A need to re-imagine the LIS education for
Ph.D. students in Pakistan

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While writing this proposal, many fond memories from my childhood and formative years of growing in Pakistan started to flash in my consciousness. I could almost feel the beautiful sunny and crisp winter mornings of Lahore, sweltering heat waves, pouring monsoons, and flower-adorned Shalimar Gardens imbued with the fragrance of spring.

Bustling streets, crowded bazaars, people overflowing with unending cheerfulness, quick wit, and a very helpful attitude. Not minding the everyday struggles that many of ordinary Pakistanis face, I experienced a joyful, content, energetic, and a confident Pakistan. Pakistani social and cultural milieu is built on thousands of years of traditions rooted in rich interplay of history, religions, economy, and politics. A milieu in which stories travel from one generation to another, where elders are considered as living books, where family and friends are never far away from sight and mind, and where people don't keep account of every minute of time and exist in present.

Such a social and cultural milieu constructs its own very unique information environment. Within this environment, context-specific native ways of information creation, seeking, searching, sharing and use emerge. Even the kinds of information people need can be and is very different from the people living in entirely different social context. In this backdrop, I would like to reason that to better serve the scholarship and teaching of library and information science in Pakistan we need to critically evaluate the theories, models and the research problems that are shaping the thinking of local Ph.D. talent.

I reason that our understanding of information, its role in society and relationship with people is almost solely based on LIS theories and models that have been developed in western contexts. These contexts are underpinned by information environments that have highly institutionalized creation of information and where people heavily rely on documented information. Furthermore, informal information sources in the form of smaller family units and friends also contribute to these information environments which then provide a context to individual and collective information behaviors. The theories and models of LIS developed in these contexts mostly reflect a formal, mediated, and an important role of documented information in society.

However, the context of Pakistan is very different. If we consider for a moment the information environment in which an average Pakistani lives then we see most of the information relevant to an individual is coming from informal channels and is verbal. Furthermore, as many institutions (e.g., libraries, museums, health department, education department, aviation etc.) are still developing their information creation and dissemination practices so we see that information coming from these sources is generally less than optimal and hence leave many questions un-answered. Also presence of large extended families and deep social connections in ones' immediate information environment create a constant source of information through which large amounts of information about a wide array of matters is being created and shared verbally. This context immensely reduces the reliance of a person on formal channels of information and by that extension on documented information.

The Pakistani context then begs the questions as to what extent (1) information creation, its use and dissemination, (2) the very categories of information seeking, searching, and use and (3) the kinds of information need people have are different from and/or similar to the contexts in which LIS theories and models have been developed? I would like to suggest that the starting point should be the creation of foundational knowledge about the nature of Pakistani information environment. Specifically, how information is created and disseminated by different institutions and what formal and informal sources of information play a crucial role in developing the information milieu for an average Pakistani.

It will also be important to analyze the relevance of and the way in which different categories of information behavior (e.g., seeking, searching, organizing, avoidance, and use) come into action for a Pakistani. Anecdotally, it can be stated that due to reliance mostly on other people for information, the information behaviors of 'seeking,' 'searching,' and 'use' will come into play very differently in Pakistanis. It is also quite likely that the number of as well as the nature of information needs a person will have in Pakistan will be very different from their counterparts in many of the developed nations. Due to spending large chunk of their daily time with other people, extended family and friends, an average Pakistani experiences a high flow of un-mediated information which should require less cognitive effort as well to process information and evaluate it.

After developing the understanding about the information environment of Pakistan and information behaviors of people, the next step should be to test that how and in what ways the existing LIS theories and models apply to this information milieu; and where can be the avenues to better contextualize these models by modifying their

conceptual scheme or substituting the existing concepts with the ones reflecting the realities of Pakistan. This exercise will also help to discard completely any theories and models not reconcilable to the Pakistani information context and should also ideally lead to the development of new models cognizant of local realities. Armed with the knowledge gained in the first two steps, the LIS faculty and Ph.D. students in Pakistan will be able to come-up with research that will create a scholarship truly authentic to Pakistani information environment.