

Report

International conference on:

Sindhi language, Indus Script and Endangered Indigenous languages
عالمي ڪانفرنس ٻولي، سنڌولڪت ۽ خطري هيٺ آيل اصلوڪين ٻولين بابت سنڌي

February 20-21, 2023 at Arts Council of Pakistan, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan.

سنڌي ٻوليءَ جي بااختيار اداري پاران آرٽس ڪائونسل ڪراچيءَ ۾ ٻن ڏينهن جي عالمي “سنڌي ٻولي، سنڌولڪت ۽ خطري هيٺ آيل اصلوڪين ٻولين بابت عالمي ڪانفرنس” تاريخ 20-21 فيبروري 2023ع تي ٿي. هن ڪانفرنس ۾ آمريڪا، برطانيه، ملائيشيا، فرانس ۽ ڀارت سميت مختلف ملڪن جي جڳ مشهور عالمن ۽ اسڪالرن مختلف موضوعن تي پنهنجا تحقيقي مقالا، مڪ تقريرون ۽ پريزنٽيشنون پيش ڪيون. افتتاحي اجلاس جي صدارت سنڌ جي تعليم، ثقافت ۽ سياحت واري وزير سيد سردار علي شاهه ڪئي. جڏهن ته ڊاڪٽر مٿل بوون، ڊاڪٽر طارق رحمان، ڊاڪٽر مارڪ ڪنائير، ڊاڪٽر فهميده حسين ۽ ڊاڪٽر ذوالفقار علي ڪلهوڙو مڪ مهمان هيا. سنڌي ٻوليءَ جي بااختيار اداري جي چيئرمئن ڊاڪٽر اسحاق سميجي اڃياڻي تقريرون ۾ ڪانفرنس جا مقصد بيان ڪيا. ٻن ڏينهن جي هن عالمي ڪانفرنس ۾ 30 کان وڌيڪ تحقيقي مقالا پيش ٿيا، جڏهن ته وفاقي ملڪن ۾ مادري ٻولين جي آئيني حيثيت بابت هڪ خاص ويهڪ پڻ ٿي، جنهن ۾ نامور سنڌي ليکڪا نورلهدا شاهه، ڊاڪٽر جعفر احمد، جامي چانڊيي ۽ شفقت قادري ڳالهايو. آخري ڏينهن تي موسيقيءَ جي محفل ٿي، جنهن ۾ سيف سميجي ۽ مانجهي فقير ڳايو. هن موقعي تي سنڌي ٻوليءَ جي بااختيار اداري پاران شايع ٿيل ڪتابن جي پڌرائي ڪرڻ سان گڏ “سنڌي ٻولي لائبرري” جو پڻ افتتاح ڪيو ويو. ڪانفرنس ۾ مايا ديود، بهاتا انسومل، ڊاڪٽر غفور ميمڻ، مدد علي سنڌي، ڊاڪٽر محمد علي مانجهي، ڊاڪٽر ادل سومرو، ڪلاٽر متوا، ڊاڪٽر آفتاب اڙو، ڊاڪٽر الطاف جوکيو، عزيز ڪنگراڻي، عامر مغيري، ڊاڪٽر رفيق وساڻ، ڊاڪٽر عبدالرزاق چنا، ياسر قاضي، امر فياض ٻرڙي، سعيد احمد سميجي، شبير ڪنڀار ۽ ٻين پنهنجا تحقيقي مقالا پيش ڪيا.

The Sindhi Language Authority (SLA) organised a two-day International Conference on Sindhi language, Indus Script and Endangered Indigenous languages. The conference was held on February 20-21, 2023 in Karachi – Arts Council of Pakistan – the provincial capital of Sindh, to reach out to wider community. The large number of audiences from academia, media, civil society, and policy officials attended the conference and participated in dialogue, panel discussion, research presentations and discussed the issues and challenges of world’s indigenous languages and with special focus on Sindhi language in the context of Pakistan.

The Sindhi Language Authority is an autonomous institution dedicated to the preservation, expansion, and development of the Sindhi language. The institution was established in 1991 under an act titled “Teaching, Promotion and use of Sindhi Language” passed by the Sindh Assembly in 1972. The main purpose of establishing this institution was to enhance the official use of Sindhi, to support the teaching of Sindhi, to develop dictionaries of various scientific and social science fields, and to devise a strategy to address the issues faced by the Sindhi language. This institution has published more than 350 books on various important subjects, such as linguistics, language history, grammar, phonetics, sociolinguistics, dictionaries, and anthologies, and has organised hundreds of conferences, workshops, seminars, and Sindhi language learning programmes, among others.

UNESCO’s International Decade of Indigenous Language 2022-2033 was the official collaborator of this event since Sindhi Language Authority is the partner in UNESCO’s movement of International Decade of Indigenous Languages to draw attention to the loss and

endangerment of indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalize and promote indigenous languages.

The conference convening and scientific committee received 76 abstracts, making it difficult to choose the best papers. However, the review team has shortlisted only 36 abstracts that were original and pertinent to the conference's themes. The conference started with an inaugural session moderated by Dr. Rafique Wassan. The inaugural session consisted welcome speech of the Chairman Sindhi Language Authority, Pro. Dr. Ishaq Samejo, concept note presentation by conference secretary Dr. Abdul Razaque Channa, keynote speeches of Prof. Dr. Tariq Rehman, renowned linguist and HEC distinguished professor spoke on The Political History of the Sindhi Language from the Colonial Period till 1972, Dr. J. Mark Kenoyer, Professor of Anthropology, the University of Wisconsin Madison, spoke on The origin, development and disappearance of the Indus Script: Reviewing the evidence from Mohenjo Daro, Harappa and other sites. Prof. Dr. Michel Boivin, historian/anthropologist and Director of the Centre for the Study of South Asia and the Himalayas (CESAH), spoke on Language, Script and Power in the Sindhi Society Before and After 1947. Dr. Fahmida Hussain, Ex - Chairperson of Sindhi Language Authority spoke on Decipherment of Indus script: Some suggestions and Dr. Zulfiquar Ali Kalhor, anthropologist and the author of 12 books spoke on Inscriptions as a source of History in The Indus valley.

During welcoming speech, Prof. Dr. Ishaq Samejo greeted all the international and national speakers and contextualised the significance of Sindhi language and endangered languages. Dr. Samejo argued that there are almost seventy-four spoken languages in the practice of which twenty-five languages are endangered or under the threat of extinction at present in Pakistan. Keeping this background in mind, we have included various session on the different aspects, prospects and challenges of languages. We included in the conference a panel discussion joined by renowned guest speakers who will talk on the question of the status of mother/national languages in Pakistan. This panel discussion has been curated in a less academic format in order to link the question of languages in Pakistan to the broader spectrum of public policy/socio-political framework. He said that this unfortunate state of the endangered status of mother languages in Pakistan calls for urgent attention and policy strategy for the protection of the linguistic diversity and heritage of Pakistan. In this regard, for the protection of the rights of mother languages, there is an urgent need to establish Language Rights Commission.

The inaugural session was presided by Syed Sardar Ali Shah, Minister for Education, Culture and Antiquities, Government of Sindh. In his presidential speech, the Minister, Syed Sardar Ali Shah profoundly appreciated and congratulated to SLA for taking concerted efforts to organise this international conference which was aimed at highlighting the importance of mother languages, and Indus script and broadly addressing the issue of endangered indigenous languages in Pakistan and beyond. He said that language has been the primary means in the history and development of human consciousness and civilization. Since times immemorial, it has been the language that has ushered into human society new and progressive ways of thinking, ideas, understanding, and worldviews and as a result, has continued to make new cultural and socio-political arrangements and dispensations. This all indicates the phenomenal role and importance of languages in the creation of knowledge, wisdom, and consciousness in its various forms i.e., symbols, oral literature, folklore, poetry as well as text and print, or word cultures. The Minister concluded his presidential speech by promising that he would take all his efforts to ensure that all schools in Sindh teach Sindhi language in schools and that his ministry takes substantial efforts to make Sindhi Language as one of the national languages of Pakistan.

During an inaugural session, six books on Sindhi Language and its various aspects were launched by the respective guests, keynote speakers and authors of the books. Along with these book launching ceremonies, the Sindhi Language Authority launched its flagship initiative of “Sindhi Virtual Library” for the promotion, preservation, and development of the Sindhi language. Sindhi online library was inaugurated by the Minister, Syed Sardar Ali Shah. It is a work in progress, but it will give an all-inclusive web-based virtual one platform for textual and audio-visual content. The primary objective of this project is to create web-based virtual resource and to facilitate writers, academics, and researchers in Sindh, Pakistan, and beyond. The web-based resource will catalogue, archive, create a knowledge hub, and digitise Sindhi language published books, magazines, research journals, and newspapers on a variety of important topics, including linguistics, language history, grammar, phonetics, sociolinguistics, dictionaries, and anthologies. <http://www.library.sindhila.org/sabhKitab>

There were international and national academics from the United States, France, Malaysia, and India and Pakistan who presented their research through the theoretical and methodological lenses of diverse disciplines, including language, literature, language engineering, digitalization, history, anthropology, archaeology, and sociology. There were 6 sessions consisting 06 presenters in each reflecting a rich theme such as Dr. Muhamamd Sajid Khan spoke on Nationalism and linguistic identity in the politics of Sindh and Prof. Aijaz Qureshi spoke on Sindhi Language: post partition in Language and Identity session. Talking on Research on Indus Script and challenges and different aspects, Ms. Bahata Ansumali spoke on from structural analysis to Rosetta stones: A multidisciplinary paradigm of decoding the semibiographical mercantile scrip of Indus Civilisation, and Aziz Kingrani spoke on Indus Script on Stones. In third session on Sindhi Language and its historical contact with other languages, Dr. Amir Zaheer spoke on the historical relationship between Sindhi and Punjabi languages: evidences from Guru Garanth Sahib. Amar Fayyaz Buriro gave presentation on Future of Human languages in post humanism in the Digitalisation of indigenous languages session. Dr. Adal Soomro, Dr. Muhammad Ali Dinakhel and Mukhtar Mallah spoke on Indigenous endangered languages and access to education and knowledge in indigenous language. Dr. Humera Naz, Dr. Manzoor Ali Veesrio and Prem Tanwani spoke on various aspect of the session theme on Sindhi Language, Culture and new Developments. In the two days conference, Sher Mehrani, Shazia Karim, Dr. Fayaz Latif and Dr. Riazat Buriro moderated the various sessions.

These fields' scholars brought their arguments and findings based on laboratory data to the living histories of indigenous peoples. These academics utilised their analytical abilities exceptionally well to address the themes and subthemes of the conference through policy and practise.

There was a panel discussion of experts on state and mother languages in federating countries: case study of Pakistan. The panellists were Madam Noor-ul-Huda Shah, Jaffer Ahmed and Jami Chandio who contextualised the status of mother national language in Pakistan and the way forward for their recognition. They argued that the diversification of culture and various language in Pakistan strengthen the national fabric of Pakistan than undermining the power dynamics. All the mother national languages spoken in Pakistan should be declared as the national language of Pakistan as it is done in various parts of the world.

The conference aimed to promote and safeguard the Sindhi language, the indigenous language of Sindh province in Pakistan, at various levels i.e., to ensure its inclusion and protection in schooling and teaching practices as well as enhance its use and viability in everyday socio-economic life. The conference generated critically informed interdisciplinary

academic exchange on the subject of the conference and to explore multiple layers, trajectories and tapestries of endangered languages. Pakistan is linguistically diverse but unfortunately the indigenous languages are hardly getting any attention to preserve, promote and highlight the linguistic richness.

The conference ended with the concluding session consisting speeches of Dr. Muhammad Ali Manjhi – EX – Directorate General of Colleges, Government of Sindh, Prof. Dr. Abdul Ghafoor Memon - Ex Chairperson Sindhi Language Authority, Dr. Fateh Marri, Vice Chancellor, Sindh Agriculture University, Tandojam and Dr. Muhammad Suleiman Shaikh – Secretary Board of Trustees – ZABIST. Ms. Sassui Palejo affiliated with Pakistan People’s Party who served as a Senator on women's reserved seat from Sindh from 2015 to 2021 and was ex-minister for culture, Government of Sindh, was the chief guest while the concluding session was presided by Prof. Dr. Maya Khemlani David, Professor of Sociolinguistics in the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics of the Universiti Malaya, Malaysia and is currently Honorary Professor with the Asia-Europe Institute in the University Malay.

Prof. Maya spoke on the determining reasons for language shift prior to determining solutions for revitalisation. In her presidential talk, she argued that it is important that a researcher must first determine reasons for language shift. Why is the community moving away from the habitual use of its ethnic language? Such reasons will provide appropriate ways of revitalising a dying language and preserving the language. Educating the Sindhi Hindus in diaspora about the economic socio-cultural capital in their Heritage language may result in the community’s greater habitual use of their ethnic language.

In the concluding session, the conference unanimously passed the following resolutions and recommendations:

- A Language Commission should be constituted to settle the Constitutional status of Pakistan's national and mother languages
- All the mother languages should be given the status of indigenous languages constitutionally.
- In Pakistan, particularly in Sindh, education for Grades 1 to 5 should be compulsory in the mother/provincial languages.
- All private educational institutions should be legally bound to include Sindhi as a compulsory subject in the curriculum for Grades 1-5 under the Sindh (Teaching, Promotion, and Use of Sindhi Language) (Application) Act 1972.
- All private and business companies should be directed to use Sindhi as a compulsory business language in the province of Sindh
- School and College Education Departments, Government of Sindh should strictly instruct all the public and private educational institutions in Sindh that the students should not be restrained from speaking their mother languages especially Sindhi language, which is also official language of the province.
- The conference demands that the Government of Sindh should ensure Sindhi as the official language in all the government, administrative, and judicial systems under the Sindh (Teaching, Promotion, and Use of Sindhi Language) (Application) Act 1972.

- It is also demanded that the Government of Sindh establish a Sindhi Science Board similar to the Urdu Science Board at the Federal Level.
- The Sindh Government should constitute a Sindhi Dictionary Board.
- There should be a compulsory foundational course in the Sindhi Language for employees in all departments under the Government of Sindh, and a certificate of foundational course in the Sindhi Language should be mandatory for employment in the Sindh Government under the Sindh (Teaching, Promotion, and Use of Sindhi Language) (Application) Act 1972.
- The mother language should be realized as a fundamental human right; therefore, multidimensional and multidisciplinary approaches must ensure their preservation, propagation, and promotion. Particularly it should be integrated into linguistics, socio-linguistics, anthropology, all social sciences, humanities, gender studies, political science, economics, and cultural studies.
- All the provincial Assemblies of the respective provinces are requested to pass provincial acts about their provincial official languages on the basis of article 251/3 of the Constitution of Pakistan

At the end of the conference, Pro. Dr. Ishaq Samejo, the president of the conference and the Chairman Sindhi Language Authority thanked all the international delegates, national scholars, experts, politicians, academicians, civil society members, media persons, teachers, students and everyone one who participated and attended the conference. He concluded the two-day international conference with the hope that the conference will cultivate a vibrant debate and dialogue on the question of recognition of indigenous languages as national languages of Pakistan, endangered languages, and the revitalization, protection, and teaching of Sindhi language in Sindh. This is particularly important given that Sindhi is one of the oldest and most ancient languages in the world, with a rich literary and cultural heritage. However, despite its immense value, the Sindhi language faces numerous challenges, including the threat of loss.

In the face of modernization and globalization, many indigenous languages are losing their relevance, and younger generations are often not able to learn or speak their native language fluently. This poses a serious threat to the survival of these languages, which are an integral part of the cultural identity of their respective communities. Through the conference, we want to raise awareness about the importance of preserving and promoting indigenous languages and to come up with concrete steps and initiatives to support their revitalization and protection.

Dr. Samejo said that the conference will serve as a platform for creating a more inclusive and diverse society that values and celebrates linguistic and cultural diversity.

At the end of the first day, Mushaira was held in which famous poets recited their poetry and at the end of the second day, famous Sufi and folk singers Manjhi Faqir and Saif Samejo moved the audiences through their magical voice in a Raag Rang Mahfil.

The two-day International Conference on Sindhi language, Indus Script and Endangered Indigenous languages was live streamed through various social media platforms. The recorded videos are available and easily assessed on the dedicated FB conference page: <https://web.facebook.com/conference.sindhila>