



# Alternative Engagements with 'Homeland':

## Sindh as an Expression of Diasporic Sindhi Identity

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### Abstract

This paper is premised on a non-traditional understanding of the nature and role of the homeland in diaspora studies. For the Hindu Sindhis who were a religious minority and forced to flee their ancestral land of Sindh during the India-Pakistan partition of 1947, relative inaccessibility and lack of identification with the primordial homeland has meant significant detachment in the 65 years since. Sindh as purely ancestral or as the actual province in present day Pakistan therefore holds little value in their everyday lives. This paper shifts away from a conservative and literal reading of the homeland as territorially bound and geographically distant, to an approach that sees the homeland as manifest in the diaspora itself. This homeland is mobile, mutable and multi-sited, and is engaged through regular expression of Sindhi identity. The two domains of religion and language are analysed as daily fields of engagement in which members of the Sindhi diaspora both sustain and struggle to keep alive their ethno-cultural heritage. In this context, it is argued that for the Sindhis who can no longer literally engage with their motherland in its physical capacity, these alternative engagements allude to and recreate forms of diasporic homeland in everyday and momentous expressions. This is the homeland that is real and meaningful by its function in the contemporary diaspora rather than just by discernible terrain or a utopic vision in the diasporic imaginary.

### The Anthem Controversy

A few years ago, controversy surrounding the word 'Sindh' in the Indian national anthem brought to light the importance of understanding 'homeland' as more than territorial space. The event makes a fitting start to this paper, which explores alternative modes of engaging the diasporic homeland beyond its physical form and boundary. Sindh, the territory in question, became a province of Pakistan in the partitioning of British India, in 1947. Sindh's Hindu minority was forced to abandon their homeland when the imperial rulers left the country divided by religious conflict between Hindus and Muslims. It has since become necessary to distinguish between a largely Muslim population that resides in Sindh, and a globally dispersed Sindhi diaspora that is for the most part Hindu. A large number of the diaspora resettled across the border in modern India's cities, but as is apparent from the anthem case at hand, their loss of ancestral land in Sindh remains a haunting and sensitive issue to date. The case provides insight into the meanings that members of the Sindhi diaspora attach to Sindh, which in turn reflect how it makes sense to them today.

The incident began in January 2005, when a petition filed by one Mr Sanjeev Bhatnagar of Delhi was admitted by the Supreme Court. According to coverage in *The Times of India* online, the motion was to remove the word 'Sindh' from the anthem, since above all else, it no longer geographically formed a part of post-partition India and so, had no business

being privileged as such. In essence, 'Sindh', insofar as it was being defined territorially, was rendered meaningless. The motion continued: by revising the lyrics, Mr Bhatnagar also sought to amend an act that violated the sovereignty of Pakistan, since the province of Sindh now rightfully belonged to the Islamic republic. On this was stamped the allegation that the anthem was guilty of textual fallacy. The issue was resurrected with a similar plea made six years later, this time on account of the alleged discrepancy between singing the word as 'Sindhu', and writing it as 'Sindh'. Both pleas were dismissed.

Echoing the sentiments of India's sizeable Sindhi community, the court legitimated the retention of "Sindh" in the national anthem; they explained it to mean much more than actual land that fell outside the current national boundary line. Interestingly, the news articles reveal that the anthem, though written in 1911 for colonial masters of an undivided India, was only ratified by the Constitutional Assembly in 1950.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the Indian parliament then saw no reason to change the anthem even after three years of Sindh's assignment to Pakistan. 'Sindh', according to both the bench and community leaders, stands for the centuries' old Indus civilization, whose people are its living representatives both within Indian borders and beyond. It is also symbolic of the river Sindhu, along which this ancient civilization developed. Furthermore, the authorities exalted 'Sindh' as resonant with the cause for Indian independence, of which the Sindhis were an indispensable part. Removal of this word carried much more weight than the word alone; it would translate into the unjust act of erasing a part of Indian history, and deeply wound a people already dispossessed of their original land.<sup>2</sup>

### **Beyond Territory: Sindh of the Diaspora**

'Sindh' as river, a civilisation, a culture and heritage, a people and their history, is testimony to 'Sindh' being much more than 'homeland' in the sense of 'land' per se. Its polysemy is evident in the variety of interpretations provided and all meanings hold true. This paper takes on these multi-faceted expressions of

Sindh and explores in discursive fashion, alternative modes of engaging the diasporic homeland, where 'homeland' is similarly understood as existing beyond its physical conception, i.e. as more than just a territorially bound entity. This exploration builds on the case of the global Hindu Sindhi diaspora whose conditions do not meet the requirements of literal engagement with their ancestral land of Sindh. In this regard, tangible measures of diaspora 'engagement' and 'development' – two growing sub-fields of diaspora studies – are replaced by other means of sustaining diasporic Sindhi identity. Contemporary South Asian diasporas that are characterised by voluntary migration for better livelihood have yielded studies focused overwhelmingly on more direct and visible forms of giving back to the home country. These include, for example, remittance flows, investments in infrastructure building, and social development in sectors such as healthcare, education and tourism. For others, such as the Sri Lankan diasporic communities particularly in Canada and the United Kingdom, political reforms dominate the agenda in relations with the homeland. Growing recognition of the power and potential of diasporas has also led to their influence in informing recent state policies such as those of India (see for example, Devesh Kapur's *Diaspora, Development, and Democracy* (2010)).

None of these engagements or means of development however, apply to the Hindu Sindhi diaspora, who neither recognise present day Sindh as their homeland nor are recognised by the Pakistani state as overseas citizens. They do not have a desire to reconnect and remain politically indifferent to the current state of affairs in Sindh. This, however, does not necessarily mean that 'Sindh' does not matter or figure meaningfully in the diaspora. 'Sindh' for the diasporic Sindhi, is more accurately conceived as an expression of their identity in their everyday lives. In order to understand the reality and function of 'Sindh', the notion of homeland needs to be decentered and reconfigured as it makes sense to these overseas communities.

This paper puts forward the notion of a homeland that is manifest in the diaspora itself; vulnerable to change and therefore mobile just as the diaspora is. It

is an instrumental homeland that is expressed and conjured (and so exists) in various forms to serve different functions and hold multiple meanings for members of its diaspora. The core link here is that between the expression of ethnic identity and how such expression creates, sustains and reinvents a sense of homeland. By conceptualising a shift-able and multi-sited possibility, and therefore plural notion of homeland, this paper addresses the strong lateral connections amongst the multi-locale establishments of the well-dispersed Hindu Sindhi diaspora, which influence and mutually reinforce the production of Sindhi identity (Clifford 1994). This approach expands the understanding of the role of homeland in diaspora studies beyond its literal and conservative, yet predominant confines. The definition of 'homeland' is more than just territorially bound, no longer only centralised – as the untainted (and therefore unchanged) powerful symbol of utopia in the diasporic imaginary, and limiting as sedentary and singular in nature. While this traditional conception of homeland is not disputed, it is considered lacking and its utility in the contemporary diaspora is questioned, particularly for generations of Sindhis whose idea of Sindhihood is not informed or affirmed by either a tangible connection to territorial Sindh or an immaterial one to an imagined Sindh.

Since their exile, Sindh has been perceived as hostile by many in the diaspora (Falzon 2003: 668). For its volatile state and imminent dangers today, such a perception of Pakistan in general continues to persist. Sindh therefore comes across as relatively inaccessible as well as undesirable for the diminishing prospects of reclaiming any lost inheritance. Decades of separation has resulted in significant detachment from Sindh by her largely affluent, economically savvy merchant diaspora, whose prosperity, one could argue, has resulted in their political indifference toward fighting for a stake in their primordial homeland. This capital-wielding prowess and political apathy ironically finds its origins in ancestral Sindh. Kothari (2004) notes that it was the affluent religious minority of Hindu Sindhis who held the province's economic power while political clout was vested in the majority Muslim peasantry.<sup>3</sup> Though even as they remain un-

interested in securing a political identity for themselves, the diasporic Sindhis' highly interconnected networks across far-flung regions sustained by their trademark merchantry, endogamy and social events like the annual Sindhi Sammelan ('gathering'), do enable and perpetuate a consciousness of being an ethnic collective. This is in spite of their diverse establishments in locations worldwide.

Indeed, Sindhi communities comprise an evolved, multi-locale and multi-generational diaspora today. Its members differentially straddle hybrid identities which are productions of their host environments enmeshed simultaneously with a version of Sindhihood that is subscribed to. For instance, while personal experiences of growing up in Sindh and the trauma of partition inform the nostalgia and fading memories of the waning number of elderly Sindhis, the middle and younger generations share no such historical connection with their ancestral land that they can associate with. Rather, for them, Sindh is more plausible as the awareness of their forefathers' tradition as *Nanak panthis* or 'followers of Nanak' – the Sikh guru. To date, Sindhi families regularly visit the *gurudwara* – the Sikh place of worship, more so than they frequent the temples of Hindu deities.

Similarly, it is more probable for Sindhi youth to envision ancestral devotion to *Jhulelal* – the iconic deity of the Sindhi diaspora and River God, who is celebrated annually on *Cheti Chand*, the Sindhi New Year. In her analysis on the role religion plays in being an Indian Sindhi, Dominique-Sila Khan writes about the integral position *Jhulelal* holds in defining Sindh identity, whose value, she suggests, can be 'raised to the rank of a "national deity"' (2008: 74). Likewise, Michel Boivin attributes a 'hero' status to *Udero Lal* (one of the few names for *Jhulelal*) for his important role in unifying the Sindhi diaspora as the all-encompassing Hindu embodiment of this scattered community (2004: 146). While the sustained practices of adherence to *Guru Nanak* and worship of *Jhulelal* are elaborated subsequently, so is the idea that the religio-cultural environment of pre-partition Sindh is temporarily manifest in the places of worship where these practices are enacted. Furthermore, it is proposed that the *mandir* or 'temple' set up in the homes

of many Sindhi families, within which photographs and tiny *murtis* ('statuettes' of gods and goddesses) of various saints and deities are venerated equally, is itself a permanent reflection of the religious eclecticism that characterised the Sindh of yore.

Yet, while in these humble and mundane ways, Sindhis in the diaspora are able to carry on with the religious customs of their ancestors, other traditions that also express their identity prove more challenging to sustain. In particular, I refer here to the linguistic tradition. It would seem that although distance between Sindhi communities does not hinder inter-diasporic contact, estrangement from the homeland – both physical and emotional – does threaten the diaspora's ability to sustain its mother tongue. There are, for example, growing concerns among older Sindhis over the attrition of the Sindhi language, which they attribute to the absence of a motherland. Sindh as a place of physical access, they claimed, would have served as a reference point to cultivate literal Sindhi expression through place attachment, i.e. via a sense of belonging to somewhere. This was the explanation given in response to an observation made during fieldwork conducted on the Sindhi merchant communities in Japan. Sindhi children in Kobe were speaking and being spoken to in English in their households, compared to Gujarati and Punjabi children who conversed with their families in their mother tongues. A similar note was made at a Sindhi wedding dinner in Vancouver, where Sindhi youth from the Canary Islands such as Las Palmas and Tenerife, most naturally communicated to each other and their parents in fluent Spanish. They were then chided for being inconsiderate and pushed to speak in English; Sindhi, apparently, came third in line.

Efforts to keep alive the Sindhi language – an integral part of the Sindhi identity – have recently taken the form of virtual engagement with Sindhi tutorials available online and the alphabet being converted into Romanised script to reach out to youngsters more easily. A later section of the paper discusses these efforts at greater length and questions the extent to which sustaining a sense of being Sindhi is possible without the anchor of an ancestral homeland to touch base with. If Sindh is manifest in the expression of Sindhi

identity, how important is its territorial form or at least the notion of access to it, necessary to sustain this expression?

### Religious Traditions in Ancestral Sindh

As was mentioned earlier, the way of religious life in pre-partition and in fact, pre-colonial Sindh (i.e. before its annexation to the Bombay Presidency in 1843) was eclectic, with the teachings of various paths observed harmoniously. It was a benign and mystical Sufi culture that prevailed at the time, one which upheld the virtues of religious syncretism, and where lines between 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' were blurred by equal reverence to deities and saints of both faiths. In fact, the deity *Jhulelal* himself is the subject of confusion and inquiry for his embodiment of the multifaceted nature of Sindhi following: 'Was he an incarnation of the Vedic Varuna, an avatar of Krishna, a yogi of the Nath sect, a manifestation of the Coranic Khwaja Khizr who had drunken the elixir of immortality, a Sufi saint, an Ismaili missionary under the guise of a Qalandar, a precursor of Kabir and Nanak's "syncretic" message?', asks Khan (2008: 81). Other scholarly works (see Boivin 2004; Kothari 2004; Ramey 2008) give similar accounts of the atypical and unorthodox versions of Hinduism and Islam practiced by the people of Sindh then. In fact, Kothari's title, "Sindhis: Hardening of Identities after Partition" (2004, underline emphasis mine), is telling of the pivotal period in time that effected a significant divide in the population. The turmoil of tensions then necessitated the induction of an apparently distinct 'Hindu' people from a uniform 'Muslim' order so that individuals could fortify themselves with aligned interests.

The notion that such religious distinction could have been largely circumstantial is upheld by observations of current practices in the contemporary Sindhi diaspora, which indicate that original influences persist to present day. Moreover, Kothari's concise feature in the *Economic and Political Weekly* details the evolution of religious practice by Hindu Sindhis, concentrating particularly on the turbulent years of

1920-1947 leading up to partition. She shows how socio-religious boundaries that were once proudly porous, fell prey to a political campaign at whose center was the subject of Sindh's autonomy from the Bombay Presidency. That critical juncture divided the people into Hindu and Muslim camps, represented by the organisations of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League respectively.

The article also states most tragically that, 'It was in Sindh that the question of partition was first raised informally in 1938 and eventually a resolution supporting the demand for Pakistan made in 1942' (ibid: p. 3888). Up until then, the people of Sindh had, to varying degrees, distinguished themselves along lines of caste, regionality and occupation but were never so distinctly divided by religious difference. Today however, Sindh is in its entirety a province of the Islamic nation-state of Pakistan; unlike the states of Punjab and Bengal that were internally divided, Sindh was delivered intact for its Muslim majority, despite urban centers such as Hyderabad and Karachi having a disproportionately large Hindu presence (Falzon 2004; Markovits 2000). Even though the idea of partition was born in the province, the irony of an undivided Sindh meant the complete loss of ancestral land for the Hindu Sindhis; they were left displaced without a physically accessible homeland that would have anchored the production and sustenance of their ethnic identity, culture and heritage.

### Religious Practices of the Sindhi Diaspora

*Oh Sindhi! May God be with you.  
May you spread happiness.  
Wherever you find your people, call it home.  
Wherever you find Sindhis, call it your Sind.*

- From 'Shadow Play' by Prabhu Wafa  
(As cited in Falzon 2003: 662)

The excerpt above by Sindhi poet, Prabhu Wafa, captures in essence, the act of transplanting the homeland that is mobile rather than a geographically confined and fixed physical entity. In the act of displacement that created the Hindu Sindhi diaspora, the homeland is also displaced and gradually re-created in the homes of its multiply placed diaspora. In

this way, its multi-sitedness parallels the global dispersion of its people as it takes on various forms and meanings that are context and generation specific, amongst other influencing factors. The homeland is inextricably tied to the identity formations in the diaspora and is, in other words, portable, carried along to be resurrected and manifest in the diaspora itself. Decentering the traditionally defined homeland in this manner is not new. In fact, its alternative expression with particular regard to the case of the Sindhi diaspora has also been explored before. Maltese anthropologist Mark-Anthony Falzon (2003) makes the argument for a more practical application of the 'homeland' when he resituates it as centres or "cultural hearts" such as Bombay, which is home to a prominent Indian Sindhi community and to where many others in the Sindhi diaspora regularly 'return' for a variety of reasons. These include kin relations, business engagements, property or a return for just a wedding function. In other words, Bombay is more realistically the accessible Sindh.

As they build their communities in new homes overseas, the Sindhis reinvent traditions that come to be associated with the production of diasporic identity. These are not entirely new traditions built from scratch, but amalgamations or hybrid identities alluded to earlier in the paper. The Sindhi diaspora invokes through knowledge of the elderly – via their memories for example – inherited customs that can be replicated abroad. Two of the most well-sustained of these customs has been the faithful adherence to *Guru Nanak* and a more vigorous revival of *Jhulelal* whose worship, according to Boivin (2004), has taken on a new form with elements added by the diaspora. Amongst these novel additions is a visual representation of the River God as a statue typically sitting on a fish – his mode of transport – against a backdrop of water. *Mandirs* dedicated solely to the deity are also cited as a diasporic development by Boivin, who associates the investment of these activities with the renewal of a distinctly Sindhi identity in India and beyond. This paper carries forward this association to suggest that the space created by the structure of these temples also bears great meaning. It fosters a collective sense of belonging that can be tied to a physical space,

even if only temporary, lasting the length of a visit for prayer. It is significant that many of these *mandirs* are built and housed within complexes that serve as the host country's official Sindhi association centre. They are multi-purposeful, functioning as a place for social gatherings, as a school for Sindhi language classes, and in the case of Kobe's Indian Social Society (ISS), even housing residential units whose owners, if not occupants, are all Sindhi. Other examples of such multi-purpose centers include the Hindu temples in Hong Kong and Manila, and the Graha Sindhu building in Jakarta (see Thapan 2002 for detailed case study analyses of these locations), as well as the Singapore Sindhi Association. Religious customs are therefore easily subsumed within a larger socio-cultural context, somewhat keeping in line with religion as more a way of life than the instillation of strict doctrine in an isolated environment.

In Kobe, Japan, some Sindhi women have formed a group, which, for several years now, visits the *Guru Nanak Darbar* every Friday afternoon to read the *Sukhmani Sahib* – a set of hymns from the holy book of Sikh scriptures, the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*. It is noteworthy that the *Darbar*, the only Sikh place of worship in the city, is located within the densely clustered Indian-Sindhi neighbourhood of *Nozaki-dori*. In fact, informants revealed that before the *Darbar* was built, the *Guru Granth* – the holy book – was brought to Japan by Sindhis and kept in the family's household for years, read from and its sessions attended regularly by both Punjabis and Sindhis in the local community. It is also worth a mention that these Friday prayers are distinctly a Sindhi initiative and request of the *Darbar's* resident *ragi*, or person who performs the recitation. The event is to be distinguished from the usual Sunday *kirtan* ('singing' or 'prayer' ritual) for which most of the Punjabi Sikhs but also members of other Indian ethnic groups, including Sindhis, are in attendance. Sindhi weddings are also known to take place in the *gurudwara* where the couple circumambulates the *Guru Granth* rather than walks around a fire at the temple, which is central in Hindu belief. In similar vein, many Sindhi families believe in deriving a newborn's initial from the 'Guru' (i.e. the same *Guru Granth*), and often hold their

child's naming ceremony at the *gurudwara*.

The sustained tradition of concurrently embracing other teachings is evident in the same Sindhi women who read the *Sukhmani Sahib* also attending *bhajans* ('prayer hymns') at *Sathya Sai Baba* congregations at the Hindu temple of Kobe's ISS. Others are devoted followers of the spiritual movement led by *Radha Soami* and faithfully partake in his *satsang* ('prayer get-together'), yet other Sindhis hold true to the *Dhan Nirankari* sect that believes in universal brotherhood. That Sindhis are varied in their belief systems is certainly not the unique feature; what is meaningful here is the simultaneous adherence to multiple faiths by the same Sindhi individual, and this eclecticism is no more clearly visible than in the composite nature of make-shift altars found in Sindhi homes. The shared space in which deities and saints of various paths are placed and revered equally, is a microcosmic representation of Sindhi identity that finds its syncretic roots in ancestral Sindh. It may be a mundane presence of the household's everyday setting but is precisely for that reason a fixture of Sindhi identity that both old and young are subtly exposed to for a prolonged period of time. These daily acts of worship are brought intensely to the fore in melodramatic fervour of performance rituals when celebrating annual occasions such the Sindhi New Year of *Cheti Chand*. To reiterate an earlier point, enacting this religious devotion within the social context of a party or cultural get-together at the multi-functional center also makes the event attractive for all age groups in the diaspora. Other than *Cheti Chand*, the occasions of *Shivratri* and *Ganesh Chaturthi* that venerate the Hindu deities, Shiva and Ganesha, are similarly celebrated by diasporic Sindhis.

By embracing a plural expression of faith in the home and carrying on the practices of regular worship at the *gurudwara*, many Sindhi families perpetuate the religious way of life of Sindh in the time of their forefathers. There is, in the mundane nature of these events, an effective transmission of custom to successive generations, whether as a conscious reinforcement of Sindhi identity or as purely out of daily habit. Religious syncretism in Sindhi households today is an enduring feature through which a form of the primor-

dial homeland is successfully mobilised in spite of place. Where physical location is of value, this section has attempted to show the possible, if only temporal, manifestation of an ethnic abode in alternative spaces such as the Sikh *darbar*, Hindu *mandir* or more subtly, in the permanent presence of the all-encompassing altar at home.

### Loss of Land, Death of a Language?

The declaration of an elderly Sindhi informant comes to mind at this point. This was during the same field trip that I had made to Japan in 2008. A staunch 'Indian community man of Yokohama', as he had so described himself, the octogenarian had proudly proclaimed that the reason why Sindhis so easily adapt wherever they go is because they are skillful in picking up new languages. Learning how locals speak allows them to quickly and naturally immerse in their host environment and this skill, he explained, could be attributed to the extensive nature and complex sounds inherent in the Sindhi language. It has led to the evolved ability of Sindhis in general to, very easily 'roll their tongues', at will. The praise becomes bitterly poignant in the context of David's grim findings that predict the death of the Sindhi language as a means of communication in itself, in a mere 20 to 30 years' time (2001: 193). Tragically, the successful immersion of Sindhis in their places of residence may be occurring at the expense of their Sindhi identity.

Kumar (2010) highlights hybridised forms of spoken language in middle generations of the Sindhi diaspora. This is the generation which is today in their 60s and 70s. They were brought up in a densely clustered Sindhi environment in India, whose geographical proximity to Sindh and temporal climate of post-partition security in a distinctly Sindhi identity cannot be ignored as influential factors in nurturing the Sindhi language. Also, even if they migrated abroad, this generation was raised by parents who had themselves grown up in ancestral Sindh and consequently, as children, were regularly exposed to Sindhi speech, and for some, the Sindhi script.

Decades later, in established settlements overseas, Sindhi merchants are as fluent in Osaka street slang

as they are in Sindhi when they converse with each other. The Sindhi merchant wives however, showcase a clearer sign of evolved hybridity in their speech with phrases that are partly in Sindhi, partly in Japanese and occasionally interspersed with English (see Kumar *ibid*). Sindhi usage, however, is less fruitful amongst younger Sindhis who have a much more diluted or almost negligible connection to their ancestral homeland. Like David (*ibid*), who finds sustenance difficult with no utility for the Sindhi language in the Malaysian Sindhi diaspora's attempts to adapt, Kumar (*ibid*) notes the long term effects of enrolling Kobe's Sindhi children in international schools where English is the singular means of communication across diverse backgrounds. In fact, Sindhi parents in Japan complained that teachers actively discouraged use of the mother tongue at home in order for the children to get more comfortable with English. As a result, even the most trusted and effective means of language transmission – via the oral tradition – is restricted by practical application and requirements of the everyday. The dire situation imprints in my mind the lonesome placards I noticed in the house of one Sindhi family in Kobe. The cut-outs held scribbles of the days of the week written in Arabic Sindhi script to serve as a reminder for the ailing grandmother of the house. Propped up, they sat humbly on the television mantle in the family's living room, neglected for the most part under the florescent glare of a screen that either featured sitcoms on the Disney Channel or soaps on the Indian cable's Zee TV.

Attrition of the Sindhi language has led to efforts by various members of the community to make it more accessible to the diaspora. As a result, free-of-charge Sindhi tutorial learning sites such as 'Sindhi Sangat' ([www.sindhisingat.com](http://www.sindhisingat.com)) and 'RomanizedSindhi.org' have recently become available online. These websites reflect the concerted efforts of organisations such as the Indian Institute of Sindhology and the Alliance of Sindhi Associations of Americas Inc, USA, to create and disseminate a standardised Roman Sindhi web portal for the diaspora. These initiatives follow in line behind prominent Sindhi sites already in existence but which harbour different motives. They include the politically charged World Sindhi

Congress (WSC) and the more social network of SANA – the Sindhi Association for North America. Online newsletters and e-magazines such as 'BR International', 'Beyond Sindh' and 'Sindhi Tattler', also add to the avenues through which Sindhis the world over keep in touch and on par with fellow Sindhis elsewhere. A venture not too long ago saw young Singaporean Sindhis kick-start a cultural newsletter aptly titled 'Cha Thio', meaning 'what happened'. Other than community events, the issues also featured Sindhi recipes and informative write-ups of Sindhi customs and the meanings of certain colloquial phrases. Taking to the web and print media to save a dying language and by extension, a threatened culture, can be considered a contemporary revival of how Sindhi poets and scholars of pre-independent India inspired the masses with their poems and songs in the struggle for freedom (Jotwani 2006). The creation of these virtual spaces for the survival of Sindh is a move in line with the times, and a possible reconstruction of the motherland, as contextualized by Boivin (2004), who nevertheless also questions its sufficiency in maintaining the Sindhi identity. I wonder the same.

### **Sindh as an Expression of Sindhi Identity: Concluding Thoughts**

This paper has sought to advance alternative conceptions of the homeland by shifting attention away from its territorial fixity to analysing possible manifestations in the diaspora, through everyday expressions that are both figurative and literal. The Sindhis' religious syncretism and the current state of their language were discussed as fields of engagement in which the diaspora perpetuates its ethnic identity, and by extension, if only fleetingly, recreates a sense of belonging. In this regard, the paper conceives of the diasporic homeland to be displaced and resituated just like the diaspora. Religious places of worship, including the temples found in Sindhi family households, were considered both transitory and permanent spaces in which a form and feeling of 'homeland' is manifest.

A more technologically advanced initiative to sustain Sindh today finds it gaining an increasingly

prominent presence online. This was contextualised as a virtual reinvention of the homeland through causes pursued to keep Sindhi culture, and therefore identity, alive. Yet amidst these laudable initiatives, one is reminded of the irresolvable factor attributed to the decline of the Sindhi language: the absence of a central physical base; a point of origin that can be accessed and returned to, to evoke and sustain a rooted sense of Sindhihood in successive generations. For all its potency and boundless reconstruction, the imagined homeland is thus still in some way lacking, and a pallid version of the original, lost homeland. Alternative engagements with alternative conceptions of 'homeland' are in this respect, also an argument to sustain the ever elusive 'homeland' itself, as it extends the indefinite process of re-producing the Sindhi identity.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The anthem was written by Rabindranath Tagore, a famous Indian poet and Nobel laureate.

<sup>2</sup> Information about the anthem controversy was retrieved from a number of articles featured in *The Times of India* online. Complete citations of the articles are listed in the bibliography at the end of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> One could also extend this argument to explain similar apathy prevalent in the contemporary Sindhi diaspora, towards securing civil and political liberties in their adopted places of residence.

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