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Maimanis and Memonis: Akin Ethno-linguistic Groups Shifting from the (M)other Tongue to the Other Tongue

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Abstract: *The linguistic situation in Oman and Pakistan symbolizes a wide diversity reflected in an array of languages spread over their different parts, with some indigenous ones and others used in nearby or distant proximities. Few of these languages originate from the same linguistic affiliation with speech communities found in both countries. Exotic among these communities are Maimanis in Oman and Memonis in Pakistan, who appear to have certain commonalities worthy of exploration. Their ethnic appellations (Maimani vs. Memoni) are so alike that they suggest two variants of the very appellation. Apart from their ethnic designations, the resemblance between the two communities includes historical, cultural and linguistic aspects. Communal narrations of both groups cite two parallel recitations regarding their ancestral pedigrees, which could trace them back to the same kinfolk. The languages of both ethnicities appear to share a considerable amount of lexical items that ensure a decent rate of mutual intelligibility. Besides the linguistic aspect, both ethnicities share cultural commonalties represented by their adherence to a local system called 'Jamaat', and their evident involvement in trade and mercantile activities. Such resemblance seems to go further to encompass other nearby ethnicities like Lawatis and Khojas who have had a certain contact with Maimanis and Memonis respectively.*
Keywords: Maimani, Memoni, Lawati, Khoja, Oman, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

It is beyond denial that globalization has triggered certain economic and cultural benefits to different communities worldwide; its effect on the linguistic aspect, however, is counter effective, especially on languages with minority speakers and lower socio-economic status. With its inexorable advent alongside other socio-political factors, a new reality is imposed on ethnic languages, leaving them with little usage and function compared to languages that serve wider

communication and better economic opportunities (Karan, 2011; Ali, 2017; Zaidi & Zaki, 2017). The situation is even bleaker in urban areas; speakers of ethic languages have no choice but to neglect their ethnic languages, and favor other ones that best serve their interests and needs in various domains. Such tough choice is mainly made in pursuit of better educational opportunities and enhanced standards of living (Karan, 2011; Ali, 2017; Siddiqi, 2019; Abbasi et al., 2020). It is factual that the attitude of speakers towards their ethnicity language is subject to individual and communal differences and views. This, however, does not conceal the fact that indifference and unconcern of using minority ethnic languages and transferring them to offspring is on a gradual increase worldwide, with globalization pushing more towards such tragic end (Bernard, 1996; Karan, 2011). The situation can reach an alarming level when certain speakers feel inclined to conceal their own language or culture and adopt another one due to unalterable socio-political or socio-economic reasons. With focus geared towards two minority languages in the Omani and Pakistani linguistic contexts, this study shows that the general attitude in both contexts align with the observed global trend regarding inattention shown to languages of lower political, economic and social status. While the attitude of using one's mother tongue in public is not so stigmatized in Oman, the situation is somewhat different in Pakistan. Studies show that the stereotype and view of majority speakers on ethnic minority language speakers as '*bevaquuf* ' (stupid) and *'jangli'* (uncivilized) , for instance, is not an uncommon practice, a sad fact that plays a major role in making some Pakistanis avoid revealing their native languages in public (Mahmud et al., 2010 ; Ali, 2015; Umerani & Memon, 2016 ; Ali & et., 2021). Apart from the social realm, the political power and economic value entitled to certain languages play a principal part in such attitude, pushing minority languages further to a narrower corner by restricting them to little circles and very limited domains. Both the Maimani community in Oman and the Memoni community in Pakistan, the two ethnicities under investigation, are no exception to such tendency due to the restricted use of their ethnic languages to domains of little influence and function, mainly family circles and social activities with fellow members of the same ethnicity.

Scholarly work on Maimani and Memoni in terms of use, history and culture is scarce indeed. Academic work addressing the Maimani ethnicity and its native language can hardly be found in both English and Arabic language (Al Jahdhami, 2022). Likewise, studies on Memonis (alternatively known as Memons) and their ethnic language and culture are indeed very scare; researchers addressing the Memoni ethnicity, whether local or foreign, admit that its history is not well recounted, which renders Memoni 'understudied' compared to other ethnic communities in Pakistan (Thaplawala, 2009; Thaplawala, 2016; O'Sullivan, 2023). The inattention towards these two ethno-linguistic groups is indeed so apparent that it necessitates collaborative work of linguists, anthropologists, and community members to yield thorough academic work on their languages and cultures, which appear to have common roots worthy of investigation. A first glance at their ethno-linguistic appellations (Maimani vs. Memoni) gives the impression that one is a derivative of the other, or one has undergone a phonetic twist out of the other. They sound like 'near homophones' that have undergone a vocalic segmental change. Within their social contexts, however, most individuals of both ethnicities are unaware of the other ethnicity and the language they use, which appear to be similar to theirs not just in the label but also in the lexical level. This indeed poses an intriguing question regarding possible links between the two ethnicities. Adopting

such assumption, their status quo offers a foreground for this study that aims to give a glimpse of these ethnicities and their languages in an attempt to trove any possible historical and linguistic connection between them. It draws on data collected from Omani native speakers of Maimani and Pakistani native speakers of Memoni including those from the Pakistani diaspora in different countries worldwide.

THE LINGUISTIC SITUATION IN OMAN AND PAKISTAN

Arabic is the official and national language of Oman with evident presence in all domains. In addition to Arabic, English is widely used in the educational and professional domains. It provides wider communication with non-speakers of Arabic visiting the country for educational, vocational or touristic purposes. Compared to its neighboring countries in Arabia, Oman embodies a rich linguistic diversity represented in several languages spoken in different parts of the country, in addition to several dialects of Omani Arabic that showcases phonological, structural and lexical variances (Anonby, 2003; Simeone- Senelle, 2010; Salman & Kharusi, 2012; Al Jahdhami, 2015). Peterson (2004) gave reference to such linguistic diversity in the eighties of the twentieth century by declaring the use of twelve local and non-local languages in 'Suq Matrah' (Matrah Market). Its strategic location makes it one of the dynamic coastal markets in Oman that has been the harbor for importing and exporting commodities in and out of Oman for hundreds of years. Recent studies report languages like Lawati, Kumzari, Zadjali, Maimani, Jabbali, Harsusi, and Bathari that are peculiarly spoken within the Omani context. Other languages spoken in Oman are Swahili, Baluchi, Hobyot and Mehri, with speakers in other countries like Pakistan, India, Iran, Yemen, Tanzania, and Kenya (Thomas, 1930; Simeone-Senelle, 2010; Anonby & Yousefian, 2011; Ozihel, 2011; Salman & Kharusi, 2011; Al Jahdhami , 2015; Gasparini, 2017; Al Jahdhami, , 2022).

Mainly based on lexical semblance, the misrepresentative designation 'dialect' is often used by the mass as well as by some of the speakers of these languages to define them as a means of communication. Failing to draw the line between dialects and languages, some locals falsely assume that these languages are distorted dialects of Arabic with abundance of foreign vocabulary (Al Jahdhami, 2019). The shared lexical items and structural patterns among those belonging to the same language families offer different shades of mutual intelligibility. Yet, it does not ensure constant flawless communication (Al Jahdhami, 2015). It also offers their speakers a somewhat hassle-free learning of these languages compared to non-speakers who have no knowledge whatsoever of such languages. This fact, however, does not seem to be advantageous since interested learners of these languages are indeed scarce, if none. At large, the majority of community members conversing in these languages, the youth in particular, do not show great interest in them, let alone outsiders. Lexical and structural match may work counterproductive since it may offer the ground for language shift to closely-related languages that have wider communication. Cited examples of language shift within the Omani context are Zadjali speakers shifting to Baluchi and Hobyot speakers to Mehri or Jabbali (Simeone-Senelle, 1997; Al Jahdhami, 2017). Speakers of Zadjali and Hobyot find language shift more instrumental than the use of their

mother tongues that seem to have a gradual decrease of native speakers and a more restricted use and function.

Worth mentioning, Peterson (2004) cited 'Hikmani' as one of the local languages spoken in Oman in the eighties of the twentieth century. Deep investigation to verify such statement showed that Hikmani the language does not exist anymore. Hikmani, as an appellation, is used to designate an Omani tribe whose members do not speak a native language apart from Arabic, nor do they converse in a distinctive dialect from the general Omani Arabic. Hikmanis in Oman deny any connection to an ethnic language used by their ancestors other than Arabic. Since most local languages in Oman are named after the tribes/ethnicities of their speakers (Al Jahdhami, 2015), it is likely that Peterson assumed that Hikmanis had their own ethnic-language that is named after the appellation of the community. Another possibility is that Peterson confused Hikmani the tribe and used it to refer to a language that he erroneously assumed to be used in Oman. Such confusion is not unlikely since language designation within the Omani context is not always clear-cut, with some languages having two simultaneous labels. For instance, Jabbali, a South Modern Arabia language spoken in the southern part of Oman, is alternatively known as Shehri. The two labels (Jabbali vs. Shehri) are derived from the words 'ʒabal' and 'ɬher', both of which mean 'mountain' in Arabic and Jabbali respectively (Al Jahdhami, 2019). Some locals assume that these designations refer to two different languages when in fact they both refer to the very language. Likewise, some locals in Oman use the designation 'Ajmi' to refer to Persian, an Indo-Iranian language spoken by some Omanis belonging to different ethnicities like Ajams, Baluchs, Lawatis and Zadjalis (Al Jahdhami, 2017). These two designations yield a space for confusion to some locals who may assume that Ajmi and Persian, locally know as Farsi, are two different languages. Likewise, the Shihhi dialect of Omani Arabic spoken in the Musandam Peninsula in the outermost northern part of Oman is often referred to by some Omanis as 'language' rather than 'dialect' due to some linguistic features it exhibits that make intelligibility of Shihhi to non-Shihhi Omanis quite difficult (Al Jahdhami, 2015). Such inaccuracy of language/ dialect distinction in addition to possible double designations leans towards the possibility that Hikmani was mistakenly identified as a language rather than a tribe.

Confusing the demarcation between languages and dialects within the Omani context is not baseless. In a recent study addressing the connection between the Lawati language and the Maimani language, findings show that Lawati and Maimani are more of two varieties of the same language, exhibiting mainly lexical differences and some segmental variances that enable a considerable rate of mutual intelligibility (Al Jahdhami, 2022). The viva voce narrations of both ethnicities confirm such resemblance and mutual intelligibility. Yet, the two ethnicities identify themselves different form one another with each having its own ethnic language (Al Lawati, 2020), which also feeds into outsiders' references to them as two different ethnicities with little or no palpable connection. Emphasis is given to the social and cultural factors to distinguish between the two ethnicities, while the linguistic factor, which is indeed very crucial and worthy of investigation, is completely ignored. Likewise, Zadjali, an Indio-Iranian language spoken by the

Zadjali community in Oman, is erroneously identified as a variety of Baluchi rather than a language of its own. Both languages are sisters branching from the same language family with several common words albeit with a marginal degree of mutual intelligibility. Ironically, outsiders to the language consider Zadjali a dialect of Baluchi mainly based on some shared cultural factors; its speakers, nonetheless, emphasize its distinct status regardless of the shared common lexical items with Baluchi (Al Jahdhami, 2017). Such overall misperceptions can be taken back to both academic and social reasons. Studies geared towards local languages in Oman are somewhat recent and not comprehensive to all local languages; they addressed some languages and skipped others that are in need of documentation (Anonby, 2003; Anonby & Yousefian, 2011; Salman & Kharusi, 2012, Al Jahdhmai, 2022). The attitude of community members towards their ethnic languages is also a major factor. Speakers' disinterest to stress the linguistic aspect of the ethnicity is often highlighted to attain a hoped-for integration within the greater community. Additionally, there is a lack of motives to familiarize outsiders with these ethnic languages. Such collective attitude has pushed more towards favoring majority languages to ethnic ones that have ended up taking an inevitable path towards a narrower use and function.

The fact that minority languages in Oman are used by different ethnicities does not preclude speakers of these languages from identifying with the general Omani identity and culture, along with the use of Omani Arabic as the lingua franca. The situation is rather different in Pakistan, a country of multiethnic groups that bring different cultures and languages into one melting pot, having around 74 languages spoken in different parts of the country, 66 of which are indigenous to Pakistan (Zaidi & Zaki, 2017; Siddiqui, 2019; Haider et al., 2021; Abbasi & Bidin, 2022). Communities conversing in these languages identify with their own identity, customs and culture that distinguish them from speakers of other languages and cultures in the country. This distinction is so salient in rural areas where these languages are considered minority languages that are strictly confined to little circles of their native speakers (Ali, 2017; Abbasi et al., 2023). The status Urdu assumes as the national language of Pakistan and the function it serves as the lingua franca that allows access to a wider communication with nationals from other ethnicities coming from different parts of the country makes it imperative to learn. Adopting Urdu also helps in accelerating and facilitating a blend into the bigger Pakistani community so that social unacceptance is avoided, especially that officials do not perceive the importance of ethnic languages. Instead, they encourage ethnicities to integrate into the bigger community by adopting the national language (Ali, 2017; Abbasi & Aftab, 2019; Haider et al., 2021). Such called-for integration in such intricate socio-linguistic context is often questioned since the bigger community is made of various tribes and ethnicities that have several ethnic languages and subcultures. Integration is urged to leave some space to accommodate social and linguistic factors by taking social, cultural and linguistic diversity into consideration so that it is more feasible and attainable (Mahmued et el., 2010; Thaplawala, 2016).

English makes another target to Pakistanis due to its status in certain domains and due to the opportunities it offers to education and better economic status (Siddiqui, 2019; Abbas & Bidin,

2022). Since each province in Pakistan has its own language policy, speakers of ethnic languages in each province acquire the lingua franca of the province to ensure communication with speakers of other languages within the same province. Linguistic plurality enjoyed by individual provinces in Pakistan, however, does not help in promoting and preserving ethnic languages, since preference is always given to majority languages that happen to offer better economic and social facilities (Weinreich, 2010; Iyengar, 2013; Abbasi & Aftab, 2019; Abbasi & Zaki, 2019). The instrumental functions Urdu and English serve compared to ethnic languages is noticeably reflected in the value and attention they receive on the individual, ethnic, and governmental, levels compared to ethnic languages. It is also reflected in the urge it imposes on speakers of ethnic languages from rural communities to move to developed cities and towns like Karachi, Peshawar, and Lahore to search for better educational and economic opportunities. (Mahmud et al., 2010; Abbasi & Aftab, 2019; Kiani et al., 2019; Abbasi at el., 2023). The new urban context consecutively imposes a new different reality from the one they have had in their homegrown areas, which pushes the use of ethnic languages to very restricted domains and circles.

Maintaining strong ethnolinguistic identity and affiliation with minority languages in Oman and Pakistan has witnessed a gradual decline over the years. This has yielded several cases of language shift witnessed in certain communities. Speakers tend to detach from their native languages and culture to languages and cultures of wider usage, with an accelerated rhythm in recent years (Al Jahdhami, 2015; Ali, 2017; Gasparini, 2017; Kiani et al., 2019; Abbasi et al., 2020, Haider, et. al, 2021; Jhatil & Kain, 2021; Shah et al., 2024). It is worth mentioning that language shift has been cited as one of the key factors that determine the endangerment level of languages based on the UNISCO document on language vitality and endangerment (2023). As a linguistic phenomenon, language shift is perceived as a noticeable reduction in the number of language domains in several settings caused by reasons that include urbanization, exogamous marriages, social sphere and language attitude (Umrani & Memon, 2016; Abassi & Aftab, 2019; Adney, 2023). Also, emphasis is often put on native speakers' attitude towards their ethnic languages in defining language shift; it is seen as the derive towards the non-use of one's language in favor of another language by which speakers of one community leave their mother tongue and adopt another prevalent in the society (Abbasi & Aftab, 2019 ; Abbasi & Zaki, 2019). Although the reasons standing behind language shift are subject to a given linguistic context, they mainly revolve round socio-economic reasons such as economic value, social prestige and social dominance. Political and psychological reasons can also be a cause towards language shift albeit with little influence compared to socio-economic reasons. The danger of language shift stems from the fact that it causes a gradual 'language attrition' in both the individual and communal level. In other words, the decrease in the number of domains associated with a given language paves the road to lack of usage and exposure, leading to a gradual decline in speakers' language proficiency (Ali, 2017).

Both language shift and attrition are confirmed in the two linguistic contexts under investigation. Minority languages in Oman have witnessed language shift and attrition reflected in various forms that range from a noticeable decline in language proficiency to having a receptive knowledge that

makes language production a difficult task (Al Jahdhami, 2015; Al Jahdhami, 2019; Al Jahdhami, 2022). Such tragic situation is more prevalent among the young generations who tend to show less attention to their ethno-linguistic identity compared to their parents and grandparents (Al Jahdhami, 2015). Such unconcern about the importance of ethnic languages originates from lack of motive to put time and effort to learn them despite the fact they can be effortlessly acquired by interaction with family members and individuals from the speech community. Ethnic languages do not necessitate an urgent need for communication, nor do they offer educational or professional opportunities compared to Arabic and English (Al Jahdhami, 2019). This has noticeably changed the perception of the mainstream of the young community by adopting the concept that putting effort and time in learning ethnic languages is a sheer waste of time that is worth spending in learning English or any other language that guarantees tangible interests and benefits. The full easy access to different forms of technology and social media platforms attained by the use of Arabic or English has worsened the situation by pushing ethnic languages to more restricted domains (Simeone-Senelle, 2010; Al Jahdhami, 2017; Gasparini, 2017). With different degrees of intensity, speakers of these languages have gradually moved towards an increased use of a non-ethnic language in most domains to serve wider audience and to better attend to certain needs (Al Jahdhami, 2015; Gasparini, 2017). Decades ago, it was hard, if not impossible, to spot a community member who is not conversant in their ethnic language. This fact has unfortunately ceased to hold true since cases of non-speakers of their own ethnic language can be easily detected these days (Al Jahdhami, 2017). Not so different from the other minority languages in Oman, language shift among Maimani speakers is witnessed in several domains including the domestic and social domains (Al Jahdhami, 2022). The effect of nearby spoken languages like Lawati is so apparent in the lexical level, causing many shared words (Al Lawati, 2018; Al Jahdhami, 2022). The number of Maimani speakers with a good grasp of their ethnic languages is on a gradual decrease; most of these speakers are from the elderly age group, who do not find any interest shown by the younger community members to learn their own language. Instead, Arabic and English are seen by both elders and offspring alike as a better option to use and learn than Maimani.

The story is not so different with speakers of minority languages in Pakistan. Studies highlighted that speakers of different languages like Memoni, Kutchi, Gujarati, Marwari, Pashto, Brushaski, Balti, Dhatki, Sindhi, Balochi, Panjabi, Shina and Sraki live in big cities of multilingual contexts. This state imposes language shift to languages of power and economic status, which coincides with losing ties with native languages and culture. Various reasons such as economic factors, academic need, prestige, sense of association, language barrier, and social acceptance are reported by Pakistani speakers of several minority languages as reasons that cause them to shift to other languages (Abassi & Aftab, 2019; Haider et al., 2021; Jhatil & Khan, 2021; Abbasi et al., 2023). Speakers of the Dhatki language, for instance, opt for language shift due to both social and linguistic factors. They were harassed due to their skin-color and mother tongue, which forces them to shift to Urdu. Removing language barrier was also a factor since Dhatki speakers believe that the society and professionals are unaware of Dhatki language (Abbasi & Aftab, 2019). Jhatial and Khan (2021) reported the same findings in their study that targeted Marwari and Dhatki

speakers. Likewise, Ali (2015) and Ali (2017) noted language shift in different indigenous communities like Memoni, Balti, Brushaki, and Shina in the home setting in urban areas , which was mainly due to the low socio-economic status of their ethnic languages compared to Urdu. Similarly, Ali et al. (2021) found that Hindko speakers shift towards Pashto, the majority language spoken in Peshawar, for socio-economic reasons, which goes in line with Weinrich's (2010) findings about Dio speakers who shift to Urdu for the same reasons.

In their study addressing the Hindko and Kashmiri communities, Kiani et al. (2019) found out that Urdu was the language in use in different domains such as market and social gatherings. The young generation tend to shift to Urdu more compared to the elder speakers who show more maintenance and use of their ethnic languages. Such shift is based on the better social and economic opportunities Urdu opens compared to their mother tongue. Saeed et el. (2013) found that Punjabi speakers shift towards Urdu and English due to positive attitudes towards English and Urdu since they give them prestige, power and institutional support. Abbasi et al. (2023) found out that language shift to Urdu within the Khowar community is reported in the home domain as well as other domains such as market, school and official conversations. Language maintenance is witnessed more among the female Khowar speakers due to their less interaction with speakers from other communities and less exposure to other languages compared to their male counterparts who mix with speakers of other languages in the market and the workplace.

Not so different from the other languages in Pakistan, Memoni has witnessed language shift in certain domains. Studies have found that although Memoni speakers always use their ethnic language in the home domain, they switch to Urdu and English in other domains (Ali, 2017, Ali et al., 2021). In their exploration of language attitude and preference among the third generation speakers in Karachi, Abbasi and Zaki (2019) found out that there is little importance given to regional languages like Memoni compared to Urdu and English. In addition to language shift, Thaplawala (2016) cited several reasons that pose challenges to the use of Memoni among its speakers. The two most prominent challenges are the inability of teaching it due to lack of teaching tools, and the lack of inter-generational transmission. Another challenge is caused by psychological factors that stem from the development of inferiority complex about heritage and the fear of discrimination by Urdu speakers (Thaplawala, 2011). Challenges facing the Memoni language and culture are also reported among Memonis in diaspora. The use of English or other languages used in the host country is essential for getting education and jobs, for day-to-day survival and for upward mobility. Such lack of political and economic power of Memoni among its speakers in diaspora affects the way Memonis view their ethnic language , which may lead to language loss over the coming generations. Rasool (2020), for instance, cited several challenges that Memoni faces in Sri Lanka like the lack of state acknowledgement of lesser known languages, lack of survey of these languages, and lack of engagement of these communities. Speakers of Memoni, as well as those of other minority languages in Sri Lanka, had no choice but to shift to languages that are more functional in the society like Tamil and Sinhala.

Such status quo of both Maimani and Memoni shows that they are not too far from endangerment, with the young generation and the urban life style having more influence in accelerating the rate of language shift and aggravating the amount of danger awaiting them (Al Jahdhami, 2015; Thaplawala, 2016 ; Al Jahdhami, 2017). This in fact goes in line with the common global observation of the fact that a big number of the world languages are in the verge of disappearance. It adds up to the worldwide alarming figures given by Bernard (1996) that 97% of world's population (around 7.760 billion speakers) speak around 4% (around 286 languages) of world's languages whereas 96% of the world's languages (around 6.865 languages) are spoken by 3% (240 million) of the world's population. Based on the range of speakers' base, extent of usage among community members, restricted domains of use, and low intergenerational transmission, minority languages in Oman fall into different shades of endangerment that is expected to exacerbate in the passage of time (Al Jahdhami, 2015; Al Jahdhami , 2019; Al Jahdhami, 2022). Likewise its sister languages in Oman, Maimani does seem to escape the endangerment reality. Al Jahdhmai (2022) identifies Maimani as a 'disappearing' or 'critically endangered' language due to its very small number of speaker's base (around two to three thousand speakers mostly from the elderly age group), its restriction to the home domain, and language shift to other languages. A look at the current linguistic situation of Maimani supports its identification as a threatened language. The need to use Arabic and English to ensure a wider range of communication and to open varied windows to educational and occupational opportunities leaves little space for Maimani in terms of usage and function. This is not to overlook the fact that speakers with good language proficiency, most of whom fall into the elderly age group, give no heed to intergenerational transmission of their ethnic language to their offspring. Inter-generational transmission of Maimani to the youth, who themselves find no motive to put effort in learning their ethnic language, is indeed so scarce. This situation has resulted in having different types of community members. It is indeed evident to find community members who can be considered semi-speakers, those who have passive knowledge of their ethnic language, and those who just inherited the ethno-linguistic label besides very scanty knowledge of few words and phrases. Cases of lexical and phrasal borrowing from Arabic, English or any other language are not uncommon. Young speakers tend to replace native words that seem to have escaped their reservoir with non-native ones. Besides, the language is not documented in any way; its name is mostly associated with the ethnicity rather than the form of communication they use. These factors collectively play a role in strengthening and speeding the danger awaiting Maimani.

The situation is not so bright in Pakistan. Studies addressing ethnicity languages in Pakistan highlight that the vitality of these languages is doubtful (Abbasi & Aftab, 2019; Abbasi & Zaki, 2019, Kiani et al., 2019; Ali et al., 2021; Abbas & Bidin, 2022). Inter-generational transmission is not given a top priority, and language shift is witnessed in several domains. The ratio of their speakers is small to total population, let alone the non-existence of media platforms or teaching materials. There is also a common change in speakers' perception of their ethnic languages and ethno-linguistic identity, which feeds into a rapid decline in language proficiency. Most speakers of these languages are interested in making their kids learn English and Urdu due to the advantages and the instrumental purposes they serve (Abbasi & Aftab, 2019; Ali et al., 2021). Although the

situation does not look so dim for Memoni compared to some other minority languages in Pakistan, language shift, gradual decrease in inter-generational transmission and the existence of several varieties of Memoni over a number of very far geographical zones puts it at risk (Thaplawala, 2011). While is it often highlighted that Memonis share language, they do not seem to share location, race and ancestry. Having said that, factors like religion, geographical location, and race do not seem to play a role in identifying them as one ethnicity, thanks to their spread throughout different zones around the world (Thaplawala, 2009). Memonis in diaspora whether in Indonesia, Malaysia, Middle East, Africa, Panama, Sri Lanka, UK, US, different parts of Europe or any other areas are not necessarily linked a to a particular ethnicity, nor do they identify themselves as Memonis. Instead, they are identified socially based on their kinfolk rather than linguistically based on the language they speak. Hence, the only left factor that connects Memonis as an ethnic group is language. The linguistic factor, however, might be further weakened by the less use of Memoni among its speakers. It is often said that a number of young Memonis of both genders are not fluent speakers of Memoni, especially those in diaspora. Memonis outside Pakistan and India mingle with new communities in their new homelands and gradually distance themselves from their language and culture. This can be easily noticed in the extensive borrowings from languages used nearby, which gave birth to several varieties of Memoni that may diverge more in the passage of time, and thus may affect the level of mutual intelligibility among these varieties (Thaplawala, 2016).

Such collective factors facing both Maimani and Memoni make directing serious attention to these languages imperative. The effort to save Maimani begins at home by encouraging its use among its speakers, and by enhancing inter-generational transmission to the young community members. Linguists' effort comes next in line by giving attention to the language via documenting it in an attempt to create a writing system that enables creating teaching materials. This in fact is easier said than done due to the enormous effort required to revitalize Maimani or to document it at best. Any attempt to write Maimani would require comprehensive research that necessities financial and collaborative support. While the situation seems so bleak for Maimani, it is not so for Memoni. There has been recent calls towards cultural and linguistic maintenance attained by communal efforts made by individual speakers and community organizations both in Pakistan and India . Thaplawala (2016) emphasizes the need to encourage both oral and written use of Memoni among community members since language is the only left source of identity for Memonis these days. He puts it forwards that Memonis are gradually facing a crisis of identity that needs to be rectified by highlighting the linguistic factor to glue all Memonis around a pivotal milestone of identity; that is language. Thaplawala (2009) suggests inventing a writing system for Memoni so that it is converted to a written language. This will make it teachable and suitable for media and press use. In fact, inventing a written script for Memoni makes a much easier case compared to Maimani that has never witnessed such unprecedented endeavor. The recent calls for inventing an orthographic system for Memoni is not pioneering since few attempts are cited in literature for making Memoni a written language. Shah et al. (2024) cited the use of 14 writings systems before the colonization of the British, one of which was the Memoni writing system of Sindhi. It was one of the ways, among other ways, in which Memonis distinguished themselves in Hyderabad, Thatta, Rahmuki Bazar and other regions. Another old attempt to invent a Memoni alphabet was made by Haji

Mohammed Hussain Abdul Kareem Nagani (Thaplawala, 2016). Using Gujarati script is often introduced as an option for writing Memoni. It is not the optimal option, however, since Gujarati is not widely used, and Memonis in India have shifted to use Hindi in their written publications. Due to the fact that Memoni has originated from Sindhi, using Sindhi script is also an option, but it is faced by the difficulty of unfamiliarity of younger generation with Sindhi script, when in fact they can read and write in Urdu and English. This makes Urdu script a more feasible option for writing Memoni than Sindhi (Mahar & Memon, 2009; Tekade et al., 2010). One successful attempt of using Urdu script yielded the first 250 page book published in Memnoi language at the early millennium [September, 2000] by Mr. Iqbal Motlani, which Thaplawala described as creating history for the Memoni language (Thaplawala, 2009).

As part of an initiative project to save and promote the use of Memoni, Thaplawala (2016) suggested using the Roman script as the optimal option to write Memoni. Doing so will make the language equally readable to all Memonis irrespective of their location in the world, and the languages they speak. Another advantage the Roman script provides is its ease and convenience for writing and typewriting using different apparatus produced by modern life. He cited some local ethnicities that made successful attempts to preserve their identity by turning their spoken languages 'Boli' into written ones like the Saraiki and Hindko ethnicities. Foreign successful attempts using the Roman script include countries like Turkey, Indonesia and Malaysia. To put his beliefs into practice, Thaplawala himself made effort to write Memoni using Roman script by proving guidelines on how to write Memoni via short texts and poems. Inventing a standardized writing system like the one suggested by Thaplawala will help establish weekly or monthly Memoni journals and newspapers that have wider circulation among community members. Luckily, there are certain cited journals that made some attempts to publish Memoni articles written in Roman script like 'The Memon Alam', 'Memon Bulletin' of Karachi, 'Memon Welfare' of Bombay and 'Memon Bulletin' of UK (Thaplawala, 2009). The story will remain incomplete if inventing a writing system is not solidified with instilling the value of feeling proud of one's language among the young and new generations as part of their identity and heritage. There must be conscious efforts to encourage Memonis to speak and write Memoni both in the home domain and elsewhere when communicating with other fellow members of the community. Parents need to adopt an on-going intergenerational transmission to children whether in Pakistan, India or elsewhere (Thaplawala, 2016; Ali, 2017). If all of these practices come to light, then they need to be expanded, promoted and encouraged among all individuals, and organizations of the community.

MAIMANIS AND MEMONIS: AN OVERALL GLIMPSE

There is indeed a dearth of materials and informed resources addressing the languages, cultures and histories of both ethnicities. Just like many other communities in the Indian subcontinent, the Memoni community remains understudied compared to other communities like the Bohra community, for instance, that received a decent amount of attention. Despite that fact that Memonis have a rich and glamourous past, few attempts are available to record their history, which were in Guajarati or Urdu (Thaplawala, 2009: Shah et al., 2024). The same holds true for Maimani

compared to most ethno-linguistic groups in Oman. Historians, researchers and interested individuals addressing both ethnicities had no choice but to rely on handful resources in narrating their stories with some episodes and incidents subject to further scrutiny and vindication (Ali, 2017; Al Jahdhami, 2022; O'Sullivan, 2023). The scarcity of resources makes the full story of both communities untold if not supplemented with the oral narrations of both communities so that a complete story regarding their cultures and histories is well recounted, particularly the Maimani ethnicity that is indeed starkly understudied whether in the Arabic or English language.

Maimanis in Oman make a small community of few thousand members mainly found in the capital Muscat in addition to other members scattered over several nearby areas. They speak their own ethic language called Maimani, a non-written language with no reliable statistics of the exact number of speakers. Based on the viva voce narration of the community, a rough estimate of two to three thousand speakers of Maimani is made, although the community members is more than this figure (Al Jahahdhami, 2022). In addition to their ethnic language, the community members speak Arabic, the national language of Oman, with some community members speaking English or other sister languages that belong to the Indo-Iranian language family like Lawati, Baluchi or Urdu. The extensive contact between Maimani and Arabic has resulted in having several words of Omani Arabic origin used in the lexicon of Maimani. Apart from Omani Maimanis, the Maimani community in Oman gives reference to other Maimanis in other Arab and non-Arab countries like Iraq, Pakistan, India, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia (Al Jahdhami, 2022). Such adopted communal narration in fact poses an intriguing question regarding any possible racial, linguistic or cultural connection between Maimanis in Oman and certain ethnicities in other countries, especially those in Pakistan, who could possibly be 'Memonis' if linguistic and cultural commonalities between the two groups are taken into consideration.

The Memoni community in Pakistan, on the other hand, is said to make less than one percent of the Pakistani population with high involvement in business and entrepreneur pursuits; almost two thirds of the community are self-employed. Those employed Memonis work in jobs of different spheres and have influence in different walks of life like education, economy and social service. They have their own ethnic language called 'Memoni', an Indo-Aryan non-written language. In addition to their ethnic language, they use Urdu, the widely used language in Pakistan and among Muslims in the Indian subcontinent. Not all Memonis, however, live in Pakistan since they have migrated to serval areas around the globe (Thaplawala, 2011; Ali et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2024). Unlike Maimani that is somewhat standardized, Memoni language includes several varieties spoken by different groups of the large 'Memoni' community, which encompasses three main groups: Kathiawari Memonis (also known as Halai Memonis or simply Memonis), Kutchi or Kachchhi Memonis, and Sindhi Memonis (Tekade et al., 2010). This division is largely based on the language they use; Kathiawari Memonis, whose ancestry is traced back to the peninsula of Kathiawar (also known as Saurashtra or Soruth and Sorath) in India, speak Memoni. The city of Rajkot was the capital of Kathiawar whose name is believed to come after the Kathi Darbar who ruled part of the region once. Kathiawari Memonis further divide into subgroups mainly based on their ancestral villages or towns like Bantva Memonis, Kutiyana Memonis, Jutpur Memonis, Dhoraji Memonis, Bombaywala Memonis and Deeplai Memonis (Thaplawala, 2016). Bantva was

a state founded in 1760 and ruled by a ruler by the name Khan Himmat Khan. The Indian forces took over its government offices and declared it part of the Indian union, which coincided with several invasions that took place over several areas nearby Bantva. Memonis who have originated from the Kutch region in Gujrat are identified as speakers of Kutchi language, which is also said to be spoken by another ethnic group called 'Ismaili Khoja' (O'Sullivan, 2023). Memonis who remained in Sindh as opposed to Memonis who migrated to other areas are identified as Sindhis and they speak Sindhi (Thaplawala, 2016). Since each group is said to develop its own identity based on the geography were it settled, other resources divide them into four groups, adding the Surti (Surati) Memonis to the other three groups (O'Sullivan, 2016).

The Kathiawari Memoni is exclusively used by Muslim Memonis whereas Kutchi and Sindhi are used by both Muslim and non-Muslim Memonis. The number of non-Muslim Memonis, however, is very minor indeed compared to their Muslim counterparts (Abbasi & Aftab, 2019). Most Muslim Memonis are Sunni with few Shiite. Some of the latter are called Syed who are believed to belong to the family of the Prophet Mohammed peace be upon him. All Memonis have special respect for Muharram, Hazarat Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet Mohammed, and his entire family (Thaplawala, 2009). The linguistic division of Memoni, in fact, explains the existence of different views on the origin of Memoni. On one hand, it is believed that it has evolved as a mixture of several languages like Sindhi, Kutchi and Gujarati (Thaplawala, 2009; Thaplawala, 2016). On another, some speakers believe that it is old Sindhi mixed with some lexical items imported from Gujarati (Tekade et al., 2010). As far as linguistic affiliation is concerned, it belongs to the Indic language family, namely the North Western subgroup. Syntactically, it is said to be an SOV language, just like its sister languages that belong to the same language family. It shares the same stress and intonation patterns with Sindhi and Kutchi. However, it borrows lexically from several nearby languages like Urdu, Hindustani and Gujarati, including distant languages like Arabic since it is the language of the religion of most Memonis (Thaplawala, 2016). Very little indeed is known about the structure and linguistic aspect of Memoni except for few scanty data about its demonstrative pronouns and nominal system that marks gender and number, verbal conjugation that agrees with subjects, and adjectives that precede and agree in gender with the heads they modify.

The origin of both Maimanis and Memonis is contested owing to the existence of several narrations and views that require more research and perusal to be substantiated. Two main narratives can be found about the origin of Maimanis. Certain members consider themselves a sub-group of the Baluchi ethnicity that migrated from the Baluchistan area to Oman whereas other members believe that their linage goes back to an Arab ancestry (Al Jahdhahmi, 2022). The origin of their appellation as 'Maimanis' is equally contested. Some Maimanis believe that they are named after their homeland 'Yemen' from which they emigrated to Oman and to other propinquities. This story goes somewhat in line with the well-known narrated story that depicts the immigration of Malik Bin Faham Al Azdi from Yemen to Oman thousands years ago following the destruction of 'Sad Marib' (Marib Dam). Malik's linage is believed to go back to Qahtani ancestry in Yemen. Upon his arrival to Oman, Malik allied with Adnani Arabas originally inhabiting Oman and managed

together to expel the Persians who were occupying some coastal areas of Oman. In the passage of time, Malik's offspring managed to diffuse into different tribes that dwelled different parts of Oman. Another less common view says that the word 'Maimani' is a derivative of the Arabic word 'Yumn' (blessing) that was used to refer to the community members as 'blessed folks'. A third view states that Maimanis inherited such name in reference to their great Arab grandfather 'Maimon' 'a blessed person', who left his native homeland in pursuit of livelihood and settled in ancient India (Oishi, 1999). In the span of time, some of the group members decided to return to their native homeland to maintain their connection with their Arab ancestry whereas another group adopted the new language and acculturated to the new life style in ancient India (Al Jahdhahmi, 2022).

Memonis, in contrast, are believed to come from several fatherlands, namely Sindh, Gujarat and Kathiawar in the Indian subcontinent after the division of British India in 1947 (Thaplawala, 2016). Other resources show that their immigration from Sindh was much further in history, going back to the early 19th century (O'Sullivan, 2016). The exact true date of their immigration is indeed hard to pinpoint since it is also said that they first moved from their original fatherland Sindh in the early 15 century and settled in several areas like Kathiawar and Kutch, which are considered to be ancestral to some Memonis (Thaplawala, 2009). Quoting a British official's observation, Oishi (1999) stated that Memonis moved to Bombay after the famine that inflected Gujarat and Cutch in 1813 in pursuit of heaven against famine and hardship. Unlike during the pre-partition era when they lived in small geographical areas, the partition of the Indian subcontinent caused a large portion of the Memoni community to migrate to several areas around the globe. Driven by reasons related to security and business, they migrated to different areas that crossed regional boundaries to several zones within the Indian subcontinent and overseas. The immigration of Memonis to Pakistan also has several views. While some believe that they settled in Pakistan following the division of British India in 1947 (Thaplawala, 2009), others believe that half of the Memoni community in the fatherland settled in Karachi between 1840 and 1880 (O'Sullivan, 2021).

Mr. Abdull Razzaq Thaplawala, whose family name is given after an ancestral village called Thapla, is a very active Pakistani Memoni showing much concern to preserve the heritage and culture of his own people. In one of his works, he recounted his very story of immigration to Pakistan from his own sub-Indian hometown 'Bantva' at the age of eleven. Unexpectedly, the Hindu farmers in Bantva attacked the houses of Muslims despite the night curfew and the presence of Sikh soldiers on duty. Other nearby cities witnessed similar attacks around the same time with bloodshed in these attacks. Around 25000 Muslims, most of whom were Memonis, immigrated to Pakistan via Bombay or Okha by steamships. After more than half a century (almost 60 years), Mr. Abdull Razzaq Thaplawala was able to go back to his homeland and nearby areas (Thaplawala, 2009). In fact, his work embodies one of the very few existing resources that address the history and culture of the Memoni community recounted by its own members. It provides interesting exotic details about the traditions, food, customs, attire and daily routines of the community. He even launched a website about and for the Memoni community, which includes some books,

poems and stories that show a glimmer of light casted on the community and its history. Other prominent examples of active Memonis who work for the greater good of the Memoni community are Mr. Muhammed Najeeb Balagamwala and Mr. Abdull Satar Adhi, among many others.

The surge to flee the attacked villages forced some Memonis to migrate to cities like Mumbai, Kerala, Calcutta and Nagpur in central India with some groups moving further to nowadays Dhaka and Chittagong in nowadays Bangladesh (Oishi, 1999). Being time-honored seafarers in addition to their acumen in mercantile activities, they managed to diffuse to areas that go beyond the Indian subcontinent, spreading their language and culture as far as Indonesia, Japan, East Africa, UK, Africa, USA, and Canada (Oishi, 1999; Thaplawala, 2016; O'Sullivan 2023a). One group that crossed the sea headed to nearby Sri Lanka, which has been a zone of a mixture of ethnicities for ages. Rassool (2020) reported that in addition to the two mostly used languages in Sri Lanka (Sinhala and Tamil), other languages spoken by different ethnicities include those of European descent (e.g. Dutch and Portuguese) and the Malay population that included smaller groups of Javanese, Ambonese, Balinese, Buginese, and Malay ancestry. One unique ethnicity is Sri Lankan Memonis who migrated to Sri Lanka from Sindh long time ago. Most of them arrived from Hyderabad in the Sindh region of Pakistan as merchants and traders after the partition of India and Pakistan. Despite such large-scale immigration to different zones, not all Memonis left their native lands. Apart from those who moved to several scattered areas, some Memonis still live in areas that are believed to be ancestral areas like Kutch and Kathiawar (Oishi, 1999; Thaplawala, 2016; O'Sullivan 2023b).

As far as the linage of Memonis is concerned, different narrations and hypothesis may exist due to the fact that Memonis had to rely on oral history to determine their origin (Thaplawala, 2011). It is widely believed, however, that their ancestors came from the middle class castes of Hinduism such as Banais, Khatris, Kutchis and Lohanas, all of which are still famous in India form their activity in business and trade (Oishi,1999; Abbasi & Aftab, 2019; Rassool, 2020). Other resources restrict them to the Lohana Hindu, who converted to Islam in the early 15 century (Thaplawala, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2021). Although the majority of Memonis converted from Hinduism to Islam, a very small number of Memonis are said to be non-Muslims, namely Hindus and Jains (O'Sullivan, 2016; O'Sullivan, 2023a). A famous story of their conversion to Islam is said to be in the early 15th century by a Sufi preacher called Yusufuddin Qadri. Qadri is a disciple of Abdull Qadir AlGilani of Baghdad, who has played a pivotal role in spreading Islam in other areas in East Africa and south Asia like Indonesia and Malaysia. Qadri called the new converts 'Momin or Mu'amin, which latter become the nowadays appellation 'Memon or Memoni' (Thaplawala, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2023b). Tracing back the etymology and usage of the term 'Momin or Mu'amin' shows that it is an Arabic word that means a believer who accepted the faith of Islam (O'Sullivan, 2023b), which can be inflected to its plural form 'Mu'aminin or Mu'aminun'. The term and its different declension forms is momentously used, along with the term 'alathina aamanu' (those who believed), in the Islamic discourse with countless occasions in Quran, and one whole chapter named 'almu'aminin' that translates to 'the Believers'. The new designation 'Momin or Mu'amin' was much in acceptance among Memonis. It was used to stress their new identity and affiliation as well as to stress equality among them irrespective of their socio-economic class, especially that

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Hinduism does stress categorizing its followers based on socio-economic status. Unlike in Hinduism where Memonis found themselves trapped within fixed commands that make moving to upper caste hard if not impossible, they found sheer equality with all other fellow followers upon their conversion to Islam. Memonis in Pakistan highlight their connection to Abdul Qadir AlGilani, a connection that is believed to stand behind the fact that Memonis made yearly pilgrimage to Baghdad in the 70s and 80s, especially the Halai Memonis who are said to have profound connection to the shrine cities in Iraq (O'Sullivan, 2023b). As part of their religious rituals, Memonis frequently invoke the name 'Abdul Qadir' in their ritual speech known locally as "Gaus Pak", which has become less common with the advent of Wahhabism that deceitfully claims its monopolizing and purest understanding of Islam, inciting animosity and fight against other Islamic schools of theology. The term 'Gaus Pak' was also used by womenfolk to say goodbye to their children and menfolk, which later alternated with the term 'khuda Haafiz' (May God be your guardian.). (Thaplawala, 2011).

Likewise Maimanis who adopt an Arab-related pedigree, one narration traces back the origin of Memonis to an Arab linage. According to this narration, Memonis are believed to be Arab Muslims by birth who left their Arab homeland and migrated to Sindh for trade. Through their trade, they strived to proselytize Islam in different places, and they ended up acculturating to their new homelands. Another related narration depicts them as the descendants of Arab soldiers of 'Bani Tamim', an Arab tribe that can be found nowadays in several countries like Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabic and other areas in the Arabian Gulf. They were a group of Arab weavers who came from Qatif near Taif with Mohammed bin Qasim who conquered India in the 8th century. They were making the 'Maymanah' of his army. Maymanah is An Arabic word that means 'right side', but in the battlefield context it signifies 'the soldiers making the right section of an army' since an army is usually divided into five sections in the Muslim culture. 'Maymanah' (right-wingers) latter developed to the current designation 'Memoni' (Ohisi, 1999). According to this narration, it is believed that the frequent visits of Muslims to the western part of India in the tenth to the fourteen century, including Arab merchants and Muslim preachers, played a major role in converting several non-Muslim communities into Islam. These communities grew in number and gained an ascending social influence when their land was annexed as part of India by Muslim political powers including the Mughals (Oishi, 1999). Unlike the Sindh-based immigration story, this Arab-linage narration is widespread among Memonis from nowadays India, who believe that their Arab ancestors have migrated to Ancient India and settled there.

One group worthy of focus is those Memonis who left their homeland heading to Arabia, most remarkably those who moved to Hijaz. They established their control of the pilgrimage and shipping industry linking between Ottoman Hijaz and Western India as well as trading in Ottoman materials to the Indian subcontinent and Arabia (Oishi, 1999; O'sullvian, 23b). They married locals and adopted the Arab-related ancestry narration as part of their acculturation to the new identity, especially when Arab Nationalism took off against the Ottoman Empire (O'Sullivan, 2023a). Several of those Memonis were known as nakhodas 'captains' actively involved in conducting pilgrimage voyages to and from Jeddah (O'Sullivan, 2018), with some leading their own vessels in and out of the Indian subcontinent in addition to vessels owned by non-Muslim

owners like the British. Apart from seafaring and trade, they were also known as devoted disciples of great scholars who spent much time in Hijaz like Muhammed Khair Al-Din, the father of Abul Kalam Azad who was an independence activist and one of the prominent national leaders in India at his time (Oishi, 1999). A worth-posing question here is whether a group of those Memonis coming to Hijaz has moved to other parts of Arabia and nearby countries like Oman and Iraq, just like those who diffused into different scattered zones within the Indian subcontinent. If this can be proven, it could provide a possible evidence regarding the linage of Maimanis who could possibly be an extension of the original kinfolk of Memoni migrating to Hijaz, especially that a group of Maimanis are found in nowadays Saudi Arabia (Al Jahdhami, 2022).

Memonis' immigration to different areas around the world makes the exact number of Memoni speakers hard, if not impossible, to pinpoint. Abbasi and Aftab (2019) estimate around 1.6 to 1.8 million Memonis in Pakistan, most of whom live in Karachi, in addition to 1 to 1.5 million outside Pakistan. Rassool (2020) gave an estimated number of 1,500 Memonis in Sri Lanka. Other than academic references, estimates given by communal narration show few million speakers dispersed in different countries like Pakistan, India, Japan, USA, England, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Middle East, Nicaragua, Nepal, South Africa, Burma and several other countries. The underneath table gives rough numbers of Memonis in several countries worldwide

Table 1. Estimation of Memonis outside Pakistan

Geographical zone	Estimated number of population	Geographical zone	Estimated number of population
India	700,000	Japan	5000
Nepal	1000	Bangladesh	10000
UK	25000	Sri Lanka	1500
China, Hong Kong	20000	Africa [Kenya/Tanzania/South Africa]	30000
Turkey	5000	Portugal	5000
USA	30000	Canada	10000
Indonesia, Malaysia	30000	Panama	3000
Brazil	1000	Argentina/Chile	500
KSA	50000	UAE	10000

Such scatted groups of Memonis caused by a large-scale immigration has its drawbacks on both the cultural and linguistic aspects. As Memonis acculturated to the new life style and traditions of the new countries, different varieties of Memoni have emerged, with each assuming the flavor and influence of language[s] spoken in the host country (Thaplawala, 2011). For instance, the variety of Memoni used in Pakistan is different from Memoni used in East Africa. The dominant use of

Urdu in Pakistan due to its national status and extent of communication has resulted in importing words of Urdu origin to the lexicon of Pakistani Memnoi, so to speak. On the other hand, as Memoni speakers settled in East Africa about 200 years ago (O'Sullivan, 2023b), Swahili has its print and influence in the lexicon of Memoni spoken there. Likewise, the one used by immigrants to the Island of Hokkaido in Japan has mixed Ainu into its lexicon, and Memoni spoken in Malaysia has incorporated lexical items from local language in Malacca. Those who have migrated to Burma have blended into Rohingya people and incorporated local lexical items into Memoni. The same holds true for other Memoni groups that have migrated to other zones in the globe. The existence of several varieties has affected the nature of the language and its ability to unite Memonis living in and out of the fatherland (Thaplawala, 2016). Although they have been successful in taking collective care of the community, maintaining their identity and language in the long run is questionable. The new generations of Memonis in diaspora gradually adopt the language, culture and traditions of the new homeland, which works against identity and language preserve, leading to a gradual loss of traits and identity (Thaplawala, 2011).

The Memoni community has some distinctive features that tease it apart from the other communities. One of these features is their business-oriented mindset that is transmitted through generations over time. Unlike parents of most communities who want their children to have highly paid jobs like doctors and engineers, Memoni parents want their children to follow their ancestor's footsteps and be involved in entrepreneurship and business. Values like trust, respect and networking are so much cherished among community members. Members who fail to adhere to these communal values will be ostracized, which may affect their social and economic successes in the long run (Abbasi & Aftab, 2019). Social connection is also much cherished among Memonis. This is reflected in the fact that young Memonis need permission of elders to live away from their parents. Compared to Bohras and Khojas, however, Memonis have more freedom and independency in decision making than the Khojas and Bohras who strictly follow the orders of their elders and religious leaders (O'Sullivan, 2023b). The elder Memonis encourage their youth to get involved in the social and economic issues of the community, with instilled mindset of high level of frugality on materialistic life reflected in their way of living and lifestyle. They work in business under the supervision of a father or elder brother, with a higher chance of living together even when they get married. Apart from business, Memonis nowadays are renowned participants in manufacturing, retailing, textile/clothing, food and the financial sector in Pakistan. They are active in the Pakistani Stock Market, which is often linked with the names of Memonis (Abbasi et al, 2023).

Another prominent feature among Memonis is their adherence to their local system known as 'Jamaat'. Jamaat is described as a cooperate system that runs the religious, social and commercial life of the community lead by its religious leaders, luminaries, intelligentsia and societal magnates (O'Sullivan, 2023a; O'Sullivan, 2023b). The word 'Jamaat' goes back etymologically to an Arab origin; it comes from the Arabic word 'Jam?ah.' - 'one group or collective endeavor'. Alternatively, the word 'panchayat' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'Jamaat' among some communities in subcontinental India. The Jamaat as a form of life reflects that the community

identifies itself and lives as one unique inseparable group. The membership to a certain Jamaat is regulated by birth, and it determines the key aspects in the individual's life like residence, marriage, work, wealth, and place of worship. As an authority, the Jamaat's task is to work for the greater good and welfare of the community, and to strengthen the relationships between its community members by running different activities such as those related to trusts, property, monetary contribution and educational institutions as well as to settle dispute among members (Oishi, 1999; Thaplawala, 2016; O'Sullivan, 2023b). The affiliation of each Memoni to a certain Jamaat, in fact, explains the innate merit reported about and by Memonis that they do not spend much since they prioritize the interest of the 'Jamaat' rather than individual interests. Memoni capital is specifically used to build service institutions and to educate the community, including women who are among the most successful female entrepreneurs in Pakistan (Abbasi & Zaki, 2019). This can also be witnessed in the contributions of the wealthy Memonis to pay for the education of Memoni students besides the building of service institutions like mosques, schools, hospitals and banks. One very ancient example of the Jamaat effort to establish service institutions is the foundation of banks like the Muslim Commercial Bank by Adamji Haji Daud in 1947 (O'Sullivan, 2023b). Since the community is deeply involved in business and trade, Jamaat members help individuals to establish business and become successful in the market. The unemployed Memonis are hired and scaffolded by established Memonis till they can get well on their way in life.

Since their very early past, the efforts of Memoni Jamaats have made a tangible touch in serval areas (Thaplawala, 2009). Memonis had control of different positions in different types of businesses in Bombay such as shop keeping, broking, furniture trading, and timber dealing. They were also involved in making endowment 'Waqf' to support poor pilgrimages (Oishi,1999). By the threshold of the twentieth century, they, along with other Muslim communities like Bohra and Khoja, made more than 40,000 individuals, which equals around 25% of the Muslim population in Bombay. Their commercial activities spread beyond the Indian Ocean up to the South China Sea and Europe with some entrepreneurs having their own companies. A famous cited example is the Chotani Memoni Family, who managed in three generations to have branches of their business in several cities around the globe including San Francisco and London (O'Sullivan, 2023b). Memonis have also imprinted a tangible touch in building mosques. Serval famous mosques built by Memoni Jamaats have been reported as remarkable architectural landmarks such as Zakari Masjid of Calcutta, Halai Memoni Masjid in Bombay, Minara Masjid of Bombay, New Memon Masjid of Karachi, Hajji Zakaryia Masjid in Bombay and Bitul Muqarram Masjid of Dacca (Abbasi & Aftab, 2019; O'Sullivan, 2023a; O'Sullivan, 2023b). Memonis also built the Calcutta's Jama Masjid, alternatively known as Nakhodha Masjid in reference to the Memonis involved in the seafaring business, including the pilgrimage line to Mecca and Madinah. Memonis also helped in buildings mosques in diaspora such as those in South America, Europe and Africa. In collaboration with other Muslim communities in Japan, they managed to build the first mosque in Japan in the early1930s (O'Sullivan, 2023b). Apart from mosques, they are also involved in building schools, colleges, banks, hospitals, dispensaries, and Islamic centers whether in their

homeland or in diaspora to attend to the needs of their community in the best way possible (Thaplawala, 2009). One unique example of efforts made by Memoni colonies to attend to their needs and challenges in diaspora is the foundation of the Memon Association in UK in 1973 and the foundation of the first center in London that was inaugurated by Prince Charles.

A question worth asking here if the Jamaat system was introduced to replace the caste system inherited from Hindu heritage. This possibility is feasible since the influence of some Hindu practices have been contested even after the conversion of Muslim communities to Islam. O'Sullivan (2023b) described the Jamaat' system as a 'corporate caste institution' affirming that Memonis and other Muslim communities were known of keeping some Hindu customary practices. Compared to Memonis and Khoja, the Bohras were known of having less stringency in drawing the line between Islamic law and Hindu custom with more use of Hindu practices than other communities, which made the British authority grant them more freedom and privileges within the colonial system. It is said that the rubric of laws in Muslim communities in subcontinental India comes from both caste practice and religion scripture due to the fact that Muslim communities lived in areas of Hindu control (O'Sullivan, 2018; O'Sullivan, 2021). One contested practice is the one that deprives females from inheritance, which is starkly against Islamic laws that grant all Muslims, irrespective of their gender, their full right of inheritance. This made some Jamaat members, females in particular, criticize caste-based Jamaat customs until they were granted their full inheritance according to Islamic law. Another practice is the dowry given to the bride prior to her move to her husband's house. Unlike in many Muslim communities elsewhere, Muslim communities in sub-continental India and nearby areas hold the practice of having fathers pay their daughters' dowry. This is believed to come from a Hindu practice called 'stridhan' that was used as a form of gift given to the bride by her father and family members. The dispute with Jamaat can also be witnessed on an individual level. Although the Jamaat system empathizes social relationship and connection among its individual members, some dissident members might be viewed as a menace to the hierarchy and authority of the Jamaat due to the dispute they may ensue against the Jamaat. Several times the relationship between the Jamaat and some individuals has witnessed ups and downs with some cases ending up in court to be settled. Such occasional disputes and clashes are in fact the exception to the common norm since Jamaat has played a pivotal role in the flourished status of Memonis both as individuals and a community at different times and in diverse zones (Thaplawala, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2023b).

The Jamaats' effort to work for the greater good of their communities goes beyond their local communities to reach other fellow Muslims in other areas. Moved by their patriotism for Islam, Memonis, both leaders and community members, realized the shared ideological orientation with the Ottoman Empire, viewing it as a better option for their socio-economic survival than the western colonial powers (O'Sullivan, 2016; O'Sullivan, 2023b). Thus, they have played a significant role in their commitment to the relief movement of the Ottoman Empire against its war with the imperial powers. The supporters of this movement included Memoni affluent merchants and Nakhoodas (captains) who held meetings and fund raisings in cities like Bombay, Calcutta, Rampur and Bhopal. A famous cited example is the support of the magnate Seth Haji Muhammad Chotani, who was actively involved in the Ottoman relief campaign (O'Sullivan, 2023b). Memonis

were also involved in the Indian strife to gain independence against the imperial powers, giving support to Mahatma Gandhi in his fight against the British hegemony (Thaplawala, 2009).

MAIMANIS AND MEMONIS: HISTORICAL, CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC CONNECTION

Before the arrival of the European imperial presence in the Indian subcontinent, the western part of the Indian Ocean was dominated by Muslim captains from different Muslim sub-Indian mercantile communities. These captains were selected by the ships' owners or merchant families to run the voyages of their commodities; some of these families are of Arab, Turkish and Persian origin (Oishi, 1999). Prominent sub-Indian mercantile communities actively involved in trade and voyages are Memonis, Khojas and Bohras. Tracing the origin of these names takes the term Memoni to the Arabic word Mu'amin 'believer', the term Bohra to the Gujrati word vohara 'trader', and the term Khoja to the Persian word khawaja 'master' (O'Sullivan, 2023b). All three mercantile groups belong to different Islamic schools, the Sunni Memonis (with some Shiite Memonis) and the Shiite Khojas and Bohras; all three were able to be adaptive to the new colonial system to obtain particular privileges and benefits, with the Bohras taking the lead among all three groups (O'Sullivan, 2021). Colonial officials and Muslim commentators emphasize that their caste institutions and religious doctrines made these communities separate from other currents of Islam, which gave them a distinctive form and nature compared to other groups in the Indian Subcontinent (O'Sullivan, 2016). They were known of their active involvement in various commercial activities that go beyond the Indian Ocean, with some referred to as 'merchant princes', owning their own vessels they used in various types of mercantile activities. Such prosperous status, however, started to decline with the arrival of the British who instigated several battels with the locals who strived to defend their homeland. A number of battels are cited upon the arrival of the British to the Sindh such the Battle of Mianim, the Battle of Dubbo and the Battle of Hyderabad that resulted in the defeat of the Talpur Mirs of Sindh and the annexation of Sindhi by the British (Shah et al., 2024). Upon the annexation of Sindh, the British made the East Indian Company in full control of the subcontinent through which they imposed the cultural and linguistic colonial ideology of the British. The new realty imposed in Sindh gave birth to several cultural, architectural and linguistic changes that introduced British value system in the region, whose influence on shaping the identity and cultural identity of Sindh continues until present time (O'Sullivan, 2023a; O'Sullivan, 2023b).

The prominence of these communities declined even more when the anarchy in the Mughal heartland caused detachment of Gujarat from the hinterland. Subsequently, it was underpinned by the transferring of the commercial center from Surat to Bombay by the British who were notoriously well known for their nefarious activities and machination for control over Muslim communities in the Indian subcontinent (O'Sullivan, 2023b). The decline of Surat as the commercial center during the Mughal period from the mid eighteenth century coincided with a commercial thrive of Bombay supported by the British (Oishi, 1999; O'Sullivan, 2023b). This has

consequently resulted into a gradual increase in the number of British ships and domination of shipping by certain companies alongside a noticeable decrease in the number of Indian ships, leaving a tiny share of trade left to native ships. Such decline was reflected in the number of ships owned by Muslim and Arab merchants, who owned 31 ships only, a sum that makes around 16% of the ships arriving at and departing the Bombay port during the eighteenth century (Oishi,1999). Supported by other factors like famine and security, the new reality has caused these communities to migrate to new zones both within the Indian subcontinent and overseas, which made them polarize to different zones (Thaplawala, 2011; Shan et. al., 2024).

The new changes imposed by the British colonization did not skip the linguistic aspect. Before their arrival, Persian was the official language of Sindh having around 30.26 million speakers in Pakistan and 1.68 million in India (Shan et al, 2024). To maintain good communication with the locals, the British chose to run their administration by using an indigenous language instead of Persian. They studied the local vernaculars with focus geared towards Sindhi, also referred to as Scindee, Scinde, or Scindhee. Since Sindhi was written differently by different ethnicities using a 52 lettered Perso-Arbic script, a committee was formed to standardize its alphabet and disseminate it among the mass (O'Sullivan, 2021). They codified its script and gave it an official status that entitles its use in printing books and as a medium of instruction in the educational system. The new script was used and polarized among all communities that used to have their own script of writing Sindhi, including Memonis. Civil servants were also required to learn Sindhi and use it in the official organizations (Shan et al, 2024).

Such alteration in the socio-economic changes, however, did not render the Muslim communities like Memonis, Khojas and Bohras passive nor static to the new reality. Unlike the Memonis and Khojas, however, the Bohras established longstanding relations with the British and thus presented less difficulties for the colonial officials which in turn gave the Bohras more advantages and freedom of movement within the colonial legal system. All three communities continued their financial operations and adapted to the new sociopolitical changes incurred by colonization and surrounding circumstances. The response of these Muslim communities was collaborative and antagonistic with forms of dependence and confrontation, producing recurrent conflict with the British hegemony in one side and taking advantage of the situation in another. (Oishi,1999; O'Sullivan, 2023a). They choose certain industries and concentrated on them to make flourishing success. One of the businesses they concentrated on was the pilgrims transportation to Mecca, in which they managed to compete with Europeans companies like the British India Steam Navigation and the Peninsular & Oriental Company, which had severe competition by the launch of steam vessels. The Muslim companies, however, had the upper hand and control of pilgrimage transportation like Hajji Cassum Company and the Bombay and Persia Steam Navigation Company. The use of the communal wealth of these three groups helped in flourishing mass pilgrimage whether to Mecca or to the shrine cities in Iraq. Southern Iraq became a site of Bohra, Khoja and some Memoni commercial operations in the final decades of Ottoman rule who made pilgrimage institutions and firms that launched railways and tram networks. Their success stems from the fact that they were supported by the Hijaz authorities under the Ottoman governor (O'Sullivan, 2023b).

Similar to Khojas and Bohras, the new situation imposed by the colonial system besides other factors like famine, lack of security, and pursuit of better zones for business and improving standards of living has caused lots of immigration among Memonis to several parts in and out of subcontinental India. Not only academic resources, but also community narrations confirm such incidents of immigrations, which tend to be inter-generationally transmitted. It is widely acknowledged that Memonis have been well-known to be mostly investors and merchants who tend to move to different places and establish trade and business under the patronage of a strong and just ruler who deals with them as his protégé. One noteworthy case in this context is the narration made by Memonis in Pakistan of some of their ancestors' immigration from mainland Pakistan to Gwadar during the late 1700 due to the decline of trade and prosperity in their native homeland. As Gwadar was under the patronage of the Sultan of Oman, the peace and prosperity the Sultan offered to Memonis in Gwadar against colonial powers played a key role in encouraging this immigration (O'Sullivan, 2023b). The strategic location of Oman as the gate to other countries in Arabia has equally contributed to this immigration. Upon their settlement in Gwadar, some Memonis gave up their native Memoni names and adopted Baluch ones instead as a means to fit in and fully assimilate into the Gwadar society, and to avoid discrimination and social problems in prospect. They were actively involved in the food business, namely in exporting wheat and rice to Oman via their own vessels. Those vessels were outside the scope of the British who were striving to impose export tariffs on exported commodities, and to get their control over trade and business in the area. Those Memonis ended up settling in Oman, mainly in the city of Matrah, the stronghold of trade between Oman and its neighboring countries. Interestingly, Matrah has been the main area where the Maimani ethnicity lived before some of its members dispersed to other areas within the capital Muscat and other nearby areas (Al Jahdhami, 2022),.

A question of interest here is whether Maimanis in Oman can be traced back to those Memonis who moved to Oman through Gwadar and acculturated to the language and culture in the new homeland. This possibility is feasible since some Maimanis in Oman hold to the view that they are part of the Baluch ethnicity that moved to Oman (Al Jahdhami, 2022), which goes in line with the narration of Pakistani Memonis that some of their ancestors moved to Gwadar, and adopted Baluch names with some reaching up to Oman. This can be backed by the fact that the Maimani ethnicity in Oman has been involved in mercantile activities from time memorial, which seems to mark one common aspect between both ethnicities. It also justifies the use of the British Indian Rupees as the currency of transactions between Omanis and foreign traders during those days, as narrated and confirmed by Omani traders and elders from that era. Having said that, it is not unlikely that the Maimani ethnicity in Oman represents one of the Memoni groups that depicts the Memoni extension to several areas in the globe including Arabia. If this question is put aside for a while, and focus is geared towards the linguistic aspect, results show a considerable resemblance in the varieties used by Maimanis in Oman and Memonis in Pakistan with some differences in the segmental or lexical level. The following table shows the Swadesh word list in both Maimani and Memoni, where similarities can be easily noticed. Common words used by both varieties are shown in normal font while those different ones are shown in bold.

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Table 2. Equivalents to the Swadesh one hundred wordlist in Maimani and Memoni respectively.

S.No.	Swadesh	Maimani	Memoni
1	I	**ama:ja/ a:m**	**a:w**
2	you	tu	tu/tum/ai
3	we	asa:	asa:/pa:
4	this	hi	hi/i
5	that	**hutti**	**u**
6	who	Ker/a:m	ker
7	what	Kurili/ kʊrʊ	kroh/ kro
8	not	na	na /na:
9	all	**sabbih**	**badʒuwi/badhu/asa:p/badaj**
10	many	**Wadi/gʊnʊwi**	**Bahuj/gana:/kıtra/ga:h**
11	one	hakkuh	Hakru/ akru
12	two	ɓuh/ ɓoh	ɓu/ ɓoh
13	big	wadʊwıh	wadʊh
14	long	**dɪgʊwıh**	**lambu**
15	small	nandʊwıh	nandʊ
16	woman	ɓa:jri	ɓa:jri
17	man	mard	mahru/ma:ru
18	person	ma:ruh	mahru/ʒa:nu/qwoj
19	fish	mahtʃıh	matʃı/ matʃlı
20	bird	**dʒılkʰri/pakʰ**	**parıngu/pıngo/parındo**
21	dog	kʊttuh	kʊttu
22	louse	**dʒujuh- dʒuj**	**Tolo**
23	tree	**Naxl/ ʒa:r**	**dʒhar/da:k**
24	seed	**da:nuh**	**pidʒu**
25	leaf	**Warquh/pannu**	**pattu/**
26	root	**dʒantah/ka:rʊm**	**dʒʊr/murju**
27	bark (of a tree)	**Kantuh/ giru**	**dʒha:rdıtanu**
28	skin	tʃamrı	ʃa:mrı/ dʒa:mrı/dʒa:mru
29	flesh	gɔ:hʃıt	gɔ:s/ gɔ:ʃt
30	blood	**rat̪**	**hun**
31	bone	hadʊ̀h	hadî/ hadʊ
32	grease	**tʃarbi**	**tʃekaj**
33	egg	a:nuh	Inu/indu
34	(animal) horn	sıŋ/ka:nt	sıŋgru/horn
35	tail	dʊmb	utʃʊri/ putʃ/dʊmbu
36	feather	pa*kʰ*ah/ pa*kʰ*	par
37	hair	wa:r	wa:r
38	head	matʰu	matʰu
39	ear	kʰan	kʰan
40	eye	akʰ	akʰi

41	nose	ɲakʰ	ɲak
42	mouth	**wa:t**	**mu**
43	tooth	ɗand	ɗand
44	tongue	zʊba:n	dʒɪb/ dʒaba:n/zaba:n
45	fingernail	**nuh**	**hadʒanakʊn /na:kun**
46	foot	pagʰ	pagʰ
47	knee	**munuh**	**go:tren/ go:ta/gotno**
48	hand	hatʰ	hatʰ
49	belly	peʈʰ	peʈʃʊtʰi /pet
50	neck	Niri/ gardın	gargın/ gardın
51	chest	tʃa:tih	tʃa:ti /sinu
52	heart	dıl	dıl
53	liver	petuh	kele:dʒu/bıttʰu/dʒɪgar/ kale:dʒi
54	drink (V)	**bjetuh**	**e:nu/ pjo/pa:jgın**
55	eat (V)	keɪtʊh	ke:nu/ tʃe:nu/ka:jgın
56	bite (V)	**ʃʰakkʊdʒɪjʊ**	**Badku/dʒeraba:rnu/bigın/ tʃabigın**
57	see (V)	ɲja:retuh	ɲaharnu/ ısnu/ɲa:ru
58	hear (V)	sʊnetuh	sunu /sonu/sʊru
59	know (V)	**ɓʊdʒetuh**	**dʒa:rnu/ dʒarnu/ samadʒ**
60	sleep (V)	sʊmmetuh	sʊmnu /sumi
61	die (V)	maretuh	marnu /mari
62	kill (V)	ma:retuh	ma:rnu/ma:ridʒınu/ m:arivıdʒu
63	swim (V)	**weɲdʒetuh**	**Tarnu/te:rnu/te:r**
64	fly (V)	udɗetuh	udɲu/ure:tu
65	walk (V)	ha:ljtuh	halnu/hale:tu
66	come (V)	aʃetuh	atʃnu/ heda:dʒ/ atʃnu/atʃ
67	lie (down) (V)	**aram karituh/lıtjiwi**	**sʊmnu/ hotʰo/ unu/le:t**
68	sit (V)	Vjetu /wituwi	Venu/Va:j
69	stand (V)	**Ubjetuh/ ubtuwı**	**uperınu/ubhu**
70	give (V)	ɗjetʊh/ ɗenetʊ	ɗenʊ /de:
71	say (V)	ʃʰejetuh	tʃʰenu/ tʃʰo/ dʒunu
72	burn (V)	ɓa:retuh	ɓa:rnu
73	sun	**dih**	**surıt / surʊt/ suradʒ**
74	moon	ʃand/ tʃand	dʒand/ dʒa:n/ tʃa:n
75	star	ta:rʊh	sıta:rʊ/ ta:rah
76	water	pa:ni	pa:ni
77	rain	**mih/ mi**	**versa:d/ nej/ba:rıʃ**
78	stone	**bahanuh**	**Pa:nu/patʰar**
79	sand	**ra:juh**	**Mıtti /re:ti/matti**
80	earth	Zamin/zmin	dʒemin/ dʒemni/zamin
81	cloud	**ma:rlu**	**wa:ɖiru/asma:d/ba:dıl/wa:ɖu**

82	smoke	**duxan/ ta:ruh**	**ɖwa:nuh/ ɖuwah**
83	fire	**ʈʰa:nduh**	**a:gʰ**
84	ash	**rama:dih/trɪja:l**	**wa:ni/ ra:gʰ**
85	path	wa:t/ rastu	rastu/tariku
86	mountain	**dʒabalih/dɒngʊr**	**faha:r**
87	red	**raʈu**	**la:g/ la:l**
88	green	**sa:w**	**lɪlo/haru**
89	yellow	**Hajdah/ hajduh**	**kɪpɪru/ pɪru/ pɪlu**
90	white	**aʃuh/ atʃu**	**sʊpʰe:d /turu/ sapʰe:d**
91	black	ka:ruh	ka:ru
92	night	radʒuh/ ra:t	ra:t/ radʒuh
93	hot	**kosuwi**	**garam**
94	cold	ʈʰaɖuwi	ʈʰaɖu/ʈʰandu
95	full	**bar*dʒ*iwi**	**Uruh /bare:lu**
96	new	na:wwi	na:wwuh/ne:ju
97	good	**ɯntʃuh/ ɯntʃuwi**	**sa:ru**
98	round	dwa:r/ gol	gol
99	dry	sʊkkujah/ sʊkkʊwi	sʊkku/ sʊkka:j
100	name	na:lu	na:m/ na:lʊh

The similarities in the lexical level shown in the above table cannot go unnoticed. Even some of the uncommon words (those shown in bold) are familiar to the speakers of the other variety; they were described as 'familiar but not in use'. Such familiarity enables a good rate of mutual intelligibility between the ethnic languages of both groups, which reflects dialectal differences rather than separate languages. It is generally expressed that such discrepancy depicts another variety of the same language spoken by another group of the same speech community. Those uncommon words are believed to be the byproduct of contact with local languages, causing a small-scale divergence from other varieties. Since Maimanis have had language contact with Arabic and Lawati, they imported Arabic and Lawati words into their native lexicon. By the same token, Memoni spoken in Pakistan has been affected by Urdu and other nearby languages. This observation makes the view that takes Maimani linage to a subcontinental Indian origin worthy of investigation indeed. Since the Memoni community has spread over different scattered zones around the globe producing several varieties of Memoni (Thaplawala, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2023b), it is very likely that the spoken variety used by those migrating to Oman has undergone certain changes that made it somewhat different from the variety used originally at home. Worth mentioning in this context is what Oishi (1999) said regarding the use of the term 'Maimani'; the famous bibliographer Abdull Aziz Al-Maimani has used the term 'Maimani' to refer to Memonis in diaspora in different parts of the world. This very appellation is also said to be used among Memonis themselves in the late nineteenth-century and the twentieth century in Zanzibar, who originally came from Rajkot, one of the largest cities in the Indian state of Gujarat and the capital of Kathiawar (Oishi, 1999). Like other migrating Memoni groups, it is likely that the group migrating to Oman kept the same ethnic appellation to identify itself in the new homeland. Its

spoken variety, however, was influenced by languages spoken in the same locality, namely Arabic and Lawati. Additionally, as one case depicting the unstable relationship between different Memoni groups and Jamaat, O'Sullivan (2023b) gave reference to a benevolent charitable association in Mauritius made of sixty Memoni members by the name of 'Cutchee Maiman Society' that was formed for a charitable and educational purposes. It had to settle certain clashes in court with a Kachchhi Memoni shipping firm as well as with other Memoni Jamaats over endowment and control of mosques. Such name of this organization no doubt reflects some connection of its Memoni members to the term Maimani. Likewise, a noteworthy observation is use of the term 'Maimani' by some Memoni speakers to refer to their language, including some of the participants asked to provide data for the study beforehand. This suggests that the label 'Maimani' is a larger term that seems to encompass both Maimanis and Memonis, which could be used to refer to their ethnic language too. One may argue that both ethnicities happen to be namesakes by coincidence. This possibility, nonetheless, is overridden by the shared linguistic aspect that shows common lexical items with a good rate of mutual intelligibility. A more plausible analysis would suggest the likeliness of having the original ethnic appellation, whether Maimani or Memoni, acquire certain changes that produced several forms (Maimani vs. Memoni), especially that the large community has diffused to different zones over a period of time (Thaplawala, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2023b),

Commonalties between the Maimani and Memoni ethnicities are also found in the cultural level. Both communities have strong bonds to a communal center that brings all community members to work for the greater good of the community via the 'Jamaat' system. The Jamaat is so much in action among Memonis reflected in the obligatory support to communal efforts to help individuals, and to sustain the social and economic development of the community. Although it is does not have the same structure, nature and power, the essence of the Jamaat system is found among the Maimani community in Oman. Members have the sense of belonging to the community and feels for its greater good. One concrete example reflecting the Jamaat system is the foundation of a Maimani charity fund for the Maimani community in Oman. It is meant to provide financial support to community members via funds made by community members. This weak form of the Jamaat system among Maimanis as opposed to Memonis is in fact inevitable for several reasons. It is highlighted that although the Jamaat system has more or less the same fundamentals among all Muslim communities, different Jamaats, even those within the bigger 'Memoni' community, have acquired their own features and have their own formulas and forms that may differ from other Jamaats within the same community. Second, it is said that Jamaats do not have the same influence over its members across all communities. O'Sullivan (2023b) confirmed that Memonis have more flexibility as far as Jamaat system is concerned compared to other Muslim communities like Bohras and Khojas who strictly adhere to their Jamaat system. Even the elite in native homelands are cited to challenge some of the Jamaat rules like allowing intermarriage, for instance. Moreover, the Jamaat system is said to be weaker among community members in diaspora since community members have more freedom that allows them to react against the Jamaat rules and regulations. As a byproduct of immigration to several zones around the globe, it is often condemned that there

is lack of a clear Jamaat center of Memoni diaspora, and the effect of Jamaat has become weaker over time (Thaplawala, 2016).

Another cultural commonalty between Maimanis and Memonis is their involvement in trade and mercantile activities. It is well established that the Memoni community is very well known for its deep connection to trade and business whether in the homeland or in diaspora (Thaplawala, 2016; O'Sullivan, 2023b). Similarly, the Maimani community in Oman has been well known for their involvement in trade , mainly trade of ore, gold and jewelries, through which they were so much in contact with other ethnicities, particularly Lawatis who themselves have been involved in trade and mercantile activities. In fact, an important aspect of the Maimani story would be untold if the cultural and linguistic resemblance of Maimani to Lawati is not addressed. As the city of Matrah was the first locale of residence for both ethnicities in Oman, Lawatis have been so much in contact with Maimanis. Their adjacent place of residence besides the inter-ethnic trade yielded an intense contact between Maimanis and Lawatis whose impact is evident in the linguistic level. It originated so many common words used in the ethnic language of both communities (Al Lawati, 2018). Nowadays Lawati and Maimani are mutually intelligible to their speakers with differences mainly phonological and lexical in nature, which suggests that Maimani and Lawati are in fact two varieties of one language (Al Jahdhami, 2022). Not so different from Maimani, it is unfortunate that mainly the elder generation of Lawatis speak their ethnic language with a smaller number of young speakers left (Al Lawati, 2018).The two ethnicities, however, identify themselves as two separate ethnic groups whose paths do not seem to come across one another. Unlike Maimanis, Lawatis are divided into more than twenty subgroups with each having its own Jamaat such as Sajwani, Babwani, Za'aabi, Al Issa and Abdawani, to name a few. Each Jamaat has its own charity fund that serves the Jamaat members, but all Jamaats have a central reference (i.e. chieftain) they refer to in terms of social and religious affairs.

Likewise their neighboring Maimanis, the origin of Lawatis is contested with two main narratives; one narration takes them back to an Arab ancestry while another traces them back to a subcontinental Indian origin. Tracing the designation 'Lawati' shows that it replaced the original designation 'Hyderabadis' that was first used to refer to the community members to highlight the homeland from which they came and brought their culture. As a modern appellation, 'Lawati' ruled out the original appellation 'Hyderabadis' and came in use. Based on this view, it is believed that Lawatis have migrated from the Indian subcontinent, and settled in Oman around four hundred years ago (Velari, 2010; Salman & Kharusi, 2012). This view is supported linguistically since the Lawatis admit that their language is based on the Sindhi language, which is believed to be the mother language of other Indo-Iranian languages spoken in Oman such as Maimani and Zadjali (Al Lawati, 2018). Its original name 'Khoja' is said to have different meanings such as master, foreigner, and noble (Salman & Kharusi, 2011; Al Lawati, 2018; O'Sullivan, 2023b). According to Al Lawati (2018), it is believed to be a mixture of Sindhi, Kutchi, Farsi and Arabic, which came to be known as 'Khojakhi'. The term 'Khojakhi' was later Arabicized to be 'Khojiyyah' and came in use albeit with less frequency compared to Lawati. Lawati is an unwritten language with very

scanty literature; Al Lawati (2018) made reference to few elegies addressing the Prophet Mohammed peace be upon him and his noble family written in both Sindhi and Arabic script.

Some Lawatis, however, still adopt the Arab-origin narration that emphasizes their emigration from the Arab world and acculturation to the subcontinental Indian culture. More precisely, one view stresses the belief that Lawatis originally emigrated from Libya to Sindh eons ago, and settled there years on end that they fully assimilated into the culture of the new homeland and acquired its native language over several generations (Al Lawati, 2020). At some point in time, they had a reverse migration to the Arab world, namely to Oman rather than Libya around more than 400 years ago. Another related narration traces them back to their great grandfather 'Sama bin Lue'i', who emigrated from Oman to Multan and spread Islam there. The Hyderabadi Lawatis were those who transferred from Multan to Hyderabad, the new capital of Sindh that was founded in 1182 after the fall of Neroon Koot. Upon their settlement, they mixed with the natives of Sindh and had intermarriage with the Talboor family that was ruling Sindh. They lead a flourished life in Sindh, but the instability brought by the British colonization forced them to reverse-migrate to Oman where they settled for keeps. The second name of their great grandfather 'Lue'i' has undergone several segmental changes that renders it 'lutti', which latter developed into the nowadays appellation 'Lawati (Al Lawati, 2020). Another view declares that Sama bin Lue'i himself gave his offspring such appellation, which came to be the common label of the community (Al Lawati, 2018). Whether it was a homecoming to the Arab world or mass immigration from the Indian subcontinent to Oman, Lawatis established the so-called 'Sur Alwatiya' 'The fortified neighborhood of Lawatis' as their place of residence upon their arrival in Oman. It was built based on the Omani architectural style in the era of the Omani Imam Omar bin Al Khattab AL Kharusi. Fortified with four forts used for protection, such confinement played a great role in saving their language for decades, especially among the female Lawatis who had no contact whatsoever with non-Lawatis. Until recent years, cases were cited of monolingual elder Lawaits who have very scanty knowledge of Arabic language due to flimsy exposure to Arabic. Not only the language of Lawatis is unique but their culture too, which can be noticed in their own neighborhood and graveyard in Matrah.

An attempt to trace back the connection between Lawatis and Maimanis based on community's viva voce narrations confirms the existence of shared beliefs regarding inter-ethnic similarities due to shared locality in Oman, and due to emigrational, cultural and commercial contact. However, they define themselves as two separate ethnicities as far as origin is concerned. Connection between them was mainly based on domiciliary and business contact, especially that both were known of their activities in ores and gold. The possibility of originating from the same domicile of origin in ancient India is somewhat plausible to some community members. Yet, it is not easy to be confirmed or utterly rejected. What both communities emphasize is the view that they come from different ancestries that could have come from the same proximity. Likewise, the Arab-linage narration of both communities do not match one another, with each having its own route. Linguistically, they believe that they speak different languages that happen to have so much in

common due to intense contact between the two ethnicities over a long period of time. With that said, two possibilities can be presented here. On one hand, the ancient trajectories of both ethnicities were somewhat shared at a certain point in time and later diverged for some reasons. On another, the contact between the two ethnicities was so intense that it resulted in shared commonalties in the cultural and linguistic aspects. Which possibility overrides the other is indeed problematic to vindicate, which makes it subject to further research and scrutiny. What makes the situation even more problematic is the fact that some Maimanis adopt the Baluchi related origin while others empathize their origin to an Arab ancestry. On the other hand, as one narration traces Lawatis to an Arab ancestry, no Lawati adopts the view that links them to Baluchis, believing unanimously that they are too far from Baluch.

The label 'Khoja' that is used to refer to the ethnic language of Lawatis is indeed worthy of investigation. The same exact term is used as an ethnic appellation of one of the Muslim communities addressed by O'Sullivan in several of his works including his recent book 'No Birds of Passage: A History of Gujarati Muslim Business Communities. O'Sullivan (2023b) addressed several aspects of the Memoni and Khoja communities and their adaptation to the new colonial system imposed by the British. He, however, did not touch on the linguistic aspect of the Khoja community other than mentioning having their ethnic language as a distinctive feature of the community. Investigating historical and linguistic links between the Khoja community in India and the Lawati community in Oman will surely unfold some possible common features about both communities, especially that one narration regarding the linage of Lawatis in Oman traces them back to Sindh and Gujarat where the Khoja have originated from (Valeri, 2010; Salman & Kharusi, 2012). This supposition is even supported by the fact that one of designations used to refer to Lawati speakers, among Hyderabadis and Lawatis, is Khojas. Besides, both groups belong to the same Islamic school- the Shiite sect of Islam (Salman & Kharusi, 2012; O'Sullivan, 2023b). As a matter of fact, O'Sullivan (2023b) made reference to such possible blood and religious relationship between the Khojas in India and Lawatis in Oman via issues related to their Jamaat system. He emphasized that dispute among Jamaat in homeland India affects the Jamaat elsewhere. During the control of Agha Khan I, about four hundred Khojas seceded from the Ismaili Khoja Jamaat in India, and declared their own claim and full control and authority on their mosque in Muscat. After correspondence with the authority in Oman on this matter, the Agha Kahn I condemned the stand of Sultan of Oman at that time. The Sultan gave the Jamaat in Muscat its full control of its own Masjid in the city of Matrah, whereas the Agha considered this Jamaat seceded from the central Jamaat in India (O'Sullivan, 2023b). This incident suggests a form of connection to the Khoja in India, irrespective of whether Lawatis were originally Arabs who moved to subcontinental India, or they originally moved from subcontinental India to Oman.

By the same token, O'Sullivan (2023b) discussed several similarities between Memonis and Khojas in ancient India, one of which is the language used by some sub-groups of both ethnicities. Memonis who came from the Kutch region in Gujrat speak the same language spoken by Ismaili

Khoja, which is referred to as the Kutchi language or Kutchi Memoni. Similarly, Tekade et al (2010) stated that Muslim Kachhi who migrated from Sindh to Gujarat state of India speak a non-written language called Memoni, which is believed to be a mixture of Sindhi and Kachhi or Kutchi. Likewise, Salman and Kharusi (2012) highlighted that the ethnic language of Lawatis in Oman is known locally among its speakers as 'Khoja', and they believe that it is based on a dialect of Sindhi called Kachichi or Cutchi. Such intertwined state suggests that not only Maimanis and Memonis have a linguistic connection, but also Memonis, Maimanis, Lawatis and Khojas have a certain historical and linguistic link that is worthy of investigation. Since all four ethnicities have migratory history with somewhat similar contested linage narrations vis-à-vis their involvement in mercantile activities, further research regarding any possible historical and cultural connection among and across these ethnicities will surely reveal exotic outcomes that add another part of the untold story.

CONCLUSION

A glimpse over the historical, cultural and linguistic commonality between the Maimani ethnicity in Oman and the Memoni ethnicity in Pakistan suggests a possible related linage that goes very far in history. Linguistically, there is a certain degree of mutual intelligibility to each group's spoken variety expect that Maimani is influenced by Arabic and Memoni is influenced by Urdu. Lexical influence incurred by nearby languages is also witnessed in Memoni varieties spoken by Memoni diaspora in different zones around the globe. Both ethnicities adopt two possible narrations regarding their linage. One narration traces them back to subcontinental India from which they immigrated to other zones including Arabia. Another narration has a reverse direction stipulating that their Arab ancestors moved to subcontinental India and embraced it as their new homeland. The existence of some Hindu practices that caused some occasional disputes within the community as well as within other Muslim communities gives more support to the first narration. If they originally moved from the Arab world, and they were Muslims by birth, it is very unlikely that they would adapt the practices of the communities they strived to convert to Islam. It defeats the purpose since it suggests their adoption of practices that go against of what they preached among the communities in subcontinental India. The endurance of some of these practices suggests conversion from Hinduism to Islam rather than importing these practices upon their arrival to India. Irrespective of which narration decisively overrides the other, a question to pose here is whether Maimani and Memoni are two labels that happen to be similar by coincidence, or if they indeed belong to the same ethnicity. Shared features support their connection rather than the otherwise. In addition to the stark resemblance in the linguistic aspect, both communities have been involved in mercantile activities and are socially similar via their devotion to a unique local system called Jamaat. The label 'Maimani' appears to be used by some Memonis to define their language as well as to refer to Memonis in diaspora. As academic resources and communal narrations confirm mass immigrations of Memonis from subcontinental India to several dispersed local and foreign areas like Oman and Hijaz, it is very likely that the Maimani community in Oman embodies one of those groups that moved from the fatherland. With its different cultural and linguistic context, the new homeland created a new reality that caused certain cultural and

linguistic changes to the immigrating group that seem to distance gradually from its original kinfolk. Connection to ancestral history and identity seems to remain in few aspects such as the local Jamaat system, involvement in mercantile activities, ethno-linguistic appellation, and the linguistic side. This is supported by the fact that the Maimani community in Oman makes reference to community members in several Arab and non-Arab countries, one of which is Pakistan. Given the historical, cultural and linguistic similarities between the two ethnicities, it is likely that such reference is meant to identify Memonis in Pakistan, who may characterize the original kinfolk of Maimanis. This by no means utterly excludes the other narration that takes Maimanis and Memonis to an Arab ancestry. A flipped version of the story is possible since it exists in other communities like Khojas and Lawatis who have a certain degree of linkage to Miamanis and Memonis. As Lawatis and Khojas have a certain degree of connection to Maimanis and Memonis, exploring any historical and linguistic link among these communities is indeed worthy of investigation. Further research will reveal some lost episodes of the under-recounted story.

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