also "Is It Wrong to Read Urdu in the Metro?" *Indian Express* online, February 24, 2016, https://indianexpress.com/article/trending/trending-in-india/is-it-wrong-to-read-urdu-on-the-metro-a-strange-incident-sets-off-twitter-debate/.

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has also continued to be a powerful force in shared cultural and political spaces where pluralism is celebrated as a distinctly Indian phenomenon, and has acquired a new lease on life with the establishment of such organizations as the Rekhta Foundation, devoted to the promotion and dissemination of Urdu literature and especially poetry. The revival of Urdu poetry in India, in the age of Hindu majoritarianism, has prompted reflection upon its ethical and political potentialities.[3] It is the history of those ethical and political potentialities, during twentieth-century assertions of progressivism, particularly of "Muslim leftists" against colonial and postcolonial forms of censorship, that lies at the heart of this book.

At the protests against the citizenship bill in early 2020, *Hum Dekheñge* (*We Shall Witness*) was widely sung and performed not only in Delhi, but in many other major cities of India, even in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, far from the north Indian heartland of Hindi and Urdu; it was also translated into southern Indian languages such as Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada.[4] The poem's popularity during the anti-CAA protests was evident in how *Hum Dekheñge* went viral across the Internet in India, with recordings of the performances made by university students, poets, and amateur musicians. The song became one of the most recognizable anthems of resistance against the BJP's authoritarianism and brutal state repression. Meanwhile, on the other side of the border, thousands gathered and protested in the cities of Pakistan for women's rights as part of the Aurat March of 2020, and in Lahore *Hum Dekheñge* was sung as part of a series of defiant performances put together by a coalition of feminist, LGBTQ rights, and leftist political organizations. As a young singer took the stage and began to sing *Hum Dekheñge*, Pakistani men and women, angered by the state's repression of women and the rights of sexual minorities, sang in unison, the words by now etched into popular protest culture.

Hum Dekheñge was first published in Pakistan in 1979, in the collection *Mere Dil, Mere Musāfir*, and was written by Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911–84), a communist and one of the most well-known progressive poets of Urdu. Faiz played a leading role in the progressive literary movement of the mid-twentieth century, as well as in leftist politics in late colonial India and postcolonial Pakistan. The history of *Hum Dekheñge*, and Faiz's poetry more broadly, is bound up closely with his life, his leftist and

[3] Anand Vivek Taneja, "The Elegy for Good Days: Encounters with Urdu Poetry in Delhi," *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and The Public Sphere*, May 2019, https://tif.ssrc.org/2019/05/29/the-elegy-for-good-days/.

[4] Anjana Shekar, "Dissenting with Faiz: How 'Hum Dekhenge' Has Been Adapted in Protests across India," *The News Minute* online, February 1, 2020, www.thenewsminute.com/article/dissenting-faiz-how-hum-dekhenge-has-been-adapted-protests-across-india-117267.

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internationalist politics, as well as his own trials against censorship. The Pakistani state's charges of sedition against him in the early 1950s were part of a larger project of suppressing communist dissent in Pakistan, which I discuss at length later in this book in Chapter 4.

Yet censorship has stalked *Hum Dekheñge*, even from its earliest beginnings. Jennifer Dubrow writes of how the history of *Hum Dekheñge* is itself little known in spite of the poem's wide circulation, for "the poem suffered an unusual textual history." While Dubrow is correct that there were early omissions, she mistakenly claims that "Faiz removed '*Hum Dekheñge*' from his collected works ... the reasons for this omission are unclear."[5] It was not Faiz who was responsible for the omissions. Although the poem is publicly accessible across the Internet, *Hum Dekheñge* is absent in most editions of Faiz's complete works, *Nuskha-hā-e Vafā*. Moreover, the lines, "The cry of *ana'l-Haqq* (I am the Truth) will be raised/Which is I as well as you," were omitted in the editions that do carry this poem. According to Faiz's grandson, Ali Hashmi, the publisher censored these lines without the consent of Faiz or his family, but the complete poem is available not only in the first place it was published, *Mere Dil, Mere Musāfir*, but also in full in *Sāre Sukhan Hamāre*, a collection of Faiz's work published from London in 1982 under the poet's supervision.[6]

What was considered so offensive about the lines, "The cry of *ana'l-Haqq* (I am the Truth) will be raised/Which is I as well as you," that they were removed in some editions in Pakistan? The answer lies in part with questions of translation, and in part with the history of Islam. *Hum Dekheñge* is difficult to translate, and translators are left to contend with the poem's revolutionary and ethically oriented impulses, drawing inspiration, simultaneously, from Marxist and Islamic imaginaries. Some translations have traditionally tended to emphasize the poem's revolutionary impulses, interpreting it more stolidly in line with leftist political purpose, its Islamic expressions seen as secondary or as a variation of Marxist universalism.

Yet, Faiz's poem cannot truly be understood without seeing it as belonging to the Islamic tradition and imagination, in particular, how its Sufi and devotional language is at once both central to, and existing *around*, the margins of Islam. The poem's Islamic universalism is key to understanding the power of *Hum Dekheñge*, for the poem explicitly draws from Quranic passages.[7] Meanwhile, in *Hum Dekheñge*, the lines, "The cry of *ana'l-Haqq* (I am the Truth) will be raised/Which is I as well as you," invoke the iconic

[5] Jennifer Dubrow, "Singing the Revolution: India's Anti-CAA Protests and Faiz's 'Hum Dekinge'," *Positions Politics*, http://positionspolitics.org/eikon_2dubrow/.
[6] Shahid, "The Politics of Enchantment." It is also available in the very first place it was published, in the collection *Mere Dil, Mere Musāfir*.
[7] Ibid.

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tenth-century Persian poet and martyr of love, Mansur al-Hallaj. His famous exclamation "*ana'l haqq*" was a declaration that voiced his understanding of the Sufi principle of the mutual relationship between human and God – God's truth and human truth being one and the same. Under the Abbassid caliphate, Hallaj's declaration was seen as heresy, with many interpreting it as a claim to Divinity, and the poet was later executed. It was this shared Islamic cultural memory and tradition from which Faiz composed the poem, as well as through which these lines were interpreted and omitted by the Pakistani publishers. Incidentally, the title of the collection of Faiz's poetry where *Hum Dekheñge* was first published, *Mere Dil, Mere Musāfir* (*My Heart, My Traveler*), invokes the "*musāfir*," a traveler or wanderer who is a standard figure and trope within traditions of poetry influenced by Sufism where investigated ethical and moral life is understood as a journey toward the Truth and the Divine, and those who are on that path are often called *sālik*, traveler or wayfarer in Arabic.

The journey of *Hum Dekheñge* is circuitous: while, in Zia's Pakistan in the 1980s, it was seen by some as "not properly Islamic enough," now, in Modi's India, it is seen as "anti-Hindu," so much so that once again the specter of censorship has arisen. While the poem was not formally banned, in the early months of 2020, *Hum Dekheñge* came under fire in India and was alleged to be "anti-Hindu," a claim that the well-known Urdu poet and Bollywood celebrity songwriter Javed Akhtar remarked was nothing short of "absurd."[8] Initially, Muslim students protesting the CAA/CAB at IIT Kanpur were admonished for reciting the poem, which included, according to one university professor there, "hurtful sentiments against Hindus." The professor pointed to the lines, "When from the *Ka'ba* of God's world/All the idols will be taken away" as his evidence. Yet, only the most spurious interpretation of the poem can produce such a misreading. It is premised upon a Hindu nationalist variety of Islamophobia, a politics which advances a grievous sense of victimhood of the majority. Large sections of the majority have now, through successful state and societal propaganda, bought into the notion of "centuries of Muslim oppression against Hindus." This idea is premised on a rather overblown myth of Muslims desecrating thousands of Hindu temples in the premodern past, a potent historical weapon. Faiz's lines certainly do not advance the destruction of any temple's gods or goddesses, and to anyone familiar with the basic premises of Islam and Islamic tradition, these lines are generic references to idols as *symbols* of untruth, falsehood, injustice, and false piety, thoughts, and ideas versus

[8] "Calling Faiz 'Anti-Hindu' Is Absurd Says Javed Akthar," *Hindustan Times* online, January 2, 2020, www.hindustantimes.com/bollywood/calling-faiz-anti-hindu-is-absurd-and-funny-says-javed-akhtar/story-c3uoMTnLN1dYtXTn6trp9O.html.

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Truth, a true faith, Justice, and fear of God. References like these appear in several other poems of Faiz's, such as "*Voh Butoñ ne Dāle Haiñ Vasvase*," but the lamentations in reference to such *butoñ* ("idols") are quite generic. They are so generic, in fact, that such laments can be found in any number of Urdu poems across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as in Bollywood songs.

There is, too, another question that unfolds as mass censorship in India has become so dangerously widespread. What happens to India's liberal-secular nationalism as the terms "Islamic" and "Muslim" for India's Hindutva ideologues are deemed antithetical and catastrophically "other" to India's essence as a Hindu nation, and thus must be excoriated from the national body politic? Javed Akhtar, at one point, was so at pains to show that Faiz Ahmed Faiz's lines could not be interpreted as anti-Hindu, that he overemphasized Faiz's credentials as a staunch secularist, an atheist. Meanwhile, the news anchorman interviewing him pointed out verses in the poem in a bizarre literary reading through a cable-TV media circus, in a country where now cinema-goers are in need of subtitles for Urdu in the movies: the deleterious lack of knowledge of Urdu among educated Indians is quite appalling, given only a generation ago the language was still shared across religious communities and north Indians, and speakers of Hindustani overall, could easily code-switch between Hindi and Urdu. It is, of course, rather paradoxical that such a condition exists even as the Urdu literary world is experiencing somewhat of a revival in India with the onset of such ventures as Rekhta and shared spaces of Urdu poetic recitation continue to be celebrated.

Akhar's superfluous insistence on Faiz's atheism implicitly suggests that the poem was not Islamic because the poet was not Islamic, as a way to defend Hindu nationalist allegations against its recitation. And yet, this overinsistence on Faiz's atheism itself operated as a kind of erasure. Interestingly, the original printed title that Faiz gave to his poem when first published in 1979 in his poetry collection *Mere Dil Mere Musāfir*, is not *Hum Dekheñge* but "*Wa yabqā, wajhu rabbika*," a phrase from the Quran (55:27), which means, "only the face of your Lord endures." As Anand Vivek Taneja has pointed out, when Faiz wrote this poem, he framed it with this Quranic phrase, indicating he understood it as a deeply theological poem.[9] Faiz, a communist, was educated in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu and deeply grounded in Islamic knowledge, a fact that in his generation and his context was not viewed in the sharply

[9] William Elison and Anand Vivek Taneja, "'We Will Witness' ('*Hum Dekhenge*') by Faiz Ahmed Faiz," July 8, 2020. Video, 20: 25. www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrR4w8EO0Ks&t=1508s.

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divided oppositional categories of "secular" and "religiosity" as understood by South Asian nationalisms today. This book revisits a constellation of such figures of the twentieth-century past.

But what are the stakes involved in drawing attention to the Islamic aspects of the poem, given that it will only render the poem ever more unacceptable in the Hindutva, and by extension the Islamophobic imagination? The recent row over *Hum Dekheñge* reveals an India so enmeshed in Hindu nationalist censorship and erasure that *any* and *all* Islam itself – together with Muslims – must be removed, and even "atheist" Muslims are interrogated for their loyalty to the "Hindu nation." As the historian Ayesha Jalal has pointed out, "India without Islam is an ingenious idea. It would certainly have obviated the need for endless scholarly outpourings on communalism ... Islam in India united or divided, is a fact of history and an intrinsic feature of the subcontinent's future."[10]

During the anti-CAA/CAB protests, and after the row over Faiz's poem and song in India, several singers further popularized the songs and now any number of songs can be found. One new version of *Hum Dekheñge* in India that began to circulate on the Internet had removed the verses that offended Hindutva sensibilities. This version was made for the protestors who saw themselves aligning with an India premised on pluralism and inclusion as articulated by the pacifist nationalism of Gandhi and the constitutional nationalism of Ambedkar, not the exclusivist Hindu nationalism of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. And yet, the singer had changed the original phrasing of Faiz's poem. The references to *Allah*, *ka'ba*, and *but* were replaced. While the song is not one of the more popular versions and is an exception, as the vast majority of versions sung in India are true to their original composition, it is striking that it exists.

What this says is just how pervasive censorship has become in India. Even Indian liberals who oppose the BJP government's recent rulings feel compelled to erase the Islamic aspects of Faiz's poem, as though to render it palatable in Hindutva's rebranding of the meanings of Indian secularism. There is, in effect, an overlapping and arguably Islamophobic concern over "the Muslim problem," between right-wing and liberal nationalisms in India. In 2020, Indian liberals were so disturbed by the cry of *Allāh-o-Akbar* that they took to social media, berating and admonishing Muslims – who are under threat of harm in India – for using it as

[10] Ayesha Jalal, "Exploding Communalism: The Politics of Muslim Identity in South Asia," *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 2.

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a rallying cry during the protests. In what amounted to "liberal paranoia of Muslims asserting their identity," Indian National Congress politician Shashi Tharoor exclaimed, in reference to Islamic slogans being used by Muslims, "We will not allow pluralism and diversity to be supplanted by any kind of religious fundamentalism."[11] The implication was clear: Muslims and Muslim slogans have the monopoly on religious fundamentalism. The historical amnesia is rampant, and Tharoor would benefit from considering the history of nationalist slogans. Almost a hundred years ago, Gandhi supported the proposal of Shaukat Ali during the noncooperation movement that there be three national slogans against British rule: *Allāh-o-Akbar* (God is Great), *Bande Mātaram* (praise to the Motherland, lit. Mother, I bow to you), and *Hindū Mussalmān Kī J̌ai* (Victory to Hindus and Muslims).[12] Moreover, the anti-CAA protests led by women of Shaheen Bagh in Delhi, students, and many other people were characterized not by a singular charismatic leader, but by "spontaneous burst of poetry and speech through which a deeper citizenship is forged via the many spangled ethos of Indian Islam," as Akeel Bilgrami noted, going on to state that, "this appeal, unafraid to give voice to the commitments and practices of popular religion of that longstanding pluralist tradition is being seamlessly integrated by the movements – in way that has never happened before – with the most abstract commitments of the codes, rights, and provisions of the law and of the Constitution."[13]

What kind of state is so threatened now by the very religio-cultural pluralism that has historically characterized it? What kind of nation sees itself so endangered by mentions of its past history of cultural accommodation of religious difference? And when it comes to the contestations over permissible and impermissible speech, what might the histories of plural forms of secular nationalisms asserted in late colonial India and postcolonial Pakistan have to contribute to the contemporary narrowing and totalitarian forms of nationalisms and their fracas over "religion" and "secularism"? This book is prompted in part by these questions, even as it centers the "Muslimness" of progressives like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, crucial to the making of national literary movements.

[11] Manash Firaq Bhattacharjee, "Debate: Shashi Tharoor and the Liberal Paranoia of Muslims Asserting Their Identity," *The Wire* online, January 18, 2020, https://thewire.in/rights/shashi-tharoor-muslims-caa-protests.

[12] Sugata Bose, "Nation, Reason, and Religion: India's Independence in International Perspective," *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 31 (1998): 2093.

[13] Akeel Bilgrami, "Two Historic Deeds: The Common Muslim Has Done What Even Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar, or Azad Couldn't," *Outlook Magazine* online, February 17, 2020, www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/india-news-caa-agitation-muslim-voices-resorting-to-poetry-creativity-and-practices-of-a-centuries-long-indian-islam/302750.

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Interestingly, in Pakistan today, where the poem *Hum Dekheñge* has been performed by numerous singers, it is currently most well-known in a rendition put together by Coke Studio, a televised program which features live studio-recorded music performances. In that version of the song, the various lines of *Hum Dekheñge* are sung by individual artistes and musicians who represent the full diversity of the Pakistani nation, from Sindhi qawwals to the singers of Balochistan, from Hindus to transgender people. In effect, this version of *Hum Dekheñge* asserts a pluralist nationalism through the religious idiom of Faiz's poetry. The song is deployed to celebrate the diversity of Pakistan, in a country that is itself being torn apart by ethnic, sectarian, and linguistic divisions, overseen, manipulated, and exacerbated by the military.

There is, of course, much to say about regimes of censorship in Pakistan that I cover extensively in this book. This censorship of speech, and particularly that of dissidents, is being well documented and incidents have ranged not only from threats to arrests, but to the murders of journalists. As scholars and historians have recently pointed out about freedom of speech in South Asia, colonial-era laws that were initially established as a form of paternalistic "protection" over colonial subjects have, in our present moment, been continuously weaponized against the most vulnerable populations in South Asia, particularly minorities, women, and dissidents on both sides of the border.[14] Censorship, Urdu literature, Islam, and progressive secular nationalisms in South Asia have a complicated and intertwined history, one that needs to be better understood if we are to move past the limited imaginations of our totalitarian presents.

[14] Manan Ahmed, Wendy Doniger, and Ayesha Jalal, "Free Speech in South Asia," Lahore Literary Festival in New York, May 2019, https://asiasociety.org/video/lahore-literary-festival-new-york-2019-free-speech-south-asia-complete.

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It is really the grace of Allah that provided me the strength to finish this work, a book that has long been in the making. Increasingly, faith was what sustained me during the arduous years of transforming my dissertation into a book – years which coincided with a difficult period of life in the US academy, where I faced sexism, xenophobia, and bigotry, as well as job and financial insecurity. There are few academic institutions within the United States that foster the ethics, vision, and overall culture to accommodate, appreciate, and enthusiastically support the work of South Asianists, at a moment when serious historical scholarship about South Asia has come under attack by state and societal forces in India as well as in Pakistan. The fallout from recent political developments in South Asia, especially over the past few decades, has increasingly diminished the avenues for historical research. At the same time, professional historians have a great deal of work ahead of them when it comes to engaging wider public audiences about pasts that have become the battlegrounds of narrow nationalisms. The lasting impact of colonialism in South Asia and subsequent neocolonialist nationalisms of the twenty-first century in particular have cultivated an attitude of immense disrespect by many formally educated South Asians themselves toward the rich diversity of their heritages, languages, and histories. Meanwhile, numerous preservers of the South Asian past who belonged to an earlier generation of scholarship have departed our world in just the past few years – at a moment of intensifying tyranny of political forces – making the study of South Asian pasts more urgent than ever.

The present work is the culmination of a PhD dissertation that I first started under the supervision of my advisor, Ayesha Jalal, whose guidance has been critical to my development as a scholar and from whom I learned so much. I was fortunate to receive her encouragement as I studied South Asian pasts. She prepared her students in a wide range of fields of expertise. In the years that followed, I rewrote considerable portions of the original dissertation as I transformed it into a book manuscript that, at one point, I nearly abandoned due to the grueling nature of academic

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writing. It has been an experience from which I learned and grew a great deal, intellectually as well as personally.

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faced over the years, Mamma and Baba have constantly supported not only our education, but also our dreams. My parents were the ones who first gifted to me the love of history. While Mamma's passionate activism drew me toward pressing questions of inequality and injustice, Baba introduced me to his library of Urdu literature and his love of poetry. My sisters Hajra and Amina, women of immense talent and compassion, are brilliant lights in my life who have consistently provided me with strength, wisdom, and inspiration. Over the years, aunts, uncles, and cousins have been so generous in their encouragement and excitement about my intellectual journey and this book. And finally, I wish to thank my husband, partner, and life companion Taimoor Shahid – a brilliant intellectual, poet, translator, and literary and historical specialist of South Asia and Islam – who has so patiently, calmly, and consistently supported me throughout the process of writing and editing this book and has always been present for me. His intellectual support has been invaluable in so many ways, for he has always been willing to read drafts and offer suggestions. His attention to detail was vital during the editing of this book manuscript. But most importantly of all, it is really his immense support as a partner in so many more pressing arenas of life far, far more significant than academia that has been truly treasured. His love is a gift.

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Transliteration Guide

This book uses several Urdu, Hindi, Persian, and Arabic words. Except for proper nouns and place names, or terms familiar to English readers, all such terms have been italicized in the text. The meanings of all of these terms are defined either in the context, by parenthetical remarks, or footnotes. I have transliterated the terms so that they will be rendered phonetically understandable to English readers. For the purposes of clarity, the following transliteration system was used in order to help the reader in pronouncing the words. As this is not a philological or linguistic study, an exhaustive transliteration system has been avoided, so as to prevent cluttering the manuscript with extensive diacritics. Most of the letters corresponding to the original Urdu words have been transliterated phonetically. The following is a guide for the transliteration used in this book:

Urdu letter	Urdu script	Transliteration
Alif mad, Alif/Khari zabar (long vowel)	آ, ا, ٰ	ā, aa
Ain	ع	‘
Hamzah	ء	’
Yeh	ی	ī, e, y
Noon-e Ghunna	ں	ñ
Vaw	و	v, w, o, ū
Ṭay (retroflex)	ٹ	ṭ
Ḍal (retroflex)	ڈ	ḍ
Ṛay (retroflex)	ڑ	ṛ

In many places, for example “Zaheer,” where the author has spelled his name in a particular way in English, the word has not been transliterated with diacritics such as “Zahīr.” Additionally, several words that already have a spelling in English such as “Hindi” or “Urdu,” have not been transliterated with diacritics. The translations in this book, when

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not otherwise cited, have been done by the author. The original Urdu script has been replaced by transliteration and/or by English translation in order to keep the text within word limits and to render the material available for non-Urdu readers who are familiar with spoken Hindustani.

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