

RESTRAINTS ON LANGUAGE AND CULTURE OF SINDH: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Sindh possesses specific and individual distinct identity formed out of its centuries old history, culture and language. The history, politics, culture, language and education have been those distinct features of this identity. But as a province in Pakistan, these distinct features of Sindhi identity are losing ground in the province resulting in the identity crisis faced by the people. Elucidating the language and culture of Sindhi people, this paper explores the richness and distinctiveness of Sindhi society. In addition to identifying various strands of distinct Sindhi character present in its history and politics, culture and civilization, language and art as well as in the education system of Sindh, the existing factors responsible for suppression of this regional identity are critically reviewed and analyzed.

INTRODUCTION

Sindh, the southern province of Pakistan has a remarkable centuries old history and culture. Three major events have contributed to the shaping of Sindh's history, politics and culture: the Muslim conquest in 711, the British conquest in 1843, and the partition of India in 1947 (Pal 2008:2). Joyo (2005a) notes differences among provinces soon after the birth of Pakistan, especially on the matter of power distribution, along with revenue and the controversies of language and education, among the two majority provinces of Bengal and Punjab. This resulted in separation of Bengal, however, the controversies did not end with the separation of Bengal, they continued in the rest of the four provinces. In particular, the migration especially affected the province of Sindh, resulting in changing the entire look of the province, due to emigration of the Hindu, both upper and middle class, to India and influx of Muslim immigrants from all over India, with varied cultures and languages.

None of the categories of immigrants, who came during or after partition (from India in 1947), mixed with the local community; rather they retained their individual identity. Ahmad (1988) mentions that: the nature of immigrants and their attitudes after settlement were quite different from those migrating due to the partition. Before partition, the immigrants were in the minority and they tried to mix and become part of the native population by adopting their language, culture and education system. Even whenever Sindh was invaded by foreigners before partition, Sindhis struggled for the endurance of their identity, resulting in the amalgamation of the invaders into the natives and their adoption of the Sindhi ways. But after partition the immigrants promoted their own language and system of education, depriving the natives from their rights and alienating them in their own land. Thus, the question of identity arose. This paper attempts to examine the reasons of distinct identity of Sindh in its history, culture, language and education system.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Sindh is mentioned in Mahabhart, the prehistoric Hindu religious book. Although its boundaries kept changing in different eras, yet it has existed much before the time of Mahabhart, during the days of Kot Diji civilization (3000-2700 BC) and the Indus Valley civilization (the largest of the four ancient urban civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, South Asia and China) of Moen-Jo-Daro and Harappa (2500-1500BC).

When the Muslims conquered South Asia, some of their historians (Al-Mas'udi, Ibn Haukal) noticed and mentioned that the language of Sindh is different from that of India. Ahmad (1988) discusses that when Arabs came to this part of the world, they could easily differentiate Sindh from the rest of the India and for them Sindh and Hind were different. Although Indus, Sindhu, Hindu, Sindh and Hind were used alternatively by different conquerors of the land before the time of Arabs, they were two distinct places, with distinct languages, cultures and traditions.

When the British conquered Sindh under Lord Napier in 1843, it was widely criticized among them as unjust, yet 'it proved

impossible to give up the conquered territory. Sind was too valuable as a frontier against the encroachment of Afghans and Pathans...' (Khuhro, 1978:8). Besides, the British were interested in acquiring the river Indus to use it to counter any Russian plans of advancing on the Empire and the Russian influence in Central Asia. Yet they justified it on the grounds of developing such laws and enactments which would bring prosperity for the people of all classes.

Markovits (2008) and Khuhro (1978) note that the Hindus and the Muslims were quite finely divided in the urban and rural areas in the province before and during British rule. Both the writers discuss the more educated and economically sound status of Hindus, who had formed an urban population and were either *Amils* (government officers) or *Banias* (rich traders and bankers who used to lend money on interest). Muslim Sindhis were either *Waderas* (landowners, who hire poor people to cultivate their land) or *Haris* (the cultivators/peasants). Except for a little middle-class Muslim urban population struggling to survive, the rest of the Muslim population was rural. Hindus, however, were living in cities, except for the comparatively less rich than the *banias* in cities (who used to lend money to *waderas*), there were *banias* in villages as shopkeepers who lent money to *haris*. 'The Balochi rulers of Sindh and their landowning followers, both Sindhi and Balochi, those known in Sindh as the *waderas*, were very dependent on the literary and financial skills of the local Hindus' (Markovits, 2008:47). With the power shifting to the British, the *amils* (who were Hindus) easily acquired the administrative jobs under British rule, whereas despite a well-established Treasury system of the British, the local *banias* remained popular with the local *waderas*. Thus Hindus and Muslims lived in harmony, in the province, without any religious conflicts, respecting and even celebrating each other's religious festivities and practicing certain beliefs commonly as well. Sindhi leaders and scholars, both Hindus and Muslims, including Mehkri (1987) and Joyo (2005a), do not consider religion to be practical division between Indians and believed it to be a British policy of 'divide and rule' for which their Muslim loyalists helped them by inventing and propagating the concepts through Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's Two Nation Theory.

Elaborating on the *raison d'être* of Pakistan, Joyo (2005a:xxx) writes in the introduction of his book:

“It is claimed that with the birth of Pakistan, a new nation was born, as if nations ever get born on command, nor do true states crop up from nowhere... Nation is a unique form of human society a product of ages, a collective personality moulded in shape by history, in a stable and awakened homeland, rooted in a language, an unequalled literature and art. A state can thus also be a product of unnatural set of events out to subordinate to itself a nation or nations in its pursuit of power. The question could always arise whether a nation raises a state that serves it or a state holds a nation or nations as tool(s) for its power base and self-aggrandizement.”

In 1940's the famous Lahore Resolution (later known as Pakistan Resolution), All India Muslim League affirmed and assured that the non-Muslims living in those parts of the Indian sub-continent which were to be separated and formed as a new country were not supposed to migrate nor even Muslims living in other parts of India were expected to migrate to the newly built state. Yet Sindh faced the influx of immigrants, the Muhajirs, as soon as the partition was declared.

With the partition, the Hindu Sindhis, who formed about 25% population of the province, migrated to India resulting in mass migration of Urdu-speaking Muslims from India to the cities of Sindh. Unlike the government of India, the government of Pakistan allowed the immigrants to acquire the properties left by the Hindus in Sindh. This resulted in the immigrants becoming more powerful and wealthier than the locals analogous to the circumstances where Hindu Sindhis were wealthier than their Muslim counterparts. Thus the conditions of the immigrants improved where as those of the natives continue to worsen.

Markovits (2008) writes that the Sindhi Muslim middle-class, which was struggling in the urban areas due to the presence of a more powerful and sound Hindu elite, assumed that after partition there would be more space for them in government services and elsewhere. But their aspirations failed due to the arrival of more educated Urdu speaking Muhajirs from India 'who proved ideally fit to replace the *Amils* in the administrative and clerical posts'

(2008:51), resulting in their (natives') frustration and conflict with the immigrants. Ahmad (1988) also discusses the same plight of the natives and he further confirms that not only the jobs left by Hindus, after partition, did not come to the share of natives but due to the arrival of Urdu-speaking, Punjabi and Pakhtoon influx from time to time after partition (till date) has engendered fierce competition in the province.

The concentration of Muhajirs in urban-Sindh, the dominance of Muhajirs in jobs in Sindh, movement of the University of Sindh to Hyderabad, a less developed city than Karachi and creation of University of Karachi with Urdu as the sole medium of education and forbiddance to use Sindhi for answering the examination gave rise to anti-Urdu feelings.

Kazi (1987:48) records that, for once official effort was taken by the civilian government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. It provided for Urdu speaking immigrant population a period of fifteen years to learn Sindhi and assimilate into the native population; until that time no discrimination was to be laid on the basis of language. They were to be called 'New Sindhis'. As soon as the Bhutto government was soon overthrown, the assimilation programs came to a halt. Rahman (1996:115) notes 'Sindhi now became a major symbol of the sense of deprivation – cultural, educational, economic, and political – which Sindhi leaders and the emerging middle class intelligentsia felt.' Sindhi newspapers and writers as well as political leaders urged that Sindhi language along with other regional languages be considered as a national language. Yet the one-unit proved fatal for the progress of the Sindhi language, subsequently Bengali was accepted as a national language along with Urdu, and all other regional languages were relegated to inferior position. Moreover, under General Ziaul Haq regime, any formal communication in indigenous languages was discouraged and made Urdu the sole medium of administration, judiciary, education etc. Students of the University of Sindh, the biggest university in the province of Sindh, were arrested, beaten and killed (in a similar way as the students of Dhakka University were suppressed) on protesting against one-unit, military rules and implementation of Urdu as the sole medium of examination.

Muhajirs demanded Urdu to be officially accepted as the provincial language of Sindh along with Sindhi which Sindhis were against as that would proclaim Sindh as a multi-ethnic province. The bloodiest language riots in the history of the country, in 1972, resulted in killings all around the province especially in the cities of Karachi and Hyderabad of Sindhi speaking people, resulting in their evacuation from these cities and movement to towns and villages.

CONTINUITY OF SINDHI CULTURE

Pre-historic Sindh was a primitive communism. Sumerian, Semetic, Babylonian and Egyptian people admired Sindh, with its ideals of peace, harmony, collective property, personal and communal cleanliness, aesthetic sense (dance, music, painting, jewellery, toys and sculpture), education and a developed system of agriculture. Ancient Sindh was a matriarchal society with woman as the chief of the clan, the inventor of agriculture, the mother of all creation, a goddess (Siraj 2009). During the course of history, Sindh was invaded by outsiders, Greeks, Iranians, Sythians etc but none could curb the artistic and architectural ways of Sindh. According to Siraj (2009), what Tatars did to Baghdad and Alexander to Iran, was done by Arabs to Sindh, as they thought it to be their religious duty to destroy the pre-Islamic, which they thought to be un-Islamic, Sindhi art and architecture.

Malkani (1984) writes about the people of Sindh to be eclectic – not very profound, but very practical: “The Sindhi rule of the thumb is to do whatever is convenient and profitable.” When it comes to defining culture, Joyo (2005b:72) believes it to be a term easily understandable yet difficult to define, because everybody understands it in his own way, and ‘finds in it all the good there is and feels proud and happy about it’. He mentions custom, costume, craft and art as four recognized cultural assets. He puts language among crafts and literature in arts. Syed (1974), however, discusses the idea in detail by making ideological beliefs, ways of social life, national identity and art (including literature and performing arts) as the important features of culture. Sindhi performing arts, music, architecture, ceramics, painting, sculpture

and domestic art and embroidery embody all the genres known to the modern world. Lifestyle, food and costume along with mutual relations among the people of the society, their traditions and rituals, social attitudes and laws form the ways of social life.

While discussing the ideological beliefs of Sindhi culture, Syed (1974:36) remarks that for Sindhis, spiritualism and atheism are only two sides of a picture. He further adds democracy, non-violence, co-existence, non alliance (with anything that is against truth and justice) and the right of self-determination as essence of Sindhi ideology.

Regardless of religious differences, Sindhis have lived together with love and humility for centuries. Sacrificing life for Sindh has been a trait that Sindhis are following ever since history has started recording it. Although Sindhis have never been warlike people yet their distinct identity runs along with freedom and fight for justice. These features for ordinary Sindhis existed long before the arrival of Islam and the creation of Pakistan. But without understanding that it is there since centuries, it is anachronistic to consider this attitude of Sindhis as anti-Islam and anti-Pakistan.

STATUS OF SINDHI LANGUAGE

Ayaz (in Ayaz *et.al.* 1978) mentions that the Sindhi language is at least 15000 years old. This proposition is built upon the basis of the well-developed form of the language found during the 5000 years old Moen-Jo-Daro time, which Ayaz assumes that the Sindhi must have acquired after an evolution of thousands of years. It is thought to be developed out of the Indo-European mother language.

Siraj (2009) follows the same school of thought and explains that Sindhis went to Europe, therefore making Sindhi as the mother of all Indo-European languages. As there is ample evidence of trade extended from Sindh to various parts of Asia and Europe during ancient times through both land and sea. It was through trade and immigration of the Sindhis to these parts that the Sindhi language spread far and wide. He quotes Dr. Noah Crammer, the expert of Sumerology in USA, who puts forth the theory that the country praised by the Sumer people as a paradise and land of gods is none other than Moen-Jo-Daro (the ancient city of Indus Valley

civilization). Dr. Trumpp is also quoted by Siraj as mentioning the link between Sanskrit (ancient Vedic language of Aryans) and Sindhi, yet he notices certain individual and original qualities in the latter which the former does not possess, that make the latter the mother language.

Sindhi is a rich language as far as its sounds are concerned and it is assumed by local linguists that there can hardly be a sound in any of the world languages which a Sindhi speaking cannot produce. The language has 39 consonants and 11 vowels and their combination makes 385 phonetic signs to form pronunciation. The main signs found at Moen-Jo-Daro (they are phonetic) resemble the modern Sindhi pronunciations (Siraj, 2009), which makes it clear that the language of those prehistoric people was none other than Sindhi or Proto-Sindhi, as Joyo (in Preface to Siraj, 2009) calls it.

Sindhi is a regular means of communication for Sindhis in Pakistan (although they take every effort to communicate in Urdu whenever and wherever possible and required), in a similar way as it was considered a vernacular during British rule. Siddiqui (2006) talks of the official language controversy in the province during British era on choosing between Sindhi, Persian/Urdu or English. At that time, one group supported Sindhi because of its being generally understood by the people of the land while the other preferred Persian or Urdu on the plea that Sindhi was in a crude form and required a lot of refinement. Khuhro (1978:243-4) quotes the following words of Captain Stack, Deputy Collector and the writer of famous *The Dictionary in English and Sindhi* (Cap. G. Stack to Secy. Govt. Sind, 28 August 1848. Bombay General Proceedings 350, Vol.25, Progs: 5964, para-7), at the time of controversy:

“Far from being a mere patois, or provincial dialect, it is an ancient and distinct tongue... It bears the marks of a primitive tongue, altered by Sanscrit innovation, yet retaining enough of the original diversity to cause a great difference between it and others of the Sanscrit family much more so than between any two dialects of Northern India I am acquainted with... The grammatical structure too is most exact and minute and in some points almost curious from its nicety. In short we will find in Sindhi, the most complete means of expressing every subject,

except the arts and sciences yet unknown to the people. Here we must borrow from more learned tongues, as has been needful in our own language.”

Thus, where a British officer was expected to pass exam of Hindi/Urdu (commonly known as Hindustani) to be posted in any of the Indian provinces, in Sindh he was supposed to pass a similar test for Sindhi as well. Sindhi has been used in the domains of power and education in pre-partition days (something which is strongly missed these days). It has been a language of learning and literature with textbooks even before the time of British. In British India, official learning used to take place in Persian and Arabic at schools in the Muslim majority areas throughout sub-continent; yet unlike the rest of the subcontinent, in Sindh there were certain schools which used to teach in Sindhi exclusively and even at the rest of the schools where Arabic and Persian were the languages, mother tongue- Sindhi- was taught till nine years. During pre-partition days, Sindhis emphasized the distinctiveness of their culture and therefore demanded separation from Bombay Presidency, which was thrust upon them by British. The separation resulted in adoption of mother tongue as medium of instruction and proved psychologically sound for the natives. In post-partition Sindh, the same status for their language and the acceptance of the individual and distinct Sindhi identity is not being emphasized.

Kazi (1987) writes that Urdu was a foreign language to Pakistani soil and it has no roots in this part of India, it was a Central Indian language and came with the Muslim immigrants after partition, yet it the national language of the country and is preferred over already developed indigenous languages. To this Rahman (1999) further adds that in the beginning of 18th century, serious attempts were made to develop an ‘elitist sociolect’ of Urdu, comprising Persian words, replacing indigenous and Hindi words, in order to serve urbanized upper class Muslims. And later the newly developed language served as the tool to raise the language controversy by differentiating it from Hindi (which possesses Sanskrit words) which became the symbol of Hindus, Urdu was made a symbol of Muslims. In 1947, Rahman (1996) mentions, East Pakistan demanded Bengali to be its state language

on the account that if Urdu would be the state language then even the most educated of Bengalis would become illiterate overnight and would not qualify for any posts. The similar controversy was raised in Sindh, because, as Kazi (1987: 47) mentions, ‘during the days of united Pakistan, Bengali and Sindhi were the only developed languages (in terms of written manuscript and mass press facilities)’.

Sindhi Muslims made it clear that although like the rest of the Muslims of India they too supported Urdu over Hindi, yet they never made Sindhi subservient to Urdu. They found their identity being put at a stake. As language is the foremost sign of national identity, national identity can exist without state but never without language (Ayaz *et.al.* 1978).

Rahman (1996:3) mentions that though the state denies the existence of varied ethnic identities and propagates a uni-national thesis, yet Pakistan has, since its existence, been a multinational state. Rahman (1996 and 1999) mentions that Muhajirs (immigrants) started asserting their separate identity during late 1980s. The ruling elite, comprising Punjabis mostly, with an all powerful position in administration, bureaucracy, armed forces and legislature, support Urdu over their mother-tongue and English over even Urdu. Rahman (1996) assumes that Punjabis do not support their language because they do not want the other indigenous languages to get strengthened. Also Rahman (1999:98) makes it clear that ‘Urdu gives it (Punjabi ruling elite) a wider base of support, a wider area to rule and seek jobs in, than the Punjabi itself’. Rahman (1996) divides the masses into Pakistani nationalists and ethno-nationalists. He mentions that the former blame the latter of being anti-Pakistan and anti-Islam and pawn of the foreign powers, especially India, to work for the disintegration of the country by evoking the language issues. Kazi (1987:46) goes a step further in explaining it, ‘whenever the ethnic nationalities have demanded their equal socio-political and economic rights from the ruling elite, both Islam and the state of Pakistan became endangered’.

The story of riots in Sindh over the language controversy claiming thousands lives has been narrated in an earlier section. These

events demonstrate that language is a matter of great sensitivity and it is an important feature of one's identity (Joyo 2005b:80).

EDUCATION SYSTEM PREVAILING THROUGH AGES

Sindh has been a centre of learning since prehistoric days. It had a well-developed education system, which was adopted by its succeeding rulers and conquerors until it joined Pakistan. After it became one of the provinces of independent state of Pakistan, its recognized and distinguished system of learning and education is extinguished.

With the invasion of Kot Diji civilization (3000-2700 BC) its two towns of Kot Diji and Gomla were burnt by the invaders. Thus due to its tragic end, the excavators have not been able to reach conclusions regarding a proper education system of this early civilization of Sindh except that it was agro-technical and was enough to cater the immediate needs of those Sindhis. A proper education system can be found in Sindh as early as the days of Moen-Jo-Daro (2500-1500BC). Although the Moen-Jo-Daro script is not completely deciphered but it is agreed that it reads from right to left, it is 'pictographic script' (of Sumer civilization), which has developed beyond the early stage of pictography. Although Aryan invaders destroyed much of this early Indus civilization, they adopted the local tradition of learning; however, they super-imposed Sanskrit over local language of Sindhi, as language of learning, as did the Arabs, the Arghuns and the British invaders later on.

Iranians, Greeks, Scythians, Kushans, Turkoman Parthians, Epthalites and White Huns continued the invasion of Sindh one after the other and usually merged in Sindhi culture and tradition and lost their identity, and they all continued to uphold the local system of education. When Arabs conquered Sindh, they found that the Holy Quran was already translated into Sindhi. Siddiqui (2006:7) quotes Ibn Abi Sabeeya (the famous Muslim scholar) as writing that the Sindhi people had a storehouse of knowledge which was later transferred to Greece.

Sindh had a well-established system of education before and during British period with Sindhi mother tongue of the people as the medium of instruction in schools since 1853. But, two years

after independence, Karachi was separated from Sind – against the wishes of the people of Sind. Besides, in 1951, the University of Karachi was established and there the University of Sindh offering Sindhi medium was then shifted to Hyderabad. With coming into being of the Karachi University, a notice for the removal of Sindhi language as an approved medium of answering question papers at university examination (the status which Sindhi enjoyed under the Sind University) was issued,’ (Joyo, 2005b: 1). This pushed Sindhis further back in terms of academic progress which they could acquire if they were not forced to adopt a foreign language for attempting the examinations.

Urdu received greatest boost during the regime of General Ziaul Haq, when Urdu was made the medium of instruction in not just all government schools but in also the English-medium schools. The National Education Policy of 1979 announced Urdu to be the symbol of Muslim culture and gave it the status of lingua franca for the people from Torkhum to Karachi, which was surely a step against the promotion of indigenous languages. Rahman (1999:85) points out, ‘in the case of Sindhi, which has been used in official domains ever since 1853, the loss will be real while in the others [other indigenous languages] it will only be symbolic’.

Under the education policy of the country, Urdu is made compulsory for all, English is taught at a later stage (in government schools only, in elitist private schools, English is the sole medium of instruction) and provinces have been allowed and disallowed during different regimes to teach and use their languages. This continuous change in allowing the provincial languages as the medium of education worsened the situation of Sindhis, who could have adopted Urdu or English (although it would be unjust and difficult to impose) if the policy of the succeeding governments would have remained same. Rahman (1999) makes it clear that the medium of instruction is a political issue and it depends on the interests of the ruling elite.

Joyo (1998) notes that it would not be the case anywhere in world, except in Sindh, that the basic education is given to people in a foreign language, when their mother tongue is developed enough and has remained a medium of formal instruction. And that

is the reason that despite investing one fourth of its annual budget on education, the quality of education in Sindh is dissatisfactory. He quotes from the UNESCO's Monographs on Fundamental Education held in November 1951 on 'The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education' in which mother tongue is considered as best medium of education.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, the history of Sindh in the context of different traits of Sindhi identity is discussed in order to bring to highlight that Sindh possesses distinct culture rooted in the Indus Valley Civilization. With the advent of Pakistan, when provincial cultures and identities were regarded as detrimental to the national Pakistani identity, people of Sindh among other rights wanted recognition for their language which is not just a mode of communication but a major symbol of identity. In the newly formed state of Pakistan, the two provinces that suffered most from the policy of making Urdu the national language and compulsory for all and a way to acquiring jobs were Bengal and Sindh, resulting in the formation of Bangladesh and continuous riots in the province of Sindh over the claims of power and the language disputes between Urdu-speaking Muslim immigrants (Muhajirs) from India and Sindhis, the natives of the province; thus adopting Urdu was more than just a medium of education issue. Rahman (1999) puts, 'the conditions of East Bengal parallel those of Sindh.' G.M.Syed advocated the creation of Sindhu Desh like Sheikh Mujeeb of Bengal. In order to make Pakistan a country free of ethnic problems, Rahman (1999) suggests making five national languages of Pakistan, Sindhi, Punjabi, Siraiki (also the formation of a province from lower Punjab for the Siraikis), Balochi and Pushto, whereas making Urdu an interprovincial language and English a language of international communication.

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