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Final Grant Report

Project Title: United for Pakistan? Shared Ideas of Nationalism among Students in East and West Pakistan in the 1960s

Fellowship Type: Pre-Doctoral

This project has examined ideas of Pakistani nationalism within the student movements of the 1960s. Students in both West and East Pakistan organized against martial law and the government of Ayub Khan and were a leading force in the movement toward democracy. This project has attempted to consider whether students in East and West Pakistan exhibited a shared vision of Pakistan's future or functioned as separate movements altogether.

The 1971 war between West and East Pakistan (ultimately resulting in independent Bangladesh) has a pervasive presence in the historical memory of former student participants. Thus, while in a larger project I have interviewed student activists from the 1960s regarding their experiences, I found that the representations of the period were heavily influenced by events of the war. This made it difficult to access a perspective on united Pakistan before the war. With the grant from AIPS, I have spent time focusing on materials produced prior to the war, in order to ascertain whether the divisions between the movements were as deep as depicted in contemporary sources. I have used materials from the Bangladesh Press Institute archives and the Bangla Academy archives.

I have reviewed the primary sources in these archives with an eye for both how students described their actions, and how the media coverage presented the events. Keeping in mind that there was not a fully free press, I have also considered that some of the activities have been presented in less than reliable framings. I have consulted the archives' extensive press holdings in both English daily newspapers, weekly magazines (a more common commentary venue) of both Left and Right perspectives, and Bangla language papers and magazines. The sum of the media coverage does present interesting perspective on the ways that events in the two halves of the country we related (or not). In addition, there is frequent (possibly sensationalized) coverage of violence between students of Eastern and Western Pakistani origin that occurred in universities of both halves.

I have also used the events and perspectives discovered in the archives to inform my understanding of the interviews I have conducted. The focused attention to the issue of Pakistani nationalism has enabled me to build a more complicated picture of the student movements of the 1960s. In some ways, my hypothesis that the student movement represented a site of greater unity than other areas has been validated, but in other ways, it is clear that the movements operated mostly autonomously. Thus, rather than consider the movements through a lens of unity, this research has clarified that solidarity and affinity are a better way to conceive of the shared repertoires and actions of the two wings' students.

The research conducted with this grant has greatly informed my dissertation research on student identity in East Pakistan. I am grateful to the American Institute of Pakistan Studies for the financial support to examine this very important perspective.