

Indigenizing Pedagogy: A Freedom Concept for Harsukh School
Lahore, Pakistan
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Background: Generations of Pakistani students have entered academia and learning communities in precarious circumstances. For many, schooling itself is a violent experience — a product of inequalities inflicted by histories of colonialism, militarism, state-neglect, and heteropatriarchy. For women, queer, and *khwaja sira*¹ students, and for students from marginalized ethnic and religious groups, claiming an education for themselves and their communities can be a challenging endeavor. Furthermore, the learning process is often instituted through spaces, tools, and vernaculars that are unfamiliar and do not honor the students' lifeworlds, communities, and passions (Zulfiqar, 2). When learning is not socially relevant and does not benefit students and their communities, it is a tool of oppression and reinforces inequalities (Jackson and Howard, 157).

It is also important to underscore the absence of necessary educational infrastructure and academic and administrative careers in Pakistan that contributes to precarity and institutional violence. The vast majority of young people in Pakistan do not have access to private elite institutions. Research consistently indicates high levels of inequities in literacy at a national level inflicted along lines of class, gender, caste, and ethnicity (ASER, 2019). However, even with major developments in expanding literacy for women and minority communities (Malala Fund Report, 17), it is clear that the delivery and implementation of educational curricula consistently fail to remedy “historical educational neglect, vacation- or pandemic-based learning losses, and socioeconomic odds criminally stacked against the typical public school learner” (Zulfiqar, 3).

Project Description and Goals: I will implement this project in partnership with *Kitab Ghar*², a public library, and *Harsukh Idara-e-Ilm-o-Funn*³, a school, in Lahore, Pakistan to develop a “freedom school” curriculum, cultivate intergenerational community volunteers, and curate a Harsukh Freedom School training guide and resource archive. I will use my existing connections and the network of activists and educators at Kitab Ghar and Harsukh School to recruit 5-6 educators and education specialists. This team will implement a multipronged process that critically analyzes the existing system and curricula to envision and codify a “Freedom School” curriculum for students at Harsukh. This curriculum will delineate and integrate culturally, historically, and ethically informed pedagogy, community engagement, and consciousness-raising within its framework based on a socially-aware collaboration of the core team with students, community-members, and other stakeholders. I will further work with curriculum specialists and administrators at Harsukh to develop guidelines and training sessions to implement the curriculum. My role in the program will primarily be one of an administrator, but I will also act as a facilitator and educator in various capacities. For the duration of the project, the core team will be teaching for 3-4 days per week at Harsukh school (dependent on the program's summer schedule) and spending 3 days per week working on curriculum development at Kitab Ghar.

Harsukh School is a non-profit initiative by a former Chief Justice of Pakistan and offers classes to students from grade one to nine. It offers an unusual mode of operation compared to most schools in Lahore and students are taught in multilingual settings, with a strong emphasis on culturally relevant pedagogy and social awareness. Many students come from underprivileged and minoritized communities in the village where the school building is located. Kitab Ghar is privately operated and an open to public library space in the densely populated town of Ichara in Lahore, with a vision to “popularize citizen initiatives that serve the public.” Kitab Ghar will provide the Freedom Concept program with office space and access to its literary and logistical resources. Both project locations are sites for youth, feminist, and education activist networks and this will serve in the interest of project sustainability. For the duration of the project, Dr. Emily Nemeth, Professor of Education Studies, and Dr. Jane Saffitz, Professor of Anthropology and Sociology, at Denison University have agreed to be my project and research supervisors.

¹ *Khwaja Sira* (“caretaker of the house”) are intersex, non-binary, genderqueer, transgender, and gender fluid people. The term is preferred by many in Pakistan over other variations like *hijra* or *khusra*.

² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1705934>

³ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/740435-a-passion-project>

Significance and Definition of Peace: My project design responds to the urgent need to reconstruct not only the dominant modes of schooling but also the pedagogical and administrative interventions usually staged through developmental programs in Pakistan. This project is invested in “the interest of the preservation and survival” of the communities where it is situated and is predicated on the notion that knowledge already exists within communities and a successful education responds to, understands, and honors that knowledge (Cooper et al., 170). Taking inspiration from the 1964 Freedom Summer projects by African American activists and the contemporary Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools, this project will work with community members, educators, youth activists, and administrators at Harsukh School, Lahore to develop and implement a freedom school curriculum.

I believe that the struggle for a liberating education cannot be separated from various other collective struggles against oppression. Therefore, in this project, peace is inextricably linked to community health and justice and might be defined as communal recourse to liberation from historical and contemporary forms of oppression and inequities. Community involvement, intergenerational leadership, and culturally and historically informed pedagogy are necessary to address forms of (socioeconomic, sexual, environmental) oppression. By modeling striving towards justice for the students, this project situates itself as one of the many steps necessary for peace in communities marked by extreme inequities. This expansive and complex framing is necessary to shape classroom, institutional, and community-specific ethos and resources (training, political education, tracking program outcomes, nutritional needs, etc.) for Harsukh School that then could be replicated elsewhere.

Project Sustainability: A primary goal of my project is to create a holistic, culturally informed, and consciousness-raising curriculum and model that serves the educators and students of Harsukh School. This curriculum will be implemented this summer at Harsukh but the project will codify a core curriculum and institute the program to be replicated yearly. A secondary goal of this curriculum will be to generate networks of intergenerational youth leaders and students advocating for their right to a liberating education. This community of educators and students will further identify community resources available to be employed in the implementation of freedom schools in communities and schools elsewhere in Lahore and Pakistan. I plan to continue my existing research and involvement in Lahore at Kitab Ghar and Harsukh School and this will also ensure my continued involvement beyond the project implementation.

Qualifications: This project builds on my research, grassroots organizing, job experiences, and scholarly interests. I have been involved with youth and feminist activists in Lahore since 2016 in various forms. This involvement formed the basis of my scholarly interests during my time at Denison University through a fully-funded summer research project on feminist and indigenous knowledges and literatures of Punjab, Pakistan, which I subsequently presented at multiple conferences. I have extensive experience as an educator, having held multiple departmental teaching and research assistant positions and consultant and management positions at Denison’s Writing Center. I worked at the CDF Freedom Schools of Licking County, Ohio in 2022 as a youth educator and was inspired to develop this project. This project will serve as the ethnographic basis and data-collection for my year-long joint senior research in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology and the Women’s and Gender Studies Program at Denison University.

References:

- Cooper, Afua, et al. “Robin D. G. Kelley and Fred Moten in Conversation.” *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2018, p. 154., <https://doi.org/10.5749/jcritethnstud.4.1.0154>.
- Education in Pakistan: Annual Status of Education Report*. ASER Pakistan, 10 Mar. 2021, <http://asERPakistan.org/index.php>.
- Jackson, Tandra, and Tyrone Howard. “The Continuing Legacy of Freedom Schools as Sites of Possibility for Equity and Social Justice for Black Students.” *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2014, pp. 155–162.
- “Malala Fund 2021-22 Annual Report.” 2021, Malala Fund, <https://2021.malala.org/>.
- Zulfiqar, Zara. “Teaching for Pakistan.” *Medium*, Medium, 19 Oct. 2022, <https://medium.com/@zulfiqarmannan/teaching-for-pakistan-55ccfef209fc>.

Project Timeline

January

A tentative contract has already been made with Kitab Ghar, to be officially signed if the grant is approved.

February

I will draft the teacher job description and contract (in Urdu), teacher workshop schedule, and extend conditional offers (pending project decision) to an education specialist and Harsukh teachers.

March

In case of a positive preliminary decision, contracts will be signed between program manager, Ali Imran, and Kitab Ghar. Job offers will be made and contracts will be finalized. Transportation for educators and curriculum specialists between Harsukh and Kitab Ghar will be arranged.

April 10 - May 1

Ali Imran and a curriculum specialist will complete the initial research and development phase for training and curriculum development plan.

May 2023 - August, 2023: A Freedom Concept for Harsukh

May 1

Payments will be made to Kitab Ghar and curriculum specialist, and travel funds will be disbursed as needed. Art supplies funds will be used to purchase supplies for Harsukh and Kitab Ghar.

May 15 - May 27

Teacher training, pedagogy workshops, and safety and consent training will be held. The timeline for the curriculum development program will be finalized alongside the final summer program schedule for students. Student enrollment will commence and community day for caretakers and students will be arranged.

May 27 - June 1

Kitab Ghar office set-up and Harsukh classroom set-up.

June 1 - July 29

Educators and researchers teach at Harsukh and work on curriculum development (dates and exact logistics subject to change per the final agreements with Kitab Ghar and Harsukh School).

August 1 -

Immediate structural recommendations will be implemented at Harsukh, final drafts for research, teacher and student observations, and other data will be finalized and archived, final drafts for core curriculum and other materials will be compiled and made publicly available by the project team.