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Title of PhD Thesis: **Pakistani Women Poets: Literary Representation and the Dynamics of Religion, Politics, and Society**

ABSTRACT

The creative expression of the women poets of Pakistan is inseparable from the cultural milieu of the land. The political, social, and religious conditions in Pakistan ever since its inception have provided ample impetus to the writing of poetry by women. The subjects discussed in their verse emerge from a conscious engagement with their political scenario, their social ethos, and their location with respect to religion. Prominent among the themes in Pakistani women's poetry are their experiences of suppression, exploitation, and disempowerment in the name of political Islamisation by dictatorial regimes, the charade of episodic, time-serving democracy and the inability of even their democratically elected leaders to change things greatly for the better. In addition, their poems express the realities of their socio-cultural ethos which is a juxtaposition of tribal, communal, and modern class identities in a state of flux. Their reactions to the sacrosanct but volatile nature of the conditions enforced upon them in the name of religion also find expression in their verse.

Chapter One of the thesis focuses on the verse traditions of Pakistan, particularly those pertaining to the Urdu language and deals with the act of literary creation by women. It purports to analyse the compulsions that propel them into literary expression at considerable cost to their self-esteem, personal and professional relationships and at times, even their lives. It also seeks to contextualise their poetry in a theoretical framework through feminist interpretations of their

work and to place Pakistani women poets in the South Asian literary context. The process of tracing the evolution of the poetry of Pakistani women poets must necessarily involve an overview of the political, social and religious structures of Pakistan; a study of the reasons behind its creation and the politico-religious compulsions that have been instrumental in framing its identity; this is the focus of Chapter Two. Chapters Three, Four and Five deal respectively with the engagement of women poets with the political scenario of Pakistan, with the religious identity of their country and with their society.

To sum up, the thesis posits that the tensions inherent in their poetry arise from the conflict between their socio-cultural ethos and their own understanding of these as articulate, thinking women. It is as if the women poets under study write themselves in their verse. There is a constant desire to know the depths of their personality, to explore the frontiers of their understanding and their apprehension of the sensual, physical world. The semantics of language assists them in this search and enables them to express themselves as they are, or as they aspire to be. The identity that they assume for themselves is a conscious construction that defines them as unique individuals who refuse to be categorized in the straitjacket of societal definitions of womanhood. Their creative expression thus becomes an act of literary, moral, political, religious, and social courage.
