Religious minorities in Pakistan, which include not only the broader religious categories such as Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist but also racial and cultural sects within the culture, are typically marginalised resulting in far-reaching consequences that have multi-dimensional social impacts on society as a whole. The conflict that arises between and amongst these sects is pervasive and has an impact on every aspect of people’s lives often creating a cycle of violent behaviour leading to further oppression. The most recent example of religious intolerance was the bombing in Lahore that took place in the middle of a Shi’ite procession on 1 September 2010. Thirty one people were killed and more than two hundred injured. In May of the same year, 86 Ahmadis were gunned down in two mosques in Lahore. In July 2009 seven members of a Christian family (on the pretext of desecrating the Holy Quran, in actual fact did not take place) were brutally murdered. These examples are a devastating reflection of the fact that religious diversity is still largely abhorred in Pakistan.

This panel will focus on three broad areas:

- how does South Asian Literature reflect the issues surrounding religious minorities
- how does the media reflect these issues both negatively and positively
- religious minorities and violence against women

The panel will aim to look at how religious minorities are represented in literature and in the different forms of media. Within the ambit of their depiction in the media some of the speakers will also discuss how women’s lives are specifically affected by their “place” in terms of their religious and cultural backgrounds. Some of the questions posed will be, does the media portray a fair image of religious minorities? How are they depicted in fiction and how influential is fiction in creating positive/ negative change in the way that people think? The recent surge of Asian authors that have been published abroad are largely concerned with the topic of religion as it is relevant to the political milieu of this age in which a person’s religion has come to define his/her identity especially when we talk about “terrorism” or even migration across borders.

In the end the panel hopes to create an informed debate on these issues in the endeavour to find ways to bridge the gaps between cultures and religions leading to a more peaceful nation that can rise above the bigotry that surrounds us.