

Education in Mother Tongue and Punjabi Language

Pakistan's education has many shortfalls and problems from funding to teaching quality and dropout rates. These issues are relatively well known and recognised. What is less well publicised and known is the major reason for this is the lack of Mother Tongue Education.

This is most glaring in the largest and most economically advanced province of Pakistan; the Punjab. For reasons going back to colonial policies, Muslim Punjabis were told that their mother tongue was Urdu. This is obviously not true now and it was not true 125 years ago. The result of Urdu being used a medium of instruction in Punjab is that the actual learning of children, the retention rate, the reading ability and the invisible cultural disconnect is becoming glaring. For a variety of politics, apathy and ignorance by successive governments of Pakistan and Punjab, this is set to continue for the foreseeable future.

The two most commonly used arguments against the use of Punjabi as a medium of instruction are:

- i) Punjabi does not have the technical range and vocabulary to teach subjects such as science and mathematics.
- ii) Punjabi does not have the necessary IT support for it to be typed or used with modern telephones or computers.

On the first point, apart from the obvious point that virtually every language in the world has the capability to be used, across the border in Indian Punjab, Punjabi is not only the medium of instruction in schools for all subjects, it is also the official language of the state in which all official business is conducted.

On the second point, there has indeed been a sad neglect of Punjabi in the Nastaliq script but serious work has been in done in the last few years to rectify this. IT experts from India, USA and of course Lahore have worked hard and it is envisaged/hope that in 2019 a full Punjabi Nastaliq e-keyboard will be developed and ready for use. This will mean that old manuscripts could be typed as they were written, books and newspapers could be easily read on line and computer pages translated in the click of a button. Technology will make possible what has been difficult to achieve till now.

Bloomsbury Pakistan has partnered with LUMS (one of Pakistan's leading universities) to spend Sunday 24 February 2019 to hold 2 seminars on these two subjects. We have experts in the benefits of Mother Tongue Education and also Punjabi's status in computational use from within Pakistan at the invitation of BP. It promises to be a major landmark in trying to resolve and understand.

Educationalists from all the large NGO's in Pakistan have confirmed their attendance and we have been informed that senior relevant government ministers also wish to attend.