

## Chapter 8

### **Looking at Punjabi Beyond Wagah**

How to paint a nearest to reality picture of Punjabi in East Punjab? With my background, the by default perception of Punjabi in East Punjab is that everything is rosy there. The reputation of Sikhs as standard-bearers and vanguard of Punjabi language historically is universally recognized. And then creating a Punjabi Suba there further cements this perception. Coming from this background and being practically illiterate in Punjabi and having learnt Gurmukhi and Devanagari scripts during the writing of this manifesto, from about January 2012 to December 2015, my perception as you must have read in the previous pages does not affirm these observations as they are normally and generally accepted. And here when I am revising this manifesto (today is 29-11-2017), I have to say something which to my own amazement consolidated finally in my mind as I was near the end of this revision. I will come to that in a new and next chapter under the title ‘The Culprit is the English Language in the Sub-continent’. This chapter did not exist originally and I had no clue of it before I was reaching the end of this revision (today is 11-1-2018). But first what I have been able to collect, edit and present to have a reasonable picture of Punjabi in Eat Punjab and therefore in India.

#### ***State of Punjabi in Indian Punjab (1)***

In this picture, strange to say Bansi Lal got very ‘prominent’ position. So, let us read about him.

#### ***Tamil in Haryana: The Unharnessed Bansi Lal***

It came to my attention that Punjabi had replaced Tamil as the second language of the State of Haryana. It was very strange for me. If this could happen to Punjabi in the former Punjab, the phenomenon must be explained. The culprit was Bansi Lal. There are many lessons in this. The following 5 pieces have been quoted for the background.

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Let us go through them and then understand the underlying matters and issues. Bansi Lal studied at the Punjab University Law College, Jalandhar.

[1] SIRSA NEWS ( [www.SirsaNews.com](http://www.SirsaNews.com) ) 30 January, 2010

**2. Punjabi edges out Tamil in Haryana** (Ajay Bhardwaj): ‘In 1969 the newly formed Haryana decided to opt for Tamil as second language in order to give a rebuff to Punjab. Last week when Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda was honoured at a function in Chandigarh for declaring Punjabi as a second language of the state, official circles were wondering what would happen to the Tamil language, which had so far been enjoying the status of second language in Haryana. Even as there is practically no presence of Tamilians in the state, Haryana had declared Tamil as its second language in 1969 when Bansi Lal was the chief minister. Officially Tamil had never enjoyed the status of a second language in this predominantly Hindi-speaking state, but the arrangement somehow carried on willy-nilly for more than 40 years. Old-timers say the Tamil was declared as the second language just to give a rebuff to Punjab. “Since it was the Punjabi suba agitation that had led to formation of Haryana, Bansi Lal thought, ‘Let any language other than Punjabi be the second language of the state’. Hence, Tamil became the second language even though there might not have been even a single Tamil native family in the state at that point of time”, said a former bureaucrat. Subsequently, though the Congress and the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) announced the replacement of Tamil with Punjabi, nothing changed on the ground. Hooda said here last month that a notification had been issued to accord Punjabi a second language status.

Incidentally, the Congress manifesto had promised to take the step.’ [2]

[2] [March 7, 2010] Place: Chandigarh | Agency: DNA  
<http://www.dnaindia.com/india/1356124/reportpunjabi-edges-out-tamil-in-haryana>

**3. Hooda learning Punjabi – Haryana’s second language** (March 28, 2010): ‘With Haryana having declared Punjabi the second language of the state, Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda is himself learning the neighbouring state's language. Hooda, who was speaking in Punjabi, Sunday said he was now trying to learn how to read and write this 'wonderful language which is spoken not only within India, but also in several other countries from Pakistan to Canada'. Addressing a gathering ... Hooda said Punjabi had an important place as a language in the country. The second language status of Punjabi in Haryana means that people can communicate with the government and its agencies in that language. It will also be taught in educational institutions across the state. People in several areas in Haryana, especially those bordering Punjab, speak Punjabi language. Haryana itself was carved out as a separate state from the unified Punjab November 1, 1966. ... Hooda said the Punjabi had its origin in the state of

Haryana from Panipat. 'Dama Dam Mast Kalander' is credited with the origin and popularity of the Punjabi language, which was formulated in Panipat on 1142,' Hooda disclosed. 'The first poet of Punjabi, Baba Farid, was from Hansi, which is a town of Haryana,' Hooda added. Emphasising the need for people to promote Punjabi, the chief minister assured them that a Punjabi teacher would be provided wherever there were 10 students intending to study the Punjabi language in institutions in Haryana.' [3]

[3] [Source IANS <http://www.sify.com/news/hooda-learning-punjabi-haryana-second-language-newsnational-kd2tOcbcajh.html>]

4. **Bansi Lal** (Full name: Bansi Lal Legha) (26 August 1927 – 28 March 2006) 'was an Indian Hindu Jat independence activist, senior Congress leader, former Chief Minister of Haryana and considered by many to be the architect of modern Haryana. Lal was elected to the State Assembly seven times, the first time in 1967. He served three separate terms as Chief Minister of Haryana: 1968–75, 1985–87, and 1996–99. Bansi Lal was considered a close confidante of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay Gandhi during the Emergency era of 1975-1977. He served as the Defence Minister from December 1975 to March 1977. He set up Haryana Vikas Party after parting ways with the Indian National Congress in 1996. Lal was president of the Bar Association, Bhiwani from 1957 to 1958. He was president of the District Congress Committee, Hissar, from 1959 to 1962 and later became a member of the Congress Working Committee and Congress Parliamentary Board. He was a member of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee between 1958 and 1962. He was a Rajya Sabha member from 1960 to 1966 and 1976 to 1980. He was a Lok Sabha member—1980 to 1984, 1985 to 1986 and 1989 to 1991. After he parted company with Congress in 1996, Bansi Lal set up the Haryana Vikas Party and his campaign against prohibition propelled him to power in the assembly polls the same year. Lal became one of the first Chief Ministers to visit Israel, when he led a delegation of agriculturalists and sarpanches to the country in 1971. Wikipedia 16-3-2015 It was under the banner of the HVP that Bansi Lal, in alliance with the BJP, became the Chief Minister of Haryana for the fourth time, after nine years, in 1996. However, he could not complete his full tenure following the withdrawal of support first by the BJP and then by the Congress. After that, Bansi Lal's political fortunes had been on a constant decline. He had to merge his party with the Congress ultimately before the last (2005) Assembly

[4] The Tribune, **March 29, 2006, Chandigarh, India.**

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**5. WikiLeaks: Defence Minister Bansi Lal pledged loyalty to Indira Gandhi, not her office:** ‘During the Emergency that was declared by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975, many of her ministers and partymen were competing to display total loyalty to her. Congress President Dev Kant Baruah's assertion, "Indira is India", is famous. A cable sent by US diplomats in India to their home office in Washington illustrates the sycophancy of then Defence Minister Bansi Lal. The cable, part of WikiLeaks' latest release, is dated January 19, 1976. It notes that Bansi Lal declared at a public rally in Haryana that he was "loyal to Mrs Gandhi personally and not to the office of Prime Minister. He said he would remain loyal to her all his life. All his strength came from the 'blessings' of Mrs Gandhi." Bansi Lal's unabashed declarations stumped the US embassy in New Delhi, which said in the cable, "Aside from raising questions about his oath of office to the constitution and President, the Defense Minister's remarks may well also strike a somewhat sour note for the officers of the Indian Army. Embassy and any indication of annoyance or concern within the Indian military to Bansi Lal's suggestion that his orders to them may relate more directly to Mrs Gandhi's personal interests than to those of the state." [5]

[5] Reported by [Nitin Gokhale](#), Edited by [Mala Das](#) | Updated:  
April 09, 2013

[HTTP://WWW.NDTV.COM/INDIA-NEWS/WIKILEAKS-DEFENCE-MINISTER-BANSI-LAL-  
PLEDGED-LOYALTY-TO-INDIRA-GANDHI-NOT-HER-OFFICE-518560](http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/wikileaks-defence-minister-bansi-lal-pledged-loyalty-to-indira-gandhi-not-her-office-518560)

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So this was Bansi Lal. Any state power is always in the position, actively or passively; wisely or foolishly, to change the course of history. The actions or non-actions of a state power are indicators of its outlook as well as its capabilities on the ground. And a state power at any time means the individuals collectively or a single individual controlling the state at that time. I do not find words to express how condemnable it is that the Punjabi language got damaged in India even after 1947. It apparently is unbelievable, particularly to those who are, like me, west of Wagah-Atari. And for that first and foremost Pundit Nehru and the Congress Party must be held responsible. I do not go into other intricacies here. That Hindus of Punjab disown Punjabi when Congress is in command and Pundit Nehru the prime minister, is not forgivable, although not perhaps forgiving is not the option. What bigger damage could have been to Punjabi that political circumstances were allowed or aided to become or made such that Punjabis disowned their own language? It is like creating a situation that a house-owner disowns his house, parents disown their children, or children disown their parents. Such was the gift of independence for Punjabi language! And that too under Pundit Nehru. This was the failure of the best available person. How to view it? We

have to be prudent. I believe it should be viewed in the context of ever present possibility of human failure at any level. Within this broad view, there is also the possibility of broken relationship and one becoming reactionary losing patience and balance.

Anyhow, Bansilal had studied at the Punjab University Law College, Jalandhar. And it is not possible for me to accept that he was not a Punjabi.

Does one has to say that there was practically no presence of Tamilians in the state? To what extent, individuals can be abnormal in their lives and prevail upon others to see their abnormality as normal? Anyhow, Haryana declared Tamil as its second language in 1969s when Bansilal was the chief minister. Officially Tamil had never enjoyed the status of a second language in this predominantly Hindi-speaking state, but the arrangement somehow carried on willy-nilly for more than 40 years. What a distorted mind Bansilal was! Then Bansilal became one of the first Chief Ministers to visit Israel, when he led a delegation of agriculturalists and sarpanches to the country in 1971. I must remind the reader that this happened after years of the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. This is a larger question and needs separate dealing. But you can connect this action of Bansilal with Pundit Nehru's perceptions and dealings with Israel discussed elsewhere, while I connect Bansilal's actions with Congress party.

If ever time came my recommendation is that all over the sub-continent the school children must be taught, other examples apart, what Punjabis (Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus) did to damage each other and eventually themselves. Not only that, this disfigured the politics of the sub-continent before, during and after the events of 1947. Repentances and prayers should become a normality in the schools, colleges and universities.

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### **1. Punjabis discriminated against in Haryana**

December 22, 2009: "Despite comprising 38 per cent of the total population, Punjabis have been deprived of their rights in Haryana." These views were expressed by speakers at a convention organised by the Punjabi Mahasabha at Chadha Palace, Ambala City, on Monday. The speakers regretted that successive governments in the state had discriminated with Punjabis who were not offered jobs in government services in proportion to their population. Mahasabha president Ashok Mehta also addressed the gathering. [1]

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[1] <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/-punjabis-discriminated-against-in-haryana-/557648/>

## **2. MLAs adopt Punjabi language resolution**

Chandigarh: In a rare show of unity between ruling SAD and opposition members, the Punjab assembly on Monday unanimously adopted a resolution seeking first language status for Punjabi in the union territory of Chandigarh. The resolution is being seen as a step towards strengthening Punjab's claim over Chandigarh. Earlier, members, cutting across party lines, expressed anguish over what they said Punjabi was not getting the required "recognition" in Chandigarh — the capital of Punjab and Haryana.

[2]

[2] TNN Mar 16, 2010, 06.39am IST

## **3 . Distortion of Punjabi language raises concern**

Patiala: Linguistic experts raised the issues of marginalization and distortion of Punjabi language in education, media and common use, during the seminar organized by a students' body at the Arts Auditorium of the Punjabi university here on Friday. Presenting his paper at the seminar, Joga Singh, head of the Linguistic Anthropology and Punjabi Lexicography department (Punjabi University) insisted on the need of making Punjabi as a medium of instruction at all levels of education. Referring to the research, he said that students could develop better understanding of concepts if they are taught in their mother language. "It is a misconception that at younger age students could learn other languages in a better way. But in fact those, who get primary education in their mother language, could learn other languages in a better way," he added. Experts rejected the contention that Punjabi is a handicapped language because it lacks technical terminology. They argued that no language could be termed as handicapped or incomplete as each language has all sufficient terminology, according to the needs of related society. Experts also said unnecessary infiltration of words of other languages, such as Hindi and English, is a threat to the integrity of Punjabi language. Sikandar Singh, assistant professor of Punjabi at Eternal University, Baru Sahib (Himachal Pardesh), raised issues related to marginalization of the language. [3]

[3] TNN Oct 8, 2011

## **4 . All mum on saving language'**

Chandigarh: With all the political parties finally out with their manifestoes, two organizations associated with culture and literature have accused them all of failing to

address issues related to Punjabi culture and language. Coming out with a list of loopholes in the manifestoes, Punjab Jagriti Manch and Punjabi Bhasha Academy stated that the Congress, SAD, BJP and even PPP had not given any importance to preserving Punjabi language. Representatives of the two organizations stated that while all parties were eager to rule Punjab, they had missed out on the relevant concerns and their agenda had nothing to do with Punjabi language and culture. In a joint statement issued by Manch general secretary Satnam Singh Manak and Academy president Joginder Singh Puar, they said that while the Congress had completely missed mentioning Punjabi language, SAD had merely given a passing reference to it without giving any clear roadmap on the issue. They said it was a cause of concern that Punjabi language was dying in Punjab but the political parties, except CPI (M), had avoided appealing to the parties to include the issues now in their agendas. They also demanded that the parties make clear promises about inclusion of Chandigarh, where Punjabi was being wiped out despite it being the capital of the state. [4]

[4] TNN Jan 25, 2012

**5. Guru Nanak Dev University introduce Punjabi compulsory subject at undergraduate level**

AMRITSAR: Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU) has become the first university of Punjab to have introduced Punjabi compulsory subject at under graduation level, this was informed by Vice Chancellor GNDU AS Brar who chaired the meeting of Syndicate of GNDU here on Monday. He said that earlier, Punjab history and culture subject was offered to the students at under graduation level as option along with Punjabi compulsory subject for those students who were not aware of Punjabi language. He said that this decision would also be beneficial not only for those students who wish to render their services in Punjab after completion of their degrees, but also spread and popularize the Punjabi language. [5]

[5] June 25, 2012 | *Yudhvir Rana, TNN*

A comment by a reader on the above: GNDU has done its students a huge favour and presented them with a great opportunity. If the students and their families have any sense, they should grab it. So far in history, only one nation has ever willingly turned its back on its own mother tongue in the false name of 'progress'. That nation is Pakistan. Unless, by some twisted logic, the Pakistani example is considered the benchmark to aspire to, I suggest all Punjabis embrace their mother tongue of Punjabi.

**6. Punjabi vision 2020: More focus on Punjabi language, literature and culture**

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PATIALA: A meeting of the Punjabi University Senate was held under the chairmanship of the vice chancellor, Dr Jaspal Singh here. A power-point presentation, depicting Punjabi University's vision for propagation and preservation of Punjabi language, literature and culture worldwide in shape of "Punjabi Vision-2020" was played during the meeting. The draft has been prepared by a committee of experts, under the patronage of the Vice-Chancellor, after seeking suggestions from a large number of Punjabis from various parts of the country. Sharing his views on the draft, Dr. J.S. Puar, a former Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University said that preparation of basic language material like standardized dictionaries, encyclopaedias, glossary of technical terminologies and quality literature was most important for the development of any language. Dr. S.S. Johl, another former Vice-Chancellor advocated the use of simple vocabulary and teaching in mother tongue at the elementary level. Dr. H.K. Manmohan Singh, a former Vice-Chancellor, stated that the University could take help from some other Universities in this regard. Dr. Prithipal Singh Kapoor, a former Pro-Vice-Chancellor of G.N.D. University appreciated the efforts of Punjabi University for the development of Punjabi language, literature and culture. Summing up the discussion, Dr Jaspal Singh said that in addition to preparation of basic language material, use of modern technology was must for the development of Punjabi. While a Punjabi-English dictionary, prepared by Punjabi University has already been made available on the internet, a mobile version of the same was ready for wider propagation of the language, he said. [6]

[6] **Parvesh Kumar Sharma, TNN Sep 7, 2012**

### **7. Right to Left all shades participated in March for Punjabi language**

Jalandhar: Once the question of language polarized people on communal lines in Punjab but in the Punjabi Jagiriti March, taken out for promoting Punjabi language here on Thursday on the occasion of International Mother Language Day, people witnessed participation from the rightist to leftist shades with RSS and communist activists walking through the city for promotion of Punjabi language along with hundreds of students of English medium elitist schools. If there were Gurudwara Committees supporting the procession so were the Mandir committees and Christian institutes. This is for the first time that RSS activists, led by its Vibhag Parmukh Chander Kant, participated in the procession for promoting Punjabi language. Their participation assumes significance as the language issue in the state had been taking communal overtones in Punjab in the post independent India, especially in 1951 census, which ultimately led to widening of communal rift also. Apart from RSS activists, managing committees of a few Hindu temples, Patanjilee Yog Peeth, and a part of Brahmin Sabha also participated in the procession. [7]



[7] [IP Singh](#), TNN Feb 22, 2013

<http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/keyword/punjabi-language>

### **8. Punjab to cancel NOCs of schools not teaching Punjabi**

The Punjab government will close all those schools in the state that have not yet started teaching Punjabi language from class first and cancel the No-Objection Certificates issued to them for opening the institutions. After launching the Right To Education (RTE) in the state, state Education and Language Minister Sewa Singh Sekhwan told mediapersons he had received complaints that some schools affiliated to CBSE, ICSE and Kendriya Vidyalayas in the state were not obeying the Punjab government order of teaching Punjabi to students. Sekhwan said he has instructed his officers to issue notices to these schools and close them after rejecting the NOCs issued to them. Punjabi language had been made a compulsory subject in schools of the state under the Punjab, Punjabi and Learning of Other Languages Act, 2008 but the schools have failed to follow the law. [8]

[8] **Monday, August 05, 2013**, <http://www.dayandnightnews.com/2011/11/punjab-to-cancel-nocs-of-schools-not-teaching-punjabi/>

### **9. Punjabi brotherhood to hold convention**

Rohtak, December 9 With a view to uniting the members of Punjabi brotherhood and putting up a concerted fight to attain a substantial socio-political presence in the state, the Akhil Bharatiya Punjabi Jagriti Manch has launched a state-wide campaign. After holding a series of public meetings in different parts of the state to garner support for the drive, the manch has decided to hold a state-level convention at Rohtak on December 15. Former minister and manch leader Subhash Batra said Rajya Sabha MP KD Singh, former Army chief Gen VK Singh and several other prominent personalities from the region had backed the movement and would attend the convention. “The underlying motive behind the move is to bring the scattered members of the Punjabi brotherhood under one umbrella and work together for attaining the common goals of having due political representation, adequate job share and emphatic social presence,” said Batra. [9]

[9] Sunit Dhawan / TNS [The tribune Haryana Edition, Online Edition 10-12-2013]

### **10. For Respect and Honour of Punjabi Language**

From the Punjabi Tribune, Chandigarh of 28 November 2017: The road sign boards on the Bathinda-Amritsar National Highway in East Punjab have three languages,

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Hindi at the top, then English below and last Punjabi at the further below position. Sometime back some activists for the honour and respect of Punjabi language and belonging to the joint struggle of Malwa Youth Federation, Dal Khalsa and Maan Boli Satikar Committee had disfigured the sign boards by brushing black on English and Hindi leaving only Punjabi as it was there. Police cases were registered against them and they were sent to jail. There was a constant agitation for the withdrawal of the cases. But now the Cabinet minister Braham Mahindra has announced that the cases would be withdrawn. According to the activists this is a victory for the struggle and the respect and honour of the mother tongue have got boosted. On the other hand, it has been reported that it had been already decided to put new road sign boards on the highway displaying only in Punjabi and English languages. The activists say that the struggle would continue. They said a few days ago the minister had said that the central government was uneasy with the campaign of black-brushing the boards and was in the mood to take severe action.

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### *State of Punjabi in Indian Punjab (2)*

#### Signs of Punjabi dropping off blackboards too

(Saving Punjabi – I, II & III, The Tribune 24, 25 & 26 November, 2017)

An aggressive attempt has been made to ‘save’ the dignity of Punjabi language on roadside signboards. But the reasons for its falling out of favour may lie far deeper — in a lack of interest in learning the language as well as apathy on the part of govt to provide the wherewithal for its teaching and promotion. The Tribune brings out the malaise in a three-part series, beginning today with the state of Punjabi learning in schools.

**Sanjeev Singh Bariana**  
**Tribune News Service**  
**Chandigarh, November 23**

The most crucial requirement for the growth of a language is a large enough user base. Punjabi may just be losing that, especially as reflected in the figures of students opting for the language in schools as well as in the learning outcomes.

There is a ‘compulsory’ version of the Punjabi language that all students have to take up as a subject till Class 12 under the Punjab School Education Board. But the language is taught in a literary sense only in the ‘elective’ version, for which students may opt after Class 10. There has been a significant drop in the latter.

In 1995, around 40 per cent of the total students taking the Punjab board Class 12 exam opted for Punjabi elective. By 2017, this has dropped to 24 per cent. A major reason is more students going for science or commerce. However, even in the humanities group, there is disappointment. From 46 per cent arts students choosing Punjabi elective as one of the subjects in 1995, it is down to 35 per cent in 2017.

But the challenge begins early, as a significant proportion of Punjabi students come from the rural background, where the teaching standards in government schools are disturbingly poor. The Annual Status of Education (Rural) report prepared by Pratham, a reputed NGO working for quality education for the underprivileged, found that at least 46 per cent of the students of Class 4 could not read books (in Punjabi) of Class 2. As many as 4.4 per cent students did not even know the alphabet till Class 3, and 20 per cent of them could not read the text of Class 1.

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### **Missing teachers**

Teaching Punjabi even as a compulsory subject in all streams is a challenge owing to lack of teachers in government schools. Devinder Punia, general secretary of the Democratic Teachers Front, says, “Approximately 1,500 senior secondary schools have only 1,113 Punjabi teachers against the sanctioned strength of 1,700, so they have to manage by using high school teachers.”

The principal of a government school in Ludhiana district, who did not want to be identified, says, “Just the compulsory paper takes up all Punjabi teachers, leaving very little resources to teach elective Punjabi.” He adds, “Big cities like Ludhiana, Patiala, Jalandhar and Amritsar do not have shortage as these stations are preferred by teachers. But the paucity shows in rural areas, where the demand for Punjabi is higher but it is not offered as an elective subject.”

Harvinder Singh, a Punjabi lecturer, is teaching 12 sections of compulsory Punjabi at Government Senior Secondary School, Amloh, where elective Punjabi is not offered. He says, “Elective Punjabi requires critical appreciation in poetry, stories and drama, besides advanced grammar, and students cannot manage without proper guidance.”

### **Sliding demand**

The socio-economic realities of the day have also pushed Punjabi down in students’ priority. A teacher in a public school near Kharar says, “Students nowadays prefer subjects with a greater employment potential, such as engineering and other professional courses.” It is also considered a low-scoring subject. So many students opt for subjects such as physical education to secure a higher percentage to help them in admissions ahead.

Gurbeer Singh, a government school teacher in Ludhiana district, says, “Students in villages at times opt for Punjabi elective believing it to be an easy subject. But without teachers, they find the going tough, and often change the subject midway.”

### **Cultural change**

There are also many students who have had their initial education outside Punjab, besides many families who want their children to excel in languages other than Punjabi. As the principal of a private school in Fazilka says, “We have a large number of students whose parents are serving in the Army, paramilitary or other government services, and they see no point in learning Punjabi. We adopt different ways to accommodate their requirements.

“What is more interesting is that a large number of Punjabi parents also do not want their children to learn the language. Many private schools thus offer French, German, or even Chinese, as many children plan to go abroad.”

Harmit Singh, a senior Punjabi teacher based in Jalandhar district, says, “Children of many Punjabi teachers studying in private schools are also not taking up this language. Punjabi books in libraries have few takers; and there can be no writing without reading. The lack of interest is evident from the fact that many of the young teachers too are not able to name five leading writers in the language.”

As a result, a large number of private schools across the state are not offering Punjabi as an elective subject. “Some are not teaching it at all, and just ‘manage’ the departmental inspections,” revealed the principal of a private school in Bathinda district.

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On its part, the Education Department too has not initiated action against any school for failing to offer Punjabi till Class 12. It only issues reminders with “strict warning” from time to time.

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## **Disappearing students and teachers of Punjabi in colleges**

Surjit Patar: As I have said earlier too, mar rahi hai meri bhasha, shabd shabd, vak vak

**Sanjeev Singh Bariana**

**Tribune News Service**

**Chandigarh, November 24**

If fewer and fewer students are opting for Punjabi in schools, can the situation be any better in Punjab’s colleges and universities? No surprises here. Not only is the percentage of students studying Punjabi literature for graduate or post-graduate degrees down by nearly half in the past decade, hiring of regular teachers for the subject in colleges has been practically nil over the past 15 years.

Just as in schools, Punjabi is a mandatory subject in undergraduate classes of Punjabi University (Patiala) and Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU, Amritsar) in one or more semesters. Panjab University (PU, Chandigarh) gives the option of Punjabi or ‘Punjab history and culture’. But the key to literature is Punjabi ‘elective’, which is losing out rapidly.

Punjabi University-affiliated colleges had approximately 13,725 students opting for Punjabi elective in 2007 for undergraduate studies. The figure today stands at 12,500. GNDU is down from 12,425 to 12,000; and PU from 14,000 to 13,035.

These figures may suggest that the drop in students is small, but that is deceptive. That is because the percentage of students out of the total taking up Punjabi elective takes a drastic hit when we take into account the fact that colleges under PU increased from 182 in 2007 to 196 today; while those under Punjabi University increased from 110 to 278. And what makes it a shockingly low percentage is the horde of private universities that have come up in the past decade, almost none of which offer Punjabi literature. While no compilation of the total number of students is readily available, it can be safely assumed that it has nearly doubled in the past decade, while those studying Punjabi has not increased; rather, it has gone down. As Punjabi University Vice-Chancellor BS Ghumman admits, the number of students of Punjabi is definitely not in keeping with the increase in the total.

### **Money matters**

The reason for private colleges and universities not offering Punjabi elective is simple — students are looking only for courses that can possibly provide them jobs. And as we see, currently even the job of a Punjabi teacher is not available.

Chancellor of Chandigarh University Satnam Singh Sandhu says, “There are no takers for Punjabi, so none of the private universities offer any course in the language. We did hire two teachers at one point, but had to pull out as we got only two students.”

Dr Yograj Angrish, Head of the Punjabi Department at PU, points to a sad reality, “Barring a miniscule fraction, bright students just don’t want Punjabi as their first option. Prof Nahar Singh of our department and I conducted a study to find the reasons,

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and found that the new universities and colleges are drawing a significant share of students with their professional courses.”

He recalls that his department could not find a suitable candidate for the post of professor despite two attempts in the recent past, which speaks of the quality of faculty available.

### **Govt abdication**

Chairperson of the Punjab Educationists Forum, Tarsem Bahia, says, “The last time the state hired a batch of regular Punjabi teachers (229) was in 1987-88. As a result, today there are only 1,200 regular teachers in all of the state’s universities and colleges against the sanctioned strength of 5,000. In the 46 government colleges, there are only 49 regular Punjabi teachers against 251 posts. Majority of the teaching work is being handled by temporary or part-time faculty, who are paid a pittance — between Rs 12,000 and Rs 15,000. That leaves no incentive for teachers.”

For the past several years, GNDU has not added a single faculty member to its strength of three, to teach a total of 300 students.

Chairperson Dr Raminder Kaur says, “We are using the services of research fellows to hold classes.” The university had 28 teachers in 1985. PU in Chandigarh has only two regular faculty members, against eight posts.

Prof NK Gosain, former Bathinda district president of the Punjab and Chandigarh College Teachers Union, says the last regular Punjabi teacher of Government Rajindra College, Bathinda, retired on September 31, 2009. There are nine sanctioned posts, all of which are vacant today. More than half the seats for Punjabi students in the PU Regional Centre, Muktsar, are also vacant.



### **A lament**

Gurbhajan Gill, former president of the Punjabi Sahit Akademi, notes the effect of this lack of interest: “The first casualty for our language is the choice of words, such as saajra savera (morning), paraga (payment in barter), thor (cactus), tarkalan (evening), deeva (earthen light), jhagga (shirt) and istri (iron). Many more will disappear if efforts are not made to preserve our glorious tradition of narration.”

Surjit Patar, writer and Chairman of the Punjab Arts Council, has the last word: “Punjabi, which is the 10th most spoken language in the world, is being shunned by a significant proportion of our youth. It is embarrassing to see how even elders are reluctant to use their mother tongue. As I have said earlier too, Mar rahi hai meri bhasha shabd shabd, vak vak.”

### **Languages Dept headed for wipeout**

- Set up with an ambitious plan for promoting Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu literature in 1956, the Languages Department based in Patiala is headed for a complete closure, as 105 out of its total 135 posts have already gone vacant, with no fresh recruitments planned.
- It has brought out no publication worth the name in several years, and mandated activities such as book exhibitions, seminars, poetic symposia, literary contests, or awards for books have not been heard of in a long time.
- There are currently only five ‘district language officers’ against 15 posts. At least 140 manuscripts are lying edited, but unpublished.

## **Academics robs literature of popular touch**

Poor choice of university syllabi only breeds poorer learning, feel experts

**Vishav Bharti**

**Tribune News Service**

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Punjabi writer Amarjit Chandan is a product of the 1960s, a time when universities and colleges were considered a vibrant place for creativity. He often wonders if what he studied at the college really made any impact on his literary creativity. He finds the answer in the negative.

“In teaching, the syllabus comes first, followed by learning. Poor literature breeds poor syllabus. It is a vicious cycle. The quality of teaching in any language depends on the quality of syllabus. That further reflects the quality of its source, the literature written in the particular language.”

Though Punjabi literature has a glorious history of almost 1,000 years, starting with Sheikh Farid (1173-1265), the history of formal Punjabi teaching is a relatively recent phenomenon. According to the People’s linguistic survey of India 2016, it was towards the end of the 19th century that a movement started for the development of Punjabi and for its use in education and administration.

It was only after Independence that Punjabi got due recognition and was used in education, mass media and administration. However, when it comes to formal Punjabi teaching, pioneer teachers Prof Sant Singh Sekhon and Prof Pritam Singh have mentioned in their memoirs that in the 1930s, the concept of diploma in Punjabi

(Budhimani, Gyani, etc) was introduced in the University of the Punjab, Lahore, and MA in Punjabi was introduced five years after Partition.

### **A downturn**

Chandan says Punjabi teaching from the outset was fraught with “whimsical individuals” like Mohan Singh Diwana, et al.

“What would one expect from students educated on the underdeveloped low-level modern prose of Teja Singh’s essay Ghusalkhana (Bathroom), and Lal Singh Kamla Akali’s travelogues?” he asks. Only Mohan Singh’s poetry by default was a saving grace, he says, adding that post-1970, Punjabi syllabi went down the drain.

Harish Jain, a major Punjabi publisher based in Chandigarh, agrees. He even goes a step further and says that formal education of Punjabi literature has done great disservice to the cause. “Academic hegemony over modern Punjabi literature has disconnected literature from the life of the common Punjabi man. In Punjabi literature, a book is not written for the reader but for critical appreciation, for an award, for recognition, or to have it included in university or college syllabi. It has become a small ecosystem, and the reader is not part of that ecosystem,” he says.

On the issue of formal Punjabi teaching, Patiala-based literary critic Dr Surjit Singh largely agrees that the main problem is with the ways of teaching and testing Punjabi, which have been structured on management and engineering lines. “There is no creativity in testing and teaching of Punjabi,” he says.

He goes into the origin of the problem, and says academics furthered the notion that certain forms of literature, including qissa and stage poetry, which were closely

### **Sarab Punjabi Manifesto**

associated with people, were low forms of literature. They even refused to acknowledge stage poetry as literature. But it was these forms that people had relished, and that is why they survived for centuries in both the written word and oral tradition,” he says.

The outcome is evident, in black and white: Every year, more than 1,000 new Punjabi literary books are published, but there are not even 50 that go into the second edition.

### **Mother tongue**

However, Prof Joga Singh, a linguist from the Department of Anthropological Linguistics and Lexicography, Punjabi University, Patiala, feels that the problem is not with formal Punjabi teaching but with what is taught. He lays emphasis on teaching only the mother tongue to children for the first 10 years. “International expert opinion and practice overwhelmingly support the view that education, particularly at the school level, can be imparted successfully only through the mother tongue,” he says.

“The contemporary international linguistic scene and practices provide irrefutable evidence that India has suffered great losses by handing over mother tongue domains to the English language. One significant reason for India’s lagging behind countries such as South Korea, Japan, and China is the intrusion of English in Indian education and other important domains,” he says. Prof Joga Singh says that at a time when Punjabi is being replaced with English at the school level, how can we create good Punjabi literature?

### **Economics of language**

The issue of language, Amarjit Chandan says, is linked with the economy. In the age of world corporate capitalism, English rules as the language of the global market. Not only Punjabi but all other languages, including Urdu and Hindi, are in dire straits.

Looking at the future of literature written in Punjabi, he fears it is bleak. A new generation of Punjabi authors publishing in English has emerged in both East and West Punjab as well as among the diaspora. It seems likely that in the last decades of this century, a generation's entire Punjabi literary output will be in English. "Just imagine," he wonders, "if Mulk Raj Anand, Khushwant Singh, Ved Mehta, Ageye, and major Urdu poets such as Iqbal and Faiz had written in their mother tongue! The level of Punjabi teaching and learning would have been very different." Indeed.

#### **Punjabi language: Some facts**

- FE Keay, a researcher in western languages, traces Punjabi back to 1000 BC
- Punjabi is spoken by 13 crore people across the world and is the 10th most spoken language in the world and fourth in Asia
- Punjabi is the third most spoken language in the Indian sub-continent and also in the UK and Canada
- There are 28 dialects of Punjabi. The major dialects spoken in eastern Punjab are Malwi, Majhi, Doabi and Puadhi, while those in western Punjab are Pothohari and Saraiki. Majhi, as spoken in the heart of Punjab, is considered the standard version

**Source:** People's Linguistic Survey of India ■