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## British Language Policy in Colonial Sindh

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### Abstract

This paper explores the language policy of the British government in colonial Sindh. The study relies on secondary data and follows the literature study framework to identify the explicit language policy and its implicit political goals. Also, it discusses the language policy of Sindh before the arrival of the British to build the context in which the British government started its rule and administration in Sindh. It is evident that after a series of battles and conflicts with the Talpurs of Sindh, British troops conquered Sindh in 1843 under Sir Charles Napier. Persian was the official language of Sindh before the arrival of the East India Company. However, the British chose to run the administration of Sindh in an indigenous language called Sindhi (also referred to as Scindee, Scinde, or Scindhee). For this purpose, they formulated a committee to devise a standard alphabet for the Sindhi language, and by 1853, a fifty-two-lettered 'Sindhized-Arabic' or 'Perso-Arabic-Sindhi' writing system of the Sindhi language was introduced. This newly codified version of the Sindhi language became the official language of Sindh under British rule. Civil servants in Sindh were required to learn Sindhi; books were printed in this language, and it was raised to the level of medium of instruction in the British educational system in Sindh.

### Introduction

The British started colonizing the Indian subcontinent using the banner of the East India Company, which made Englishmen the rulers from the traders in India. The company had started acquiring land and raised an imperial army to sustain its rule in India. However, one of their most extensive tools was cultural and linguistic imperialism. British imposed their language, culture and value system on the people of India. Although they did not adopt a universal language policy in the Indian education system, which they introduced. For example, in the case of Sindh, more of an orientalist language policy was introduced. Instead of crushing the language of majority in Sindh, a formal writing code of the Sindhi language was established, and the language was raised to an official status in Sindh. This language policy does not reflect the British intentions of wellbeing of masses or the cultural and linguistic promotion of Sindhi people; it had some political goals to achieve.

### Sindhi Language

Sindhi is one of the oldest languages of the Indian subcontinent and 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 Sind's educational institutions than the other languages of Pakistan were in the areas where they were spoken (Rehman). It is the mother tongue of 30.26 million people in Pakistan (Pakistan's census 2017) and 1.68 million in India (India's census 2011). Though once the language was written in different scripts, it is now confined to only Persio-Arabic in Sindh, Pakistan and Devanagari in India. The Persio-Arabic script (also called the Sindhized-Arabic script) has more excellent literature and is identified as the standard writing system of the Sindhi language. This is connected to the history of Sindh during the British colonial era, when Persio-Arabic-Sindhi was standardized and made an official language, and then following the British language policy, all the officers of Sindh were required to learn this language. It was the only indigenous Pakistani language taught officially by the British at various levels of education (Rehman).

### **Language Policy of Sindh before the Arrival of British**

Before the arrival of the British, although Sindhi was the dominant language and served as the primary language of communication in Sindh, the Persian enjoyed the prestige of being the official language of Sindh. Persian was the language of governance, administration, and trade. It was used in the government courts and commercial activities in Sindh.

The rulers of Sindh, such as the Talpurs and the Kalhoras, promoted the use of Sindhi and patronized its literature and culture, but Sindhi was not an official language. One of the reasons was that the Sindhi language had no standard writing system at that time. The language was written in various scripts based on the region or purpose it was being written for. Islamic scholars would write it differently than Hindu Birhamins; traders would write it differently than ordinary people and different regions would promote literature in their writing system of the Sindhi language. Dr Ghulam Ali Allana (1964), in his book 'Sindhi Sooratakhti (Sindhi Script)' gives an account of fourteen writing systems of the Sindhi language used before the arrival of the British. They include:

#### **Lohana**

The language script of Sindhi that was used in Thatta and Birhamanabad by Lohana community.

#### **Bhatia**

Bhattia was also a language script which the people of Thatta had in practice. However, it has been identified as the writing style of the Bhatia community of Thatta only.

#### **Lari**

Laar is often regarded as the Southern Sindh. The traders and ordinary men of Laar, especially Badin, Fateh Bagh, Jor, Rari, and Rahmuki Bazar, used to write in this script.

#### **Rajjai**

Rajjai was the writing system used by the people of Jakhi Port, Sandi Port, Mirpur Sakro, Dabi and a few villages of Thatta.

#### **Memoni**

Memon community of Sindh distinguishes themselves in many ways. One such way before British colonization of Sindh was their language alphabet. The Memon community of Hyderabad, Thatta, Rahmuki Bazar and other regions are said to have used Memoni alphabet of writing Sindhi language.

#### **Khuwajka**

Newly converted Muslims, who were Lohana before that, used to write in Khuwajka script.

#### **Southern Lahnda**

The Hindu communities other than Bhatia and Lohana in the southern regions of Sindh, including Badin and Fateh Bagh practiced using Southern Lahnda script of writing Sindhi language.

#### **Lunda or Warnka**

It was the writing system developed and used by Bhai Band Wanria community.

#### **Wangai**

The traders and commoners of Wangi, Kochi and Banghar had this Wangai method of writing Sindhi. They lie on the southern side of Sindh near Badin.

#### **Khudawadi**

Khudabadi was the writing mechanism of the people of KhudaAbad.

#### **Sehwani**

The people around Sehwan had their own writing system of Sindhi called Sehwani.

#### **Shikarpuri**

This writing system was followed in Shikarpur and nearby regions.

#### **Sakhro**

Sakhro was language script of the people of Sukkar, which is in the Northern Sindh.

#### **Gurmukhi**

Sikhs, the followers of Guru Nanak, are said to have used their distinguished way of writing Sindhi called Gurmukhi.

Dr Bhavnani (2018) claimed that Sindhi was written in sixteen different forms or scripts before the British colonial era. In this way, he adds two more to this list:

#### **Persio-Arabic**

Sindh is famously known as the land of sufis and saints. Also it is referred to as the Babul-Islam, meaning the gateway of Islam. To make preaching of Islam easier, the Muslim scholars of Sindh devised a writing system using Persian and Arabic letters.

#### **Nagri or Devanagari**

Devanagari is the second most used script of Sindhi language. It has been in practice from pre-British era. It was known as the language of Sindhi Birhamans (Hindu Scholars). Sindhi speakers of today's India are still found using this system of writing Sindhi language.

### **The Arrival of the British in Sindh**

There was a series of battles in 1843, including the Battle of Miani, a decisive battle fought between the British East India Company and the Talpur Mirs of Sindh; the Battle of Dubbo, a lesser-known battle that took place during the conquest of Sindh, with limited historical information available; and the Battle of Hyderabad, the final battle of the conquest, resulting in the defeat of the Talpur Mirs and the annexation of Sindh by the British. Sir Charles Napier led the British army in the conquest of Sindh and made the East India Company the ruler of Sindh.

When the British came to Sindh, significant changes in the linguistic and cultural fabric of the region were brought. Culturally, the British influence was felt through various aspects of life. The British also brought their architectural styles, resulting in the construction of colonial buildings and structures that still remain reminders of the past. It is important to note that the arrival of the British also led to cultural challenges and resistance. Some individuals and communities in Sindh sought to preserve their cultural identity and resisted the imposition of British customs and values. They held on to their traditional attire, vernacular languages, and customs, creating a rich tapestry of cultural diversity in Sindh. However, the British did not try to wipe out the linguistic identity of people ultimately. They studied the vernacular languages of Sindh, especially the Sindhi language, which they referred to as Scindhee. Sindhi script was codified and officially taught in schools in Sindh under the British regime. Moreover, the legacy of British rule in Sindh continues to shape Sindh's identity and cultural diversity today.

### **Language Policy of Sindh under the British Rule**

By 1843, the British East India Company had set its rule in Sindh. In 1845, the Board of Education in Bombay suggested establishing the Sindh Educational Agency (Allana G.; 1964; 100). In 1848, Governor Bombay declared that they reintroduced the country's languages (namely Scindhee) as the medium of official intercourse. I do not see how our revenue and judicial officers (however, their offices and courts may be continued) can work effectually through a foreign communication medium, such as Persian or English. A period of eighteen months shall, therefore, be allowed for the officers in civil employ to qualify themselves for an examination in the Scindhee language. Their doing so will be facilitated by the publication of the dictionary and grammar which I proposed, and Lieutenant Stack shall be allowed to have it printed. The recommendation of the commissioner that 'early measure to education, as in our other provinces', is no doubt judicious. However, it was premature to take any measure for farming educational establishments before our European administration obtained a complete knowledge of the country and before we had trained persons fitted to impart knowledge in the vernacular tongue (Sir et al.'s minutes on (Scindhe, 1854; as cited in Allana G.; 1964; 101)."

In 1851, Commissioner (Sir Bartle Frere) issued an order with the following three clauses:

1. All official work would now be done in Scindhee (Sindhi)
2. All the Europeans and other foreigners shall learn Scindhee (Sindhi) to qualify to hold offices and communicate with Sindhi people.
3. Scindhee (Sindhi) schools shall be opened.

This explicitly shows that the Orientalist school of thought inspired the British language policy in Sindh. The British scholars were divided into two groups on the education development issue in India. One group called the Orientalists, advocated the promotion of oriental subjects through Indian languages. The other group called the Anglicists, argued for the cause of Western sciences and literature in the medium of the English language (Rehman). In the case of Sindh, a vernacular language, Sindhi was promoted and given an official status.

However, implementing this policy was a great challenge without a defined script of the Sindhi language. Under the supervision of the Assistant Commissioner, a committee of ten members was formed in this perspective. Eight committee members were local Sindhi scholars, while two were British officers. They included:

- 1) Rai Bahadur Naraer Jagannath (N.J.V High School Karachi)
- 2) Khan Bahadur Mirza Sadiq Ali Baig
- 3) Deevan Prabhudas Aanandram Ramchandani
- 4) Deevan Adharam Thanvardas Mirchandani
- 5) Deevan Nandiram of Sehwan
- 6) Mian Muhammad of Hyderabad
- 7) Qazi Ghulam Ali of Thatta
- 8) Mian Ghulam Hussain of Thatta
- 9) Captain George Stack

## 10) Captain F. Burton

The script was codified by July 1853 and sent to the Education Department for further implications. In a year, the Assistant Commissioner had published several books in the newly made script and wrote a report on progress in December 1854. Commissioner forwarded that report to the Governor of Bombay (Bhavnani, 2018).

**The Potential British Interests behind this Language Policy**

Sindh was different from other Indian regions. It was rich in art, culture, literature and language differently. In this case, it was only possible to rule Sindh by giving back something in the language. Talpurs' time in Sindhi ended in 1843, and the East India Company took control. The administrative services needed to be stronger. Officers were unable to communicate with the common masses. British analyzed that if their rule in Sindh was to be successful, appropriate communicative schemes needed to be installed. The best and the most apparent means of accomplishing this, as they perceived, was through the common ground of language. Thus, from the very beginning of their rule, attention was drawn to making Sindhi an official language. Clerk (1848), in his memorandum to the House of Commons on the administration of Sindh, broached this issue, giving counsel the practicability of using Sindhi vernacular for administrative purposes (Pirzado; 2009; 44).

**Conclusion**

The Orientalist school of thought inspired the British language policy in colonial Sindh. In Sindh, the most spoken local language, Sindhi, was standardized and raised to an official status. The civil servants were required to show some competency in the Sindhi language if they were to be posted in Sindh. In addition, Sindhi grammar was constructed, and many books were translated into the newly established fifty-two-lettered Sindhi script, which emerged as the language of the medium of instruction in schools following the British educational scheme.

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