

Language, Preservation and Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of Sindhi Community in India

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Abstract

After the Partition of India, researchers have frequently dismissed the Sindhi language in India, attributing its decline to perceived linguistic corruption, diminishing areas of usage, and a decline in its written form. This study provides the detailed vision and the assimilation that is taking place, as well as internal and external forces that tend to prevent the use of the mother tongue and the influence of the mother tongue. This article advocates for a new approach to understanding the trajectory of Sindhi in post-Partition India in order to address this apparent contradiction. It employs a language-ecological standpoint and examines significant sociolinguistic shifts in Indian Sindhi over the years. This research proposes to delve into preserving the Sindhi language which is engulfed by the issues of modernity and globalization. Also, this paper will try to shed light on the importance of language preservation and strategies employed by the Sindhi community to preserve their language culture for future generations within the broader context of the extensive cultural heritage of India.

Keywords: Sindhi community, language, culture, preservation, young generation

Introduction

The Sindhi language arrived in India alongside Sindhi immigrants, who previously primarily resided in Pakistan's Sindh province. Previous studies on the language habits of Sindh communities in India conducted by Khubchandani (1963ⁱ, 1998ⁱⁱ), Daswani and Parchani 1978ⁱⁱⁱ; Daswani 1985^{iv}, Iyengar and Parchani 2021^v strongly indicate that there are gradual intergenerational changes in the language heritage of Sindh in cities, many of which have already adopted Hindi or English as the mother tongue. However, most of the literature related to this change is based on empirical data and does not actively explore the mindset of Sindhis who have undergone hereditary language changes. Over 31 lakh people in India speak Sindhi as their mother tongue, according to the 2001 Indian Census. Now, it is witnessed that many native Sindhis in India do not identify as speaking Sindhi as their mother tongue. Since there isn't a

single area in the nation where Sindhis are spoken, they are dispersed throughout it and choose various languages for interacting with locals. No matter how many people speak Sindhi in reality, very few Sindhis in India obtain their education in the language. Despite being declared a scheduled language; Sindhi is not taught in many schools across the nation. There needs to be more efforts in encouraging young generation Sindhis to select the language of reading and writing.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The study aims to assess the status of language transfer and maintenance among young Sindhi speakers living in urban environments. It further aims to study the importance of language preservation and strategies employed by the Sindhi community to preserve their language culture for future generations within the broader context of the extensive cultural heritage of India.

Research Problems

The impact of the partition of India in 1947 had far-reaching consequences for various communities, including the Sindhi community. The sudden divisions and migration affect the functional load of Sindhi language use and these factors contributed to the decrease in Sindhi language use outside the home. The emergence of English and Hindi impacted the linguistic landscape within the Sindhi community. They also observed that English or Hindi was not only replacing Sindhi in reading and writing, but was also replacing Sindhi in interpersonal communication between some parts of the elite of the community, when English and Hindi began to emerge to replace the young Sindhi. This has caused Sindhi speakers to even use these languages for internal communication within the community instead of their mother tongue.

Research Questions

1. How did the concentration of Sindhi speakers in specific areas influence language use and preservation?
2. Were there variations in language practices based on age, education, or social status?
3. How did the community respond to the challenges posed by language shift?
4. What efforts were made to preserve Sindhi culture and traditions despite the changing linguistic landscape?
5. Did the pride associated with Hindi and English loan words impact internal communication within the community?

Sindhi Diaspora: Navigating Immigration and Language Dynamics

Following India's partition in 1947, a considerable number of Hindu refugees from Pakistan's Punjab and Bengal moved across the Indian portions of those two states, where they found a uniform language and culture. The social and cultural recovery of these linguistic communities was greatly aided by the existence of physical areas in India where Bengali and Punjabi were recognised as native tongues. In contrast to the experiences of Punjabi and Bengali immigrants, Sindhi refugees had a very different fate due to the lack of a geographical area in India where Sindhi language and culture could survive independently. As a result, Sindhi refugees dispersed throughout nearly all of India. Although some small refugee settlements emerged along the way, particularly in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, the majority population in these regions did not speak Sindhi. The fact that they are scattered throughout the whole nation has caused the Sindhi migrants to face several issues, one of which was the use of their native language. The deprivation of one's social structure and culture can cause a painful reaction, as has been described by Eisenbruch (1990^{vi}, 1991^{vii}). Migration requires the loss of the familiar, including values, language (especially colloquial and dialect), social structure, attitudes, and support networks. Mourning for this loss can be seen as a healthy reaction and a natural consequence of migration; however, if the symptoms cause significant unhappiness or impairment and last for a specified period, psychiatric intervention may be warranted.

More than twelve lakh Hindu Sindhis fled across Sindh to India during the Partition. Their want to go was an instinctive move driven by a sense of helplessness, uncertainty about their situation, and difficulty about what had unfolded. Over two years passed during the ceaseless migration, which began in September or October 1947. The decades-long process of migration to India is still ongoing, with a steady stream of Sindhi Hindus entering the country every day. During the first few years, many families felt compelled to leave the country of their ancestors even though they had no idea where they were heading or what lay ahead for them. Individuals travelled via plane, rail, sea, and road. According to Thakur (1959)^{viii}, they frequently travelled in big groups inside neighbourhoods because they believed that there was security due to the numbers. After arriving in India, they faced numerous difficulties, including the lack of a province or region where they could live as a cohesive community. The majority of families struggled to find sources of income and they were first housed in "Refugee Camps,"

which were established by the federal and provincial administrations. Numerous families relocated from one refugee community to another in pursuit of employment opportunities, to locate missing family members, or just with the expectation that life would be better somewhere else. Nevertheless, the hopelessness gave way to fortitude, bravery, and a will to rectify the injustice that fate had dealt them.

The struggles faced by the Sindhi minority in India are widely known and documented in a wide range of official records and creative works. This paper does not aim to narrate the struggles, hardships, or unrest that a Sindhi community encountered during its initial years in India. The community as an entire deserves praise for not submitting docilely to the harsh fate. The community rebuilt their lives in their new adoptive homes, rising from the ashes of physical uprooting and financial deprivation like the mythological phoenix. It is commonly known that no Sindhi ever caught anyone begging or seeking assistance during those early days. Instead of losing their motherland, Sindh, the migrant people in India found comfort in a more diverse cultural environment.

Numerous people and organisations worked towards the social, cultural, educational, and religious restoration of the town simultaneously discovering new employment opportunities for the migrant Sindh communities in India. Many schools in Sindhi were established, particularly in areas with large Sindhi settlements, despite the community's need to adjust to the new social and educational arrangements in the local Indian languages. Along with school educators and university dons, several well-known litterateurs and philosophers who had been well-established writers in Sindh dedicated their lives to the community's intellectual and educational rehabilitation.

As the wider Sindhi community across the nation valiantly fought for its survival, writers, social workers, and leaders of the Sindhi community mobilised to spearhead a significant campaign to have Sindhi included as one of the "recognised" languages in the 1950 Indian Constitution. The Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which lists every one of the major Indian languages, does not contain Sindhi, as per the failure of the Constituent Assembly which created the document. Sindhi was eventually included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian

Constitution in 1967 after a twenty-year battle. Daswani (1979)^{ix} provides a comprehensive overview of the movement for the recognition of Sindhi in his scholarly work.

After gaining independence, Sindhis put a lot of effort into the first twenty years of the language's preservation and advancement. However, as soon as their request to have the language included in the constitution was granted, a sense of exhaustion set in, and the community began to focus more on their economic survival and rebirth. They permitted the utilisation of Hindi or English even mutilated versions within their borders due to dubious beliefs and perceptions. As a result, their second generation started to distance itself from the community of which they were a part, in addition to losing the delicacy of their mother tongue, Sindhi. Schools that taught Sindhi gradually closed their doors, and those that had previously allowed students to take the language as an elective eliminated Sindhi from their curriculum. Instead of speaking Sindhi with their wards, the very individuals who spearheaded the movement to provide the language constitutional rights encouraged younger generations to learn and speak foreign languages. They once had dreams of returning to Sindh and vowed to sacrifice their life for the sake of their home tongue, Sindhi. However, eventually, they began to discount the notion that the Sindhi language could ever be saved. This prediction of destiny has come to pass, and it can be seen in every state in India. The Sindhis of every state have assimilated and employed local vocabulary to such an extent that they are unable to understand the Sindhi language in a different state. To comprehend the meaning of the Sindhi language used in that state, one has to consult the local language dictionary. This unfortunate condition of affairs cannot be entirely attributed to younger generation; rather, the entire fault must rest with the older generation, who, feared their economic collapse and thus forced the younger generation to adopt English or local languages. Some of the known famous Sindhi writers projected throughout the 1970s feared the language as a whole would not survive for more than ten years. They used to complain loudly and in public about the status of the Sindhi language declining, but they blamed others for it. It has been observed in few of the cases that the participants have no language proficiency in any of the four skills of a language; hence their mother tongue is at the language loss stage. This is determined by Ali (2015)^x; however, due to the limited scope of the study, language skills cannot be explored. Although David, (2001)^{xi} used native pronunciation instructions and reported jokes and idioms as parameters to judge changes in the language.

Sindhi Heritage: Safeguarding Language for Future Generations

The history of languages all over the globe teaches us that a language requires a long time to spread over the world and is also difficult to eradicate. Languages have always changed over time. But, given how quickly conventional languages are vanishing and how few seem to be emerging in their stead, the rate of change currently underway is unprecedented. There are about 6000 languages around the world, of which it is currently believed that more than 50% are endangered; only 4% of people speak more than 96% of these languages; and one language disappears every two weeks on average. One such language that is on the endangered list is Sindhi, particularly in India.

Geographically speaking, Sindhi is a native of Sindh, a region of Pakistan. However, a significant portion of the general population speaks Sindhi in India as well, where the Indian Constitution recognizes it. While Sindhi is heavily Urduized in its home country of Pakistan, it is losing its vibrancy and brilliance in India as a result of the dispersed position of Sindhis, an absence of options to learn the language in Devnagiri (Hindi) or Arabic script, and the tendency to incorporate local slang into everyday conversations, which is made worse by reluctance to speak the language at home. These unmistakable indicators indicate Sindhi's demise in India.^{xii}

The language's decline even in domains where it was once secure like cultural practices in the home and the preference of younger generations to speak other languages as well as parents failing to teach their children Sindhi are further indicators that the language is endangered (Iyengar and Parchani 2021)^{xiii}. Geographic isolation is also no longer a useful barrier (as well as in the case of Sindhi in Pakistan), considering the impact and extraordinary reach of global communications, which are further exacerbated by the flood of Indian migrants. It is said in context of language that it "embodies the intellectual wealth of the people that speak it." Considering the obvious connection between a person's sense of value, culture, and language, the loss of Sindhi in India is grave. It is like injecting a fatal virus into a culture when a language is lost. There has been an odd occurrence wherein the younger generation had asked their elders, who they were, more than fifty years after they were born. Who were they? The criteria for

defining a native language are the number of functions it performs, the level of ability, the speaker's self-identity, and others' identification with them as a group (Kangas, 2008)^{xiv}.

A beam of light appears to be indicating the closure of a gloomy tunnel. Compared to Indian Sindhis, Non-Resident Sindhis are more devoted to their language. New advances in science and technology were also very beneficial. The internet and computer use contributed to the Sindhi language's comeback. The development of computer-aided Sindhi writing and software more than made up for the loss of treadling composers of the language. Sindhi Sammelans are currently being held at a local, national, and even international scale. To a significant extent, digital media has also benefited the Sindhi communities. The introduction of the Sindhi language, music, theatre, and other elements into each Sindhi household worldwide has been made possible by the satellite broadcasting of Sindhi programming on TV stations.

Minority-run institutions were allowed to set aside 50% of their earnings towards their local communities during the 1980s. After restricting its operations to education in schools until 1992; the University of Mumbai's Sindhi Department began to support research initiatives in the year 1994. Numerous students have since finished various M. Phil. and doctoral studies in Sindhi literature. Regardless of whether someone is present or not, this procession shouldn't halt. They now published Sindhi novels internally. Due to their lack of even elementary knowledge of their home tongue, they have established short-term certificates, and diplomas, including advanced Diploma training programs in Sindhi for the people from cosmopolitan Mumbai. To provide various courses on their platform, they have also contacted other institutions. Taking inspiration from what Sindhi communities are doing, the Department of Sindhi at the University of Mumbai and the National Council for Promotion of Sindhi Language (NCPSSL), which was founded by the Indian central government, provided the same courses via correspondence across the country. Despite having a small budget, the University of Mumbai's Sindhi Department hosted several national and international seminars that gave writers from Pakistan and India a single platform. The fact that the NCPSSL organized events like sammelans and music performances for writers and performers from both nations is a source of tremendous delight. Indian writers have also begun to travel to Sindh. These actions have made India's Sindhi language environment

extremely beneficial. It is possible to form a worldwide association and implement certain measures which are aimed at the conservation and advancement of the Sindhi language.

Result

The target population of this study is only the third generation Sindhi speakers. Various factors contributing to language change have been observed. The primary research interest lies in understanding how attitudes evolve, which involves in-depth analysis. A new research stage will integrate ideology and attitude, particularly examining conflicts between ideology and the mother tongue.

1. In different settings, what are the language choices of the young Sindhi language users and the factors leading to these choices?
2. What is the status of language transfer and maintenance of young Sindhi speakers in urban areas?

These findings could provide opportunities for language policy makers to redesign education policies and promote the mother tongue. The attention garnered by this research encourages Sindhi speakers to actively preserve their language in urban contexts. Minority language users and researchers should advocate for and safeguard their historical language. Introducing mother tongue education is crucial and community-level awareness programs can play a significant role. In addition, at the community level, native speakers must introduce different awareness programs to maintain their traditional language. Longitudinal studies within the city can provide further insights into language dynamics.

Conclusion

India's Sindhi community has left its imprint in a variety of fields, including fine arts, commerce, education, industry, cinema, and health. Encouraging and making sure the Sindhi language is used in every Sindhi household is currently the most important demand for Sindhis. Additionally, it should be ensured that Sindhi children choose to study Sindhi as an alternative. In this approach, one might expect that Sindhi children would seek to preserve and promote their origins and roots instead of forgetting them. As regularly as possible, they should converse in Sindhi with their family members and relatives. One needs to make sure that Indian Sindhis, especially the younger generations, speak the language regularly for it to survive. If the Sindhis

want to continue existing as a unique community, they have to make it feasible for their youngsters to read in their native language. Although Parchani (1998)^{xv} has shown that in the past years, there has indeed been a renewed interest in the language and culture of the community, the question remains what specific steps can be taken to maintain the language among the members of the community? Perceiving your language is not unpopular, but unnecessary.

Endnotes:

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