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Sītā of Sindh

SUMMARY: The aim of this paper is to show how the Sindhī community in India (Rājasthān) builds and strengthens its identity by using both traditional and modern means of transmission. The process of reinterpretation of tradition will be demonstrated by discussing the *Ūmar–Mārvī* story, which belongs to the repertoire of orally transmitted local Sindhī folk stories. The *Ūmar–Mārvī* story mainly emphasizes local patriotism and adherence to motherland. The message of the story is still valid in the 21st century. In the *Surabhi*, the literary magazine on Sindhī literature in the Hindī language issued periodically in Jaypur, it took the modern form of a comic book. Thus, it provides another example of a well-known fact in Indian culture, that of the old being repeated but in a new form. Despite using modern means of transmission, traditional mechanisms can still be seen. It seems that it is not enough for the Sindhī community to continue using the folk story but, moreover, it is necessary to give the story a higher rank (a recognised one) by placing it within the frames of the mainstream tradition, that is the so-called Great Tradition of the Hindu culture. This aim is achieved by making the heroine Mārvī equal to Sītā, and, thus, the Sindhī story is linked with the great epic *Rāmāyaṇa*. As a result, the final product is an old Sindhī folk story presented in the form of a comic book, targeted for a wider audience than the Sindhī community exclusively, entitled *Sītā of Sindh* (*Sindh kī Sītā*).

KEYWORDS: Sindh, Sindhī community, Sindhī folk stories, *Ūmar–Mārvī* story, Sītā

Introduction

The aim of this paper[1] is to show how the Hindu Sindhī community in India builds and strengthens its identity by using both traditional and modern means of transmission. The process of reinterpretation of tradition will be exemplified by the narrative of *Ūmar–Mārvī* or *Ūmar–Mārūī* that belongs to the repertoire of local Sindhī folk stories transmitted orally.
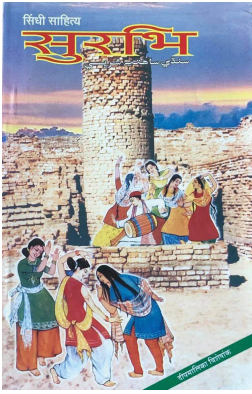
Sindhīs are originally inhabitants of the province of Sindh, which is now part of Pakistan. Many Sindhī Hindus migrated to India after the Partition of British India in 1947 and in the late 1960s during and after the second war between India and Pakistan (1965). The majority of them settled down in North-Western India, mainly in Gujarāt and Rājasthān, and in Mahārāṣṭra (Bombay), which are the neighbouring regions of Sindh. The population of Sindhīs in India is more than 2,5 million (2 535 485) according to the 2001 census of India and the Sindhī language has the status of an official language in the Constitution of India. There are ten important institutions in India founded for propagation and support of the development of Sindhī culture, language and literature,[2] which proves that Sindhīs form a well-defined community in India. The 10th of April is celebrated as Sindhiyat Day (The Day of Sindhiness) in order to support and maintain the distinct Sindhī identity. The need to preserve Sindhī culture is

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[1]   The article is based on the paper delivered at the *7th Coffee Break Conference. Comparisons Across Time and Space*, organised by the University of Leiden (8–10 September 2016), in the panel *Local (Hi)stories: Cases from India*, organised and chaired by Dr. Ewa Dębicka-Borek (Jagiellonian University).

[2]   For example, such institutions as: the Indian Institute of Sindhology in Adipur-Gandhidham in Gujarāt, established in 1989 (for more information, see: http://sindhology.org); the National Council for Promotion of the Sindhi Language, established in 1994, with its headquarters in Vadodara (Gujarāt) (for more information see http://www.rajsindhiacademy.com); the Sindhi Academy Delhi, founded in 1994; Madhya Pradesh Sindhi Sahitya Academy, established in 1981 in Bhopal; the Gujarat Sindhi Sahitya Academy in Gandhinagar; the Uttar Pradesh Sindhi Sahitya Academy in Lakhnau; the Chattisgarh Sindhi Sahitya Academy in Raypur and the Rajasthan Sindhi Sahitya Academy, established in Jaypur in 1978. [last access: 05.10.2017].

clearly declared by Rohra in his article Sindhiyat and role of Sindhology, in which we read: "It is the sacred duty of every generation to preserve and pass on to the next generation our customs and beliefs, faith and tradition, thinking and behaviour which make us feel Sindhi and love Sindhi".[3] This aim is achieved by means of various strategies; for example, by linking the culture of the ancient civilisation of the Indus Valley directly with the Sindhī community. Sindhīs claim to be direct descendants of the inhabitants of the Indus Valley civilisation and their successors, as the ruins of the ancient city of Mohenjo Daro are located in the modern Sindh region. The claim of a direct link with this civilisation is also evident through the placing of photos of certain artefacts from Mohenjo Daro on the main page of the website of the Indian Institute of Sindhology (http://sindhology.org) and on the main cover of the Sindhī literary magazine *Surabhi* (2003). This seems to imply that, though the Sindhī identity is distinct, it is still in the process of becoming established. The same process can be noticed in Sindh on the Pakistani side as well. In regard to literature, according to Asani, Sindhī literary tradition can already be discerned as early as in the 9th century but:

The cover of the magazine *Surabhi* (2003) featuring the ruins of Mohenjo Daro. Photo: Aleksandra Turek

> [y]et it can also be argued that consciousness of a distinct Sindhi literary culture is a relatively recent phenomenon—dating only to the eighteenth century—when with the collapse of the authority of the Mughals and their Persianate court culture in Sindh, there was a remarkable growth of all types of Sindhi literature. (Asani 2003: 614)

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[3] The article is available on the website of the Indian Institute of Sindhology. (http://sindhology.org/articles/sindhiyat/) [last access: 05.10.2017].

Re-telling Sindhī folk stories also serves the purpose of strengthening Sindhī identity. Sindhī literature is dominated by the works of Sufi poets that are considered to be its most valuable literary masterpieces (for more information see Schimmel 1974). There are, however, seven folk stories transmitted orally which are identified as originally Sindhī (Khemānī 2003: 39; Devāṇī 2006: 69–72; cf. Asani 2003: 635). The *Ūmar–Mārūī* story, which will be discussed in this paper, is one of them. In the opinion of Schimmel (Schimmel 1974: 10), this story could have been created during the reign of the Sūmrā dynasty in Sindh, i.e. between the 11th and 14th centuries. Part of the Thar Desert, which today is located in the province of Sindh in Pakistan, was also known under the name of Ūmar Sūmrā. The capital of this region was the fort of Umarkoṭ, which was included in the nine forts surrounding Mārvāṛ (the desert region of Rājasthān today on the Indian side). In the Arabic chronicles, the Sūmrā are listed as Muslims; nevertheless, according to Hindu sources, members of the Sūmrā line belonged to the Rājpūt clan of Bhaṭṭīs. When Muslims arrived in Sindh, the Sūmrā converted to Islam (Todd 1829–1832/1997: II: 236). One of the main characters of the *Ūmar–Mārvī* story is Ūmar Sūmrā—a non-generalized but individual, historical figure. Most probably he is the only one historical character of the story in contrast to the other heroes. The main heroine—Mārvī or Mārūī—is a generalised figure as well. Her name derives from the place-name Mārū.[4] Ūmar Sūmrā ruled from 1355 till 1390 in the region of the Thar Desert, from the capital Umarkoṭ. Men from the Sūmrā dynasty were famous for a love of luxury and abduction of women. The historical sources mention Ūmar's father, Hammīr Sūmrā, who, in 1030, kidnapped the Gujarātī princess Jāsal. The army of Gujarāt attacked Sindh for that reason and rescued the princess (Khemānī 2003: 39–41). Maybe these abductions were so frequent and characteristic of the Sūmrās that such events were reflected in local

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[4]   The word *mārū/ maru* as a masculine noun denotes the region of Mārvāṛ—Marudeś. As a proper noun it is feminine and, thus, the heroine Mārūī is the symbol of Mārvāṛ and the most representative beauty of the desert region.

folk stories and became the inspiration for new narratives, e.g. for the *Ūmar–Mārūī* story (cf. Szyszko 2012: 175).

It appears that the *Ūmar–Mārvī* story is still well-known, as it can be found in many modern collections of Sindhī folk tales published both in India and Pakistan (cf. Khemānī 2003: 39–50; Tariq 1996: 78–83; Komal 1976: 24–28). It was also published in 2003, in the new form of a comic book, in the previously mentioned *Surabhi* magazine on Sindhī literature in the Hindī language, issued periodically in Jaypur (Rājasthān). The text of the comic was prepared by Vāsudev 'Sindhu Bhāratī' and the pictures by the artist Anant Kuśvāhā (*Surabhi* 2003: 73). The fact that works by Sindhī writers are published in Hindī can be understood as another ambitious attempt to reach a wider group of readers than the one limited only to the Sindhī audience. At the same time, we should also keep in mind that not all Sindhīs in India declare Sindhī to be their mother tongue. Despite being an official language, Sindhī does not have a solid utility base in India and the use of this language is restricted mainly to domestic circles. Younger generations of Sindhīs in India prefer to switch to English or Hindī (Asani 2003: 642).

The outline of the *Ūmar–Mārvī* story

Before proceeding to its analysis, let us briefly summarise the story. The outline is based on the story published in the collection of Sindhī romantic folk stories (Khemānī 2003) and is compared with another version of the *Ūmar–Mārvī* story published in the comic. The main character is Mārūī (also known as Mārvī), the most beautiful woman from the Malīr[5] village in the Thar Desert. The story begins with an episode introducing the circumstances of the girl's birth. At that

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[5]   The village of Malīr, in the Bhālvā region, in the Tharparkar district, is located in the Thar Desert, about 28 miles from Umarkoṭ. Tariq, however, mentions another village—Bhal De Ka Tarr, situated in the same region of Tharparkar, also in the neighbourhood of Umarkoṭ (Tariq 1996: 78).

time, Sindh was under the reign of Hammīr Sūmrā. One day, during the monsoon season, the king goes hunting and he gets chilled to the bone because of very cold rain and, hence, he loses consciousness. The elders advice heating him up with the warm body of a local young woman from the desert region. When Hammīr Sūmrā regains consciousness, he returns to Umarkoṭ with his retinue and forgets about the whole event. In the meantime, the woman who warmed the king up delivers a daughter. She gives her the name Mārūī or Mārvī. The girl grows up in the Malīr village.

One day, a boy named Phogsen (also called Phog for short), who has worked as a servant at Mārūī's home since childhood, falls in love with the girl. He asks Mārūī's grandfather for her hand but he is refused because the girl is promised to Khetsen, another young man from the village (Khemānī 2003: 39). In the comic story, the plot is slightly different. Mārūī milks a buffalo cow herself and states that even her animal (named Śakuntalā) is disgusted with the servant. Mārūī, molested by Phog, is rescued by Khetsen. Phog, refused by the girl, asks the village *pañcāyat* (the village council) to decide who has the right to her hand and, as a result of its decision, Phog is expelled from Malīr (*Surabhi* 2003: 74–76).

Phog decides to take revenge for the refusal of his marriage offer and travels to Umarkoṭ, where Ūmar Sūmrā, Hammīr's son, reigns. Phog praises the unparalleled beauty of Mārūī in front of the ruler. Ūmar, encouraged by the description of her, begins to enquire about the possibility of seeing her. The boy replies that every day at dawn, she goes with her friends to the well to fetch water. Ūmar Sūmrā goes to Mārūī's village and waits for her near the well at daybreak. When she comes, he asks her for water. After that, he uses the opportunity to drag her onto a camel and takes her away to Umarkoṭ. Mārvī explains that they are brother and sister, but Ūmar ignores it. He imprisons her in his fortress and waits until she is ready to marry him. The girl refuses food because her hands are dyed with henna, and this decoration was done at her home. She is afraid that the design on her hands, which reminds her of her home, will be removed by dipping her fingers

in food. Mārūī declares that she will wash her hands only where her countrymen live. She sends back presents from Ūmar, declaring that she will not uncover her wrapper woven in Malīr village until her death. When the monsoon season comes, she sees the Mārū country in her dream (the desert region). She suffers more and more because of homesickness. Mārvī feels that she will die soon and, therefore, asks Ūmar to arrange her cremation and funeral rites in her homeland (Khemānī 2003: 41–43; cf. Szyszko 2012: 172–173).

Then, in the story from the magazine *Surabhi*, there follows an episode which is absent from the published versions of the *Ūmar–Mārūī* story, created in order to make the action of the comic more dynamic. In the kingdom of Ūmar, injustice and disorder set in because of the shameful act of the woman's abduction by the king. Ūmar leaves his fortress and wanders in disguise in the streets of Umarkoṭ in order to learn what his subjects think of this act and he is subsequently attacked by a group of bandits and rescued by Khetsen, Mārūī's fiancé, who had come to Umarkoṭ. When the king wants to reward him for saving his life, Khetsen asks him to send Mārūī back to her homeland. Ūmar does not agree to this. As the news of Mārūī's abduction spread around the kingdom, Ūmar's relative comes one day and informs him that he cannot marry Mārūī as she is his sister. Ūmar learns that he was fed on the milk of Mārūī's mother in child-hood and, therefore, the girl should be considered his sister (*Surabhi* 2003: 80–81).

The comic story featuring the episode of Mārūī's abduction (*Surabhi* 2003: 79).
Photo: Aleksandra Turek

Finally, Ūmar real-izes that he did wrong. He sends her back to her home country and accepts her as his sis-ter. On her way back from Umarkoṭ, Mārūī pays a visit to her fiancé

Khetsen in his field and she asks him for water. As he has no water with him, he gives her a watermelon, but the fruit is bereft of the pulp. Mārūī understands this allusion. She spent one year in the house of another man. The fact causes her to doubt her virtue and she begins to pray. The earth opens and absorbs her (Khemānī 2003: 39–49). Khemānī writes that there is a happy end in other variants of the story as well. When Mārvī returns home, people demand a trial of fire to prove the girl's virtue. Mārvī comes through the trial successfully because she is innocent. She marries Khetsen afterwards and they live happily (Khemānī 2003: 49; cf. Szyszko 2012: 173).

In the comic version of the story, Mārūī returns to Malīr with splendid presents from Ūmar for all the inhabitants of the village. This also causes doubts about her virtue due to the fact that she has stayed so long in the house of a strange man. She has to prove her innocence by holding a hot iron without burning her hands and she manages to walk ten steps with a red, hot iron in her hands (*Surabhi* 2003: 84). She marries Khetsen afterwards and they live happily. The same variant is attested in the story published in Pakistan (Tariq 1996: 82).

Mārūī holds hot iron (*Surabhi* 2003: 84).
Photo: Aleksandra Turek

Ūmar–Mārvī: a multi-faceted story in multiple forms

Eclecticism of Sindhī culture and its literature is a well-known fact. Asani aptly notes that

[o]n account of its unique geographical position as a buffer zone between the Indic and the Iranian-Arab worlds, Sindh has been a place

where different cultures have met and interacted with each other for many centuries. Consequently, its literary culture is characterized by convergences: between oral and written genres and forms, and between different languages, literatures, alphabets, scripts, systems of prosody, grammatical structures, and even literary symbols. (Asani 2003: 612)

Despite the fact that the *Ūmar–Mārvī* is usually termed as *premākhyān* (a romantic, oral folk tale, very often Sufi tale), it does not represent a typical, standard love-story, as the main stress is put on local patriotism and adherence to motherland. Mārūī's homesickness for her home village in the desert is well detailed in the story. What is significant is that the Malīr village is a real place, located in the Thar Desert. Therefore, Malīr becomes a symbol of the desert region of Sindh and Mārūī is not an ordinary village girl but the most prominent and beautiful representative of Sindh. The figure of Mārūī is celebrated during a special festival organised every year in Malīr (*Surabhi* 2003: 73). The importance of Malīr as an evident and well-known symbol of Sindh is corroborated by another example. A special village for Sindhī writers, artists and scholars founded by the Indian Institute of Sindhology and built on land given to the Sindhī community in Gujarāt is called Malīr. Its symbolic meaning would be unintelligible without reference to the context of the story of *Ūmar–Mārvī*.

The *Ūmar–Mārvī* also serves as a good example of how a narrative can interact with a local and mainstream culture, in various registers and in multiple forms. There are at least four forms in which the *Ūmar–Mārvī* story functions:

1) in a Sufi version;
2) in a form mixed with the Rājasthānī narrative tradition of the *Ḍholā-Mārū* story;
3) in a Persian version;
4) linked to the pan-Indian literature of the so-called Great Tradition.

The Sufi version

The *Ūmar–Mārvī* story with its message of love and strong affection for motherland was reinterpreted once again within the Sindhī culture.

It was used by Śāh Abdul Latīf (1689–1752), the most prominent poet of Sindhī literature (Schimmel 1974: 14). In his most famous composition *Shāh Jo Risālo* (*Shah's message*), he transforms the main characters of the story into mystical symbols of Sufism (Schimmel 1974: 15; Tariq 1996: 82–83; cf. Szyszko 2012: 176–178; for more about Sufism in South Asia, see Subhan 2002). Asani writes that Śāh Abdul Latīf was among these poets "who were intimately familiar with the Persianate tradition and begun to compose poetry in Sindhi. They turned to the indigenous nonliterate folk/ bardic tradition for poetic forms, symbols, and metaphors that would provide their compositions with a distinctly Sindhi ethos as opposed to a Persian one" (Asani 2003: 635). Another specialist on Sindhī literature, Annemarie Schimmel, points out that in contrast to Persian and Turkish Sufi poetry, in which the love of two men symbolizes the love of a soul and God, in Sindhī poetry, a soul missing God is always portrayed as a woman who is able to endure any adversity to find the divine lover (Schimmel 1974: 15; cf. Szyszko 2012: 177).

Thus Mārūī, who suffers from homesickness and misses the folk from her home village of Malīr, represents an innocent soul longing for the union with God. Ūmar Sūmrā represents worldly temptations that can be an obstacle on a truthful path towards God. Annemarie Schimmel notes that:

> Ordinary female inhabitants of Sindh were made the main hero-
> ines by Latīf in his compositions. (...) Latīf developed the theme
> ofMārvī's waiting for messages, and the imprisoned girl waits
> for messages from home, i.e. from God. This motif has played
> an important role in Sindhī literature since the times of Latīf.
> (Schimmel 1974: 15)

The transformation of the *Ūmar–Mārvī* into a mystical, Sufi story reinforces the importance of this folk tale in the culture of Sindh. This also proves to be another example of the well-known fact in South Asian culture that the old is repeated in a new form.

The Rājasthānī version

Mārūī (known also as Mārū), as the most prominent representative of the Thar Desert country, also functions in the same role in a folk tale from Rājasthān—the *Ḍholā-Mārū* story. It is a story originally in Rājasthānī that was created in the desert region. In the beginning, it was most probably circulating in the form of a set of folk songs about a local woman (Mārū), an inhabitant of the Thar Desert, who was longing for her absent husband (Ḍholā) and, hence, suffering the pains of separation (Szyszko 2012: 27–42; cf. Vaudeville 1962: 316–321). The *Ḍholā-Mārū* as a story transmitted orally is super-regional, spread through the whole region of North India, but only in Rājasthān in the 16th–19th centuries did it appear in the written form of an elaborated poem, generally known as the *Ḍholā Mārū rā dūhā* (see Rāmsiṃh et al. 1995). The fact that the *Ūmar–Mārvī* was added to the more widespread narrative tradition proves its popularity and its super-regional spread; however, it then loses its typical Sindhī features.

It is worth noting that not only were the episodes of the Sindhī story added to the literary tradition of the *Ḍholā-Mārū*, but the Rājasthānī story also permeated to the region of Sindh. At least eight oral versions of the *Ḍholā-Mārū* story are found in Sindh as well and this narrative was also reinterpreted by Śāh Abdul Latīf in his famous *Shāh Jo Risālo* (Āġhā 1985). The analysis of the interconnection of the stories of *Ūmar–Mārvī* and *Ḍholā-Mārū* has already been published (Szyszko 2012: 171–178). In the Rājasthānī story, the same episode with Ūmar Sūmrā wanting princess Mārū for himself also appears but only in its traditional literary form—in the medieval poem, *Ḍholā Mārū rā dūhā*. Szyszko has tried to demonstrate that the common name shared by the main heroines of both stories, and the fact that their names indicate their connection with the desert, as well as the common figure of their torturer (Ūmar Sūmrā) facilitate the process of mixing these narratives (Szyszko 2012: 176), but let us not forget that both stories belong to the same milieu of the Thar Desert culture. Despite being labelled as Sindhī or Rājasthānī, the cultures interacted mutually and, therefore, until

the Partition in 1947, the borders were not so clearly distinct. One version of the *Ḍholā-Mārū* story popular in the whole region of Sindh proves this fact (Āġhā 1985: 21). This variant is *de facto* a mixture of both stories—*Ḍholā-Mārū* and *Ūmar–Mārvī*—and, as a result, there are many inconsistencies in the plot. In the Rājasthānī story, Ḍholā is always Mārū's husband, but in this version, however, he travels to Umarkoṭ to meet his wife and accepts her as his sister (sic) (for a summary of this story see Szyszko 2012: 265). This also points to the fact that the *Ḍholā–Mārū*, which does not belong to indigenous Sindhī narratives, in less known or even totally unknown passages, is supplemented with a story better-known to the audience of Sindh—with elements of the Ūmar–Mārvī story (cf. Szyszko 2012: 176). Nevertheless, because episodes of the Sindhī story were added to *Ḍholā-Mārū rā dūhā*, which is acknowledged as the jewel of Rājasthānī literature, the status of the Ūmar–Mārvī story is elevated as well.

The Persian version

In a work of Behram Tariq (Tariq 1996: 83), it is mentioned that the eminent historian of Sindh, Sayed Mohammad Tahir Masyani, composed the tale of Ūmar and Mārvī in verse in Persian under the title *Rāz-o-Niyāz*. We can risk a statement that the existence of the story written in Persian is another attempt that links the story with a higher register of Persian culture, which for centuries also existed in South Asia as another important literary culture propagated by Muslim rulers (mainly by the Great Moghuls). Due to my lack of access to the *Rāz-o-Niyāz* story, it is impossible to draw more conclusions. With the mention of the Persian version of the *Ūmar–Mārvī* story, I tend to see a conscious attempt of Sindhī culture to start a dialogue and make links with greater literary cultures.

The story linked to the Great Tradition

The *Ūmar–Mārvī* story becomes a part of mainstream Indian literature through the strategy of making Marūī the Sītā of Sindh, which indicates that it is not enough for the Sindhī community to continue using this folk story,

but there is also a need to place it within the frames of the Great Tradition of Indian culture. This aim is achieved by creating a story with a plot full of considerable analogies with the great epic *Rāmāyaṇa*. The figure of Ūmar can be understood as Rāvaṇa, who is informed about the beauty of Marūī and incited by Phog. The rejected lover—Phog—who wants revenge is, thus, a counterpart of Śūrpaṇakhā from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Marūī is captured when she gives Ūmar water on his request. The strongest effect, however, is obtained by making the heroine Marūī equal to Sītā. When she is imprisoned in Umarkoṭ, she expects death like Sītā suffering Rāvaṇa's threats in Laṅkā. The spouse of Rāma is the symbol of an ideal Indian woman, virtuous and always faithful. Even in the practical sphere of the cult, the statues of Sītā, installed in temples, are very often made of gold, the purest of metals, which symbolises the purity and innocence of her character (Pattanaik 2011: 153). This practice seems to be an allusion to the motif in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* of Rāma using a golden statue to represent Sītā at the *aśvamedha* sacrifice that he performs after he has exiled her from Ayodhyā:

> The delight of the Raghus took no wife after Sītā, so that in sacrifice after sacrifice, a golden Jānakī served in the role of his wife.
> (*Rāmāyaṇa*, 7.89.4 in Goldman, et al. 2018: 424)

According to tradition Sītā is the incarnation of the great goddess Mahālakṣmī. Identifying Marūī with Sītā means attributing Marūī with ideal features, deifying her and, in this way, linking her to the pantheon of Indian goddesses. Interestingly, along with using modern means of transmission in the form of a comic, the traditional process of establishing links with Indian Great Tradition is still in use. Although the mechanisms of reshuffling motives are well-known in Indian culture, it seems that equating Marūī with Sītā is quite recent—the story was published in *Surabhi* only in 2003 under the meaningful title *Sītā of Sindh*. It is worth adding that the main heroine of the *Ḍholā-Mārū* story from Rājasthān, Mārū, who is closely connected with the Sindhī heroine Marūī, is also compared to Sītā; however, we should also keep

in mind that it is a typical, standard comparison in Indian culture and poetry. In the poem *Ḍholā Mārū rā dūhā*, we find the following couplet, which also proves the existence of the attempt made to link the heroine of the desert region with the higher register of the Indian Great Tradition. The heroine's name is notably mentioned in the verse as Marūī:

> [She] moves [like] Gaṅgā, [she is] wise [as] Sarasvatī,
> [she has] nature and morality [of] Sītā.
> Amongst women there is no other one like Mārūī.[6]

As with Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Marūī, in the *Ūmar–Mārvī* story, has to prove her innocence as she was staying in another man's house. She has to undergo a trial as did Sītā. The spouse of Rāma has, in fact, to undergo the trial twice, first by the fire-ordeal (*agniparīkṣā*). In order to assert her innocence, Sītā says the following words:

> "Build me a pyre, Saumitri, the only remedy for this calamity. I cannot bear to live tainted by these false allegations.
> Rejected in this public gathering by my husband, who is not satisfied with my virtues, I shall enter the fire, bearer of oblations, so that I may follow the only path proper for me. (…)
> Since my heart has never once strayed from Rāghava, so may Agni, the purifier, witness of all the world, protect me in every way."
> When she had spoken in this fashion, Vaidehī reverently circumambulated the fire, eater of oblations. Then, with complete detachment, she entered the blazing flames.
> (*Rāmāyaṇa*, 6.104.18–19, 24–25 in Goldman, et al. 2010: 457–458)

Sītā goes through the trial successfully, but her innocence is doubted for a second time. She then calls to the earth, in which she was born, and, finally, Sītā is absorbed by the earth (*Rāmāyaṇa*, 7.88.10). In the *Ūmar–Mārvī*

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6   *gati gaṅgā, mati sarasatī, sītā sīḷa subhāi.*
     mahilã̄ sarahara—mārūī, avara na dūjī kāi.
     (Rāmsiṃh, et al. 1995: 153, verse no. 451).

story, this strategy is, however, not used consistently as there is a difference between undergoing *agniparīkṣā* as in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and holding a hot piece of iron (cf. also a version of the story in Komal 1976: 28). The latter seems to be rather an elliptical trial of fire, but still this is a worldwide chastity test. In other versions of the story, the link with the *Rāmāyaṇa* is more evident—the earth opens and absorbs Marūī (Khemānī 2003: 49). Nevertheless, the *Ūmar–Mārvī* story reassures the universal rules in Hindu culture that through protection of women's innocence, the honour of the entire community is saved.

Marūī, like Sītā, is praised after proving her innocence. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, when Sītā is absorbed by the earth, the gods shout:

> Suddenly there arose a great cry of "excellent!" among the gods: "Excellent! Excellent! O Sītā, you who demonstrate such virtuous conduct!".
> (*Rāmāyaṇa*, 7.88.15 in Goldman, et al. 2018: 421)

In the *Ūmar–Mārvī* story, when Marūī successfully endures the trial people from her village shout, "*glory to Satī Mārūī*" (*Surabhi* 2003: 84).

Satī-Mārūī (*Surabhi* 2003: 84).
Photo: Aleksandra Turek

Suddenly, Sītā of Sindh becomes Satī. This is noteworthy because it provides another example of the process of deifying the most prominent representative of Sindh—a woman ascending the funeral pyre of her husband—Satī—is deified and, after her death, she is worshipped as a goddess. Although, in the case of Marūī, she does not enter the fire because of the death of her husband, she is associated here with a Satī woman. It seems that the reason for this association is not only the contact with fire but a general understanding of Satī as 'the good and virtuous woman'.

Notwithstanding, the great popularity of the cult of Satī has survived up to today, particularly in Rājasthān, which has become its major stronghold. According to Noble and Sankhyan, "the strength of the institution of *satī* in Rājasthān is clearly related to the Rājpūt presence in the area. The practice fits well with medieval Rājpūt conceptions of chivalry and honour, and has been particularly embraced by the Rājpūt community" (Noble, Sankhyan 2001: 345, 372). Rājasthān is the place where the literary magazine *Surabhi* is issued as well. This is thus another way in which Marūī is deified and we see here a double association with holy women: Sītā and Satī.

Conclusions

It is noteworthy that all the forms in which the *Ūmar–Mārvī* story functions analysed in this paper prove that traditional mechanisms of how a story is given a higher rank (the recognised one) by placing it within the frames of the mainstream tradition are still valid and can still be seen nowadays. It is notable that the community of Hindu Sindhīs still feel the need to make reference to Hindu terminology and pan-Indian, well-defined, cultural codes, such as the figure of Sītā or Satī, in the process of retelling their local story. The eclecticism of Sindhī culture facilitates this process as well. In regard to the Sindhī language, Asani explains this phenomenon in such a way:

> Linguistically, Sindhi has been developing in different directions in the two countries. Sindhi in Pakistan has been heavily Perso-Arabised to project an Islamic identity, while Sindhi in India has been drifted toward increased Sanskritisation in conformity with general pan-Indian trends. (Asani 2003: 640)

Summing up, we can say that the *Ūmar–Mārvī* story seems to be a very productive and useful tool to build and strengthen Sindhī identity in India even in the 21st century. It assumes new forms but the content is old—it gets reinterpreted in such a way that the dialogue between

peripheral, local and mainstream cultures can be continued. As a result, the Sindhī community in India has their own Sītā of Sindh.

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