

Public Lecture



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LANGUAGE ON WHEELS: INSCRIPTIONS ON PAKISTANI TRUCKS AS A WINDOW INTO POPULAR WORLDVIEW

Trucks in Pakistan are generally decorated and inscribed with sayings, phrases and couplets in Urdu, Pashto, Punjabi, Sindhi and the other languages of the country. They also have iconic writings in Arabic with themes from traditional folk Islam. Themes from mystical or fundamentalist Islam, however, are expressed in Urdu. This lecture describes and analyzes these inscriptions with a view to understanding how they are written and what conventions govern their location on the body of the truck. More importantly it is argued that these inscriptions symbolize a worldview which values romantic poetry concerning love and beauty. It also believes in fate and values the mother as an emblem of love and devotion for her truck-driver sons who celebrates her through inscriptions. This worldview is under strain as the competing worldview of Islamic fundamentalism discourages painting, romantic love and the portrayal of beauty. However, this traditional folk worldview still prevails as romantic inscriptions continue to be the dominant themes of all writings on trucks in Pakistan.

time and place: Monday, July 5, 2010, 18.00 – 20.00 h
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