Cultural Maintenance in the Face of Language Shift- Young Sindhi Muslims in Karachi, Pakistan

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Abstract

The Sindhi language, a descendent of a pre-Vedic Prakit language is the most widely spoken language in South-Asia. Sindhi speech community comprises of both Muslims, and Hindus which have distinct cultural and religious practices, yet they are socially connected because of the geographical link with their land. However, due to the partitioning of the Indian sub-continent many Sindhi Hindus migrated to India, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, United Kingdom, Hong Kong, and many other countries. There has not only been external diaspora but within Pakistan there has also been internal diaspora of younger Sindhi Muslims who have moved to cities like Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkur to pursue tertiary education. These young speakers have acquired and learnt the dominant languages Urdu and English as their second and third languages while shifting away from their native Sindhi language. This study investigates the identity markers which have enabled them to retain their Sindhiness[1]. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 male and female young Sindhis and shadow observation of three participants in Karachi. The analysis shows that young Sindhi speakers have a high sense of group solidarity with their community and retain the use of culturally loaded identity markers which include naming patterns, cuisine, dressing, music, customs, rituals, social values, and networking. According to Fishman (1996) there is a deep relationship between language and culture. Despite a shift away from habitual use of the Sindhi language these respondents have maintained their cultural values and norms.

Keywords: cultural maintenance, language shift, Sindhi community, Karachi

Introduction

Sindh is one of the four provinces of Pakistan and is ancestral home of the Sindhis. Sindhi speakers' population amounts 14.57% of the total population of Pakistan and 61.60% of the total

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[1] Sindhiness is a feeling which comprises of a group of people sharing cultural and linguistic commonalities beyond any geographical boundary.

number of language speakers within the province of Sindh (Census, 2017). Karachi is the capital of the Sindh province. Karachi has a majority Muhajir (Urdu) speaking population and Sindhis are a minority in the city along with other language speakers. (Ahmar, 2020). The demography of the city is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Demography of Karachi

Ethnic Group Population	Percentage
Urdu	45%
Pukhtoon	25%
Punjabi	10%
Sindhi	10%
Other (Balochs, Seraiki, Kashmiris, Burushki, Hindhko,Gujarati speakers)	10%

Note: The statistical data has been gathered from Ahmar (2020) article 'Karachi as an ethnic challenge in Express Tribune

On independence in 1947 Govt, of Pakistan made Urdu the national language despite resistance from minority Bengali speakers to counter the narrative of Hindi as being the national language in the divided sub-continent. (Jabeen, Chandio & Qasim). Because of economic, social, and religious reasons various community members shifted to different parts of the world. Hence, most Sindhi Hindus fled the country and are dispersed in numerous cities throughout the world. Several studies of the Sindhis in diaspora reveal that the Sindhi Hindu community in India, Malaysia, Singapore, London (U.K), Hong Kong and Manila have shifted away from the dominant use of their ancestral language. (David, 1999; 2000; 2001a; 2001b) A more recent study of them in Kuala Lumpur shows conclusively that despite this shift from Sindhi they are closely bound by social networks and cultural norms (David, Chana, Manan, & Dumaing, 2020).

The focus of this paper is on Sindhi Muslims within the city of Karachi. As language shift has already been observed in the external diaspora among Sindhi Hindus. Consequently, internal migration of Sindhi Muslims to urban centers (Karachi) has also happened because of education,

business and job purpose (Abbasi, 2019). Hence, language shift to the dominant languages in Karachi- Urdu and English is also observed in the internal diaspora (Abbasi & Zaki, 2019). This is an interesting finding given that there is high ethnolinguistic vitality of the language in Sindh (David, Ali & Baloch, 2017).

A shift to urban areas often results in a shift to more powerful languages in those sites as Iyengar (2013) in his study of the Sindhi Hindus in Pune, India shows. Iyengar examined perceptions of heritage shift among young Sindhis in the city of Pune where there has been a shift by the young respondents in the city. The Sindhis both in India and Pakistan and in other countries may have experienced language shift but maintain their identity. It has been argued that ethnic identity is seen in the use of the heritage language, but the Sindhis who have moved away from their ancestral land have negotiated and reproduced their ethnic identity by the retention of core cultural modalities (Cook & David, 2020). Therefore, in this study we investigated if the young Sindhi Muslims within their ancestral land, but more specifically in the city of Karachi in Pakistan, who had shifted away from the use of their heritage language have maintained Sindhi customs and cultural norms.

Research Question

What are the different customs and cultural norms that have been maintained by young Sindhi speakers in Karachi?

Literature Review

Sindhi Muslims and Hindus constituted a significant part of Sindhi's population and cultural diversity. Both cultural and religious events highlighted important aspects of Sindhi identity in the South-Asia. However, partition changed the dynamics of the South-Asia and mostly Sindhi Hindus migrated to India, South-East Asian countries, and western block because of fear of communal discrimination and oppression (Bhavani, 2006). As a result, several cultural practices, and traditions over the period of time changed dynamically and faced resistance, as Bhavani (2006) discussed "*how cultural practices such as consumption of food and writing in Naskh, Arabic writing system made the Hindus angry*" (p.794). Hence, discrimination and negative attitudes towards Sindhi Hindus resulted in language shift and attrition. (Cook & David, 2020).

As researchers began to explore in different parts of the migrated country to know whether the Sindhi community is maintaining the language, culture and religious practices. David (1999) investigated language scenario in Malaysia and found out a total shift towards English and Malay languages. A similar finding was reported Detaraman and Lock (2003) in Hong Kong. Comparatively, David (2000) identified that Sindhi speakers are using a mixed discourse in their daily use of their mother tongue. Contrastively, Ivengar (2013) studied the perceptions of Sindhi Youth in Pune, India and reported that the Youth was shifting towards the majority language. Abbasi (2019) presented a similar finding in Karachi, Pakistan. However, all these studies focused on the language use, patterns, functions, and discourse. Cultural and Religious practices are yet to be explored whether the community are preserving their ancestral heritage culture or not.

Previous cultural studies like Dewik and Omar (2016) investigated the cultural elements that Circassian American community of New Jersey had preserved. The study utilized a mixed method approach to collect data from 40 participants using sociolinguistic questionnaire and interviews. The findings showed that food, folklore, music, Circassian celebrations and manners that includes respect, honor, hospitality, character, and discipline (Adiga Xabza) are some of the cultural identity markers that the community has preserved. MitntStud (2008) using in-depth semi-structured interviews investigated the cultural values of Druze of Southern Australia. The findings suggested that Druze community maintained their cultural practices and identities although the speakers had shifted away from their habitual language use patterns.

In another study in Kansas among the Croatian community. Glasgow (2012) explored cultural maintenance. The data was collected from 20 participants using semi-structured interviews. The findings suggested that the speakers had no proficiency in Croatian language and mostly relied on bilingualism. Contrastively, they maintain some aspects of their culture like food, gatherings and music. The present study uses the same approach and aims to analyze the cultural identity patterns among Sindhi Muslims in Karachi (Sindh-Pakistan) who have shifted away from the habitual use of their heritage language.

Methodology

Identity construction is an important element for minority communities. To determine the practices and cultural rituals that are being observed among Sindhis in urban areas a qualitative case study has been undertaken; in which interviews and observation was conducted with young Sindhi speakers who had shifted away from their language (Abbasi, 2019). Therefore, multi-stage purposive sampling was used. Firstly, through homogenous purposive sampling technique (Creswell, 2014), twenty participants studying in a public sector university were selected based on their accessibility, literacy, language usage and time spent in urban area.

The participants before becoming a part of the research were informed, that this study aims to know about the different identity markers which the young Sindhi speakers use to associate with their Sindhi community in urban areas. After their formal consent they were interviewed using semi-structured questions. The participants were inquired about what is Sindhi identity for them in their daily life, what are the different norms, values, and cultural practices they attach with their identity like what kind of food and clothing style they prefer. Also, whether they are preserving the cultural rituals, traditions, and norms of their grandparents or not. These twenty literate university participants aged 19 to 24 years included 10 male and 10 female participants. The researcher relied more on the information provided by the participants and avoided personal comments and information about the Sindhi community while taking the interviews.

In addition to the interviews, observation was done as well to avoid personal bias of the researcher towards the community. Therefore, using purposive critical sampling (Creswell, 2014), three participants were selected for observation. As the researcher is a member of the community; observing the participants in the natural setting became an advantage for the research. Participant observation was done using a technique of shadowing (Theron & Sappey, 2012).

Shadowing is a technique in which the researcher closely follows the participants and seems to be a running commentary between the person shadowed and the people around him/her (McDonald, 2005). Shadowing enabled the researcher to gather comprehensive and rich contextual data, as being a member of the ethnic community member, it became easier for the researcher to shadow and observe the participants as they shared a mutual culture and traditions. Umrani (2015) used the similar technique of participant shadowing for observing English language learner

identity construction and negotiation in a public sector university. This tool was used to enhance understanding and for triangulating the gathered data.

However, shadowing could only be done with three participants; as due to the societal norms and cultural values of the community, one participant refused to be shadowed. Those who participated gave their consent before being shadowed. The site selected for observation must be a natural setting and one that is accessible to the researcher and participants (Monahan & Fisher, 2010; Umrani, 2016)**.** Therefore, different social events were observed like engagement, wedding, birthday ceremonies in home, hotels, and village near the city. This technique helped in getting first-hand information about the identity construction and cultural realities among young Sindhi speakers in Karachi.

Shadowing appeared to be the most appropriate approach; however, the researcher's presence was minimized as much as possible, and the events and places were carefully selected. In the first attempt, a social event was observed which was open to all the Sindhi community; therefore, researcher's influence on the participants was minimized and then two more events were observed as the participants and researcher felt more comfortable with each other's presence. All the three events were selected to reduce, researcher's presence near the participant as in all the three events a lot of people were invited, and communication took place with almost everyone. To remove 'observer's effect', the researcher arrived before the participant in the social events; so as to become part of the natural settings and do not closely follow the participant being shadowed.

The data collected from the participants was coded and themes were generated to form a collective view about cultural maintenance among young Sindhis in Karachi. Field-notes during observation validated the themes obtained and generated from the semi-structured interviews.

Findings

Language is one component in the term culture. However, there are many other aspects to that term. Fishman (2000) contends that the loss of a language diminishes language and cultural diversification. While these young Pakistani Sindhis in Karachi accommodate and use the language of the majority in their new urban setting, they still maintain their cultural norms. After

analysis of data collected from interviews and validated through observation, the following themes are noted.

Language

Sindhi speakers have a great sense of association with their heritage language and being asked their ethnic identity, ten of the participants considered Sindhi as their identity marker even though they cannot speak it. It is the high sense of community that speakers have within their community that makes them identify based on community identification-that of being a Sindhi (David et al, 2017). One of the participants said that 'for me community is everything and my identity as a member of the community is inquired when applying for different posts'. Similarly, another participant responded that 'Sindhi speakers have a high sense of association among themselves and while interacting with strangers who are Sindhis, a sense of brotherhood and social contact is created automatically'. Stating they are Sindhis is the key identity marker for the young respondents who have shifted away from the dominant use of the Sindhi language.

Naming Pattern

Some of the participants remarked that since they are unable to speak the language and prefer the mainstream language in the urban domains, their identity marker is their name specially their caste/family name "Wadho", "*Abbasi*" "*Mahar*" "*Sibghataullah*" and "Jatoi" as their caste names give them a sense of affiliation with their heritage language. As one participant said,

> I never knew I was a Sindhi speaker in my childhood, I was only after my father insisted on using the caste after my name, I came to know that I am a Sindhi' since then this has become my identity and I make sure everyone pronounce and write my name using the correct spelling'. This associates me with my culture and the geographical roots of my ancestral home. (GHOO7)

The caste/family name is one obvious identity marker even when not using the language.

Cuisine

Sindhi food is quite popular and is eaten by non-Sindhis. All the participants mentioned Sindhi food dishes. '*Sindhi Pulao'* is consumed on special occasions, and on weekends. The other food items mentioned were s*ai bahji (spinach), palli (green vegetables), pallo machi (fish), behah,*

*allo tikki, tahiri (sweet rice) paari ware saiyon (vermicelli), busri and mithi koki or loli (*breakfast dish among Sindhis made from whole wheat flour, sugar or jaggery*).* These are some of the food items as shown in Figure 1 below, which were mentioned by the participants. During special cultural and festive occasions like '*Bhusriyon', Kacchi Misri and Pakki misri* Sindhi food served. Therefore, despite shifting away from the language, the young speakers find Sindhi cuisine as a unique part of their identity. Figure 1 shows images of food which were shared by the respondents and the researcher also took some images while the respondent serve the following food after consent.
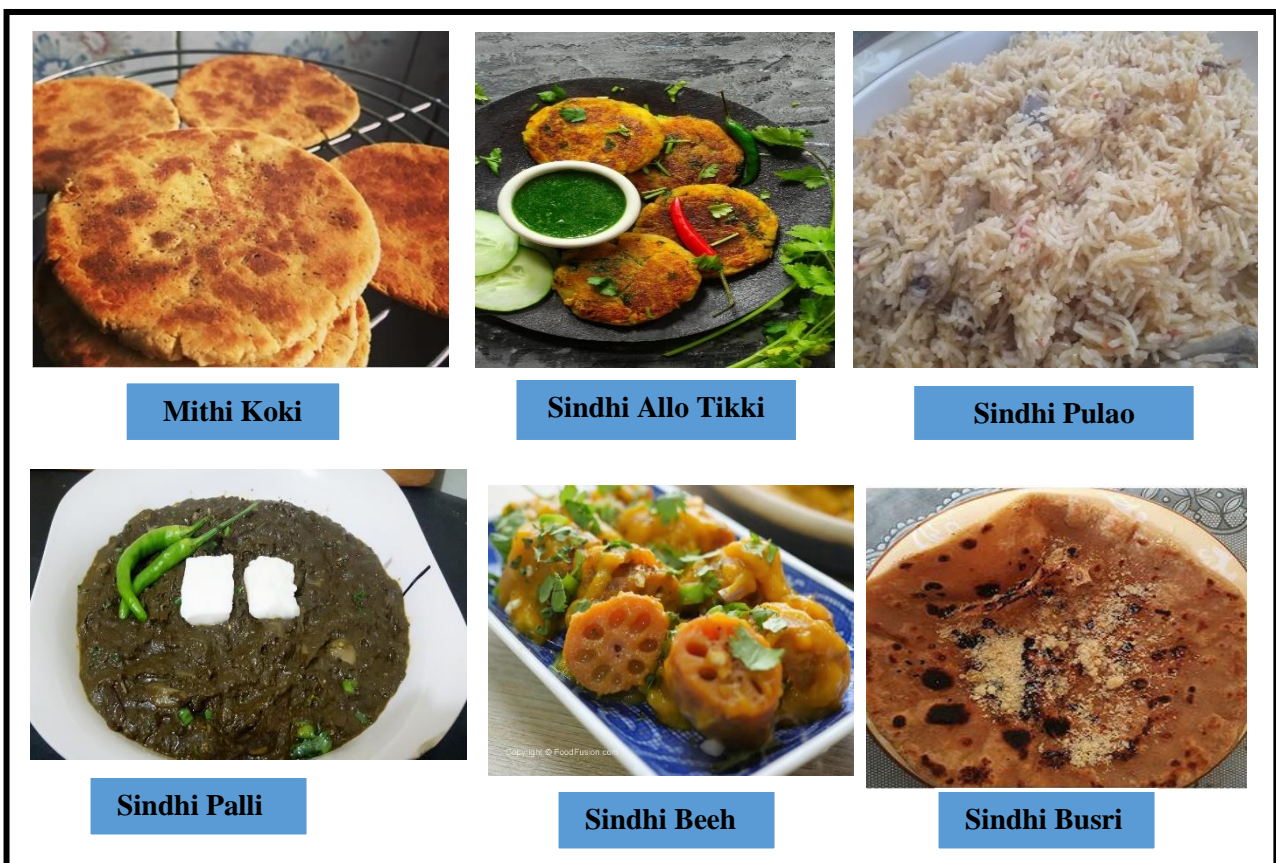

Mithi Koki	**Sindhi Allo Tikki**	**Sindhi Pulao**
Sindhi Palli	**Sindhi Beeh**	**Sindhi Busri**

Figure 1 shows the Sindhi Cuisne popular among the Sindhi Youth

Dressing

Sindhi dressing depicts the colorful life of the Sindhis. Ahmar (2018) reported that ajrak is a prominent symbol of Sindhi culture. 8 female and male participants said that they like to wear

traditional attire especially the Sindhi topi (hat) and ajrak. As one the participant said that 'Sindhi topi and ajrak day was celebrated in our university and everybody exclaimed that you look so wonderful in it. At that time, I feel proud that this is part of my culture'.The female participants also said that 'we like to wear Sindhi ajrak and dresses with karhai' as it is the special part of culture. Similarly, seven male participants said that they prefer to wear white cotton shalwar kameez as part of their culture.

While observing a wedding ceremony, it was noted that the male participants wear their traditional dress '*bhoski'* (off-white shalwar kameez) with *ajrak* and Sindhi *topi* as seen in Figure 2 and the female wore jewelry and embroidered dresses reflecting Sindhi color and fabrics. Ahmar (2018) narrates that Sindhi ajrak and shawl depicts Sindhi culture and hospitality. Figure 2 shows a groom wearing traditional Sindhi wedding attire, the photograph was taken during observation and participation in the wedding after formal consent from the respondents and family members. Most of the family members were eager to get their photographs clicked and use for research purposes. This highlights the positive attitude and cultural promotion activities that are fostered by Sindhi community members.

Figure 1 Groom wearing Traditional dress, Ajrak & Top

Music

Music is an integral part of a culture. Eight male and female participants remarked that they listen to Sindhi music despite the fact that they are unable to understand the traditional songs.

Some songs like "*Jeye Sindh jeye Sindh wara jeeyan, sindhi topi ajrak wara jeyan[2]; Han maa sindhi aheyan[3] and 'Sind mohje aman'[4]*are quite famous. These songs were mentioned by the respondents. At the wedding observed Sindhi *sehra* (folk music) was sung by guests who changed the lyrics and used the names of the bride and groom and their family members.

Customs & Rituals

Sindhi weddings are full of ceremonies and rituals. All the ten male and female participants said that these rituals are celebrated in the city too. These include *vanvah, tying a thread around each other's finger, drinking milk, kacchi misri, pakki misri, baari (displaying the clothes given by the groom to the bride as gift) and laawan. Laawan* as shown *in* figure 3 *is* a unique Sindhi ritual where the heads of the bride and groom meet and the elders within the family bless and give 'laawan' to the newlywed couple. It was noted that after the Nikkah, everybody hugs the groom and gives him a *kandeh (*a garland in which there is cash). Figure 3 shows a traditional Sindhi wedding where the researcher during observation took the photographs after formal consent of the participating community.
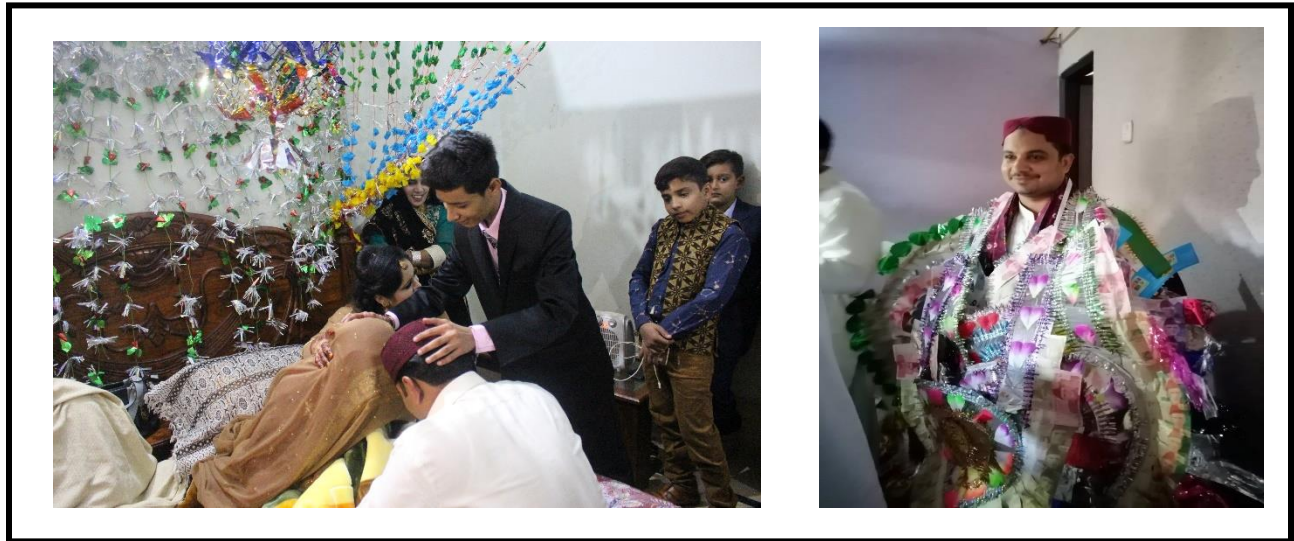

Figure 2 Image of Laawan (Left) and Groom wearing Kadeh (Right)

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[2] Song can be listened using the following link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cce3FqFU9fA
[3] Song can be listened using the following link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSQnWZT9UpM
[4] Song can be listened using the following link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQrrFq_QF-8

Greetings

The Sindhis have a special way of greeting, they hold both their hand together high and say Salam just like Hindus say *Namaste* to each other and when the person responds they respond by putting their hand on the chest. This way of greeting is unique and has special value among Sindhi speakers as shown in the figure 4, which was shared by the participant. Similarly, one participant said that I like the social conduct "like when men greet, I have seen them using the word "Saein" to give respect a lot. As they greet, they put their left hand on their chest and then hug (GH006). Comparatively, the youngsters touch the feet of their elders while greeting them. These social values are unique to the Sindhi identity being observed and liked by most of the participants. Figure 4 was shared by the participant to promote and value Sindhi greeting norm with all the cultures. It was taken during a visit of a political leader to the family.

Figure 3 Image showing greeting norm in Sindhi Culture

Values

The Sindhis are hospitable (Ahmar, 2018) and serve the guest with respect and serve delicious Sindhi food. One of the male participant said that "Sindhi pulao is quite famous among my friends' while five of the male and female participants narrated that 'my mother specially cooks Pulao on Friday for my best friend who comes to visit us' and "we welcome our guest with delicious local famous food" One male participant remarked "people remember us for years; even

if we leave the neighborhood, people still remember our behavior, way of living and food that Sindhi mothers cook"

Social Networking

To maintain cultural ties, it is important to have frequent contact. The participants reported that met their relatives frequently on different occasions. One of the participants said "they prefer weddings within the same community." Hence endogamous marriages are more common than exogamous marriages. Another participant remarked that "once you find out the person sitting next to you is Sindhi, then communication never stops until the two exchange their contact numbers or home-addresses or invitation to their home-town". Similarly, one female participant remarked "socializing is in the roots of our grandparents and parents, and it feels so awkward at times when you are unable to reach that comfort level with the new friend or community person"

Discussion

Although young Sindhi speakers can recall the cultural names of traditional food items, names of few traditions popular in Sindhi weddings and values at lexical level. They are still unable to speak the Sindhi language due to preference and language choice as observed in the external and internal Sindhi diaspora. But by remembering or recalling names of their cultural products, the young Sindhi speakers are maintaining their cultural traditions which they can transform to the coming generation as well. (Ahmar, 2018). Also, the young generation who have lost their language and shifted to the majority language in different parts of the world (Karachi, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, U.K and India) are maintaining their culture due to the presence of elders in their community. Dewik and Omar (2016) also reported that social values in a community are always preserved and transformed through the elders of a specific community. Both Sindhi Muslims and Hindus religiously follow the different traditions of elders. And the older generation is keener to keep their ancestral language alive at least cultural values can be transformed.

Sindhis speakers follow the values and belief system of their community rigidly. Similar findings were reported by Dewik and Oamr (2016). Although young generation have shifted away from the language as was the case with. Croatian language but they still maintain and preserve their culture especially music, food, and social gatherings. Similar findings have been reported in

this study that culture can be maintained as it is reproduced through food, naming pattern, weddings, and social networking.

Conclusion

The participants ascribed to themselves many positive features (David et al,2020). The participants said apart from language other cultural variables like their names, dressing, celebration of cultural ceremonies and social events, maintenance of social networks, enjoyment of traditional food and music suggest that their identity as Sindhis is maintained. These are the different identity markers which Sindhi speakers are using in urban areas to preserve their distinct identity like naming patterns where merely the last name and caste is the only identity marker. Similarly, greetings, wearing Sindhi dresses occasionally and listening to Sindhi music have been idealized as identity markers of preserving one's language in urban areas. Also, the participants narrated that merely participating in the cultural events help them to retain their socio-cultural identity as Sindhi speakers

Hence, beside language and literature, beliefs, morals, and customs are also part of identity. But due to the limited exposure and internal migration, young Sindhi speakers are introduced to some of the identify markers. While moral beliefs are being only followed by the older generations or those living in the villages. As people living in urban areas do not belief in superstitious and Sufi values that have been part of the Sindhi identity since centuries as it relates with the Indus civilization. However, currently the young generation is taking keen interest in connecting with their community through the social media where Sindhi language, reading, music and customs are promoted to create an awareness among the youth to preserve their distinct identity.

Overall, this study shows that even though the young Sindhi respondents in the city resort to mainstream languages (Abbasi, 2019) yet they are trying to maintain their ethnic tastes in food and music and maintain strong ethnic ties with members of the community. Much emphasis is put on maintaining ethnic rituals and customs even when living in towns. Therefore, it is possible to say that losing a language does not mean that the cultural and spiritual connectivity with the ethnic identity is also lost. Though they have shifted away from dominant use of their ethnic language, yet they have maintained their cuisine, social networks, ethnic rituals, and social values.

A further comparative study analyzing the cultural traits and norms of Sindhi speakers living in cities and villages or within the internal diaspora among the older and younger generation may further highlight the distinct cultural Sindhi identity. In the same way, a study among diaspora Sindhisin different countries to learn about the different features of Sindhiness can be conducted in future as well.

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