

# The Soft Power of Punjabi: Language in the Domain of Pleasure

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# Soft Power

Power is the ability to gratify its holder in any form. This concept is used in international relation for a nation state's power to improve its image, increase its commercial and cultural footprint and, thus, gratify its government and citizens.

# Language and Power

1. Conventionally scholars have been concerned with the use of a language in the domains of power (government, bureaucracy, judiciary, armed forces, higher education, commerce, media).

All empower those who enter them by manipulating the word.

2. Domains of pleasure are (a) relationships (b) friendship (c) bonding (d) emotional relationships (e) entertainment.
3. Entertainment is visual, auditory, emotional and intellectual i-e. painting, pictures, music, poetry, riddles, etc. Films, theatre, drama combine all of the above.

# Theoretical Insights

1. Linguistic capital (Pierre Bourdieu)-  
Does Panjab  
I have any? (Silverstien etc)
2. Indexality – is Punjabi indexed with  
some kind of positive identity?
3. Enregisterment (Asif Agha, 2005)- how  
identity is acted out in contexts where it  
confers value.
4. The capital is in informal settings of  
bonhomie, coing-of- age rituals, boding,

# Table 1

## Regions with Punjabi Population

<b>Pakistan</b>	<b>76,335,300</b>
India	29,109,672
UK	2,300,000
Canada	800,000
UAE	720,000

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/punjabi-people>

# Punjabi as official Language in Pakistani Punjab

**The Punjabi Language Movement convener Nazeer Kahut has demanded that the government introduce the Punjabi Language Act in the Punjab Assembly.**

**The Supreme Court of Pakistan has directed that the regional languages should be given a role to play in their own provinces. There is no progress on this.**

## Table 2

### Punjabi speakers as a percentage of population in India & Pakistan

<b>India</b>			
	<b>Population</b>	<b>Punjabi Speakers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1971	548,159,652	14,108,443	2.57
1981	665,287,849	19,611,199	2.95
1991	838,583,988	23,378,744	2.79
2001	1,028,610,328	29,102,477	2.83
<b>Pakistan</b>			
	<b>Population</b>	<b>Punjabi Speakers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1972	65,309,340	43,176,004	56.11
1981	84,253,644	40,584,980	48.17
1998	132,352,279	58,433,431	44.15

Table 3

PROPORTION OF LITERACY AMONG PUNJABIS IN  
India & Pakistan

Country	India	Pakistan
Population	1.28 billion	29 million
Literacy (%)	74.04 (in 2011)	76.7 (in 2015)
Source: <a href="http://www.indionlinepages.com/population/literacy%20rate%20in%20india.html">www.indionlinepages.com/population/literacy rate in india.html</a>		



## Table 4

Table: Punjab, Punjabi, Gurmukhi – Population, Speakers and Newspapers. 1961-91

	1971	1981	1991
Population (millions)	13.6	16.8	20.3
No of literates (millions)	4.2	6.8	10.0
Literacy (percentage of total population)	33	41	49
Urbanization (percentage)	24	28	30
Punjabi speakers (millions)	16.4	18.6	21.1 (estimated)
Punjabi daily circulations ('000)	73	231	654
Punjabi dailies per '000			
Punjabi-speakers	5	12	31

Source: Jeffrey 1997:443. These figures are based on official publications.

## Table 5

# Language-wise Film Production Compared to Percentage of Mother-tongues in Pakistan

Language	Number of Films	1948-2012 Percentage of films	Percentage of speakers of languages
Urdu	1588	39.44	7.60
Punjabi	1347	33.46	48.17
Pashto	715	17.76	13.14
Bengali	117	2.91	
Double	177	4.40	As above
Sindhi	73	1.81	11.77
Siraiki	07	0.17	9.83
Gujrati	02	0.05	Not known
Total	4,026	100	

# The Ideal World of Cinema

1. The riots of 1947 in the Punjab were avoided and an uncritical make-belief world of “Puryabiyat” was created Bollywood by Yash Chopra ( Srijana Mitra Das 2006).
2. There were elements in traditional Punjabi culture to draw upon: *doms*, *bhands*, *mirasis*, singers of love legends (Heer etc). There were dances like the *bhangra* too.
3. Punjabi cinema is worth \$7.9 million compared to Bollywood’s \$ 630 million (2015 figures). However, the Sahnis, Anands, Chopras, Puris,

# The Construction of the Ideal Self in Film / Theatre

1. Films (are popular especially in small towns). The theatre is more of popular comedy with appeal to suppressed libido.
2. Even when in Hindi–Urdu they hint at “*Punjabiyaat*” through names, accents, songs and the Sikh image.
3. Their ideal Punjabi identity is brave, generous, tolerant, humors, emotional and found of life and sincere lover (‘Veer Zara’, Shaheed-e-Muhabbat ‘Boota Singh’ etc).

## Song / Dance

*Girl: Hun mahian di ayi vari  
Main kuri Lahore shahr di,  
Kade tappiyan wich nai hai*

*Girl: Seeni utte seeni hai  
tere nalon nai vasna  
teri zat kasmini hai*

*Girl: Roti utte pa Pista  
mere kolon ki mangda  
meri maan kolon mang rishta*

## Conclusion

Punjabi is used in the private domain of pleasure. It serves to create solidarity, bonhomie and the feeling of a confident, lively, optimistic community. This gives Punjabi soft power in both Pakistan and India. In the latter country, however, it also empowers the Punjabis in the lower domains of power.