

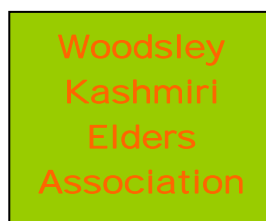
# Pahari Language Awareness Conference

A map of Pahari speaking areas which overlap into India, Pakistan and Nepal, the central point being the Himalayan region of the state of Jammu and Kashmir from where most Kashmiris settled in Britain have migrated



Tuesday 22nd March 2005  
Held at Woodsley Road Multi Cultural Centre  
Leeds, England, UK

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## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks go to the sponsors of the conference-Awards for All, Kashmir Charitable Trust (UK) and the Kashmiri Elders Association held at the Woodsley Road Multicultural Centre. The conference was hosted by the Aalami Pahari Adabi Sangat which was formed in Leeds in 2000 but is currently working in Azad Kashmir (Pakistani occupied area) and Indian occupied Kashmir to promote the Pahari language and help to support and encourage writers and artists in this language. The organisation came about through a series of meetings between (but not exclusively) members of the UK Kashmiri community. A big thank you to members of the Aalami Pahari Sangat, particularly Daalat Ali and Sajaad Raja (Chair of Aalami Pahari Adabi Sangat, Leeds) for their efforts in organising this conference a special thanks to all the presenters and conference participants for their contributions and to the chairs Dr Sewan Singh Kalsi and Mohsin Zulfiqar for the smooth running of each session. Last but not least thanks to Abid Hussain for his comments on an earlier version of this document.

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**Contents**

**Page**

**Acknowledgments**

**Forward**

**Pahari Language Awareness Conference**

**Session One: Origins, historical development and**

**Recent revival in the UK of the Pahari language**

**Session Two: Pahari language and the impact on**

**service provision**

**Conference Outcomes**

## **Forward**

The Pahari Language Awareness Conference is an important event in the development and enrichment of multicultural Britain's ethnic landscape. For too long the variety of Britain's ethnic minorities has been obscured by the classificatory schemes of the British State. It is only in the 1980s that a distinct Asian identity was disaggregated from the overall label of Black which used to cover all Britain's post-colonial ethnic minorities. In recent years it has become increasingly noticeable that the label Asian covers diverse communities with distinct socio-economic profiles and trajectories and that there is a great need to fine tune our vocabulary of ethnic minorities so that it reflects solidarities and associations found among those minorities rather than groupings imposed for the convenience of service delivery and monitoring.

It has been clear for some time that one of the most marginalised and dispossessed groups among ethnic minorities hail from Azad Kashmir. Part of the reason why these Kashmiris appear at the bottom of so many socio-economic indicators and quality of life opportunities is due to their invisibility within both official and non-official public discourse. There is even no agreed upon way of describing this population, various labels such as Pakistani, Kashmiri, Mirpuri continue to be used by various agencies and public bodies. One way around this confusion is to allow this population to narrate its own sense of belonging. As part of this move towards self-ascription the Pahari Language Awareness Conference sought to disseminate the relationship between Pahari as a distinct language spoken by this amorphous population and its service and public needs. By using Pahari it allows us to recognise

Pahari speakers as they would want themselves to be recognised as a distinct ethnic minority in the multicultural ethno-scape of post-colonial Britain. The conference emphasised that the recognition of the Pahari language was not simply an aesthetic or linguistic challenge but rather it was a means by which the invisible could be made visible and the needs and wants of the Pahari speakers could enter the public domain without having to wave flags of convenience.

Dr Nasreen Ali.

## **Pahari Language Awareness Conference**

The aim of this conference was to understand the historical development and relevance of the Pahari language for a significant number of Azad Kashmiri citizens of the UK whose mother tongue is Pahari. Pahari continues to be regarded as a dialect of Punjabi. It is estimated that approximately two thirds of those people who travel on Pakistani passports are actually from Azad Kashmir. There are fewer Kashmiris from Indian occupied Kashmir settled in the UK. Non recognition of Pahari as the language spoken by the majority of Azad Kashmiris settled in the UK is leading to their exclusion from many mainstream and ethnic services. The presentations and discussions that followed in this conference highlighted the linguistic needs of this marginalised community with the view to providing more equitable service delivery.

The conference was organised around two sessions. The papers in the first session set the context of the Pahari language by discussing the origins, historical development and recent revival of Pahari in the UK context. The second session reviewed the impact of Pahari non recognition on members of the Azad Kashmiri community settled in the UK with the view to informing service planners, providers and front line staff on communicating with Pahari speakers.

### **First Session: origins, historical development and recent revival in the UK of the Pahari language.**

**Ghulam Hussain** began this session by outlining the papers to be presented during the conference. He argued that the Kashmiri community have a separate language and cultural identity both of which are closely linked. He identified one of the main

outcomes of the conference should be to move away from questions of whether Pahari is a separate language to addressing the needs of this marginalised community. He suggested that there was a need to map out the way forward in partnership to achieve better involvement and services for Pahari speaking Kashmiri people living in the UK.

**Daalat Ali** (Adaalat Ali) well known for his short stories in the Pahari language presented a paper looking at the historic development, survival and the recent revival of the Pahari language. He began by pointing out that Pahari is a language of the Indo-Aryan family of languages and is spoken throughout the foothills of the Himalayas, in Hamachal Pardesh (Northern Indian province), the Indian controlled part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistani controlled Jammu Kashmir and through Northern Pakistan, up to River Indus and Chitral. He argued that the language takes on various names representing the districts in which it is spoken e.g. in the Potwar region (which comprises of four districts, Rawalpindi, Jhelum, Chakwal and Attock and the hills of Muree in Northern Punjab) it is referred to as Pothwari, in Mirpur it is called Mirpuri and in Jammu Dogari. Ali went on to highlight the historical evolution of the language and explained that some writers argue that the earliest written form of Pahari was in the Sharda alphabet and formed one of the oldest written languages in South Asia. The Pahari language has evolved and been subject to the political and social changes that go hand in hand with imperialism and colonialism. He highlighted that that the use of the language had been subjected to the trappings of imperialism and colonialism. Two things happened as a result of partition in 1947. First the written form of Pahari became divided into Shah Mukhi and Gurmukhi. Second the language as a whole was suppressed (like many other

languages and dialects) in the drive to promote English generally and Urdu as the national language of Pakistan (Persian script) and Hindi as the national language of India. In India and Pakistan Urdu and Hindi became the language of the educated classes, and Pahari was relegated to the language of the illiterate rural classes. Ali argued that as many members of the rural classes could not read and write rather than Pahari finding its way into the classroom (like Punjabi, Shindi and Pushto) its popularity has grown in the media in the South Asian sub continent and in the UK so that now Pahari can be heard on local TV and Radio stations. In addition a thriving revival of literature and poetry written and recited in Pahari is emerging e.g. 'Chitka' in the UK.

**Professor Nazir Tabassum** noted for his 'Phonological Analysis of Pahari Language' spoke about the endangered (in the biological sense) nature of the Pahari language suggesting that special arrangements should be made to protect the language. He suggested that there should be recognition that the users of a particular language as a distinct geographical, ethnic and cultural entity are the guarantee for the preservation promotion and progress of a language. Linguistic imperialism has however stunted the growth of some languages such as Pahari e.g. the extensive use of English and English literature in Pakistani University's and schools thus also relegating it to the educated classes and therefore fewer users in Pakistan. **Tabassum** argued that Pahari needs to be revived by acknowledging what is needed for its vigour and vitality. Whilst acknowledging the Pahari literary society and the 'Chitka' school of scholars he argued that Pahari needs to be made functional. He pointed out that there has been some move towards this through the development of the exact form of the spoken language through the Persian text. What is still needed is further

explorations of sentence structures and the development of the grammar needed to teach the Pahari language. He highlighted that the Pahari dictionary is also currently being compiled. An equally important linguistic tool is the idioms, phrases and proverbs of the language. He pointed out that the proverbs are particularly important to understand the cultural background of a community. He concluded the paper by arguing that to make Pahari functional and avoid its extinction it must be taught in the classroom especially in the UK. He suggested that the UK Government has a responsibility to protect the cultural and ethnic lives of one of its largest settler communities through its commitment to a multicultural and poly-ethnic society.

**Questions and Comments:** The papers in this sessions generated considerable discussion. Some comments and questions from the floor were as follows: **Sitara Khan** continuing from Tabassum's suggestion that Pahari should be made functional by introducing it into schools in Britain pointed out if the language of teaching does not resonate with children then they put up barriers to understanding. She argued that it was important to open children up to recognise the cultural and linguistic heritage that they are bringing to the classroom and it is only from this basis that we can begin to learn second or subsequent language. She also highlighted that language is not only part of someone's identity but that it is contextual. She asked how we create the context because we are living in urban industrial societies and not rural societies where proverbs originated. **Helen Goodway** commented that language is at the heart of oppression and resistance to oppressions e.g. the case of the Kurdish language which was banned in Turkey in 1923 and was only politically allowed last year; Welsh which was oppressed in the United Kingdom. She further argued that language conformity is ordered by the state e.g. English in America as a political tool to

perpetuate the myth of the American State has led to some languages virtually dying out. Similarly she commented that the USSR had a hard attitude to languages with all but four banned. **Zahid Hussain** said that the Pahari language rather than being seen in an abstract way should be seen as an integral part of society. **Michael Haynes** said that the development of a literature was very important for the promotion of a language and thanked Ali Adalat for his work. He continued to ask about the plans to develop a dictionary and grammar statement. **Daalat Ali** replied by pointing out that the work on a dictionary is almost complete on the Indian side of Kashmir. The Aalami Pahari Sangat has a role in facilitating all sides to ensure a common consensus as there are many dialects of Pahari to negotiate. **Mohammed Farooq** made the point that language was essential for communication and called upon all service providers to use appropriate interpreters to ensure good communication. **Lisa Jones**, a primary school teacher from Dewsbury made the point that they were unable to ask parents to identify themselves as Kashmiri on LEA forms as the category did not exist. If they had requested this then the school would have lost funding. She made the point that Pahari awareness needs to go to the Government and asked the panel how they felt they were going to do that. In reply **Ghulam Hussain** indicated that there are many local authorities that have now accepted Kashmiris as an ethnic category and it is being included in the monitoring process e.g. school and housing. He continued to say that nationally the Kashmir National Identity Campaign has been working with the Census office and are working to get Kashmiri included in the 2011 Census. **Peter Smith** continued the theme of questions on Pahari in schools and asked how Pahari could be promoted in schools when there was so little literature in Pahari in schools. Daalat Ali commented that there is quite a bit of literature around including children's books and nursery rhymes. He commented that further literature needs to be

commissioned in much the same way that literature in Urdu and Punjabi has been promoted.

## **Second Session: Pahari language and impact of service provision.**

In the second session **Shams Rehman** discussed the development of the Pahari Institute in Britain with reference to 'back home' and with particular emphasis on the creation of the Pahari alphabet. His presentation was reflective as he himself has been involved in founding many organisations promoting Kashmiri identity generally and more specifically Pahari e.g. Karavan E Adab, 'Chitka' and Kashmir National Identity Campaign to name a few. **Rehman** pointed out that in South Asia Pahari was ousted from state patronage but people kept it alive in two spheres. First in common use so although education was provided in the languages of state (in the Empire eras these were Persian, Arabic and English) and in the post colonial era (Hindi and Urdu) ignored that space. In the State of Kashmir education was not for all so for those people Pahari was the only language that they could speak in so the language survived. The second sphere where the language defended its linguistic territory was in the folk literature and music. Pahari was not considered to be the language of the literate people and remained confined to rural areas. After migration to Britain despite adopting English outside the home Pahari also remained the main language spoken in the home. **Rehman** said that despite conversing in this language since his childhood it was only when he arrived in Britain and was involved in the language writing movement that he became curious to know what this language was called. The language writing movement was concerned with increasing the status of Pahari and consequently felt it necessary to start writing in this language. **Rehman** described some of the problems of creating a Pahari alphabet. He commented that a Pahari

alphabet was created based on most of the letters from the Arabic alphabet but there were problems with certain sounds for which there were no letters available in Arabic, Urdu or Persian. With the support of linguistic experts (Kashmiri who spoke all variations of Pahari as well as non Kashmiris) the current situation is that a Pahari alphabet was developed.

**Abid Hussian's** presentation dealt with service delivery issues for Pahari speakers. He started his talk by pointing out that local authorities have made some progress for communities that are unable to speak English but South Asian communities continue to be categorised as one group and this has led to the invisibility of some groups like the Kashmiri's. He argued that public service providers often miss out on providing appropriate services to Kashmiri's in the language that they need. He pointed out that there are some problems within the Kashmiri community requesting particular services and he attributed this to two main factors: first as a result of oppression where their Kashmiri identity has been subjugated they are unable to request Kashmiri/Pahari specific services and instead refer to themselves as Pakistani and Urdu/Punjabi speakers. Second as a result of these perceptions they do not want to be seen as nuisance and continue to accept the Pakistani category e.g. even when a Pahari speaker is asked what language they speak they might say Urdu or Punjabi. Non-recognition of the Kashmiri identity and the Pahari language can have severe consequences. He gave an example of Iqbal Begum's case who was accused of murdering her husband, after the trial it was discovered that she spoke Pahari. She had not been provided with a Pahari interpreter at the trial, in fact the person translating was not even a professional interpreter but an accountant. Iqbal Begum took her own life some years later. **Hussian** made the point that despite the community having been

settled here for the last fifty years or so service providers continue to mix Pahari with Punjabi and Urdu. He argued that there are genuine difficulties in establishing the correct language. **Hussian** went on to present the Kirklees model. The Kirklees Council recognised the Kashmiri community as a separate ethnic group in June 2000 and made a commitment to providing appropriate services. Kirklees Metropolitan Council has its own language service which provides services to all departments. It specifically recruited Pahari speaking interpreters. These interpreters were tested for their Pahari language skills to ensure they were speaking the appropriate dialects. He argues when providing interpreting services it was essential that distinctions be made between Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi-Indian, Punjabi-Pakistani and Pahari. By following a procedure where a person's ethnic, regional and religious background are explored it is more likely that an appropriate interpreter can be allocated.

**Helen Goodway** discussed the role of mother tongue in education. She argued that mother tongue currently play a small part in children's education and is not taken seriously enough. Despite the Bullock Report in 1975 recognising the important of mother tongue it has not been incorporated into education policy. She argued that the sociological definition of mother tongue is currently used for the purposes of children's education and it is this that is used for ethnic monitoring but this implies racial categorisation and confusion around ethnic monitoring is rampant. In the 'Supporting Pupils Learning English as an Additional Language' she said that pupils are identified as Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi (national definitions) and as Black Caribbean (an ethnic geographic description) and as Gypsy Traveller pupils. There is some reference to first language but interestingly this is made under the umbrella of relationships/behaviour/discipline. She also pointed out that according to Ofstead

'only one third of LEA's monitor ethnic attainment comprehensively'. What happens under the current model of education then is that non recognition of Kashmiri as an ethnic group and Pahari as their language leads not only exclusion from the monitoring process but the marginalisation of their language and culture in the classroom having the result of these students having difficulty in acquiring second language-English. Goodway argues that recognition of Pahari as the mother tongue of the vast majority of pupils categorised as Pakistani will help Ofstead to recognise patterns of achievement (an identified problem) In addition the recognition will go some way to respecting the cultural identity of Pahari speakers. It would allow for more parental involvement thus empowering them to support their children's education. Information provision in oral form to help facilitate better communication and overall may facilitate better parental involvement in their children's schools. In secondary education she called for the inclusion of Pahari as an optional examination at GCE and A levels. She concluded by saying that local education authorities have a pivotal roles to play raising the profile of mother tongue in education.

**Questions and Comments:** **Sitara Khan** suggested there was confusion between Pakistani and Pahari as a language. She pointed out that distinction between Pakistani which is a political distinction and Pahari which is a linguistic description is the same as a British person travelling on a British passport and speaking Welsh. **Mohammed Farooq** added that Kashmiri people have denied their language as a result of oppression. In addition choices have been limited and when they are given the choice of someone who speaks Punjabi or Urdu there are problems He argued that the Kashmiri people have faced this for so long that they are unable to request anything else. **Mohammed Javed** commented that in Birmingham. Mirpuri is considered to be

the slang of Punjabi and this causes problems. **Iftikhar** talked in Pahari **Ghulam Hussain** translated and pointed out that he wanted to speak in his own language to highlight the problem for monolingual people. He reported that parents have an important role in maintaining Pahari. He pointed out that the majority of people want to speak in Urdu or English so it is important to work hard to maintain the language. In response to Helen Goodway's presentation **Chitna Shah** suggested that there is some good news with regards education training. She pointed out that DFES has put together an EAL pilot and have asked each of the LEAs (22 involved all over the country). Going to schools and giving teachers access to learning about second language acquisition. **Councillor Javed Akhtar** said that it was important to recognise the language that is spoken across the city. He suggested that after the conference it was important to meet up with Daalat Ali to see how the issues discussed at the conference could be taken forward. He suggested regular meetings to achieve this and gave his personal commitment to the issue. **Daalat Ali** pointed out that Audio visual material in Pahari is available in Leeds for service providers and other to access. He added that it was important to open a dialogue with the institute of languages to create diplomas and certificates in Pahari interpretation. **Dr Sewan Singh Kalsi** suggested two books for further reading Cultural History of India edited by A L Bashin. Clarendon Press Oxford. 'The Quest for the Vedic Culture the Indo-Aryan Migration Debate' by Edwin Bryant 2001 Open University Press. **Mohsin Zulfiqar** suggested Robert Robinson's book 'Lingualism'.

## **Conference Outcomes**

The conference was concluded by **Ghulam Hussain** who summarised the papers and discussed the way forward. The following outcomes were agreed upon:

- To have continued dialogue between the organisers-Aalami Pahari Adabi Sangat, the Kashmiri community, service providers and local politicians to raise the profile of the Pahari language.
- To work closely with other local authorities who have high populations of Kashmiri settlers to learn from best practice e.g. the Kirklees model. As a first step towards this report will be circulated to all local authorities serving the Kashmiri community.
- To submit this report with a cover letter requesting local and national art and heritage organisations to support the promotion and development of research and literature in Pahari.
- To circulate this report with a cover letter to national and local education authorities requesting that they include Pahari language within the national curriculum at GCSE and/or A Level.
- A motion was unanimously passed for a formal recommendation from the conference that the category of Kashmiri should be adopted by the appropriate authorities e.g. the Census Office, all other Government Offices and the Institute of Languages. To this end a formal letter from the conference will be written and submitted with a copy of this report to raise awareness of the Pahari language.



