

## **The Teaching of Punjabi in American Universities: Present Situation and Future Prospects**

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The paper begins with the historical context in which South Asian languages began to be taught in the United States, and highlight the teaching of Punjabi in some American Universities. It then goes on to focus on the factors that were instrumental in the creation of these programs, the key academic players on the scene, the constituency of students interested in learning Punjabi and their reasons for doing so, and some accomplishments of the past decade. The paper concludes by outlining the historical and linguistic challenges that will need to be confronted to strengthen the future development of Punjabi.

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The teaching of Punjabi was introduced into the university system of the United States in the late-1980s, and it is presently available in South Asian language curricula of Columbia University (1989-), University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (1989-), the University of California, Berkeley (1993-), the University of Pennsylvania (1995-), and the University of California, Santa Barbara (1999-).<sup>1</sup> Provisions to teach Punjabi exist at the University of Chicago and the University of Washington, Seattle.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Punjabi is offered at Stanford University (1986-), San Jose State University (1998-), and Hofstra University (2004-), the universities with relatively recent associations with South Asian Studies. How Punjabi emerged on the language map of the U.S. universities and where it is current prospects lie are issues of significance for those who are interested in studying the history and culture of the Punjab and Punjabis living overseas.

The paper begins with a discussion of the larger context that helped the rise of the teaching of South Asian languages in the post-Second World War United States. In the main section, I focus on the introduction of Punjabi into the language curricula of several American universities, analyze the student constituency interested in learning Punjabi, and assess the important programmatic developments at some of the places where Punjabi is taught. In a brief conclusion, I attempt to outline the historical and linguistic challenges facing Punjabi at the turn of the twenty-first century and propose some recommendations. In the process, I hope to reconstruct the history of the teaching of Punjabi in the United States, examine the considerations that resulted in its adoption for teaching, and identify opportunities for the further development of Punjabi to meet the needs of a global and globalizing community.

### The Context

The teaching of South Asian languages in the United States developed in two phases. The first began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when Sanskrit began to be offered at major universities of the U.S. The pioneer scholars in the field included W. D. Whitney (1827-1894) and E. W. Hopkins (1857-1932) at Yale, C. R. Lanman (1850-1941) at Harvard, M. Bloomfield (1855-1928) at Johns Hopkins, and A. V. W. Jackson (1862-1937) at Columbia. The early decades of the twentieth century saw the establishment of Sanskrit chairs at the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, and Princeton University.<sup>3</sup> The teaching of Sanskrit continued in these universities without a break, and students interested in languages, literature, and South Asian studies learned it.

The second phase began in the middle-decades of the twentieth century. With American troops landing in India during the Second World War, the government of the United States needed social scientists to help it understand South Asian reality, and this project required the learning of local languages.<sup>4</sup> The historical circumstances thus created a need to learn the languages of people the Americans wanted to deal with. Unlike the teaching of Sanskrit, which resulted from purely academic interests, the introduction of modern South Asian languages in the university system originated from the political necessities of the post-War period.

With the United States acquiring increasing role in international affairs, the basic linguistic wherewithal to understand distant regions and cultures received further affirmation. The geographic position of South Asia, vis-à-vis China and Russia, and the sheer numbers of people present in the subcontinent were significant basis to continue develop interest in the region. Further more, the post-1965 Immigration Act period saw the coming of large number of South Asians to the U.S., presently over 1.5 million, adding impetus to the interest in the culture of the subcontinent.

In the early stages, the financial support to start the teaching of South Asian languages came from private foundations interested in educational development. The Carnegie Corporation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the United States government (under the Fulbright and National Defense Education Acts) supported the establishment of the first program in South Asian Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and under W. Norman Brown's supervision, the teaching of modern South Asian languages was introduced there in 1947.<sup>5</sup>

The discussions on the issues of which modern South Asian languages to introduce in the United States' universities in the 1950s make it clear that American scholars were aware of the linguistic complexity of the subcontinent but for pragmatic reasons they divided them into two groups: Hindi and Urdu, and all other regional languages.<sup>6</sup> The political significance of Hindu and Urdu was reinforced by their linguistic and literary traditions and this resulted in a special recognition assigned to these two in the United States. The support for regional languages remained largely restricted to individual scholars, who

argued for their importance in the larger framework of the study of South Asia. C. D. Dimmock's backing of Bengali at Chicago is a case in point.

Hindi quickly gathered the leading status among South Asian languages and it began to be taught in the United States at several places during the 1950s. In addition to the University of Pennsylvania, it was introduced at the University of Arizona, the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Chicago, Cornell University, the University of Michigan, the University of Wisconsin, and the Foreign Service Institute in Washington D. C. Hindi was followed by Urdu, which was introduced at the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Foreign Service Institute. Over the years, the teaching of these two languages has been blended, and they are primarily taught in a two-year Hindi-Urdu cycle in most of the universities where they are offered.

Other South Asian languages that began to be taught in the late 1950s and the early 1960 included, Bengali at the University of Chicago and the University of Pennsylvania, Marathi at the University of Pennsylvania, Tamil at the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Chicago, and the University of Pennsylvania, Telugu at the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Wisconsin, and Gujarati at Cornell University, and the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>7</sup>

The teaching of South Asian languages received a big boost with the founding of the American Institute of Indian Studies (1961), and the establishment of advanced language-training centers at Banaras and Jaipur (Hindi), Calcutta (Bengali), and Madurai (Tamil).<sup>8</sup> The establishment of the American Institute of Pakistani Studies (1973) and the Berkeley Urdu program based in Lahore started around the same time expanded this agenda. Scholars from the U.S. participated in immersion program and also spent extended periods of stay at these places to do their research.

Over time, these language programs in the United States and South Asia have prepared new teaching materials, have trained a generation of young scholars, and in the process have helped consolidate the teaching of South Asian languages in the United States. Although still in the category of 'Less Commonly Taught' languages, Hindi-Urdu combination has done well and is now offered at all major centers of South Asian Studies. The teaching of other languages, however, has not been that successful and is still in a relatively shaky stage of growth.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Case of Punjabi**

With the political focus broadly on Delhi (India-Hindi) and Islamabad (Pakistan-Urdu), it is ironic that the large Punjabi speaking region connecting these two centers did not figure in any prominent way in mid-twentieth century thinking. Scholars were aware that Punjabi written in Gurmukhi is the language of the Sikhs, but it got clubbed with other regional languages of the subcontinent and did not attract serious attention for introduction in the United States.<sup>10</sup> The absence of a cosmopolitan center in the Punjab comparable to

Calcutta (Bengali), Madras (Tamil), or Bombay (Marathi/Gujarati), which American scholars had visited and with which they had developed a degree of comfort did not help the situation.

Further more, Punjabi did not have any advocate within the American academia to argue for its literary/regional importance at the early stage of the debates. In the late 1950s, there was a possibility for the emergence of Punjabi, but it did not materialize. This opportunity came when a major figure in the field of General Linguistics, H. A. Gleason, got interested in the work of a young scholar, Harjeet Singh Gill, whom he met during his visit to the Institute of Languages at Pune, and brought him to the United States for advanced work. Their collaboration resulted in the publication of *A Reference Grammar for Punjabi* (Hartford: Hartford Seminary Foundation Press, 1962), a definitive study in the field, which remains unchallenged some forty years from its original publication. *A Start in Punjabi* (Hartford: Hartford Seminary Foundation Press, 1963) followed the earlier seminal work.

The Gleason-Gill collaboration was a crucial beginning and in the natural course of things it could have paved the way for major strides in the teaching of Punjabi in the United States, but that was not to be. Perhaps because of a shift in Gill's interests from Structural Linguistics to a more culture-related approach to language, he left the United States for France and then returned to the Punjab. With Gill's departure from the United States, Punjabi lost a potential supporter groomed by one of the leading linguist of the time. Gill could have based himself in a major university, developed a program in Punjabi and helped train young scholars who would have taken the language with them, wherever they went.<sup>11</sup>

Two other scholars had the opportunity to play this role of leadership. Kalicharan Bahl, who came to the United States during this period showed interest in Punjabi, and published two important papers: 'Tones in Punjabi', *Indian Linguistics* 17 (1957), and 'Panjabi', in T. A. Sebeock, ed., *Current Trends in Linguistics V* (The Hague: 1969), 153-200. Ved Prakash Vatak, a native of Meerut, a town on the borders of east Punjab, came to the Department of Linguistics, Harvard University in 1959, and he went on to compile *Punjabi Readers I and II* (Fort Collins, Co: Colorado State University Research Foundation, 1964) and *Spoken Punjabi* for Peace Corps people in 1966.<sup>12</sup> In the following years, both these scholars, however, shifted their attention to Hindi, a field that was in a state of more effective expansion and offered steady careers.<sup>13</sup>

While teaching of some regional languages became available in the newly created centers of modern South Asian languages, Punjabi missed the chance of being present in any of these places. It became a cyclical story for Punjabi; there was no scholar of eminence in Punjabi, so there was no program, and since there was no program, no younger scholar could dedicate his or her research to Punjabi. American scholars who did research on Punjab had to learn Punjabi primarily through their own efforts in the United States or by extended visits to the Punjab.<sup>14</sup>

Beginning with the late 1970s, there was a slow change in the situation. Tej Krishan Bhatia's doctoral dissertation entitled 'A Syntactic and Semantic

Description of Negation in South Asian Languages' at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, in 1978, included extensive work on Punjabi. He has since been associated with the Department of Linguistics at Syracuse University, and has produced a substantial work, *Reference Grammar of Punjabi* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1993).<sup>15</sup> In addition, we see willingness on the part of some language teachers to introduce Punjabi in their course offerings. The credit for this fresh initiative went to Michael Shapiro at the University of Washington, and Vijay Gambhir at the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, this crucial development synchronized with the complex historical reality of the 1980s. Three developments during this period proved to be conducive to the entry of Punjabi into the university curriculum in the United States. First, the Sikhs in the United States reached a sizable number and achieved a degree of success by the early 1980s. They were acutely aware of the need to tell fellow Americans regarding their beliefs and practices. The political situation in the Punjab that resulted in the Indian government's attack of the *Darbar Sahib*, Amritsar, the center of Sikh sacred geography, in 1984, added a considerable degree of urgency to the existing situation. Sikh leadership began to consider the universities as the possible avenues to accomplish this task.<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, the demand for a separate Sikh state, and the possibility of fragmentation of India brought the region and the Sikh issues in the eye of the international media. The American academia faced the challenge to understand and then interpret this political development for the policy makers of the United States. American Council of Learned Societies' invitation to W. H. McLeod of the University of Otago, New Zealand, to lecture on the Sikhs in the major North American Universities in 1986-87 was one indication of this felt need to know more about the Sikhs and the nature of the problems in the Punjab.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, in the 1980s Sikh students began to enter the universities in some numbers, and they felt the need to know about the culture and language of their parents and the violence in the Punjab served as an additional impetus for this need. A group of Sikh students, for example, approached officials at the University of California, Berkeley, and persistently raised the demand that the university provide them with the wherewithal to learn Punjabi and the culture of the region their families came from.<sup>19</sup>

Scholarly awareness of the urgent need to understand the regional reality in the Punjab that may shape the political future of South Asia and the legitimacy of the demand of students on campuses like the University of California, Berkeley, to learn about the languages and culture of their parents brought the offering of Punjabi to focus. The Sikh community's resolve to support the academic initiative of introducing Punjabi and Sikh Studies with their hard-earned dollars helped the situation further.

Finally, Sikh Studies and Punjabi found a supporter in Mark Juergensmeyer at the University of California, Santa Barbara, who was willing to take concrete steps in helping the development of the field. While teaching at the University of Berkeley in the 1970s, he was the first American scholar to organize a conference on Sikh issues in the U.S. and was instrumental in initiating a

conversation between the Sikh community and the University to explore the possibility of creating a position in Sikh Studies.<sup>20</sup> While teaching at UCSB in the 1990s, he allocated a position to Sikh Studies, the details of which we will return to later in the paper.

These overall developments resulted in the introduction of Punjabi at Columbia University (1989), the University of Michigan (1989), the University of California, Berkeley (1993), the University of Pennsylvania (1995-), and the University of California, Santa Barbara (1999-), all big names in the area of South Asian Studies. From being a language that was placed low for development planning of South Asian languages in the early 1960s, Punjabi suddenly rose to compete with regional languages such as Bengali, Tamil, etc.<sup>21</sup>

A brief introduction to some of these programs in various universities is in order. The program at the University of Michigan is based in the Department of Asian Languages and Culture and began in 1989. The primary support, amounting to \$1.25 million required for the position, came from the Sikh community resources, and was raised by the Sikh Studies Association, Williamston. The largest single contribution came from Amrik Singh Chatha of Pittsburg and the position was named "Tara Singh, Balwant Kaur Chattha, Gurbaksh Singh, and Kirpal Kaur Brar Chair" in Sikh and Punjab Studies.<sup>22</sup>

Elena Bashir, a linguist by training, taught Punjabi from 1989-1991, Pashaura Singh, a scholar of Sikh Studies moved there in 1992 and taught Punjabi and Sikh Studies there until 2005. After his departure, the responsibilities of the Sikh Studies position were split into two. Pinderjeet Gill, who holds a degree in Punjabi from Guru Nanak Dev University (1997), was hired to teach Punjabi, and Arvind-pal Mandair, who completed his doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Warwick, U.K., in 1999, was appointed to the chair in 2007.

The teaching of Punjabi was introduced in Columbia University in 1989 and it was part of the Sikh Studies Program based in the department of Religion. The Sikh Cultural Society, Richmond Hill, New York, helped begin the program and this effort was later expanded to include organizations and individuals all over the country.<sup>23</sup> I was associated with this program from its inception to 1999, at the time of my departure the program was downsized to offer courses in Punjabi only, and Rajnarinder Kaur Ahluwalia and later Sandeep Singh have overseen the teaching work there.

In 1999, the University of California, Santa Barbara, started the program in Sikh and Punjab Studies. Here comes the crucial role of a friend of the field! Professor Mark Juergensmeyer was brought to UCSB to build Global and International Studies Program and as part of this undertaking he was assigned several full-time positions to use as he thought fit. He decided to allocate one of these positions to the area of Sikh Studies, and in the process created the first position in Sikh Studies in North America that was entirely funded from the university's own resources. Juergensmeyer also invited Satinder and Narinder Singh Kapany of Palo Alto to attach an endowment (\$350,000) with the position and name it as they liked. The Kapany's welcomed the idea and the chair was

named after Narinder's mother, Kundan Kaur. I was fortunate to have been offered the position and have been associated with it since its inception in 1999.

The program at the University of California, Berkeley, began in 1993 and runs under the auspices of its Center for South Asia Studies. The Sikh Foundation of America, Palo Alto, supported the program at its inception and several community organizations had to chip in to keep it afloat in the past years. It is only recently that the university seems to have been willing to use some part of their Title VI grant to support the teaching of Punjabi. As mentioned earlier, the Berkeley program had resulted from a protracted student demand that they be given the opportunity to study Punjabi. The university's acceptance of their request was a significant development in itself, but it has preferred to restrict it to Punjabi and has been reluctant to establish a full time position in Sikh or Punjab Studies. Atamjit Singh, an expert in Sikh literature was hired in 1993 and he worked there until 1998 when Upkar Ubhi, a graduate of School for Oriental and African Studies, took over and has taught there since then.<sup>24</sup>

Stanford University began the teaching of Punjabi to meet the needs of Harpal Singh Sandhu, a Sikh student of Industrial Engineering, who argued that he wants to learn Punjabi to go to the Punjab to do research on the industrial development of the region. Ravinder Dhillon, who works in the university administration, is responsible for teaching Punjabi, which is offered under the auspices of the Department of Linguistics. Stanford however, was the first university without an established tradition of teaching South Asian languages to begin offering Punjabi as part of their policy to meet the needs of their students.<sup>25</sup> After his stint at UC Berkeley, Atamjit Singh moved to San Jose State University, where he oversees the community supported teaching of Punjabi since 1998. The 'Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Chair' in Sikh Studies was established at Hofstra University in Long Island, New York, in 2001. As part of its course offerings, Punjabi was introduced there in 2004 and an additional teacher was hired to do this work.

The past two decades have thus seen the introduction of the teaching of Punjabi in a set of universities in the U.S. We can now move on to see who comes to these classes and why. For this discussion, let us focus on Columbia and Santa Barbara, the two places I know well, and what we say of these places is largely true of other programs too. First, the number of students learning Punjabi is small. For instance, during my teaching at Columbia, the number of students had ranged from 3 to 9 and at Santa Barbara, the range has varied from 6 to 12. One needs to remember, however, that this number may be smaller than the students interested in Hindi and Urdu but it quite comparable with students attending languages such as Bengali and Gujarati.

What are the reasons for learning Punjabi? Students taking Punjabi courses fall into two broad groups: the first group of students is attracted to Punjabi for personal reasons, and the second is interested in learning for academic reasons. In the first category, an overwhelming majority are students who come to these classes to learn the language of their parents and this effort helps their own search for cultural roots. These students come with varying degrees of linguistic

proficiency. Many of them understand the language when they hear it, but they cannot speak, read or write it.

There are some American students, who are either married to Punjabis or considering the possibility of that. Learning the language for them is part of their genuine attempt to know the culture of someone they deeply love and care for. These students hope to acquire the basic language skills that will enable them to communicate more effectively with native Punjabi speakers and make better sense of their visits to the Punjab.

The second category includes students who are interested in learning Punjabi for professional reasons. For example, advanced students of South Asian religions and history take Punjabi. James Lochtefeld, who presently teaches Religion including a course on Sikhism at Carthage College, learned Punjabi at Washington and Columbia. He has done an excellent translation of the *Japji*, a Sikh liturgical text, which he uses for his class at Carthage College. Susan VanKosky, who completed her doctoral dissertation on the British Army in the 1990s, learned Punjabi as part of her research equipment.

After learning Punjabi at Columbia, Farina Mir and Anne Murphy have done groundbreaking research and presently hold prestigious positions at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and the University of British Columbia, respectively. Purnima Dhavan, who teaches history at the University of Washington, learnt Punjabi at Michigan and Berkeley and is currently involved in analyzing major Punjabi sources to reconstruct the developments in the Punjab during the eighteenth century. Several students who learnt Punjabi at UC Santa Barbara are now working on their doctoral dissertations and will be moving to teaching positions in the next few years.

Punjabi programs in the United States are thus vibrant, and have attracted a variety of students interested in learning the language for varied set of reasons. The past years have already evolved a core of young scholars, who have studied Punjabi with a high degree of seriousness and are ready to make significant contributions to the propagation of Punjabi and Punjab Studies in the U. S.

The Santa Barbara program deserves mention in connection with the development work in the teaching of Punjabi. First, the Summer Program in Punjab Studies that I had started at Columbia in 1997 moved to Santa Barbara in 1999. Under its auspices, scholars go to the Punjab for six weeks to learn Punjabi and basic knowledge of the history and culture of the region. During the program, the participants are able to listen to and meet the leading scholars in the area of Punjab Studies as well as travel extensively in the region. In the past eleven years the Program has served 152 students who came from 58 universities in ten countries (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, England, France, Germany, India, Italy, Sweden, and the U.S.).<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, since the teaching of Punjabi as a foreign language is a relatively recent phenomenon, the materials needed to accomplish this task are yet to be fully developed. This fact dawned on me when I began teaching Punjabi at Columbia University in 1989. Gurdit Singh, Ami P. Shah, Anne Murphy, and Gibb Schreffler, scholars in Sociology, Religion, Religion, and Ethnomusicology, respectively, joined me in the effort to fill this gap. While



Shah, Murphy, and Schreffler learnt Punjabi as a foreign language, Gurdit was born in Delhi but came to the U.S. when very young. Their respective backgrounds brought considerable richness to the book. It has taken us some years to bring the text to its completion, and we hope to make it available in printed form by the end of 2008.

The sequence of lessons in this book is intended for two years of class work. Part One of this manual explores the grammatical structure of Punjabi through descriptions, targeted exercises and vocabulary lists, dialogues, and reading passages. Students should focus on each new lesson while simultaneously continuing to review the previous ones. Through memorization of grammar and vocabulary and conversation, it is hoped that students will develop a significant level of comfort with the language. Part Two builds upon the grammatical structure outlined in Part One by providing students with an opportunity to encounter the language through poetry, short stories, and popular songs in Punjabi. We hope this book will make the learning of Punjabi easier and enjoyable for everyone - those learning it as a foreign language as well others who have cultural roots in the Punjab.

In 2005, the Punjab Studies Program at UC Santa Barbara, in collaboration with the UC Consortium for Language Learning and Teaching, UC Davis, received a Title VI grant from the U.S. Department of Education to consolidate this work and make it available on the Internet.<sup>27</sup> The same year, we received a grant from South Asia Language Resource Center, the University of Chicago, to convert the materials we have prepared into the Indo-Persian script.<sup>28</sup>

Once we are able to accomplish this task, anyone in any part of the globe interested in learning Punjabi can register with the University of California extension program and have access to these materials in Gurmukhi or in Indo-Persian and work toward elementary or advanced level of proficiency. The appropriate certification will be available at the end of the course.

Thirdly, the *Journal of Punjab Studies* moved to the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 2004. It was started in the United Kingdom and after a ten years stint there, its editorial board decided to pass it on to us. During the past five years we have had special issues ranging from economy to folk beliefs, geography, and literature of the Punjab. These issues are used as basic teaching tools in some places and it is gratifying to receive requests for additional copies every now and then.

The literature issue had been particularly well received. It was divided into two sections: the first included samples of twentieth-century poetry from both sides of the border along with translations done by Randi Clary, Gibb Schreffler, and Ami Shah, all studying at Santa Barbara. The second included an introduction to twentieth century literature and detailed studies of the major figures of the period. Najm Hussain Said, Gurdial Singh, and Surjit Patar, all revered figures in Punjabi literature, wrote to congratulate us for the effort. They appreciated our selection of poetry as well as the high quality of translations done by young scholars at UCSB.

Finally, we have also been fortunate to hold a series of events at Santa Barbara in which Punjabi poets and singers made presentation of their art. These

included Amarjeet Chandan, Surjit Patar, Ahmad Salim, leading Punjabi poets, Ajit Singh Pantal and Bhai Baldeep Singh, classical singers, a team of three famous village singers of Kabir from the Nagpur area, and Gharib Das, a prominent dholi of the Punjab.<sup>29</sup> This has added a great degree of interest among our students at UCSB, and we hope to build on this in the years ahead.

To sum up this section, the teaching of Punjabi is now available in some of the leading universities in the United States. A considerable effort has been invested in places like UCSB to build basic materials required for the teaching of Punjabi. Further more, a critical mass of scholars in Punjabi and Punjab Studies is steadily emerging, and this is sure to increase as their students take up projects related to Punjabi and the Punjab. Finally, the Sikh community is willing to offer financial support to further strengthen and expand these programs. All this bodes well for the future of Punjabi and Punjab Studies in general.

### **Conclusion**

While bringing this paper to close, there are two sets of issues that deserved to be raised. The first pertains to the historical context and the second focuses on linguistic issues. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the Punjabis are no longer restricted to the Punjab but constitute a global community. The literature in Punjabi is being produced in East Punjab, West Punjab, and other parts of the world. These are new developments and deserve welcome from all Punjabis.

Simultaneously, there is limited pride, if any, in the learning or teaching of Punjabi in both East and West Punjab. Punjabi is fast fading in places like Chandigarh and few people like to speak it with their children. The situation in the overseas communities is not very different. Sikh parents among Punjabis like their children to speak Punjabi at home, but when it comes to learning it in the schools system in places such as Fresno, California, or Richmond Hill, New York, there is relative reluctance to encourage children to take it up.

Furthermore, we have seen in our earlier discussion that the introduction of Punjabi in the U.S. universities came as part of the package of Sikh Studies. This proposition has its own complexity. On the one hand, it is a sad reflection on the religious divisions within the Punjabi speaking community overseas and the fact stands that Muslims and Hindus by and large show relatively little interest in Punjabi once they move out of the Punjab. On the other hand, when the Sikhs, the smallest group within the Punjabi speaking community, take up the role of guarding the interests Punjabi, it understandably turns into a potent symbol of their religious heritage.

Moving on to the linguistic issues, interesting developments have taken place during the past century. For instance, the large scale of publication work that has taken place in the past decades shows little effort in the standardization of Punjabi spellings. One can site examples of a word spelt in different ways on the very first page of a book published by the university presses in the Punjab. In the commercial market, the scene is even more dismal. Although efforts have been made in this direction, no consensus has yet emerged as to how to address

this problem. With the availability of the computer and the benefits of broad searches etc., the standardization of the spelling has become imperative.

In the post-Partition Punjab, Punjabi has evolved differently on both sides of the border. In East Punjab, the existing Hindi and Sanskrit dictionaries served as the model for Punjabi lexicography, and this left a deep impact particularly on the usage of Punjabi for scholarly writing. In West Punjab, Farsi played more or less the same role. In the process, a significant amount of words that were not part of the vocabulary that the Punjabi speakers shared prior to 1947 has been injected into the language. In this trend, many indigenous Punjabi words have sometimes simply disappeared from the scene.

Furthermore, the issue of script adds to the complexity of the situation. The post-Partition Punjabi-speaking generations have grown up with different scripts in East and West Punjab, and this is an obstruction to cross-border communications. While people in East Punjab know Gurmukhi but not Indo-Persian, the case in West Punjab is exactly the opposite. The symbolism of that is so poignant as one stands on the Wagah border, Punjabis on both sides of the border cannot read what is written on the large sign boards across the border. The computer may help converting the script but the possibility of learning/teaching both scripts to the coming generations is worth a consideration, if one is seriously reflecting on building a cohesive Punjabi community.

To conclude, some concerted effort needs to be put into addressing these issues. The promotion of Punjabi assumes some basic degree of cultural pride in the language as well as the need to go beyond the religious and the geopolitical boundaries. Simultaneously, methods need to be devised to help the standardization of spellings, emphasize the usage of indigenous Punjabi lexicon, and encourage the learning of both Gurmukhi and Indo-Persian scripts. The Punjabi intellectuals and policy makers on both sides of the divide between Amritsar and Lahore, and from among the overseas Punjabi communities, should come together and collectively decide how best these goals can be achieved. A considered blueprint to strengthen the Punjabi cultural heritage in the Punjab and overseas is the best legacy this generation can leave at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

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### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The teaching of Punjabi in the United States has also goes on in gurdwaras and Summer camps held for Sikh children. In addition, the community forums such as Apna at <http://www.apnaorg.com/> and more recently the Sikh Research Institute at <http://www.sikhri.org/> have taken interest in promoting Punjabi

language and literature. My focus in this paper, however, is restricted to the programs based at the universities in the U.S.

<sup>2</sup> Elena Bashir teaches South Asian Languages and Civilization at the University of Chicago; Michael Shapiro's presence at the University of Washington makes the teaching of Punjabi possible there.

<sup>3</sup> W. Norman Brown, *The United States and India and Pakistan* (Cambridge: Massachusetts, 1955), 264.

<sup>4</sup> In some ways, the situation seems parallel to the U.S. government's current efforts to seek help from anthropologists to untangle the problems in Afghanistan.

<sup>5</sup> Rosane Rocher, ed., *India and Indology: Selected Articles by W. Norman Brown* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> W. Norman Brown, *The United States and India and Pakistan*, pp. 209-214.

<sup>7</sup> W. Norman Brown, *Resources for South Asian Language Studies in the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 12.

<sup>8</sup> For the history of the activities of the American Institute of Indian Studies, see their pamphlet. The establishment of the institute was related to the passing of the National Defense Education Act, which emphasized the learning of foreign languages to have a better understanding of the third world countries.

<sup>9</sup> See *A Survey of Material Development Priorities in the Less Commonly Taught Languages for the 1990s* (Washington D. C.: U. S. Department of Education, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> W. Norman Brown, *The United States and India and Pakistan*, 215.

<sup>11</sup> Gill joined Punjabi University, Patiala, in the late 1960s, and trained a whole generation of Punjabi linguists who made remarkable contribution to the field. Gill eventually shifted to JNU, Delhi, in 1980s and continued his important work from there till his retirement.

<sup>12</sup> Vatak's earlier work included a Masters in Sanskrit, Agra University (1954). His work in Punjabi was supported by the Office of Education, and Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

<sup>13</sup> In my conversation with Ved Prakash Vatak in the late 1990s, it was clear that his main interest was not Punjabi. He did these books because he could raise grants for this kind of work. The same may very well be true of Kalicharan Behl. The issue is that if someone like Gill had persisted, Punjabi may have achieved some recognition earlier on.

<sup>14</sup> Prominent among these scholars are David Gilmartin (University of North Carolina), Arthur W. Helweg (University of Kalamazoo), Kenneth Jones (University of Kansas), Mark Juergensmeyer (University of California, Santa Barbara), N. G. Barrier and Paul Wallace (University of Missouri). They have made significant contributions to the field of Punjab Studies.

<sup>15</sup> For a review of Bhatia's book, see *International Journal of Punjab Studies* 2: 1 (1994), 126-128. The other interesting doctoral work on Punjabi done in the West during this period is that of Mangat Rai Bhardwaj, *The Punjabi Sentence as a Form-Meaning Complex* (University of Manchester, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> At the University of Pennsylvania Elementary and Intermediate Punjabi are regularly offered, and at present the responsibility for teaching it is with Amrit Gahunia, who holds an M. A. in Hindi from Punjabi University, and an M. Phil. from Panjab University (1980) in the same subject.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of this see my 'Sikh Studies and the Sikh Educational Heritage,' in John Stratton Hawley and Gurinder Singh Mann, eds., *Studying the Sikhs: Issues for North Americas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 103-110.

<sup>18</sup> From this lecture series came *The Sikhs: History Religion, and Society* (New York: Columbia University, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> Students who took the leading role in this included Daljit Singh of Los Angeles, and Ravi Bhalla and Kimpreet of New Jersey. They had long and tedious meetings with the departmental heads and the deans before convincing them of the legitimacy of their demands to learn Punjabi.

<sup>20</sup> For a volume of essays that resulted from this conference, see Mark Juergensmeyer, and N.G. Barrier, eds., *Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition* (Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1979)

<sup>21</sup> W. Norman Brown, *Resources for South Asian Language Studies in the United States*, p. 12. In the latest report of the Center for Applied Linguistics on the lesser-known languages, Punjabi is placed after Hindi and Urdu.

<sup>22</sup> Satnam Singh Bhugra, a professor of psychology, Varinder Singh Grewal, a physician, played the key role in the raising of the funds for this project. Trilochan Singh, a professor of engineering in Detroit and some others joined them later.

<sup>23</sup> Jagjit Singh Mangat, the president of the Sikh Cultural Society in the late 1980s took special interest in the Columbia program. Later, Rabinder Singh Bhamra took over this leadership role and helped raising the fund all through the 1990s.

<sup>24</sup> Atamjit Singh was from the discipline of Punjabi language and literature. He holds a Ph. D. in Punjabi Literature (1966), and an M. Litt. in Linguistics (1976), both from Delhi University.

<sup>25</sup> The program was discontinued after 1988. In 1991, however, the Sikh Foundation of Palo Alto decided to offer soft money to meet the expenses involved, and since then the Foundation has supported the program.

<sup>26</sup> For details of the program, see <http://www.global.ucsb.edu/punjab/>

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