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SIND, SINDHI, AND ETHNIC SLURS
Did President Musharraf Really Say that?!
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1. ETHNIC, CASTE, AND RELIGIOUS SLURS IN INDIA

In India, slurs relating to ethnicity, caste, region, and religion are quite commonly used. Some of these "slurs" or "slur-like characterizations" can be identified in classical texts such as *Natya Sastra* and *Manu Smriti*. One may claim that such observations were merely descriptive of the people or professions or regions being referred to, but those who identify themselves with the subjects associated with the slurs may consider it otherwise.

Tamil classical texts also reveal some of the slurs or slur-like attitudes current among the people of ancient times.

2. ETHNIC, CASTE, AND RELIGIOUS SLURS IN PUBLIC SQUARE

However, in modern times, we have evolved a convention that in the public square such slurs are not to be uttered. There is no denying the fact that despite this convention, now and then, people resort to using these slurs, and, for this, these people are widely condemned in the press and in political platforms.

And yet it is unimaginable that a Prime Minister or a President would allow himself or herself to even make a hint of such slurs in their speech and writing.

3. SINDHIS CANNOT BE POSTED TO SUPREME OFFICES? SINDHIS ON THE WARPATH

This seems to have happened, unfortunately, in Pakistan, according to a resolution passed in the 16th International Conference on Sindhi. A resolution, among other things, demanded "an apology from Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, for his 'statement' that Sindhis are incapable of being posted to supreme government offices," according to a Press Trust of India report from London dated August 1, 2004.

4. ON DEFINING SLURS AND INTENT OF SLURS

This alleged statement of President Musharraf may not amount to using a slur, but this is not very far from the intent of a slur, in some general sense.

By a general definition, an ethnic slur is "used to refer to members of a given ethnicity (or, in some cases, nationality or religion) in a derogatory or pejorative manner."

Bigotry, prejudice, superiority complex, casteist, religious, and regional feelings as well as racism often motivate people to use slurs. Many of us tend to use the slurs without realizing that the terms we use are indeed offensive and debasing to those being referred to by these terms. As Kenneth G. Wilson points out in *The Columbia Guide to Standard American English*, 1993, "ignorance or absence of malice never justifies their use. Always use yourself and teach your children to use the designations preferred by the groups in question."

5. THE SAGA OF THE SINDHIS

Sindhis in India have a very honorable position in all walks of life. Their industriousness and business acumen, their hardwork and their ability to overcome the odds are a great source of inspiration for other communities. Their zeal is comparable to the zeal and industriousness of the Sikh people in India. Even our own small and restricted field of linguistics can claim some great linguists of modern times such as Professor C. J. Daswani. They have reached this place of honor by sheer hard work. However, their saga for recognition still continues!

The achievements of Sindhis in Pakistan and elsewhere abroad are no less significant than their counterparts in India.

6. CHARTER OF EQUALITY OF RACES

South Asian nations share a common legacy in a significant Act of the British Parliament on the subject of equality of ethnic groups. And this alone is enough to question the assumption that the Sindhis are incapable of being posted to supreme offices.

The 1833 Act of the British Parliament, called also the **Charter of Equality of Races**, made it clear that no native of the Indian territories, nor any natural born subject of His Majesty resident therein, shall, by reason only of his religion, place of birth, descent, color or any of them be disabled from holding any place, office, or employment under the East India Company.

The court of the East India Company conceived this section to mean that there shall be no governing caste in British India; that whatever other tests of qualification may be adopted, distinction of race or religion shall not be of the number; that no subject of the King, whether of Indian or British or mixed descent, shall be excluded, from the posts usually conferred on uncovenanted servants of India, or from the covenant service itself, provided he be otherwise eligible.

7. LANGUAGE WAS NOT CONSIDERED AS AN IMPORTANT VARIABLE OR REASON

Note that, in the scheme of things proposed here, differences based on race, caste and religion, apart from the economic factors, were alone pointedly referred to. Differences based on language, or the possibility of language acting as the mark of identity for several factors such as race, caste, and religion was not emphasized. Perhaps this was based on the assumption of the British Rulers that each race/caste/religion had its own language, or, labels such as religion and race included under them distinct languages.

Since, in the matter of language for governance, the trend was well-settled in favor of English (see a study of such trends in the Punjab, in Rangila, et al. [BRINGING ORDER TO LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY: LANGUAGE PLANNING IN THE BRITISH RAJ](#)), it was perhaps assumed that more than the vernacular identity and its use, it was the other factors, such as race or religion, which came to regulate the happenings. There was not much of a recognition that language could easily cut across the factor of religion or race. (The British would cite the language factor just before the creation of Pakistan to illustrate the difficulty in partitioning British India. Details are not presented in this article.) Also it was perhaps difficult for an European power to concede the possibility of one nation having many languages of power and administration.

8. CHOICE OF A COMPULORY INDIAN LANGUAGE FOR THE ICS OFFICERS IN THE BRITISH RAJ - SINDHI LOSES OUT TO HINDUSTANI!

The India Office in London had been considering the question of the specific oriental languages to be studied in England by the candidates selected for the Indian Civil Service. In a letter dated the 12th August, 1881, Her Majesty's Under Secretary of State for India, India Office, London, wrote to the Secretary, Civil Service Commission, London, that, based on the reference made to the Government of India, which was communicated in the Government of India Despatch No.21 of 17th April 1881, it was decided that in future selected candidates should be required before leaving England to qualify in the following languages:

In the case of Bombay, somewhat different conditions have to be met. There can be no doubt that the first or compulsory vernacular for Bombay candidates should be Marathi; opinions, however, differ as to the second. The Government of India recommends Gujarati. But His Lordship in Council has been advised that, as a vernacular, Gujarati is certainly not of equal importance with Marathi, and is probably not more important than Canarese or Sindhi, both of which are vernaculars in parts of that Presidency. On the other hand, the adoption of Gujarati as the second optional language for Bombay, would exclude Hindustani, which, though, as the Government of India truly says, not in any part of Bombay, a vernacular, is yet more or less current nearly everywhere, and is of great importance for communication with the Natives, and particularly, Mahomedan gentlemen, and for transactions with Native Courts, and the many petty chiefships which so largely scattered over the Presidency in question. On the whole, therefore, and as a choice in a case of some difficulty, His Lordship in Council would, in the case of Bombay, accept Hindustani as the second or optional language, to be encouraged by marks and prizes.

Sindhi naturally lost its case at this stage, which I think is an unfortunate decision.

9. SINDHI'S PLACE DURING THE HOME RULE MOVEMENT: LINGUISTIC PROVINCES

During the Home Rule Movement, there were many significant processes at work. Firstly, we observe the favorable stance of the Home Rule Movement as regards the Indian vernaculars; secondly, prior to Dr. Annie Besant's thesis in favor of the vernaculars as possible medium of administration in the provinces, we find some interesting proposals (Faridpur proposals) towards the right to preserve one's language and script in the deliberations for communal representation. Thirdly, we find that the Indian National Congress was veering around to the idea of creation of its Provincial Committees based on linguistic considerations.

A resolution was accepted by the Calcutta Congress in 1917 which recognized Andhra as a separate Congress Circle. This was due to the perseverance of Congress leaders of Andhra who inaugurated and persistently conducted a movement in Andhra in 1913. They raised the proposal in the Congress of 1915 and they also elevated the movement to the general question of redistributing the Indian provinces on linguistic lines.

Sirtaramayya (1935:250-251) points out:

It had its origin really in the efforts made by Mahesh Narayan of Bihar in 1894 to get his Province separated from Bengal. The Congress created Bihar into a separate Province in 1908, and the principle was approved in the scheme of Provincial Autonomy set forth in the Government of India's Despatch of August 25, 1911 and Bihar separated from Bengal as the result of that Despatch. Wide and strong was the belief that for Provincial Autonomy to be successful, the medium of instruction as well as administration must be the provincial language, and that the failure of the British administration, notably in the domain of Local Self-Government, is undoubtedly due to the pell-mell admixture of populations in British Provinces which are carried out on no logical or ethnological, but on a chronological basis. In 1915 the Congress was not prepared to deal with the question but it was pressed to the fore in 1916 by the Andhra Conference, and to anticipate events, we may say that on the 8th April, 1917, the All India Congress Committee to which it was referred by the Lucknow Congress 1916, accepted the principle after duly consulting the Provincial Congress Committees of Madras and Bombay, and resolved that the Telugu speaking districts of the Madras Presidency be constituted into a separate Congress Province. Sindh followed suit and Karnataka came later.

Sitaramayya further records:

The subject was hotly contested in the Subjects Committee of the Calcutta Congress (1917). Even Gandhi thought that the question might wait the implementing of Reforms but Lokamanya Tilak saw the point, namely, that Linguistic Provinces were an essential condition prerequisite to real Provincial autonomy. Dr. Annie Besant presided over the Calcutta Congress (1917), and the idea was opposed vehemently by her as well as by some Tamil friends from the South. The subject held the field for over two hours in

Calcutta, and was ultimately accepted late at night at 10.15 pm. Sindh was recognized as a separate Congress Circle by the AICC on 6th October 1917.

10. SOME HESITANT MOVES

Note that, although Dr. Annie Besant was on record asking for a linguistic delimitation of Provinces in her Presidential Address, she was reported to have resisted the move for a separate Linguistic Circle of the Indian National Congress for the Telugu-speaking territory. Also note that Mahatma Gandhi was reportedly against an immediate decision on the matter.

These should not be considered as isolated events nor should these be considered as a slur on the individuals who appeared to contradict their own positions (as in the case of Dr. Annie Besant). These should, indeed, be taken as symptomatic of the complexity of the problem, and symptomatic of the consequent conflicting tendencies and reluctance on the part of opinion leaders.

11. SLOW MOVEMENTS FORWARD TO RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE AS AN IMPORTANT IDENTITY

Language was yet to receive a more serious and detailed scrutiny in relation to the demands for Self-Government. The role of the Indian vernacular for mass-based agitations and for mass communication was very well recognized even in the earliest part of the history of the Indian National Congress, but the role of vernaculars in administration and education began to be debated only in the twenties (1920s) within the Indian National Congress with the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi.

12. THE MOTILAL NEHRU COMMITTEE

The Madras Congress of 1927 passed a resolution that an All Parties Conference be summoned to work out the principles for the future Constitution of India.

Accordingly, an All-Parties Conference was summoned at Delhi in February and March 1928. The Conference decided that the future Constitution of India be discussed based on Full Responsible Government. The question of communal relations and proportionate representation, etc., was also discussed. There were 25 sittings in the months of the Conference. The third conference met on 19th May 1928 and passed a resolution appointing a committee with Pandit Motilal Nehru as President to draft the principles of the Constitution of India.

13. FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND THE CREATION OF SINDH PROVINCE

The Motilal Nehru Committee appointed by the All-Parties Conference to consider and determine the principles of the Constitution for India and to frame a Constitution providing for the establishment of full responsible government, considered also aspects of fundamental rights and language use in India.

The Committee considered the opposition of Hindus against separating Sind from Bombay and making it a separate province.

While language was the primary factor in enabling the Indian National Congress in creating a separate Congress province of Sindh in 1920, in course of time, Hindus came to oppose the ultimate creation of the province on communal grounds, (the Hindus were in a minority in the Sind Province).

The Committee, however, noted that for the last eight years, since the National Congress made Sindh into a separate province, no voice was raised in protest. It said:

It is stated on behalf of the Hindus in Sind and elsewhere that they are strongly opposed to the creation of 'communal' provinces. We agree that the Muslim demand for the separation of Sindh was not put forward in the happiest way. It was based on communalism and it was tacked on irrelevantly to certain other matters with which it had no concern whatsoever.

We can understand the Hindu reaction to this. But the manner of putting it forward does not necessarily weaken the merits of a proposal. There is no question of creating a 'communal' province. We have merely to recognize facts as they are. A long succession of events in history is responsible for the distribution of the population of India as it is today. Sind happens to contain a large majority of Muslims. Whether a new province is created or not, Sind must remain a predominantly Muslim area. And, if the wishes of the large majority are not acceded to, it would not be doing violence to the principle of self-determination, but would necessarily result in antagonizing that majority population. No Indian desiring a free India, progressing peacefully and harmoniously, can view this result with equanimity.

To say from the larger viewpoint of nationalism that no 'communal' provinces should be created is, in a way, equivalent to saying from the still wider international viewpoint that there should be no separate nations. Both these statements have a measure of truth in them. But the staunchest internationalist recognizes that without the fullest national autonomy it is extraordinarily difficult to create the international state. So, also without the fullest cultural autonomy, and communalism in its better aspect is culture, it will be difficult to create a harmonious nation If, however, there is still some ground for fear, that is a matter for safeguards, not of opposing a just demand.

14. LINGUISTIC HOMOGENEITY VERSUS RELIGIOUS HETEROGENEITY

Note that the Indian National Congress applied straight forward the principle of delimitation of provinces on a linguistic basis, even though it would lead to, as in Sind, creation of a province inhabited predominantly by the Muslims. While, thus, the Indian National Congress took a principled stand, those who opposed this view, in both the communities, Hindu and Muslim, looked at the matter not from the point of view of linguistic homogeneity but only from the dominant ideology of heterogeneity of religions.

Whereas, in the South, and throughout the non-Hindustani states, linguistic homogeneity could act effectively to unite peoples of different faiths, in a Hindustani belt, even such well-knit linguistically homogeneous Sindhi speaking community, would look at the problem only from the point of view of religious heterogeneity.

15. A GUARANTEE TO PROTECT LANGUAGES AND SCRIPTS

The Working Committee of the Indian National Congress, which met on July 20, 1931, issued an important statement on the Communal Question.

The Working Committee has therefore after full and free discussion passed the following scheme:

1. 1.
 - a. The article in the Constitution relating to Fundamental Rights shall include a guarantee to the communities concerned of their cultures, languages, scripts, education, profession and practice of religion, and religious endowments.
 - b. Personal laws shall be protected by specific provisions to be embodied in the Constitution.
 - c. Protection of political and other rights of minority communities in the various Provinces shall be the concern and be within the jurisdiction of the Federal Government.
2. The franchise shall be extended to all adult men and women.
3.
 - a. Joint electorates shall form the basis of representation in the future Constitution of India.
 - b. For the Hindus in Sindh, the Muslims in Assam and the Sikhs in the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province, and for Hindus and Muslims in any Province where they are less than 25 per cent of the population, seats shall be reserved in the Federal and Provincial Legislatures on the basis of population with the right to context additional seats.
4. Appointments shall be made by non-party Public Service Commissions which shall prescribe the minimum qualifications, and which shall have due regard to efficiency of the public service as well as to the principle of equal opportunity to all communities for a fair share in the public services of the country.
5. In the formation of Federal and Provincial Cabinet the interest of minority communities should be recognized by convention.
6. The North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan shall have the same form of government and administration as other Provinces.
7. Sindh shall be constituted into a separate Province, provided that the people of Sindh are prepared to bear the financial burden of the separated Province.
8. The future Constitution of the country shall be federal. The residuary powers shall vest in the federating units, unless, on further examination it is found to be against the best interests of India.

"The Working Committee has adopted the foregoing scheme as a compromise between the proposals based on undiluted communalism and undiluted nationalism. Whilst on the one hand the Working Committee hopes that the whole nation will endorse the scheme, on the other it assures those who take extreme views and cannot adopt it that the Committee will gladly, as it is bound by the Lahore Resolution, accept without reservation any other scheme if it commends the acceptance of all the parties concerned."

16. THE TWO-NATION THEORY, AND THE PLACE OF LANGUAGE

In the evolution and adoption of the two-nation theory propounded by the Muslim League (and by some sections of Hindus), language was but a minor issue only. Cultural and religious beliefs dominated the reasoning of the leadership of the Muslim League. It was due mainly because a two-nation theory needed only the differences between the two communities.

Although Urdu was a contentious issue between the two communities, there was a readymade solution offered by the Indian National Congress under the influence and leadership of Mahatma Gandhi that Hindustani could be written in both Devanagari and Perso-Arabic scripts. Furthermore, almost all the languages of India were spoken by both Muslims and Hindus, a fact that would rather unite them than divide them. Punjabi was the mother tongue of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. Sindhi was the mother tongue of both Hindus and Muslims. Bengali was the mother tongue of both Hindus and Muslims. Language, thus, was a unifying force, and hence those who supported the two-nation theory had to emphasize the differences between Hindus and Muslims mostly on grounds other than linguistic.

However, after Independence, Pakistan had to face the emerging pressures from various linguistic groups. In our opinion, by and large, the Pakistani political leadership has done well to manage the pressures through suitable constitutional arrangements.

The alleged utterances of President Musharaf, however, show certain areas of weakness that still need attention, especially the past legacies of the British Raj still influencing the perception relating to ethnic communities in the minds of the Pakistani Armed Forces.
