



## SINDHI

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**SINDHI**, a language of the Indo-Aryan family. Many of its numerous distinctive features may be attributed to the isolated position in the lower Indus valley of Sindh (< *sindhu* “Indus”), the spelling now officially preferred to the Persian-style “Sind.” These features include some distinctive historical innovations, like the four voiced implosives here transcribed as *ɓ ɗ ɗ̣ ɡ* (Turner 1924a, 1924b), as well as many conservative preservations, including many grammatical inflections as well as the final short vowels (usually pronounced as whispered vowels) which have been lost in most New Indo-Aryan languages. More general areal features, such as the use of suffixed pronouns with nominal and prepositional forms as well as verbs, underline its position on the frontier of Indo-Aryan with Iranian.

While it was the Arab conquest of Sindh in the 8th century which made it the first area of the subcontinent to come under Muslim rule, it is the subsequent prolonged use of Persian, the main administrative and cultural language of the region down to the British conquest of 1843, which principally accounts for the large number of Persian (including Perso-Arabic) loanwords which have been absorbed by Sindhi.

The distinctiveness of Sindhi is emphasized by its script (Khubchandani, pp. 634-36), a specialized adaptation of the Perso-Arabic script standardized by the British in 1853, which differs from standard Urdu *nasta'liq* both in its *nask* style and in many graphic forms. Digraphs with *-h* are used only for *jh* and *gh*, with other aspirated sounds being indicated by single consonants with added dots, or in the case of *k* and *kh* by the use of different styles of *kāf*. For other



sets in the complex consonantal inventory, various patterns of dots are also used to distinguish the Sindhi implosives *ḅ j̣ ḍ g̣*, the retroflex consonants *t' d' r'*, and the phonemic nasals *ń ñ* while the retroflex nasal *ń* is written with a small *ṭ* over *nun*. Sindhi lacks the Urdu device of indicating nasalization by omitting the dot over final *nun*, but exceptionally marks nasalized vowels by *tanwin* below *mim* for *mēn* “in,” even below *hamza* for *ain* “and”. Since the full set of Perso-Arabic letters is also maintained to indicate the historical spellings of loanwords, the Sindhi alphabet contains the large total of 52 letters.

The semantic patterns of Persian loanwords (here transcribed with the Indo-Persian vowels *a ā ī ī u ū ē ai ō au*) in Sindhi are similar to those described elsewhere with particular reference to Urdu (see [INDIA xv](#)). As in other New Indo-Aryan languages, educated urban speech is importantly distinguished by the frequency and careful pronunciation of Persian loans from uneducated and rural speech (Buglio, pp. 70-73). The distinctive features of Sindhi morphology (Trumpp; Beg; Khubchandani, pp. 638-53) account for the regular adaptation of word endings in both pronunciation and spelling (Allana), as in the assimilation of most Persian nouns in *-a* to the extended masculine declension in *-ō*, thus *darvāzō* “gate,” oblique *darvāzē*, plural *darvāzā*, plural oblique *darvāzani*. Nouns ending in a consonant add a final short vowel, which is not usually written, e.g., *umata* “community” (< *ummat* with regular loss of germination), *bāzu* “hawk” (< *bāz*, versus *bāza* “arm” < *bāzū* with exceptional vowel change). Assignments of gender are often unpredictable, and sometimes different from Urdu e.g., *kitābu* “book” (m.), *bāzara* “market” (f., with shortened second syllable), *dili* “heart” (f.), versus Urdu *kitāb* (f.), *bāzār* (m.), *dil* (m.). Besides compound verbs of the usual Perso-Urdu type with Persian nominal elements plus, e.g., *karañu* “to do,” there are a few integral Sindhi verbs derived from nominal loans, e.g., *dafnāñu* “to bury” (< *dafn*), *ṭalbañu* “to seek” (< *ṭalab*), *naṣrijañu* “to appear” (< *nazar*).

Historically recorded in the now obsolete Khojki script (Asani 1987), the religious literature of the Khoja Nizari Isma‘ilis, a community closely linked to Sindh and the adjacent Indian area of Kachchh in Gujarat, provides a particularly interesting instance of the deliberate development of parallel sets of Indic and Perso-Arabic terms for its doctrinal presentation (Shackle and Moir, pp. 19-24), e.g., *nar*, *rājō*, *sirī*, alongside *maulā*, *ṣāhib*, *ṣāh* “lord” to describe the Imam, or *vačan*, *vāčō* alongside *qaul*, *qarār* “promise” to describe his compact with his believers, who are regularly called both *rakhīsar* (*r̥ṣīṣvara-*) and *mōman* (< *mo`men*).

From the earliest period of Muslim rule (Shackle 1993), as elsewhere in South Asia, the local cultivation of Persian literature in Sindh (Sadarangani; Aḥmad) for long confined Sindhi to poetry in popular styles. The classic period of Sindhi literature (Ajwani; Schimmel 1974) is dominated by Sufi poetry, characteristically composed in the condensed alliterative couplet called *baita*. Reaching its apogee in the *Risālō* of Shah ‘Abd-al-Laṭif (d. 1752, see ‘[ABD-AL-LAṬIF BHETĀ’I, SHAH](#), and furthermore Sorley; Schimmel 1976; Sayed), Sindhi poetry shows the increasing influence of Persian examples in its later developments (Shackle 1981; Asani 2003). Even from the start, though, the presence of Persian loanwords is a characteristic of this poetry, as in this *baita* by Qāzi Qādan (d. 1551), alluding to the state of the soul at peace (*naḥs-e moṭma’enna*): *šāhbāzu hī bāzu thiyō, hēra pakhī na māre, akhiyūn khōrē ‘araša mēn, luḍē mathē munārē* (Jotwani, p. 53) “The hawk (< *bāz*) has become a royal falcon (< *šāhbāz*) which no longer kills birds, with its eyes fixed on heaven (< ‘*arš*), it swoops above the minaret (< *manāra*).”

In the British period, when Sindh was separately administered from Bombay, full encouragement was given to the development of Sindhi, rather than Urdu, as the local language of education and administration. The example of such pioneers as the prolific polymath Mirzā Qalič Beg (1853-1929) (Schimmel 1974, pp. 29-31) encouraged the development of a modern Sindhi literature, indebted to English example but drawing extensively upon Persian for its abstract vocabulary, by both Muslim and Hindu authors.

After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, however, the previous linguistic homogeneity of Sindh was severely disturbed by the expulsion of the Hindu minority across the border and the largescale settlement of the Mohajirs (< *mohājer*), Urdu-speaking Muslims from India, who rapidly came to outnumber the Sindhis in Karachi, Hyderabad and other major cities. The subsequent history of Sindh (Shackle 2005) has been marked by sometimes violent clashes between Sindhis and Mohajirs over the degree of official recognition to be accorded to their respective languages, which is at present governed by an uneasy compromise. While the more extreme partisans of an independent “Sindhu Desh” espouse a linguistic chauvinism which actively seeks to minimize the Persian component in Sindhi as an alien presence which has become associated with Urdu, mainstream educated Sindhi usage continues to employ a very substantial number of Persian loanwords.



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