



 **LUMS** | Gurmani Centre for
Languages and Literature

Annual Newsletter 2024-25


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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In the academic year 2024–25, the Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature sharpened its intellectual focus on the production, circulation, and theorization of knowledge rooted in Pakistan's linguistic and literary traditions. Central to this effort was the ambition not only to foreground rigorous research in classical and modern South Asian languages but also to challenge the entrenched idea of the West as the sole site of universal theory. The Centre, through the call for manuscripts regarding its publication series, invites scholars to engage local archives, literary forms, and epistemic traditions not as relics in need of rescue, but as active sites of critique and theoretical renewal. This vision shaped our programming throughout the year: a major conference on colonial knowledge systems examined the marginalization of regional languages and the epistemic violence of linguistic hierarchies, while events on Cold War cultural production and post-Partition memory traced the entanglement of aesthetics, geopolitics, and historical narrative. We also advanced the pedagogical project of linguistic reclamation through short courses in Hindī and Sanskrit, alongside the Haft Zubānī Mela, which celebrated the plurality of Pakistan's literary and linguistic landscape. Across these efforts, the Centre affirmed the principle that theory must emerge from the ground of language—that it must be shaped by the textures, contradictions, and imaginative horizons of local lifeworlds. Through academic sessions, film screenings, musical performances, and interdisciplinary collaborations, we created spaces for intellectual and aesthetic experimentation. As we look ahead, our agenda remains committed to fostering a critical South Asian thought tradition, one that interrogates inherited paradigms, reclaims the authority of local knowledge, and engages the global not through mimicry, but through grounded and insurgent conversation.

Ali Usman Qasmi

Director, Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature,
Associate Professor, History,
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS)



The Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature (GCLL) was launched in 2010 to serve and promote South Asian languages, literature and art by the Gurmani Foundation. Ever since its inception, the Centre has been offering language teaching, organizing literary discussions and staging artistic performances representing different communities and cultures across Pakistan. While language courses are designed to popularize all languages of Pakistan and the region, our events are curated to inspire a deeper engagement with the history and practice of languages, literature, heritage and art. Today, the Centre is recognized for its valuable contributions not only by the LUMS community but also by literature, art and heritage connoisseurs throughout Pakistan and abroad.

Fall Term Recap (Sept-Dec 2024)

Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn by Syed Nomanul Haq

Sep 12th

This session marked the launch of Syed Nomanul Haq's latest work, *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn*, and featured prominent speakers including Ahmad Javed, Dr. Najeeba Arif, and Athar Masood. Hosted by Dr. Ali Usman Qasmi, the event opened with Syed Nomanul Haq's reflections on the complex figure of Mansur al-Hallaj, emphasizing the interplay between his historical and metaphysical dimensions. Athar Masood highlighted the book's intellectual rigor and literary elegance, praising its engagement with critical traditions across multiple languages, and called it a rare work that fuses philosophy, mysticism, and literary charm. Dr. Najeeba Arif described the work as a milestone in contemporary Islamic thought, particularly for its exploration of *Haqiqat-e-Muhammadi* (PBUH), and emphasized its creative relevance within the tradition of Islamic cultural expression. Concluding the session, Ahmad Javed lauded the book as a valuable contribution to modern Sufi studies and offered a profound reading of one of Hallaj's poems featured in the text, noting that the book revives Hallaj's revolutionary spirit for a new generation of readers.

The Handbook of Mirza Ghalib's Poetry and Poetics by Tariq Rehman

Sep 26th

The Gurmani Centre hosted the launch of Dr. Tariq Rehman's latest book, *The Handbook of Mirza Ghalib's Poetry and Poetics: Commentaries and Contemporary Concerns*. Moderated by Aneeqa Mazhar Wattoo, the session featured an engaging discussion with Dr. Tariq Rehman, Dr. Anjum Altaf, and Dr. Nasir Abbas Nayyar. Dr. Rehman opened the event by outlining the motivations behind the book, underscoring the challenges posed by modern education's disconnect from classical literature, and stressing the book's aim to make Ghalib accessible to readers unfamiliar with Urdu. Dr. Anjum Altaf reflected on Ghalib's timeless relevance, praising the clarity of the book's translations and its ability to engage contemporary audiences with the complexities of poetic expression. Dr. Nasir Abbas Nayyar addressed the historical reception of Urdu ghazal, critiquing colonial misreadings and advocating for a culturally rooted understanding of Ghalib's poetics. He lauded the book as a landmark contribution to Ghalib studies, particularly for its decolonial framing and depth of literary commentary.



Lāhore kī Kahānī, Shāiyīrī kī Zubānī — Book Launch

Oct 11th

The Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature organized the launch of *Lāhore kī Kahānī, Shāiyīrī kī Zubānī*, the third publication of the Gurmani Centre's Publication Cell, featuring a distinguished panel including Dr. Ambreen Salahuddin, Iqbal Qaiser, Dr. Nasir Abbas Nayyar, and Dr. Tahir Kamran. The session was devoted to exploring the representation of Lahore as a space and place in literature, with Dr. Nayyar opening the discussion by examining how Lahore is produced and experienced through literary and artistic expression. He emphasized the often-overlooked importance of spatial analysis in Urdu criticism and highlighted Lahore's complex literary relationship. Dr. Ambreen Salahuddin reflected on the book's preface as a "Sheharnāmā," underscoring the need to consider gender dynamics in urban literary discourse, especially the differing spatial agency of female poets. Iqbal Qaiser praised the book for its comprehensive coverage and its potential to spark deeper research into Lahore's cultural history, particularly regarding the partition and Persian literary traditions. Dr. Tahir Kamran concluded with a theoretical framing of space and time, discussing the colonial and migratory impacts on literary memory and place attachment. The event ended with a vibrant question-and-answer session, fostering rich scholarly engagement on the significance of place in literature.



Rabb dā Bāgh by Zahid Hassan — Book Launch

Oct 25th

The Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature hosted the launch of *Rabb dā Bāgh*, a new book by renowned Punjabi novelist and poet Zahid Hassan. The event featured Ashok Kumar (Punjab University), Mudassir Iqbal Butt (Chairman, Punjab Media Group), and Zahid Hassan himself. Ashok Kumar opened the discussion by emphasizing the poet's role as a chronicler of pain and collective memory, praising *Rabb dā Bāgh* as a significant addition to Punjabi fiction, especially at a time when literary output in the language is declining. Zahid Hassan read selections from his work and reflected on the inspiration he drew from Lahore's landscape and his personal experiences. Mudassir Iqbal Butt, delivering the presidential remarks, spoke of Hassan's literary journey and described the book as a vital fusion of classical sensibilities and modern themes. He expressed pride in publishing the book through his foundation. Concluding the session, Dr. Ali Usman Qasmi underlined the Centre's ongoing commitment to supporting literary expression in Pakistan's regional languages, particularly Punjabi fiction.

Hindī Rāsm ul Khat Sīkhēn — Language Workshop

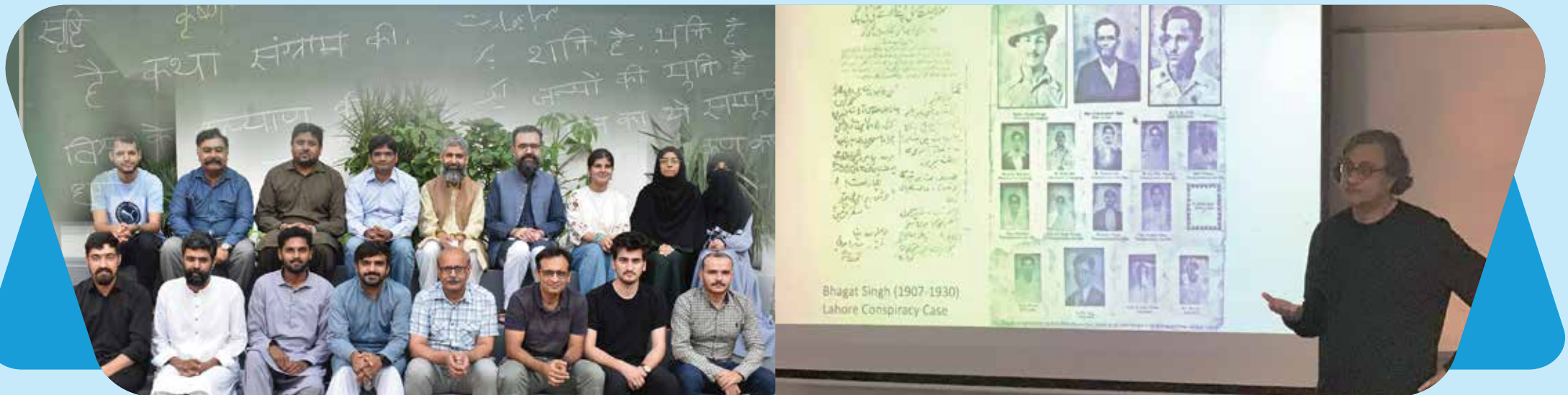
Oct 5th–26th

The Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature organized a four-session weekly workshop titled *Hindī Rāsm ul Khat Sīkhēn*, led by Dr. Shahid Rasheed, Assistant Professor at Forman Christian College and an experienced Hindī language trainer. The workshop brought together scholars and students eager to develop a foundational understanding of the Hindī script and its cultural significance. In the first session, Dr. Rasheed introduced the script alongside a broader discussion on South Asian mythology, particularly the *Mahabharata* and *Ramāyan*, illustrating their influence on language and identity. Through interactive exercises, participants began practicing basic letter forms and improved their writing skills. Subsequent sessions delved into Hindī grammar, sentence construction, and reading selected poetry from the Hindī Qāid'ah, enriching participants' grammatical understanding and appreciation of poetic forms. The final sessions focused on reading fluency, group discussions of Hindī texts, and revision of grammar through collaborative exercises. The workshop concluded with Dr. Rasheed's evocative reading of the poem *Hai Kathā Sagrām kī, Vishu kē Kalyān kī*. Dr. Ali Usman Qasmi, thanked Dr. Rasheed and the participants for their dedication, distributed certificates of completion, and announced plans for an upcoming Sanskrit language workshop, encouraging continued engagement with South Asian linguistic traditions.

100 Years of Lahore Cinema: A Session with Iftikhar Dadi

Nov 6th

The Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature hosted a session titled *100 Years of Lahore Cinema*, featuring renowned artist and scholar Iftikhar Dadi. In his talk, Dadi explored the role of Lahore's commercial cinema in shaping shared experiences of modernity and identity, bridging social and cultural divides across South Asia. He introduced the concept of the "Lahore Effect," coined by Rajadhyaksha, to highlight Lahore's cinematic legacy, which draws from Hindu mythology, Islamic legends, Urdu literature, Sufi thought, and global cinema. Analyzing the recurring Anarkali theme in both Lahore and Bombay cinema, Dadi discussed films like *Mughal-e-Azam* and *Ghoonghat*, illustrating the city's lyrical and hybrid cinematic form. He also reflected on the liberal cultural climate of the Ayub Khan era, which allowed filmmakers to operate with greater creative freedom. A key concern raised was the absence of a national film archive in Pakistan, limiting access to a vast multilingual cinematic heritage, unlike India and Bangladesh. The session offered valuable insights into Lahore's enduring influence on South Asian cinema.



Honoring Guru Nanak: Celebrating the Rababi Tradition through Film Screening and Shabad Kirtan Performance

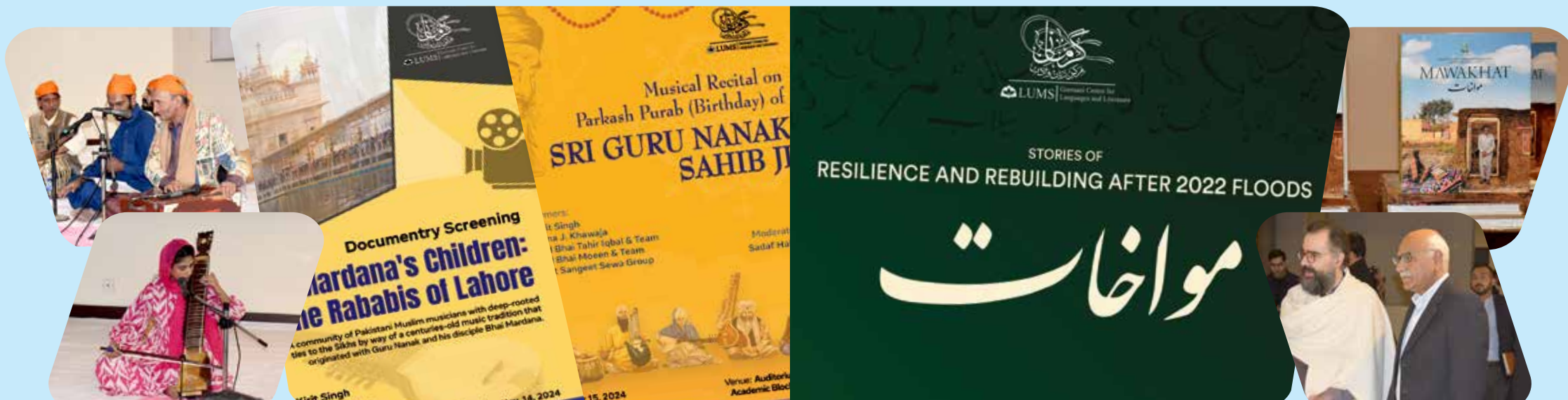
Nov 15th–16th

The Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature organized a two-day event celebrating the musical legacy of the Rababi tradition and the birth anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak. The first day featured a screening of the documentary *Mardana's Children: Rababis of Lahore*, followed by a panel discussion with Dr. Kirit Singh, Saleema J. Khwaja, and Ustad Bhai Moeen, moderated by Dr. Khola Iftikhar Cheema. The conversation highlighted the history of Muslim Rababis—devotees who served Sikh Gurus through music, addressing their marginalization post-Partition and reflecting on their cultural and spiritual contributions. On November 16, a *Shabad Kirtan* performance titled *Musical Recital on Prakash Purab of Sri Guru Nanak Sahib Ji* brought together Ustad Bhai Moeen, Ustad Bhai Tahir Iqbal, Saleema Khwaja, Dr. Singh, and the Gurmat Sangeet Sewa Group in a moving tribute. The performances illuminated the living continuity of the Rababi tradition and its role in sustaining the plural ethos of the subcontinent. The event resonated deeply with the audience, fostering interfaith understanding through the shared language of music and devotion.

Book Launch and Photo Exhibition *Mawākhāt: Stories of Resilience and Solidarity After the 2022 Floods*

Nov 26th

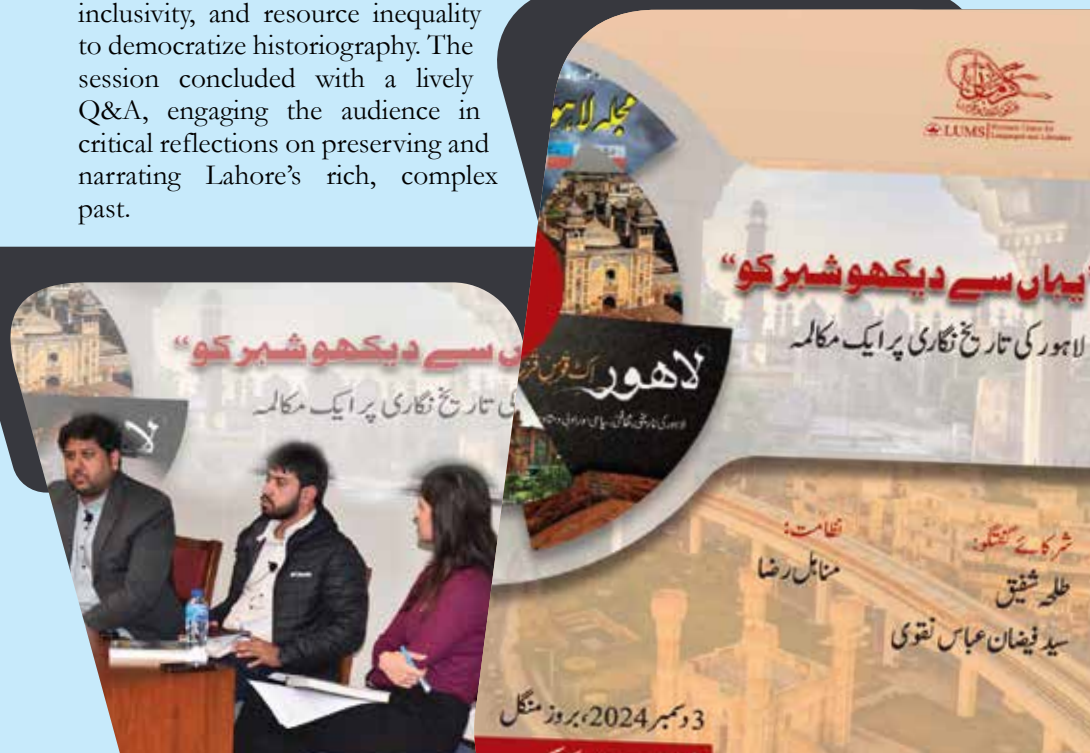
The Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature hosted a book launch and photo exhibition for *Mawākhāt*, a compelling collection chronicling resilience and resistance in the aftermath of Pakistan's devastating 2022 floods that displaced nearly 33 million people. The book presents over 100 powerful stories and portraits showcasing lives transformed through Akhuwat Foundation's flood relief efforts, which rebuilt more than 6,000 homes across Sindh, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab. The event featured Dr. Amjad Saqib, founder of Akhuwat, environmental lawyer Ahmad Rafay Alam, and editor Faizan Ahmad. Alam highlighted the human-driven causes of climate change, emphasizing overconsumption and the exploitative economic systems of the Global North, and stressed that recovery requires reimagining life itself beyond mere reconstruction. Dr. Saqib discussed Akhuwat's unique interest-free microfinance model that empowered communities toward full recovery and reflected on *Mawākhāt* as a philosophy of mutual support bridging social divides. Faizan Ahmad shared his experience documenting the flood-affected communities with sensitivity and dignity, capturing their enduring spirit. In closing, Alam underscored the inequities in environmental accountability, noting how those most responsible evade blame while vulnerable populations suffer the consequences. The event underscored solidarity, environmental justice, and the urgent need to rethink societal values in the face of the climate crisis.



A Dialogue on Lahore's Historiography — *Yahān sē Dēkho Shehr ko*

Dec 3rd

The Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature hosted a compelling session titled “*Yahān sē Dēkho Shehr ko: Lahore kī Tārīkh Nigārī per Mukālmā*,” focusing on the historiography of Lahore. The discussion featured two young self-taught historians, Talha Shafeeq and Syed Faizan Abbas Naqvi, moderated by LUMS visiting faculty Manahil Raza. The session began with Shafeeq’s reflections on his book *Labor: Aik Qos-e-Qazab*, drawing inspiration from South Africa’s “Rainbow Culture” to describe Lahore’s multicultural and multi-religious identity. Both speakers explored their deep intellectual and personal engagements with Lahore’s layered history, highlighting Shafeeq’s research on lesser-known sites — architecture, tombs, mosques, and temples — and Naqvi’s advocacy through *Labor Shanasī* for protecting the city’s endangered heritage amid urban pressures. They emphasized adopting alternative, community-centered methodologies for studying local histories, integrating themes like environmentalism, gender inclusivity, and resource inequality to democratize historiography. The session concluded with a lively Q&A, engaging the audience in critical reflections on preserving and narrating Lahore’s rich, complex past.



Spring Term Recap (Jan–May 2025)

Graduate Student Training Workshop on *South Asian Languages and Literature*

Jan 17th–18th

The Gurmani Centre hosted a two-day Graduate Student Training Workshop on South Asian Languages and Literature at LUMS, bringing together emerging scholars from across Pakistan. Designed for graduate students and early-career academics, the workshop focused on building critical engagement with South Asian languages, literatures, and their historical contexts through the lens of vernacular humanities. Led by Professors Maryam Wasif Khan and Ali Raza, the sessions combined close readings, theoretical reflection, and methodological inquiry into the role of humanism in postcolonial thought. Participants engaged in intensive discussions on disciplinary formations, colonial legacies, and the ethical demands of knowledge production in the Global South. The workshop served as a vital space for dialogue, collaboration, and academic mentorship, affirming the Centre’s ongoing commitment to fostering critical scholarship rooted in regional languages and traditions.



بوسے کھلے رکھیں

let the doors stay open



Film Screening of *Buhay Khulay Rakhi:* Remembering the Lost Children of Partition

Jan 30th

The Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature at LUMS screened *Buhay Khulay Rakhi* (Keep the Doors Open), a documentary directed by Nida Mehboob that sheds light on the untold stories of children separated, orphaned, and adopted across religious lines during the 1947 Partition of Punjab. Produced by historians Dr. Ali Usman Qasmi, Dr. Ilyas Ahmad Chattha, and Dr. Ali Raza, the film uses personal testimonies and archival footage to reveal the lasting trauma of Partition, focusing on individuals like

Qari Farooq and Fazal Ahmad who were adopted by Sikh and Dalit families before being repatriated to Pakistan. Following the screening, a panel moderated by Dr. Ali Raza featured Mehboob and historian Khayyam Chohan, whose *Desi Infotainer* YouTube channel plays a key role in reconnecting families and sharing personal Partition narratives beyond official histories. The discussion highlighted how religion was wielded as a divisive tool leading to violence and displacement, and how digital platforms now provide a vital space for collective memory, cross-border dialogue, and healing. Emphasizing the deep personal impact of Partition on ordinary lives, the event closed with a hopeful call for empathy, solidarity, and the preservation of these stories as essential steps toward reconciliation.

Launch Event of Dr. Nasir Abbas Nayyar's Fifth Short Story Collection

Jab Tak Hai Zameen

Jan 31st

The Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature hosted the launch of Nasir Abbas Nayyar's fifth short story collection, *Jab Tak Hai Zameen*, with notable literary figures Dr. Asghar Nadeem Syed, Dr. Najiba Arif, Muhammad Hameed Shahid, and Professor Sarwar Al-Huda (joined online from Delhi) discussing its intellectual and artistic merits. Moderated by Shaista Hassan, the session featured thoughtful analyses highlighting Nayyar's unique style that blends cultural depth, intellectual rigor, and imaginative language. Professor Sarwar Al-Huda emphasized the harmony between Nayyar's critical and creative voice, noting how his stories transcend language to express cultural and humanistic themes. Muhammad Hameed Shahid praised Nayyar's balanced approach of combining storytelling with wisdom and reflection, while Asghar Nadeem Syed pointed to the collection's engagement with contemporary issues such as the environment, particularly mentioning the story "Apne Mazi Ke Khuda Se." Dr. Najiba Arif noted the stories' capacity to provoke thoughtful unease rather than mere emotional reaction. The event concluded with audience reflections appreciating the book's stylistic and thematic richness, making it a stimulating literary gathering.



Discussion on

Urdu, Islam, and the Cold War: Literary Narratives and Ideological Currents

Feb 7th

The Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature hosted a compelling discussion titled "Urdu, Islam, and the Cold War: Literary Narratives and Ideological Currents," featuring Dr. Ali Raza, Dr. Maryam Wasif Khan, and Dr. Ali Usman Qasmi. The event examined Urdu literature's ideological and literary evolution from colonial to postcolonial Pakistan, focusing on the Cold War's profound impact on literary narratives and cultural production. Dr. Wasif Khan traced Urdu literature's historical trajectory, highlighting persistent questions about Muslim identity rooted in colonial-era Orientalist discourse and how reformist fiction, grounded in Islamic nationalism, shaped Urdu's literary canon through themes of piety, citizenship, and gender roles, contrasting with progressive literature. Dr. Raza explored social realism, jazz's rise, and ideological contestations within academic circles, particularly the CCF Pakistan Committee's efforts to shape discourse. The session offered a nuanced analysis of the power dynamics embedded in Urdu literary production, emphasizing literature's dual role in resistance and ideological reinforcement, shaping national and religious identities in Pakistan.



A World in Translation: The Craft and Challenges of Literary Translation — A Conversation with Astri Gosh

Feb 17th

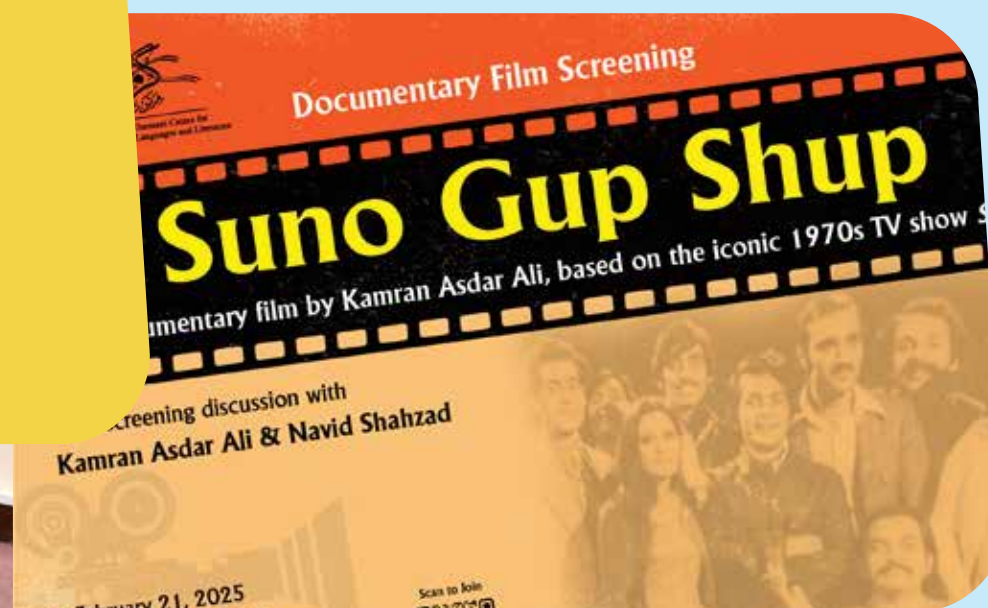
The Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature hosted a captivating session titled *A World in Translation: The Craft and Challenges of Literary Translation* with acclaimed translator Astri Gosh at LUMS. Gosh shared her deep insights into the delicate art of translation, emphasizing the translator's role in preserving the original text's ambiance, emotional tone, and cultural nuances while ensuring the translation reads naturally in the target language. She highlighted that translation is an experimental and fearless craft involving much more than literal word-for-word conversion, often requiring expansion or shifts in meaning to capture context effectively. Gosh discussed the challenges posed by varying publishing cultures and the tension between faithfulness to the source and accessibility for new audiences. She described the translator's unique position bridging cultures—navigating silences, ambiguities, and untranslatable elements—and underscored the complex negotiation between what is lost and gained in translation. The session illuminated the intricate process of literary translation and its crucial role in connecting diverse voices to global readers.



Screening of a Documentary film by Kamran Asdar Ali *Suno Gup Shup*

Feb 21st

The Gurmani Centre for Language and Literature hosted a screening of *Suno Gup Shup*, a documentary by Kamran Asdar Ali that revisits the iconic 1970s Pakistan Television show *Such Gup*. The documentary offered a nostalgic exploration of the show's pioneering role in political and social satire, highlighting its sharp wit, bold critique of bureaucracy, education, and politics, and its influence on later satirical programs. Featuring reflections from the *Such Gup* cast, the film revealed the show's clever handling of sensitive topics such as the Bangladesh liberation and prisoners of war, along with a tribute to the late Nayyara Noor, whose songs enriched the series. The post-screening discussion included historian Ali Usman Qasmi and filmmaker Kamran Asdar Ali, who spoke about the making of the documentary, archival challenges, and the unique Lahori humor—marked by irony and subtlety—that defined *Such Gup*. The event celebrated the show's fearless satire amid censorship challenges and reaffirmed satire's vital role in Pakistan's cultural and political discourse, leaving the audience with a deeper appreciation of the country's rich tradition of comedic social critique.



A Vibrant Celebration of Pakistan's Linguistic and Cultural Diversity: *Haft Zubani Mela*

Feb 28th

February 28, 2025. The Gurmani Centre for Language and Literature, in collaboration with the LUMS Cultural Society and Student Council, hosted the *Haft Zubani Mela*, a vibrant celebration of Pakistan's linguistic and cultural diversity. The event brought together scholars, poets, musicians, and students for an evening of dialogue, poetry, and music dedicated to honoring the country's rich multilingual heritage. In his welcome address, Dr. Ali Usman Qasmi, Director of the Gurmani Centre, emphasized the importance of local and classical languages as vital components of identity and tradition, reflecting on the colonial legacy of language politics in Pakistan. Special guests Ashok Kumar and Dr. Shahid Rasheed offered further reflections on the role of language in shaping collective identities. A key highlight of the evening was an illuminating talk by Dr. Khurshid Rizvi on *Teaching Classical Languages in Pakistan*, followed by a certificate distribution ceremony for participants of the *Short Course on Sanskrit*. The literary segment featured a multilingual *Mushaira* presided over by Dr. Rizvi, with performances by Hammad Niazi, Fariha Naqvi, Raz Ehtesham, and student poets. The event concluded with powerful musical renditions from various regions of Pakistan, celebrating indigenous languages and traditions. The *Haft Zubani Mela* served as a moving affirmation of the need to preserve and promote Pakistan's linguistic heritage, reminding attendees that languages are living embodiments of culture, memory, and belonging.

The Gurmani Centre for Languages & Literature



Literary Session on Latest book by Dr. Shahid Siddiqui *Aasmān Dar Aasmān*

Apr 10th

The Gurmani Centre for Language and Literature hosted a literary session on *Aasmān Dar Aasmān*, the latest book by renowned scholar and writer Dr. Shahid Siddiqui, focusing on the theme, 1947, Migration, and the Artist. The event featured distinguished historian Dr. Ali Usman Qasmi and acclaimed fiction writer Amna Mufti, who explored the emotional, psychological, and aesthetic dimensions of migration. Dr. Qasmi emphasized that migration is not merely a political event but a civilizational and existential rupture that deeply influences the artist's inner world. Amna Mufti praised the simplicity and emotional depth of Dr. Siddiqui's prose, noting its ability to connect with readers and foster reflection on the lasting effects of Partition. The speakers highlighted how *Aasmān Dar Aasmān* transcends historical narrative to explore the creative transformation of pain through art, particularly music. The book examines the lives of artists like Mehdi Hassan, Noor Jehan, and Raees Khan, whose identities and art were profoundly shaped by migration. The session framed the book as more than a literary work—as a cultural inquiry into how displacement informs creativity, memory, and identity.



Book Talk and Performance: *A New Explanation for the Decline of Hindustani Music in Pakistan*

Apr 11th

The Gurmani Centre for Language and Literature hosted a thought-provoking session on Kabir Altaf's book *A New Explanation for the Decline of Hindustani Music in Pakistan*, blending critical discussion with a moving live performance. Originally written as a dissertation in ethnomusicology at SOAS, Altaf's work reframes the decline of Hindustani classical music not as a simple consequence of religious conservatism or lost patronage, but as a result of broader sociological processes such as Partition, modernization, and the transformation of gharana structures. Historian Dr. Ghazala Irfan, drawing on APMC archives and her fieldwork, questioned the narrative of decline by pointing to the enduring presence of classical music in urban spaces. Altaf responded by distinguishing between surface-level popularity and the deeper erosion of the *khayal* tradition. The evening culminated in a soul-stirring performance by Altaf, who guided the audience through *Khayal*, *Dardā*, and *Ghazal*, turning the recital into a musical conversation. The event underscored the resilience and vulnerability of classical traditions, inviting a reconsideration of cultural preservation in contemporary Pakistan.



Documentary Screening: *No Other Land*

Apr 15th

The Gurmani Centre for Language and Literature hosted a screening of *No Other Land*, a powerful and award-winning documentary that chronicles the forced displacement of Palestinians in Masafer Yatta, located in the occupied West Bank. Co-directed by Palestinian and Israeli filmmakers Basel Adra, Hamdan Ballal, Yuval Abraham, and Rachel Szor, the film stands as a rare collaboration that defies political boundaries while highlighting the deeply unequal realities of occupation. Through raw footage spanning from 2019 to 2023, the film captures the demolition of homes, the trauma of dispossession, and the daily resistance of Palestinians struggling to preserve their lives and history. Central to the narrative is the evolving friendship between Adra and Abraham, whose collaboration exposes the stark contrast in privilege, mobility, and freedom under Israeli rule. After the screening, historian Dr. Ali Raza reflected on the film's relevance, stressing the ethical imperative of witnessing and the power of storytelling in confronting systems of oppression. The event reinforced that *No Other Land* is not only a documentary, but a vital act of documentation and solidarity in the face of ongoing erasure.



Literary Discussion: *Modern Punjabi Fiction*

Apr 18th

The Gurmani Centre for Language and Literature hosted a stimulating literary session exploring the evolution of modern Punjabi fiction, featuring discussions on *Chik*, a novel by Nain Sukh, and *Jangal Rākhay Jag dey*, a short story collection by Shahzad Aslam. Iqbal Haider Butt opened the session with a critical reflection on *Chik*, emphasizing the novel's embrace of linguistic hybridity and its resistance to treating Punjabi as a marginal language. He praised Nain Sukh's narrative for its anthropological depth and its critique of the socio-political formation of Punjab's elite. The second half of the event spotlighted Shahzad Aslam, who discussed the intellectual trajectory of his fiction, drawing links from classical poetics to modernist influences such as Virginia Woolf. His insights into narrative techniques like stream of consciousness were complemented by Tipu Sultan Makhdoom's critique, which underscored the importance of perspective and introspection in literary storytelling. Together, the discussions highlighted Punjabi's capacity to engage with complex intellectual and emotional landscapes, reaffirming its role as a vibrant medium of contemporary literary innovation.



A Multidimensional Symposium *Iqbal Revisited: Exploring the Legacy, Paradoxes, and Relevance of a Poet-Philosopher for Today*

Apr 25th

The Gurmani Centre for Language and Literature hosted a wide-ranging symposium titled *Iqbal Revisited: Exploring the Legacy, Paradoxes, and Relevance of a Poet-Philosopher for Today*, which brought together scholars from Pakistan and abroad to re-examine the intellectual and poetic contributions of Allama Iqbal in light of today's spiritual, philosophical, and social crises. The first session featured Dr. Syed Nomanul Haq's call to rediscover the aesthetic and metaphysical depth of Iqbal's verse, Dr. Nauman Faizi's framing of reform as a shared vulnerability, and Dr. Sevcin Öztürk's comparative reading of Iqbal and Kierkegaard on faith and selfhood. The second session opened with Khurram Ali Shafique's personal and interpretive journey through Iqbal's writings, proposing a new framework of "Iqbal Sciences." Dr. Saida Mirsadri reflected on Iqbal's call for dignity and moral agency amid modern disorientation, while Dr. Feyzullah Yilmaz offered a provocative reading of Iqbal's philosophical journey through nihilism, engaging with Nietzsche and Islamic metaphysics. Collectively, the symposium portrayed Iqbal as a figure of poetic brilliance, existential insight, and global philosophical relevance—uncontainable by any single tradition, and continually inviting new encounters.





Conference Report: *The Formation of Knowledge and Language Politics — A Historical and Political Inquiry*

May 17th

The Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature at LUMS hosted a landmark conference titled “تخلیل علم اور لسانی سیاست: ایک تاریخی اور سیاسی حاکمہ” (*The Formation of Knowledge and Language Politics: A Historical and Political Inquiry*), which convened scholars from across Pakistan to critically examine the intersections of colonial knowledge production, language politics, and literary canon formation in South Asia. Opening remarks by Dr. Ali Usman Qasmi and Dr. Ali Khan framed the event

within ongoing debates on epistemic decolonization and the challenges of preserving linguistic diversity. The conference featured three sessions: the first explored the impact of colonial missionary institutions on literary standards; the second delved into print culture’s role in shaping religious and nationalist identities; and the third addressed post-1947 linguistic politics and regional language marginalization in Pakistan. A final panel, including Zahra Sabri, Mufti Abdul Aziz, and Dr. Nasir Abbas Nayyar, discussed the obstacles and potentials of Urdu as a scholarly research language, sparking a lively Q&A on sustaining linguistic plurality in academia. With participation from diverse universities and regions, the event underscored the urgent need to rethink inherited knowledge systems and to promote a more inclusive, critical approach to language and literature in Pakistan’s intellectual landscape.

Meet the faculty: **Conversation with Zahid Hassan—Punjabi Language Instructor**

Interviewer: **Amna Khalid**

Zahid Hassan, whose real name is Zahid Hussain, has been affiliated with the Gurmani Centre for Language and Literature for the past nine years. He teaches Punjabi and is known as a poet, novelist, and literary figure in the Punjabi language. He has written five novels and two books of short stories in Punjabi. Poetry and research work are in addition to that. He has received several national awards along with the international fiction prize for Punjabi literature, the “*Dāhān International Prize*”. At the Gurmani Centre for Language and Literature, he not only serves as the editor of *Numūd*, a multilingual annual students’ magazine, but also actively contributes to the Centre’s academic and literary events.

Presented here is a conversation with him about his teaching at the Centre and other professional engagements.

Q: Since when have you been teaching Punjabi at LUMS, and how has the experience been so far?

A: I began teaching Punjabi at LUMS in 2019, so it’s been a full six years now. Over this time, a considerable number of students have taken the Punjabi



course. It’s primarily a language course, but in the first one or two classes, I also introduce students to the history of Punjabi language and literature. This gives them a broader understanding of the linguistic, literary, and cultural heritage of Punjabi.

As for the experience of teaching Punjabi at LUMS, I would call it remarkable, not just for myself, but for the students as well. Despite Punjabi being the most widely spoken language in Pakistan, many students come in with very little awareness of it. That, unfortunately, is due to a long-standing pattern of neglect by both the state and educational institutions when it comes to our national languages, especially Punjabi.

But it’s heartening to witness the genuine interest and affection students show for the language. A language that isn’t even part of the curriculum in Punjab’s primary schools is being taken by nearly 75 students every year at LUMS and many of them want to enroll in the Punjabi language course each semester. That, to me, is a source of joy and satisfaction and it gives me the motivation to teach with even more passion and energy every semester.

Q: Why do you think Punjabi has been so consistently ignored by the Pakistani state, and especially the Punjab government?

A: That’s a question best answered by someone within the government. However, from the very beginning, we’ve tended to distance ourselves from our local cultures and languages and to overlook them. And the result is a deep cultural crisis, one that we’ve been suffering from since the early days of our nationhood. You won’t find another nation in the world who carries as much shame and embarrassment about their own languages and cultural heritage as we do. But I do believe that language courses/instruction at the Gurmani Centre for Language and Literature at LUMS marks a positive step forward. Our public education institutions have much to learn from it.

Currently, alongside Punjabi, the Gurmani Centre offers courses in Persian, Arabic, Urdu, Pashto, Sindhi, Hindi, and Balochi. From the next semester, we’re also expecting to add major languages like Kashmiri and Sanskrit to this list. The current director of the Gurmani Centre, Dr. Ali Usman Qasmi, is deeply committed to promoting Pakistani languages and takes thoughtful initiatives regularly and that commitment is reflected in the Centre’s steady progress.

Q: So did your teaching journey at LUMS begin with Punjabi language course?

A: As you may already know, my primary association is with literature — specifically, Punjabi literature. I’ve always been drawn to storytelling,

and over the years, novel writing and fiction in Punjabi have become my main form of creative expression.

About a year after joining the Gurmani Centre at LUMS, I began teaching a course titled Creative Writing in Urdu and Punjabi. It was designed as a workshop-style course, usually taken by students who had an interest in fiction, especially in the craft of storytelling and writing. The course turned out to be a great success. Some of the stories written by the students were so powerful, they even surprised me with their depth and creativity.

In addition to this, I've taught a number of other courses over the years.

However, in 2019, the Gurmani Centre formally decided that since Punjabi is the national language of the majority of Pakistan's population, it was important to offer it as a dedicated language course at LUMS. Since then, I've been teaching Punjabi at LUMS, although I continue to teach other courses alongside it as well.

Q: So Punjabi is taught here solely as a language course?

A: Not at all, there are other courses as well. For instance, there's a course on Punjabi Vār literature taught by Dr. Ali Usman Qasmi, which I co-teach with him. This course has been offered three times and is considered one of the important and popular courses at LUMS.

Similarly, Sara Kazmi has taught a course on Punjabi Sufi poets, and I've also taught a Punjabi literature course myself, which was very well received. So, alongside the Punjabi language course, we also offer literature-focused courses, and occasionally ones related to Punjabi history. These courses are taught from time to time as part of the broader effort to engage with Punjabi as both a language and a cultural tradition.

Q: Is the Punjabi language course you teach based on a curriculum developed by the Punjab government or the Punjab Textbook Board?

A: No, not at all. As you may know, LUMS doesn't use the Punjab Textbook Board curriculum for any of its courses, and Punjabi is no exception.

While a few individuals with a personal interest in Punjabi have developed basic primers for early learners, there is still no well-written grammar or foundational textbook for Punjabi available at the primary school level in Pakistani Punjab. So, I have designed a course myself, specifically for students learning Punjabi at LUMS. It's a foundational course that I've been teaching for the past six years. One measure of its success is the students' enthusiasm to enroll in the course, often the course cap fills up within just an hour of opening. That level of interest is truly

encouraging.

Q: You also write Punjabi fiction and poetry. Could you tell us a bit about your creative journey?

A: I've been deeply interested in Punjabi language and literature from the very beginning. I initially started with poetry but eventually turned to fiction — writing short stories and novels in Punjabi. So far, I've published two short story collections and five novels, along with two books of poetry. I've also done some research-related work.

I have received several international awards on my books, particularly my novels. My fourth novel, *Tassi Dharti*, was awarded the Dhahan International Prize in Canada, which is the most prestigious award for Punjabi fiction till now. In addition, four of my novels have been honored by the Pakistan Academy of Letters in Islamabad, receiving awards such as the Syed Waris Shah Award and the Afzal Ahsan Randhawa Award. I've received a few other awards along the way as well.

Q: Which form of writing do you consider the most powerful for creative expression?

A: For me, the novel is the most powerful and refined form of creative expression. It's a genre through which one can portray the complexities of human life — its events, emotions, and circumstances — in great depth and detail. The novel is not only an effective medium for expression but also a strong vehicle for conveying one's language, culture, society, and worldview to the wider world.

Q: What are your plans for the future?

A: Most of my time during the semester is spent preparing for classes and participating in programs at the Gurmani Centre. However, I also try to read important literary works whenever I can. Recently, I've started working on a new novel that revolves around the COVID era. It explores the helplessness of humanity and the tragic loss of life during the pandemic. Specially, the importance of time for a person during illness has been made a central theme in the novel.



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