

## Cultural Background of the Languages Spoken in Swat

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### Abstract

*Swat has its peculiar historical, geographical, and cultural position. It is a place where various cultures and civilizations developed. Many ethnic and linguistic groups are living in Swat. Presently, nine different indigenous languages are spoken in Swat. Besides these indigenous languages Urdu as national lingua franca and English as international lingua franca is also spoken to some extent. These nine indigenous languages include Pukhto (Pashto), Gujro (Gujri), Torwali, Gawri, Ushojo, Qashqari, Badeshi, Shina Kohistani, and Western dialect of Kohistani. Among these languages the Ushojo and Badeshi are endangered languages. All of the languages spoken in Swat have a common cultural background. This shared cultural background is the main cause of linguistic commonalities. Religion, national language, media, education system and many other factors created these linguistic commonalities. Pashto being language of the majority and market play a role of lingua franca among various linguistic groups of Swat. That is why Pashto language and Pashtun culture has also influenced these indigenous languages and cultures. This article attempts to introduce languages spoken in Swat along with shared cultural background of these languages.*

**Keywords:** Swat, Languages, Pashto, Torwali, Gujri, Gawri, Ushojo, Qashqari, Badeshi, Shina, Kohistani

Swat Valley lies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Minimum elevation at the junction of Panjkora and Swat rivers is 2,000 feet while maximum elevation to the northern peaks ranges from 15,000 to 22,000 feet (Rome, 2009).

Swat has its importance on account of its specific geographical location, historical heritage, and social organization. Swat has remained the centre of various cultures and civilizations like Gandhara, Indo-Greek, Buddhism, Hindu Shahi and Islam. The presence of these civilizations can also be verified from archaeological remains and various ethnic groups living in Swat. Its natural beauty and abundance of resources have attracted the people of various cultures and languages.

### Languages spoken in Swat

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Besides the indigenous languages which are going to be discussed later on, imprints of Arabic language are also found in Swat after the invasion of Mahmud of Ghazna. A stone inscription (*katba*) of Ghaznavid period has been discovered which bears the Arabic script. Actually it is an inscription fixed on a wall of an ancient mosque. The year mentioned in the fifth line of this epigraph is 440 A.H/ 1048-49 A.D. (Khan, 1985) During 16<sup>th</sup> century Gabri and Yadri or Dari languages were also spoken in Swat. Rulers and elite class people were speaking Gabri while Dari/Persian was spoken by the subjects (Shah, 1971). Dari/Persian was also in vogue at that time and Dhegan and Yusufzai were speaking Persian language (Shah, 1971). During their early arrival into Swat, the Yusufzai were bilingual and fluent in Persian because, because in Afghanistan Persian and Pashto were main languages. As Pashto was their mother tongue and Persian was the main language of the country, therefore they were talking in both of these languages. Before the declaration of Pashto as official language of Swat state in 1937, Persian was the official language of Swat state. After 1937 Persian was replaced by Pashto, being declared as official language of the State. Various scholars and writers have briefly described the languages spoken in Swat. Fredrik Baarth has mentioned four Dardic languages in Swat State. They are Gawri, Torwali, and Eastern and Western dialect of Kohistai or Mayian (Barth, 1956). Makhдум Tasadduq Ahmad has written has described Gawri language by the name of Kohistani language. Further he describes that there are seven languages spoken in Swat that are different from Pashto. He has listed these languages: Garvi, Torwali, Chitrali, Gujri, Kohistani, Shina and Bati. The official language of the State is Pakhto. Excepting that of the Gujars the mother tongue of the people who are living in the Swat and Buner valleys is also Pakhto. Those in Kalam and Indus Kohistan are usually bilingual and Pakhto is mostly understood there (Ahmad, 1962). As already told the majority language is Pashto/Pukhto. Gujjars speak Gujri/Gujro language among themselves but also speak Pashto. majority of their new generation have lost their mother tongue and have adopted Pashto as their mother tongue or first language (Rome, 2009). Except Gujri and Pashto all of the remaining languages of Swat are generally known among the common people as Kohistani language(s).

As a whole nine indigenous languages are spoken in Swat. These include Pukhto (Pashto), Gujro (Gujri), Torwali, Gawri, Ushojo, Qashqari, Badeshi, Shina Kohistani (the language of the East bank of the Indus in Kohistan district) and Westren dialect of Kohistani language whic is called Kohistani, kohisti, Khili, Maiyon, Mair, Maiya, Shutun. In these languages the Ushojo and Badeshi are endangered languages and are going to be extinct.

Persian as ancient language of culture and literature of the whole region and Arabic being language of religious books have their impacts on the languages of Swat. Pashto being language of the majority serves as lingua franca. Being lingua franca and the official

language of the Swat state, Pashto also have its impact on the other languages of Swat. Before going on to further discuss the cultural background of these languages spoken in Swat, it is necessary to know about culture.

**Culture:** Those behaviours which are learnt by individuals as member of a group is called culture. First of all, British anthropologist Edward B. Tylor, in 1871 while defining the term culture explicitly referred it to that complex whole which includes, law, custom, beliefs, morals, art and knowledge and any other habits and capabilities acquired by an individual in a society (Academic American Encyclopedia, 1983).

**Cultural Area:** A cultural area is a geographic region within which the human population share similar culture traits, patterns of cultural ecology, and a similar way of life....cultural boundaries are often coincide with the physical barriers that separate human populations. Such barriers are bodies of water, mountain ranges, deserts, and large unpopulated stretches of land. Social, political, religious, or historical boundaries also may be preserved solely on the basis of strict adherence by one or both groups to traditional ways of life that culture could be seen as a ‘semi-civilization’.” (Academic American Encyclopedia, 1983).

**Language and Culture:** language is a very important component of human culture. Through language, meanings are being communicated by symbols and sound. Language is a foundation of all human cultures. All languages are complex and capable to transmit their cultures. With the advancement and complexity of culture language expands and provides flexibility. Culture is being acquired and learnt by the children through language. Culture and language are not related to genetic constitution or race. (Academic American Encyclopedia, 1983).

**Pashto (Pukhto):** Pashto belongs to the Indo-Iranian group which broadly falls under Indo-European group of languages. There are numerous groups of dialects in Pashto language. Two main groups/divisions of Pashto dialects are the Yusufzai and the Khatak or Qandahari dialects. Swat represents the Yusufzai dialect with its specific changes. In this regard Grierson writes that ‘North-Eastern dialect spoken in the independent Swat Valley has minor changes. Grierson has described minor changes in the Pashto dialect of Swat that in Swat *ts* and *ds* are pronounced *s* and *z* respectively. He has also written that the short *a* is merely used; a full *a* being used instead (Grierson (a), n.d.). Although Grierson has noted that /*ts*/ is pronounced as /*s*/ but it cannot be generalized because majority of the people articulate /*ts*/.

**Gujro (gujri):** Gujri which is locally known as Gujro is another majority language spoken in Swat. It is an Indo Aryan language. It belongs to central zone and is traced back to Indo-European, Indo-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Central zone, Rajasthani (Baart, 2001). Gujjars are living in scattered areas in Swat (Baart, 2001). Gujjars are scatterly found in

the whole Swat valley but abundantly living in Swat Kohistan. In 1987 their population in Swat Kohistan has been shown 20,000 (Baart, 2001) but actually it doesn't seem to be a correct number because they are more than this number. Estimating the actual number of gujjars in the area is difficult (Barth, 1956).

**Torwali:** It belongs to Indo-European, Indo-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Northwestern zone, Dardic group. This is the language of the Torwalis. They occupy the upper portion of the main Swat Valley for about sixty miles from Aryana to Chiroli, and the Chail Darrah, a valley running to the east from the Swat Valley a little above Chiroli. Torwali certainly belongs to the Dardic family, and the mode of formation of the feminine, and some of the verbal forms, show clearly that it is connected with Kashmiri. It is, however, much mixed up with Pashto forms. It is most nearly akin to the language of the Indus Valley which is described by Colonel Biddulph under the name of Gowro (Grierson (b), n.d.).

As mentioned above that 'Torwali is much mixed up with Pashto forms', the reason is that of a common geographical and cultural background. Medium of instruction in Swat Kohistan is Urdu or Pashto. In this regard Decker writes that 'Medium of instruction in Chail is Urdu/Pashto, (Decker: 2002).

**Gawri:** It is also known as Kalami, belongs to Indo-European, Indo-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Northwestern zone, Dardic, Kohistani group of languages. In the ethnographic and linguistic literature, the language has been given different names. Grierson states:

This language is spoken in the Swat Kohistan. It is the speech of the Gaware, a sept of which tribe is named Bashghar, a fact which has led Colonel Biddulph to erroneously call it 'Bushkarik,' and to call the entire tribe 'Bushkar.' The language is closely connected with that of the Torwal, who inhabit the Swat and Panjkora valleys lower down than the Gaware. It is evidently of dardic origin. (Grierson (b), n.d.).

As mentioned earlier that Pashto is the Languafranca of Swat, that is why names of a few villages, in non Pashto speaking areas, have been changed into Pashto. As the name of Rashkot has been changed into Pasho as Patrak, as mentioned by Biddulph in the above mentioned passage. About the advent of Islam in this area and the specifications of Gawri language, Grierson says.

With reference to the above remarks, the conversion of the people to Islam began in the time of Akhun Darweza, about three hundred years ago, and has been carried on up to within the last century. Garwi, like the other languages of the Swat Kohistan, has one remarkable peculiarity. The verb, except in the Future Tense, and in the Imperative mood, does not distinguish between the various persons. In some of these languages, e.g. Garwi (as described by Biddulph under

the name of Bushkarik), even number is not distinguished. On the other hand, throughout the conjugation of the verb, the distinction of gender is carefully maintained. Thus, in Garwi, the present tense of the verb ‘to be’ is, masculine, *thu*, feminine, *thi*. According to the gender of subject, each of these words means, I am, thou art, he, she, or it is, we are, you are, they are, as they context may require. (Grierson (b), n.d.).

The geographical area of Gawri/Kalami is Kalam and surrounding areas (Baart, 2004).

### **Multilingualism in Kalam**

Speakers of other languages like Kohistani, Khowar, Gujri and Pashto are also living in the geographical boundary of Gawri language that is why all Gawri speakers are bilingual (Rensch, Decker, & Hallberg, 2002). The people of Kalam as a second language generally communicate in Pashto and Urdu (Baart, 2004).

### **Kalami and Pashto**

From the above passage and similar other evidences one can say that Pashto has great impact on the Kohistani languages spoken in Swat. Although these Kohistani (Dardic) languages belong to the Indo-Aryan language group. Sindhi, Punjabi and Urdu have close genetic relations with Dardic languages as compared to Balochi and Pashto (Baart, 1997). But the cause of the impact of Pashto is that Pashto is the Languafranca of Swat. Moreover all of these languages have the same cultural and religious background.

**Ushojo:** It is an endangered language. It is spoken in Swat Kohistan in Bishigram and east of Madyan. It belongs to Indo-European, Indo-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Northwestern zone, Dardic family of languages. It is said that several hundred years ago this language has come from Indus Kohistan (Kolai) via Ushu, Swat. hence the name Ushojo has been given. Sandra J. Decker writes about this language that In the year between (Decker, 2002) estimated number of its speakers are 2000. It was spoken in twelve villages. These villages are: Danda, Tukai, Moghul Mar, Kappal Banda, Tangai Banda, Sore, Karial, Nalkot, Derai, Kas, Shepiza, and Bishigram (Decker, 2002). Ushojo speakers like Pashto rather than Urdu.

**Qashqari:** it is a dialect of the Khowar language spoken in Chitral. It belongs to Indo-European, Indo-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Northwestern zone, Dardic family of languages. ‘This language passes under various names. It is called Kho-war by the people who speak it, \_\_\_the Chitralis, or as they call themselves, Khos. It is usually called Chitrali and sometimes Qashqari by the English. It was called ‘Armyina’ by Leitner, the name being based on the Shin word *Arinah*, employed to designate a portion of Yasin where Kho-war

is spoken. Chitrar, or Qashqar as it is called by the Pathans, is bounded on the north by the Hindu Kush range, separating it from Badakhshan and Wakhan; on the south by the Indus, Swat, and Panjkora Kohistans, and the Asmar district: on the east by Kanjut, Gilgit, Punial, and Dir; and on the west by the Hindu Kush and Kafiristan' (Grierson (b), n.d.).

**Indus Kohistani (of western bank/right bank of the Indus River):** It is also known as Khili, kohisti, Mair, Maiva, Maiyon. . It is spoken in the Indus Kohistan district on the western bank of the Indus River. It is also a dardic language and is traced to indo-European languages family as indo-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Northwestern Zone, dardic (Baart, 2001). Indus Kohistani language has two main dialects. Among them one is spoken in the settlements along the Indus River such as Jijal, Pattan and Seo. These settlements are located along the Karakoram highway, which has facilitated greater contact between speakers within the dialect area. .the other main dialect, is spoken in the Duber and Kandya Valleys, which are more remote and are connected to one another high in the mountains (Hallberg, 1999) Basically the speakers of this language has migrated to Swat from time to time from Indus Kohistan.

**Shina Kohistani (the language of the East bank of the Indus):** The speakers of this language have also come from the east bank of the Indus Kohistan. They are living scattered in Swat Kohistan and a few other villages of Swat proper. It is called the Shina Kohistani (the language of the East bank of the Indus in Kohistan district). This language is also called Palasi Kohistani, Kohistani, and Kohistyo (Baart, 2001). It is indo-European, indo-Iranian, indo-Aryan, Northern zone, dardic language. Like Kashmiri language, it belongs to Dardic family of Aryan languages (Fayaz, 1971). There are three dialects of Shina: Gilgiti, Kohistani and Astori. Dr. Namoos has given to Kohistani, the name of Chilasi (Sindhi, 1992). Daniel G. Halberg and other write about this language that 'Indus Kohistani (or Maiya, as it is referred to in some of the literature) is the major language on the west bank of the Indus River. The major language on the east bank of the river is a variety of Shina; Shina is also the main language spoken in the Gilgit valley. Bateri (or Bateri Kohistani) is spoken by people who live in a group of villages on the east bank of Indus River, just north of Besham. Chilisso is spoken by some individuals from the Chiliss khel (clan) who live in the Jalkot and Mahrin village areas, also on the east bank. Finally, based on evidence available to us, Gowro is spoken by only a few individuals who live on the east bank of the river in the village of Mahrin, in Kolai.

The name Indus Kohistani is used here to differentiate the variety of Kohistani under study (that spoken on the west bank of the Indus River in District Kohistan) from related varieties spoken in the region, including Torwali Kohistani (Torwali) and Kalam Kohistani (Kalami), both spoken in the Swat valley, and Bateri Kohistani (Bateri) and Shina, both spoken in District Kohistan. The variety of Shina that is spoken on the east bank of the

Indus River is referred to by the local people with virtually the same name Kostyo (Schmidt and Kohistani 1998), as that used for related but distinct language under study here, kohiste. While speakers in the area use the word Kohiste, or variants thereof, to refer to their language, they also refer to it by village or area-specific names such as Seois (referring to the village of seo on the west bank), Pattani (for Pattan, on the west bank), Duberi (for Duber, also on the west bank), and Jalkoti (for Jalkot, on the east bank).’ (Hallberg, 1999). Grierson writes about this language in these words.

This is the language spoken in Gilgit and the neighboring valleys. Properly it is the language of the shin tribe, who, although numerically inferior have established their language to the exclusion of others wherever they have penetrated. Amongst the many dialect of Shina now spoken, that of Gilgit, which was the seat of Shina rule, is still considered the most refined, but it is much mixed with Burushaski, and of late, with Kashmiri, owing to an immigration of Kashmiris which took place about a century and a half ago. In various dialects, Shina is the language of the Gurez Valley in Kashmir, of the Astor Valley, and of the Gilgit district as far north as Yasin and Hunza. It also extends down the Indus valley through the Chilas country, as far as Palus and Koli, close to the Indus Kohistan, on the left bank of that river. Again, to the east, in Baltistan, there are isolated colonies of dards, still speaking their original language (Grierson (b): n.d.).

**Geographical Setting of Shina:** In district Kohistan, on the east bank of the Indus, Shina language is spoken. In Northern Areas of Pakistan, Shina is a language of majority of the people. Its majority speakers are living in Diamar and Gilgit districts. Shina speakers are also found in Kohistan district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Radloff, 2002). ‘Geographically, Shina is not only the language of Northern areas of Pakistan but it is also spoken in some areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The valleys of Kolai, Palas and Jalkot where Shina language is spoken are parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Radloff, 1999).

**Badeshi:** This language is spoken in the upper parts of Bishigram valley. It is situated in the east of Madyan in Swat Kohistan. Besides, small groups in Swat, Alai, Puran, Chakesar and Tirat also speak this language. It is also known as Badakhshi. It has been classified as Indo-European, Indo-Iranian. it is endangered language because its speakers use dominant languages of the area: Torwali, Pashto, or Ushojo, Most of the above mentioned languages, spoken in Swat belong to same family i.e Indo Aryan family of languages. That is why syntactical resemblance is present in these languages (ethnologue, 2014).

### **Kohistani Languages and Pashto**

Several languages spoken in Panjkora, Indus Kohistan and Swat are known collectively as Kohistani languages. These languages have their dialect and are linked together. At a very short distance in small valleys the people have their own 'jib'. Colonel Biddulph has described these languages. It is difficult to draw a boundary line between Pashto and these Kohistani languages. Majority of the people are bilingual with Pashto (ethnologue, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

Within the same geographical boundaries with shared religion and culture in addition to same education system, same media, and same linguafranca, numerous cultural and civilizational commonalities are found among various ethnic and linguistic groups. These shared religion, cultures and other factors have also influenced almost all of the languages spoken in Swat. That is why lexical and semantic commonalities are found in the languages spoken in Swat. Before the advent of Islam, the Kohistani languages: Torwali, Gawri, Ushojo, Badishi and Qashqari were pure languages in their form but later on mostly they have been influenced by Urdu, the National language of the country, by the Pashto, the local linguafranca, Persian, official and pedagogical language and English, the international language. After the arrival of Islam influences of Arabic language are also found. Modern education bridged the gap and brought these languages and people closer to each other. Medium of instruction in the schools of Swat Kohistan is either Urdu or Pashto. In those schools where teachers are not Pashto speaker, they use Urdu as medium of instruction and Pashto speaking teachers use Pashto as medium of instruction. Media also played an important role in shaping a shared background of these languages. Pashtuns spread Islam to the non Muslim linguistic groups and that is why these later Muslims also have a sort of sacred feelings for Pashto language. All these factors greatly helped in the understanding of these languages. In early times due to lack of communication, Swat Kohistan was an unattractive and dangerous area, for the Pukhtuns, living comparatively in proper plain areas of Swat (Barth, 1956).

But later on roads were built and modern transport facilities came here and thus the people found an opportunity of mingling with each other. Hotels and restaurants were built in Swat Kohistan areas and this part of Swat became most attractive for the people of lower Swat as well as for the tourists of all over the world (Barth, 1956). That is why the attitude of Pukhtuns about Kohistanis has been changed positively. Languages of Dard group have been influenced by Pashto (Grierson (b), n.d.).



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