The Punjabi Sikh Community in Kuching: Assimilation or Enculturation?

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ABSTRACT – *This study was conducted using a mixed research method including quantitative and qualitative data collection to investigate the cultural and linguistic practices of the Punjabi Sikhs in Kuching, Sarawak in East Malaysia. It was aimed to determine whether the community had integrated with the majority community/communities in Kuching and to what extend it has preserved its ethnic identity. Data were collected on the Punjabis' use of language in the domains of family, workplace, and entertainment. Other social factors like eating habits, dressing, celebration of festivals, marriage preference, religious practices and self-identity were also examined. It was identified that the minority community of the Punjabi Sikhs in Kuching, Sarawak has a tendency towards maintaining a strong cultural vitality and uniqueness. The community shows a high degree of assimilating towards the use of English language, although they appear to be maintaining their core Punjabi cultural traits and practices. Kuching Punjabis may have lost a vital segment of their cultural enrichment in the form of language but they crucially hold positive perceptions about their ethno-cultural and ethno-linguistic identity. Thus contradicting the traditional cultural studies, which incline that not maintaining the language, can lead to losing the other aspects of culture.*

KEYWORDS: ACCULTURATION, MINORITY COMMUNITY, CULTURAL VITALITY, ETHNIC IDENTITY, ASSIMILATION

INTRODUCTION

A generally held belief in cultural studies is that minority groups tend to adopt the dominant group's culture. Some studies tend to integrate language with other cultural aspects and state that not maintaining the language can lead to losing the other aspects of culture and lead to acculturation towards the majority community. These researches have lead to the belief that minority languages are used not only as a means of communication, but also play a big role in expressing cultural heritage and ethnic identity (Crystal 1997, 2000; Fishman 1991, 2001, 2007; Padilla 1999; Lanca, Alksnis, Roese & Gardner 1994). Fishman (1989:6) strongly believes that 'at every stage, ethnicity is linked to language, whether indexically, implementationally or symbolically'. Fishman conceptualizes language and culture as inseparable as specific cultural meaning is inherent in language (Fishman 1991).

Many studies (Giles & Johnson 1987, Edwards 1988, Breitborde 1998, Carbaugh 1996) have examined the relationship between identity and minority language maintenance and shift. Giles and Johnson's concept of ethno-linguistic vitality theorizes that the success of language maintenance in minority groups is highly dependent on the perception of the vitality that minority group members attach to their language.

However, although it is possible that the minority group would want to adopt certain cultural traits, this does not necessarily mean that they want to be completely integrated with the dominant group. Consequently, there are levels of adaption and integration that differs across the minority groups. In order to assess and explain these levels, many models of acculturation theory are presented in the literature, the two most common of which are the unidirectional or unidimensional models and the bidirectional or bidimensional models (Flannery, Reise & Yu 2001; Soo-Kyung Lee, Sobal & Frongillo 2003).

The unidirectional models represent the traditional view of acculturation. They define acculturation as the departure from an old culture usually the minority culture and the adopting of the new culture of the host or the majority culture. Since these models tend to describe only one consequence of acculturation, that is assimilation, they are also called unilinear. These models hypothesize that assimilation takes place in various layers and stages including linguistic, social, and economic levels (Gordon 1964).

The bidirectional models likewise, emphasize that these layers are involved in the process of acculturation. However, they imply that minority culture and the majority (host) culture orientations must be measured independently. Therefore, every factor in the

bidirectional models can take two dimensions, a horizontal axis viewing a community's host culture and a vertical axis showing a community's minority or home culture (Berry, Kim, Power &Young 1989; Flannery, Reise & Yu 2003).

The model used to assess the degree of acculturation of the Sikh community of Kuching Sarawak, in the present study is a unidirectional model called the continuum model of the levels of integration (Nazaruddin Mohd. Jali, Ma'rof Redzuan, Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah & Ismail Mohd Rashid 2003). This model is generated considering the Malaysian context and was used due to its appropriateness for this context. Figure 1, illustrates the continuum model of the levels of integration (Nazaruddin Mohd. Jali, Ma'rof Redzuan, Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah & Ismail Mohd Rashid 2003: 164). A brief description of the levels of integration in this model is presented below.

Segregation entails the social isolation of a group from another, and at the other extreme end of the process, is the cultural amalgamation of the minority group to the dominant group. Macionis (2001: 364) explains segregation as 'the physical and social separation of categories of people'. Accommodation on the other hand is 'a process where ethnic groups are aware of each other's norms and values but they continue to safeguard their own living culture' (Nazaruddin Mohd. Jali, Ma'rof Redzuan, Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah & Ismail Mohd Rashid 2003: 164) while living together in harmony. In contrast, acculturation (or enculturation) is the change in the direction of the culture of another ethnic group. This process involves members of one ethnic group borrowing cultural elements from those of another ethnic group (Tan, 1988: 239).

Acculturation does not necessarily involve a loss of ethnic identity (Teo, 2003:6). Acculturation is gradual rather than abrupt and is the process of systematic cultural change of a particular society carried out by a dominant society (Winthrop 1991:82-83 cited in King and Wright). Such changes come about due to conditions of direct contact between individuals of each society. Individuals of the minority culture learn the language, habits, and values of dominant culture by the cultural process of acculturation. The changes may be reciprocal or non-reciprocal.

Halimah and Zainab (2004:18-19) appear to agree with a two-way diffusion of cultures. In researching the enculturation of the offspring of Malay and Indian marriages in Malaysia, they state that generally the processes of acculturation and assimilation occur to varying degrees as two groups of people of different ethnic backgrounds and cultural orientations come into contact and interact with one another over a period of time. Changes may take place in the cultures of either one of the two groups, or there may be a reciprocal influence whereby the cultures of both groups are modified. This process of

change or acculturation occurs overtly in cultural patterns like dress, food and language and in less overt cultural markers like religious beliefs.

The generally held belief is that minority groups tend to adopt the dominant group's culture. However, although it is possible that the minority group would want to adopt certain cultural traits, this does not mean that they want to be completely integrated with the dominant group (Sam & Berry, 2010).

Assimilation is 'the processes by which minorities gradually adopt patterns of the dominant culture' (Macionis 2001: 363-364). It involves the changing modes of dress, attitudes and values, religion, language and social networks and even identity (Macionis 2001). The confusion between acculturation and assimilation can be explained by considering the levels of assimilation. Gordon (1964: 71) explains that the easiest level of assimilation to achieve is change in the extrinsic cultural patterns in the way of life such as dress, food, language and education. Intrinsic cultural patterns such as religious beliefs, family and kinship systems and ethical values take a longer time to assimilate. Inherited values are normally more strongly entrenched and are difficult to change compared with integrated values, which arise out of the external environment. Total or complete assimilation is facilitated by structural assimilation where the migrant group manages to penetrate the social organizations of the dominant group and intermarriage occurs on a large scale. This causes identification assimilation where the minority group loses its original ethnic identity and takes on the ethnic identity of the dominant group. In total assimilation, one's original cultural identity is relinquished and the individual chooses to move into the larger, more dominant society.

It must be pointed out that acculturation does not inevitably result in assimilation because value systems of the minority or weaker culture are a part of the entire configuration of culture. It may not always be possible for the minority culture to take over the complete way of life of the majority culture. Often a period of transition follows where the minority society increasingly loses faith in its own traditional values, but is unable to adopt the values of the dominant culture. During this transition period there is a feeling of dysphoria, in which individuals in the minority society exhibit feelings of insecurity and unhappiness (Titiev 1958:200).

Assimilation is facilitated when the two communities share a common religion. David (2003) discussing the offspring of Pakistani men with Kelantanese women in Kelantan, a state in Malaysia, shows that assimilation is complete as they speak the local Kelantanese dialect and are completely integrated with the larger Kelantanese community. In addition to a common religion, being a minute minority the Pakistani men adapted and assimilated

with the local culture. In the same way the small Chinese community in Kelantan known as 'Kampung Cina' or 'Peranakan' Chinese also known as Babas has assimilated in terms of language, clothes, names and even dietary habits (see Teo 2003). Despite such a high degree of assimilation they 'will always identify themselves as Chinese' (Teo 2003). Tan (1993) discussing the Babas states that their identity is one of both being indigenous and being Chinese at the same time (Tan 1993:x). He explains that an overt example is the style of dressing which follows the Malay style while their culinary skills exhibit a unique combination of Chinese and indigenous cuisine. Their assimilation is only at the level of culture but not considered identificational level.

Acculturation must precede assimilation. However, even though a minority may be acculturated, assimilation is not always the end result. It should be pointed out that acculturation and assimilation serve to homogenize the minority group into the dominant group. The many factors facilitating or preventing this homogenization include the age of the individual, ethnic background, religious and political affiliations, and economic level.

Amalgamation is the last stage of Nazarudin's (2003) continuum model of the levels of integration. It is defined as a 'process that happens when culture or race mixes to form types of new culture and race,' and it usually takes place through inter-marriage between ethnic groups or races (Nazaruddin Mohd. Jali, Ma'rof Redzuan, Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah & Ismail Mohd Rashid 2003: 165). In places with small minority communities with little economic power and limited marriage partners from within the minority culture, accommodation or even assimilation may be a necessity whereas in countries with large and economically powerful minority communities and easy access to marriage partners, diasphoric minorities tend to maintain more strongly their identity.

The aim of this study is to investigate the possible stages of acculturation in the Punjabi Sikh community residing in Kuching, a city in Sarawak, Malaysia. Different cultural aspects such as language, food and eating habits, entertainment, education, religion and marriage are probed to find out the community's attitude towards their Punjabi identity and the majority community.

INTEGRATION OF THE MINORITY CULTURE INTO THE DOMINANT ONE

The process of accommodation leading to assimilation and even amalgamation has been attributed to a number of factors, both social and psychological. Reasons proposed for this phenomenon are: it is a way to move up the social ladder, to escape prejudice and discrimination of the majority group, attitudes and to obtain the advantages of certain public policies (see David 2003). However, there are cases where the minority groups voluntarily 'pull' themselves away from the majority group in order to maintain their own

identity and distinctiveness, as seen in the Amish community in the United States. In this case ethno-cultural vitality is strong.

Ethnlonguisitc vitality and cultural autonomy are the two relevant conceptual constructs that basically provide a framework for the determination of the linguistic, cultural and identity vitality of a language group. Ethnologuisitc vitality advanced by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977), is defined as 'that which make' (1977:308) a group likely to behave as distinctive and collective entity in intergroup settings. The framework proposes that ethnolinguisitc vitality of a group is dependent upon three basic components such as demography, socio-historical status and institutional support. In addition to this, the subjective or perceived vitality of the group concerned also makes up for ethnolinguistic vitality (Bourhis, Giles & Rosenthal 1981; Harwood, Giles & Bourhis 1994).

A community that secures a substantial amount of institutional support for the promotion of its language and culture, with a healthy demographic profile and a prestigious socio-historical status, is believed to have 'high vitality'. The members of such groups are likely to assert their ethnic identity, and accentuate their ethnolinguistic distinctiveness. Conversely, the group with perceived 'low vitality' has the tendency to assimilate and stop living as a distinct collective community. This group aims at high level of proficiency in the dominant language and tends to disparage its language and culture (Beebe & Giles 1984). It is important to note that the concept of ethnolinguistic vitality has been derived from the 'Social Identity Theory' as advanced by Tajfel (1982). The theory proposed that the identities of individuals come from in-group memberships. Therefore, if individuals find their membership unsatisfactory, they may decide to look for and shift to the other groups, which they grade as having higher prestige.

Along the same lines, Fishman (2001) proposed the Cultural Autonomy Model, which regards three dimensions as instrumental for cultural autonomy and identity maintenance in a minority context. These contain institutional control, social proximity and ideological legitimacy. These three factors in Fishman's view interact with each other and potentially impact the elevation or attrition of a groups' collective distinctiveness as a cultural and linguistic entity in a certain setting. The collective identity of a group is the basis for the nature and scope of the community (Breton 1983). Bourhis and Landry (2008:193) believe that, 'When collective identity is weak and lacks focus, collective action can be hampered'.

With reference to the three components of the Cultural Autonomy Model, institutional support or control refers to the degree of support a community receives either from the government or the private institutions for the development of its language and culture.

Bourhis and Laundry (2008) also term institutional support within state and private institutions as the key that can substantially help enhance a community's 'collective linguistic and cultural capital'. The other factor is that of social proximity. This concept closely equates with demographic factors under the ethnolonguistic vitality framework of Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977). The focus of this dimension as Fishman (1990, 1991 and 2001) labels is the 'home-family-neighbourhood-community' nexus. According to Fishman, this dimension is pivotal and basic in the language and culture survival of a community. It is obvious that a community residing in close proximity to its cultural institutions such as school, the church, other community members and leisure centre is likely to keep its language and culture going.

The ideological dimension of this model implies that it is the recognition of the state and other citizens that a particular community receives. When a community succeeds in winning 'ideological legitimacy', it tends to hold high-perceived vitality (Bourdieu, 1982; Sachdev & Bourhis 2001). Bourhis (1994) refers to this concept by stating that if the community members themselves undervalue their language or culture, the cultural autonomy will further sink and ultimately die out. On this front, the community itself is required to show activism for the just projection of its legitimate place in a given polity (Landry, Allard & Deveau 2007). Van Dijk (1998) defines both activism and indifference of a community(s) as purely ideology-oriented. Fishman (1991) also makes the same proposition. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) thinks that fundamentally societal ideologies work behind the promotion of some cultures or language and linguistic and cultural genocide of many others.

In the case of the Baba community of Malacca Malaysia, where exogamous marriages took place between local Malays and the Chinese community 'acculturation has occurred with partial assimilation' (Teo 2003:2). Their language is a sinicised form of Malay and they have not shifted to Islam. Total assimilation was partly impeded by the religious factor (p. 4). In the same way the Tamil Chitty community of Malacca has also partially assimilated. They wear clothes that resemble the Malay sarong and embroidered blouses and speak a variety of Malay but still practice Hinduism (Ravichandran 2009).

In Malaysia, government integration policies, like that of a common public or national school system has influenced changes in cultural and linguistic behaviour (see David and Govindasamy 2003). Certain rights given to the dominant community would also encourage others to assimilate and be perceived as part of that dominant community. The Javanese community for instance has assimilated totally to the larger Malay society (Muhamad Subakir 1998). Basically, the greater the powers of the community, the lesser

are the chances of assimilation and vice versa. Huschka (2006) describes how immigration has contributed to 'social anomie', or a loss of a stable cultural identity of an ethnic group or community. Each ethnic group has unique cultural traditions (e.g., customs and rituals) that are passed from generation to generation. However, there is a greater tendency for subsequent generations to acculturate as new generations are born in the receiving country (Weichold 2010).

In Malaysia the Chitty community of Malacca appears to have fully assimilated to the language and dressing of the larger Malay community as have the Baba community. Other ethnic communities to some extent are using the majority community's language. For instance, a study of Malaysian Tamils shows some shift away from the ethnic language to English and Malay especially in the friendship domain (David and Naji 2000) while non-English speaking first generation Sindhi women are shifting to Malay when speaking with their grandchildren (David 1998).

Environmental variables that may have an influence for adoption of the majority community's culture include the opportunity for exposure to the dominant culture. Malgady and Zayas (2001) suggest that younger children are better able to acculturate, learn the language, and assimilate into the majority culture than adults, particularly because children attend school, socialize more readily with members of the majority community, and have the accessibility to tap into the resources available to them in the school systems. Individuals, who do not view interaction as dilution of their culture, may seek to acculturate more readily.

PUNJABI SIKHS IN MALAYSIA AND IN SARAWAK

In Malaysia the Punjabi Sikh community stands as the second largest community after the Tamils within the Indian communities. Randhawa (2010) states that the number of Sikhs was 126,000 throughout Malaysia in 2008 and had reduced to 100,000 in 2011. Geographically, the Punjabi Sikhs are spread over different parts of Malaysia and their geographical distribution is not even. The largest concentrations are seen in the Kinta Valley stretching from Klang to Kuala Lumpur. The rest are settled in small pockets in Johor, Penang and even in the states of Sabah and Sarawak, mainly in towns (Randhawa 2010).

Sarawak, located on the island of Borneo, is one of the 13 states, which make up Malaysia. The population totalling 2,420,009, comprises different ethnicities: Ibans (30per cent), Chinese (24per cent), Malays (23per cent), Bidayuhs (8per cent), Melanaus (5per cent) Orang Ulu (5per cent) and others (5per cent) (Department of Statistics, Malaysia – Population & Housing Census 2010). The Indian community with a

population of 3851 comes under the 'others' and is the smallest of the seven recognized ethnic groups in Sarawak. The Punjabi Sikhs with a population of 357 constitutes the smallest ethnic group within this Indian community.

The Punjabi Sikhs came to Peninsula Malaya in the second half of the 19th century under the British patronage as they were recruited for the army and police services. According to Rajindar Singh Bedi (2001)[1] the first Sikhs to arrive in Malaya were political prisoners from the Punjab. Some of these political prisoners were officers and army personnel of the annexed Punjab, deemed captured by the British after the second Punjab war of 1848. These men were deemed dangerous to the East India [2]Company rule in Punjab. Penang and Singapore were designated penal colonies for prisoners from India serving sentences of more than seven years.

The Punjabi Sikhs came to Sarawak later, in December 1940 when a company of 2/15th Punjab was sent to Sarawak to provide a garrison. The battalion consisted of approximately 1050 soldiers under the command of Major C. M. Lane. The other troops from the 2/15 Punjabis were deployed in airfields and oil facilities in Sarawak.

After the independence of Malaysia from the British Raj, the Sikhs expanded their socioeconomic base and took mainly to professions such as tin mining, cattle rearing, trade, industry, planting and farming. The generations that followed further widened their social mobility by joining professions like medicine, law, engineering and other such fields (Randhawa 2010).

Like in many minority immigrant communities globally, the Punjabi language also experienced a sharp decline and drastic attrition over the years. The decreasing use of the Punjabi language among the Punjabi speakers led to decreasing levels of proficiency. Though the Punjabi language declined over the years, the cultural dimensions were still strong and deep-rooted. As an ethno-linguistic and ethno-cultural group in Malaysia, the Punjabi Sikh community holds strong sentiments; however, the use of heritage language had drastically decreased (Manan 2011).

In the Klang Valley in Peninsular Malaya the Punjabi language has markedly declined within and outside the family domains. It has been gradually superseded by other locally dominant and functional languages like Malay and English, and mostly it has not been transmitted inter-generationally (David, Naji & Sheena 2003).

Given the language decline among the Punjabi speakers, the community activists were prompted to launch a systematic network of language and cultural centres that could

teach the Punjabi language and inculcate cultural and religious values among the new generations. This resulted in the establishment of the Punjabi Education Trust Malaysia (PETM) under the supervision of Khalsa Dewan Malaysia (KDM). Currently, the 'community-driven reverse language shift measures have led to the foundation of 20 Punjabi Education Centres nationwide with more than 3000 students and 220 teachers' (Gill, 2009). In 2010, the number of community-supported centres further rose to 36 all over Malaysia, with the number of trained teachers climbing up to 300. The number of students has also improved as about 3500 students were registered in the Punjabi education centres where the classes are held every weekend (Randhawa 2010).

Presently in the state of Sarawak the Sikh community includes about 1000 members of whom about 350 of live in Kuching, Sarawak (interview with Pyara Singh Gill). These comprise about 75 to 80 Punjabi Sikh families living in the city proper.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study attempts to address the following two research questions:

1. To what extent have the Punjabi Sikhs maintained their ethno-cultural and ethno-linguistic identity in Malaysia?

2. What cultural and linguistic aspects of the Punjabi Sikh culture have been assimilated into the Malaysian culture?

METHODOLOGY

A mixed method approach including both quantitative and qualitative data collection and data analysis tools were used to conduct this study. A partially mixed concurrent dominant status design (Creswell, Plano Clark, Guttmann & Hanson 2003; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson 2004; Leech & Onwuegnuzi 2009) was used as the framework for the data collection and data analysis. The dominant approach was the quantitative method since the bulk of the data was collected through the questionnaire. The qualitative data collection and analysis followed the quantitative phase and was used to validate the data collected via the questionnaire support and also to enrich the quantitative results.

Subsequently, the data collection and administration process involved two phases: distribution of questionnaire and conducting the interviews and observations. The presentation of the findings was guided by the data gathered from the questionnaire and augmented with data from interviews and observations, wherever relevant. In order to study whether the community had integrated with the majority community/communities in Kuching, data were collected on the Punjabis' use of language in the domains of

family, workplace, and entertainment. In addition, other social factors like their eating habits, dressing, celebration of festivals, marriage preference, religious practices and self-identity were examined.

QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire used for the data gathering focused on the concepts of accommodation, acculturation and assimilation. It was divided into four parts. The first part covers the demographic profile of the respondents, the second part is about the migration process, the third part is on language use, and the last part includes questions on social identity.

INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION

The observations and interviews were conducted to gather some information about the community since not much information is documented about Sikhs living in Kuching. The information collected through the interviews helped to trace the history of the community and the actual practices of the Punjabi respondents. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews with prominent members of the community were conducted.

Non-respondent observations were carried out during a three-month period of weekend visits to the Gurdwara, the place of worship for the Punjabi Sikhs, in order to observe the community in general and their language use in particular. This was also done to get information about the community as a background to the study and to validate the responses provided both in the questionnaires and the interviews.

PILOT STUDY OF QUESTIONNAIRE

A pilot study was conducted to validate the questionnaire used in this research. This helped to determine if some of the questions asked had to be omitted in the final questionnaire before its dissemination to the respondents of the study.

DATA ANALYSIS

A descriptive analysis of the data is presented based on the results obtained from the questionnaire.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Tables 1 to 3 provide a demographic profile of the respondents including the generation, age, employment status, and income, medium of instruction in school/university and religion of the respondents.

GENERATION

As shown in Table 1, the majority of the Punjabi respondents are from the second generation. The first generation has only 7 members, the third generation has 8 and the fourth generation has 1 respondent only.

AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Table 2 shows the age of the respondents. There were 8 respondents whose ages ranged from 30 to 49 years, 16 respondents were in the 50-59 age range, 7 respondents were 70 years old or above and 1 respondent was in the age range of 18-29. The majority of the respondents (50per cent) are from the 30-49 age range group.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

As shown in table 3 most of the respondents (53.12per cent) are working. There were 17 respondents who were working; eight were retired, six unemployed and one still in school.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OF THE RESPONDENTS

Table 4 shows the religious affiliation of the respondents. The data shows that out of 32 respondents, 31 of the respondents follow Sikhism and only one has converted to Islam.

LANGUAGE: ASSIMILATION OR ACCOMMODATION

The information presented in this section deals with language preferences of the respondents and the degree of their linguistic assimilation in different contexts including home, workplace and entertainment.

MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOL OR UNIVERSITY

The table below shows the medium of instruction that was experienced by the respondents during their school days. A total of 23 respondents had English as the medium of instruction, 3 had Punjabi, one Malay, and one had both Punjabi and Malay, one had Punjabi and Hindi, two had English and Malay and 1 had no schooling. It can be said that majority of the respondents (71.87per cent) were educated in a system where English was used as the medium of instruction.

LANGUAGE USE

An important cultural or heritage element of a community is its heritage language. We studied the language used by the Punjabi families in Kuching at home, work and in entertainment domains to establish how much of the heritage language (Punjabi) was used in these domains.

LANGUAGE IN THE HOME DOMAIN

A majority of 19 respondents (59.37per cent) use English as the medium of communication at home, seven (21.87per cent) Punjabi one (3.12per cent) Bahasa Malaysia (BM), four (12.59per cent) use a mix of English and Punjabi and one (3.12per cent) used Malay, English, Punjabi, and Chinese. Code switching between Punjabi and English does occur in the case of 4 of the respondents.

LANGUAGE USED WITH SUPERIORS AT WORK

Chart 3 shows the language used to communicate with superiors at the workplace. The majority of the respondents use English when communicating with their superiors. 16 (50per cent) respondents used English, three (9.37per cent) used BM, two (6.25per cent) used Punjabi, and two (6.25per cent) mixed English and Malay while eight (25per cent) were unemployed and one (3.12per cent) was still at school.

LANGUAGE PREFERENCE FOR DVDS/CDS

Chart 4 shows the language preference of the respondents in terms of DVDs and CDs. The data revealed that most of the respondents (37.5per cent) prefer DVDs and CDs in the Hindi language. 12 respondents preferred Hindi DVDs and CDs, one preferred BM, two favoured English and four preferred Punjabi as the medium of entertainment. Some of the respondents had multiple language preferences. Two liked to have their DVDs and CDs in Punjabi-Hindi, one favoured BM-Punjabi, five preferred English-Hindi, one liked Punjabi-BM, combinations of BM-English-Punjabi, English-Hindi, Punjabi-Hindi, BM-Hindi-Chinese and English-Punjabi each had one interested respondent. The respondents' preference of the Hindi DVDs and CDs is a sign of their loyalty and inclination mainly to North Indian music.

LANGUAGE PREFERENCE OF NEWSPAPER

Chart 5 shows that 10 of them prefer English newspapers, four BM, one Punjabi, one Mixed BM-Punjabi, four BM-English, one English-Punjabi, two Punjabi-Hindi, one BM-English-Punjabi-Chinese, two English-Hindi, one English-Punjabi, one Punjabi-English-BM, one Hindi-BM, one BM-English-Punjabi and two preferred not to state any language. It is clear that their preference is for English language newspapers.

LANGUAGE(S) PREFERENCE OF TV SHOW

Chart 6 shows the language preference of TV shows. A total of 23 respondents preferred to watch TV shows in English. The other respondents' language preference for TV shows was stated as the following: five Punjabi, two BM, one Malayalam (a language spoken in the State of Kerala in India) and one Hindi.

LANGUAGE USE WITH COLLEAGUES IN THE WORKPLACE

This section describes the main language(s) used with colleagues by the working respondents. When respondents interact with their Malay friends and colleagues they tend to use more BM and English. The data showed that 25 respondents have jobs, out of which 13 used BM and seven used English most of the time. Language preference of the colleagues and clients also affected the respondents' language choice in the workplace. Since 17 of them who had non-Punjabi colleagues reported that in dealing with the Indians colleagues who are non-Punjabi they would use either BM (two) or English (15); those with Chinese Colleagues, used English (15) and Hokkien (five); one used BM with Punjabi colleagues, 11 used English, 1preferred Chinese and eight used Punjabi; and one used BM with Dayak. It can be generalized that in the work domain, the chance of accommodating and assimilating with other languages is high specifically between BM and the Chinese language.

LANGUAGE USE IN WORKPLACE (FOR RETIRED RESPONDENTS)

The main language(s) used with colleagues and friends by respondents who had retired is presented in this section. Four of the retired respondents used BM and one English when interacting with Malay colleagues/friends; when interacting with Indian (non-Punjabi) two used BM and four used English; in dealing with the Chinese and Punjabi colleagues and friends 4 used English; and in dealing with the Dayak two used BM. Even among the retirees, the use of BM in their former workplace appears to be prominent. This means that the Punjabis try to accommodate and assimilate to other languages.

FOOD

This section presents the data related to the eating habits of the respondents in different contexts. As shown in Chart 7, the majority (71per cent) consumed Punjabi food at home whereas 10per cent preferred Chinese and 10per cent Chinese/ Punjabi food, 6per cent consumed a mixture of Punjabi, Malay and Chinese food and (3per cent) ate Punjabi, Western and Chinese. It is clear the Punjabi food is still being cooked in home.

The Punjabi respondents have retained their loyalty to their ethnic food specifically in their food preference at home. Other types of food are also eaten but by few respondents. At home, most of the respondents have a strong sense of cultural identity as evidenced through their choice of heritage food. Therefore, there is not much accommodation and assimilation to the culture of the other ethnic groups in the home domain.

FOOD HABITUALLY CONSUMED OUTSIDE THE HOME

Chart 8 shows the type of food habitually consumed outside the home. It shows that Chinese food has become the major preference among the respondents. Data show that 27 respondents prefer Chinese food outside home; two prefer Punjabi, Chinese and Malay; two Chinese and Hindi; and one a mix of Punjabi, Western and Chinese.

CHANGE OF FOOD PREFERENCE OVER THE YEARS

Table 6 shows the change of food preference over the years. Eighteen respondents have not changed their food preference while 14 respondents have changed. Based on the data gathered, it can be generalized that some of the Punjabis in Kuching have started to accommodate and assimilate the Malaysian culture.

OTHER CULTURAL ASPECTS

- Music and Performing Arts: Music: The findings showed that 17 prefer to listen to Punjabi music, two prefer western, two prefer religious music, five prefer Punjabi-Hindi-Malay music, two prefer Western-Malay music and four prefer Punjabi-Hindi music. It can be said that when it comes to music 26 of the respondents (81per cent) still show total or partial a preference for heritage music. This data is summarized in chart 9.

- Music instruments played: Table 7 shows the musical instruments played by the respondents. The data reveal that only a small number of the Punjabi respondents play musical instruments like trumpet, piano, accordion, drum and harmonium, some of which are typical Indian musical instruments. As shown in the table, only 6 respondents play a kind of musical instrument.

- Respondents' use of Punjabi clothing: The findings show that the majority of the respondents (81per cent) still maintain the Punjabi dressing style at home and especially for religious activities. However, 12 respondents (19per cent) reported that they do not wear traditional Punjabi clothes. The typical Punjabi suiting and turban and Punjabi suits are used by those maintaining the Punjabi mode of dressing.

- Festival(s): Usually people in multicultural and multilingual societies celebrate a number of festivals. They celebrate their own and at the same time celebrate the festivals of others. Table 8 shows the festivals celebrated by the respondents. It reveals that 27 respondents celebrate Vesaki, a Punjabi festival and 4 celebrate Deepavali. As Deepavali is a Hindu celebration some of the respondents celebrate

it as a symbol of their Indian heritage. One respondent, who has converted to Islam, celebrates Hari Raya, an Islamic festival.

- Ethnicity of spouse: Table 9 shows the ethnicity of the spouses of the Punjabi respondents. The majority of the respondents (84.37per cent) have contracted endogamous marriages. Among the 28 married respondents, 27 are married to Sikhs and one is married to a Bidayuh. Intermarriage is not common among the Punjabi Sikhs in Kuching. Therefore the possibility of accommodating and assimilating with the other ethnic groups is markedly less probable.

- Table 10 shows the ethnicity of the spouses of the children of the respondents.

- It shows that most of them have contracted endogamous marriages. 30 respondents married fellow Punjabis, two married other Indians, two foreigners, one Chinese and one Iban. Exogamous marriages among the Kuching Punjabis are not as common as they are with the Punjabis from Kota Kinabalu Sabah, the other East Malaysia state. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why they are able to maintain their ethnic practices.

- Table 11 shows that the majority (22) of the respondents were not disagreeable to their children contracting exogamous marriages. In other words, they do not mid their children marrying non-Punjabis. Perhaps such an attitude has come about because of the realization that as parents they cannot exert their beliefs on their children in an increasingly globalised environment.

SOCIAL IDENTITY

The respondents' description of their own social identity and their reasons for calling themselves 'Punjabi' was investigated and the reports are presented in this section.

- Respondents' description of themselves: Chart 10 shows how the respondents viewed themselves with regard to social identity. Only 13 respondents describe themselves as Punjabi, one believes himself to be Sarawakian, six claim to be Malaysian, three said they were Malaysian Punjabi, two called themselves Malaysian Indian, two as Malaysian Sikh and five as Sarawakian Punjabi. The findings show that most of the respondents identify themselves as Punjabi or Sikh though sometimes prefaced with the 'Malaysian' identity. This self-identification as Punjabi is strong and implies that such self-perception lays much premium on ethnic and or religious identity.

- Respondents' reasons for calling themselves as Punjabis: The respondents stated different reasons for considering themselves as Punjabis. The majority stated that they were born as Punjabis (31.25per cent), their parents were Punjabis (12.5per cent) or they were born as Sikhs (12.5per cent). Therefore they call themselves Punjabis. The rest of the respondents, who answered this question, also gave similar responses as shown in chart 11.

DISCUSSION

In order to address the research questions, the researchers employed three instruments to gather data – a 10-page questionnaire, semi-structured interview and observation. The thrust of the questionnaire was to gather information on the community's use of language in the domains of family, workplace, and entertainment, as well as their eating habits, dressing, celebration of festivals, marriage preference, religious practices and self-identity. Given a paucity of information about the community in Kuching, the interviews served to provide an overview of the community's historical background, including the process of migration. The observations were largely limited to areas where the community congregated such as temples and homes of individuals which afforded the researchers opportunities to observe the language that was actually used in intra-community communication.

In this research, the majority of the respondents, Malaysian Punjabis in Kuching in the state of Sarawak belong to the third generation and most of them are 30 to 49 years old. In addition, the majority of them are working. Considering their educational background, most of them have been exposed to English as the medium of instruction and this is reflected in their patterns of language use, where they speak English most of the time. However, Punjabi is also spoken by many but in limited domains. Punjabi is frequently used in religious services, as Sikhism is the religion of the majority of the Punjabis. The extent of acculturation of the Punjabi in Kuching have been examined through the language(s) they use in various domains, in their preferences for food, music and performing arts, dressing, choice of marriage partners, and celebration of festivals. The findings disclose that there is not much accommodation and acculturation to the other ethnic groups. Almost all of the respondents have preserved their culture by maintaining their ethnic preferences for food, music, and festivals.

The use of ethnic Punjabi language at home is marginal as English has become their main mode of communication. The use of English at home and work is common among Punjabi families. However Punjabi culture is retained in food, music, festivals and

marriage practices. Although the English language is used, the Punjabis have been able to maintain their cultural practices.

An interesting fact that the study uncovered is the connection between language and culture. As noted earlier, a number of previous studies have addressed language and acculturation, and all have emphatically underscored the inseparable relationship between language and culture (García 1995, Carliner 2000, Al-Khatib & Al-Ali 2005, Crawford 2007). Fishman (1991) for instance asserts that the relationship between language and culture is three-dimensional: indexical, language as an expressive tool of culture and the symbolic relation between the two. Fishman (2007: 79) further explicates, 'culture is expressed through language. When language is lost, those things that represent a way of life, a way of valuing, and human reality, are also lost'. For instance he strongly signals that all culture-laden expressive tools are lost when a language is lost.

Contrary to the above postulations, the Punjabi community has maintained its culture despite the fact that the use of the Punjabi language by the younger generations has declined.

The second interesting point, which has not been addressed in previous research is the tendency of the Kuching Punjabi Sikhs to accommodate a language different from the one of the majority community in which they live. As shown by the data most of the respondents have moved from Punjabi to English as a means of communication. More research should be done to explain the reasons and roots of this interesting phenomenon.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The data illustrates that, a minority community; the Punjabi Sikhs in Kuching in the state of Sarawak in Malaysia have strongly adhered to their religion and culture, which has in turn helped them maintain their distinct identity as an ethnic group in their multicultural surrounding. The data suggest that the Punjabis of Kuching hold strong perceived vitality of their culture, religion and to a limited extent, their language. This obviously points to the highly perceived ethno-cultural vitality of the community and the consciousness of the community towards its ethnic identity. They have, by and large, inculturated rather than acculturated. The Punjabis, as substantiated by the data have exercised all the symbolic manifestations that are emblematic of one's distinct culture. In terms of dress, food, music, rituals and marriages, the community demonstrates substantial evidence of Punjabi culture maintenance.

In terms of language, they have made almost a complete shift towards English language as it stands as their predominant home and workplace language. On the other hand, the

use of the Punjabi language is restricted mostly in religious ceremonies and rituals. Even though the Punjabi speakers do not use their heritage language as the predominant, daily language, yet they appear to be maintaining their core Punjabi cultural traits and practices such as Punjabi food, Punjabi dress, Sikhism as religion and consciousness of their Punjabi identity. Therefore, one can argue that the Punjabis may have almost lost a vital segment of their cultural enrichment in the form of language; however, they still practice a large part of their culture, and crucially hold positive perceptions about their ethno-cultural and ethno-linguistic identity in Malaysia. Furthermore, the case of Punjabi community in this study suggests a deviation from the emphatic assertion of some of the researchers that language and culture are inseparable (Fishman 1991& 2007). A community may maintain its culture without fully maintaining its language.

Bearing in mind the continuum model of the adaptation of foreign cultural identity (Nazaruddin Mohd. Jali, Ma'rof Redzuan, Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah & Ismail Mohd Rashid 2003) the Sikh community in Kuching, Sarawak is moving forward in the process of integration very slowly. This community has not assimilated to the Malaysian context in many important cultural aspects such as religion and marriage and is far from assimilation or integration. It can be claimed that different aspects of culture in this society are in various stages of integration, since the ethno-linguistic factor is moving towards the last stages of assimilation but not with the local languages but perhaps just with English as a function language. Religion and marriage are practiced at the other extreme end of the continuum, at the accommodation stage. On the other hand food and entertainment factors show a midway trait towards assimilation.

In general it can be concluded that the minority community of the Punjabi Sikhs in Kuching, Sarawak has a tendency towards maintaining a strong cultural vitality and uniqueness. The community members practice a high-perceived vitality, which has helped them to preserve their Punjabi/Sikh cultural identity. The movement towards assimilation is more distinct in the case of language. The integration process for other aspects of culture like food, entertainment, marriage and specially religion is moving towards acculturation very slowly.

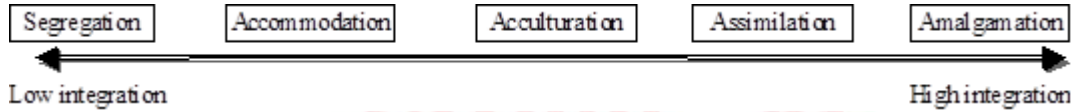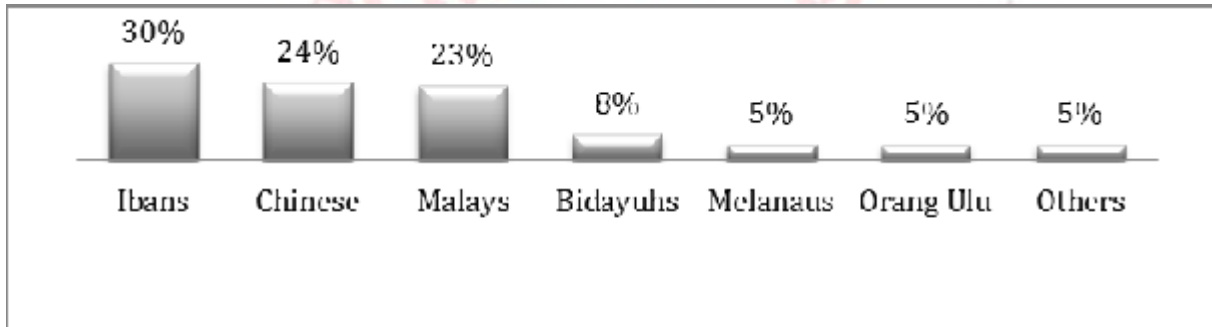# FIGURES AND TABLES

FIGURES

Figure 1: A continuum model of the adaptation of foreign cultural identity markers

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia – Population & Housing Census 2010
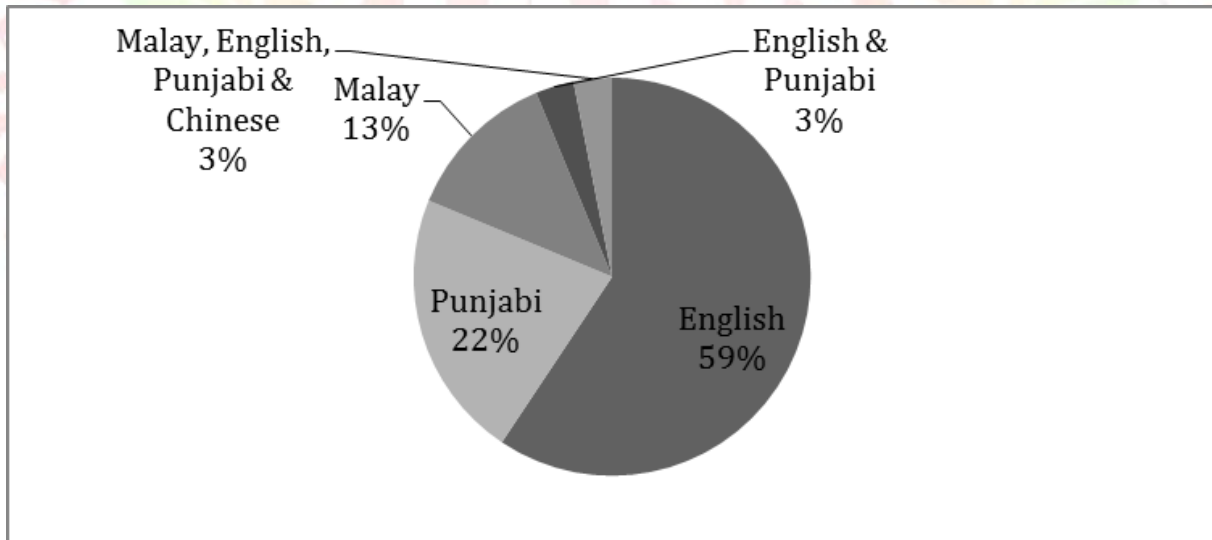
Figure 2: Chart 1. Population of Sarawak
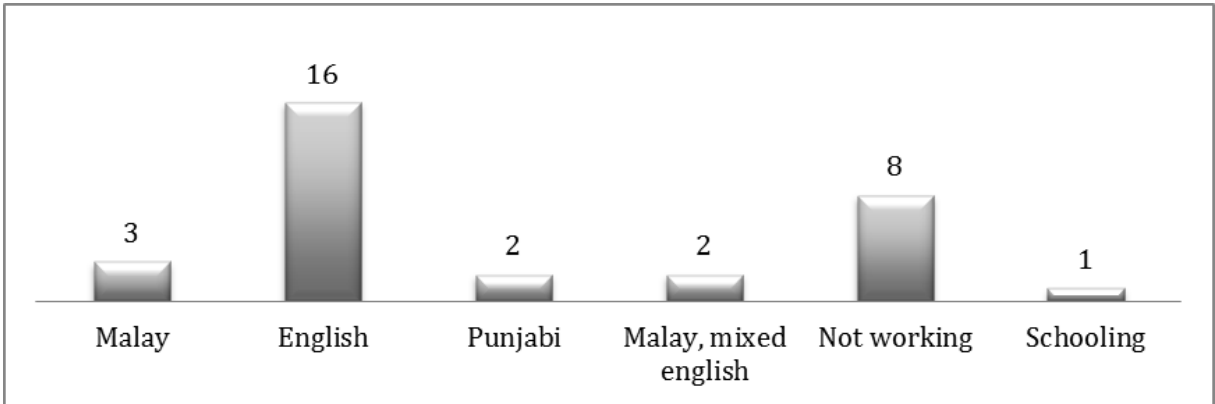

Figure 3: Chart 2. Language used at home
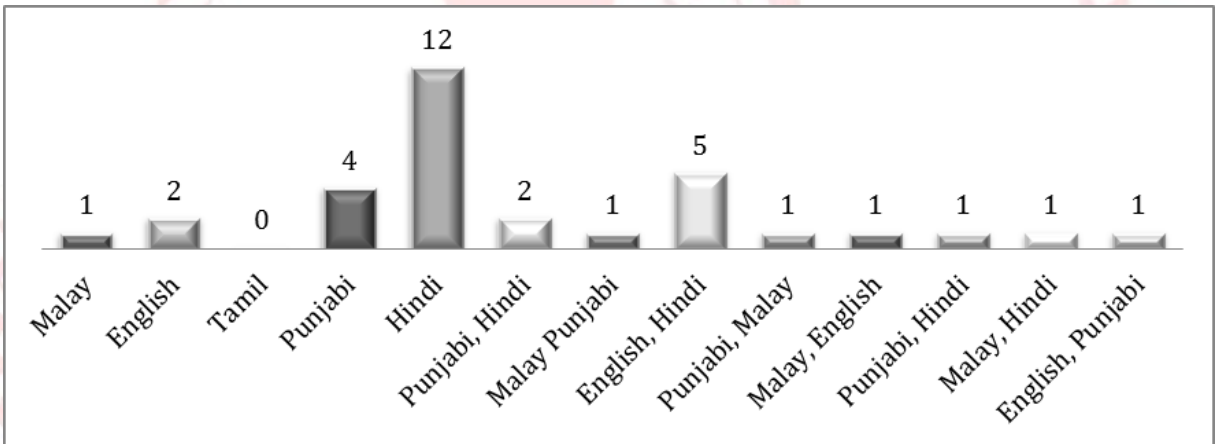
Figure 4: Chart 3. Language used with superiors at work
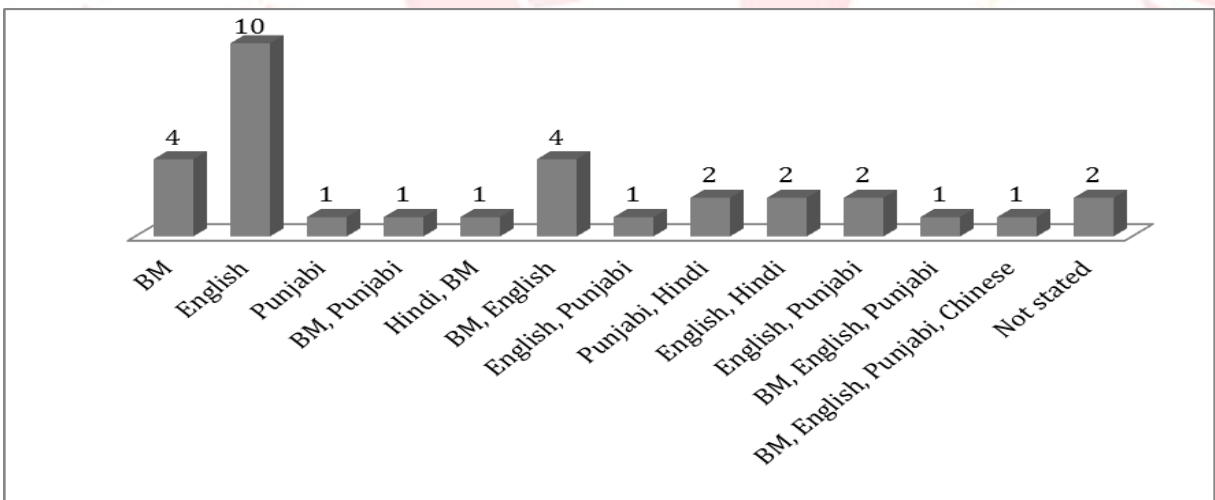

Figure 5: Chart 4. Language preference of DVDs/CDs

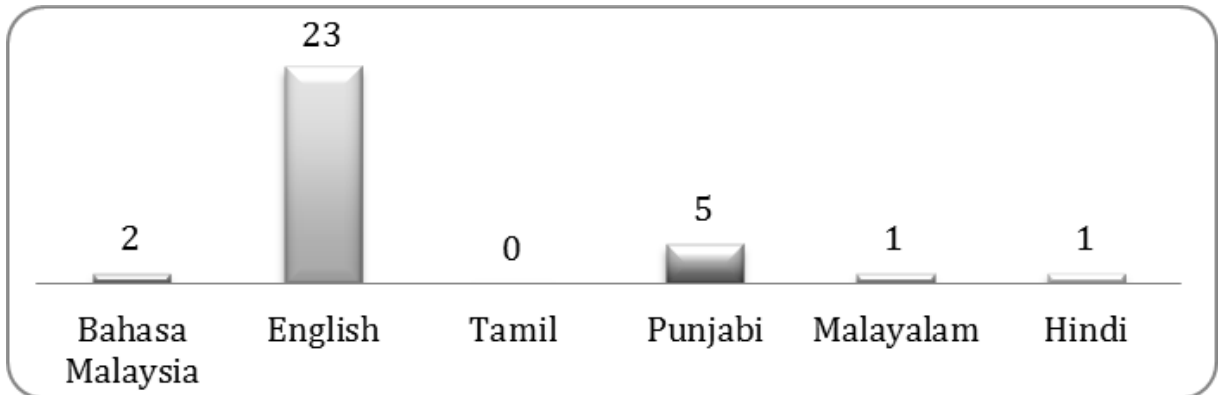**Figure 6: Chart 5. Language preference of newspaper**

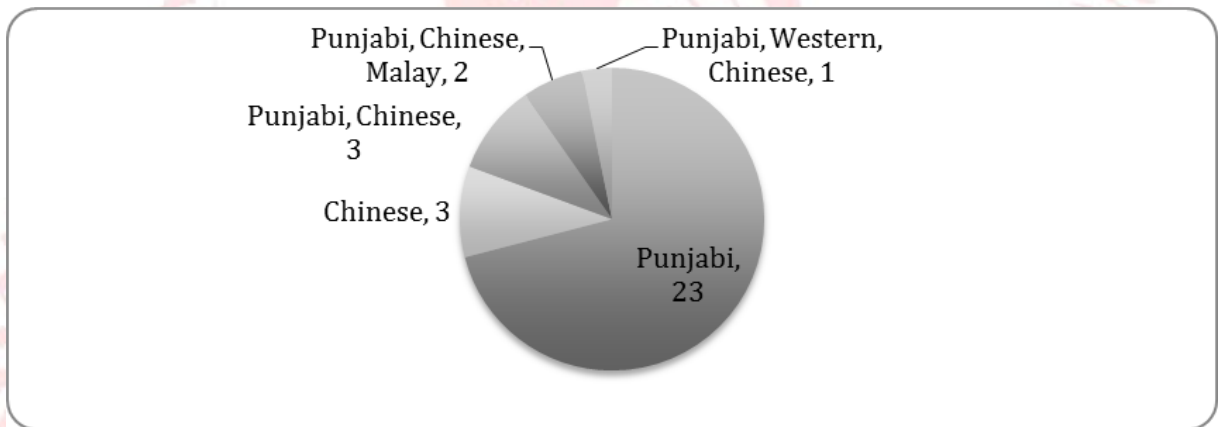**Figure 7: Chart.6 Language(s) preference of TV shows**

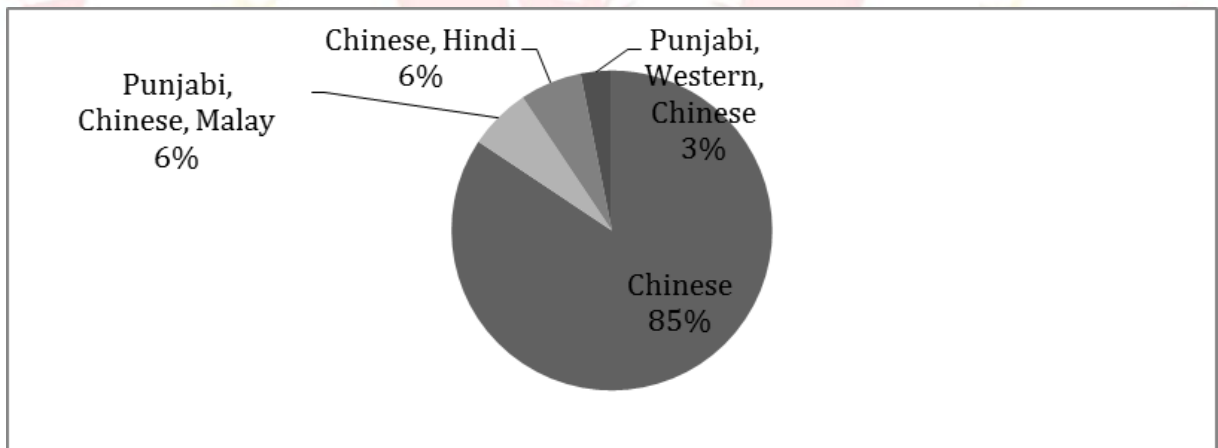**Figure 8: Chart 7. Food habitually consumed at home**
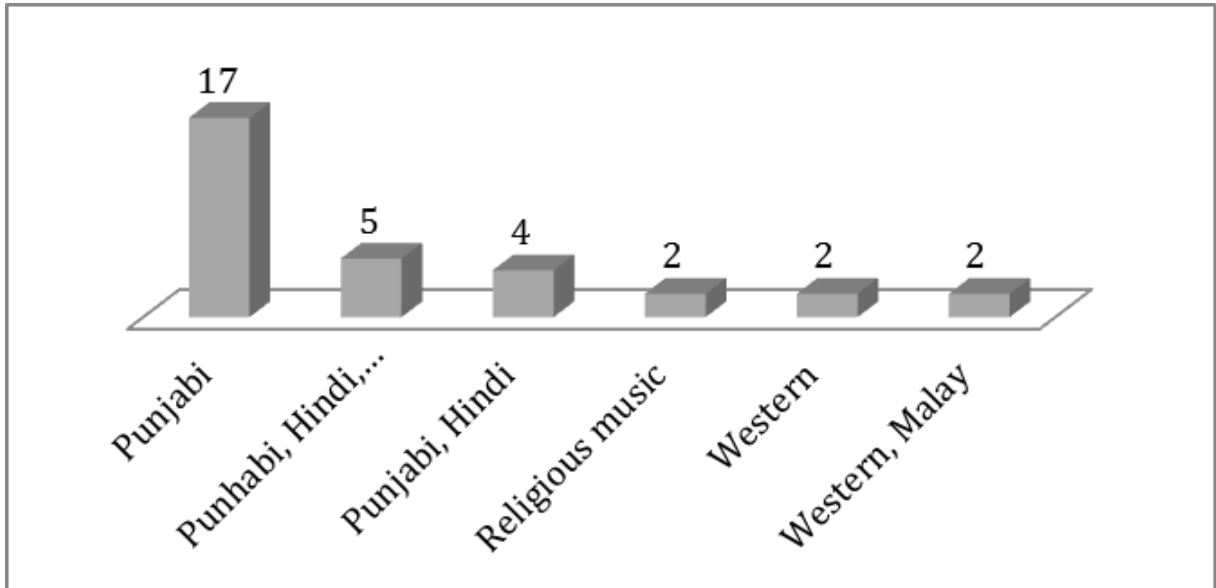

Figure 9: Chart 8. Food habitually consumed outside the home
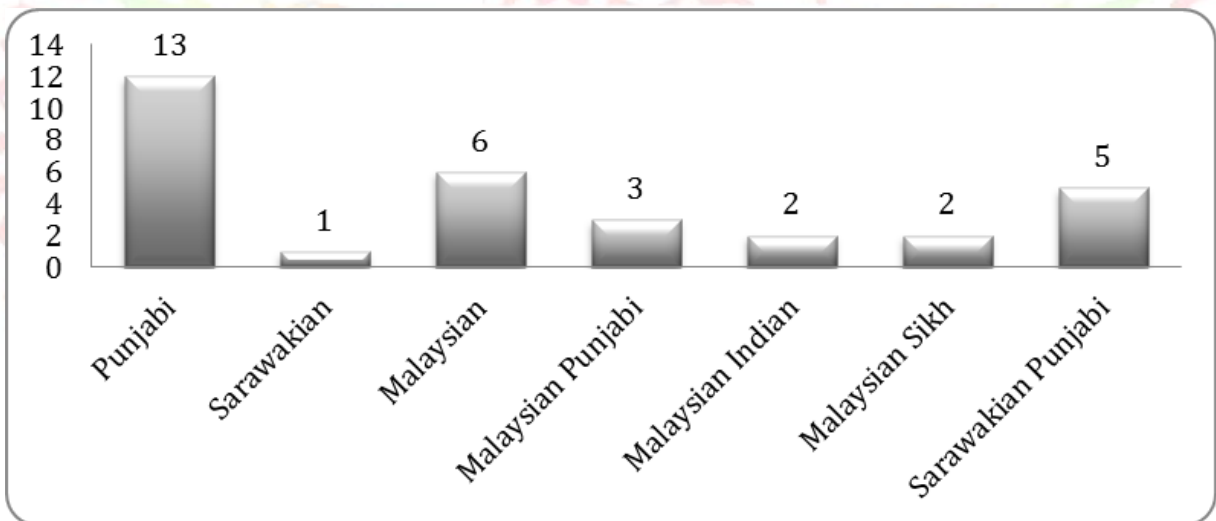
Figure 10: Chart 9. Music preferences

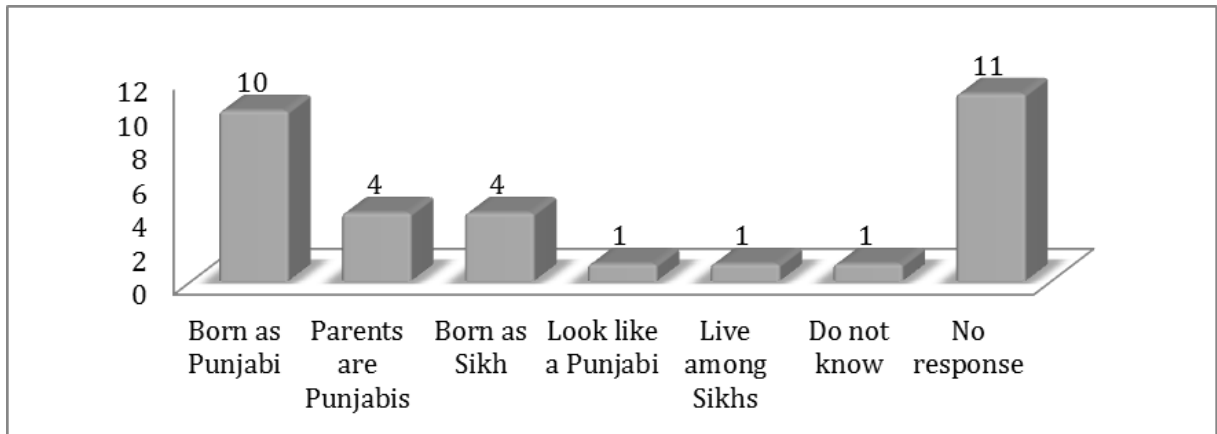**Figure 11: Chart 10. Respondents' description of themselves**

Figure 12: Chart 11. Respondents' reasons for calling themselves as /Punjabi

TABLES

Table 1: Respondents according to Generations

Generation	Number	Percentage %
1st generation	7	21.87
2nd generation	16	50
3rd generation	8	25
4th generation	1	3.12
Total	32	100%

Table 2: Age of the respondents

Age	Number	Percentage %
18-29 years	1	3.12
30-49 years	8	50 25
50-59 years	16	25 50
70 and above	7	21.87
Total	32	100%

Table 3: Status of respondents

Status	Number	Percentage %
Schooling	1	3.12
Working	17	53.12
Unemployed	6	18.75
Retired	8	25
Total	32	100%

Table 4: Religious affiliation of the respondents

Religion	Number	Percentage %
Sikhism	31	96.87
Islam	1	3.12

Table 5: Medium of instruction in school or university

Medium of Instruction	Number	Percentage %
English	23	71.87
Punjabi	3	9.37
Malay	1	3.12
Punjabi, Malay	1	3.12
Punjabi, Hindi	1	3.12
English, Malay	2	6.25
No schooling	1	3.12
Total	32	100%

Table 6: Change of food preference over the years

Change of food preference	Number of respondents	Percentages %
Yes	14	43.75
No	18	56.25

Table 7: Musical instruments played

Musical instrument played	Number
Trumpet	1
Piano	1
Accordion	1
Drum	1
Tabla and Harmonium	1
Harmonium	1

Table 8: Festivals celebrated

Festivals celebrated	Number	Percentages %
Vesaki & Deepavali	4	56.25
Vesaki	27	84.37
Hari Raya	1	3.12

Table 9: Ethnicity of spouse

Ethnicity of spouse	Number	Percentage %
Punjabi	27	84.37
Bidayuh	1	3.12
Single	4	12.5

Table 10: Ethnicity of spouse of married children

Ethnicity of spouse of married children	Number
Punjabi	30
Chinese	1
Iban	1
Indian	2
Foreigner	2

Table 11: Parents' perception of children marrying outsiders

Children contracting exogamous marriages	Number of respondents	Percentage %
Agreed	22	68.75
Did not agree	7	21.87

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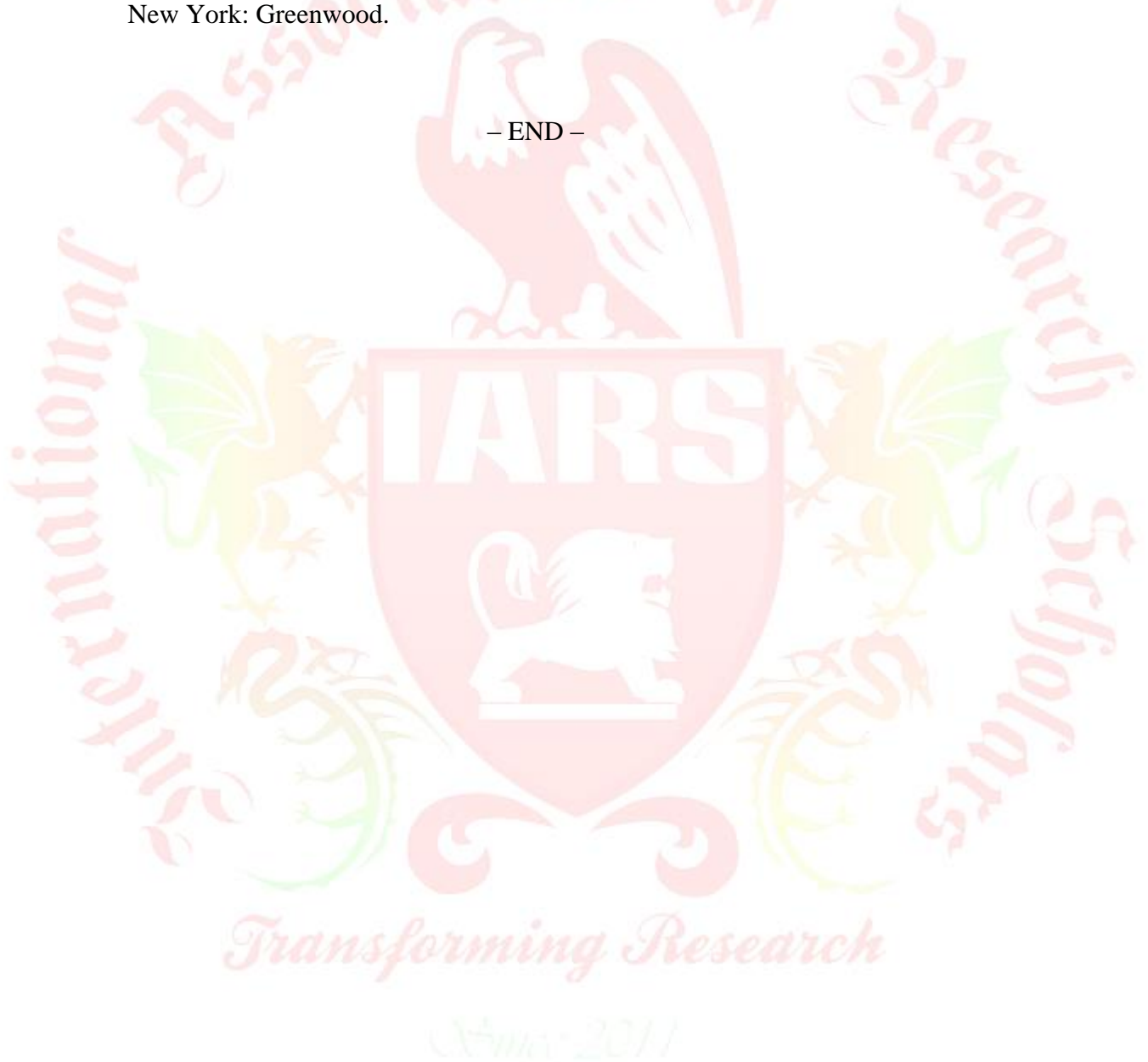
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