

to south direction of the valley, whereby all the land obtains sufficient sunshine and a shorter season of severe cold, adds greatly to the favourable character of its climate. The scantiness of the present population is ascribed by Colonel Biddulph, no doubt quite correctly, to oppression and misgovernment,¹⁴ and that this has been long continued is sufficiently clear from what we know of the history of Khushwaqt rule during the last two centuries.¹⁵

The fact that the constant 'wars of the Yāsīn rulers since the beginning of the century have', as Colonel Biddulph has rightly observed,¹⁶ 'been the most powerful agent in depopulating the country', supplies an additional reason for drawing attention here to a geographical factor of interest. I believe that this warlike activity of the Yāsīn rulers is itself largely explained by geographical conditions. A look at the map shows that the peculiar position of the Yāsīn valley makes it a favourable base for aggression in the direction both of Chitrāl and of the main valley of the Gilgit river, access to the upper portion of which it completely commands. On the other hand Yāsīn itself is easily defended both on the north and south, as already pointed out, and its remoteness alone tends to make it secure from local attack by tribal communities or petty chiefships. It is only when command of the direct route connecting Indus and Oxus by way of Yāsīn and the passes of Darkōt and Barōghil becomes an important object for distant but powerful neighbours, that the seclusion of Yāsīn fails to protect it. It was thus when Tibetans and Chinese in turn were striving for a hold upon Little P'o-lü, and again in our own days when political developments between two big Asiatic powers affected remote Yāsīn in a curiously similar manner.¹⁷

This relative remoteness and seclusion of Yāsīn are reflected in an interesting ethnological and linguistic fact. The language spoken in Yāsīn by the bulk of the population is Burushaskī, locally known as *Wurishkī*, a tongue wholly distinct from the Dardic languages of the Hindukush region and without any known relationship. The name of the tongue is derived from the designation *Wurish* which the Yāsīn people apply to themselves, and this appears again in the name *Wurshigūm* or *Warshigum*, by which Yāsīn proper is still known locally.^{17a} Outside Yāsīn Burushaskī is now spoken only in Hunza and Nagar, both of them territories that in position exactly correspond to Yāsīn and are even better protected by natural difficulties of access. But there is plentiful linguistic evidence that in earlier times the area where this strange language was spoken extended much farther to the south. Traces of its influence have been found in almost all Dardic languages, however far removed from the valleys where Burushaskī (*Wurishkī*) still survives.¹⁸

It has been long recognized that the present restriction of Burushaskī to the most remote valleys south of the main Hindukush range and to a very small portion of the total population of the whole mountain region points to a gradual withdrawal and absorption of the race that originally spoke it, due to a wave of 'Aryan' invasion represented by the tribes speaking Dardic

Natural defences of Yāsīn.

Burushaskī spoken in Yāsīn.

Recession of Burushaskī speech.

¹⁴ See *Hindoo Koosh*, p. 56.

¹⁵ The effects of this misrule, as far as number of the population is concerned, have been made, no doubt, still more lasting by the devastation and wholesale slaughter accompanying the two Dōgrā invasions of 1860 and 1863 which followed constant attacks and intrigues of the Yāsīn chiefs against Gilgit; cf. Drew, *Jummoo and Kashmir*, pp. 444, 446; Leitner, *Dardistān*, p. 66, where harrowing details are recorded from the mouth of native witnesses.

¹⁶ See *Hindoo Koosh*, p. 33.

¹⁷ It is well known that it was the strategic importance of the routes leading from the uppermost Oxus and the Pāmīrs across the Barōghil saddle towards the valleys of

the Indus and Kābul river that forced the Indian Government after 1885, in view of the Russian menace, to extend an increasingly effective control over Yāsīn and Chitrāl—territories which the Dōgrās, in spite of their troubles in connexion with Gilgit, had been quite content to leave in virtual independence.

^{17a} Cf. Biddulph, *Hindoo Koosh*, p. 38. Mughul Bēg's survey made about 1789-90 records the name as *Warshigum*; see Raverty, *Notes on Afghānistān*, p. 189, where a remarkably accurate account of Yāsīn based on Mughul Bēg's report is given. The form *Warshgum* is also found on the Survey of India Maps.

¹⁸ Cf. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey*, VIII. ii. pp. 6, 186.