The Distribution of the Parachi Language

By

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Ten years ago on a linguistic research with Prof. Benvenist (Prof. de College de France), I had the opportunity to make a trip towards the north and northeast. The main scope of this trip consisted in studying the distribution of the languages in that area. The first language that we studied on our way to the north was Parachi. This language is spoken still by the inhabitants of the Shutul’s Valley and was studied several years ago by a Norwegian scholar in Kabul, but not on the spot.

Afghanistan is a crossroad of Asia, and besides the Persian and Pashtu languages, has several other languages as Pashai, Wakhi, Nuristani, Turki, Parachi etc. In this article I would like to describe the distribution of the Parachi language in Afghanistan.

The Parachi language was first mentioned by Babur in his memoirs. He wrote that in the villages and districts of Kabul there were in addition to Persian and Pashtu several other languages as Turki, Moghuli, Hindi, Bereki, Parachi.

Today the nearest place to Kabul where the Parachi language is spoken is the valley of Shutul, situated at 80 km to the north of Kabul and 20 km to the north of Gulbahar. To reach the

2. *Memoirs of Zahir-Ed-Din Mohammed Baber*, Translated by J. Leyden and W. Erskine, (Longman, Rerr, Oume, Brown, and Green, Edinburgh, 1826) p. 140: "In the country of Kabul there are many and various tribes. Its valleys and plains are inhabited by Turks, Aimsa, and Aralabs. In the city and the greater part of the villages, the population consists of Tajiks. Many other of the villages and districts are occupied by Pashnis, Parachis, Tajiks, Bereks, and Afghans. In the hill country to the west, reside the Hazaras and Nukderis. Among the Hazaras and Nukderis tribes there are some who speak the Monghul language. In the hill country to the northeast lies Kafiristan, such as Kattor and Gebrek. To the south is Afghanistan."


valley one must go to Dallan-sang situated at the foot of the mountain on the way to Panjshir. Then one must climb the mountain and its pass to the other side. A torrent runs through the green valley, the houses being built on both sides of the stream. This narrow valley has the shape of a semicircle and contains several villages (1) of which the most important are chilanak, Khanan Jooy, Bostan, Kunda, Ruidarrah of Persian language speakers. In Andarabisat and Arzava, the inhabitants speak a mixture of Persian and Parachi, and finally three other villages, Akhmadandoor and Marah Deh Kalan, all three are inhabited by speakers of Parachi.

According to the inhabitants of Shutul, their ancestors migrated from Najrau situated 120 km north of Kabul and settled in Shutul and Kurabah, which is situated on the left bank of the Panjshir and a short distance from Dallan-sang. But in spite of an inquiry on the spot, we did not find any trace of Parachi language in Kurabah. Parachi there has become extinct and substituted for by Persian. In Shutul the Parachi language is decaying and will probably disappear within 20 or 30 years and be replaced by Persian.

The largest survival area in Afghanistan of Parachi is Najrau. The beautiful valley of Najrau is situated on the south watershed of the Hindu Kush range. It is very important from the point of view of tourism and linguistics. Najrau is at a distance of 120 km northeast of Kabul. The valley has the shape of a palm and is intersected by the secondary and very deep valleys of Darrah Kalan, Ghaus, Potta, Pachaghan and Kharedj Darrah.

The land of Najrau is rich and water is in abundance. Its staples are corn, barley, maize (Indian corn), rice, and fruit. The milk industry there is flourishing and its cheese is well known all over the country.

1 According to a new research, made recently by myself in the valley of Marreh in Shutul, there are fifteen villages in the valley of Shutul to wit: Chelanak, Jananjooy, Ghorah, Bostan Dehkalan, Marrah, Andarabisat, Senaware, Sange Lakhchan, Kondu, Akhmadandoor, Rooydarah, Arzawah, Astoofalo, Kham.
The Parachi language, which belongs to the Indo-European family of languages, is spoken only in two places in Afghanistan, in Shutul and in Patcharan Valley. The villages of this picturesque valley are Ghayn, Yahyakhel, Locakhel, Daulat Khan Khel, Husein Khan-khel, Pachay, Doquaumy, Ibrahim Khel, Khadja Ghar, Zekria-Khel, Mirkhankhel. The number of the inhabitants of Parachi language in Shutul is estimated at 2000 to 2500; those of the Najrau at 5000 or 6000.

The Russian scholar, Prof. M. S. Andreev, visited Panjshir in 1926. He wrote a report on his trip, but he did not publish his materials about Parachi. According to him, Parachi is spoken in Kuraba, a village situated on the left bank of the Panjshir River.

From the researches that we did several years ago, there is no doubt that the Parachi language is spoken today only in two places in Afghanistan, one in Shutul and the other in Nejrau, both in the north of the country.