

## PRESERVING THE ENDANGERED: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF DOCUMENTATION OF POTOHARI/PAHARI, A LANGUAGE OF WESTERN PUNJAB AND KASHMIR

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### Abstract

*The Potohar region has always been a center of social and economic activities, especially during the British era. It was considered a garrison region due to its high representation in the British Indian Army. The region's language, called Potohari, is mainly spoken in the tehsils of Rawalpindi District and some parts of Azad Kashmir. Potohari is a unique dialect of the Punjabi language, but unfortunately, due to neglect at the national level, it may be included among the endangered dialects of Punjabi. Initially, critics were adamant about not recognizing Potohari as a distinct dialect with its own folklore, and little was done to document the rich literature of the Potohar region. After the partition of India, Rawalpindi became an economic hub, attracting people from all over Pakistan for work and other engagements. Consequently, the dialect spoken in the main cities gradually became an amalgamation of different languages and dialects of Punjabi. Locals in their efforts to communicate with outsiders started using a more orthodox Punjabi dialect for the ease of listeners. This shift greatly affected Potohari, which is now primarily spoken in villages and outlying areas. With the rise in urban migration, this vulnerable dialect faces extinction and is in dire need of preservation. A mixed method approach with both descriptive and analytical methods is used to provide a clear understanding of the current status of the endangered language.*

**Keywords:** *Potohar Region, Potohari Culture and Folklore, Vulnerable Dialect, Preservation*

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## Introduction

Nations globally celebrate 21<sup>st</sup> February as International Mother Language Day, as initiated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1999 to honor linguistic diversity. Ironically, these calibrations are commemorated in memories of the demonstrations on 21<sup>st</sup> February, 1952 by the East Pakistan Bengal students in order to pressurize the central government to accept the Bangla language as one of the national languages of Pakistan along with Urdu.<sup>1</sup>

Urdu has enjoyed its position as a bonding force amongst the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent as it also originated in that part of the world. It is a mixture of different vernacular languages and was coined by the Muslim invaders to communicate within the Islamic army consisting of Arabs, Turks and Afghans and also with different sections of indigenous societies of India with Hindi written in Devnagri script as their local language.<sup>2</sup> Since its inception the Muslim elite got themselves glued with the very idea of protecting their most precious communication asset i.e., the Urdu language. With the downfall of the Muslim rule in India, the *Muslimani*<sup>3</sup> language also had to share the consequences, and it felt vulnerable against the advances of a dominating Hindi Language. There were campaigns in the past where Muslims from all parts of the sub-continent fought together for the protection and preservation of their beloved language.<sup>4</sup> During the testing times of Urdu-Hindi Controversy (1867), Muslims from diverse backgrounds and origins were united to

<sup>1</sup> A 'Language Martyr Day' or the *Ekushe* (the 21<sup>st</sup>) is celebrated every year in Bangladesh since 1953. The day marks the resistance of the Bengali speaking people of the East Pakistan against the West Pakistani political leaders who were adamant to declare Urdu as the only national language of Pakistan despite the fact that 56% population of Pakistan spoke Bangla as their mother tongue. For details see, Md Mijanur Rahman, "Linguistic diversity and social justice in (Bangla)desh: a socio-historical and language ideological perspective", *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, May 2019, 41:4, pp.289-304.

<sup>2</sup> Waaz Laal. *Urdu Zuban ki Tarikh*. Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1920, 17-38.

<sup>3</sup> H. Spencer, "Musalmanni Vernacular Gospels Used in India," *The Bible Translator* 4, no. 4 (1953): 12-165.

<sup>4</sup> The Times of India, October 9, 1936, "The Urdu-Hindi Controversy: Mr. Gandhi's View"; Belkacem Belmekki, "The Urdu-Hindi Language Controversy," in *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and the Muslim Cause in India*, vol. 292 (Germany: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2010); Karan Singh Chauhan, "Role of Devnagari and Persian Script in Hindi-Urdu Controversy: A Historical Perspective," *Indian Studies* 16, no. 2 (Karian Indian Society, 2011): 259-279; Christopher King, "The Hindi-Urdu Controversy of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh and Communal Consciousness," *Journal of South Asian Literature* 13 (East Lansing: Asian Study Centre, n.d.): 111-120.

protect their language. India and Bangladesh had problems with the Urdu language in the past but are now running institutions and producing material to protect the same language.

Urdu also enjoyed good reception in Pakistan after independence as it came with the Urdu speaking migrants from Delhi and adjoining areas. These Urdu speaking migrants were considered cultured and well-educated by both the ruling elites and the masses in general. Apart from Urdu, there are four major provincial languages, including Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, and Balochi, along with regional languages such as Saraiki, Kashmiri, Hindco, Brahvi, Burushaski etc. Now these regional languages have further dialects, like Punjabi has different dialects across the international borders of former united Punjab. One of the Punjabi dialect is called Potohari/Pahari, which is spoken in the Potohar plateau starting from Attock to Jhelum and towards the northern parts of Kashmir, especially Kotli, Sehensa, Sarsawa, etc. Potohari has sub-dialects too mainly associated with the area. Like the Potohari spoken in Gujar Khan is regarded as an unadulterated dialect and is somewhat different from the Potohari spoken in Rawalpindi city with adjoining suburbs. The Potohari spoken in the hilly areas like Murree and Kashmir is termed as Pahari Potohari.

Potohar has always been an important region throughout the history of the Punjab, but unfortunately, hardly any academic work is conducted to protect the rich linguistic culture of the region. Before the partition of India, it was a multi-religious and multi-cultural land. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and other communities used to live together under the umbrella of a vibrant Potohari culture. The land has produced quite a substantial number of artists, thinkers and poets such as, Mian Muhammad Bukhsh, Inder Kumar Gujral, Dr. Manmohan Singh, Kartar Singh Duggal, Akhtar Imam Rizvi, Balraj Sahni, Syed Al-e-Imran, Arshad Chahal, Ahmad Habib, Sunial Dutt, Gulzar, etc. Potohar has a very young history of folklore and vernacular literature. Earlier, those who wrote in Potohari were not originally from Potohar, which was quite easy for a Potohar-born reader to notice.

## Literature Review

After the creation of Pakistan in 1947 people like Baqi Siddiqi and Afzal Pervaiz who had witnessed the growth of Urdu language in that era, felt the need to protect their mother tongue, Potohari. Baqi Siddiqi's '*Katchay Garay*'<sup>5</sup> is considered to be the first collection of Potohari poetry published in 1967. His most famous poem being the 'Azadi'(Freedom).

*Uchiayan Kandhan*  
*Dak na Sakan*

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<sup>5</sup> Baqi Siddiqui, *Kachay Gharry* (Rawalpindi: Rumail House of Publications, 2019).

*Phullan ni Khushbu**(Towering walls cannot stop the fragrance of the flowers)*

Afzal Parvez was a multifaceted, excelling as a poet, journalist, critic, and musician. His collection '*Kikran di Chann*'<sup>6</sup> was published in 1971. Sultan Zahoor Akhtar also published '*Dongay Sumander*'<sup>7</sup> in 1980 that represented the Potohari Dohay,<sup>8</sup> Bait,<sup>9</sup> Jugni,<sup>10</sup> Sammi<sup>11</sup> and Kikli.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Afzal Parvez, "Kikraan ni Chann," (Islamabad, 1971)

<sup>7</sup> Sultan Zahoor Akhtar, *Dongay Sumander* (Rawalpindi: Mrasim Publishers, 2008)

<sup>8</sup> A Doha is a couplet consisting of two lines.

<sup>9</sup> Bait or Sherkhwani is an old folk singing tradition in Potohar. It is usually contested between two artists usually at festivals or weddings. The contest is called Bait Bazi. The participants are supposed to outsmart the other by singing in extempore in response to the satire initiated by the other. It is a kind of a modern day rap competition.

<sup>10</sup> According to the Punjabi encyclopedia *Mahan Kosh* (1930) by Kahn Singh Nabha relates Jugni with a Punjabi jewel worn by women around the neck. This ornament is believed to be derived from the Muslim *Tasbih* or the praying beads which over the time was assimilated to Punjabi fashion. It is, hence believed that the Jugni was used by many Punjabi poets to describe the women who wore the jewel. British writer John T. Plates in *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English* (London: Crosby Lockwood and Son, 1911) argues that Jugni is likely to be a corrupt form of Jugno (a fire-fly), therefore, used by poets to describe the mystical nature of certain individuals.

Another theory suggest that the word Jugni is associated with two folk singers Manda and Bishna from Majha region of Punjab. It is believed that both the artists used to perform at the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the British Raj in India in the year 1908. Being illiterate, it was difficult for them to pronounce Jubilee so they started quoting Jugni instead of Jubilee when they sing in the celebrations. They were quite skeptical in their narration and they used to highlight the plight of the natives under British Raj. The ruling elite was unfamiliar with Punjab language therefore could not understand the feelings portrayed in the lyrics. Soon the British somehow manage to understand the hidden critique and banned the performance. However, the artists did not take the orders seriously as they were pulling large crowds while performing Jugni. Ultimately they were arrested and were allegedly killed and buried in an unknown graveyard. So the "Jugni" at times is portrayed as voice of the revolutionary martyrs of Punjabi folklore. In Pakistan the folk singer Alam Lohar treated Jugni as a spiritual connection and he is considered primarily by his family as someone who had coined the word Jugni after having inspiration from Sufi teaching of Hazrat Baba Bullay Shah. When Jugni reached Potohar, "Meri Jugni" gave way to 'Mahdi Jugni' and is sung on festivals and weddings.

<sup>11</sup> Sammi is a Punjabi dance variation from the Sandal Bar Area which lies between the Chenab and Ravi in Punjab, Pakistan. Gujranwala, Sialkot, Faisalabad, Shekhupura, Muridkay, Hafizabad and Toba Tek Singh are some of the major cities of Sandal Bar area. It is most popular in the Amritsar, Sandal Bar and Potohar regions of Punjab. This dance form has slow and

Dilpazeer Shaad published his poetry collection '*Saanjay Saik*'<sup>13</sup> in 1978. He also published '*Wailay ni Akh*'<sup>14</sup> in 1999. Abdul Qadir Qadri also contributed by publishing '*Wasnanh Potohar*'<sup>15</sup>

Apart from these, some contemporary poets have also published in Potohari which included Sheraz Tahir's '*Bang Bang Zanjeer*'<sup>16</sup> Al-e-Imran's '*Path na Phrol*'<sup>17</sup> Mukhtar Azhar Karbalai's '*Harfan naal Dil Bolay*'<sup>18</sup> Sher Zaman Mirza's '*Ashq Ramzah*'<sup>19</sup> Mumtaz Hussain Awan Tajpuri's '*Oh Pai Jandi Ay*'<sup>20</sup> and '*Laho Kashmirian Da*'<sup>21</sup>. The aforementioned well established poets encouraged many new-comers to write and publish in Potohari. These newcomers were Zaigham Javed, Hanif Hanfi, Naseem Taqi Jafri, Ishwaq Badal, Munir Chisti, and Dr. M.S. Parviaz Bhatti etc.

Unlike poetry, the history of Potohari prose is not that old. The first recognized collection of Potohari/Pahari stories, '*Poonch na Sarmad*'<sup>22</sup> was published in 1999 by Ali Adalat, who has recently published another short story collection, '*Taharaan ni Agg*'<sup>23</sup>. Imtiaz Gullyanvi published '*Saddraan na Saik*'<sup>24</sup> in 2022. Another important collection of Potohari

graceful movements and is performed with songs like "Sammi meri Waar, Main Wari" meaning 'Sammi, now it's my turn, I declare my love and offer up my self'. Legend associated with this dance tells us the story of Princess Sammi of Marwad who originally performed this form of dance to express her grief over her separation from Rajkumar Suchkumar of Rajasthan.

<sup>12</sup> Kikkli is a folk dance of Punjab, primarily performed by young girls, usually two by holding hands and twirling each other in circles. Various songs are sung by the participating girls while performing this dance. The popular song associated with this dance is "Kikkli Kaleer Di, Pag Mery Veer Di" meaning that the "Kikkli dance is for the young girls and the turban is for my brother".

<sup>13</sup> Dalpazeer Shaad, *Sanjay Saik* (Rawalpindi: Punjabi Adabi Sanghat, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> Dilpazeer Shaad, *Wailay ni Akh* (Rawalpindi: Potohari Adabi Sanghat, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Abdul Qadir Qadri, *Wasnanh Potohar* (n.d.)

<sup>16</sup> Sheeraz Tahir, *Bung Bung Zanjeer* (Rawalpindi: Sakh Potohari Adabi Board, 2002); Sheeraz Tahir, *Potohari Zuban-o-Adab* (Peshawar: Gandhara Hindko Academy, 2018); Sheeraz Tahir, *Sanhay Mahrian Akhian Nain* (Rawalpindi: PURA Publications, 2018); Sheeraz Tahir, *Nooran* (Gujarkhan: PURA Publications, 2016); Sheeraz Tahir, *Kokalay* (Gujarkhan: PURA Publications, 2015);

<sup>17</sup> Al-e-Imran, *Path na Phrol* (Gujar Khan: Saak Publishers, 2002); Al-e-Imran, *Sadhar* (Rawalpindi: Potohari Language and Cultural Council, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Mukhtar Aazhar Karbaliai, *Harfaan naal Dil Bolay* (Rawalpindi: Saiful Maluk Academy, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Sher Zaman Khan, *Ashq Ramzah* (GujarKhan: Maktaba Mir Kalan Badshah, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> The book could not be located.

<sup>21</sup> The book could not be located.

<sup>22</sup> Ali Adalat, *Poonch na Sarmad* (Rawalpindi: Saif-ul-Malook Academy, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> The book could not be located.

<sup>24</sup> Imtiaz Gullyanvi, *Saddraan na Saik* (Gujarkhan: Sakk Publishers, 2002).

short stories is *'Tara Tara Lou'*,<sup>25</sup> which was jointly written by Amjad Ali Bhatti and Syed Al-e-Imran Naqvi in 2002. The first novel *'Kokan Bair'*<sup>26</sup> was written by Arshad Chahal.

Apart from these poetical and literary works many historians and critics have written about the culture and history of Potohar plateau. The historical books about the region include Aziz Malik's *'Potohar'* (1978) and *'Rawal Dais'*,<sup>27</sup> Karam Haideri's *'Potohari Lok Geet'*, Arif Minhas Raja's *'Tarikh-e-Potohar'* 1978 and two volumes of *'Tareekh-e-Rawalpindi'* in 1982 and 1986. Moreover, *'Wadiy Potohar'*, *'Potohar Ma-o- Saal ky Aianey Main'*, *'Channa thara Chanana'*, *'Potohar k lok Geet'*, and *'Tarekh-e-Gujarkhan'* etc. are notable additions.

Apart from Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) USA that have worked on different dialects of Punjabi, including the Pahari and Potohari language emphasizing the grammatical and colloquial differences and similarities, some local Potohari writers have also worked on the grammar, proverbs, idioms and alphabets of different dialects and accents of Potohari. The first and foremost responsibility of the writers was to capture and write in pure Potohari accent, preserving its unique characteristic and rich heritage. In this context, Sheraz Tahir is one individual hailing from Mandra in Gujarkhan who not only wrote Potohari with such detailed phonetics that any native speaker would vouch that he has written it with such finesse that while reading, one would feel as if they are listening to a native speaker. His collection of prose writing is an evidence to this statement. Apart from Prose, his most valuable work is the development of a Potohari dictionary, i.e. *Sheraz-ul-Lughaat*.<sup>28</sup> Similarly some other local writers started working on the linguistic aspects of the language. These writers include Faisal Irfan, Raja M.Sharif Shad, Yasir Mehmood Kiani, Shahid Latif Hashmi, Qamar Abdullah, M.Saleem Mirza, Shamsa Noreen, Syed Tariq Mehmood, Nouman Razzaq, Sufi Arif Adeeb Kiani, Raja Shahid Rasheed, Shakoor Ahsan, Ali Ahmad Qamar, Adil Sultan Khaki, Akhtar Imam Rizvi, Saqib Imam Rizvi, Muhammad Artasab etc.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Amjad Ali Bhutti and Al-e-Imran, *Tara Tara Lou* (Dina: Prala Publishers, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Arshad Chahal, *Kokan Bair* (Islamabad: Modern Book Depot, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Aziz Malik, *Rawal Dais* (Rawalpindi: Book Centre, 1970); Aziz Malik, *Potohar* (Islamabad: Lok Virsa, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Sheraz Tahir, *Sheraz-ul-Lughaat* (Peshawar: Gandhara Hindko Academy, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Faisal Irfan, *Hoshay* (Rawalpindi: PURRA Publications, 2023); Faisal Irfan, *Parjhat Mahari Anni* (Rawalpindi: PURRA Publications, 2021); Faisal Irfan, *Potohari Akhaan Tey Muhawray* (Gujarkhan: Mukhdooma Ameer Jan Library, 2019); Raja M.Sharif Shad, *Potohari Quaida* (Rawalpindi: Potohari Adabi Board, 2021); Raja M.Sharif Shad, *Sianariyan Naan Kahnaray* (Peshawar: Gandhara Hindko Academy, 2017); Raja M.Sharif Shaad, Kouser Potohari Grammar (Rawalpindi: Pothowari Writers Club, 2020), Raja M. Sharif Shad of

Contributions made by the artists associated with print and electronic media are also very important in keeping alive the dialect and the typical accent of a particular vernacular language. The establishment of Rawalpindi Radio Station in 1950 created new avenues for local Potohari artists such as Akhtar Jafri, Baqi Siddiqui, and Syed Tasaddaq Ejaz etc. They introduced new Potohari programs to be aired from Rawalpindi Radio Station. These programs included, *Garaan ni Wasni*, *Rawal Rawail*, *Doosa* etc. Similarly, on TV, though the local artists had very little airtime to perform their talent because there was only one state Channel PTV catering to all the provinces of Pakistan. But somehow they managed to make their presence felt which helped the literature and folklore of Potohar to reach remote corners of Pakistan. Akhtar Imam Rizvi, with his drama series *Neeli Dhar* and *Utchay Bohay* was instrumental in the reorganisation of Potohari as a language associated with the Potohar plateau.

## Theoretical Framework

The current research require the phonological and grammatical analysis with special consideration to phonemes and other unique

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Gujar Khan translated the Holy Quran into Potohari Language in just four years; Yasir Mehmood Kiani, *Potohari: Zuban-o-Grammar* (Rawalpindi: Qureshi Art and Printing Centre, 2005); Shahid Latif Hashmi, *Goshey* (Rawalpindi: PURRA Publications, 2016); Qamar Mehmood Abdullah, *Sardar (PBUH) Khalqat Nay* (Rawalpindi: PURRA Publications, 2021); Qamar Abdullah, *Sanjahan Wich Tarerain* (Lahore: Idara Punjabi Likharian, 2010); Dilpazeer Shaad, *Kamli Walay Muhammad Habib-e-Khuda* (Rawalpindi: Potohari Adabi Sanghat, 2011); Mirza M. Saleem, *Taropy* (Gujar Khan: Qalam Dost Publications, 2018); Shamsa Noreen, *Phul Choli Nay* (Rawalpindi: Potohari Writers Club, 2020); Syed Tariq Masood, *Tawain Tawain Taray* (Islamabad: Manzil Publications, 2007); Chitka Committeee, *Potohari/Pahari Nah Pahla Quaida* (Jhelun: Prala Publishers, n.d.); Shahid Latif Hashmi, *Daar* (Gujar Khan: PURRA Publications, 2018); Shahid Latif Hashmi, *Gamdand* (Gujarkhan: Pothwari Writers Club, 2021); Nauman Razzaq, *Mitti Mohu Bolni* (Rawalpindi: PURRA Publications, 2018); Sufi Aarif Adeeb Kiani, *Sukkay Tandaay* (Rawalpindi: Majlis-e- Shua, 2003); Raja Shahid Rasheed, *Nukta Nukta Noor* (Rawalpindi: Captain Shabir Shaheed Trust Sohawa, 2013); Shakoor Ahsan, *Peenghan* (Gujarkhan: PURRA, 2017); Shakoor Ahsan, *Kosay Kosay Saah* (Rawalpindi: PURRA Publications, 2019); Ali Ahmad Qamar, *Pachawa* (Islamabad: Inheraf, 2010); Shahid Latif Hashmi, *Humlee* (Gujarkhan: PURRA Publications, 2022); Adil Sultan Khaki, *Lapara* (Gujar Khan: Muzrab Publications, 2023); Al-e-Imran, *Sadhar* (Rawalpindi: Potohari Language and Cultural Council, 2014); M. Saleem Mirza, *Lughay Behray* (Gujar Khan: Kashi Printers, 2020); Akhtar Imam Rizvi, trans. *Pehli Tibbi Imdad* (Rawalpindi: Sanjh, nd.); Saqib Imam Rizvi, *Balney Athrooh* (Rawalpindi: PURRA, 2023); Muhammad Artasab, *Tazkara Potohar: Wajah e Tasmiya Daihat Potohar* (Gujar Khan: Saak Publishers, n.d.).

linguistic features when comparing Potohari/Pahari with other closely related languages or similar dialects. A researcher working on any aspect of any endangered language faces different academic barriers at different stages of his research. The sociolinguistic framework to interpret the finding that why a language is declining cannot be studied with the language endangerment methods every time especially when a vulnerable language is not properly documented.

The documentation of local languages especially when the native speakers have moved out of their villages and have settled into more cosmopolitan cities and town. Potohari suffered the same. The new generation is somewhat cutoff from their roots in search of better educational facilities hence they do not speak their mother tongue more often. The urban migration has played a key role in the decline of Potohari speaking community especially young children.

Not much attention has been given to the language at the national level. Much has been done to propagate Punjabi but somehow Potohari has been neglected in terms of documentation and preservation. The most important medium that has kept the language alive is its folklore; usually the elderly women in a village are the ones who are keeping it alive by playing the role of a poet and a story teller in a rhythmic style. This tends to happen when they fix a day for a wedding lasting from 10 to 20 days. The main segment in the wedding preparation is a series of musical nights where women sing the *Maheya*, *Channa*, *Lamay Gawan*, *Tappa*, *Dhola*, *Thal* and *Kikkli* mostly in a poetic form.<sup>30</sup> The young girls show interest in the

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<sup>30</sup> The word *Maheya* means “My Beloved”. The suburban greater Punjab is considered as the origin of this traditional form of folk poetry. It consists of short verses which are usually recited or sung. It is performed during harvesting season, weddings, festivals and all other kinds of communal events.

In Punjabi language *Channa* means the “moon”. In poetry the term *Channa* is referred to a lover or beloved. It reflects the connotations of emotional attachment and tenderness.

*Lamay* in Punjabi means ‘long or tall’, whereas *Gawan* means songs or storytelling. Therefore, *Lamay Gawan* suggest a poetic composition of a considerable length. It is performed by skilled story tellers and it narrates certain historical events, deeds, sufism or love stories of Punjabi folklore such as ‘*Heer*’ of Waris Shah and *Saif-ul-Malook* of Mian Muhammad Bukhsh. *Lamay* can also be translated as songs of complaints or sorrow.

The Word *Tappa* is derived from the Punjabi word *Tappana*, meaning swinging, jumping and hopping. It is often sung in fast tempo and it consist of short verses known as ‘*bol*’ or ‘*Pauri*’ and they are sung in rapid succession. It is performed by those artists who have the ability to sing at a fast pace while keeping the pronunciations and expressions clear and audible. For more details on *Tappas*, please see, Dr. Ranjana Saxena, ‘*Tappa, it’s Origin and Development: An analytical study*’, *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*, vol.10, issue, 5, 2022.



stories narrated in the folklore and try to memorize the lyrics, but this leisure activity is not enough to protect the endangered language. With the demise of the elderly in the rural localities, there would be hardly anyone to keep the tradition alive.

### **Key Findings**

From 1947 to 1960, the language did manage to survive and developed into a dialect of Punjabi despite the fact that almost all of the non-Muslims who did contribute in its development had to leave for India. The vacuum was filled with the indigenous educated class who started to acquire education after the independence and in order to maintain their separate identity and boast about their glorious past they somehow worked for the survival of their ancestral language. Radio Pakistan Rawalpindi did provide chances to the local Potohari artists to showcase their talent, hence playing their role in the preservation of the Potohari language. There were programs like *Dosa*, *Jamore ni Awaz* etc kept the local audience alive and Potohari became the patent language of the garrison district of Punjab.

Potohari is mainly spoken in the four Tehsils of the Rawalpindi District including, Murree, Kahuta, Rawalpindi City and its suburbs (Present day Islamabad) and Gujar Khan. It was also spoken in certain parts of Kashmir with a slightly different accent from that of the then mainland. Similarly, Potohari, spoken in the four districts of Rawalpindi, did have some accent differences that can only be identified by the locals. The reason for people of Gujar Khan to be considered the guardians of the language is the fact that they have lived there for centuries, and normally, in the village, no outsider is encouraged to buy lands as per the customs of the area. These locals included both Muslims and non-Muslims. Whereas the Potohari spoken in the Rawalpindi city and its suburbs have a few foreign words included. This is due to its demography and economic outfit as being the military headquarters of the British army and an economic hub somewhat apart from the local population. There were many new settlers associated to the army setup or opened up new businesses in the city. These newcomers came with their culture and a whole new vocabulary of words was included in the Potohari dictionary and somehow these new words gradually became part and parcel of the local language.

Whereas the villages of Gujar Khan, Murree, Kahuta, and Kashmir escaped this invasion of foreign words, though the highlanders have a distinctive pitch as compared to the mainlanders. With the establishment of the new capital Islamabad, many Potohari-speaking villages such as Nadala Kalan, Parian, Meda, Chak, Beecho, Dina etc became victims of

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Dhola is referred to a beloved or a darling. It is the main figure of Punjabi romantic poetry where the singers express their love and at times the pain of separation from their beloved. For Kikkli see FN no.12.

development-induced migration. The uprooted locals had to settle in Rawalpindi city and the newly developed 1-9 and I-10 sectors in Islamabad amongst people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The resettled locals in order to effectively communicate with people from different backgrounds had to rely on the national language Urdu or they eventually started communicating in Punjabi rather than pure Potohari for the convenience of their listeners. Earlier, the pre-partitioned government schools such as Danny's, Islamia High School, Milia, and Khalsa High School, later renamed as Muslim High School, where most students and even teachers were from neighboring villages, kept the language alive. At times, the teachers used to communicate in Potohari, which encouraged young students to feel proud of the language of their forefathers. They took ownership of the unique accent and dialect. But with the passage of time and being a part of the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, the Potohari-speaking people gave in and encouraged the shift from the mother tongue to conventional Punjabi, national tongue Urdu, and even English. Surprisingly, the educated parents with strong Potohari background started discouraging their young to speak Potohari outside the premises of their homes.

Now, the youngsters had only one option to learn the language skills of their parents, i.e., through communicating with their grandparents, who were adamant about speaking Potohari or were not familiar with other languages. It is an unfortunate reality that within the next fifty years, there may hardly be any school going children from the Potohar belt, especially from urban areas, who would understand or communicate in the language of their forefathers.

## **Conclusion**

The Potohari is endangered on the same grounds as Urdu was, the dominance of the Hindi language in United India, the only difference being the fact that the Urdu speaking community is not forcing the Potoharis to discourage their new generation from adopting Potohari as their mother tongue. Urdu was lucky in a sense that the Muslims of United India were all out to protect the language because they were recognized by it. Potohari, being a local language, is unfortunately not as fortunate. There have been no serious academic efforts in the past and even now to preserve the rich culture of the Potohari language. Ironically, those who were working for the benefit of the language lack the required skills or have their own vested agendas. There is no institute run by the government to document the alphabets, phrases and folklore of the land. At times, it is hardly included in the local languages of the Punjab. Some hold the view that mentioning the Punjabi language will encompass all the local dialects. There is a dire need to work on war footings to preserve the endangered local language on state level.

Those who are somehow working in a private capacity had different views about the nature of the threat to the language and if so, had their own solutions for that. After a thorough research associated with the issue, one tends to believe that the private school systems have also inflicted damage to the local language where the students are forbidden to speak in their mother tongue. The government should come up with such a strict policy that the schools should be made to run short courses in the respective local languages. The Ministry of Culture should ensure that the languages spoken, even in the remote areas with small number of people, should also be protected. Many institutions in foreign countries, such as Summer Institute of Linguistic (SIL), Texas, USA, and the Pothohar Association UK, are working to preserve different dialects of Punjabi, including Potohari.<sup>31</sup> Mr. Chanchal Singh Chowdhry of the Pothohar Association UK is a true guardian of Potohari heritage in the UK. As a native speaker, his dedication brings authenticity and passion, ensuring that future generations can inherit the rich linguistic treasures of Potohar. Despite limited resources, both these organizations annually organize events, seminars, and conferences to provide platforms for writers, artists, sports personalities, politicians, and others to come together for the restoration of their mother tongue. These initiatives have given new generations, especially the Punjabi diaspora around the world, an opportunity to learn about the rich literature of their forefathers, to admire it, and to protect the legacy. Social media has played a pivotal role in the restoration of various facets of the Potohari language and culture. Now, Potohari-speaking people from all over the world can stay in touch with each other and share their knowledge with other linguists for the common cause of preserving this unique Punjabi dialect. In the same vein, the government of Pakistan, particularly the Punjab provincial government should undertake the task of preserving Potohari and other endangered languages, lifting them out of the danger zone.

If we compare Potohari with Urdu as far as the protection of a language is concerned, Urdu enjoyed the status of a national language as

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<sup>31</sup> The Summer Institute of Linguistic (SIL) international was founded by William Cameron Townsend (1896-1982). It began operating in 1934 as a summer training program in Arkansas USA with only two students. In 1953 they started language development work in Asia. In 1980s, the SIL teams surveyed the languages of northern Pakistan with the collaboration of the Ministry of Culture and was facilitated by the Lok Virsa and the National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. By 2000s, they had initiated work on the different dialects of Punjabi, Potohari and Pahari. Their research work on languages can be viewed on their website i.e. [www.sil.org](http://www.sil.org). The Pothohar Association UK was founded in 1970 by five prominent members including Dr. Gurmeet Singh Johar, Mr. Davinder Singh Goomer, Mr. Gurcharan Singh Bakshi, Mr. Surinder Singh Gujral and Mr. Harbans Singh Sethi. Their activities can be viewed on [www.thepothohar.com](http://www.thepothohar.com).

an honor or as a symbol of a certain elite status. Conversely, Potohari was eclipsed by the internally accepted Punjabi, characterized by a certain Lahori or East Punjabi accent and dialect. Resultantly, most Potohari-speaking people started to prefer speaking in the accepted and well-understood Punjabi dialect rather than their own unique Potohari dialect. This shift did not help the local dialect gain recognition alongside other more prominent dialects. But now, thanks to the efforts of some sons of the soil, it has gained recognition as a distinct dialect of the Punjabi language. These individuals included academicians like Dr. Amjad Bhatti and TV and Radio Presenter and poet (Late) Syed Al-e-Imran Naqvi. Due to their efforts, Potohari/Pahari is now taught at higher academic levels at the Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad.<sup>32</sup> Dr. Bhatti has played a significant role in the development of the Potohari curriculum, contributing to the preservation and promotion of this regional language. His efforts have been instrumental in creating an academic framework that integrates Potohari language and literature into formal education. He also actively supports researchers working for the Potohari language and literature, providing guidance and fostering a deeper understanding of the Potohari culture. Syed Al-e-Imran dedicated his life to the documentation, restoration, and propagation of the language through his writings, poetry, and his radio and TV programs in Potohari language both in Pakistan and abroad. His TV programs, like 'Ji Karan' attracted the new generation whose only interaction with the language had been through leisure communication with their elderly grandparents. It is because of the efforts of these individuals that the rich and unique folklore of Potohar is making inroads to the minds and hearts of the future generations who were earlier not familiar or were not encouraged to connect with a very unique language of the Punjab. There are numerous institutions around the world that are working for the conservation of endangered vernacular languages, but in Pakistan, it is not considered as a top priority. The intelligentsia hailing from Potohar is of the view that the most important thing would be to document whatever is available around the world and only then the new generation would be encouraged to speak and feel proud of the language of their ancestors. The government should facilitate the restoration by allocating a special department of local languages in all the public schools and universities where research and conservation work should be done as part of the development of a curriculum. This would eventually create a team of individuals who are well-trained in the field. They should also be provided with employment opportunities so that the endangered languages can be preserved. There are a number of young writers and poets from the Potohari background who have taken up the task of writing prose and poetry in the Potohari language, are initiating research work on the folklore of the Potohar, and are quite vocal for the

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<sup>32</sup> For details see, [www.aiou.edu.pk/m.phil-languages-and-literature](http://www.aiou.edu.pk/m.phil-languages-and-literature).

establishment of linguistic departments and even a public university to specialize in the protection and preservation of endangered local languages such as Potohari. These individuals need encouragement and support from the government.

