

Investigating The Caste-Stereotypes In Punjabi Language And Women's Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the Punjabi women's attitude towards caste stereotypes in Punjabi language. In Punjabi society, Punjabi women speak Punjabi with different dialects and all dialects have caste stereotypes which have been existent in Punjabi language owing to inter-caste prejudice, bias, socio economic status, social experience and collective wisdom. The researcher interviewed 18 women (age 50-70 years) for gaining insight into local caste stereotypes in Punjabi women. A questionnaire was also constructed, keeping in view the stereotypes collected from interviews and relevant literature on caste stereotypes and it was administered to a sample 48 women of the same age group. The study concludes that Punjabi women's belief in the truth of caste stereotypes in Punjabi language and their negative influence on social relations and inter-communication of the selected castes is strong. Punjabi women's belief that caste stereotypes in Punjabi language represent the typical characteristics of the higher and the lower professional castes in Punjabi society is strong.

Keywords: social relations, attitude, caste stereotypes, Punjabi Society.

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Introduction

Referring to the Indian situation, Sinha (1967) described that the belief in and practice of caste are very common not only among the Hindus, but also among the Muslims. Pakistani society, an ex-part of India, has vivid stratifications of economic classes, regions, the rural and urban domains, tribal, feudal, and capitalist social formations. Raza (1969) considers that Muslims in Pakistan specially those who are the residents of rural areas, have adapted the Hindu Caste system in which some castes are the subordination of many other castes and particularly Punjabi people inherited this system centuries ago and it is still the dominant feature of Punjabi society. He also says that Social stratification is a universal characteristic because some division of functions is inevitable in all human societies and these differentiations are mostly socially determined which Lipman (1922) codifies as stereotypes that mean "the pictures in our heads"

Caste stereotypes not only play a vital role in the identification of any social groups in a society but also play crucial role in creating social discrimination, affecting the social relations and mutual interaction of the people. Pakistan, being an ex-part of India, has not remained intact from caste system. **Caste** stereotypes in Punjabi society are also a very common social phenomenon. The women in Punjabi society, like men display **Caste** stereotypes in their communication despite the fact that the women's situation vis-à-vis men is of systemic gender subordination, although there have been

some efforts by the government and enlightened groups to elevate the status of women in Pakistani society. Be it stratification or systemic gender subordination, in both the cases it gives way to the concept of otherness. This concept of otherness among women in Punjabi society is the production of Indian caste mechanism.

Ethnicity and caste mechanisms are the dimensions traced by earlier European researchers in sociolinguistics. These dimensions have been traced out by famous linguist Trique Rehman and a number of other sociolinguists in Pakistan. But few researchers have worked on Stereotypes in Punjabi language. Punjabi language certainly has various caste stereotypes. These stereotypes demark the social boundaries among the people belonging to different social groups in the society. Women are a potent faction of Punjabi society and the present research attempts to identify women's attitude towards caste stereotypes in Punjabi language.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Stereotype is a mental picture which a social group has for another group in the community or outside the community. This mental picture disparages the out groups i.e., Professors are absent minded, students are lazy and athletes are stupid. This disparagement of the out groups seems to be a serious matter in the area of racial and ethnic conflicts. The great thing about ethnic and national characteristics is that people in various cultures are different from one another to some extent and any

society that successfully assimilates such diversity benefits itself from a kind of hybrid vigor. Unfortunately, these real differences are also at the bottom of much bias and prejudice in groups, (Rajecki, 1990 p, 265). These social differences make a picture in the heads of people of one kind for another group which may be classed as stereotypes. Perseverance in the face of group-based stereotypes about ones' limitations poses a daunting challenge. Beyond enduring negative expectations and discouragement from others, members of the stereotyped group may respond to inevitable disappointments and difficulties by questioning their own fitness and acceptance in the social environment" (Pronin et al, 2003). Stereotypes are the instrumental part of a society.

Men are divided into castes, tribes, sects and religions due to which they can be easily recognized. People having geographically different background are seen as possessing different cultures, languages, customs, traditions, color, and dress according to their territory or a country where they reside. These geographical and territorial heterogeneous perspectives give way to social distinctions by creating a concept of otherness. Pakistan is replete with number of ethnic groups such as Sindhi, Muhajir, Balochi, Pushto, Seraiki, and Punjabi etc. All of these major ethnic groups have some concepts about one another which exhibit the idea of distinctions between them. Rahman(1997) states that Pakistan consists of four major ethnic groups which are divided according to four provinces of Pakistan e.g.in Balochistan major communicative language of the people is Balochi and in Sindh majority of local population speak Sindhi and in Khyber P.K, people speak Pushto for local communication purpose and in Punjab, majority of the locals speak Punjabi. Punjabi society has also ethnic groups based on castes which are bifurcated into higher and lower professional castes. Some of the most prevalent expressions of these social groups are the caste stereotypes and Caste stereotypes in Punjabi language are very important socially constructed phenomenon to be found in Punjabi society which is specifically associated to many social groups. Various linguists have conducted their researches on language, ethnicity and stereotypes.

Talbot (2003) conducted research on the stereotypes representation of women and came out with results that Women possess more complaining behavior by representing themselves as either bitching or nagging while males behave wisely and give natural explanation to the events.

Rahman (1997) conducted research on the problems caused by major ethnic groups in Pakistan with reference to Urdu language when it was being declared as official language after the establishment of Pakistan. He narrated provincial hatred and prejudices of major ethnic groups and ethnic movements in four provinces who favored their

languages to be taken up as official language. He also described about the people of Punjab and their caste system bifurcated into higher and lower professional castes with their local names for their languages such as Majhi, Dogri, Jangali, Pahari and others.

Mullick and Hrabá (2001) tested Punjabi students in Pakistan sharing as a group, an ethnic hierarchy, showing the same types of prejudice found in the West. 192 students responded to a questionnaire in English, with questions nearly identical to those previously used by American and Dutch researchers. Principal component analysis revealed that respondents shared an ethnic hierarchy of out-groups in social distance, with Pathans at the least and Muhajirs at the most social distance. Factor analysis showed that these students distinguished among aversive, symbolic, and biological prejudice parallel to American and Dutch results. There were two subtypes of symbolic prejudice, one in reference to the Pakistani quota system (affirmative action) and another to its uneven regional and ethnic development. Discussion centers on reasons that a shared ethnic hierarchy and types of prejudice found in Western countries appear in this Islamic country as well.

Titus (1998) quotes the approach; the British took to govern the parts of the empire that now, constituted Pakistan. Their formula which says that rule over the Punjabis, intimidate the Sindhis, buy the Pushtun, and honor the Baloch. While doing fieldwork in Quetta, he found that current stereotypes about Baloch and Pushtun held by members of both groups about themselves and each other reflect essentially the same attitudes as those expressed in the aphorism.

Zhang (2009) conducted research on the two aspects of stereotypes. He narrated accurate stereotypes and inaccurate stereotypes. He found out that accurate stereotypes assist to give cultural-level predictions about the behavior of strangers and inaccurate stereotypes lead to misconceptions about others. He also threw light on the problems of the stereotypes and their solutions.

Present research is about women's attitude towards caste stereotypes in Punjabi language which the society has inherited, over centuries. Earlier researches have been made on major ethnic groups and stereotypes but through different perspectives in Pakistan. Caste stereotypes, although a very common social phenomenon, is very crucial in the identification of many social groups.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out women's beliefs about the caste stereotypes in Punjabi language.
2. To explore women's attitude towards stereotypes in Punjabi language about major castes.
3. To investigate women's attitude towards stereotypes in Punjabi language about lower professional Castes.

4. METHODOLOGY

The researcher employed Mixed Methods that include qualitative and quantitative approaches. Interviews were conducted prior to the administration of the questionnaire which was developed in the light of the information got from the interviews. The questionnaire was got validated properly. The sample comprised of 48 women who were purposively selected from 12 castes in the Punjabi society, including eight higher castes and four lower professional castes, 04 persons from each caste, available at District Vehari where the majority of the people are agrarian with two big factions: the land lords and the peasants. The data were collected through personal visits. Later on, the data were transferred on a data sheet in the form of rows and columns for their further analysis. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze data and to calculate frequencies and percentages.

5. RESULTS

Table 1. showing Women’s belief in Caste stereotypes.

Statements	Response					χ ²	Significance	Mean	Remarks
	Totally wrong (1)	Wrong (2)	Don't know(3)	To some extent right	Quite right(5)				
	%	%	%	%	%				
Caste stereotypes creating hatred between upper and lower professional castes	2.1	8.3	0	20.8	68.8	161.969	Significant.	4.46	Quite right
Women of upper castes have assertive behaviour while talking to women of lower castes?	4.2	4.2	0	25.0	66.7	155.2585	Significant	4.46	To some extent right
You are more polite while meeting stranger women of your own caste	8.30	0	0	22.9	68.8	166.337	Significant	4.44	To some extent right
People believe in caste Stereotypes	0	2.1	6.3	47.9	43.8	112.6475	Significant	4.33	To some extent right
Women of the upper castes show moderate behaviour among themselves	4.2	6.3	4.2	31.3	54.2	99.215	Significant	4.25	To some extent right
Caste stereotypes are due to illiteracy, Indian caste system & socio economic status	4.2	6.3	8.3	22.9	58.3	102.476	Significant	4.25	To some extent right
Caste stereotypes are the representative of Punjabi Castes	6.3	6.3	8.3	20.8	58.3	98.99	Significant	4.19	To some extent right
General belief of the people about caste stereotypes based on facts	2.1	6.30	4.2	50.0	37.5	98.1995	Significant	4.15	To some extent right
Castes stereotypes are reducing due to modernity and scientific development	4.2	4.2	6.3	50.0	35.4	91.2065	Significant	4.08	To some extent right
People are using caste stereotypes in present age	0	16.7	0	45.8	37.5	89.139	Significant	4.04	To some extent right
Stereotypes produce negative effects on mutual relations among different castes	8.3	10.4	2.1	33.3	45.8	69.5995	Significant	3.98	To some extent right

Caste stereotypes are production of collective Wisdom	4.2	8.3	12.5	52.1	22.9)	74.08	Significant	3.81	To some extent right
Caste stereotypes causing social boundaries	8.3	10.4	4.2	35.0	43.8	63.5065	Significant	3.81	To some extent right

Table 1 includes 13 statements which show the respondents' belief in Caste stereotypes that women in the Punjabi society have strong belief in caste stereotypes in Punjabi language. The respondents strongly believe that caste stereotypes create hatred between higher and lower professional castes while the language of the women of the higher castes is assertive when they speak with the women belonging to lower castes and their language is polite while talking to the stranger women belonging to their own caste and they show moderate behaviour while talking to the women of the same caste. Caste stereotypes are due to illiteracy, Indian caste system & socio economic status. These stereotypes are the representative of castes in Punjabi society and based on facts but they are getting reduced due to modernity and globalisation. They are currently in use in Punjabi language and producing negative impacts on mutual relations on different castes in Punjab. These are the production of collective wisdom and causing social boundaries among different social groups.

Table 2: Women's attitude towards Stereotypes associated with higher Castes

statements	Response					X ²	Significance	Mean	Remarks
	Totally wrong(1)	Wrong (2)	Don't know (3)	To some extent right(4)	Quite right (5)				
	%	%	%	%	%				
People of Sheikh caste are stereotyped as extremely close fistid in Society	2.1	4.2	2.1	120.8	70.8	681.587	Significant	4.54	Quite right
People of Baloch caste are stereotyped as disloyal, robbers or Thieves	-	10.4	8.3	35.4	45.8	76.5925	Significant	4.17	To some extent right
People of Arain caste are stereotyped as fair weather and Untrustworthy	14.7	8.3	4.2	18.8	54.2	79.285	Significant	3.90	To some extent right
Peopple of Jutt caste are stereotyped as having derogatory language with no wisdom	6.3	10.4	10.4	41.7	31.3	48.5295	Significant	3.81	To some extent right
People of Dogar caste are stereotyped as useless and non co operative	8.3	10.4	20.8	27.2	33.3	22.921	Significant	3.67	To some extent right
People of Kamboh caste are stereotyped as loving to their family but classed as worse caste	6.3	10.4	33.3	31.3	18.8	29.2935	Significant	3.46	Don't know
People of Rajput caste are stereotyped as arrogant and worse than non believers	14.7	16.7	20.8	18.8	29.2	6.285	Non-significant	3.31	Don't know
People of Gujjar castes are stereotyped as uncultured and uncivilized.	20.8	16.7	10.4	25.0	27.1	8.955	Non-significant	3.21	Don't know

Table 2 includes four statements about which show the attitude of the respondents towards stereotypes in Punjabi language about higher castes. The respondents give significant response that Sheikhs are extremely close fisted in the society, Baloch are disloyal, robbers or thieves, Arain are fair weather

and untrustworthy, Jutts have derogatory language and no intellect and Dogars are useless and non co operative. But the respondents do not know about the stereotypes characteristics of Kamboh and Rajput castes.

Table 3: Shows women’s attitudes towards caste-stereotypes

Statements	Response					χ ²	Significance	Mean	Remarks
	Totally wrong(1)	Wrong (2)	Don't Know (3)	To some Extent right(4)	Quite right (5)				
	%	%	%	%	%				
People of Telli(Oil presser) caste are stereotyped as bad friends and unreliable	6.3	4.2	10.4	22.9	56.3	92.7795	Significant	4.19	To some extent right
People of Nai (Barber) caste stereotyped as to be impatient and snake in the grass.	4.2	8.3	6.3	18.8	62.5	119.0955	Significant	4.27	To some extent right
MOCHI (Shoe makers) are stereotyped as greedy & Saints are not born in this caste.	6.3	14.7	25.0	18.8	35.4	23.969	Significant	3.63	To some extent right
People of JULAHA (weaver) caste are stereotyped as ill-mannered and no sense of good behaviour?	8.3	14.7	25.0	25.0	27.1	13.2695	Significant	3.48	Don't know

Table 3 includes four statements which show the attitude of the respondents towards lower professional castes. The respondents give the significant response that Tellies(Oil pressers) are bad friends and unreliable people, Nai(Barbars) are impatient and a snake in the grass and Mochis (Shoe makers) are greedy & Saints are not born in this caste and Julahas (weavers) are ill mannered and have no sense of good behaviour.

6. DISCUSSION

The discussion has been divided into three phases.

1st Phase: This phase provides evidence that the women in Punjabi society are well aware of the Caste stereotypes commonly used and quoted in Punjabi language. The research is divided into three parts i.e. women’s belief, their attitude towards stereotypes about major castes and lower professional castes. The results of the study show that women in the Punjabi society understand and believe in the role played by the castes stereotypes among different social and ethnic groups existing in the society. Caste stereotypes are content categories which take place in a social set up and serve the purpose to well understand the “in groups and out groups.” Although the role of the women in Pakistan is not as much active as in the European

and other advanced countries of the world yet they give equal significance to caste stereotypes being used in social fibre. Like men, women in Punjabi society also believe that these caste stereotypes are casting negative impacts on language behaviour, social relations and discrimination among women belonging to different castes or clans.

During the interview, some of the respondents said that women do not want to see such discriminations as higher and lower professional castes as Islam does not allow such racial or ethnic discriminations in the Muslim community. The current Sikh Rahit Maryada (Sikh Code of Conduct), also exhorts the Sikhs to eliminate caste considerations: "Reject caste distinctions and untouchability." The Rahit Maryada also states that the objectives of Khalsa can be achieved only if the Sikhs disregard caste, creed, or nationality but caste considerations are often taken into account for marriage among the Sikhs, quite contrary to their religious faith. So, in matrimonial matters, priority is given to (brathari) the caste. The political activities during elections in the Punjab are the vital indicator of caste stereotypes and social discriminations. Elections, especially Local Bodies Elections highlight caste stereotypes because majority of the people cast their votes for the sake of the caste. Casting of the vote to the candidate belonging to one’s caste out of merit is actually the result of sense of superiority and sense of pride on

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