

Writing Back Sindhi in post Partition India with reference to Partition Remembrance Day:

Exploring Regimes of Language and Culture

Supported by:

National council for the promotion of
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Organised by:

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DLT - 9, 9:00 am onwards

Linguistic diversity has been the dominant motif of Indian civilization, bearing testimony to the subcontinent's robust regionalism as well as to its centrality in conveying and expressing modernity. It was language that emerged as a site of experimentation with modernity in the nineteenth century, it was language that helped forge a strong regional identity that complemented national imaginaries, it was language again that provided post-independence policy-makers to conceive of a linguistic basis for state organization without compromising the commitment to the idea of India as a civilizational entity. Given the vicissitudes of India's historical experience in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is not surprising that many languages and even scripts underwent differential trajectories generating a range of important initiatives from communities of language speakers and from the government. It is in this context that we propose an academic program in the form of a composite set of lectures, conference events and cultural activities to look closely at select languages and their history and status in our present times. While we keep the focus on the Sindhi language (a shared practice across borders) we wish to look at a range of languages - Konkani, Marathi, Bengali and Hindi - to help us adopt a comparative perspective on a number of vital issues that the larger theme of language promotion raises.

Our proposal gains particular significance in the light of the recent declaration by our Prime Minister that 14th of August will be observed as Partition Horrors Remembrance Day. This brings home the poignancy of shared language memories as it does of the trauma that the subcontinent and its peoples underwent. The underlying rationale behind the proposed academic program is therefore to address the importance of looking closely at a language like Sindhi which suffered neglect in both India and Pakistan as well as of Bangla that enjoyed promotion in West Bengal and marginalization in East Pakistan. The Partition disrupted communities of language speakers, especially the Sindhi community and its literary life in a major way. In the newly created state of Pakistan, Sindhi was replaced by Urdu, while in India it came to be mentioned in the schedule of languages quite late in the day. Not much is known about the literary aspirations and imagination of Sindhi writers although in the 1980's we know how new poetry came to infuse Sindhi literary enterprise (the work of Tirth Basant, Mayaram Kukreja and Motilal Jotwani). While the Sahitya Akademi has extended support to Sindhi literary work, a lot needs to be done especially as social challenges threaten to displace the use of Sindhi in educational institutions as well. The proposed program therefore hopes to invite

Discussion on themes such as literary modernism, the challenges of translation across Indian languages as well as of comparative literature programs in Indian universities to assess their record of bringing regional languages and literatures in conversation. It is in this connection that the program hopes to look closely and comparatively at languages such as Marathi and Konkani as well as of Hindi and Bangla that enjoyed greater patronage and have all accommodated complex histories in the past and the present. The challenges faced by Konkani to come into the mainstream need to be reviewed carefully and critically in the larger context of politics that came up around script and language. Additionally, the program hopes to tackle the issue of multi-lingualism and identity, how the pronounced preference for English medium schools notwithstanding lack of government support complicates the campaign for Sindhi, Marathi and Konkani literary and linguistic awareness. While we look forward to the participation from academics and scholars in Sindhi, Konkani and Marathi literatures from across the country, we have received immediate support from the Sindhi community in Goa. The President of the Sindhi community in Vasco da Gama, headed Mr. Vasudev B. Agicha, has shown immense interest in the proposed academic program