

## **RITUALS AND FESTIVALS AS A SPACE FOR KALASH IDENTITY**

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### **Abstract**

*This research paper is an attempt to understand ancestral and cultural traditions, faith, mystic experiences, oral history and mythology of the Kalash people. There is no written evidence about the history and origin of Kalash. The religious ideology is attained through the verbal recollection of folklore, myths and miracles. Kalash identity is exhibited in the form of their sacred rituals and festivals. Rituals are the means of communication to the Supreme Being; they are very peculiar, and very symbolic. Their identity can be witnessed through the ritual of exclusive public dance which distinguishes them from others occupying the same geographical space. Their tradition is famous and distinguished because of its mystic songs accompanied with an unusual group dancing. The triumphant of drum and chants of clapping all together creates a sensational environment for the visitors. The contemporary Kalash religion and rituals are entirely different from the accounts provided by the historians, travelers and sociologists before the war of independence in 1857. The Kalash are now monotheist believing in one supreme authority "Dezau" and the shamans through whom they have received their religious knowledge. The study was conducted in Bumburet valley of district Chitral, Pakistan. The qualitative anthropological research technique was adopted for acquiring the ethnographic data for the research in hand.*

**Keywords:** *folklore, myths, spiritual beliefs, rhythm, rhyme, dances and sacrifice*

## Introduction

The history and origin of Kalash have been held in obscurity. There is no written evidence in the form of literature, art, and architecture. The religious ideology is attained through the verbal recollection of folklore, myths and miracles. According to myth (Saifullah Jan, 1996) *Shalak Shah* came to Chitral with the army of great general and later decided to settle down there. He ruled the region and had four sons. Later he divided his kingdom among his sons. The rest is lost in the mist of time and no historical data is present. Professor Paolo Graziosi, Professor of Anthropology and Prehistory at the University of Florence states, that the Kalash have purely Europoid traits reminiscent of Mediterranean or, under certain aspects, Alpine peoples. He found the Kalasha to have light skin, sometimes light coloured eyes, regular features and was of medium height. Some of the women he found truly beautiful.

“Khodai, the supreme God, long ago, at the time of distributions among the sons of Adam gave land to live on. Kalasha the youngest son, decided with his family to keep the valley, as this was the most beautiful and fertile valley in the whole world. The two other brothers, Katis and Bashagailis became jealous when they saw that the most beautiful valley has been given to the youngest brother. This caused enmity between the different tribes of the Kalash; the *saih posh* (wearer of black robe), the *surkh posh* (the wearer of redrobe) and the *safiad posh* (wearer of white robe)”.

(United Nations Declaration, 2007)

Kalasha recollect the memory of having Kings like *Rajawai and Balasing*. Their Kingdom was based in the Batrik village of Bumburet which included Bashagaland Uchusht in Chitral (ibid). Balasing was a powerful king, but it is the common believe that due to his sins, massacre and egoistic pride God had punished him and he was defeated by the Rais. The Kalash ruled Chitral in complete harmony and mutual respect alongside with *Prince Sumalik*. In 1320 Nadir Shah took control by defeating Prince Balasing. The Kalash were taken prisoner and later massacred. The ordeal, humiliation and persecution of Kalash were beyond imagination. Their women were forcibly taken into marriage, their

youth into slavery. They were even forced to change their religion. Many had obeyed, but a few for the sake of their lives and to avoid conversion fled to the south and settled in inaccessible valleys. They tried to revive their old traditions secretly. Tom Campbell believes that

“Slaves have no reason beyond the capacity to understand what is required of them, they therefore require total direction from the master, and thus difference in natural capacity is used as a basis for a simple division of labor and quasi political familial organization”.

(Campbell, 1981)

The Katur's period was a period of relief for the Kalash minority group because of the power struggle between the Katur's and the equally strong opposition of *Khuswaqtia*. Almost immediately the Katur realized that the subjugated Kalash bore no threat to his kingdom, nor had any conflict with the Islamic beliefs. They put a partial end to the severe atrocities addressed towards Kalash but with exception to a few isolated incidents of taking their youth as slaves and taking their pretty daughters as bride or mistresses.

Historical events, if being followed carefully, the reason behind the silence of the British colonials to protect this unique non-Muslim community is puzzling, in contrast to their friendliness for the Ismaili community. Besides Kalash there are varieties of other ethnic group sharing the same geographical space to maintain their cultural and religious identity. The historical accounts reveal that the Chitral region was accessible to invaders and foreign travelers for trade purposes which had provided them with the opportunity to subjugate the local people. These assaults had left their marks on the cultural, religious and group identity of indigenous people. Their identity is exhibited in the form of their sacred rituals and festivals. Rituals are the means of communication to the Supreme Being; they are very peculiar, and very symbolic. There is a sequential arrangement of words, rhythm, rhyme, dancing and sacrifice of animal or human beings in case of prehistoric societies.

### **Research Site**

The study was conducted in Bumburet valley of district Chitral, Pakistan. The modern state of Chitral district is located in Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa Province. This state was once an old country with its borders extending up to *Badakshan* and

*Bashagal* in the North West and the *Kunar* Valley in the south all the way to *Bilam* and *Chaghasswari*. Most of these areas now lie in Afghanistan. The border of the state was not permanent due to the ongoing expansion of the neighboring state of Gilgit and Kashakar.

Bumburet Valley of Kalash is part of Chitral and it laid claim to a land of steep slopes, some 35 kilometers to the south of Chitral which opens towards the Kunar River. During 1959 the kingdom of Chitral was attached to Pakistan and therefore the Kalash people became citizens of Pakistan. The total area of Bumburet valley is 180 Km sq out of which 51 Km sq is habitable and cultivable. There are six main pasture units at an elevation of 3500m above sea level and occupy about half of the total geographical area of the valley. The Kalash villages in all the three valleys are located at a height of approximately 1900 to 2200m (Denker, 1981). The climate is generally semi-arid.

### **Research Methodology**

The qualitative anthropological research technique was adopted for acquiring the ethnographic data for the research in hand. The researchers lived in Bumburet Valley, and participated in their festivals, feasts, offerings and prayers. Thus a complete immersion in the said culture has been adopted for a very good rapport, acceptance and recognition by the society. The basic data was collected through the socioeconomic survey. The survey facilitated me to gather information about the village regarding sex, education, family system, caste, population, ethnic groups, occupation, and number of households residing in the village. The Bumburet valley is composed of 12 hamlets and through random sampling we selected few hamlets where both Kalasha and Muslims coexisted and shared the geographical space. We visited every house of the village Anish, Brun, Batrik and Karakal and conducted in-depth interviews to collect detailed information about their religion. Audio recording was used during the interviews. The secondary data for this study was collected from library by reviewing, journals, articles and documentary programs about the mythical people of Kalash. The data has been assembled in the form of photographs, maps, sketches, and floor plans.

### **Results and Discussion**

Kalash identity is exhibited in the form of their sacred rituals and festivals. Rituals are the means of communication to the Supreme Being; they are very peculiar, and

very symbolic. There is a sequential arrangement of words, rhythm, rhyme, dancing and sacrifice of animal or human beings in case of prehistoric societies. Language and actions of rituals itself express identity (Durkheim, 1915). For performing them, they like any other group observe specific rules before their submission to *Allah or Dezahu*. For the prayer, both men and women clean themselves by taking bath, cover their head and face towards west “*suribihot`k gehen*” which is followed by a sacrifice. The blood of the animal is sprinkled on fire with the help of juniper leaves and freshly baked bread “*au`*” is served with grape wine, and milk. Praying ritual is customary before starting any important or new thing associated with daily matters. The prayer is stated with “*maula ta dewa*” (Lord the Spirit). All the prayers are named according the nature of the event and are performed by the elders without the thumping of drums. These prayers are not followed by their customary dances. The prayers are conducted when the goat reaches the high pasture “*Ucal`k batya*” since the high pastures are considered pure and sacred grounds. The Qazi build, “*Saraz dyek*” a large fire by putting *saraz* branches in the fire. The branches yield a sweet smell. The Qazi then pours milk or grape juice in the fire and pray. In altars before the harvest, the wheat ears are burnt together with *saraz* leaves as a gratitude to god for the good and healthy crop. When a special corn ear is spotted in the cornfield having two heads and more grains, it is considered very pure and is regarded as a symbol that their prayers have been answered and they again follow it by a sacrifice of an animal and sprinkle his blood on the corn as an act of thankfulness.

### **Kalash Traditional Songs and Dance**

Kalash identity can also be witnessed through the ritual of exclusive public dance which distinguishes them from others occupying the same geographical space. *Cha, Doshak, Dezalilk, Bazoon, Chanja. nat, Indreen, Grohony nat, Prapan Dawak nat, Pisty totobarki, Mehomaho, Awa, Hocha hopay nat, Shagayak nat, Grazdak, ohaha nat*. All these are the names of their traditional dances which include individual dances, torch dance, axe dance, i.e. specifically for men alone and can dance in the vertical moment like a train. These dances are accompanied by the rhythmical clapping and drum beats.

The traditional music tunes are *hoho...*, *oh oh....*, *lalaylalo....*, *dusiii...*, *ah ha ha ha ha*. Traditional musical instrument are *whan'ac* a small drum, *Dhan'w* large drum, *Ishpoin* flute. The cultural processes of identity formation embodied in dance are open, fluid and contested as a ritual is constantly being reinterpreted (Queen, 1996). The dance ritual in Kalash society is an important cultural vehicle and strategy for consolidating identity of its members. Many transitional changes had occurred over the years, but the public dance demonstrations are still functioning on their same elegant composure. This dancing is the integral part of their seasonal festivals and are attended and enjoyed by both the local and the tourists.

Kalash tradition is famous and distinguished because of its mystic songs accompanied with an unusual group dancing. The triumphant of drum and chants of clapping all together creates a sensational environment for the visitors. The rhythm and beats try to communicate a silent message to the perceiver. Though the songs are regarding their glorious past, but when combined with their present miseries cast an everlasting impact. Kalash songs are classified according to their themes and purpose like love songs, praise songs, festal and lullabies. “*Drazailak*” is a mode of solo singing where songs are textually focused and elaborated. The song constitutes 10 to 12 verses. After the solo performance the group recites the verses. The dance participants simultaneously make a long chain linked together by shoulder to shoulder. “*Disak*” style is an abbreviated and faster paced singing accompanied by the feisty dancing. “*Ca~e*” is the clapping style of songs and dance (Parkes, 1990). This is more of a traditional nature where minimum importance is given to song composition. To compose a memorable song the singer is supposed to consult an expert (*Qazi*) on their history and legend. It is not necessary for the singer to memorize the whole legend as brief reference is required for his song. The theme is in accordance to the wealth and status of the man. Most Kalash oral literature and performance, though concerns with ambiguities, but they do contain some reference of their ancestral background.

### **Song in Bumburet Valley**

*Eg kond` I mon matram e ko` karo de may suri zhe mastruk*

(Attention please; my sun and moon, I have something to say,)

*Prenaw day sira` dyaio trupaun paraw bazaar mumuret.*

(The wind blow from the other side, which frighten the Mumeret.)

*S`abas` o mimi natya desh bas`ara momal a gra`u`i.*

(I praise you my heroes and leaders,)

*Shoshongay shong may thara bala may grom mutabaran*

(I am too frighten by others; listen my homeland leaders,)

*Shura Ingaw wir pashala d` aya kay s`is`a dewal` ok.*

(Dewalokh showed the great warrior up in the sky.)

*Jamili shiras to tren chinil`ac`hikis ko-`una ne.*

(Women never get separated from the group we never heard,)

*Sha`ga` yak nat` o phatuki aran batrika pala`aw jaw.*

(There were Shagyak dance in Palawjaw at Batrik,)

*Sual ta ne aran o rajaaway nawaw.*

(They didn't pray oh, my great Rajawai grandson;)

*Onjes`t`a kui Bul`ima`in desh s` injin may desh zhe dunia.*

(I will convince my Balimain; Oh, my villager and the world.)

There are two main themes of praise or renown (namus) that are appropriate as topics of panegyric those concerning the prosperity of a man, such as his successful management of a large household, together with his wealth in goats or land; and his personal achievements or prowess as an elder. Kalasha songs composers can thus, tend to be narrowly stereotyped: an exclamation of “*sabas*” i.e. bravo, Mutimir, Buliman followed by the lineage identity of the elder (named as descendent or grandson of an ancestor) and the singers kinship lineage with him. Closing lines are equally regular, serving to alert an audience that the song may now be repeated inchorus. They typically end with the expression of modesty in attempting to convey sufficient praise or that to recount fully all the deeds of an elder (*drigazazai we nasine drasniu*) would be like a water channel that will never come to an end (ibid, p.318). I quote from the same paper the following song;

*Sabas o mimi, mutimer na wau ze bakan nawau!*

(Bravo to you, descendants of Mutimit and decedents of Bakar!)

*Basan mastruk dranal e, rua biana chales*

(The month of spring emerged, and you pulled out a silver treasure.)

*Jamili- sir asale, ta (s)I jagai, khosan tre kalasa des`*

(It was your clan's women, and looking at them, they please the three  
Kalash community.)

*Lot mondro kila deke? asois tai dxorust ze~ mrat- n orik*

(What great talk shall we give? It became so beautiful at your doorway and  
beneath your mulberry tree.)

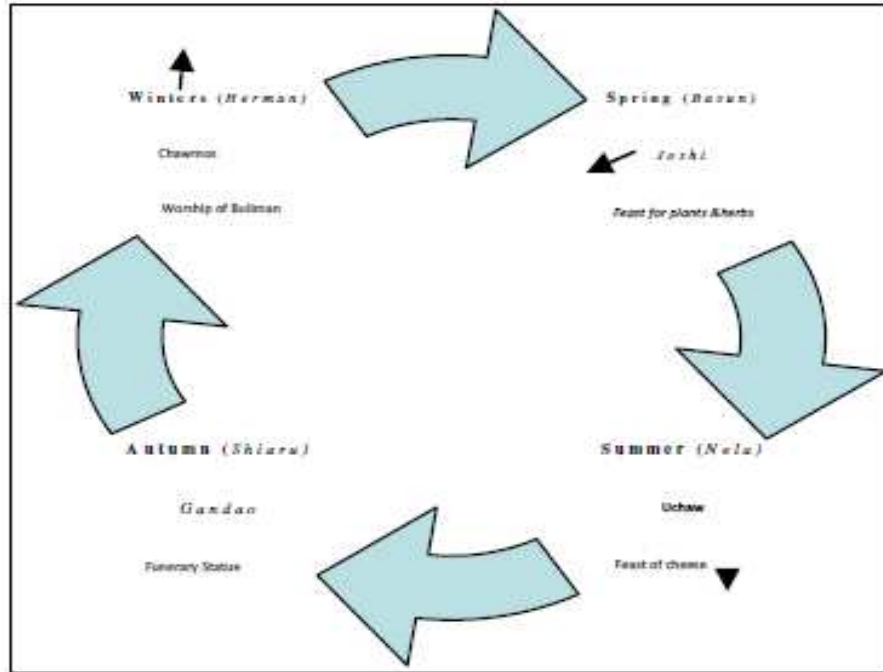
The limited literature available is complex in nature and prior knowledge about the Kalash locals is essential. The only reason for the survival of the Kalash literature is the legacy of recitation. In reality the recitation has actually caused the death of originality of Kalash literature because it is humanly impossible to memories each and every account in chronological order and that is why when the researcher asked them about the names and miracles of their shaman they were unable to even name them correctly and the accounts produced are vague in nature. Therefore, whatever is left of their present literature should not be underestimated.

### **Festivals and Feasts in Kalash**

The festivals of Kalash are associated with the seasons. Changes in the seasons (Loude, et al, 1988) occurring in relation of the calendar follow a clockwise pattern. Various feasts and festivals are held in accordance with the seasonal changes and requirements (ibid). The Kalash festival and offerings bear a close resemblance with the prehistoric pagan culture, which had been a very dominant cult in Europe. Paganism is an ancient religion practiced by groups. These people worshiped the sun, earth, moon and extreme weathers. They made offerings to an invisible god. This religion was destroyed by the Roman Christian. These pagans were forced to embrace Christianity, but paganism was not destroyed or diminished completely, some pagan traditions were incorporated into Christianity.



Earlier Christians disapproved the idea of celebrating birthdays as if it was a pagan practice.



**Figure 2:** The clockwise movement of festivals in Kalash seasonal calendar

If we put the rituals and the festivals of the Christian and Kalash parallel to each other, a close analogy can be attained despite of differences in the philosophy and rationale of the two religions. The basis of the ceremonies and advent of festivals is remarkably same. The chawmos festival is celebrated in December as winter solstice is truly pagan in nature and spirit. Pagans hibernate in severe winters and pray to god for a better and prosperous future during spring and summer. Christian in the same month celebrate the birth of Christ or “*Massiah*” during December which is regarded as are logos, event, i.e. an affair in which the whole community participates, pray and dance to pass the days of hibernation. It has been proven by the meteorologists, scientists and historians that the description, timing and climate of Hebron (the birth place of Christ) does not match with the description of the 25th December as claimed by the church ([http://www. Hope-of-Israel.org/ Cmas 1](http://www.Hope-of-Israel.org/Cmas1)). Even Easter which is celebrated on the first Sunday in the month of April symbolizes the pagan ritual, i.e. as a day for sun`s worship. It is

believed that present day festivals and ceremonies in Christianity are pagan in nature and which were adopted and incorporated by the Christians for making resemblance to their pagan beliefs prior to Christianity. This ideological maneuvering turned out to be very successful and the church successfully lures the innocent pagans by claiming religious identity.

The people of Kalash are often referred as the pagans because of their religious practices, but due to the constant influence of various external and internal religious factors have transformed their cultural traits and developed a new cultural identity. The festivals celebrated by the Kalash people are very colorful, joyous, and gay. All the three valleys collectively and simultaneously celebrate the festive occasion open heartedly. These festivals are the main ingredient of traditions based upon their religious beliefs. Generally there are two types of religious festivals. In the first type they sing, dance and enjoy their feast as a symbol of gratitude to their gods for all the blessings and favors. In the second type it is very sober and serious affair followed by a sacrifice. This is purely conducted by the elders and the youth is just entertained with the food and drinks, especially the holy drink, grape wine, and stories are told about their glorious past.

The Qazi is primarily responsible to announce the date and time for the festival and urges the people for commencement of preparation and for participation with full enthusiasm. The Qazi along with other elders visits each family who had suffered a loss. They present flowers “*gamburi*” to the family members with a presentation of colorful gown “*chapan*” to the male members to “*shoak chink*” breaks the mourning and invites them to take part in the festival. The first ceremony of the calendar year is called “*Gila Shiraz*” to celebrate the arrival of the New Year and is celebrated around the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of March or first week of April depending on the weather conditions. The people are compulsorily supposed to consume vegetable for dinner.

*Joshi or zhoshi* is the second major festival, which is celebrated in the month of May. This festival is symbolically regarded as equivalent to *Eid* celebrations of Muslims. People store Milk, walnuts, dry fruits for ten days to be used in these days. On the eleventh day the girls collect yellow roses from the high pastures since they are the only flowers which seemingly bloom in the valley at that time. The figure eleven bore a close similarity with the Muslims of the region since

they religiously celebrate “*Giraween Sharif*” the 11th of the Islamic month by distributing alms, sweets, grains and flour to the needy. In essence, this is quite different from the Kalash but it symbolizes the cultural foundation of certain practices borrowed by the religion to perpetuate its control of the society.

This festival is attended by the tourists and is full of excitement, fun and jubilation. The event lasts for five days. The offerings in form of walnuts and milk are distributed amongst the tribe to celebrate the birth of all the children born in the winters and a prayer is conducted for the health and longevity of the children. It is customary to sing traditional songs on the thumping of the drums.

### **Zhoshi Song**

*S` abas` o tay hatya e may baya o muntimir nawaw.baya*

*may ne aphucaw eg nagorey pai gora chomay pa;aw*

(I appreciate you my grandson Mutimir, Brother you  
didn't ask me, and conveyed yourself.)

*Kia pes`man tay aris e ko ari tay zhanay naometi? Rau*

*zhe su `a` gel`ail anger zhe bazaar may Kal`as`a grom.*

(What are the factors that make you angry; you played  
with golden and silver at my village Kalasha grum;)

*Prehanka kay jagemi c` hir o goc` har prenaw C`hetgru*

*shay. Bira kumba `l` asala e sanheshan pay thara alalagaril`*

(When I glanced to the other side of my place, it seems very  
fascinating my village Chet Guru)

*Azura son may thara cara asta kris`na t` emani moc.*

(When you take your goats to the place lagari, Last there  
was a man from an unknown place;)

*May thara sarang hul` a ghona sajigor zahe balima`in.*

*Bira marat` aris e, abujaw may puri zindgi*

(I was protected by sagigor and Buliman, when I sacrifice goat,)

*Shukur khodayas som e ne shiau may tangi zhe majburi e.*

*lot` mondro kia dem e dadas to ga `u` k kat` asinga demo?*

(Thanks to god for the hardships and pleasures, what else I

tell but my power remains for Kater Sing.)

The next festival “*Ucaw*” is celebrated in the month of August to mark the harvest of wheat and barley. The festivities involve food, wine with combination of singing and dancing. The Qazi announces the date for the festival after perceiving that everyone is in a position to participate. The *Rat`nat* festival is “feast of cheese’s” i.e. to regain the favors of the fairies, which is followed by the official *Ucaw* ceremony where sacrifices are made on high pastures and altars. The male eats at the altar and female are served in the home. The females collectively or in turn consume the food and then join the dance. The ceremony continues till the next morning.

Another distinctive festival is of “*Sharu*” the autumn festival. In this festival the sacrifice of a goat is made for two main gods’ *Mahdev* and *Sajigor*. Every clan organizes its own feast or “*Precesh*”. This ceremony is held in Birir Valley. People of other valleys are not formally invited only the close family and relative alone attend the ceremony. Another small, informal ceremony is *Alasing Zhonta* which is only celebrated by those who are prosperous. This ceremony is regarded as an exhibit of family wealth where the father of the bride presents, gifts in the form of goods and livestock to his daughters family and in-laws. Another ceremony is conducted in the presence of the guests and visitors to highlight their prosperity and to cast an impression on the villagers and is known as “*Sareik*” festival. Both these celebrations are conducted in the month of “*Jani Mastruk*” December.

The most important festival which is often regarded as the source of their traditional identity and sets them apart from the others coexisting with them in the region is the winter solstice “*chawmos*”. This is a colorful festival, which is celebrated when the region is covered with snow and the weather is extremely cold “*OS*” so they conserve their energy and rely on their food reserves to pass the

weather severity. This festival is the combination of songs, dance, bonfire, food and mischievous acts to pass the severest and snowy winters.

**Chawmos Song:**

*Jangal bathanay mo kasi khan o.*

(Don't walk in the native land of forest)

*Tat khuray o sohorum j,anjer o.*

(You have worn golden chains of shoes)

*Asmanani hurghoon day la o*

(It has been said that the queen of sky is waiting for you)

*janatani hur o tay raphek o*

(The price of heaven fancy for her.....)

The Kalash people hibernate at this time of year. They fear the cruelty of the winter season so they pray to god and seek forgiveness and asking for favors and bounties in the next spring when arrive. This is a very sacred and religious occasion for them and they don't allow the visitors and non-believers to participate or interfere with the proceeding. They do permit the visitors to observe the rituals. They have a very firm believe in their religious ideology and rituals. They respect and guard it without indulging into any logical or scientific proof for their religion. Kalash people are very generous and considerate towards the feelings of others, therefore they have embedded certain rituals console the families which may have suffered some loss prior to the holding of the festival (Loude, et al, 1988). This festival is rather an extended festival, which lasts a fortnight.

Generally it is held between 7th to 31st December. The *Qazi* announces the date of commencement of the festival, which is usually the first week of December. The festival begins with the traditional method of inviting those who are mourning a loss for a loved one and then the rest of the villagers prepare food in honor of the family and a red "*chaapan*" a long coat is presented as a gift. The acceptance of gift by the mourners is a sign to break the mourning. The whole village is invited formally by a group of youth personally visiting each household. They purify and clean themselves and their homes thoroughly as a ritual and don

on neat and clean clothes. This occasion also includes the distribution of bread and walnuts which they store all summer for this festival (ibid). They later celebrate the day of dead soul which is a rather sad occasion where everyone sits quietly and they remember their loved ones. They distribute offerings and fruits in the name of their dead one. They make a special fire and eat the food rather quietly.

The second phase of the festival is rather exciting and entertaining. There is a song competition where boys and girls compete with each other by teasing and cutting jokes on one another. Sometimes elders have to interfere to bring order and discipline when their children go out of control and cross limits. They even disguise their sexes for the sake of entertainment and fun. The elders prepare a sacrifice of goat in the *jestikhan* and sprinkle its blood on the walls and distribute the meat amongst the villagers. This festival is associated with the advent of *Buliman*, the god of riches and prosperity who is invisible, but comes on a horse and stays with the people and on the basis of their sacrifices and prayers grants them most of their wishes.

### **Religious Cultural Sensitivities**

This is a known fact that when people coexist in a hostile environment with a fundamental difference in religious ideology they are bound to develop certain sensitivities based on rational or irrational behavior. These simple careless attitudes serve as a space to cultivate certain conflicts and misunderstandings which eventually corrupts the spiritualism and harmonization of the region. The people of Kalash do welcome the visitors and the tourists open heartedly. They are only irritated when their females are mistreated or abused by the visitors, especially when they are dancing. Dance is an essential ritual and is only observed to please the gods and the deities.

During the course of data collection it has been observed that they had cancelled a performance just because of the irresponsible behavior of the tourist from Lahore, Pakistan. He tried to flirt with one of the female participants. The Kalash youth took very serious notice of that and forced the girls to go home. The ceremony for that day was immediately cancelled. The young girls aged 12 to 18 conveyed displeasure and disgust towards the presence of visitors in their holy festival. The Kalash often accused Muslims with the charge that they humiliate, accuse and

harass them. They believe that Muslims of the region show disrespect to them due to the fact that their women folk do not observe *purdah* although Kalash females fulfill the requirement of “*Satar*” or concealment.

Apparently, the Muslims of the region have a superiority complex, whereas in reality it is only partially true. The Muslims and the Kalash are two different societies having opposite cultural and religious ideologies which often result in misunderstanding and mistrust. Cultural identities are constituted by employing signs and symbols in accordance with the cultural and religious context. These are further interpreted according to one’s personal, cultural perception with or without the information of the subject society. The Kalash society is very open and broad minded. They ignore their daughter’s flirtation for the sake of fun with the tourists. The boys from Lahore misconstrued and considered this an open invitation and made physical advances in response. This created bitterness because of the classic example of misinterpretation of symbols generated by the two cultures when they interact with each other. No humiliation or harassment was intended as explained by the apologetic and embarrassed youth when they were condemned by the tourists.

Consuming wine on social and religious gathering is a ritual for the Kalash. They especially brew wines in the cellar for both personal and commercial use. The administration of Chitral has put impediment on the trade, which subsequently affect their financial position and is very unfair for them. This prohibition is apparently imposed on the Muslims of the region who buy and consume liquor, which is strictly forbidden in Islam. But many Muslim youth go to their festival and consume free flowing alcohol. On many occasions it have been reported some Muslim youth under the influence have tried to molest Kalash girls. This gives rise to small intergroup rivalries which is eventually resolved by the intervention of elders of both communities.

The issue of religious conversion is a bone of contention in the region. The Kalash often convert their religious identity in order to get their debts wavered and later they denounce their conversion by reverting back to the religion of their forefathers. In Islam, such person is called “*murtad*”. Islam is very critical in such cases, though it shows much tolerance for the religious minorities, but shows no

tolerance for “*Murtad din*”<sup>1</sup>. There is one incident in Kalash related to a young Kalash boy who later was murdered by the so called religious zealots. The family claimed that the boy didn't convert to Islam and only had developed a close association with the Muslims whereas the *Imam Masjid* of Bumburet had produced witness for the claim. The Kalash to this date is horrified and has not forgotten the episode. The ASI of the area when questioned regarding the incident was reluctant to comment and stressed that the area is very peaceful and without hostility. There was a slight bitterness between the youth when they mocked the researcher regarding the incident where the *Imam* of *Lal Masjid* Islamabad tried to escape from the mosque disguised as a woman wearing a veil. The groups don't miss any chance of teasing one another's religious leaders. The Kalash are equally sensitive to their national identity and despise the idea when their intentions are doubted because of their religion. They are in-fact, more patriot than their Muslim counterpart in the region. Religion though philosophically refers to the relationship of man with God and his messengers on whose authority they have some faith. The role of religion as a space in the production of identity is not only restricted to philosophical thoughts and theological beliefs; it absorbs the conscious and unconscious influence of political, social and economic implications. These identities are often manipulated to create or resist social change. In reality it also plays an integral part in constructing personal, ethnic and national identity.

The contemporary Kalash religion and rituals are entirely different from the accounts provided by the historians, travelers and sociologists before the war of independence in 1857. The Kalash are now monotheist believing in one supreme authority “*Dezau*” and the shamans through whom they have received their religious knowledge. The temples and sanctuaries like *sajigor*, *mahdev*, *Ingaw* are sacred holy places. Like any religious group they celebrate their festivals and traditions with regularity and enthusiasm to keep their religious identity alive. The elders of Kalash do not interfere or involve in the comparative religions discourse. They like to keep their religion, personal. Even in Kalash there is a minor difference between the beliefs of elders from that of youth. Youth require logical explanation or even a mythical account of certain religious beliefs about which the Kalash elders have no satisfactory answer, but there the matter rest. The youth

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<sup>1</sup> “Murtad Din” is the one who denounces Islam and accepts any other religion. The punishment for this crime is death.



is also following the footsteps of their elders and are following the tradition without going into philosophical and logical explanation behind their religion and history. But there are few who are trying to document the traditional believe in a correct chronological order. The frustration and hardships endured in the course of life by the Kalash community are the basic reason for their passive attitude of “live and let live”, it is a significant part of their survival which enable them to keep their traditional identity intact.

Outwardly the Kalash are indistinguishable from the rest of the people residing in the region which is inhabited by other ethnic groups. They are only distinguished by the religion they profess, the festivals they celebrate and the way their womenfolk dress. Their festivals are seasonal in nature although they are dedicated to one god and his deities. The customs and tradition of Kalash have remained intact as the researcher found no significant change in them over the years. The practice today is almost the same as reported by different anthropologists over the last fifty years. Their religious feast and festivals are now regarded as cultural events. The people inhabiting Kalash territory are racially and ethnically the same. The only difference is that of religion they practice and custom and tradition, they follow which show up in their festivals and their dress and adornments. When a Kalash gets converted to Islam, he denounces all the customs and traditions of Kalash and adopts those prescribed by Islam. The attendance of festivals by actual participation is a taboo for the Muslim. However the Muslim relative can be a spectator to the religious festivities of his Kalash family. His participation and presence on religious occasions is not approved by the elder of Kalash community. They regard them impure and feel betrayed by the weakness and lack of conviction of their converted brother. They consider conversion as a threat to their culture and religious identity.

### **Conclusion**

The basic purpose of the study was to understand the role and significance of traditions and customs as a prime tool for establishing identity for the conventional people of Kalash, who have managed to maintain their identity through their unique and nonviolent way of life based on their oral traditions, practiced through centuries. The study leads towards establishing the fact that a culture is an actual ambient, legitimate and flexible space in which a small group

of individuals can survive, maintain and perpetuate their unique way of life even in the tough conditions.

Tradition is one of the building blocks in the complex structure of identity. This can be on an individual, group, nation or race. In all its manifestation cultural identity draws support from traditions. Tradition is a set of customs and rules handed down from the past to the present in the form of religious songs, folklore, dress, art and crafts. It is a known fact that rituals, beliefs and practices which are based on religions survive the longest. In contrast to ancient lost civilization, the people of Kalash symbolize as the model of harmony within their own tribe and with other cultural groups occupying the region.

Cultural space in its simplest definition is the visible information about locations, places, how people and their cultures interact with their environments, and the transformation of goods, ideas, and services from one culture to another. This cultural and social, spatial division of boundaries enables Kalash people as individuals and as members of groups, to create places for their daily lives which further make possible to shape up shared spatial relationships with a degree of positive connectivity between the groups to formulate a distinctive geo cultural landscape.

The annual festivals seem to be necessitated by the social needs of the people to provide them a chance for intermixing and to salvage the space created to reaffirm their cultural identity. An attempt to recollect all the religious accounts are made by the Qazi's and the youth to make religion more comprehensive and clear. The major occasions when identity is affirmed on the Kalash people are the religious festivals which bring together the largest number of people of the three valleys, and often from the distant places. This is the main context in which a sustained and richly textured expression of Kalash identity can be exhibited. These events are of a lengthy sequence of activities continuing for several days including formal welcomes, discussions and preparation of food, singing and dancing. These rituals are performed to show allegiance with a specific identity which is not only related to the philosophical thoughts and theological beliefs, but has a conscience manipulation of political, social and economic implications.

It may be concluded that Kalash are an enlighten society and can assimilate foreign thought without allowing them to shadow their own traditional thought process. If the culture is based on strong principles, morals and justice, it lays down the foundation of a space in which people can survive, perpetuate and maintain their identity independent of geographical surroundings. The Spanish and British conquest of Americas is a prime example when a strong culture ensured the perpetuation of the identity of the Europeans in a foreign land and resulted in the dominance of their culture over the indigenous population of Americans. The indigenous population on the other hand realized the probability of extinction, found their survival in their own traditional culture in reservations.

The Kalash people have maintained their centuries old traditional culture despite the fact of current globalization, and modernization. Media is invading their privacy, esteem and societal norms by introducing new ideas, and inspirations to the youth. Albeit the people have subjugated to the latest trends of globalization and modernization, but are also striving to keep pace with their socio- cultural and religious traditions transmitted to them by their forefathers. Currently the society is passing from the phase of transition and transculturation due to the impact of modernization, and change, but still the people are trying hard to preserve and maintain their centuries old cultural identity.

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