



MIFS NEWSLETTER 12

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Editorial

Since the last issue of the newsletter was published in February 2022, several academic events have been organized in terms of conferences, publications, and others in South Asia, Europe, and North America. One can see the strengthening of this field of study, Sindhi Studies. However, the significant event was the first Social Sciences Winter School held in November 2022 at IBA, Karachi. In addition, before going into the details developed in each section, it should be mentioned that the Centre for South Asian Studies (CEIAS) was transformed on 1 January 2023. It merged with the Centre of Himalayan Studies (CEH) to create the Centre for the Study of South Asia and the Himalayas (CESAH).

Michel Boivin

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In Conversation with Professor Steven Ramey

By Trisha Lalchandani, CESA H (CNRS-EHESS)



Steven Ramey completed his PhD in the religions of South Asia, especially focusing on Hinduism and Islam, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He was promoted to full professor in the Fall 2016. He began serving as director of graduate studies in Fall 2020.

Dr. Ramey's primary research focuses on the contests over identifications, particularly in contexts of migration and disagreements over contemporary practices related to subgroups within a larger community. He has conducted extensive research with people from the region of Sindh who assert a clear Hindu identification but whose practices, which incorporate Hindu deities and texts, the Guru Granth Sahib, and Sufi saints, lead others to question the Hindu identification of the Sindhis. He has also researched South Asian religions in the southeastern United States, especially focusing on Indo-Caribbean Hindus and Sindhi Hindus in this context. He uses the case of the Sindhi Hindus, Indo-Caribbean Hindus, and other subgroups to analyze the ways religious boundaries are constructed and contested in both academic studies and contemporary societies and the impact of those processes on minority groups.

<https://religion.ua.edu/people/steven-ramey/>

TL: Religious identification does not always congruously align with regional, national, or linguistic identities, and there are porous boundaries that such entities are constantly navigating. Could you comment on that particularly with regard to Sindhi diaspora in India and elsewhere?

SR: The notion of fixed religious identifications, that a person identifies with one religion and engages that religion exclusively, is a simplistic imposition that largely develops during the colonial period. Religious practices and identifications are much more fluid in most communities, including within the colonial power centers (even though they did not always recognize their own fluidity). Sindhi practices are excellent examples of this, with Sufi pirs accepting initiates who identified as Hindu, families that



identified as Hindu making their oldest son a Khalsa Sikh, etc. Regional, national, and linguistic identities are similarly fluid. Some who identify as Sindhi have a special affinity for one region within Sindh; some emphasize one subgroup (e.g., Amil or Bhaibund) and their identification with that subgroup, especially when finding a suitable marriage partner. The boundaries of Sindh also have changed over time, a fluidity that challenges static views of being Sindhi. This is nothing new or unique to Sindh, as the creation of a community identity requires significant effort to bring together the different people and encourage them to identify as a group.

As a thought experiment, in early twentieth century Rangoon, whom did a merchant from Shikarpur see as their main community? Would a Hyderabad merchant in Rangoon be a part of their community? We often lump them together as Sindhi Hindus, and they might have seen themselves that way, but they might see as much connection to someone from Multan as Hyderabad or unite with people who have a similar interest that is not based on regional heritage. Thus, maintaining a specific community identity in diaspora, whether Hindu or Indian or Sindhi or something else, requires significant group effort, since any of these identifications are not automatic.

TL: In recent times, have the Sindhis in India abandoned ambiguities of identification and resorted to more culturally and politically aligned standards of linguistic and cultural practices?

SR: People who identify as Sindhi in India have adopted a variety of approaches to their cultural heritage. Some have chosen not to emphasize a distinctive Sindhi-ness. They know elements of their heritage, or at least that some family left Sindh following Partition, but they have chosen to fit with the larger society and focus on other elements of life, including business success at times. Some referenced the Sindhi ability to learn languages for business success to describe their focus on local languages, wherever they were living, finding little value to Sindhi language or practices.

Others have chosen to maintain a distinctive Sindhi identity. Most of the people participating in the communities where I conducted my fieldwork fit into this category. But it was clear that, like any community, they adjusted their practices to a new context, and in a variety of ways. Some continued to honor Sindhi Sufis but did not transfer that veneration to Sufi shrines in India. Some visited gurdwaras and temples along with Sindhi temples/ashrams, while others put less emphasis on elements identified with Sikhism.

Sindhi community institutions have continued to change as well, adapting to the needs of the community in the context of diaspora and, at times, conforming to the expectations of the larger society for recognized Hindu practices. Cultural practices, whether identified as religious or not, whether in diaspora or not, are always changing and developing in new ways. New teachers or leaders arise with different ideas. The needs and fashions of the community shift, and the practices shift



accordingly. So while the ambiguities of identification remain for some, their practices and ideas have shifted, as have the practices and ideas of Sindhis in Sindh.

TL: How have Sindhis in diaspora reified and mobilized their cultural-linguistic-religious identities to the advantage of larger economic and cultural phenomena in whichever geographical regions they occupy?

SR: One clear example of this is the emphasis on Jhule Lal, building on a deliberate choice in India to promote Jhule Lal and the celebration of Cheti Chand as a Sindhi Hindu deity. Ram Panjwani recognized the need for a unifying symbol to maintain a sense of Sindhi-ness and pride in their heritage despite the trauma of Partition and migration, and he chose Jhule Lal, a regional deity worshipped by some who identified as Sindhi Hindus, as a main focus for Sindhis in India, and his efforts became quite successful. Jhule Lal is fairly ubiquitous in institutions that Sindhi Hindus have helped develop. The celebration of Cheti Chand becomes an opportunity to demonstrate publicly, through festivals, processions, and media coverage, the richness of Sindhi heritage as well as its Hindu-ness. When I have observed celebrations of Cheti Chand, some participants talk about it representing Sindhi Hindu culture to the larger public, but the version of Sindhi Hindu culture being demonstrated tends to ignore or downplay elements, such as the veneration of Nanak, Shah Abdul Latif, and the Guru Granth Sahib, that do not fit the larger understanding of Hindu practices, even though these same communities venerate all three in their regular community gatherings.

TL: How central is the study of religion to a comprehensive historical analysis of the Hindu Sindhis, both in Sindh and in diaspora, India and elsewhere?

SR: On one level, the study of religion is central. Religious practice is one element that many who identify as Sindhi highlight as somewhat distinctive in the region. These practices have also become a main avenue for maintaining a sense of Sindhi uniqueness in diaspora. While examples of mutuality and participation across presumed religious boundaries are common in Sindh, the distinction of Sindhi Hindu from Sindhi Muslim or Sindhi Sikh was important enough in Sindh that many maintained those identifications (or perhaps subgroup identifications that we relate to those three distinct identifications). The importance of these identifications become readily apparent in the events of Partition, which also hardened those identifications for some.

However, that representation overlooks the fact that being a Sindhi Hindu had connotations in Sindh before Partition that we do not commonly associate with religion. The correlation of religious identification to rural / urban divisions and occupational distinctions are significant enough that we should not see the hardening of religious identifications as simply about religion. Economic differences become an important way of understanding Partition and other parts of Sindhi history, also. Moreover, if we view the history of Sindhi diaspora through the lens of economics, some of the tensions that we primarily discuss as religious (those identifying as Sindhi Hindu not being accepted as Hindu in India because their practices were different) connect to other economic issues, such as the struggle that Sindhis and other communities faced reestablishing their economic livelihoods after migration. The



negative stereotype of the Sindhi business owner in India (perhaps developing from competition among migrants from Sindh, Punjab and elsewhere) probably compounds the negative assessment by some of the Hindu identification of Sindhis. So, studying religion is significant in researching Sindhis but is incomplete in isolation.

TL: How has Hindutva shown to be a persistent presence among the Hindus in your ethnographic work on Indo-Caribbean Hindus in the United States?

SR: Like many Sindhi communities, Indo-Caribbean Hindus are on the margins of Hinduism in the United States. Where possible, many have established separate temples that reflect the different practices as they developed in the context of the Caribbean. Some Indo-Caribbean Hindus expressed frustration at what they perceived as the homogenization of Hinduism, even in the United States, the pressure to conform to particular forms of temple practice to be accepted as fully Hindu. However, as with the complexity of religious and occupational identification in Sindh, the divisions between Indo-Caribbean and Indian-American Hindus in the United States also reflects differences in immigration history, socio-economic position, and education. Thus, describing this tension and homogenization as primarily Hindutva probably overvalues the religious component of complex community factors.

TL: Some of your work has also examined methodological concerns when studying religion, especially the threat of losing the balance between empiricism and experientiality. What in your opinion are the implications of using experience as a discursive category in the ethnography of religion?

SR: Experience is a tricky category within the ethnography of religion, because we cannot reach the “experience” itself. What we can access is the description of experience that someone conveys to us, or our own articulation of our experience. In either case, the articulation of the experience reflects the limitations of language to describe a complex experience as well as the interests of the person articulating it. When I was researching with Sindhi communities, I know that different people with whom I spoke saw me as a scholar who would be talking about their community, so my position influenced how they described their experience. Some particularly felt pressure to represent the community appropriately. This deliberate representation is the same as anyone does in any conversation with another person. If I describe my experience at work to a student, a colleague, the Dean, or my neighbor, I frame it somewhat differently for the different audience. We should not dismiss such representations as duplicitous or dishonest, as it can be appropriate to tell different people different things, using different language. If we take a person’s articulation of an experience as simply the entirety of their experience, we deny them the agency to choose how they represent their experience to any one person, plus we miss the fact that no representation of an experience can be complete.

TL: Finally, how has your work on the Sindhis influenced your other work in recent years?

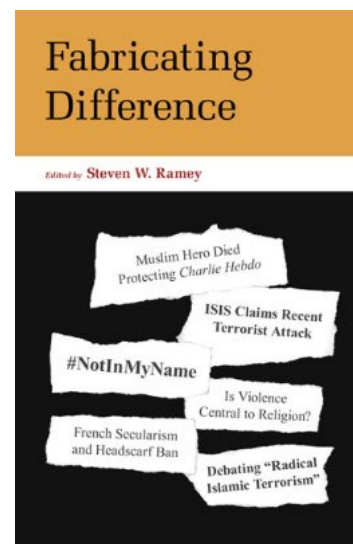
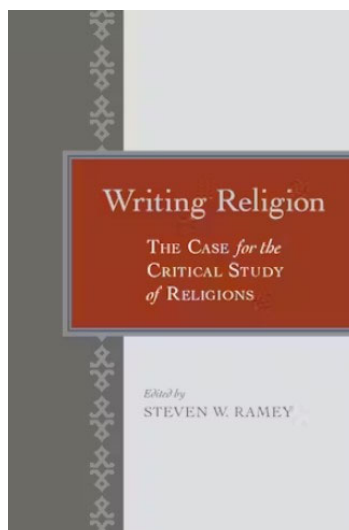
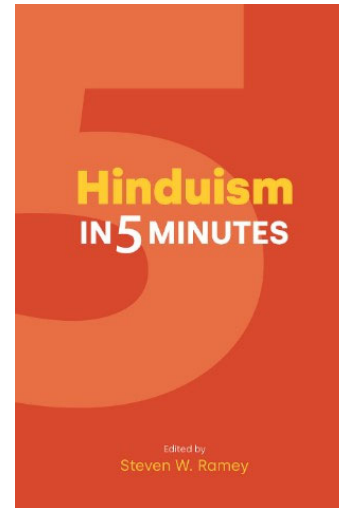
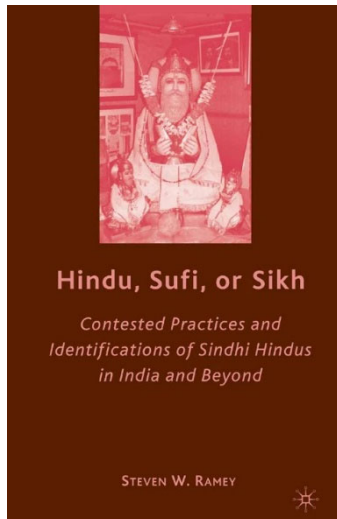
SR: My research on the Sindhis and the complexity of their identifications has contributed to my research on identification processes and the implications of different contested identifications. For



example, the question of identifications and the ways that they are constructed, shifted, and contested, raises serious questions for our ways of representing material. If I simply declare that the Guru Granth Sahib is a Sikh text, as many scholars do, I have marginalized communities like Sindhis whose understanding and engagement with that text occurs most often in a Hindu frame. This simplistic marginalization has challenged me to consider other areas where scholars should be more precise in their language. Because identifications are often contested, it is vital to acknowledge who is responsible for any particular labeling. Thus, declaring “Sikhs generally identify the Guru Granth Sahib as the central Sikh text,” or “Sindhi Hindus typically describe the Guru Granth Sahib and Nanak as Hindus” is more precise in acknowledging whose label we repeat. This also serves to remind our audience that such labels are not static descriptions but strategic choices.

Such ideas also influence my work with students. I am currently working with a coauthor on a World Religions textbook that takes seriously the incompleteness of any single representation of a religion, with the goal of leaving the reader well-equipped to think critically about any description of a religion, rather than feeling like they “know” Hinduism or Judaism. As another example, one of my students is currently working on the contestations among those who identify as Khalsa Sikh and those who identify as Ravidassia. The debate whether the Ravidassia fit within Sikhism or form a separate religion is a contest over identifications and belonging that has similarities to some of the experiences of Sindhi Hindus outside of Sindh. Thus, what I have learned from studying Sindhi communities is influencing how I work with students at the University of Alabama and the application of these insights to other communities

Some Publications by Prof. Ramey



A short note on a new impetus in Sindhi Studies: Jhulelal between architecture and anthropology

Michel Boivin, CESA (CNRS-EHESS)



Udero Lal's *darbar* (east side)
© Michel Boivin

Anyone who has traveled through Sindh will have spotted a monumental architectural complex in central Sindh: the *darbar* of Udero Lal. Despite its size and architecture, it is surprising that it is not mentioned in the famous *Antiquities of Sindh*, published by Henry Cousens in 1925. This unique place is dedicated to a dual figure, as it is venerated under different names by Muslims and Hindus: Shaykh Tahir or Udero Lal. Having said that, a single designation is used today: Jhulelal. One of the fields in which the works devoted to Udero Lal's *darbar* is shared religious worship, which has also seen a significant boom since the 2020s. To a certain extent, this is the last site to be shared by Muslims and Hindus in Sindh, although there were others during the colonial period. Furthermore, it would be essential to define what is meant by the term "sharing" in this context. In other words, what is shared, and by whom? Some researchers prefer the term "encounter". This very short review is not intended to go into his early work but rather to focus on recent works devoted to Jhulelal in architecture and anthropology.

One of the first works devoted to the Udero Lal site was by an architect, published more than twenty years back. Specializing in the Hindu architecture of Sindh, Murlidhar Dawani looked at the shrine of



Udero Lal as “ a symbolic expression of Sindh’s cultural past.” For him, the buildings resulted from the fusion of two Islamic architectural styles: one is the dome vault initiated by Sher Shah Suri (1486-1545) in Kashmir, and the other is the bulbous dome from Persia (Dawani 2002: 67). While several articles were devoted to the figure of Jhulelal, Rehman Ali Chandio took Udero Lal’s shrine as a topic for his M. Sc. In anthropology at Quaid-e Azam University (Islamabad), he submitted in 2008, which was published soon after (Chandio 2012). He introduced the site, the main actors, and the most important rituals and festivals. Before turning to two other studies devoted to the same site, we should mention that Jhulelal has also become an academic focus in India.

While it is true that most of the works devoted to the Hindu Sindhis of India mention him, a doctoral thesis was devoted to him in 2018 by Harish Gopalji Thakkar. Thakkar’s research provides an exciting overview of the literature published in Hindi, Gujarati, and Sindhi in India. He also reminds us that Jhulelal, with the name of Dariyalal, is also venerated by the Lohanas of India and other castes such as the Bhatias. The Kutchi Lohanas hold the oldest temple devoted to him in Mumbai, and it was probably built in 1875. The main contribution of Thakkar’s research is to provide a complete survey of the sources related to both Udero Lal and Dariyalal. Notwithstanding, being himself a Kutchi, he doesn’t address the issue of the booming of Jhulelal’s temple in today’s India. Nonetheless, his work suggests new avenues to explore in relation to Jhulelal, such as a comparative approach to his cult among the Sindhis and the Kutchis.

Returning to Udero Lal’s *darbar*, Shanzay Shaikh proposes a study of what she calls “the vanishing architectural heritage” of the complex. Her work is very detailed about the built legacy of the site, and the main part is organized like a catalog of the diverse architectural items in the *darbar*. Recently, scholars have considered the diversity of Jhulelal's built heritage. A chapter was published recently by four authors, from whom three architects teach at N. E. D. University in Karachi. Through a partnership with the CEIAS (CNRS-EHESS), a three-year research program has been completed in 2022. The chapter explored three sites devoted to Jhulelal: Udero Lal’s *darbar*, Naserpur, and Sukkur. The part on Udero Lal’s *darbar* includes a map of the complex drawn by Masooma Shakir and Seemi Hasan (p. 65). The second part is on the temple of Naserpur, which is said to have been built to commemorate the birthplace of Jhulelal. The two sites exhibit the same architectural structure: a monument built on a square drum, topped with a dome on an eight-sided structure.

The third and last part is devoted to the temple of Jinda Pir in Sukkur. The story goes that during British colonization, a dispute occurred in the nearby island of Zinda Pir, where Muslims and Hindus venerated Khwaja Khizr. The Hindus would have been expelled in the late nineteenth century and would have decided to build a temple on dry land. The temple was recently renovated and enlarged. It is worth observing that the basic built structure, as detailed above, can’t be found. Before the renovation was completed in the late 2010s, a small dome was put above the temple. Now, a dome can be seen from far away, for instance, from the island of Khwaja Khizr. The dome is nevertheless not built following the basic historical structure: it is more elevated and fluted. Although different, it looks like a smaller fluted door under the main gate. Thanks to Suneela Ahmed, a map of the new *mandir* allows us to visualize how the space is distributed between the different built elements, all around the main court (p. 67). Contrary to the two other temples, Jinda Pir is close to the Indus River. Consequently, the rituals start in the temple, continue, and come to an end on boats on the river.

Another scholar has recently submitted a PhD at Quaid-e Azam University in anthropology on Udero Lal’s *darbar* (see the abstract below p.). According to the title, he locates his research in “shared



religious spaces.” It aims to question the common representation of this site as a place of tolerance, sharing, and harmony between Muslims and Hindus. The scholar locates his research in “anthropologist Robert M. Hayden's (2016) theoretical framework by specifically looking at the concepts of antagonistic tolerance and competitive sharing of religious sites and spaces.” (p. 16). The research is well constructed and argued: it will be a landmark in the field of Sindhi studies and shared religious spaces. Finally, the author observed that, as developed by Hayden, there is always a dominant group in such spaces, who finally impose his view on the other. Nevertheless, the case of Udero Lal is exemplary in that in a country like the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, it is the Hindus who have imposed themselves. The author attributes this result to the policy developed by the current *gadi nashin*, Mata Bina.

This brief note on the boom in studies devoted to Jhulelal shows the growing interest in this sacred figure. Muhbat Ali Shah's thesis is the crowning glory of this development, providing a first-rate anthropological study. We can only hope that it will soon be published. However, the field of Jhulelal studies is far from complete. Apart from the *darbar* at Udero Lal, other significant sites are dedicated to Jhulelal, such as Mol Sharif and the Jinda Pir temple in Sukkur. However, these sites have one significant difference from Udero Lal: they are not shared. However, studying them would answer many questions, such as those relating to authority, the transmission of tradition, and so on. Another major project would be to broaden the scope to include India and the Sindhi diaspora. But in this case, it would be necessary to move beyond the issue of shared sacred spaces.

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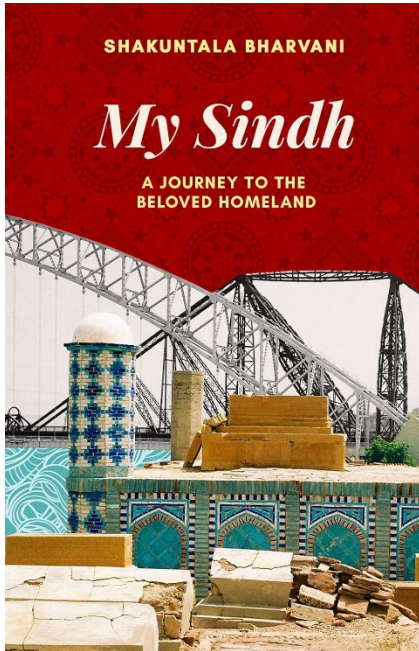
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Book review

Shakuntala Bharvani, *My Sindh: A Journey to the the Beloved Homeland*, 2021, Black-and-White Fountain, ISBN No: 978-93-83465-26-2, EBook ISBN No: 978-93-83465-24-8.

By Vidya Tewani

Assistant Professor of English at Pravin Gandhi College of Law, Mumbai



Evoking collective memories of a scattered community, with a personal narrative endowing historical awareness to a past that is both elusive and palpable, this book brings the homeland home.

Inder Bhojwani, in his ode to Sindh, *Suhini Sindhdi* (Beautiful Sindh), poignantly makes a promise: *Tuhinji Sirata, Sindh! Sandeedasi Saha saan* (We will hold your memories, Sindh, close to our hearts). These fond memories of the homeland have enabled Sindhis to connect with their past - to have a 'home' etched in the collective consciousness of a community that now remains scattered across the globe. Sindh, undivided at the time of partition, was placed on the map of Pakistan, in its entirety. Nearly 1.4 million Sindhi Hindus had to leave their homeland and seek refuge elsewhere.

Shakuntala Bharvani was a young child when her family had to leave their home and the homeland. Her book, *My Sindh: A Journey to the Beloved Homeland*, offers a journey to her lost homeland; the roadmaps here are drawn through the memories of those who gain and give access to a homeland that remains elusive and is yet palpable. The thematically interconnected chapters are centered on the idea of exploring a migrant community's past to reflect on its present. Bharvani's long-standing experience as a professor of English lends this book poetic grace, combined with her remarkable scholarship. With the skill of a raconteur, Bharvani narrates stories of those who lived through the



partition, faced displacement, and rebuilt their lives with faith and fortitude. Like a long journey full of scenic beauty and many memorable milestones, the book presents a rich discussion on the socio-cultural history of Sindhis - of Sindh, of the Sindhi language, their religious practices, the Sindhi food, festivals, and festivities.

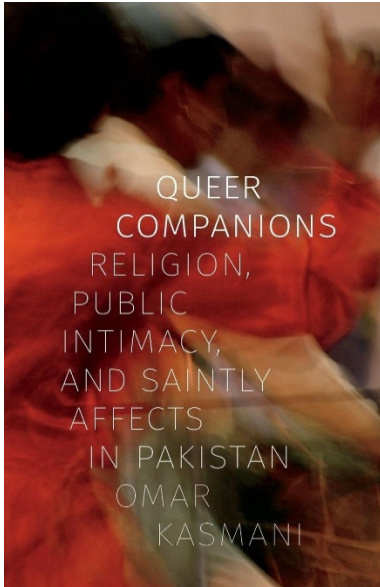
The author offers fascinating insights and anecdotes on this home-bound journey: the discussion on the Sindhi language is made winsome through the infusion of peppery *pahakas*; the chinwag with the *chachis* and the *nanis* is made charming through the chiming of the Sindhi words, left untranslated; and, fun facts are told through intriguing stories such as that of the Sindhi mutton in New York! The author endows a sense of historical awareness by providing points of reference to our everyday experiences: the section on the archetypal Sufi song *Damadam Mast Qalandar* adds context and meaning as the author translates the lyrics in a note written for her young niece.

One cannot miss Bharvani's uninhibited sense of humor that makes the book so pleasurable: Writing about the Indus and its course, she piquantly throws in a pause-worthy comment: "...the Indus has been more whimsical and changeable - just like it's Sindhi people! And, like us, unmindful of our history, it has wiped out so much of our past.". The book is strewn with these interjections, nudging us to think more. Dotted with musing monochromes - photos from family albums, images from personal collections, and sketches from history and travel books - the book compels the reader to imagine Sindh and Sindhis through the expanses of the landscapes and the contours of the portraits.

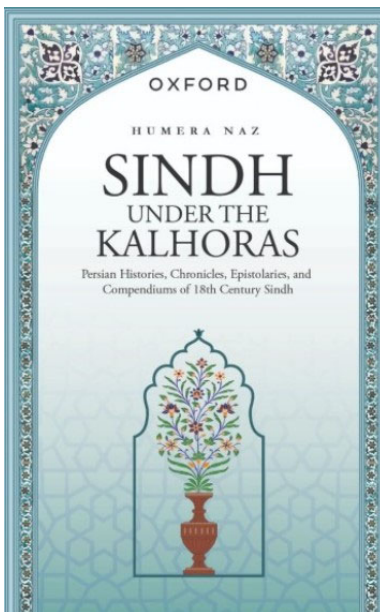
What sets the book apart are the chronicles that unravel to a young reader the simultaneity of Sindh in the lives of Sindhis: When the author writes about the Sadh Belo (Rohri, Pakistan), she also shares how, in Bombay, her in-laws visit a temple that the Sindhis call the Sadh Belo. Such post-partition phenomena are seen as an attempt at imbuing the immediate physical space with a sense of home-like semblance. The book introduces many such places and notions that one sees on both sides of the border - like parallel universes that the Sindhis live in to bring the homeland home.

The thematic threads of the book echo Prabhu Wafa's words from his poem *Shadow Play*: "*Wherever you find your people, call it home, wherever you find Sindhis, call it Sind*". In this book, Bharvani both legitimizes and contends the notion of the place of origin. Weaving a personal narrative into a mosaic of collective memories, adding strokes of history, folklore, and mythology, Bharvani makes the reader see their (my) Sindh. This homeland is as metaphorical as it is real. For those who wish to journey to the beloved homeland of Sindhis, this book has much to take home.

Book Abstracts



In *Queer Companions* Omar Kasmani theorizes saintly intimacy and the construction of queer social relations at Pakistan's most important site of Sufi pilgrimage. Conjoining queer theory and the anthropology of Islam, Kasmani outlines the felt and enfolded ways in which saintly affections bind individuals, society, and the state in Pakistan through a public architecture of intimacy. Islamic saints become lovers and queer companions just as a religious universe is made valuable to critical and queer forms of thinking. Focusing on the lives of ascetics known as fakirs in Pakistan, Kasmani shows how the affective bonds with the place's patron saint, a thirteenth-century antinomian mystic, foster unstraight modes of living in the present. In a national context where religious shrines are entangled in the state's infrastructures of governance, coming close to saints further entails a drawing near to more-than-official histories and public forms of affect. Through various fakir life stories, Kasmani contends that this intimacy offers a form of queer world making with saints.



This book introduces several historical sources relevant to Sindh, with a particular emphasis on the eighteenth century. It examines the general set of values of the Sindhi society during the Kalhora period (1701–1783) which determined the historiographic outlook of that era. It also analyses the different historiographic premises to which the Kalhoras subscribed and the individual idiosyncrasies of the contemporary authors. The work has been written with the aim to assist future analysts of the history of Sindh with fresh markers and incentives for reanalysis and interpretation of primary resources of that era. The research is open-ended and opens vistas for future historians to continue their investigation further through the British period and bring it up to the present era to explore the nexus and various stages of evolution in the field of writing the contemporary history of Sindh.



New PHDs in Sindhi Studies

Muhsbat Ali Shah, *Shared Religious Spaces in Sindh: A Case Study of Udero Lal*, Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University (Islamabad, Pakistan), 2022

Abstract

This Ph.D. case study takes account of the shared religious space of the shrine of Udero Lal situated in District Matiari, Sindh, Pakistan. In the study, I have conducted ethnographic research methods. The shared religious heritage shrine of Udero Lal established under the name of saint Udero Lal has a dual identity and is venerated by the religious community of both the Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims. In the popular belief culture and conception in Sindh, it is generally presumed that Udero Lal shrine's shared space is a symbol of interfaith harmony, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence among the Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims in Sindh. The shared and syncretic shrine complex of Udero Lal contains both the Mosque and the temple representing its dual and hybrid identity and an „extrinsic source of information“ in the sense of religious symbol (Geertz, 1971) for interfaith communal relations between Sindhi Muslim and Sindhi Hindus. The saint Udero Lal is considered a god by Hindus and revered as a saint by Muslims. This study finds out that the apparent harmony and tolerance in the form of sacred visitation of the shrine have kept the observers obscure the deep and internal contestation between the practitioners belonging to two faith groups. The study reveals that the shrine space contestation and conflict take place between the Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslim religious groups mainly on the Udero Lal's identity, ownership, economy, and property. At present, the shared shrine space of Udero Lal has become hotly contested, and tolerance is seen to be damaged. For instance, the contestation and conflict have led to the physical transformation of the second part of the shared space *balanbo sahib* (sacred water well) where the Shiv temple and equestrian structures were constructed in 2016 and 2014 by the Hindu patrons of the shrine. Moreover, in the year 2020 the Hindu patrons of the shrine have also constructed the new main gate with figure depictions at the second part of the Udero Lal shrine complex. In these religious depictions, the statue of the *Pallo* (fish) on the top of the gate, the symbol of *Om* at the center of the gate, a trident (*trisul*) sacred sign on the posts of the top corner, and Swastika on the below posts of the corner of the gate have been fixed.

This study further finds out that the shift in the main and the first part of the shared space of Udero Lal took place in the year 2017. In this shift, the Hindu patrons attempted to transform the main shared space of the Udero Lal, and they fixed the declaration of the Udero Lal notice board as Hindu Pir inside the shrine. On the other hand, the contestation on the part of the Muslim community is also noticed in this study. The Muslim patrons of this shared shrine space of Udero Lal have also placed the holy Quran inside the shrine. Further, they have fastened the Islamic religious sticker inside the shrine walls. The Muslim group has also made the Mosque functional. The whole shrine complex of Udero Lal has been of white color historically over the generations but currently, the Muslim patrons have transformed the mosque into a green color. Despite all this the contestation and transformation have taken place at the shared shrine of Udero Lal, this study argues that the shared religious heritage identity of the Udero Lal shrine complex displays the sustenance and continuity of tolerance but it seems in a fragile condition day by day. In this context, my study argues that at present the shared religious space of Udero Lal shrine is tacitly practiced. This study mainly takes up anthropologist Robert M. Hayden's (2016) theoretical framework by specifically looking at the concepts of antagonistic



tolerance and competitive sharing of religious sites and spaces. Anthropologically, this study has also investigated the process of rituals, symbols, and oral traditions of the Udero Lal shrine.

Radhika Chakraborty, *Diaspora and Nodal Mobilities: The Hindu Sindhi Community in Hong Kong*, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, National University of Singapore, 2023.

Summary

This thesis addresses the domain of diaspora and the movements and connections it entails and is sustained by, through the case of the Hindu Sindhi community in Hong Kong. The Hindu Sindhi diaspora in Hong Kong has emerged through multiple contexts of movement and migration. These include sojourning for trade, displacement from Sindh during the 1947 Partition, and migrations to Hong Kong for business, employment, and marriage. Building on in-depth interviews with Hindu Sindhis from Hong Kong, ethnographic data, and archival resources collected between 2020-2021, I explore how a historical 'merchant network' has translated into contemporary diasporic formations, with a focus on a particular diasporic node, Hong Kong.

This thesis builds on the dialogues between the cognate domains of diaspora, migration, and mobilities. I propose the framework of 'nodal mobilities' of diaspora, to capture how Hindu Sindhis move and are moved, and the connections engendered through these mobilities. I follow two key threads as suggested by this framework – movements and connections – across spatial, social, and temporal domains. In the first instance, movements are highlighted, in exploring how the mobilities and immobilities of the erstwhile merchant network translate into contemporary diasporic formations. Through these movements, I trace the emergence of Hong Kong as a diasporic node through past and futural diasporic imaginaries. Next, I highlight how diaspora mediates connections to and between nodes and places, which engender forms of belonging and unbelonging and unsettle the centrality and singularity of the diasporic homeland. The transnational connections embedded in particular diasporic activities demonstrate how flows of people, ideas, and things coalesce at diaspora nodes, and shape diasporic formations. Through the thesis, migratory biographies, and gendered and generational dimensions are foregrounded, to recalibrate and reframe the focus of diaspora.

Academic Events

Social Sciences Winter School in Karachi Karachi

November 21-26, 2022 at Institute of Business Management (IBA), Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan

By Rémy Delage & Michel Boivin, CESA (CNRS-EHESS)

A Social Sciences Winter School (SSWS) was held in Karachi from November 21 to 26, 2022, in partnership with the CEIAS (CNRS-EHESS) and the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) of Karachi University. It took place on the City Campus of this institution, and benefited from other funding from several local institutional partners. The SSWS was organized by Michel Boivin (CNRS-CEIAS), Rémy Delage (CNRS-CEIAS) and Akbar Zaidi (IBA). It brought together 21 speakers (10 from Pakistan and 11 from France) and 45 participants (36 from Pakistan and 11 from abroad including 5 PhD students from France).



Group photo, IBA Main Campus, Karachi, November 25th, 2022

The issue of heritage in the social sciences was introduced in four plenary sessions and operationalized in three distinct methodological workshops:

- **Workshop 1** – Heritage, public space and collaborative mapping: conceptions, practices and appropriations
- **Workshop 2** – City, architectural space and monuments: heritage perceptions, uses and management



- **Workshop 3** – Interrogating the city from document to archive

The general idea of the SSWS is to develop a multi-disciplinary and intensive training course in the theories, methods and tools of social science research. The project also aims to strengthen regionalism and multidisciplinary in the social sciences, and promotes the transfer of skills and the development of local skills. This first edition of the Winter School in Karachi enabled 45 participants from various academic, disciplinary and geographical backgrounds to be trained and supervised by some twenty French and Pakistani teacher-researchers in three multidisciplinary methodological workshops.

The theme chosen for this first edition in Karachi is fully in line with the intersection of the multidisciplinary fields of urban studies and heritage studies: Cities, urban change and heritage management through geotechnologies and digital humanities. In the context of this training course, we were more particularly interested in the relationship between heritage and local territory. Heritage was not considered in the strict sense of cultural heritage to be preserved but rather as a complex and multi-scalar process involving actors and institutions, as a component of the process of belonging and a structuring dimension of the territorialization process.

In addition to the theoretical and thematic introductory sessions, half a day was set aside for practicing fieldwork and the implementation of methodological protocols:

- **Workshop 1:** three groups devoted half a day to various practical exercises in the historical district of Kharadar which has particularities in terms of the juxtaposition of religious and architectural heritage: topographical inventories, sound surveys and short interviews.
- **Workshop 2:** Private visit to the National Museum of Pakistan (Karachi) and practice photogrammetry in the gardens for the purpose of 3D modelling of historical monuments and sites.
- **Workshop 3:** visit, presentation and handling of the archive collections located at the Sindh Archives in Clifton, more specifically specialized archives on the Karachi municipality and its markets during the colonial period.





Several cultural activities were organized in conjunction with the training:

- Frere Hall: Karachi, guided tour on Saturday 19 November 2022
- Heritage Walk Karachi: Guided tour on Sunday 20 November 2022
- Mohatta Palace: Karachi, guided tour on Thursday 24 November 2022
- Sindhi music concert: Winter School closing night on Friday 25 November at the *Alliance Française de Karachi*.
- Makli-Thatta-Keenjhar Lake (Sindh): visit to the Makli Necropolis, one of the largest in the world, on Saturday 26 November 2022 and the Shah Jahan Mosque (17th century) in Thatta.

This Social Sciences Winter School project in Karachi is intended to be sustainable and therefore means to capitalize on the experience of the first edition, with the same university partner, IBA. The (provisional) theme of the 2023 edition will be focused on the study of the relationship between environment and climate risk vulnerabilities in South Asia.

For more information and to get all current information about the forthcoming editions, don't hesitate to visit our website: www.winterspy.hypotheses.org/pakistan

Sindhi language, Indus Script and Endangered Indigenous languages

عالمي ڪانفرنس ٻولي، سنڌولڪت ۽ خطري هيٺ آيل اصلوڪين ٻولين بابت سنڌي
February 20-21, 2023 at Arts Council of Pakistan, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan.

By Abd al-Razaque Channa, University of Sindh

سنڌي ٻوليءَ جي بااختيار اداري پاران آرٽس ڪائونسل ڪراچيءَ ۾ ٻن ڏينهن جي عالمي “سنڌي ٻولي، سنڌو لکت ۽ خطري هيٺ آيل اصلوڪين ٻولين بابت عالمي ڪانفرنس” تاريخ 20-21 فيبروري 2023ع تي ٿي. هن ڪانفرنس ۾ آمريڪا، برطانيه، ملائيشيا، فرانس ۽ ڀارت سميت مختلف ملڪن جي جڳ مشهور عالمن ۽ اسڪالرن مختلف موضوعن تي پنهنجا تحقيقي مقالا، مُک تقريرون ۽ پريزنٽيشنون پيش ڪيون. افتتاحي اجلاس جي صدارت سنڌ جي تعليم، ثقافت ۽ سياحت واري وزير سيد سردار علي شاهه ڪئي. جڏهن ته ڊاڪٽر مشل بوون، ڊاڪٽر طارق رحمان، ڊاڪٽر مارڪ ڪنائير، ڊاڪٽر فهميده حسين ۽ ڊاڪٽر ذوالفقار علي ڪلهوڙو مک مهمان هيا. سنڌي ٻوليءَ جي بااختيار اداري جي چيئرمئن ڊاڪٽر اسحاق سميجي اڃياڻي تقرير ۾ ڪانفرنس جا مقصد بيان ڪيا. ٻن ڏينهن جي هن عالمي ڪانفرنس ۾ 30 کان وڌيڪ تحقيقي مقالا پيش ٿيا، جڏهن ته وفاقي ملڪن ۾ مادري ٻولين جي آئيني حيثيت بابت هڪ خاص ويهڪ پڻ ٿي، جنهن ۾ نامور سنڌي ليکڪا نورلهدا شاهه، ڊاڪٽر جعفر احمد، جامي چانڊيي ۽ شفقت قادري ڳالهايو. آخري ڏينهن تي موسيقيءَ جي محفل ٿي، جنهن ۾ سيف سميجي ۽ مانجهي فقير ڳايو. هن موقعي تي سنڌي ٻوليءَ جي بااختيار اداري پاران شايع ٿيل ڪتابن جي پڌرائي ڪرڻ سان گڏ آنلائن “سنڌي ٻولي لائبرري” جو پڻ افتتاح ڪيو ويو. ڪانفرنس ۾ مايا ديود، بهاتا انسومل، ڊاڪٽر غفور ميمڻ، مدد علي سنڌي، ڊاڪٽر محمد علي مانجهي، ڊاڪٽر ادل سومرو، ڪلاڻر متوا، ڊاڪٽر آفتاب اڙو، ڊاڪٽر الطاف جوکيو، عزيز ڪنگراڻي، عامر مغيري، ڊاڪٽر رفيق وساڻ، ڊاڪٽر عبدالرزاق چنا، ياسر قاضي، امر فياض ٻرڙي، سعيد احمد سميجي، شبير ڪنڀار ۽ ٻين پنهنجا تحقيقي مقالا پيش ڪيا.

The Sindhi Language Authority (SLA) organised a two-day International Conference on the Sindhi language, Indus Script, and Endangered Indigenous languages. The conference was held on February 20-21, 2023, in Karachi – Arts Council of Pakistan – the provincial capital of Sindh, to reach the broader community. A large number of audiences from academia, media, civil society, and policy officials attended the conference and participated in the dialogue, panel discussion, and research presentations, and discussed the issues and challenges of the world's indigenous languages with a particular focus on the Sindhi language in the context of Pakistan.



A large audience attended the Conference, Arts Council of Pakistan, Karachi © Michel Boivin



The conference convening and scientific committee received 76 abstracts, making it difficult to choose the best papers. However, the review team has shortlisted only 36 original and pertinent abstracts to the conference's themes. The conference started with an inaugural session moderated by Dr. Rafique Wassan. The inaugural session consisted of a welcome speech by the Chairman of the Sindhi Language Authority, Pro. Dr. Ishaq Samejo, concept note presentation by conference secretary Dr. Abdul Razaque Channa, keynote speeches of Prof. Dr. Tariq Rehman, renowned linguist and HEC distinguished professor spoke on The Political History of the Sindhi Language from the Colonial Period till 1972, Dr. J. Mark Kenoyer, Professor of Anthropology, the University of Wisconsin Madison, spoke on The origin, development and disappearance of the Indus Script: Reviewing the evidence from Mohenjo Daro, Harappa and other sites. Prof. Dr. Michel Boivin, historian/anthropologist at the Centre for the Study of South Asia and the Himalayas (CESAH), spoke on Language, Script, and Power in the Sindhi Society Before and After 1947. Dr. Fahmida Hussain, Chairperson of Sindhi Language Authority, spoke on Decipherment of Indus script: Some Suggestions, and Dr. Zulfiquar Ali Kalhoro, anthropologist and the author of 12 books, spoke on Inscriptions as a source of History in The Indus Valley.

The inaugural session was presided over by Syed Sardar Ali Shah, Minister for Education, Culture and Antiquities, Government of Sindh. Six books on the Sindhi Language and its various aspects were launched by the respective guests, keynote speakers, and authors of the books. Along with these book-launching ceremonies, the Sindhi Language Authority launched its flagship initiative, "Sindhi Virtual Library," to promote, preserve, and develop the Sindhi language. The web-based resource will catalog, archive, create a knowledge hub, and digitize the Sindhi language-published books, magazines, research journals, and newspapers on a variety of important topics, including linguistics, language history, grammar, phonetics, sociolinguistics, dictionaries, and anthologies. <http://www.library.sindhila.org/sabhKitab>



Participants in the conference with organizers © Michel Boivin



There was a panel discussion of experts on state and mother languages in federating countries: a case study of Pakistan. The panelists were Madam Noor-ul-Huda Shah, Jaffer Ahmed, and Jami Chandio, who contextualized the status of the mother national language in Pakistan and the way forward for their recognition. They argued that the diversification of culture and various languages in Pakistan strengthens the national fabric of Pakistan rather than undermining the power dynamics. All the mother national languages spoken in Pakistan should be declared as the national language of Pakistan as it is done in various parts of the world.

The conference ended with the concluding session moderated by the conference secretary, Dr. Abdul Razaque Channa. The session consisted of speeches of Dr. Muhammad Ali Manjhi – EX – Directorate General of Colleges, Government of Sindh, Prof. Dr. Abdul Ghafoor Memon -, Chairperson Sindhi Language Authority, Dr. Fateh Marri, Vice Chancellor, Sindh Agriculture University, Tandojam and Dr. Muhammad Suleiman Shaikh – Secretary Board of Trustees – ZABIST. Ms. Sassui Palejo, affiliated with the Pakistan People's Party who served as a Senator in a women's reserved seat from Sindh from 2015 to 2021 and was ex-minister for Culture, Government of Sindh, was the chief guest while the concluding session was presided by Prof. Dr. Maya Khemlani David, Professor of Sociolinguistics in the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics of the University of Malaya, Malaysia and is currently Honorary Professor with the Asia-Europe Institute in the University Malay.

Prof. Maya spoke on the reasons for the language shift before determining solutions for revitalization. In her presidential talk, she argued that it is essential that a researcher must first determine reasons for language shift. Why is the community moving away from the habitual use of its ethnic language? Such senses will provide appropriate ways of revitalizing a dying language and preserving the language. Educating the Sindhi Hindus in the diaspora about the economic socio-cultural capital in their Heritage language may result in the community's greater habitual use of their ethnic language.

During the conference's concluding session, unanimous resolutions and recommendations were made. Key points include establishing a Language Commission for Pakistan's national and mother languages' constitutional status, granting indigenous language status to mother languages, compulsory mother/provincial language education (Grades 1-5), Sindhi as a mandatory subject in private schools (Grades 1-5), Sindhi as a compulsory business language in Sindh, and promoting the use of mother languages, particularly Sindhi. Additionally, there were calls for Sindhi as the official language in various sectors, Sindhi-focused educational and dictionary boards, foundational Sindhi language courses for government employees, and recognizing mother languages as fundamental human rights. Furthermore, urging provincial assemblies to enact laws regarding official provincial languages was emphasized.

At the end of the conference, Pro. Dr. Ishaq Samejo, the president of the conference and the Chairman of the Sindhi Language Authority, thanked all the international delegates, national scholars, experts, politicians, academicians, civil society members, media persons, teachers, students, and everyone who participated and attended the conference. He said that in the face of modernization and globalization, many indigenous languages are losing their relevance, and younger generations are often unable to learn or speak their native language fluently. This poses a severe threat to the survival of these



languages, which are an integral part of the cultural identity of their respective communities. Through the conference, we want to raise awareness about preserving and promoting indigenous languages and develop concrete steps and initiatives to support their revitalization and protection.

At the end of the first day, Mushaira was held, where famous poets recited their poetry. At the end of the second day, famous Sufi and folk singers Manjhi Faqir and Saif Samejo moved the audiences through their magical voices in a Raag Rang Mahfil.

International Conference on Alexander in Sindh
22nd-24th February 2024

By Amal Hashim, Polytech' Tours, Université de Tours

Alexander's time in the Indus, estimated to be around 323 B.C., compared to his campaigns elsewhere, was relatively brief – a mere two and a half years. However, the legacy he left behind defined a (cultural) epoch in this geographical region that is not understood and is usually overlooked. In the past, historians have focused mainly on his military achievements rather than also considering the profound cultural changes he inadvertently brought about by settling sections of his armies in different parts of the region and establishing new towns in places he conquered.

Even now, more than 2300 years later, stories of Alexander's sojourn in Sindh are deeply embedded within local folklore and popular imagination. Until recently, a road in Sehwan was popularly known as Sikandari Road since, according to locals, this was the route Alexander used to cross into Sehwan. Furthermore, several sites dating to the Neolithic period have been attributed by locals to Alexander or his army. One such place exists in Gujjo, where locals have found rock carvings. However, due to a lack of investigation into Alexander's legacy (aside from militarily), we have not been able to ascertain whether Alexander himself would have camped here, merely his army, or even whether some sections of the latter might have been settled here by him.

Even along the coast, several sites mentioned by Nearchus or Arrian are still "alive." Two of these are the island of Manora (called Morontobara by Nearchus) and the shrine of Mangho Pir (which might be the island of Krokola, identified by Nearchus' fleet because of the existence of crocodiles in both places).



An exhibition of archaeological findings was organized in the hall of IBA auditorium, Central Campus, Karachi © Michel Boivin



The Endowment Fund Trust for the Preservation of Heritage of Sindh (EFT) has been working on restoring the Sehwan Fort, excavations of which began with the first French Mission led by Dr. Monik Kervran. EFT's regional office, the Center for Documentation and Conservation (CDC), has carried on this work and has been documenting artifacts found within the boundaries of the Fort. Unfortunately, over the years, with the growth of the city's population and the proximity of the shrine of Bodlo Bahaar to the Fort, several encroachments have cropped up, which harm its integrity and are a danger to themselves. The Endowment Fund Trust has been working with local stakeholders to raise awareness about Sehwan's historical importance and the need to preserve the fabric of its built heritage.

The International Conference on Alexander in the Indus Valley was part of EFT's ongoing awareness-raising efforts with the local people, government, and the international community. The three-day conference occurred at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) in Karachi, Pakistan, in February 2023. In attendance were scholars such as Dr. Robin Lane Fox (University of Oxford), Dr. Richard Stoneman (University of Exeter), F.S. Aijazuddin, Dr. Rachel Mairs (University of Reading), Heba Hashmi (Maritime Archeological and Heritage Institute), and Dr. Michel Boivin (CNRS-CESAH), among others.

The three-day conference was filled with exciting and informative panel discussions and lectures from scholars who had worked on some aspects of Alexander's vacation in the region. From attempts at contextualizing Alexander's stay here more than two millennia ago to what the city of Sehwan has come to mean to people since the arrival of the Sufi saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, scholars spent three days debating Alexander's military strategy and journey down the River Indus. Dr. Robin Lane Fox, in fact, also touched upon Alexander's decision to travel to Balochistan and the ramifications that decision had for him vis-à-vis his army's future revolt against him. On the other hand, Dr. Michel Boivin highlighted Sehwan's Sufi culture and its links to Alexander. As Alexander is known in the Indus region, Sikander is the principal devotee of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, and his shrine stands at the foot of the hill known as Alexander's Fort.



Participants during the visit of the Fort rebuilt by EFT, Sehwan Sharif © Michel Boivin



The conference was followed by a visit to Sehwan, where the scholars were given a tour of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar's shrine, Bodlo Bahaar's shrine, and the Fort. At each shrine, scholars were enthralled by the Qalandari *dhamal* (a particular form of music and dance in Sufi worship performed by the devotees of Bodlo Bahar and Lal Shahbaz Qalandar). In addition, the scholars participated in another round of discussions regarding Alexander and the centrality of Sehwan to any conversation about him. This time, however, the debate was with locals who had been or were involved with administrating the city's many religious and historic sites.

The International Conference on Alexander in the Indus Valley successfully created a space where the region's pre-Islamic history could finally be discussed and brought to the fore. In the contemporary era, Sehwan's Sufi heritage and links overshadow all its previous (and non-Muslim) history. By highlighting another historical period in the city's long life, EFT and the Government of Sindh have created a space for conversations about other similar towns and regions in Sindh.



Third Khoja Studies Conference, Florida International University (Miami)

4-5 May 2023 Sindh and the Making of Communities in South Asia and the Indian Ocean: Between Myths and Reality

By Iqbal Akhtar, Florida International University

The Khoja Studies Conference (KSC) brings together researchers and members of communities reflecting on merchant groups and their activities in the Greater West Indian Ocean. These groups belong to different religions, Muslims, Hindus, Parsis, Jains, and others. The KSC is interested in how these groups have adapted to the multiple transformations the world has undergone since the 19th century. The first edition of the KSC took place at EHESS in Paris in 2016, and the second at the University of Mumbai in 2019. This third edition was organized in Miami on the topic: “Sindh and the Making of Communities in South Asia and the Indian Ocean: Myth and Reality.”

South Asia and the Indian Ocean form a vast area that gave birth to an array of varied cultures based on the huge interactions between the shores, in terms of material as well as religious and cultural goods. In the Indian Subcontinent, a space was often quoted in the narratives related to the origin of the communities: Sindh. Today a province of Pakistan, the very name of Sindh comes from the Sanskrit Sindhu, the River, which will give the words Hind in Arabic, thus Hindu, and later on India. Originally, the name of Sindh was given to the main part of the Indus Valley, and in such an arid country, the River was life, and as the Swiss scholar Gilbert Etienne says, this area was a gift from the Indus, paraphrasing Herodotus who said Egypt was a gift from the Nile.



The participants in the Third Khoja Studies Conference, Miami © FIU



The Third Khoja Studies Conference aims to explore how Sindh was represented in the making of the different religious communities of the region, including Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, Parsi, and others. Some communities were historically born in Sindh, while others were not, but for several reasons, they incorporated Sindh in their mythical narrative of origin. For example, the official narrative related to the birth of the Khoja community, as extracted from *ginans* attributed to Pir Sadr al-Din (14th C.), clearly claims that Sindh, exactly a place named Kotri on the Indus River, was the cradle of the making of the Khojas as a community. Other groups claim to be of Sindhi origin, such as the Jarejas but were compelled to migrate to Gujarat, where they ruled Kutchch and the Western part of Kathiawar for centuries. Lohanas, for instance, were arguably from Punjab, but they were 'Sindhized'. Furthermore, focusing on Sindh is an innovative way to reflect on the issue of interactions between religions. The Hindu epic of Mahabharata contains mention of Sindh. Ismaili and Sufi Muslims started their proselytism in Sindh. Beyond Islam and Hinduism, Sindh was also a cradle for Buddhism, Jainism, and the Udasi branch of Sikhism.

The conference aims to address these questions: Was Sindh working as a matrix in the making of communities? When they refer to Sindh, is it about a mythical Sindh, and in this case, what was the benefit of referring to it? Or was it included in searching for roots in a 'real' territory, as if belonging to a soil was necessary to make a community? How did Sindh host various communities with syncretic ideologies and practices? These and similar questions will be examined by leading scholars of different communities under study, using data ranging from devotional literature to monuments.



Call for participants - Social Sciences Winter School in Karachi 2023

The second Social Sciences Winter School in Karachi is jointly organized by the **Centre for South Asian and Himalayan Studies** in Paris (CESAH, CNRS-EHESS) and the **Institute of Business Administration** (IBA). It will be held at IBA City Campus in Karachi from December 11th to 15th, 2023, and will address issues at the interface of **environmental change, societies at risk and social vulnerabilities**.



Students will choose one of the three workshops described below:

- Workshop 1 – Urban infrastructures, natural hazards and risk responses through uses of geotechnologies
- Workshop 2 – Dynamics of socio-ecosystems, local knowledge and adaptation strategies to climate risk
- Workshop 3 – Historical and sociological approaches to environmental studies

More info here:

- Website: <https://winterspy.hypotheses.org/pakistan>
- Facebook page: @winterschoolkarachi



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