

## Literary Culture: Sindhi.

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Literary culture in Sindhi language unlike the culture of contemporary other Indian languages moves on quite different trajectories and planes. The obvious reason of this is that when the rest of India celebrates the Independence Day on the 15<sup>th</sup> August every year in the collective psyche of Sindhi community in India this day is remembered as a day of partition. This day is Historical watershed in the collective memory of Sindhi speaking people. Every reference point is pre-partition and post partition. In such a situation the main thrust of the present presentation would be on the changed 'Context' of Sindhi society its changing contours running parallel in Sindhi Literature. In a way departing from the set structured format of enquiry into various aspects of a 'Literary Culture.'

Here I have no intention of relating the horrors that partition brought and the arousal of the basic instinct for the physical survival and grim struggle that followed .In this dark hour of despair the political leadership of the community advised the community to merge their distinct identity among the people where ever they found themselves. At the same time the then relief and rehabilitation Minister Mr.K.C Neogy observed , “ that the important point to remember is that Sindhis are threatened with extinction as separate people with their peculiar and distinctive customs and qualities. Thinly spread over India with no place to call their own they cannot hope to retain their language and culture.”

As the community slowly recovered from stunned stupor every where they found themselves in a different milieu, their past identities of family, community ties, neighbors and even geography- all identities had been lost. The axis of Sindhi society was not the caste. It is not a caste based society, as is the case with other Indian Societies, but Sindhi society had a strong sense of geographical identity ie. From Shirpur, Larkana, Hyderabad etc. This geographical sense of identity was totally blurred. New bearings were yet to be found.

But life force and its vibrant rhythm proved all the prophets of doom false.

In fact the society that had migrated to India was only a ribbon of a complete society. This ribbon consisted of mostly middle class shopkeepers, businessmen

with keen entrepreneurial skills, professionals and some landowners with their typical value structure. At the same time peasants, workers, artisans and masses remained on the other side. During the centuries of Muslim rule they had converted to Islam. Thus the ribbon that migrated to India had their distinct class characteristics. Apart from businessmen it had educationists, students, journalists, writers in its fold. As the threads of life began to be collected and rhythm resumed the education occupied the place only next to mere survival. Thus schools were started in the Verandahs of existing schools and often classes were conducted when normal schools conducted there would be empty. Soon text Books had to be provided printing presses set up, Journalists re started their papers, and writers started writing. In Bombay and Ulhasnagar a group of writer, old as well new would weekly meet and discuss their recent creations, thus inspire and be inspired in turn. Thus “ Sindhi Sahit Mandal” came into existence. Old writer prof: M.U.Malkani played a role of a Patriarch with considerable zeal. In this period of utter despondency the young writers who in Sindh had come under the Marxist influence and had been a part of ‘Progressive writers Movement’ came to the fore and brought a ray of hope through the impending revolution which was sure to wipe away their miseries. Their writings struck a receptive chord in the readers who were yearning for ‘better future’.

The total disruption of the society had another significant fall out. In this entire process the position of woman in society changed. She was no longer confined to home and hearth. To eke out living they had to come out and supplement their family income for survival. This was reflected in the literary field also. Where as in Sindh only one female writer Guli Sadarangani had contributed one novel. After partition host of lady writers have occupied literary scene and have made significant contribution. Only a few names that could be cited are Tara Mirchandani, Sundri uttamchandani, Kala Prakash, Popati Hiranadani. First story mirroring existing reality came from the pen of Tara Mirchandani entitled” Gopu”. In this we find the changed context. Here we find camp life instead of normal Village/town life and a local train a symbol of urbanization with all its horrors. . It mirrors grim struggle for survival when child after school hours takes to selling ‘pepermints’ in the local train and while moving from one compartment to another loses his life. Another significant story is ‘Bhoori’ by Sundri Uttamchandani. Bhoori ( A Doll) a beauty of yester years and heart throb of many a youngsters in her native town is found quite haggard spent while selling ‘Papads’ in Bombay

neighborhoods. But a sense of dignity of labour has invested her with inner beauty and pride. Short stories of those times have camp life as a background. Mohan Kalpana's stories and Novels mirror the life of grim poverty and pain of unemployment. As Sindhis arrived in India they were herded into various barracks which had been left by departing British troops. They were called 'Refugee camps'. Thus the identity of the locale and milieu was first to manifest in Sindhi literature.

While all this was going on the constitution of India was promulgated. Sindhi did not find place in the eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution and for all practical purposes by all official agencies eighth schedule was considered as 'recognition'. Sindhi Language did not get even its just and legitimate demands. Though it is quite significant fact Sindhi Language was included in its activities by Sahitya Akademi in 1955 itself. Non inclusion in eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution was reason enough to discriminate against Sindhi Language. This discrimination was most evident in sphere of school education. Thus it was felt that the very root of language is under attack. There was an outcry and a strong demand for 'recognition' of Sindhi Language by including it in the eighth schedule of the constitution. Writers, Journalists, Educationists social workers all joined and movement for 'recognition' for Sindhi Language was launched. During this movement which subsequently came to be called "Sindhayat Movement" groups of writers at many places emerged- Ahmedabad, Ajmer, Delhi, Jaipur, Bhopal etc. Writers were the back bone of this movement and remained the vanguard. Most of the writers who emerged at that time are still active contributing to Sindhi literature and significantly writers who emerged during that movement also have been Sahitya Akademi Awardees. Eventually Sindhi Language was 'recognized' by amendment to Indian constitution only on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1967. By that time many things had changed in Sindhi Society which all will be dwelt at a later stage.

In the aftermath of the partition when it was realized by both governments that evacuees from both side are reality of fall out of Partition of the country. The process of paying token compensation was taken up. To avail the paltry sum in lieu of large properties left back home they had to file their claims. When this realization on 'NO RETURN' sank in there was a flood of memories of life left behind and the bonds of friendships that had endured all the misfortunes. There was a flood of nostalgic literature. In this respect the response of the eminent poet Lekhraj 'Aziz' was characteristic. In his poem he thundered, "What are asking me

to file the claim of property left behind, I have claim over Sindh and all of Sindh belongs to me.” Narain Bharti’s short stories “DASTAVAZ” ( A document ) and “CLAIM” mirror the life of harmony, friendship and good neighborly cordial relationship that Hindus and Muslims alike shared back home in Sindh. There are numerous such short stories. A Poet Khialdas “Fani” wrote a poem remembering his Muslim co poets in Sindh and which was promptly reciprocated by poets across the border. When during 1965 war Sheikh Ayaz wrote a a symbolic poem, “Narayan Shayamis before me how can I aimagun at him?” He had to face imprisonment in Pakistan for years together. The fact that we were forced to leave our homes and hearths due to religion did not come in the way of life of harmony lived together through centuries. It is where the culture and the value structure which nourished it triumphed over political reality. Our literature and culture has remained secular across the borders of both the countries. Nayan “Shyam” a legendry poet in post partition India in his poem declared, “ Gnaga, Jamuna are all necter, it is Sindhu that is mother’s milk.” Krishi Rahi penned a soul stirring Composition “ Sindh and Sindhis” which brought tears to those who heard it in voice of Bhagwanti Nawani- a singer who toured in India and abroad to propagate and promote Sindhi vocal culture with a missionary Zeal. Moti Prakash came out with the song “ Aandhi e mein Jyot Jgaen wara Sindhi” to assert sindhi pride.

With the passage of time another dimension was added to sentimental aspect. As mentioned earlier it took struggle of nearly 20 years for Sindhi Language in the eighth schedule of the constitution. In these 20 years it became clear to Sindhis residing in India that this language has no land which can nurture it. This is not the language of market place; this is not a language which will get you any government job. The utility of this language is not seen anywhere. In the society where the prime necessity it to meet the bare needs the learning of Sindhi Language seemed to be redundant. To complicate the matter further it was decided by the Political leaders that the script of Sindhi be changed to Devnagiri script. This was done without proper follow up in the matter by standardizing the Devnagiri script and without any plan to provide facilities for transliteration. This also added to the sense of redundancy of Sindhi Language and many people abandoned Sindhi and opted for education of their Children in Hindi or in English. In post liberalization phase and emergence of consumer society this phenomena encompasses all languages cutting across all barriers where people in upper income bracket are opting for English language education instead of their mother tongue.

The case of Sindhi has been further complicated by the fact that whereas other languages have villages as backyard where the language and culture is not threatened with extinction Sindhis in India do not have such a back yard.

In absence of land, being scattered all across India and being in miniscule minority of less than half a percent of population it is only language which guarantees our distinct identity as a society. Nostalgic literature and the literature of distinct Sindhi identity has remained an important trait in Sindhi Literature. The fear of losing identity has been brought out in bold relief in a short story “Ghanti” by Harish Vaswani. this aged parent has been given a bell to signal any emergency. When a friend of his son visits him and speaks to him in Sindhi at the time guest is about to leave he rings emergency bell saying, “ perhaps this is the last time I am seeing any one speaking my language!” Vasdev Mohi, in one of his poems “Bemoans the fact that One is left without any language, even a camel has a bell around his neck now perhaps that bell will also disappear!”

### **Prophets of doom have always proved false.**

For the generation that immediately grew up after Partition it became almost incumbent to start earning after matriculation. Thus young Sindhis occupied clerical positions in Railways, government offices, Banks, Insurance and wherever any vacancy was available. This gave rise to phenomena of learning while earning. Many morning colleges were started during that time. Young students would leave their homes by 6 am and after attending to college and full time job would return home by 8 pm. It is surprising that even in that period many continued with their literary creations and would attend literary classes on Saturdays evenings/nights and Sundays. They worked as if possessed. In this atmosphere Sindhi Associations were established in western/central railways, banks and many other offices and the main activity would be to bring out Annual Literary Issue of considerable literary merit.

This as a social and economic background short stories appeared which had a low paid clerk as a central character. Ishwar Chander’s short stories mirror this reality of a young man torn under the burden of duty towards elderly dependent parents and demands and aspirations of his personal family. His short story ‘ Na maran jo dukh...’ ( The grief of not dying). In this story the main character takes loan from his office to meet the expenses of his mother’s impending death. His sisters and other close relations visit him and mother recovers. His money is all spent but

mother is still alive leaving him with fear that in the case of actual death where will money come from? Resulting in his disappointment at his mother not dying. With change in time line in Shyam Jaisinghani's stories instead of a clerk we find the character of young executive and nuclear family. His short story 'Another day' paints the roller coaster of varied experiences of young working couple. Whereas his story "Adai ghar ...." This story depicts atmosphere of a young overseas family and shattering of established 'moral codes'. Wife in Hongkong, mistress at Tokyo and parental home at Pune. It is significant to observe that during this period the majority of Sindhi society was occupied with a single point agenda of making money, money and more money. This single minded pursuit of material possessions like any other of neo rich class everywhere made it ostentatious contempt for traditional values customs, culture and life style. It had no concern for literature language and understanding of rich cultural heritage. This situation was mirrored in most of short stories of Krishin Khatwani and Lakhmi Khilnani.. This fact has been underlined by Vasdev Mohi in his poem when he says that he has heart of Leela and feet of Sasui.\*( Referring to Sindhi diasporas across the globe. This has reference to folk tales of Leela Chanesar Sasand Sasui Punhoon. Leela is attracted to pearls and Sasui wanders in the desert). Prem Prakash has invoked the traditional folk form of ' Bhagat' to create his mini epic of one to one dialogue.

It would be erroneous to believe that Sindhi literature has remained insular. As was the case in other literatures of Indian Languages Sindhi was also influenced by 'New Wave' or 'modern' trend. This trend as against progressive trend literature where society and a sense of collective occupied centrality it was the individual who was at the center of narrative and all the discourse. This came like a flood. It created writers overnight. Some of the established writers also could not resist this force. But with the benefit of hindsight it could be said that though this school of thought gave Sindhi Literature a few talented and gifted writers on which Sindhi literature can take legitimate pride the bulk of the literature produced by that torrent has not survived. Experimental plays by Prem Prakash of that period are exceptional and poetry of Harish Vaswani remains significant while Vasdev Mohi is moving ahead to uncharted paths. It may be said that though in literary/critical circles post modernism is discussed by at creative level it has not been able to make any significant impact. Theories of New Historicism and Magic Realism are yet waiting to be discussed. It has been realized that all the tools of literary

criticism and various theories concern more the critic rather than a creative writer. The force of creation is strong to be straitjacketed by any literary theory.

The struggle for recognition of Sindhi language was carried on under the banner of 'Akhil Bharat Sindhi Boli ain sahit sabha'. Even after more than 50 years that organization is working today also. It has the distinction of starting literary seminars which work has been now taken over by other governmental agencies and Academies. Now it annually honors writers and artists by giving awards instituted by various individuals, and organizes drama festivals at various places. Indian Institute of Sindhology based at Adipur is engaged in documentation and preservation of books and promote Sindhi language and culture by various activities. They have about 16000 Sindhi books in their library. They organize the Book fairs at important Sindhi functions and showcase every year Sindhi publications at National Book fair at Delhi. They bring out literary Magazine 'Rachna' also every 3 months. Other regular literary magazines are published from 'Ulhasnagar' 'Koonj' and from Mumbai "sipoon". They do not enjoy vast readership and mainly survive on the advertisements issued by well meaning nonresident Sindhi individuals and some business Houses. The readership is mainly confined within the writer community itself. The fact that young generation has left their language, reading habit being on wane and the scattered condition of the community makes distribution of the literature extremely difficult, the 'market' for Sindhi literature is practically nonexistent. Therefore in case of Sindhi language its being under the pressure of market forces is not evident.

In spite of all the adverse conditions writers are continuing with their writings, perhaps in time capsule concept. At literary level the experiments in new forms continue. In poetry a form of 'Tanha' (One line poem) has evolved Vasdev Mohi is experimenting with 'picture ghazal' and creative use of 'radif' in his poetry and is now experimenting in the genre of Short stories taking characters which are on the margins of the society. He had successfully experimented with a long poem book of one character 'Mankoo' a migrant labour which won him all round applause. Gopal Thakur introduced a form 'Cho- akhra' a poem made from mere four words. Arjan Hassid has abandoned the much used concept of contradiction which formed essential core of ghazal and is moving ahead with straight line sensibility. New writers are entering the fold. It is curious that new writers entering the Sindhi field are those who have already made their mark in Hindi or other language. This

phenomena may be attributed to the fact that every creative writing is exploration of self identity and mother tongue is at the core of one's own identity.

As stated earlier under the popular demand government of India yielded to establish National Council for promotion of Sindhi Language and in states where Sindhis live in sizeable numbers Sindhi Academies at state level have been established but more often than not they are used to rehabilitate Politicians affiliated to ruling party of the time. They are filled with people who have no understanding of literature and culture. Though handful of writers are 'installed' as show pieces. They routinely dole out some awards and aid for publications. National Council for promotion of Sindhi Language purchases 150 copies of every book for free distribution irrespective of its quality. Occasionally seminars are jointly conducted which merely remain a talking shops without any in-depth discussions.

All this has resulted in the Sindhi community lost its two generations who are not connected with Sindhi language, literature and Sindhi life, and obviously Sindhi literature.

In this grim situation a window of opportunity could be discerned in the domain of internet. At this stage I would skirt the philosophical discussion on virtual reality confronting actual 'reality.' The cyberspace has eliminated all kinds of boundaries. The political boundaries drawn at the time of partition have become redundant. So far there was no exchange of literature published in Sindhi language in Pakistan and that published in India, except at personal level. Now E libraries in Sindhi language have come into existence where at a recently launched site [sindhsalamat.com](http://sindhsalamat.com) more than 400 books published in Sind are available and more sites related to Sindhi culture and literature are coming up very fast. The system of 'Unicode' has made Sindhi E mails and chat sites in Sindhi language possible. Sindhi TV chanel shows are available at U tube and songs are available on I tunes. The cultural shows organized by Sindhi Sangat and Teleplays telecast are available at the site [sindhisingat.com](http://sindhisingat.com). 24-7 Sindhi programmes are beamed by various private channels from Sindh. In such a situation Sindhi literary culture is expected to be impacted in a positive manner.

There is a possibility of Sindhi Diaspora being connected at mental level and the loss sustained due to geographical distances would become redundant.

This window of opportunity holds forth a great potential. I am sure it will surely be fully exploited in future. Books about Sindhi literature are uploaded on internet. Efforts are afoot to write about Sindhi culture and Sindhi literature and those books are uploaded on various sites on internet. All these developments show a flicker of light at the end of dark tunnel.

With all other Indian languages we share the concern of steamrolling the dissidence and enforcing uniformity in the realm of ideas- the emerging culture of intolerance. The exploitation by media chasing sensationalism for their TRP,s. There is hardly any distinction made between literacy and education. The institution of mentor has disappeared. The relationship of teacher and taught has been reduced akin to salesman dispensing ‘knowledge capsules’ across the counter and student passively accepting the same as a prescription to pass the examination. In this era of super specialization the holistic and inter disciplinary approach has become a causality. In ‘consumer society’ the only dominant relation that exists is that of producer and consumer. Of course there are many ‘Hidden Persuaders’ inform of advertisements which aim to promote only ‘brands’. In the west publishing has become an industry. The writer happens to be only a part of it. It has publishing agents, book make over teams, marketing strategists, marketing events and marketing machines. In this marketing process is it wonder that writers also become ‘Brands?’

It depends on us.... There are questions and more questions and again from tentative answers more questions arising? Can there be any final word in the sphere of ideas and creavity!

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