



Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

I am writing to apply for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Scholar Award at the University of Toronto's Institute of Iranian Studies. I am a social and cultural historian of early modern and modern South Asia whose current research focuses on the passage of Persianate South Asia into early colonial rule. At present, I am Assistant Professor of Persianate Islamic Cultures of South Asia at the University of British Columbia.

Two historiographical perspectives have fed my research interests over the years—first, a growing attentiveness to the early modern connections that linked South Asia within a ramifying network of political and religious encounters, trade, and travel that stretched across Eurasia; second, an awareness that prior to the advent of colonialism, the predominant imperial idiom in South Asia and its Central- and West-Asian neighbors was Persianate. In its broadest form, my research engages both perspectives to ask: how did the Persianate cultures of South Asia transform when the imperial scaffolding and transregional connections that had nurtured them began to wear thin?

Drawing upon these perspectives, my first monograph, entitled *Life after Conquest: Afghan Pathways in Early Colonial North India (ca. 1774 – 1857)*, explores the political imagination and social affiliations of autonomous Afghan soldiers, scholars, and scribes. By focusing on a set of socially marginal figures, who were never quite integrated into the Mughal Empire in India or amenable to the colonial state that succeeded it, it examines the stakes and implications of emerging intellectual practices that were autonomous, that is, unattached to stable sources of political patronage. While most of the Afghan service professionals whom I track had memories of inhabiting regional states in late Mughal North India, the experience of colonial annexation dispersed them, prompting them to reflect on their own evolving histories in diaries, poetry, legal opinions, and chronicles in Persian, Urdu, and Pashto.

I have drafted three of the five chapters that constitute the sum and substance of my monograph. Having received an SSHRC Insight Development Grant in 2021, I spent the last three years collecting, reading and annotating research materials, consisting of digital copies of manuscripts, lithographs and India Office records. Simultaneously, as a cohort member of the “Balzan Seminar on the Study of the Formation, Maintenance, and Failure of States in Muslim Societies,” run by Michael Cook, Antoine Borrut, and Marie Legendre, I have workshopped drafts of chapters with my fellow-specialists in Islamic history.

The moment is now ripe for me to complete drafting the remaining two chapters of my manuscript. Receiving the Scholar Award would grant me the necessary support to prepare the full book manuscript for review to option with the acquisition editor of the *Connected Histories of the Middle East and the Global South* series at the University of Texas Press, a prime venue

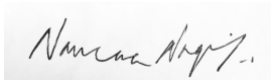
for the study of the regional specificities that manifested in varied parts of the Persianate world. I would also seize the opportunity to workshop my manuscript with Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, Karen Ruffle and the community of scholars affiliated with the Institute of Iranian Studies at the University of Toronto.

Since commencing my tenure-track position at UBC in 2019, I have been engaged in active research, teaching undergraduate and graduate courses, graduate student mentorship and program-building. I introduced entirely new courses that shed light on India's relationships with the wider Persianate World, Mughal India, Muslims in modern South Asia and Afghan history. I have served as supervisor and committee member for MA and PhD students who have done original research on Persianate South Asia. I recently began to serve as co-organizer of the Alireza Ahmadian Lectures in Iranian and Persianate Studies. Along with my newly appointed colleagues who conduct research and teach on Modern Iranian literature and classical Persianate literature, I am directly involved in ongoing efforts to build the fledgling Persianate and Iranian Studies Program at UBC. Being able to secure the time and resources to produce a robust tenure file (due on July 1, 2027), will guarantee my ability to continue to build upon this foundation at my home institution.

The security of having prepared my monograph will also afford me the opportunity to pursue subsequent projects including a second monograph. This next line of inquiry is tethered to my examination of collective identities and self-awareness during the early nineteenth century. It seeks to focus on the political vocabulary of the Maratha confederacy, an expansionist polity that originated in peninsular India and ventured northwards over the course of the eighteenth century. Using an unexplored Persian and Marathi archive called the *Parasnis* [i.e. *fārsī-nawīs*] *Daftar*, I will examine the political concepts that Maratha officials and their interlocutors used in deliberate ways to frame their expansionist efforts. I have already presented my initial analyses of the contents of this archive among specialists.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,  
Naveena Naqvi



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