

Chapter Twelve

Sharing our Stories: The Sindhi Voices Project

by *Natasha Raheja*

First my childish naiveté, and then my teenage arrogance, blinded me from the 80 years of rich history embodied in the grandparents that lovingly received my sister and me each year. My grandfather's passing in 2005 was a harsh reminder that I could not continue to wait until the next annual family India trip to spend time listening to and recording his memories. Since then, both a growing academic interest in themes of movement and partitioning along with the continuous personal exploration of my own multi-hyphenated identity have informed my decision to commit myself to listening, and through the Sindhi Voices Project, encouraging others to do the same. What began with informal meetings and conversations with Sindhi elders, during the year I spent in Lucknow on a language program, has grown to a more formalized endeavor – the Sindhi Voices Project.

Project Objectives

The project aims to document the life narratives of Sindhi elders, broadly defined to include individuals that left Sindh, stayed in Sindh, migrated into Sindh, and received and hosted Sindhi immigrants after the 1947 Partition of India. The project seeks to initiate intergenerational and intercommunity dialogue through a threefold mission. We aspire to

- 1) Build a publicly accessible virtual archive of the life narratives of Sindhi elders,
- 2) Develop a multimedia artistic exhibit of select oral histories, and
- 3) Produce a short film with an accompanying intergroup dialogue curriculum for youth.

One Oral History Interview Circuit

I write this piece from Delhi, where I am beginning one oral history circuit. Over the next ten months, I plan to travel across Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Sindh. During this time I will not only record oral histories and get material for the exhibit, but also and equally important, distribute our interview field kit so that the community is engaged through the opportunity to conduct and submit interviews on their own.

Mobilizing the Community

Reflecting our commitment to mobilize our community in the production and documentation of its history or, more precisely, histories, we have developed oral history interview field kit. The twelve page kit guides untrained interviewers with step by step instructions on how to conduct and submit an interview as per our project guidelines. **Just think, if each of us completed an oral history with an elderly person in our family and submitted the recording to the archive, we'd have a diverse collection in a matter of months!**

Involving Schools

In addition to distributing this field kit amongst Sindhi communities that are now located across the entire globe, we are working on implementing oral history in the history and social studies curricula of Sindhi medium schools in India and Pakistan. This assignment, in engaging students to record and evaluate an interview with an elder in their family or in the wider community, enhances the social studies process as history comes alive through the narration of a living person. Interview recordings would be stored at both the school library and become part of a larger Sindhi Voices Archive. We envisage this archive functioning as a consolidation site of previous oral history archival efforts in the community.

Engagement through Multiple Media

Recognizing the limitations of an online interview archive in terms of appeal and connectivity, we aim for further outreach and exposure, within and outside of the Sindhi community, through the physical circulation of an artistic multimedia exhibit that will showcase select oral histories. This exhibit will creatively depict a unique set of experiences and demographics, engaging patrons on multiple sensory levels by bringing together documentary photography, excerpted audio and narrative text.

The Larger Importance of the Project

Why do these histories matter? Beyond the great historical value of an archive for future generations to come, Sindhi life histories offer an insight into issues of migration and international living that characterize our increasingly globalized world today. In these narratives, lies an exploration of the simultaneously creative, destructive, and ambivalent effects of the movement of people, community, and culture.

An Invitation

To learn more about our current and future plans including the Anhad Project, we encourage you to visit our website at www.sindhivoices.org. There are many ways to get involved. **For starters, if you're an elder reading this or if you know an elder who would like to share their stories (anywhere in the world!), please share the relevant contact information using the form on our site. If you're feeling really inspired, download a field kit and help someone share their story!**

Let's have strong representation from Dallas, my hometown!

Natasha Raheja, one of our own, recently completed her MA in the Department of Asian Studies from the University of Texas at Austin and is the moving spirit behind the Sindhi Voices Project. The DFW Sindhi Association calls on its members to record the stories using the field kit and share them with the archive.