



Linguistic Diversity and National Identity in Pakistan: Parliament's Influence



Chaman Hussain

PhD. Scholar, Department of History and Pakistan Studies. University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

Mahboob Hussain

Chairman, Department of History and Pakistan Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

Humaira Dar

Associate Professor/ Head of Department History and Pakistan Studies, Government Islamia College, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

Abstract: *Since its formation in 1947, Pakistan's linguistic diversity, where more than 70 languages are spoken, has had a significant impact on the country's national identity. This study uses a multidisciplinary method to analyse how Pakistan's parliament affects national identity in the midst of this diversity. It draws on linguistics, the study of politics, and sociology. The impact of parliamentary language rules on political discourse and unity is examined. This study examines how parliament promotes interlanguage harmony, protects rights, and builds a shared national identity through an extensive assessment of parliament debates, legislation, and their implementation. Additionally, it examines the challenges posed by linguistic diversity and how these impact cohesiveness and stability. This study provides insights to guide strategies that encourage unity in the face of variety, fostering a more inclusive and peaceful Pakistani society. It does this by shedding light on the interactions between diversity in languages, parliament, and national identity.*

Key Words: Linguistic Diversity, National Identity, Pakistan, Parliament, Influence

Corresponding Author: Chaman Hussain (PhD Scholar, Department of History and Pakistan Studies. University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: chamannaz@live.com)

Introduction

Pakistan, a country that was created after British India was divided in 1947, is a striking illustration of how linguistic diversity shapes national identity. Pakistan's linguistic environment is as complex as it is rich, with more than 70 different languages being spoken there (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2016). It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of language in shaping national identity, as well as the parliament has been instrumental

in achieving the delicate balance between languages and national cohesion. In spite of such linguistic diversity, this research study explores how the parliament of Pakistan has influenced the growth and maintenance of a common national identity.

Academic disciplines have shown interest in the dynamics of language variety, national identity, and the effect of parliament. There are strong theoretical underpinnings for comprehending how

language affects identity and how political institutions influence language policies. (Anderson, 1985; Fishman & Gilbert, 1975; Patten, 2009). A closer look is necessary before applying these concepts to Pakistan's unique situation.

This study examines the complex relationship between linguistic variety and national identity throughout Pakistan using concepts from linguistics, political philosophy, and sociology. It aims to reveal the intricate relationship that underlies the pursuit of national unity among variety by evaluating legislative debates, language-related laws, and their practical effects.

The study's findings may be a useful tool for academics and policymakers seeking to strengthen the impression of national solidarity in countries with a diverse linguistic population. This research also advances knowledge of how politics and language interact to influence a country's social structure.

Literature Review

Pakistan's complicated history is at the heart of the country's linguistic variety. Long before the country of Pakistan was founded in 1947, the area that currently includes it was home to numerous linguistic communities. The British Empire left behind a patchwork of languages and dialects, which contributed to the linguistic variety of modern-day Pakistan. (Malik, 2010)

Theories and Ideas Regarding National Identity and Linguistic Diversity

Language politics can be understood conceptually within the context of theories on the diversity of languages and national identity. The idea of "imagined communities" popularised by Anderson (1985) emphasises how a common language can foster a sense of community among disparate populations. The "Sociology of Language" by Fishman &

Gilbert (1975), which highlights the role that language plays as a crucial sign of individuality and social division, emphasises the societal ramifications of linguistic variation. These theories lay the foundation for investigating how language contributes to the formation of national identity.

Role of Parliament in Shaping Language Policies

The literature is replete with examples of how the parliament influences language laws and, in turn, national identity. The main entities for passing laws and regulations pertaining to language are parliaments. They serve as debating venues as well, illuminating the difficulties and conflicts associated with linguistic variety. (Schiffman, 1996) Understanding the subtleties of this influence is crucial for understanding the bigger picture of national identity, especially in the case of Pakistan, where the parliament has struggled with language regulations since its inception.

Linguistic Diversity in Pakistan

A distinguishing feature of Pakistan is its linguistic diversity, with a wide variety of languages being spoken in different parts of the country. Pakistan is a vibrant and complex linguistically as a result of its historical, geographic, and cultural variety.

The Indo-Aryan & Iranian language families represent one of Pakistan's main linguistic divisions. A significant language and Pakistan's official language, Urdu is an Indo-Aryan language. It is used as a lingua franca and is commonly spoken in urban areas. (Rahman, 2002) The provinces of Pakistan, on the other hand, show a notable level of linguistic diversity.

In the Punjab province, Punjabi, an Indo-Aryan language, is the most common tongue. (Rahman, 2002) The majority language in the Sindh province is Sindhi, an Indo-Aryan. (Rahman, 2002). The main tongue of

Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly the North-West Frontier Province) is Pashto, a part of the Iranian language family. (Rahman, 2002). Balochi, another Iranian language, is the major language in Baluchistan (Rahman, 2002).

A number of additional languages, like as Saraiki, Kashmiri, Shina, and others, are also spoken by sizable numbers of people in various parts of the nation. The linguistic complexity is further increased by the fact that dialects like Punjabi, Bengali, and Sindhi are written in a variety of scripts (such as Arabic, Devanagari, and Gurmukhi). (Schiffman, 1996)

Particularly during the 1971 War, where cultural and linguistic distinctions played a key role, Pakistan's linguistic variety is closely linked to regional identities and has historical ramifications. (Rahman, 2002).

Understanding Pakistan's linguistic diversity and distribution is essential to understanding the benefits and difficulties it brings for the country's identity and government.

The Evolution of Language Policies

Since Pakistan's founding, language policy has seen considerable adjustments and advancements. The linguistic variety and the development of national identity have been significantly influenced by these measures.

English was the official language used in education and government in the early years after independence in 1947, a legacy of the colonial past. The national language, Urdu, was chosen with the goal of uniting the linguistically varied country. (Rahman, 2002). However, this choice was met with opposition in provinces where the languages of indigenous people had deep cultural traditions.

The 1956 constitution's adoption signalled a significant advancement in language policy. Despite permitting provinces to utilise their native tongues for

official reasons, it recognised Urdu as the nation's official language. (Rahman, 2002) The necessity to take into account regional identities and language preferences was reflected in this acceptance of linguistic variety.

While recognising the right of the provinces to use their native tongues for official purposes, the constitution of 1973 maintained Urdu's status as the country's official language. However, in reality, this constitutional recognition frequently ran into difficulties, resulting in tensions and linguistic disputes.

The establishment of Urdu as the only language of instruction in federally funded schools and the growth of province languages in the areas they represent were additional language policy changes. Along with Urdu and English, regional languages were to be promoted and preserved under the 1973 National Education Policy. (National Education Policy, 1979).

With the passage of the amendment known as the 18th to the Constitution in 2010, granting the provinces more authority over matters like education and language regulations, the linguistic environment underwent significant change. (18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, 2010). As an outcome, provinces were given more freedom to choose their language policy, enabling them to meet the needs of their respective populations.

Pakistan's continual efforts to strike a balance between the development of Urdu, the country's official language, and the protection of regional language identities can be seen in the evolution of its language laws. The development of a common national identity as well as the nation's linguistic variety have been significantly impacted by these measures.

Parliament's Influence on National Identity

As the country's highest legislative body, the

Pakistani parliament has been instrumental in forming the nation's identity through legislation and linguistic policies. The implementation of laws pertaining to language, parliamentary discussions, and the incorporation of linguistic diversity are only a few examples of how the effect of parliament may be seen in this situation.

The choice to make Urdu the nation's official language is a significant illustration of how the parliament shapes national identity. In an effort to promote linguistic unity within a country with a wide variety of languages, Pakistan's 1956 constitution recognised Urdu as its official national tongue. (Rahman, [2002](#)) This choice had a big impact on building a common language groundwork.

Language policy has been greatly influenced by parliamentary debates on related topics. These discussions shed light on the difficulties and conflicts associated with language variety. They also represent the many interests and issues of Pakistan's various geographical and linguistic populations. (Schiffman, 1996)

Parliament's ability to shape national identity has been further boosted by the creation of legislative committees and groups devoted to language concerns. These organisations examine language laws and their effects, assisting in the protection of linguistic rights and well-informed decision-making. (Schiffman, 1996)

Despite attempts by parliament to strike a balance between linguistic variety and national identity, difficulties nevertheless exist. The conflicts that result from linguistic discussions and decisions frequently bring to light how difficult it is to unify a country with many different languages under an umbrella linguistic standard. (Rahman, [2002](#))

The parliament's ability to shape national identity through linguistic decisions is still a fluid and developing process. The function of parliament in determining the character of the country remains a crucial

component of this intricate and ongoing story as Pakistan keeps balancing linguistic variety and unity.

Challenges and Tensions

While Pakistan's linguistic diversity contributes to its cultural diversity, it has also historically and in modern society created considerable obstacles and tensions. These difficulties include discrimination based on language, unequal utilisation of resources, and disagreements over language regulations.

The possibility of linguistic discrimination, in which speakers of marginalised languages may experience marginalisation in a variety of spheres of life, especially education and work, is one of the ongoing difficulties. (Gadit, [2008](#)) There have occasionally been discrepancies and tensions relating to having access to opportunities due to the dominance of English and Urdu in official arenas.

Language policy disagreements and their execution have occasionally become a major source of conflict. In Pakistan, where several languages coexist, linguistic bias must be avoided by the implementation of explicit policies. Political and social strife has resulted from conflicts over the usage and promotion of regional languages vs national languages like Urdu. (Rahman, [1997](#))

Political movements and wars, like the 1971 War, where linguistic inequalities fueled calls for linguistic and cultural autonomy, also display the social ramifications of linguistic tensions. (Rahman, [2002](#)). These conflicts have continued to various degrees in many areas and communities, illuminating the intricate ways that language diversity shapes identities.

These difficulties and conflicts highlight the complicated interplay in Pakistan between language variety and national identity. Language diversity is an indicator of cultural pride, but it also highlights the need

for inclusive policies on languages to address gaps and tensions.

Case Studies

This section includes a number of case studies to give readers a clearer understanding of the dynamics of linguistic variety and how it affects national identity in Pakistan. These instances highlight the difficulties and complications involved in maintaining the country's linguistic diversity.

The Sindhi Language Movement

From the perspective of linguistic variety, the Sindhi Language Movement is an important case study. It has been distinguished by attempts to advance and safeguard Sindhi and its significance in establishing a unique Sindhi identity. This movement highlights the conflict between the more general national identity and regional language identities. (Rahman, [2002](#))

Baluchistan and the Balochi Language

The situation in Baluchistan emphasises how important the Balochi language is in defining the Balochi community's identity. Since the Balochi language is crucial to identifying the ethnic and cultural makeup of the Baloch people, there has been a fight in Baluchistan for its recognition and advancement. (Gul, [2017](#))

The Implementation of Punjabi in Punjab

The most linguistically varied province of Pakistan, Punjab, provides a case study of the difficulties associated with putting language policies into practice. The persistent conflicts between different regions and national identities are reflected in the argument regarding whether Punjabi ought to be used more frequently for government functions inside Punjab. (Zaidi, [2018](#))

The varied cultural and linguistic landscapes of Pakistan are shown in these case studies, as well as the complex interactions between spoken language, identity, and politics.

Implementation of Language Policies

An essential component of managing linguistic variety and forming a national identity within Pakistan is the adoption of language policies. The goal of language policy is to effectively implement laws, which frequently entails resolving issues on a practical level.

Language of Instruction in Schools

The language of teaching in schools is a crucial component of Pakistan's language policy implementation. Even though Urdu is the official language, English is also widely used in education. It can be difficult and difficult to make the switch from regional dialects to Urdu or English as the primary means of instruction because there are few resources available for teacher education and publications in these languages. (Malik, [2010](#))

Promoting Regional Languages

Efforts to promote and preserve regional languages require practical measures. Provinces have taken steps to develop curricula, textbooks, and teaching materials in regional languages, but disparities exist in the availability and quality of resources across regions. (Naseem, [2011](#)). Effective teacher preparation and equitable resource distribution are necessary for successful implementation.

Official Documentation and Services

Official services and paperwork are also impacted by language rules. The governmental documents of Pakistan frequently employ both Urdu and English. The use of indigenous languages in local

government and documentation, however, may be emphasised in regions with a strong sense of linguistic identity. (Khalid, [2005](#)). Effective bilingual policy implementation is a difficult task.

Community and Grassroots Engagement

Participation at the local level and from the community is essential for language policy success. Local authorities, community people, and grassroots organisations all contribute significantly to the preservation and promotion of their own languages. (Saeed, [2013](#)). Collaboration with these parties is necessary for the successful implementation of language policies.

The process of putting language policy into effect in Pakistan is complex and calls for consideration of real-world issues, allocation of resources, and community involvement. The impact of these policies on national identity is best seen in how well they are implemented.

The Impact on National Unity

National cohesion in Pakistan is significantly impacted by language regulations and linguistic diversity. The government's linguistic decisions and their effects on the nation's numerous communities of speakers have both formed and tested the idea of a common national identity.

Fostering National Unity

Fostering national unity has been one of language policy's stated objectives. To offer a linguistic bridge for the heterogeneous population, Urdu was promoted as the national tongue. (Rahman, [2002](#)). While Urdu is a representation of national harmony, it may also cause conflict in areas in which it is not the main language.

Challenges to Unity

The divisions caused by language restrictions

may make it difficult to maintain national harmony. Discontent has been caused in some places by differences in the availability of assets, possibilities, and the acceptance of regional languages. (Gadit, [2008](#)). Language preferences and cultural identities can cause splits within the country.

Balancing Regional Identities

In Pakistan, maintaining a balance of both national and local identities is frequently necessary for national unity. To acknowledge the variety of identities inside the country, it is crucial to promote and preserve regional languages in addition to Urdu. (Gul, [2017](#)).

Role in Political Movements

Linguistic identity and language have played significant roles in various political movements in Pakistan. The Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, driven by linguistic and cultural disparities, resulted in the creation of Bangladesh. (Rahman, [2002](#)). These movements highlight the relationship between linguistic variety, linguistic laws, and a sense of national identity.

The interaction between establishing a common identity and respecting and recognising regional linguistic identities has a significant impact on national unity. Understanding these dynamics is crucial if one is to grasp the benefits and difficulties that linguistic variety brings in the quest for a strong sense of national identity.

Conclusion

This study's focus has been on the complex interactions between linguistic variety, and national identity, especially the power of Pakistan's parliament. Pakistan, a country gifted with a variety of languages, is both a monument to cultural diversity and a test in creating a strong sense of national identity. Through this multidisciplinary lens, issues such as the importance of language in forming this identity, the historical

development of language policies, the difficulties and conflicts caused by linguistic variety, and the effect on national unity have all been studied.

The process of creating Pakistan's country has been centred on language, which serves as both a mirror of identity and an expression of solidarity. In order to build a sense of belonging among the diverse population, it has been crucial to promote Urdu to be the national language along with recognising regional languages. However, there have been some conflicts with these regulations because language diversity frequently reflects regional and cultural distinctions. Maintaining national unity while balancing these considerations is a difficult challenge.

The case studies discussed here provide insight into the subtleties of linguistic variation among Pakistan's many regions. The Sindhi Language Movement, the function of Balochi in Baluchistan, and the intricate language dynamics in Punjab are three examples of the difficulties and possibilities that regional language policies bring. These case studies demonstrate the necessity of regional identity recognition and preservation strategies within a larger national framework.

The execution of language regulations is vital since it influences people's ability to access government documents, career opportunities, and education. However, it frequently faces real-world difficulties including resource shortages and regional inequities. In order to prevent language regulations from escalating linguistic inequities, effective implementation is essential.

A major worry is how language laws may affect racial harmony. While language can bring people together, it can also cause conflict when regional linguistic preferences clash with the predominance of national ones. The 1971 War serves as a historical

example of language differences, which emphasises the dangers of ignoring linguistic variety.

The variety of languages spoken in Pakistan is an asset and a challenge, to sum up. For countries to navigate this variance, language policies that are shaped by the parliament are crucial. This study emphasises the significance of inclusive speech policies, successful execution, and regional acknowledgement to generate a stronger sense of togetherness in Pakistan, despite the challenges that come with achieving a shared national identity in the face of linguistic diversity.

The results of this study add to our comprehension of how the diversity of languages, linguistic policies, and parliamentary influence interact to alter a country's social structure. For academics and policymakers interested in promoting national unity in nations with a diverse linguistic population, they provide insightful information.

The harmony between local and national characteristics will continue to be a crucial component in the continuous creation of a dynamic and diverse Pakistani country as Pakistan continues to develop and adapt to the dynamics of linguistic variety.

Original Research-related Contribution

This study makes an unusual contribution by thoroughly examining the complex connections between linguistic variety, national identity, as well as the authority of Pakistan's parliament, especially in the context of the nation's provinces and administered territories. This research develops the field by offering specific to the area case studies that offer intricate insights into the interaction between language legislation, parliamentary decisions, along local identity dynamics. While the body of existing literature has addressed the more

general issues of the diversity of languages and national identity in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan this research goes further by presenting region-specific case studies.

These case studies help to contextualise the problem by illuminating the difficulties and complexities that regions with distinctive linguistic identities encounter. This study adds to the body of knowledge by exploring the varied languages of Pakistan's

provinces and provides a novel viewpoint on the challenges associated with handling various languages within a country. Additionally, this research contributes to the larger field of sociocultural research by offering insightful lessons and suggestions for politicians and academics looking to address comparable issues in other nations characterised by linguistic variation and cultural complexity.

References

- The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (2010). *18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan*. <https://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/amendments/18amendment.html>
- Anderson, B. R. O. (1985). Imagined Communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. *Pacific Affairs*, 58(3), 497. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2759245>
- Constitution of Pakistan. (1973). Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1549886415_632.pdf
- Gilbert, G. G., & Fishman, J. A. (1975). The Sociology of Language: An interdisciplinary social science approach to language in society. *Language*, 51(1), 234. <https://doi.org/10.2307/413168>
- Gadit, A. A. M. (2008). Cultural and linguistic diversity in Pakistan: Implications for health and mental health. *Journal of Pakistan Medical Association*, 58(5), 276-278.
- Gul, H. (2017). *Balochistan's identity crisis: The impact of language on Baloch nationalism*. In S. Iqbal, & R. A. Lopez (Eds.), *Language, Identity and Education on the Arabian Peninsula: Bilingual Policies and Identity Transformation in Qatar* (pp. 155-175). Springer.
- Khalid, S. (2005). Language, politics and identity: The Sindhi case. *Asian Ethnicity*, 6(3), 193-208.
- Lewis, M. P., Simons, G. F., & Fennig, C. D. (2016). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World (19th ed.)*. SIL International.
- Malik, S. (2010). Language and Colonial Legacies: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Identity in South Asia. *Anthem Press*.
- Malik, S. C. (2010). Multilingual education in South Asia. In A. A. K. Ahmed (Ed.), *Language and Social Change in South Asia* (pp. 291-302). *Pearson Education India*.
- Naseem, S. (2011). Language policy, identity, and the provision of education in Pakistan. *Language Policy*, 10(4), 365-385.
- National Education Policy. (1979). National Education Policy 1979. Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan. <https://www.scribd.com/document/114148382/Education-Policy-1979-by-Saleem>
- Patten, A. (2009). *The Political Philosophy of Nationalism: An Exposition and Defense of the Nation-State*. *Edinburgh University Press*.
- Rahman, T. (1997). Language and ethnicity in Pakistan. *Asian Survey*, 37(9), 833-839. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645700>
- Rahman, T. (2002). *Language and Politics in Pakistan*. Oxford University Press. https://books.google.com.pk/books/about/Language_and_Politics_in_Pakistan.html?id=LKWxAAAAIAAJ
- Saeed, A. (2013). Language and identity in South Asia. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 33, 243-260.
- Schiffman, H. (1996). *Linguistic Culture and Language Policy*. Psychology Press. https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=5rsMo7LBoh8C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=o#v=0nepage&q&f=false
- Zaidi, S. F. (2018). Ethnicity, language, and the politics of regional identity in Punjab, Pakistan. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 41(2), 350-369.