

THE language problem in Sindh has resurfaced. But this time, the heated debate among Sindhi intellectuals, writers and journalists is on the medium of instruction for Sindhi children at the primary school level. A group of Sindhi intellectuals consider it an important issue for the future generations of Sindh and for Sindhi language as well. There is a small number of writers and intellectuals that favour English as a medium of instruction for Sindhi speaking children at this level.

The controversy erupted at the Sindhi literary conference organized by the Sindhi Adabi Sangat (SAS) on "Sindhi language: Problems of literature and culture," at Hyderabad recently. The disagreement on the subject surfaced when SAS presented a resolution in favour of Sindhi language as a medium of instruction in the primary classes. Sindh's distinguished intellectual and educationist Muhammad Ibrahim Joyo supported the move.

The objection on the subject by a young writer Inam Shaikh was sufficient to invite abusive criticism for the supporters of English language. Inam Shaikh had opined that such a decision would snatch the right of learning in English from the poor Sindhi children in an

Language controversy among Sindhi intellectuals

By Anwer Abro

age ruled by English. "The Sindhi language should be a first language and English a second language at the primary level," he suggested. His views created an uproar in the programme, which was dominated by Sindhi nationalist writers and intellectuals. At last, the resolution was passed with a majority vote.

Muhammad Ibrahim Joyo was of the opinion that he was not against the English and Urdu languages, but the Sindhi language must also be given the status of a medium of instruction in Sindh. "It is not a crime to talk about the preservation of the Sindhi language," the 89 years old Sindhi intellectual commented and added that, "our education system is against the Sindhi language, because English has been made compulsory in primary education." He argued that Sindhi is written from the right side and English from the left side. Hence, it creates confusion for a child, who is educated in both languages at the same time. "We should evolve a strategy for the development of Sindhi by

keeping the needs of the day in view," the former chairman of Sindhi Adabi Board maintained.

It would be worthy to mention here that Joyo Sahib was among those few persons, who had agitated for the preservation and promotion of the Sindhi language in Sindh especially in Karachi during the One Unit. He had written many critical articles on the subject and protested on the closure of a number of Sindhi-medium schools in the city.

Noted research scholar Shamsuddin Ursani was also present at the conference. He believed that Sindhi is in danger these days, therefore, steps on scientific grounds should be taken for its preservation.

A small section of moderate Sindhi intellectuals, in touch with the changing world are aware about the needs of a new era. Anwer Pirzado, a prominent journalist is one of them. He opined that English must be taught to Sindhi children, as it is essential for the progress of their careers. Sindhi is a simple language, he said, so a



child can learn it within a week. "I have told my daughter's in-laws that they must teach English to their children," he said and added that English has an international scope and our future generations would be more able to find jobs in the international market.

He makes literate Sindhis responsible for the distortion of the Sindhi language. "Honestly speaking, Sindhi

is preserved through the inhabitants of the villages and small settlements of rural Sindh," he remarked. He also wants to see a more effective role for the SAS which he terms a think tank of Sindh.

Inam Shaikh, in an interview, while tracing the history of Sindhi language as a medium of instruction said that, The "Persian language remained a medium of

instruction in Sindh for about 7,00 years. Likewise, Arabic remained for 5,000 years. On the other hand Sindhi was made a medium of instruction in 1936, after the separation of Sindh from the Bombay Presidency." He clarified that he is not against Sindhi which is his mother tongue, but that English should be taught to Sindhi kids from class three with Urdu which

Illustration by Riaz Ali Khan

Actuals

is taught to them at the same class.

Dr. Inayat Magsi, a young psychiatrist while analyzing the brain capacity of a child asserted that a child could learn more than seven languages till the age of early nine years. So, there is no harm if a child learns English in his or her initial classes.

A majority of writers accuse the people who support Sindhi as a medium of instruction of having their own children educated in English medium schools.

Expressing his disillusionment at the problems facing Sindhi Imdad Hussaini, a prominent poet observed that folk sayings, idioms, traditions and cultural values are at the base of Sindhi. Hence, these must be preserved.

Dr. Qasim Bughio the chairman of the Sindhi Language Authority complains that government functionaries are not sincere about Sindhi. "If we write a letter to them in Sindhi language, they do not bother to reply," he claims. Tajal Bevas, a noted poet is in favour of the formation of a committee for the prevention of distortions in Sindhi. But

the question emerges: if another body as suggested by him is formed for keeping a balance and check what then would the role of the Sindhi Language Authority and Sindhi Adabi Board be which is set up for just a such purpose?

Dr. Shams Soomro, a critic and political analyst is in favour of a return of a book-reading culture. Dr. Fahmida is also in favour of English as a subject to be taught from the lower classes. "To acquire education in English is a necessity, not a fashion," Jan Khaskheli, a young journalist and short story writer says.

Dr. Gul Buledi, a young writer, Taj Joyo, secretary Sindhi Language Authority, Abdul Khaliq Junejo, chairman Jeay Sindh Mahaz, Zeb Sindhi, an educationist and short story writer and Anwar Azad Kandhro, central treasurer of SAS emphasize the preservation and promotion of Sindhi language in educational institutes as well as in government departments.

Some Sindhi men of letters argue that Sindhi youths are intelligent, but from lack of fluency in English fail to avail the opportunities in various fields at home or abroad. They demanded that the government should introduce English, as a subject from class three in Sindh and Sindhi language should be given the same status that it enjoys today. ■