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## **Indigenous Language Abandonment in the Religious Domain in Murree: A Family Report Analysis**

**Muhammad Gulfraz Abbasi, M.A, Ph.D. Scholar**

**Zafar Iqbal Khattak, M.A, Ph.D. Scholar**

**Mujahid Shah, M.A, M.Phil. Scholar**

**Sayyam Bin Saeed, M.A.**

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### **Abstract**

The roots of any indigenous language lie in the heart of its respective culture. Expression of any sort becomes more fluent and powerful when it takes the route through indigenous language. However, the use of indigenous language is continuously decreasing in schools as well as in the family domain in Murree and the suburban Pahari speaking areas (Abbasi & Asif, 2010).

The present study analyses the use of Pahari in the religious domain from the interviews data gathered mostly in the home domain. The religious domain which supposedly has conservative trends also seems to abandon Pahari on religious occasions giving way to Urdu on a massive level. It transpires from the findings of the present study that Pahari, if ever used on religious occasions, is presumed to lose the rhetorical vigor leading to less powerful linguistic impact.

The study concludes that Pahari can soon be on the verge of death if the domain of religion also shifts to Urdu like other domains.

## **Introduction**

A language which has a secure future usually occupies almost all the domains in the society including the domain of religion. As school is important in language transmission and propagation, religious institutions also play vital role in determining whether a language is important or not. This institution is more important in the sense that people generally have a great respect and regard for it and religious scholars. The language used by the religious teachers and the language use in the collective prayers hold a great influence on the individual choice of language.

Arabic is the language of the Quran and hence the language of the Muslims in this respect. Muslims hold it very dear considering it a language which has supposedly more spiritual power than other languages of the world. The holy book of the Muslims was not translated into any other language for such a long time as any other language might, in their opinion, desecrate it and it could not be able to convey complete meanings. However, there was a change in the thinking later on and the Quranic teachings spread in other languages as well.

In Pakistan, Urdu is the national language but it is the mother tongue of only 7.5 percent people (Rahman, 2005) which shows that it is learnt as a second language in Pakistan. Despite this fact, it enjoys a prestigious status and venerable significance in Pakistan. It is used excessively in all the important social domains in Pakistan. After English it occupies the most important place (Asif, 2005). English is the official language of Pakistan and is the language of power and prestige, hence the language of the elite class which receives English medium education from either the elite institutions or from foreign countries. Those who have no approach to this luxury, resort to Urdu, the second most valuable language in the country.

### **Priority sequence 1**

English-----Urdu-----Indigenous language/Mother tongue

Religious domain is no exception to this. However, it is different in the sense that it has a different priority sequence. Its first priority is Arabic language.

### **Priority sequence 2**

Arabic-----Urdu-----Indigenous language/Mother tongue

There are two similarities in the attitude of both these language sequences from the point of view of the elite and the religious. This is the language class system which is held in high esteem by both these groups.

Secondly, they both have the same pattern of holding the languages in their favour. Both groups have foreign languages as their first priority, be it English or Arabic in either case. Urdu is commonly held as second priority; whereas, native /regional or mother tongue is given the least priority.

### **The Position of Pahari**

In Murree, Pahari or Dhundi-Kairali language is the mother tongue of most of the people. It is a northern zone language and a branch of Pahari Pothohari mentioned in the Ethnologue (Gordon, 2005). Out of four varieties of Pahari, Dhundi /Dhundi-Kairali or Pahari is the central variety which is spoken in large part of Murree and its suburbs. Pahari is diminishing and is giving way to Urdu in this area. The Schools favor Urdu (Abbasi & Khattak, 2010) and Pahari is becoming a stigma.

The present paper looks at the religious domain and explores how it uses language other than Pahari to address the local people. It is part of the interviews which the authors conducted for detailed analysis. This paper discusses only that part of self reports which deal with the religious institution in this part of Pakistan.

### **Method**

Ethnographic technique has been used and it includes participant observation and in-depth interviews of 91 participants. The sample was selected from both rural and urban areas of Murree in order to make the data representative. Moreover, three generations were involved in these interviews which showed the language situation along three generations. The descriptive statistics and qualitative discussion has been made in this paper.

### **Discussion**

In the following section, we shall discuss the answers given by the respondents from the sample in connection with the language usage in the religious services and Quran teaching.

### **Language of Sermons**

The *waaz/khutba* (sermon) or the speech of the Imam of a local mosque indicates the language preference of the community for the domain of religion. We have included Pahari and Urdu as the two languages and excluded Arabic because we are concerned mainly with the medium of instruction and the language used in the prayers. The members of three generations were asked a

question regarding the medium of language used during Friday sermons and other occasions. Their answers have been recorded in the following table.

**Table 1 Language of Waaz/Khutba (Sermons)**

Location	Categories Of People	Pahari	Urdu	Total
<b>Rural</b>	Grandparents	0 (0%)	12 (100%) (13.19%)	12 (100%) (13.19%)
	Parents	0 (0%)	19 (100%) (20.88%)	19 (100%) (20.88%)
	Children	0 (0%)	20 (100%) (21.98%)	20 (100%) (21.98%)
Rural Total		<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>51 (100%) (56.04%)</b>	<b>51 (100%) (56.04%)</b>
<b>Urban</b>	Grandparents	0 (0%)	08 (100%) (8.79%)	08 (100%) (8.79%)
	Parents	0 (0%)	15 (100%) (16.48%)	15 (100%) (16.48%)
	Children	0 (0%)	17 (100%) (18.68%)	17 (100%) (18.68%)
Urban Total		<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>40 (100%) (43.96%)</b>	<b>40 (100%) (43.96%)</b>
Rural + Urban Total		<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>91 (100%) (100%)</b>	<b>91 (100%) (100%)</b>

No respondent from the rural or urban area said that Pahari was used for khutba speech in their mosque. 100% respondents said that Urdu was used in religious speeches made by the *Imam* of their mosques. We also inquired the elderly people how during their childhood or adolescence, *imams* would make their khutba speeches. One of the grandparents from the urban area referred to the imam of a central mosque in Murree city and said:

*He had the authority to give verdicts in Islamic law. People would consult him for the solution of religious issues. He would make his speech in Urdu but it was close to Pahari.*

This was the central and most important mosque in the city but the imam of this mosque would speak in Urdu with dense code switching from Pahari. Perhaps he did that with a purpose as in the city there were people who would understand only Urdu and people who would only understand Pahari. It was likely that the imam of that mosque might have been trying to reach the ears of both these communities through the use of Urdu and Pahari.

The *Jama Masjid* or the mosques (where the Friday prayers are usually offered) were limited in number. There were mosques in each bazaar and each *gali* (a connecting place between the mountains and the center of business and trade) for the people linked to the surrounding mountains. Earlier, mostly the *imams* of the mosques and teachers of the Holy Quran would come of a specific family or tribe. The language mostly used by these imams was Pahari with a bit mixing of Punjabi and Pothohari. Besides, conducting Friday prayers in the mosques, these imams would also do all kind of services concerning death, funeral and consecutive weekly prayer functions and then the fortieth day function (*chehleum*) of prayers after the death of somebody. They were the centre of attention because they would conduct the prayers and everyone would follow them. In this regard an elderly male grandparent narrated:

*If somebody died, the religious person would most of the time stay in that house for almost forty days, especially on Thursdays... on the fortieth day of death they would make speeches and narrate the stories of Noor nama, yousaf zalaikha and Saif-ul-Maluk.*

These religious congregations within the houses were conducted in Pahari language. The stories that the grandfather referred to in his statement were mostly written in Pahari with some Pothohari element in them. Saif-ul-Maluk is a great poetic work of a renowned Pahari poet and saint Mian Muhammad Bakksh.

So from the conversation with the community members we can judge that Urdu gradually started replacing Pahari in this domain around seventies.

### **Preferred Language for Sermons**

Most of the respondents in our study said that they would like the imams of their mosques to speak Urdu instead of Pahari in their Friday prayers and at other congregations. Pahari was favoured by only 15 percent of the total respondents including rural and urban participants. But the most interesting thing is that these 15 percent are all from the rural areas. Nobody from the urban areas did favour Pahari as the language of the imams of the mosques. Even the grandparent generation from the urban areas did not like Pahari to be the language of imams during ‘*waaz/khutba*’. The rest of respondents including children said that Pahari was not suitable for this kind of function and in their opinion Urdu was the most suitable language for these occasions.

**Table 2**  
**Preferred language for 'waaz/khutba' (Sermons)**

Location	Categories Of People	Pahari	Urdu	Total
<b>Rural</b>	Grandparents	10 (83.33%) (10.99%)	02 (16.67%) (2.2%)	12 (100%) (13.19%)
	Parents	04 (21.05%) (4.39%)	15 (78.95%) (16.49%)	19 (100%) (20.88%)
	Children	0 (0%)	20 (100%) (20.98%)	20 (100%)
<b>Rural Total</b>		<b>14 (27.45%) (15.38%)</b>	<b>37 (72.55%) (40.66%)</b>	<b>51 (100%) (56.04%)</b>
<b>Urban</b>	Grandparents	0 (0%)	08 (100%)	08 (100%) (8.8%)
	Parents	0 (0%)	15 (100%) (16.48%)	15 (100%) (16.48%)
	Children	0 (0%)	17 (100%) (18.68%)	17 (100%) (18.68%)
<b>Urban Total</b>		<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>40 (100%) (43.96%)</b>	<b>40 (100%) (43.96%)</b>
<b>Rural + Urban Total</b>		<b>14 (15.38%) (15.38%)</b>	<b>77 (84.62%) (84.62%)</b>	<b>91 (100%) (100%)</b>

Even two grandparents from the rural side favoured Urdu for imams of the mosques. When we asked one of them why should the imam use Urdu and not Pahari, he said:

*Imam makes his speech in the loud speaker and everybody hears, if he uses Pahari it won't look nice.*

This statement shows language shame which the community feels if Pahari is heard far and near through loud speaker. They have an apprehension that people listening to Pahari speech would consider them to be backward. One female respondent told us that even the death announcements were made from the loud speakers of mosques in Urdu but the same people used Pahari when they called their relatives on phone about the death of a person. She wanted to say that in fact Pahari was an informal language and on every formal occasion Urdu was preferred. Even in the village locale, the announcement of death is made in Urdu although nobody is native Urdu speaker. If somebody uses loud speaker for Pahari language people are surprised and start laughing as if this language were not fit for these formal announcements.

## Language of Dua (Prayers)

Prayers are personal and secret conversation with God. Most of the prayers are in Arabic language but they are usually supported by the prayers in local language or in the language which gives the best expression to their feelings. In response to a question, we observed that 60% used Pahari and 40% used Urdu in their prayers from the rural sample. In the urban sample 35% said that they prayed in Pahari while 56% said that they used Urdu in their prayers. On the whole 56% claimed to pray in Urdu and around 44% voted in favour of Pahari. One father said regarding the language in prayers:

*(I pray in Pahari language, If I pray in Urdu, it looks that my prayers have no power in them)*  
*(My father used to pray aloud in Pahari language on each Thursday evening I still remember those words of prayers).*

When we asked this question from a student of madrassa he said:

*(We pray in Urdu)*  
*qari sab bhi Urdu mai taqreer karta hai aur Urdu he boltay ha*  
*(Our teacher also makes his speech in Urdu and also speaks Urdu)*  
*(Our teacher uses Urdu in his prayers, all the madrassa students use Urdu for prayers and speak in Urdu)*

**Table 3 Language of prayers**

Location	Categories Of People	Pahari & Arabic	Urdu & Arabic	Total
<b>Rural</b>	Grandparents	12 (100%) (13.19%)	0 (0%)	12 (100%) (13.19%)
	Parents	14 (73.68%) (73.68%)	05 (26.32%) (5.49%)	19 (100%) (20.88%)
	Children	05 (25%) (5.49%)	15 (75%) (16.48%)	20 (100%) (21.98%)
<b>Rural Total</b>		<b>31 (60.78%) (34.06%)</b>	<b>20 (39.22%) (21.98%)</b>	<b>51 (100%) (56.04%)</b>
<b>Urban</b>	Grandparents	07 (87.5%) (7.69%)	01 (12.5%) (1.1%)	08 (100%) (8.8%)
	Parents	07 (46.67%) (7.69%)	08 (53.33%) (8.79%)	15 (100%) (16.48%)

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Muhammad Gulfraz Abbasi, M.A, Ph.D. Scholar, Zafar Iqbal Khattak, M.A, Ph.D. Scholar, Mujahid Shah, M.A, M.Phil. Scholar and Sayyam Bin Saeed, M.A.

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Children	0 (0%)	17 (100%) (18.68%)	17 (100%) (18.68%)
Urban Total	<b>14 (35%) (15.38%)</b>	<b>26 (65%) (28.57%)</b>	<b>40 (100%) (43.96%)</b>
Rural + Urban Total	<b>40 (43.96%) (43.96%)</b>	<b>51 (56.04%) (56.04%)</b>	<b>91 (100%) (100%)</b>

So the table 3 and the given statements show that Urdu is widely penetrating into the religious activities and hence it is an indicator that it has to a great extent become the language of thought processes. During our observation, we noticed that the Quran education and prayer trainings were given by those teachers who preferred speaking Urdu instead of Pahari even if they were the native speakers of Pahari. So we observed that the current Quran teaching is almost completely in Urdu. Therefore, the children generation is adopting Urdu as it is clear from the table 3 above. The earlier system of Quran teaching which was reserved for a specific family or tribe has collapsed and the Quran education spread through madrassas. With its spread and with the increase in education, Urdu language also has dominated and taken the place of Pahari in this domain too.

### Language Used in Quran Teaching

**Table 4 Language of the teachers of Quran**

Area	Categories Of People	Pahari	Pahari & Urdu	Punjabi & Urdu	Urdu	Total
Rural	Grandparents	12 (100%) (13.19%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	12 (100%) (13.19%)
	Parents	0 (0%)	11 (57.89%) (12.09%)	0 (0%)	08 (42.10) (8.79%)	19 (100%) (20.88%)
	Children	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	20 (100%) (21.98%)	20 (100%) (21.98%)
Rural Total		<b>12 (23.53%) (13.19%)</b>	<b>11 (21.57%) (12.09%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>28 (54.90%) (30.77%)</b>	<b>51 (100%) (56.04%)</b>
Urban	Grandparents	05 (62.5%) (5.49%)	02 (25%) (2.2%)	01 (12.5%) (1.2%)	0 (0%)	08 (100%) (8.79%)
	Parents	0 (0%)	04 (26.67%) (4.39%)	04 (26.67%)	07 (46.67)	15 (100%)
	Children	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	17 (100%) (18.68%)	17 (100%) (18.68%)

Urban Total	<b>05 (12.5%)</b> <b>(5.49%)</b>	<b>06 (15%)</b> <b>(16.48%)</b>	<b>05 (12.5%)</b> <b>(5.49%)</b>	<b>24 (60%)</b> <b>(26.37%)</b>	<b>40 (100%)</b> <b>(43.96%)</b>
Urban + Rural Total	<b>17 (18.68%)</b> <b>(18.68%)</b>	<b>17 (18.68%)</b> <b>(18.68%)</b>	<b>05 (5.49%)</b> <b>(5.49%)</b>	<b>52 (57.14%)</b> <b>(52.14%)</b>	<b>91 (100%)</b> <b>(100%)</b>

The teachers of the Holy Quran cast a lot of impact on the language of the students studying the Holy Quran there. From the general analysis of the table it transpires that only 17 people out of 91 said that the language of their teachers was Pahari and these responses were given wholly by the grandparents. However, Pahari and Urdu both languages were used by the teachers of 17 respondents and then the rest of the respondents said that Urdu or Punjabi Urdu were the languages of their teachers. Here Urdu again dominated and 57% teachers would speak Urdu.

Most of the teachers of Quran belong to Pahari speaking areas and their mother tongue is Pahari, but they have been trained in a way that they do not use it with their students. Most of the teachers of Quran themselves received Quran education from the madrassas outside Murree. So they naturally learnt Urdu and they have kept the same medium of instruction in which they were themselves taught.

### Conclusion

The paper concludes that Urdu has occupied the religious domain in Murree and overshadows Pahari. The use of Urdu has become popular among the people and especially those who are in charge of religious preaching and teachings in the mosques in the Pahari speaking areas. But this shift has occurred recently as one generation earlier the teachers of religion used Pahari in their sermons such as on the funeral rituals and other religious occasions.

As religion occupies the most important position in the day to day life of the Pahari people, the people revere everything attached with it. Language is no exception to this. So, in Murree and suburbs, Urdu gets more fame because of its growing use in mosques and madrassas, etc. Given this background, it appears that Pahari was used only by the grand parents' generation of preachers and imams. The present generation uses Pahari on informal occasions but as soon as they become formal, they use Urdu with dense Arabic pronunciation.

The study concludes that Pahari is endangered in most of the social domains and needs to be maintained and revitalized in order to save it from possible extinction.

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Muhammad Gulfraz Abbasi, M.A., Ph.D. Scholar  
Bahauddin Zakariya University  
Multan  
Pakistan  
[gulfrazabbasi@gmail.com](mailto:gulfrazabbasi@gmail.com)

Zafar Iqbal Khattak, M.A., Ph.D. Scholar  
Abdul Wali Khan University  
Mardan  
Pakistan  
[zafariqbal@awkum.edu.pk](mailto:zafariqbal@awkum.edu.pk)

Mujahid Shah, M.A., M.Phil. Scholar  
Abdul Wali Khan University  
Mardan  
Pakistan  
[mujahidshah@awkum.edu.pk](mailto:mujahidshah@awkum.edu.pk)

Sayyam Bin Saeed, M.A.  
[Sayyambinsaheed@yahoo.com](mailto:Sayyambinsaheed@yahoo.com)

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