

Ethnographic Study of the Saraiki Identity and Its Struggle for Cultural Recognition

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<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2025.14.2.18>

Abstract

The study with delves into the issue of Saraiki identity in relation to both language and cultural expressions in Pakistan and some parts of India. Indo-Aryan language Saraiki with its speakers of about 29 million people in Pakistan is in a decline, and particularly for Generation Z, due to the expansion of urbanization and dominance of Punjabi in the present time. Ethnographic methods involved in this exercise include direct participation and qualitative analysis of a very detailed nature to explore cultural practices such as the Jhummar dance and other cultural rituals and a diminishing role of Saraiki poets and artists in mainstream media. Taking anthropological postmodernist theory, this work examines how Saraiki identities retain their unique nature in the face of globalizing trends that frequently try to abolish cultural diversification. Research findings show continuity of Saraiki identity in Pakistan and in Indian Rounds in Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The key findings Saraiki 's position as a poetic language with a rich history has not stopped Saraiki speakers among the younger population from understanding it as a language offered with few economical and education benefits. This research brings out the strengths and weaknesses of Saraiki identity, seen in contemporary times and among communities from India (mostly Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh). The research calls for inclusive cultural policies, greater media representation, and grassroots initiatives to preserve and promote Saraiki heritage, emphasizing the vital role of Saraiki speakers in sustaining their cultural identity.

Keywords: Saraiki Identity, Mother Tongue Articulations, Ethnographic, Diasporic Societies.

Introduction

The Saraiki identity, rooted in the cultural and linguistic heritage of South Punjab, Pakistan, represents a vibrant yet marginalized ethno-linguistic community. Centered in regions like Multan, Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, and Kot Mithan, the Saraiki people speak a distinct Indo-Aryan language and uphold unique traditions, including poetry by luminaries like Khwaja Ghulam Farid and Shakir shujabadi, and folk practices tied to Sufi shrines such as Farid's in Kot Mithan. This ethnographic study explores the Saraiki struggle for cultural recognition, examining how language, poetry, and folk traditions shape regional identity amidst dominant Punjabi and national Urdu-centric narratives as per (Muhammad, 2010).

South Punjab's cultural landscape, enriched by its historical role as a crossroads of Indus Valley civilizations, is expressed through Saraiki poetry, music, and agrarian traditions. However, colonial

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policies, post-partition centralization, and the prioritization of Urdu and Punjabi have sidelined Saraiki culture, confining its language to informal domains and limiting its presence in education and governance. This marginalization, coupled with South Punjab's socio-economic challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure and educational access, has fueled a sense of cultural alienation (Ali, 2017).

Table 1: Prominent Saraiki Poets and Their Cultural Impact

Poet	Contribution	Key Statistics
Khwaja Ghulam Farid	Classical Sufi poet; known for <i>Kafi</i> poetry	Referenced in 50+ academic theses - Shrine attracts 500,000+ annual visitors
Shakir Shujabadi	Contemporary poet focusing on social justice and identity	- Over 10 million online views - Thousands of poetry books sold - Featured in national Mushairas

Table 2: Prominent Saraiki Folk Singers and Their Reach

Singer	Contribution	Key Statistics
Attaullah Khan Esakhelvi	Prolific folk & romantic singer, multi-lingual performer	5,000+ recorded songs - Guinness World Record holder - Millions of fans worldwide
Pathanay Khan	Iconic singer of Khwaja Farid's poetry	- Performed on PTV/Radio Pakistan - Pride of Performance (1979)
Mansoor Malangi	Famous for emotional Saraiki ballads	Hit song: <i>Ik Phul Motia Da Mara Wey</i> - Pride of Performance (2005)

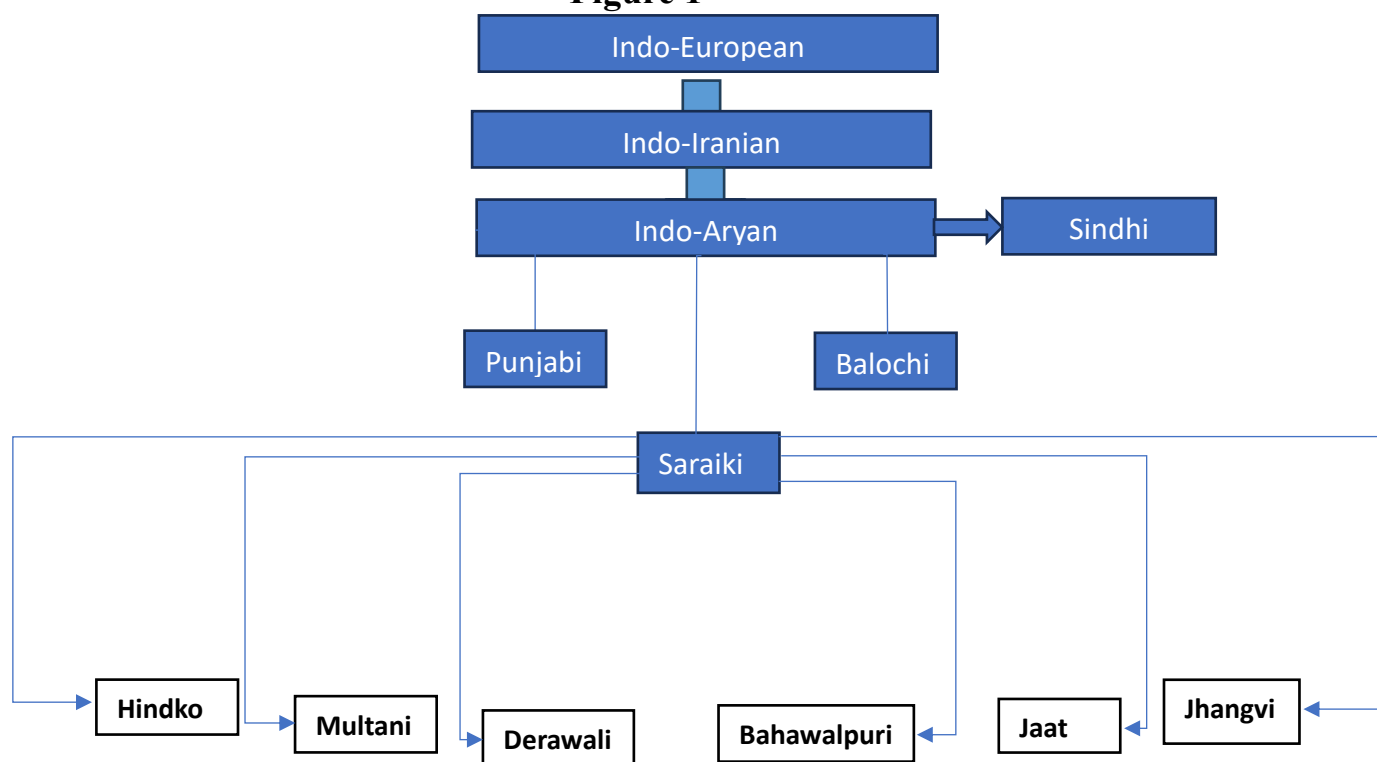
Employing an ethnographic approach, this study engages Saraiki communities, poets, and cultural practitioners to document their lived experiences. It investigates how the Saraiki language serves as a cultural anchor, how poets like Farid and Shakir shujabadi articulate regional aspirations, and how folk traditions, including those centered in Kot Mithan, reinforce communal bonds. The research also explores the political dimension of the Saraiki movement, particularly the demand for a separate province, which reflects aspirations for cultural and economic equity (Riaz, 2015). By highlighting the interplay of language, poetry, and folk traditions, the study reveals how Saraiki communities negotiate their identity within Pakistan's multicultural framework. It examines the role of cultural festivals, local media, and youth activism in revitalizing Saraiki heritage, with Kot Mithan's shrine as a key site of cultural continuity. The research situates the Saraiki struggle within postcolonial dynamics, where subnational groups challenge centralized narratives to assert their place in nation-building, contributing to discussions on cultural diversity and minority rights. This study amplifies Saraiki voices, advocating for inclusive policies that recognize regional identities. By focusing on the cultural significance of figures like Khwaja Ghulam Farid and places like Kot Mithan, it underscores the resilience of Saraiki identity and its contributions to Pakistan's cultural mosaic (Imran, 2019).

Historical Background

The Saraiki identity is a unique blend of rich culture and historical subjugation. South Punjab's Multan region during the Mughal era was an important cultural and commercial region, connecting the Indo Valley and Central Asia. The evolution of Saraiki language can be traced back to an Indo-

Aryan language as it was morphing due to the Persian and Arabic influence (Tariq, 2018). With rich oral traditions and Sufi poetry, Saraiki became not just a language but a means of pride and spirituality for the region. Subsequent poets transformed the identity of the region profoundly such as Khawaja Ghulam Farid who was based in Kot Mithan, and later Shakir Shujabadi. Shakir's verse brought to life the harsh realities and pride of the ordinary Saraiki speaker whereas Farid's kafis glorified the deep spiritual and natural allure of South Punjab. Currently, the Saraiki language is no longer limited to South Punjab. It is used all over southern and central Pakistan, and its speakers reside in Sindh, Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and even parts of India, especially in the northern region of Rajasthan as per (Abbas, 2015). With a speaker population exceeding 25 million, Saraiki ranks among the most widely spoken regional languages in Pakistan

Figure 1



This figure illustrates that Saraiki is a Northwestern Indo-Aryan language, evolving through multiple layers of linguistic development that trace back to the ancient Indo-European roots. While it has formed a distinct identity over time, Saraiki shares historical and structural connections with other Indo-Aryan languages such as Punjabi and Hindko (Mehmood, 2021). Additionally, centuries of trade, migration, and cultural interaction have infused the language with notable influences from Persian, Arabic, and Sindhi, enriching its vocabulary and literary depth as per the (Zahra, 2020).

The 1947 partition entrenched Saraiki marginalization. As Punjab was divided between India and Pakistan, South Punjab, including Kot Mithan, fell under Pakistani Punjab, with Lahore as the capital. The state's promotion of Urdu as a national language and Punjabi's provincial dominance marginalized Saraiki, excluding it from education and media. South Punjab's economic neglect, despite its agricultural significance, fueled perceptions of discrimination (Krishnan, 2020).

The 1960s saw the rise of the Saraiki movement, led by intellectuals and poets who sought to reclaim their heritage. Poets like Shakir shujabadi used verse to voice regional struggles, while cultural sites like Kot Mithan's shrine reinforced Saraiki identity through festivals and recitations. The demand for a separate Saraiki province emerged, responding to cultural suppression and economic inequities, with South Punjab lagging in infrastructure and services (Ghani, 2023).

In recent decades, Saraiki identity has been revitalized through folk traditions, literary organizations, and local media. Cultural festivals and Sufi shrines, particularly in Kot Mithan, serve as spaces for asserting regional identity (Rahman, 2010). However, the movement faces challenges, including state resistance to provincial demands and internal divisions. This historical context underscores the Saraiki struggle, highlighting how colonial legacies and post-partition policies have shaped their quest for cultural recognition and autonomy (Faisal, 2024).

Research Questions

1. Why are Gen Z in the Saraiki community losing interest in preserving their language, despite its rich cultural, poetic, and folk heritage?
2. Why are traditional Saraiki cultural elements, such as the Jhummar dance and traditional wedding customs, gradually losing their original form under the influence of external cultures?
3. What has caused the contributions of poets Shakir shujabadi and Khwaja Ghulam Farid, and folk singer Haseena Khanum, to the Saraiki movement's advocacy for cultural recognition to remain under-acknowledged?

Objectives

1. To explore the reasons behind the declining interest among Gen Z in the Saraiki community toward preserving their language, despite its rich cultural, poetic, and folk heritage.
2. To examine the factors contributing to the dilution of traditional Saraiki cultural elements, such as the Jhummar dance and traditional wedding customs.
3. To investigate why the contributions of key cultural figures like Shakir Shujabadi, Khwaja Ghulam Farid, and Haseena Khanum remain under-acknowledged in the broader discourse on Saraiki cultural recognition.

Significance of Study

The Saraiki language carries an extensive cultural legacy which spans extensive areas of southern Punjab as well as neighboring parts of present-day Pakistan and India. The language is used by millions yet continues to remain marginalized in both linguistic and cultural discourse. The urban population of Saraiki speakers declined significantly due to migration following the Partition as a result of the Subcontinent's Partition. The rich legacy of poetic tradition reflected in the works of Khwaja Ghulam Farid and Shakir Shujabadi

Famous Jhummar dance have faced a decreasing level of engagement among modern youth. This research carries significance because it investigates why Youth from the Saraiki community and members of Generation Z shift away from their linguistic roots during the current accelerating pace of the global world. The study presents cultural adaptations that support efforts toward language maintenance and cultural education transmission and heritage preservation at educational institutions, media platforms, and government departments. The poetic traditions established by Khwaja Ghulam Farid and Shakir Shujabadi alongside Jhummar dance have declined due to diminishing appreciation of contemporary youth. The scholarship investigates active Saraiki speaking areas and dialect numbers while mapping their geography across multiple urban centers.

Research explores how the Saraiki identity suffers from marginalization though its oral literary elements are powerful because it does not appear in national histories.

The study works to protect Saraiki language through three essential functions: written language maintenance and active language transfer between generations. It aims to inspire young people, especially Gen Z, to take pride in their roots, embrace their cultural heritage, and carry forward the unique identity of their region.

Literature Review

The researchers combine anthropology with linguistics to investigate how South Punjab residents defend their Saraiki cultural identity. The research looks at South Punjab by studying its varied poetic traditions and linguistic-cultural elements using examples from poets Khwaja Ghulam Farid and Shakir Shujabadi. Their words, translations, and the cultural work done in places like Kot Mithan offer deep insight into the soul of the Saraiki people and their fight to be seen and heard.

The research demonstrates cultural communication using genuine Saraiki poetry which highlights culturally specific knowledge system. Linguistic researchers have revealed Pakistan's language system, which positions Saraiki at the margins. The state's preference for Urdu as its national language according to (Rahman, 2023) has pushed Saraiki into second-class status by restricting educational use and access to media outlets. The phonological and grammatical structures of Saraiki create linguistic independence which separates it from Punjabi as per (Shameer, 2021). The unique characteristics of the Saraiki language provide support to cultural and political organizations striving for autonomous government in their area.

The 2017 Pakistani census shows Saraiki has 26 million native speakers in Pakistan coupled with cultural roots extending unverified but substantial numbers in Indian Punjab and Rajasthan making it one of South Asia's largest regional languages. The demographic dominance of Saraiki speakers remains insufficient to secure institutional backing for the language. After the Partition those who moved from India to Pakistan developed traditional poetic and oral traditions of Saraiki speaking yet the language decline results from their integration into predominant ethnic structures and minimal governmental support for their language. Scholars in cultural studies use studies of Saraiki poetry in conjunction with folk traditions as a way to study identity maintenance.

The research focuses on Khwaja Ghulam Farid who lived as a Sufi poet during the 19th century in Kot Mithan while producing kafis that combined devotional elements with local feelings of pride (Amjad, 2024). Farid highlights the regional environments of South Punjab through his poetry collection as his work survives through English and Urdu translations which maintain regional features even while reaching an international audience. The contemporary poetry produced by Shakir Shujabadi examines poverty and economic difficulties facing society. Through his poem "Main Saraiki aan" (I am Saraiki) which possess lines such as "My tongue sings the soil's song" he states his Saraiki identity. The works of these poets can be found at Kot Mithan shrine along with Multan Urs's festivals where they work towards resisting assimilation and strengthening communal relations. Both poets deliver their performances at Kot Mithan and Multan Urs festivals while promoting cultural unity and resisting cultural assimilation.

To illustrate Saraiki poetry's role in identity, consider this original Saraiki poem

Saraiki Poem

"Mitti di Mehak" (The Scent of the Soil)

Main mitti di mehak, Saraiki zuban,

Darya di lehr, te dhup di thaana.

Jhummar di taal, te kafi di rooh,

Kot Mithan di yaad, dil di sooh.
Punjab di chadar, tanha ajnabi,
Apni pehchan, main Saraiki.

Translation (English)

I am the scent of the soil, the Saraiki tongue,
The river's wave, the sun's warm song.
The rhythm of Jhummar, the soul of kafi,
Memories of Kot Mithan, my heart's decree.
In Punjab's blanket, a stranger alone,
My identity shines, I am Saraiki, my own.

Saraiki Poetry: by Shakir shujabadi

میں سرانیکی آن، میں درد دی آواز آن
میں دھرتی دی چپ وچ بولدی راز آن
(Main Saraiki aan, main dard di awaaz aan
Main dharti di chup wich boldi raaz aan)

Translation

I am Saraiki, the voice of pain; I am the secret spoken from the silence of the soil.

Poet: شاکر شجاع آبادی

ہکو رنگ دا کفن تے ہکو جٹیاں قبریں
مر گئے انسان برابر
ہوندا فرق امیر غریب دا جگ تے
سب قبرستان برابر
گنہگار ہوساں تے دوزخ سڑساں
تیڈی میڈی جان برابر
کھڑے ہوسن شاکر محشر نوں
پکھی واس تے خان برابر

English Translation

One color of shroud, and graves all the same,
In death, all humans are equal.
In the world, there may be rich and poor,
But in the graveyard, all are the same.
We may be sinners, and we may burn in hell,
But the pain and soul are equally judged.
On the Day of Judgment, says Shakir,
The beggar and the king will stand the same.

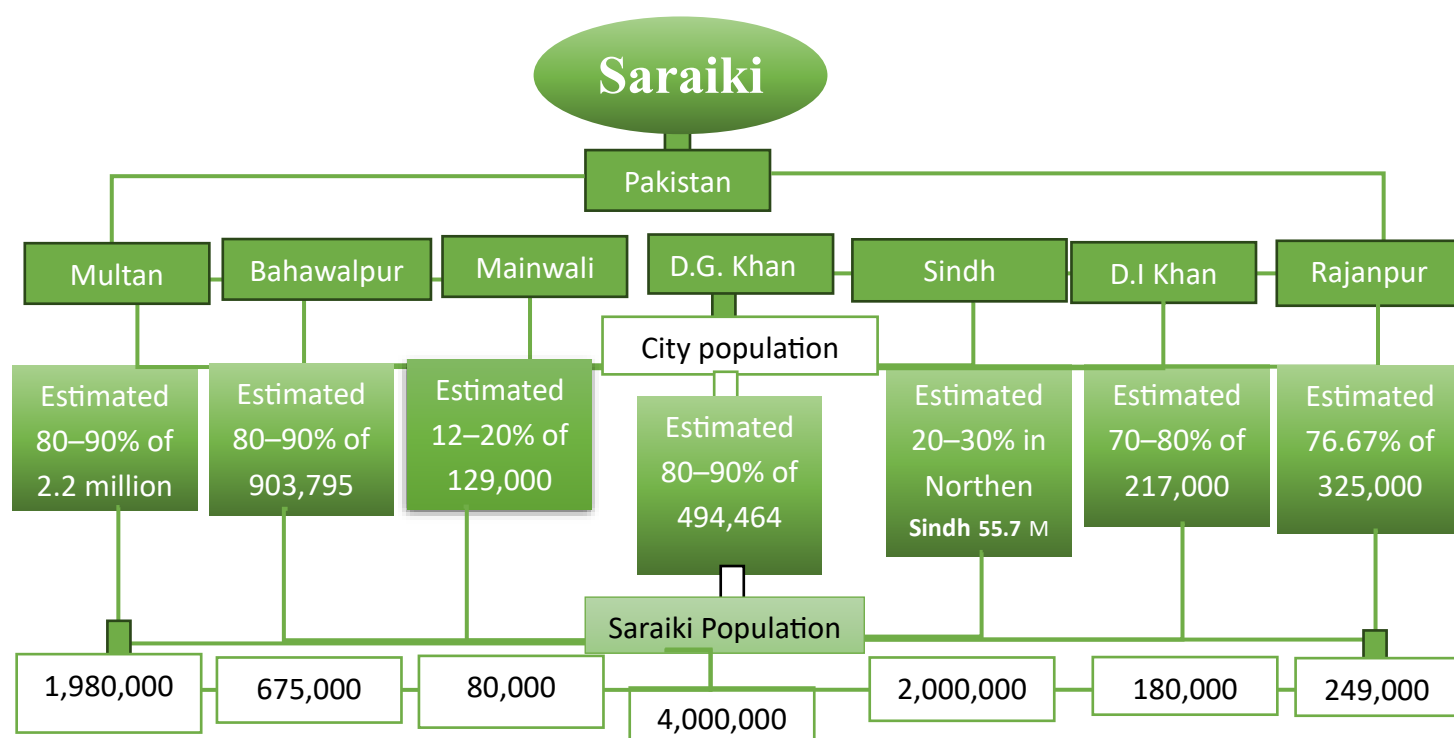
Through their analysis of Khwaja Ghulam Farid and Shakir Shujabadi's poetry the authors bring back the authentic scenery and cultural elements of South Punjab. The works of Khwaja Ghulam Farid and Shakir Shujabadi depict regional beauty while seeking homage and recognition for South Punjab residents. Through their expressive language and emotionally driven writing they develop the Saraiki community identity. (Daniyal, 2022) explores traditional Jhummar dance and Saraiki music performed at Multan Urs and Kot Mithan's shrine. According to Langah these practices serve as a reaction to Punjabi hegemony through musical pieces such as Jhok Ranjhan which

reflect Farid's poetic imagery. Cultural events at Farid's shrine in Kot Mithan continue to celebrate Saraiki tradition while preserving it through explanatory rituals. From a political lens, scholars like (Sohail, 2023) link the region's lack of development to growing calls for a separate province, showing how cultural and political voices are deeply intertwined. The Researchers investigate dance and Saraiki music that performs at Multan Ur's and Kot Mithan's shrine.

The poetry of Shujabadi functions as an instrument of politics to convey complaints regarding centralized control. Research approaches the Saraiki movement through the lens of Pakistan's ethnic politics.

Scholars working in postcolonial theory present tools which enhance our comprehension of the Saraiki movement (Khan, 2019). Demonstrates that Pakistan forces a unified national identity which results in marginalized regional perspectives leading to conflicts experienced during the Saraiki movement shows communities protect their traditions through cultural customs found in Kot Mithan as a method to avoid dying out. Through poetic translations Khwaja Ghulam Farid and Shakir Shujabadi maintain Saraiki identity through resistance by reaching national and global audiences. Current studies deliver important findings on language use, poetry, and cultural activities but each research examines a solitary aspect of the broader story. Many scholars dedicate their work to linguistic analysis receive attention. Existing research fails to acknowledge everyday Saraiki practices performed by local people in regions such as Kot Mithan. There exists a significant gap in academic investigation regarding the real-world experiences of wedding customs and rural youth in addition to their modern storytelling methods using poetry alongside digital media. The research fills an academic vacancy by exploring these spaces. The study examines how translations together with Gen Z influence present-day identity development. By centering Kot Mithan and the people who live, speak, and create there, this research offers a more complete and human understanding of the Saraiki cultural journey and its call for recognition.

Figure 2: Chart Showing the Distribution of Saraiki-Speaking Population in Pakistan/India



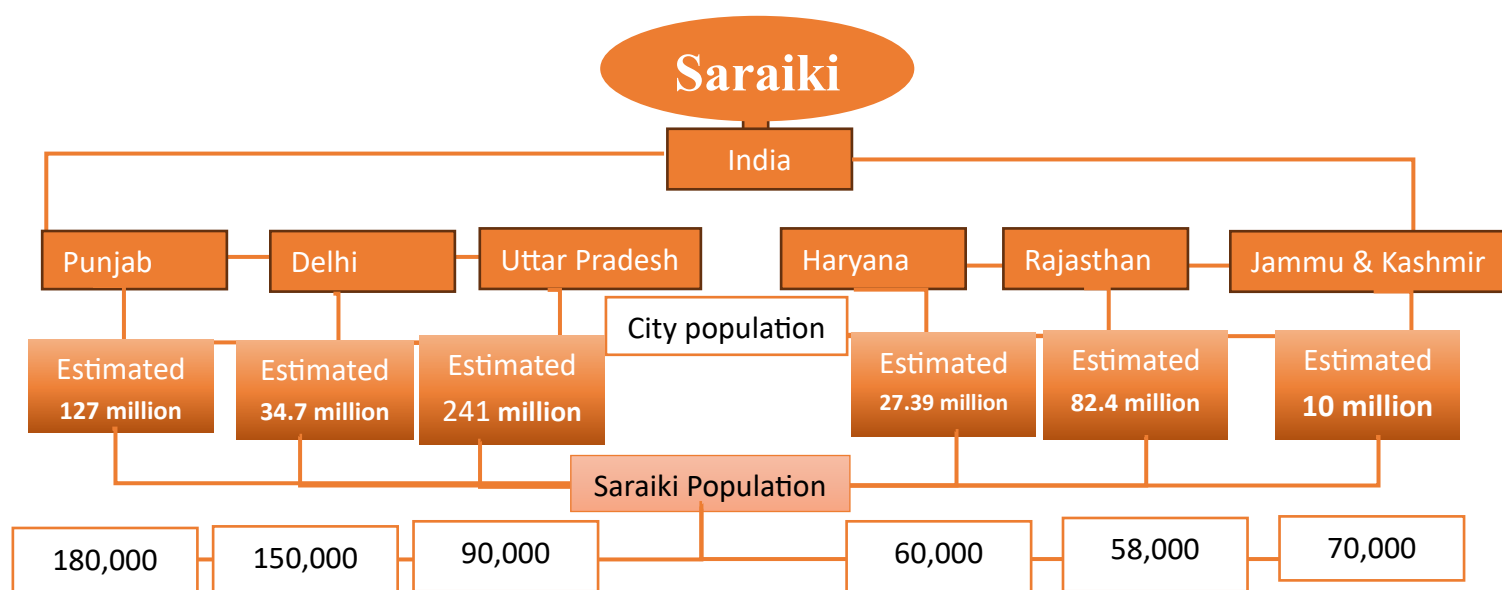


Figure 2 shows the demographics of people who speak Saraiki in both Pakistan and India with a particular focus on the populations in Rajanpur, Kot Mithan and Mianwali by references to the Pakistan 2023 Census and Indian Census 2011 but some data included from 2024 population. The lack of specific city statistics led to an estimation of Saraiki prevalence which relied on regional trends from Pakistan. The data from India does not present specific population numbers for cities nor is it current as per the (Pakistan, 2023) and (Census of India: Language data., 2011).

Literature Gap

Many researchers have studied Saraiki language and poetry together with regional identity however scholars must address multiple important gaps in knowledge. Most studies emphasize linguistic structure and political identity without investigating how Gen Z disengages from their socio-cultural heritage.

The research about young Saraikis who inherit a rich cultural heritage but show declining interest in safeguarding their language and poetry while traditions decline remains scant. Studies show that local Saraiki households have two fluent speakers out of ten children despite anecdotal evidence indicating generational disengagement with their cultural heritage. Literature currently fails to represent and teach the extensive dialectal and geographic variations” of the Saraiki language. Saraiki shows linguistic diversity through its distinct variants known as Multani Derawali and Jatki in Pakistan.

Post-Partition migrant communities in Indian Punjab and Rajasthan maintain elements of the language in spite of being a lesser-known diaspora. Academic research lacks comprehensive mapping which shows the present status of dialects and their adaptation patterns due to migration and assimilation and language policy changes across Pakistani and Indian cities. Very little work exists to document how traditional cultural performances of Saraiki like Jhoomer with local wedding customs and verbal storytelling traditions have developed. Research has overlooked the underlying reasons for cultural changes particularly regarding the impact of modern world and urbanization along with dominant Punjabi and Urdu norms. Academic scholars neglect the substantial influence that the literary contributions of Khwaja Ghulam Farid and Shakir Shujabadi along with the musical achievements of Haseena Khanum have had on Saraiki identity.

Theoretical Framework

This study applies the usage of Postmodernist Theory in Anthropology, this focuses among others on cultural inherent constructs, splits and the powerfully effective nature of power in the narratives of societies. Cultures are dynamic, and the product of social processes, struggle to maintain identity, and intellectualized by prevailing ideologies. Using postmodernist glasses, it is possible to see how the Saraiki language and cultural identities are marginalized and watered down by the dominant cultural frameworks in Pakistan. Associated with postmodernist outlooks, national identity and the dominant culture are commonly established through some selective historical processes, in which powerful groups determine what is considered legitimate and valuable (Lyotard, 1984). By applying a postmodern anthropological framework, this study interprets the decline of the Saraiki language and traditions not as a passive cultural loss, but as part of a broader struggle over meaning, identity, and power. Postmodern theory challenges grand national narratives that marginalize local voices, instead highlighting the fragmented and subjective nature of cultural expression. The voices of Saraiki poets, singers, and youth captured in this ethnography underscore the multiplicity of identities within Pakistan and point to an urgent need for rethinking cultural policies through the lens of inclusivity, pluralism, and localized agency.

In Pakistan, the imposition of Punjabi language and culture, especially by media, education and government institutions has, over time, marginalized or silenced the Saraiki culture and its immediate neighbors. This influence operates across the language spectrum and thus spreads into social constitutes such as marriage rites, rituals and how names are given among others in the wider cultural setting all of which are increasingly being assimilated in terms of Punjabi standards. Additionally, the convergence of dialects based on commonalities in language, ease of mutual understanding and shared accents have, erroneously, placed Saraiki under the category of dialect of Punjabi rather than a language of its own. The effects thus, are many individuals of the Saraiki background are mistakenly recorded as Punjabi in administrative documents, still diminishing the separate characteristics of Saraiki as language. By employing postmodernist strategies, we can examine the way that state classification as well as conventional forms of culture combine in order to make the reality of Saraiki as a uniquely different language ambiguous.

These issues, in the case of the youth generation, are compounded by urbanization, technology, and Urdu and English languages which are taught for success at formal learning institutions. Young Saraiki people, therefore, tend to dissociate themselves from their language/cultural heritage perceiving it as old-fashioned, or case of their locality. It is in line with critiques of modernity, proposed by postmodern theorists, in which local and indigenous knowledge system often become marginalized in the name of centralized, “rational” and global norms (respond That Their minimal acknowledgment is symptomatic of hierarchical power structures which determine what segments of culture get praised and what is left unrecognized. Grounded in postmodernist anthropology, this research tries to illuminate the mechanism of how a shattered cultural identity, state-imposed assimilation, and dominant power relations accelerate the process of eroding Saraiki culture – and how such retrieval serves as a symbolic gesture and a political undertaking.

Table 2: Postmodernist Anthropology & the Erosion of Saraiki Culture Analytical

Aspect	Postmodernist Anthropology View	Saraiki Cultural Context	Effect/Outcome
Cultural Construction	Culture is not fixed it's produced, negotiated, and shaped by power relations.	Saraiki culture is increasingly being redefined or absorbed into dominant Punjabi narratives.	Loss of distinct identity and cultural expression.
Language and Identity	Language reflects power structures; dominant languages suppress marginalized ones.	Punjabi, Urdu, and English dominate; Saraiki often misclassified as Punjabi or ignored in policy.	Linguistic assimilation; official undercounting of Saraiki speakers.
Power & Representation	Dominant groups control cultural narratives and visibility.	Saraiki poets and folk icons like Shakir Shujabadi and Pathanay Khan are sidelined in national media.	Cultural figures remain unrecognized nationally despite regional importance.
Cultural Domains (Beyond Language)	Culture includes traditions, rituals, customs, and social behaviors (e.g., marriage).	Punjabi customs dominate media portrayal and social life, influencing youth preferences and family norms.	Shift in wedding rituals, family naming, and dress styles towards Punjabi norms.
Urbanization & Modern Media	Globalization and urbanization promote homogenized cultures.	Modern media promotes Urdu/Punjabi pop culture; Saraiki youth often feel detached from their roots.	Disengagement of Gen Z from Saraiki cultural practices.
Educational Structures	Education often promotes dominant ideologies and languages.	Schools emphasize Urdu/English; Saraiki is not institutionalized or taught formally.	Youth associate success with dominant languages, not regional identity.
Dialectical Ambiguity	Cultural boundaries are porous; classification often benefits power holders.	Riasti, Derawali dialects often listed under Punjabi.	Statistical erasure and further weakening of Saraiki linguistic presence.
Postmodern Reflexivity	Researchers must critique their own role and examine who constructs cultural knowledge.	National policies, academic research, and census tools reinforce centralist ideologies.	Need for more inclusive, community-rooted cultural representation and policy revision.
Resistance & Recovery	Marginalized communities can reclaim identity through alternative narratives.	Revival of Saraiki music, festivals, literature, and grassroots media projects.	Cultural empowerment, regional pride, and heritage preservation potential.

Table 2 explains how postmodernist anthropology reveals the decline of Saraiki culture under Punjabi dominance. It shows how language, media, education, and cultural practices contribute to the erosion of Saraiki identity. The chart also highlights power structures that marginalize regional traditions while proposing paths for cultural recovery and youth engagement.

Research Methodology

A South Punjab ethnographic research study investigates the ongoing cultural acknowledgment struggle of Saraiki members by using qualitative research methods. This investigation takes a fieldwork approach to understanding the Saraiki identity in its authentic cultural forms. Rather than interviewing people, it seeks understanding through observation, archival research, participation, and reflection on how customs and routines reveal more powerful underlying stories of identity.

The study combines direct event observation of Multan and Kot Mithan Urs festivals to observe living expressions of cultural memory through Jhummar dances and public recitations of Khwaja Ghulam Farid and Shakir Shujabadi poetry. Through these gatherings Saraiki people actively showcase their identity and simultaneously celebrate their heritage with others. It shows how Saraiki people had employed their language as a means of solidarity and struggle against erasure and silencing throughout history. The research selects Multan, Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, and Kot Mithan for site exploration utilizing purposive selection to showcase regional dissimilarities for these interpretations, the study employs thematic analyses framed within postcolonial inquiry, cultural identity theory, and subaltern studies focus on power, agency, and representation concerning the identity dynamics of the community.

This research employs thematic analysis to study power dimensions relating to voice and identity using postcolonial theory and cultural identity theory and subaltern studies. To enhance the validity of the study, a triangulated approach is taken, combining firsthand accounts with cultural materials and scholarly works. At all stages and alongside these strategies, the work is guided by the principles of ethics, culture, and respect for the accurate representation of the rich history and heritage of the Saraiki people.

Saraiki Language and Its Relation to Other Regional Languages

The blending of Saraiki with other regional languages of Pakistan like Punjabi, Hindko and others similar dialects is so profound that it requires analysis.

Table 3: Languages with Indo Arayan origin

Concept	Saraiki	Punjabi	Hindko	Sindhi
Water	Pani	paani	paani	paani
Mother	اماں / amma	maa / amma	amma	ama
house	گھر / ghar	ghar	ghar	ghar
Heart	Dil	Dil	Dil	Dil
Come here	اِته آ / ith aa	ith aa	ith aa	hither aa
Love	Muhabbat	Muhabbat	Muhabbat	Muhabbat

As shown in Table 3, there are words like water, ghar (house), dil (heart), and ‘ith aa’ meaning come over here, which further proves that these languages have an Indo-Aryan origin with Saraiki, Punjabi, and Hindko sharing roots. It is more than mere coincidence that these peoples have shared geographic and culturally distinct areas for a long time. The influence and dominion of Persian-Arabic culture, literature, administration, and Islam profoundly impacted this region and created common terms such as love (muhabbat) that span the spectrum of these languages. Despite Balochi being from the Iranic languages, its lexicon bears Saraiki words, which is due to the prolonged socio-cultural contact and coexistence in Pakistan’s South-Western region. The tendency to use Sindhi and Balochi to describe regions alongside the pronunciation and script variation draw from the same region underscores the complex identity fostered throughout the evolution of languages. This relationship emphasizes the astonishing diversity of Pakistan’s languages that while distinct and unique in their ethnic and cultural ties and heritage remain inextricably interconnected as per the (Shackle, 1976).

Table 4: Languages/Dialects Closely Related to Saraiki (Possible Sub-branches or Siblings)

Language/Dialect	Relation to Saraiki
Hindko	Sister dialect in Lahnda group; shares grammar and vocabulary
Multani	Often treated as a dialect of Saraiki itself
Derawali	Variant of Saraiki spoken in Dera Ghazi Khan area
Bahawalpuri	Sub-dialect spoken in Bahawalpur region
Jatk	Sometimes used synonymously with rural Saraiki dialects
Jhangvi	Transitional dialect between Punjabi and Saraiki

Brings the Saraiki language within focus to show its place in the broader Indo-Aryan family. Saraiki is not a parent language of Hindko or Sindhi, but a sibling sharing common roots with both. It also has a notable share of vocabulary and grammar with Punjabi and Hindko which demonstrates a close relationship between them. Sindhi also does not fall under the Saraiki sub-branch, but is affiliated with the Southern Indo-Aryan group. Sindhi has had a pervading influence on Saraiki because of trade and shared cultural and religious traditions in South Punjab. Balochi is quite the opposite as it comes from the Iranian branch of the Indo-Iranian family. However, due to geographic reasons, Balochi and Saraiki have had the opportunity to coexist and because of that Balochi has lent Saraiki many words, mainly of Persian and Arabic origin. This interrelationship of vocabulary flow helps explain the borders of Saraiki and Balochi languages which are linguistically far apart from each other. Thus, table 1.2 captures the intricate relationships where the boundaries of language in Pakistan are formed as much by history and cultural contact as by language alone (Grierson, 2021).

Reasons behind the declining interest among Gen Z in the Saraiki community toward preserving their language

Migration from South Punjab to the Gulf for economic opportunities has led many Saraiki families to adopt new languages and lifestyles, causing a gradual loss of cultural and linguistic ties. Since around 2008, this shift has been especially noticeable among Gen Z, who, raised in urban centers or abroad, often speak Urdu or English fluently but lack proficiency in Saraiki. Unlike Pashtun or Baloch communities that preserve their native tongues, many Saraiki households have stopped using the language, weakening intergenerational transmission. As a result, Saraiki youth often grow up culturally aware but linguistically disconnected from their heritage.

Factors contributing to the dilution of traditional Saraiki cultural Jhummar

Jhummar dancing has long been a vital part of Saraiki identity, uniting rural South Punjab communities during festivals, weddings, and ceremonies. Traditionally, Jhummar was more than dance—it was a communal ritual bridging generations. However, since 2010, Jhummar began to be seen by some as outdated and backward, leading to negative perceptions. Modern Jhummar parties emerged but became commercialized, losing many traditional elements to suit contemporary tastes. This shift created a generational divide, with elders and youth no longer united through the dance. The research explores how media, urbanization, and commercialization have contributed to the erosion of authentic Saraiki cultural traditions like Jhummar.

To investigate why the contributions of key cultural figures and rituals remain under-acknowledged

The spread of Punjabi language and culture has brought about massive lack of comprehension with regard to the fact that Saraiki is in fact a language which carries its own identity. In the face of the supremacy of other languages, Saraiki identity has become vague and most customary rites such as weddings in the Saraiki region have been declining. These cultural practices have been absorbed more and more into the mainstream linguistic cultures – most prominently Punjabi. Overshadowing of the Saraiki language by the more powerful ones, perhaps is one of the main reasons as to why the national platform still does not recognize artists like Khawaja Ghulam Farid, Shakir Shujabadi, Pathanay Khan, Haseena Khanum and Mansoor. Although such poets, musicians, and storytellers made important contributions to regional identity, they continue to be left out of mainstream media, national curriculum, and official institutions. A lot of the invisibility of Saraiki figures is attributable to massive dominance of major linguistic cultures. The Saraiki society still remains busy in asserting fear of their visibility, preserving their cultural identity and gaining proper recognition in an increasingly competitive environment of national and international lingual circles.

Findings

1. Generation Z of the Saraiki community is losing connection with the Saraiki language is more exposed to Urdu and English in education and media.
2. Modernization, urbanization and digital exposure have recoded the habitus of the Saraiki youth and exposed them to the notion that success is associated with mainstream national and global culture.
3. Such traditional cultural practices as Jhummar dance and native wedding rituals are quickly being eroded by external cultural pressures.
4. There is obviously a generation gap, with a few children per 10 in certain areas only speaking Saraiki at home now.
5. The cultural works of poets such as Shakir Shujabadi and Khwaja Ghulam Farid are under appreciated at the national level because of cultural power structures that define symbolic cultural value.
6. Even folk artists like Haseena Khanum, Attaullah Khan Esakhelvi, Mansoor Malangi and Pathanay Khan remain celebrated locally but marginalized in the larger popular discourse of in the media and academic discourse.
7. There is a dearth of comprehensive documentation and academic discussion of the varied dialects of Saraiki spoken around Pakistan and India.

8. Although Saraiki exudes much historical and poetic richness, it is frequently perceived by the youth to be a “village” language because of its poor economic and educational value.
9. There is also pressure from many Saraiki-speaking families themselves to prevent their children using the language in formal settings or social outings for fear of social stigmatization.
10. Mainstream media platforms are not tapping the whole potential of using platforms to reach out to Saraiki-speaking audiences, hence, lack of engaging cultural materials for the youth.

Recommendations

Based on the research this paper presents, the cultural identity movement of culture of the Saraiki community of the South Punjab has practicable solutions to be supported: the Saraiki language needs to be secured, the dialects must be promoted, and the marginalized members must be given voice, and equal opportunities should be created to restore the cultural self-determination with the help of the strength of the historic personality of the Saraiki community, such as Khwaja Ghulam Farid, Shakir Shujabadi, Haseena Khanum, Mansoor Malangi and Pathanay Khan.

Linguistic Preservation

A dedicated Saraiki broadcasting network, including television, radio, and news stations, should promote iconic works like Pathanay Khan's *Meda Ishq Vi Toon*, Khanum's *Akhiyan Da Sanwal*, Mansoor Malangi's *Ik Phul Motia Da*, and poetry by Shakir Shujabadi and Khwaja Ghulam Farid. Digital platforms must stream translated Saraiki content to engage youth and strengthen language roots. National cultural festivals should equally celebrate Saraiki heritage alongside Punjabi and Sindhi, with events like the *Shakir Shujabadi Literary Festival* and *Khwaja Ghulam Farid Sufi Festivall* featuring Jhummar dance and Sufi poetry. Investment beyond Kot Mithan and Multan is essential to develop Saraiki theater and comedy.

Amplifying Subaltern Voices

Arrange existing cultural events alongside oral history research on Saraiki women to highlight their vital role in Pakistan's heritage. Establish chartered organizations dedicated to preserving the legacies of Mansoor Malangi and Pathanay Khan, empowering Saraiki communities to lead in safeguarding their history. For socio-political equity, the government must boost South Punjab's economic development by funding infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Incorporating Saraiki intellectuals into policy boards can address feelings of alienation and ease regional autonomy demands. Community development owes much to the passionate efforts of Farid, Abadi, Khanum, Malangi, and Pathanay Khan through their self-driven initiatives.

Conclusion

Although spoken by millions in Pakistan and parts of India, Saraiki identity remains endangered. The language is increasingly blending with dominant languages like Punjabi, compromising its distinctiveness. This erosion extends beyond language to cultural practices, with traditional Saraiki wedding rites often replaced by Punjabi or Urdu customs. Post-1947 partition displacement Saraiki voices further. For Generation Z, Urdu dominates daily use, causing a significant loss of linguistic heritage. While celebrated figures like Shakir Shujabadi, Pathanay Khan, and Haseena Khanum remain unknown, many important contributors to Saraiki culture receive little attention. Traditional celebrations and rituals are fading, reflecting a broader loss of cultural knowledge. Saraiki is often mistaken as a Punjabi dialect, diminishing its status. Despite these challenges, Saraiki culture strives to survive against dominant cultural forces. Urgent institutional recognition

and community efforts are essential to preserve Saraiki as a vital part of Pakistan's and South Asia's rich cultural legacy.

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