SIR RICHARD BURTON AND SINDHI LANGUAGE

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BY

LACHMAN M. KHUBCHANDANI

[Born March 19, 1821; died at Trieste, October 20, 1890; son of Colonel J. Netterville Burton; matriculated at Trinity College, Oxford, 1840. During his service in the Indian Army 1842–1859, as cadet, lieutenant, captain, Burton lived a wandering life like a *dervish*, travelling throughout Sind-Baluchistan, and the Frontier made himself proficient in Oriental languages. In 1853, he made a pilgrimage to Mecca under various disguises. During 1854–1859, he explored Somaliland, and led an expedition to discover the source of the Nile. He married Isabel Arundell in 1861. The rest of his life was spent in consular service in Brazil, Damascus, Trieste. He revisited Aden, Sind, and Goa in 1876.

R. Burton distinguished himself as an explorer. His works, mostly travelogues, exceeded fifty volumes; prominent among them are the accounts of the Sind Valley (1851, 1877), pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah (1855–56), explorations in East Africa (1856), lake regions of Central Africa (1860), across the Rocky Mountains of California (1861), the Nile Basin (1864), Brazil (1869), Paraguay (1870), Syria (1875), Iceland (1875), Etruscan Bologna (1876), trips to Gorilla land and Congo (1876), and Gold Coast (1883). In his early career, he wrote philological accounts of three languages on the Indian Frontier : Mooltanee (Multani), Beluchi ond Pushtoo (1849). The later years, he devoted himself to literature; translated *Beitāl Pachisī* —(the tales of Hindu devilry) (1870), *Book of the Sword* (1884), works of Camoens (1880–1884), *The Arabian Nights* (1885–1886). He was awarded the gold medal of the Royal Geographical Society in 1859, and was made K C M G in 1885.]

In the Volume concerning the races inhabiting the Valley of the Indus (1851), Sir Burton discusses at length the ' manners and customs of a barbarous or semi-civilized race ', with the intention ' to write a work interesting to the linguist and the ethnographer ' (Preface). His brief accounts of

Sindhi language and writing (pp. 56–80) and of Sindhi education (pp. 134–157) are one of the earliest descriptions available after the conquest of Sind by the British in 1843. He proclaims : ' (Sindhi) is as old as any of the vulgar tongues of modern India. It is a perfectly distinct dialect, and, not, as has been asserted, a mere corruption of Hindostani ' (p. 69). He lists five prominent dialects of the language: 1 *Lari* (literary language of Lar, the southern Sindh), 2. *Siraiki* (language of Siro, the upper Sindh), 3. *Kachi* (of the Cutch, approaching the Guzerattee), 4. *Thareli* or *Jesalmeri* (of the Tharr and Jesulmere tracts on the east), and 5. *Takkarana Ji boli* (of the western mountain range, corrupted by a mixture of Brahui and Belochi). The last one is also known as *Lasi*, the language of Las Belo region in Baluchistan. In the *Linguistic Survey of India* (1919), Grierson, giving a brief sketch of five Sindhi dialects, regards *Siraiki* as a variety of *Vicholi*, the standard language of the central Sind.

Commenting on the ' peculiarities ' of Sindhi, Burton remarks : ' The Sindhi grammar is much more complicated than those modern dialects of western India '. In various exclamatory statements, he describes the verb in Sindhi as ' much more artful than in Hindostani ' and the vocabulary as ' often degenerating into a useless luxuriance and a mere plurality of synonyms ... the barbarous Sindho-Persian has word for every article ... Abstract words are borrowed from Arabic, Sanskrit, Persian, almost *ad libitum*. ' The poetical literature of the vernacular is charcterized ' fresh, idiomatic, and sufficiently original, copious, and varied in words and expression, at the same time simple and natural ' (p. 80).

The Sindhi sounds attracted the attention of early European scholars primarily to explain the pronunciation of suction stops, later known as *implosives* ɓ ɗ ʄ ɠ. Burton refers to five such sounds unknown to the cognate systems as, ' *B*, a peculiar labial formed by forcibly pressing the lips together; *G* resembles our (English) *g*, but it is articulated deep in the throat; *J*, a mixture of dental and palatal sounds, somewhat resembling the rapid articulation of *d* and *y*, " *dya* "; *Dr*, a cerebral *d* run into the liquid which follows it; *Tr*, a compound cerebral and liquid of the same formation as *Dr*. '

An elaborate account of the multilingual pattern of education in Sind makes an interesting reading. According to him (1851), a Hindu child started by learning the Devanagari script from a Brahmin teacher to study religious texts in the Sindhi, and also acquired rudiments of Sanskri. He also learned *Gurumukhi* characters to read the *Guru Granth* – a sacred text of the Sikhs and Hindu in northern India. An *Amil* boy (belonging to the ' courtly ' Hindu class) then moved to an *Akhund* (a Muslim or Hindu

pedagogue under the *maktab* system) and was introduced to popular *Persian* poetry. A few studied *Arabic* also. The *Amil* boy is then taken to some *daftar* (secretariat) by a relation to be initiated in the mysteries of *arzi* (petition-writing in Persian), simple calculation, etc. p. 149).

At the time of the British conquest of Sind, different scripts for writing the language were in use distinguished according to locality, social group and domain of use. Besides ' the Muslim varieties of the Semetic alphabet ', Burton refers to at least eight different alphabets used principally by the Hindoos, viz., 1. the Khudāwādī (Wānikhākhar), 2. The Thathaī — (a) Lohānā (b) Bhātihā hand, 3. The Saraī (in Upper Sind), 4. The Khwājāh, 5. The Meman, 6. The Ochkī (a form of Panjabi), 7. The Landī (of Panjabi), 8. The Gurumukhī (of Panjabi) (p. 152).

Expressing his concern for authorizing a single writing system in the midst of diverse usage, Burton discusses at length the advantages and disadvantages of adopting Devanagari, Khudawadi, Gurumukhi, Naskhi, and Wastalik characters of Arabic (pp. 147–157). The author does not hide his enchantment of the Arabic script, and asserts its superiority to many scripts in ' elegance of appearance ', and in ' brevity without obscurity '. The Arabic script is termed as ' par excellence the alphabet of Asia ', having spread ' from Arabia to Algiers and the Ganges, to Bokhara and Ceylon '. He, therefore, strongly advocates the adoption of the *Naskhi* characters of the Arabic alphabet with certain additions to indicate Sindhi sounds. Referring to the Devanagari writing system, the author, however, concedes that ' (it is) most scholar-like ' and ' perhaps, the best for dictionaries, grammars. and other works solely for the purpose of teaching the language to Europeans ", but, at the same time, he remarks ' however well adapted for books, (it) is tedious and cumbersome for official papers ... difficult to learn, troublesome and useless '.

One can imagine the difficulties encountered by the rulers in formulating a unified policy for the writing of Sindhi when Britih Orientalists themselves were divided on the issue (Khubchandani 1969, pp. 203–205). Burton's views concerning the Sindhi alphabet (favouring Perso-Arabic script) had a decisive role in framing the British policy about Sindhi script. Though noted philologists like Capt. Stack (1853) and the Rev. Trumpp (1872) contended for the adoption of one or another form of the Devanagari script with certain modifications, the claims of Devanagari script were ultimately set aside; and the British rulers, after a prolonged debate extending nearly three decades, accorded in 1872 an official [sanction] to the modified Perso-Arabic system of writing extending the twenty-nine Arabic characters to fifty-two.

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