

**Saving Sindhu: River defense movements along the Indus river in Pakistan**

**Abstract:**

Since 2005, activists have been gathering along Sindhu, the Indus river, to sing, dance, and perform rituals pledges to defend riverine life. Scholarship shows that strong traditions of environmentalism, nature worship, and indigenous peoples struggles explain the emergence of movements to defend rivers (or nature). But Pakistan doesn't boast of any of these factors. Yet such groups have emerged in multiple locations, expanded and demanded recognition of rights of the Indus. What explains the emergence and spread of the river defense in the Indus basin of Pakistan?

The studies of water politics in Pakistan usually focus on transboundary disputes, inter-provincial conflicts, or issues of water governance. Consequently, we know about the politics of the state, water bureaucracies, and nationalist movements, but very little about the indigenous, subaltern, and working-class sources of riverine resistance. My dissertation research addresses this gap by examining three river protest movements along the Indus that emerged in late 1990s. While anti-dam resistance at Tarbela focused on resettling the displaced, Sindhu Bachao Tarla in southern Punjab and Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum in Sindh launched campaigns to defend the Indus river and associated cultural and ecological way of being. I examine these movements through detailed fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and review of movement archives. I upset the stable categories of 'subaltern' and 'indigenous' in decolonial theories to show that river defense movements emerge when subaltern indigenous groups forge alliances with ethno-nationalist groups who consider Indus river as central to the culture and ecology of their regions. (246 words).