Saraiki Language

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Why in news?

The viral folk song Chhalrey Chhalrey Waal has spotlighted Saraiki, a language closely related to Punjabi yet distinct in its cultural and linguistic heritage.

- **Saraiki** – It is an Indo-Aryan language of the Lahnda group and is often described as "the language of the middle Indus valley".
- **Distribution** – It is spoken predominantly in southern Punjab in Pakistan, particularly in and around Multan, Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan and Muzaffargarh, as well as among migrant communities in India whose families migrated during Partition.
- The language extends into northern Sindh and parts of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- In India, it is spoken by some migrant communities in Punjab, Delhi, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, particularly descendants of Partition-era migrants.
- According to Pakistan's 2023 Census, about 12% of the country's population speaks Saraiki.
- **Origins & Identity** – Saraiki belongs to the Lahnda (Western Punjabi) group of languages. The term Lahnda means "land where the sun sets."
- The language was once commonly known as Multani.
- The term Saraiki gained prominence in the 1960s as speakers sought recognition of its separate linguistic and cultural identity.
- Beyond being a language, it serves as an important marker of the cultural identity of the Saraiki people and shares deep historical ties across the Indus Valley.
- **Scripts** – Primarily written in a modified Perso-Arabic script (Shahmukhi/Saraiki alphabet) in Pakistan, while Gurmukhi and Devanagari are used in India.
- Historically, the Multani script was also used.
- **Saraiki is different from Punjabi** – Although Saraiki sounds familiar to Punjabi speakers because of shared vocabulary and geographical proximity -
    - It has its own grammar, vocabulary, and phonetic system.
    - Saraiki is closely related to Punjabi, Sindhi and other northwestern languages.
- Wide regional varieties include Southern, Northern, Central, Sindhi, Jhangi, and Shahpuri Saraiki, each with slight differences in pronunciation.
- **Rich Literary & Musical Heritage** – The most celebrated Saraiki literary figure is *Khwaja Ghulam Farid*, a 19th-century Sufi poet known for devotional poetry (kafis).
- His works have been popularised by legendary singers such as Abida Parveen and Ustad Salamat Ali Khan.
- Music has played a crucial role in preserving and promoting the language.

Reference

[Indian Express | Story of Saraiki, the language of viral folk song ‘Chhalrey Chhalrey Waal’]