

Different Histories and Geographies of the Indus Delta

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This paper presents different historical and geographic narratives of the Indus delta region of Sindh, Pakistan. Through the biography of Abdul Razaque Jat, a storyteller of different times and spaces, I show how one can engage in critical conversations about memory, citizenship and history in Pakistan. Building on Abdul Razaque Jat's narrative, I use the examples of the Shah Jahan Mosque in Thatta and the history of the Portuguese and Goans in Sindh to show how histories of the Indus delta were un-parochial in the past. The paper asks how we should think about histories that are not written, archived, or narrated officially and yet are not dead, lost, or forgotten. I share ethnographic encounters in public spaces like tea-cafes, fishing jetties, shrines and male guesthouses that become the foundation of a new understanding of how history and geography function in the Delta. The paper will situate these narratives in my larger research that shows that in contemporary Pakistan the Delta's poor population invents survival strategies by utilizing and co-opting material, social and ideological resources. It also demonstrates how a lack of water in the Delta pushes fishermen beyond Pakistan's maritime borders into Indian waters and how those arrested by the Indian Navy end up in Indian jails for years, without recourse to any legal help. Understanding the precarious lives of Pakistanis who inhabit such marginal rural spaces provides necessary insight into Pakistan's political ecology, knowledge that is central to anthropological inquiry, particularly with ongoing discussions of climate change and its social impacts.