Saraiki: The Language Behind a Folk-Song Revival

News context: 18 November 2026 | Publication: 19 November 2026
Prelims: art and culture; languages of the Indian subcontinent



Original symbolic illustration: pcsmantra.com

▼ In this article

- Why in the news
- Language and region
- Language is not the same as script
- Reading the census correctly
- Literature and scholarship
- Exam distinctions
- Prelims Practice Questions
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
- Sources

Why in the news

A new rendition of the folk song Chhalrey Chhalrey Waal has drawn attention to Saraiki. A song finding listeners across borders offers a useful way to understand language, script and cultural identity. [4]

Language and region

Saraiki is an **Indo-Aryan language**. Bahauddin Zakariya University places it in the Lahnda group and identifies southwestern Punjab in Pakistan as its principal region. Multan is an important centre of its cultural tradition and academic study. The language was previously also known as Multani, after its main dialect. [1] [2]

The university describes close relationships with Punjabi, Sindhi, Dogri and Dhatki. Linguistic relationships and a community's distinct language identity are different matters. Shared vocabulary is not a reason to treat related languages as identical in every context. [1]

Related reading: **Kurumba: A Living Language the Census Cannot See**

Language is not the same as script

A **language** is a system of sounds, words and grammar. A **script** is a system of written signs used to represent it. A language can therefore be written in more than one script.

The university states that a form of the Perso-Arabic alphabet is used for Saraiki in Pakistan, while Gurmukhi and Devanagari are also used in India. Its account also refers to the historical Multani script. For exam purposes, the important distinction is that a language name and a script name need not be the same. [1]

Reading the census correctly

National **Table 11** of Pakistan's 2023 census records **28,849,579** people with Saraiki as their mother tongue, out of a listed national population of 240,458,089. These are national figures for Pakistan, not a count of every Saraiki speaker in the world. [3]

A mother-tongue count differs from a count of everyone who knows a language. Someone reporting one mother tongue may also understand or speak other languages. The mother-tongue figure should not be presented as the complete number of all users of the language.

Literature and scholarship

Poetry and music are important forms of Saraiki cultural expression. The university's material names Khwaja Ghulam Farid among its poets. Its Saraiki Research Centre was established in 2001 and became a Department of Saraiki in May 2006, when regular MA classes began. The university now has a Saraiki Area Study Centre. [1] [2]

A digital version of a folk song can introduce a language to distant listeners. Online popularity, however, is not a full measure of its position in education, publishing or transmission between generations.

Exam distinctions

Keep **Saraiki as a language**, **Lahnda as a linguistic grouping**, and **Gurmukhi or Devanagari as scripts** separate. Link the principal region with mother-tongue census data and literary study. A viral song alone does not establish a language's legal status or whether it is endangered.

PCSMANTRA.COM

Prelims Practice Questions

Question 1

Consider the following statements about Saraiki:

Statement 1: It is classified as an Indo-Aryan language.

Statement 2: Southwestern Punjab in Pakistan is a principal region where it is spoken.

Statement 3: It can be written only in Devanagari.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

▼ Answer and Explanation

Correct answer: (a)

Statement 1 is correct: the university classifies Saraiki as Indo-Aryan.

Statement 2 is correct: its account identifies southwestern Punjab as the principal region.

Statement 3 is incorrect: the Perso-Arabic alphabet, Gurmukhi and Devanagari are among the writing systems mentioned.

PCSMANTRA.COM

Question 2

Which statement best distinguishes a language from a script?

(a) A language cannot be written in more than one script

(b) A script is a system of written signs; different scripts can represent a language

(c) Using the same script always means using the same language

(d) Mother tongue and script are the same statistical category

▼ Answer and Explanation

Correct answer: (b)

A script is a system of written signs. A language involves sounds, vocabulary and grammar. There is no necessary one-to-one relationship between them.

Question 3

What can a census mother-tongue count establish?

(a) The number of every person worldwide who understands the language

(b) The number of all bilingual people without further questions

(c) The number reporting that mother tongue within the census area

(d) The language’s constitutional status automatically

▼ Answer and Explanation

Correct answer: (c)

Mother-tongue data must be read within the census area and its definitions. It is neither a global total of language knowledge nor proof of legal status.

PCSMANTRA.COM

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Are Multan and Multani the same kind of name?

No. Multan is a place. Multani is associated with Saraiki’s main dialect; the university says the language was previously also known by that name.

Does Pakistan’s mother-tongue table count Saraiki speakers in India?

No. The national table covers Pakistan’s census area, not the worldwide population of Saraiki speakers.

Does digital popularity give a complete picture of language preservation?

No. Education, literature, everyday use and transmission to the next generation need to be considered separately.

Sources

1. https://bzu.edu.pk/about-saraiki.php
2. https://bzu.edu.pk/view_department.php?deptID=33
3. https://www.pbs.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/census_tables/tables/table_11_national.pdf
4. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-culture/saraiki-language-viral-folk-song-chhalrey-chhalrey-waal-10968182/

PCSMANTRA.COM