

Brahui Script-History, Research and Analysis

Language and Literature

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Abstract

The research article critically analyses the history of Brahui script, its problems and contemporary development. Moreover, it discusses the Brahui script in comparative perspective with Arabic, Persian and Urdu scripts. In addition, it discusses the origins of language and successive developments of scripts and its challenges throughout history. The notable scholars of Brahui language and their efforts for standardization of Brahui script are also mentioned in the article. The article has mainly used secondary sources for the conduct of research.

Keywords: Brahui Script, Language development, Standardization

Language and Writing of Language

The genesis of social life had been the 'language' for understanding and exchange of ideas. In the same manner the language too made demand for a written form which culminated in the creation of letters/alphabets. After a long and tedious journey of hundreds of years, the constructed and disfigured shapes took the form A-Ba and were moulded to the symbols of sounds of speaking language. The expression of feelings gave the 'Pen' in human hands and with the strength of pen, the darkness of ignorance receded and light of knowledge spread.

According to Jamil Jalibi, language is an institution which was created by man's social friendly nature. Language is basically a source of fulfilling social needs of men. In case of no language, the entire society will be deaf and dumb. Neither anyone will talk nor will listen to someone. Society and culture will not evolve and all the work in the world will be at a stand still and leading a life will be utterly difficult. Language is a medium which helps to share experiences, ideas, feelings and emotions with other

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people and in this process compatibility is created in their way of thinking and actions. Such a similarity in thinking and action could create civilizational and social unanimity and a common culture is born (Jalibi, 1981)

In fact, the written form of language is associated with the above mentioned lines and has been created by socially ingrained nature of men. That is why 'script' or characters can be said to be the creation of social life. Different views are given about letters or script. Many experts and researchers call it the language of gods or legends of ancient people. Some people think that when man learnt a language then he felt to write and tried to give different forms to his words. This was called writing in pictures which afterwards gradually changed into symbols and today we find it in the form of letters/alphabets. Regarding scripts or myths of languages, the prominent researcher- Dr. Saleem Akhter writes, "like many ancient civilizations, the origins of scripts is also mythological. In this connection, there is no differentiation between East and West. In the myths of many countries, we find gods and goddesses which taught men writing and learning. There are two reasons for this point of view: firstly, every good, bad and incomprehensible thing is associated with gods. Secondly, the reason can be that in ancient times education was not wide-spread and writing and learning was specific to Hindu priests, wizards, astrologers, poets along with rulers. This phenomenon was very mysterious to common people and in some cases bewildering. Their command of language was paramount which as expressed in their writing and speech. Therefore, the apprehension of the common people to the writings as mysterious, mesmerizing, sacred was understandable and associating it with gods was conceivable (Akhter, 1987, P-32).

According to famous researcher Ali Abbas Jalalpuri, with the advent of writing men took steps towards civilization and urbanization because he became capable of preserving ideas and achievements. Writing started with pictures which were discovered from caves. The oldest writing of Summeries which is called 'Paikani' script. The Egyptian Hieroglyphy was a form of writing in pictures. Kinyanians or Phonecians for the sake of understanding took some symbols from the method of writings of Summeries, Pakani and Egyptian Hieroglyphy and compiled it in the shape of 'Alfaba'. Alfaba also spread in Asian, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Sanskrit and languages of other countries (Jalalpuri, 1993, p-85).

Historical Status of Brahui Script

Although Brahui is considered to be the oldest language of this region but we cannot say anything with authenticity about its having an ancient script. However, in different epochs, different claims have been made about the Brahui script. Dr. Abdul Rehman says, "Due to scarcity of historical evidence, we cannot say at once that when the Brahui language adopted a written form. Brahui since the ancient times was written in Hieroglyphic form. There is also an opinion that Mohen-Jo Daro script was the ancient script of Brahui. However, two thousand years ago, this language was written in 'Kharoshthi' script. (Brahui, 1982, p-55).

This matter is still worth research as to what was the Brahui script. Regarding 'Kharoshti' script, the famous Baloch –Gul Khan Naseer in his book 'Koch and Baloch' narrates in detail that Kajula Khadphises which in history is known as the 'kadnisas' was the first King of Kush orKushanti tribe. Many inscriptions and coins of this King have been traced by archaeologists. The Karoshti letters engraved on these coins with slight changes could be considered to be the specimen of Brahui language. For example, on a coin at one side, the king has been shown to be sitting on a throne and on the other side Maheshwara's (big master of mountains) figure is engraved. Around the figure of the King Kharoshti letters are also written. The experts have taken the following meaning from these words: great Prince, Prince of Princes son of the sky Ka jo Kad Nisas's.

Maharaj sai ra jata sai, dwa putra say, ka jo kad nisas's

Like-wise on this coin another word 'Maheshwara' is also engraved which emans master of mountains and this is a Brahui word. 'mahesh' or 'mush' is till used for mountain in Brahui Language. Wara is twisted form of Wala which is common in Balochi and Brahui. Therefore, its meaning will be resident of mountain and idiomatically its meaning could be 'Master of mountain' (Naseer, 1988. p-58-59)

Gul Khan Naseer further writes that on a coin of that era, the half faction of King is engraved. The direction of the King's face is on the right and these words are inscribed in Greek languages.

Bas balous aur mokad fizas

It means 'King and Mokad Fizas'. On the back of the coin Maheshwara has been shown to be standing and these words are written in 'kharoshthi' language.

Maharaja sa.....

Here too by changing the letters we get the following sentence:-

Maharaj sai.....

This sentence is without doubt, the oldest version of Brahui language and the word 'Sha' too is a Brahui word. (Naseer, 1988, p- 59-60).

Archaeological sites of Kushani era were discovered in Afghanistan by Moseau Donia under the supervision of Mosears Bakin in 1937 and 1939. This site of ruins is in the north-east of Bagram. Here a Buddhist temple with the name of 'Shalokia' was discovered. In this reference Gul Khan Naseer says that in Persian 'Mohbid Shalokia' is 'Mohbid Shutrak' i.e 'Temple of Camel'. It is clarified that 'Lok' in Brahui means big camel and 'Sha' in this language is meant as King or elder.

Similarly there is a mention of another temple with the name of 'Pehlawa Sirah' which was built by 'maharaja Ashok'. This word too is compound of two names i.e 'Peel' and 'Sirah'. In Brahui language 'Peel' means elephant and 'Sirah' means head. Therefore in Brahui language 'peelo Sirah' means head of the elephant. In French and Persian languages too, it has been translated as 'feel sar'. (Naseer, 1988, p-60-61).

The above mentioned arguments substantiate into reality ancient script or character of Brahui language. However, further research is still needed. Mir Gul Khan Naseer's research is itself a real attempt but other historians, researchers and linguists have not paid any special attention to it, which is much needed. No doubt that the compatibility with modern times is required but knowing about the historical status and stature of a language is also necessary.

Known Script of Brahui

The historical script of Brahui language could be 'Kharoshti' or Mohenjo-Darian, Egyptian Hieroglyphy – all this needs further research. However, the known written history of this language started in thirteenth century. According to Dr. Abdul Rehman Brahui, the first known book of Brahui is 'service to Religion' which consists of hundred of pages and contains advice and counselling. (Brahui, 1982, p-89).

Certainly, this book is a benchmark for the known and written history of Brahui. About the script of the books, Dr. Abdul Rehman Brahui says that till now, we have received 18th century books which have both Arabic and

Persian scripts. Durkhani school preferred Arabic script but in the modern times, Persian script is getting popular. (Brahui, 1982, p 59).

We can say about the Arabic and Persian Languages that they had deep impact on the languages of this region. Persian had been the official language of this region and with the spread of Islam, Aarabic language also influenced the languages of this region. Majority of local languages adopted Arabic and Persian scripts and one of them is Brahui. The English researcher Liutenant R-Leech and famous tourist –Charles Masson also wrote the Brahui language script in Arabic and Persian.

The first known poet of Brhau language – ‘Mullah Malik Dad Qalathi’ who was linked to the court of ‘Noori Nasir Khan’ in his book ‘Thofath-ul-Hajaib’ (which was printed in 1760) had adopted the Arabic script and at many places Pashto letter shave been used. Durkhani school which was established in reaction to English occupation; printed and published many books from its platform. The script of this institution was Arabic.

The writings in ‘Khat-e-Naskh’ gradually change dinto Nastaliq until the English missionary printed the third edition of ‘yuhana’ in Nastaliq so that the people of this area could read it easily. Before this, the English orientalisists worked in Roman script regarding Brahui language when Pakistan came into being, the usage of Roman script was encouraged and recently this was practice once again. But no success was seen as the surrounding languages were related to Nastaliq script. Therefore, to adopt Roman script is a difficult task. However, it can be argued that as compared to ‘Nastaliq’ , the Roman solves all the sound problems of Brahui Language. Roman makes it easier not only in writing but also in reading. Similarly, Sindhi script has also been used for Brahui language. Especially Brahui speakers living in Sindh wrote in Sindhi script. But as a whole, in the present time, Brahui language has adopted ‘Nastaliq’ script and new newspapers, magazines and books in Brahui are published in this script.

Conclusion

As the language is a great creation of men, similarly moulding the language into a written form is a brilliant feat. We know well that development and popularization of a language has its own tradition and history which encompassed centuries. On this path, a language has passed through different stages and ups and downs. Like the spoken language, the letters (symbols) or writings too have its own story and history. There is no

denying the fact that after attaining the written form, the languages have developed manifold because it is not confined to speaking but writing and reading are also its important parts. The language and its speakers are of paramount importance while the writing and reading keep a record of a language and make it more embellished.

According to experts, there are six thousand languages in the world, today but for such a large number of languages, the number of scripts/characters are not many. However, the basic script is only one which is called by Ali Abbas Jalalpuri as the Paikani script of Summeries or it can be Egyptian Hieroglyphy which was written in pictures. It would have been pertinent that every language should have its own specific script but it is not so. That is why we are obliged to choose one script from the limited number of scripts. The experts select a script at random by keeping in view the sound and grammar and make additions and modifications accordingly.

Brahui language too faces the problem of script from the very beginning and like Brahui literature its script has been influenced by Arabic, Persian and Urdu. The Persian language had a specific impact on Brahui language because the Persian had been the official language of this region as well as the language of Kalat State. The rulers of Kalat state (who were called Khans) despite being Baloch did not patronize or give any importance to Balochi and Brahui languages. However, according to Inayatullah Baloch, in 1947 the Khan declared Brahui as official language and this policy continued till March, 1948. It is obvious that for the development and dissemination of any language, the few months of state patronage is a short-period which the Brahui language received.

When Pakistan came into being, the formal works on Brahui language started. The Urdu script/character was given the final shape which is still prevalent. But the main problem being faced by Brahui language is the absence of uniformity in script. The consonants are more in Brahui than in Urdu which cannot be brought fully into writing and sometimes make it misleading. Other letters especially Arabic have also entered into Brahui which do not represent the sounds in Brahui fully without ambiguity. Therefore the niceties of Brahui language cannot be maintained nor it can be written in a beautiful and simple language.

Keeping in view, the large number of problems, the Brahui literary society in 1988 formed a committee for evolving a script and standardization of its written language. Formal sessions of this committee were held and Brahui writers and poets tried to solve the problems of uniformity/standardization. Although, it was a good attempt but it could not

achieve the desired objectives with concrete solutions. The decisions of the committee were not applied in letter and spirit, however, the minutes of the session were compiled in a book form. This indicates that such a huge task cannot be carried out by one person only but by the institutions.

As the Brahui language is not free of the malady of script and absence of a standard form, therefore there is a great impediment in the progress of the language. Along with literature the other branches of knowledge also face the problem of conceptualization in Brahui language. In this connection, proper action is required to make the work and decisions effective. The role of electronic and print media in Brahui language is minimal in terms of quality and quantity. It is especially incumbent upon writers to address the problems of Brahui language seriously. In addition to an excellent script, the research and knowledge based work could keep a language and sophistication alive. For carrying out this work serious thinking and practical steps have to be taken.

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