

## A BRIEF NOTE ON MORPHOLOGICAL AND MORPHOPHONEMIC FEATURES OF SHEIKHA GAL (WATALI)

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### INTRODUCTION

*Watal* or *Sheikhs* are a community of people who live in Srinagar, Uri, Sopore, Rajouri, Kupwara, Kulgam (KanThipora, Sher colony), Haihum, Bandipora, Tangmarg (Vogmun), Handawara, Drogmul, areas of Jammu and Kashmir, and as per their claims they number around 2 to 3 lakhs (The census records do not show them in a separate bracket). In Srinagar, they are mostly clustered around the foothills of Hari Parbat, a hillock in Srinagar. The community is typically called *Watal* by outsiders i.e. non-watals, though this community would prefer to be called *Sheikhs*. Their language *Watali/Sheikha gal* is an unclassified language and the name of this language or its speakers is not mentioned in the census.

The *Watal* or *Sheikhs* belong to a social segment of people who mostly work as scavengers, cobblers, leather workers, makers of winnowing trays (*shup'*), brooms, etc. The name *watul* (sing.) or *watal* (pl.) is considered derogatory by them and they claim that the original name assigned to them was *watvun* 'those who do some job' a politically correct way to refer to those who clean and dispose off dirt and filth. They are mainly classified into three categories on the basis of their occupation. Viz;

1. *SupIr' Sheikh* (those involved in the making of winnowing trays '*shup'*')
2. *tshi:nts'* (Scavengers)
3. *kə:Sir' Sheikh* or *Duvan Watal* (Sweepers)

The origin of these people is unclear. One claim made by them about their origin is that seven generations back they were basically the residents of Rawalpindi, Pakistan and after an attack by tribals there, they migrated to different places. After their migration, they did not have permanent places to live and used to move from place to place. They led a nomadic life and usually would camp in open fields *medaan*. They claim that because of their settling in *medaan* they were known as *Harmaadaani Sheikh* which was said to be another name for gypsies. However, they also claim that their gypsy nature was not by choice but rather the locals would not prefer them to be around. This is an oral claim made by the older people of their community and is not supported by any documentary evidence. From a documentary perspective, the term *Watal* is first (and probably the only time) observed in the writings of Lawrence (1895) who refers to them as a wandering tribe, and according to him though sometimes a family will settle down in a village, and will build a permanent hut, the roving instinct is too strong, and after a few years, the family moves on. They are not considered very honest, and are much given to robbing hen-roosts (pp, 314-315). Apart from Lawrence (1895)'s observations: no scholar of note has mentioned this community and most of the data has been collected first hand by observations and interviewing the members of this community. In the present day, the community is no longer a nomadic community, and they are observed to be settled in different places, although it is important to mention that they are observed to be essentially residing in mohallas of their own brethren and not in joint communities with other Kashmiri populations.

Apart from the reference in Lawrence (1895), *Sheikha Gal (Watali)* has not been worked on from any linguistic or sociological perspective. The present paper attempts to focus on the morphophonemic features of *Sheikha Gal*. Morphophonemics is the study of the alternation between phonemes in morphemes which are related to each other by internal change. The morphophonemic features can be discussed in relation to morphological features of a language. It is important to mention here the segmental inventory of *Sheikha Gal (Watali)*, which includes 36 consonant sounds and 16 vowel sounds, given in the charts below (Kak. A. A. & Panzoo. O. F. 2009):

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## A. CONSONANT

anner of Articulation		Place of Articulation							
		Bilabials	Labio dentals	Dentals	Palato- alveolars	Palatals	Velars	Uvulars	Glottals
<b>Stops</b>	<b>VI.unasp.</b>	p		T	T		k	Q	
	<b>VI.asp.</b>	ph/f		Th	Th		kh		
	<b>Vd.unasp.</b>	b		d	D		g	G	
	<b>Vd. asp.</b>	bh		dh			gh		
<b>Affricates</b>	<b>VI.unasp.</b>			ts		c			
	<b>VI.asp.</b>			tsh		ch			
	<b>Vd.unasp.</b>					j			
	<b>Vd. asp.</b>					jh			
<b>Fricatives</b>	<b>VI.</b>			s		S			H
	<b>Vd.</b>		v	z					
<b>Nasals</b>		m		n	ɳ		N		
<b>Laterals</b>				l					
<b>Trills</b>				r					
<b>Flaps</b>				ɾ					
<b>Semi-vowels</b>						y			

Table 1: Consonant system of Sheikha Gal

## B. VOWELS

Shiekha Gal has 16 vowels which are arranged in a table below:

	Front		Central		Back	
	Short	Long	Short	Long	Short	Long
<b>Close</b>	i	i:	ɪ		u	u:
<b>Half close</b>	e		ə	ə:	o	o:
<b>Half open</b>	ɛ	ɛ:	a	a:	ɔ	
<b>Open</b>	æ					

Table 2: Vowel system of Sheikha Gal

## METHOD

The methodology employed for this paper consisted of tape recorded data collected from 30 speakers of this language. The recorded data was transcribed and analysed into various morphological and morphophonemic features which are given below:

### A. MORPHOLOGICAL FEATURES: THESE FEATURES INCLUDE

#### 1. GENDER FORMATION:

Most gender formation processes involve:

- (i) Suffixation
- (ii) Vowel changes
- (iii) Suppletion

#### (i) SUFFIXATION:

The following suffix /o:ni/ is added to masculine bases to derive feminine forms. Certain morphophonemic changes also occur.

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Masculine	Feminine
/a:ɾma:/ 'vegetable grower'	/a:ɾmio:ni/ 'vegetable grower (f.s)'
/ka: dɾa:/ 'bakerman'	/ka: dɾio:ni/ 'baker woman'
/go:ɾa/ 'milkman'	/gɾio:ni/ 'milk maid'

(ii) **VOWEL CHANGES:** The feminine forms are derived from masculine forms with certain phonemic changes such as vowel change.

Masculine	Feminine
/jhala/ 'mad (m.s)'	/jholi/ 'mad (f.s)'
/Dinga/ 'twisted (m.s)'	/Dingi/ 'twisted (f.s)'
/chuva/ 'rat'	/chuvi/ 'rat (f.s)'
/kho:ta/ 'stupid (m.s)'	/kho:ti/ (f.s)'
/ɛNa/ 'lame (m.s)'	/ɛNi/ 'lame (f.s)'
/khaTa/ 'sour (m.s)'	/khoTi/ 'sour (f.s)'
/pya:ɾa/ 'dear (m.s)'	/pyo:ri/ 'dear(f.s)'
/Thola/ 'fat'	/Thuli/ 'fat (f.s)'
/go:Da/ 'horse'	/gu:Di/ 'mare'
/kala/ 'dumb (m.s)'	/koli/ 'dumb (f.s)'
/nika/ 'small (m.s)'	/niki/ 'small (f.s)'
/chu:Ta/ 'short (m.s)'	/chu:Ti/ 'short (f.s)'

(iii) **SUPPLETION:** Some feminine forms present examples of suppletion as follows:

Masculine	Feminine
/caphra/ 'broad (m.s)'	/khuli/ 'broad (f.s)'
/so:ra/ 'father in law'	/sas/ 'mother in law'
/pitriya/ 'uncle'	/coci/ 'aunt'
/khasIm/ 'husband'	/trimut/ 'wife'
/marId/ 'man'	/ju:ni/ 'woman'

**2. NUMBER FORMATION:** In the number formation, the singular forms are basic from which plural forms are derived by the process of suffixation and vowel changes. The plural forms vary with gender.

(i) **SUFFIXATION:** It involves two steps:

a. The suffix /ya: / is added to the singular forms ending at vowels to derive plural forms.

Singular	Plural
/kuDi/ 'girl'	/kuDiya: / 'girls'
/khoTi/ 'sour'	/khoTiya:/ 'sour (pl)'
/khuni/ 'a piece'	/khuniya: / 'pieces'
/si:li/ 'eye brow'	/si:liya: / 'eyebrows'
/ke:la/ 'banana'	/ke:liya: / 'bananas'
/Tu:pi/ 'hat'	/Tu:piya: / 'hats'
/koNri/ 'a kashmiri fire pot'	/koNriya: / 'a kashmiri fire pot'

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b. The suffix /a:/ is added to the singular forms ending at consonants to derive plural forms. No vowel changes take place.

Singular	Plural
/rag/ 'vein'	/raga:/ 'veins'
/ta:r/ 'wire'	/ta:ra:/ 'wires'
/pensil/ 'pencil'	/pensila:/ 'pencils'

### (ii) VOWEL CHANGES:

a. In the formation of feminine plurals from feminine singulars, some vowel changes occur in the presence of a plural suffix /ya:/. E.g.

Singular	Plural
/copli/ 'sandal'	/cɔpliya:/ 'sandals'
/bəDi/ 'big(f.s)'	/boDiya:/ 'big ones'

b. Masculine plural forms are formed from masculine singular forms by undergoing vowel changes. e.g.

Singular	Plural
/chuva/ 'rat'	/chuve/ 'rats'
/kota/ 'dog'	/kote/ 'dogs'
/laDka/ 'boy'	/laDke/ 'boys'
/ka:la/ 'swarthy'	/ka:le/ 'swarthy (pl)'

On the basis of above, the following morphophonemic Features were observed in the language.

**B. MORPHOPHONEMIC FEATURES:** These features include Vowel and Consonant Alternations, given below:

**(i) VOWEL ALTERNATIONS:** The following vowel alternations result in the formation of feminine forms from masculine basis and in the formation of plurals from singular forms.

a. The central vowel /a/ changes to back vowel /o/ in medial position and to front vowel /i/ at word final position, resulting in the formation of feminine forms from masculine basis. For example

Masculine	Feminine
/jhala/ 'madman'	/jholi/ 'mad woman'
/tata/ 'hot'	/toti/ 'hot (f.s)'
/ThanDa/ 'cold'	/ThonDi/ 'cold (f.s)'
/kala/ 'black'	/ko:li/ 'black(f.s)'
/khaTa/ 'sour (m.s)'	/khoTi/ 'sour (f.s)'
/pyara/ 'dear'	/pyo:ri/ 'dear (m.s)'
/kala/ 'dumb (m.s)'	/koli/ 'dumb (f.s)'
/chuva/ 'rat (m.s)'	/chuvi/ 'rat (f.s)'
/kota/ 'dog'	/koti/ 'bitch'

b. The back vowel /o/ changes to /u/ in medial position in addition to the change of /a/ to /i/ finally.



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Masculine	Feminine
/cho:Ta/ 'young (m.s)'	/chu:Ti/ 'young (f.s)'
/go:Da/ 'horse'	/gu:Di/ 'mare'
/kho:ta/ 'stupid'	/khu:ti/ 'stupid'

c. The central vowel /a/ at word final position changes to front vowel /i/ when the feminine suffix beginning with /o:/ is added. e.g.

Masculine	Feminine
/a:ma:/ 'vegetable grower (m.s)'	/a:rmio:ni/ 'vegetable grower (f.s)'
/ka: dra:/ 'baker man'	/ka: drio:ni/ 'baker woman'
/go:ra/ 'milkman'	/grio:ni/ 'milk maid'

d. The second vowel /a/ of the disyllabic words of the CVCV structure is changed to the low vowel /ɛ/ when the plural forming suffix /ø/ is added to them. e.g.

Singular	Plural
/chuva/ 'rat'	/chuve/ 'rats'
/kota/ 'dog'	/kote/ 'dogs'
/ka:la/ 'black'	/ka:le/ 'black (pl)'

e. The vowel /a/ of CVCV structure is changed to front vowel /i/ when plural forming suffix /ya:/ is added to them. E.g.

Singular	Plural
/kɛ:la/ 'banana'	/kɛ:liya:/ 'bananas'

f. The central vowel /ə/ of CVCV structure is changed to back vowel /o/ when plural forming /ya:/ is added to them. E.g.

Singular	Plural
/bəDi/ 'big(f.s)'	/boDiya:/ 'big (f.p)'
/khuṇi/ 'piece (f.s)'	/khuṇiya:/ 'pieces (f.pl)'

g. The low front vowel /ɛ/ of CVCV structure is changed to high front vowel /i/ and the low central vowel /a/ to /i/ when a feminine forming suffix /ø/ is added to them. E.g.

Masculine	Feminine
/cɛTa/ 'fair (m.s)'	/ciTi/ 'fair (f.s)'

h. The vowel /o/ of CVCCV structure is changed to /ɔ/ when plural forming suffix /ya:/ is added to them. E.g.

Singular	Plural
/copli/ 'sandal (f.s)'	/cɔpliya:/ 'sandals (f.p)'

(ii) **CONSONANT ALTERNATIONS**:-The following consonant alternation results in the formation of plurals from singular basis.

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a. The consonant /t/ of CVCV structure is observed to change into affricate /c/ when plural forming suffix /ya:/ is added. E.g.

Singular	Plural
/hoTi/ 'picce of wood (m.s)'	/hociya:/ 'pieces of wood (f.p)'

## CONCLUSION

The present paper is an introduction to morphological and morphophonemic features of *Sheikha Gal (Watali)*. This is the first study in this domain of this language and more work is required to be done to understand the processes intricately and comprehensively.

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