

Balochi Language spoken In

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Introduction

Balochi is spoken in south-western Pakistan, south-eastern Iran, southern Afghanistan, the Gulf States and Turkmenistan. There are also communities of Baloch in East Africa and India, as well as in several countries of the West, e.g. Great Britain and the USA. It is very hard to estimate the total number of speakers of Balochi, especially since central governments do not generally stress ethnic identity in census reports, but statistics available give at hand that at least between Ten and Fifteen million Baloch speak the language. Linguistically Balochi belongs to the western group of the Iranian branch of the Indo-European languages, and is closely related to Kurdish and Persian.

The main dialect split is that between eastern, southern and western dialects. Eastern Balochi dialects are spoken in border areas to Indian languages in Punjab, Sind, and the north eastern parts of Pakistani Balochistan, and are heavily influenced by Indian languages, e.g. Sindhi and Lahnda. Southern (Makorani) Balochi is spoken in the southern areas of the Balochi speaking parts of Iran and Pakistan, including Karachi, as well as in the Gulf States. Western Balochi is spoken in the northern Balochi speaking area in Iran and Pakistan (except in the north east), in Afghanistan and in Turkmenistan.

The Balochi language is a north-west Iranian language but is nowadays spoken in the south eastern corner of the Iranian linguistic area. According to the epic tradition of the Baloch themselves, they are of Arabic origin and migrated from Aleppo in Syria after the battle of Karbala, where, despite being mainly Sunni Muslims, they fought on the side of the Shi'a Muslim imam and martyr Hussein. Even if these legends must be seriously questioned they may at least carry some truth in them. It is possible that the original home of the Baloch was somewhere in the central Caspian region, and that they then migrated south-eastwards under pressure from the Turks peoples invading the Iranian plateau from Central Asia. It is also possible that tribes and groups of various ethnic origin, including Indo-European, Semitic, Dravidic, Turkic, and others have been incorporated into the very heterogeneous ethnic group known as the Baloch.

The Balochi language has long been regarded as a dialect of Persian, and has not until recently been used as a written language. Balochi possesses, however, a rich oral literature of both poetry and prose. As a written language Balochi can be divided into two periods, the colonial period with British rule in India, and the period after the Independence of Pakistan. During the first period most of the existing written literature was produced as a result of British influence. The literature of this time on and in Balochi consists of grammar books and collections of oral poetry and tales, compiled in order to provide samples of the language and to make it possible for British military and civil officials to learn Balochi.

With the withdrawal of the British and the Independence of Pakistan in 1947, the Baloch themselves became increasingly concerned with the development of their language. Baloch poets, who had previously composed mainly in Persian and Urdu started to write poetry in their mother tongue. Literary circles were founded and publication of magazines and books in Balochi got underway. This use of Balochi as a written language has mainly been limited to Pakistan, where Quetta and Karachi soon developed into the two main centres of Balochi literary activities. In Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and the Gulf States Balochi is still basically an

oral language, despite sporadic attempts at writing and publication. In these place there are more strict rule against writing in Balochi. Hence, the Balochi writers especially in Iran are scared of writing in Baloch for fear of being arrested by the Iranian secret police.

Balochi, thus, has a very short tradition of writing. The works written in the 19th and early 20th centuries by Englishmen are in Roman script. The orthography used today by the Baloch in Pakistan is based on the Arabic script with Persian-Urdu conventions. There is no standard written language, and therefore no fixed alphabet. Depending on which dialect is written the number of letters in a proposed alphabet may vary. The complete Arabic alphabet has, however, been adopted for Persian/Urdu and thereby also for Balochi, and Arabic loanwords in Balochi are generally spelled in accordance with their spelling in Arabic. This leads to over-representation of consonant phonemes. Vowel phonemes are, on the contrary, not fully represented.

Balochi was more widely spoken in the 19th and early 20th centuries than nowadays. Especially in Punjab and Sind there are today many people who recognize themselves as Baloch but speak Indian languages. There are also Baloch both in the Gulf States and in East Africa who have switched over from speaking Balochi to speaking (and writing) Arabic and Swahili respectively. On the other hand, several Brahui tribes, both in Iran and Pakistan have switched over from speaking Brahui to speaking Balochi.

Education in the Balochi speaking areas is invariably in a second language, namely in Urdu/English (Pakistan), Persian (Iran and Afghanistan - if there is any education at all in present-day Afghanistan), Arabic (the Gulf States) and Turkmen/Russian (Turkmenistan). This means that Balochi is used only in certain language domains, and by most of its speakers only as a spoken, not as a written language. It also happens that e.g. Baloch from Iran use Persian among themselves for discussing subjects such as science or politics, which are taught in school or acquired through reading books in Persian and other languages. Balochi is thus forcefully confined to a language mainly of the home and the local community. In education, administration, and in urban areas, often also at work, other languages are used.

Baloch are also to be found in the Iranian Diaspora after the Islamic Revolution. Thus, a limited number of mainly well educated Baloch live in several European countries, the USA, Canada and other countries where Iranians have taken refuge. Balochi is surrounded by languages belonging to at least five language families. In the Balochi mainland it meets other Iranian languages, Persian (Farsi and Dari) in the west and north-west, and Pashto in the north and north-east, as well as Indian languages, e.g. Punjabi, Lahnda and Sindhi in the north-east and east. All these languages belong to the Indo-Iranian branch of Indo-European languages. In the Gulf States Balochi stands in contact with Arabic (Semitic) and in East Africa with Bantu languages (e.g. Swahili). In the central parts of Pakistani Balochistan the Dravidian language Brahui has lived in symbiosis with and been dominated by Balochi for centuries, and in Turkmenistan Balochi meets the Turkic language Turkmen. In the Diaspora in Europe and North America, Balochi meets new languages, mainly of the Indo-European family. Balochi is not an official language, i.e. not a language of education and/or administration in any of the countries where it is spoken. Efforts to preserve and promote the language are therefore mainly initiatives taken by individuals lacking the authority that official decisions would have been invested with. This can easily be seen e.g. in the lack of a standard written norm for the language. Although in recent decades the Baloch Academy in Quetta has done a great deal of work including various comprehensive Balochi Dictionaries and Grammar books.

A number of educated Baloch, mainly in Pakistan, have since the 1950s actively attempted to preserve their language, creating a literature in it, and promoting it as a literary vehicle and in the area of education. Quetta and Karachi are the main centres of these activities. There is a Balochi Academy in Quetta, founded in 1961, receiving some financial support from the Government. Its most important literary activities are publication of books, mainly in Balochi, and arranging literary meetings. There are also other "Academies", publishing houses and individuals active in these fields. A number of periodicals have been published in Balochi for a shorter or longer period of time. Some of the Baloch in the Diaspora are also concerned with the preservation and promotion of Balochi, publishing magazines and arranging literacy classes, cultural evenings etc. Nowadays there are numerous weekly and monthly magazines published in Balochi.

There have been some attempts at starting primary education in Balochi. In 1991 a state programme for mother tongue education in the Province of Balochistan, Pakistan, was established, but it did not carry on for long, neither did it result in any official decision on matters of language standardization. Private initiatives have also been taken to teach Balochi, especially in the main Baloch residential area of Karachi, Lyari. It is also possible to study Balochi for an M. A. degree at the University of Balochistan, Quetta as well as in other parts of the World such as UK, Sweden, Italy, USA, India and Australia. However the Iranian Government under both the late Shah and the Islamic regime do not allow Balochi language. It is forbidden in Iran to write in Balochi, a situation comparable with the Kurdish plight in Turkey where the Kurds are regarded merely as "Turkish Peasants).

The issue of a Latin based script for Balochi was very fervently discussed among young Baloch intellectuals especially in the 1960s and early 1970s. There was also a considerable number of neologisms coined during this period for new phenomena in society and to replace loanwords. In the present volume different aspects of the Balochi language and its role in society are treated. Josef Elfenbein describes a self-lived process of trying to work out a Latin based script for Balochi in the 1960s and 70s. The issue of script is also addressed by Serge Axenov, who describes the different scripts that have been used for Balochi in Turkmenistan. Vyacheslav Moshkalo, too, describes the role of the Baloch and their language in the Turkmen society. The role of the Baloch in another border area, namely East Africa, is the topic of Abdulaziz Lodhi's article. The issue of mother tongue education in Balochi is treated by Tim Farrell and Eunice Tan, and Carina Jahani also touches on this question when she describes language attitudes and language maintenance among the Baloch in Sweden. As for Jan Muhammad Dashti, his contribution is an analysis of the relation between Balochi poetry and society from the beginning of the literary movement up to 1985. Others such as Dr Badal Khan of Italy and Dr Azim Shahbux of UK are doing certain works in this area.

Each writer has been free to use his or her own preferred system of transcription. Some homogenization has, however, been carried out. Thus, Baloch, Balochi, and Balochistan are the spellings that have been adopted, rather than Baluch, Baluchi and Baluchistan or Balouch, Balouchestan and Balouchi. The system for references and bibliographical data has also been unified. A common bibliography was preferred, since several references occur in more than one of the articles, and would have had to be repeated if each article was to be accompanied by its own bibliography. Baloch authors are placed in the bibliography according to their first name. Thus, for example, 'At? Sh?d is placed according to 'At?, not according to Sh?d. Geographical names are written without diacritics throughout the book. Several of these have an established spelling in English, and for the sake of consistency it was decided to omit all diacritics on geographical names. On proper names of persons who normally employ the Arabic script (i.e. not persons from Turkmenistan and East Africa), on the other hand, diacritics are used to indicate the correct spelling of these names in the Arabic script. Exceptions are names of persons well known in Europe, e.g. Bhutto, which are spelled according to the English convention. Also in references to books or articles written in English the name of the author is written in accordance with the spelling used by the person himself.

The aim of the present work is by no means to give a total picture of the status of the Balochi language in the different countries where it is spoken. There is, for example, no reference to Balochi in the Gulf States or in Afghanistan, mainly due to the limited character of the symposium of which this work is the result. Field research, especially of a sociolinguistic character is furthermore a very sensitive issue in all the countries where Balochi is spoken. On the other hand, the articles all treat subjects that have hardly been studied, let alone described up to the present. This volume wants to shed some light on how a minority group, like the Baloch, try to preserve and promote their language and culture within the framework of the states where they live, and are either discouraged from doing so as in Pakistan or are forbidden to do so as in Iran.. This has not always been an easy task, and although it is only in Pakistan that one can actually talk about the existence of a written Balochi language and literature, Baloch in other countries, too, inspired both by the literary movement in Pakistan and by cultural and ethnic movements among other minorities in their neighborhood, e.g. the Kurds, are eager to see the development of a standard written Balochi language and the creation of a corpus of written Balochi literature.

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