

Pamiri Languages and Problems of Written Language

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Abstract

Pamirian languages date back to the ancient Eastern Iranian dialects, unlike Tajiki, an Iranian language of the western group. Historical comparative analysis of phonetics and structural- typo-logical similarities of the modern Pamiri languages allows us to assume that these are areal groups of languages. This Union originated after the arrival of the ancestors of the Pamirians in the area due to the mutual influence and convergent evolution of the languages, as well as the overall interaction with the substrate side and the superstructure of the Tajik language.

Keywords: Shughni language, Pamir, written languages

1. Introduction

The scientific study of the non-written Iranian languages of the Pamir and Eastern Hindi Kush has a rich history. First of all, it should be noted that European, Russian and Soviet linguists and historians made a great contribution in the linguistics research. Such classical works by R. Shaw, K.G. Zaleman, R. Gauthiot, G. Morgenstierne, A. A. Bobrinskoi, I.I Zabubin, A. E. Snesev, M. S. Andreev, V.A. Lifshitz, T. N. Pakhalina, A.K. Pisarchik, V.S. Sokolova, etc... form the basis of modern Eastern Iranian linguistics. Tajik linguists had also contributed to this science. Their names are R.Kh.Dodikhudoev, D.K.Karamshoev, M. Faizov, N. Karamkhudoev, B.B. Lashkarbekov and many others.

In the works of the above researchers, synchronous description of all Pamir languages is given. They analyzed in depth the lexicology and studied historical phonetics and grammar of the Pamir languages. Proto-language conditions of some of these languages were reconstructed at the level of ancient Eastern-Iranian dialects. And some of the similarities with the common Iranian dialects was revealed. All of their works allowed to identify the genetic relationships between some of the Pamir and Eastern Iranian languages and to determine their place in the family tree among the same Eastern Iranian branch.

However, these studies are often purely linguistic and ethno-linguistic problems are barely covered. At this stage of overall linguistics development, the interest in ethno-linguistic problems increases on a daily basis. The urgency of this problem is also related to the fact that rapid globalization of the modern world can lead to a drastic change in ethno-linguistic situation, even in remote parts of the world, and to the disappearance of the various ethnic communities that tend to leave their traces with all ancient civilizations.

Scientific analysis of the ethno-linguistic history of smaller groups of people of the Pamirs can also contribute to the number of controversial issues of ethnicity of the peoples of Pamirs. Such modern authors as B.B.Lashkarbekov, Sh. P.Yusufbekov and L.R. Dodikhudoeva contributed significantly to the above discussions with their recent publications.

2. Ethno-linguistic situation in Pamir-Eastern Hindu Kush region

In the monotonous region of the Pamir-Eastern Hindu Kush, located in the heart of the Central Asia, live nations and ethnic groups that speak both Indo-European and non-Indo-European languages. Indo-European languages include Iranian, Indian, Dazdian and Nuristanian languages while non-Indo-European languages are Turkic and Burushaski.

We are interested in the ethno-linguistic history of small indigenous peoples speaking Eastern Iranian languages that include:

- Munji (whith igda dialect)
- Wakhi
- Closely related Ishkoshimi and Sanglichi as language-dialects
- Shughni-Rushani group (Shughni, Rushani, Bartangi, Roshorvi and Sarikuli language-dialects)
- Yazgulomi

2. a Geography of Eastern-Iranian languages

Native speakers of all these languages live in four different countries: Tajikistan, Afghanistan, China and Pakistan. More precisely, in the Tajik, Afghan and Chinese parts of the Pamirs and in some valleys of the Eastern Hindu Kush that are parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

According to Gruenberg and Steblin-Kamenskiy, it is a separate ethno-linguistic region, because these people have much in common not only in language but also in material and spiritual culture. In this regard, the ethno-linguistic region referred to herein should be explored not otherwise as historically established integer. Just covering all ethno-cultural space, it is possible to recreate a realistic picture of local ethno-linguistic communities.

It should be noted that until now these Iranian-speaking peoples (nations), despite the emerged disunity and political fragmentation are a kind of unity that created their own special regional Pamir-Eastern Hindu Kush culture.

2. b Ethno-linguistic map of Eastern-Iranian languages

Here is some statistics on dissemination of Eastern Iranian languages speakers in the region of Pamir-Eastern Hindu Kush:

- 1) Shughni (105-110 thousands) live in Khorog city, Shughnan and Roshkala districts of the Republic of Tajikistan. Shughnan vulusvoli of Afghanistan.
- 2) Wakhi (65-70 thousands) live in Wakhan valley of Ishakashim district of Tajikistan, in Tajik autonomous volost Qoshgar oblast of Xinyang-Uyghur Autonomous region of China and Khunza and Ishkoman valleys in Northern Pakistan in the foothills of the Hindu Kush.
- 3) Rushani and Bartangi (near 30 thousands) live in Rushan district of the Republic of Tajikistan.
- 4) Sariquli (25 thousands) live in Tashqurgan volost Qoshgar oblast of Xinyang-Uyghur Autonomous region of China.
- 5) Yazgulomi (8-10 thousands) live in Yazgulom valley of Wanj district of Tajikistan.

- 6) Munji (near 4 thousands) live in Khunza valley in northern Pakistan.
- 7) Ishkoshimi (1.5 thousands) live in Rin and Sumchin villages of Ishkoshim district of Tajikistan.
- 8) Sanglichi (from 100 to 150) live in Badakhshan province of Afghanistan.

Hence, the total number of Iranian-speaking of Pamir-Eastern Hindu Kush reaches 240-250 thousands. Should be noted that peoples of the Pamirs live in the capital of Tajikistan, Dushanbe city and in some other areas of the south Tajikistan (Qumsangir, Jillicul, Qabodiyon), north Tajikistan (Khujand, Chkalovsk), in Kirgizia (Osh city) and in Russia (Moscow, Krasnodar, Vladimir, Samara, Sankt Petersburg, Ekaterinburg) as compact communities. There isn't an exact data on the population of these communities. From non-official data we can find that about 50 thousand of the Tajik Pamiris live in Post-Soviet countries outside of Badakhshan, Tajikistan.



2.c Definition of Pamir languages

Definition of the Pamir languages: Pamir languages the concept is likely to be geographical, because in genetic aspect they are generally not a separate branch of the Eastern Iranian sub-groups. There exists a secondary commonality between the northern Pamir languages such as Shughni-Rushani sub-group.

3. The initial period of the spread of Iranian languages in Pamir - Eastern Hindu Kush region

Linguistic research has shed light on some features of the eastern Iranian tribes settled in this region in the first half of the first millennium BC, to identify ways and stages of their migration and settlement. The language can be judged by the characteristic features of the material and spiritual cultures of ancient settlers.

3a. Migration and Settlement

Studying the genetic relationships of the Pamir languages most researchers agree that in this case the common linguistic state could not exist. This means that the ancient settlers of the Pamir - Eastern Hindu Kush were independent from each other from the beginning of the development of the region. Perhaps the Iranian

settlers in these places came as waves at different times from different places. From the beginning these were tribes with distinct ethno-linguistic attributes. To penetrate into the region as they could from the east through the Alai valley and from West passing through the Darvaz ridge. It is possible that some tribes reached Pamir from the south through the current Afghan Badakhshan a more accessible path than that of the West and East.

Research on history of phonetics and grammar indicate on that with the collapse of the south-eastern sub-groups some of the protopamir languages developed autonomously. It has been discovered that genetic commonality between Yazgulomi language and Shughni –Rushani group and between Munji language and Yazgulomi-shighni group. The first inhabitants of the Pamir coming from the East according to the archeological data belong to nomadic saak tribes. Perhaps they include protowakhis separated from the main mass of the saaks. The name of the first top Wakhi village on the Pamir river *Ratm* came from the ancient Iranian < *fra-tama which means “first,” “initial” indicates that Saak nomads entered the Wakhan valley exactly from the Eastern side.

3b. Ethno-confessional relations and characteristics

In the names of the individual religious buildings reflected in the beliefs of the ancient inhabitants, the ancestors of the contemporary Pamirians. For example, ancient Wakhis were sun worshipers and constructed religious buildings in honor of the heavenly bodies (wakhi veriz – the name of a place in Langar village where there is a religious building came from the ancient Iranian hvara-yaza “a place for sun worship”; vendat, name of a village in Afghan Wakhan came from ancient Iranian hvan-data “sun-given.” Later with the spread of Zoroastrianism the ancestors of ancient Wakhis accepted this new belief but brought in new elements of their own faith. Furthermore, the word sun was acquired from the Supreme Deity of Zoroastrians – Ahuramazda (ahura, sun is ir in Wakhi and khir in Shughni.)

This suggests that the ancient settlers of the Pamir and Hindu Kush worshiped the sun and in the period of Zoroastrianism belonged to the same religion.

4. The process of the emergence of the new ethno-linguistic communities

The collapse of the ethno-linguistic Eastern Iranian communities began very early in the period of tribal system when language of a tribe was still a dialect of an ancient Iranian language. Southern and northern sub-groups of languages could not keep the linguistic unity and very soon broke up into new dialects. Southern sub-group at early stages split into dialects which formed the basics for the Khotan-saak and Wakhi languages, likely due to expressive mobility of the nomadic tribes of Saaks. The relocation of the protowakhis in the Pamirs was the cause for the split of these commonalities. This separation could have occurred in 7th - 6th centuries BC. The transition to a sedentary lifestyle opens a direct path to the formation of an independent Wakhi language in the third stage of language development. Chinese historical chronicle gives information on Wakhan at the turn of our era. It has been indicated that the beliefs of the ancient Wakhis represent a synthesis of the Iranian saaks and local pre-Iranian traditions then transformed into one of the varieties of Zoroastrianism. In the Middle Ages in Wakhan penetrates Buddhism. All this has left its mark in Ismailism, that spread in Pamir near 1100 years ago.

5. Modern and Contemporary Ethno-linguistic History of small nations of the Pamir- Eastern Hindu Kush

In 1895 an Agreement on the definition of the boundaries of two powers was signed by the two Russian and British Empires. De jure put an end to the Big Game. De facto allowed for the so-called “Pamir question.”

Thus this led to the establishment of the colonial rule over Central Asia on the one hand and northern India and Afghanistan on the other.

Qualitatively new political conditions changed the riverbed ethno-linguistic processes and the new epoch can be formally divided into three stages.

5a. Colonial period

Colonialism put an end to the oldest surviving in the Central Asian ethno-linguistic entities that were the Pamir and Eastern Hindu Kush leadership. Historic Wakhan, Shughnan, Rushan and Darvaz arranged in a sequence one after another in the upper reaches of the Amu-Darya, where dissected: the left bank of the village moved to a dependence on Britain to Afghanistan and the right bank to Russia and Bukhara.

Wakhan settlement in Hunza and Ishkoman became part of British India (now Pakistan.) The region has changed the political and living conditions which also led to the formation of new traits in local groups of the same people living on different sides of the border. So under the influence of language Burushaski, Urdu, and English in northern Pakistan formed the new Wakhani speech. We have different ethno-cultural environment in which changing the mentality of people, the evolution of traditions, customs, and dress code, music and performing arts. Such changes are observed in the traditions and customs of Wakhian, Ishakishimian, Shughnian, and Rushanian of Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The Pamir languages are strongly influenced by Dari and Pashto in Afghanistan, Tajiki and Russian in Tajikistan. Particularly, lexical elements of these languages were intensively borrowed from other languages.

5b. Soviet period

Soviet period left an imprint in languages and cultures of the people and defined an advantageous condition for many years ahead. It was the most favorable period in the history of Pamirs in the modern times, despite all the negative effects caused by ideological attitudes. In the late 30s Shughni language acquired a written form and became the subject of schooling. Unfortunately, such a development in language and culture did not last very long. In the post war years and further for the people of the Pamir it was ceased to recognize the independent status of this ethnic group. Pamir languages were prohibited to be used in public places, kept from learning, were not allowed to perform, sing songs or pass them on to the radio.

5c. Independent period

In the post-Soviet era many restrictions were removed that were raised out of previous political and ideological installations. In 1991, ABC Shughni language was re-introduced. There were a lot of creative groups and ethnographic ensembles performing pamirian songs and dance. Population of the region came out of spiritual isolation while establishing ethno-confessional connection with their spiritual leader the Aga Khan IV and coreligionists worldwide.

However, in recent years due to the economic turmoil in the country, people in the Pamir faced with discrimination based on ethno-linguistic and religious indications. Youth population at the Pamir leaving their homes in search of work and wondering around Russia, other CIS countries and abroad. One can only hope that these challenges carry a temporary character and the society is able to overcome the difficulties.