

Language of the Khetrans of Barkhan of Pakistani Balochistan: A preliminary description



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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a preliminary investigation on the documentation of the language of Khetrans. The Khetrans, being one of the many Baloch tribes that speak a language apart from Balochi, primarily occupy the Barkhan district of Balochistan. Earlier observations describe their language as forming a part of Sindhi or being a type of Lahnda. Khetrani is undoubtedly a northwestern Indo-Aryan language, and the evidence at the researcher's disposal shows that it does share features with both Sindhi and Siraiki. Historically Khetrani lay well on a dialect continuum that spanned both of these languages and has preserved features intermediate to each. Its adjectival morphology is nearly the same as Siraiki's but the pronominal one closer to Sindhi. Khetrani verb structure is largely similar to and at par with Siraiki for it lacks the "richness" of Sindhi, despite the forms of many cognate verbs being identical to Sindhi. The most salient features of the verbal morphology aligning Khetrani with Siraiki are a sigmatic future and the continuous aspect. The valence model, however, is similar to Sindhi and Khetrani has a Passive Participle peculiar to itself. These features distinguish Khetrani as an independent language.

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The Glossary of the Tribes and Castes (Rose, 1911), employing the data of Ibbetson's Census Report for the Punjab (1883), describes the Khetrans as "an independent Baloch tribe which is situated behind *Leghari*, *Lund* and *Khosas*" (Rose, 1911: 534). About the language of the Khetrans it is remarked that their "speech is an Indian dialect closely allied with Sindhi, and in fact probably a form of the Jatki speech of the lower Indus" (Rose, 1911: 535); yet the "septs" of Khetrans are named using "the Balochi patronymic suffix *ani*". Further it is mentioned that though the Khetrans happen to be "capital cultivators", yet "they are now for all practical purposes a Baloch tribe" (Rose, 1911: 535).

The Khetrans are an important tribe of Balochistan that occupy a large hilly tract in the Sulaiman Mountains, which includes the entire Barkhan district and also minor parts of Kohlu towards the southwest and Musakhel in the north. They also have a sizable population in the neighbouring Dera Ghazi Khan district to the east where they possess huge tracts of land (Fig. 1).

Abbreviations: ADJ, Adjective; Adpos., Adposition; ADV, Adverb; Approx., Approximant; AUX, Auxiliary; CONJ, Conjunction; Conj. Ptc., Conjunctive Participle; Dir., Direct; Fem., Feminine; Fric., Fricative; Fut. pass. ger., Future Passive Gerund; Implo., Implosive; Inf., Infinitive; Intr., Intransitive; Khet., Khetrani; LSI, Linguistic Survey of India; Masc., Masculine; Modi., Modifier; N, Noun; NEG, Negation particle; Obl., Oblique; Pass., Passive; Pl., Plural; Pr. adv. ptc., Present Adverbial Participle; Pr. ptc., Present Participle; PRN, Pronoun; PRN Inter., Interrogative Pronoun; PRN Suf., Pronominal Suffix; Pst. Ptc., Past Participle; Ptc., Participle; QUANT, Quantifier; Sg., Singular; Sin., Sindhi; Sir., Siraiki; Suf., Suffix; Tr., Transitive.

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Fig. 1. Geographical distribution of the Khetran tribe.

The seasonal raiding of the local tribes led to the intervention of the British authorities of India in the region during late 19th century. According to *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* (1908, p. 38) the first official British presence in Kheran territory began in 1879 when a detachment was stationed at *Vitakri*, in part with the treaty of Gandamak to keep the raiding activities of the tribes in check, but it was withdrawn the same year. In 1880, the Khetrans petitioned to be taken under the British protection; this they were but four years later granted (i.e., in 1884) in the form of a political control following disturbances among the local tribes the preceding year (*Balochistan Gazetteer*, 1907). After the construction of the frontier road in 1887, direct administrative control became possible (*Balochistan Gazetteer*, 1907) and the entire valley was brought under the British Protection as the Barkhan tahsil of Loralai district (*Imperial Gazetteer*, 1908). With a population of 13,600 out of a total of about 68,000 the Khetrans formed the only *non-Afghan* tribe in the district in 1901 (*Imperial Gazetteer*, 1908).

The earliest observers, although familiar with the fact that their language posed a peculiar Indic dialect, still identified the Khetrans alongside their Iranian neighbours. One of these observers was Ibbetson, the author of *Panjab Castes* (1916), which was based on the material of his already mentioned *Census Report* of 1883. He referred to them as “being Biloch in Derah Ghazi Khan, Pathan in Derah Ismail Khan, and probably of Jat origin in both” (*Panjab Castes* 1916: 39). At one point he located them to the east of *Marris* and included them among “the organized Biloch tribes of the Derajat” (Ibbetson, 1916: 47); at another point, he put them together with the *Kasranis*, at the southern boundary of Dera Ismail Khan (Ibbetson, 1916: 55) but he favoured Vehowa, the latter, as being “their original homeland” (Ibbetson, 1916: 47).

Following him, Bonarjee (1899: 36–37), who in fact used the same materials of the Census Report of 1883, found the Khetran to be “occupying portions of land off the Baloch frontier”. He described them as “partly Pathan and partly Baluch” but admitting that they “class themselves as Baluch” (Bonarjee, 1899: 50). He also remarked upon their being richer than the other Baloch tribes because they were good agriculturalists and “not very warlike”.

As an officer of the British Indian government posted in Dera Ghazi Khan District, Dames (1904) worked extensively in the region, particularly with regard to documenting the history and literature of the Baloch tribes and the Balochi language (see Dames, 1922). In line with the preceding observers, he too mentioned the Khetrans as “an aboriginal Indian tribe” (Dames, 1904: 44) whose language occurred to him as “akin to Sindhi and Jatt” (Dames, 1904: 14). But he explicitly stated that they “strictly be called Baloch” (Dames, 1904: 13). He preferred deriving their name from *khetr* ‘field’ (Dames, 1904: 13) for they were chiefly cultivators in contrast to their primarily nomadic Iranian neighbours.

According to the *Balochistan Gazetteer* (1907: 72), the Khetrans formed about 20% of the population of 61,322 of Loralai. Grierson (1919: 372) quoted a number of 14,581 individuals as of the year 1901. Suggested estimates put their

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