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The Concept of Riyasat-e-Madīna and Ethno-Linguistic Divides in Pakistan

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Abstract

Languages are associated with human identity. Pakistan enjoys great geo-political significance in this region of warm waters. Pakistan is a multilingual country. The linguistic and cultural fabric of Pakistan is composed of multilingual and multiethnic identities and 'as many as 80 languages'. Urdu is the national language of Pakistan. English has the status of foreign-cum second language in Pakistan. Superiority attached with certain languages raises questions of the inferiority of other languages. This is why the country has been suffering from linguistic contestations since 1947. There is a need to eliminate these profound linguistic splits and chauvinistic conflicts among our people. The current study highlights how insights and examples from the time-honored *Riasat-e-Madīna* can neutralize these ethno-linguistic conflicts in Pakistan.

Keywords: Islam, linguistic discrimination, linguisticism, linguistic variations, Riasat-e-Madina.

1. Introduction:

Prime Minister Imran Ahmad Khan has repeatedly referred to the celebrated Riyasat-e-Madina in his speeches and shown his enthusiasm to develop Pakistan on the model of the Riyasat-e-Madina. The concept of Riayasat-e-Madina is not new and there is little need of philosophical discussions on it. The Riayasat-e-Madina was founded by the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) the Khatam an-Nabiyyin. The state was built with countless sacrifices made by the noble companions of the Prophet. It was a true welfare state depicting matchless but real-life examples of faith, divine love, brotherhood, fellow-feeling, discipline, unity, human freedom, tolerance, patience, law and order and a broader and healthier vision of life in the hereafter. The world witnessed how narrow boundaries and identities which divide humanity were forfeited by the companions for the sake of winning pleasure of Almighty Allah. The teachings of the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) the Khatam an-Nabiyyin were so dynamic and effective that the Muslim Arabia, without any exaggeration, was transformed into an earthly paradise. The same teachings, thanks to Almighty Allah, survive even today and can transform human lives in the 21st century as well.

Situated in the Indus valley, Pakistan is a multilingual country. In addition to the geographical variations, the country enjoys the existence of a rich variety of languages. The country has as many as 80 languages. These languages add to the beauty of human existence but at the same time, narrow understanding of these variations can destabilize this land of mountains, desert and fertile plains.

Language is part of an individual's social identity. The term identity is often used in studies related to ethnicity and gender issues. There are personal, social and regional aspects of identity. Actually, identities are formed gradually. As we grow and move among humans, we get connected to languages, cultures, religion, places, people, professions, institutes, families, tribes, social circles, parties, interests, activities, schools of thoughts and ideologies. We can use all these words with the word 'identity' to point to a specific dimension or facets of an individual's identity. Thus, we have several facets of an individual's identity such as linguistic identity, cultural identity, tribal identity, political identity, national identity, religious identity and ideological identity. Our close connections with these and other aspects of human life define our identity. All those aspects of human existence with which we identify ourselves are part of our overall identity. Since we grow with our mother tongues, naturally, our association with our mother tongues is very strong. So, our identity and our

languages are intertwined. Our accent and choice of words in communication reflects our origin, class and education. For instance, in the Americas ‘Black English Vernacular’ is associated with black Americans. There are situations when people may change their accent to associate themselves with certain social class or a social group or to hide their native identity. Why do people do it? ¹At times, people hide their true linguistic identity to escape unfair treatment from people around them because they are afraid that their native languages do not enjoy prestige in that particular culture and as a result, they may become the victims of cultural and ethnic prejudices of people or groups in power. Crystal explains that ‘...our perception of our own and others’ language can become, in varying degrees, a source of pleasure, pride, anxiety, offence, anger and even violence’.² Linguistic discrimination fuels social and political problems in society. Linguistic discrimination and linguicism refer to treating people unequally on the basis of their languages. Skutnabb-Kangas explains that in linguicism certain languages are not allowed in official use.³ Skutnabb-Kangas believes that linguicism is a threat to linguistic diversity of the world. She argues that the threat to linguistic diversity is ‘much greater than the threat to biodiversity’.⁴

Thus, linguistic discrimination which results from false language identities can fuel prejudices and violence in human society. In addition, it jeopardizes one important part of human existence on the earth—linguistic variation. Behind linguicism stands the idea that certain languages are better than others. Hudson argues that ‘one of the most solid achievements of linguistics in the twentieth century has been to eliminate the idea (at least among professional linguists) that some languages or dialects are ‘inherently’ better than others’.⁵ It is easier to eliminate such ideas among linguists and researchers of social sciences who deal with academic issues within the precincts of educational institutes. But, it may not be an easy task to eliminate language conflicts among tribes and ethnic groups who face every day harsh realities of life. At times, especially in multi-ethnic countries, these conflicts lead to persecutions, violence and wars. Lake observes that ‘in the United States, conflicts over language persist, particularly in places with large immigrant populations’. For instance,

¹ Bhattacharyya, H. *Federalism in Asia: India, Pakistan and Malaysia*. NY: Routledge, 2010, p.33.

² Crystal, David. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997, p. 17.

³ Skutnabb-Kangas, T. Linguistic Human Rights. In Ammon, U., Ungeheuer, G., Steger, H., Wiegand, H. E., & Burkhart, A. (Ed). *Sociolinguistics: An international handbook of the science of language and society*. Berlin [u.a.: Gruyter.2006.

⁴ Ibid. p. 2578.

⁵ Hudson. *Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980, p.191.

in 1862, Lake records that General Benjamin⁶ Butler 'had some Francophones executed--specifically, some scholars believe, to discourage the use of French' in the USA (para 2). Similar instances of persecution and conflicts can be found in different parts of the world. Divisions caused by ethno-linguistic different are likely to be deeper in countries founded on ethnic, cultural, linguistic, political and racial identities than in countries founded on religious ideologies. Pakistani was separated from India on the basis of Islam. Let us now see how Pakistan has been intermittently facing language conflicts since its establishment.

2. Language Conflicts in Pakistan

Language conflicts in Pakistan date back to the very establishment of Pakistan in 1947. At that time people in the then Eastern Pakistan wanted their Bengla language to be recognized as the official language of Pakistan. So, Bengla language movement started in 1948, according to Ayress.⁷ The following excerpt from page 428 of Shahab *Beeti*, a book of Shahbuddin Rehmatullah, an ICS officer appointed in Eastern Pakistan show a few glimpses of the sanguinary situation Pakistan and Pakistani people face during the tragic fall of Eastern Pakistan. When Eastern Pakistan fell, the officer was left there and had to face the horrendous discrimination at the hands of linguistically jaundiced the "Mukti Bahini" thugs. Shahbuddin Rehmatullah writes

پھر سر شام ہی سے مکتی باہنی کے غنڈوں کا ریلا میرے اسکاٹن کے فلیٹ میں شروع ہو گیا۔ ان لوگوں نے میری ٹیلیفون لائن کاٹ دی۔ اس کے لیڈرنے (جو محض چھو کر اساتھا) کہا "آپ بنگلہ میں باتیں کیجئے گا۔ آپ کے گھر کی تلاشی لینے چند شریر لڑکے آئیں گے۔ انکار مت کیجئے گا یہ تلاشی اسلحہ برآمد کرنے کے سلسلے میں ہے۔" اس نے یہ اطلاع بھی دی "ہمارے شیخ صاحب کے حکم کے مطابق بنگلہ دیش میں ایک بھی اردو بھاشی یا باہر والا زندہ رہنے نہ دیا جائے گا اور جلد ہی میر پور، محمد پور اور دوسری مہاجر کالونیوں پر چڑھائی کی جائے گی۔ آپ گھبراہٹیں نہیں آپ کو کوئی زیادہ تکلیف نہ ہوگی۔ بس چند سیکنڈ میں کام تمام ہو جائے گا۔ یہ جو آپ کے پاس تین حسین بچے ہیں ان پر رحم آتا ہے مگر کرنا کیا ہے۔ حکم حاکم بہتر یہ ہے کہ جہاں ہیں وہیں رہیں۔ دیکھیے کیا ہوتا ہے" جب مکتی باہنی کا چھو کر ایہ سب کچھ کہہ رہا تھا تو یہ تینوں ننھی منی جانیں میری جان سے لپٹی ہوئی تھیں۔⁸

These cited words show a few glimpses of how language divide can cause social divides. There were reports in the Media that in Dhaka, on February 21, 1952, some political activists were killed when Bengali people demanded equal status for their native tongue. . 'February 21, 1952, was the first day when linguistic conflict in Pakistan caused bloodshed in the form of deaths of four students demanding official

⁶ Lake (2000). Language Wars. Harvard Magazine. Retrieved August 4, 2015, from <http://harvardmagazine.com/2002/03/language-wars.html>, para8.

⁷ Ayress, A. The Politics of language Policy In Pakistan. In Michael E. Brown & SumitGanguly (Ed) Fighting words: Language policy and ethnic relations in Asia. . Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003.

⁸ Shahbuddin Rehmatullah (2000). Shahab Beeti. Print Media Publications: Karachi

language status for Benglai'.⁹ Later on, Pakistan witnessed the fall of Dhaka in 1971. Then, Sindh became the hot bed of language conflicts in the form of Muhajar-sindhi conflict, Muhajar Pashtun conflict and Sindhi-Punjabi conflict. Ayress observes that in 1972, after the fall of Dakha when the provincial assembly of Sindh presented the Sindhi Language bill requiring Sindhi to be used in all government departments, Muhajirs protested. 'The language riots that followed were the bloodiest in Pakistan's history', points out Ayress¹⁰. As far as Baluchistan is concerned, it has linguistically heterogeneous population. Baluchi, Brahvi and Pashtu are the main languages. In addition, there are Punjabi and Urdu-speaking settlers as well. Baluchistan has been facing law and order situation since 2003. The target killing incidents in Baluchistan and Sindh on the basis of language have been reported by newspapers. Baloch, one of the reporters of the Nation reports a killing spree based on ethnicism and linguisticism. The report further said that the victims who were killed on the bases of their language in Baluchistan were travelling to Quetta from Lahore. The perpetrators 'asked all the passengers to show their identity cards. Sources said that after identifying 12 passengers as residents of Punjab, the attackers separated them from rest of the passengers and took them to nearby mountains where they opened indiscriminate firing on them'¹¹. Shahid reported that 50 unidentified armed men killed 20 labourers who were sleeping in the construction site camp in Balochistan's Kech district, on Saturday. The victims belonged to the Punjab and Sind.¹²Shah reports that in Quetta, 'two assailants on a motorcycle Wednesday shot dead three welders at a shop in Quetta, in what police said was an ethnically motivated attack . . . it appeared to be an "ethnic" killing as the victims were from Punjab'¹³. Another report of the Dawn points out that these ethnic waves of target killing have hit not only labourers, passengers and shopkeepers, but teachers well¹⁴. These are only a few reports about the sanguinary situation in the largest province of Pakistan. If this jingoistic attitude

⁹ Ibid, p59.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.66)

¹¹ Baloch. B. 16 Punjabis killed in Balochistan attacks. The Nation. Retrieved July 23, 2015, from <http://nation.com.pk/politics/15-Aug-2010/16-Punjabis-killed-in-Balochistan-attacks>, (August 15, 2010), (para 1-4).

¹² Shahid.S. (Apr 12, 2015). 20 labourers gunned down in Turbat. The Dawn. Retrieved July 23, 2015, from <http://www.dawn.com/news/1175427>

¹³ Shah.S.A. (July 01, 2015). Gunmen kill 3 in targeted attack in Quetta. The Dawn. Retrieved July 23, 2015, from <http://www.dawn.com/news/1191661>

¹⁴ Murder of teachers in Balochistan (May 30, 2010).The Dawn. Retrieved August 5, 2015, from <http://www.dawn.com/news/880837/murder-of-teachers-in-balochistan>

towards other languages continues, it may put at risk the stability of our country.

In the past, Pakistan leaders raised the slogan of being a nation on the basis of Islam, despite linguistic and cultural differences, but then there were events which went against our hopes and ideologies. It appears that after independence, we did not pay attention to how Islam could consolidate multi-ethnic Pakistan established in 1947. Schiffman points out that ‘religion (Islam) was paramount in the establishment of Islamic Pakistan, but once established, the linguistic split between East (Bengali-speaking) Pakistan and West Pakistan (Panjabi, Urdu) led to split that resulted in the emergence of Bangladesh’¹⁵. We have already lost our eastern wing situated in the Bay of Bengal due to ethno-linguistic conflicts. There is a need to cure our people of these language-conflicts through education. It is time to return to Islam and brotherhood based on Islam and let Islam, a great unifying force, consolidate our unity as a nation. We should wisely channelize these identities and we should allow Islam to infuse a spirit of brotherhood among the people of Pakistan.

3. Islam and Linguicism

Islam is against racism, ethnicism and, by implication, linguicism. It is against all forms of prejudices based on parochial identities. Our group identities are based on colour, race, lineage, region and language. Group identities or tribal identities were built-in in the pre-Islamic Arab society. ‘For the pre-Islamic Arabs, both urban and nomadic, the tribe was the source of their identity, expressed in the notions of *nasab* (‘lineage’) and *hasab* (‘collective heroic deeds’), based upon which they evolved an intricate system of kinship and genealogical relationship’ and that ‘blood feuds were often conducted in order to avenge loss of either personal or tribal honor’¹⁶. So, during Jahiliyyah days or ignorance days, we hear that Arabs frequently engaged in blood feuds and clan wars due to trivial issues. These seemingly endless clan wars started, for instance during horse races, finding another tribe’ camel grazing in your field. At times, there were serious issues behind tribal conflicts. Ismail explains that ‘the pre-Islamic Arabs had very warlike temperaments. They fought each other over the right to control the resources of water and over the pastureland’¹⁷. Neutralizing these sanguinary tendencies was not an easy job and we know the huge efforts Hazrat

¹⁵ Schiffman, H.F. Linguistic culture and language policy. NY: Routledge, 1998, p.24.

¹⁶ Afsaruddin, A. Arabic—Islamic literature: continuities and transformations. In Ahmed, A. S., & Sonn, T. (Ed). The Sage handbook of Islamic studies. Los Angeles, Calif: SAGE, 2010, p.165.

¹⁷ Ismail, H. Arabic and Islamic literary tradition. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Utusan Publications & Distributors, 1982, p.4.

Muhammad (PBUH), the last Prophet and Messenger of Allah made to transform the Arabs. The following verse of the noble Quran clearly states that tribal and familial variations of humanity are for the purpose of identification. Let us attentively listen to the words of our Creator.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ
عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَاهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ¹⁸

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.

Identification necessitates unique and diverse features. If diversity is missing, it may become difficult to set off things from one another. These magnificent Quranic lines seem to indicate that there is a divine design and purpose in the existence of tribal, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity in the world. We should try to align our personal opinions about variations and diversities to the meaning of this verse. These diversities should not perplex us. They set us off from one another. Since, these diversities are part of larger design of the world, we should respect these diversities and we should not consider any culture, tribe and language inferior. In short, this verse should deter believers from harbouring any hatred based on ethnic and linguistic differences. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) disliked group chauvinism. Hirsch, Kett & Trefil define chauvinism as ‘exaggerated belief in the supremacy of one’s nation, class, caste, or group’¹⁹.

Reported by Abu Dawud, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘He who calls others to group chauvinism does not belong to us; he who fights for the sake of group chauvinism does not belong to us; and he who dies upholding group chauvinism does not belong to us’²⁰. Al-Qaradawi explains that Islam reduced ‘every kind of group chauvinism to dust, forbidding the Muslim to revive any of the disputes of such chauvinism or to summon others toward it’²¹. Reported by Al-Bazzar (as cited in Al-

¹⁸ Al-Quran :Surah 49, verse 13).

¹⁹ Hirsch, E. D., Kett, J. F., & Trefil, J. The new dictionary of cultural literacy. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002, p.314.

²⁰ Al-Qaradawi. Yusuf. The lawful and the prohibited in Islam. Selangor (Malaysia) The Other Press / Islamic Book Trust, 2013, p.274.

²¹ Ibid.

Qaradawi , 2013), the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘these genealogies of your are not a reason to revile anyone. You are all children of Adam. No one has superiority over another except in religion and taqwa(the fear of Allah)’²². In one of the ahadith reported in Al-Tirmidhi, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘Let the people cease to boast about their ancestors who have died. . . Allah has removed from you the pride of jahiliyyah and its boasting about ancestors. One is either God-fearing Believer or a wicked sinner. All people are children of Adam and Adam was created from dust’²³. The last line of this citation explains the meaning of the Quranic verse quoted above. All people are children of Adam and Adam was created from dust. This clarification should remove all forms of false prejudices based on one’s familial and social connections and extrinsic worth. The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) himself was a paragon of these egalitarian precepts. In one of the ahadith, reported by Ahmad, in his last public address delivered among thousands of Muslims, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said:

O people, your Lord is One. Know that there is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, or of non-Arab over an Arab, nor of a white over a black or of a black over a white—except through consciousness of Allah (taqwa). Verily, the most honourable among you in the light of Allah is the one who has the most taqwa²⁴.

Hazrat Abu Dharr and Bilal, the Abyssinian, once quarreled. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said to Abu Dharr, ‘Look! You are no better than a white or black man unless you excel in the fear of Allah’²⁵. Thus, Ideological stance of Islam is clear that all humans are equal regardless of gender, race, tribe, language and class. Nations are not established with such divisions. When the Muhajireen from Makkah arrived in Madina without any material, they received extraordinary welcome and treatment from the Muslims of Yathrib . The Holy Prophet (PBUH) established bond of brotherhood between Ansar (helpers) and Muhajiroon (immigrants) and made them one community. Mubarakpuri observes that ‘ the Ansar tried to outdo each other in making the Muhajireen comfortable in Madinah and put themselves and their

²² Ibid. p.277

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. p.278

²⁵ Ibid .276

possessions at the service of the newcomers.²⁶ Thus, the world witnessed unprecedented examples of fraternity. We quote here just two glimpses of this sacred fraternity.

In one of the ahadith narrated Abu Juhaifa, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) established a bond of brotherhood between Salman (RA) and Abu Darda (RA). Salman (RA) paid a visit to Abu ad-Darda (RA) and ‘. . . Abu Ad-Darda prepared a meal for him (Salman), and said to him, "(Please) eat for I am fasting." Salman said, "I am not going to eat, unless you eat." So Abu Ad-Darda' ate.²⁷ In another example of this exemplary brotherhood, Sa'd bin Ar-Rabi was an ansari companion of the Prophet (PBUH). He was a rich man. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) established a bond of brotherhood between Sa'd bin Ar-Rabi (RA) and Abdur-Rahman bin 'Awf (RA). In one of the ahadith of Sahih Bukhari, narrated by Anas (RA), Sa'd bin Ar-Rabi (RA) said to his muhajir brother, ‘The Ansar know that I am the richest of all of them, so I want to divide my property into two parts between me and you, and I have two wives; see which of the two you like and so that I may divorce her and , you can marry her after she becomes lawful to you by passing her prescribed period (i.e.Idda) of divorce. Abdur-Rahman said, ‘May Allah bless your family (i.e. wives) for you²⁸.

The ahadith further record that Hazrat Abdur Rahman (RA) asked his Ansari brother where the market was. ‘So they showed him the Qainuqa’ market. (He went there and) returned with a profit in the form of dried yogurt and butter. . .’²⁹. He kept going to the market and then married an Ansari woman, so the Holy Prophet (PBUH) asked him to ‘arrange a marriage banquet even with a sheep’³⁰. Thus, bond of brotherhood between Muhajireen and Ansar was the golden precedence of peace the world witnessed. During these halcyon days of love and peace, tribal, familial and linguistic variations did not disrupt the unity of humans. But, all this happened under the self-less, unique and matchless leadership of the Prophet (PBUH) during the times which are regarded as the best of all times or the the *Khairul Quroon* era. We live in the 21st century surrounded with rampant materialism. Prejudices and splits have created wide chasms in our collective existence. Talking about tribal and familial

²⁶ Mubarakpuri. SafiurRahman When the moon split: a biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) . Riyadh: Darussalam, 2000, p.140.

²⁷ Sahih al-Bukhari ,Translated byKhan, M. M.. Medina: Dar al-Fikr.1981. Volume 8 , Book 73, Number 161

²⁸ Ibid. Volume 5, Book 58, Number 125

²⁹ Ibid. Volume 5, Book 58, Number 124

³⁰ Ibid. Volume 5, Book 58, Number 125

divides of modern times, Akhtar explains:

Instead of recognition and identification, mankind has made this a reason to claim virtue and supremacy over others. Those people that are of a certain tribe or family lineage consider people from another tribe to be inferior and lowly. From this verse [49:13], we have understood the following that it is ignorant to have pride and arrogance in one's family lineage, tribe, or name. In actuality, this opposes the purpose of recognition³¹.

Iqbal versified similar in his famous poem *Jawab-e-Shikwa* (Response to a Complaint):

یوں تو سید بھی ہو مرزا بھی ہو افغان بھی ہو
تم سبھی کچھ ہو بتاؤ مسلمان بھی ہو³²

You (the Muslims) are proud to be ‘Syed’, ‘Mughal’, and ‘Afghan’;
Definitely you are, (but), can you really claim as well the name of
Muslim?

In addition to talking about tribal and familial variations of human world, the holy Quran specifically discusses linguistic variation as well. The Quran says:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقَ السَّمُوتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَالْوَنُكْمِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ³³

And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge³³.

The words ‘those of knowledge’ in the translation of the meaning of the verse explain that these signs of Allah’s greatness are for those who have knowledge. As geographical diversities (snow-capped mountains, hills, deserts, seas, fauna and flora) of the earth are signs of Allah, similarly, diversities of human world, colours and languages are signs of Allah. Akhtar argues that ‘one should understand that the wisdom behind the creation of the different languages and colours is not to bring about hatred and enmity, but rather, to create love and recognition’³⁴. Since linguistic variation is sign of Allah, it should be respected. He explains:

Many prominent, so-called "educated" people have hatred in

³¹ Akhtar.M.S. The remedy to evil disease of racism and prejudice. Karachi: KhanqahImdadiaAshrafia, 2009, p.13.

³² Muhammad. Nazir&Nazir. Tahir.KuliyateIqbal.Lahore: Khazeena e Ilm o Adab, 2006, p.247.

³³ The Qur'an :Surah 30 , verse 22

³⁴ Akhtar.M.S. The remedy to evil disease of racism and prejudice. Karachi: KhanqahImdadiaAshrafia, 2009, p.6.

their hearts for others due to differences in race & language. People do not understand the reality of sin! If someone does not accept a sign of Allah, then this is disbelief. Unfortunately, the condition of people today is such that if someone happens to speak the Punjabi or Sindhi language, amongst Urdu speaking people, then the Urdu speaking people laugh and ridicule them for the difference in language. Urdu is a nice language but to consider it superior and more virtuous than every other language is not permissible; in actuality, it is not permissible to look down upon any language. One should not look down upon English language either. If a person from England accepts Islam, then, what language will he speak? Obviously, he will be speaking the English language; therefore, consider all languages and dialects to be good and manifestations of Allah's greatness. If you were born in England, you would have grown up speaking English. If you were born in Punjab, you would have spoken Punjabi, and if you were born in Sindh, then you would have spoken Sindhi. Considering this, would you look down upon on the language you were born with? Thus, we should not discriminate against any language.³⁵

These words of Akhtar beautifully summarize the point we have been trying to bring home in this study. We can respect this linguistic diversity by learning languages other than our mother tongue and this is one of the gifts the prophets were gifted with because they had to communicate the message of Allah to different ethnic groups, so Allah gave them powerful linguistic skills. The noble Quran mentions that the Prophet Suleiman (AS) was taught the languages of birds.

وَوَرِثَ سُلَيْمٰنٌ دَاوُدَ وَقَالَ يَاۤٓأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ عَلَّمْنَا مَنطِقَ الطَّيْرِ وَأَوْتَيْنَا مِّنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ جَزَآءًا ۗ هٰذَا
لَهُۥ الْفَضْلُ الْمُبِيۡنُ³⁶

And Suleiman inherited Dawud. He said, "O people, we have been taught the language of birds, and we have been given from all things. Indeed, this is evident bounty.

In these lines, the Prophet Suleiman (AS) is referring to the special linguistic skills and gifts given to him by Allah. Ghazālī explains that 'God had endowed

³⁵ Ibid p.4-5.

³⁶ The Qur'an :Surah 27 , verse 16

Prophet Suleiman with the gift of understanding animal communication methods and the ability to communicate with them³⁷. He was taught the languages of birds and this was one of the special bounties of Allah the Almighty. How does the linguistic variation in human world appear to us from the point of view of meaning of this verse of the Quran? It appears to be something special, beautiful and worth studying. It does not appear to be something for which we should kill one another and harbour prejudices against certain groups. Since, the Prophet Suleiman was given a vast empire which spanned creatures of Allah other than humans, so he was taught the languages of those creatures which he ruled over. This shows that Allah the Almighty taught him the languages of the creatures he had to interact with. This Quranic verse seems to tell us that if we learn the languages of people we have to interact with, then it is a personal asset or quality. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) too had dynamic speaking skills. Al-Mubarakpuri writes:

The Prophet (PBUH) was noted for superb eloquence and fluency in Arabic. He was remarkable in position and rank. He was an accurate, unpretending straightforward speaker. He was well-versed in Arabic and quite familiar with the dialects and accents of every tribe. He spoke with his entertainers using their own accents and dialects. He mastered and was quite eloquent at both Bedouin and town speech. So he had the strength and eloquence of Bedouin language as well as the clarity and the decorated splendid speech of town³⁷

Thus, according to this citation, the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) was aware of the linguistic variation of Arabia. He treated his addresses with respect by speaking with them in their own dialects and accents. These words of Al-Mubarakpuri show that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) had dynamic speaking skills. In fact, the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) himself mentioned that Allah had gifted him with ability to speak comprehensively and concisely. In one of the ahadith of Sahih Muslim, Abu Hurairah (RA) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said that he had been given superiority over the other Prophets in six respects. One of those six aspects was that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) had been blessed with ‘Jawame Al-Kalim(ie ., shortest

³⁷ Al-Mubarakpuri .Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum (The Sealed Nectar): Biography of the Prophet. Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003, p.319.

words which are comprehensive in meaning³⁸. So, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) had been given concise but comprehensive words. With these perfect skills to produce comprehensive and concise talk, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) moved among people who spoke different dialects and languages. At Taif, he communicated with Addas, who belonged to the Assyrian town of Nineveh. When he brought grapes for the Holy Prophet (PBUH), the Holy Prophet (PBUH) began with ‘Bismillah’ (in the name of Allah) and this surprised Addas. Azzam & Gouverneur write:

Before he began to eat, the Prophet (PBUH) said ‘Bismillah’— ‘In the name of Allah’. The servant, whose name was Addas was very surprised at these words which he had heard never before. ‘By Allah’, said Addas, ‘this is not the way the people of this country speak’. ‘Then from what country do you come, Addas, and what is your religion?’ asked the Prophet (PBUH). ‘I am a Christian from the Assyrian town of Nineveh’, he replied. ‘From the town of that good man Jonah, son of Matta’, added the Prophet. ‘How do you know about him?’ asked Addas. He is my brother—he was a Prophet and I am a Prophet, answered the Messenger of Allah (PBUH). Addas bent down and kissed the Prophet’s head, his hands and his feet, because now he saw that he was truly a Prophet³⁹

This citation refers to a sense of brotherhood which surpasses geographical regions. This borderless love based on faith in Allah Almighty surpasses even temporal limitations as well. Addas was a young man with non-Arab origin. But, he was a man of faith so he readily embraced Islam. In addition, there were other people in the life of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) who were of non-Arab origin and background and the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) treated them with care and kindness. In addition to the Jews who spoke Arabic with distinct Hebrew accent, there were people like Hazrat Salman al-Farsi (RA) who were immigrants. Hazrat Bilal ibn Ribah (RA) and Wahshyibn Harb (RA) belonged to -al Ḥabašah. Hazrat Maria al-Qibtiyya(RA) was Coptic. Hazrat Salman Al Farsi (RA) was sold many times before he accepted Islam and got freedom. Then, in the company of the Messenger of Allah,

³⁸ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim. Mundhirī, A. -A. A.-Q., & Muslim, . -H.-Q. .The translation of the meanings of Summarized SahihMuslim : Arabic-English. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam Publishers & Distributors, 2000, The Book of As Salat / The Prayer, Number 257 p.170.

³⁹ Azzam, L., & Gouverneur, A. The life of the prophet Muhammad: Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. Alexandria: Conveying Islamic Message Society, 2000, p.36.

he became one of the most knowledgeable persons among the companions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Hazrat Bilal bin Rabah (RA) was a slave freed by Hazrat Abu Bakr. The following two ahadith show some glimpses of the piety, status and respect, he won despite difficulties. Narrated Abu Huraira the merits of Bilal bin Rabah (RA) , the freed slave of Abu Bakr (RA) : The prophet said (to Bilal), I heard the sound of your shoes in Paradise just in front of me ⁴⁰. ‘Narrated Jabir bin Abdullah: Umar used to say, “Abu Bakr is our chief, and he manumitted our chief”, meaning Bilal’⁴¹ The word ‘chief’ used by Hazrat Umar (RA) for Hazrat Bilal (RA) shows how much respect he had won among the Muslims with his dedication and devotion. Abu Lahab (father of flame) and Abu Jahl (father of folly) were native Arabs but they could not attain piety, while Hazrat Bilal (RA) and Hazrat Salman al-Farsi (RA) were non-native Arabs but they attained piety in the company of the Prophet (PBUH) Akhtar observes that ‘your virtue and honor is not in your languages and colours, it is in fear of Allah’⁴². Thus, Akhtar explains that to look down upon someone because of language or colour indicates that a person is in disagreement with the signs of Allah⁴³.

He further explains that ‘to look down upon any language from the heart or to express any hatred through the tongue is an act which may lead to kufr’⁴⁴. Thus, looking down upon any language may have a stench of disbelief in it. In addition, we know that the Prophet (PBUH) was sent as mercy not only to Arabs but to the worlds.

⁴⁵ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

And We have not sent you, [O Muáammad], except as a mercy to the worlds.

We should try to focus on the word ‘mercy’ here. The opposite of mercy is unkindness. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) was sent as mercy. Our nafs (impure self) is paragon of darkness. So, before the Holy Prophet (PBUH) came, humanity was at the mercy of unkind human nafs. The personality of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is a paragon of mercy and his words and sayings are also epitomes of mercy because if a group of people exclude from their lives the teachings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), then what they are left is sheer darkness no matter how euphemistically that darkness

⁴⁰ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Volume 5, Book 57, Number 97)

⁴¹ (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Volume 5, Book 57, Number 98).

⁴² Akhtar.M.S. The remedy to evil disease of racism and prejudice. Karachi: Khanqah Imdadia Ashrafia, 2009, p.7

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid. ,p.14.

⁴⁵ (The Qur'an :Surah 21 , verse 107).

is described. If our personal opinions do not align with the teachings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), then, we are in darkness. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) was sent to the worlds and not to a single region or ethnic group. This implies that he was sent to the people of all languages. Akhtar argues that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) ‘is the Prophet for the people of all languages whether they may be Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, the British, Africans, or Americans, the Prophet (PBUH) is the Prophet for all of them’⁴⁶. Since, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) was sent to all the worlds, as followers of the same Prophet (PBUH), we have a duty to spread the message of Islam and peace to the worlds or to the people of all languages, so, therefore, we need to communicate to the world. We can convey the message best if we learn to speak different languages of the world. Therefore, Akhtar avers that ‘every language is our language’⁴⁷. This cosmic linguistic identity is precisely what we need to internalize if we want to neutralize language conflicts not only in Pakistan but in the world as well.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that language gives clues about our identity. At times, our ethno-linguistic identities and linguistic discrimination practiced by powerful groups in society can create law and order problems. We have quoted examples from Islamic sources and maintained that Islam is against racism, ethnicism and linguisticism or linguistic discrimination. Linguists disapprove of language superiority complex. We have tried to explore the possibility of neutralizing the ethno-linguistic differences in Pakistan by creating a scientific attitude towards languages among people. We can include relevant insights of linguists in our school and college textbooks so that Pakistanis know that languages are not superior or inferior. We should educate them that cultural, tribal and linguistic diversities are part of larger designs of existence and do not make this world chaotic. Cultural and linguistic diversity may have its own functions in the scheme of things. We can educate them about these aspects by effectively utilizing the media. Furthermore, in order to solve the problem of language conflicts in Pakistan, we have tried to infer relevant insights from the noble Quran, life of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and his companions. The Holy Prophet (PBUH), a model for all times, was sent as a mercy to

⁴⁶ Akhtar.M.S. The remedy to evil disease of racism and prejudice. Karachi: Khanqah Imdadia Ashrafia, 2009, p.16

⁴⁷ Akhtar.M.S. The remedy to evil disease of racism and prejudice. Karachi: Khanqah Imdadia Ashrafia, 2009, p.16

the worlds, human and non-human creatures obedient to their Lord. This fact, then, causes us to look at linguistic variation from a different angle. It gives importance to the vast linguistic variation in the world. We come to know that divine mercy wants to encompass all tribes, regions, cultures and languages of the world and we should try to work for the realization of this divine and sublime aim instead of confining our lives to narrow identities which, inevitably, erode away with the passage of time.



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