

Diversity in Unity

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Abstract

Every nation is known by its culture. Pakistanis also desire to be identified by their culture when they are outside Pakistan. The national culture of Pakistan can have some features in common with all regional cultures, so that on the national level the cultural spirit of various regions could form a bouquet in which flowers of different colours come together to present a multi-coloured unity.

Sindh is a region of diverse cultural influences. Sindhi culture claims to be a bunch of flowers which has formed a colourful bouquet of Pakistani culture.

Pakistan is divided, politically into four major provinces, Punjab, Sindh, N.W.F.P. and Balochistan, but physically, Pakistan can be divided into three regions: (i) The Northern Region, (ii) The Central Region (Indus Valley), and (iii) The Eastern Desert Strip. The natural phenomenon, therefore, has affected the daily life of different regions of Pakistan, and the daily life of every region has influenced the culture of people, their way of living, their customs and traditions, their dwellings and huts, and their business and occupation. All these aspects of daily life throw light on socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions of the people of Pakistan.

Pakistan has been the abode of people belonging to different social and ethnic groups, each group can be termed in sociological terms as nationality. They speak different languages, follow different customs and traditions, and have their own cultures.

Pakistan is a Federation, comprising of all the above mentioned provinces. Each of these provinces, their regions and sub-regions possess the peculiarities of their own culture, and the culture of every province and its regions is the result of its geographical position, social, economic and political set up.

Fortified by the impassable mountains in the North, it lies open in the West and North-west, with Khyber and Bolan as its main gateways. The fertility of its soil, is perhaps the reason why forces from outside made endless incursions into its boundaries. The mountain passes welcomed the invaders-ethnic, military and just plunderers. Each one has, thus, altered the pattern of entire existing culture.

Sindh, a province of Pakistan, is essentially the Indus Delta Country, has derived its name from its life-stream, the river, known to the people by the name of “Sindhu” from time immemorial. In view of Pithawalla, one of the greatest geographer of Pakistan:

“Of the provinces of Pakistan, Sindh is the best and oldest from the point of view of cultural progress.”

The Indus Valley civilization represented by, in the findings at Mehrgarh, Amri, Kot Diji, Mohen-Jo-Daro and Harappa is a virtual treasure not only for the archaeologists but also for the scholars who are interested in History, Culture, Linguistics and Anthropology. The life and culture once flourished in its scores of these ancient towns.

Following the civilization of Mohen-Jo-Daro (2300-1750 BC), there is a proof of Aryan settlement in this valley. The earth history of Sindh points out the contacts of Sindh with Iran at the time of Darius-I (519BC – 486BC) when Sindh was annexed to Persian (Achaemenian) Empire. Thus during these days, the Iranian Culture left its influence on Sindh.

Nearly two centuries later, i.e. in 326 BC Alexander, the Great, invaded Indian soil and captured the territory of Sindh also. Entering from the North, he passed through the territories of Aror, invaded the fertile region, touched the ancient settlement on the site of Sehwan on the Indus, and passed through the deltaic town of Patala, and proceeded South-ward to the coastal haven of Barbarikan, from where he left for Babylon by land route leading through Gedrosia.

After Alexander's death, Sindh came under the dominion of Chandraghupta Maurya (325 BC), and then was succeeded by Asoka. During his reign Sindh was influenced by Buddhism. Even today, the influences of Buddhism are found in Sindh. Then came Indo-Greeks and Parthian (3rd-2nd Century BC) and the Scythians and Kushans (100 BC-300 AD). The Scythians made Sindh as their permanent abode, and even now a large number of people of Scythian origin live in Sindh, though now they are converted to Islam. Excavations at Bhambore have brought to light the Scythian material confirming their hold on the coast line of Sindh.

Then came Kushans. Under Kushan Emperor, Kanishka (78-100 AD), the influence of Buddhism increased in Sindh. The most prominent successor of Kanishka were Huvishka and Vasudeva. The latter ruled as late as ninety eight years after Kanishka's accession.

From the 3rd to 7th century AD, Sindh remained under the political supremacy of Sassanid Persia. The founder of the Sassanian Dynasty of Persia was Ardashir Babagan, who ruled from 226 AD to 241 AD. There is some evidence that the Abhiras living to the East of the lower valley of the Indus during this period, acknowledged the sway of the Sassanians. When Shapur II besieged Amida on Tigris in 360 AD, he had the aid of Indian-elephants and of Kushan troops. According to Persian traditions, Sindh was actually ceded by its Indian overlord to Bahram V, better known as Bahram Gur, who ruled Persia from 420 AD to 440 AD.

Sindh came to be ruled by the Rai Dynasty in 550 AD when Naushirwan was ruling up to the right bank of the Indus. The rulers of Rai-Dynasty drove Iranians from the territory of Sindh and expanded their dominion up to Kerman, the city of Eastern Iran. The rulers of Rai-Dynasty were the followers of Buddhism. They ruled over Sindh for 94 years; i.e. from 550 AD up to 644 AD.

Chach Brahman captured the throne of Sindh after the death of Rai Sahasi II, in 644 AD, and thus Sindh fell under the Brahman rule, which came to an end by the Arab conquest in 712 AD, and the

foundation stone of Muslim rule and Muslim Culture was laid in the subcontinent.

From the perusal of long history of Sindh and the influence of various cultures on local Sindhi Culture, Sindh played a very important role in the history of culture and civilization in the subcontinent. Thus cultural sequence and its continuity in the subcontinent has remained continued.

Every nation is known by its culture. For instance the French, the English, the Japanese and the Chinese are identified by their particular cultures, same is with Pakistanis, when they are in a foreign country. Pakistanis also desire to be identified by their culture when they are outside Pakistan. But the question is what is Pakistani culture, which is to be reckoned as Pakistani culture? Is there any culture which is to be reckoned outside Pakistan? Is there any culture which is to be reckoned as Pakistani culture? What are our National (Pakistani) cultural characteristics? Are our habits common in all the provinces? Are our modes of living alike in all the regions? Do we follow the same customs and traditions in the whole country? Do we speak the same language every where? Do we use the same and common colors, motifs, designs in Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan and North-West Frontier province, Gilgit and Baltistan and FATA? The reply to all these questions, is no. Then what is Pakistani culture? Men vary from one another in their temperament, their likes and dislikes, and their vision. A Pathan may not be in habits and in visions like a Punjabi or a Sindhi, and similarly a Punjabi may not resemble to a Sindhi or to a Balochi.

Thus, there are varieties of cultures, in different provinces and regions in Pakistan. The people of all these provinces and regions are different in their languages, in their modes of living, in their tastes, as a consequence of their geographical environment. Even the forces of Federation have not been successful to keep them near to each other so that the variety of cultures might have looked like a thought with multifarious colors. Dr. Jamil Jalibi is of the view:

“I wanted to describe Pakistani culture. I could describe separately the habits, customs, arts and crafts, way of thinking and acting, and the cultural environment of the people of different regions of Pakistan, and we put on these the collective label of Pakistani culture. But I am sure that this would not satisfy you any more than it would satisfy me. When I wish to know that what Pakistani culture is, it means that I wish to know the common script that informs all the people living within the geographical boundaries of Pakistan, Punjabis, Sindhis, Pathans and Balochis alike, and on account of which there is not merely a similarity among their ways of thinking and but complete identity irrespective of regions” (Jamil Jalibi, Dr. 1984: 45-46 and 51).

“Let us look at Pakistani society from the stand-point and decide”, says Dr. Jalibi, “whether there exists on the national plan a culture which we can proudly describe as national culture of Pakistan. We do have regional cultures that unite these regional cultures in a deep spiritual bond. At national level, there is no such a thing as the Pakistani culture” (Jamil Jalibi, Dr., 1984: 45-46 and 51)

The regional cultures can play a very important role in national culture. The national culture can have some features in common with all the regional cultures, so that on the national level the cultural spirit

of the various regions could form a bouquet in which flowers of different colors come together to present a multi-colored unity. This unity of regional cultures can be named “National Culture”.

Sindhi culture has played a very significant role in forming the National Culture of Pakistan. In view of Dr. N.A. Baloch:

“Pakistani culture is a unity of regional cultures and sub-cultures. Its five main linguistic areas which constitute the five typical cultures, which are: the Sindh region, the Punjab regions, the Balochistan region, the Frontier region and the Northern region (extending North-wards of the Punjab and the Frontier region covering the Indus Kohistan, the Sawat Kohistan and the older Dardistan, including Chitral, Hunza, Gilgit and Baltistan). Sindhi, Punjabi, Balochi, Pashto and Dardic group of Kohistan, Khowar, Kafir and Shina are Respectively, the main languages of these regions”

(Baloch, N.A., Dr., 1965: 170-171, 181, 183 and 184).

Dr. Baloch recognises the following four factors as functions of traditional cultures of Pakistan:

- 1) Natural Environment or Geographical Conditions
- 2) History
- 3) Ethnology and
- 4) Islam, the people's faith

According to him (Dr. N.A. Baloch) “Under the influence of these basic factors people have developed varying patterns of living, constituting external forms (such as food, dress and shelter) social customs and behavior, and psychological and spiritual attitudes which manifest through choices, beliefs and ideals.”

Sindh is a region of diverse cultural influences. Throughout the centuries as these influences arrived in Sindh, they were incorporated into rich traditions, which are defined as Sindhi Culture. Thus the people and culture of Sindh can be thought of a distinct entity in which almost every aspect eludes simple definition.

Sindhi culture can easily be termed one of the richest in the world, and it can truly lay claim to being one of the oldest cultural traditions known to man. To see the richness of Sindhi Culture, Dr. Louis Flam writes:

“One only has to visit Sindh to be made aware of the diversity and beauty of her people and then language, literature, arts and crafts, music and social customs. Historically, the rudiments of Sindhi Culture can be found in the civilization represented by the ancient site of Mohen-Jo-Daro”.

A vast field of Sindhi Culture plays a very important role not only in Pakistan, but in the whole world. The study of various ethnic groups, their daily life and dwellings, their costumes and attire, their customs and traditions, their food and recipes, their traditional arts and crafts are very important aspects of folk life and culture of people of Sindh.

The work of folk artisans reflect the every day life of the people and their customs, their ideas and beliefs. A study of designs, patterns, motifs and their history throw the light on many obscure historical events, including the development of number of civilizations and people that existed in the Indus valley.

Such a study throws the light of cultural influence of the immigrants on the indigenous traditions and intermingling of the two arts.

The importance of Sindhi culture can be compared with the ideas of one of the most famous Hungarian poets of the early 20th century, Gyula Juhasz who said:

“Let us take care of the people who sing, the people who create myths, the women who

draw pictures and the man who carve wood and bone and do not become extinct, for their extinction would mean the end of mankind. Let us preserve, collect and disseminate their works; let us learn from them; let their art which is as permanent as nature and as continuous as history, becomes a part of our own living soul.”

To study the culture of any nation or nationality one should conduct the study of its languages because language also plays a very important role in expression and dissemination of culture. Language is a very important symbol and organ for any culture. It affects literature, and its literature affects the life of a nation. Language is a primary vehicle of communication, thoughts and feelings.

Like a language, literature is also very important for nation building. Literature plays a very significant role in a nation's society. It is the expression of our daily life and culture. Men of letters develop their language. They record and collect literary gleanings, relate them to current myths and legends, translate treasures of traditional literatures and synthesize the various cultural streams by writing the folklore.

It is literature which reflects the countries of cultural nationalism. It is only by acquainting ourselves with the literature through which we know so much about the cultures of the past ages.

The men of letters modernise the language and keep it alive by constant borrowing from other living tongues. They point out the deep relationship between literature and its historical inspiration. They relate poetry to patriotism and prose to national pride. They give new ideas, thoughts and inspiration to their readers through their writings.

The case of Sindhi language can be studied in the perspective drawn above. Sindhi is a very rich language. Its literature has a very magnificent past and bright future. Its contemporary literature depicts the vivid picture of Sindhi society and Sindhi culture. The writers of Sindhi language have not only translated literature from other languages but they have contributed much towards creative and

original literature also. They have done a great service not only to Sindhi literature but also to Sindhi language. They have created many new words and phrases to express the depth and delicacy of their thought. One can find variety of material and forms in the prose and poetry of Sindhi language. The poets of Sindhi language have preached for national awakening, nationalism, national freedom and internationalism. Sindh, Sindhi culture, Sindhi language, Sindhi people and their problems are the main features of their theme. They have, of course, been influenced by Western literature. This was actually the era of modernism. This era gave birth to new renaissance. This new renaissance, radical in content, was manifestation and aspiration of people confronting social problems, particularly the problems of middle and oppressed classes were rationally discussed. Even the love poetry of this renaissance was revolt against the feudal concept of romance.

The writers of Sindhi language have created new forms and have minted new words and phrases during every period of Sindhi literature. One can quote examples and instances right from the period when Pir Sadr al-Din (1290-1409A.D.), one of our classical earliest Sufi poets and philosophers used to live. We can mention the name of Qazi Qadan, Shah Karim of Bulri, Makhdoom Nuh, Shah Lutfullah Qadri, Shah Sharif Bhadai, Miyun Shah Inat, Khawja Muhammad Zaman of Lunari Sharif, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, Sachal Sarmast and Sami.

During every period of history of Sindhi literature, many socio-political and economic movements were influenced. The partition of Bengal in 1905, and the Home Rule Movement in 1916 gave birth to many Sindhi magazines, newspapers and periodicals. Dr. Schimmel is of the view:

“After the partition of Bengal in 1905, the Sindhi too, began to take more enthusiastically part in cultural activities on a large scale. Muslims and Hindus both did their best to elevate Sindhi cultural life from

among the many authors who flourished from 1905 to the beginning of the World War II, only a few can be singled out.”

After the World War II, many socio-political and economic movements such as Khilafat Movement, Anne-Bessant Movement etc. brought to light many scholars, writers and intellectuals. Most of them were original and creative writers. Mirza Qaleech Beg, Shamsuddin ‘Bulbul’, Naraindas Bhambani, Shri Dayaram Gidumal, Kauromal and others were the pioneers of the new school of diction and style. They switched over to the new, modern and natural style in Sindhi prose. Their style made Sindhi prose very popular.

The main factor which had influenced Sindhi prose, before and after the independence, was a widespread demand for social reforms of every kind, not slow and ordinary reforms, which were in progress, but immediate and intemperate reforms, which breed a spirit of rebellion and violent change and despair. The writers of post-independence period have mostly critical attitude towards moral, wealthy persons, zamindars, feudal lords, religious leaders, Mullahs, civil and military bureaucrats.

During the period of last fifty years, there have been considerable changes in beliefs and behaviors. There has been a wide change in political and social life. Beliefs, rituals, superstitions, and old customs, traditions and ceremonies have tended to loose their grip upon the mind of men or have been replaced by the new ideas and ideology.

Progressive literature has been dominant particularly on youth in the recent past. The new technology, specialization, conquest of space and nuclear weapons have totally changed the attitude of people towards life.

Thus many literary societies and men of letters before and after independence have rendered tremendous services to Sindhi language, literature and culture. They have initiated and infused spirit in many young and immature youngsters to write prose and poetry.

Folklore has also played a very important role in our oral history and culture. One of the greatest experts in French Folklore C.P. Saintyves, has beautifully written in his book 'Manuel du Folklore', published in 1933. He has said:

“Folklore is a study of traditions, and for this reason its first task is to collect and classify the facts that make up traditions, after this it must explain their nature and traditional essence. Folk tradition can not be compared to buried treasure. It is a flow of all kind of richness, an infinite succession of thousands of human inventions enjoyed by the stars, performs the miracle of perpetual motion”

Folk art is a major aspect of our cultural heritage and bears all the characteristics of an authentic form. Its components have various origins, expressing the ethnic and geographical identities of various communities of Sindh. Numerous immigrations and local development throughout the history have led to wealth of form, the sheer variety of which is rare in the world of folk arts.

Historically and archaeologically the roots of Sindhi arts and culture go back a very long way. Although heavily influenced by Iranians, Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Mongols and certain aspects of Western culture, the tradition of arts has continued unbroken.

Archaeological research of the 19th and early 20th century showed the roots of Sindh village life, religion, agricultural practices and number of traditional arts and crafts which can be traced back to the Indus Valley civilization of the third millennium BC.

Sindh has been the cradle of arts, crafts and culture since the time immemorial. The people of Indus Valley were not only great town-planners, builders, engineers, architects and masons, but they were also expert potters, goldsmiths, jewelers, artists, artisans, musicians and lapidaries. The political, cultural and historical destiny

of Sindh was shaped by its geographical locations at the cross roads between Rajasthan, Punjab and Balochistan. Over the centuries, this land has been the home of various people, the breeding-ground of major civilization and the meeting point of numerous migrations. A rich and varied cultural heritage has thus been handed down.

Thus the study of Sindhi culture and literature underlines its important role in the development of National Culture and literature of Pakistan. Sindhi Culture claims to be a bunch of flowers which has formed a colorful bouquet of Pakistani Culture.

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