

Who are the Punjabis and what is Punjabiya?

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Who are the Punjabis? What is Punjabiya? These are two questions about Punjabi identity which I posed to a number of Punjabi writers and intellectuals. Some very interesting answers were given but to my surprise very few responded. Such odd behavior can only be made sense of from the fact that hardly any other group of people in the Indian Subcontinent represents as many ambiguities and paradoxes as do the Punjabis. Therefore, writing down coherent answers to the two questions mentioned above requires an intellectual discipline and sophistication, which probably some found too demanding. However, there can be another reason also: many people who have earned recognition as Punjabi poets, scholars or intellectuals probably felt they would rather not commit themselves on these two themes.

The reason is the very tortuous and traumatic history of the Punjabis in the 20th century, of the partition of India and of the Punjab (Ahmed 2014). Under the circumstances, the Punjabi identity and identification with different groups and communities in the Punjab poses sensitive political and ideological consequences and not everyone is willing to make his/her standpoint public. Therefore, evading categorization, one way or the other, on Punjabi identity can be a useful strategy to steer clear of controversy and thus, maintain a positive reputation as a Punjabi intellectual. However, before the predicaments of Punjabi identity are reviewed on the basis of the responses, a theoretical discussion on identity is in order.

Identity: Individual and Collective

Human beings act together in groups in pursuit of their collective objectives. Thus, shared identity plays an important role in connecting them to each other. In terms of politics, the study of identity is interesting as it explains how individuals and groups invoke it to justify their claims to power within a state or as a separate nation entitled to independent statehood. The question is, of course, what brings individuals together? Is group formation a voluntary choice or are individuals born into groups and remain in them forever?

In social science literature, one can conventionally locate two contrasting perspectives to group-formation and identification: the primordialist and the instrumentalist. The primordialists argue that ethno-centrism is natural to human beings; individuals have always been grouped together on the basis of shared objective characteristics such as

common descent, skin color, tribe and religion; each group develops a sense of identity and ethnicity as it faces, in different historical contexts, challenges to its survival. Thus, the collective memory of such experiences becomes the reference-point for developing strategies to ensure the security of the group (Geertz, 1963; Shils, 1957).

In contrast, the instrumentalists assert that identity is fluid and easily pliable and therefore contains no permanent boundaries. Rather, competition over power and resources between the élite and élite factions makes élite leaders or political entrepreneurs exploit shared cultural factors to create a new identity in order to mobilize support for their agendas. In the latter view, hence, ethnic identity is merely a construction, a political instrument rather than some objective or intrinsic property of human nature (Brass, 1991).

I shall argue from a middle position which seeks to synthesize these extreme views. Biologically-fixed characteristics are given. These may have no significance, for example, where everyone belongs to the same ethnic type, or, these can carry defining importance where many discrete and distinct groups exist. The Punjabi ethnic pool is quite varied and extends eastwards into northern India. In any case, being a frontier region of the plains, the Punjab received waves of people moving in from the mountain passes in the north-west and south-west of the Indian Subcontinent. The most numerous are the so-called Aryan stock but Scythians, Huns, Mongols, Persians, Turks, Afghans, Arabs and many other minor groups arrived at different periods in history, either as part of invading armies or refugees from famine and hunger from the more rugged and sparse regions of Central Asia and beyond. Then there were the local people conventionally described as the aboriginal proto-Australoids as well as the Dravidians (Ahmed 1998). A revisionist theory popular in India currently is that it was Indians, presumably a majority from the Punjab, who emigrated out of the Subcontinent rather than the so-called Aryans coming from outside. At least one such group did emigrate from the Subcontinent to other parts of the world the Romany people or Gypsies as they were called earlier. It is unclear when they emigrated from the Subcontinent but it was in small numbers down the ages. Their language and genetic roots suggest an origin from and around Punjab and some affinity has been suggested to the large agricultural caste of Jats.

The most obvious description of the Punjabis would be people whose mother tongue is Punjabi. However, that in itself is prone to considerable controversy and dispute with regard to the Punjabi language. An increasing trend among educated Pakistanis is to speak Urdu or English and use Punjabi with grandparents or servants. In India, the Sikhs valiantly hold on to Punjabi as their mother tongue but one learns that Hindi vocabulary and a Sanskritized Punjabi permeate the literature and academic writings in Indian Punjab. Then there are millions of Punjabis,

especially Hindus and Muslims, who live outside the Punjab in other parts of India and Pakistan or outside the Subcontinent. Many do not speak Punjabi but identify themselves on the basis of ancestry and ethnicity. Moreover, linguists inform us that the Punjabi language has a Sanskrit base and it descends from Hindi or Hinduvi but its vocabulary contains Dravidian words and sounds. This is, however, denied by others who assert that the Punjabi language belongs to the Dravidian or rather the Munda group of ancient tongues and is therefore not based on Sanskrit. Another variant of this denial of the Sanskrit root is that Urdu is a developed form of Punjabi and therefore, there is no contradiction in the Punjabis adopting Urdu as their “mother tongue” (Rahman, 2011).

Other objective factors defining group identity are religion, sect and caste. Religious, sectarian and linguistic identities can in principle change while caste ordinarily does not. Though given the constant upheavals, warfare and the concomitant instability in the region considered as the Punjab, changes in caste identity have also been reported throughout history and especially in the census records maintained by the British. However, change of religion, sect and caste usually takes place at the individual level; groups rarely make the transformation from one identity to another.

Theoretically speaking, one needs to bear in mind that both, at the individual and collective or group level identity is multi-dimensional and the context determines which factor is relevant at a given moment in time. Thus, for example, I am a Punjabi who is quite proud to speak Punjabi whenever possible; I am a Sunni by birth and was born in the Arain *biradari* (kinship ties) of Mozang, Lahore. I am a political scientist by education and a Swedish citizen of Pakistani-origin. Someone wanting to categorize speakers of Punjabi together will include me and thus objectify my identity as a Punjabi on that basis. However, others may do it on the basis of my religious affiliation, sect or caste. I may personally have a different idea of who I am and may want others to pay special heed to my self-description as a Punjabi with little interest in creed or sect or caste. Here, then, is a situation in which identity self-defined and other-defined can be in tension and consequently an incongruence arises between the two and so ambiguity about them can occur. Thus, my identity at any given moment in time is defined by context and the situation and is relational.

Equally, group identities are multi-dimensional. For example, the Hindu community can be visualized as an overarching identity under which a plethora of castes and sects are subsumed. Under a real or perceived threat to its existence it is likely to act as one body but in normal circumstances ‘the Hindu community’ is likely to be no more than a convenient description of the sum-total of sub-groups and their activities. The same applies to other religious communities or groups

identified on the basis of language or a more vague term, culture. However, in the recent history of the Punjab, especially that related to the partition of India and the Punjab, the religious identity came to dominate politics. I shall demonstrate that too was relational rather than absolute or constant (Ahmed 2014: 1-19).

The History of the Punjab and its Identity

Contemporary Punjab, divided between India and Pakistan, coincides roughly with areas that in antiquity were known as the *Sapta Sindhu* or the Land of Seven Rivers which included the mighty Indus as well as the now extant Saraswati. Indigenous people comprising tribal as well as village-folk, developed urban communities and waves of people identified as speakers of Dravidian and Aryan languages settled in this region. The Hindu caste system, Islam and Sikhism created their own combination of castes and *biradaris*, thus, creating different configurations. It is conjectured that during the Mughal, era “Punjab” came to mean the land of five rivers and the people who lived in it were identified as speakers of a language called Punjabi, that albeit has several dialects. Outstanding Sufi, Bhakti and Sikh literature has been produced by some of the most outstanding minds that were born and raised in the Punjab. This literature has continued to be recited and quoted down the ages and remains a robustly pulsating source of a counter-narrative to religious extremism and caste oppression. It inspires a dissenting view on spirituality and humanism that is inclusive and tolerant. However, such powerful literature was written in two or three entirely different scripts. As a result, the written word could not be conveyed to those conversant in one script but not in the other. Its medium of dissemination became the spoken word which roving bards and story-tellers went around reciting before rural and urban audiences. Thus, a folksy Punjabi culture can be identified down the ages.

The only genuinely Punjabi kingdom that emerged in this region, before the British annexed it in 1849, was when in 1799 the Sikh chieftain Maharaja Ranjit Singh captured Lahore. Yet he employed Persian as the state language. The Kingdom of Lahore included Lahore and Multan provinces, Kashmir and territories beyond the Attock up to Jamrud near Peshawar. However, Punjabi-speaking princely states such as Patiala and others in the east were not part of his kingdom. The British fixed the boundaries of their Punjab province in 1901, when some districts, mostly Pushto-speaking but also Hindko which was closely related to Punjabi, in the north-west were separated and given to the new North West Frontier Province. They, however, included several princely states in the east as well as Hindi-speaking districts in the east up to the Yamuna River. In 1911, Delhi District was separated from the Punjab. It included both directly administered British areas as well as princely states.

With the arrival of the 20th century, religious revivals took place among the three major communities of the Punjab – the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs – largely in response to Christian missionary activities. As a result, folk or popular religion, in which the boundaries were not clearly marked, began to be supplanted by purified versions of the three religions. Such changes meant that boundaries between them were also sharply drawn. Another trend which appeared concurrently in the census records was that Hindus began to record Hindi as their mother tongue, Muslims Urdu and the Sikhs Punjabi. The fact that Punjabi had historically been written in two or rather three distinct scripts: Persian-Urdu, Gurmukhi and Devanagari, meant that there already was a problem among the literati in the Punjab with regard to communication and intellectual interaction.

In 1947, the Punjab was partitioned between India and Pakistan on the basis of contiguous Muslim and non-Muslim areas. The demand for the partition of the Punjab was made by the Sikhs, who constituted 13-14 percent of its population after Indian Muslims, in their meeting on 23 March, 1940 at Lahore, the capital of the Punjab. The Muslims wanted to retain the Punjab as a united province in Pakistan but this was not acceptable to the Sikhs and Hindus who wanted the same principle of contiguous Muslim and non-Muslim areas to be applied to the Punjab and Bengal. Hence, the Punjab was partitioned along with the rest of India, including the province of Bengal, in mid-August 1947.

The partition of India, Punjab and Bengal resulted altogether in at least a million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs being killed and 14-18 million migrating across the India-Pakistan border, essentially to escape death and injury for having the wrong religious identity: Hindus and Sikhs left for India and Muslims for Pakistan. At that time the total population of India was 400 million. However, the Punjab bore the main brunt of massive acts of inhumanity and barbarity. According to the 1941 census, the total population of the Punjab, including British Punjab and the princely states, was 34.3 million. The Muslims were in an absolute majority of 53.2 percent, Hindus were 29.1 percent, Sikhs 14.9 percent and Christians 1.9 percent. The British Punjab comprised 29 districts with a total population of 28.4 million. The population distribution was as follows: Muslims 57.1 percent; Hindus 27.8 percent; Sikh 13.2 percent and Christians 2.1 percent. Some 500,000 – 800,000 Punjabi Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were killed and 10 million forced to flee for their lives across the international border drawn in the Punjab, which created the Pakistani West Punjab and the Indian East Punjab (Ahmed 2014).

The veteran Indian journalist Rajinder Puri lamented the negative impact of the partition on Punjab in the following words:

After partition the Punjabis disappeared. In West Punjab they became Pakistanis. In East Punjab they became Hindus and Sikhs. They also became Akalis and Congressmen, Arya Samajists and Jan Sanghis. Never Punjabis (Puri 1985: 132).

Pakistani and Indian Punjab

Pakistani Punjab

West Punjab emerged as the most powerful and dominant province in Pakistan comprising two wings: East and West Pakistan with 1500 kilometers of Indian territory in between. After East Pakistan ceded in December 1971 and became Bangladesh, the Pakistani Punjab became, population-wise, the biggest province of Pakistan (48 to 58 percent of the total population of Pakistan, depending on whether Saraiki is considered a separate language or a dialect of Punjabi). Its representation in the military and civil bureaucracy increased and the Punjabis made great gains in the formation of the Pakistani bourgeoisie as well.

However, with regard to the Punjabi language, there was no change in official policy: since 1947, government policy, both central and provincial, has been to discourage literacy in Punjabi; the reason being that the Punjabi intelligentsia was conversant and functional in Urdu as a medium of communication. Such a skill had always been advantageous to the Punjabi power elite in promoting a nationalism that extended to the whole of Pakistan in the name of Urdu, the national language of Pakistan. Consequently, official policy expressly forbids the Punjabi language being used in official correspondence and no worthwhile Punjabi print media exists in Pakistan. It was in 1990 that the speaker of the Punjab Legislative Assembly, Hanif Ramay, allowed speeches to be made in Punjabi in the House but it was discontinued after him (Ahmed 1998: 183-184). More and more Punjabis, especially those who receive some education, speak Urdu, though Punjabi in its various dialects is still the predominant spoken language.

On the other hand, from the 1950s onwards Pakistani Punjabis have clashed on the basis of sectarian differences; in 1947 they acted as one compact Muslim group vis-à-vis Hindus and Sikhs. Sectarian terrorism gained a great boost in the wake of the Iranian-Saudi competition to be leaders of the Muslim world. Both cultivated their sectarian affiliates and from the 1990s onwards Shia-Sunni extremists were involved in several terrorist activities against both leaders as well as completely uninvolved members of each other's groups. Now, since at least the beginning of the 21st century, the Pakistani Punjab faces the prospect of being split on the basis of people in the southern parts of it claiming to speak a different language, Saraiki.

Indian Punjab

The Indian East Punjab was split in 1966 on the demand of the Sikhs and the Hindi-speaking areas were given to Haryana. In the 1980s, the Sikh separatist Khalistan movement emerged. It was masterminded by Sikhs in the diaspora and a fundamentalist preacher, Sant Jarnail Singh Bindrawale. It resulted in a large-scale clash with the might of the Indian state, with at least 80,000 deaths including the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the massacre of at least 4000 Sikhs in and around Delhi. It was crushed by the early 1990s and democracy was restored (Ahmed 1998: 113-136; Deol 2000). Furthermore, the Sikhs clashed on a sectarian basis: the Khalsa majority versus the Nirankaris. Among Punjabi Hindus, the Dalits have all along felt alienated in the Punjab from the mainstream (Ajay Bhardwaj 2007).

From the above sketch one can establish the fact that the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh identities, which during the partition process polarized into the Hindu-Sikh versus Muslim groupings, in the post-partition period went through further subdivisions. In the Pakistani Punjab, sectarian divisions became the basis for tension and conflict, which was compounded by the controversy over Punjabi versus Saraiki. In the Indian Punjab, the Hindu-Sikh alliance proved brittle as the two communities split on the Punjabi *Suba* question and within each community sectarian or caste contradictions served as a basis of conflict.

Punjabiya in a Loose, Sentimental Sense

Indian Punjabis are less than 2 percent of the population of India and include several million who do not live in the Punjab; they are spread all over India. Despite their small numbers, they have a very visible presence in the Bombay film industry and Punjabi songs and tunes are often part of Bollywood blockbusters.

Emigration to other parts of the world from the Punjab started in the 19th century when Punjabis went to Canada, the United States and in very large numbers settled in the United Kingdom and elsewhere as a result of post-World War II migration of mainly unskilled workers to Western Europe (Ahmed 2013: 265-282). They are also found in significant numbers in the Persian Gulf and Southeast Asia.

In spite of all these extraordinary if not unique, even contradictory and clashing characteristics, a sense of Punjabiya or shared cultural identity permeates the lives of Punjabis. Although Pakistani and Indian Punjabis and by that token Hindu and Sikh and even the miniscule minority of Christian Punjabis in the diaspora continue to identify themselves mainly on state-nationalism or religious and sectarian based factors. In recent times, several vigorous Punjabi cultural and social organizations and

movements have emerged in the United States and Canada where an educated Punjabi literati is now settled. Similar efforts are afoot in the UK but the Punjabi language and cultural organizations there are still weak. Are such trends indicative of Punjabiya remaining a constant, even though a weak and vague one, in the emotional makeup and identity of Punjabis? I have a feeling they are. Punjabiya does not exercise such a hold on Punjabis that they can transcend the cleavages of religion but shared culture does create positive emotions whenever they interact. Keeping this background and context in mind we now look at some responses to my two questions: Who are the Punjabis? And, what is Punjabiya?

Dr Alam Sher, PharmD, MBA, USA

Who is a Punjabi and what is Punjabiya (Punjabi culture or Punjabi-ness - Wikipedia) are the two basic questions that need to be answered and explained. The bigger question however is, if a Punjabi can be separated from Punjabiya or vice versa?

In my opinion, there is no argument about who is a Punjabi. Anyone who is born in or has lineage going back to the Punjab, or has adopted the land of five rivers, is a Punjabi. On the other hand, Punjabiya includes much more. Like any other culture, Punjabiya is comprised of traditions, values, religion, diet, attire and last but not least language. Sadly though, the Punjabi culture or Punjabiya has never seen a time when it was attacked and abandoned by its own people as it has been in the last few decades. This commentary will make an attempt to address some of the consequences the Pakistani Punjabis and Punjabiya have suffered since the partition of the Punjab in 1947.

Punjab and Bengal were the only two provinces that underwent a painful division. It was indeed a Punjabi Holocaust that took place in 1947. Some people believe that in 1947, in the name of religious freedom, Pakistani Punjabis were forced to move from British slavery to the Urdu speakers' slavery. The Punjab on both sides has not recovered ever since. After this horrific partition or *vand*, the Pakistani Punjab took a nosedive into the abyss of oblivion as far as Punjabiya is concerned. Since the partition, Pakistani Punjabis have abandoned their culture and are now seriously suffering from an identity crisis. This has caused the biggest denial one can imagine and has also led to very low self-esteem among Pakistani Punjabis. They have been brainwashed to believe that only religion is their culture, thus, the obligatory Arabization of all aspects of their lives is presently being enforced. They have replaced *Khuda Hafiz* or *Rab Raakha* with *Allah Hafiz* and prefer *Ramadhan Mubarak* over *Ramzan Mubarak*. They like to name their children with Arabic names. All their heroes are either Arabs or Central Asian butchers and murderous warriors who actually pummeled and looted the Punjab over and over again. These invaders also captured and kidnapped Punjabi or Indian women to sell or use as sex slaves.

Whereas the other provinces in Pakistan are proudly teaching, speaking, reading, writing and doing business in their *maanboli* (mother tongue) like Sindhi in Sindh, Baluchi in Baluchistan and Pashto in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, sadly and conversely, Pakistani Punjabis have totally forgotten their *maanboli*. They love to teach, speak, read, write and do business either in Urdu or English (I call them “the undercover Punjabis”). They do not know or refuse to accept that in reality Urdu cannot be even considered a full-blown language. To be considered a bona fide language one needs to meet three very basic tenets: grammar, vocabulary and alphabets. Urdu fails to meet all these three tenets as its grammar is Hindi, alphabet is Arabic and vocabulary is mostly Hindi, Arabic, Farsi and other languages. This is why the Pakistani National Anthem by Hafiz Jallandhari, a Punjabi who wrote poems only in Urdu, is written in Farsi. It lacks Hindi words and completely circumvents Hindi grammar. Also one cannot find a single line of an Urdu poem by Allama Iqbal, the so-called dreamer of a separate country for the Indian Muslims, engraved in his mausoleum. Even these great Urdu poets knew that Urdu is nothing but a version of Hindi or Hindsustani with many Farsi and Arabic words in it. Ustad Daman, the great and legendary Punjabi poet, wrote in one of his poems:

<i>Urdu da mein dukhi naahin</i>	I am not offended by Urdu
<i>Te dushman nai angrezi da</i>	Nor am I an enemy of English
<i>Puchdeo mere dil di boli</i>	If you ask me what is in my heart
<i>Haan ji haan, Punjabi ae</i>	Yes and yes, it is Punjabi.
<i>Bulha milia aise vichon</i>	I found Bulha in it
<i>Aise vichon Waris vi</i>	Waris is also there
<i>Dhaaran milian aise vichon</i>	I was nursed by it
<i>Meri maan Punjabi ae</i>	My mother is Punjabi
<i>Ehde bol kannan ich painde</i>	Its words are music to my ears
<i>Dil mere de vich ne rehnde</i>	They live in my heart
<i>Tapdian hoyan raitaan te</i>	On hot and balmy nights
<i>Ik thandi chaan Punjabi ae</i>	It provides a cool shade for me
<i>Ahde dudhaan de vich makhni</i>	Its milk is rich with cream and butter
<i>Makhmaan vich heo de chakhni</i>	The butter and cream turn into Ghee
<i>Dab kharbki dhol jatti</i>	This is my colorful beloved.
<i>Ik saadi gaan, Punjabi ae</i>	Yes our cow is Punjabi

Pakistani Punjabis are like a crow that tries to be a *Hans* (a mythical bird) who ultimately forgets how to be a crow. Pakistani Punjabis will probably face the same doom if they continue in their efforts to be somebody other than who they really are. Nobody respects a person who does not respect himself/herself. A poem by a Punjabi poetess can be perhaps best translated as, “Had you fallen from my eyes I would have immediately picked you up with my eye lashes and put you back in my eyes but I cannot help you because you have fallen from your

own eyes”. Today’s Pakistani Punjabis have fallen from their own eyes and have lost their identity and respect as a nation because they have stopped being Punjabis and are not adhering to Punjabinity.

In his short Punjabi poem below, Ustad Daman has probably answered the above two questions better than anybody.

<i>Meinooon kiniyan ne aakia kai vari</i>	Many have asked me numerous times
<i>Tun lena Punjabi da naan chad de</i>	Stop speaking of Punjabi
<i>Goad jidhi vich pal ke jawan hoyon</i>	Mother’s embrace that nurtured and nursed me
<i>O’Maan chad de o’garan chad de</i>	Disclaim your mother and your village
<i>Meinooon inj lagda loki aakh de ne</i>	It seems as if people are saying
<i>O’ Putra, tun apni maan chad de</i>	O son, we want you to disown your mother

Can a person be called a Punjabi without adhering to Punjabinity? I do not think so.

Dr Pritam Singh, Oxford Brookes University

What is most important in defining someone as a Punjabi is the subjective self-consciousness of being a Punjabi. Punjabis are all those individuals and groups in whose self-view, a sense of being a Punjabi is, in some degree, a part of their self-view. This subjective self-view of being a Punjabi in a cultural sense could co-exist with being a Punjabi Muslim, Punjabi Sikh, Punjabi Hindu, Punjabi Christian, Punjabi Jain or Punjabi atheist. Between being a Punjabi in a cultural sense and being (or not being) a member of a religious community, different individuals would attach different degrees of importance to these markers of self-identity but irrespective of these differences, such individuals would be Punjabis. Along with these religious differences, there could be differentiation based on class, caste and gender but as long as an individual views himself/herself as a Punjabi along with being a member of the landed aristocracy or peasantry or any other class; Brahmin, dalit or another caste; woman, man or transgendered, such an individual is a Punjabi.

The core of Punjabinity or Punjabi identity is a sense of belonging, in varying degrees, to the historical region of the Punjab – now East Punjab in India and West Punjab in Pakistan. In addition to this sense of regional location of Punjabi belonging, Punjabinity is that shared universe that includes Punjabi language, Punjabi literature (poetry, fiction, plays and so on), Punjabi arts (cinema, theatre, paintings and so on), Punjabi music, Punjabi modes of aesthetic imagination and articulation (embroidery, painting, sculpture and jewellery), Punjabi folk songs, Punjabi folk heroes, Punjabi food, Punjabi dress, Punjabi birth/marriages/death ceremonies, Punjabi dances, Punjabi humor,

Punjabi sarcasm, Punjabi bravery/cowardice, Punjabi cleverness, Punjabi enterprise/adventurism/daredevilry, Punjabi subterfuge, Punjabi treachery/cheating and Punjabi quarrelsomeness/infighting/factionalism. Bravery/cowardice, cleverness, treachery and factionalism are universal character traits but anyone who is a Punjabi has an intuitive sense of the Punjabi version of these character traits even if one is not able to verbalise or define these Punjabi versions.

All individuals who can be considered or who view themselves as part of this Punjabi universe may not share all the character traits of being a Punjabi. There could be minimalist or maximalist versions of Punjabiyat. An individual's sense of being a Punjabi may be as minimal as having a preference for Punjabi food on a regular day to day basis while someone else's might extend to most of the identity markers mentioned above. These identity markers may not exist in their pure form, if any, but in a variety of hybrid forms. The process of globalisation is accelerating the emergence of these hybrid forms of Punjabiyat. Bhangra music, for example, in its diverse forms has grown to become the focal point of Punjabi and hybrid identities; it has also spawned new interest in learning the Punjabi language in diverse scripts.

The process of globalisation and the emergence of Punjabi diaspora has given birth to a dimension of Punjabiyat - the global Punjabiyat - which while retaining some imaginary sense of territorial belonging to *Desh* Punjab, transcends any geographical boundaries of Punjabiyat.

Harjap Singh Aujla, Expert on Indian Music and Punjabi Composers and Singers, USA

Punjabi is the name of a culture, language and broadly speaking a way of life.¹ The Punjabis are basically large-hearted, fun loving and flamboyant people. By religious affiliation, the majority consists of Muslims; the Hindus outnumber the Sikhs by a ratio of 2:1. All Punjabis prefer to eat lots of dairy products. The Muslims are big time meat eaters. The Sikhs eat meat too but they kill the animal or bird with one stroke. Most of the Punjabi Hindus are non-meat eaters. All Punjabis have common musical tastes. Their folk songs are common. Up to 1946, all Punjabis were very loyal to their language and culture but in 1947, the loyalty of the Muslim Punjabis became more pronounced towards Urdu. Similarly most Punjabi Hindus in East Punjab switched their linguistic loyalty to Hindi.

At one time the turban was the symbol of respect and reverence for all Punjabis but with the passage of time and modernization, a majority of Muslim Punjabis and Hindu Punjabis have abandoned it. Only the fully practicing Sikhs still persist with it. The daughter of one person, irrespective of religion, caste or creed was considered the daughter of the entire village.

Brushing aside the animosities of 1947, when two Punjabis meet all of a sudden on foreign soil, they greet each other very warmly and try to help each other. For example, two Punjabis, a Sikh lawyer and an uneducated, unemployed Muslim met in Paris. The Muslim had no money for accommodation. The Sikh lawyer had two beds in his hotel room; he shared one with the Muslim stranger. This is typically how a Punjabi meets a Punjabi. I have seen well-settled Hindu Punjabi professionals helping Sikh economic refugees in America.

Gulshan Dayal, a Leading Figure of the Sanjha Punjab Website Network

Jadd bahut choti hundi saa'n taa'n lagda hunda si ki je tusi'n Panjabi bolde ho'n taa'n tusi'n Sikh ho'n ... Panjab di dharti da hale concept nahi si bania .. yaa'n injh keh lavo ki sirf Sikh hi Panjabi hunde ne te oho ee Punjabi bolde ne ... injh ih shaid is karke si ki mummy ne choti hundi noo'n jis elementary school vich padhan pai si uh ikk Arya school si te yaad hai ki shani charvaar noo'n kadi kadi ithe ikk harwan kita jaanda si te jis vich Sanskrit de mantar padhe jaande san... te teacher ihi aakhde san ki Hindi hi boli hundi hai.. te mere baalman vich ihi baith gia ki jo Hindu hunde han uh Hindi bolde nay... yaa ghatto ghatt iss school vich mere man te ihi chaap payi si... Muslmaa'n Punjabi da te mainu sufne vich vi qyaas nahi si... Muslmaan dekhe san, Urdu bolde, Bangla bolde, dakhni Haidraabadi bolde, par Panjabi bolde kadi nahi si dekhe ..., bus mere lai Punjabi hon da ihi matlab si ... ih te bahut baad vich pata lgga ki Panjabi bolan waliaan da ikk wadda saara ilaaka sarhaddo'n paar si ... te uh Muslmaan san te dushman qaum san .. ithihaas dia'n kitaaba'n ne vi ihi samjhaiaa si .. school chaddia te college aa gayi .. par ithe ithihaas nahi padhia ... science padhi... college mukkia te mummy ne kiha ki main kujh na kujh padhdi riha kraa'n ... mummy ithihaas de student san uhna mainoo'n England Europe te Indian Subcontinent da ithihaas padhan noo'n kiha jo vi ghar vich ithihaas diaa'n kitaaba'n san uh padh lyiaa'n hauli haulu ahsaas hoiaa ki ithihaaskaar vi uhi dasde han jo uh dasna chahunde han .. khai gall te Panjabi hon baare chal rahi a ..

So ih te bahut baad vich pata lggia ki Panjabi hon da matlab uss dharti di mitti vicho'n hona jithe panjdaria vagde ne te fir ih andrila man gumm ho chukke dariaavaa'n noo'n labhan lgga ... uh dariaa kitho'n labhne san .. uh dariya taa'n sarhaddo'n paar san .. jis jhnaa'n te Jhelum de paaniaa'n de kandiaa'n naal Panjabi ishq diaa'n kahaniaa'n labrez san, uh saatho'n vichad gaye han ...

Uh Ravi jis de paaniaa'n ne Shri Guru Arjan Dev Ji de paak shareer noo'n jazb kar lia si .. uhna paaniyaa'n noo'n asaa'n Panjabiyaa'n ne khud hi zehar kar lia si ... uhna beliaa'n vich jithe ranjhe di piaar bhari vanjhli goo'njdi si, te heer di choori di mehak si, us harwa vich asi nafrat dio badboo khilaar ditti hai .. uh ket hi nahi rahe jithe babe naank vaang sache saude hunde san ... ih saada asli virsa hai te sahi pchaan vi .. mere lai Panjabi hon da matlab hai Bulleh Shah da naach te us di kaafi meri jaageer hai ... Fareed te mera haq hai ... bulla mere dil di dhadkan noo'n hi likhda hai ... te Panjabi hon da matlab ih

vi hona chahida hai ki mainoo'n us paar japuji de bol sunai dene chahide ne ... mere lai Panjabi hoon da matlab panj dariaavaa'n di dharti meri hai te main us dharti di ... bhavei'n kinne vi dialects hon Panjabi boli de uh sabh kise na kise traah aaps vich gunne hoye ne .. siaasi lok kujh vi aakhi jaan par mere lai Panjabi hin da matlab hai mera rishta jis mitti naal hai uh hai panj dariaavaa'n di mitti ... panjabi hon da ihh vi matlab hai ki piaar karna te tutt ke piaar karna .. apni dharti lai apni boli lai jaan vaar deni .. jivei'n vi hai jinna vi hai, jinna vi ho sake vand ke chkna, har takleef ivch chad'di kala vich rehna ... te us da bhaana man'na te har ikk de haasiaa'n lai qurbaan ho ho jaana ... mere lai ihi Panjabiyat hai.

Conclusion

From the above responses the basic argument about identity that I have offered should become quite clear. However, the fact that some leading Punjabi intellectuals have reservations about making themselves explicit on the two questions can be interpreted as indicative of some other priority within the religious, sectarian or linguistic spectrum. Perhaps the overarching nationalist identity as an Indian or as a Pakistani is important for them and in the light of this consideration a response on who is a Punjabi or what is Panjabiyat becomes politically sensitive.

On the whole, the Punjabi language and identification with it seems to be the common denominator and that should not be surprising but many Punjabis do not speak Punjabi any more or consider their Punjabi ancestry or ethnicity important. Therefore, the subjective factor of self-identification is also important. One need not labor the point that the Punjabis are a people with extraordinarily complicated issues about their identity and their identifications.

Endnote

1 After the unsuccessful revolt of 1857, the British rulers decided to punish the Jats who were prominent in the revolt. Their compact geographical region was divided into three provinces. Those living close to Bharatpur were merged with Rajputana. Jats of Agra, Mathura and Meerut area were merged with the U.P. The Jats of Rohtak, Hissar and Gurgaon were merged with the Punjab. Their areas are certainly non-Punjabi. The British divided the post-Ranjit Singh Punjab into five administrative divisions. The Eastern-most and least Punjabi division was Ambala. Leaving aside the three Jat dominated districts of Rohtak, Hissar and Gurgaon, the other three districts were Karnal (speaking a crude mixture of Punjabi and Hindi), Ambala (speaking *Puadhi*, a dialect of Punjabi) and Simla (speaking *Pahadi*, a dialect of Punjabi). The other four divisions were historically pure Punjabi in culture and language. Jalandhar Division's largest district was Kangra, which was speaking *Dogri* and *Pahadi* Punjabi but their habits and culture were primarily Punjabi. Lahore division which was also called the Central Division called the shots linguistically and culturally. The Multan Division spoke a different form of Punjabi called Saraiki but their character traits and habits were Punjabi. Similarly, the Rawalpindi Division spoke with a very sweet *Pothohari* accent but in all other characteristics, they were just like any other Punjabi.

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