

Q Critically evaluate the supreme court of Pakistan's decision to replace English with Urdu as the official language and its subsequent lack of implementation. What challenges have impeded this linguistic transition? Is there an inherent reluctance within the state and the institutions to adopt Urdu as the official language or are there issues within the constitutional articles pertaining to the official language that have hindered this process.

Answer:

Urdu is one of the official languages of Pakistan. It holds a significant status and is widely used in various official, educational and cultural contexts along side English. The Constitution of Pakistan recognises both Urdu and English as official languages, and they are used in official communication and documentation at the federal level. Additionally, different regions of Pakistan may have their own regional languages, reflecting the country's linguistic diversity. Many challenges were faced for the survival of Urdu during the Movement of Independence. After independence Urdu was declared to be the national language of Pakistan.

Afterwards certain bodies were established for its proper implementation as official language. This aspect is recognised as constitutional obligation in term of Article 251 of Constitution 1973. Though the government was given sufficient time for the compliance of the same, this task could not have been accomplished despite the lapse of almost fifty years. Even the Judicial verdict could not make the concerned institutions mindful.

## Challenges that impeded this linguistic transition:

- (i) Constitutional Issue.
- (ii) Reluctance within the state and its institutions.

### (i) Constitutional Issue:

Article 251 of Constitution of Pakistan 1973 is related to National languages

- 1- The National language of Pakistan is Urdu, and arrangements shall be made for its being used for official and other purposes within fifteen years from the commencing day.

2: Subject to clause (1), the English Language may be used for official purposes until arrangements are made for its replacement by Urdu.

3: Without prejudice to the status of national language, a provincial assembly may by law prescribe measures for the teaching, promotion and use of a provincial language in addition to the national language.

The significance of national language along with local languages is protected in Article 251. Urdu is official language and it shall replace all other languages in official domains, including English. Then, the state shall make sure that Urdu replaces all languages in official businesses after a lapse of fifteen years.

In 1948, there was debate about Urdu or Bengali being declared as National Language, but there was no debate about official language, because all the office work were done in English. So the clause of the constitution that clearly talks about the replacement of official language from English to Urdu is problematic. English is now an international language and learning it is important to deal the matters on international level.

In addition to constitutional and legislative support, the Supreme Court of Pakistan has declared through the judgement by Justice Jawwad S Khawaja that Urdu should replace all other languages, including English as an official language.

Judiciary gave decision according to the constitution, but it is not just a difficult task, but also

implementing a language shift requires infrastructure adjustments and training programs. Government officials may need training to adapt to a new language requirements.

The effectiveness of such a decision depends on strong legal framework, clear policies and efficient implementation mechanisms. If these are lacking or face delays it can impede successful execution.

Certainly, there are issues with in the constitutional articles. When English was already an official language, there was no need of introducing a new official language, especially when the works are also related to international affairs making the implementation of the second clause of article 251 of the constitution almost impossible.

## (ii) Reluctance of state and its institutions.

English was the language of administration during colonial period, and it continued to be used in official and educational settings after Pakistan gained independence in 1947. The historical legacy has contributed to persistence of English in various domains. All the official work, before the 2<sup>nd</sup> provision of article 251 of the constitution, was done in English and it is not possible to convert all that work to Urdu. And sudden shift to Urdu as a sole official language could <sup>face</sup> challenges related to continuity, especially in documents and legal proceedings.

English is medium of instruction in educational institutions. Shifting entirely to Urdu may require significant adjustments in the educational infrastructure and curriculum.

Urdu is mixture of few languages like Persian, Turkish, Sanskrit, Portuguese, Sindhi and Punjabi so it will require a vast dictionary to translate every English word to Urdu.

The very famous incident of Peshawar High Court (2016) where the writ was to be written in Urdu

The word Prime minister was translated as "munshi" in Urdu because "wazir" is Persian.

And few more incidents happen where the word of English could not be properly translated to Urdu.

So first requirement for the conversion of language is a dictionary that translates all English words.

All these challenges makes it impossible for the state to convert the official language from English to Urdu. So, apparently there is no reluctance from the state and its institutions.

The judiciary should have been more careful in giving the decision on the second provision of article 251, in 2015. The justice gave a positivist approach where as the Nationalist approach was needed. Not every article of the Constitution is important to be implemented.

If we take an example from US constitution of article related to the "right to bear arms" the Supreme Courts decision on it is against the article.

But Urdu along side English would not <sup>have</sup> been a big problem but shifting entirely to Urdu would be very challenging.

## Conclusion:

Urdu holds a special status as the national language and is used in various official capacities, including government, communications, legislation and education. Pakistan is linguistically diverse, and several other languages are spoken across different regions. In the article 251 of the constitution, the second clause is relate to convert English to Urdu as official language. The entire shift of language will be challenging. Better approach would have been Urdu alongside English, not the entire shift. So, this clause of the constitution is problematic and can not be implemented even in fifty years or more.