

Sharing Our Stories: Sindhi Voices Project Field Kit

The Sindhi Voices Project aims to document the life narratives of elders who lived through the 1947 Partition of India. This group is broadly defined to include individuals that, after the 1947 Partition of India, left Sindh, stayed in Sindh, migrated from India into Sindh, and even those that received emigrant Sindhis. We hope to engage the Sindhi community as we develop an archive of the oral histories collected and submitted using this field kit. This project encourages multi-generational and inter-community dialogue as interviewers and narrators and their unique life narratives will come together in the form of a historical archive and relevant community building projects.

The Sindhi Voices Project relies on volunteers like you to document interviews with Sindhi elders and share the recordings with our archive. It is our hope that this project will inspire future generations with the rich and complex stories of the Sindhi community's as well as re-affirm the historical value of first-person life narratives.

With permission, the Sindhi Voices Project field kit has been compiled with significant help from the Vietnamese-American Heritage Foundation's 500 Oral History Project Field Kit.

Visit <http://www.vietnameaseamerican.org/> for more information.

You can also read more about oral histories from the Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Guide: http://www.folklife.si.edu/education_exhibits/resources/guide/introduction.aspx, the Oral History Association's Guidelines: <http://www.oralhistory.org/do-oral-history/principles-and-practices/> and the Baylor Institute for Oral History Web Workshop: http://www.baylor.edu/oral_history/index.php?id=23560

We sincerely thank you for your participation.

Please visit our website or contact us for any more questions.

Website: <http://www.sindhivoices.org>

Email Address: sindhivoicesproject@gmail.com

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Oral History Overview

“Oral history is a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving, and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events. Oral history is both the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating the written word, and one of the most modern, initiated with particular aspects of historical experience which tend to be missing from other sources (personal relationships, domestic work, family life, etc.)”
– Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*

“Oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interview. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format. Recordings of the interview are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then placed in a library or archive. These interviews may be used for research or excerpted in publication, radio or video documentary, museum exhibition, dramatization or other form of public presentation.”
– Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*

Guidelines

1. Understand the subject.

Conduct some background research about the subject you are interested in at the library, on the Internet, or by visiting a museum or archive. Knowing more can help you ask better questions and yields a richer interview. **The interview can be conducted in Sindhi, Hindi, Urdu, English,** or any other language the narrator (interviewee) is comfortable speaking in.

2. Have a structured line of questioning.

Think of the interview as a building; ask foundational questions and build upon them in a coherent manner.

3. Ask open ended questions (how, what, why) rather than leading questions (do, did).

“What happened? How did you feel?” ~~Did you leave Sindh? Do you remember your childhood in Sindh?~~
Sometimes the best question is a statement. “Tell me more about that.”

4. Improvise.

LISTEN! Then you can ask relevant follow-up questions, even if they are not on your list. Know which questions are important, but do not feel bound by them. The questions are designed as a bare backbone structure to help you focus and guide the interview. You should be able to ask relevant questions about details to inspire emotions and further details.

5. Be active but not controlling.

Participate in the conversation without dominating it. Try not to interrupt but do not be afraid of silences – give the person you are interviewing time to think and respond. Be alert to what your tradition-bearer wants to talk about and be prepared to detour from your list of questions if he or she takes up a rich subject you haven’t even thought of.

6. Maintain appropriate body language.

Show genuine interest in the story and listen carefully to what your narrator is saying. Keep eye contact and encourage him or her with nods and smiles to acknowledge that you are processing everything. Try to give only non-verbal feedback. Avoid chuckles, and “uh-huhs.” Such verbal signals become easily excessive and are very tedious to transcribe!

7. Be sensitive.

The idea of this project is to facilitate a meaningful conversation between two generations. It is your chance to connect on an emotional level. Allow the narrator to speak freely about their experiences. Be prepared to show compassion as their stories may often be quite emotional. If the narrator is hesitant to share intimate details, try to guide the conversation without pressuring them or making them feel uncomfortable.

8. Take breaks.

Interviews usually range between 1-2 hours but may run longer. Be prepared to pause the interview to charge batteries, change tapes, transfer files to a hard drive or take a break if the narrator needs to.

The Interviewing Process

Pre-Interview Preparation:

1. **REVIEW ORAL HISTORY OVERVIEW AND FOLLOW WEB LINK ON THE FIRST PAGE FOR MORE GUIDANCE.** http://www.folklife.si.edu/education_exhibits/resources/guide/introduction.aspx
2. **CHOOSE RECORDING EQUIPMENT**
 - a. Use a reliable recording device
 - b. Record your interview in audio and if possible, video* format. If working with a video format, **use a tripod**, to place the camera in a fixed position on the narrator. The interviewer's image should not be included in the video recording.
 - c. If possible, please use an external microphone for better quality, especially if using your computer to record.
 - d. Before choosing your equipment, make sure that all recordings can convert into uncompressed digital files, preferably DVD for video or .wav format for audio.
 - e. Perform an equipment check a day before the interview, and bring extra media tapes/ batteries.

***Note:** Some people may not feel comfortable in front of a camera and should not be pressured to do so. Also, the ear is less forgiving than the eye. A good audio recording is much more valuable than a poor video recording!
3. **ASK NARRATORS TO FILL OUT BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION PAGE (or fill it out for them)**
 - a. The narrator form will provide you with a basic background of the person you will be interviewing, which will help you construct appropriate questions.
 - b. Review the biographical information page to update questions.

During the Interview:

4. **DURING THE INTERVIEW**
 - a. Choose a quiet place to interview with few distractions. Ask that phones be put on silent mode. Discourage "onlookers" unless the narrator requests a family member or translator to be present. Limit the number of people in the room. Ambient noises that capture the mood or setting are acceptable
 - b. Set aside at least **two hours** for the interview. You do not want to rush the interview.
 - c. Start the recording equipment and **begin the interview by stating the interviewer name first and then the narrator name as well as the location, date, and time of the interview.**
 - d. Sit near the narrator, and preferably facing them, or at a slight angle (on two ends of a sofa, for example) but try not to have an obstacle (a table) between you. Some memories may be painful to recall and elicit an emotional response. A table can create an emotional obstacle apart from the obvious physical one. Also, if you are close, you can engage directly with the narrator, eye contact, gestures, repeating a question. Some narrators may be hard of hearing and it will be useful to be nearer to them in case you need to engage them in a question more immediately through repetition.
 - e. Relax and enjoy listening to this person's unique life story! Take notes for follow up questions and to get spellings clarified.

After the Interview:

5. AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- a. Review and sign all permission forms and give copies to the narrator.
- b. Take a photograph of the participant. If they would like to use a different image, arrange for them to send you a digital photograph. Take photographs of the interview location, any religious alters, decorations, etc. and make copies of any other relevant objects, mementos, letters, refugee card, claim documents, news clippings, diaries, etc. that the narrator shares with you.

Post-Interview Checklist:

- ___ After the interview, ask the interviewer to suggest any other potential narrators and interview them or tell us about them!
- ___ Thank the narrator for their time and participation. Sending thank you notes by mail is always appreciated.
- ___ Fill out deed of gift form. Arrange for a copy of the form if the narrator makes such a request.
- ___ Fill out post-interview form.
- ___ Double-check all signatures and permission forms.
- ___ Label the audio/video tapes.
- ___ Label and pack all copies of relevant mementos and documents.
- ___ Pack all forms/equipment.
- ___ Re-charge and return borrowed equipment.
- ___ Make a digital copy of your interview so you can transcribe it. (**transcription is optional**)
- ___ Inform us via email or phone that your recorded interview is on its way!

Narrator Pre-Interview Biographical Data Form

Thank you for participating in the Sindhi Voices Project. The primary goal of this project is to document and preserve the life histories of Sindhis who have adolescent and childhood memories before 1947. The following information will help us interview you about your life experiences.

Narrator Contact Information:

Name:

Phone/Email:

Mailing Address:

Biographical Information:

Gender:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Cities/towns/villages, districts resided in Sindh (if any):

Places resided outside of Sindh (if any):

Occupation(s):

Religion (if any):

Formal Education (if any):

Languages able to Speak:

Languages able to Read:

Languages able to Write:

Class and/or Caste background:

Name of Spouse (if any):

of Children (if any):

If applicable:

Date of migration from Sindh:

First place of arrival:

Missing Persons:

Killed Persons:

For Interviewer:

Name of Interviewer:

Relationship to narrator:

Interviewer Email Address/Phone:

Sample Questions

Read this list of questions before your interview and adapt them to your needs. Listen carefully to the person being interviewed and ask follow-up questions. **Do not get too focused on asking all the questions listed in each paragraph.** These questions should guide the discussion, not structure it. Remember to ask one question at a time. Encourage personal, not generalized responses. Some questions might be asked in a different order and may not be applicable to each narrator. **If you're comfortable, just ask for a life sketch or to talk about defining life moments and ask some of these questions intermittently.**

Each narrator is unique and these sample questions may be inadequate or irrelevant.

First, TAG interview with your name, narrator's name, birthdate, today's date, time, and location.

Ex: My name is [interviewer's name] and I am conducting an oral history interview with [narrator's name] who was born on [birth date] on [date] at [time] in [location (city, state/province)]. This interview is being conducted as part of the Sindhi Voices Project.

Personal History:

-Can you describe the house you grew up in? Describe your hometown (urban neighborhood, small town, rural community, suburb?). What did people do for a living, what about for vacation? What were your neighbors like? What kind of food/meals did you eat? Describe a typical meal in your home.

- What are some of your childhood memories? What games did you play when you were a child? Did you sing verses when you played games? What were they? What kinds of toys did you play with? What kind of home entertainment was there? Music (live, gramophone), dance, plays? Were there craft

traditions? Were you taught any folk stories, songs, or dances? If so, can you share a song or story? What kinds of clothes did you wear and where did you get them? Did your family read newspapers or listen to the radio? What did the male and female elders in your family do for entertainment/leisure?

- From your childhood community, what places stand out most in your mind and why? Was there a particular park or garden you visited? Can you describe it? Do you have any memories of trees or bodies of water from your childhood/adolescence? Ask about the Sindhu River. What about a bazaar you went to often? Did you go to the cinema hall? Which films do you recall seeing? What types of places were you able to go to alone or with friends/family?

-What kinds of local gatherings and events were there? How did you celebrate special occasions? Cheti Chand? Diwali? Eid? Muharram? Which holiday did your family/community celebrate the most lavishly?

-- If you or someone in your family fell sick, where did you turn to for help? Did your family go to a specific pir for blessings or in sickness? Can you share the experience? Which places of worship did you visit? Darbars? Gurudwaras? Masjids? Temples? Did fakirs/sants come to your house? Any one in particular that you have memories of?

-What education have you had (formal/informal)? Any religious education? Can you describe your school/learning environment (even if home-schooled)? Did you have friends/classmates from different religious and class backgrounds? What were the relations between bhaiobands (business class) and amils (intellectual class)? Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs? Which figures were central to your community? Jhulelal? Any other icons? Did you hear of or worship Jhulelal in Sindh? What about Zinda Pir?

Family History:

- What do you know about your family surname? Are there stories about its history or origins? Has it changed? Why? Are there any naming traditions for children? What are they?
- How many siblings did you have? Did you live in a joint family? What was that experience like? How were the women in your family treated? Did your family have servants? How were they treated? What was their religious, ethnic, etc. background?
- (If married), Can you tell me about any stories surrounding your marriage or the births of your children?
- What languages do you speak? Do you speak a different language in different settings? Was it difficult for you to pick up a new language if you moved to a new place? Which scripts do you know? Which script do you prefer Sindhi to be printed in?
- What folk, religious, family, bedtime stories have your parents and grandparents told you in the past? Can you share these stories with us? What about stories about your more distant ancestors?

Culture and Tradition:

- Does your family have any special sayings or traditions? Are there special family traditions, customs, songs, foods?
- How are or are not Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Ismaili, Sikh, etc. elements of Sindhi religious identity expressed and/or reconciled for you and your family? How are Sindhi practices of religion similar or different than mainstream practices of Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, etc.
- What family heirlooms and mementos do you possess? Pictures, figurines, letters, jewelry? Why are they valuable to you? What is their history? Did you or anyone from your family keep a diary? **Ask the narrator if they could later share these items.**

Partition Experiences:

- What were your feelings about Independence? What was the mood on Independence Day? Do you remember how you found out and how you and your family reacted?
- How old were you when you found about the Partition? How did you find out? What were your feelings and thoughts? Were you or your family politically active in either the independence struggle or regional/national politics?
- What was the environment like in Sindh after Partition? How did the Partition affect your family and community? Why do you think so many Sindhis left Sindh after 1947?
- Did you or your family suffer any injuries or sicknesses as a result of the Partition? Was anyone you knew killed in the riots and violence? Did you directly witness or participate in any violence? Did you witness the January 1948 riots in Karachi? Did you or anyone you knew get physically sick from the Partition itself or memories of the Partition or times in refugee camps? Describe these experiences.

Immigration Questions (if applicable):

- If your family stayed in Sindh (and was Sindhi Hindu), what were the considerations made? If your family left, when did you leave Sindh and in what conditions? Who made the decision to leave and why? What possessions did you leave behind? Which family members came along or stayed behind? Where did you first arrive? What was the route you took? Can you describe the journey? Did you leave behind friends and family?
- What were your first impressions of your new home? Did you live in a refugee camp? For how long? Can you describe the experience? How did your family make a living after emigrating? What entertainment did you have in the camps? Did political leaders or entertainers come to the camps? Were you involved in any organized activities such as the Arya Samaj, RSS, music groups, satsangs?

- Did you know it would be a permanent move? Are you happy with your family's decision to leave Sindh? What was the hardest thing about starting a new life?

- What do you consider your vatan (homeland)? Have you ever wanted to go/have gone back to Sindh? Why or why not?

Life Today

- How do you feel that Sindh is now a part of Pakistan and not at all a part of India nor independent? What is the status of Sindhis in India/Pakistan/current location? Have Sindhis been accepted by the communities (Gujarati, Chinese, Spanish, Punjabi, etc.) they live amongst?

-Did you ever feel like you had to hide your Sindhi identity? Have you ever been discriminated against for being different or for being Sindhi in any of your places of residence? What was the experience? Have you ever been accused of not being a "proper" Christian Hindu, Muslim, Sindhi, American, etc because of your cultural practices?

- How did you end up in the city you are living in today? Do you think your sense of the Sindhi community was/is attached to physical boundaries (i.e. – area of Sindh)? Has your feeling and sense of Sindhi community changed over time? What do you think would be the current situation had Partition not occurred or if Sindh were allocated to India?

- How have the relations between Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims changed post-Partition? Do you follow the current situation in Sindh? What are your feelings toward the current flood situation? Do you keep in touch with Sindhi friends from different religions?

- In your life today, what things remind you of your

childhood in Sindh? A song? A particular smell? A food item? Do you feel nostalgia for pre-Partition Sindh? Do you ever have nightmares or haunting memories about Partition or daydreams about living in Sindh? Has your health been affected by bad memories? Have you ever gotten physically sick because of a bad memories or experiences What do you tell your family/friends about independence/partition?

- What is the difference between Sindhis, Hindus, and Muslims? Which of the following aspects of your identity take precedence and why: Sindhi, Hindu/Muslim, Indian/Pakistani? Do you feel there is a divide in the Sindhi community (i.e.) between Hindus and Muslims, "muhajir" and "maqaumi" residents)? In your opinion, how so, and can it be resolved?

-What traditions have you preserved, changed, given up? In your opinion, what is the most distinct marker of the Sindhi community? Is it important to keep cultural identity? Why or why not? What is your opinion on the status of Sindhi culture today and its future? Any advice you'd like to give youth today?

- Are there any other memories you'd like to share?

Remember to take or obtain a photo of the participant and make copies of relevant documents and mementos. If allowed, take photographs of the interview location/people around. Make records in the photo and document log.

After the interview, ask the narrator to share any relevant documents or photographs and suggest any other potential narrators.

Sindhi Voices Project Consent Form (Copy for Submission)

The purpose of the Sindhi Voices Project is to gather and preserve historical documents by means of the recorded interview, including, but not limited to, interviews of individuals who lived through the 1947 Partition. The Sindhi Voices Project believes that all viewpoints need to be included and respected, and encourages all who participate in an interview with us to speak openly about their experiences. Video recordings, audio recordings, photographs, document copies, and transcripts resulting from the Sindhi Voices Project interviews become part of the Sindhi Voices Project Archive and will be made available to scholars, students, and the general public.

Interview Agreement

I hereby give, grant, convey, and consign this oral memoir, as well as any photographs and documents provided by me in connection with this project, to the Sindhi Voices Project as a donation for historical and educational purposes.

I hereby grant and assign all of my rights of whatever kind pertaining to any and all of my interview(s) to the Sindhi Voices Project and public.

I hereby release you, the Sindhi Voices Project, (and/or any of its collaborators and/or derivative projects), your legal representatives, and assigns from all claims and liability relating to said interview recordings and materials.

I, in view of the historical and educational value of the interview or items discussed knowingly, voluntarily permit the Sindhi Voices Project to share and make full use of this interview, follow-up interviews, and related items.

Narrator (Signature)	Date	Interviewer (Signature)	Date
Narrator (Print)	Interviewer (Print)		

Thank you very much for participating in the interview process. If you have any concerns, we will be happy to discuss them with you. Please email us at sindhivoicesproject@gmail.com

Post-Interview Form

Interview Information:

Narrator Name:

Interviewer Name:

Date and exact time of Interview:

Interview Format: Audio __ Video__ Both __

Location:

Length of Recording:

Sound conditions (background noise, etc.):

Other people around (*if other people are in the room, they must also sign the release form*):

Recording Equipment used (recorder, camera, microphone, notes, etc and model/make):

Type of tape or media:

Interview Abstract Notes and feedback about interview (include major and unique topics discussed such as transport, childhood, food, refugee camps, riots, marriage, etc). *We'd also love to read your more personal reflections and response to the interview and the process. If inclined to share your reflections with us, please attach and submit an additional page(s):*

Photo Log:

Person photographed:

Photographer:

Date taken:

Location:

Photo conditions (light, weather, etc.):

General description (especially if they provided the photograph for you rather than you taking it):

Documents Log:

Please list information regarding any other photographs or Xerox copies of documents included:

Submission Guidelines

1. **Make three copies of the recorded audio/visual interview and transcription.**
Provide a copy to your narrator, keep one for yourself, and make one for the project.
2. **Transfer the interview to a CD or DVD and clearly label all items.**
.wav format or tape cassettes for audio recordings and MiniDV, DVAM, DVPRO, highest quality MPEG-2 on CD/DVD, format for video recordings are acceptable. **Note, we cannot accept MP3 files.** Label all files: Narratorfirstname.Narratorlastname.month.year.doc/wav/etc.
ex: MohiniKarnani.interview.Sept.2010.doc
3. **If completing a transcript, please include both a hard and soft copy.** Include the soft copy in an editable text file such as .doc, .docx, .txt format on the same CD, DVD as the audio interview if possible.
4. **Make copies of and clearly label any other documents** (photographs, news clippings, letters, diaries, mementos, etc.) **you are submitting. Transfer all digital photographs/scans to a CD of DVD** (the same one as before if there is sufficient space). Label all media with a marker. Ballpoint pen easily rubs off. Include the following info: Interviewer’s Name, Narrator’s Name, Date, Location, and Length.
5. **Ensure that all three required forms are completed with signatures and included in your submission.**

Submission Packet Checklist

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. Labeled Recording | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. 3 Original Completed Forms (Pre-Int, Deed of Gift, Post-Int) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Supplementary Documents – photos, letters, news clippings, etc. (Optional) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Transcription of Interview (Optional) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Using a reliable postal service, send submissions to:

Mailing Address:

Sindhi Voices Project 1440 Country Ridge Drive DeSoto, TX, USA 75115	OR	Sindhi Voices Project 1,Engineers Enclave Pitam Pura Road no. 44, near Madhuban Chowk. Delhi, India 110034	OR	Sindhi Voices Project F-13, Off Khyaban e Jami Block 9 Clifton, Karachi, Pakistan
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Email: sindhivoicesproject@gmail.com

If you would like confirmation of receipt of materials, please include your email address on the consent form. If an email address is not available, please list your phone number.

**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING AND HELPING MAKE
THE SINDHI VOICES PROJECT A SUCCESS!!**