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Significance of Research

My dissertation research examines ways in which Sindhi Sufi poetry performance is used as a tool for imparting Islamic teachings to rural Muslims in Kachchh, Gujarat, a region in western India on the border with Sindh, Pakistan. For my fieldwork in Kachchh, I worked with non-professional singers, who are primarily agriculturalists and pastoralists, and with professional drummers from the Langa hereditary musician caste. The study of Sindhi Sufi musico-poetic performance in Kachchh is of significance to Pakistan studies because it is revealing of the contours of post-Partition cultural life in the region of greater Sindh. In my dissertation I argue that poetry performance, musical and otherwise, is a central means by which Kachchhi Muslims remain connected to Sindh, which is for many Muslims in Kachchh the primary locus of valued cultural production (especially poetry, music, and textiles). I examine how different forms of media have enabled the age-old ties between Sindh and Kachchh to continue after Partition: performers in Kachchh learned much of their repertoire by listening to Pakistani radio transmissions and smuggled cassettes, and these days they remain connected to Pakistani mediatized music through smart phone-based social media. I also discuss the exchange and production of musico-poetic knowledge between Pakistani and Indian poets and performers of Sindhi Sufi poetry since the 1950s, thus tracing a history of a Sindhi musical culture that continued to thrive into the 2000s despite the increased difficulty in cross-border travel and communication after the 1971 India-Pakistan war. The social facts of Muslim musical life in Kachchh are relevant to understanding contemporary western India because they run against the grain of Indian national narratives in which Pakistan is viewed as an enemy nation; indeed, they reveal how Muslim Kachchh in certain ways remains a peripheral region of