

## Kashmiris in Britain: The Crisis of Identity

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### Introduction

*Pahari* is a language of the Indo-Aryan family of languages.[1] It derives its name from *Pahar* meaning "hills and mountains" for it is spoken over a very large area starting from Nepal and running throughout the foothills of the Himalayas, in the Himachal Pradesh (Northern Indian province), the Indian administered part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the Pakistani administered Jammu and Kashmir and through out the Northern Pakistan, up to River Indus and Chitral[2], The language spoken in Pothwar in Northern Punjab is by all means *Pahari* language, deriving its so-called name from the Pothwari region which consists of four districts, Rawalpindi, Jhelum,, Chakwal and Attock[3]. It is called *Pothwari* in this region for much the same reason as the *Pahari* spoken in the district Mirpur (especially in Britain) is some time referred to *Mirpuri* or in the *Rajouri Chibali* and in Jammu *Dogri* and it commands many more regional names.

*Pahari* like many other languages of the world has seen rise and fall in the course of history. Its history is old as well complex. *Pahari* was initially written in Landa script and Landa is a form of Sharda which was invented by Buddhists[4]. Sharda was a Buddhist university which is situated in Neelam valley (Kishan Ganga) in the Azad Jammu Kashmir (Pakistan administered Kashmir). In this village there are remains of an ancient Buddhist university, a monastery and certain stupas[5] quoting from Professor Buhler's *indische palaeography*, Dr Grierson states that Sharda script was introduced in Kashmir[6]. Heim Chander (1088-1172), an eminent Chinese scholar, collected eight ancient manuscripts from the Sharda monastery in order to compile his new book of grammar entitled "Sada Heim Chander"[7] The forests of Sharda exhibit a rich growth of paper trees locally called "*Purzi*" or "*Bhoj pattar*", that casts off paper-thin bark used for writing purposes, and now-a-days the holy men use it for writing talismans.

It can be said that Sharda *Pahari* is the one of the oldest written language in South Asia and it has contributed in developing other languages, old and modern, including Urdu[8]. *Pahari* and most other similar South Asian languages, are not taught in the classroom but are very much alive within the people and overlap a lot through population's physical contact and interaction[9], Alongwith other languages, *Pahari* has suffered at the hands of foreign invaders. *Pahari's* erosion started with Greek

invasion and rafts of invasions thereafter. The region has witnessed Pushtu, Farsi, Arabic, Punjabi, Urdu and English official languages dominating the area. In Kashmir, *Pahari* was and still is to certain extent written by Hindu business people in Landa script[10] and has been kept alive as a legacy from father to the son.

Post 1947 Like Punjabi, *Pahari* has suffered from the division of India and the written forms got divided too in the shapes of *Shah Mukhi* and *Gurmukhi*. Punjabi seemed to have made some progress on the both sides of the border but *Pahari* in Jammu Kashmir got further suppressed through this neo- colonial status-co between Hindi and Persian scripts. However, recently there have been efforts made on both the sides of Kashmir to revive the language and as a result of that during the last ten years many books have been produced, which includes poetry, prose, short stories, novels, nursery rhymes and folk literature. These are mainly written in Persian script. Most of this work began in Britain in the early 1990s. One might question, why Britain?

Most social commentators write that in Britain 80% to 90% of the so called Pakistanis are in fact, of Kashmiri origin.[11] Professor Nazir Tabbasam in his paper *Pahari* sounds writes "People who emigrated to UK on Pakistani passports, 80% were of Kashmiri origin. They are quite distinct from the rest of the south Asians not only culturally and linguistically but ethnically too"[12] Similarly 99% of the Kashmiris emigrated from the districts of Mirpur, Kotli, Bhimber, Pouch, Mehendar, Muzafabad, Rajori, Jammu and Noshara, around 1% from the Valley, Gilgit, Baltistan and Ladakh/Kirgil. Thus 99% of the people of state of Jammu and Kashmir and northern India and Pakistan in Britain speak *Pahari*. This makes *Pahari* the largest language in Britain after English i.e. more than 1 million which makes Kashmiri community and *Pahari* speakers almost 2% of the UK population.

### ***Pahari* in Britain**

The spoken language of nearly all Kashmiris in the UK is *Pahari*, and many are unable to read any other language. Once settled in Britain, decision-makers in an attempt to make services accessible began to invest in interpreting and translation services. However the languages offered to people originating from South Asia have been limited to Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, and Gujrati. Very little attention has been paid to Kashmiri community or *Pahari*, speaking population. The decision-makers have wrongly tended to use Urdu or Punjabi to communicate with Britain's Kashmiri community. In such instances, members of the Kashmiri community who are unable to communicate in English have had to settle with another groups' language. This had a significant impact the way in which services have been delivered. A main factor for not providing *Pahari* as a language is because there has been no official recognition of the Kashmiri community residing in Britain and the recognition of their language and communication needs.

With the decline in Britain's manufacturing industry in the 1970s, especially in the north and midland, the Kashmiri community was disproportionately disadvantaged compared to other minority ethnic groups. The economic impact upon the Kashmiri community has been profound with long term consequences. With reliance on large manufacturing industries for employment, racial discrimination in the job market and no appropriate opportunities given for training to explore other employment opportunities, the Kashmiri community by the 1980s was economically devastated suffering from large scale unemployment. This was despite the fact that this community had contributed to the economic success of Britain during the previous two-decades.

Learning and Skills Council invested a lot of money to train and provided the skills to the people to put them back in to employment, this included office work as well as trades like motor repairs, plumbing, electricians, gardening and other semi skilled jobs. To train unemployed people whose first language was not English, learning and skills council introduced ESOL courses, where people were taught English before enrolling them to the trade or skill courses. ESOL was set up for the recognised language groups and *Pahari* was not one of them. Realising the gap, questions were asked and answered by giving Kashmiris new name of "Mirpuri community" i.e., the community was Mirpuri and its language was Mirpuri too. Mirpuri then was identified as dialect of Punjabi. Therefore it was presumed that this group of people(Kashmiri community) was provided the advantage and in the process Kashmiris missed out on all employment opportunities created for BME groups.

However, British High Commission in Islamabad was quick to realize the different language need of the Kashmiri community and employed *Pahari* speaking interpreters. This was followed up by the BBC world and Asian radio net works. In 1990s a *Pahari* magazine called *Chitka* was launched from the north and *Pahari* writers in Britain published their works in it.

### **Today's British Kashmiri**

Today's British Kashmiri can be seen driving taxis or running a 'take away', joint. Despite the economic shift towards self-employment, the second third and now even fourth generation of Kashmiris are suffering from their parent's disadvantaged legacy. Many young British Kashmiris lack professional role models in their own community and the demographic location further perpetuates social/economic disadvantage. This growing community has alarming levels of unemployment which is a big challenge. As a result, not only a significant socio/economic potential in Britain is being wasted. The Kashmiri youngsters seeking acceptance and a sense of belonging become an easy pray for right wing groups of one kind or the other. It may be noted that, cities riots in 1980, 1990 and 1999 were related to Kashmiri's non-recognition and Kashmiri youngsters frustration against discrimination and alienation. Kashmiri community is never mentioned in any government reports and Kashmiri youngsters are not engaged at any level by community cohesion or other government consultative bodies.

Evidence available from the commission for Racial Equality Runnymede Trust, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the academic work on the subject suggest that Pakistanis and Bangladeshis suffer the most disadvantages in all aspects of life in Britain. This includes for instance, as follows:

- More likely to be subject to racial harassment,
- Less likely to obtain work (6 times likely to be unemployed),
- Under-achievement in education,
- Living in over crowded conditions,
- Health inequalities,
- Low income per household.

However, in case the Kashmiri community's data was monitored on its own and not mixed with Pakistanis, it would indicate that Kashmiri community is probably more disadvantaged than all other South Asian ethnic groups.

The Kashmiri community is likely to suffer racism like other BME groups and also intolerance from other south Asian groups, similar to that of Irish community. To an outsider the Irish are white, speak English, and are Christians. Then how are they included as a separate category for monitoring purposes. Kashmiri case is the similar to the Irish case.

### **Interpretation/Translation**

Most service providers until very recently were under the impression that all South Asians speak either Hindi or Urdu. But these trends are changing and the service providers have started making efforts to recognise other linguistic groups. Kashmiri community still continues to be marginalised and following are some of the examples of how non recognition affects *Pahari* speaking Kashmiri community in every day life:

Leeds Health Trust which is the biggest in Europe, carried out a survey of the language needs of its patients in 1999.<sup>13</sup> The internal audit report stated that over the last year, 3000 Urdu Mirpuri, 1000 Bangali Mirpuri and 4000 Punjabi Mirpuri interpretation assignments were carried out. This report was challenged by Kashmiri groups in the city of Leeds. On inquiry it was found that:

- The trust had very little knowledge of the Kashmiri community and it relied on Asian GPs, South Asian ethnicity advisers and Trust interpreters' advice.

- The Kashmiri community was the principle community which needed interpretation.
- The interpreters pretended they could speak these peoples' language and gave it the name that suited them.
- The Kashmiri community was not aware of the interpretation service and thought that these people (interpreters) were doing them a free favour.
- Kashmiri community was never consulted about the services and *Pahari* interpreters were never used at the consultation days.
- Few interpreters had monopoly on the interpretation service and they earned three times the salary of a midwife.
- One interpreter would spend full day with a midwife and interpreter for all the South Asian languages, while having expertise in only one.
- Most interpreters were inter related to GPs or people on various committees.
- No complaint was recorded by Kashmiri community, instead they brought their children for interpretation, very often the interpreters got through to Kashmiri patients via the patient's children.

In 2001, the Health Trust and the local authority employed a manager to improve the service. All the existing interpreters were tested for language ability and following were the results:

- None of the interpreters spoke *Pahari* and they all failed in the institute of languages test when examined.
- All interpreters claimed that the language was Mirpuri and it was a dialect of one or the other but none was aware that Mirpuri was a dialect of *Pahari*.
- All Punjabi and Urdu speaking interpreters complained about the test, some refused to take part saying it was not a language.
- Pakistani and Muslim community leaders made very strong representations to Local Authority and Health Trust complaining about the language test. The argument used were as follows:

"We are all Muslims and there is no need to recognise *Pahari* or Kashmiri community. Recognising *Paharis* and Kashmiris for monitoring purposes was against Pakistan and Islam. A lot of rhetoric was used and the complainants included some Kashmiris too.

However, Leeds City Council and Health Trusts have, recognised now Kashmiri community and *Pahari* language and have included Kashmiri and *Pahari* in their monitoring system. Since this recognition, many researches have been conducted especially by department of social services, education and Help for the Aged England<sup>14</sup> with clear recognition of special cultural and linguistic needs of the Kashmiri community.

## **Education**

It is widely recognised that gender, ethnic origin, social and economic background are strongly associated with educational attainment and reflects a wide range of influence on children and impacts the opportunities for them. In terms of ethnicity it is now generally perceived that average levels of educational attainment have increased for all groups in UK but at a slower rate for Bangladeshis and Pakistanis.

While it is generally the case that some ethnic minorities are performing not much less than their white peers. However, a number of ethnic groups have, on average, higher levels of attainment than white groups (for, example Indian and Chinese) and Pakistanis are not far behind but mixed with Kashmiris, Pakistani average comes down very drastically. This seems to be the case in employment, housing and business.

It is believed that educational achievements of the youngsters from Pakistani community living in Birmingham is low and has been a cause for concern for education planners, parents and Muslim community leaders and experts. A review of literature suggests that mainstream education authorities failed to comprehend the cultural and educational needs of the ethnic minority children<sup>15</sup>

The origin of the problem probably goes as far back as early 1960s when the need of the culture and language of new groups from Mirpur was identified but not diagnosed properly. The aim at that time was to teach new comers (usually in their early teens) in English teaching centres by multi lingual teachers. The majority of these people were economic migrants from Kashmir primarily with an uneducated agrarian background. The multi lingual teachers were from urban areas of Pakistan and India and they pushed down their cultural biases and languages on the illiterate communities. The Kashmiri community was completely ignored and brushed aside and till this day is still struggling to regain its identity, culture and language. They continue to be disadvantaged and marginalized.

Local authorities and the local education department and National Institutions provide advice, information and guidance for parents in a very complex and technical English, which then is translated in to a more complex Urdu. Both of these languages are foreign to *Pahari* speaking Kashmiri community. In order to explain these complex documents, relevant authorities may make an effort to employ some Punjabi worker to

interpret these complex documents through informal meetings, with no success. Reason being that Punjabi is not the language, of rural Kashmiri population. The mothers who play a pivotal role in the achievement of a child is not linguistically equipped to pass messages effectively to their offsprings.

Over the last few years, it has been noticed across the country that education department's ethnicity monitoring guide lines are very confusing in relation to Kashmiri community. It refers Kashmiris as Pakistani Mirpuris, Mirpuris, Punjabi Mirpuris and Kashmiris. It only suggest two things: one, the Education Ministry is not aware of the Kashmiri community, and two, the Local and National ethnicity advisors in the education department are deliberately trying to confuse the issue. This policy of misinformation has given rise to confusion and mistrust and has created a sense of alienation and marginalisation among the Kashmiri community, which results in non attendance of the parents education meetings as well raising the levels of their ability to help their children in their educational achievements. Hence, Kashmiri children continue to suffer.

Non recognition of Kashmiri cultural values and linguistic needs of the parents and their children resulting in underachievement, sometimes is explained to the authorities that these Mirpuris are not interested in education and like gypsies have no desire to be educated. While the fact is different. Kashmiri parents do not understand the system and have never been consulted, involved, engaged in understanding the system. Other Asian urban middle classes continue to deny the Kashmiris their ethnicity, language and culture. Aided by the service providers, the other agendas such as their *Muslimness, Urdu, 'we are all Pakistanis'* and other such values are thrust on the Kashmiri children and their parents which results in their further confusion, alienation and underachievement.

Collapse of manufacturing industry resulted in very high unemployment in inner city areas of Britain. It seems that Kashmiris manual workers felt the brunt of it. There had been many government drives to retrain the work force. Most of the Kashmiris were either first generation migrants or joined their extended families and had very little or no command of English. Learning and Skill council invested a lot of money to teach English which was followed by a skill/trade.

In Rochdale, Kashmir Youth Project (KYP) specialises in Ethnic training, and it has been in the business for the last twenty five years. Recently they wrote to Learning and Skill council that, "the majority of our clients on the ESOL courses are of Kashmiri origin, whose mother tongue is *Pahari*. *Pahari* is not recognised by the Learning and Skill council, therefore we have to teach people according to the existing curriculum, which is Urdu to English. Thus in the last twenty years, despite Kashmiri people attending ESOL courses have learnt nothing. Because both Urdu and English are foreign languages to them. This not only results in waste of tax payers money but

effects the aspirations of their offspring's educational achievement and parents ability to support their children in educational achievement.

### **Non-recognition disadvantages**

Kashmiri community started coming to Britain straight after the Second World War, and worked in textile and steel industry as well as took up other manual unskilled labour jobs. They settled in industrial areas of northern cities and midland. It is widely believed that Bradford has more than 80,000 Kashmiri population while Birmingham has more than 100,000. Fifty years on, if one looks at both cities and their white collar workforce, taxis and Take Away small Shops, the picture emerges clearly.

Kashmiris are nowhere to be seen in local authority, health and other public services. They are over represented in taxis, take ways and other lower paid jobs, and suffer from high unemployment, over crowding, drugs, crime and ill health.

There seem to be similarities in inner city areas particularly among South Asian communities between Bradford and Birmingham, in terms of white collar workforce, educational attainment, level of unemployment, taxis/takeaways, riots, drugs, representation in the penal system, health, including mental health. In places like Leicester they continue to do well. It is important to mention that non-recognition of Kashmiri identity is further laying an adverse impact on the psyche of Kashmiri youth.

Kashmiris miss out on most of the state benefits. They either do not receive any advise at all or make use of advise at the crisis point only. This includes careers, criminal justice, state benefits, health initiatives like smoking, drugs, aids and mental health problems. They often are seen to resort to *Pirs* (the talisman), often with fatal consequences.

### **Good business sense**

Since the inclusion of ethnic categories in the 1991 census, decision-makers at national and local levels have used collated data to ensure the socio/economic needs of Britain's minority ethnic communities. It is an important tool to ascertain the levels of discrimination and disadvantages experiences by Britain's minority ethnic communities.

Over the last decade public and private bodies alike have used ethnic monitoring to set targets in order to regularly improve employment as well as service delivery opportunities to all 'recognised' minority ethnic groups. Evidence gathered from ethnic monitoring has been used by various decision makers to formulate their policies and strategies. For example Bangladeshis in seventies were seen as East Pakistanis and their national language was recognised as Urdu. Until 1991 census, there was no real data on this community, hence service planners and providers found it difficult to include them

in their policies and strategies in any meaningful way. But since the 1991 census, the information and accurate monitoring at the local and national levels have enabled all relevant bodies to react to Bangladesh's special needs and address their under-achievement in a positive manner. It can be seen that all over the country, the quality of life of Bangladeshis has started improving and in places like Tower Hamlet, Bangladeshi educational attainment has improved.

Shifts towards the 'knowing customer' approach by public bodies such as local authorities in the light of best value and modernisation has further highlighted the importance of ethnic monitoring. Progressive local authorities have realised that accurate ethnic monitoring reflecting the origin and the size of local communities is a key management tool to deliver good quality services tailored to meet the diverse needs of 'recognised' minority ethnic groups.

Since the inception of the recognition of, minority ethnic communities as indicated in the 1991, they have benefited socially and economically. However despite the benefits of ethnic monitoring there remains a major gap with a very large ethnic group omitted from the official ethnic categories. This group is Britain's Kashmiri community, which numbers between half to one million and constitutes possibly the second largest ethnic group from South Asia. An accurate figure can only be ascertained if Kashmiris are recognised as a separate ethnic category. In absence of Kashmiri category, the overwhelming majority of people of Kashmiri origin have incorrectly been identified as of 'Pakistani' ethnic origin. Recent Kashmir National Identity Campaign (KNIC) sample researches show that a very large number of Kashmiris did not participate in the 1991 or 2001 census.

With no clear option given for members of Britain's Kashmiri community to indicate their 'true ethnicity', decision-makers have gathered skewed and distorted information. This in turn may have led to the under usage of services and limited employment opportunities for this very large ethnic group. Anecdotal evidence from academics and policy think tanks suggest that members of the Kashmiri community are more likely to experience racial discrimination and disadvantage than any other ethnic group. Not recognising Britain's Kashmiri community in ethnic monitoring has further compounded this disadvantage and three generations on, Kashmiri community continues to be under achievers in all the walks of life and continues to experience marginalisation.

## **Recommendations and issues for the consideration**

### ***Decision Making***

1. Education department should monitor the ethnicity of its enrolled students and their mother tongue very carefully and include Kashmiris in its monitoring systems.

2. There seems to be a lot of confusion within the teachers, education advisors and curriculum setters about their beneficiaries. Nationally and particularly in Birmingham as to who their beneficiaries are? Asian, Pakistani, Muslim are the main buzz words but within that all South Asian groups are recognised except Kashmiris and their mother tongue *Pahari* with Mirpuri dialect.
3. All concerned people need awareness and training which includes teachers, education planners and the community itself. The community needs special awareness regarding home work, school attendance, holidays, need for extra reading and leisure activities and career planning.
4. Appropriate methods of awareness should be adopted, for example, open days for teachers and audio/video tapes for the parents because written material has not served the purpose in view of the previous experience.
5. Employment opportunities for *Pahari* speakers should be highlighted in various industries, for example, interpretation/translation field, front line staff in local authority, health, financial sector, sales personal including tele sales, mortgages, insurance and in all other statutory voluntary sectors. The customer's language is a very distinct advantage.
6. The education authority should consider at including G.C.S.E 'O' and 'A' levels in the national curriculum (*Pahari*) alongwith the vocational skills. At the moment, Kashmiri students who speak English at school and mother tongue *Pahari* at home, learn Arabic at the Mosque are given Urdu as a vocational choice which they find not only difficult but useless in view of the biggest language help demand coming from *Pahari/ Mirpuri* speaking Kashmiri community.
7. Inclusion of *Pahari* at secondary school level. The customer's language recognition will enhance potential employment chances for Kashmiri youngsters. This needs to be put across to Kashmiri parents in such a way that they feel valued and empowered.

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