

I am here to speak on behalf of a language that does not face danger of extinction, but is rendered irrelevant and stigmatised in India. Sindhi is one of the official languages of India and Pakistan. The Sindhi speaking Hindus migrated to India during the partition of undivided India in 1947. I will first talk about them, since I represent that group. The state extends financial support for the teaching of Sindhi and also provides generous awards to Sindhi writers. The state does this to 'protect' the interest of this linguistic minority since Sindhi is spoken by less than one percent of India's population. The people who speak it are scattered across various parts of India, and do not constitute a cohesive linguistic or territorial group anywhere. The state support in such a scenario would seem benign, and hence there is no apparent reason for complaining. However forces of marginalization do not appear in recognizable forms. Also they are not always from the outside. The Sindhis do not have any use for this language. In a country formed by linguistic units, Sindhi has no real relevance in any state. The nation-state can provide money but not audiences and purposes to a language. This is because Sindhi is a transborder language, its roots lie in what the state and its people see as an "enemy nation" that is, Pakistan. This has made the users of Sindhi distance themselves from the language. There are also unrelenting stereotypes surrounding the Sindhi community, especially the Sindhi trader, who like the ubiquitous Jew is known for shrewd business. Like the Jews, Indian Sindhis are also a diaporic people subjected to migration and exile through the history of Partition. The Sindhi in India does not have the choice of doing higher education in the Sindhi language. He or she cannot use Sindhi in the public domain because no other community in India knows this language. Driven out therefore by public domain by becoming irrelevant and evoking stereotypes, the language is confined to a private domain. This space is also under seige because the transmission of Sindhi from one generation to another is not taking place for various reasons (See my book, *The Burden of Refuge : The Sindhi Hindus of Gujarat*, Orient Longman, 2007). Thus the Sindhis have collaborated with marginalising forces and helped the rejection of the Sindhi language. This is ironic because the constitution of India defines them only in linguistic terms. The territory of Sindh which could have conferred a territorial and historical identity upon them went to Pakistan. With virtually no access to that land, the Sindhis are people without a land and history. The language that could have kept alive the memory of history is confined to the generation that underwent Partition directly. For those who are undergoing this trauma of partition indirectly, the loss of Sindhi is yet an unacknowledged.

As for Sindhi in Pakistan, its marginalization is blatant. Pakistan's bias towards Urdu and systematic sidelining of Sindhi is a long story. This story of persecution of the Sindhi language forms an essential part of Sindhi nationalism. Basically the historic event of Partition brought bad news to Sindhis on both sides of the border. If the Sindhis in Pakistan can identify Urdu or Punjabi as their enemy, the Sindhis in India point to no one in particular because they have not had the honesty to face the reasons why people do not wish to speak the language. The model of marginalization-revival-restoration does not work therefore for the language I speak about. As I said before the marginality of Sindhi in India is not merely the result of domination from outside, although the presence of domination through 'state' language is undeniable. But this domination also finds collaboration who agree with non-Sindhis that there is no point in using Sindhi. As for revival, do I declare the language dead to revive it? Finally, I wish to stay that I am involved in restoring, not so much the language, a pretentious task that would be, but restoring the dignity of the language by using it, bringing it to different fora, and by translating from Sindhi. I am thankful to the ICWT for enabling me to do this. The translation grant I received from ICWT has

been used to translate over thirty stories about the Partition experience from Sindhi into English. This is one of the first documentation of partition narratives from Sindhi made available in English, it is also the first transborder collection of narratives which brings Sindhis writers from the national borders of India and Pakistan, and religious borders of Hinduism and Islam together.

-- Dr.Rita Kothari
Associate Professor, MICA
Director, Katha Academic Centre
Ahmedabad, India.
website: www.mica-india.net