

# KHOWAR LANGUAGE: THE ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION THROUGH HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Syed Anwar Ali Shah<sup>\*1</sup>, Abdul Fattah<sup>2</sup>, Ayaz Ud Din<sup>3</sup>

<sup>\*1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English University of Chitral.

<sup>2,3</sup>Mphil Scholar University of Chitral.

<sup>1</sup>[syedanwar@uoch.edu.pk](mailto:syedanwar@uoch.edu.pk), <sup>2</sup>[fatahgcms7@gmail.com](mailto:fatahgcms7@gmail.com), <sup>3</sup>[ayaazuddiin@gmail.com](mailto:ayaazuddiin@gmail.com)

Corresponding Author: \*

Dr. Syed Anwar Ali Shah

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15379064>

Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
09 November, 2024	09 December, 2024	24 December, 2024	31 December, 2024

## ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to explore the origins and evolution through historical and cultural perspective of Khowar language in Chitral by applying qualitative content analysis. The findings revealed that the Prototype Khowar came into existence due to the admittance and interaction of Dravidian speech community with the indigenous inhabitance of Chitral (known as "Pisacha" who spoke "Pisacha" language, "seemed to be "Kalash"). The language in turn developed six speech sounds different from the languages whose origins do not go to the Indo-Iranian roots. Besides, the finding revealed that Khowar language there are a number of lexis particular to agriculture seemed to be from Dravidian origins. Moreover, the findings also explored that Khowar language has its distinct inflectional system; and the words with medial and terminal /k/ sound have their close affinity with Dravidian language rather than the languages coming from the Indo-Iranian origins.

**Keywords:** Khowar, Dravidians, Pisacha, Existence, Medial and Terminal, Indo-Iranian and Origin

## INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the origins and evolution through historical and cultural perspective of Khowar language. Though, Khowar is one of the major languages of Northern Pakistan it is mainly spoken in Chitral, which is strategically located right at the center of different cultures with distinctive languages (Israr, 2012). It has close cultural ties with Central Asian countries on the northern side and shares the same bond with Asian countries in the south (Warburton, 2007). making it a repository of various cultures. Therefore, Khowar has a rich linguistic diversity encompassing all the cultures and languages that it has encountered. Before, the British occupation of this region, several invading forces attacked Chitral coming both from northern and southern borders (Warburton, 2007). Some of the invading forces left behind their people

who settled down in this region and mingled with the indigenous population to develop a society comprising various ethnic groups who afterward helped evolve a compact culture to be known as Khow culture, which eventually gave birth to Khow caste (Ramat, 1999).

The word "Khow" does not relate to any specific ethnic group. This multiethnic society fostered a common language known as Khowar or Chitrali language and helped to cement mutual relationship as a unifying force (Decker, 1992; 42). Khowar is a language spoken by a small community confined to a mountainous region, which is hardly accessible to the outside world due to its harsh terrain (Decker, 1992; 28). Until recent times Khowar even did not exist in written form although it is a very rich language in terms of all the conventions that are

attributed to any indigenous community. It has been a language of a tribal society, deprived of formal education since its inception; therefore, it did not grow much academically and mostly remained static due to scarcity of research on the various attributes and components of Khowar.

Subsequently, Khowar has been a lingua Franca of the heterogeneous Khow caste in this region (Decker, 1992; 42). It contains features of both Central Asian and South Asian languages. There are a few other languages spoken in this region namely *Kaelasha-monde*, *Palulla*, *Dameeli*, *Gawarbat*, *Nooristani*, *Yidigha*, *Burushaskey*, *Gujary*, *Wakhy*, *Kyrgyzi*, *Persian-Dary*, *Pushto*, *Urdu*, and *English* (Sloan, 1980). Among these languages, *Pashto*, *Urdu* and *English* are used by young people who either learn them at schools, colleges and universities or at workplaces outside Chitral (Magnus, 2005; 40).

Although, majority of the population uses Khowar language as a vehicle of thought and they prefer to call themselves as Chitralis (Magnus, 2005). Khowar speaking people in Chitral resides in various valleys, like *Torikhow*, *Mulikhow*, *Mustaj*, *Kooh*, *Lot-kooh* and *Drush*. This figure does not include people who have migrated to other places and their number reaches almost about a million (Decker, 1992; 41-42). Anyhow, Khowar is spoken in a few other surrounding areas such as *Nuristan* (Afghanistan) *Gurno Badakhshan* (Tajikistan) *Ghizar* (Gilgit) and *Kalam* (Swat) (Magnus, 2005).

Similarly, when the British came to Chitral as a colonial power, they realized the strategic importance of Chitral, which was serving as a checkpoint against invasions from the north thus protecting British India and indigenous rulers from hostile forces (Thomson, 1981; 296). Hence, it served as a defensive wall for British India as well as for the indigenous rulers, against the invading forces (Faizi, 1996). This contact between the Britishers and Chitralis paved the way for interaction between English and Khowar language, which influenced the latter to a considerable extent. Local people were hired in the British Army, which encouraged Chitralis to incorporate English words in their local language. This mingling of the two languages greatly enriched Khowar language on one hand, but at the same time overshadowed the development of Khowar language due to the

predominance of English as an international language.

As compared to other languages, no linguistic study of Khowar has so far been made except that a few individuals initiated some sort of investigation into this language at a personal level for their own interest (Decker, 1992). The reason why no such task was undertaken seems to be the lack of easy access to Chitral; in the first place as high mountain ranges like the *Hindu Kush*, *Karakorum* and *Himalayas* broke communication links for a good part of the year. Even those who worked on the Khowar language obtained information from outside resources instead of physically accessing the region (Magnus, 2005).

However, a major contribution to language study was made by Morgenstern, who visited Chitral in 1929, which in fact paved the way for further interest in Khowar language, thus a few other individuals tried to probe into this subject (Decker, 1992). John Biddulph (1977) states in his work titled "Tribes of the Hindoo Kush" that further research would prove Khowar to be equally derived from *Zend* (Avestan, Old Persian) and *Sanskrit*. D. J. T. O'Brien's (1885) work on Khowar contains Grammar and vocabulary. Major Gurdon collected some information about Khowar language during his stay in Chitral from 1895 to 1902, which were later on, included in the linguistic Survey of India by Grison. On the basis of that information Grison has kept Khowar in the family of the indo-Iranian Dardic group of languages. As he mentions~ The inhabitants of Dardistan are frequently mentioned in ancient literature. In Sanskrit literature they are spoken of as 'Darada' and the inhabitants were called 'Pisachas' whether 'Pischas' a word that was really a tribal name, later extended to denote such a demon, or the term 'raw-eating demon' was given as a nickname to the tribes inhabiting the Dard country, and they occupied this entire tract and influenced its speech. The Dardic languages of the present day fall into three groups—the "Kafir", "Khowar" and the "Dard". Of these, Khowar consists of a single language, standing, as we shall see, somewhat apart from the others (Gerson, 1928). The author has given a historical account of the previous studies in the field of Indian languages. A classified list of all languages spoken in Pakistan and India are

elucidated. Moreover, a complete list of names given to those Languages is also included in the above-cited work. Besides, a comparison between the statistics of the survey and those of the census of 1921 is the only authentic record of its nature in this work. He (Gerson) further elaborates, 'the first Aryan invaders from the north influenced, no doubt by the non-Iranian tongues. Keeping in view the aforementioned statement about Khowar language, there is a research gap. Thus, this research article tries to bridge the research gap by digging out the origin and evolution through historical and cultural prospective of the Khowar language. Moreover, this research study will open a fresh avenue for debate and discussion about the origin and evolution through historical and cultural prospective of the Khowar language.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To explore the origination of prototype Khowar in Chitral.
- To analysis the evolution of Khowar language through historical and cultural perspective.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- How the prototype Khowar came to exist?
- What are the historical and cultural evolution perspective of Khowar language?

#### DELIMITATION:

The study was limited to the origin and evolution through historical and cultural perspective of Khowar language under the umbrella of Dravidian language; and other related development has been covered under this study. The study opened a new avenue for debate and discussion about the Khowar language in academic circle.

#### METHODOLOGY:

The paradigm of this study is qualitative, which explored and analyzed words of proto type Khowar (Creswell, 1998). Whereas the qualitative content analysis was the method of the study: and the interpretation of the text data was systematically classified through coding, identifying themes and patterns" (Hsieh H. F., 1998, p.1278). thus, the study attended to unique themes that illustrate the range of the meanings of the phenomenon rather than the statistical significance of the occurrence of particular texts and concepts. Besides, a

considerable number of texts were reviewed purposively for data collection. Hence, the data was obtained from select books, Journal, indigenous texts of folklores, poetry and analytical works of both local and international scholars on the topic. The data was analyzed through careful reading and rereading, the textual data coding and the coded segments into broader categories as well as themes.

#### DISCUSSION:

The term Dravidian was introduced by a linguist "Robert A. Caldwell" (1856) in his work titled "Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages". He proclaims that Dravidians were living in India before the evolution of Sanskrit and the Aryans migration to India. (Nasim, 1949). It is believed that they were the first inhabitants of the sub-continent and spoke a language, called Dravidian language (Gerson, 1928). The speakers of the language imitated the basic sounds of birds and animals in the initial stage of its development. Subsequently, the migration of the Dravidians continued and reached the extreme north of the present Pakistan and Afghanistan and evolved into an unfasten language

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dravidian\\_languages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dravidian_languages)). The family of the Dravidian language is one of the largest families of Languages in the world; includes seventy-three languages spoken by more than two hundred and twenty-two million people in India, Sri Lanka, and certain areas of Pakistan. Now the only Dravidian language spoken in Pakistan and Afghanistan is Brahui, the number of its speakers in Pakistan is more than two hundred thousand. Presently, most of the Dravidian languages are spoken in the southern part of Indian sub-continent, while on the northern part of Indian sub-continent (Pakistan) the Indo-Aryan languages are spoken. It is believed that Dravidians were Indian natives and spread throughout India and spoke Dravidian languages (Morgenstern, 1947). Later on, the invasion of Indo-Aryan from the north compelled Dravidians to move into the southern part of India ([file://Dravidian%20Language%20Languages.html](http://Dravidian%20Language%20Languages.html)). The assumption of the possibility of the speaker of Proto-Dravidian language in the earlier stage entered into the sub-continent from

the Central Asia gives us no authenticity (Emwnwu, 1994). While it shows the possibility that in the Vedic Sanskrit the Dravidian loanwords might have entered due to the expansion of Dravidian speakers in the north. It has also been suggested that in the northwest of the sub-continent some languages may have been spoken earlier. Thus, the Kafir (Nuristani) which make up the northern part of the subcontinent have languages with many Dravidian words along with Sanskrit, which in turn shows that Dravidian prevailed in what is now northern Pakistan (Emwnwu, 1984), (of which Chitral makes a part). According to Major Biddulph, in the regions of Dirdistan a single language was spoken, which got split, when Khowar language came in. In addition, he argues that Khowar has very close relationship with "Kalash" language as compared to the other languages of those regions. It is assumed, earlier people called 'Pisacha', speaking 'Pisacha language; inhabited the regions between Hindu Kush and Himalayas (Gardezi, 1989), and is supposed to be the single language spoken in the region (Biddulph, 1977). The above-mentioned clues reveal that linguistic core of Khowar does not come from Aryan sources, but point to the presence of an earlier form of language, which might be termed as Prototype Khowar, and in turn emerged as a result of interactions between 'Pisachas' and 'Dravidians'.

However, a renowned linguist, Morgenstern says that the origin of many words in Khowar is not known. This unknown characteristic of Khowar supports my proposition of the study. Moreover, Khowar has developed its own Inflectional system different from Sanskrit (Morgenstern, 1947). European theorists usually focus on Sanskrit as the mother to most of the languages spoken today in Asia and Europe. However, some recent studies point to the links between Dravidians, Turkish and the languages spoken by the aborigines of Australia. This assumption prompts one to revisit the Sanskrit model. Theoretically, this model is a convenient tool for categorizing linguistic layers. Things become complicated when the reader tries to imagine the linguistic situation before the rise of Aryans in India. In this regard, linguists rely on the religious texts of the Hindus and the Zoroastrians. Interestingly, the differences between the two sources are not so great to treat

them as two distinct languages. So, it is difficult to dig out any literature about the exact history of Khowar, hence to find out such information we have to rely only on the existing speech sounds and words for our supposition. It is presumed that Khowar has been spoken in Chitral since its early history i.e., 5th century B.C (Faizi I. U., 1996). According to Ismail Solon 'Khowar is believed to be an old language; certainly, older than Persian' (Solon, 1981).

### **DRAVIDIAN LAYER IN THE ORIGNATION OF PROTOTYPE KHOWAR:**

These assumptions suggest the history of Khowar language, which is usually called Prototype Khowar; begins with the interaction of Dravidian with the indigenous inhabitant called 'Pisachas'. There are words (vocabularies) in Khowar, which can be used as a reference to such supposition. In linguistics, the study of the history of words is called etymology (Turner, 1973), shows when words entered in one language from the other and from what sources, and with the passage of time how meaning and form of that words have been changed. Words may enter from one language to other languages as a loanword through derivational morphology with the combination of preexisting elements in the borrowing language. The hybrid of this evolution is called the process of the phono-semantic; and this method of linguistic study is being applied on the Dravidian words in Khowar language are the following:

1. In Dravidian language the word "/Var/" means a language or tongue (Emwnwu, 1984). On the other hand, in Khowar the word "/var/" has the same meaning, which means language i.e., /Kho-var/ (the language of the "Khow" People), it indicates that the word "/var/" seemed to be derived from Dravidian language.
2. The word '/vari/' means seed or grain (Emwnwu, 1984); and the word exists in Khowar as '/varo/' means seed or grain. At the end of the word the vowel /i/ changed into /o/ vowel sound. When the people increase and become multilingual (Magnus, 2005), as a result of swelling regional changes, the resulting language could undergo parallel changes either through actual contact or as a result of mutual cultural or biological conditions; an example from



Dravidian are the words ‘/vari/’ and ‘/varo/’ already mentioned.

3. A word of Dravidian and Khowar in the same form and meaning is “/nul/” means twist, (Emwnwu, 1984), which is used as a sandal beneath the feet of horse, mule etc.

4. The word “/gonada/” (David, 1988), in Proto-Dravidian means, “wall” while in Khowar “/kanda/” means “wall”; only the /g/ sound has been changed into /k/ sound.

5. Another vocabulary in Dravidian is “/kalan/” means threshing ground. (David, 1988) It is “/khol-an/” in Khowar, /k/ sound is aspirated and the vowel sound /a/ has been changed into /o/ sound; and used as plural form of “/khol/”.

6. The word “/gonad/” means a piece of wood used as a hook of something like axe etc in Dravidian, while this word in the same meaning Khowar in “/gondaro/”.

7. A word “/kott-ay/” (Emwnwu, 1984), in Dravidian means ‘fort’ whereas the word “/kotani/ or /kotanai/” means bungalow in Khowar. “/kali/”, (Emwnwu, 1984), which means in Dravidian to join or come together, “/kali/” in Khowar has the same meaning; it is a staff to fasten the bullocks for tilting.

8. The word “/koric/”, (Emwnwu, 1984), in Dravidian means to nip off the husks of grain, in Khowar the word is pronounced “/kromic/” in the same meaning i.e., to nip off the husks of grain (Emwnwu, 1984).

9. The word “/pal/” means a kind of harrow both Dravidian and Khowar used for tilting (Emwnwu, 1984).

10. The word “/nar/” means water in Dravidians, while in Khowar /nar/ means the gushing point of water.

The above cited cognate words of Dravidian show the foundation of Khowar lexis, which are mostly related to agricultural stuffs. These also reveal that agriculture in Chitral started from that very point of time when Dravidian reached in Chitral.

Besides, the above-mentioned words, other words of Dravidian homophone words also exist in Khowar, a glittering example is the word “/Kotakai/”, (Emwnwu, 1984), even now used for a room attached to a mosque. Moreover, the noun “/ure/”, (Emwnwu, 1984), in proto Dravidian means house, while in Khowar it is pronounced by modification as “/dure/” means

house./paran/ means the place of fire or the sides of fire place in proto Dravidian and the same word /paran/ is used for the same meaning in Khowar. A word /tak/, (Emwnwu, 1984), which means to sustain or to tie-up in proto Dravidian, the word /tak/ in Khowar has the same meaning as tie-up, which is used in Khowar like this “Istoroheratakkora” means, tie-up the horse there. The word /pot/ in proto-Dravidian means the blast of the boiling dish during boiling process; and this word is used for the same meaning in Khowar, i.e., “shakhish-pot doyan”. Dravidians prevailed in the country before Aryan immigrations (Morgenstern, 1947). It indicates that Prototype Khowar has taken its roots from the Dravidians; consider the chart.

### THE PROTOTYPE KHOWAR:

Prototype Khowar has its distinct phonology, and inflectional system (Morgenstern, 1947). There exist six speech sounds in Khowar, hence, makes it different from other languages coming from the Indo-European or Indo-Iranian roots. As it has already been mentioned that Khowar has been spoken in Chitral since 5th B. C. (Faizi 1996), these speech sounds are as following.

Figure:

1. ç/çh “çhey” \_\_\_\_\_ çetraar (Chitral), çetrari (Chitrali).
2. ts/ts “tsey” \_\_\_\_\_ tsetseq, (Children), /tsowoe/ means hungry, /tsoghu/ means orphan.
3. j/j “jeem” \_\_\_\_\_ jenfair (Chain).
4. ð/w “ðaw” \_\_\_\_\_ khoshgað (Yak)
5. ž/žh “ž” \_\_\_\_\_ žhindrik (a kind of horse's braying), žar means sharp or quick.
6. š/šh “šeen” \_\_\_\_\_ /šapik/ (bread), /šhaa/ (black), /šhawai/ (pearl). /Kišepi/, means Magpie, /šour/ means salty, /buypašh/ means a big traditional room in çetrar (Chitral), /šotar/ means seashore, “/kawošh/” means sandals.

As mentioned by (Solon, 1981), the author of Khowar English Dictionary that Khowar has 42 phonemes, while (Faizi I. , 1976) says most of the phonemes do not exist in any other language of the region. For instance, the letters /t/, /th/, /d/, /l/, /sh/, /ch/, /chh/, and /j/ all have two dissimilar forms, i.e., retroflexed and detail-volar (non-retroflexed). The inhabitants who learnt the language on his mother's knee could easily distinguish these forms, whereas outsiders can

never learn the phonemes, no matter how long they stay in Chitral (Solon 1981). Among these, the most interesting are the /chh/ aspirated and /ch/ non-aspirated sounds, the word Chitral itself is the best example; never pronounced correctly by outsiders (Sloan, 1981). Among the people of these regions, Chitral is always pronounced and written "Chitrar": it seems to rise from an inquisitive lack of ability to make a distinction between the letter "r" and "L", (In this way "/Konur/" becomes "/Konul/", the "/Lowri Pass" the "/Rowli/" Pass etc. (Biddulph, 1971).

To differentiate the above-mentioned phonemes; word like "/chuchi/" means "tomorrow morning" has two entirely different 'ch' sounds. The former is aspirated palato-alveolar and the latter is un-aspirated palato-alveolar. Besides, "/Chuy/" means "night" is palato-alveolar while "/chuy/" means "hungry" is retroflex. "/char/" means "a cliff" or an oval ground un-aspirated palato-alveolar and "/char/" means "a dry leaf" is un-aspirated retroflex. The aforementioned discussion showed that the Proto-type Khowar took its roots from the Dravidian language and later on evolved in different phases of historical and cultural perspective.

## CONCLUSION:

The Prototype Khowar came to exist in Chitral with the interaction of Dravidians with the indigenous people of Chitral. They were known as "Pisacha" and spoke "Pisacha" language. It developed six speech sounds different from the languages coming from the Indo-Iranian roots. On the other hand, the cited words (nouns) mostly concerned with agricultural stuff have been still in use in Khowar, shows that agriculture started in those regions from that point of time, when Dravidians accessed to Chitral. Later on, the Aryans came to these regions as invaders, so, Sanskrit as the language of the invaders had considerable impact on Khowar in its developmental stage. Khowar has borrowed so many names of the villages and mountains from Sanskrit. Besides, the Turkic and the Ghalchach languages i.e., Wakhi have very considerable share in the development of Khowar, because of its geographical contiguity with Eastern Turkistan (Xinjing) and Wakhiks of Gorno-Badakhshan and Wakhan corridor. In

near past the people of those areas were passing through Chitral in the form of invaders, traders, and pilgrims by leaving behind their linguistic influences, in this way Khowar became a full-fledged language. It is concluded that the floor is opened further study on preservation of Khowar language.

## REFERENCES:

- Ager, S. (n.d.). Writing Khowar. Retrieved 08 05, 2018, from [omnilgot.com: www.omnilgot.com/writing/khowar.htm](http://omnilgot.com/www.omnilgot.com/writing/khowar.htm)
- Biddulph, M. (1977). *Dialects of Hindukush*. Karachi: Indus Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. Oaks: Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Decker, K., & Sloan, S. *Languages of Chitral* (pp. 28-41). Islamabad: Quaid-i-Azam University press.
- Emwnwu, M. B. (1994). *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ewen, M. J. (1987). *principles of dependency phonology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Faizi, I. (1976). *Khowar Bol Chal*. Chitral: Anjumana Taraqia Khowar.
- Faizi, I. U. (1996). *Wakhan: A window into Central Asia*. Peshawar: Al Qalam.
- Gardezi, M. N. (1989). *The Growth and Development of the Wakhi Language*. University of Peshawar, Area Study Center. Peshawar: Area Study Center University of Peshawar.
- Gerson, G. A. (1928). *Linguistic Survey of India* (Vol. 1). Lahore: Accurate.
- Hsieh, H. F. (1998). *Three approaches to qualitative research*. Qualitative Health Research, Thousand Oaks, AC: Sage.
- Hsieh, h. F. (2005). *Three approaches to qualitative research*. Qualitative Health Research.
- Israr., D. (2012). *Sir: Muhammad Nasirul Mulk*. Peshawar: Peshawar University.
- Marsden, M. (2005). *Living Islam. Muslim Religious Experiences in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Morgenstern, G. (1932). *Report on a linguistic mission to NorthWestern India* (pp. 14-15). Oslo: Inst.

Morgenstern., G. (1942). Notes On Dameli: A Kafir-Dardic Language of Chitral. Vol. 12. N.p.: Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap.  
Ramat. B. K. (1999). *The Hindu Kush Study Series*, Peshawar: Peshawar Rehmat Printing Press.  
Sloan. M. I. (1981). *Khowar-English Dictionary*.

Peshawar: Peshawar Sheikh Shah Publisher.  
Thomson., H. C. (1981). A Narrative of Events: In Chitral Swat and Bajour. Lahore: Sange-Meel Publisher.  
Warburton. R. (2007). Eighteen years in the Khyber (Lahore: Sange-Meel Publishers.

