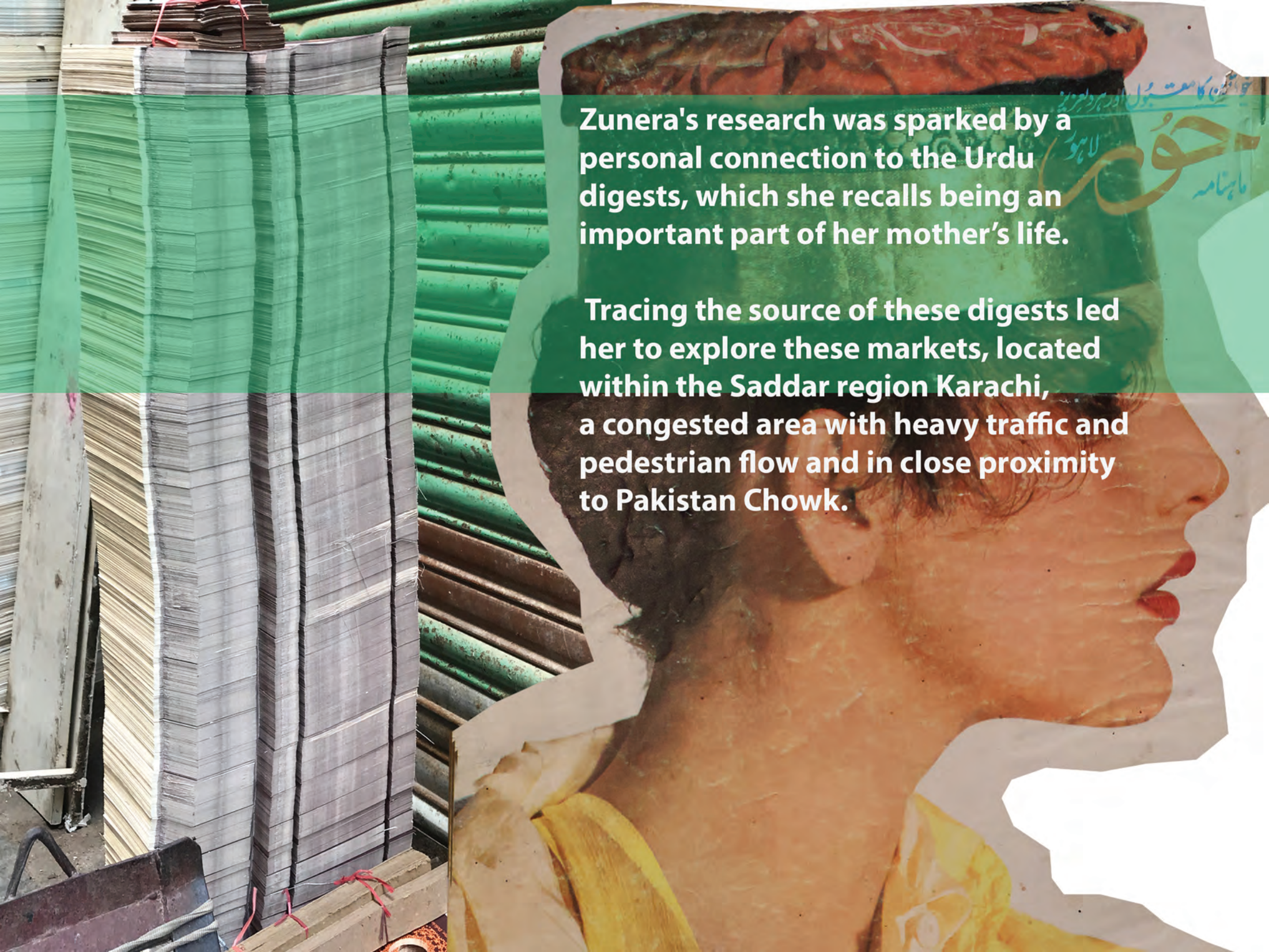


The Paper Trail: Shifting Markets and the Feminine Voice

This document explores the paper and print materials available in Karachi from

Paper Market
Urdu Bazaar &
Akhbaar Market

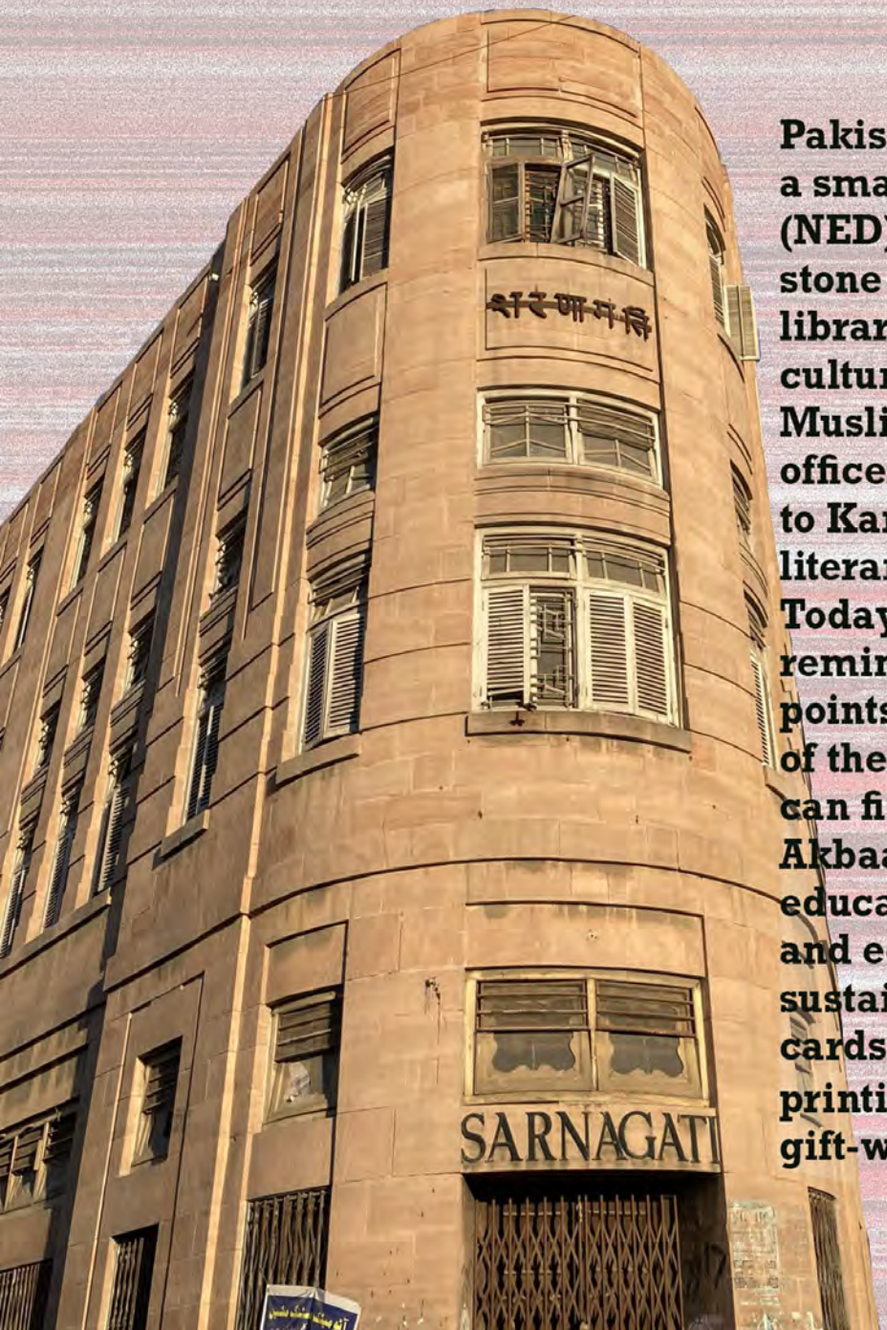
The research is part of Zunera Rashid's thesis project, a graduate of the Department of Fine Art at IVS, 2024. Collaborating with the URA, this document presents her findings and insights into these environments



Zunera's research was sparked by a personal connection to the Urdu digests, which she recalls being an important part of her mother's life.

Tracing the source of these digests led her to explore these markets, located within the Saddar region Karachi, a congested area with heavy traffic and pedestrian flow and in close proximity to Pakistan Chowk.


PC
PRIME
CARD
QUALITY PRINTERS
of Printing Wedding Cards & Graphics Designing
WISE
GRAPHICS
0333-3181884
0310-8071961
URGENT PANAFLEX
VISITING CARD
A4 - A3 COLOR PRINT
Shan Art
S.R. GRAPHICS
DESIGN & QUALITY OFFSET PRINTING
Card Inn
designer wedding cards - office stationary
Bashir & Sons
Printer
شادی کارڈ
وزیٹنگ کارڈ
رواج
RIVAAJ
WEDDING CARDS
PRINTING SOLUTION FOR CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS
Imperial
WEDDING CARDS



Pakistan Chowk is located within Saddar, Karachi, centered around a small roundabout, and lies next to the Nadirshaw Edulji Dinshaw (NED) University, which was established in the 1920s, and the pink stone Saranagati Building, which once housed the old British Council library. Historically, it was known as the city's educational and cultural hub, with universities (still present in the area), the Sindh Muslim Law college, libraries, cultural initiatives, legal consultation officers and most importantly, printing presses. This chowk is home to Karachi's first printing press, which printed and circulated various literary books and magazines, including Ismat and Saraswati. Today, as indicated by a plaque at Pakistan Chowk, we are also reminded of the numerous water tanks and safe drinking water points which also used to exist around the chowk. Walking in and out of the adjacent roads which are all off-shoots from this chowk, one can find buzzing retail hubs such as Paper Market, Urdu Bazaar and Akbaar Market which are all irrevocably connected to the area's educational entrepreneurship, community centres, student ventures and economic movements. Today, the front-facing shops in the area sustain themselves by offering services such as printing wedding cards, stickers and other types of stationery for businesses as well as printing lesser known newspapers, and providing an assortment of gift-wrapping options.









Most of the large paper cutting and printing machines are made and imported from Germany and can be found tucked away in small alley-ways in small rooms surrounded by stacks of bound paper.

With cultural preservation initiatives like the Pakistan Chowk Community Centre and its increasingly popular Heritage Walk which starts at Pakistan Chowk itself, there has been a revived interest in chronicling the area's history, particularly the link between the printing presses, educational materials and associated retail ventures. Though the student hostels, libraries, and institutes continue to deteriorate brick by brick through vandalism and capitalist erasures, these printing presses buzzing to the tune of their mechanical routine, remain a steadfast part of the area's legacy.







Akhbaar Market

In the narrow alleyways of Paper Market and Akhbaar Bazaar, Zunera discovered unintentional forms and designs that would later inspire her thesis research.

Initially, she visited these markets in search of journals and magazines targeted at female audiences, but her focus gradually shifted. Over time, her attention turned to specific types of paper—either used for printing or recycled for other purposes. As her practice centered around sourcing materials, these market visits became a crucial part of her field research.

Zunera began documenting the stacks of paper, cardboard, and envelopes, noting the way they were often piled and stacked inside or outside shops.

She found their distinct geometric forms and subtle misalignments fascinating, as they conveyed deeper meaning through their seemingly unintentional arrangement.

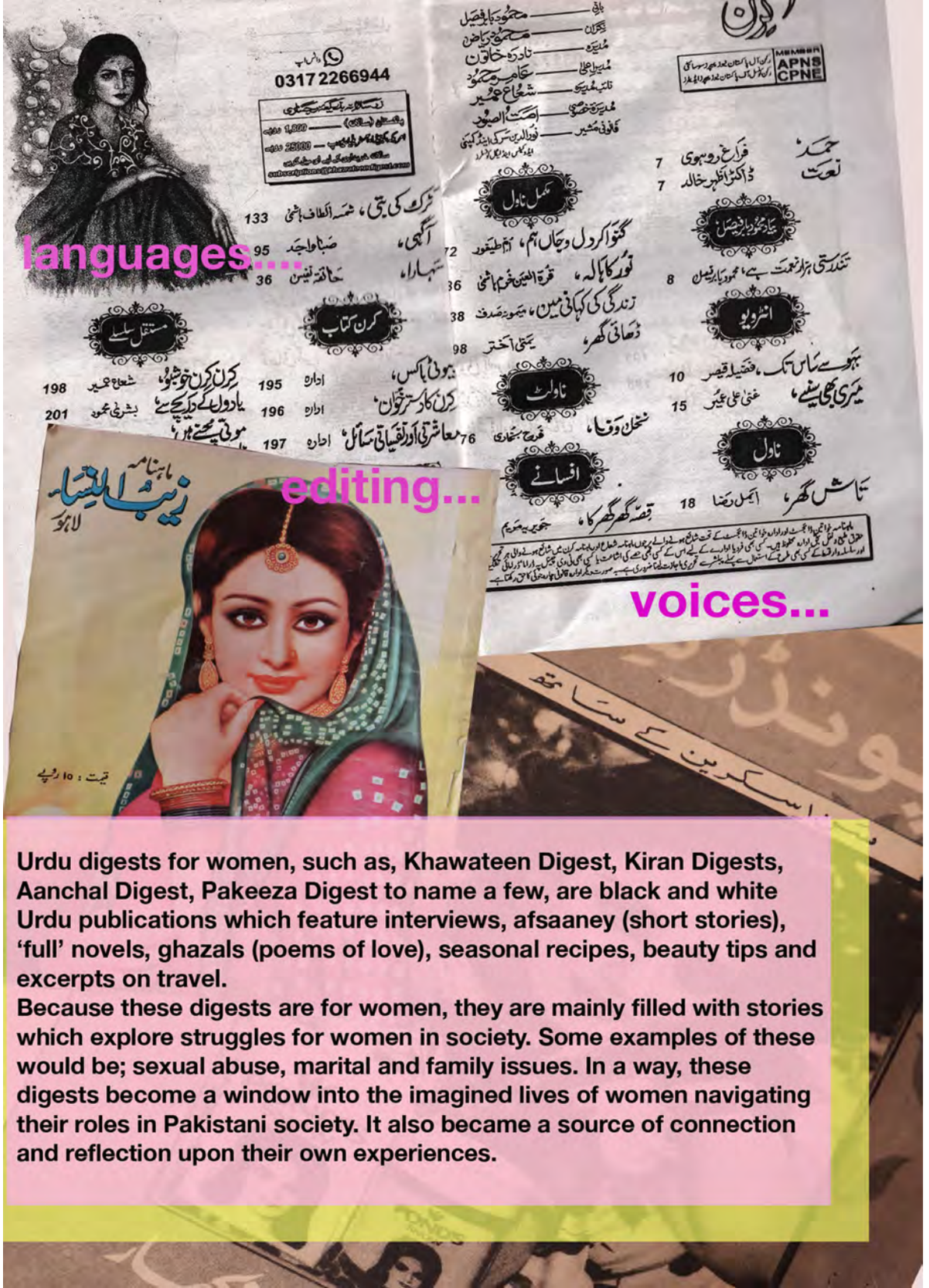


As her work evolved, she began incorporating these geometric shapes into her practice, along with the language of recycled print and paper. These elements became central to her exploration of materiality, form, and the layers of meaning embedded in everyday, discarded objects.



Her time spent in Paper Market allowed Zunera to observe how items, especially bulk paper, were stored and displayed, creating an unpredictable yet rich environment for discovering different types of paper used primarily for printing or packaging purposes.

These included materials such as cardboard boxes, corrugated sheets, and paper bags, often sold in bulk. Many shops also stocked recycled paper, which was reused for various print and packaging needs.



Urdu digests for women, such as, Khawateen Digest, Kiran Digests, Aanchal Digest, Pakeeza Digest to name a few, are black and white Urdu publications which feature interviews, afsaaney (short stories), 'full' novels, ghazals (poems of love), seasonal recipes, beauty tips and excerpts on travel.

Because these digests are for women, they are mainly filled with stories which explore struggles for women in society. Some examples of these would be; sexual abuse, marital and family issues. In a way, these digests become a window into the imagined lives of women navigating their roles in Pakistani society. It also became a source of connection and reflection upon their own experiences.

The content in these books play an important role in constructing and disseminating various ideologies in society and have become primarily a product of popular culture. This popular culture is presumed by women folk to take their issues seriously and are by and large written by women about the women's issues.

This popular culture is presumed by women folk to take their issues seriously and are by and large written women about the women's issues.

Hodge and Kress, 1993











Urdu digests are easily recognizable because of the out-of-the-box cover design. While today, most of these digests feature an AI generated model on the cover page but earlier issues would have images of women painted and drawn. Sometimes these would be just portraits of women in ornate clothing and jewelry and at times they would be arresting compositions showcasing women in seductive poses against different backdrops showing scenes of nature, architecture, animals etc. Loosely based on fantasy characters, Hollywood and Bollywood actresses, showing preconceived notions on what beauty is.

محترمہ وحیدہ نسیم صاحبہ کے طویل اور خوبصورت

افسانوں کا مجموعہ

بیلے کی کلیاں

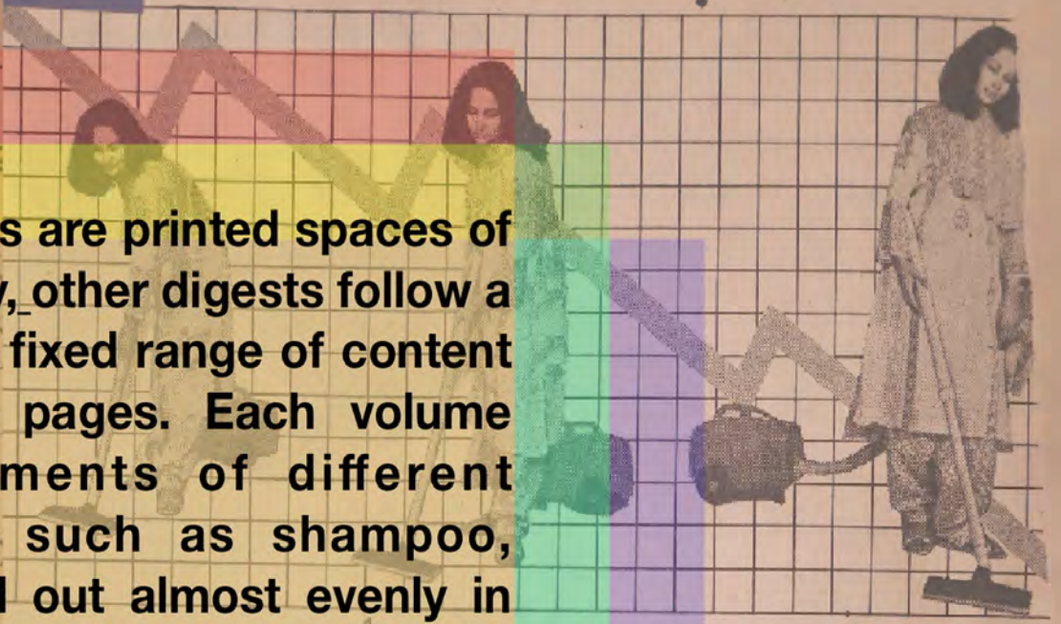
انشاءاللہ آئندہ ماہ آپ کی خدمت میں پیش کر دیا جائیگا آج ہی اپنے ہاکر سے بک کرالیں

دعا کی طاقت

دعا میں بڑی طاقت ہے۔ اس کا احساس مجھے بچپن میں ایک ایسے واقعے سے ہوا جسے میں کبھی فراموش نہیں کر سکتی۔

اُن دنوں میں اپنے ابو اور امی کے ساتھ کینیڈا میں تھی۔ میرے والد وہاں انجینئر تھے اور اس کے ساتھ ساتھ ایک فلائنگ کلب میں شوقیہ ہوا بازی سیکھ رہے تھے

جب آپ کی توانائی میں کمی آجائے



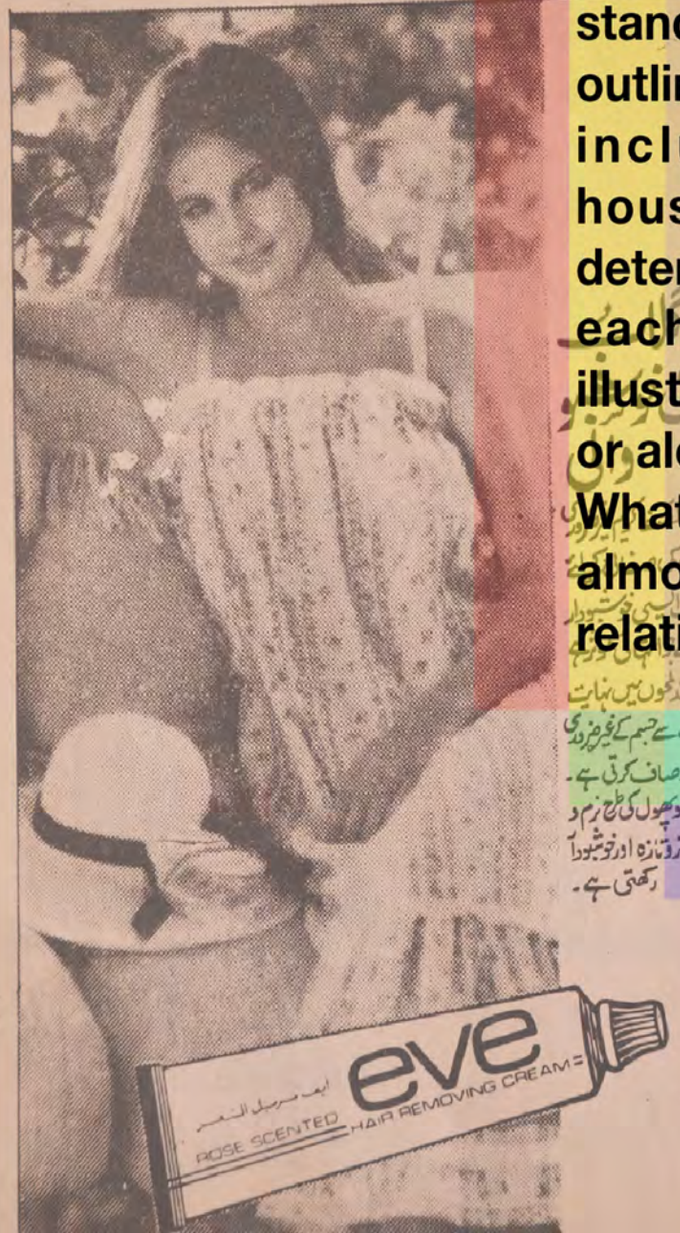
گلیکسوز ڈی کی

توانائی کی نعمت



روزمرہ کے کام کاج سے آپ کی توانائی میں
ی آجاتی ہے۔ توانائی کی تعمیر کے لئے
لیکسوز۔ ڈی لیجئے۔
لیکسوز۔ ڈی میں گلوکوز، کیلشیم اور وٹامن ڈی
شامل ہیں۔ ایک بڑا چمچہ گلیکسوز۔ ڈی چائے،
ہ، پھلوں کے رس، لسی، دُودھ یا سادے
پانی میں ملا کر پیجئے۔ گلیکسوز۔ ڈی توانائی کی
تعمیر کرتا ہے۔

توانائی کی تعمیر کے لئے آپ کا آزمودہ ۔ گلیکسوز۔ ڈی



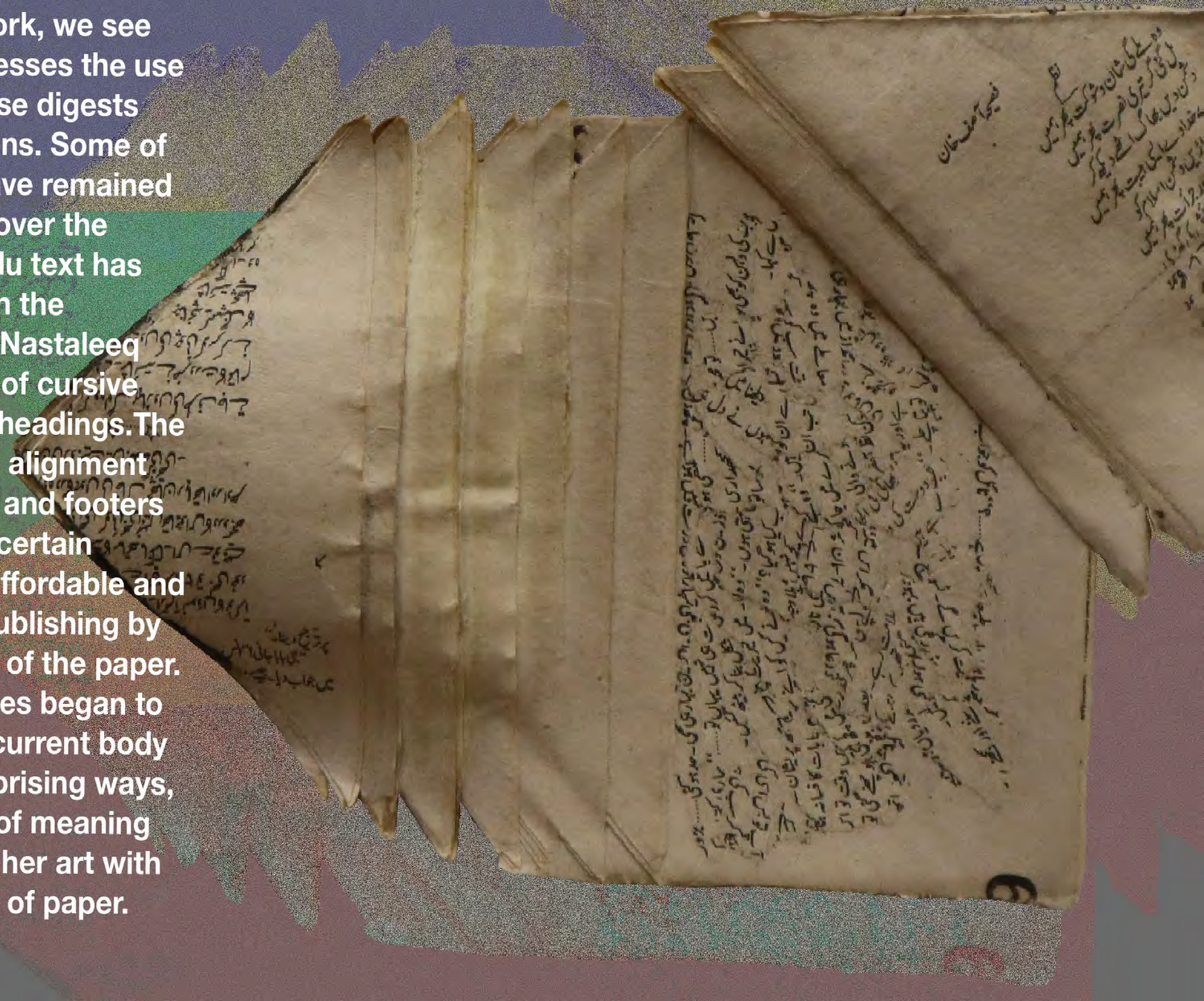
ایسی چیزوں میں نہایت
نفاست سے جسم کے غیر ضروری
بالوں کو صاف کرتی ہے۔
اور جلد کو پھول کی طرح نرم و
صاف، تر و تازہ اور خوشبودار
رکھتی ہے۔

خدا سے دعا کرو، طیارہ بحفاظت اُتر جائے اور
سلامت رہے!"

ہم نے دل کی گہرائیوں سے پائیلٹ کی سلامتی کی دعا
چھٹی ہونے پر ہیں گھر آئی تو ڈیڈی موجود تھے۔
نہایت پُرجوش لہجہ میں انہیں سکول کا واقعہ اور
کا قصہ سُنایا۔ وہ مسکرائے اور کہا
"بیٹی تمہیں معلوم ہے وہ پائیلٹ کون تھا؟"
"نہیں! تو مجھے تو پتہ نہیں!"
"وہ میں تھا بیٹی اور تمہاری دُعا نے مجھے بچا لیا!"
(عائشہ مبین۔ کراچی)

While some publications are printed spaces of discourse and creativity, other digests follow a standard format with a fixed range of content outlined in the index pages. Each volume includes advertisements of different household products such as shampoo, detergents etc. Spread out almost evenly in each publication are different kinds of illustrations of women holding different poses or alongside objects and landscapes.
What stands out about this the most is that almost all of these illustrations have no relation to the content in the digests.

In Zunera's work, we see how she addresses the use of fonts in these digests and publications. Some of these fonts have remained homogenous over the years. The Urdu text has been printed in the Jameel Noori-Nastaleeq font with a bit of cursive styling on the headings.The tight columns, alignment with headings and footers encompass a certain sensibility of affordable and eco-friendly publishing by using all sides of the paper. These strategies began to influence her current body of work in surprising ways, adding layers of meaning and texture to her art with different types of paper.



Paper Market: Field Notes

- A bustling wholesale market, home to small and medium-sized businesses that supply paper and stationery to various parts of the city and beyond.

- Known for its affordability, wide selection of products, playing a vital role in supporting Karachi's printing, packaging, and educational sectors.

- Items include decorations for parties, weddings, and celebrations.

- Various types of large-format paper available, used for multiple purposes.

- Popular among art students and creative enthusiasts.

- Market receives plenty of recycled paper, considered raw material, which is cut and assembled locally for packaging (e.g., takeaway food boxes, commercial products).

- Goods in the market are for immediate consumption, with a constant shift in available materials depending on the time of year.

- The types of materials available in the market shift according to seasonal events. For example, around National Day, there's an increased demand for paper flags and other patriotic items. Similarly, during wedding seasons and other celebrations, the market sees a rise in the availability of materials for decorations, such as ceremonial paper goods and event-specific supplies.



Akhbaar Market: Field Notes

- Smaller in size compared to Paper Market.

- Entrance: Rusted black gate leading into a building with Akhbaar Market located on the ground floor.



- Items found: Both Urdu and English language magazines, newspaper, novels, digests, fashion magazines and catalogs, brochures—recent and older editions.

- Materials: Often sourced from Raddiwalas (scrap dealers).

- Observations: Vendors seem to be collecting magazines rather than selling them, creating a market filled with archives.

Digests and journals from the 2010s are considered older issues and are seen tightly bound and tucked into corners, lying somewhat forgotten.

Urdu Bazaar: Field Notes

- One of the oldest book markets, today, known to sell new and secondhand school/education related books and stationary.
- Off and on one finds western books on art, literature and history.
- Visited mostly by students and retailers from other parts of the city.



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