

LANGUAGE, POLITICS AND POWER IN  
PAKISTAN:  
THE CASE OF  
SINDH AND SINDHI

TARIQ RAHMAN

# Language, Politics and Power in Pakistan: The Case of Sindh and Sindhi

Tariq Rahman

---

## Abstract

Sindhi is probably the oldest written language of Pakistan. Even when Persian was the official language of the Muslim rulers of Sind, Sindhi was given more importance in the educational institutions of Sind than the other languages of Pakistan were in the areas where they were spoken. From the 17th century onwards a number of religious and other books were written in Sindhi and were probably part of the curricula of religious seminaries. It was the only indigenous Pakistani language which was taught officially by the British at various levels of education. After the influx of Urdu-speaking *Mohajirs* to Sindh in 1947, the teaching of Sindhi has become an ethnic, identity symbol for the Sindhi nationalists. Thus, it is promoted by the Sindhis and resisted by the *Mohajirs*. This article sheds light on how language-teaching, in this case that of Sindhi, can have implications for ethnic politics.

---

## I

### Sindhi Ethnicity and the Teaching of Sindhi

Sindhi is one of the oldest languages of India. Indeed, the first language Muslims (Arabs) came in contact with when they entered India in large numbers was Sindhi. Thus several Arab writers mention that Sindhi was the language of the people in al-Mansura, the capital of Sind. Indeed, the Rajah of Alra called Mahraj, whose kingdom was situated between Kashmir and Punjab, requested Amir Abdullah bin Umar, the ruler of al-Mansura, to send him someone to translate the Quran into his language around AD 882. The language is called 'Hindi' by Arab historians (in this case the author of *Ajaib ul Hind*) who often failed to distinguish between the different languages of India and put them all under

the generic name of 'Hindi.' However, Syed Salman Nadwi, who calls this the first translation of the Quran into any Indian language suggests that this language might be Sindhi.<sup>i</sup> Later, between 1020-1030 al-Beruni visited India and wrote a book on it called *Kitab Ma-li al Hind* which was translated by Edward C Sachau as *Alberuni's India* (1888).<sup>ii</sup> In this several alphabets of the Hindus are mentioned. Going on with his list al-Beruni says:

Other alphabets are the *Malwari*, used in Malwashau, in Southern Sind, towards the seacoast; the *Saindhava*, used in Bahamanwa or Almansura.<sup>iii</sup>

Nabi Baksh Baloch, the famous Pakistani Sindhologist, opines that *Saindhava* was Sindhi. In his words:

This was the Arabic-Sindhi script, the 'Sindhized Arabic script' or the truly Sindhi script. On the basis of indirect evidence, it may be presumed that the graphemes for the more typical Sindhi phonemes were divided by adding dots to the corresponding Arabic letters.<sup>iv</sup>

But al-Beruni's text, or at least its English translation, concerns itself only with the 'Hindu alphabet.' The very first thing which is said about it is that 'The Hindus write from the left to the right like Greeks.'<sup>v</sup> After this the general characteristics of the Brahmi script, characteristics which all its derivatives share in common, are described. Then comes the list in which the word *Saindhava* occurs. As such, it is difficult to believe that al-Beruni was talking about a script which, being based upon Arabic, ran from right to left.

However, there is evidence other than al-Beruni's that there was a 'Sindhized Arabic script' in Sind in 1020-1030 AD when al-Beruni was in India. This comes from *Kitab al Fihrist*, a book of lists compiled by an Arab writer al-Nadim (d. 990 AD). In this list a script using both single and double dots is recorded in Sind. Since this is older than even al-Beruni's days, there must have been an Arabic Sindhi script during his time too. In any case, even if dots and other diacritical marks were used to show the distinctive pronunciation of Sindhi sounds, these could not have been used in a uniform standardised manner. Thus different people, generally Muslim poets and men of letters, must have used slightly different versions of the same Arabic script. The Hindus, especially business people, used derivatives of the Brahmi script.

In the 16th century, by which time much was written in Sindhi, Makhdum Jafar of Dadu published an Arabic work called *Nahj al-Ta'allum*. It was on education and its Persian version was also prepared by the author in 1568. Both works are no longer extant but Nabi Bakhsh Baloch has published a digest called *Hasil al-Nahj* based upon it in 1969. According to this digest Makhdum Jafar emphasised the pupil rather than the teacher and the text. One can hardly call this a precursor of the modern pupil centred teaching methodologies but, if Baloch is right, it did lead to teaching in the mother tongue which the pupil could understand. In those days teaching was in Persian though teachers could hardly not have used Sindhi to explain the Persian alphabet and vocabulary to small children. However, in contradistinction to Punjab and north India, Sindhi became the recognised medium of instruction in Sind as well as a subject of study. Textbooks in Sindhi, generally of a religious character, were in circulation in Sind just as similar books in other languages were in circulation in other Muslim communities during the last days of the Mughal period.

An important book in this category was Abdur Rahman's *Qawaid ul Quran* which is said to have been written in the 13th century of the Hijra (which begins from November 1785) to guide students to read the Quran correctly. Muslims have always been concerned with the correct pronunciation of the Quran because, in their view, the meanings of words change if they are pronounced incorrectly. The purpose of the book, therefore, was to preserve the standardised pronunciation of classical Arabic for religious reasons. However, the book is also a treatise, albeit

unscientific, on orthoepy and phonetics. The writer is concerned with the place and manner of articulation of Arabic phonemes not found in Sindhi. This makes the book one of the first, possibly even the first, treatise on phonetics in Sindhi.

The best known book in Sindhi written in the end of the 17th century is by Abul Hasan of Thatta. It is also mentioned as *Abul Hasan Ji Sindhi* by B H Ellis in his report on education in Sind at the time of the British conquest in 1843.<sup>vi</sup> Another such book was by Makhdum Zia Uddin. Like that of his predecessor, this too is known by his name—*Makhdum Ziauddin Ji Sindhi*. It was written in the 18th century and it explains how prayers are to be said. Since it is meant to guide children it focuses on rituals of cleanliness, times of congregational and other prayers and other such practical matters. Incidentally, it reveals the state of astronomical belief of pre-modern Sindhi Muslims. References to planets, stars and their place in heavens is, indeed, still part of the idiom and world view of astrologers and palmists who ply their trade of telling the future in the cities of Pakistan and those who visit them in order to avert coming crises. The purpose of the book, however, is religious so that most of the space is taken up by lessons on rituals.

There are other such books too which have been edited and reprinted recently by Dr. Nabi Baksh Baloch. Among them are the *Nur Nama*, *Meraj Nama*, *Munajat Nama*, *Hashar Nama*, *Qiamat Nama* and so on. All the ones mentioned above, and a number of other works of this kind, have been collected together in *Sindhi Boli Jo Agatho Manzooom Zakheero*.<sup>vii</sup> These books are all religious and didactic. All the versions of the *Nur Nama*, not only in Sindhi but also in other languages, are about spiritual radiance and enlightenment (Nur = light) which follow from faith. Other books refer to prevalent beliefs about the day of judgement, salvation and other such doctrines. The important point, in our context, is the fact that these works were in Sindhi and that the language was taught. Richard Burton, the first Englishman to write a report on education in Sind, says:

He [a boy pupil] probably is nine years old before he proceeds to the next step— the systematic study of his mother tongue, the Sindhi. The course is as follows:

- 1st. The *Nur-nama*, a short and easy religious treatise upon the history of things in general, before the creation of man. The work was composed by one Abdul Rehman, and appears to be borrowed from the different Ahadis, or traditional sayings of the Prophet...
- 2nd. The works of Makhdum Hashem, beginning with the *Tafsir*.
- 3rd. Tales in verse and prose, such as the adventures of Saiful, Laili-Majano, etc. The most popular works are the *Hikayet-e-Salihin* a translation from the Arabic by a Sindhi Mullah, Abd al Hakim; the subjects are the lives, adventures, and remarkable sayings of the most celebrated saints, male and female, of the golden age of Islam. The *Ladaro* is an account of the Prophet's death, borrowed from the *Habib-el-Siyar*, by Mian Abdullah. The *Miraj-Nama* is an account of Mohammad's night excursion to heaven... The *Sau-Masala*, or Hundred Problems, is a short work by one Ismail, showing how Abd-el-Halim, a Fakir, married the daughter of the Sultan of Rum, after answering the hundred queries with which this accomplished lady used to perplex her numerous lovers.<sup>viii</sup>

From the age of nine till the age of 12 or 13, roughly about four years, the student read these works in his mother tongue. It was only then that he started studying Persian. In the rest of India, as we know already, Persian began from infancy though there too the teachers had to explain the basic vocabulary and the art of spelling and writing informally through the mother tongue.

The place of honour was, of course, reserved for Persian which was a symbol of good breeding, refinement and learning. In addition to its social significance, it had tremendous utilitarian importance being the language of the domains of power. Thus, besides the Muslims, the Hindu Amils who aspired to bureaucratic jobs under the rulers of Sind, also learned Persian. This state of affairs changed when the British took Persian down from its high pedestal and put English in its place. But

for lower jobs in the domains of power, the British chose Sindhi in the Arabic script.<sup>ix</sup> Sindhi now was much in demand not only by the British officers, who always learned and were examined in, the languages of the areas they served in but by Sindhis desirous of employment with the British. For teaching Sindhi, books were required.

The first book which was published was *Hikayat-us-Sualehin* (Lives of Saints). Lieutenant Arthur, who published it, also published a list of idiomatic sentences, originally written by Dossabhoy, in Sindhi.<sup>x</sup> *Hikayat us Sualehin*, also mentioned by Burton, was recommended by the British, among them also Burton, as 'a work which may be recommended to the European scholar when beginning to read Sindhi. The Arabic and Persian vocables in which it abounds will facilitate study; the style is pure, copious, and not too much laboured.'<sup>xi</sup> However, Ellis did not approve of this book. In his report he wrote:

Even this would hardly be the work to choose as a text-book for the rising generation; and in the utter want of all elementary works, it was necessary to translate, from the English and other languages, a series adapted for school instruction.<sup>xii</sup>

The government, therefore, got a number of books, including *Aesop's Fables*, translated from different languages into Sindhi. Among these were books on arithmetic, geography, drawing and history.<sup>xiii</sup>

Ground was now laid for adopting Sindhi as a medium of instruction in schools. The break from the past, when Persian and Arabic were the focus of linguistic studies, was decisive but to soften the blow the British decided not to eliminate Persian and Arabic at once. However, Sindhi was to be encouraged as follows. In the words of Ellis:

Although tuition in English, Arabic, or Persian, is to be paid for by fees, instruction in Sindhee is to be gratuitous; and I would with all deference submit that, although not in accordance with the rule as laid down by the Court, this arrangement be allowed to hold good.<sup>xiv</sup>

For the Sindhi Hindus, whom Ellis did not want to alienate from the British *raj* either, schools were established in which Hindu Sindhi—Sindhi written in the khudawadi script—was taught. But this script did not prosper because jobs came only by the knowledge of the Arabic Sindhi script. In short, the new language-teaching policy was to disseminate knowledge of the Arabic-Sindhi script; to make English available only for a tiny elite and to appease the Hindus by keeping up the illusion that their script too was taught. For this purpose Ellis requested funds for the establishment of schools as follows:

1. The establishment of 'District schools, where Sindhee will be the chief study; but where Persian will also be taught for a fee; and, if required, Arabic.'
2. The establishment of an English school at the head quarters of each Collectorate.
3. Hindoo-Sindhee schools, for instruction in an improved uniform character, founded on the Khudawadee.<sup>xv</sup>

This policy continued undisturbed throughout the nineteenth century and a modern literature as well as journalism started flourishing in Sindhi.

## II

### Urdu-Sindhi Controversy before the Partition

The Sindhi Muslims were backward in education especially the children of the feudal lords (*the zamindars*). To suggest measures to change this, a committee was appointed by the Bombay government. These were the days of the Urdu-Hindi controversy all over British India because of which Urdu had become associated with Muslims. Thus, to the members of the Commission, the teaching of Urdu was one way of satisfying the Muslims. Among these members Syed Shamsuddin Kadri was the only one who signed subject to his minute of dissent. The other five members, of whom there was no Sindhi Muslim, reached a consensus on the necessity of encouraging Urdu in Sind.

The Committee, appointed in June 1913, submitted its report a year later. Among other things it recommended that:<sup>xvi</sup>

The Committee is in favour of the experiment already initiated by Government of having all teaching in Urdu schools given through the medium of Urdu, the vernacular of the district being taught to those who wish to study it. The Committee thinks that this should apply to the whole presidency, the different Urdu standards being started simultaneously.<sup>xvii</sup>

The experiment alluded to in the report must have resulted in the printing of a large number of textbooks in Urdu because the report goes on to state:

The Committee is advised that adequate textbooks in Urdu exist, and that all the subjects can be taught through this medium at once, except the geography of the province, for which special translations may be required.<sup>xviii</sup>

The Committee emphasised Urdu in other ways too: it provided grants to encourage the production of literature in Urdu and suggested that statistics about the number of Urdu schools should be provided annually to the government of India.

W H Sharp, the Director of Public Instruction who sent the report onwards to the Bombay authorities, noted that he was not convinced that it was either the desire of Muslims or in their interest to teach them only in Urdu. However, some of their representatives had urgently requested that texts should be prepared in Urdu and he had agreed to countenance the experiment.

The report was then circulated to the district officers of Sind who further asked prominent Muslims for their opinion. Among others the Wazir of Khairpur state, Mahomed Ibrahim Shaikh Ismail, commented as follows:

... to adopt Urdu as the vernacular of the Mohamedan Community in the province, in my opinion, is not only unnecessary, but may be positively harmful.

The conditions prevailing in this province are vastly different from those obtaining in the Presidency proper. The Sindhi language is as much the Vernacular of the Moslem Community as that of the Hindus of Sind; besides the Court language is also Sindhi. If Urdu is to be taught to them as compulsory language, instead of Sindhi, which is the language of the Province and the mother tongue of the Mohamedan Community, in the Primary and the Anglo Vernacular Schools, the Community will be forced to impart to their children education in two foreign languages, which to an ordinary scholar will appear a troublesome task to accomplish.<sup>xix</sup>

Khan Bahadur Allahando Shah of Nawabshah also said the same (Letter of K B Syed Allahando Shah to the Collector of Nawabshah, 11 February 1915. English translation of the Sindhi letter in the Collector's Letter to the Commissioner in Sind, 11 February 1915, No. 292). The district officers themselves also held similar views. At last the Commissioner sent the following views to the authorities in Bombay:

On one point there is entire unanimity of opinion, amongst officials and non-officials, namely on the necessity for the encouragement of Urdu in Sind; as Government are doubtless aware Urdu is not the mother tongue of the Sind Mahomedans; his vernacular is Sindhi and he would be much embarrassed if Urdu were forced upon him.<sup>xx</sup>

The Commissioner also suggested that another committee—this time consisting mostly of Sindhi Muslims and Englishmen working in Sind—should be appointed ‘to consider for Sind the whole question of Mahomedan education.’

This committee was appointed in 1915 and submitted its report a year later. Among other things it recommended that the teaching of Persian and to a lesser extent Arabic, be encouraged but it decided not to take up the vexed question of Urdu again.<sup>xxi</sup> As such Sindhi continued to be the medium of instruction at the school level as before.

### III Sindhi Teaching in Pakistan

In independent Pakistan the only provinces in which the indigenous languages were the media of instruction in the non-elitist state schools were Bengal and Sind. In both, therefore, the resistance against perceived domination by the centre came to be expressed primarily through linguistic and cultural symbols. In Sind the feeling for Sindhi was high because it had already been part of the struggle against the administrative domination of Bombay. Although an administrative matter on the surface, the issue had the overtones (and hence the stridency) of a Hindu-Muslim conflict. The Muslim leaders wanted Sind to be separated from the Bombay presidency on grounds of Sind being a separate entity, a cultural and linguistic whole with its distinct identity. The Hindus felt that this would create a Muslim majority province and, therefore, have the effect of increasing Muslim power at their expense. Sindhi was very much part of the struggle, the Muslims claiming that it gave Sind an identity distinct from Bombay while the Hindus said that this argument would sub-divide Bombay along other linguistic lines as well. (Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the Sub-Committee on Sind, 14 January 1931.<sup>xxii</sup>) Eventually the Muslims won and Sind became a separate province in 1930.<sup>xxiii</sup>

One of the consequences of this separation was the establishment of the University of Sind. Although the medium of instruction at the proposed university was not to be Sindhi, it was mentioned as an entity in need of development which only a university could do. Dr. Gurbakhshani wrote a note arguing:

Sind is an old province, perhaps the most ancient in India. It has a history, traditions and a culture of its own. Its soil and stones could be compelled to reveal movements and geological formations of the hoary past. Its races and its language possess a distinct Oriental bias. All this remains unexplored and no attention paid to the systematic study of Arabic, Persian or Sindhi with all its philological wealth.<sup>xxiv</sup>

The University was established in 1946 in Karachi, only a year before the creation of Pakistan.

Thus, on the eve of the partition, the position of Sindhi was strong. It was the medium of instruction in state schools; it was to be promoted by the university; it was a subject of study at various levels in educational institutions. Above all, and what made it popular, was the fact that at the lower level of the administration and the judiciary as well as in journalism, it was in demand. Thus someone who had acquired it could get jobs. This position was not enjoyed by any other language of (West) Pakistan at that time because neither Punjabi nor Pashto nor Balochi, the major languages of this area, were used in the domains of power at any level.

The coming in of the Urdu-speaking *Mohajirs* from India challenged this privileged position of Sindhi. According to the 1951 Census the *Mohajirs* constituted about 57% of the population of Karachi and dominated other Sindhi cities too: Hyderabad (66.08%); Sukkur (54.08%); Mirpurkhas (68.42%) and Nawabshah (54.79%).<sup>xxv</sup> The consequences of this in linguistic, cultural and educational terms were profound. Above all, it meant that Sind was a divided province. Its cities were predominantly Urdu-speaking while its villages were Sindhi-speaking. This, in turn, implied that the Sindhis would be disadvantaged not only culturally and socially but also educationally and economically because they would have to compete with mother-tongue speakers of Urdu for jobs in the cities which would now be available at the lower level in Urdu and at the higher in English. The psychological trauma of this cannot be adequately comprehended by non-Sindhis. But the feeling that one has become disadvantaged, and what is worse, one's self-esteem has been lowered in one's own country must have been very galling for the emerging Sindhi middle class. Language and culture are intimately linked not only with jobs and power but even more importantly with self-esteem. To feel that one's language is regarded as a rustic-tongue; an uncouth jargon; is to feel humiliated. The dominance of Urdu, which was seen as the language of sophistication and civilised intercourse, was in itself a source of humiliation for the Sindhis. Moreover, the *Mohajirs* made little effort to conceal the fact that they looked at Sindhi culture as a rustic, and hence less sophisticated, culture. Thus, they felt no psychological need to assimilate with this culture and learn Sindhi.

Looking at this issue from the *Mohajir* point of view one finds an alternative version of reality. Urdu, as we know, had replaced Persian as a symbol of elitist, educated Muslim identity in north India during the 19th century. The Hindi-Urdu movement hardened attitudes both among Muslims and Hindus so that Urdu became more closely associated with Muslim identity, and Hindi with the Hindu one, than ever before.<sup>xxvi</sup> So, the *Mohajirs* assumed that Pakistan would be a place to preserve and promote Urdu. The idea of reducing its importance for the sake of the indigenous languages went against everything they had heard for more than a century in favour of Urdu being the language of *all* Indian Muslims. Even more importantly, the *Mohajirs* were mostly urban people and were now living in urban areas again. Urban people do look down upon rural people not only in South Asia but almost everywhere in the world. Thus, the *Mohajirs* had a prejudice against Sindhi which made them resistant to learning Sindhi.

Above all, the state's policies did not force the *Mohajirs* to transcend or suppress their preconceived attitudes and learn Sindhi. At least in the cities, where most *Mohajirs* lived, the business of life could be carried on in Urdu. Cultural life, as Feroz Ahmed<sup>xxvii</sup> and many other Sindhis pointed out, was so dominated by Urdu that one did not feel that the cities of (West) Pakistan used any language in the streets other than Urdu. The music, the films, the popular magazines, the newspapers, the conversation—all were in Urdu in the cities of Sind. In the villages and towns *Mohajirs* did learn Sindhi even if they never stopped believing in the superiority of Urdu; but most of them lived in the cities. They did not feel inclined nor did they need to learn Sindhi. Indeed, they could not even if they wanted to because all business, formal and informal, was carried out in Urdu and not in Sindhi. Thus the *Mohajirs* remained a non-assimilationist, urban and privileged minority in Sind—a fact which made the teaching of Sindhi part of the ethnic politics of Sind.

As the present author has referred to the role of language teaching in the ethnic politics of Sind with special reference to the Sindhi language movement,<sup>xxviii</sup> there is no need to repeat the details. However, some repetition is inevitable considering that the teaching of Sindhi is an important issue in Pakistan.

Briefly, then the first shock for the Sindhis was the removal of the Sindh University from Karachi to Hyderabad. Writing on this issue Feroz Ahmed says:



The creation of Pakistan coincided with the decision to set up Sindh University in Karachi. The Pakistan government packed off the new university to Hyderabad to vacate the room for Karachi University, which was supposed to be an Urdu-speaking refugee university in which there was room for even a department of the Sindhi language. While Karachi University remained a more or less exclusive preserve for the Urdu-speaking intelligentsia, no such exclusive policy was adopted in the hiring of faculty at Sindh University.<sup>xxx</sup>

As Karachi was made the federal area, the new university was not even part of Sind in name and was seen to be antagonistic to Sindhi. Thus, when in 1957-58 the University of Karachi forbade students from taking examinations in Sindhi, the Sindhi nationalists protested strongly. Among others, Hyder Baksh Jatoti, president of the Sind Hari Committee, said that the new order was a signal to Sindhi students to: 'Leave Karachi, go to Sind if you want to retain Sindhi, Karachi is none of yours.'<sup>xxx</sup>

In 1954 Sind became part of the one-unit (of West Pakistan). Ayub Khuhro, the then premier of Sind, argued that Sindhi language and culture would be preserved as follows:

So far as culture and language is concerned, Sind has done its bit. Our Legislature has passed an Act appointing a statutory body which goes by the name of Sind Cultural Advancement Board to look after the development of Sind Culture. Sind Government has made an endowment of 25 lakhs we have given for the library, art and art gallery and the development of oriental and Sindhi literature and its preservation. It is hoped that in the future set-up, Sind's interests regarding its culture are fully preserved.<sup>xxxi</sup>

But, in fact, such puny efforts were of no avail. In the one-unit Sindhi was relegated to a regional, hence peripheral, language. In 1957 the Sindhi Adabi Sangat, one of the several bodies which had sprung up to defend the interests of Sindhi and Sindhis, said that the Sindhi-speaking people would be handicapped as far as the race for jobs is concerned if Sindhi is not 'made to serve as an official language at least for Sind and its adjoining areas.'<sup>xxxii</sup> Even worse, in 1958 one-unit came to be backed by Ayub Khan's martial law. The tide was now even more against the teaching of Sindhi.

There are anecdotes about how General Tikka Khan, then part of the martial law machinery in Sind, stopped the teaching of Sindhi in parts of the former province. However, evidence does not support these stories. There is no doubt, however, that the military, being centrist and highly distrustful of ethnic movements, did want to suppress the teaching of Sindhi. This is borne out by the Education Commission which submitted its report in 1959. After having said that Bengali and Urdu, the national languages, would be encouraged, the report points out that in West Pakistan Urdu is, indeed, the medium of instruction from class VI onwards. Indeed, even up to class IV, it was the medium of instruction in the Punjab, most parts of the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP), Balochistan and Azad Kashmir. In Sind alone was Sindhi, rather than Urdu, the medium of instruction even after this level. To the centrist members of the commission this could prevent the Sindhis from being 'nationalised.' Hence, they suggested, that 'Urdu should be introduced as the medium of instruction from class VI from 1963.'<sup>xxxiii</sup>

But such a radical change in the position of Sindhi could not be accepted by the Sindhi nationalists. Hence, despite the repressive nature of the state, the Sindhis took out processions throughout the province and finally Ayub Khan decided to let Sindhi alone.<sup>xxxiv</sup> However, Urdu was encouraged and Sindhi discouraged during the Ayub Khan era—a fact which led to much resentment among the Sindhis.

Although Sindhi was still the medium of instruction in schools (rural schools generally), Urdu was taught as a subject. Sindhi nationalists sometimes objected even to this arrangement. One of them (probably Ibrahim Joyo?) wrote as follows:

In Sind, Sindhi-medium children read Urdu compulsorily from class IV to class XII. The Urdu medium children have not to read Sindhi correspondingly. This imposes inequality of burdens, inequality of opportunity, and social and cultural inferiority on the Sindhi-speaking children, and is the greatest discrimination against a free people in a free country.<sup>xxxv</sup>

A number of Sindhi-medium schools closed down in the urban areas probably because urban people were either non-Sindhis or people who wanted their children to acquire Urdu for utilitarian reasons.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The anonymous 'publicist,' whose article has been referred to above, reported the establishment of Urdu-medium schools in Mirpur Khas and Khairpur Mirs in order to seduce Sindhi-medium students away from their own schools.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

When Ayub's rule ended, the Sindhis felt relieved. Although martial law was imposed once again by General Yahya Khan, the one-unit was abolished and the Sindhi nationalists felt that their language would be given the importance it had before the one-unit days. However, the Yahya government's educational policy, issued under the chairmanship of Air Marshal Nur Khan, laid even more emphasis on the national languages—Bengali and Urdu—than the Ayub Khan one. Once again the indigenous languages of the people of Pakistan, called the 'regional languages,' were to be marginalised.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Again the Sindhi nationalists protested saying that they desired that Sindhi should be taught more widely.<sup>xxxix</sup> For them the teaching of Sindhi was part of Sindhi identity and ethnic assertion.

#### IV

#### Language Riots and Sindhi Teaching

Ethnic assertion, as the present author's previous book<sup>xl</sup> suggests, is a consequence of many factors. In the case of Sind instrumental factors—lack of jobs, lack of access to power commensurate with the rise of the population and historical position of the Sindhis, growth of the middle class wanting a role in the salariat—contributed to the ethnic assertion and language was the symbol which expressed it. However, the actors in language movements—the educated young men and members of the intelligentsia—are not motivated by such factors alone. In the heat of the moment they feel as if they are striking a blow for their language i.e. their heritage, their identity, the very essence of their nationality. Thus, one has to take the sentimental reasons of both Sindhis and *Mohajirs* to understand language riots. The riots, however, have been explained earlier. Let us see what role language-teaching played in it.

In the January-February 1971, language-teaching led to riots because it was resisted. One reason why the situation became explosive was because the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE), Hyderabad, resolved on 21 December 1970 that *Mohajir* students be examined in Sindhi in the Secondary School Certificate examination of the year 1972.<sup>xli</sup> Nawab Muzaffar Hussain, leader of the *Mohajirs* at that time, decided to resist this decision and brought out processions in Hyderabad. Soon other cities became influenced and the *Mohajirs* clashed with the Sindhis in Nawabshah, Mirpur Khas, Hyderabad and even in Karachi. Indeed, in Karachi the situation became very violent by the end of January and the army had to be called out.

In July 1972 there was a replay of this bloody drama once again. This time it was the Sind (Teaching, Promotion and use of Sindhi Language) Bill of 1972 passed on 7 July 1972 by the Sind Legislative Assembly, which created the problem. Although what caused extreme apprehension among the *Mohajirs* was clause 6 of the Bill according to which Sindhi could be used in the domains of power (offices, courts, legislature etc), the language-teaching provisions too were controversial. The language-teaching provisions provided for the teaching of both Urdu and Sindhi as compulsory subjects from class IV to class XII. On the face of it this was only just but in 1972, when a Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government was in power both in Sind and the centre, the *Mohajirs* of Sind

(especially those of Karachi) felt completely alienated. They had voted against the PPP and they felt disillusioned with the loss of East Pakistan. They felt that they too, like the Urdu-speaking Biharis of East Pakistan, would be 'thrown out into the sea' if Sindhis came to dominate Sind. The Sindhis, including Mumtaz Bhutto and later Z A Bhutto himself, explained reasonably that Urdu was the national language of Pakistan and that the purpose of the bill was merely to secure the position of Sindhi which one-unit and martial law had harmed. But the question was really one of power in Sind, and language was the apparent bone of contention. The *Mohajirs*, as non-assimilationist as ever, had converted Sind into a bilingual province. They wanted the Sindhis to recognise this reality. The Sindhis did not. Indeed, they could not without also recognising that Sind had, indeed, been partitioned. As such there was a compromise after the bloodiest language riots in Pakistan's history took place in the fateful summer of 1972. The extent of the loss, as reported in the national assembly, was staggering.<sup>xlii</sup> But, more ominously, the bitterness of the conflict led to the rise of militant ethnicity among the *Mohajirs* which led to Karachi becoming a battlefield from 1985 onwards.

The compromise solution, issued by the Governor of Sind on 16 July, gave a twelve-year reprieve to the *Mohajirs* but, in fact, no government dared make only Sindhi the language of state employment in Sind. This means that, like before, urban *Mohajirs* get away without learning much Sindhi while Sindhis have to learn Urdu so as to prevent being locked out of the domains of power in Sind.

However, the fact that Sindhi is more convenient for those whose mother tongue it is, is borne out by the following statistics of the preference of school students in the 1981 matriculation examination.

|                 | Medium of Examination (Percentage) |         |         |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                 | Urdu                               | Sindhi  | English |
| Karachi Board   | 97.90 %                            | Nil     | 2.59%   |
| Sukkur Board    | 21.13 %                            | 78.62 % | 0.23%   |
| Hyderabad Board | 50.80                              | 45.23   | 3.95    |

Source: Gazettes of the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Sindh.

## V

### The Teaching of Sindhi at Present: Higher Studies in Sindhi

Sindhi was used both as a medium of instruction in Sind and was taught as a subject. Masters courses were offered in it at the University of Sind when it was at Karachi. When the university moved to Hyderabad, the Masters classes were suspended but were continued once again in 1971.<sup>xliii</sup> At the newly established University of Sind in Jamshoro, the MA in Sindhi was started by Dr. Nabi Baksh Baloch along with his colleagues in the early 1950s.<sup>xliv</sup>

The MA is important as a symbol of the development of a language in Pakistan. Thus the Sindhi nationalists point out with pride that their language and literature were developed enough to justify teaching at such an advanced level. The products of the post-graduate departments of Sindhi do better than those of Pashto, Punjabi, Balochi and Brahvi because there are schools and colleges where Sindhi is compulsory and they can find jobs. Thus the MA in Sindhi is the most successful MA among all the other MAs in the indigenous languages of Pakistan.

Apart from the MA, higher research is also available in Sindhi language and literature. The University of Sind (Jamshoro) and the University of Karachi both offer research courses leading to the MPhil and PhD. The University of Karachi has both a Department of Sindhi and the Shah Abdul Latif Chair. The presence of such academic programmes has had a multiplier effect on academic and

creative writing in Sindhi. Thus, there are many books on the historical and linguistic aspects of Sindhi among which the works of Nabi Baksh Baloch and G A Allana<sup>xlvi</sup> are well known. These books are in circulation because students in colleges and universities need them. This demand encourages publishers to publish and authors to write more books thus resulting in the establishment of Sindhi as an academic language in addition to being a language of journalism, literature and administration.

After the rise of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) in Karachi and Hyderabad in 1984, language has become a secondary issue in Sind. It was, in a sense, a secondary issue even earlier because the primary issues even then were power, goods and services and shares in employment. But language, being an ethnic symbol, stood for the Sindhi and *Mohajir* community's consolidated power as a pressure group. Moreover, language was seen as a repository of culture and, therefore, worthwhile in its own right and not only as a symbol of identity. This gave language far more prominence than it enjoys today.

This decrease in the significance of language is the direct consequence of the rise of militancy, chaotic conditions and a sense of emergency in Sind—especially in Karachi. Even so, the Sindhi nationalists do emphasise their language and insist that its teaching should be improved. The eleven prominent members of the Sindhi intelligentsia I interviewed in 1997 agreed that the *Mohajirs* and Sindhis could integrate if Sindhi was taught more effectively to all of them. However, one of them did point out that integration would require other inputs as well.

During the Zia ul Haq era (1977-88), Urdu was encouraged as a centrist symbol. Although no ostensibly anti-Sindhi steps were taken, the emphasis on Urdu and Islam discouraged the expression of ethnic nationalist (and, hence, pro-Sindhi) views. Moreover, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) became so powerful in Sind that it almost took on the semblance of a civil war. In February 1988, however, a Sindhi Adabi Conference was held at Jamshoro. Among the resolutions it passed, one was that Sindhi should be taught in the cities.<sup>xlvi</sup> Later, the Sindhi Bolo Sath and other organisations worked to get Sindhi adopted as the sole official language, and hence a major instructional language, of Sind.

Speaking at a conference of the Sindhi Adabi Sangat on 17 August 1996 at Hyderabad, Ibrahim Joyo blamed all state functionaries, including those who were Sindhis but collaborated with the centre, for neglecting Sindhi. Among other things, a resolution was passed to ensure the publication of Sindhi books for the Urdu-speaking students of class XI as agreed upon earlier in the 1972 language agreement. Moreover, it was also resolved that Sindhi be introduced in all the English medium schools of the province.<sup>xlvi</sup> Thus, the idea was to expand the domain of Sindhi-language teaching.

Apart from the Sath and the Sangat, other bodies [such as the Servants of Sind Society (SSS)] also kept urging a wider dissemination of Sindhi. The president of SSS, Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah who is a well known Sindhi nationalist intellectual, said:

“Those who do not speak Sindhi and have no pride in being Sindhis, have no right to be included in the population of Sindh.”<sup>xlvi</sup>

This statement was issued in the context of the census which was to be held in January 1998. Committed Sindhi nationalists still keep lamenting the state's alleged apathy towards Sindhi.

## VI Conclusion

The teaching of Sindhi has two points of significance for Sindhi-speaking people. First, it has utilitarian value as a language of the lower salariat. In this capacity it has been used since British days and, despite the domination of the Urdu-speaking *Mohajirs* in the cities of Sind, continues to be useful for Sindhis even now. Secondly, it has symbolic value as a marker of Sindhi ethnic identity. In this capacity it has become the most important icon of Sindhi identity since the nineteen fifties when the Sindhis first started feeling alienated in their own land because of the domination of non-Sindhis in the cities; the high handedness of the central ruling elite (which was mostly Punjabi) and policies which reduced their power as an ethnic group. For both reasons, but especially because of the second, the Sindhi intelligentsia responded by promoting their language as an identity symbol. The idea was to preserve, or create, the consciousness of the Sindhi identity in the Sindhis and bring about the assimilation of the non-Sindhis. In this process a large body of creative and academic writing was produced which has made Sindhi one of the richest languages of Pakistan. However, Sindhi is far from being the major language of instruction for all the inhabitants of Sind for both utilitarian and political reasons. The non-Sindhis (*Mohajirs*, Punjabis and Pashtuns) resist it because they can get jobs through Urdu and English and there are no utilitarian incentives to learn Sindhi. Moreover, for them Sindhi is the major symbol of an identity they do not wish to adopt. In the case of *Mohajirs*, indeed, it is an identity they have often struggled not to assimilate into (at least in the urban areas). Thus the teaching of Sindhi remains a politicised issue—politicised because it is so deeply connected with power and identity.

---

Tariq Rahman is Associate Professor of Linguistics, National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

## Notes

- i. Syed Salman Nadwi, *Arab o Hind Ke Taluqqat*, Karachi, Kareem Sons Publishers, 1972, pp 241-242.
- ii. Edward C Sachau, *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India*, Vol. 1, 1888. Reprinted Lahore, Sheikh Mubarak Ali, 1962.
- iii. *Ibid.*, p 232.
- iv. N B Baloch, *Sindhi Suratkhati e Khattati*, Hyderabad, Sindhi Language Authority, 1991, p vi.
- v. Sachau, *op.cit.*, p 231.
- vi. B H Ellis, 1856, 'Report on Education in Sind,' Nabi Baksh Baloch (ed.), *Education in Sind before the British Conquest and the Educational Policies of the Government*, Hyderabad, University of Sindh, 1971, pp 1-44.
- vii. N B Baloch (ed. & comp), *Sindhi Boli Jo Aganhro Mangzum Zakhuro*, Hyderabad, Sindhi Language Authority, 1993.
- viii. Richard F Burton, 1851, 'Muslim Education in Sind' in Baloch (ed.), *op.cit.*, 1971, p 48.

- ix. Tariq Rahman, *Language and Politics in Pakistan*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp 103-108; Hamida Khuhro, *The Making of Modern Sind: British Policy and Social Change in the Nineteenth Century*, Karachi, Indus Publications, 1978, p 257.
- x. Ellis, *op.cit.*, p 14.
- xi. Burton, *op.cit.*, p 65.
- xii. Ellis, *op.cit.*, p 21.
- xiii. For the list see Ellis, *ibid.*, p 21.
- xiv. Ellis, *ibid.*, p 26.
- xv. *Ibid.*, pp 29-30.
- xvi. 'Report of the Committee Appointed by Government Resolution No. 1788, Educational Department, dated June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1913, to Report on the Measures to be taken for the Promotion of Education among the Mohamedan Community of the Presidency Proper,' Karachi, Printed Typescript, Sind Archives, 1913.
- xvii. *Ibid.*, para 6.
- xviii. *Ibid.*, para 7.
- xix. Ebrahim Shaikh Ismail, Letter to the Assistant Commissioner in Sind, 14 May 1915, No. 1806, Educational Department. Copy in Sind Archives, Karachi, 1915.
- xx. 'Memorandum from the Commissioner in Sind,' 26th May 1915, No. E-239, Educational Department. Copy in Sind Archives, Karachi, 1915.
- xxi. 'Report of the Committee Appointed by Government Order No. 2157 of 24th July 1915, Educational Department, to Consider the Question of Mohamadan Education in Sind,' Karachi, Sind Archives, 1916.
- xxii. Hamida Khuhro (ed.), *Documents on Separation of Sind from Bombay Presidency Vol. 1*, Islamabad, Institute of Islamic History, Culture and Civilisation, 1982, p 416.
- xxiii. Hamida Khuhro, *Mohammad Ayub Khuhro: A Life of Courage in Politics*, Lahore, Feroz Sons (Pvt) Ltd., 1998, pp 87-110.
- xxiv. *Ibid.*, p 116.
- xxv. *Census of Pakistan 1951, Pakistan; Report and Tables Vol. 1*, Table 2, Section 2&3 and *District Census Report* by E H Slade, Karachi, Manager of Publication, 1951.
- xxvi. Christopher R King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India*, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1994.
- xxvii. Feroz Ahmed, *Ethnicity and Politics in Pakistan*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp 77-78.
- xxviii. Rahman, *op.cit.*, Chapter 7.
- xxix. Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p 78.
- xxx. Hyder Baksh Jatui, *Shall Sindhi Language Stay in Karachi or Not?* Hyderabad, Sind Hari Committee, 1957, p 13.

- xxxi. Khuhro, *op.cit.*, 1998, p 422.
- xxxii. Sangat, n.d. *Declare Sindhi as Official Language of West Pakistan*, [Pamphlet] Karachi, p 7.
- xxxiii. *Report of the National Education Commission*, Karachi, Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Education, 1959, p 284.
- xxxiv. Rahman, *op.cit.*, p 116.
- xxxv. Publicist, *Problem of Languages in West Pakistan*, Khairpur Mirs: Saleem Ahmed, 1967, p 19.
- xxxvi. See LAD-S *Legislative Assembly Debates—Sind* LAD-S, 29 May 1974, p 30 for a statement about the schools which had closed down.
- xxxvii. Publicist, *op.cit.*, pp 3-4.
- xxxviii. *Proposals for a New Educational Policy*, Islamabad, Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, 1969, pp 3-4.
- xxxix. M Yusuf Talpur, *A Memorandum on Proposals for a New Educational Policy and Sindhi Language*, Hyderabad, Jeay Sind Najawan Mahaz Publication 3, 1969, p 8.
- xl. Rahman, *op.cit.*, pp 121-122.
- xli. Resolution No. 21 'Resolution about Sindhi and Urdu Language Teaching,' Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, 21 December 1970.
- xl.ii. *Legislative Assembly Debates—Pakistan*, 28 August 1972, p 506.
- xl.iii. Interview with Dr. Saleem A Memon, Chairman, Department of Sindhi, University of Karachi, 2 March 1999.
- xl.iv. Interview with Dr. Nabi Baksh Baloch, Professor Emeritus, University of Sindh, Hyderabad, 1 March 1999.
- xl.v. G A Allana, *Sindhi Suratkhati*, Hyderabad, Sindhi Language Authority, 1993.
- xl.vi. *Frontier Post*, 5 February 1988.
- xl.vii. *Dawn*, 18 August 1996.
- xl.viii. *Dawn*, 26 August 1997.