

Lost in the Translation: Punjabi Identity and Language in Pakistan

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Abstract

Punjabi identity in Pakistan is primarily motivated by the language. The discussion around the Punjabi language or identity has received criticism in the contemporary political milieu of Pakistan compared to other ethnic identity politics. Many leftists render the debate around diminishing Punjabi identity and language as an insignificant question because Punjabis constitute majority. Despite numerical dominance, Punjabi usage and vernacular are waning compared to Eastern Punjab. These developments are demoted with Punjabi identity as secondary to supporting perceived threats to the federation since Fall of Dhaka and Punjabi elites' preference for Urdu. Regardless of the profound historical and cultural richness of the Punjabi culture and language, as evidenced by literary contributions and vast historical demographic, their cultural identity is paradoxically relegated to mockery and jest.

Keywords: Punjabi Language, Punjab, Pakistan, Nationalism, Colonialism.

Introduction

The cultural and political characters within a nation are classified into two domains – the inner and outer domains. The inner domain is where people practice autonomy, free of external influences of the outer domain of state. The Punjabi language and culture have thrived in the inner domains, even though it has never been designated as an official language or language of instruction since Sikh Raj, British Colonization, and after partition. In a colonial infrastructure, colonized people create their own identity survival toolkits. They interact differently within survival zones, leading dual lives, similar to living with multiple personality disorder, wherein a person's real self is in a continuous struggle to meet the expectations of environment. In this scenario, Punjabi identity is lost to fulfil the demands of the system only to continue in this race

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against colonization or integration. Indigenous people establish these survival zones to preserve their integral national characters and spiritual conscience while integrating into the prevalent colonial infrastructure outside. Colonizers tend to shift these domains to secure their political and economic interests to counter less resistance; however, they are mainly unsuccessful in effecting an absolute change. As a result, these colonized societies get lost in translation, which are neither fully native nor colonial but indigenized, which are still viewed via colonial gaze by the neo-colonial world. It is imperative to recognize that, for a more accurate understanding of the culture of a region or ethnicity, rural areas derive insights closer to reality compared to the regionally hybrid urban centers. At the cultural and social stratum, identity is derived from language, serving as the primary representation of people belonging to a specific ethnicity or a region. The Punjabi identity is entwined with the language, which is often claimed to be losing its originality in modern-day Punjab due to various reasons, mostly emanating from inner domain influenced by national outer domain.

Research Methodology

This study reads through the stagnancy around progress of Punjabi, despite its status as the widely spoken language in Pakistan. These aspects include conscious attempts at disconnecting locals from their language to strengthen colonization of Punjab which continued to serve the purpose of common national language to avoid ethnic tensions. The ontological position aligns with relativism to investigate the social attitude of native speakers, including the linguistic sustenance in said intimidated policies. A textual analytical method of research is utilized to study the collected data which comprises books, research papers, archives, and reports from the Government of Pakistan. Government archives direct an instrumentalist notion to study colonial or governmental inclinations which can be incongruent with common person's ideals or may suggest whether a common person's life is affected by these actions which exhibit spiritual bias for a good reason.

Inner Domain of Punjabis

The inner domain composes social fabric, culture, religion, and language as a marker of identity which is at stake in the outer domain comprising material, national, and colonial identity (Kamran, 2008). However, language does not hold any formal power in the outer domains of governance, education, judicature, or other instruments of power (Rehman, 2002). The outer domain serves as a coercive instrument of the colonial entity that impacts the inner domain by categorizing the material character of the state. The inner domain can

be invincible (Panikkar, 2002), as colonizers try to break the spirit of the natives along with taking over the resources. However, the inner domains reflect the resilience of nation or culture, which may choose to remain unchanged or influenced to a certain degree (Chatterjee, 1991). The "*babu*" or "*katha angrez*" culture in the British subcontinent reflects the outer domain, where people were compelled to adopt certain lifestyles to appease the colonizer. The Muslims of Punjab internalized the need to have a communal identity in outer domains and contained ethnic identity in their inner domains. In the British subcontinent, the outer domain was characterized by Western superiority, mastery, and authority, which could not have been challenged, while the inner domain contained the social fabric (Chatterjee, 1986).

Punjabi Linguistic Identity Amidst Muslim and Pakistani Nationalism

Punjab, often regarded as the heart of Indic culture, has undergone historical events that have not only altered the region's history, traditions, and daily practices but also disrupted its historic lens and cultural fabric. The question of erasure of Punjabi language in Pakistan cannot be fully understood without understanding the prospects of the British colonialism, Muslim nationalism, and partition of the Sub-continent (Singh, 2012). The annexation of Punjab led to a historic crisis in the region including the language. Persian, the previous official language, was replaced by Urdu for administrative purposes. Urdu had already been established as the administrative language in North India. The question arises as to why the British chose Urdu over Punjabi for the administration of Punjab. Some suggest that the clerical staff favored Urdu, as many of them hailed from Northern India and British were fluent in Urdu as they were already learning it before the annexation in 1849 (Mirza, 1989; Rahman, 1996). An additional rationale for incorporating Urdu in judicial and administrative bodies in colonial Punjab focuses on challenges British officers faced in judicial and criminal proceedings, specifically in the documentation of witness testimonies and understanding of Punjabi (with native dialects) figurative expressions absent in English. The need for an adequate court language was felt. This matter was recommended to the Governor General, suggesting Urdu as a practical option in the courts of Lahore and Jhelum divisions, and districts of Pakpattan and Jhang. Subsequently, Urdu was made the language of the government. Local staff in the Hazara and Multan Divisions showed unfamiliarity towards Urdu, contrary to those in the Jhang, Lahore, or Gujrat divisions, where some level of understanding of Urdu was witnessed. British officials observed that most of the native Punjabi populace in these regions predominantly spoke Punjabi and

hence had a lesser understanding of Urdu. The Administrative Report of the Government of Punjab suggested that Urdu as a medium of instruction could produce sound results other than English. According to the British assumptions, Punjabi was only widely spoken in rural areas of Punjab and had the tendency to lose currency if Urdu were introduced. It is also a viable to remember that even before the British, the Sikh Raj had Persian as the official language instead of Punjabi (Kamran, 2008). Numerous British officers made false claims about the prevalence of Urdu as the dominant language in Punjab from Multan to Peshawar. British officer John Lawrence asserted on the vitality of introducing Urdu among the staff. These officers harbored biases aimed at subjecting control over any resistance and assuring their own convenience, thereby eroding the use of Punjabi (Kamran, 2008; Rahman, 1996) . They preferred enforcing an unfamiliar language upon the native Punjabis who spoke numerous dialects, varying in tone and deep vernacular, misconstruing that Urdu was like Punjabi. They held the idea that it would be inconvenient for colonial officials and non-native staff to learn a new language and then speak broken Punjabi (Jalal, 1995).

Often this question is raised whether both British and Hindustanis were biased against Punjabis and their language. According to a statement by Leitner, Principal of Government College Lahore, where Urdu was the medium of instruction, *"The fact is that the direction of the Educational Department has long been in the hands of men, both European and Native, connected with Delhi"* (Rahman, 1996) . Additionally, Punjabi written in the Persian script or *Shahmukhi* was considered politically dangerous. By 1854, Urdu was already enforced in lower administrative strata – judiciary and education in the Punjab province extending to Peshawar and Hazara divisions. Initially, Hindus and Sikhs opposed this position while supported by the Muslims who did not perceive Urdu as a threat. However, a British officer, Robert Cust, expressed his support for enforcing Gurmukhi Punjabi as a vernacular language (Robert Cust, n.d.). This suggestion was rejected by other British officers who, due to their lack of understanding of native culture and history, regarded Punjabi as a mere dialect of Urdu. The Deputy Commissioner of Gujrat, in a letter to the Commissioner of Rawalpindi expressed: *"Even a Punjabi villager will more readily understand simple Urdu than indifferent Punjabi spoken by us foreigners and by those of our clerks who may be from Hindustan."* During the Hunter Commission developments, after the Urdu-Hindi Controversy, Hindu and Muslim Punjabis, sided with communal languages of Urdu and Hindi over Punjabi, while Sikhs advocated for Gurmukhi Punjab (Rahman, 1996). Sikhs were asked to adopt Urdu as a source of means, enforced by the British administration. The Deputy Commissioner of Shahpur, J. Wilson voiced his

assessment regarding the low literacy rate in Punjab, attributing it to the use of Urdu with Persian script, which was not legible to Punjabis. He stated that only 4 percent of male students in Punjab between the ages of five to fourteen were able to learn to write in Urdu, out of which 12 percent were Hindus and 3 percent were Muslims. The entire male population who could read and write in Urdu was 5.89 percent, out of which 1.44 percent belonged to the agricultural class. Wilson noticed that to a common Punjabi, Urdu was as legible as French was to English villagers (Kamran, 2008). Judge A. W. Stogdon, the Divisional Judge of Jalandhar, expressed in his letter that Punjabi was unsuitable as a language (Rahman, 1996).

It cannot be denied that Urdu-Hindi Controversy became the identity of Punjabi Muslims. Any attempt at hindering progress of Urdu in Punjab was sought as hostility towards Islam. In a speech made by the Bengali educationist Partha Chatterjee at Punjab University, he remarked to replace Urdu with Punjabi. Chatterjee's remarks were condemned by Muslim leader Sir Muhammad Shafi in Amritsar on 29 December 1908 (Barelvi, 1970). A member of the All-India Muslim League, Sheikh Zahoor Ahmed in a meeting in 1910 referred Punjabi as a jargon of Babylonians. Conversely, Punjabi Muslim elites raised the slogans of "Read Urdu, Speak Urdu, and Write Urdu" (Jalal, 1995). Another rationale besides Muslim identity in Punjab, Muslim elites favored Urdu to enhance the enrollment of Muslim Punjabi students in the school system. However, Urdu was an unfamiliar language to Punjabis, particularly in rural settings, exacerbating the problem of illiteracy in Punjab. These elites and intellectuals joined the Muslim nationalist movement to protect communal rights of Muslims and adopted Urdu to reimagine their identity in a larger political milieu of British India (Kamran, 2008). However, British and Sindhi Muslim elites were moving in different direction. Sindhi Muslim elites, including Quaid E Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, aimed at separating Sindh from Bombay as they believed Sindh had a unique socioeconomic capital comparable to that of Bombay. In 1936, Sindh achieved its unique status, and Sindhi became the language of instruction, including various steps towards the promotion of Sindhi. Sindhi leaders realized that the Muslim identity was under attack; however, they used Sindhi as an identity for Sindhi Muslims (Syed, 1949).

Political Punjabi: An Approach towards Punjabi Language in Pakistan

In November 1947, a political-linguistic decision was made by the government of Pakistan, making Urdu the national language without a debate in the constituent assembly. However, 55 per cent of the population (or leaders) from East Pakistan took it as a relegation of their language (Zaidi, 2010). The

rationale behind was presented disguising Urdu as the language of imagined identity of Muslims which evolved from 712 CE to 1947 (Ayres, 2008) wielding ethno-nationalist concerns into a single center under Islam. Punjabi, with its dialects, is a native language, yet a significant portion of the Punjabi population undermines it. In the 1998 census, Punjabi was widely spoken language at 44.1% (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 1998) , but it has since decreased to 38.78% in the 2017 census (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Many Punjabis have willingly denied their language and identity to boost Pakistani nationalism and social status by giving up on their ethnic identity. The decline of Punjabi is not a post-partition occurrence, it goes way (Mirza, 2013). Punjabi is viewed as language of jest whereas conversations in Urdu and English are only perceived formal as power and professionalism are associated with them; an extension of Englishmen's view regarding Punjabi. Numerous aspects have contributed to such approach, including colonization, One-Unit, Islamization (Rammah, 2006), loss of vernacular, disconnection from history to appease Afghan sentiments, stigma perpetuated by colonizers, and the education system (Haidar et al., 2021). To investigate the impact of the One-Unit policy in Sindh, a widespread protest by the intelligentsia was observed, compelling President Ayub Khan to ensure that Sindhi would remain the medium of instruction up to the BA level, as it had been before (Rahman, 1996). Right after the independence, Punjabi as a university subject was eliminated from Punjab University (Shackle, 1970). The promotion of Urdu in Punjab came at the cost of Punjabi language (Salik, 1956). Shafqat Tanvir Mirza views the 1958 martial law as anti-Punjabi. The advocacy of Punjabi language and literature was perceived as anti-state (Matringe, 2006) . The ban on the Punjabi *Majlis* in 1959 by Ayub Khan *or* condemnation of Punjabi writers by General Zia were a few significant incidents as well. Punjabi *Majlis* was coined as a political body by the martial law regime (Rahman, 1996) . Government inspected these motives as inciting Punjabi-Urdu controversy. The State sought one of the demands for the reinstatement of Gurmukhi script instead of Urdu/*Shahmukhis* a threat.

However, in 1962, the government took certain initiatives to promote Punjabi literature. On February 22, 1962, the Punjabi Group of the Writers' Guild held a seminar with the aim to raise awareness as in "consciousness-rising" of Punjabis. On March 15, 1962, the principal of Oriental College accused the members of the Writers' Guild of being anti-Islam and anti-Pakistan (Mehram Yar, 1963) . On 6th of April 1969, the Punjabi Writers Guild was banned as its activities were perceived as a stain on Urdu. Concerns arose among bureaucratic establishments over the Punjabi-Urdu controversy in Lahore; senior bureaucrat Altaf Gauhar labeled it as a threat to national unity. Hamid Ali Khan, serving as a

representative of Punjabi in the Central Language Board at the time, expressed his admiration for literary Punjabi rather than political Punjabi. The term "Political Punjabi" referred to the introduction of Punjabi as the language of administration, education, and judiciary in the province of Punjab (Mir Safdar, 1963). Activists emphasized to introduce Punjabi at primary level and as medium of instruction in adult literacy programs. Academicians and journalists expressed their apprehensions over the antagonization of the Punjabi language that it had not been included in the education policy of 1969 unlike Sindhi and Pashto (Mir Safdar, 1963). Activists realized that Punjabi became too comprehensible for non-natives with abundance of Urdu words. A Punjabi newspaper *Sajjan* closed its operation within a few months (Ahmed, 2020), whose critic opined that it contained content with Sanskriti words that were unintelligible to common readers. Certain words, such as "*akhar*" for "*lafz*," "*harh*" for "*sailaab*," or "*ikhath*" for "*taqreeb*," were employed, substituting Persian terms with Sanskrit equivalents (Rahman, 1996).

It is also evident that Urdu or Persian words incorporated in Punjabi are pronounced in respective Punjabi accents which are source of jest for non-native listeners. Islamization too has something to do with the recessive usage of Punjabi as many activists who opposed the military rule were also proponents of regional languages. The omission of Sikh writers from the literature of master's curriculum at Punjab University was perceived as an intimidating tool of Islamization. To respond to such steps, one unique incident happened when a Punjabi activist Muhammad Masud decided to pray in Punjabi instead of Arabic (Haidar et al., 2021; Zaidi, 2010). The government saw such incidents as a Kemalist approach. There also used to be a ban on addressing the house of provincial assembly in Punjabi (Ahmed, 2020), which was too observed in oath taking ceremony in provincial assembly of Punjab in 2002 (Zaidi, 2010). Punjabi Movement had leftist roots which are often perceived as anti-state (Malik, 1985). In an interview, Sardar Iqbal Dhillon of Morcha Tehreek stated that Government often got alarmed when the larger Punjabi identity was celebrated (Rahman, 1996). On the other hand, Punjabi Muslims, for more than a century, sought Muslim nationalism instead of ethno-nationalism. Punjabi people, including Sikhs and Hindus, had long abandoned Punjabi to seek political and market benefits during the late 1800s (Rehman, 2002).

Colonial Punjabi Identity

The overlooking of Punjabi is primarily attributed to the choices made by the Punjabis themselves, who consciously compromised their linguistic identity by internalizing the stigma. While individuals do converse in Punjabi, its

articulation is not widely celebrated. It cannot be denied that many educated families consider Punjabi as less prestigious language, which itself is a colonial behavior, when British officers considered Punjabi as a patio dialect (Kamran, 2008; Zaidi, 2010). The literature in the Punjabi language is exceptionally prolific, attesting to its enduring richness and vitality. Despite its linguistic abundance, native Punjabi speakers often exhibit a reluctance to take pride in it, let alone exhibiting ethnic Punjabi behavior is termed as rustic or *Pendu* (Shafi, 2013). Punjabi is still considered a ghettoizing way of communication (Mansoor, 2004), one of the many reasons Punjabis have been coerced into believing their identity manifests ignorance. The concept of "*Punjabiyaat*" is only limited to its festive nature (Singh, 2012). It lacks historical significance, collective struggle, memories of victories and loss, or distinct Punjabi identity.

Stage of Contentment

The images of Dullah Bhatti, Rai Ahmed Kharral, Bhagat Singh, or Nizam Dako – the Punjabi Robinhood are hardly there in the collective memory of Punjabis (Sargana, 2021). These anti-colonial heroes are forgotten from Punjabi consciousness. Festivals like *Lohri*, which were enrooted in celebration of harvest are long forgotten. The question arises, why are Punjabis in Pakistan have distanced themselves from historic memories of sorrow and joy? Is it only Muslim nationalism or it is separating them from the Sikh identity for religious reasons? Perhaps Punjabis are not struggling for their survival?

Ibn Khaldun's cyclical theory suggests the evolution of civilizations at different stages of rise and fall. Several aspects contribute to this development including integration, social cohesion, leadership, economic rise, and linguistic and cultural vitality. Punjab, with its endless history and diverse culture, has experienced similar stages of development. During the stage of ascendancy, Punjab has been a center of cultural exchange, ingenuity, and innovation, contributing potently to the cultural lineage, and an extension of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization. Although, Punjab has also gone through periods of decline and cultural erosion. This demise may manifest in linguistic shift, loss of historic practices, erosion of cultural norms, and dilution of traditional symbols. The enforcement of Urdu was a pressing need of federation; however, it came at the cost of the history and vernacular of Punjab. Considering Ibn Khaldun's cyclical theory, are Punjabis experiencing the penultimate stage of contentment in their ethnic identity? Despite being the majority, due to the absence of shared ethnic values and collective memory of an agonizing past in politically polarized Pakistan, are Punjabis at risk of losing as per Ibn Khaldun's cyclical view of history (Stone, 2010) ? On the other hand, Halbwachs' emphasis on human

memory suggests that it only exists within a collective context. A particular incident can affect the lived experience of an entire group, leading to the formation of collective memory that shapes future behaviors. Among the people of Punjab, the experience of war and the trauma it brought, have become ordinary aspects of life. Modern-day Punjabis may have faced a shared collective memory (Halbwachs, 1950) of partition as a betrayal, which made them compromise on their shared past.

Paradox of Educated Punjabi

Commonly called as the language of poets and scholars, it is paradoxical that native Punjabi speakers are often nonintegrated in their own language. Being Punjabi does not give people a sense of accomplishment, collective memories of joy, and victories have never been introduced, they lack the opportunities to be proud of heritage and linguistic lineage. A survey consisted of 2136 students, 121 teachers, and 63 parents from all the provincial and federal capital cities, revealed that only 2 percent of literate individuals possessed the ability to read or write in Punjabi. Most of the participants exhibited unfavorable sentiments towards Punjabi culture and language (Mansoor, 2004). In another survey conducted in Urdu and English medium schools, Punjabi students expressed themselves at lowest levels of being socially graceful, modern, and cultured (Mansoor, 1993). On the other hand, a survey conducted in four universities of Islamabad, where students from diverse Punjabi backgrounds study, suggested that vast number of Punjabi students attributed their language with illiteracy. Some claimed their esteem in Punjabi identity; however, their response towards language was indifferent. Students from rural areas believed that they communicate in Punjabi when they are in their hometowns (Haidar et al., 2021). Does it suggest that cultural markers can be associated with rural areas more than regionalized cities?

Lost Economy of Cultural Prestige

Language or way of speaking – dialects or accents – are not merely a means of communication; but also reflects our identity, class, and demographics (Mitchell, 2005). Punjab, a multitude of racial and ethnic groups exists, each representing its unique linguistic identity and holding a distinct status both cultural and economic within Punjabi society. Consequently, numerous social challenges emerge from subjective milieus, where stereotypes associated with different castes or races become normal.

Punjab is a diverse and vast regional identity, deep in ancient and historic times. Its demographics are beyond the modern-day geographical, provincial, or international divides. Every caste is linked with specific spiritual, economic, or historical memories, contributing to certain classifications based on either praise or bias. Both internal and external stigmas may contribute to reluctance to disclose their ethnic identity, let alone Punjabis being referred to as ignorant by a wider biased audience (Haidar et al., 2021). While native Punjabi speakers can communicate, read, and write in continental languages, engaging in Punjabi presents a challenge. Consequently, many Punjabis from suburbs find themselves unable to converse in their mother tongue, let alone thirty plus dialects across Punjab, Jammu, and Hazara division (Jamshaid, 2016). The sense of inferiority is either fostered by the strict formality of Urdu/English or as if it has instilled an inferiority complex in native Punjabis towards their ethnic history. However, the situation of Punjabi is still better in rural settings where individuals prefer to converse in Punjabi with its lexicon intact as well. Punjabi is undermined due to the lack of economic incentives, where it fails to offer any white collars jobs (Abbas, 2020). It reflects the century old position of Hunter Commission which required a different medium of instruction at primary level in Punjab. In April 1882, the Governor of Punjab, Sir Charles Aitchison was requested by the Sri Guru Singh Sabha to introduce Gurmukhi Punjabi as the medium of instruction for the Sikh students. To which Sir Aitchison responded that enforcing Gurmukhi Punjabi would not serve any professional goal in future. At that time, the British recommended Urdu as the medium of instruction for the Sikhs, who believed that it was detrimental to progress without learning Urdu in Punjab (Rahman, 2017).

The transition from Urdu to English as the medium of instruction in Punjab, intended to provide better opportunities in future has proven egregious for disadvantaged children who even struggle to converse in Urdu. Language, in contemporary Pakistan, because of colonization, is also a class issue where Punjabi does not stand a chance (Bashir, 2017). Children belonging to middle-class, converse in Urdu while children forced into child labour openly converse in Punjabi, who have not internalized Punjabi-Urdu stigma. Parents and grandparents ensure that their children speak Urdu or English instead of Punjabi, as the act of speaking Punjabi is viewed as a cultural taboo, burdened with shame, and perceived as vulgar (Zaidi, 2010). Punjabi parents make sure that their children learn the languages of power and knowledge. The subjugation of Punjabi begins from family first which later becomes the communal psyche of natives. In social spheres, children conversing in Punjabi is assumed as bad parenting. The association of the Punjabis with the state infrastructure mainly

civil-military bureaucracy and carving a wider national identity often results in allegations against Punjabis for coercion of authority and manipulation of resources at the expense of other provinces. Therefore, Punjabis are often made to feel ashamed of their heritage to mitigate devised ethnic guilt.

Despite Punjabi being the predominant language spoken in the country since 1971, the national language has remained Urdu. Conversely, Urdu is spoken by 7 to 8 percent of the population in Karachi and Hyderabad, predominantly by Urdu speaking Muhajirs (Daily Industry, 2022). Despite its native speakers holding on to the major share in power and resources, Punjabi faces solitude in one's own abode (Ayres, 2008). Pierre Bourdieu's idea of linguistic capital emphasizes that people often tend to use their language, similar lineage, or culture as a mean to gain material interests (Bourdieu, 1977). Punjabis are guilty of the same, where Punjabis use Punjabi identity – language or caste as small favors economy (Rahman, 2017).

A fundamental element of the discussion concerning Punjabi identity is whether it aligns with separatist tendencies, as expressed in ethno-nationalist movements in KPK or Sindh in past or resurgence in Balochistan. They do not claim to be part of the imagined Khalistan. The contemporary voices of Punjabi discourse are based on the spiritual revival – vernacular and ancient to modern history – which often collides with the imagined identity of Muslims with the neighboring regions as many invaders from neighboring regions happened to be Muslims and defenders along with Punjabi Muslims happened to be Sikhs. The Punjabi discourse is not instrumental in nature as Punjabis are economically secure in Pakistan due to their size – resources and demographics. People of Punjab are aware of the situation their language and cultural identity are in (Mansoor, 1993). Urban dialects are gradually incorporating Urdu grammar, resulting in loss of standardization. Those who use original Punjabi vernacular are often labelled as speaking the Punjabi of Sikhs or it is associated with them (Rehman, 2002).

Resilience of Punjabi Language

It is crucial to recognize that the Punjabi language and its various dialects have endured among rural Punjabis, historical Punjabi nomadic, or lower-class communities known as *Marasi*, *Chachi*, *Changar*, or *Pakhiwaal*. Punjabi has sustained in rural settings as these places are yet to be exposed to metropolitans where expectations to assimilate are for instrumental reasons. The lower-class/nomadic groups have not only retained their language but also clung to native cultural practices (S. Ahmed et al., 2022). Punjabis have strong affiliation with their language in their inner domain, predominantly. It is a language

spoken at homes and intimate sittings. People can better express themselves and communicate. At a Punjabi Sangat Convention, Faiz Ahmed Faiz reiterated that only Punjabi could be a true expression for Punjabis. Many young Punjabis find both Urdu and Punjabi as a medium of expression instead of English still today. Urdu has become their formal mean of expression while Punjabi is their intimate or aesthetic expression.

The endorsement of Urdu over Punjabi was not solely a colonial convenience for the officials; instead, it served as a reminder of the Sikh Raj. The colonial bias, which viewed Punjabi as the language of villagers, thrived (Singh, 2012). Despite being deprived of print, education, and administration, Punjabi became a viable language. The vitality of a language impacts language behaviors (Fishman, 1972), and these behaviors reshape and redesign the same language and culture accordingly with conventions. Could this be an indication that the vitality of Punjabi did not fail to influence informal outer domains among Punjabi speakers?

Findings

- The unexpressed reason of Punjabis compromising on their language or ethnic identity is deeply rooted in the colonial bias, traumatic memories of violence that erupted during the Urdu-Hindi Controversy 1867 and the Partition of Punjab 1947.
- When it is said that some divisions of colonial Punjab preferred Urdu or Persian, it's imperative to reflect the convenience and bias of British officials instead of Punjabis. When local administrative staff showed an understanding of Urdu in Lahore, Jhang, or Gujrat divisions, it does not suggest that the people of these divisions were willing to opt for Urdu or understood it. Rather a vast number of North Indians might be working there. The British-recruited administrative staff did not reflect the locals who only conversed in Punjabi with regional dialects.
- The perceived status of Punjabi as language of illiterates is an extension of the colonizers who view native languages, discourses, system of governance as outdated and primitive.
- The slogan “*Punjabi Ko Izzat Du*” needs to be addressed by Punjabi populace itself. To preserve and reimagine Punjabi identity, both Muslim (Sufism) and Pakistani nationalism can be placed in cognizance with ethnic identity going back to centuries. Reimagination of Punjabi identity manifested in Sufism can also address religious polarization in the province. Pakistan can

instrumentalize the “Political Punjabi” identity to achieve neighboring strategic interests manifested in Khalsa identity.

- Parents cannot be blamed for keeping their children from learning Punjabi, as the existing system does not accommodate Punjabi-speaking students. Often parents, who discourage their children from speaking Punjabi is not due to their negative perception of the language but rather because of the societal stigma associated with it. Additionally, Punjabi holds no academic incentive for children at school level.
- The imminent threat to Punjabi is the gradual loss of organic lexicon and vocabulary. Considering the fact, many Punjabis cannot read or write yet understand Punjabi, it is necessary to emphasize on oral telling of Punjabi folklores. Punjabis fully embrace their culture within their inner domains. The fact that Punjabi remains the most widely spoken language in Pakistan is evident that Punjabi children, regardless of their demographics, continue to speak it. However, the graph is gradually going down.
- Education and television dramas are a potent medium to reshape, rewrite, and reintroduce their forgotten past, presenting stances that show required national values, interests, and identities. By cautiously crafting storylines and characters, shows can magnificently impact perceptive public views towards the concealed history. This powerful medium of art has the strength to redesign and reinterpret history. It allows nations to address past traumas, reflect heroic actions, and garner a sense of national pride and dignity. In Pakistan, leveraging entertainment industry to revisit Punjab’s history offers an insight to reconnect people with their lost heritage, linguistic roots, and folklores. By portraying historical events such as wars or celebrations, heroic figures, and cultural values can evoke a sense of déjà vu and appreciation for Punjab’s historical contributions against foreign invasions, be it ancient Assyrians, Afghans, or English. It can also show how people of this mother region lived in ancient times and interacted with the world.
- Art is not a mere need for aesthetic sense but rather a modern weapon to save its national interests. Through concerted efforts to produce organic content, Pakistan can garner the everlasting power of television to protect and reinvent Punjabi language and past, fostering an understanding and appreciation of its forever green cultural magnificence. This can not only educate and entertain the

masses but also contributes to the preservation and celebration of Punjab's ancient heritage for present and future generations to marvel at.

Conclusion

The influence colonials had over the means of knowledge and representation prevails today as a weapon. It has severed the connection of language or culture between generations before and after colonization of entire Punjabi demographics across the divides. Different languages and cultures are perceived differently to foreigners, as loud and polite, civilized or less civilized based on their internalized fears and biases. The transition of Punjabi scripts from Aramaic to Brahmi and then Gurmukhi to Shahmukhi exhibits the innate human trait of pragmatic considerations to avoid conflict or disadvantage.

The colonial stigma attached to Punjabi has penetrated the inner domains and has not left since then. It is an unfortunate development that an entire race with diverse groups and sub-groups covering demographics and geo-economics have internalized shame and neo-colonial manipulation into thinking they do not belong to the lands of their ancestors and should not speak the language which defines their rich growth – archeology and scripture.

Ethnic nationalism, which initially sought to make Bengali the national language, was alive in the memory of the Pakistani state, that is why, there was opposition to making any ethnic language the official language. The altered manifestation of Punjabi identity is predominantly observed within the middle and upper economic strata, characterized by a heightened emphasis on modern institutions such as education and government. Conversely, the lower-class Punjabis, receiving less challenges to strive in modern fields have upheld their identity, exclusively.

The predominance of Punjabi language in Pakistan refutes the very popular belief that all Punjabis place their language in low regards. Punjabis have not forsaken their language; rather, they have chosen to educate their children in system unlike some who have internalized shame. If indeed all Punjabis disregarded their language, then Punjabi would have likely ceased to exist over 150-year timeframe. Despite not receiving support in Pakistan, Punjabi is still spoken and sung in thirty dialects. Does this resilience suggest that it is a robust language and culture capable of withstanding further challenges?

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