



American Institute of Bangladesh Studies

NEILESH BOSE TRAVEL GRANT REQUEST CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION AND BANGLADESH STUDIES

I am applying for an AIBS Conference Travel Grant to support my upcoming trip to the International Society for Cultural History 2010 conference, titled “Cultural Histories: Close Readings, Critical Syntheses.” The conference will take place from 26 – 30 May, 2010 in Turku, Finland (<http://isch2010.utu.fi/index.php>; my paper is listed under Session 1, Decolonization at <http://isch2010.utu.fi/sessions.php>). My paper entitled “Bengali Muslim "Culture" and Ideas of Pakistan: Cultural History and Decolonization, 1940-1947” examines the role of ideas of Bengali cultural autonomy within the Pakistan movement of the 1940s.

This paper comprises the bulk of a chapter in my forthcoming book manuscript provisionally entitled *Recasting the Region: Bengali Muslim Cultural History and the Intellectual History of Decolonization in South Asia*. This book, aimed at multiple audiences, concerns the role of ideas of culture and linguistic and literary distinctiveness within Bengali Muslim circles from the 1870s through the 1950s emergence of a language movement to establish the primacy of Bengali in the post-1947 Pakistani state. Though not directly a study of Bangladesh, the book argues for the centrality of late colonial and early post-colonial politics within the *longue duree* of East Bengali and after 1971, Bangladeshi history. Though the bulk of this book concerns the pre-1947 period, I

sketch continuities between the politics of Bengali Muslim politics in the East Pakistan era and the emergence of Bangladesh with the late colonial period, in particular from the 1920s onward. This work will hold relevance for the historiography of Bangladesh as it considers the role of East Pakistan, decolonization, and often overlooked periods in Bengal's history within the making of Bangladesh's historical foundations. Furthermore, by looking at the cultural and intellectual dimensions of debates about Bengali Muslim cultural autonomy, the book also will provide a useful alternative to the political and state-centred histories that dominate the literature on Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Traveling to this conference will enable me to learn from practicing cultural historians working in South Asia, European, and American fields and thereby enlarge my scope of approaches toward my topic of Bengali Muslim studies. I also aim to generate discussion about the inclusion of Bengali Muslim topics – the engagement between Islam and Bengali language traditions, the relationship between pan-Indic Islamic traditions and Bengali local specificity, and the rising tide of various traditions folklore collection (notably German-inspired) – into larger conversations about how to apprehend changes in ideas of culture in an area usually dominated by scholars working in European or American fields. This paper about ideas of culture utilized in the Pakistan movement builds upon an earlier chapter of mine about the usage of Germanic models of folklore in the construction of Bengali Muslim linguistic and literary identities and I hope to discuss the larger implications of placing Bengali Muslim agents inside of a global cultural history.