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Edito

Despite the persistence of COVID, there has been a lot of scientific activity in the field of Sindhi Studies since the last newsletter in July. Hopefully, 2021 will bring a revival of travel and fieldwork, especially as it will be marked by two major events: the ten-year anniversary of the CSSK, which now has a logo, and the organisation of the first Karachi Winter School in Social Sciences. Last but not least, we welcome Saba Sindhri, doctoral student at EHESS, who has joined the newsletter team.



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In Conversation: Masooma Shakir with Saba Sindhri



Architect Masooma Mohib Shakir is Assistant Professor at the Architecture and Planning Department, NED, Karachi. She got her undergraduate degree in Architecture from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in Karachi, Pakistan. She got her Masters from University of Leuven, Belgium and is currently working on her Phd research on Interrelationship of Living Heritage to its Context, Case of Sufi Shrines in Sindh, at the , in Germany. Her interests lie particularly in planning and urban design for historic environments. She has been involved in several urban research projects and publications and contributed to national and international journals, symposiums and conferences. Since 2019, Masooma Shakir is PI of an international project funded by the French Embassy and HEC Pakistan. Based on a partnership between CEIAS (CNRS-EHESS) and NED University, it focuses on the representations of the Indus River within the riverside populations and beyond.

SS: *What was your basic academic training and career? How did it inspire you to work on Sindh and how did you select the topics you are working on?*

MS: Thank you Saba for this opportunity! I am an architect by training and got my undergraduate degree in Architecture from Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in Karachi. After being engaged in regular architecture practice for a couple of years, I decided that something enormous was missing in the practice realm and joined Architect Arif Hasan to work on design and urban research projects; both to learn from him and to study the built environment on a larger scale. It was there that I was introduced to the idea of looking at community frameworks with reference to built space, the concept of social inequalities being represented/manifested through various planned interventions. I then got a Master's in Architecture for Human Settlements from KU Leuven, Belgium and joined the Architecture Department at NED University as an academic in 2007—where I have been ever since. Throughout this period, I have maintained engagements with multiple research projects at NED oriented towards understanding urban and community contexts and spatial associations. Working with Dr. Noman Ahmed and the various faculty members of the department while taking advantage of opportunities to engage with visiting scholars and academics who broaden the scope of architecture, I am constantly learning.

History, for me, plays an important role in the shaping of built environments and people associate with historic/traditional environments in special ways. I decided to explore this association in my doctorate work, where I focused on community associations with Sufi heritage in the Sindh region. For me, Sindh has been that non-urban reference which contrasts sharply with the fast changing, urban character and detachment (to the point of being ruthless) that I associate with the city of Karachi where I reside and have worked.



Of course, Sindh has many other cities within it, but their patterns of urban development are relatively slow in comparison with the capital. This contrast makes Sindh a good ground for research aiming to identify meaningful associations and their patterns as represented in built space.

Research work on cities and historical areas in Sindh allows an opportunity to travel, to experience the towns, their structuring features connected to ecology, geography, culture, distribution of zones and major roads, and history and people. Historic sites often summarise these associations within a built space and therefore become interesting places for study.

SS: *What are your current publications?*

MS: My recent works have focused on specific traditional communities and the historic landmarks and architecture attached to them. This includes the PhD work that I finished in 2018 and work with Prof. Michel Boivin on the Hindu communities attached to Oderolal. Recently, research frames have been created to study, among others, the Mallah and Mohana communities that have been associated by livelihood to the Indus River, coast and delta.

SS: *Your Ph.D. thesis, among other research works of yours, is very interesting. Could you please tell us a little bit about it: what was your purpose? What were your findings when your research was completed?*

MS: My PhD thesis stemmed from the frustration of watching heritage in the Karachiite context crumble and deteriorate. Karachi is the main economic center of the country and its orientation is primarily on business and the economy. History and its preservation are generally not valued much within the Karachiite context where interests of stakeholders within the old city areas clash. The purpose of my study was to look at a community that worked at preserving a historic, cultural, and social association. My case study of the Mazar of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai in Bhitshah was an interesting exploration of this. An examination of the conflicts in ideology of preservation between formal institutions and the traditional community structure was an interesting outcome.

Yes, I learned many things from my research, most important of which is that when a traditional community is oriented towards preservation of a regional history, persistence and motivation is dictated by the community's social organization and the sentiments that support that association and that this persistence can be seen as a fragile one within the larger milieu. Thus, it needs to be dealt with as such, that is, with care in planning. Yes, you can say I managed to achieve my aims, but I believe this is only another major piece within the larger puzzle of understanding contextual changes.

SS: *Apart from space as cultural heritage, how do you observe devotees in separate groups such as Hindus, Muslims, and Scheduled castes? Could you explain how they share space with each other and how, specifically, Muslims and Hindus share it with Scheduled Castes?*

MS: I prefer to see them within frameworks of community with a particular hierarchy and relations that dictate their role. While my work does have anthropological leanings, scheduled castes are not a subject that I have touched upon. I do understand that social relations often dictate the organization of spaces, the case of Oderolal dargah and the Hindu complex has been one that brings this out clearly. Physical boundaries at times are safe spaces that represent the tensions between particular social groups; that they may delineate the comfort zones of groups for particular activities has been an interesting observation that has come through.



SS: *How would you generalize the religiosity of Sindh in Sufi shrines and in other sacred places, in past and in present? If you give a general historical background of Sufi shrines, could you please tell us which century in the history of Sindh is important in order to understand the origin of such spaces and why? Finally, did you observe change in religiosity since you started to work on shrines?*

MS: Sufi shrines are religious/sacred spaces for many, and my research revealed that places like Bhitshah which have a performance dimension attached are also visited for recreational purposes by groups of friends or single men from the region. According to the fakirs attached to the shrines, the numbers visiting for recreational purpose has increased over time. I do not believe that this can be generalized though because it varies from place to place and shrine to shrine. Some shrines are more controlled and religious. Sometimes the associated facilities, like madrasas, or institutes etc. also add to this. The Mazar of Bhitai is different from many other shrines because of some of its spatial features and cultural elements, perhaps also by its location at the center of the town. The sanctity of the space seems to somehow justify the congregation of various social groups whose code of behavior is much different from that observed in streets.

Similarly, I feel that each shrine has to be seen within its own historical framework and context. Various shrines have been historically significant within their own context. The social and cultural associations of these built environments with the community and the region, in the various forms of expression particularly in terms of historical and political relevance, is important to decipher. Their historic role in communities and subsequent evolution is an area of research interest for me.

For the rural populace, the occasional visit to shrines is a day out. It definitely has a recreational value for young people. The older members of the family attribute religious value to the places. I suppose the young are still learning about them. I also feel that history of shrines should be available at the sites as general information for the masses so they are informed. In some of the bigger shrines, there are some little booklets and plaques that give this information.

SS: *Do you have any ongoing project on Sindh?*

MS: Currently, we (Department of Architecture and Planning, NED UET Karachi) are working on a collaborative interdisciplinary research project with Prof. Michel Boivin and his team from the CEAIS under the Pak France Periodot Research Project funded by the Higher Education Commission Pakistan and French Consulate. The project is oriented to study communities associated with the River Heritage of and related to the Indus River. The major focus of this research is to understand the different dimensions of sanctity attached to the river, in material and social forms, attached to figures like Oderolal, Khwaja Khizr, Zindapir, Sheikh Tahir. In line with this, the various built heritage are a focus of study and documentation. Our project fieldwork and travel however, has been delayed quite a bit due to the corona virus outbreak in both countries!



SS: *How do you think we can reinforce Sindhi Studies in Sindh, Pakistan and European projects?*

MS: Projects like the Pak France Peridot are good opportunities that foster and promote the study of Sindh through scholarly interaction between universities. Prof. Michel Boivin is very well informed about Sindh and often he discusses aspects that provides a framework for us, and we learn about the very region where we live and work in. People from Pakistan and Sindh themselves need to understand the global theoretical frameworks to create lenses and objective methodologies of documentation of the region in the larger context. Regional studies of any part of the world have to be done within certain frameworks that present an accurate and unbiased picture of the area. My Sindhi colleagues in the academia usually agree that there is dire need for better scholarship on Sindh from within. Familiarity with the language is in my opinion a big advantage that can allow them as native speakers to document and interact closely with the locals of the region and understand the finer undertones that often some of us miss as non-Sindhi speakers.

2019-2021 | URLP - Interdisciplinary Survey of the Legacy related to Uderolal/Zindapir in the Indus Valley – Udero Lal Research Project

Cordinators: Michel Boivin (CNRS-CEIAS) and Masooma Shakir (N. E. D. University)

In October 2019, a new research project « Interdisciplinary Survey of the Legacy related to Uderolal/Zindapir in Sindh – Uderolal Research Project (ULRP) » was started by the CEIAS and N.E.D. University (Karachi). It is jointly funded by the French Embassy in Pakistan and the High Education Committee (Islamabad).

The Udero Lal Research Project (ULRP) visions to highlight the interaction between the local society of Sindh and the Indus River, in centering on the material legacy that has been constructed throughout the centuries. The ULRP plans to survey first the material culture that shows the multidimensional involvement of the local people with the Indus River. It will include the built structures, as well as art expressions, such as iconography, architecture, decorations, etc. The main case study will be the darbar of Udero Lal, about 50kms north of Hyderabad, for the relationship between the local people and the Indus River was embodied in a sacred figure, known under many different names, from Jhulelal to Zinda Pir. Secondly, the project will analyze how the sacred figures related to the Indus River was appropriated by different communities, and how his life narrative draw peaceful and balanced relations between the different communities, firstly Hindus and Muslims. Several sites related to his life narratives will be surveyed, such as the physical remnants of his birthplace in Nasarpur, along with the place of his qabr / samadhi, as well as the Zinda Pir island in Rohri. It will reveal the multiple ways through which the local groups associated this figure with the Indus River, and how the River nurtured the local life.



Mata's *Melo*: Devi Worship among the Samis of Sindh

Saba sindhri, CEIAS-EHESS

This fieldwork report is part of an ongoing PhD research. The research is not specifically on the Devi panth in Sindh but on the Samis as a social group who follow Devi and celebrate her autumn festival Navratri. The following text is a field report on the festival celebration which was conducted in October 2020 preceded by a short literature analysis on the Devi panth in Sindh.

Devipanth in Sindh

Goddess worship in Sindh is known as Shakti cult or Devi Panth. They both refer to the following of one deity, Maa Sherawali, and her different forms/avatars. Among different temples of the Goddess in Sindh, Singh Bhavani and Hinglaj Mata are popular for visits. Hinglaj is one of the fifty-one Pithas,¹ and it is believed to be the place where her head landed (Briggs 1938: 106).

On the various forms of the Goddess, U.T Thakur in his book titled *Sindhi Culture*, states that three forms of *Mata*, Singh Bhavani or the lion goddess, Kali, and Sitala Mata (Thakur 1959: 115) are followed in Sindh. He further writes Sonaras are a caste of Devi worshippers, who claim themselves *Mai pota* (sons of the Goddess). BGur, Wanhan, and Bhat also worship Devi, and Shaivas, like Jogis and Sanyasi, may be Shaktas at the same time (p;116). However, goddess worship is not limited to only a few groups. Raja Rajput in Tharparkar are followers of Devi and many other scheduled caste communities are Devi-pujak (Goddess followers). U.T. Thakur's idea of Goddess worship by Brahmins and a limited number of groups is mainly based on the observation of upper castes but apart from them, all the scheduled castes worship the Goddess alongside other gods like Shiva or Vishnu. Some, like Gujarati Meghwar in Hyderabad at Fateh Chowk and Gujarati Vagri in Bheempura and Narayanpura in Karachi, are exclusively Goddess—in the form of Kali—worshippers. The Meghwars of Hariyar village, Tharparkar, also Goddess worshippers, are constructing new spaces in her name using local names like Mata Malhan, Maubhan, and Mauji (Kalhoro 2015: 26) while the Jogis of Nabisar, Tharparkar, who used to keep stones as *murti* (idols) of the Goddess, are now constructing temples in her name. Therefore, the following of the Goddess in Sindh is not restricted to certain groups. Many communities in Sindh including the Meghwar, Jogis and Samis follow her as their clan-deity.

There is a lot of regional work, presented in the form of *bhajans* (religious songs) published on Durga Mata, Maa Sherawali and other forms of the Goddess by Hinglaj Sheva Mandali, Sundar Sheva Mandali and other regional publications. Some literature circulates from different areas of India as well. However, existing literature is mostly about *bhajans* and Navratri and not much is published on the different groups and their following of Goddess. In particular, there is a dearth of literature examining the different rites, the different iconographies of the Goddess and groups' associations with her.

Recently, an in-depth study on Hinglaj Devi was completed by Austrian scholar Jurgen Schaflechner who has studied Hinduism in the Islamic republic of Pakistan through the case study of Hinglaj Devi in his book titled *Hinglaj Devi: Solidifying Hindu Identity at a Hindu Temple in Pakistan*. He observes

¹ Spots where the dismembered limbs of Sati were scattered.



how the Hinglaj Seva Mandali has organized and solidified the historical tradition of Hingaj Devi and has excluded or included traditions of the members' own caste, Lasi-Lohana. He also examines their influence over the tradition of *bali* (animal sacrifice) which has been a core-ritual of Goddess worship. The tradition of *bali* is associated with one particular form of the Goddess, Kali Mata, who asks requires for blood. In the ritual, a red cloth is placed over the *murti* of the Goddess and her temple until the *bali* is completed and the meat is distributed and eaten by those who have performed the ritual. In the *patel* sub-castes, Devi-pujak Vagri, who refute the ban on *bali*, carry out the ritual and similarly, in the case of Samis, one sub-caste performs *bali* among other the others. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why Devi-pujak Vagri find it hard to understand the ban on *bali* and how it is easier for Lasi-Lohana. Depending on the authority and their influence, different traditions in the methods and subject of worship have evolved.

The role of the Lohana community and its emergence in the late 1980s at the Hinglaj temple is interesting because we observe that the caste/Dalit issue in Sindh dates back to this period. Devi-pujak Vagri are scheduled caste Hindus and Lasi-Lohana are upper caste. Hence, there is a need to understand what in the context of that period led rise to the emergence of upper castes as the new authority at the temples and the subjugation of the Dalits.

Moreover, the book seems more about Devi-pujaks than Devi herself. It overlooks Goddess worshipping in different forms by different groups. For example, the Goddess of the Samis does not ride a lion but sits in a chair and similarly, Malhanr Devi, in Hariyar village, rides a horse. The different regional names with completely different iconography deserve detailed study. A separate, specific study is also required to understand the Devi cult and Devi-pujaks individually and comparatively.

Samin jo Melo/ Mata no Melo/ Norata/Navratri

The Samis refer to their Goddess as *Mata* (singular, *Matas* [plural]) and celebrate her festival every year in the seventh month of Hindu religious calendar *Asu*² (Ashvin). They call it *Mata no Melo*; *Mata* means "mother" referring to Mother Goddess, *no* in Gujarati is used as "of" and *melo* means festival or fair and thus the "Festival of the Mother Goddess" in English translation. *Mata no Melo* is a *Navratri* festival celebrated in the honor of the Goddess and Samis call it *Norata* (*Navratri*). *Norata* is commonly used in place of *Navratri* in Kutch, Gujarat and Rajasthan. It is a big Hindu festival celebrated by almost every Hindu group. Samis, as well as considering it a religious event, celebrate it as a social event. Gathering at one place for ten days, they bring their conflicts for resolution before Sardar Lal Chand, prostrate before their *mata*, pray for a prosperous year ahead and perform the rituals.

Sami call their *Mata* as *Murshid* (Guide). *Murshid* is the common term for a Sufi master in Muslim context. They explained it to me that everyone in Sindh has a *murshid* and their *murshid* is *Mata*. It is incomprehensible to them to not have a *murshid*. Many Samis are followers of Muslim saints and visit their *Melo* and similarly, *Mata* along with being their Goddess is their *Murshid* whom they feel obliged to visit during *Melo/Norata*.

The Samis, as a group, are divided in sub-castes called Parra (singular as Parro) or Nukhoon (singular as Nukh) and every Parro has their own *Mata*. The different names of *Mata* are Mata Sherawali, Mata Verai, Mata Herochi, Mata Vishet, Jog Mata, Mata Shekootar, Sombarr Mata and Hark Mayi.³ Each *Mata* has more than one name, for example, Mata Sherawali is also called Hinglaj

² The Indian religious calendar is a lunisolar calendar and Navratri starts on the 14th of the solar month.

³ Mayi is also used for mother in Sindhi, derived from Maa, but the typical meaning of mayi is woman.



Mata and Sarniyani Mata and Mata Verai as Mata Bhawani. Mata Sherawali is considered the supreme Mata whereas the others are considered her avatars whom she created to fight the demons. The Samis do not explain why Mata Sherawali is the highest ranking, but as their forefathers revered her as supreme, they follow the tradition. Mata Sherawali is also the Mata of Romani Parro from which the Sardar of Samis is descendent. The different Parra of the Samis include Romani, Parmar, Parahee, Mogriya, Chauhan, Keehani, Nangnai, Bheemani, Rathod, Sukhani, Garirri, Magani, Noraye, Bhand (Gora (white) Bhand and Kara (black) Bhand) and Dodani.

In Sindh, Samis celebrate *Mata no Melo* at Nar jo Potho,⁴ Tando Bagho, Badin. It is said that Mir Bande Ali Khan Talpur⁵ gave this *potho* to their *sardar* Kanbho Khan and asked him to settle there.⁶ Some Samis tell a different story that this land was given to them by General Ayoub Khan as a return gift for a *rilli* (quilt).⁷ Either way, Samis have been living there ever since. In the past, as per their stories, a whole community of Samis was settled at this place and celebrated *melo* together but then, some of the *parra* of Samis moved to different areas of Badin and nearby districts. Now all the *parra* have moved to different places except the Romani Parro of Sardar. However, the mobility of different *parra* of Samis has brought changes in the traditions of their *melo* celebration. When they lived together, they celebrated *melo* together and even after their migrations, the other *parra* would bring their *mata* back to Nar jo Potho for the festival. However, now many prefer to celebrate at the place they have settled. Last year and this year, only three *parra* including the Romani Parro of Sardar, Nangani and Garirri Parro brought their *matas* to Nar jo Potho. A man from Keehani Parro, follower of Mata Vishet, visited Sardar on the 9th day of Melo. He came from Nabi Bux, Badin, and told me that normally they come to Nar jo Potho every year for Melo but this time, monsoon rains caused floods and made it impossible for them to bring their goddess and all the people of his *parro*. Therefore, Sardar Lal Chand told them to celebrate where they had settled in Nabi Bux.

Besides this, there are other reasons due to which many *parra* of Samis have restricted celebration to their places. For example, Sardar plays a major role in the resolution of conflicts between different *parra* at the time of Melo and it is said, he resolves them according to the amount of money offered as a bribe in turn making unfair decisions if a bribe is not paid. As a result, many Samis have stopped coming due to his unjust behavior (the Sardar and his authority will be discussed in a separate chapter dedicated to the Samis of Sindh). Another reason for changes in the celebration location is that some of the Samis have moved quite far in their migration and find it difficult to reach Nar jo Potho. Thus, they prefer to celebrate Melo at their place of settlement.

Rituals of Melo

Building the Thon (temple)

Thon is the corrupted pronunciation of *thaan*. Samis in their language, which as per their claims is Gujarati, pronounce “aa” sound as “o.” Therefore, *thaan* becomes *thon* which means temple. A few days before the celebration of Melo, Samis build the clay *thon* (temple). The *patel*⁸ of each *parro* (sub-caste) initiates the work at their own temple and others help him. They take soil from nearby fields of cotton or wheat and mix it with water to make mud. The *patel* draws a square of around three feet in width and three and half or four feet in the length. Using the mud, the square is built up

⁴ *Potho* is the name given to a dried-out land in Sindhi. *Nar jo potho* means the land created by the drying out of the Nara canal in that area.

⁵ Mir Bande Ali Khan was Chief Minister of Sindh from April 1940 to March 1941.

⁶ Samis have different legends associated with the Talpurs which lack the evidence in detail and need some research on it.

⁷ Samis women have different arts and styles of making *Rilli* which are known as *Sami Rilli* in Sindh.

⁸ *Patel*, as a term in conversation, can be replaced with *Muzawir* (caretaker of a shrine) and *Changoo Murrs* (influential man).

one-foot above ground level. The shape may be irregular, sometimes square, and sometimes oval. Around the temple, they sow wheat which grows little in ten to fifteen days. Legend says the *rott* was cooked from the wheat grown around the temple but now it does not grow well, so they buy the flour needed to make it.

Rott is derived from the word *roti* (bread). Samis cook *roti* from wheat flour and break it into small pieces which they later mix with *ghee* (clarified butter) and serve as *prasad* (food offered to a deity). In Sindh, Mureed (followers in Muslim context) of Ghous Bahaudin Zakariya also distribute such an offering and call it *rott*,⁹ but they add sugar while the Samis' *rott* is *phiko* (sugarless). Vagri Gujarati, settled in Karachi, also offer *Rott* to Mata at the time of Navratri. The difference between the *rott* of Gujarati Vagri and that of the Samis is that Samis do not add sugar and Vagri do not add salt. Vagris say that salt is prohibited as *Mata* does not like salt while the Samis say, *Mata* does not like sugar.



Fig. 1 Temple structure

Returning back to the *thon*; after building up the irregular level, the Samis make three round dome-like shapes on it. One is for the *murti* (idol) of *Mata* (Samis have small gold and silver *murtis*), the second is for a *deo* (lamp) and the third for Dado Gogo. A metal *nag* (serpent) of the cobra is used to symbolize Dado Gogo beside Mata Sherawali at the *thons* dedicated to her (Fig.1).

Dado Gogo is the patron saint of Jogis. They give *dohi* (oath) of Dado Gogo to snakes and then it is believed that the snakes will not bite. Like the Jogis, the Lohana community also, claim themselves the descendants from the *nag* or the Cobra (Thakur 1959: 111). However, why Samis follow Dado Gogo, how they associate themselves with snakes, and what the connection between Mata Sherawali and Dado Gogo is remains unknown. However, it is one aspect which brought Samis closer to the Jogis as a community. (This will be discussed in the chapter dedicated to the Samis).

The sub-caste Romani, settled in Nao Dumbalo, are followers of Mata Sherawali but they do not go to Nar jo Potho for Melo, and celebrate at home. They have a different *murti* of Mata Sherawali and worship a *nag* as Dado Gogo. They have two snakes, one of metal and one of wood. However, in Mata Sherawali's *thon* at the Sardar's home there is a silver *nag* and people coming to the Melo pray to both for blessings equally. The *nag* is only associated with Mata Sherawali. Other *thons* do not have any *nag*. Next to the *murtis* of Mata and Nag, is a dried coconut which, according to the Romani, it symbolizes Dado Khetarpal considered the protector of Mata. (fig. 2)

The remaining space is decorated with seashells and images of Mata and contains a pot of clarified butter, a small box containing *gugar* (myrrh) or *loban* (frankincense) inside, a packet of incense sticks, a flat seashell for the *dhoop* (smoke of burning incense) and a *sanks* (conch shell) (see fig.5 below). All the objects are considered sacred by the Samis.

⁹ The researcher gathered this information through oral sources, mainly interviews with different participants other than Samis.



Figure 2 From left: Dado Khetarpal, Ma Sherawali and Dado Gogo

1st day of Melo: Installing Tents in the evening

On the first evening of the Melo celebration, the *patel*, his relatives, and some helpers gather around the *thon* to install a tent. The *patel* keeps the tent and tools at his house or “*pakho*”¹⁰ (the description will be discussed in the chapter dedicated to the Samis of Sindh). Tents and tools are not purchased annually but kept carefully when not in use as the tools are as sacred to Samis as other objects of the *thon*. The *thon* is considered Mata’s home or palace. The *patel* brings the tent from his *pakho* and everyone works together to unfold it. The tent is comprised of a flat covering sheet, four bamboo sticks and four stakes. They spread the sheet on the ground, attach the stakes to the sticks and erect it (Fig.3). Then, they dig small holes for the stakes which balance the tent. Old women of the family and relatives help in tent making and usually, tent installation is specifically women’s work. As men



Figure 3 Tent Installation

are always on *musafiri*¹¹ (travelling) or *pheri Pheri*¹² (local circuit), as the group migrates from place-to-place women are responsible for any building or tent construction. However, at the time of Melo, women are not seen performing any role in building the *thon* or installing the tent on it. They are kept at a distance from Melo activities except visiting the *thon* on the 7th night. The organization of Melo and all the rituals are performed by men while the role of women in this entire process is only to be silent spectators. When the tent is installed, the workers unwrap Mata and open her *madh*.

¹⁰ The term *pakho* is commonly used for a roof made up of small reed sticks which is put upon the house. Here *pakho* refers to house.

¹¹ *Musafiri* is a term used by Samis for begging outside their district or province.

¹² *Pheri* is used for begging in the village where men go for a brief round in the village and come back in few hours..

Mata no Madh

Madh refers to the basket made of straw with red cloth stitched around it. The *murti* of Mata and other sacred objects are kept in the basket, “Mata no madh” or home of Mata (Fig. 4)¹³ during the majority of the year. The basket is similar to the baskets used by Jogis for their snakes, a Jogi basket is covered with patched pieces of cloth or a quilt. Samis keep the basket tied to a wooden staff in the *patel's pakho*. The head of staff is carved with a cobra head symbolizing Dado Gogo as the guard of Mata.

Figure 4 Mata no madh



The legend about the tying of *Mata no Madh* to the wooden staff is that it is Mata's wish, and a tradition, to keep her wrapped in the basket. Samis, even those living far from each other, tell the story that once a policeman visited their houses and asked them to open the basket. The Samis resisted but the policeman insisted. Frightened, they opened the *madh* and saw fire is coming out of the eyes of the *murti* of Mata which went straight into the eyes of policeman and blinded him. He then cried a lot, apologized, and implored Mata for the recovery of his sight. He was granted his wish and so promised not to annoy Samis again. Samis strongly believe in the truth of this story and consider that opening the *madh* before Melo will bring bad luck into their lives. The story resembles that of the army of Ghulam Shah Kalhoro (Kalhora ruler) who at the time of attacking Kutch, attacked *Mata no Madh*, the main temple devoted to Mata in the area worshipped by the Jarejas (the kings of Kutch) who were a branch of the Sindhi Sammas.¹⁴ Mata in a rage, punished the army of Ghulam Shah Kalhoro by blinding each of the soldiers.¹⁵ It is likely that these stories are one and the same and having been repeated by generation to generation are so entrenched that the story has become something they themselves witnessed.

Samis tie Mata to a staff because they have gold and silver *murtis* which might be stolen. Once, one of the *murtis* was stolen by a man out from their community and to recover it they had to ask for the help of the *mir*. Another reason given for keeping Mata in the basket is that as the Samis are nomads, building a permanent temple is not possible. They explain that if they left the temple, someone could come and disrespect the space of Mata so she is safer kept with them and in the *madh*.

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¹³ In other groups like the Vagris settled in Karachi, *madh* refers to the ritual of Navratri during which they take soil, make mud out of it and grow barley. They water the barley seeds for the ten days of Navratri and after the celebration, they soak the barley in the water.

¹⁴ Sammas ruled Sindh from 1365-1521.

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mata_no_Madh

¹⁶ *Mir* meaning king. It is commonly used for Talpur rulers in Sindh, who ruled Sindh before British colonization.



With regards to the origin of Mata's *murti* and sacred objects in the Madh, the Samis say that all the objects were transferred to them from their forefathers. *Murtis* are very old and have different iconography than the known iconography of Goddess. However, all *murtis* have a seal attached to the chest in which the Goddess is riding a lion, which seems newly added. (The iconography will be discussed in the chapter dedicated to Melo). Excepting the *murtis*, there are many items that could be traced as recent and are not as old as the Samis claim. For example, the piece of cloth which is put at the *thons* is mainly the red cloth from the basket, but at some thons, there are carpet pieces or covers brought by the Samis from different areas where they go for *musafiri*. They mostly use carpets brought from Iran where, as per their story, they started going for begging after the 1970s, when the Bhutto regime opened good relations with neighboring countries. The mobility of Samis in Iran and its influences in their religious practices will be discussed in a separate chapter.

Opening the Madh

The sun is set and now the *patel* opens *Mata no Madh*. He takes the *murti* and other objects from the basket and places them on the *thon*. Along with the *murti* and its seat, the *madh* contains many seashells, deo (lamps), snakes, a flat seashell as *dhoop* plate (*dhoop* is smoke of burning incense) and *sanks* (seashells). The *patel* decorates the *thon* with all the sacred objects (fig.5) and then performs *pooja*. *Pooja* in their language is *Mata no Jheelanr* (Gujarati for giving a bath to Mata). The *patel* takes the plate, puts Mata in it and gives her a bath. Then he places her back in her chair. Next, he takes burning coals from the *chulh* (stove) for the *dhoop*, puts them on the flat seashell with *gugar* (myrrh) or *loban* (frankincense) incense on it and moves it in circular motion before the *murti* of Mata while chanting "Jai Shree Ram" and "Om Namah Shiva." According to the *patel*, *gugar* is collected from the Mukul myrrh trees in Khuzdar, Baluchistan. He used to extract it himself on his way to do *musafiri*. Everyone who goes on *musafiri* to Balochistan or beyond collects *gugar* from those trees and brings it for the Melo. While the *dhoop* burns, Patel chants "Om Namah Shiva" and asks children to play the *sanks*. The *patel* finishes the *pooja* with the sounds of the *sanks*. Then they all sit under the tent, converse with each other and listen to Bhajjan. *Marsiya*, dedicated to Imams, are played along with the Bhajjans as Samis have an inclination to Shia Islam which they say was influenced by their trips to Iran after the 1970s.





This *pooja* of *Mata no Jheelanr* is performed twice a day, at dawn and at sunset, for the ten days of Melo. The *pooja* is performed by the *patel* and if he is not present, one of his close relatives like a son or brother can perform it as the entire *patel* family of each *parro* refrains from eating meat and dedicates these ten days to Mata.

Other than the daily *poojas*, Samis participate in various other activities during Melo. For example they take their conflicts to the *sardar* for resolution (to be discussed in detail in the chapter dedicated to Samis). In terms of religious activities, the 7th night of Melo is very important because on this night families bring newly wed couples and newborn babies to their temples (discussed in detail below). Samis believe that it is bad luck for babies to visit shrines and temples before visiting Mata. Samis are followers of many Muslim and Hindu saints like Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, Abdul Qadar Gilani, Ramdev Pir and others, but they cannot go to their temples until they have paid homage to Mata who is only visible during Melo.

7th night of Melo

The evening begins with the *pooja* after which they prepare *rott* (Fig. 6). At the Sherawali temple, which holds the *mata* considered the highest ranking two *rott* are prepared; one for Mata and the other for Dado Gogo. Mata's *rott* is distributed to both men and women whereas Dado Gogo's *rott* is distributed strictly among men as it is believed women should not eat Dado Gogo's *rott*. The making of *rott* takes three ingredients: wheat flour, *ghee* (clarified butter) and salt. They cook the flour meal after grinding it. *Ghee* is not added at this time.

Figure 6 Devotees preparing Rott



The *rott* is put aside and the preparation begins for the *jot* (fire) which they call "*Mata no jot*." For the *jot*, they take burning coals from the *hawan* and place them at some distance from the temple. Then, together they call Mata to light it. They do not add *ghee* or anything to light the fire, but call Mata.

Samis believe Mata shows her presence through the lighting of the *jot* and if it is not lit; it means Mata has not visited the temple or she is not happy with them. If Mata is happy with the Samis, she will light the *jot* in seconds however, if there is someone whom Mata does not like or if someone is wearing black then it can take longer. This time, Mata took twenty minutes to light the fire because there was a boy in black dress standing nearby in the tent. The *patel* asked him to leave the temple so that Mata could be happy as she does not like the color black. During the process, the Samis continuously call Mata with loud voices sometimes asking her sweetly and sometimes angrily threatening that if she does not light the *jot*, they will not bring coconuts and sweets for her nor celebrate Melo in coming years. After twenty minutes, the *jot* was ignited and everyone under the tent shouted with cheer and chanted "*Jai Mata Sherawali*" in excitement. After lighting the *jot*, Mata also possessed a man from the crowd who started screaming, dancing around the *jot* to the feet of Mata; when he prostrated before her Mata left his body. Samis believe the *jot* and possessed body represent magic acts performed by Mata.



After the magic, the *patel* asks people from the crowd to play the *sanks* and others to add the *ghee* to the *rott*. (Ghee is not added unless the *jot* is lit). Then the *rott* is distributed in the crowd with some saved for the families who visit later in the evening. The *patel* tries to ensure every person gets some because it is believed to contain blessings and healing properties.

After the *pooja*, *jot* and *rott* rituals, men leave the tent for other family rituals of *Paghe lagho* (foot touching). The ritual involves touching the feet of Mata or bowing before her. Here newly born babies and newly-weds are brought to the *thon*. At this time, all the men present for the *jot* leave the tent. Only those with responsibilities like allowing one family at one time into the *thon*, or keeping other men out, remain.

Newly wed couples are allowed to enter the *thon* at this point, along with the other male members of their families. Before entering, at a distance from the *thon*, (tent description above), there is a bamboo stick to which they must knot a coconut folded in red colored piece of cloth. Then it is untied again and the coconut brought to the *thon*. At the entrance of the temple, the helper of the *patel*, sprinkles water on the family saying “Jai Mata Sherawali” and “Om Namah Shiva.”¹⁷ It is believed that water purifies the sins of devotees for their visit to Mata.

After entering the *thon*, the families bring the coconut to the *patel* who opens the knot, and places the coconut on the altar with the piece of cloth aside it. Then, the newly wed couple gives their *chori*¹⁸ which has dried date and rice in it to the *patel*. He opens it, gives half a dried date to the groom and half to the bride who eat it. Next, the couple prostrates before Mata and the *patel* taps on the back of the groom when he is in prostrating position¹⁹ which is considered as a blessing by Mata on the couple. After that, the whole family prays for the couple and asks Mata to bless them with a son so that they can come the next year again and offer her coconuts. The family gives one thousand rupees to the *patel* as *phori* (donation) which Samis call “Mata ni Phori.” It is given by all the families as a financial contribution towards the organizing of Melo. After presenting *phori*, they leave the *thon* with folded hands.

For the infant, both parents, along with the family, bring him inside the tent and repeat the process of knotting a coconut to the bamboo stick, then unknot it and take baby to the *patel*. This ritual is also called *Paghe Lagho* (feet touching) (Fig. 7). The male parent holds the child in his lap while the *patel* performs ritual which involves applying *raakh* (ash) from the *dhoop* plate to the forehead of the infant and leaning him forward to prostrate before Mata. The infants were mostly male on this occasion.



Figure 7 Paghe lagjo ritual

¹⁷ “Jai Mata Sherawali” and “Om Namah Shiva” are Bhajjans sung by devotees of the Goddess and Shiv.

¹⁸ *Chori* is a wedding ritual in which bride and groom walk around the Hawan with their veils knotted. When this knot is opened by the *patel* in the Melo, it is called *chori*.

¹⁹ The back tapping is also seen at different shrines in Sindh (to be discussed).



In between the rituals, the *patel* knots the *doro* (thread) of white color for those who ask for it. Samis/devotees wear it around the neck or wrist and consider it a healing talisman. These rituals continue till midnight. Then for rest of the night, people sing *bhajans* in Sindhi and Gujarati language. However, on this occasion only three *khadra faqeer* (transgenders) sang who were also Samis and came to see Mata from the Kandiaro city of Sindh. They sang some short *bhajans*, one in Sindhi and two in their language of Gujarati. Samis do not have any musical instruments but use a pot as a drum and sing along with it.

Usually according to attendees, bhajans are sung through the whole 7th night till the morning pooja. After the *pooja*, the *patel* and his family cut the coconuts into small pieces called *prasad*. The distribution of *prasad* continues till the last day of Melo.

Also, in the morning of the 7th, followers of Herochi Mata perform the *bali* (animal sacrifice) of a calf (fig. 8). The *bali* is performed early in the morning. The butcher and all the attendees belong to sub-group who follow Herochi Mata. They perform a *pooja* in the morning and bring the calf near the temple. The tradition is that the calf must lick the *murti* of Mata which symbolizes that Mata has accepted the *bali*. They wait until the calf licks the *murti* and if it takes time, Samis loudly ask Mata to accept the *bali*. After the calf licks *murti*, the process of *bali* starts. The butcher performs *bali* with a big knife and there is a pot to collect the blood. With that blood, the *patel* puts *tilak* (marks) on the *murti* and coconuts (fig. 9), then the rest of the blood is cooked and distributed as *prasad* among the unmarried girls.



Figure 8 Calf brought for the Bali



Figure 9 Blood marks on mata, coconut and dado Khartarpal

During *bali* and its process, all other murtis and their temples (followed by other sub-groups of Samis) are covered with red cloth. The legends say other Matas are soft in nature and do not like *bali*. The piece of cloth is removed after the *bali* is finished and its meat is eaten.

¹⁷ "Jai Mata Sherawali" and "Om Namah Shiva" are Bhajans sung by devotees of the Goddess and Shiv.

¹⁸ *Chori* is a wedding ritual in which bride and groom walk around the Hawan with their veils knotted. When this knot is opened by the *patel* in the Melo, it is called *chori*.

¹⁹ The back tapping is also seen at different shrines in Sindh (to be discussed).

On the 8th evening and 9th night, families visit the *thon* again bringing rice (fig.10). Rice is knotted in the corner of women's veils and then showered on Mata while making a wish in the heart with folded hands. They then prostrate before Mata and promise if their wishes are fulfilled to come the following year with fresh and dry coconuts. During this ritual, the *patel* guides people to uninstall the tent and fold Mata in the basket with all her objects. After sunset, *Mata no Madh* is taken back to the *pakho* of the *patel* and tied to the wooden staff there. The Melo ends with the Mata going back to her abode.



Figure 10
Women devotees offering rice
to Mata on 8th of evening

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Udero Lal in G. E. L. Carter's Colonial Ethnography of Sindh

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The objective of MIFSEN is to bring together researchers and students working in the field of Sindhi studies. MIFSEN publishes short articles, interviews, mission and event reports, as well as proceedings. However, given the wide dispersion of sources related to Sindhi studies, a new section has been created: "inaccessible sources," which proposes the reproduction of sources that are not always easy to access. The first "inaccessible source" proposed is three short articles that G. E. L. Carter devoted to Sindh about a century ago.

George Carter is one of those authors who wrote about Sindh whose life is difficult to know in detail. When he signed his writings, he only indicated that he belonged to the Indian Civil Service (ICS), without giving more details. Born in Exmouth, Devon, George Edward Lovelace Carter (1886-1974) was the son of a builder, studied Geography and Modern History at Oxford, joined the Indian Civil Service and then became interested in Ethnography and Archaeology while posted in Sindh. In 1926 he brought his family home, qualified as a barrister at Gray's Inn but did not practice, instead taking up the reins of the family business in Exmouth ().

Carter as archaeologist and ethnographer

George Carter's interest in ethnography and archaeology went back to his childhood. Indeed, Devon, the region where he was born, is famous for its prehistoric pebbles. He became an enthusiastic amateur archaeologist and geologist and from the 1930s until the 1960s he investigated prehistoric lumps and bumps in the region, developing ideas that brought him into conflict with the recognized experts of the day. He thought there were strong similarities between the arrangement of pebble mounds and pavements he uncovered on the Pebblebed Heaths and

Ancient funerary and sacrificial monuments he had observed in Sindh. Speculating that the Devon monuments had been made by descendants of migrants from Iran and Northern India, he ascribed them to the Druids and dated them to around 2000 years ago.

On Aylesbeare Common, Carter and his daughters excavated at least nine pebble pavements or platforms in the run-up to World War II. It is thought their remains were destroyed during the war when bombing decoys were sited nearby. He also excavated a trench across an enigmatic mound beside a spring known as Jacob's Well on the hillside overlooking the Exe estuary. Beneath the middle of this black mound, he found four sharpened stakes and a large, shaped stone. He decided the stakes had held up an altar over the spring and the stone might be its "Godling," the focus of a rain-making cult. Jacob's Well is now known to be a rare burnt mound, also a Bronze Age monument, dating from around 1500 BC, but there is still debate about its purpose.

G. E. L. Carter (1886-1974)





Carter collected many prehistoric stone tools over the years, sometimes from field walking and occasionally because he became known as the local expert. In addition to archaeology George was interested in geology. He was intrigued by the unusual radioactive nodules that occur naturally in the cliffs at the western end of Budleigh beach and he devised an experiment to discover whether the substance at the core of the nodules caused the greenish grey discolouration around them or whether something in the discoloured rock was concentrating to form the core.

The writings Carter published on Sindh are not numerous: three articles all published in the *Indian Antiquaries*, for a total of 23 pages, and a booklet titled *A Short History of Sind*, with 46 pages. Although it is not possible to know how long he did stay in Sindh, he was possibly based in Hyderabad and the part of Sindh he knew the best was Southern Sindh, or Lar. Given the thinness of his work on Sindh, one might question the interest in directing attention to Carter, especially since many other British writers published much more on the subject. However, I would say he was a pioneer in that he crossed methodologies in his work. Carter had a certain gift for getting to the heart of the matter—not in depth as others—for asking the most relevant questions, and consequently for uncovering cultural and social aspects of Sindh that had not been revealed until then. This is evident in particular in his work on Udero Lal, the sites dedicated to him, and the priests who officiate in Udero Lal's cult. In addition, Carter did not hesitate to criticize his illustrious predecessors or contemporaries.

Carter was engaged by the popular questions of his time and his environment, in which the quest for origins plays a considerable part. His work is linked to the search for a possible antediluvian Sindh religion. What he named “the course of early religion of Sind” (Carter 1917: 208) would have prevailed before the arrival of the Muslim Arabs, but was also not related to Hinduism or Buddhism. According to him, Islam as well as Buddhism and Hinduism “converted” ancient local cults which had been mostly based on the veneration of natural elements, starting with the Indus River.

A final point is necessary regarding the methodology implemented by Carter. In fact, it is not known how he became aware of the elements he reports in his articles. Some very specific descriptions, as well as the maps he drew of sites, would suggest that he himself visited or observed rituals and places. Although he once mentioned his “Muslim informants” (Carter 1918: 207), his information sometimes seems general, and it is reasonable to ask whether he obtained the information directly, or if it was reported to him by someone else.

Udero Lal: the figure and the sites

One of the most interesting points in Carter's work is his interest in river-related cults. He was one of the first to give importance to the study of the cult, including its oral and ritual expressions. Carter was certainly not the first to be interested in river worship. One of his predecessors was none other than Richard F. Burton, but Burton's interest was only literary: he was not interested in the material aspects of the cult, such as the sites where the river is worshipped. It was not until 1883 that Dayaram Gidumal devoted several chapters to Udero Lal, mentioning for the first time the Thakurs in charge of the great sanctuary established in the village of Udero Lal, near Hala.

The approach Carter deployed for his study can be described as ethnoarchaeological. Indeed, Carter always started from a site, from the remains, and then focused on the people who were, or were not, attached to it. He very quickly observed the importance of the locality in the cult of Udero Lal which Carter illustrated through onomastic study: Udero Lal is often given a specific name in a given place. In Bohara, for example, on the Bhagar canal near the road between Gharo and Mirpur Sakro, Udero



Lal disciples call him Waman Janti Har Wasso. The locality also expresses itself in the diversity of calendars: at the same site of Bohara, it is on the 10 *Bado*, and not the 1st *Chet*, that the most important annual ceremonies take place (Carter 1917: 205).

Another innovative aspect of Carter's work was his interest in the crocodile cult, which he links to the mounts of Varuna and Udero Lal. He begins by observing that there is an unusual association in Sindh between crocodile and *pir* (Muslim saint). He points to two sites in this regard: Mangho Pir near Karachi, and Amir Pir north of Thatta, where crocodiles are sacred. He also briefly mentions: "Now one finds among the sacrificial symbols in use in the Lar an occasional brass makara head," without saying more unfortunately (Carter 1917: 206). This is very frustrating for the researcher in Sindhi studies. My hypothesis is that he is referring to the *kishti*, the wandering Sufis' begging bowl, such as that of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar which is in brass with *makara* heads at both ends (Boivin 2011: 106–108).

Further on, Carter poses the question of how we went from the *wagho* (crocodile) as the mount of Varuna to the *palla* (fish), as the mount of Udero Lal. Here again, he links his explanatory hypothesis to Stone Age man who, coming from Kohistan, would have been terrified by the crocodiles he discovered on the banks of the Indus. For the Aryas, giving Varuna the crocodile as a mount indicated that he had mastered the forces of nature, embodied by the crocodile. In the case of Udero Lal, an incarnation of Varuna, this function was no longer required as part of his story of saving Hindus from forced conversion to Islam. The narrative therefore gave him the *palla* instead of the crocodile, because he was a more docile, less "demonic" aquatic animal: "The crocodile continued to typify the demonic force of the Indus in anger, in excessive flood (...)" (Carter 1917: 208).

Carter goes even further in his association between man and the forces of nature. For him, every human society has had to fight natural forces for survival and has symbolized these forces by a wild animal: the wolf in Europe, the tiger in several parts of India, and the crocodile in Sindh. However, the fact that the crocodile is mentioned in the *Mahabharata*, an excerpt of which is quoted by Carter, indicates that by spreading its cult, the Hindus of Sindh sought to integrate themselves into a "Catholic" Hinduism (Carter 1918: 198). In summary, for Carter, prehistoric worship of the river embodied by the crocodile, was Hinduized by the Aryas in the form of Varuna, the Vedic god who subjected the river embodied by the crocodile then used it as his mount.

However, Carter's main question was: How did the standardized river worship by Hindus survive Buddhism and Islam? It is in the second article, published one year after the previous one, that he attempted to answer this question. He specifies that it is from the sanctuary of Udero Lal located in central Sindh, and more precisely from the Thakurs, that he was able to obtain information. Thus, one can deduct that Carter obtained the account of Udero Lal's life from the Thakurs of the sanctuary of Udero Lal, although he does not mention explicitly they did inform him about the narrative. He makes no mention that he visited the site, however given his interest in describing of monuments, one can deduce that he did not go himself, as otherwise he would surely have given his typical detailed description of the site.

Udero Lal: the Thakurs and the followers

Thus, unable to rely on personal observation in this case, Carter called upon two types of sources: the story of Udero Lal and the customs of the Thakurs' caste, in particular their practice of exogamy. The story of Udero Lal was taken from religious texts known as *janam sakhis* (life narratives of Udero Lal) (Carter 1918: 202). These may have been updated versions determined by the mention of the Bhagavad Gita or the organization of Hindus in *panchayat*. Of note is that in his account it is explicitly



stated that Udero Lal and Zinda Pir are one and the same entity (Carter 1918: 199). Carter provides other proprietary information that unfortunately could not be cross-referenced.

He is, for example, the first to mention the existence of two lineages of Thakurs, and their origin: the Buddhais are the descendants of Pugar who was asked by Udero Lal to organize the cult, and the Somas those of Somo, Udero Lal's brother who having refused to organize the cult became jealous of Pugar later on. The temple of Naserpur where Udero Lal was born is managed by the Somas, while the Buddhais manage the temples of Udero Lal (Carter 1918: 201) and other places including Sehwan and Shikarpur. Finally, in a note, Carter mentions that the chief of the Thakurs resides in Alipur, Punjab. The fact that the temples were managed by two different lineages could lead one to think that the two lineages had shared the management of the most important temples, Naserpur and Udero Lal.

Carter's study contains previously unpublished information, which has never, up to the present, been repeated. He stated that the community of followers, known as Daryapanthis, are strict monotheists, and that they do not worship any other god. Another interesting element concerns the ritual service at Udero Lal: it is performed by a *bairagi* who has been entrusted with it by the Thakurs. The *bairagi* has his own disciples, from among whom his future successor will be selected. In fact, Carter seems to be referring to a division of ritual roles between the *bairagi* and the Thakurs: the *bairagi* places the cloth on the tombs and the crowns at their ends, but the Thakurs "ceremonially cast the rice and sugarcandy into the river" (Carter 1918: 202).

However, a closer look reveals that the *bairagi* to whom he refers is in fact not the Muslim representative. Indeed, it would be curious, to say the least, if a Hindu were to perform a typical Muslim ritual of placing brocades on the graves of the Muslim *sajjada nashins*. In this regard, Carter makes absolutely no reference to the fact that authority at the Udero Lal site is divided between Hindus and Muslims, the latter being known as *sajjada nashins*. He only points out that Muslims do not go to Naserpur and never eat with Hindus, including in Udero Lal (Carter 1918: 203).

As mentioned earlier, another interesting point is the exogamy issue Carter relates with the Thakurs as a caste: "No Thakur may marry from Thakur family: more especially a Buddhai may not marry from a Somai Thakur family for all Thakurs are brothers" (Carter 1918: 203). The ban on marriage is in fact extended to the whole group formed by the Daryapanthis. A last detail deserves attention: "The cult of Udero Lal has become purely anthropomorphic in the hands of the Thakurs" (Carter 1918: 207). Regarding the social organization of the Thakurs, Upendranath Thakur's thesis will increase knowledge on Pugar's descendants settling in Sindh, Punjab and Kutch (Thakur 1959: 64). Thanks to him, a discontinuous genealogy of Pugar's descendants can be reconstructed.

Conclusion

This brief note on Carter's ethnography of Sindh focused on Udero Lal, the figure and the worship. Although it is not easy to know how he collected the data he is providing, he was able to increase knowledge on two fronts. Carter was convinced of the role played by locality in the agency of Udero Lal's worship. Followers in a village had a temple built, and under a Thakur or any other priest they worshiped Udero Lal. Furthermore, Carter explicitly spoke of worship rituals performed directly on the river, without the mediation of a built structure. Knowing this disposition, one can surmise temples were built in commemoration of the main episodes of Udero Lal's life, namely at Naserpur, Udero Lal, and Sukkur. Otherwise, when the commemoration process was not involved, there was no need to build a temple.



Another significant contribution made by Carter is related to the Thakurs, the priestly caste of Udero Lal. He is aware they are distributed in two main lineages and is the first to state the temple of Naserpur is run by Somai Thakurs. While the temple of Udero Lal appears the center of Udero Lal worship, there does not seem to be a centralized authority in the community of followers. Finally, Carter was not exempt from making errors, the origin of which is difficult to know. These may be obvious errors of his own, as when he names a “petty Sumro prince during the latter part of the 10th century,” he referred to Mahmud of Ghazni’s cruel invasions (Carter 1928: 203). Both Mahmud and Somras ruled in the 11th century. At other times, it can be errors of interpretation, as when he talked about the *bairagi*, while this character was obviously a Muslim *faqir*.

Carter’s study contains previously unpublished information, which has never, up to the present, been repeated. He stated that the community of followers, known as Daryapanthis, are strict monotheists, and that they do not worship any other god. Another interesting element concerns the ritual service at Udero Lal: it is performed by a *bairagi* who has been entrusted with it by the Thakurs. The *bairagi* has his own disciples, from among whom his future successor will be selected. In fact, Carter seems to be referring to a division of ritual roles between the *bairagi* and the Thakurs: the *bairagi* places the cloth on the tombs and the crowns at their ends, but the Thakurs “ceremonially cast the rice and sugarcandy into the river” (Carter 1918: 202).

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New PhDs in Sindhi Studies: 2020

Fatima Quraishi,

Necropolis as Palimpsest: The Cemetery of Maklī in Sindh, Pakistan,

Institute of Fine Arts, New York University 2019.

Abstract: The Maklī Necropolis is a vast funerary complex constructed on a ridge along a tributary of the Indus River in southern Sindh, Pakistan. This veritable city of the dead, stretching along four kilometres was established in the late fourteenth century, with monumental construction continuing until the late seventeenth century. The prolonged history of building, during which significant socio-political transformation took place in the region, resulted in a site where multiple architectural traditions and local artistic practices intersected. A further layer to this history is the ritual role played by religion—emerging from both orthodox Muslim traditions and popular piety—in shaping the site. It was here that mystics were transformed in death into venerated saints whose bodies, through burial, enshrinement, and pilgrimage, became the spatial anchors of a sacred landscape. This dissertation engages with Maklī as a transregional and transcultural space, investigating the movement of multiple ethnic and religious groups across the region involving different, sometimes intersecting, and overlapping circuits of mobility of artisans, craftsmen, and patrons, and their impact on the necropolis' architecture. In so doing, this study of a frontier region at the threshold of Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and the Indian Ocean ecumene, touches upon themes of memory, mobility, piety, and temporality and sheds light on the modalities of artistic transmission and the value of architecture as witness to a vibrant intercultural dialogue across the longue durée, topics that resonate well beyond a little-known corner of South Asia.

Brian Bond,

A Heavy Rain Has Fallen Upon My People: Sindhi Sufi Poetry Performance, Emotion, and Islamic Knowledge in Kachchh, Gujarat,

CUNY, 2020.

Abstract: My dissertation examines Sindhi Sufi sung poetry performance as a medium of Islamic knowledge transmission in rural Muslim communities in Kachchh, a border district in western India. I argue that the pedagogical efficacy of poetry performance is undergirded by its potential to index layers of meaning so that local knowledge and history, lived experience, and Islamic significance resonate affectively together. Locating an ecology of Sufi poetry performance practices in the socio-religious and political context of contemporary Gujarat, I discuss the polarizing effects that Islamic reform and Hindu nationalism have had on Kachchhi musical life since the 1970s.

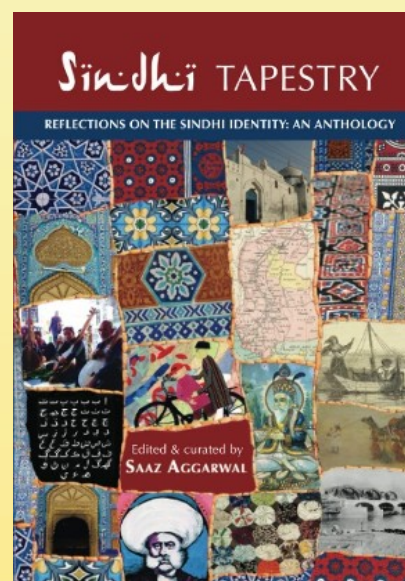


Book Reviews

Saaz Aggarwal (edited and curated by), *Sindhi Tapestry. Reflections on the Sindhi Identities: An Anthology*, Pune, Black and White Fountain, 2020, 432 p.

Jonathan Varghese EHESS-CEIAS

Curated by Saaz Aggarwal, *Sindhi Tapestry* represents the coming together of an ambitious assortment of personal memories and historical research about the Sindhi community within and outside of India. Each contribution can be individuated by the personal imprints of the respective writer. Perhaps this is the reason behind the title, because just as in a medieval tapestry, the book is a result of individual human industry where individual strands delicately constitute the end product. Though the contributions vary from the personal to the academic, the book is in every manner an anthology of personal experiences sourced from both Sindhis and non-Sindhis spread out across the globe. The book insists that Sindh is both global and local at the same time; that at any given moment a Sindhi, no matter where he/she resides, belongs to Sindh.



The Sindhi community's curious relationship with geography is a recurrent theme in the book and as such Mathew Cook's article attempts to bridge the vast gulf of Sindhi experience across three different geographical zones— California, Bombay and Sindh in Pakistan.

By his own admission Mathew Cook encountered a Sindhi before he discovered Sindh. In California his experiences of Sindh are mediated by his interactions with a young enterprising Sindhi by the name of Sandy. In many ways this preliminary introduction occurs within a socially privileged context. In Bombay at the Churchgate flat and Willingdon Sports Club, he further expands his understanding of the community within a matrix defined by class, ethnicity, and language. It is however in the final sections of the article that he invites us to consider a crucial aspect of the Sindhi community's heritage. During the course of his journey to Sindh, Pakistan he draws our attention to the Gobind Ram Darbar which was built to pay homage to Bhagat Kanwar Ram, a Hindu Sufi poet. This seemingly oxymoronic but nevertheless significant pre-Partition individual was murdered by communalists. As Cook reminisces about this episode, he points out that the preservation of the Gobind Ram Darbar site was part of an effort to memorialize this aspect of the multi-cultural heritage of Sindh. It is a heritage, he remarks, that was steadily undergoing deterioration.

Elsewhere in the book a similar idea is invoked when Michel Boivin introduces the figure of the Hindu-Sufi as the focus of his research. Though the article does not embody the reflective aspects of Cook's essay, Boivin draws our attention to the complexity of the Hindu Sindhi's interactions with Sufism. This association, he informs us, was primarily mediated by the Ismaili (Shia) sect and the Sohrawardi Sufis, both of whom shared a liberal interpretation of the Islamic faith. The Lal Shahbaz Qalandar burial site at Sehwan Sharif, where Hindus participated in the pilgrimage rituals of a Sufi pilgrim site bore testimony to this. It is Boivin's suggestion that though the Partition did not cause much to change the terms of this "Hindu-Muslim" interaction, the resurfacing of Hindutva ideology in India has done much to discourage Hindus from participating in these seemingly Islamic rituals.



The Sindhi community's association with Hindutva ideology, through organizations such as the RSS, is a necessary means to understanding its relationship with politics. In his essay Dharmendra Tolani speaks of this association as a teenage affectation that any Sindhi would eventually learn to outgrow. Tolani does not pontificate much but the early sections of his essay touch upon his past fascination with the figure of the Swayamsevak. In its most sanitized version, the RSS's interpretation of independence and self reliance was perceived as a necessary means to nation-building and was as such attractive to the teenage imagination of the young Tolani. However, the events of 2002, the author clarifies, rendered the idea of the *Swayamsevak* and the pursuit of nation-building incompatible. It is while negotiating his own identity with his family's relation to the larger Sindhi community that the author clarifies his personal interpretation of Hindutva ideology.

This ongoing effort to negotiate one's identity with one's community is a recurring theme in the book and at the center of this process is the notion of the family.

One memorable instance is Radhika Chakraborty's use of photographs to reconstruct her family history. The essay, which, in itself, is demonstrative of this act of reconstruction, presents the Sindhi identity's complex relationship with memory. The photographs, handiwork of RM Mathrani (the grandfather) and MP Mathrani (his father), though seemingly dispensable to their creators, represent to the author, the visual imprints of a past that she can no longer access. In many ways the essay is evocative of an ode; an ode to the construction of the Sukkur Barrage and to the building of her house in Delhi, two episodes that testify to the Sindhi community's spirit of enterprise and fortitude. Premised on these photographs, Chakraborty's considered evocation conjures what can best be described as a lexicon of remembrance. The words provide a template of reference for the reader as he/she moves between the inchoate assembly of images and as the author guides us through the visual imprints of her grandfather's enterprise.

Enterprise is another recurrent aspect consistent with the history of the Sindhi community. Though as a theme this occurs on many occasions in the narrative it is perhaps most jovially demonstrated in Atul Khatri's piece, when he relives his own transitioning from a Shikarpuri businessman to a stand-up comic. While Chakraborty's piece is defined by nostalgic reminiscing, Khatri's words impart the experiences of the present. They carry the lighthearted immediacy that we have come to associate with his stand-up routines. There is perhaps a reason for this. Radhika Chakraborty is temperamentally and temporally distant from the world she seeks to recreate and therefore her writing reflects a tension. Khatri's narrative bridges two temporally different worlds—the world of Kaytek Computer Services and the world of stand-up comedy—by evoking, what he refers to as, the Sindhi entrepreneurial spirit. Time and again Khatri insists that his transition into a comic was an outcome of calculated deliberations. Being a stand-up comic and a Sindhi is serious business, he adds.

The Sindhi community's relationship with enterprise was nurtured by the many transactions over the Arabian sea which for the Sindhis of post Partitioned India were a necessary means of survival. Enterprise, Uttara Shahani informs us, is one of the primary means towards homogenization within the community. Perhaps it was also the most practical means of countering cultural and political unpredictability. The goal, she insists, was to establish a focal point for a community that is otherwise scattered. A Sindhi yearns to *imagine* a Sindh because the "tangible-geographical" Sindh lies outside of the confines of the India nation-state. We must bear in mind that such an imagining emerges from the peculiar conditioning of the discourses around Sindhi identity. She remarks that in post Partitioned India a Sindhi as Sindhi is characterized by negation—he/she is a Sindhi because he/she is not someone or something else. This aspiration for homogeneity in the wake of Partition is a continuous trope throughout the book.



Such a project of homogeneity is however not without its inconsistencies. As Trisha Lalchandani informs us, to legitimize one's identity by means of an "origin" story is a taxing process, especially if its temporality precedes print culture and modernity. By drawing our attention to the role of folklore Lalchandani points out the inadequacies of the institution of the *archive* as a site of production or preservation of history. Perplexed by the impenetrability of the Perso-Arabic script of early sources and the platitudes of the contemporary Devanagari (Sindhi) literature, the author's own struggle with historical sources is an insightful commentary on the nature of Sindhi literary archives. We are informed that it is within the world of folklore that Lalchandani finds a possible reservoir of Sindhi history.

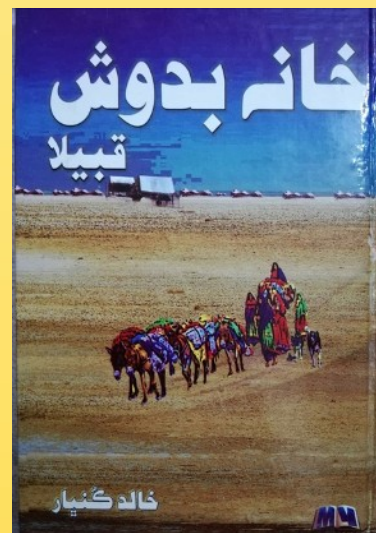
Alongside written institutional archives, the emergence of folklore as intimate reservoirs of memory informs the Sapna Bhavnani piece too. Throughout the narrative of the book, many contributors have addressed the intimate quality of their own relationship with historical memory but in the making of the critically acclaimed documentary *Sindhustan*, Bhavnani's relates that her relationship with her identity assumes a rather visceral quality—the skin becomes the template for memory to imprint itself. While Trisha Lalchandani refers to Sindhi identity as something that does not "fit," Uttara Shahani speaks of it as something that is worn "lightly." The Sindhi folklore imprinted on Sapna Bhavnani's limbs signify the culminating apotheosis of the book's narrative logic. Her tattooed skin becomes an archive of both trauma and liberation. The body becomes the text and signifier of one's identity.

It is often difficult to surmise the quality of a book. What a review can hope to achieve is to guide a reader through the reading process. It is possible to read this as an anthology of Sindhi voices reaching out to a contemporaneity that is continuously evasive. It is equally possible to read it as a critique of history and historiography. It can be read as a testament to nostalgia and its power to form a network of human experiences across geographically and culturally distanced zones. It is also possible to read this as an ode to human migration. No matter how you read this book, what is undeniable is what the book achieves—an indication of the Sindhi community's imagining of human relationships across and despite borders.

Kunbher, Khalid, *Khana Badosh Qabeela (Nomadic Tribes)*, Sukkur, My Publication, 2020, 175 p.

Saba Sindhri, CEIAS-EHESS

The book *Khana Badosh Qabeela* (Nomadic Tribes) by Khalid Kunbher is a primary book in the studies of nomadic tribes in Sindh, published by My Publication, Sukkur, in 2020. Earlier texts on the subject include those by Khursheed Qaemkhani including, *Bhatakti Naslen: Sindh ke khana badoshon ka Samaji Manzarnama* (Wandering People: The Social Scenario of Nomads of Sindh) published by Rohtas books, Lahore, in 1999 and *Jogi Basti* (Jogi Settlement) published by Roshni Publication, Kandiaro, in 2015.





The book is a compilation of articles written for different vernacular Sindhi newspapers and later compiled into book form. Kumbher explains how his own inclination towards seeing differently brought him to study nomadic groups who differ from the settled groups in Sindh. He condemns the idea of calling them the *Asloka Raha'ku* (original inhabitants) of Sindh and attempts to convince by countering that in the times of a united sub-continent, these nomadic groups migrated between different regions of the sub-continent eventually migrating within Sindh after partition.

Khursheed Qaemkhani discusses nomadic groups, specifically focusing on Jogis, and Gypsies in general, but he seems more interested in Dalit Studies because he criticizes religious and social traditions of groups and asks them to revolt against the system. In comparison, Khalid Kumbher, author of *Khana Badosh Qabeela*, traces the presence of different groups in Sindh and highlights many until-now unheard-of communities and their stories. Unlike Qaemkhani, he is not interested in uplifting their social status but rather attempts to explore their different life-styles through their long-standing traditions

There are two points made in the book which I found particularly remarkable. First, it reflects that the nomadic groups, such as Kanjriyun, Sansi, Koochirra, Sami, Jogi, Bheel and many others, have a flexible-yet-fixed style of living: Flexible in terms that they are not completely orthodox in religion; fixed in the sense that they remain loyal to their traditions of following Shaivism, Shaktism and the worship of nature. Kumbher notes that these groups follow different traditions simultaneously; for example, in the article on the Kokiri community, he recounts how the Kokiri follow Goddess Sherawali, go to Ramapir festival, and revere the Sindhu (the Sindhi name for the Indus River).

Next, the author attempts to trace these groups whether they are living in the desert of Sanghar or in the narrow streets of towns in South of Sindh. He visits them and records their narratives about their migration, profession, religion collecting them in written form. In addition, Kumbher attempts to highlight those minority groups which are not even considered as minorities. As a matter of fact, in the constitution, the greatest attention is given to Hindus and Christians, whereas the nomadic groups, or "scheduled castes" as per the constitution, are ignored, although they also officially belong to "minorities."

However, apart from its many good points, the book lacks in critical aspects. It merely provides an introduction with no in-depth analysis of the data. For example, in the case of the narratives, it seems they are collected and transposed into written form without any fact checking. In one case, the author states that Samis follow Lal Shahbaz Qalandar more than their deities and that their belief in their Goddess is weak (p.58). However, in fact, Samis revere the Goddess as they revere other religious figures, perhaps even more. These statements, which are discussed in almost every article, deserve deep anthropological study. Also, the author reaches conclusions after a few sittings with the groups, whereas as a researcher, one knows when working with nomadic groups that long fieldworks are required before analysis and that sometimes clear conclusions can be difficult to achieve.

Furthermore, the reflexivity of author shows his fascination in the different behaviors of these groups and in his excitement, he brings many things into focus but forgets to explore them in depth or ignores the "middle" of the story. Also, he overlooked including photographs or images which would have helped to visualize both the people and their stories.

Notwithstanding the above points, the book is an introduction to different minor Hindu groups. As there is a dearth of literature published on this subject, it is courageous of the author to take up a pen and write about these lesser-known groups of Sindh. The book provides a path for new researchers and contributes to the nomadic studies of Sindh.

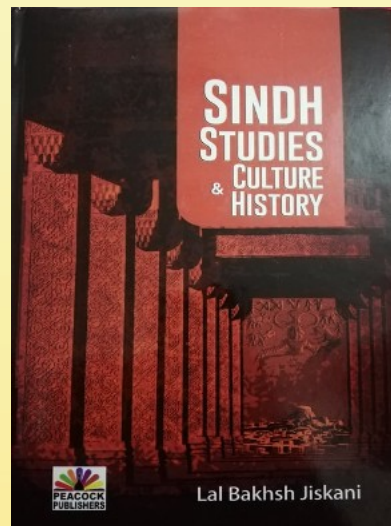


Jiskani, Lal Baksh, *Sindh Studies Culture and History*, Karachi, Peacock Publishers, 2020, 264 pages.

Saba Sindhri CEIAS-EHESS

Sindh Studies Culture and History is a recent publication (2020) by Peacock Publishers, Karachi authored by Sindhi historian, Lal Baksh Jiskani. He has worked with other Sindhi scholars like Dr. Hamida Khuro and Dr. N. A. Baloch and started the academic journal *Grassroots*, published from the Pakistani Study Center at the University of Sindh. He is associated with the Pakistan Study Centre as a professor.

There have been many national and international scholarly works produced in the field of Sindhi Studies to which the current book by Jiskani attempts to contribute as well. The book is a careful effort to compile useful sources and includes a general introduction to a few personalities, movements, customs, and books on Sindh.



The author's position as a Sufi leftist (the term denotes an approach reflected by Sindhi scholars who are politically inclined to the left and reject orthodox Islam), is interesting and helps clarify the scholarships of Sindhi scholars working on Sindh. The book is divided into three parts: National Biography, Historical Perspective, and Book Review.

The first part (National Biography) contains sketches of different figures. First, Bulle Shah, a poet from Punjab region is discussed, portrayed as a Sufi poet and spreader of universal love and this does not tally with a book dedicated to Sindhi Studies. However, other than Bullhe Shah, the rest of the personalities discussed in this part are either Sindhi or linked with Sindh. There is, for example, Hyder Bux Jatoti, a leftist leader and the founder of the *Hari* Committee (peasant committee), who ran a peasant movement in Sindh. Among other figures, there is a Kalhoru ruler, Mian Noor Muhmmmed (1719-1753), believed to be a "successful" king in the author's view because he dug canals and irrigated barren lands and patronized arts and crafts. After him, Dr. Hamida Khuro, Dr. N.A Baloch and Shams-ul-Ulema Mirza Qaleech Baig are discussed for their literary contributions. The personality of Darya Khan (15th century) is also mentioned as a war strategist who fought against the foreign invasions of the Arghuns in Sindh during the time of last king of the Sama Dynasty, Jam Feruzudin.

Moreover, the first part also discusses the Khakhsar movement and socio-political culture under Talpur rule. This part of the book is composed of reflections on personalities which are already well-known in Sindh. It is somewhat disappointing that there were no introductions to figures who contributed to Sindhi society who had not been discussed before.

The second part of the book begins with Jinnah's vision of Pakistan as a separate homeland for Muslims and praise of his vision by the author. This is followed by a section about the peasant resistance (1520-1577) against the Arghuns led by Darya Khan and other tribal chiefs. The third section of the second part is titled "The Post 9/11 Environment: Extremism Violence Terrorism and Bigotry." It is an entirely new theme and has little or nothing to do with the previous themes and content of the book. This whole part of the book lacks in the coordination of the themes and their relevance with each other. The final section is within Historical Perspective and the articles within are an attempt to reconstruct Sindh's past as an autonomous kingdom in history. Overall, the themes and



sections of this part of the book are very interesting, but they don't connect with each other. For example, the author starts the section with Quaid's vision of Pakistan and goes on to discuss the post 9/11 environment ending the section with constitutional dynamics and provincial autonomy. None of the articles share the same theme. The second part disappoints by not sharing any knowledge as the articles lack new findings, detailed analyses, and coordination or continuity of themes, arguments and conclusions.

The third part of the book is titled Book Reviews and includes the reviews of *One Unit and Sindh* by Professor Aijaz A. Qureshi and some books of Dr. Nabi Bux Baloch on Sindh culture. The reviews by the author shed some light on very important work done in Sindh.

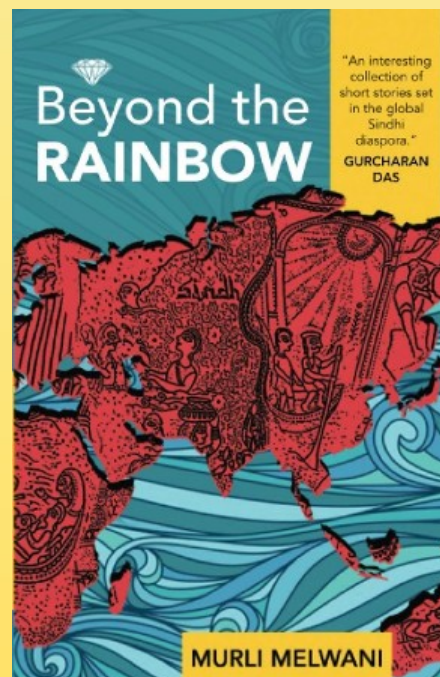
Notwithstanding the lacks in coherence, coordination, relation, and relevance of themes with each other, the book, to a limited extent, helps understand the changes experienced by Sindh in different periods of history. However, due to the author's enthusiasm to cover various subjects in one book without focusing deeply on any, the reader will find that the book has very little to do with its title, *Sindh Studies, Culture and History* and contributes equally minimally to Sindhi Studies. As evident from the nostalgic introduction of ancient Indus civilization, overall, the book lacks the coordination of themes and flow of arguments.

Murli Melwani, *Beyond the Rainbow*, Pune, Black-and-white Fountain, Pune, 2020, 232 pages.

Saaz Aggarwal

One of the most interesting aspects of the Sindhi diaspora are its many communities scattered in ports around the world, and this collection of fine short stories is an intimate glimpse into its realities by one of its members, Murli Melwani, professor at Sankerdev College, Shillong, Meghalaya (India). In the 1980s, political events in Shillong caused Murli to leave the home in which his family had settled after Partition. In his forties, he became a businessman, lived briefly in Hong Kong, then in Taiwan for twenty-five years, and eventually in 2005 moved to the US, where he now lives. All this while, he continued to write, and his academic repertoire includes *Themes in the Indian Short Story in English*

As a businessman, Murli was buying in one place to sell in another, as Sindhi businessmen have done for centuries. In the 1850s, they began to do so in countries around the world, and Murli is one of the many who followed this tradition, establishing the theme for his own short stories. Set in various exotic locations, each of the short stories in this collection was inspired by something Murli saw or heard, and he refers to the collection as "a gift of my travels."





Says Murli, on the cover of the book:

We are viewed as shallow for our ability to suppress negative thoughts, devote unbounded energy to business and live a flashy lifestyle. Being individualistic and opinionated by nature, and because we have not shown a cohesive and attractive face to the world, Hindu Sindhis are seen as stereotypes. With these stories, I have endeavored to show that we have lives as individuals too.

In *Water on a Hot Plate*, Hari and Rajni are visiting their son in Toronto, and they meet an Indian Chinese lady who runs a restaurant there. They converse with her in Mandarin—learned during their several years spent in Taiwan; of course, they speak to her in Hindi and English too. From the “Bollywood” music playing in the background, Hari can tell that the India she belonged to was not the India he had left. Resh, their lunch guest, is visiting from Curacao. She speaks Dutch and English and even idiomatic Papiamentu—a Portuguese and Spanish-based Creole language—but not Sindhi.

Writing a Fairy Tale is a gripping love story in which the reader journeys into the rainforests of eco-versatile Chile—and unexpectedly encounters the Arabic aspects of the country too. *The Mexican Girlfriend* is also a love story, and though set in a home by a lake on the U.S. border where migratory birds flock—a real place, as Murli told me when I asked—has more sinister than exotic twists. Followed by *The Bhorwani Marriage*, a high-energy satire of Sindhi weddings including an expose of the business opportunities offered by matchmaking in the diaspora, it appears that Sindhis do not really do romance. Family comes overwhelmingly first; business and profits are a priority; and comfort of living is never going to be sacrificed for a lover.

It is not that everyone in the community is money minded. This book takes us beyond that stereotype, with businessmen who are polite, mature and love to read. The skilled portrayals of many different kinds of relationships reveal the author to be an exceptionally subtle and discerning person himself. Even the businessman in shiva with a garland, lonely in his marriage, “had grown sensitive and become aware of many things. He had come to understand the right and wrong of things and the meaning and worth of happiness.”

These are splendid stories: good plots, lifelike characters, beautifully laid out in clean, distinctive language. However, Murli is not just an observer of humans and their situation, not just a weaver of tales—he is a skilled businessman too. His stories provide practical never-fail tips on selling, exposure to business cycles, and the understanding that large investments, even the most obvious, could turn out to be ruinous. There are young employees who clone their employers, swiftly learning the trade and soon enough snatching it out from under their employer’s feet to set up as competitors. Some families have members living in other countries: the father ships out goods from a manufacturing location while the sons sell in other parts of the world, creating hugely profitable companies which run around the clock. So, while Murli’s PhD is in English Literature, this book also tells all kinds of things he did not learn at Harvard Business School.

For more about Murli, his book and his community see this interview by Saaz Aggarwal on:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9RPjM9qr2k>

Read the story behind the cover of this book on:
<https://sindhstories.wordpress.com/2020/09/30/packaging-a-rainbow/>



2020 Academic Events (Flyers/Reports)

A Discussion on “Hindu Belonging and Minority Recognition in Pakistan”

Parijat Jha, Cornell University, Department of Anthropology

SOUTH ASIA PROGRAM


Monday October 26
11:15am - 12:30pm
Virtual

Virtual Roundtable:
**Hindu Belonging and
Minority Recognition in Pakistan**

Panelists:

Ghazal Asif John Hopkins University	Kapil Dev Human Rights Activist
Chander Kolhi Progressive Human Foundation	Juergen Schaflechner Freie Universität Berlin

Moderator:
Natasha Raheja
Anthropology, Cornell University

 This seminar series is partially funded by a National Resource Center grant from the U.S. Department of Education

<https://einaudi.cornell.edu/programs/south-asia-program>

Mario Einaudi
**CENTER FOR
INTERNATIONAL
STUDIES**

On Monday, October 26th, 2020 the South Asia Center at Cornell University hosted a roundtable that brought academics and activists together to discuss contemporary issues of Hindu belonging and minority recognition in Pakistan. Speakers drew on their ethnographic research and activism with Hindus in Sindh, Pakistan to engage questions of devotional life, religious difference, caste, class, and gender hierarchy, and the possibilities and limits of state recognition. Furthermore, the roundtable highlighted how notions of “majority,” “minority,” and “other” shift across time and space and illuminated how majoritarianism operates outside of any fixed identity.

The speakers included Ghazal Asif, Kapil Dev, Chander Kohli, and Juergen Schaflechner. Ghazal Asif, a PhD candidate in anthropology at John Hopkins University, spoke on the topic of “The 2017 Hindu Marriage and Family Act: Caste, Gender, and the Law in Pakistan.” Human rights activist Kapil Dev, discussed “From Hindu to Non-Muslim: Negation of Hindu Identity in Post-colonial Pakistan.” Chander Kolhi, from the Progressive Human



Foundation, talked about “Inequality and Injustice to Scheduled Castes in Pakistan.” Finally, Assistant Professor at the University of Heidelberg’s South Asia Institute, Dr. Juergen Schaflechner’s talk was titled, “‘Wary and Aware’: Self-representation and Public Performances of Hindus in Pakistan’s Public Spheres.”

After the discussants presented on their particular subjects, the moderator, Natasha Raheja (Assistant Professor of Anthropology), and audience members followed up with questions. Among the questions were the following: how the struggles of Hindu recognition and Scheduled Caste justice overlap and diverge in Pakistan? How does conversion shape caste discrimination for Dalit and Adivasi individuals in the process of converting? How do broader geopolitical conditions and Western human rights discourse shape strategic and tactical decisions about fighting for minority recognition for Hindus in a majority Muslim state? From gendered implications of caste-based discrimination, to shifting representations of non-Muslim communities in Pakistan, and personal stories of navigating the education system in Pakistan as a non-Muslim, the vibrant discussion touched on a wide range of topics relevant to scholarly and activist interests in South Asia.

Retaining Cities History: an approach to integrated planning



**RETAINING CITY HISTORIES;
AN APPROACH TO INTEGRATED PLANNING**

The Chairperson and Faculty Members of
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**4th International Conference on
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18th Dec 2020 (3:00 pm onward)
19th Dec 2020 (10:00 am onward)

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CONFERENCE PROGRAM

DAY-1: 18th December 2020, Friday (03:00 - 6:00pm)

INAUGURAL SESSION

- Recitation from the Holy Quran
- National Anthem
- Welcome Address by **Prof. Dr. Anila Naem**, Chairperson Department of Architecture and Planning, NED University, Karachi
- Keynote Address by **Prof. Sajida Haider Vandal**, Vice-Chancellor Institute for Art and Culture, (IAC) Lahore
- Address by the Chief Guest **Mr. Syed Abul Fazal Rizvi**, CEO Sindh Engro Coal Mining Company (SECMC)
- Presiding Remarks by **Dr. Sarosh Hashmat Lodi**, Vice Chancellor NED University, Karachi
- "Dissonant Heritage and the Hazards of Retention" by **Jon Calame**, Global Institute for Sustainable Prosperity, USA
- Panel Discussion and Question – Answer Session
- Sponsor's Presentation
- Vote of Thanks by **Saadia Bano**, Conference Convenor

Day-2: 19th December 2020, Saturday (10:00 am - 5:00pm)

TECHNICAL SESSION-1 (10:00 am - 12:00pm)

- "The Impact of Urban Revitalization Approaches on Socio-Economic Structure of Iranian Cities" by **Sadat al Shariyeh Hosseini Nasab**, COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus
- "The Tangible and Intangible Urban Heritage Values of Traditional Street Market in Lahore Walled City" by **Zunaira Batool**, National College of Arts (NCA) Lahore
- "Mapping Historicity of a Place: Tracing Trading Trends of Hyderabad" by **Fahmida Shaikh**, NED University, Karachi
- Panel Discussion and Question-Answer Session

TECHNICAL SESSION-2 (12:30 pm - 2:30pm)

- "The Historic Area of Miri Shah, Lahore" by **Saba Samee**, Institute for Art and Culture (IAC), Lahore
- "Traditional Socio-Cultural Mechanisms Supporting a Living Cultural Heritage: Surviving Indigenous Modernity of the Small Town of Bhitshah, Sindh" by **Dr. Masooma Shakir**, NED University, Karachi
- "Sufi Architecture in Albania: The Case of ZallTekke" by **Enea Serjani**, Italy
- Panel Discussion and Question-Answer Session

TECHNICAL SESSION-3 (3:00 - 5:00pm)

- "Water Histories Forming Urban Histories-Indus River Delta" by **Dure-e-Shahwar Khalil**, KU Leuven, Belgium
- "Enabling Development: Gwadar's Mahigeer, Evolution or Repression?" by **Mishele Ijaz**, Urban Unit, Lahore
- "The Influence of Urban Pull-Factors in Urbanizing Major Cities: A Study of Hyderabad" by **Hassam bin Waseem & Mir Aftab Hussain Talpur**, Department of City and Regional Planning, Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, Jamshoro
- "River Ecosystem Service in Settlement Development and History of Coastal Bangladesh: A Case Study on Kachua Upazilla" by **Shibu Prashad Bosu & Noor-A-MD. Amanat Ullah**, Khulna University, Khulna, Bangladesh
- Panel Discussion and Question-Answer Session

CONCLUDING SESSION

- Summing up by **Dr. Suneela Ahmed**
- Vote of Thanks by **FarihaTahseen**, Conference Co-Convenor

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December 2020 SOMA, 21

Histoire et anthropologie des sociétés musulmanes dans l'Asie du sud contemporaine

Michel BOIVIN, *directeur de recherche au CNRS(TH)*

Delphine ORTIS, *chargée de cours à l'INALCO*

Fabrizio SPEZIALE, *directeur d'études à l'EHESS(TH)*

<https://enseignements.ehess.fr/2020-2021/ue/451>

December 2, 2020

10:00 am to 1:00pm (Room A07_37, 54 bd Raspail 75006 Paris)

Link to the virtual room: <https://webinaire.ehess.fr/b/boi-kh2-7r7>

Introduction to the session

Fahmida Shaikh, NEDUET (Karachi)

Integrating Historicity of a Place with Planning Process: An Exploration through the case of Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan

Suneela Ahmed, NEDUET (Karachi)

Achieving localness within the Urban Paradigm: A tool for Urban Resilience to achieve *maqamiyat* for Karachi

Discussants:

Rémy Delage, CNRS-CEIAS

Omar Kasmani, Freie Universität Berlin

<http://listsem.ehess.fr/courses/451/requests/new>

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Forthcoming Event

March 18 & 19, 2021

Workshop on Sindh

Organized by Uttara Shahani, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge

<https://www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/whats-on-2/>

In Memorium

Suhail Lari, A Story Teller

Marvi Mazhar

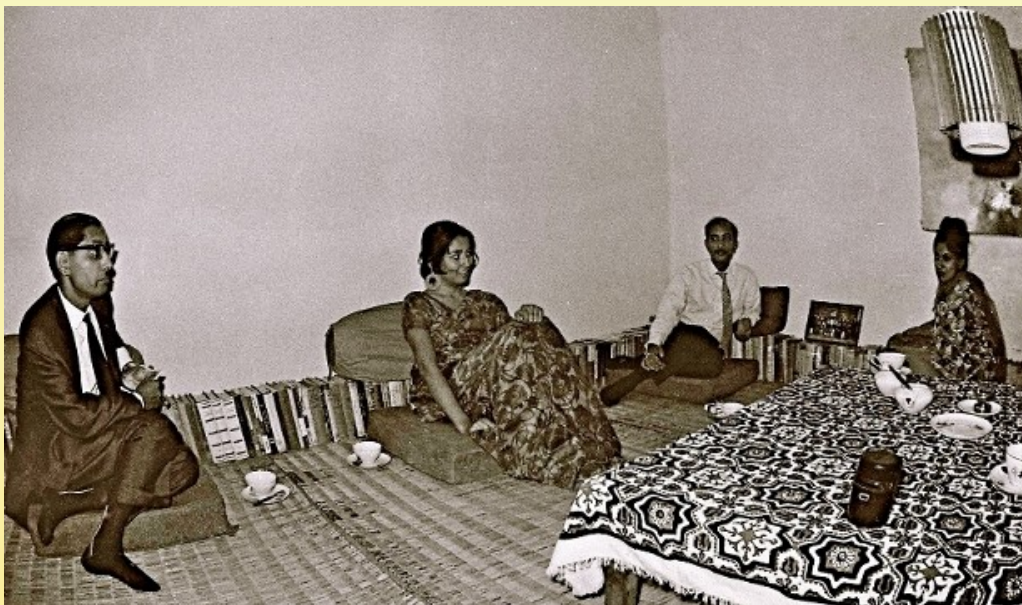


Photograph Credit: Faiza Khan

Suhail Zaheer Lari on his website starts the first chapter of “My Genetic Origin,” by explaining all living organisms, from bacteria to man, as basic cells with the same chemical substances and describing his interest in DNA through which he defined his own genetic marker M17, which are nomadic steppe farmers. “They were the first to domesticate the horse, which eased their numerous migrations. My M17 ancestors spread from Europe to India. They were responsible for the birth of the Indo-European languages, the world’s most widely spoken language family, which includes English, the Romance Languages, Farsi and various Indian tongues.”

Lari, born in Gorakhpur, beautifully illustrates a visual map of his house. He fondly reminisces about Lar Town and the village of Manjharia where he grew up in a courtyard house, surrounded by mango and lychee orchards. Later, he was educated at Allahabad, Lahore, Karachi and Oxford.

Suhail and his wife Yasmeen Lari were life-long companions with incredible stories of the 70s, a time when Karachi had no publicly accessible cultural nexus and they hosted the most imminent writers, researchers, artists in their apartments. They continued this practice till his last days. He, along with Yasmeen, an internationally recognized architect, co-founded the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan in 1980; a very important organization working and experimenting in indigenous material focusing on zero carbon footprint.



Mrs Suhail Lari sitting far right in their plan apartment,
Photo Credit: Suhail Lari.

I did not belong to his world of the past, but I connected to his stories to understand Karachi's complexities. These stories were important to me, and Suhail was a connector. He sat for hours in the TV room, behind his computer, showing me a world that had not been a part of my growing up. My most important visual memory is seeing Nusrat Bhutto in her black turtleneck shirt playing with Persian cats and Zulfikar Bhutto sitting casually in the gardens of 70 Clifton, both lovingly photographed by Suhail Lari.

Suhail Sahib and I spent days at Makli. We used to leave Karachi in the early hours and stay in Thatta for weeks to document and collect visual data. The usual routine was to wake up at 6am and photograph the necropolis, document each corner and link it to history through referencing and research. We walked among the remaining shrines, tombs and decayed ruins sharing foot notes and looking at the details of the cornices and Persian calligraphy framed with ornamentation and floral patterns.

Suhail Lari's obsession with photography would be seen whenever one went to his tv room, scrolling through hundreds of images from his dark room and digital archives. He wrote around 60 books on history and passionately documented the process of Heritage Foundation's interventions. He wrote *An Illustrated History of Sindh, Neither Islamic Nor Persian—A History of Muslim Painting, Meri Mitti ke Log, Meri Society ke Log, Makli under the Samma, Makli under the Mughals, Makli under Timurid, and Makli under the Sufi.*

Suhail sahib, I wish more young people knew you. You were a storyteller. Goodbye, my friend.



Navin Ghulam Haider (1960-2020)

Michel Boivin, CNRS-CEIAS



I met Navin at the same time as Suhail Lari. I was beginning research on Ismailis in Karachi and Sindh, and I think Navin had attended a lecture I had given on the third Aga Khan, Sultan Muhammad Shah (1877-1957). In fact, being Ismaili herself, I had initially thought of her as an informant, but she became a colleague and a true friend. I remember at that time I was living in Defence, Karachi. I used to take the bus to Karachi University campus every Monday morning and meet her in her Pakistan Study Centre office. We would discuss the history and traditions of the Ismaili people in the area, and then she would drive me back to the university gate, from where I would return home. Her family was originally from Gwadar, and she introduced me to a community historian who had just published a book in Urdu on the Ismaili community of Gwadar.

Navin was teaching as Assistant Professor at the Pakistan Study Centre, University of Karachi. One of the first papers she published was devoted to the role played by Aga Khan III in the Muslim nationalist movement in colonial India ("Aga Khan the IIIrd: Thoughts and Contributions," *Pakistan Perspectives*, Vol. II, No. 2, December 1997, pp. 108–138). Then she published books in Urdu and in English. In 2014, Navin was granted a PHD on "Fazlur Rahman: A Muslim Modernist," by the Pakistan Study Center, University of Karachi. Navin was a very discreet person but also very courageous. One of her chosen battles was to defend women targeted by sexual harassment, after she had to deal with it herself.

Navin Ghulam Haider

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=978320818857582&set=t.1084580772&type=3>



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