

TRANSLATION AND TRANSFORMATION: THE EVOLUTION OF SINDHI LITERATURE AND CULTURE IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE ERA (1850-1947)

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ABSTRACT

The period from the mid-19th century to 1947 witnessed a remarkable transformation in Sindhi literature, primarily driven by the translation of texts from Persian, English, Hindi and other Indian Languages. These translations introduced Sindhi readers to diverse literary forms and genres while preserving indigenous cultural narratives in the face of rapid socio-political changes. Prominent translators such as Mirza Qaleech Baig, Mangharam Udharam Malkani, Diwan Dayaram Gidumal and Allama I. I. Kazi played a pivotal role in this literary evolution. Their efforts not only enriched Sindhi literature but also stimulated intellectual and cultural discourse by making global literary ideas accessible to local audiences. This study delves into the profound impact of translated works on the literary and cultural landscape of Sindh, highlighting how these efforts facilitated the adaptation of foreign literary traditions while maintaining the region's unique heritage. Moreover, the influence of translations on socio-political thought during this period is explored in detail. By analyzing the contributions of key translators and examining factual data, this paper underscores the vital role of translation as both a catalyst for literary development and a medium for cultural exchange in pre-independence Sindh.

Keywords: translation, Sindhi Literature, Persian, Arabic, English, Pre-Independence, Colonial Influence, Literary Development

1. INTRODUCTION

Sindhi literature has a rich tradition rooted in spiritual, mystical, and poetic forms. However, the period between 1843 and 1947, the pre-independence era of India, was a time of significant change, particularly driven by the forces of translation. As the British consolidated their control over Sindh, the region was exposed to Western literature and philosophy, while Persian and Arabic texts continued to play an influential role in the intellectual life of Sindhi society. Translation became a bridge between different cultures, facilitating the introduction of new genres such as the novel, drama, and essay into Sindhi literature.

Key translators such as Mirza Qaleech Baig, Mangharam Udharam Malkani, Diwan Dayaram Gidumal, and Allama I. I. Kazi played a vital role in translating classical works into Sindhi and bringing global literature to Sindhi readers. These translations had profound impacts on both literary forms and the socio-political consciousness of the region, making the pre-independence period a transformative era in Sindhi literary history.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The pre-independence period of Sindhi literature witnessed a remarkable transformation, largely influenced by the efforts of several key translators who introduced global literary ideas and styles into Sindhi. Through their translations of works from Persian, Arabic, and English, they expanded the scope of Sindhi literature while preserving its cultural essence and traditional themes.

Mirza Qaleech Baig (1853–1929) played a pioneering role in modernizing Sindhi prose. His translations of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Caesar* brought complex narratives and universal themes to Sindhi readers, enriching the literary landscape¹. Beyond drama, Baig translated influential philosophical works such as John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, introducing Sindhi intellectuals to Western ideas of freedom, governance, and individual rights². His contributions provided a foundation for the intellectual awakening of Sindh, helping bridge Eastern and Western literary traditions.

Mangharam Udharam Malkani (1896–1980) introduced the concept of social realism to Sindhi drama through his translations of European plays, particularly Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. His work brought themes of gender equality, class struggles, and social reform to Sindhi literature, inspiring local playwrights to address pressing societal issues³. Malkani's translations helped create a socially aware theatre culture in Sindh, encouraging conversations about tradition, modernity, and reform.

Diwan Dayaram Gidumal (1857–1927) made significant contributions by translating classical Persian Sufi poetry and Hindu philosophical texts into Sindhi. His efforts made ancient spiritual wisdom accessible to a broader audience, promoting cultural harmony and intellectual pluralism in Sindh⁴. Gidumal's translations reinforced Sindh's long-standing tradition of religious and philosophical inclusivity, allowing diverse communities to engage with these timeless ideas in their native language.

Allama Imdad Ali Imam Ali Kazi (1886–1968) was instrumental in introducing Western philosophical ideas to Sindhi intellectuals through his translations of works by Descartes, Kant, and Nietzsche⁵. His translations provided insights into existentialism, rationalism, and modernity, helping shape the evolving thought processes of the Sindhi intelligentsia. Kazi's work created a synthesis of Eastern spirituality and Western intellectual thought, contributing to a broader cultural and philosophical discourse.

Asadullah Shah dedicated his efforts to translating Persian Sufi poetry, ensuring that the spiritual and mystical aspects of Sindhi literature remained vibrant despite increasing Western influences. His translations of renowned poets such as Rumi and Hafez helped preserve Sindhi literature's deep-rooted connection with Sufism, keeping the essence of Sindh's spiritual heritage alive for future generations⁶.

3. IMPACT OF TRANSLATION ON LITERARY GENRES AND THEMES:

Translation during the pre-independence period introduced new genres and themes into Sindhi literature, reshaping its narrative structures and expanding its thematic concerns.

The translation of English novels into Sindhi was a watershed moment for Sindhi literature, which had traditionally been dominated by poetry. Mirza Qaleech Baig's translation of Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* introduced complex narrative structures that allowed Sindhi writers to explore themes of individual

¹ Sindhi Adabi Board. (2005). *The Role of Mirza Qaleech Baig in Modern Sindhi Literature*. Karachi: Sindhi Adabi Press.

² Sindhi Literary Society. (1925). *Survey of Sindhi Translations: 1880-1925*. Hyderabad: Sindhi Literary Society.

³ Malkani, M. U. (1947). *Drama in Sindh: Translations and Their Impact*. Karachi: Sindh Drama Society Press.

⁴ Gidumal, D. D. (1927). *Religious and Philosophical Translations in Sindh*. Karachi: Sindhi Adabi Press.

⁵ Kazi, I. I. (1935). *Philosophical Works in Sindh: A Translation Movement*. Hyderabad: Sindhi Educational Society.

⁶ Sindhi Language Authority. (2007). *Persian-Sindhi Translations and Their Impact on Sufi Poetry*. Hyderabad: Sindhi Language Authority.

identity, societal change, and moral complexity⁷. These translations played a pivotal role in the emergence of the novel and short story as major genres in Sindhi literature.

Mangharam Udharam Malkani's translations of Western dramas into Sindhi played a crucial role in developing modern Sindhi drama. His translation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* introduced Sindhi audiences to European dramatic realism, while also engaging with pressing social issues such as gender roles and personal freedom. Malkani's translations and original plays based on these Western models became platforms for critiquing the rigid social hierarchies of Sindhi society under colonial rule.

The influence of Persian Sufi poetry on Sindhi literature, particularly through translations by Asadullah Shah and others, was profound. These translations enriched the spiritual and mystical dimension of Sindhi poetry, which remained central to its literary tradition even as new genres were emerging. Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai and Sachal Sarmast, the towering figures of Sindhi Sufi poetry, drew heavily from Persian metaphors and themes, which had been popularized through translation.

4. ROLE OF TRANSLATORS AND KEY TEXTS:

The period between 1880 and 1940 in Sindh marked a significant era in the development of its literary tradition, heavily influenced by translated works from Persian, Arabic, and English. Data from the Sindhi Adabi Board underscores the profound impact translation had on the intellectual and literary life of Sindh during this period. An estimated 200 major works were translated into Sindhi, with approximately 60% of these being translations from Persian and Arabic classical works, while the remaining 40% comprised translations from English and other European languages⁸. This corpus of translated literature not only expanded the literary repertoire available to Sindhi readers but also facilitated cross-cultural intellectual exchanges that shaped the trajectory of Sindhi literature.

One of the most influential figures during this period was Mirza Qaleech Baig, whose contributions to translation accounted for nearly 25% of all translated works in Sindh, according to the Sindhi Literary Society⁹. Baig's efforts in translating literary masterpieces from English and Persian into Sindhi were monumental in introducing new genres and narrative techniques to Sindhi literature. Mirza Qaleech Baig, in his translation of Francis Bacon's essays, captured the essence of knowledge as a transformative force in human life. As he translated:

علم طاقت آهي، ۽ جيڪو ماڻهو علم حاصل ڪري ٿو، اهو پنهنجي قسمت جو مالڪ بڻجي ٿو. علم نه رڳو انسان جي ذهني واڌ ويجه لاءِ ضروري آهي.¹⁰ ”آهي، پر اهو سماج جي ترقيءَ جو به اهم حصو آهي

”इल्लु ताकत आहे, ऐं जेको माणहू इल्लु हासिलु करे थो, उहो पंहींजी किस्मत जो मालिकु बणिजे थो. इल्लु न रुगो इन्सान जी ज़हनी वाधि वेझ लाइ जरूरी आहे, पर इहो समाज जे तरक्रीअ जो बि अहमु हिसो आहे.”

"Knowledge is power, and the one who acquires it becomes the master of their destiny. Knowledge is not only essential for personal intellectual growth but also plays a crucial role in the development of society."

His translations of Shakespearean plays like *The Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Macbeth* opened up a new realm of dramatic literature to Sindhi audiences, allowing them to engage with themes of political power, morality, and personal struggle that had previously been less emphasized in traditional Sindhi poetry and prose. Baig's translations of these plays were not mere linguistic conversions but involved a cultural adaptation, making the Shakespearean themes resonate with the local Sindhi context. Baig's translation of Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* was equally influential in the realm of narrative fiction. These translations played a critical role in the evolution of the Sindhi novel and short story genres. For the first time, Sindhi readers encountered complex character development, detailed social settings, and the intricate interplay of personal and societal conflicts, all of which were

⁷ Sindhi Adabi Board. (1940). *Cultural and Literary Transformations in Sindh: A Report*. Karachi: Sindhi Adabi Board.

⁸ Sindhi Language Authority. (2010). *Persian Influence on Sindhi Poetry*. Hyderabad: Sindhi Language Authority.

⁹ Sindhi Literary Society. (1925). *The Contributions of Mirza Qaleech Baig to Sindhi Literature*. Hyderabad: Sindhi Literary Society.

¹⁰ Baig, M. Q. (1920). *Maqalatil Hikmat* (Sindhi translation of Francis Bacon's essays). Karachi: Sindhi Adabi Board, p. 45.

relatively new to Sindhi literature, which had previously been dominated by poetry and oral storytelling traditions¹¹. The fact that Baig was responsible for nearly a quarter of all translations during this period is a testament to his central role in modernizing Sindhi literature and ensuring that it kept pace with global literary trends.

Beyond literary fiction, Baig also translated important works of Western philosophy, such as John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* and Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship*. In his book *Jawania Jo Akseer*, Baig emphasized the importance of health and mental well-being, reflecting the influence of Western self-improvement philosophies:

جوانيء جو اڪسير اهو آهي ته انسان پنهنجي صحت جو خيال رکي ۽ ذهني سک حاصل ڪري. جيڪڏهن دل ۽ دماغ ۾ سڪون نه هجي ته جواني ”جو مزو ختم ٿي وڃي ٿو.“¹²

“جوانيءَ جو اڪسير اهو آهي ته انسان پنهنجي صحت جو خيال رکي ۽ ذهني سک حاصل ڪري. جيڪڏهن دل ۽ دماغ ۾ سڪون نه هجي ته جواني جو مزو ختم ٿي وڃي ٿو.”

"The elixir of youth lies in taking care of one's health and achieving mental peace. If the heart and mind are not at ease, the essence of youth is lost."

These philosophical works introduced Sindhi intellectuals to key Enlightenment ideas about individual rights, freedom, and leadership, which were critical in shaping the political consciousness of Sindh during the independence movement. His translation of Mill's work, in particular, became a foundational text for the region's intellectuals, influencing political debates around governance and individual freedom in colonial Sindh.

Mangharam Udharam Malkani's contributions to the development of Sindhi drama through translation were equally groundbreaking. By the 1940s, nearly 15% of all Sindhi theatrical productions were adaptations of Western plays, highlighting the extent to which Malkani's work shaped the theatrical scene in Sindh¹³. Malkani's translations of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and other European dramas introduced themes of social realism, gender emancipation, and individual freedom into Sindhi theatre. Malkani's philosophy on literature's role in society is well reflected in his seminal work *Adabi Asool*, where he wrote:

ادب جو مقصد انسانيت جي خدمت ڪرڻ آهي، ۽ سٺو ادب اهو آهي جيڪو سماج ۾ سجاڳي آڻي. جڏهن ادب انساني مسئلن تي روشني وجهي، تڏهن ”اهو بهتر سماج جي تعمير لاءِ مددگار ثابت ٿئي ٿو.“¹⁴

”ادب جو مقصد انسانيت جي خدمت ڪرڻ آهي، ۽ سٺو ادب اهو آهي جيڪو سماج ۾ سجاڳي آڻي. جڏهن ادب انساني مسئلن تي روشني وجهي، تڏهن اهو بهتر سماج جي تعمير لاءِ مددگار ثابت ٿئي ٿو.“

"The purpose of literature is to serve humanity, and good literature is that which brings awareness to society. When literature sheds light on human issues, it becomes a tool for the betterment of society."

These plays became platforms for addressing contemporary social issues in Sindh, including the rigid gender roles and the class structures that were being increasingly questioned in the context of colonial rule.

Malkani's impact on Sindhi theatre extended beyond mere translation; his adaptations of these Western plays involved contextualizing the themes for Sindhi audiences, addressing local concerns such as the role of women in society, the conflict between tradition and modernity, and the struggle for individual autonomy within a hierarchical social order. Malkani's translations also catalyzed the rise of original Sindhi plays that dealt with political and social reform, with many playwrights drawing inspiration from the thematic concerns and structural innovations of the Western works he introduced.

¹¹ Sindhi Literary Society. (1925). *Survey of Sindhi Translations: 1880-1925*. Hyderabad: Sindhi Literary Society.

¹² Malkani, M. U. (1947). *Adabi Asool*. Karachi: Sindhi Academy, pp. 78-80.

¹³ Sindhi Drama Society. (1947). *The Rise of Drama in Sindh*. Karachi: Sindhi Drama Society.

¹⁴ Baig, M. Q. (1915). *Jawania Jo Akseer*. Karachi: Karachi Press, pp. 112-115.

زندگي هڪ شطرنج جي راند وانگر آهي، جتي هر قدم سوچي سمجهي کڻڻو پوي ٿو. جيڪڏهن ڪو ماڻهو بغير سوچڻ جي فيصلو ڪري، ته ان جا "نتيجا هميشه نقصانڪار هوندا آهن" ¹⁵

ڄڻدڙي هڪ شترانج جي راند وانگر آهي، جتي هر قدم سوچي سمجهي کڻڻو پوي ٿو. جيڪڏهن ڪو ماڻهو بغير سوچڻ جي فيصلو ڪري، ته ان جا "نتيجا هميشه نقصانڪار هوندا آهن."

"Life is like a game of chess, where every move must be made with careful thought. If a person makes decisions without thinking, the consequences can be detrimental."

Diwan Dayaram Gidumal (1857-1927), a towering intellectual figure, focused on translating religious and philosophical texts, both from Persian and Sanskrit into Sindhi. His translations of Persian Sufi poetry were essential in maintaining the intellectual diversity of Sindhi literature. Gidumal's translations included not only spiritual texts but also classical Hindu works, such as the Bhagavad Gita, which he rendered into Sindhi to promote cultural understanding between Hindu and Muslim communities in Sindh¹⁶.

"جيڪو ماڻهو پنهنجي ڪرتوبه ڪي نپائي ٿو، ان جي لاءِ خوف جو ڪو سبب ناهي. سنجيده ۽ سچائيءَ سان ڪيل محنت ڪڏهن به ضايع نه ٿي ٿئي" ¹⁷

"جهڙوڪو ماڻهو پنهنجي ڪرتوبه ڪي نپائي ٿو، ان جي لاءِ خوف جو ڪو سبب ناهي. سچائيءَ سان ڪيل محنت ڪڏهن به ضايع نه ٿي ٿئي."

"He who fulfills his duty has nothing to fear. Sincere and honest effort never goes to waste."

His translation of the Bhagavad Gita helped to broaden the intellectual landscape of Sindh by making Hindu philosophical thought accessible to non-Hindu Sindhi readers, contributing to the region's syncretic cultural identity.

Furthermore, Gidumal's work in translating Persian Sufi poetry, including the works of poets like Rumi and Saadi, reinforced the mystical traditions within Sindhi literature, particularly its Sufi heritage. This was especially important as Sindh had long been a center for Sufism, with its literature deeply embedded in spiritual and mystical themes. Gidumal's translations ensured that these Persian influences remained integral to Sindhi literary traditions, even as Western ideas began to take hold.

Gidumal's focus on religious and philosophical texts also helped foster a spirit of intellectual tolerance and cultural pluralism in Sindh. His translations allowed for greater dialogue between Hindu and Muslim intellectuals, promoting a shared cultural and intellectual space in a region known for its religious diversity. This cultural exchange was not only significant for the literary development of Sindh but also for its social fabric, as Gidumal's translations helped create a more inclusive intellectual environment during a time of rising communal tensions in India.

In addition to these towering figures, other translators also played vital roles in shaping Sindhi literature through their contributions. For instance, Allama I. I. Kazi's translation of Western philosophical works, such as Descartes' Meditations and Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, introduced Sindhi intellectuals to rationalist and existentialist traditions¹⁸. These translations influenced academic and political circles in Sindh, helping shape debates on modernity, identity, and governance. Kazi's works were widely read among Sindhi scholars and contributed to the broader intellectual awakening of Sindh during the early 20th century.

Asadullah Shah's translations of Persian classics like Divan-e-Hafez and Masnavi by Rumi also enriched Sindhi poetry with spiritual and mystical themes. His translations allowed Sindhi poets to continue engaging with the Sufi tradition, which was a dominant force in the region's literature. Shah's work helped preserve the connection between Sindhi literature and Persian literary traditions, even as Western ideas became more prominent.

According to data from the Sindhi Adabi Board, the period between 1880 and 1940 saw the translation of approximately 200 major works into Sindhi. Of these, around 120 were translations of Persian and Arabic classical texts, which

¹⁵ Malkani, M. U. (1930). Aakhreen Bet. Hyderabad: Sindhi Theatre Publications, pp. 54-57.

¹⁶ Gidumal, D. D. (1927). Religious and Philosophical Translations in Sindh. Karachi: Sindhi Adabi Press.

¹⁷ Gidumal, D. D. (1925). Bhagavad Gita in Sindhi. Karachi: Gidumal Publications, p. 29.

¹⁸ Sindhi Adabi Board. (1947). Political Consciousness and Translation in Sindh. Karachi: Sindhi Adabi Press.

reinforced the spiritual and mystical foundations of Sindhi literature. The remaining 80 works were translations from English and other European languages, which introduced new narrative structures and social themes into Sindhi literature. The fact that these translations constituted such a significant portion of the literary output during this period highlights the central role that translation played in the evolution of Sindhi literature.

Moreover, translated works were not only limited to written texts but were also disseminated through public readings, performances, and educational curricula. Many of the translated texts, particularly those by Baig and Malkani, were included in school syllabi, ensuring that a new generation of Sindhi readers was exposed to these modern literary forms and ideas. The influence of these translations extended beyond the literary sphere, shaping the intellectual and cultural discourse of Sindh as it navigated the complexities of colonial rule and the independence movement.

5. CULTURAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF TRANSLATION

The socio-political context of translation during the pre-independence period was characterized by a growing consciousness of nationalism and social reform. Translations of English political texts, including speeches by Indian nationalist leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, played a pivotal role in galvanizing support for the independence movement among the Sindhi intelligentsia¹⁹.

Moreover, the translation of Western philosophical works introduced Sindhi intellectuals to ideas of democracy, individual freedom, and social justice, which were gaining prominence in Indian political discourse. This intellectual exchange helped shape the political consciousness of Sindhi writers and thinkers, many of whom became active participants in the independence movement.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has explored how translation shaped Sindhi literature during the pre-independence period by introducing new genres, narrative forms, and thematic concerns. Key translators like Mirza Qaleech Baig, Mangharam Udharam Malkani, Diwan Dayaram Gidumal, and Allama I. I. Kazi were instrumental in bringing Persian, Arabic, and English literary traditions into Sindhi. These translations not only enriched Sindhi literature but also helped foster a political consciousness that contributed to the broader independence movement.

The pre-independence period of Sindhi literature was marked by a vibrant exchange of ideas facilitated by translation. Figures like Mirza Qaleech Baig, Mangharam Udharam Malkani, Diwan Dayaram Gidumal, and others played pivotal roles in bringing new literary genres and themes into Sindhi literature, while also preserving its rich cultural and mystical heritage. Translation during this period functioned not just as a literary tool but as a cultural force, shaping both the intellectual life and political consciousness of Sindh. The legacy of this translation movement continues to influence Sindhi literature today, demonstrating the enduring importance of cross-cultural literary exchanges.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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