

She Has Sindh

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What is Sindhiyat? Is it proximity to a region? Is it a language people speak? Did Sindh, as a geographical location, become irrelevant to the Sindhi diaspora living elsewhere? What is the everyday experience of being a Sindhi?

Answering these questions is a series of talks that deep dive into every aspect of Sindhiism. Rightly called 'Doorway to Sindh', these are explorations into different periods through architecture and cultural mapping available on Facebook and Instagram. While the target is a series of 50 such talks, currently they have 15 and work is underway on others.

Says Aruna Madnani, a Sindhi herself and the person behind this series, "During the pandemic, I realised I could reach out to scholars from across the border

Aruna Madnani's online talk series 'Doorway to Sindh' is a rich tapestry of a homeland by the Indus

By KHUSHBOO RAMNANE



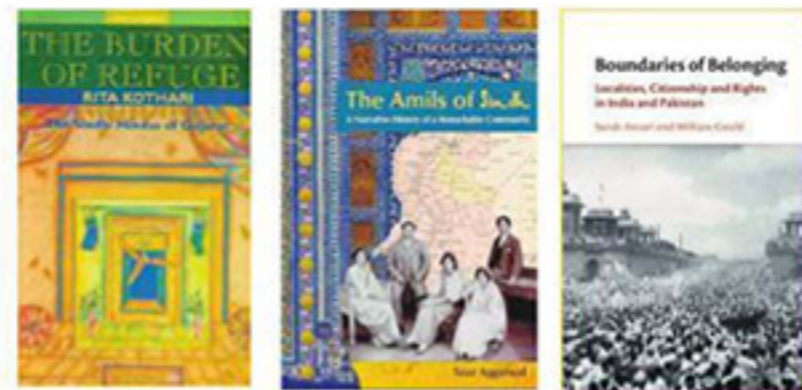
Aruna Madnani in Sindh; (below) books on Sindhiyat: *The Burden of Refuge* by Rita Kothari, *Amils of Sindh* by Saaz Aggarwal and *Boundaries of Belonging* by Sarah Ansari and William Gould



A fabric piece with intricate Sindhi embroidery (top); Syed Hizbullah Shah, the third Pir Pagaro (spiritual leader) who died in 1890



Rita Kothari; (below) Shabnam Virmani



and the world to give us a glimpse of their decades-long research. I had been conducting talks at the National Gallery of Modern Art and Bangalore International Centre, but the pandemic opened up doors to far wider opportunities."

Madnani is the Bengaluru-based founder of the Sindhi Culture Foundation, which she started in 2008 to promote awareness and interest in the rich heritage of Sindh. Her

vision and mission are to research and make available archives on Sindhi culture for everyone. Madnani loves Sindh nostalgia and made a trip to Sindh in Pakistan in 2018 to see the city her father grew up in.

In the initial sessions, they explore Sindh—real and imagined with Dr Rita Kothari and Dr Sarah Ansari, then move on to exploring different periods like Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, Mirpur Khas and more. For Kothari, professor of English at Ashoka University, Sonipat, Haryana, it was the gaze of the other that became the base of her lifelong ethnographic research on the Sindhi community. She owns up to Sindhiyat

and points towards some uncomfortable facts. "People think of Sindhis as greedy, and uneducated. It is also our proxy-ness to Muslims; we remind Hindus of being Muslim-like and hence become undesirable to them." For Kothari, this has also deepened her understanding of communalism in India.

Ansari from the University of London has conducted extensive research in the Sindh province and authored books including *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sindh, 1843-1947* and *Life after Partition: Migration, Community and Strife in Sindh, 1947-1962*.

In about nine episodes, Bengaluru-based documentary filmmaker Shabnam Virmani of The Kabir Project fame along with her contemporaries discuss Sufi and Sindhi poet Shah Abdul Latif. Latif's work is called *Shah Jo Rasalo* from which Virmani delves deep into Sur Samundhi. Surs are clusters of poems, also indicative of the rhythm.

In one of the videos that will be broadcast online, she explains "Latif was a turn of the century Sindhi poet. His oeuvre unfolds incredible detail about different layers of Sindhiyat through physical topographies (as he travelled extensively and hung

out with local communities like blacksmiths, fishermen and traders), history, economics and more. What is really striking to me is that he speaks through the voices of women who were part of love legends then. This makes him special." Like any other poetry, his poetry operates at multiple levels—physical, meta-physical and socio-political.

Doorway to Sindh promises to articulate a cultural underpinning, a glorious journey into Sindh, which was waiting to happen. After all, as they say, "We are all stories, in the end," comments Madnani. They are using their social media handles to drive traction for the launch. The series will be available on BookMyShow from next month.

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