

# Pahari language and its implications for Britain

## Purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to provide some background to the presence of Pahari language in Birmingham and its implications for service provision to its speakers

## Background

Pahari is the name of the language (some would say it was a dialect!) which is spoken by people who originate from Azad Kashmir. The language is sometimes described as Mirpuri as many, though not all, of its speakers in Birmingham actually come from the Mirpur District (see Annex A for further details)

The spoken language of nearly all Kashmiris in the UK is Pahari, when it comes to reading, some read Urdu but many are not able to read their mother tongue. Statistically, it is recognised that over 80% of the local 'Pakistani' community are actually from this disputed part of the Indian sub-continent. To put some figures on it, the recent census showed the community to form over 10% of the City of Birmingham. In Education, over 18% of the school population are speakers of the language, thus making them the largest non-white community.

Many British decision-makers, in an attempt to make services accessible, have invested in interpreting and translation services. However the languages offered to people originating from South Asia have been limited to Urdu, Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi, and Gujrati. There has been little reference made to Kashmiri community or the Pahari language; instead decision-makers have incorrectly tended to use Urdu or Punjabi to communicate with Britain's Kashmiri community. In such instances, members of the Kashmiri community unable to communicate in English have had to settle with another group's language. A main factor for not providing Pahari as a language is because there has been no official recognition of the Kashmiri community residing in Britain nor their language and communication needs.

## Provision (or lack of) in Pahari

Lack of provision in Pahari has had a significant impact in the way in which services have been delivered. There are many examples of situations where people have not been able to understand what was being communicated to them in English nor in Urdu or Punjabi. These situations have included the law courts, schools and health services.

However, it is not all doom and gloom!

There are isolated examples of good practice where service providers have recognised the linguistic needs of the Kashmiris community. These have included the British High Commission in Islamabad who were quick to pick up the different language needs of the community and employed Pahari speaking interpreters. This then was followed up by the BBC world and Asian radio networks. In 1990s a Pahari magazine called Chitka was launched from the North.

For a few years now the BBC Asian Network has been broadcasting a twice-weekly Mirpuri programme; Radio XL has a similar programme.

There are now quite a few Pahari writers in Britain who have had their works published.

#### Example of the Leeds Health Trust

A number of service providers have slowly begun to recognise the need to provide information in Pahari. The above Trust carried out a survey of its patients language needs in 1999 and found that:

The Kashmiri community was the principle community which needed interpretation

The trust had very little knowledge of the Kashmiri community and it relied on interpreter's advice.

Although the interpreters pretended they could speak the community's language, when they were formally tested it was discovered that they could not speak Pahari

The Kashmiri community, not realising their right to demand interpreters, enlisted the support of their school-age children who often missed school in order to help their parents out.

#### Leeds City Council and the health trusts

have since recognised the Kashmiri community and Pahari language and have included Kashmiri and Pahari in their monitoring system.

## Education

The under-achievement of Pakistani children is well documented. However, in our view if the problems of the Kashmiri children are even worse than those who are true Pakistanis.

There are many examples of 'good' practice where schools have at least tried to accommodate the needs of Kashmiri children. Sadly, even in these situations it is wrongly assumed that the children speak Urdu, thus even that communication fails to reach them.

There are isolated examples where LEAs have begun to recognise the Kashmiri community and target its projects at them. Telford and Wrekin LEA are one such example. They have a project which is targeted at the Mirpuri-speaking community.

Local education departments as well as the DfES do from time to time produce advice, information and guidance for parents. This usually starts off in complex and extremely technical English. It is then translated in to complex and technical Urdu; to read it one needs to be a graduate. Sadly, the Pahari speaking Kashmiri community yet again misses out. Occasionally, schools enlist the support of interpreters in order to help at parents' meetings. Even here there is no systematic way of making sure that they communicate effectively with Pahari speakers, many of whom are illiterate mothers.

Such non-engagement and misinformation give rise to confusion and mistrust and create a sense of alienation and marginalisation for the Kashmiri community. This results in non-attendance at parents' evenings and other important education meetings with the result of parents not playing their role in their children's education which can often be critical in the process.

The problem also carries on into Adult

Education. Here many of the learners are being taught English through the medium of Urdu, both of which are foreign to them. This invariably impedes their progress.

The situation in Birmingham

We are aware that there is recognition by Birmingham LEA that the educational achievements of the pupils from the local Pakistani community are low as illustrated by the production of the Asian heritage Achievement Action Plan and allocation of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant to set up a research project aimed at underachieving Pakistani pupils. It has also set up a Pakistani Advisory Group to help address the specific needs of the community.

In our view, the problem of underachievement by Kashmiri children is made worse through misdiagnosis and lack of proper communication with parents. Many of the schools do provide classroom assistants and others who try to reach the children through their mother tongue. Sadly, even these fail to achieve their desired outcome, as often they are Urdu and not Pahari speakers.

Recommendations and issues for consideration

Monitoring and recognition: Birmingham education department should recognise the Kashmiri community and Pahari language and monitor for their presence in its schools.

Auditing of the provision: there should be auditing of the needs and the provision currently being made; the numbers of Pahari speakers amongst the staff; their competence etc

Awareness and training: in our view there is a great deal of confusion about Kashmiri community and their needs and the Pahari language. It is essential that steps are taken to raise the awareness of all staff within the Authority

Information for parents: there is an urgent need to raise parents awareness of the education system around things like homework, school attendance, extended holidays, need for extra reading, leisure activities which complement schooling and career planning for their children. This needs to be through audio/video tapes. (Please let's have no more expensively produced glossy written information which experience has shown that many of the parents cannot read.)

Accreditation: opportunities need to be provided for school pupils to have their competence in Pahari accredited through appropriate examinations.

Employment opportunities: steps should be taken to highlight the many employment opportunities which have begun to appear for Pahari speakers in a range of frontline service areas. These are present in all sectors such as education, health, finance, sales including tele-sales and voluntary/community organisations, wherever knowledge of customers language can add value.

## Annex A

Pahari is a language of the Indo-Aryan family of languages. It derives its name from Pahar meaning "hills and mountains" for it is spoken over a very large area starting from Nepal and running throughout the foothills of the Himalayas, in the Hamachal Pardesh (Northern Indian province), the Indian controlled part of the state of Jammu Kashmir, the Pakistani controlled Jammu Kashmir and through out the Northern Pakistan, up to River Indus and Chitral. The language spoken in Pothwar in Northern Punjab is by all means Pahari language, deriving its so-called name from the Pothwari region which consists of four districts, Rawalpindi, Jhelum, Chakwal and Attock. It is called Pothwari in this region for much the same reason as the Pahari spoken in the district Mirpur (especially in Britain) is some time referred to as Mirpuri. A great deal of work is being done in Pahari amongst the Kashmiri community in Britain

Pahari like many other languages of the world has seen rise and fall in the course of history. Its written historical

story is as old and as complex as the language itself. Pahari was initially written in Landa script which is a form of Sharda which was invented by Buddhists.

It can be said that arguably Sharda Pahari is the oldest written language in South Asia and it has contributed in developing other languages old and modern including Urdu.

Pahari and other similar South Asian languages are not taught in the

Classroom but are very much alive within the people and overlap a lot

through Population physical contact and interaction.

Although, the language is available in a written form and has its own alphabet, many of its speakers who are able to read, actually read Urdu. This complicates it somewhat when it comes to data gathering because many of its speakers, when asked to record their mother tongue, put down Urdu.

Post-1947, Pahari, like Punjabi, has suffered from the division of India and the written forms got divided too in the shapes of Shah Mukhi and Gurmukhi broadly speaking. Punjabi seemed to have made some progress on the both sides of the border but Pahari in Jammu Kashmir got further suppressed through this neo- colonial status between Hindi and Persian scripts, However, recently there has been efforts made on both sides of Kashmir to revive the language and as a result of that last ten years has witnessed many books being produced this includes poetry, prose, short stories, novels, nursery rhymes and people's folk stories. These are mainly written in Persian script.

Similarly 99% of the Kashmiris emigrated from the districts of Mirpur, Kotli, Bhimber, Pouch, Mehendar, Muzafabad, Rajori, Jammu and Noshara, around 1% from the Valley, Gilgit, Baltistan and Ladakh/Kirgil. Thus nearly all of the people of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and northern India and Pakistan in Britain speak Pahari. This arguably makes Pahari the largest language in Britain after English.

Most social commentators write that in Britain 80% to 90% of the so-called Pakistanis are in fact of Kashmiri origin. Professor Nazir Tabbasam in his paper A Phonological Analysis of Pahari language (a research paper written under the supervision of J.M.Y. Simpson, the senior lecturer in the department of English language, University of Glasgow), writes

"People who immigrated to UK on Pakistani passports, 80% were of Kashmiri origin. They are quite distinct from the rest of the south Asians not only culturally and linguistically but ethnically too".

Dr Tahir Abbas, of Birmingham University, one of the few Kashmiri academics in Britain, sates:

"There are 747,000 Pakistanis in Britain. I estimate that about 80% of Pakistanis are from the Mirpuri region - which means that over half a million people are Mirpuri speakers in this country. In Birmingham, there are 100, 000 Pakistanis - one in ten of the population. Therefore, with 80-90,000 speaking Pahari they are by far the second largest language group in the City.