

Arvind Iyengar*

A diachronic analysis of Sindhi multiscryptality

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Abstract: Recent debates in modern India on which script to use for the Sindhi language in the country present the situation as a binary choice between Perso-Arabic and Devanagari. However, such debates almost always fail to take into account the fact that the Sindhi language has, for most of its written history, been written in multiple scripts by different user groups and for different purposes. This study investigates the rich history of multiscryptality in the Sindhi language by analysing data on the use of various scripts for the language from the tenth century to the present day. I show that, historically, the Sindhi community chose and used scripts based on utilitarian and pragmatic principles, rather than on ideology or prejudice. I also demonstrate that script choice in the Sindhi community was determined by religio-occupational needs, one's gender affiliation as well as the purpose and function of writing. In doing so, I argue that the case of Sindhi multiscryptality makes significant contributions to our understanding of the sociolinguistics of writing, of script choice, and of the paradigm of biscriptality (Bunčić, Daniel, Sandra L. Lippert & Achim Rabus (eds.). 2016. *Biscriptality: A sociolinguistic typology*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter).

Keywords: Sindhi, Perso-Arabic, Devanagari, grapholinguistics, biscriptality

1 Introduction

This paper examines the phenomenon of multiscryptality in the Sindhi language of South Asia from a historical perspective, starting from the tenth century AD to present times. Based on historical-sociolinguistic data, I investigate the various scripts that have been used to write Sindhi through the ages, their users and their patterns of use. I also scrutinise why these user groups and patterns of use arose, and how they inform our awareness of script use for Sindhi in historical times. In

*Corresponding author: Arvind Iyengar, Discipline of Linguistics, University of New England, Armidale, NSW, Australia, E-mail: arvind.iyengar@une.edu.au. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7303-1524>

doing so, I argue that the Sindhi case makes valuable contributions to our understanding of the sociolinguistics of writing, script choice and bi/multiscriptality.

To those subscribing to a ‘one-script-per-language’ assumption, the case of Sindhi multiscriptality might come across as unusual, odd or even isolated. For instance, Gelb (1963: 227) opined that: “[n]ormally a language uses only one writing at a time. ... Cases in which one language is expressed at the same time in different writings are few and unimpressive”. Gelb’s statement is all the more remarkable given that he is considered to have pioneered the study of writing systems as a distinct field of study in modern linguistics (Daniels 1996). Nevertheless, since Gelb’s statement, multiscriptality has been shown to be far from unusual and, in fact, a rich site for graphematic and sociolinguistic investigation (Bunčić et al. 2016).

Against this background, the case of Sindhi assumes significance. Whereas the language is well-known as an example of a multiscriptal one, much of its scriptal history still remains understudied. As I will show in this paper, an investigation into historical Sindhi multiscriptality pushes the boundaries of our understanding of the phenomenon, particularly with regard to the unquestioned association of certain scripts with certain sociolinguistic or indexical values. In analysing the phenomenon of multiscriptality in Sindhi, this paper will challenge stereotypes and simplistic assumptions of language, script and their sociolinguistic values that may still be prevalent in certain linguistic circles. Thus, the research questions that this paper will unpack and address are

- i. What lessons does the phenomenon of historical multiscriptality in Sindhi have for our understanding of the sociolinguistics of writing (Bunčić 2016a: 27–30; Coulmas 2003: 223; Sebba 2007: 5)?
- ii. To what extent does the phenomenon of historical multiscriptality in Sindhi reinforce, and to what extent does it challenge, prevalent models of script choice ideology (Unseth 2005)?
- iii. Finally, where does the case of Sindhi fit into, and how does it augment the framework of biscriptality (Bunčić et al. 2016)?

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a brief background of Sindhi, the various scripts for the language in present use, and how this situation is consistent with its past. Section 3 describes the theoretical frameworks adopted in this study and summarises existing relevant literature. Section 4 presents the sociolinguistic data. Section 5 comprises an analysis of the data and addresses the research questions posed above. Section 6 summarises the findings of the study and highlights their implications for theory and practice.

Throughout this paper, words originating in Sindhi and other South Asian languages that do not have commonly accepted English spellings appear in a simplified version of Grierson's (1919: ix–x) diacritical Roman transcription.

2 Background

The Sindhi language is an Indo-Aryan language (Khubchandani 2007) native to the Sindh region – today a province – of southern Pakistan. According to Lewis et al. (2019), Sindhi is spoken as a first language by 24.6 million people worldwide. Of these, 22.7 million are estimated to reside in Pakistan, primarily in Sindh, and 1.7 million speakers in various parts of India. In Pakistan, Sindhi is an official language of Sindh province, where, along with Urdu and English, the language is used in education, administration, media and daily formal and informal interaction, in both oral and written forms (Rahman 1996, 1999). In India, Sindhi is one of 22 constitutionally recognised or “scheduled” languages (Constitution of India, Schedule VIII).

The Sindhi community in India is primarily a result of the emigration of Hindu Sindhis from Sindh after the Partition of British-ruled India in 1947. The Partition resulted in the formation of two independent countries, Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. Sindh with its Muslim-majority population was included as a province of Pakistan, following which religious violence erupted in parts of the province. This resulted in most Hindu Sindhis fleeing to India. However, these refugees did not settle in one place, but ended up in various parts of the country, especially in urban and semiurban areas such as Mumbai (formerly Bombay), Pune (formerly Poona), Ahmedabad, Ulhasnagar and Delhi (Cole 2006; Jetley 2000). Compared to India's population of 1.35 billion (World Bank 2019), the Sindhi community in the country is, in Khubchandani's words, a “microscopic minority” (1995: 309). A section of the Hindu Sindhi refugees eventually emigrated to other countries, contributing to the formation of the worldwide Sindhi diaspora, which is present in over a hundred different countries and is estimated at 500,000 (Falzon 2004: 6). That being said, several members of the diaspora – especially the youngest generation – may not be fluent in the Sindhi language (Detaramani and Lock 2003; Dewan 1989; Khemlani David 1991, 2001, 2008; Raina Thapan 2002) and may, hence, not figure in estimates of Sindhi language speakers worldwide.

In Pakistan, the Sindhi language is currently written in a modified version of the Arabic script known as Perso-Arabic (... اب پ پ) (Salomon 2003: 75). In India, Perso-Arabic used to be the predominant script for the Sindhi language, but its use is currently on the decline in the country. The reasons for this are twofold. First, the Hindu Sindhi community in India tends to educate its children in languages other

than Sindhi, chiefly English (Daswani 1989), resulting in limited opportunities for Sindhi children to learn the Perso-Arabic script. Secondly, the Perso-Arabic script is very different in appearance and structure from other scripts commonly used in India (King 2001: 44), due to which there is little scope of literacy transfer. For these reasons, attempts have been made in India for several decades now to supplement or replace Perso-Arabic with the Devanagari script (अ आ इ ई ...) for writing Sindhi (Daswani 1979).¹ One of the commonly stated rationales behind adopting Devanagari is the widespread use of the script in India for writing other languages, primarily Hindi. However, attempts to introduce Devanagari for Sindhi have only been partly successful (Shackle 2014). In other words, the situation of the Sindhi language in India is one where the Perso-Arabic script is dying out, and where the Devanagari script has not taken its place entirely. For a detailed analysis of orthographical and pedagogical issues surrounding the Perso-Arabic and Devanagari scripts for Sindhi, see Iyengar (2018).

Of late, the Roman script (A B C D ...) has been proposed by certain community members as a potential solution to the script divide (Chandiramani 2011; Jaisinghani 2004; RomanizedSindhi.org 2010; Sagar n.d.; Sarwar 2013). This may give the impression that Sindhi today is written and read in three scripts – Perso-Arabic, Devanagari and Roman. To some, such concurrent usage of multiple scripts for a single language may come across as remarkable. Yet, this phenomenon of multiscriptality is not unusual in the historical context of Sindhi. Not only is the language written in multiple scripts in the present day, it has been in the past as well, some of which are no longer in active use today.

Thus, in order to enable engagement in a more informed manner with contemporary issues of Sindhi multiscriptality, it becomes imperative to investigate of the phenomenon of Sindhi multiscriptality from a historical-sociolinguistic perspective (see Auer et al. 2015; Milroy 1992; Romaine 1982). Nevertheless, while there have been works focusing on Sindhi literature (Allana 1991; Asani 2013; Jotwani 1992; Lekhwani 2011; Schimmel 1974) as well as occasional studies on Sindhi orthography in various scripts (Iyengar 2018; Stack 1849b; Trumpp 1872), there exist no rigorous analyses of script use for the language from a historical-sociolinguistic perspective. This paper aims to be the first step in that direction.

¹ The Devanagari (from *deva*- ‘divine’ and *-nāgarī* ‘of the city, urban’) script is a particular variant of the Nāgarī script family (Maurer 1976: 104; Salomon 1998: 40–41). The *deva*- prefix alludes to the frequent usage of the script, particularly in northern South Asia, to write Sanskrit, a liturgical language for Hindus (Fischer 2001: 110). The term has been attested since at least the eighteenth century (Halhed 1776: xxiv).

3 Theoretical foundations

Broadly speaking, this paper deals with the study of scripts or writing systems – a field variously known as *grammatology* (Daniels and Bright 1996: xli; Gelb 1963), *graphemics* (Kurzon 2010), *graphematics* (Augst 1986) and, of late, *graphonomy* (Daniels 2018) and *grapholinguistics* (Meletis 2018; Neef 2015). That being said, the emphasis throughout the paper is not so much on the graphical aspect of writing as on the sociolinguistic one. Against this background, there are three areas of research and related bodies of literature that are relevant to and inform the approaches and methodologies adopted in this paper.

3.1 Sociolinguistics of writing

Specifically, this paper falls within the field of study known as the *sociolinguistics of writing* (Bunčić 2016a: 27–30; Coulmas 2003: 223; Sebba 2007: 5), namely, the role that written language and writing play in society (Coulmas 2013: ix). Early treatments of this field of inquiry can be found in Daniels and Bright (1996: 763–784) and Coulmas (2003: 223–241). Significant for this paper is Coulmas' (2003: 226) concept of the dual, and sometimes conflicting, aims behind the acquisition of literacy: economic payoff and cultural payoff. This concept will inform the analysis of why certain subsections among the Sindhi community used certain scripts for their native language in a historical context.

More recent and extensive monographs on the sociolinguistics of writing are Sebba (2007) and Coulmas (2013). While these works are wide-ranging, they critically inform the areas of research described in Sections 3.2 and 3.3.

3.2 Script choice

While writing systems and community reaction to them have long been an area of linguistic study (see, for example, Fishman 1977), the term “sociolinguistics of script choice” was likely first used by Smith and Schmidt (1996) and was further popularised by Unseth (2008). In a well-known paper on the subject, Unseth (2005: 37) refers to scripts used predominantly by women within a given language community. To the extent intra-community variation in script choice has been studied, the most commonly cited reasons for such variation have been geographical separation and religious differences (see, for example, Ahmad 2008; Eira 1998). Nevertheless, there is a paucity of studies that investigate intra-community variation in script choice based on other factors, gender, occupation or

even the purpose of writing. Admittedly, community-internal multiscryptality along lines of gender, occupation or text genre is now rare, having been on the decline over the last hundred years due to the advent of mass literacy and the information age – both of which are predicated upon the usage of a single script. Consequently, I argue that focusing on such lesser-studied factors in analysing multiscryptality, especially in a historical context will significantly contribute to the body of knowledge on the sociolinguistics of script choice.

3.3 Biscryptality

The phenomenon of a given language being written in more than one script has been recognised in the literature for some time now, typically under the label *digraphia* (see Grivelet 2001), as the written counterpart to spoken-language diglossia (Ferguson 1959). The phenomenon has also been referred to by a variety of other appellations, including *multiscryptality* and *multialphabetism*, among others (see Bunčić 2016a: 16). Of late, an enhanced and augmented framework for the study of multiple scripts for a given language has been put forward by Bunčić et al. (2016) under the name *biscryptality*. According to the authors, biscryptality is the simultaneous use of more than one writing system or script for the same language, including varieties of the same language (Bunčić 2016c: 51, 54). While the authors treat the term *biscryptality* as a cover term for the phenomenon of multiple scripts for the same language, they make a provision for the term *multiscryptality* to be used in cases of “complex biscryptality” (Bunčić 2016c: 55). Given that the Sindhi case meets this requirement, as I will describe in the sections following, I use the term multiscryptality in the context of Sindhi.

Given that the biscryptality framework is highly elaborate and far more comprehensive than previous models of the phenomenon, space constraints preclude a more detailed treatment here (see Bunčić et al. 2016). Therefore, I only make reference to the following aspects of the framework that are relevant for this paper:

- the concept of *scriptal pluricentricity*, where the choice of script is determined by the writer’s group affiliation, typically a religious or geopolitical affiliation (Bunčić 2016c: 60).
- the revised and redefined concept of *digraphia*, where the choice of script is determined by the nature, purpose or function of the text. This is based on Ferguson’s (1959) classic definition of diglossia, where the choice of register is determined by the nature or function of the discourse.

Elaborating on these concepts further, Bunčić (2016c: 55, 63), drawing on Gregory (1967) states that, in a situation of scriptal pluricentricity, script choice is *user-*

oriented, being determined by the user's affiliation and/or script competence. In contrast, in a situation of digraphia, script choice is often *use-oriented*, being determined on the type or functional category of text.

Relevant for this paper is the question of where Sindhi fits into the biscriptality framework. Currently, Sindhi is classified as a case of scriptal pluricentricity (Bunčić 2016c: 59, 2016d: 188), on the basis that it is read and written in Pakistan in the Perso-Arabic script, but in India in the Devanagari script. Whereas this may be true in the present day (although not without qualification, as will be described in Sections 4.2 and 5), this appears to have been slightly different in the past. I argue that, within the biscriptality framework, Sindhi in a historical context exhibits characteristics of scriptal pluricentricity distinct from present times and may also be considered to exhibit characteristics of digraphia.

It is necessary to note that the biscriptality framework only applies to multiple scripts being used for the same language synchronically, and not diachronically (Bunčić 2016b: 53–54). To use Grivelet's (2001: 6) terminology, the biscriptality framework only analyses “concurrent” and not “sequential” use of multiple scripts for the same language. To align with this condition, the data on Sindhi multiscryptality in this study will be presented under the relevant historical eras, so that the phenomenon can be measured synchronically at various points in history, and then compared and contrasted diachronically.

4 Data

This section presents historical data on the scripts in which the Sindhi language has been found written. The presentation of data has been subdivided into three sections: from the tenth century AD to the British colonisation of Sindh (pre-1843), the period of British colonisation (1843–1947), and after independence (1947 onwards).

A distinction is also made between oral and written folklore in Sindhi. Oral poetry in Sindhi has been dated to at least the ninth century AD (Asani 2003: 622) and, over the years, a rich tradition of poetry, religious hymns and folk ballads has emerged in the language. Indeed, certain sources have characterised Sindhi as having one of the most extensive ‘literatures’ among Indo-Aryan languages (Schimmel 1974). Nevertheless, Sindhi folkloric compositions that were performative in nature and tended to be propagated by oral means are not considered to be ‘literature’ for the purposes of this study. They are better characterised as orature and, therefore, fall outside the scope of this study.

Thus, the history of scripts used for the Sindhi language goes hand in hand with the history of written literature in Sindhi. Since scholarly works focusing

primarily on Sindhi scripts are few and far between, I use scholarly works on the literature and historical sociolinguistics of the Sindhi language as primary sources of information on historical script use for Sindhi. Some of the most comprehensive works on the subject of historical Sindhi scripts are certain British-era works (1843–1947) on Sindh and the Sindhi language, including Burton (1851), Grierson (1919), Stack (1849a, 1849b, 1855) and Trumpp (1857, 1872). Additional works on Sindhi language and literature that serve as sources of data include Allana (1991), Asani (2003), Daswani (1979), Lekhwani (2011), Khubchandani (2007), Schimmel (1974) and Shackle and Moir (2000). Pandey's (2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b) brief papers on historical Sindhi scripts also provide crucial data on the subject. Data from the aforementioned sources and others are compiled, compared and contrasted in the following subsections, in order to arrive at a detailed historical overview of Sindhi multiscryptality. This will be followed by a critical analysis in Section 5.

4.1 Pre-1843

While there exist community opinions that seek to equate the advent of written Sindhi with the seals excavated at sites of the Indus Valley Civilisation (3300–1900 BC) (see Iyengar 2017; Khubchandani 2007), modern scholarship generally agrees that Sindhi in the modern sense likely appeared in writing in the ninth century AD (Khubchandani 2007; Lekhwani 2011). The earliest written literature in Sindhi has not survived and is known only through indirect references. Khubchandani (2007: 688), Lekhwani (2011: 26–27) and Rahman (1999: 21–22) state that the Qur'ān was translated into Sindhi in the ninth century AD, presumably using an Arabic-based script. Chatterji (1958) refers to a Sindhi version of the Indian epic *Mahābhārata* that is supposed to have existed in the eleventh century AD, known only through its subsequent Arabic and Persian translations. The script of the original Sindhi composition, however, is not known.

Nevertheless, despite the lack of primary sources, secondary sources attest that several scripts were in use for the language even a thousand years ago. The tenth-century Arab traveller Al-Nadīm cites accounts of there being two hundred scripts being used in Sindh at the time (Dodge 1970: 34). Al-Nadīm's contemporary, the Persian scholar Al-Bīrūnī, reports a more plausible three scripts in vogue in the region at the time. He gives their names as *Ardhanāgarī* (half-nāgarī), *Malwārī* and *Saindhava* (Sachau 1910: 173). Considering that Sindh was under Arab rule at the time, Baloch (1991: vi–vii) contends that the Saindhava script would have been based on the Arabic script, with graphemes augmented with dots to represent Sindhi-specific phonemes. Rahman (1999: 22) questions Baloch's assertion on

Saindhava being Arabic-based, but concedes that the Arabic script in some form must have been in use at the time.

In medieval times, Sindh came under the sphere of influence of the Persianate Mughal dynasty. Consequently, Persian remained the court and prestige language in Sindh for much of this period. Persian was also used for educating clerks and merchants, both Muslim and Hindu, in quotidian matters such as court records and bookkeeping. Education for the elite, on the other hand, was usually in liturgical languages. Since elite education at the time was primarily offered in religious institutions, the language of such education was often the liturgical language associated with the religion in question – Arabic for Muslims, and Sanskrit for the Hindu Brahmin priests. In this sense, medieval education in Sindh was stratified by “vocational relevance” (Khubchandani 1977: 34). The stratification of language instruction based on vocation and religion meant that different user groups tended to be conversant with different scripts. To the extent educated, Persian-educated Hindu Sindhi bureaucrats, known as *‘Āmil*, and Muslim Sindhis were typically literate in the Perso-Arabic script, while Sanskrit-educated Brahmins were typically literate in Devanagari. Regardless, spoken Sindhi remained common to all sections of society.

Despite its lack of official status throughout the middle ages, a fair amount of written literature had appeared in Sindhi by the sixteenth century (Rahman 1999: 22). Nevertheless, the lack of official status meant that orthographic standardisation in Sindhi, irrespective of script, was slow. Consequently, the use of Sindhi in writing was usually in a variety of unstandardised orthographies (Asani 2003: 622) based on those scripts that the user was already conversant in. That being said, the scripts in use for writing Sindhi essentially fell into two broad categories – Perso-Arabic abjads or consonantaries, and Indic abugidas or alphasyllabaries (see Daniels and Bright 1996). The Indic abugidas in use for Sindhi can themselves be classified on the one hand into Devanagari, and on the other into varieties of a regional script family called *Landā*.²

The *Landā* varieties emerged in the 16th century AD in the north-west of the Subcontinent. Technically speaking, the *Landā* forms were essentially localised graphic variants on a continuum that varied from region to region (Stack 1849b: 1; Trumpp 1872: 1). These varieties were primarily used by traders in Sindh, known as *Vāṇiyā*, to record accounts and transactional details. Since it was chiefly traders who made use of these script varieties, they were also called *Baniyā*, *Vāṇikā* (Asani 2003: 623; Grierson 1919: 14; Pandey 2010a: 1) or *Haṭavāṇikā* (Lekhwani 2011: 36), all meaning ‘mercantile’. These script varieties typically did not have diacritics for

2 The Sindhi name for this script family is *Lunḍo* (Khubchandani 2007: 695; Lekhwani 2011: 35; Pandey 2010c: 2).

vowels, did not always distinguish between plosives and implosives or aspirated and unaspirated consonants, and did not employ consistent word spacing or punctuation (Pandey 2010a: 1). Such shorthand practices were what resulted in the name *Landā*, meaning ‘clipped’ (Grierson 1904: 68; Pandey 2010a: 1, 2010c: 2). Early British and European authors were highly contemptuous of these writing methods. In his (1872) *Sindhi grammar*, Trumpp dismisses these forms as “utterly unfit for literary purposes, as they have become greatly mutilated in the course of time and are very deficient in the vowel and consonant system, so that the Hindu merchants themselves, after a lapse of time, are hardly able to reproduce with accuracy what they have entered in the ledgers” (Trumpp 1872: 1). In the same vein, Grierson (1919: 14) states that *Landā* was “a most imperfect script, wanting in signs for the medial vowels. It is seldom legible to anyone except the original writer, and not always to him”. Unsurprisingly, apocryphal stories and jokes on the supposed misinterpretations arising from such shorthand writing abound in the Sindhi community and continue to be popular even today (Falzon 2004: 272; Shackle and Moir 2000: 34).³

It is often mentioned in the literature that the *Landā* forms were a secret traders’ script (Anand 1996: 8; Boivin 2015; Falzon 2004). Such depictions imply that the shorthand practices in question were deliberate, allowing traders to maintain their accounts in a cryptic form and conceal details of their dealings from the authorities. However, it also seems likely that these shorthand practices arose simply from traders’ need for expediency and compactness rather than phonetic fidelity. For instance, Prinsep (1837: 352) states that “the inconvenience of this omission [of vowel signs] is not much felt in the limited scope of mercantile correspondence, ... where the same sentences are constantly repeated”. An example of such a “constantly repeated” mercantile sentence in *Landā* Sindhi on a *hundī*, or indigenous bill of exchange, is shown in Figure 1.⁴

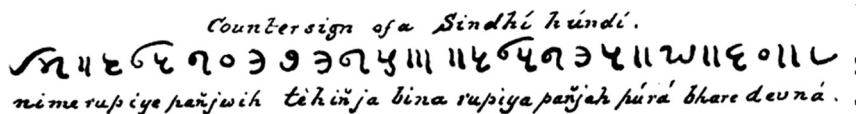


Figure 1: Example of vowelless *Landā* Sindhi writing on a *hundī* (Prinsep 1837: 352).

³ An example of such a joke: Someone reportedly wrote a note in *Landā* to an acquaintance, containing the Sindhi phrase [fiu adʒ' mer' u' jo] ‘He went to Ajmer city’. The recipient read it as [fiu əf' məri u' jo] ‘He died today’.

⁴ The text in Figure 1 means “one half (being) rupees twenty-five, double fifty, to be paid in full” (Prinsep 1837: 352 fn.). In modern Sindhi, the text would read [nim' rup'ja pəndʒʰʊfiʰ tʰɪn'dʒa biʃa rup'ja pəndʒʰafiʰ pura bʰəre dɪʃa].

Indeed, the two functions of *Landā* as a shorthand form and as a secret script can be seen as going hand in hand. In other words, its usage as a secret script might have simply been a convenient extension of it being a shorthand form of writing known only to a closed group (Falzon 2004: 271; Shackle and Moir 2000: 34). Sindhi grammarian and lexicographer Kanhaiyalal Lekhwani (personal communication) also surmises that the practice of conventionally omitting vowel diacritics in Perso-Arabic might have influenced the omission of vowel signs in *Landā*. In other words, the possibility of a spillover effect from Perso-Arabic Sindhi orthography onto *Landā* Sindhi orthography cannot be ruled out. Lekhwani's conjecture is echoed by a major nineteenth-century work on world scripts (Faulmann 1880: 121), which alludes to the *Landā* practice of omitting medial vowel diacritics, along the lines of Semitic abjads.

Irrespective of their perceived shortcomings, the *Landā* varieties were relatively widely used in Sindh during pre-British times. During the rule of the Kalhoro clan in the eighteenth century, the *Landā* form used in the capital city of Sindh at the time, *Khudābād*, rose to the level of a quasi-standard and came to be known as *Khudābādī* or *Khudāwādī* (Lekhwani 2011: 36; Pandey 2010a, 2010c). The *Khudāwādī* script eventually came to be identified with the Sindhi language to the extent that it is occasionally referred to by authors as the “Sindhi” script (Lekhwani 2011: 36; Pandey 2010a, 2010c; Stack 1849b: 1–2).

Apart from *Khudāwādī*, a few other varieties of *Landā* went on to be standardised as scripts for particular religio-linguistic communities in Punjab and Sindh and were “developed into full-fledged vehicles of literary expression” (Asani 2003: 623). Two such examples are *Gurmukhī* and *Khōjki*.⁵ *Gurmukhī*, literally ‘from the mouth of the guru’ (Gill 1996: 395), is the script traditionally used to transcribe the religious hymns of the Sikh community of Punjab, composed in various Indo-Iranian language varieties that were in use in the north and west of the Subcontinent, including Sanskrit, Persian, Punjabi and Sindhi (Trumpp 1877). Sikh legend has it that the script in its present form was standardised by the Sikh guru Angad (1504–1552) (Gill 1996: 395; Salomon 2003: 92). Hindu Sindhis who also followed Sikh teachings, therefore, learnt *Gurmukhī* to be able to read the Sikh scriptures.⁶ The main users of *Gurmukhī* were Hindu Sindhi women, as they tended to devote more time to religious rituals than the men (Falzon 2004: 54; Khemlani David 2001: 231). While a limited amount of non-Sikh literature, including the couplets of the

⁵ Several spelling and corresponding pronunciation variants are attested; *Gurmukhī* is also spelt and pronounced “*Gurumukhī*” while *Khōjki* also appears as “*Khōjiki*”, “*Khōjaki*” (Pandey 2011b: 1), “*Khwājaki*” and “*Khuwājiki*” (Asani 2003: 622–624).

⁶ In a historical context, the faith of so-called Hindu Sindhis is better described as a syncretic one incorporating both Hindu and Sikh elements (Daswani and Parchani 1978: 21; Ramey 2008: 178).

well-known Sindhi poet Sāmī, did appear in Gurmukhī, the script largely remained restricted to Sikh temples and books, and did not find wide use as an everyday script for the Sindhi language (Lekhwani 2011: 37–38).

Along lines similar to Gurmukhī, *Khojki* arose in the 16th century from a need to accurately transcribe the religious hymns of the *Khojā* sect of Shia Muslims in Sindh and Gujarat, which had been composed in the early modern Sindhi-Kachchhi language (Pandey 2010a: 1). This script variant also came to be known as *Chālīh^a Akharī* (Allana 1991: 41; Lekhwani 2011: 36) or *Chārī Akharī* (Shackle and Moir 2000: 35), both meaning ‘forty-letter script’.

Besides *Khudāwādī*, Gurmukhī, *Khojki* and the unstandardised *Landā* varieties, another Indic script occasionally used for Sindhi in pre-British times was Devanagari. For instance, the poetry of Qāzī Qādan, hailed by some authors as the first real Sindhi poet (Asani 2003: 616; Lekhwani 2011: 37) has been found written in Devanagari.

Apart from the various Indic scripts, Sindhi in pre-British times was also written in the Perso-Arabic script. Since the majority of Sindh’s population has been Muslim since medieval times, those Muslim Sindhis who received an education did so in Arabic, the liturgical language for Muslims worldwide. They also received some education in Persian, which had been the court language in Sindh since medieval times. Consequently, educated Muslim Sindhis were literate in the Perso-Arabic script (Lekhwani 2011: 38). This script received a modicum of standardisation in the 17th century when the Sindhi theologian Abūl Hasan of Ṭaṭo used a particular form of the script in his works. This augmented version of the Perso-Arabic script came to be known as ‘Abūl Hasan Sindhi’ (Allana 1991: 21; Lekhwani 2011: 28 fn.; Schimmel 1963: 229). The augmentation essentially comprised adding dots to existing Perso-Arabic graphemes in order to unambiguously represent Sindhi-specific phonemes. Significant was the representation of aspirate phonemes using only one grapheme, modified by dots as required. This was illustrative of the emic Sindhi view that the aspirate stops were single phonemes, and not clusters of a stop and /h/ (Trumpp 1872: 3). In spite of this attempt at standardisation, several ambiguities continued to remain in the manner Perso-Arabic Sindhi was written in pre-British times. These mainly concerned inconsistencies in the application of dots for creating new letters, and the under differentiation of certain phonemes in the script (Trumpp 1872: 2–3). These matters would not be addressed until after the British conquered Sindh.

At this stage, it must be emphasised that, prior to British colonisation and the advent of mass education, only a very small proportion of the Subcontinent’s population, including within the Sindhi community, were formally educated and, consequently, literate. Ferguson (1996: 86) estimates that, before the 19th century, the literacy rate for the Subcontinent as a whole would have been around two

percent. Therefore, the question of script competence only concerns this miniscule literate subsection of the Sindhi population.

4.2 1843–1947

As mentioned in the previous section, much of Sindhi folklore that had survived and been passed down up until British times was in oral form, with early written literature in the language often having been lost over the centuries. This is affirmed by Trumpp's (1866: v) reference to the predominantly oral nature of the region's folklore and to the overall paucity of nonreligious printed works in Sindh as of the mid-19th century: "[T]he old literature of the country [consisted] of an inexhaustible store of legends, ballads and songs, which had been handed down orally and committed to the memory of the travelling bards and singers; for written books are scarce in Sindh, and those, which came to hands, were without exception learned treatises of the Mullas upon religious subjects..." Indeed, the apparent dearth of written literature in Sindhi at the start of the colonial era led many British and European authors, with a focus only the written form of language, to characterise Sindhi folklore in unflattering terms (Grierson 1919: 12–13; Imperial Gazetteer of India 1908: 406). Notwithstanding this negative view, several European scholars, either independently or in collaboration with native Sindhi scholars, produced high-quality grammars and dictionaries on the language. Notably, the initial target audience of such works was mostly European officers and missionaries based in India (Khubchandani 2007: 685). Such works also include some of the earliest first-hand references to the phenomenon of Sindhi multiscryptality.

By 1843, Sindh had fallen into British hands. The new rulers had a policy of running lower-level administration in the local language (Khubchandani 2007: 696). Consequently, it was decided that Persian would be replaced by Sindhi as the official language of the provincial government. Before this could be done, though, the British felt the need to finalise a standardised script for Sindhi (Cook 2014). The *Landā* forms were rejected due to their perceived inability to unambiguously represent phonemes (Asani 2003: 624–625). The choice for an official script, therefore, lay chiefly between Perso-Arabic and Devanagari.

In his account of Sindh, British explorer Richard Francis Burton (1851: 152–157) outlines what he feels are the relative advantages and disadvantages of some of the scripts in use for Sindhi as of the mid-19th century – Devanagari, Gurmukhī, *Khudāwādī* and Perso-Arabic. Burton admits the suitability of Devanagari based on its familiarity to Europeans in India but notes that it was unfamiliar to most Sindhis themselves. Furthermore, he claims that Devanagari would require several

Both Burton (1851) and Stack (1849b) tend to wax eloquent about their preferred scripts and gloss over their flaws and focus instead on the purported drawbacks of the other scripts in the fray. For instance, Burton (1851) ignores the fact that the Perso-Arabic script retains superfluous graphemes for Arabic and Persian consonant phonemes not present in Sindhi's phonemic inventory. In fact, Burton seems to suggest that these graphemes specific to Persian and Arabic loanwords are necessary simply because Sindhi borrows a much greater number of Persian and Arabic words than do other South Asian languages (1851: 400). In doing so, he glosses over the fact that the Sindhi pronunciations of such loanwords have been phonologically indigenised and differ from their source pronunciations (Kaye 1996). Burton also claims that *Laṇḍā* is unsuitable for Sindhi due to the script's lack of vowel signs but underplays the fact that the same practice of omitting vowel signs for short vowels is followed in the Perso-Arabic script as well. On the other hand, Stack (1849b) denounces both Perso-Arabic and Roman as requiring several new signs and marks in order to render them suitable for Sindhi, while defending the enhancement of Devanagari with similar additional signs. Also of note is that Stack prefers Devanagari on the grounds that it was relatively well-known to Europeans at the time (1849b: vi), albeit largely unfamiliar to Sindhis themselves. Ostensibly, Stack's target audience was British and European officers in the government, who had to learn the Sindhi language as part of their administrative duties.

Eventually, the pro-Perso-Arabic advocates prevailed. Playing a decisive role in this outcome was the support received by Hindu Sindhis well-versed in Persian, and Europeans like Burton (Cook 2014; Khubchandani 1985). A 52-letter enlarged Perso-Arabic-based script was devised based on existing conventions and adopted as the official script for Sindhi in 1853 (Asani 2003: 625; Khubchandani 2007: 696). However, the committee that finalised this script did not pay sufficient attention to the finer points of orthography such as diacritics, the spellings of words and collation order (Lekhwani 2011: 38). Much of the resultant ambiguity in these aspects of Perso-Arabic Sindhi orthography continues to persist to the present day (Iyengar 2018).

However, the script controversy for Sindhi did not end with the decree of an official script by the government. Supporters for Devanagari continued to make a case for it, with a prominent advocate being the German-born Christian missionary Ernest Trumpp. Trumpp (1857: 685) criticises prevalent Perso-Arabic orthography variants for Sindhi as being loaded "with a confusing heap of dots and other diacritical marks". In his pioneering grammar of Sindhi, Trumpp (1872) devotes an entire chapter to the development, characteristics and a critique of Perso-Arabic graphemic inventories for Sindhi (1872: 1–30). This is likely the most detailed work

on the subject from that period. In this work, Trumpp maintains that Devanagari, which he calls the “Sanskrit alphabet” (1872: 1), is the best suited for Sindhi.

A constant thread across several of Trumpp’s works is the supposed existence of religious prejudices between the Muslims and Hindus of Sindh. Trumpp also ascribes scripts to religious groups to the extent that he labels the Perso-Arabic and Devanagari scripts “Muslim” and “Hindu” scripts, respectively (Trumpp 1872). In his opinion, the prevailing communal prejudices meant that one group would not learn the script of the other: “As the population of Sindh consists of Hindûs and Muhammadans, two distinct alphabets will be required for them. In respect to the Muhammadans, all are agreed that only the Arabic character will do for them The national alphabet for the Hindûs is the *Sanscrit* [Devanagari] character, ...” (Trumpp 1858: ii–iii; emphasis in original). A similar claim is found in Trumpp’s other works (1857, 1872). In brief, he claims that Devanagari, although linguistically better suited to the Sindhi language, would be inappropriate since the majority of Sindh’s population was Muslim. However, Trumpp also criticises the 1853 standardisation of the Perso-Arabic script for Sindhi, claiming that it was as unsystematic and indiscriminate in its application of dots as was the previous unstandardised practice. In his works (1857, 1872), he repeatedly advocates that the Perso-Arabic script as modified for the Hindustani language be adopted for Sindhi as well.⁷ In Trumpp’s opinion, the Hindustani Perso-Arabic graphemic inventory is more comprehensive, allowing for both Sanskritic as well as Perso-Arabic words to be accurately transcribed. He recommends that the Hindustani version of the Perso-Arabic script be adopted in its entirety for Sindhi. Trumpp’s grammar (1872: 534–535) contains a useful comparison of the Perso-Arabic-based graphemic inventories for Hindustani, pre-1853 Sindhi and post-1853 Sindhi.

Nonetheless, Trumpp claims that even the Hindustani Perso-Arabic variant would not find favour with the Hindus of Sindh, due to supposed religious acrimony between them and the Muslims. Similar statements are also found in the works of European scholars such as Stack and Burton. Significantly, such opinion has also been attributed to British government officers (Aitken 1907: 474). Anand (1996: 17–18) opines that the instituting of two separate scripts for Muslim and Hindu Sindhis was deliberate, and consistent with the British policy of ‘Divide and Rule’. Whether due to genuine belief in Muslim–Hindu religious prejudice or as a covert implementation of Divide and Rule, the government decided to promulgate a second standardised script for Sindhi in 1868, specifically for educating the

7 In the 19th century, Hindustani was the common term for the language variety today known as Urdu. Nowadays, Hindustani is usually used as an umbrella term for the colloquial variety of Hindi-Urdu as spoken across the northern part of the Subcontinent, of which Hindi and Urdu are Sanskritised and Arabicised registers, respectively.

Hindu community of Sindh. The script selected as the basis for the new standard was the *Khudāwādī* variant of *Landā* (Pandey 2010a, 2010b, 2011a), since it was already in use in a semi-standardised form among the mercantile Hindu community. To this end, the government initiated the publication of textbooks in *Khudāwādī* Sindhi (Boivin 2015: 13). However, contrary to the government's expectations, education in the script did not flourish. Since government jobs were available only to those with knowledge of the Perso-Arabic script (Hughes 1876; Rahman 2002: 330), the pragmatic Hindu Sindhi community preferred to educate its children in schools offering instruction in Perso-Arabic Sindhi (Anand 1996: 18; Kothari 2009: 19–20). Eventually, schools teaching in *Khudāwādī* Sindhi were shut down (Grierson 1919: 18), and Perso-Arabic ended up prevailing as the dominant script for the Sindhi language. In other words, the assumption by European officials and scholars that religious groups in Sindh would not use a script emblematic of other religious groups was ultimately proven false.

Besides Perso-Arabic, Devanagari and *Khudāwādī*, other scripts were also used to limited extents during British rule in Sindh. Grierson (1919: 13) notes that, in addition to Perso-Arabic and Devanagari-script Sindhi, certain Christian scriptures were also translated and transliterated into Gurmukhī-script Sindhi by European missionaries in the 1850s. The choice of Gurmukhī suggests a target audience of Hindu Sindhi women (see Section 4.1). A Gurmukhī-script Sindhi-language monthly magazine entitled *Sudhār^a Patrikā* ('Journal of Reform'), dealing with women's issues, was launched in 1890 from Hyderabad (Jotwani 1992: 368).

SINDHI

BANYA CHARACTER

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 ۳/ ۱۱۱ ۱۱۱ ۱۱۱ ۱۱۱ ۱۱۱ ۱۱۱
 ۴/ ۱۱۱ ۱۱۱ ۱۱۱ ۱۱۱ ۱۱۱ ۱۱۱،
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Mt 3. 3–6 1913

1182

GURMUKHI CHARACTER

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Lk 3. 1–4 1917

Figure 3: *Khudāwādī* ('Banya') and Gurmukhī Sindhi specimens (Nida 1972: 102).

Again, the choice of Gurmukhī for this magazine was likely determined by the script competence of its target audience. At the turn of the 20th century, Gurmukhī was taught to a limited extent in girls' schools in Sindh, although many girls continued to learn the script at home (Aitken 1907: 479).

Figure 3 shows extracts of the Bible translated into Sindhi in the *Khudāwādī* and Gurmukhī scripts from the early 20th century, ostensibly targeted at specific audiences.

Another script that found occasional use in British-era Sindhi writing, usually targeted at European audiences, was Roman. Significantly, some of the earliest European attempts at writing grammars of Sindhi were in the Roman script. Among these attempts were those of the reputed Indologist James Prinsep (1835) and W. H. Wathen (1836), secretary to the British Government of Bombay. Due to copies of these books being physically or electronically inaccessible, it is not known what script(s) Prinsep used in his grammar. Through Prinsep (1837: 351) and Stack (1849b: v), it is known that Wathen used the Perso-Arabic script along with a Roman transliteration in his work, although what form of augmented Perso-Arabic letters he used to accommodate Sindhi sounds is unclear. Eastwick (1843) prepared an English-Sindhi wordlist entirely in the Roman script. However, the orthography used was essentially ad hoc, and made no attempt at distinguishing long vowels, retroflex consonants and other specificities of the language.

The most comprehensive attempt at using Roman for Sindhi, albeit only as an auxiliary academic transliteration, appears to be that of Grierson (1919: ix–x). In his monumental eight-volume *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903–1928), Grierson employs a Roman transliteration based on the one initially proposed by the Welsh scholar William Jones (Shipley Jones 1799). This Roman transliteration is loosely based on the principle of “vowels as in Italian, consonants as in English”, which was a concept popular among English missionaries at the time (Gleason 1996: 778). Grierson's Roman transliteration incorporated established Indic romanisation standards, such as representing a long vowel with a macron above the vowel letter (e.g., ⟨ā⟩), and a retroflex consonant with an underdot (e.g., ⟨ḍ⟩). It also included graphetic innovations such as representing the characteristic extra-short vowels of Sindhi by superscript letters. Grierson's work also features sample texts in the form of Christian scriptures translated into Perso-Arabic, Devanagari and Roman Sindhi. Figure 4 shows an extract of a translation into Roman Sindhi, with an English interlinear gloss.

Whereas Gurmukhī, *Khudāwādī*, Khojki and the unstandardised *Landā* forms for Sindhi survived in pockets, the bulk of education and publishing in the language continued to be in the Perso-Arabic script until Partition.

At this juncture, it is worth noting that, despite British attempts at institutionalising mass education, increases in literacy rates were slow. Even as late as

[No. 1.]

INDO-ARYAN FAMILY.

NORTH-WESTERN GROUP.

SINDHI.

STANDARD DIALECT.

DISTRICT HYDERABAD.

SPECIMEN I.

TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION.

Hekirē-māphu ² -khē	bba	put ²	huā.	Tin ² -mā ²	nandhē
<i>One-man-to</i>	<i>two</i>	<i>sons</i>	<i>were.</i>	<i>Them-from-among</i>	<i>by-the-younger</i>
pi ² -khē	chayō,	‘ē	bābā,	māl ² -mā ²	jēkō
<i>the-father-to</i>	<i>it-was-said,</i>	<i>‘O</i>	<i>father,</i>	<i>the-property-from-in</i>	<i>whatever portion</i>
mūh ² -jē-hi ²	achē,	sō	mū ² -khē	khañi-dḍē,	jāh ² -tē
<i>in-me-of-the-share</i>	<i>may-come,</i>	<i>that</i>	<i>me-to</i>	<i>set-to-and-give,</i>	<i>which-upon</i>
māl ²	bbinhi-khē	virāhē-dḍi ² inō.	Thōran ² -dḍi ² hān ² -khā ² -pō ²		
<i>the-property</i>	<i>the-two-to</i>	<i>was-decided(-and)-given.</i>	<i>A-few-days-from-after</i>		

Figure 4: Roman Sindhi specimen with interlinear English gloss (Grierson 1919: 102).

1901, the literacy rate in Sindh was reported at 9.3 percent for Hindus, and 0.74 percent for Muslims. Also, of the literate population of Sindh, 83 percent were literate in Sindhi (Aitken 1907: 480). Therefore, as in pre-British times, any investigation of Sindhi literacy until the turn of the 20th century remains restricted to a small educated minority of the Sindhi community.

4.3 1947 onwards

The Sindhi script controversy seems to have lain low until after the independence and Partition of British India in 1947 and the emigration of most Hindu Sindhis from Sindh to independent India. The call for instating the Devanagari script for Sindhi in independent India was first made by a group called the *Sindhi Sāhitya Sabhā* (‘Sindhi Literary Assembly’) in Mumbai (then Bombay) in 1948 (Asani 2003: 625; Daswani 1979: 61). This proposal was accepted by the Government of India on 9 March 1950 (Cook 2014), and Devanagari was declared the official script for Sindhi in India. However, a pro-Perso-Arabic group called the *Sindhi Sāhitya Maṇḍal* (‘Sindhi Literary Circle’) challenged the government order in court.⁸ As a result, the government in 1951 declared Perso-Arabic a co-official script for Sindhi, on par with Devanagari (Cook 2014; Daswani 1979: 62). Curiously, for more than 15 years, Sindhi in India had two official scripts but did not have official language status; the latter was achieved only in April 1967 (Cook 2014; Daswani 1979: 66). Ironically, the granting of official language status had the effect of rekindling the

⁸ The Sindhi Sāhitya Maṇḍal later changed its name to *Akhil Bhārat Sindhi Bōli āi Sāhit Sabhā* ‘All India Sindhi Language and Literature Assembly’ (Cook 2014). In this latter form, it has continued to advocate for the Perso-Arabic script to be used for Sindhi in India (Agnani 2013).

Sindhi script debate (Cook 2014). Being an official language of India, Sindhi was now eligible for government funding and support. Consequently, supporters from both script factions wanted to appropriate the entirety of these funds for teaching and publication in the script of their choice (Daswani 1979: 66). This resulted in the two factions attempting to elbow out the other where possible.

In terms of rationale behind their respective stances, the pro-Devanagari lobby has typically claimed that their script is linguistically more suitable to the Sindhi language, and that there exists a historical and cultural link of the script with the language. In the process, script and religious identity are often conflated, and the Perso-Arabic script is identified with Islam. On these lines, it has been claimed that Devanagari was “buried underground by Muslim conquerors” (Asani 2003: 625). It has also been claimed that Devanagari is ubiquitous in India. On this basis, it is argued that the adoption of Devanagari is in the interest of the Sindhi language’s long-term survival in the country (Cook 2014). On the other hand, the pro-Perso-Arabic lobby has claimed that usage of their favoured script would continue to ensure the readability of past Sindhi literature, maintain a link between Indian and Pakistani Sindhis, and confer a distinct identity on the written language. Using Devanagari, they argue, would re-emphasise the hegemony of the Hindi language over the Sindhi community in India, especially among the younger generation (Asani 2003: 625; Cook 2014). In the process, the pro-Perso-Arabic lobby paints the pro-Devanagari lobby as sectarian, due to the latter’s use of anti-Islamic rhetoric in its propaganda (Cook 2014; Daswani 1979: 66).

The infighting and indecision on the Sindhi script issue in post-Partition India has been criticised by various authors, from different perspectives. Daswani (1979: 66) states that the script limbo has made the Sindhi community at large disillusioned with the issue, causing a large section of the younger generation to have no opinion in the matter. Anand (1996: 128) disapproves of the script “compromise”, asserting that it is in no way helping the cause of a language already under threat due to its speakers being dispersed. On the other hand, scholars like Khubchandani take a broader view of the situation, and object to the very preoccupation with standardisation and codification of language and script. Khubchandani opines that the overall endeavour at “bringing order to chaotic diversity” (1984: 172) ultimately stems from a Western monolingual and homogenising mindset.

In the meantime, the Indian government has resolutely kept out of the Sindhi script debate, leaving the final decision to the community itself. Government institutions, including the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), usually bring out their Sindhi-language publications in both scripts. According to Daswani, this leads to “duplication and a waste of public funds” (1979: 67). Although nowhere as intense as a half-century ago, the one-upmanship between the two script factions remains. For instance, the *Sahitya Akademi*, the National Academy of Letters in

India, only considers works written in Perso-Arabic eligible for its Sindhi literature awards. This has been attributed to Perso-Arabic supporters holding influential positions in the Academy (Sindhi pedagogue Lachman Hardwani, personal communication). The indecision on the script issue also leads to occasional symbolic setbacks, such as Sindhi-language text being left out from Indian rupee currency notes, despite Sindhi being an official language of the country (Young 2009: 165–166; see Figure 5).

Irrespective of the script debate, the use of Perso-Arabic for Sindhi in India has been on the decline since Partition. This is due to the Sindhi community in India preferring to educate its children in languages other than Sindhi, and due to the graphical and structural difference of the Perso-Arabic script from other commonly

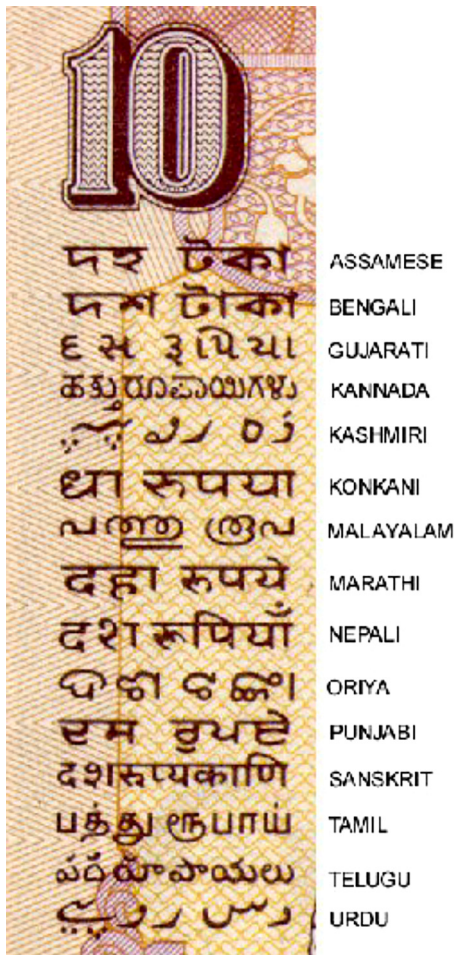


Figure 5: Language panel on the reverse of a contemporary Indian ten-rupee note, bearing translations of the words “ten rupees” into various languages (Reserve Bank of India n.d.).

used scripts in India such as Devanagari (Iyengar 2017: 3). However, this has not necessarily meant a corresponding rise in the use of Devanagari for Sindhi. Rather, Sindhi in India is increasingly becoming an unwritten language, and maintained to a limited extent as a purely oral language for community-internal communication. To the extent it is written in Devanagari, there is a lack of a commonly accepted orthographic standard (Iyengar 2018). Thus, Sindhi in India is a language with an extensive literary and written history (Asani 2003) that is now being progressively restricted to an ever-shrinking set of domains, and largely reduced to a spoken-only form (Bugchio 2006: 98–99; Iyengar 2017: 14). This phenomenon has been described by Annamalai (2014) as *neo-vernacularisation*.

Other scripts for Sindhi such as Gurmukhī and Khojki have largely disappeared from everyday use for the language. In pre-Partition Sindh, the main users of Gurmukhī were women who were typically homemakers and learnt to read the script from older stay-at-home women. However, in post-Partition India, the spread of mass education meant that girls began to receive their education in Perso-Arabic or Devanagari Sindhi, and subsequently in other languages such as Hindi and English. While reliable statistics are lacking, anecdotal evidence suggests that literacy in Gurmukhī Sindhi today is largely restricted to older Sindhi women. Consequently, Sindhi religious literature that would earlier have likely been printed in Gurmukhī may today be printed in other scripts such as Devanagari (Gidwani 2012). Notwithstanding the decline of Gurmukhī for the Sindhi language, its use for the Punjabi language has flourished; in fact, it has been adopted as the standard script for Punjabi in India. The acquisition and use of the Khojki script today is largely restricted to liturgical use by Khojā Muslims worldwide (Pandey 2011b: 2).

In Pakistan, the Perso-Arabic script continues to be the unchallenged official script for the Sindhi language. A few publications in Devanagari Sindhi have been brought out by the Hyderabad-based Sindhi Language Authority (SLA) (Hussain 2011), but Devanagari is not used in Sindh in any official or educational capacity.

In the 21st century, with the spread of technology and the Internet, there have been calls for the Roman script to be used for Sindhi. Proponents claim that Roman is effectively the only script in present times common to Sindhis worldwide, whether in Pakistan, India or in other countries (RomanizedSindhi.org 2010). This is portrayed as having two advantages. First, Roman could act as an ideologically neutral solution to the Sindhi script debate, given the worldwide prevalence of the script, including in Pakistan and India (Chandiramani 2011). Second, the Roman script would enable children in the Sindhi diaspora, namely, in countries other than Pakistan and India, to easily learn, read and write their heritage language, considering that children in the diaspora would typically be literate in Roman, but not in Perso-Arabic or Devanagari (Sarwar 2013). Finally, it is claimed that the

ubiquity of the Roman script on computers and electronic devices would facilitate the creation and dissemination of content in Sindhi, were the language to be written and read in Roman (Jaisinghani 2004). It is implied that these advantages of Roman give it the potential to resolve the increasing neo-vernacularisation of Sindhi in India and among the diaspora. To this end, at least three Roman-script Sindhi orthographies have also been proposed, supplemented by various symbols and diacritics (Jaisinghani 2004; RomanizedSindhi.org 2010; Sagar n.d.). Nevertheless, at the time of writing, the proposal for using Roman for Sindhi is yet to gain traction in the community. For a study on issues surrounding the use of Roman for Sindhi, including community opinion on the proposal, see Iyengar (2017).

5 Analysis

The review of historical script and language use in the Sindhi community over the ages reveals certain distinct trends and patterns, with different user groups employing different scripts. Certain sources, especially colonial-era British and European sources, have attributed this variation to religious stratification (Trumpp 1872: 1). However, the data in this study reveal that, although religious affiliation did *influence* the choice of script by particular user groups, it would be an oversimplification to state that religious affiliation *dictated* the choice of script. In fact, closer investigation reveals a great deal of diversity in script use among various Sindhi socioreligious and occupational groups (Burton 1851: 152–157; Jhangiani 1992), with there being not just religion-based variation, but also occupation-based and gender-based variation. These observations are analysed in detail in the sections that follow.

5.1 Sociolinguistics of writing

The data reveal that, historically, there was a great deal of diversity in script use within the Sindhi community. In part, this diversity can be attributed to the fact that there was no centralised mass education in South Asia before the British era. Only liturgical and administrative languages, and the scripts used for them, formed part of the limited education available. The data show that competence in a particular script was typically acquired as part of competence acquisition in a liturgical or administrative language, typically Arabic, Sanskrit or Persian. Therefore, in general, people learnt to read and write – if at all – depending on their religio-occupational needs, rather than on purported ideologies and prejudices.

As a result, affiliation to a particular social group, be it based on religion, sect, occupation or gender, influenced the kind of education one received and,

consequently, determined one's script competences. In other words, people learnt scripts that were required to read the religious scriptures of their community, or to take up the traditional occupations of their social group. In the context of the Sindhi community, Muslim Sindhis learnt the Arabic script to read Islamic texts, while Muslim Sindhis of the *Khojā* sect often also learnt *Khojki* to read their sect-specific hymns. Among Hindu Sindhis, *Vāṇiyā* men involved in trade learnt the local *Laṇḍā* variety to maintain commercial accounts, while 'Āmil men in the administration learnt to read and write Persian. Hindu Brahmin priests learnt Devanagari, in which Sanskrit scriptures tended to be written in northern parts of the Subcontinent. Hindu women, on the other hand, sometimes learnt to read and write Gurmukhī, in order to read the Sikh scriptures that they followed. In this manner, religio-occupational needs and gender group indirectly influenced user competence in a particular script and, consequently, engendered a skill-based preference for that script.

Also, despite being the everyday language of most of Sindh's inhabitants, Sindhi was not formally taught before the British era. Therefore, in the instances that Sindhi was read and written at the time, it was logical that people would use the script that they were literate or most comfortable in. This might have given rise to the unqualified assumption among early European scholars that religious affiliation, and even prejudice, led certain Sindhis to choose a particular script and reject others. The use of particular scripts by different user groups is better understood as a tendency emerging organically from competence in a particular script, rather than as an active ideological choice. This pattern is also reflected in the recent community proposals for using the Roman script to write Sindhi. The call appears to be founded largely on utilitarian intentions – that knowledge of Roman is widespread within the Sindhi community in present times and, hence, would facilitate written communication in Sindhi – and not on any ideological affinity to the Roman script.

Therefore, the data in this study affirm that different subgroups within the Sindhi community acquired literacy in certain scripts for perceived economic or cultural payoff, in line with Coulmas' (2003: 226) observations on the aims behind the acquisition of literacy. They also refute the proposition of historical script choice within the Sindhi community being an outcome of ideology and prejudice, which will be elaborated on in the following section.

5.2 Script choice

As outlined in Section 5.1, the data in this study reveal that the historical acquisition of scripts in the Sindhi community did not necessarily conform to

stereotypical indexical associations based on religion. In other words, the common South Asian religion–script stereotypes of Perso-Arabic = Muslim, Hindu = Devanagari and Sikh = Gurmukhi (see Salomon 2003: 59) were not strictly adhered to within the Sindhi community in a historical context. *Khojā* Muslim Sindhis adopted the Indic-origin *Khojki* script to read and write Sindhi, to the extent that the script is now emblematic of the community (Shackle and Moir 2000: 34). ‘Āmil Hindu Sindhis took to education in the Perso-Arabic script in order to be eligible for government jobs that required knowledge of Sindhi in Perso-Arabic. In fact, sections of the Hindu community rejected education in what the colonial government termed the ‘Hindu Sindhi’ script – the *Khudāwādī* script – because education in the script was not perceived as having economic payoff (Aitken 1907: 479). Hindu Sindhi women, to the extent literate, adopted the Gurmukhī script typically identified with Sikhs. Building on the analysis in the previous section, which showed that historical literacy acquisition in Sindhi was determined chiefly by economic and cultural payoff, it is further seen that religion-based fault lines were not evident in historical script choice within the Sindhi community.

In this sense, the data show that historical script acquisition and use in the Sindhi community contrasted with the historical religion-based script divides seen in other South Asian language communities, in particular the Hindi-Urdu-speaking communities of north-central India. Whereas the Hindi-Urdu example has become synonymous with a religion-based script divide (Ahmad 2008; Brandt 2016; King 1994, 2001), some may unwittingly assume that a similar divide applies to all South Asian language communities. However, this is not borne out by the data in the context of Sindhi.

Thus, the data in this study demonstrate that it was not so much religion but, rather, occupation and gender that shaped historical script choice within the Sindhi community. Moreover, also determining script choice was the purpose or function of writing, which will be taken up in the following section.

5.3 Biscryptality

As mentioned in Section 3.3, the biscryptality framework currently cites Sindhi as an example of scriptal pluricentricity, the justification being that the language today is read and written in Pakistan in the Perso-Arabic script, but in India in the Devanagari script. However, the data in this study indicate that this argument would benefit from further nuance, both in the context of the present day as well as of the past.

As revealed in the data, the present-day situation is one in which the Perso-Arabic script is the undisputed script for Sindhi in Pakistan, in almost all domains

of use. In contrast, the Indian situation is somewhat more complex. Immediately after Partition, both Perso-Arabic and Devanagari were used for the language, making it biscriptal within India at the time. Since then, use of Perso-Arabic has declined, but its place has not been fully taken by Devanagari. Therefore, while Sindhi in India in present times is written to a limited extent in (unstandardised) Devanagari, it also qualifies as a largely oral or neo-vernacularised language. These additional observations serve to refine the claim that Sindhi today is a scriptally pluricentric language across the two centres of Pakistan and India.

However, in times past, both in the pre-British and British eras, the distribution of scripts for Sindhi was different in terms of the ‘script centres’. Compared to present times, where script use for the language is centred on the geopolitical entities of Pakistan and India, script use in the past was centred on occupational or gender-based groups, as shown in Sections 5.1 and 5.2. Use of Perso-Arabic, *Khojki*, Devanagari, *Laṇḍā* and Gurmukhī scripts or script forms was centred on Muslim and ‘Āmil Hindu men, *Khojā* Muslim men, Hindu (male) priests, *Vāṇiyā* men, and Hindu women, respectively. Thus, while multiscriptality in Sindhi has continued to remain largely user-oriented, the user groups themselves were distinct in the past from what they are in present times.

Notwithstanding persistent user-oriented multiscriptality in Sindhi, the data also show evidence of use-oriented multiscriptality in the language in historical times. That is, besides orientation along the dimensions of occupation and gender, Sindhi literacy practices in pre-British and early British times also show a distinct bifurcation in terms of use based on the purpose or function of text. The data reveal that, for religious or administrative writing, the scripts in use were so-called fully developed scripts, such as Perso-Arabic, Devanagari, *Khojki* and Gurmukhī. On the other hand, for commercial or other ephemeral writing, the scripts in use were so-called defective ones, such as the unstandardised *Laṇḍā* forms. In other words, the scripts used, and their ‘completeness’ from the perspective of phonological representation, depended on their vocational relevance (Khumbchandani 1977: 34), and there existed a neat division of labour or domain complementarity (Timm 1981) among the scripts. Therefore, Sindhi script use in pre-British and early British times exhibited not just user-oriented variation, but also use-oriented variation. Applying Ferguson’s (1959) classic definition of diglossia to the domain of writing, the historical scripts used for formal or high-status (H) Sindhi writing qualify as H scripts (see Bunčić 2016c: 56–57). In contrast, the scripts used for informal, ephemeral or low-status (L) writing qualify as L script forms. On this basis, it can be argued that writing in Sindhi during the eras in question also exhibits characteristics of digraphia.

The use of Gurmukhī by Hindu Sindhi women presents an especially intriguing case of digraphia. Similar historical cases in East Asia are alluded to by Bunčić

(2016d, 2016e) and Unseth (2005: 37), where a particular language was written and read in one script by men, but in another by women. Consequently, the script used by women – notionally, the L stratum in premodern, strongly patriarchal societies – was, by association, deemed the L variety. Bunčić (2016c) terms this gender-based digraphia. This has parallels with the data in this study, where Sindhi women in pre-British and early British times typically did not receive a formal education but, in some cases, did acquire competence in Gurmukhī from older stay-at-home women in order to read Sikh scriptures. However, the Sindhi case also contrasts with those described by Bunčić and Unseth in that the Gurmukhī script used by women – the supposed L stratum of Sindhi society at the time – was primarily used for religious writing, which would render it an H script in the context. Put differently, Gurmukhī for Sindhi may represent a noteworthy case of digraphia where a written language is accessed by an L group using an H script. Regardless of whether this interpretation is affirmed or rebutted by further research, the fact remains that the case of Gurmukhī-script Sindhi makes valuable contributions to our knowledge of historical gender-based digraphia, and to the biscriptality paradigm as a whole.

It should be clarified that, though the data reveal that Gurmukhī was learnt and read by some Hindu Sindhi women, the data do not shed light on how much the script was actively used in quotidian writing by such women at the time. Nevertheless, given the emergence of women's magazines and Christian scriptures in Gurmukhī from the late 1800s onwards, we may surmise that the user base in the script was sizable enough to warrant Sindhi-language publication in it.

Finally, also deserving mention is the institutionalisation and furtherance of Sindhi multiscryptality by the British colonial government and Christian missionaries in the region, such as Trumpp. As seen in the data, both the government as well as missionaries subscribed to the idea of separate scripts for Muslim and Hindu Sindhis. Nevertheless, it is necessary to draw a distinction between the government's and missionaries' advocacy of multiscryptality. As shown in the data, the colonial government's motives may have been informed by the policy of Divide and Rule. In contrast, missionaries were driven by the aim of making Christian scriptures as widely readable as possible among the Sindhi-speaking population. Considering the different script competences prevalent among different groups in Sindhi society, it was expedient for missionaries to not just translate but transliterate their work accordingly. As a result, translations of Christian scriptures into Sindhi emerged in various scripts in order to potentially cover various groups. Translations appeared in Perso-Arabic to cover Muslims and Persian-educated Hindu administrators, in *Khudāwādī* to cover Hindu traders, in Devanagari to cover Hindu priests, and in Gurmukhī to cover Hindu stay-at-home women. It appears, therefore, that the colonial government and the missionaries,

despite having ostensibly different aims, ended up doing the same thing – promoting separate scripts for separate groups.

6 Conclusion

This study has shown that historical script use in the Sindhi community provides key insights for theory as well as practice. In terms of theoretical implications, the study adds to and enhances the frameworks of the sociolinguistics of writing, script choice and biscriptality. First, it affirms Coulmas' (2003: 226) observations on the aims behind the acquisition of literacy being economic and/or cultural payoff. Consequently, the analysis shows that user-oriented script variation within of the Sindhi community was not necessarily due to explicit dogmatic choice but, rather, implicit based on existing script competences. In doing so, the study shows that literacy acquisition for the Sindhi community has been, and continues to be, largely a utilitarian endeavour rather than one based predominantly on religious ideology.

Second, and following from the above, the study shows that religion-based fault lines were not conspicuous in historical script choice within the Sindhi community. This distinguishes the historical Sindhi case from other South Asian cases of bi- or multiscriptality such as Hindi-Urdu, the analysis of which is sometimes indiscriminately applied to the Sindhi context. The study shows that there existed historical multiscriptality in Sindhi along various dimensions, including religion, occupation and even gender.

This brings us to the third insight that, while written Sindhi was and is user-oriented and scriptally pluricentric, the script centres themselves have varied with time. In present times, the geopolitical entities of Pakistan and India act as script centres for the Sindhi language, while, in the past, it was occupation and gender that acted as script centres. In addition, there also existed use-oriented script variation, or digraphia, in that formal or H texts were written in certain scripts, while informal or L texts in others. The use of Gurmukhī by Hindu Sindhi women represents a particularly interesting case of an L social group using an H script.

In terms of practical implications, the study demonstrates that the indexical associations of Perso-Arabic = Muslim and Devanagari = Hindu advanced by some stakeholders in the Sindhi script debate in India is simplistic and historically unsustainable in the context of the Sindhi language. While these associations may have been tenable in the historical context of other South Asian languages, primarily Hindi-Urdu, they are not for Sindhi – at least not without further qualification. In any event, given that the Sindhi language in India is slowly being neo-vernacularised, the Sindhi script debate in India is increasingly becoming moot.

Consequently, those interested in the welfare of the Sindhi language in India might do better to refocus their efforts towards ensuring sustainable maintenance of the language in the community.

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