

## KALASH VALLEY: AN OVERVIEW OF CULTURAL PRACTICES ON TRANSITORY STAGES IN HUMAN LIFE

Niaz Muhammad, Ali Askar and Mushtaq Ahmad Jan

### Abstract

*This study is conducted on the rites and ceremonies related to the non-Muslim community of Bamborite, one of the three valleys of Kalash in the Chitral District. It is carried out under qualitative method and data has been collected through case study method, focus group discussion and observation checklist. The research study finds the Kalash people on different rites in different nature on the occasions of childbirth betrothal/engagement, marriage, death and illness. These are practiced on the eve of their festivals mainly on the most prominent one, Chilimjosht. Goats and other cattle are slaughtered on all-important gatherings. Doolashtuk, an exercise of beating drum, is a salient feature of all events of cheer and tear. The Muslim community of Bamborite also participates in rites celebrity and Chilimjosht festival. The Kalash people have no proper knowledge about the historical roots of their cultural practices. However, the amount of compliance is hyper.*

### Introduction

Kalash people are living in the Chitral District of the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan with their unique pattern of life, distinct from any cultural or geographical unit of the entire country. The exclusivity of rites on occasions relating to different stages of life is of a great interest attracting the attention of tourists, ethnographers, archaeologists, historians and other related circles. These inimitable rites are exercised on the occasions of childbirth, engagement, marriage, illness and death, and specific festivals further characterise the Kalash culture. The Kalashis inhabit three adjacent valleys—Bamborite, Birir and Rambur—with their peculiar culture, which is declining. As the culture of the three valleys is almost the same in its structure and practice, the valley of Bamborite is selected as sample unit for its easy access from the district capital of Chitral on the East at the distance of 22 KM through the winding mountainous curves and ever-existing sliding remnants on both sides of the road. The configuration of six divergent ethnic groups such as Bazekay, Aspayee Nawao, Bairamok Nawao, Rajwai, Meranuk and Bulesinghay reflects their social integration in the target valley (The Pashtune Post, 2008, P. 01).

The whole socio-cultural life of the area revolves around the festivals, *Chilimjusht*, *Otchaal* and *Chitarmash*; and important decisions take place on the eve of Chilimjusht. The festival of Chilimjosht is celebrated twice a year. The first Chilimjusht is arranged in the spring season, which is normally attended by the Kalash and non-Kalash people (Government of NWFP, 2007, P. 02). The Kalash men wear their special attire *Chapan* whereas women are dressed in the traditional dress *Chrooshti*. Every Kalash looks jubilant and enthusiastic on the celebrity of all festivals. Every house is well decorated with flowers and the females sprinkle milk over the place of festival being called *Jastak* in the local language. This is the occasion on which the engagement, marriage constitution and reconstitution, and marriage dissolution occur. The elopement act gets regularized and the new husband is asked for the restitution in cash for the objects given in bride price by the previous husband, which is called *Dukh* in local language. During the whole session drum is beaten (locally known as *Doolashtuk*) and the services of ancestors are admired in the laurel lyrics by the singers and musicians. The second Chilimjusht is organized in the second week of the month of May and every year its date is fixed by the Qazi of the area. This part of Chilimjosht is restricted to the male members only. It is just for the purpose to maintain and further augment the compliance of local people to their social structure through participation in the said activity. The second festival is

Ochaal, which is held in *Krakal*. Ten to fifteen cattle are taken to pasture to the mountainous area in connection with festival. The villagers present them milk, cheese and butter skimmed ghee. Singing and dancing characterize the festival. The third festival is Chitarmash, which is celebrated in the month of December and normally between 10<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of the month. Cows, oxen and goats are slaughtered with the conviction to propitiate their goddess *jestak*. Three days are spent in the pasture and people go to Batrik in the evening in the form of convoys carrying lit candles in their hands. Both men and women stay for a night at Batrik. It is summed up that these three festivals have been providing opportunities for performance of ceremonial activities related to different crucial events. The main focus of this study was on the nature and process of different festivals of Kalash people, to identify the variety of rites/ceremonies related to various facets to human life in Kalash community and also to ascertain the extent of participation of Kalash and non-Kalash people in these rites. The rites/rituals are generally explained in the views of some thinkers.

Ritual is a term used by Anthropologists to refer to an event that involves one or more of the various ways to approach the supernatural power (Rosman and Rubel, 1989:192). It is a way of performing religious acts such as praying, singing sacred songs, dancing to gods, making sacrifice or preparing offerings (Beals & Hoijer, 1959:555). Anthropologists have identified at least two kinds of rituals or rites: *rites of passage and rites of intensification*. The Rites of passage are communal ceremonies being held to mark the changes in status of an individual goes through as he or she progresses in the life cycle (Rosman & Rubel, 1989: 192.) As a person moves through the life cycle, there are points such as birth, puberty, marriage and death that mark significant changes in his or her life. These points frequently become the occasions for ceremonies known as rites of passage-rites (Ibid, 38).

All rites of passage involve three stages. The first stage marks the separation of the individual from the category or status previously occupied. Then there is a period of transition in which the individual is in a kind of limbo. During this stage all the individuals are scheduled from the rest of the society. The last stage is the one of reincorporation in which the individual is ceremonially incorporated back into society. (Turner, 1967, P.p. 93-99). Arnold van Gennep in his book "*the rites of Passage*" has given a detailed description on the rites/rituals on different transitional stages of the life and related ceremonies in different societies across the world. According to Gennep (1965), the life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another. Wherever there is found a distinction among age or occupational groups, progression from one group to the next is accompanied by special acts like those make up apprenticeship in our trades. Among semi civilized people such acts are enveloped in ceremonies; and to the semi civilized mind, no act is entirely free of the sacred. In such societies every change in personal life involves actions and reactions between sacred and profane-action and reaction to be regulated and guarded so that society as a whole will suffer no discomfort or injury (Ibid, 04).

His work is based on the contributions of preceding thinkers who worked on religions, magic and culture patterns. The major stalwarts, whose contributions have been utilized from different ways, included Reville (1881), Marillier (1905) in France; Liebrecht (1879), Andree (1889), Koch (1900), and Schultz (1900) in Germany; Tiele (1885), Wilken (1885), and Kruijt in Netherlands; Monseur (1905), and DeCock in Belgium; E.B. Tylor (1903), Lang, Clodd (1988), and Hartland (1891) in Great Britain; and D.G.Brinton (1897) in the United States of America". Gennep has concluded that human life is transitory and an individual is supposed to go through from various stages like birth, childhood, betrothal/engagement, marriage, death and others. All these are the constants of social life and followed by ceremonies. Though these ceremonies are varying in nature but almost similar in function. Over the time, some tribes also started celebrating the temporary events like pregnancy, journey and illness etc. As quoted by Gennep, Hartland (1891: 335-99) observed similarities in the rites of initiation and marriage; Frazer (1900: 204-10, 418) witnessed such similarities in puberty rites and funeral rites; Webster referred to initiation rites into the secret societies and ordination of

shamans; and Hertz observed the transitory stage as emanates from marriage to birth of the first child and then corresponds to death in Borneo tribe of Indonesia. He added the opening of new house as entrant to the list of rites.

The examples of the rites of passage are the Boy's Initiation rite of Arapesh of New Guinea, Kwakiutl and American's wedding, Trobriand and American's funerals, Jewish circumcision rites, Christian Baptism (Rosman & Rubel, 1989:192), Girl's Puberty Rites of Chiricahua Apache (Opler, 1941: 117), Karimojong and Ashanti Age grade ceremonies (John, 1977, P. 211).

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted under qualitative method for the purpose to get detailed and accurate information on the rites related to human life in Kalash community. Data was obtained through different sources mentioned below.

- i) **Case study Method:** Key informants of the area were interviewed exclusively and intensively for acquiring the required information.
- ii) **Focus Group Discussion:** Leaders and residents of the sampled areas were furnished an opportunity of joint gathering in which they openly extended and furnished valuable information, which proved contributory in the compilation of the study report. The principal researcher acted as a facilitator in focus group discussion.
- iii) **Observation Checklist:** Under the checklist programme, the traditional attires and objects involved in the circulation of various rites, the venues of rites and festivals, and physical characteristics of the community were observed. Besides, the questions deemed unanswerable through any tool were included in the observation checklist. This practice proved beneficial in drawing the conclusions of the study.

There are five clusters of the dwelling units in Bamborite valley and data was collected from all these clusters such as Aneesh, Batrik, Broon, Krakal and Sarik Jao. Information through 25 case histories of informants from all blocks of the community, with equal representation of five each, was obtained under case study method. To verify such information for the sake of accurate data, focus group discussions (FGDs) were also exercised in each village. FGDs furnished an opportunity to the senior members to have joint sitting for sharing thoughts on issues related to important events of life on the one hand, and fixing a concentrated mind to the researcher on the other. Each FGD included from 12 to 16 members .The following tabular information further makes it clear.

<b>Village</b>	<b>Key Informants</b>	<b>Focus Group Discussion</b>
1. Aneesh	05	01
2. Batrik	05	01
3. Baroon	05	01
4. Krakal	05	01
5. Sarik Jao	05	01

## Results and Discussion

The following findings are drawn in the light of data collected from all sources about the rites and ceremonies centred on various transitional stages in human life.

### Child Birth Rites

The birth of child is celebrated in the form of different rites. Kafirs in the Kalash community exercise discrimination in the birth of male and female babies. When a birth takes place, the rite of *mol* is celebrated with gender difference. The birth of male child is celebrated warmly in the form of distributing sweets among the people sharing the pleasant moments and aerial firing follows the rite in order to enhance the importance of the event. On this occasion *Gurala*, a traditional dish, is served among the participants. *Gurala* is composed of six ingredients-bean, maize, wheat, locally made ghee and peanuts. The same is not seen on the birth of female baby. The Kalash mother is culturally required to give birth at *Bashilini* instead of her home and remains there for ten days after delivery. *Bashilini* is a community place being used by the menstruating and pregnant women only; it exists in every ward and is facilitated with midwifery. Purification concerning childbirth contains two rites i.e. *Saroos* and *Dukbunyak*. *Saroos* is observed in *Bashilini* when birth-giving lady leaves for home after ten days. The rite includes sprinkling of blood of slaughtered goat and smoking of the *Janifer* plant (locally known as *Saroos*) at the specific place in *Bashilini* where the lady gives birth. When the mother along with newly born baby is shifted to her home, relatives across the area start coming and congratulating her on the birth of child. *Dukbunyak Rite* is celebrated on the expiry of maternity period. The mother takes bath at *Bashilini* to ensure her purity and consequently the husband gets the right of cohabitation. The *Butsumbyak Rite* on wearing of trousers to child for the first time by maternal uncle also takes place whereas another rite *Dandoyak* follows on the appearance of the first tooth of the child. On the occasions of all these rites, rice and other palatable dishes are served to the participants.

### Betrothal/Engagement Rites

*Jiakhojar Rite* is simply exercised on the occasion of Betrothal as a non-formal declaration of engagement at childhood. While engagement ceremony at grown up age is celebrated amidst various activities boosting the jubilant zeal of the aspirant youngsters present on the occasion. It takes place on the eve of the prominent annual festival *Chilimjosht*. Since it is a mutual matrimonial enterprise between the two families, so the girl cannot think to deny the matrimony in any case. However, she has the option to elope with some one else on the occasion of *Chilimjosht* after she gets married to the betrothed person. On the eve of engagement, *Doolashtuk* is organized for three days consecutively, including music, dance and drum-beating by the local people who are non-professionals. Traditional songs are not the constituent part of the rite. The participants from the three valleys of Kalash are served with the cooked meat of goats. A rich man is supposed to slaughter 40 he-goats and cooks 20 bags of flour for the participants while an average person slaughters 10 goats. Cheese and wine are served to the guests. Later on, a boy from a rich family visits the house of father-in-law along with an ox and in retaliation he is provided with trunk box, utensils and cow. The programme of same nature is also arranged in the house of the girl. Wedding in the period of in two weeks after engagement is appreciated.

### Marriage Rites

*Jiada* rite marks the wedding ceremony between young male and female in which all the invitees participate. In view of the great number of participants or shortage of appropriate space, the programme is arranged in the community centre '*Jesterkan*'. Through out the rite, sessions of dancing, music and drum beating are in progress and the local singers are committed to sing the traditional songs. *Shohmano*, another rite regarding marriage is celebrated in Kalash community and the trousers-belt known as *Shomano* in the local Kalashwar language is hung in the neck of the

bridegroom, which reflects the local perception that honour of bride is now the responsibility of the bride groom. This act the bride does herself in the function and so the rite of *Anhgushtri* (wearing ring to the girl) starts in the cheering mood of the relatives and friends amongst throwing the walnuts in huge quantity over the head of the boy. Bride receives ring from the groom on this occasion amidst singing laurel songs in favour of marriage by the relatives and friends. There is not practiced any proper religious function when the two are on the route to establish a new union as husband and wife. However, a cultural gathering at the time of seeing off "Rukhsati" takes place followed by slaughtering a he-goat and its cooked meat is presented to both the bride and bridegroom in the same plate. The relatives of the bride attempt to hide a shoe of the groom and return it on paying cash money what they demand at that time. Such rite is termed *Choghak*. The Kalash people practice polygynous marriage (having several wives by one husband) and in many cases the bond of marriage does not prove strong as the married women have a sort of cultural permission to make a way on the eve of cultural festivals and announce remarrying men whom they love. Such situation has led to mitigate the importance of divorce in the target community. Another remarkable aspect of the second marriage of the eloping woman is that her second husband shall pay the expenses of bride price and other objects to the affected husband as per the decision of the Qazi (Judge). It may be recalled that the act of elopement on the cultural festival is not considered a social stigma, nor it harms her status in community.

### **Death Rites**

A five days long ceremony marks the death of a kalash person at *Jesterkan*. Gender differentiation is exercised in the funeral rites as Jester Kan is confined to male members only. The funerals of female members or unnatural death of males are performed at their respective homes. On the first day of death, two cows and 25 he-goats (Tits) are slaughtered and cooked for serving to the participants. Dulashtuk is seen on this occasion in which the participants fire in the air in order to show their expression of sympathy to the bereaved family. The purpose of beating the drum is to show the people that by doing so they are presenting the tears of the grieved family over the demise. The coffin of deceased person is kept at Jesterkan and Doolashtuk activity starts there, which follows music and drum. The heroic efforts of dead person are lauded through songs and every participant praises him for his contributions throughout his life. On this occasion, the *Kohn Rite* is celebrated in which a shoe is put to the foot of dead body and his face is covered with red cloth. A connected activity about the succession 'Rite of Butshambiak' is held for a child (if present on the occasion) to convert into adolescence and so gets the succession opportunity of dead person. Finally, the dead body is given a bath known as *Wazek* and the person giving the bath is termed *Wazeek*. On the last day of ceremonial rites Kroot Punyak, a final rite at community place, follows and his wooden statue 'Gandu' is fixed. Mandajao is the cemetery of Kalash people where a coffin is buried along with an agricultural tool *Catapult* in his right hand and a piece of bread in the left hand. The widow of him is asked to observe three months long period of *Iddat*, which is locally called *Shooq*. On expiry of period, the Rite of *Estoonghosh* is observed, which grants permission for the second marriage, if she wishes. The funerals of a woman are simply exercised at home and *Surmandaq Rite* follows whereby her head is covered with a piece of black cloth. She wears a thread made bracelet in her right hand and keeps food in the left hand.

### **Other Rites**

**Epidemic Rite:** The people rush to Batrik, a plain area of the target valley known as religious land, for the exercise of Ingahr Rite when an epidemic disease spreads out there. It contains special services and prayers. Goats are sacrificed and the cooked meat is served to the people participating in the ceremonial activity. It is pertinent to mention that women are strictly disallowed to access the area where the rite is taking place. On violation, the place is considered polluted and for the

purification of defilement a goat is slaughtered. The same rite is also observed when heavy raining or snowfall paralyses the life there.

**Earthquake Rite:** The local people have the belief that the earth is resting between the two horns of a bull and it is shaken by jerking of head when flies sit on the back, nose or ear of the bull. In such panic situation they look for the exercise of Tnumanda Rite in which the local people throw wheat in the air.

**Illness Rites:** Khudai rite comes on the scene if a person falls ill. The participants are praying for recovery of the patient from illness, known as Lehazu. After recovery from illness, the rite of gratitude *Prooshtu* follows.

### Conclusions

The people of historic Kalash valley are very much enthusiastic in their cultural practices and full participation by them in varied rites on various transitional stages is a supporting evidence of it. Social integration of Muslim community and non-Muslim community exists because Muslims of the same community do not hesitate to participate as spectators only in their social gatherings and even they have friendly relations with them. Rites related to different occasions in Kalash valley are more or less the same with those parts of the world, which have been mentioned in the book titled 'the Rites of Passage' written by Van A.Gennep, (1965). Ceremonies on initiation and pregnancy, which are common in the rites practicing societies, did not exist among kalash people. However, epidemic rites and gender disparity in childbirth rites are the distinguishing features of the Kalash community.

### Bibliographic References

- Beals, R. L. & Hoijer, H., 1959, *An introduction to Anthropology*. New York: Macmillan Company P. 555
- Beattie, John. (1977). *Other Cultures: Aims, Methods and Achievement in Social Anthropology*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, P. 211.
- Gennep V. Arnold (1965). *Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Pvt. Ltd. P. 2, 4, 36-140
- Government of NWFP. (2007). *Kalash: the Indigenous Wisdom*. [Online] available from [www.nwfp.gov.pk](http://www.nwfp.gov.pk)
- Opler, M. E. (1941). *An Apache Life Way*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, P. 117
- Rosman, Abraham & Rubel, Paula G. (1989). *The Tapestry of Culture*. New York: Random House, P.p. 38, 192,
- Turner, Victor. (1967). *The Forest of Symbols: Aspect of Ndembu Ritual*. New York: Cornell University Press, P.p. 93-99