

The Dards, Dardistan and its linguistic diversity

Zubair Torwali*

Abstract:

The paper briefly traces the history of the geo-cultural region known in academia as Dardistan, a brief note on the history of the inhabitants of Dardistan—the Dards—and the linguistic diversity of this region with a major focus on North Pakistan.

After the history of Dardistan and the Dards a brief note on each of the languages is given along with three words in of each language transliterated in International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA) and translated into English.

Keyword: geo-cultural, Dardistan, linguistic diversity, Transliterated IPA

Dardistan:

Dardistan is the name many explorers and scholars associated with the British India refer to the mountainous area of Hindu Kush, Karakoram and westernmost Himalaya. It was called so, and to a greater extent now as well, mainly because of its major ethnic agglomeration, the Dards, Darada or Dardic, who speak several Indo-Aryan languages which vary from the Indo-Aryan languages spoken in the plain valleys of Indus and Ganges. A derogatory term, Kafiristan, was also used to describe this area, mainly by travelers, invaders and researchers associated with the Mughal empire of India or were from Afghanistan and Central Asia. They described these people, Kafirs (unbelievers/pagans) because of their different faith systems and cultures, which did not resemble to any of the main religions. Traces of their ancient religions can still be found in the religious practices by the Kalash people of Southern Chitral in Pakistan.

With the emergence of colonization indigenous communities were subdued, assimilated; and their lands redistributed. Out of this colonization, modern nation states were formed, and the lands of the indigenous communities were divided among various states with new political borders drawn. This redistribution of the population very often divided the people of the same ethnicities as ‘citizens’ of different states. This happened in *Abya Yala*, the indigenous name for the Americas in the *Guna* language. It was done in Australia, in Caucasus, in the Middle East, in Turkey and in other parts of the world. Such a pre-colonized territory existed in the mountainous crossroads between South and Central Asia, which was referred to as *Dardistan*, the land of the Dards.

This area includes the valleys of four mighty mountain ranges: Hindu Kush, Karakorum, Pamir, and western Himalaya, with Hindu Kush having most of the land and number of communities. More than 50 distinct languages belonging to five phyla are found in this area.

The name, Dardistan, to this geo-cultural territory was first applied by the well-known orientalist and the then principal of the Government College in Lahore, Dr Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner (1840—1899), in his book “Dardistan 1861” (Leitner, 1861). Though still having popularity in academia; and recently re-emerged among the inhabitants of the land themselves,

* Educationist and Linguist (Expert on endanger languages)

this name has, however, remained a contested topic of debate among the geographers and, in the same way a related linguistic classification the ‘*Dardic languages*’ of the Indo-Aryan phylogenetic has also remained disputed among the linguists. But it has a quite visible presence in the scholarship on the people and languages of this area. Another British officer Edmund George Barrow (1852—1934) wrote in his book “*Dradistan and Kafiristan*” in 1885, “There is no such country as Dardistan. It is like *Yaghistan*, merely a convenient expression embracing a large tract of country inhabited by cognate races. It applies to all the country lying between Kafiristan on the west and Kashmir and Kaghan on the east, the Hindu Kush on the north and the Pushto-speaking races on the south” (Barrow, 1885). *Yaghistan* means a territory which is not under any formal law by a state or empire but operates under its own archaic traditions. The term Dardistan was also mentioned in the book “*Caste in India: its nature, function and origins*” by John Henry Hutton (1885–1968). He writes, “Towards Dardistan on the edge of the Pathan country are found what is left after constant harrying by the Afghans, of the Red and Black Kafirs” (Hutton, 1951).

Dardistan was a zone of immense strategic significance in the Great Game, a term coined by the first British spy, Arthur Conolly, in his story of adventure ‘*Journey to the North of India, Overland from England, Through Russia, Persia and Afghanistan*’, who was “sent into the field to reconnoiter the military and political no-man’s land between the Caucasus and the Khyber, through which a Russian army might march”, as Peter Hopkirk narrates in his book “*The Great Game 2001*”. (Hopkirk, 2001) Lieutenant Conolly used the term long before Rudyard Kipling gave it an international recognition through his fiction work ‘*Kim*’ in 1901 wherein the protagonist Kim says “Now I shall go far and far into the North, playing the Great Game . . .” (Hopkirk, 2001)

The “Gilgit Game” was a crucial episode in the Great Game as John Keay informs us in his book of 1979 “*The Gilgit Game—The Explorers of the Western Himalaya*”, “The Gilgit Game is simply the story of how and by whom such a wilderness was explored and appropriated. It was called a game in recognition of the process being a crucial episode in the Great Game, the century-long rivalry between Russia and British India for control of Central Asia” (Keay, 1979). And during the Great Game the route to Gilgit was kept open from the Kashmir side only, by doing so was strategically useful to keep it closed from the north or south for the defense of India in the Great Game. German geographer Hermann Kreutzmann also refers to the conflicts in Northern Pakistan as continuation of the “Great Game”. He writes in his paper “*Kashmir and the northern areas of Pakistan: Boundary-making along contested frontiers*” in 2008, “The results of the ‘*Great Game*’ have created major sources for conflicts and war. Kashmir, the Siachin Glacier, and the Northern Areas of Pakistan are prime examples of virulent disputes which are still hot issues today.” (Kreutzmann, 2008) Gilgit is now the most important strategic center in ‘Dardistan’ through which now passes the famous China Pakistan Economic Corridor or CPEC, one of the branch projects of China’s One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative; and upon which Pakistan so persistently rests its future prosperity.

For this area, another name ‘*Peristan*’ i.e. land of fairies, was suggested by the Italian anthropologists Alberto A. Cacopardo and Augusto S. Cacopardo in their work “*Gates of Peristan: history, religion and society in the Hindu Kush*” in 2001 and describe its present geography as “Geographically, this area includes, to the west, the Afghan province of Nuristan, the Chitral-Kunar valley, the upper Dir and Swat valleys, in the Pakistani province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with water courses all tributaries of the Kabul river; and to the east, the basin of the Gilgit river with the upper reaches of the Indus basin.” (Cacopardo & Cacopardo, 2001)

Cacopardo brothers and the noted Austrian anthropologist, ethologist and archeologist Dr. Karl Jettmar (1918-2002) regard this region as a “culture area” (Cacopardo & Cacopardo, 2001) which was in the past characterized by a degree of cultural homogeneity. Jettmar in his paper “Ethnological Research in Dardistan 1958 preliminary report” (Fishman, 2001) (Fishman, 2001) states “in this respect the Dards of the Karakoram, the Kafirs and Dards of the Hindukush, the Iranians of the Hindukush and of the Pamir, as well as the Burushaski-speaking peoples, belong to a homogeneous cultural area. (Jettmar, 1961)”

Dardistan, today is predominantly Muslim with its various denominations like Sunni, Shiite, Ismailite and Nurbakhshi. Sunni Muslims are in majority in the region. There are, however, presently only two minor non-Muslim communities in the entire region: the decreasing Buddhist population of Ladakh known as Brokpa, and the fast erasing ethnic and religious minority, the Kalasha community in the district of Chitral in Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.

The region was mentioned as Bolor by Marco Polo. It was known Bolor or Boloristan in chronicles written in Persian such as “*Tarikh-e-Rashidi*” written in the sixteenth century, by Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat from which Wolfgang Holzwarth quotes (Holzwarth, 1999), “An eyewitness, Mirza Haider, as he led an Islamic frontier raid (*ghaza*) into Bolor in 1527-28, noted that the whole population was non-Muslim: “Bolor is infidel country (Kafiristan), and most of its inhabitants are mountaineers. Not one of them has a religion or a creed”. (Holzwarth, 1999) quotes Mirza Haider describing Bolor as “Bolor (Boloristan) as (politically extremely segmented) mountainous region border on Badakhshan, Sarigh Chupan (Wakhan), Sarigh Kul and Raskam, Balti, Kashmir, Swat, and Kabul and Laghman” from his chronicle, *Tarikh-e-Rashidi*, written in Persian language.

The Dards (Dardic people):

Whether Dardistan was a geographically defined territory or not the ethnonym Dard and its variants were used to describe the people since primaeval times. According to the famous Italian orientalist and Indologist, Dr Giuseppe Tucci (1894—1984) who did pioneer work on archeology in the Swat Valley of Pakistan, “the Dadikai, Daradas, Dards, according to the Herodotean list, were for reasons administration, connected with the seventh satrapy [of the Achaemenian Empire] equally subject to tribute” (Tucci, 1977). He further elaborates in the same book, “The Dadikai are the Dards, the Daradas of the Puranic geographical lists, the Daedala of Curtius, who after dealing with the story Nysa and with the orders given by Alexander to Hephaestion and to other generals to go ahead to build the bridge on the Indus writes “and then he went to Daedala”. Tucci further states, “Many a quotation of the Darada is found in the old Sanskrit texts such as *Rāmāyana* and the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānā*” (Tucci, 1977).

The English orientalist, H.H Wilson (1786—1860), who taught Sanskrit at Oxford, wrote in a volume of travels in 1825 published by William Moorcroft (1767—1825), the explorer employed by the East India Company to travel the Himalayas, Central Asia and Tibet,, “Few people can be traced through so long a history as these as they are evidently the Daradas of the Sanscrit geography, and Dardae or Daradrae of Strabo. They are also, no doubt, the Kafers of the Mohammedans. (Clark, 1977)”. Strabo (64 BCE—21 CE) was a Greek geographer and philosopher.

A local Kashmiri emissary, Izzet Ullah, sent by Moorcroft to visit Himalaya wrote in the ‘*Quarterly Magazine Review of Cashmir*’ in 1825, about the country he explored, “The house of this country hitherward from Matayain were all in a ruinous and deserted condition, a number of

persons having been carried off the year before by a party of people called *Dardi*, an independent mountain tribe, three or four marches north from Dras, who speak the Pushtu as well as the *Dardi* language: their religion is not known. It is said to be a journey of ten stages to Badakhshan from Cashmir, through the country of the Dardis. (Clark, 1977)”

Because of these historical accounts and, most of the Dardic language and connected ethnicities, it becomes quite convincing to follow Leitner and maintain the term *Dradistan* for this mountainous region with high peaks, large glaciers, deep gorges and green valleys; alpine pastures; and above all the unique pre-Islamic history. The region had a cultural homogeneity, vestige of that still exists; and it was and, still is, predominantly inhabited by the Dards. It is, therefore, plausible to put the main ethnonym, Dard, before the suffix **-istan** in the tradition of the Persian language which has been used to designate the modern states around this specific region which have their names with the major ethnic groups along with the suffix **-istan**, as for instance: Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. However, this does not mean that the area is linguistically and ethnically homogenous, neither the term ‘Dardic’ can be applied to all languages spoken here.

Linguistic diversity of Dardistan:

In order to show the linguistic diversity and the Dard ethnicity it is quite plausible to have a glance at the languages spoken in Dardistan.

Dardistan is linguistically and ethnically one of the most diverse regions in the world. The veteran Norwegian linguist Georg Morgenstierne (1892—1978) even called a smaller part of Dardistan, Lower Chitral, as one of the most polyglots in Asia (Morgenstierne, 1932).

Dardistan is, as discussed above, a geo-cultural cover term for the area but whether it is a ‘linguistic area’ or not is an interesting question. In a paper ‘*India as a Linguistic Area*’ in 1956 linguist, M. B. Emeneau, defines *Sprachbund* or ‘*linguistic area*’ as “an area which includes languages belonging to more than one family but showing traits which are found not to belong to the other members (at least one) of the families. (Emeneau, 1956)” The Stockholm based linguist, Henrik Liljegren, who has been conducting research on the languages of the area for the last two decades, answers this question in his very recent comparative research, “The Hindu Kush—Karakorum and linguistic areality’ published in April 2021. He argues that the area is not a ‘*linguistic area*’ in the traditional usage of the term which means “a geographical area with well-defined and neat boundaries within which all or most of the languages, regardless of phylogenetic identity, share a significant number of unique features that have arisen as the result of contact” (Liljegren, 2021). Contrarily, Liljegren, maintains that it is a ‘linguistic area’ if by that it is meant a “convergence zone with a core that share certain linguistic features as the result of many local contact situations that have existed for a prolonged time period, with surrounding subareas in which languages share some, but not all, of the same features, and to a varying extent display other micro- areal convergence patterns (Liljegren, 2021).”

Languages of Dardistan

The region is home to six language groups namely Indo-Aryan, Iranian, Nuristani (All Indo-European), Turkic, Sino-Tibetan and Busurshaski, the language isolate. The Indo-Aryan phylum is the major one with about 30 languages, which have also been lumped together as ‘Dardic’ (North-Western Indo-Aryan) by linguists including John Biddulph, George Grierson, Gérard Fussman, George Morgenstierne, Džoj Edelman, Richard Strand, Elena Bashir, and Hermann Kreutzmann in the past (Cacopardo A. S., 2016). Second largest group is Iranian; and its

languages are spread over territories of several countries: Afghanistan, China, India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kirghizstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. However, larger number of these languages are primarily spoken in Pakistan, India and Afghanistan with North Pakistan, having more than 30 of all the 50 languages of the region. Therefore, this study is from now on focused on this linguistic diversity of North Pakistan. It includes all languages of all the five phyla and the Burushaski.

In the larger part of Dardistan, what is now North Pakistan, we find more than two dozen of endangered languages. Historically the north of North Pakistan had small states whereas its south was mostly inhabited by acephalous communities.

Languages of North Pakistan

By ‘*North Pakistan*’ I mean the region of Gilgit-Baltistan, the upper parts of the Pakistan’s northwest province, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including the districts of Chitral, Dir, Swat, Buner, Shangla, Kohistan and Mansehra; and the part of Kashmir Vale under Pakistan’s control.

None of Pakistan’s governments or a university has ever taken any initiative of profiling the languages spoken by the people of Pakistan. Only a few of them—Urdu, Pashto, Punjabi, Balochi, Sindhi and Saraiki—are mentioned in media, teaching materials and in any kind of national database.

According to, *Ethnologue*, an informative compendium of the languages of world, Pakistan has by now 76 languages spoken within its territory (Ethnologue, 2021). Past attempts of profiling the languages of what is now Pakistan have been done by foreign researchers either associated with the colonial British government or with international organizations. Before Grierson, Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner, did some linguistic and anthropological work on the languages and people of these areas in a book called “*Languages and Races of Dardistan*” (Leitner, 1861). Following Leitner, another officer in the then British Army, *John Biddulph*, did monumental work on the languages and peoples of these areas in a volume called *Tribes of Hindoo Koosh*” (Biddulph, 1880). The Irish linguist and language scholar who had also served in the Indian Civil Services, Sir George Abraham Grierson (died in 1941), did a remarkable survey of about 364 languages and dialects of India and published the work in nineteen volumes after a work for over thirty years. The work was titled as *Linguistic Survey of India* and was published in five years from 1903 to 1928. He has also done some pioneering work on the various varieties of the Pashai language in his publication “*The Pišača Languages of North-Western India*” of 1906 (Grierson, 1906). The survey and the work on the Pišača also have information about some of the languages spoken in the mountainous region of Pakistani territory. Still more progress was made by Georg Morgenstierne. His important book “*Report on a Linguistic Mission to North-Western India* (Morgenstierne, 1932)” of 1932 was followed by a long series of similar publications by him.

Leitner also wrote about the language of Hunza and Nagar, Burushaski. Afterwards the British scholar and an officer of the British Indian Army, David Lockhart Robertson Lorimer (1876—1962) did standard work on Burushaski (Lorimer, 1939).

Following them, a number of notable linguists and anthropologists, the likes of, Karl Jettmar, Frederik Barth (Barth, 1956), Colin Masica (Masica, 1991), Richard Strand, Elena Bashir et al studied the languages and cultures of northern Pakistan, and of Afghanistan.

A sociolinguistic survey on the languages of northern Pakistan was started in 1986 by the Summer Institute of Linguistics in collaboration with the *National Institute of Folk Heritage, Lok Virsa*, and The National Institute of Pakistan Studies (NIPS), at the Quad-e-Azam University, Islamabad. This survey was jointly published in five volumes in 1992. The survey titled,

“*Sociolinguistic Survey of Northern Pakistan*”, covering 25 languages of Northern Pakistan including Pashto, Hindko, Ormuri and Waneci (O’Leary, 1992).

A brief note about each language will be of help for those who are interested in the linguistic diversity of the spectacular northern parts of Pakistan. It is difficult to count the exact numbers of speakers of each language because none of these languages, except Pashto and Hindko, has ever given space in the six national censuses so far conducted in Pakistan. The number of speakers of these languages may vary from 500 to one million. Many of these languages are also spoken in the Pakistan’s neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan, India and China.

All these languages are categorized as ‘endangered’ in the Routledge’s *Encyclopedia of World’s Endangered Languages* (2008) edited by *Christopher Moseley* (Moseley, 2008). Many of them are ‘*severely endangered*’ whereas a few are ‘*moribund*’ or already ‘*extinct*’.

To show how diverse these languages are two kinship words ‘father, daughter’ and three words of the most common things in the physical world ‘mountain, tongue and tree’ are presented along with an example from each language for the numerical word ‘twenty’. I am grateful to Henrik Liljegren for providing me with wordlists of these languages from his recent data.

Brief note on the languages of North Pakistan, the greater part of Dardistan

Language isolate:

Burushaski: It is the single ‘language isolate’ in Pakistan as it has not been classified under any of the major or subgroups of languages. It is not related to its neighbouring languages, the Dardic or Iranian. It is spoken in the districts of Hunza, Nagar and in the Yasin valley in the Ghizer district of Gilgit Baltistan. Burushaski words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*au*” and “*ai*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*tɛ^har*], [*o:mus*] and [*tom*]. [*alt^her*] means ‘twenty’ in Burushaski.

The Dardic (North-West Indo-Aryan)

1. *Bateri*: Bateri is a Dardic language spoken by people living in Batera villages on the east bank of the Indus River in the Lower Kohistan district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Bateri words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*m^hal*” and “*d^hi:*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*k^ha:n*], [*zi:b*] and [*bi:tʃ*]. [*bi:ɛ*] means ‘twenty’ in Bateri.

2. *Chilisso*: It is a Dardic language which is now moribund. It is sparsely spoken in scattered villages in the right bank of the Indus River amid the majority Shina-speaking population in eastern side of the Kohistan districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

3. *Dameli*: Dameli is again a Dardic language spoken in the Damel Valley, which is situated between Drosh and Arandu, about 20 kilometers south of Drosh in Southern Chitral in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Dameli words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*dadi*” and “*zu*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*tɛuɔ*], [*zip*] and [*bi:tʃ*]. [*bici*] means ‘twenty’ in Dameli.

4. *Domaaki*: Domaaki is a language spoken by a small community living in the scattered villages in Hunza and in Nagar. The people have recently renamed it as Dawoodi. It is also severely endangered.

5. *Gawarbati*: Gawarbati is another Dardic language spoken by the people living along the Chitral River, predominantly in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area near the village of Arandu in the Chitral district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Gawarbati words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*ba:p*” and “*zu*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*daɾa*], [*zip*] and [*mut^hə*]. [*ici*] means ‘twenty’ in Gawarbati.

6. Gawri: Gawri is another Dardic language spoken in the hilly villages in the districts of Swat and Upper Dir. The most famous touristic destinations of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Kalam in Swat and Kumrat in Upper Dir are owned by people speaking the Gawri language. Gawri words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*bob*” and “*du:j*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*k^han*], [*dzib*] and [*tam*]. [*biε*] means ‘twenty’ in Gawri.

7. Gowro: The Gowro is believed to be the language of the Gabar Khel clan living scattered in some of the villages in the eastern Kohistan region in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It is also a moribund Dardic language.

8. Kalasha: Many people in Pakistan, and abroad, are familiar with unique Kalash people living in three valleys in Chitral. Kalasha is the language of these people and is a Dardic language. The Kalasha are concentrated in several small valleys on the west side of the Chitral River south of Chitral town: in the Rumbur, Bumboret, Birir and Urstun Valleys of district Chitral in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Kalasha words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*da:da*” and “*te^hu*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*dē:ta*], [*dzip*] and [*muʃ*]. [*bi:ei:*] means ‘twenty’ in Kalasha.

9. Kalkoti: Kalkoti is an endangered Dardic language spoken by a small number of people in Kalkot village in Kalkot tehsil of Upper Dir. Kalkoti words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*baʃ/ma:l*” and “*pe:/ di:*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*k^han*], [*dzib*] and [*tam*]. [*bi:ε*] means ‘twenty’ in Kalkoti.

10. Kashmiri: Kashmiri a Dardic branch of the Indo-Aryan linguistic family. It is primarily spoken in the Kashmir valley and in districts geographically contiguous with it. It has a considerable number of speakers in Pakistan’s Administered Kashmir. Kashmiri words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*mo:l*” and “*ko:ɽ*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*paha:ɽ*], [*z^heo*] and [*kul*]. [*wu*] means ‘twenty’ in Kashmiri.

11. Khowar: Khowar is a major Dardic language spoken in Chitral. It is also spoken in certain villages and valleys in the Ghizer district of Gilgit Baltistan. Khowar words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*tat*” and “*zu:r*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*zəm*], [*ligini*] and [*kaŋ*]. [*bi:ε:r*] means ‘twenty’ in Khowar.

12. Kohistani: Kohistani is one of the major Dardic languages that is spoken mainly on the west bank of the Indus River in the Kohistan region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including the Kandhia valley adjacent to Diamer district of Gilgit Baltistan. Kohistani words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*aba:*” and “*d^hi:*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*k^ha:n*], [*zi:b*] and [*gai*]. [*bi:ε*] means ‘twenty’ in Kohistani.

13. Kundal Shahi: Kundal Shahi is a Dardic Indo-Aryan language spoken by a small population living in the village of Kundal Shahi in the Neelam Valley in Azad Kashmir, North Pakistan. Kundal Shahi words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*ma:l*” and “*kyɽ^h*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*bəʃo:*], [*dzib*] and [*tōm*]. [*bi:*] means ‘twenty’ in Kundal Shahi.

14. Mankiyali: Mankiyali is an endangered Dardic language spoken by a few hundred people in the Danna village in Mansehra district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The language was added to *Ethnologue* recently.

15. Palula: Palula is a Dardic language spoken by a small population in a few of villages on the east side of the Chitral Valley near Drosh in southern Chitral. Palula words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*ba:bu/m^ha:lu*” and “*d^hi:*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*k^ha:ŋ*], [*dzip*] and [*muʃ*]. [*b^hi:ε*] means ‘twenty’ in Palula.

16. Shina: Shina is the major language of Gilgit Baltistan. Among all the Dardic languages there is much literature found on Shina and in Khowar. It is spoken in Gilgit city, Puniyal, in villages of Ghizer district, in Shinaki area connected to Hunza, and in Astor and in Diamer districts of Gilgit Baltistan. It is also spoken in Easter Kohistan region, on eastern side of the River Indus in Kohistan area, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Shina words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*ba:bo/ ma:lo/ba:p*” and “*di:*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*ko:r*], [*dzip*] and [*tom*]. [*bi:*] means ‘twenty’ in Shina.

17. Torwali: The speakers of Dardic language, Torwali, live in the main Swat Valley as well as in one of its tributaries, Chail Valley. These two valleys join at Madyan, a Pashto-speaking town just eight kilometers below the scenic town Bahrain in the Swat valley in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Torwali words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*ba:p*” and “*d^hu:*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*k^ha:n*], [*dzib*] and [*t^ha:m*]. [*bi:f*] means ‘twenty’ in Torwali.

18. Ushojo: With a small number of speakers this severely endangered Dardic language is spoken in smaller hamlets in the Chail valley to the east of Madyan town in the Swat Valley in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Ushojo words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*da:da:/ ma:lu/da:dzi:*” and “*p^huwi:/di:*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*k^ho:n*], [*dzib*] and [*t^ho:m*]. [*bi:*] means ‘twenty’ in Ushojo.

Sino-Tibetan:

Balti: It is also referred to as Tibeto-Burman, a major subgroup of the former. It is spoken by the Balti people in the current four districts—Skardu, Shigar, Ganche and Kharmand—of the Baltistan division of Gilgit-Baltistan region. Balti words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*ata*” and “*boŋo:*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*braq*], [*tt̪e:*] and [*staqdzi:*]. [*ŋieu:*] means ‘twenty’ in Balti.

Turkic:

1. Kirghiz: Kirghiz is a Turkic language in the Altaic family of languages. In North Pakistan it is spoken by a few Kirghiz families living in the Baroghil area to the extreme north to Chitral. Kirghiz words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*a:ta*” and “*quz*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*qur*], [*til*] and [*tiri:k*]. [*dzigirmæ*] means ‘twenty’ in Kirghiz.

Nuristani:

1. Eastern Kativiri: Eastern Kativiri is one of Nuristani languages. In Pakistan it is spoken in Lutkuh valley and by some people in the villages in the Bumboret, Rumbur and Urtsun of the Chitral district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Eastern Kati words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*ta:*” and “*dzuk*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*da*], [*dits*] and [*k̪ana:*]. [*watsə:*] means ‘twenty’ in E. Kativiri.

2. Kamviri or Shekhani: Shekhani is a term used by most people in Chitral for both Eastern Kativiri and Kamviri speakers. Shekhani means ‘the language of the sheikhs, or converts’. It is spoken by a small population in the Langorbat and Badrugal villages in Chitral in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Kamviri words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*to:t*” and “*dzuk*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*da*], [*dits*] and [*kanɔ*]. [*witsi*] means ‘twenty’ in Kamviri.

Iranian:

1. *Madaghlashti*: Madaghlashti or Madakhlashti is an Iranian language spoken by a small population in the Madakhlasht village in the Shishi Koh valley in Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
2. *Wakhi*: It is an Iranian language. In Pakistan it is mainly spoken in Gojal, Hunza in Gilgit Baltistan region. However, a small number of Wakhi speaking people also live in Yasin valley in the Ghizer district of Gilgit Baltistan. It is also spoken by a small population in the Yarkhun valley of Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Wakhi words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*tat*” and “*dzuk*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*kuh*], [*zik*] and [*draxt*]. [*wist*] means ‘twenty’ in Wakhi.
3. *Yidgha*: It is an Iranian language. In Pakistan it is mainly spoken in the Lutkuh Valley of western Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. There are probably 15 villages of the Yidgha speakers in the Lutkuh tehsil between Garam Chashma and Darosh pass in Chitral. Yidgha words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*tat*” and “*lukdo*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*vənəvəro:*], [*zəbi:k*] and [*draxt*]. [*ysto*] means ‘twenty’ in Yidgha.
4. *Sariquli*: Sariquli is another Iranian language spoken in Baroghil in the extreme north of Chitral bordering the Wakhan corrido in the same area of Chitral by a small number of about 70 people.
5. *Pashto*: Pashto belongs to the East Iranian group of Iranian languages. In North Pakistan it is mainly spoken in southern Hindu Kush, mainly in Swat, Dir, Buner, Shangla, Torghar and Bategram in upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It is one of the dominating languages in Northern Pakistan. Pashto words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*pla:r*” and “*lur*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*yar*], [*zəba*] and [*wəna*]. [*fəl*] means ‘twenty’ in Pashto.
6. *Badeshi*: It is an Iranian language and is now reportedly spoken by a few elderly people in a faraway village in the Chail valley to the east of the Madyan town in Swat

Other Indo-Aryan languages spoken in Northern Pakistan

1. *Gojri*: Gojri is the language spoken by the Gujjars in various parts of Pakistan. It is also spoken in scattered villages in Gilgit Baltistan, Chitral, Dir and in Swat. Gojri words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*ba:p*” and “*tiji*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*pa:r*], [*dzi:b*] and [*bu:to:*]. [*bi:*] means ‘twenty’ in Gojri.
2. *Hindko*: Hindko is an Indo-Aryan language closely related to Punjabi and is mainly spoken in Hazara division, comprising the districts of Haripur, Abbottabad, Mansehra and Battagram; and in parts of Azad Jammu and Kashmir in North Pakistan. Hindko words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*pe:*” and “*tiji:*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*taka*], [*dzi:b*] and [*bu:ta*]. [*bi:s*] means ‘twenty’ in Hindko.
3. *Pahari*: In North Pakistan, the language Pahari is mainly spoken along the Pir Panjal range of mountains in Jammu & Kashmir. It is also spoken in the Murree and Hazara districts. Pahari words for ‘father and daughter’ are “*peo:*” and “*ti:*” respectively while a ‘mountain’, ‘tongue’ and ‘tree’ are respectively called [*taki:/pā:r*], [*dzi:w*] and [*bu:ta*]. [*vi:*] means ‘twenty’ in Pahari.

Conclusion

This paper is on Dardistan which is the Hindu-Kush Karakoram region with a brief history and a snapshot of languages. Some of the languages spoken in Dardistan are also widely spoken outside it. For instance, Pashto, Hindko and Gujari are also spoken in other areas which are not within the boundaries of Dardistan. Therefore, in this paper only those areas of these languages are given which are considered within this geo-cultural entity, Dardistan.

As obvious from the sources quoted there is unfortunately none of any Pakistani linguist in the list. Nor has any research institute or university in Pakistan ever undertaken any task to document these languages. All the linguists, ethnographers and anthropologists cited above are either from Europe or the USA. These researchers and scholars have, at least, focused this diversity in the mountain valleys and have done remarkable work; and have provided firm grounds for any future research in these areas; and consequently built the foundation for any planning to preserve and revitalize these languages.

Attention towards the depleting diversity by the concerned communities is also a recent phenomenon which particularly happened over the past two decades. But again nobody among the concerned communities is a noted linguist, ethnographer, historian or anthropologist.

The few organizations and individuals, including this author and the organization Idara Baraye Taleem-o-Taraqi (IBT) he founded, have been working for the preservation, promotion and maintenance of their languages and cultures without any support from the state or its organizations. This lack of interest, rather a sheer apathy, on the part of the state of Pakistan has left this beautiful mosaic of diversity at the mercy of fast encroaching internal and external globalization.

The work for these languages and cultures by the individual activists, scholars and organizations is highly commendable but it is not sustainable given the meagre sources and support these entities get from foreign universities or organizations. Unless and until the central government of Pakistan as well as the regional governments pay special attention to this diversity and give due space for these languages in the policies and education in the country there is no way out of the loss of indigenous knowledge, local histories, folklore, literature and cultures.

In Pakistan the few 'major' languages whose speakers possess some sort of political clout get state attention but the speakers of the languages in North Pakistan are marginalized and hence do not get due attention. Therefore, they feel as if they and their languages indigenous are aliens to mainstream Pakistan. They are peripheries among peripheries and thus twice disadvantaged.

This author has been involved in documenting, preserving and promoting the languages of North Pakistan as he also belongs to one of the Dardic communities. This paper is written in order to raise awareness among the concerned people, organizations and state functionaries about the erosion of this boastful diversity.

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