

# The Linguistic Heritage of Himachal Pradesh: A Case for Himāchalī Pahārī as an Umbrella Classification

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## Abstract

The paper examines the linguistic heritage of Himachal Pradesh, arguing for the classification of the region's diverse dialects under the umbrella term "Himāchalī Pahārī" language. The study critiques George Grierson's historical classification system, which excluded key dialects such as Kangri, Kahluri, Lahauli, and Kanavari from the Pahārī language family. Through detailed analysis of eleven major sublanguages and their subsidiary units, the paper demonstrates that despite significant variations in grammatical structures and formulations, these dialects share underlying cultural-geographical unity that justifies their collective classification. The research highlights the rich folk literature developed across these dialects as evidence of a common cultural foundation. The proposed inclusive classification aligns with the vision of Himachal Pradesh's founding figures, who recognized language as a fundamental unifying marker for the region's diverse communities, and better reflects the sociolinguistic reality of the region, where geographical proximity and shared cultural practices often supersede strict linguistic taxonomies.

**Keywords:** Pahārī, Himāchalī, dialects, Grierson, sublanguages, linguistic, cultural, geographical, folk literature, classification.

## Introduction

The paper examines the linguistic heritage of the modern Himachal Pradesh region, primarily characterized by its

mountainous topography. These geographical features inform the central thesis: that the various dialects originating from, or spoken within this region should be classified collectively under the Himāchalī Pahārī language, notwithstanding the significant or minor variations in their grammatical structures or formulations.

## Historical Context and Regional Identity

The terms Pahār (mountains), Pahārī jan (mountain people), and Pahārī language (language of the mountain) hold special significance in terms of the Himalayan region's civilization, culture, history, and linguistics. While the term 'Pahārī' geographically indicates the various forms of mountain ranges, it also encompasses meanings related to mountain folk, mountain language, and its dialects. Pahārī people are distinctly connected to the mountains, with their own dress, food habits, lifestyle, and eternal traditions of culture, speaking in their mother tongue or folk language that distinguishes them from other populations.

As Yashwant Singh Parmar, the first Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh emphasized on October 20, 1975:

"The Pahārī language, which serves as a powerful medium of expression for the people of Himachal Pradesh, is the true language of this region. Efforts will be made to secure national recognition for this language. In fact, the attainment of full statehood for Himachal Pradesh signifies the acknowledgment of the distinct identity of its people. In this backdrop, the Pahārī language will eventually receive its rightful place...For the cultural enrichment of any region, the most effective medium is the language that is widely spoken in that area..."<sup>1</sup>.

The statement brought to the forefront the need to preserve the Pahārī language as one of the markers of the people of Himachal Pradesh.

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## Linguistic Classification and Scholarly Perspectives

Pahārī encompasses those Indo-Aryan languages found primarily in the Himalayan regions and adjacent territories. The term refers to a group of language varieties distributed across the Sub-Himalayan hills, spanning from Bhadrawah north of Punjab eastward through Nepal. This linguistic area is bordered by Tibeto-Burman languages to the north and east, Kashmiri and western Punjabi-related Aryan languages to the west, and the Aryan languages of Punjab and the Gangetic plains to the south<sup>2</sup>. Linguists hold diverse views regarding the origin of the Pahārī language. Dr. Grierson traces its origin to Khash-Dard-Paishachi, with Khash (alternatively called Dard, derived from Sanskrit) originating from regions north of Kashmir, including Gilgit, Kafiristan, Chitral, Kohistan, Swat, Sindh, Kashmir, and Gilgit. Conversely, linguists like Dharendra Verma (1933), Bholanath Tiwari (1954), Krishna Lal Hans (1960) and Govind Chatak (1959) attribute its origin to Shauraseni.

Writing in the Himāchalī Pahārī language, Sharma<sup>3</sup> offers this succinct definition: “Pahārī is the Indo-Aryan language family that is spoken in Himachal Pradesh, located in the Western Himalayas and some of its bordering regions. Pahārī language has its sublanguages or dialects and subdialects that enrich it, and these sublanguages or dialects and subdialects have their rich folk literature.”

The conceptualization of Himāchalī Pahārī languages requires modification to recognize Tibeto-Burman influence on certain dialects. Contemporary linguistic boundaries suggest that varieties previously classified by Grierson within the Himalayan group<sup>4</sup> warrant either recategorization or simultaneous categorization as components of Himāchalī Pahārī languages, a taxonomic adjustment that aligns with modern geo-linguistic parameters while acknowledging their hybrid linguistic status.

### Grierson’s Classification and Its Limitations

Pahārī language was classified into four categories based on the censuses of 1881 and 1901 by acclaimed linguist George Grierson:

1. Eastern Pahārī, Khash-Kush or Nepali
2. Middle Pahārī, or Kumaoni and Garhwali
3. Western Pahārī (of Juansar-Babar, Shimla Hill states, Kullu, Mandi-Suket, Chamba and Western Kashmir)<sup>5</sup>

In his seminal work, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Grierson categorized nine sublanguages or dialects of the Western Pahārī language—Jaunsari, Sirmauri, Baghati, Kyonthal, Sutlej series, Kullui, Mandiyali, Chambyali, and

Bhadrawahi—into one category, while declaring Kangri and Kahluri as sublanguages of Punjabi.

However, George Grierson’s linguistic survey was primarily based on geographical units rather than on in-depth linguistic or philological principles. As a result, significant dialects or sub-dialects of Himachal Pradesh, such as Kangri and Kahluri, were excluded from his classification due to the prevailing conditions, the lack of serious linguistic studies, and an administrative perspective. Grierson categorized Kangri under Dogri, a classification that did not align with the dialects spoken in the mountainous regions of Punjab. Similarly, he grouped Kahluri with Mangal, Nalagarh, and Mahlog, a stratification that neither corresponded with linguistic principles nor reflected the linguistic landscape of the hill regions of Punjab.

Another notable limitation of Grierson’s classification system is his placement of Lahauli and Kanavari dialects under the Tibeto-Tibetan family—a categorization that, while aligned with certain linguistic principles, fails to account for the geographical, cultural and national unity of the modern Himachal Pradesh.

### Contemporary Reclassification Efforts

Later, Mouluram Thakur (2008), Himachal’s renowned linguist, made a monumental effort by composing *Pahārī Bhasha Vyakaran* (Pahārī Language Grammar), presenting linguistic analysis of ten sublanguages, including Kangri and Kahluri (Bilaspuri) as distinct units of Himāchalī Pahārī.

### Case for a More Inclusive Classification

The current paper challenges Grierson’s classification by asserting that Lahauli and Kanavari dialects, despite their evident Tibeto-Burman linguistic features of the Himalayan region, legitimately belong within the broader Pahārī classification framework. Specifically, these dialects should be positioned within the Himāchalī Pahārī grouping following the contemporary requirements. This position is based not on linguistic features alone, but on their geographical situation within the Himalayan region and their shared cultural heritage with other mountain communities of Himachal Pradesh.

Building on this specific case, the evidence suggests that “Himāchalī Pahārī” should function as an umbrella term encompassing all languages spoken throughout the northern Himalayan mountainous regions, particularly within Himachal Pradesh. The inclusive approach acknowledges the geographical unity of these speech communities and their shared cultural heritage, while

still recognizing the distinctive linguistic characteristics that reflect various historical influences and contacts.

The proposed inclusive classification would better reflect the sociolinguistic reality of the region, where geographical proximity and shared cultural practices often supersede strict linguistic taxonomies. Furthermore, it would align with the political and cultural identity of Himachal Pradesh as articulated by its founding figures, who recognized language as a unifying cultural marker for the region's inhabitants. This perspective is particularly significant in the context of national and state identity formation, where language recognition serves not only linguistic purposes but also reinforces the cultural and political cohesion of the state within the broader national framework.

### Supporting Sublanguages or Dialects of Pahārī Language of Himachal Pradesh

The linguistic heritage of what now constitutes Himachal Pradesh predominantly comprises eleven sublanguages or dialects: Sirmauri, Kangri, Chambyali, Lahuli, Kullui, Mandiyali, Kahluri, Kanavari, Kyonthali, Baghati, and Jaunsari. These sublanguages or dialects further contain smaller linguistic units, which are detailed below.

**Sirmaurī** dialect represents a distinctive linguistic variety within the broader Pahārī language family, occupying a geographic territory bordered by Hindi-speaking regions of Kalsi, Dehradun, and Ambala to the south, southeast, and southwest, respectively; the Bayāṭī dialect to the northwest; Mahāsūī to the northeast; and Jaunsārī to the east. Within this complex linguistic landscape, the Viśeī variant, classified as a sub-unit of Mahāsūī, functions as an important transitional dialect between Sirmaurī and Mahāsūī in the Giripārī region<sup>6</sup>.

The geographical division created by the Giri River offers crucial context for understanding the dialectal variations of Sirmaurī. This river, locally known as Giri Gaṅgā and recognized as a nurturing force for the region's rich cultural heritage, bisects the Sirmaur district from northwest to southeast, giving rise to two distinct territorial designations: Giripārī (beyond the river) and Girivārī (near the river). The Girivārī region features a minor Shivalik mountain range called Dhār. thī, and linguists have designated the dialect of this area as 'Sirmaurī-Chārthī'. Conversely, the Giripārī linguistic zone is termed 'Viśeī', which extends into the Jubbal and Chaupal territories and has been classified by Dr. Grierson as a component of Sirmaurī Giripārī Pahārī.

The Girivārī zone encompasses several areas—Raṇī, tī, Chegrā, Sendhār, and Pachchhād—that collectively constitute a unified linguistic entity, while the Giripārī

territories include regions beyond Dhārthī, such as the Pargaṇās, Lādū, and the Joil-Moīl area (comprising the entire Hāṭī region), as well as the Viśeī Pargaṇās of Chaupal in the former Jubbal princely state. Further linguistic sub-classifications exist within these areas, including Ladiyāṇī, Palyāṇī, and Moīlī<sup>7</sup>.

**Jaunsari**, though officially recognized as Uttarakhand's language, extends to villages bordering Shimla district's Kiran, Jubbal, Kuddu, Rohru, and Sirmaur's Giripaar. Historically, its territory largely fell within Himachal, explaining its prevalence in the Shimla district's border regions. Linguistically, Jaunsari closely aligns with Himāchalī Pahārī<sup>8</sup>.

The Jaunsār-Bāwar region, currently situated within Uttarakhand state, represents a distinctive linguistic area encircled by multiple language varieties, including Hindi from Dehradun, Garhwali from the Garhwal region, and the Mahāsūī and Sirmaurī subdialects of the broader Pahārī language family. This region maintains significant socio-cultural connections with various areas of Himachal Pradesh, including Jubbal, Rohdu, Chaupal, and parts of Sirmaur, evidenced through shared religious practices such as the worship of the deity Mahāsu throughout these territories. These cultural ties, reinforced by cross-border matrimonial alliances, naturally facilitate linguistic exchange and convergence among these regions<sup>9</sup>.

**Kyonthali, or Kyontali**, covers Rampur Bushahr, Rohdu, Junga, Jubbal, Chopal, Theog, Kumarsain, and Kotgarh. Its minor units include Baradi, Shaurachali, Kirani, Handuri, Shimla-Saraji, and Kochi, with Kochi extending to Chuhara and Dodra-Kwar. The formation of the Mahasu district later led to the emergence of the Mahsui dialect. The linguistic variety historically designated as Kyomthalī derives its nomenclature from Dr. Grierson's reference to the Kyomthal principality—a significant political entity among the twelve thakurās that encompassed Shimla and its peripheral territories. Grierson's taxonomic framework incorporated six additional linguistic subdivisions—Haṇḍūrī, Shimlā-Sarājī, Barārī, Shaurāchalī, Kiraṇī, and Kochī—within the broader Kyomthalī classification. These speech communities were distributed across the Rampur principality and the twelve and eighteen thakurās, with Grierson emphasizing the geographical distribution of these linguistic varieties. The 1901 Indian Census Report independently documented several related dialects, including Thiogī, Rāmpurī, Rāvīm (associated with Jubbal), and Pachhamī (of Sirmaur origin). T. Graham Bailey's (1908) seminal work, "Languages of the Northern Himalayas," further refined this classification by identifying two additional micro-linguistic units within Kyomthalī—Koṭgurū and Koṭkhāī—incorporating the

linguistic features of the Koṭgarh and Koṭkhāi speech communities<sup>10</sup>.

The contemporary designation for this linguistic variety has shifted to 'Mahāsūi,' while the Haṇḍūrī linguistic zone now primarily encompasses the border regions of Baddī, Nālāgarh, and Kahlūr. Following administrative reorganization with the establishment of the Mahāsū district, the former Kyomthalī dialect manifested in differentiated forms as Upper Mahāsūi and Lower Mahāsūi. Concurrently, linguistic designations such as Bāvalī emerged for varieties spoken in Solan and adjacent lower elevations. The subsequent reconstitution of administrative boundaries resulting in the formation of Shimla district retained the designation 'Mahāsūi' for the district's predominant linguistic variety across institutional contexts, including Shimla All India Radio, governmental language departments, and academic institutions. This terminological transition from Kyomthalī to Mahāsūi has been institutionalized in literary production, with the latter term now representing the collective linguistic identity encompassing Barāṛī, Shaurāchalī, Kiraṇī, Kochī, and the Viśemī minor varieties of Sirmaurī.

Despite nomenclatural evolution, minimal linguistic differentiation exists between historical Kyomthalī and contemporary Mahāsūi, including its constituent varieties Shimlā-Sarājī, Barāṛī, Shaurāchalī, Kiraṇī, and Kochī<sup>11</sup>.

**Baghati's** linguistic region extends from Paramanu to northwestern Koti and Kaithlighat, also known as the Lower Mahsui region. Baghli represents a minor unit of Baghati, encompassing the linguistic territory of 22 valleys (ghats)<sup>12</sup>.

The Baghāṭī dialect constitutes a significant linguistic variety within the Indo-Aryan language family, historically associated with the geographical terrain of the Baghāṭ princely state, which encompassed twenty-two valley regions (ghāṭs). Following the establishment of the Bāchal principality in subsequent periods, a subsidiary linguistic unit known as Bāyalī emerged from the broader Baghāṭī language. Contemporary linguistic scholarship classifies these speech varieties within the South Mahāsūi linguistic group. Presently, Baghāṭī serves as the predominant dialect throughout the Solan district, occupying a central position in a complex linguistic geography that interfaces with Sirmaurī to the east, Kyomthalī to the northeast, Mahāsūi to the north, Bāpalī to the northwest, Hamḍūrī to the west, and Haryānavī varieties to the south. The territorial distribution of Baghāṭī extends approximately from Parvāṇu to the Kaivalīghāṭ region<sup>13</sup>.

**Kullui's** linguistic domain encompasses the entire Kullu district, including Outer Siraj and Malana. Its minor units include Bahya Saraji and Kanashi (Malani)<sup>14</sup>.

The Kullū district occupies a position of particular significance in the preservation and development of the Pahārī language, with its cultural traditions serving as a vital repository for linguistic practices dating from antiquity. The principal linguistic variety of this region, designated as Kuluī, has been classified by Dr. Grierson as a distinctive subdialect within the Western Pahārī language group, alongside Kyomvatī and Baghāṭī. In his comprehensive linguistic survey, Grierson characterized the Maṇḍyālī dialect as a southern variant of Kuluī and identified Chambayālī as a derivative form influenced by Kuluī. Grierson further postulated that Chambayālī subsequently manifested elements in the Ḍogrī and Bhadravāhī linguistic forms of the Jammu region during later historical periods.

The Kullū dialectal continuum encompasses notable micro-linguistic varieties, particularly Bāhy Sarājī and Kaṇāśī. The former maintains distinctive linguistic traditions throughout the regions of Ānī, Dalās, and Nirmaṇḍ within the Bāhy Sarāj territory. The latter variety, Kaṇāśī—potentially a modified form of Kirātī—persists in the ancient settlement of Malāṇā. These subordinate linguistic units within the broader Kullū classification represent significant components of the dialect's internal variation and contribute substantively to the linguistic diversity of the Pahārī language ecosystem, underscoring Kullū's integral role in the maintenance and evolution of the Pahārī linguistic tradition<sup>15</sup>.

**Mandyali** incorporates the linguistic regions of the former Suket and Mandi principalities. Its minor units include Chuhari (villages of Bhuhujot valley), Sargeti, and Saraji (Inner Saraji).

Maṇḍyālī constitutes a linguistically distinctive subdialect within the central Himachal region, encompassing the contemporary geographical boundaries of Maṇḍī district as its primary speech area. This linguistic variety exists within a complex dialectal continuum, interfacing with Bhangālī (spoken in Chhoṭā Bhangāl) to the north, Kāngrī to the west, Bhītārī Sirājī (a variant of Kuluī) to the southwest, and Kuluī proper to the northwest, all of which exert varying degrees of influence on Maṇḍyālī's phonological and morphological characteristics<sup>16</sup>.

In his taxonomic classification, Dr. Grierson established a tripartite division of the Maṇḍyālī linguistic complex, differentiating between: (1) standard Maṇḍyālī, (2) Maṇḍyālī Pahārī, and (3) Suketī. Within popular linguistic consciousness, additional micro-dialectal distinctions are recognized, including Chuhārī, Bhītārī Sarājī, and Sargetī. Despite discernible variations in phonetic realization and articulatory tendencies, these varieties exhibit substantial commonality in their core linguistic features, suggesting a fundamental unity within the broader Maṇḍyālī classification<sup>17</sup>.

**Chambyali** encompasses the entire linguistic territory of Chamba, Pangi, and Bharmour. Its subsidiary units include Churahi, Pangwali, Gaddi (Bharmauri), and Bhatyali<sup>18</sup>.

The linguistic variety designated as Chambayālī constitutes the primary dialectal form of the Chamba district, termed 'Chameālī' in Grierson's comprehensive language survey. This linguistic region presents notable geographical and topographical diversity, encompassing the remote territories of Pāṅgī and Bharmaur alongside distinct areas inhabited by the Gaddi community, each contributing to the region's distinctive linguistic identity. Within this complex dialectal landscape, several micro-linguistic units maintain their vitality, including Paṅgvālī, Bhaṭyālī, Churāhī, and Gaddī (Bharmaurī), each with defined territorial distributions that collectively enrich both the Chambayālī subdialect and the broader Pahārī language system.

Ethnolinguistic research indicates that the Gaddī variety predates Chambayālī in its origins and demonstrates greater geographical extension, with its speech community distributed across Bharmaur, Chamba, Khajiyār, Bhaṭiyāt, Baṛā Bhangāl, Baijnāth, Pālampur, Dharmśālā, Nūrpur, Shāhpur, and extending to Basolī in Jammu. Despite apparent differences attributable to extralinguistic factors and geographical isolation, systematic linguistic analysis reveals substantial structural commonalities among these varieties. The Pāṅgī region additionally features 'Moṭlī' (Bhoṭī), utilized by the local Buddhist population centered around the established Bhaṭoriyās (Buddhist monasteries). From an articulatory perspective, Chambayālī demonstrates greater proximity to the Outer Pahārī linguistic group<sup>19</sup>.

### Lahauli

Lāhulī represents a linguistic complex comprising four distinct dialectal varieties associated with the Kirāt tribal communities: Bānun (also known as Gārī), Tinan (or Raṅglōī), Manchatī (or Paṭṭanī), and Tod. These language varieties are distributed across specific geographical territories, including the Yunān Spītī, Bhāgā, Chandrā, and Paṭṭan valleys. The speech communities are concentrated in various settlements, including Kardang, Barbāg, Kolang, and Gumrang in the Bhāgā Valley; Khoksar, Sissū, Gondlā, and Gushāl in the Raṅglōī region; and Tāndī, Bārpā, Rānikā, Shanshā, Jālmā, and Jovarang in the Paṭṭan area. Tibetan language (known locally as Bhoṭī or Bhoṭ) is also spoken in the Spītī region of Lāhaul and in Kolang's highland areas. Historically, the Jangjung language was spoken in eastern Lāhaul. Chanālī, a subset of the Manchatī dialect, shows strong Sanskrit influences. Linguistic analysis reveals significant interrelationships

among these varieties, suggesting a complex network of historical and structural connections.

### Kanavari

Kanāvārī constitutes the primary linguistic variety throughout the Kanāvār or Kinnaur territory. In the higher elevation zones of Hangarang, beyond Spū, Tibetan language (alternatively known as Bhoṭī or Bhoṭ) predominates. The Kanāvārī language complex is commonly identified as Ham-Skand and encompasses several micro-linguistic units, including Tho-Shaṅg, Pau-Skand, and Shubh Chho-Skand. Linguistically, Kanāvārī preserves lexical elements from diverse historical sources, maintaining vocabulary derived from Vedic Sanskrit, Kirātī, and Tibetan linguistic traditions.

**Kangrī's** linguistic territory encompasses villages across Kangra, Hamirpur, and Una. Currently, Unnayali and Hamirpuri function as its minor units<sup>20</sup>.

The political recognition of Kāngrī's status within the Pahārī language family received significant institutional validation through the memorandum submitted by Kāngrā legislators to the Punjab Reorganization Commission in 1966 under the auspices of the 'Pahārī Integration Committee'. This document, incorporating substantial linguistic evidence supporting Kāngrī's affiliation with the broader Pahārī language complex, contributed to Dr. Yashvant Singh Parmar's compelling presentation before the Parliamentary Committee regarding the linguistic and cultural unity of the hill regions encompassing Kāngrā, Kullū, Lāhaul-Spītī, and Shimlā. Dr. Parmar's argument emphasized the inseparability of these territories from the core Pahārī cultural and linguistic sphere, noting the shared traditions, cultural practices, festivals, culinary traditions, linguistic features, and sartorial customs across these regions, thereby establishing their integral relationship to the broader Himāchalī cultural identity. The strength of these linguistic and cultural arguments ultimately resulted in the administrative integration of these territories into Himachal Pradesh.

Through its distinctive phonological, morphological, and syntactic characteristics, alongside its well-established historical relationship to adjacent Pahārī varieties, Kāngrī maintains a dual linguistic identity—preserving its distinctive dialectal features while simultaneously functioning as an integral component within the broader Pahārī language complex, thereby contributing significantly to the linguistic diversity and cultural richness of this Himalayan language family<sup>21</sup>.

**Kahluri** encompasses the entire region of the former Bilaspur principality, with its minor unit now prevalent as Bilaspuri. According to linguistic principles, Bilaspuri

and Kahluri's linguistic regions maintain intrinsic interconnectedness<sup>22</sup>.

Bilāspur derives its nomenclature from the sage Maharṣi Vyāsa, with historical records indicating its ancient designation as Vyāsapur. The district holds significant religious importance as the ascetic retreat of both Maharṣi Mārkaṇḍeya and Maharṣi Vyāsa. During the Rajput dynastic period, paralleling other principalities within Himachal Pradesh, the Bilāspur principality functioned as the administrative centre of the Kahlūr state governed by Chandravanṣī monarchs. The historical appellation "Kahlūr" for the Bilāspur principality consequently led to the regional inhabitants being identified as "Kahlūriyas" and their linguistic variety as "Kahlūrī." According to local oral tradition, the state's designation as Kahlūr originated from the construction of a fortress by either a Gurjar named Kahlū or by Kāhal Chandra.

Geographically positioned in the southwestern sector of Himachal Pradesh, Bilāspur encompasses an area of 1167 square kilometres. The district's territorial boundaries adjoin Solan to the east, Ūnā-Hamīrpur to the west, Maṇḍī-Hamīrpur to the north, and Punjab's Ropar district to the south. The region exhibits significant topographical variation, with elevations ranging from approximately 200 meters to 1980 meters above sea level.

From a linguistic perspective, the predominant vernacular of the Bilāspur district is classified as the Kahlūrī dialect of Western Pahārī, while Punjabi serves as the primary language in certain villages along the Punjab border. Kahlūrī exhibits pronounced influence from Sanskrit in both its lexical inventory and syntactic structures, establishing Sanskrit as its primary etymological source. This Sanskrit influence is evidenced across multiple grammatical categories, including nominal, pronominal, and verbal systems<sup>23</sup>.

The 1881 census recorded residents of the Himachal region under the Jalandhar division declaring Pahārī as their mother tongue on linguistic grounds, a fact also cited in the 1983-84 Gazetteer Part-1. When Himachal achieved full statehood in 1971, Pahārī language and its linguistic structure were already established. While early linguists studied ten sublanguages or dialects, the 1931 census indicated their number at sixty-three. Dr. Yashwant Singh Parmar, in his book *Himachal: Kshetra aur Bhasha* (1970), established Pahārī as the language spoken by Himachal's people, enumerating thirty dialects<sup>24</sup>. T. Graham Bailey (1908) also extensively analysed Himāchalī Pahārī dialects in his work *Languages of the Northern Himalayas*.

### Folk Literature of Himāchalī Pahārī Language

The various sublanguages and dialects of the Himāchalī Pahārī language have developed a rich tradition of

folk literature, encompassing a diverse range of oral and written forms, including folk songs, tales, ballads, folk theatre, and maxims. These literary traditions, which have been transmitted orally for generations, have been systematically compiled and documented by contemporary folklorists, preserving a significant cultural heritage.

Scholars such as Mahendra Singh Randhawa's (1970) *Kangra Kala evam Desh aur Geet*, Gautam Sharma Vyathit's (1973) *Kangri Lokgeet*, Sudarshan Vashishtha's (2021) *Himachal ke Lokgeet* and Krishna Lal Sehgal's (2020) *Geet Meri Maati Re* have contributed significantly to the preservation of Himāchalī folk songs. These works consist of extensive compilations of traditional songs whose original composers and singers remain unknown.

In the domain of folk ballads, Om Prakash Sharma's work (2011), *Sanskrit Prabhavit Mahsuvi evam Sirmauri Lokgathaen*, examines the influence of classical Sanskrit texts, including the Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas, on the Mahasuvi and Sirmauri folk traditions. The British colonial scholar Capt. R. C. Temple (1962) in *Legends of Punjab* (Vol. 2 & Vol. 3), documented notable ballads from Himachal Pradesh, including the ballads of Raja Fateh Prakash of Sirmaur and Raja Jagat of Noorpur. Additionally, the folk theatrical traditions of Himachal Pradesh have been explored by Tulsi Raman (2012) in *Himachal Pradesh ke Loknatya*, which highlights regional theatrical forms such as Kariyala, Barlaj, and Dhaja, particularly prominent in the Solan region. The collection and analysis of folk proverbs have also been undertaken, as exemplified by Dhyan Singh Kutleheriya's (1969) *Himāchalī Kahavato ka Sangrah*, which compiles a vast array of proverbs reflecting the linguistic and cultural diversity of the region.

Among those who composed poetry in song form, Ramesh Chandra 'Mastana's (2023) *Mereya Mitra* is prominent. A notable figure in Sirmauri sub-dialect poetry, Vidyanand Saraik (1975) published his collection, *Chitti Chadar*. This work vividly captures themes of patriotism, religion, culture, and nature, woven into diverse poetic expressions.

Linguistic scholars have conducted research and studies on Himāchalī Pahārī. Multiple doctoral theses in linguistics exist in universities, with some published. Mouluram Thakur's (2008) *Pahārī Language Grammar* is published by the Language and Culture Department of Himachal Pradesh. Comprehensive Pahārī language dictionaries and collections of folk maxims have been published. Various institutions are engaged in promoting the Pahārī language.

### Scripts of the Himachali Pahārī Language

Scripts were invented to transform spoken language

into written form. The sacred land of Himachal has chronologically used Brahmi, Kharosthi, Kutila, Sharda, Bhoti, and Nagari scripts. Later, Tankri, Pabuci, Bhatakhri, Pandwani, and Chandwani scripts emerged from Sharda. These scripts were used for inscriptions and manuscripts, with over forty inscriptions found in Chamba written in Chambyali dialect. From a commercial perspective, numerous documents, administrative orders, and manuscripts are available in Tankri script. Over three hundred template manuscripts exist in scripts derived from Sharda. Current Pahārī literature employs Devanagari script as its standard writing system<sup>25</sup>.

### Conclusion

The paper has established that Himāchalī Pahārī stands as an independent language with a complex historical development, emerging from India's Shauraseni Prakrit with subsequent Tibetan influences. Our analysis has identified significant limitations in Grierson's classification system, particularly his problematic placement of Lahauli and Kanavari dialects under the Indo-Tibetan family and his exclusion of Kangri and Kahluri from the Pahārī language family.

The rich folk literature that has developed across Pahārī dialects reflects a common cultural foundation despite variations in linguistic expression. Contemporary documentation efforts reveal thematic and structural commonalities that transcend dialectal boundaries. Reclassification efforts by Thakur (2008) and others represent important steps toward recognizing the unity within diversity that characterizes the Pahārī language complex.

The paper, therefore, proposes expanding the classification of "Himāchalī Pahārī" to function as a comprehensive umbrella term encompassing all eleven major linguistic varieties spoken throughout Himachal Pradesh. This taxonomic reformation acknowledges both the structural linguistic variations present across these dialects and their underlying cultural-geographical unity. This position aligns with the political and cultural vision articulated by Dr. Yashwant Singh Parmar and other founding figures of Himachal Pradesh, who recognized language as a fundamental unifying marker for the region's diverse communities.

While these sublanguages, dialects, and their minor units maintain individual characteristics, collectively they constitute the "Himāchalī Pahārī" language, forming a vibrant linguistic identity within India's diverse linguistic landscape that continues to evolve through both traditional and modern expressions.

### Notes

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