

THE PAMIRIAN LANGUAGES: BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE (the case of the Shughni language)



Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit's Research Paper #5

THE PAMIRIAN LANGUAGES: BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE (the case of the Shughni language)

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Abstract:

The Pamirian Tajiks live in the high mountainous valleys of Pamir in the Republic of Tajikistan. They preserved ancient East Iranian languages and their indigenous culture. It is estimated that more than 150,000 native speakers live in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous region (GBAO) of the Republic of Tajikistan. The paper examines the state of the Pamirian languages (based on the example of the Shughni language) during the Soviet times, as well as during the independence period of the Republic of Tajikistan. The article consists of two parts, which present the history and the formation of peculiarities in the Pamirian languages during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Despite the significant progress achieved in this area, still much work needs to be done to preserve the Pamirian languages. One of the priorities is to state the presence of these languages during the upcoming population census in the Republic of Tajikistan in 2020¹.

Keywords: Pamir, Tajikistan, population census, native language, Pamirian languages, East Iranian languages, language and people, Shambezoda, Shughni language.

About the author:

Kalandarov Tohir Safarbekovich is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences. The main focus of the research is the material and spiritual culture of the Pamirian peoples, in particular, Ismaili faith, pre-Muslim religious beliefs, ceremonies and cults, religious syncretism, as well as issues of ethno-confessional identity of the Pamirian peoples. Kalandarov's scientific interests also include migration from Tajikistan to Russia, problems of adaptation and integration of migrant Tajiks. Tohir Kalandarov has published two books – *Shughnani (historical-ethnographic research)* M. 2004; *Journey into the land of ruby mountains*. M. 2006 (in collaboration with V. P. Terehov) and dozens of scientific articles.

¹ The author thanks Sunatullo Djonboboiev, Research Fellow of UCA, for the valuable advice he has given after reading the first draft of the article.

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The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this paper are entirely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Central Asia. The text and sources of the article should be referenced in this format: T. Kalandarov (2020). The Pamirian languages: between past and future (the case of the Shughni language). Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit of UCA, Research Paper # 5, 32 p.

*Ай муаллим дарси кинā тар зибо лак чїд бакор,
Кудакенат гулайен хейдовти шич сāй чїд бакор,
Ай виродār дуст мидустат иттифоқ савет фукав,
Шич ху наник зивтийав машард китоб чоп чїд бакор.*

Oh, teacher, abandon the old methods of studying,
Kids and adults need to be taught in new ways,
Brothers, join hands and be united,
We must now publish books in our native language¹.

(Shambezoda, 1931)

“Pamirian languages” is an established linguistic term, having been employed even before the dawn of the Soviet empire by one of the pioneers of Pamir studies I. I. Zarubin³ (*Bukhert 2011: 30*; see also: *Zarubin 1924*). The Pamirian languages are spoken by people in Tajikistan, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Pakistan and China. The Pamirian language family includes the Bartangi, Wakhi, Ishkashimi, Munji, Oroshor, Rushani, Sarikoli, Starovanj, Shughni, and Yazgulyam languages. The history of systematic studying of the Pamirian languages is rich and marked by names of outstanding scientists. It originated in the second half of the 19th century, when K. G. Zaleman and R. Shaw published their research on the Shughni, Wakhi and Sarikoli languages (*Zaleman 1895; Shaw 1876*). Since the historiography of Pamirian languages studies is not the focus of this article, interested readers are best directed to the works of D. I. Edelman, T. N. Pakhalina, D. K. Karamshoev, L. R. Dodihudoeva, and G. Morgenstierne, which contain historiography and bibliography of this area (see: *Edelman 1964: 128-138; Pakhalina 1969; Karamshoev 1977: 126-133; Dodihudoeva 1999: 170-174; Morgenstierne 1928; Morgenstierne 1938*). For the purposes of this article, discussion is confined to demonstrating the spread of the Pamirian languages in the form of the Iranian languages schematic map.

This article is based on an analysis of rare Shughni books, published in the 1930s, and modern literature on endangered and unwritten languages, as well as the results of field researches that were conducted in September of 2016 and August of 2019, mainly in Khorog city, Shughnan and Roshtkalin districts of the GBAO. The methodology of the fieldwork consisted of participant observation (the Shughni language is native to the author) and transcripts of interviews with key informants – activists of nongovernmental organizations (NGO), poets, who write in the Pamirian languages, and regular native speakers. Additionally, in preparing this article social media platforms (Facebook, Odnoklassniki) were actively monitored to search for poems, posted by accounts of speakers of the Pamirian languages.

¹ All semantic translations from Shughni, unless specially indicated in the article, were done by the author.

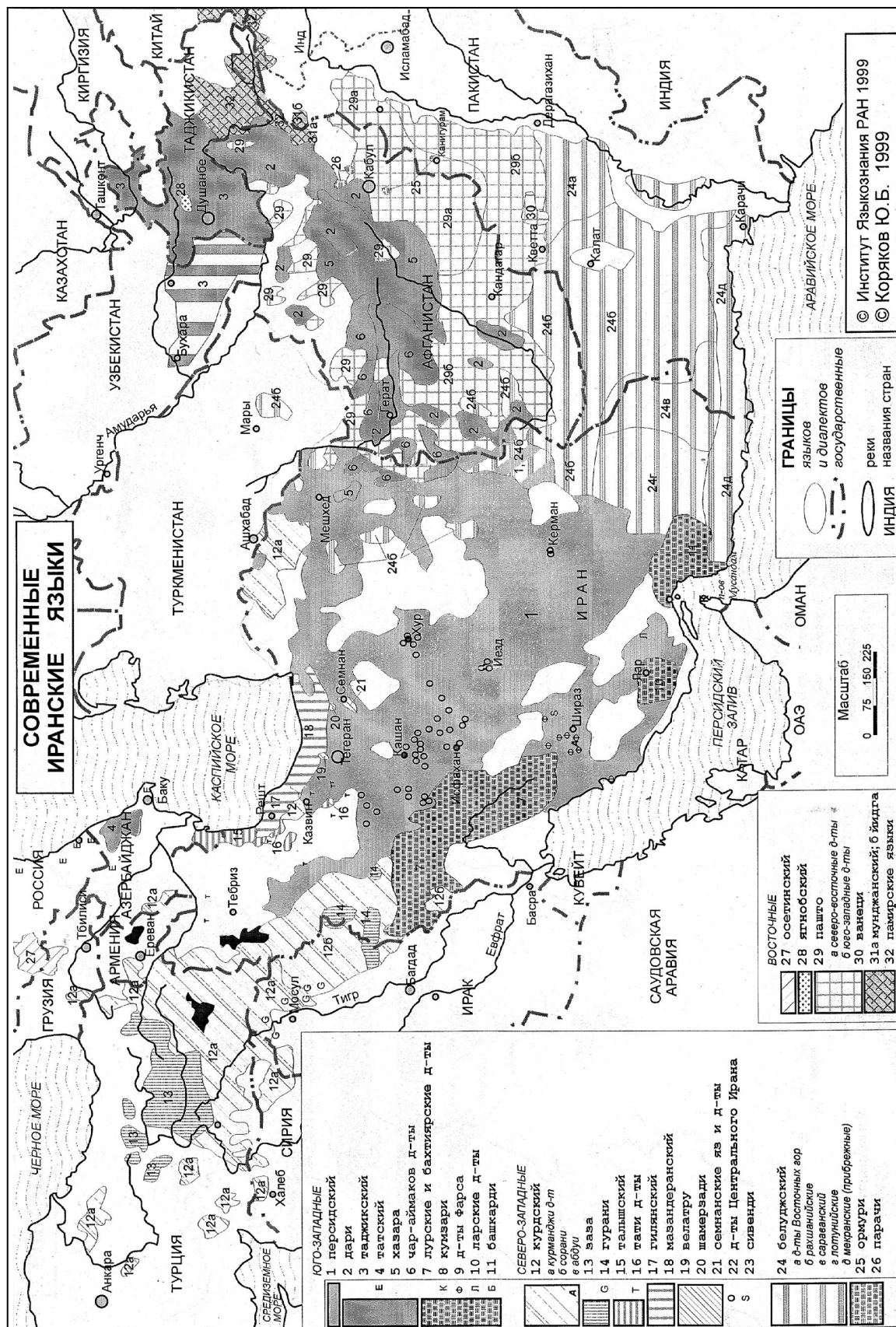


Photo 1. Spread of the Iranian languages (from "The language of the World" book, 2000).

The theoretical basis of the article was founded upon E. Hobsbawm's argument that "to take a language out of homes and streets into the wide world, you no longer need to give it the official status" (Hobsbawm 1997: 90). After several years spent studying linguistic politics across the world, Hobsbawm came to the conclusion that the evolving cable television and internet technology would in future aid the development of minority languages. In other words, modern communication devices enable unwritten and rare languages to expand beyond their narrow geographic borders.

Based on the analysis of the Pamirian languages proliferation on the internet, I will attempt to prove Hobsbawm's theory in this article. The article is mostly focused on the Shughni language on the territory of modern Tajikistan, which is the most popular language among the Pamir Tajiks. According to Sh. P. Yusufbekov, Shughni is evolving into the second regional lingua franca of the Pamirs today, behind the Tajik language (Yusufbekov 2011: 279).

The first mention of the Shughni language and writing was found in journals of Xuan Zang, a Chinese traveler and monk, who in the second quarter of the 7th century travelled across the Wakhan Valley to China. This is what he notes: "The (Shughni) writing is the same as in Duholo (i. e. Toharistan), but the language itself is different" (Xuan Zang 2012: 326). In the beginning of the 8th century another Chinese monk Hoei-chen, when travelling across Wakhan, described Shughni as "unique, different from languages in other provinces" (Mandelstam 1957: 123).

Unfortunately, there is a limited amount of recorded materials regarding Shughni, or any of the other Pamirian languages, from ancient times or even the medieval period. It is possible to find multiple mentions of Shughnan and its people (in "Shahname" and other resources), but there is no known information on the language, apart from the Chinese sources presented above.

Scientific study of the Pamirian languages began only in the 19th century, prompted by the so-called "Great Game" in Pamir, when war specialists, linguists and ethnographers began to closely engage with the region. They had their own interests unrelated to politics. As D. Karamshoev related: "the Pamir Tajiks and their numerous languages and dialects due to their historical isolation and insularity managed to keep many archaic characteristics and, thus, their linguistic, folk, and ethnographic data present great scientific interest not only for Iranology, but also for Indo-European studies, and in some cases can shed light on the solutions of complicated and controversial issues of historical and ethnogenetic nature" (Karamshoev 1977: 127).

Official estimations of the number of Pamirian language speakers began in 1926, when the first All-Union census, which included the Pamirian people, collected, among other matters, data on ethnicity and native language. In that census, as their native language, six people reported Wakhi, six people indicated Shughni, six people reported Rushani, and 1,019 people reported themselves as speakers of Yazgulyam (Ethnicity 1928: 24, 26). As is evident here, only the people of Yazgulyam (almost the entire community) out of all the Pamirians claimed the Yazgulyam language as their native. According to I. I. Zarubin, in 1925 there were approximately 200 households in Yazgulyam (Zarubin 1925: 5). We can only now guess why no other Pamirians chose to state their native language, beside the Yazgulyam people. Perhaps, the census takers did not effectively explain the point of their survey questions to the residents. The remote location may also have played a role. In 1926, the Tajik language was less commonly spoken in Yazgulyam than it was in Shughnan. These factors may have been decisive, but it is now impossible to ascertain.

The concept of “native language” was the subject of heated debate among scientists and politicians during censuses. As is known, in 2020 the Republic of Tajikistan, as well as Russia, plan to conduct another census. Some scientists propose a dual option for indicating a native language, as they believe a person can have more than one. Not all agree with that opinion, however. Linguist Kh. D. Shambezoda, for instance, argues that, “it is fundamentally impossible for us to have more than one native language, because, firstly, there is simply not enough justification for that, secondly, existence of second “native” language usually entails the implication that replacement of ethnic languages is harmless, which is, in part, what is happening with the Pamirian languages” (*Shambezoda* 2007: 344). If native language is considered to be the same thing as mother tongue, then, according to V. G. Kostomarov, a person cannot have two mother tongues (*Kostomarov* 1991:11). However, we believe that in a case of kids, born in a mixed marriage, they can have two mother tongues. Y. V. Rojdestvenskiy maintains the same opinion. He writes that “ethnically mixed children can have two or more native languages” (*Rojdestvenskiy* 2002: 40).

The academic V. A. Tishkov makes the following arguments on the subject: “recognizing the right to be naturally bilingual takes away the tension and awkwardness that many Russian citizens feel, when they are asked to choose between their parents’ languages, or simply two languages that are equally native to them” (*Tishkov* 2016: 302).

In summer of 2015 the chairman of the Committee on Language and Terminology under the Government of Tajikistan revealed in a press conference that, in view of the endangered status of the Pamirian languages, a working group was being established to examine the issue (The Language Committee 2015). A paradoxical situation occurred: during the 2010 census no native speakers of these languages were formally identified, while the government simultaneously expressed concern about their preservation. It is important to remember that according to the 1989 All-Union census over 101,000 people claimed one of the Pamirian languages as their native tongue (*Monogarova* 2001: 47). We should also note that Article 4 of the 2009 Law of the Republic of Tajikistan states that: “The Republic of Tajikistan creates conditions for free application, protection and development of Badakhshan (Pamir) languages and Yagnobi language” (Tajik Constitution 2009, Article IV, 553). As rightly pointed out by V. A. Tishkov: “linguistic issues traditionally arise in censuses of many countries, because the bureaucratic language (or languages) is formed based on that data, which is then used to communicate with taxpayers, develop informational and educational policies, as well as measures to support various languages, if necessary” (*Tishkov* 2007: 50). Naturally, citizens must know the official language, but if, for instance, a policeman enters a house in a remote village and sees no one but a five-year-old there, he will have to speak with him in the child’s native tongue, even if it is different from the official one.

Language itself is a cultural asset for any state, especially if it is ancient, but unwritten languages, such as the Pamirian languages, require even greater support from the government. It is worth noting that in the 1930s the Pamirian elite (though not alone)² attempted to create an alphabet for the local languages.

The first scientific convention of Tajik linguists, which was held in Stalinabad from August 22nd to 27th, 1930, played a major role in the development of alphabets for the Pamirian languages. Two days

² For example, Swedish Iranist H. Scheldt and Russian doctor and historian A. M. Dyakov engaged in the creation of the Shughni alphabet. There is a remarkable article by Dyakov on challenges of publishing books in the Pamirian languages (*Dyakov* 1931: 85-90).

before the beginning of the convention newspaper “Tojikistoni Surkh” (Red Tajikistan) – the print media outlet of the Tajikistan’s Communist Party’s (of Bolsheviks) Central Committee – published an article titled “Greetings to the Convention’s Participants”. It discussed how the convention was fighting many obstacles to make the Tajik language more accessible to the population, so that with a simpler language the Tajik people can achieve the socialist revolution (*Tojikistoni Surkh* August 20, 1930). Although the event was dedicated to linguistic issues only, newspapers at that time proclaimed it as the first scientific convention of Tajikistan. It was opened by the commissioner of education of the Republic of Tajikistan Nisor Muhammad³, who spoke about the development of science, education and culture in Tajikistan. His welcoming words were followed by speeches by Shirinsho Shohtemur⁴, Chinor Imomov⁵, Lohuti⁶, Ayni⁷, and others. The convention was held at a pivotal time for the Tajik and Pamirian languages. The fate of the Tajik literary language was decided in that period. In fact, the term “literary language of Tajikistan’s proletariat” first appeared in the media on the eve of the convention. In an anonymous article covering the event, the author wrote that “the (Tajik) language must take socialistic form” (*Tojikistoni Surkh* August 23, 1930). On the opening day of the convention, M.S. Andreev⁸ presented the article entitled Issues of Scientific Linguistic Convention, which underlined the importance of the Tajik literary language for the young republic. The article contained a peculiar story about a discussion on the Tajik language during a consulting meeting in Tashkent. According to Andreev, all members of the presidium and most of the attendees agreed that the Tajik language is very similar to Uzbek, and Tajiks schools can easily teach kids using Uzbek textbooks. The professor cited this example as a case of an erroneous view on the Tajik language and culture. He added that at the time two people fought valiantly for Tajik rights, but he wouldn’t name them out of consideration for their modesty – “*shikastanafasii eshon*”.⁹ Then M. S. Andreev wrote that he himself is a proponent of a “simple” alphabet for the Tajik language. (*Tojikistoni Surkh* August 22, 1930). One of the items on the convention’s agenda was dedicated to the Shughni alphabet. A. Dyakov presented on the topic (*Ohonniezov* 2012: 44).

Work began first on the development of a Shughni alphabet as it was the most popular language in the Pamir region, spoken by roughly 90,000 people. One of the volunteers to take on this complex and, as it turned out, perilous challenge was a young Shughni poet Nodir Shambezoda¹⁰. The Shughni alphabet was developed based on the Latin script. One of the first textbooks was published in 1931, and, interestingly enough, it was aimed at adults, as at that time a campaign to eradicate mass illiteracy was taking place (likbez). The textbook was written by N. Shambezoda, H. Musrifshoev, and B. Bandishoev (ABC book 1931).

This article contains exclusive scans of pages from several Shughni books. Introduction of this rare bibliographical material into the scientific circulation is a relevant and indispensable step for further research of the ethnocultural processes in Pamir and surrounding countries. Almost all of

3 Nisor Muhammad – born in modern Pakistan, was the people's commissar of education in Tajikistan. In 1937 was subject to repression and imprisonment. His remains are presumed located in the Donskoy cemetery, Moscow.

4 Shirinsho Shotemur (1899-1937) – Soviet politician, was subject to repression and imprisonment in 1937. Buried in a mass grave in Moscow. By decree of the President of the Tajikistan dated June 27, 2006, was awarded the highest honor in the country – Hero of Tajikistan.

5 Chinor Imomov (1898-1939) – Tajik politician. In the 1930s held senior posts in the Tajik government. In 1939 he was subject to state repression and imprisonment.

6 Abulkasim Lohuti (1887-1957) – Tajik poet and politician, and Iranian native.

7 Sadridin Ayni (1878-1954) – founder of Tajik Soviet literature. By decree of the President of the RT dated September 8, 1998, was awarded the highest honor in the country – Hero of Tajikistan.

8 M. S. Andreev (1873-1954) – prominent Russian and Soviet scientist, one of the pioneers of ethnographic study of the Pamirian people.

9 It is possible that Andreev was talking about S. Ayni and S. Shotemur.

10 Shambezoda Nodir (1908-1990) – poet, the founder of the Shughni language literature (see more: *Ohonniezov* 2012; *Abdulnazarov* 2012: 9-13).

the textbooks are illustrated in black and white, and, unsurprisingly, as products of their time, they contain numerous political slogans and poems, glorifying proletariat masses and the Red Army. Here, as an example, is a poem about the Red Army soldiers.

Semantic translation from the Shughni language:

You freed the oppressed nation, glory to you, the red soldiers,
 You built the Soviet Country, glory to you, the red soldiers,
 The rich bared their teeth, which you then broke,
 You helped the poor, glory to you, the red soldiers,
 The rich grinned, when they looked down at us,
 You flooded their foundations, glory to you, the red soldiers,
 The poor from the rich, slaves from masters, peasants from lords,
 You freed them bravely, glory to you, the red soldiers,
 Basmach, when sees you, hides in a grave,
 Our country is peaceful and prospering, glory to you, the red soldiers,
 When he saw all this, Shambezoda cried out in joy,
 Glory, a hundred times, glory to you, the red soldiers!

(ABC book 1931: 36).

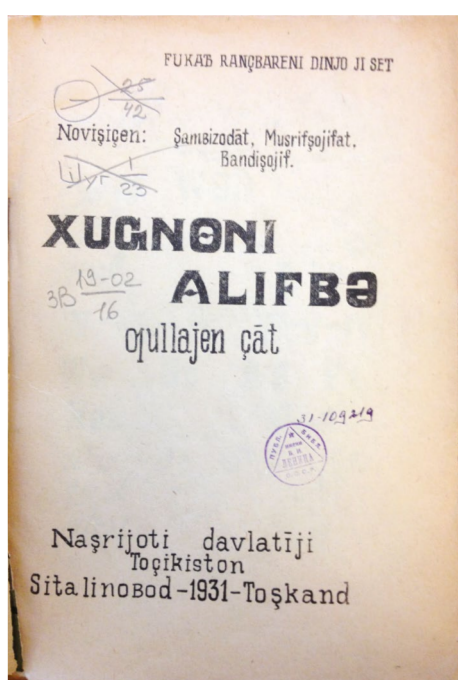


Photo 2 ABC book for adults
 (from the personal archive of the author).

As is evident here, the poem celebrates the new Soviet order in Pamir. In another poem of the same textbook, Shambezoda praises the new school contrasting it with the previous one. He says that the old school could not give students proper knowledge, but the new one not only teaches writing and reading, but also international affairs. With that, Shambezoda notes political literacy of the Soviet school students (Op. cit.: 39-40). The authors then argue that sick people must seek help not from mullah, but from doctors, because mullah exploits people's ignorance for their own gain (Op. cit.: 42). The authors conclude the medical topic by advising to cure illnesses with pills prescribed by doctors, otherwise any sickness can lead to the gravest outcome. The book also underscores the benefits of reading social-economic and political newspapers (Op. cit.: 42-43). Because the textbook was aimed at adults, it included a short piece on dangers of opium¹¹, especially, on the social repercussions of smoking opium, like losing land, gardens, and having to steal to survive. The authors urged every member of the public to fight against opium and ended the piece with a poem mocking opium smokers. (Op. cit.: 51-53).

¹¹ It should be noted that smoking opium was quite popular among the Pamirian people, and only after the annexation by the Russian Empire in 1895, did systematic efforts to fight the vice begin. For instance, one of the first rulers of the Russian Imperial Administration in the Pamir, Kivikes, issued a special decree prohibiting opium smoking in Pamir (To learn more about Kivikes see: Khudonazarov 2008: 76-80). Readers can find an evocative story about an opium smoking father in the Shughni writings of I.I. Zarubin (Zarubin 1960: 15-16).

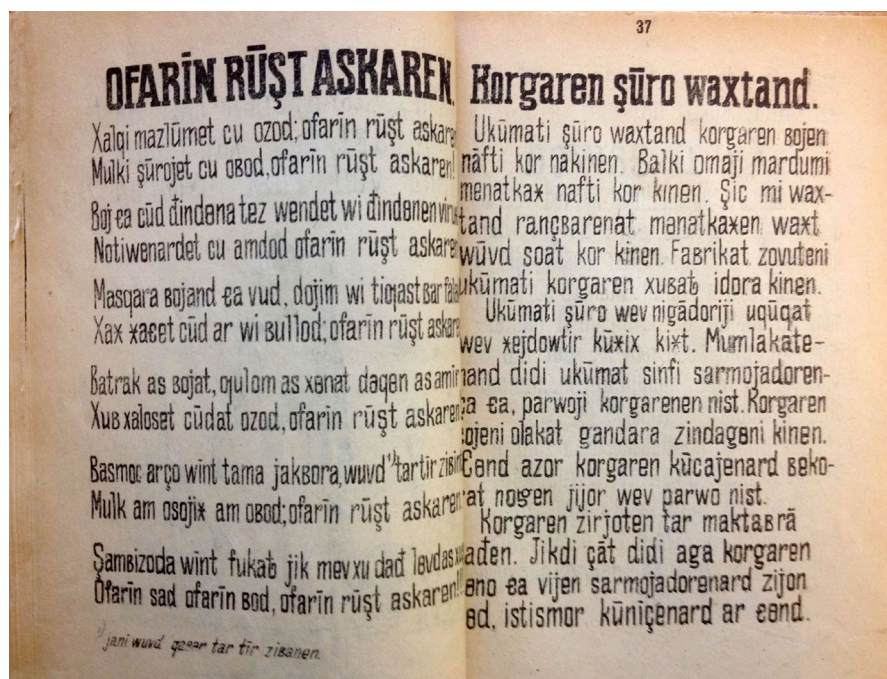


Photo 3. A poem by N. Shambezade about the Red Army (from the personal archive of the author).

The textbook also discussed the advantages of collective farming, communities and artels (cooperative associations), and recommended that farmers join forces to purchase machinery. (Op. cit.: 56-59). There is also a section dedicated to the development of sericulture – the cultivation of silkworms – in the Pamir, which could be of interest to researchers. The economic impact of this industry is corroborated by reported numbers from the time period: two poods¹² (about 32 kg) cost the government 130 rubles (Op. cit.: 60-62). The cotton industry is also provided a detailed review in the following section of the textbook (Op. cit.: 63-65). But of course, the authors' main objective was the eradication of illiteracy among the population. To further convey the importance of this goal, the book cites the architect of the Soviet state V. I. Lenin, who said: "Without literacy there can be no politics" (Op. cit.: 72-73). Following that, a brief information on Komsomol, the trade union, and Pioneer organization is provided (Op. cit.: 84-94), as well as the description of the USSR crest and the fundamental principles of the Soviet Union (Op. cit.: 95-104). The authors emphasized gender equality in the USSR and discussed its supreme governing body – the Congress of Soviets (Op. cit.: 108-112). They also highlighted different categories of people, who do not have a say in Soviet Pamirian society. On the first level of this negative hierarchy are those, who exploit other people's labor for their own gain. For the same reason, the second place belongs to plants and factories owners. Although there were no large plants or factories in 1930s Pamir, the authors projected the trends of the Soviet economic development onto the region. The third category included sellers, shopkeepers and other trade dealers. The fourth one listed religious clergy, the fifth – officers of the old Imperial Administration, the sixth – mentally unstable people and the seventh – people with a criminal record. The textbook also covers the Soviet holidays, like May 1st and March 8th (Same book p.: 129-134). Additionally, the authors wrote a short separate essay dedicated to the founder of the Russian Communist Party V. I. Lenin (Same book p.: 136-141). Despite targeting the adult audience, the textbook contains numerous illustrations and had a large print run – 3,000 copies.

12 A pood was a traditional Russian unit of measurement, officially abolished by the USSR in 1924 but which remained widespread until the 1940s.



Photo 4. Khusrav Musrifshoev
(from the personal archive of Kh. Davlatov).

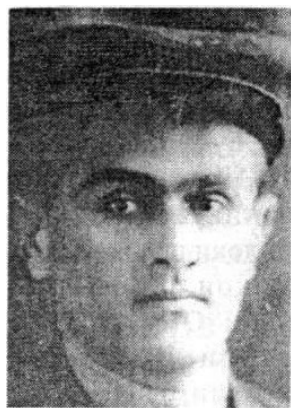


Photo 5. Bogsho Bandishoev
(from book "Shughnan" 2017).



Photo 6. Zoolsho Shonavruzov
(from the personal archive of
Shonavruz Afzalshoev).

The authors of the book deserve special recognition here. While Shambezoda is relatively famous in Tajikistan and even beyond, there is not much information available about the other two, apart from brief mentions in the book by S. Shonavruzov called "Three generations of Badahshan teachers". The second co-author of the textbook Khusrav Musrifshoev was born in 1908, in Porshinev valley. In 1925 he was admitted to Tashkent Institute for teacher training, but did not finish it, as he was summoned by a regional department of the communist party to Khorog. There he worked first as a schoolteacher, later was promoted to lead refresher courses for teachers of the region. Young teachers were also invited to his open classes, where they could see the methods of pedagogical work in practice. In 1929 Musrifshoev left for the second time to Tashkent and entered the Law Faculty of the Central Asian Communist University. After graduating in 1932, he returned to the home province. From 1932 to 1935, Musrifshoev worked as a prosecutor in the Shughni district. In 1935 he was appointed head of the education department of GBAO. Unfortunately, in 1937 he was falsely accused of treason and imprisoned (*Shonavruzov & Haidarsho* 1991: 20-23). In 1967 one of Porshinev's general secondary school was named after Khusrav Musrifshoev¹³.

The third author of the textbook, Bandishoev Bogsho, was born in 1908, in the Porshinev valley. In 1923 he was accepted into the senior class of a boarding school in Khorog city. After a year, he was sent as a gifted student to Tashkent Institute for teacher training. Two years later Bandishoev returned to Khorog to work as a teacher. Not long after, however, his leadership was recognized, and he was appointed the secretary of Komsomol organization of the recently formed region¹⁴. There Bandishoev fortified his reputation as a capable and promising talent, and in 1929 he was admitted to the Central Asian Communist University, from which he successfully graduated in 1931. He then finished graduate studies and returned to the Pamir region, where he was appointed First Deputy Chairman of the Regional Executive Committee. In 1936 Shirinsho Shotemur personally invited him to Dushanbe offering the position of Head of Organizational Department of the Central Executive Committee of the Republic of Tajikistan. However, Stalin's repression machine did not spare Shirinsho Shotemur nor Bogsho Bandishoev, whose lives were cut short in 1937 (*Shonavruzov, Haidarsho* 1991: 33-34).

¹³ Special thanks to Khushkadam Davlatov and Shonavruz Afzalshoev for providing information about Khusrav Musrifshoev.

¹⁴ The GBAO was established on January 2, 1925

In 1931 Zoolsho Shonavruzov published an ABC book in Shughni (*Shonavruzov* 1931).

The author Z. Shonavruzov was born in 1912 in Khorog. He is considered to be the first Pioneer leader in Pamir, rightfully so. In 1926, when the first Pioneer brigade of GBAO was formed in Khorog, Zoolsho was a “son of the regiment” at Khorog border post and spoke Russian quite well. At the first meeting of the Pioneer brigade he was elected as the leader supported by a recommendation letter from the chief of the special unit of Khorog border post A. Y. Dukkur. In 1927 young Zoolsho went to study in the Communist Party school in Dushanbe, and a year later entered the Central Asian Communist University. After graduating he returned to Pamir and spent the rest of his life working in high ranks of the Party and Soviet administration (*Shonavruzov & Haidarsho* 1991: 35-37). In 1930s Z. Shonavruzov published his first Tajik poem in the local newspaper *Badakhshoni Surkh* (Red Badakhshan), which was the print media of the regional communist organization. It was a poem about spring, and it was published in the 12th issue of the newspaper (*Shonavruzov* 1936).

In 1933 B. Iskandarov¹⁵ and S. Amdinov published the “Native Language for Second Grade” textbook (*Iskandarov & Amdinov* 1933). B. I. Iskandarov later became famous in Tajikistan and beyond, but Safarmamad Amdinov remains unknown. There is a short article about him in the Encyclopedia of Badakhshan, revealing that he was born in 1911 in Khorog. After graduating from a boarding school in Khorog, Amdinov studied at Tashkent Institute for teacher training from 1927 to 1929. He began his career as the director of teacher training courses in Shahrison district in Leninabad region (modern Sogd region). From 1937 to 1940 Amdinov lived and work in Osh city, the Kyrgyz SSR. After returning to Tajikistan, he held various positions: from school principal to counselor at the Institute of Advanced Teacher Education in GBAO to head of the City Department of education in Khorog. From 1964 to 1990 Amdinov was the chairman of the trade union committee of higher education in the Tajik SSR. He died in 1997 (Encyclopedia of Badakhshan: 37).

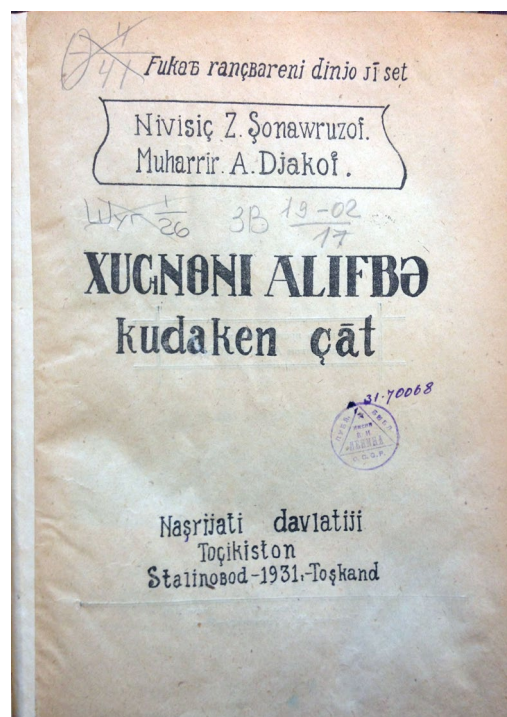


Photo 7. ABC book
(from the author's personal archive).



Photo 8. The Native Language for Second Grade.
Textbook (from the author's personal archive).

¹⁵ Iskandarov B. I. (1912-2004) – full member of the Academy of Sciences in the Republic of Tajikistan. In 2012 by decision of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Institute of the Humanities under the Academy of Sciences in Tajikistan was named after Bahodur Iskandarovich Iskandarov (See more: Bahodur Iskandarov 2013).

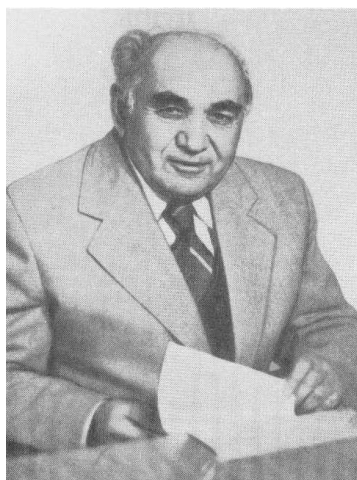


Photo 9. B. I. Iskandarov
(from Wikipedia).



Photo 10. Safarmamad Amdinov
(from the personal archive of
Asiyatmo Safarmamadova).



Photo 11. Nodir Shambezoda

Amdinov, like young Shonavruzov, wrote poems in Tajik and published one of them, dedicated to farmers, in the same 12th issue of “*Badakhshoni surkh*” newspaper (Amdinov 1936).

In 1935 Shambezoda under the pseudonym of Naghat wrote an article in “*Tojikistoni surkh*” newspaper¹⁶, where he discussed in great detail the history of the Shughni alphabet and phonetics of the language. In particular, he noted:

In 1928 professor Scheldt drafted the first project for the Shughni alphabet, which for various reasons was rejected. The second attempt, which had more success, was by comrade Dyakov. His project was far more accurate and authentic to the language and phonetics of the Shughni people. At that time the issue of the Shughni alphabet was brought up by Dyakov himself (comrade Dyakov was fluent in Shughni, which is why he was invited to the consulting meeting). After the alphabet was adopted, several ABC books in Shughni for kids and adults were published, but in 1933-1934 the initiative slowly faded out (*Tojikistoni surkh* dated August 23, 1935).

Then Shambezoda writes about challenges of publishing books in Shughni. Along with the lack of local talents¹⁷ and internal disputes regarding the appropriateness of publishing books in Shughni, G. Broido¹⁸, who at the time was the head of the Bolshevik Party in Tajikistan, believed that Shughni should assimilate into Tajik. Shambezoda writes: “How can anyone say that the Shughni and Wakhi languages are not independent, but rather are dialects of Tajik? Of course, these are separate languages that differ greatly from each other” (Op. cit.). After criticizing G. Broido, Shambezoda continues to say that the appointment of comrade Shadunce¹⁹ as the First secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (b) in Tajikistan has improved the situation: “under comrade Shadunce’s leadership, nationalists will not have influence on the issue. In June, when meeting with writers, comrade Shadunce told them that “the previous administration was ready to devour the Shughni people” (i.e. destroy their culture). But now the Central Committee ordered to develop a new Shughni alphabet and to begin teaching the Shughni kids in their native language in schools” (Op. cit.). However, as it is known, fate decreed otherwise: Shadunce was imprisoned, and school teaching in the Shughni language was delayed by decades.

¹⁶ Special thanks to the staff of the periodical office of RSL (Khimki Department) for their help in finding the articles.

¹⁷ The importance of local talents for issues of the Eastern peoples was also brought up by professor N. N. Yakovlev (1898-1970) Here is what he wrote in 1925: “The key to cultural development of the Eastern peoples in the Union is education and training of their scientists and teachers, who will take the matters of native language culture and national school into their own hands” (Yakovlev 1925: 242).

¹⁸ G. I. Broido (1884-1956) in 1933-1934 was the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (b) in Tajikistan.

¹⁹ S. K. Shadunce (1898-1938) in 1935 – 1937 was the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Tajikistan. Was arrested in November 1937 and on April 21, 1938, was executed in the Moscow region (Wikipedia).



Photo 12. The article by Shambezoda in Tojikistoni Surkh newspaper (from the author's personal archive).

In 1937 Shambezoda published an ABC book in Shughni for first grade students (*Shambezoda 1937*).

The ABC book provides the orthography of the Shughni language. Each letter is accompanied by a separate illustration. Despite the fact that the book was written for first graders, it contains a great deal of political messaging of the early years of the Soviet State. For example, page 44 is dedicated to gender equality and women's rights.

In addition, several other books were translated into Shughni (*Fortunatova 1937*; *Karim 1938*). However, the ABC book was rejected by the officials after the authors were accused of nationalism. Despite that, a great deal was done for the linguistic development in Pamir by 1937. As legitimately pointed out by V.M. Solncev and V.Y. Mikhalchenko: "the Soviet experience in linguistic development in the first decades of the regime is remarkable. It has no analogues in the entire human history. Orthographies for 50 previously unwritten languages

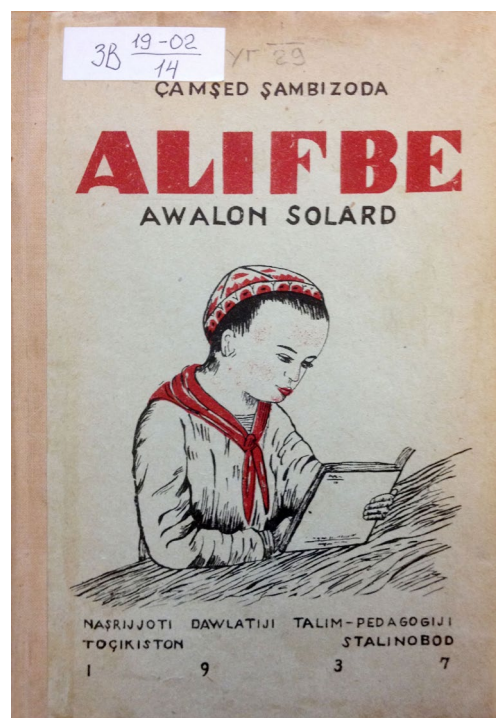


Photo 13. ABC book by Shambezoda (from the author's personal archive).

were created, and then used to publish literature and organize the educational system” (*Solncev & Mikhalechenko* 1990: 15). Schools in the Pamir utilized the new Shughni orthography until 1937, but then it was abolished. “This campaign was part of Stalin’s politics, disguised as the fight against local nationalism”, linguists A.L. Grunberg and I.M. Steblin-Kamenskiy posit. “It was a policy aimed at eradicating ethnic identity and diversity, which led to repression of advocates of orthographic and cultural development in their native language” (*Grunberg & Steblin-Kamenskiy* 1989: 37). It was in 1937-1938 that Stalin began his ruthless war on supporters of widespread dissemination and application of native languages; it was the period of so-called anti-nativization (see: *Guboglo, Safin* 2000: 282-287; *Fouse* 2000: 312-313). One of the Shughni alphabet creators, N. Shambezoda, managed to survive the regime, but could not escape imprisonment. In 1937 he published a book of his poems in Shughni called *Gulguncha* (Blossom) (*Okhonniezov* 1998: 5-18; *Okhonniezov* 2012: 68-96). The preface, written by the famous linguist and Iranologist S. I. Klimchitskiy (1899-1941), reads “Poet Shughnan Shambezoda... in his art had to use new Shughni forms and metrics. This volume is one of the first successes in the sphere” (*Okhonniezov* 2012: 75). The book became one of the reasons behind Shambezoda’s repression at the hands of the state. At the time anonymous tips were sent amply to various public authorities. Thus, the Secretary of the Party Committee in Shughnan district received a letter from “concerned citizens” claiming that, “the book *Gulguncha* without a doubt is an anti-revolutionary work detached from reality, and, therefore, it must be immediately banned. The Party organization can decide whether to dismiss or expel the author from his Party ranks”. Such callousness was rampant at the time. The First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Tajikistan S. K. Shadunce could not help Shambezoda as he himself was arrested on November 11, 1937.

In 1939 the VI Plenum of GBAO regional committee of CP (b) in Tajikistan (January 7-8, 1939) concluded that “the trend of publishing books and teaching in the Shughni language is harmful and impedes development and prosperity of the Tajik culture in GBAO” (*Alamshoev* 2009: 180). Perhaps, this explains why N. Shambezoda is missing from the bibliographical list of Soviet writers of Tajikistan (see: *Soviet Writers* 1949).

Although Shambezoda was the author of several collections of poems in the Tajik language, he considered himself to be a Shughni writer. This is what he said in one of his interviews:

I started out writing in Shughni and later moved to Tajik, but I never stopped writing in my native language. Many of my Tajik poems were published, making me well-known among poetry lovers. But my Shughni work never saw the light, despite my best efforts. Soon I realized that as an artist I am my truest self in the Shughni language, because the life philosophy, the mastery that were in my Shughni poetry were more often than not missing in my Tajik work. Because no person can express his thoughts in foreign language – no matter how fluent he is – as fully and eloquently as he can do it in his native tongue (*Shorahmatulloev* 1990).

In the same article the author, the renowned poet A. Shorahmatulloev,²⁰ criticizes the elites of the GBAO for not doing enough: “how long can this go on! Readers might get the impression that these daily articles are done not out of love for languages, but for paycheck only... We must move from

20 Shorahmatulloev A. A. (1963-2002) – famous Shughni and Rushani poet, journalist, bard, who wrote under the pseudonym Lidush Habib.

words to action” (Op. cit.). Sometimes the very existence of the Pamirian languages is questioned, and their validity undermined by those labeling them as dialects. This kind of sentiment is often shared by various officials, and occasionally by artists. For instance, in 1990 *Adabiet va San’at* (Literature and Art) newspaper published an address by young Tajik writers to the parliament of the Tajik SSR, in which the Pamirian languages were labeled as dialects (Address 1990). The authors likely considered them to be dialects of the Tajik language, although they did not specify that. In such case, however, it should be noted that Tajik belongs to the western group of the Iranian languages, and the Pamirian languages belong to the eastern one, which inherently excludes their dialect affiliation with Tajik. As we can see here, cultural and linguistic issues yet again take on, using the term by the famous Russian sociologist L. M. Drobijeva, a “political and ideological tone” (Drobijeva 1989: 45). The Party leaders in those years often made victims fight their battles. So, on June 24th, 1988, three national newspapers simultaneously published an open letter in three languages (Tajik, Russian, and Uzbek) by war and labor veterans of GBAO. In it they spoke out against publishing of newspapers and journals in the Pamirian languages. According to the veterans there was simply no need for that. (Open letter 1988). To give the Communist Party full freedom in dealing with those fighting for a revival of the Pamirian languages, the veterans concluded their letter with a request to the Central Committee of the CP of Tajikistan to “put a stop to the unhealthy sentiments among scientists and creative intellectuals by all means of political and ideological influence” (Op. cit.). It is regrettable to know that many of those, who signed the letter, were fully aware of the danger they were putting other people into by setting the Communist Party against them. Fortunately, this happened during Gorbachev’s perestroika (restructuring) and not Stalin’s period of repressions, so scientists and creatives were spared.

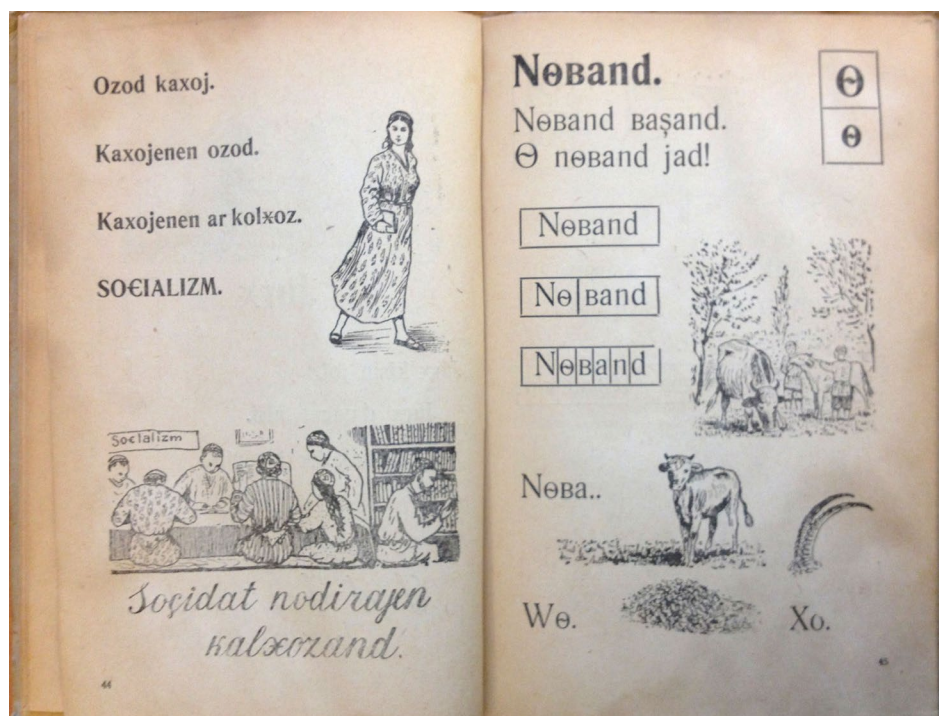


Photo 14. Free woman (from the author’s personal archive).



The desire to preserve one's own language is a natural reaction of any ethnic culture. As Russian ethnologist S.V.Cheshko put it: "Every ethnicity, just like other types of social characteristics, develops its own interests reflecting its needs; that includes needs of biological recreation and recreation of its primal characteristics (language, culture, identity), and needs in development and protection from absorption by other ethnicities, as well as many other needs, which derive from that" (*Cheshko* 1988: 70; about defending ethnic and cultural identity of the Pamirian people see more in another article by him: *Cheshko* 1990: 123). Notably, one of the founders of the Tajik SSR and today a Hero of Tajikistan Shirinsho Shotemur in his application to the Stalin Communist University of Eastern Workers in 1927 marked Shughni as his native language.

16

An important milestone for the preservation and research of the Pamirian languages and folklore was the creation of a dedicated unit on the base of the Rudaki Institute of Language and Literature under the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan in December of 1967. The unit was founded by professor D.K.Karamshoev (1932-2007)²², and in 1974 was converted to the Department of the Pamirian languages. It published dozens of scientific monographs and hundreds of articles on the history, grammar and folklore of the Pamirian languages. (See more at: *Yusufbekov, Ofaridaev* 2013: 6-11). In 1991 the department became a part of the newly created Institute of Humanities under the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan in Khorog, the administrative center of GBAO. It successfully continues its work to this day.

In the post-Soviet era researchers in the academic institutes of Moscow and Dushanbe returned to the issue of the Pamirian languages. On March 30-31, 1989 the Institute of Linguistics under the USSR Academy of Sciences held a round-table meeting dedicated to research of rare languages in the Union. Famous linguists from GBAO presented at that meeting including D.K.Karamshoev, R.H.Dodikhudoev, and P.D.Jamshedov. In their speeches they touched upon the issue of the 1989 census, which did not take into account the Pamirian people. According to D.K.Karamshoev "...a new census is necessary to account for ethnic minorities. The State must also provide safeguards in respect to the rights of free use of the Pamirian languages in GBAO and assist in development (restoration) of their orthographies" (*Kolesnik* 1990: 187). R. H. Dodikhudoev, when speaking on flaws of the 1989 census, noted that "... the inherently inaccurate data led to mistakes in the linguistic policies, like claims of "uselessness" of teaching in the Pamirian languages" (Op. cit.: 187). P. D. Jamshedov proposed a creation of "conditions for functioning of the languages in mass media, newspapers, and radio" (Op. cit.: 188).

In 1990 the issue of an alphabet for the Pamirian languages arose once again. The Latin-based orthography was no longer accepted for further utilization (*Edelman & Yusufbekov* 2000: 226). In 2000 the Institute of Humanities in Pamir under the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan developed and published "ABC book of the Pamirian languages based on the Tajik alphabet and Cyrillic script" (*Karamshoev* 2000). The author D. Karamshoev had previously co-written with his student M. Alamshoev "ABC book of the Shughni language" (*Karamshoev & Alamshoev* 1996). In 2000 they also published together The Shughni Language Textbook for Grades 2-4 (*Karamshoev & Alamshoev* 2000). Linguists in Moscow were too trying to create an alphabet for the Pamirian languages.

АНКЕТА ДЛЯ СТУДЕНТА КУТВ

Год поступления: 1989, Студенческий билет № 4081/100

Наименование организации: Советский национально-демократический университет им. И.В. Сталина, СССР

Вопросы	О	Т	В	Е	Т	М
1. Памирия						
2. Имя						
3. Пол						
4. Год рождения и место рождения						
5. Национальность						
6. Родной язык						
7. Наименование других языков, которыми владеет						
8. Место рождения						
9. Семейная принадлежность						
10. Силы происхождения						
11. Это студент, аспирант, профессор						
12. Чем занимается студент, аспирант, профессор						

Сохранили авали же аз варахони шахини III. Шотемур, ки бо дастони худи у нур карда шудааст. Соли 1927, ш. Москва.

Photo 16. Shotemur's application (from the book by Alamshoh K. "Wherever I'd be with Tajiks")

22 D. Karamshoev's 3-volume Shughni-Russian dictionary, his Russian-Shughni dictionary and Pamirian names collection are considered to be a major contribution to the global Iranology (see more: bibliography).



Photo 17. The Shughni alphabet
(from the author's personal archive).

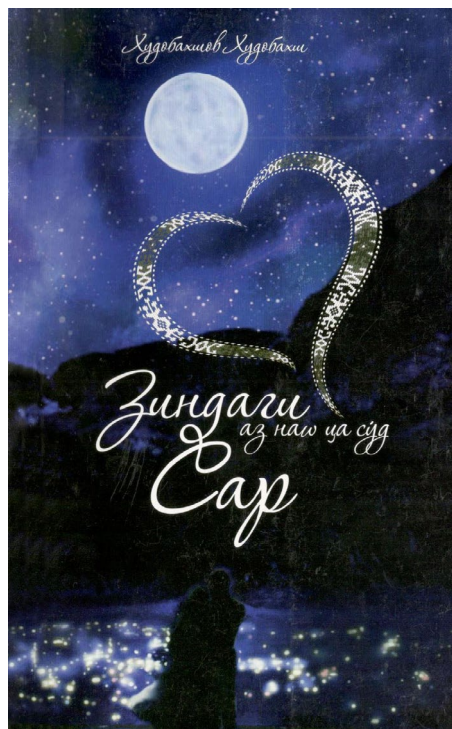


Photo 18. Cover of the first Shughni novel
(from the personal archive).

In 2013 a seminar was organized under the leadership of B.B. Lashkarbekov, the Iranian Languages sector officer at the Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences, where in addition to other sector officers, the participants included the Pamirian languages poets and writers from GBAO. At the seminar they supported the use of the Cyrillic script in the development of the Pamirian alphabet (Edelman 2016: 104).

Lately, more and more children's books are being published in the Pamirian languages. Practically all of them use the Tajik alphabet with minor changes, such as the use of digraphs, etc. An example of that is *Stories of Ravshan*, a children's book written in Shughni by the famous Shughni-Tajik poet Ato Mirkhoja (Mirkhoja 2010). A great deal of work for the preservation of the Pamirian languages is being undertaken by the NGO Nur. Based in the rural council of Porshinev in the GBO, since 2013 Nur has published more than 20 children books in the Pamirian languages. These children books were written using the Shughni alphabet based on the Cyrillic script.

With the direct support from "Nur", the first Shughni novel *Zindagi az nav tsa sūd sar* (If Life Began Again) by a young author, Khudobakhsh Khudobakhshov, was published. In the preface the author talks about the value of the Pamirian languages and asks a question: "What he himself can do to help?" That was the reason behind his book in Shughni. Another goal was representation, so that "... our Leili and Mejnun had their own version of Romeo and Juliet, not a mindless copy, but a truly Pamirian love story" (Khudobakhshov 2017: 4).

The novel follows four friends – Barzu, Said, Rasul and Nasim – and their tense lives in Khorog city and its outskirts. The love between Barzu and Aliya runs like a thread through the book. While there had been previous publications of Shughni prose, they had all been translations from the Russian language. For instance, *The Story of Little Muck* by W. Hauff and *The Queen of Snows* by L. Kassil. Gorky's *Mother* was also translated, but not published (Edelman 2017: 191).

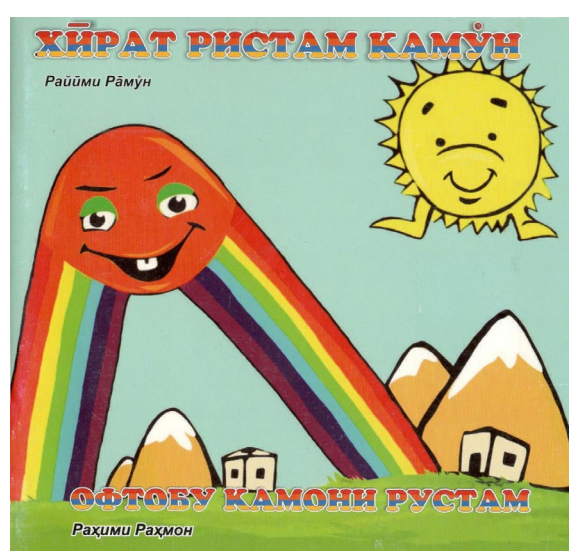
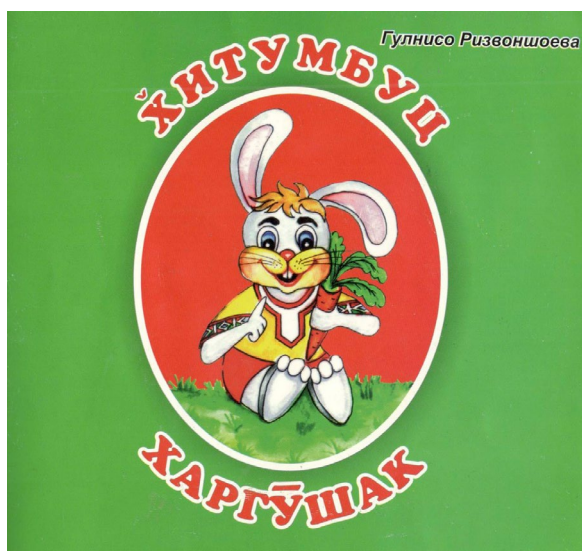


Photo 19. Covers of children books in Shughni (from the author's personal archive).

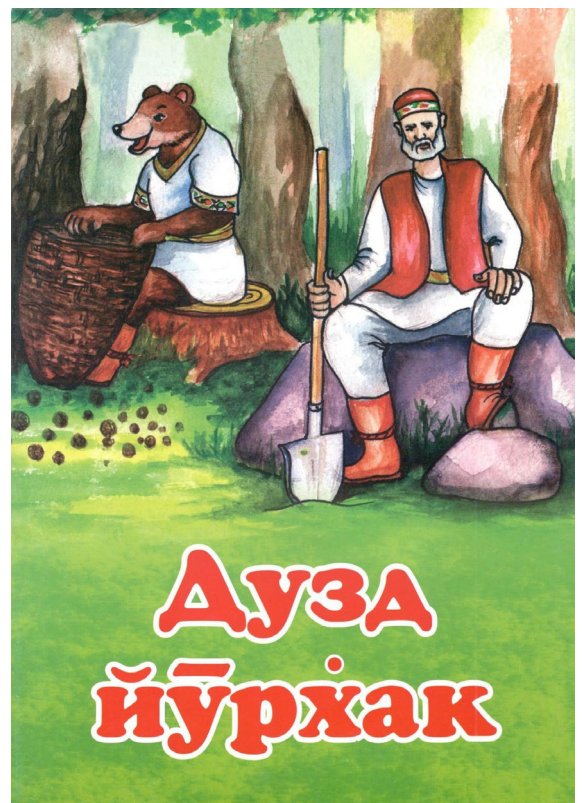
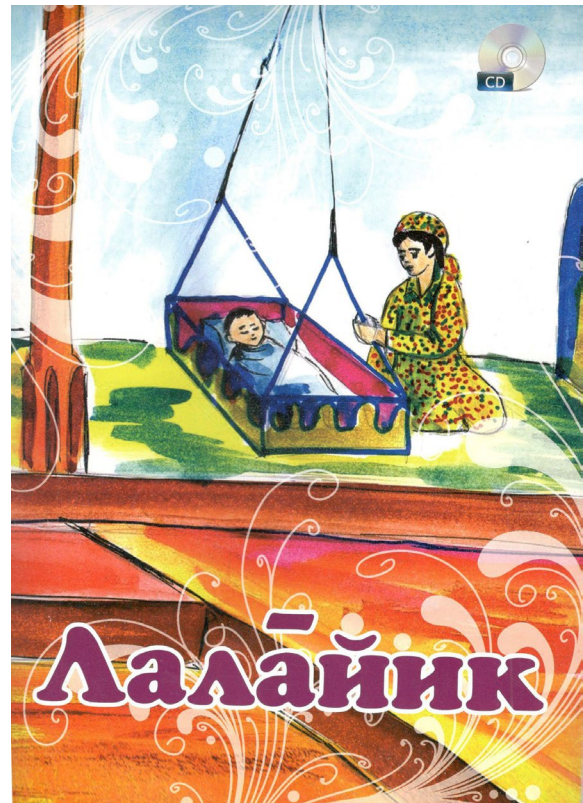


Photo 20. Covers of children books in Shughni (from the author's personal archive).

In October of 2009 the first issue of monthly “*Lozar*” (“Iceberg” in Shughni) newspaper was published. The newspaper featured poems, stories, and folklore in the Pamirian languages. Unfortunately, it ceased publication after seven issues, because, according to the head editor – famous Shughni-Tajik poet Khushomad Alidodov – it was “recommended” that the paper’s investors stop their support (Author’s fieldwork materials 2016).

In 2019 “The Dead Tree in a Desert” a Russian translation of a collection of Shughni poems by Lidush Habib – was published in Dushanbe.

The poems were translated by Isfandiyor Nekkadamov (1978-2015). He was a talented poet and translator, who died young. Below is the masterful translation by Nekkadamov of Lidush’s poem-confession called “Forty Years”:



Photo 21. Lidush Habib (Wikipedia).

*Вузум вихӯз тар ху маорат навирӯдху,
Бӯд аз ху маорат ӣе роат навирӯдху.
Роат ме дунӣо-тё ӣе соат навирӯдху,
Дӯнчат малол аз ху хайолат мё ху олум.
Мундё му маорат му чӯд йор нё бало ху,
Аз дастё шаробё му чӯд гарқё гуноху,
Бӯдё му шароб зиндагийанд чӯд му фаноху.
Чизард? Вуз айрӯн хубав аз ху саволум.
Вузум гумӯн чӯд йам умрё дарозху,
Бӯдум на ху дӯнд чӯд сироқат, на ху созху,
Арҷондиен лӯд – зивостум ху авозху
Шич аз йичийав най хубав аз ху малолум.
Шич-та сафар вуз муқобилё шамолум,
Чил сол бакор мурд йҷой пур та ху солум,
Бӯд-та азаманд вуз ху чил ар ху чуволум,
Мурд зеб наред настё, вуз шоирё болум.*

For forty years
I could not find the key to my talent,
And my talent never brought me joy.
The search for peaceful life broke my heart.
So I resent my fate for that.
With talent came misfortunes.
And sins drowned me in the lake of guilt.
Wine pushed me into the abyss.
What for? Alas, my friends, I couldn’t find the answer.

I was certain: I'll live a long life and be remembered forever.
I scattered my poems without a care.
When asked "sing!" – I sang everywhere to people.
And only myself now have to blame.
But now I go against the wind in life.
I need forty years, somewhere I'll collect them.
And only then, spreading my wings, I'll soar.
I am the sky's poet! I belong to the sky

(*Dead tree 2019: 46-47*).

The book also contains several ruba'i and a poem in Russian written by Isfandiyor Nekkadamov himself. Here is one of the ruba'i:

Dozens of hundreds souls left this wretched world:
Hayam, Rumi, Rustam, Suhrob, Djami and Siyavush...
They are no longer with us, but the names remained in our hearts,
And like them, in the Pamirian hearts is carved – *Lidush* (*Op. cit.: 14*).

Apart from a short period in the 1930s, books in the Pamirian languages were rarely published in the Soviet Union. Moreover, 1972 saw a campaign to destroy all Pamirian books in the Ferdowsi Public Library in Dushanbe, which remains "a black spot" in the history of the cultural life of Tajikistan. As M. I. Isaev argues, "the destruction of the Shughni books (in 1972), which had been miraculously preserved until that point, is a clear indication of the disregard toward cultural issues of ethnic minorities. Zealous activists wanted to burn the pages of the cultural history of the Pamirian peoples out of public memory" (*Isaev 1990: 98; Dodikhudoev 1991:6*). According to M. Y. Martinova, by the end of 1970-s education in the USSR was available only in 14 (*Martinova 2020: 45*).

Disregard for people's natural needs and cultural requests in preservation of their native languages often leads to radical outcomes. One of the reasons behind the adoption of the Declaration on the elevation of GBAO to the Autonomous Republic of Badakhshan (Pamir) of the Republic of Tajikistan (April 10, 1992) was to attempt to preserve the Pamirian languages²³.

Preservation of the endangered Pamirian languages is an issue of public interest. Specialists in the sphere have developed practical advice (see: *Zamyatin et al 2012: 133-162*), which could help to preserve and develop the Pamirian languages. As S. A. Arutyunov asserts, "any language, regardless of the development level of its speakers, has the potential to evolve into the modern use" (*Arutyunov 2005: 160*).

The internet has become one of the unexpected saviors of the endangered languages. On social media platforms such as Facebook or Odnoklassniki dedicated communities or chat groups have grown with titles such as "Tajik poetry" or "Pamir poetry." Users are able to post their writing or like, comment on, and share work produced by others. The more "likes" an author gets, the more popular

²³ To learn more on the subject, please, see the article: *Khudoyorov 2011: 78-81*.

they become on the Internet. In addition, there are many videos featuring songs and poems in the Pamirian languages on YouTube. In online discussions, writers and poets must often develop their own orthography, as many Pamirian languages still lack an official one. However, cultural content creators on YouTube avoid this type of struggle (see more on the development of original poetry in Shughni and Wakhi in *Okhonniezov* 2017).

It should be noted that poetry serves not only the purpose of self-expression, but it also encourages communication between countrymen in the virtual world. Often a new poem posted on the internet is followed by extensive discourse in the comments section. For instance, a Wakhi poem is accompanied by discussions in Wakhi, and comments under a video of a Shughni song are all in Shughni, and so on. As a result, social media provides a favorable platform, the technology of which enables personal thoughts and ambitions of poets to reach a wide audience. The rising popularity of the Shughni language on the internet supports the claim by E. Hobsbaum that, “we no longer live in the culture of writing and reading exclusively” (*Hobsbawm* 1997: 90). Iranologists A. L. Grunberg and I. M. Steblin-Kamenskiy once noted with regret that “Study of the Shughni poetic folklore and personal work by Shughni poets is complicated by the fact that they were almost never written down” (*Skazki...*, 1976: 9). Today the internet provides native speakers of unwritten languages the opportunity to record and share cultural material with people across the globe.

A large number of Shughni-speaking poets have emerged on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Odnoklassniki, where they post their work in written, audio, or video form. Amongst these poets are Abdalnazarov A., Abdurahmonov B., Akdodov F., Bahtibekov A., Davlatov A., Davlatov I., Dilbarsho M., Zaifi S., Okhonniezov V., Mirzohasanov L., Mirkhoja A., Muboriz R., Nazarov K., Rizvonsho G., Rustambekov A., Rustambek A., Shohin M., Shukrilloev A.

A tragic event on September 10, 2019 – the public self-immolation of Udmurt scientist and activist Albert Razin in front of the Udmurtia regional parliament building – shocked Russian society. Razin sacrificed himself to preserve Udmurt, as the act was done to draw attention to the problem of the “language extinction”. One of the signs Razin held up in his solitary protest read: “If tomorrow my language disappears, I am ready to die today”. And he did. After the incident debates and discussions around Russian state policy relating to minority languages erupted not only in public forums, but also in the scientific community, which was illustrated by the dialogue between V. A. Tishkov and H. M. Akbaev (*Tishkov & Akbaev* 2020: 19-39). The academic Tishkov published an opinion piece in *Izvestia* newspaper titled “A Nation Doesn’t Die with its Language”, where he argued that “a death of a language doesn’t mean death of its people”. Tishkov contends that, “languages are not equal in their use, potential and status. A significant part of the world’s cultural heritage was written in Russian – the works of Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. That’s why Russian will always be favored in our country” (*Tishkov & Akbaev* 2020: 26). The article was countered by Karachaev, linguist and member of the Writers Union in Russia Harun Akbaev, who is a supporter of “language is dead, so is ethnicity” thesis. Akbaev postulates: “what is the criteria for language equality? There is no such thing! All that is just legal gibberish, a trick used by political opportunists.... If one of the best representatives of our society cannot fathom equality of our language, it seems we are expected to accept superiority of Russian speakers”. Tishkov objected:

There is a difference between equal rights and equality. Equal rights mean equal opportunities provided by the law and state policies. It applies to both individuals and their languages. People can have equal rights, but it doesn’t make them equal, because one is born strong and handsome – another one is not,

one inherited his parents' assets – another one got nothing but debts, one was born in a prosperous city – another one was born in a poor village. Such is the axiom of sociology. There are also social-linguistic axioms, which present the concepts of global languages (top world languages) and minority languages. Global language is a language, in which a significant part of the world speaks, and it was used in the creation of globally recognized cultural achievements (Op. cit.: 27).

Although Tishkov does not support the contention that an ethnicity dies with its language. Instead, he advocates for the revival of endangered languages and concludes with the assertion that “educated and positive thinking Russians can solve such problems” (Op. cit. 38).

The preamble of the Constitution Law of the Republic of Tajikistan regarding the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (signed by the President of Tajikistan on July 30, 2007) states that the GBAO along with special geographic and cultural values has “unique language values” (Constitutional Law 2007). It is important to recognize unequivocally that the Pamirian languages, and Shughni in particular, are not a burden to the Republic of Tajikistan, but rather a valuable asset, and as such, must be strengthened. The Pamirian languages can stimulate the development of “ethnographic tourism” in GBAO. They have the potential to become the key drivers for both domestic and international tourism. There is also a political element to preservation of the languages, as they are the proof of the autochthony of Tajiks (East Iranian people) in the region. Many Shughni words are rooted in the Avestan language and in Sanskrit. For instance, the Shughni word for father “*mam*” is pronounced in Sanskrit as *tāta* (Kochergina 1987: 239). For that reason, the Pamirian languages can hold the key to unlocking the mysteries of ancient written languages of Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Wonderful Russian poet P.A. Vyazemsky (1792-1878) in his poem “English Woman”, wrote the following lines:

Language is the confession of the nation:

In it its nature sounds,

In it its soul and way of life...

(Vyazemsky 1958: 331)

The millennia long history of the Pamirian Tajiks was preserved in the form of oral traditions, passed down the generations. We hope that the cultural transmission function of the Pamirian languages will be preserved for centuries to come.

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