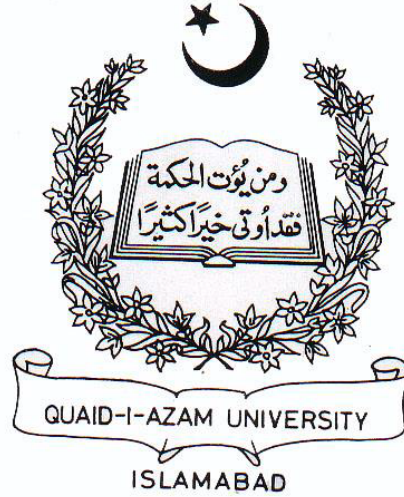


Kalash Tribe's Cultural Profiling & its relationship to proselytization.



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Thesis submitted to the Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, in partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Science in Anthropology.

Quaid-I-Azam University
Department of Anthropology
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2020

FORMAL DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this is my own work without anyone else help except those mentioned here.

This work has not been submitted or published for any degree or examination in any other university in identical or similar shape. All the other sources used in this work have been mentioned as complete references.

Hamza Ilyas Khan

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1 Introduction

Religion is the most important element which happens to give an identity to a person. It tends to provide answers to questions which are otherwise incomprehensible. Religion is prone to articulate the routine life of an individual and promotes community solidarity and interrelatedness. People are committed to their religion emotionally as famous scholar of religious studies, Reza Aslan has pointed out *“It’s an emotion, and that emotion is not predicated on facts or any kind of information. That emotion is predicated on an attempt to find themselves.”* (Aslan, 2017)

Finding oneself, in terms of identity and associating oneself with a larger purpose is the ultimate endeavor of a human being. To do this people connect themselves with social groups that might help them, and associates themselves emotionally. At times people are not satisfied somehow with their status of identity or their religion. Therefore, they find different ways to cope with such situations. One way is to change their original belief system and enter a new religion, learn its behaviors, practices and beliefs.

Changing religions is not something that people might consider insignificant for their lives. Rather it evolves into a revolutionary transformation of an individual's psyche. The proselytizer confesses his/her transformed identity holistically. Even those who do not feel deeply connected to their current faith often wary of converting to another. This has less to do with theology that aims to retain religious adherents and more to do with the fact that changing religions means a person fundamentally changes its identity. Secular culture puts little emphasis on faith and the effect it has on a person, but religion is one of the cornerstones of a person's worldview even if they are not the slightest bit devout. A person's faith forms the basic foundation for their sense for morality and the consequences for acting in unethical or immoral ways. While the major world religions, and most of the smaller religions, share common moral themes, there are subtle differences between them.

Converts also need to find that what they were missing in their own religion can be satisfied by another. They need to connect with a new faith and feel that it is the answer to their challenges. Both their dissatisfaction with their old faith and their love of their new faith need to be maintained over a decent period of time as well. An intense curiosity about a new faith is not necessarily the same as an interest in converting.

My emphasis in this thesis will not be upon defining religion. There is a lot of literature already available to entertain this topic. My argument will remain to the premises of reasons for the conversion from one religion to another. The anthropological term for this switching of religion is called Proselytization.

Apparently, there are many reasons that causes a human being to convert from one religion to another. Forceful conversions, lack of confidence in original beliefs, economics, peer pressure etc. But my analysis will revolve around people of Kalash and their reasons to convert in particular. The community is surrounded by Muslim majority and has a huge trend to leave their religion and adopt Islam as their new religion. What is the impact of this on their social life or family? What measures are being taken by the

authorities and the community itself to control this rate of conversion and preserve Kalash, which is the only culture of its kind and mitigating.

This research will be helpful to control the conversion rate and carve out policies and methods which will be helpful in future preservation of the community.

1.1 Development of Interest

Kalasha people are a precise and unusual cultural community bearing their distinct dogmas and loose conceptions of super natural. Surrounded by a comparatively well organized and regulated community of Muslims, we discern an extraordinary contrast in every social aspect emerging from the Kalasha belief system. In the first instance if somebody has a glimpse of Kalasha community on any form of media, the very immediate reaction would be of bewilderment. A glimpse of their dress code and traditional moments casts a mystifying spell on the onlookers belonging from a conventional life style.

Kalasha community has been enlisted as a world heritage culture. This surely signifies their importance as being one of the others most unique social structures residing within a community of no more than 4000. It's a grazing field for every desiring and craving anthropologist who wishes to know about humans from another time and place. Kalasha people are Pakistan's cultural crown jewel. Institutions within the state body glorifies and promotes their presence in the form of tourism and diplomatic forums related to minority rights. Kalasha community's exotic identity emanates in the minds of the general public from the colorful illustrations that they see around incidentally on mainstream media i.e. commercials, brochures and social websites. The colorful women dress, lush green valleys, celebrations and genetic classification nominates Kalasha people as a cherry on top of Pakistan's cultural cake. For an enthusiastic and novice anthropologist like me, it was surely a *treat* and honor to live among the community for 3 months.

After I had only visited the locale and gained an access to the core community, I was surprised to learn the inconsistencies in the information I had extracted or had learned certain facts earlier. Many irresponsible social media channels have forged the information, spiced it up and had bluntly distributed half-true and dishonest facts and claims. Even some serious thesis findings had turned out to be forged, biased or dishonest in contrast to what I have witnessed. The facts on ground had puzzled my pre-conceptions about Kalasha life style which I would be addressing to in later topics. My findings which I would be elaborating later opened-up new perspectives and rectified various assumptions and pre-knowledge that I had. For instance, there was this general perception, regarding marriage pattern, of girls running away with the men and getting married which is in a sense half true. A general perception of the community being extremely liberal and open minded was merely a delusion. There do exist conservative elements which are rather in their nature very fundamental or primary.



Fig.1 Depiction of colourful expression

1.2 Accessing the Community and Barriers

I had to pay a prerequisite and unofficial visit to the locale for a three-day quick survey. I knew it was a tourist resort and could easily grab a motel for two nights. This warm-up tour helped me to uncover barriers and get an access to the community gate keepers. Gaining access to the central community was certainly not an easy task. The community as such is not physically hidden or bounded with strict regulations over outsiders, rather access across the barriers of community shyness was one of the hurdles that I needed to cross. At some moments, I even had to face offensive impulse within the community because of the sensitivity that my investigation carried.

My first interaction with community's watchful instinct was at a funeral. The choice to do a warm-up visit had well payed off, bringing in an incidental yet a very important communal activity for someone like me. I was strolling as a tourist on a rock-strewn road, taking random photos when a friendly local Muslim informed me about a Kalasha community member's demise at Krakal village. Thrilled and confused I started walking towards the village. I followed the crowd which was approaching from other Kalasha valleys for the ritual performances. I was not sure about the response I was going to get. Someone from outside, who just arrived at Bumburet valley 24hrs ago with DSLR in hand, apprehensively walking towards something very community private would surely raise few suspicious eyebrows. I stopped to ask a young lean man about the deceased home, after introducing myself and sharing my purpose of visit. "You need to issue an NOC before you continue your activity." To my shock he was a policeman. His objection was certainly legit because of his position. He got irritated slightly, as I was expecting and may be because the deceased person was his grandfather. I never received the answer and disappointedly walked back to my Hotel.

This incident directed me to an official or bureaucratic channel and projected the sensitivity and critical nature of the area. I came back to Lahore and got myself connected with the KPK government. It was not hard for me to acquire NOC may be because I had links through my father, otherwise acquisition of NOC is no more a regular service for

the place and purpose I required it due to certain incidents which I would be talking about in subsequent chapters. Fig.1 shows a snapshot of NOC which was issued to me by Deputy Commissioner Chitral apparently stating my purpose of visit and Terms & Conditions of NOC. This experience indeed anticipated the challenges laid ahead pertaining to my research, as the delicate nature of my topic indicates. In addition, even the deputy commissioner advised me to remain cautious and careful during my investigation.

It is important to understand that Kalash people are profiting from extensive tourism and have articulated in various ways to entertain the on comers. The on comers of course did not only include tourists but also researchers. The day I received my NOC, while I was in Chitral, I visited the office of Pakistan tourism out of curiosity. To my surprise the officer appointed there was a Kalashi himself. I introduced myself to Zareen Khan and informed him about my business in Chitral. He was indeed a gentleman. I asked whether if he could arrange me some sort of guesthouse where I could have access to an immediate Kalasha presence at any time of the day. He didn't only arrange me a perfect guesthouse rather he also proposed that I could teach voluntarily to the students in a school established by Greek volunteers. It was a sheer chance that I got this opportunity and I was the first researcher ever to get this privilege to teach Kalasha students. For me this was a great culturally valuable exchange. I taught them and in return I could identify children's behavioural patterns.

The accidental engaging with Zareen Khan was my first experience with a potential gate-keeper of the community and to my surprise I was treated with protocol and graveness. This mixed experience, i.e. at one point I received confrontation and hostility, at another I was being treated as a celebrity, had various reasons that I would be hoisting later. Pleasing the gate-keepers was never required because of their hospitality but still I felt obliged to award a token of appreciation. Belonging from Multan, a place where Sohan Halwa (Sweet) is considered its souvenir, I presented this sweet to almost every person that I considered was valuable or helped me significantly. Yet I believe that it was not necessary as such because of their hospitality.

1.3 Gaining Rapport

Rapport is a trusting relationship between the researcher and the study of population. In the early stages of research, the primary goal of research is to establish rapport with key leaders or decision makers in the community who may serve as gatekeepers (*people who formally or informally control the access to the group or community*).

As mentioned before I was welcomed in the community openly, yet I felt obliged to present some souvenir for those who welcomed me. Moreover, my professional behaviour also impacted their decision to accept me in their community. As mostly, people who come in this part of the world, are attracted by the women and get involved with them emotionally.

My behaviour with my host family was purely professional and did not involve any sort of personal involvement with any member of Kalash people.

Thus, gaining rapport was not a difficult task at my disposal as there had been many researchers who had come here before me and the local populous had sufficient idea of my involvement with them.

1.4 Problem Statement and Objectives

There were various objectives that I was intending to achieve, various questions ran in my mind about their religion, cultural activities and social life style. But my main agenda was “Why do Kalash members convert to Islam?” Then out of this problem, further queries originate pertaining to which gender group tends to change and why and what age group is more prone to conversion.

Further I related this practice of conversion with what sort of environment this produces within the Kalash families. Does this cause any sort of disputes? How far does the family

behaviour changes with the person who got converted? Does conversion of one member of the family effects the religious groundings of rest of the members? Do they get vulnerable as well? Problems like these has remained my focus throughout my research.

1.4.1 The sensitivity of my problem statement

The nature of my topic was extremely sensitive and delicate. I was warned by my supervisor about this before even I travelled to the valleys. My main intention was to find out the causes and effects of proselytization of Kalash people into Islam. Professor Rao alerted me about this serious and vulnerable topic. People will raise some suspicious eyebrows. He recommended me to initially work on rapport building and do one month roaming just making friends and sketching a cultural profile. Trying to know the community in a way that I realise their fragile aspects and avoid to pursuit those questions that make them feel insecure. He warned me to keep away from my main topic and assess the community by merely asking cultural and introductory questions. Moreover, when I had a meeting with deputy commissioner of Chitral he was for once surprised and petrified. He thought for a moment and advised to be vigilant and careful with my proceedings. I was oblivious of the fact that my topic can carry such an alerting theme. I only got aware of this fact when I listened to some stories told to me by the locals about a woman who got converted and then when misunderstood of reverting was subjected to persecution. I was fortunate enough to find this woman and take her interview which I would talk over in proceeding chapters.

There was this one incident which I would like to confer about in detail. This was like my end of research and I was aggressively into asking questions about conversions and cherry picking with help of my informants some cases where Kalash members have converted to Islam. One of my key informant ‘Sher Ahmed’ a member of Kalash, took me to his brother’s house on Eid-ul-Azha. His name was Yusuf age 40+ and had converted to Islam when he was 14 years of age. They were sacrificing a cow in their home at that time. I was welcomed by everybody who was present at that time in his house. Everyone was sitting on a large wooden bed under a shade. That group of people included Muslim

members as well as Kalash members. They were all having a fun time, and I needed to interact with them regarding their activities and level of cohesion these both communities have during Muslim Eid. Sher Ahmed who being a Kalash started helping in butchering the meat for his Muslim brother. I sat on the edge of the bed where everyone was gossiping and then I was introduced to the group by Sher Ahmed regarding my purpose. I initiated in quite an unplanned manner and straight forward jumped into the main questions. I started asking about the relation between the two communities. Whether they were cooperative among themselves or not? How do they come about different activities during Muslim Eid celebrations and Kalash festivals? Everyone in the group was enthusiastic to tell about their view point. I must insist here that people are camera conscience. The moment I felt that I have gained the groups confidence, with their permission, I started recording these conversations. Nobody objected, until when a Kalash member had something to contribute. When he started speaking I turned my camera in his direction to capture his interview. He immediately objected and asked me to not to film him. I immediately responded and stop filming him. But I don't know why he didn't continue with his contribution but straight away introduced himself as an Intelligence officer and started inquiring my credentials. Everyone in the group was shocked. He asserted that the topic I was conducting my research upon has a potential to create chaos and it tends to promote hostility and can initiate something unwanted in Kalash. I was blamed of spreading antagonistic ideas which can disrupt the community's cohesion. I was asked for Legal NOC which unfortunately was not present at that time with me. He took my number and asked me to send him the NOC. I adhered to his demand but could not continue with the group interview unfortunately. His reaction what I concluded was because of two reasons. Firstly, being a responsible Government agency officer, he got slightly offended. Secondly, the moment he saw that he was being filmed, rather contributing to the group discussion, he deviated and objected me filming his story.

Kalash valleys reside right next to Afghanistan border. Many times, people across border cross over, steal from and murder the residents of Bumburet. Moreover because of unstable political situation between these two countries, the area is charged with Intelligence agencies and they keep a strict manoeuvring over activities which have

potential to create social quarrelling. I have also heard a story of misusing the data collected, against the Kalash community. In another incident, digital equipment of some tourists was confiscated, by the army men, rather broken immediately as they were not following the terms and conditions for filming. Pakistan Army is abundantly monitoring the area hence such concerns and objections that I faced were vulnerable.

1.4.2 Variables

Certain variables that pointed my direction of research included Education, tourism, women status, economy, certain cultural traits and many related aspects to these variables became the foundational theme of my research and how these themes related to my major concern of the research.

- Education in terms of curriculum that the Government authorities have set forth for students that contains religious specific content and how they affect the raw minds of children.
- Effects of tourism on Kalash tribe collectively and its impacts in terms of conversion possibilities.
- I was aware that the rate of conversion of women was more, hence it was necessary for me to include women as a social group and its relation to rate of conversion.
- Economy was one variable that was tied to various other variable and contributed in the reasons of conversion collectively. For instance, tourism was a major contributor to the local economy and to what other variables it impacted.



CHITRAL

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
CHITRAL

No: 12660 /DCC/DA/
Dated Chitral the 9th April 2019

NO OBJECTION CERTIFICATE.

Reference application dated 9/4/2019 and letter dated 26/3/2019 from the Incharge Department of Anthropology Quide Azam University Islamabad letter dated 26-3-2019.

This office has no objection, if, **Hamza Ilyas Khan s/o Muhammad Ilyas Khan, student Department of Anthropology, Quid e Azam, Islamabad CNIC No. 36302-6338190-9** visit Kalash Valley to conduct interview, filming & Photography and participating in Kalash Cultural Activities during his research on the topic "**Causes and effects of Proselytisation of Kalash Tribe**" during the period from 10/4/2019 to 10/7/2019 subject to the following conditions:-

TERMS & CONDITIONS OF NOC.

1. The individual will:-
 - a. Not visit or take pictures of any prohibited/border areas.
 - b. Not carry out any survey (Geological, Seismic) or collect data in the area for any other purpose.
 - c. Provide all information to Law Enforcement Agencies without any hesitation.
 - d. Not impart/spread any hate literature/material, which cause injury to the sentiments of any citizen/ethnic group.
 - e. Not take picture or interview without consent of the Individual.
 - f. Will share research work with the District Administration/DC Office Chitral
2. This NOC will be cancelled if any negative observation reported against the individual.
3. This NOC is specifically for the above mentioned activities in the said area.

Deputy Commissioner
Chitral

No: 12661-64.

Copy forwarded to the:-

1. Commander Chitral Task Force, HQ Chitral for information.
2. District Police Officer Chitral for information.
3. Incharge, Department of Anthropology, Quid e Azam University Islamabad
4. **Hamza Ilyas Khan s/o Muhammad Ilyas Khan, student Department of Anthropology, Quid e Azam, Islamabad.**

Deputy Commissioner
Chitral.
Deputy Commissioner
CHITRAL

Fig.1 NOC issued from Commissioner office Chitral District

2 Data collection Methods and Tools

2.1 Ethnographic research

Ethnography is defined as an illuminative account of social life and culture in a particular social system based on multiple detailed observations of what people actually do in the social setting being observed. My research was mostly based on observation. I stayed for more than three months in Bumburet valley in order to extract and classify my data.

2.2 Observation

My prolonged stay at the site or field work, resulted in an in-depth extraction of subtle issues pertaining to almost every aspect of social, economic and political structure and its connection to proselytization. Observation was profoundly my immediate tool to reason and conclude my findings. Mere walks across the valley brought forth valuable information and data. Equipped with Digital camera and other sound recording tools, I captured practices, rituals and mundane activities. I observed and participated in festivals and mundane activities. For observing mundane activities, I was a guest to a Kalasha family and articulated my activities around their daily routines. While for festivals I was more treated as a tourist and had to limit my participation.

2.3 Participant Observation

Fieldwork is annexed with participant observation for a more in depth and qualitative data mining. Participant observation is a research method for learning about culture that involves living in a culture for an extended period while gathering data.

The father of participant observation is Bronislaw Malinowski. He is credited with inventing a new approach to learning about culture while he was in Trobriand Islands in the South Pacific.

The phrase participant observation includes two processes: participating or being part of the people's lives, and at the same time, carefully observing. These two activities may sound simple but they are actually quite complex. Being a participant mean that I had to adopt the lifestyle of the people being studied, living in the same kind of housing, eating similar food, wearing similar clothing and participating in the daily round of activities and in special events. The rationale is that participation over a long period improves the quality of data.

After I had leaped into the hearts of the community, I was kept on being invited to marriage ceremonies, funerals and community festivals. I participated among them trying to gain first-hand experience of the practices they performed. Even more, I ploughed land, cooked with the family, helped in collecting local fruits, joined them in their leisure activities (which included strolls up the hills, sports and local events) and was escorted to herd moving ceremony, up the hills for a whole two nights.

With these methods at disposal I managed to drag a significant qualitative ethnographic data for my research. Which later helped me to connect the dots and conceive results and conclusions about the problem statement I was endeavouring upon. Sometimes it was easy to interact with locals, and other times I faced unexpected sudden outburst majorly because of the camera equipment. Kalashi women would cover their faces the moment they see the camera and in some cases, would aggressively react against my shooting. Once I started filming a conversation between two men, a kalashi and a tourist, at a funeral.

Considering all such mixed reactions I had to limit my shooting to permission from the subjects. Yet those who became friendly took me to extreme levels of private gatherings

and entertained me with what I needed to observe and shoot. And others would simply give a cold shoulder and move on with their tasks of the day.

2.4 Interviews

An interview is a technique for gathering verbal data through questions or guided conversation. It is more purposeful than a casual conversation. An interview may involve only two people, the interviewer and the interviewee, or several people in what are called group interviews or focus group.

I took initially various spontaneous interviews which was purely conversational or more like a gossip with purpose of knowing the individual psyche developed in result of culture and environment they resided in. I interviewed young and old, male and female, Muslims and Kalashis. This helped me in multiple ways. Firstly, these spontaneous interviews introduced me to the community. Secondly the community members started to put confidence in me as the word of my presence spread around. This led to gaining deeper access into core of the community, further helping to pave path for me to start structured Interviews which involved sensitive questions like reasons of conversion from one faith to another. Due to the essence of my topic, my main method to extract data was Interviews. To know about the reasons for conversion was only possible through asking local people questions like what motivated them or what shortcomings did they face in Kalash that they were forced to leave this religion of theirs.

2.5 Sampling technique

2.5.1 Non-probability sampling

Non-probability sampling is a sampling technique where the samples are gathered in a process that does not give all the individuals in the population equal chances of being selected. Although my respondents were selected based on their religious status. But for cultural profiling I used probability sampling, as my respondents were random Kalash

members. Any Kalash member I knew provided me with information I needed to gather for sketching.

2.5.2 Convenience Sampling

I used convenience sampling, which is a type of non-probability sampling, for my data extraction technique. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling that involves the sample being drawn from that part of the population that is close to hand. This type of sampling is most useful for pilot testing.

“The selection of participants was random. They were not scrutinized according to a specific stratum of the community; rather, every convert who agreed was interviewed. Random selection ensured the objectivity of the research, because there was no influence of any kind in the selection of the converts for the interviews.”(Kazmi,2017)

The place I was staying at was a Kalash family’s residence. With their help, I managed to get hold of people who were compatible with my research.

I had to divide my sample of interviews from my given population into three categories. Interviewing Kalash members, Muslim members and converts. Each category had similar set of questions yet during the conduction of interview sometimes questions spontaneously arose and were inculcated as part of the finding. Each category carried a different perspective of the situation and helped me grasp the jest of the topic from different worldviews. Those findings then later helped me to analyse in depth the reasons for conversion and effects.

2.5.3 Unit of Data collection

My samples included of only individuals from whom I took interviews at different times and places. We can also state that my unit of data collection was the whole community when the methodology I adopted at times was purely observation based. But when the

situation required me to be more exact and precise with my findings, I had to scoop out individuals from the huge population of 4000 people and use each individual as my unit of data collection.

2.5.4 Unit of Data analysis

This revolves around the idea that who or what I am analysing for study. For instance, when I was concerned about tourism and its impact on local culture, I looked for the local tour guides. As they would give me authentic, advance and exact information than any random person from the community would provide. Similarly, when concerned with some religious aspect, I looked for those people who were religiously aware and authoritative or had some kind of religious position or status.

2.6 Equipment for data collection

2.6.1 Daily diary

In a process of long stay at a locale, it is important to carry a diary with yourself as data collection sometimes turns out to be spontaneous exercise. This was my daily diary which consisted of notes of my observation. Unfortunately, I lost one of my note book. It got stolen with my bag while I was conducting an interview. But I still had another notebook that also carried significant amount of findings. After every day travel in the valley, conducting interviews, writing spontaneous ideas and random thoughts whatever pops up in my mind pertaining to my research of course, I would come back to my residing place and go through my writing and write down further more about what I felt like today, experiences that I went through and questions that arise from that day to ask tomorrow. Then I would structure my findings and categorise them under different headings.

2.6.2 Voice Recording

Some times while I am conducting interviews it gets difficult to keep up with the respondent's information. It becomes difficult to write everything down in sequence. Hence as I possessed a smart phone which has this utility of voice recording helped me to store the interviews in digital form. Moreover, as my respondents were female members as well, they hesitated to appear before my camera. Therefore, maintaining my research ethics I would switch my camera off, and utilise the voice recording tool. For instance, there was this case of a Muslim convert. Her name was Rina. Her interview was very important for my research and video documentary that I was making along with my research thesis. Unfortunately, she was hesitant to appear on camera because of her husband, from whom she was afraid and did not want any trouble from him if he finds out. Her husband was a conservative Muslim and was very protective with regards to women modesty, especially in case of his wife. Moreover, the case of Rina has gained huge popularity and already his husband was offended when he got to know that she is giving away interviews in front of camera.

2.6.3 Video and pictures

I also carried with me a DSLR and a boom mic, which recorded video and audio both. Most of my interviews were conducted in working presence of this modern equipment. This helped me to recall interviews and activities in detail. Now that I am writing this thesis down, it is certainly helping me to study and extract things which I have missed live.

3 Locale and Infrastructure



Fig. 2 Map of Bumburet Valley

3.1 Locale

Kalash tribe is situated in the southern gorges of the Hindu Kush mountain range in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province district Chitral. Hindu Kush is a difficult and tough terrain. The valleys are located at a height of approximately 1900 to 2200m and are surrounded by hilly mountains. Landscape is abundant with rugged Rocky Mountains and extends for hundreds of miles in all directions.

3.2 Infrastructure

It took me 12 hours approximately to reach Chitral from Islamabad. This road trip coursed through Motorway up until Nowshera, from where we diverted towards Mardan and Malakand Division and finally after Dir through Lowari vehicular tunnel we reached Chitral. Lowari tunnel is 10Km long which bypasses a huge meandering old Lowari pass that previously connected the Chitral district with rest of the country. Lowari tunnel successfully saves up to 7 hours of extra travel to reach Chitral district. This recent addition of infrastructure to the lives of the people of Kalash and rest of the people of Chitral has significantly affected the dynamics of economics and other social adaptations by the community at large which I would be relating to on a later note. Hence Chitral was rarely accessible, but after the opening of Lowari tunnel, the average time from Islamabad has shortened by 7 hours. Thus, allowing external factors to approach more frequently and influence the local material culture.



Fig 3. Lowari Tunnel

In past, Chitral has remained disconnected with rest of the country almost 6 months around year because of the hilly terrain and snow. Originally conceived as a railway tunnel, construction of Lowari tunnel began in September 1975 and was inaugurated by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. However, less than a year later work stopped in 1976 due to non-allocation of funds. Construction resumed in September 2005 under President Pervez Musharraf and was initially expected to be completed by 2009 and to convert it into a vehicle road tunnel and was finally opened for use in 2018.

The weather on the date I arrived, 7th of march, was pleasant and workable for my NOC acquiring activities. The next day I moved and took a local ride to Bumburet valley for almost 1.5hrs of travel over an extremely rugged, narrow and dangerous two-way road. There is this strange conspiracy of why that patch of road from main Chitral road to Kalasha valleys is not mended. Some say that it is to glorify the travel to Kalash and make it feel a worthwhile visit for the tourists. And some say that its typical carelessness of the authorities. It was told to me by one of my key informants that the construction of the road has been under a plan for a while, demarcations had been made, yet no sign of practical commencement of the work has been discerned. Before reaching the valley, I was inquired by the police for my purpose of visit twice. Thankfully my NOC provided all the answers.

3.3 Architecture and Housing

It was indeed a pleasant sight entering Bamburet valley. Sky blue river tributary flowed aggressively down on our left and the right-side was completely walled with pointed hills with sharp slopes, scoring a dangerous height. The moment we enter the first village of the valley, our brains are aroused with the fragrance of juniper wood because of carpenter workshops. Steadily the low-profile markets begin to appear projecting surreal hand-crafts and Kalasha ornaments at multiple souvenir shops. The first kalasha village Palawande was pointed out by the driver far above from the street level. Clustered together we could see the homes, eloquently fixed into each other midway up the hill, denoting unity in a compromised space. Those houses were made from wood and stone.

Climate and geography influences communities, at a certain time and place, both physically and mentally. A sheer presence of humans in any environment molds the routine behavior of the members. I would like to emphasize here that the material needed for constructing an indigenous house is extracted from the immediate environment a community dwells in. For instance, in Punjab plane land villages, houses are constructed with a mixture of clay and hay, as soil is most abundantly available in that part of the country. The material used in the construction of houses in Chitral is directly connected with what is abundantly available in the environment. Stones from the hills and woods is what I saw most abundantly in Chitral and surrounding valleys, hence, the construction even of the recent houses were done with these materials. Very rarely I saw any house constructed from processed bricks and cement. This directed me to reconsider my definition of culture slightly. Culture is derived from the word cultivation. The latter means the manipulation done by indigenous people upon the environment for personal usage and subsistence. Therefore, culture most immediately emerges with the innovative activities and practices carried out in the environment by people living in that space. However, difference of faith rarely effects the sort of material used for house construction. I saw Muslim homesteads as well, that were made from the same material. Therefore, culture sometimes travels across the mundane culture.



Fig 4. A typical Kalash homestead made from wood and stone only

3.4 Accessibility

Bumburet Valley is only accessible from only one possible direction. And that is from Ayun village. It is 30 minutes away from District Chitral and from Ayun it takes 1.5 hours on average to reach Bumburet valley. Chitral is main market place for the Kalash community. We often see Kalash women in their peculiar attire at Chitral main Bazar shopping.

3.5 Sanitation

I have not seen open sanitary drainages anywhere throughout Bumburet. All the sanitation is underground. In past, this used to be not the case. People would go out in open for elimination. But today every household possess attached bathrooms and properly regulated sanitation system. Yet it reflects the features of pure rural and original

3.6 Faith based buildings

Kalash have one major faith based building also known as Jashtakhan. It is constructed in a centre of every village in all the three valleys. This is a square shaped building again made from wood and stones.

There is another faith based building that is particular for the women only, and this is located outside from the boundary of the village. This is called Bashalini. Older buildings were made from the same material. But today NGOs have done enough effort to carve out comfortable building for the women as the community women has to stay here for the time of their menstrual periods.

4 Literature Review

Cultural anthropologists often find a topic to research by carrying out a literature review, which is the formal term for reading what others have already written about the subject and assessing its strengths and gaps. Another idea for a research project is a restudy, or fieldwork conducted in a previously researched community. Many previous studies offer a foundation on which later studies can build, providing insights into changes that have occurred or offering a new angle.

Although I was inspired to conduct this research over causes and effects of proselytization after watching a short BBC documentary. Later I figured out that some people have already done this research. But had failed to highlight certain features that were very important, rather were major reasons for conversion. Some propagations proposed by the authors were under researched and needed reconsideration which I would be discussing in the following paragraphs.

First let's consider the dictionary definition of Proselytization

“convert or attempt to convert (someone) from one religion, belief, or opinion to another” (Merriam Webster)

This is so far accepted if we assume that a person is not converted forcefully. But most of the literature that I went through concerned with forcing Kalash people to convert, which was not the case at all as such. The conversion carried subtle overtones of preaching the Kalash which cannot be categorised as forceful conversions. I would dive into this discussion on a later note. Before that the following interesting argument related to the ethical issue of asking people about their faith and proclaiming it to be false highlights problems about forceful conversion. Nobody in Kalash I have witnessed held anyone responsible for forceful conversion yet we witness many writings depicting this false assertion.

“The argument: in an increasingly secular society, proselytism in public environments is deeply inappropriate – a form of incivility. The problem of proselytism is that religious groups prioritise their needs and aspirations over the wider public good. At best, questioning the religious beliefs of others is irritating; at worst, it is uniquely divisive. In order to avoid unwelcome proselytising, faith-based organisations should not play a significant role in public services. When and if they do, they should restrain themselves from any tangible expression of faith.” (Bickley, 2015)

It is true that Kalash youth are more prone to conversion than other age groups in the community. But the reasons some resources provide are weak in their analysis. For example, in the following article, the author highlighted that students are being forcefully converted, which is not the case exactly. Teachers in schools are not actively participating to convert students with an agenda. Rather its more of a passive form of preaching. Forceful conversion implies active and direct action from the authorities to convert the youth. I have myself witnessed the schools and talked to the staff personally over this issue. They say they carry out only the appointed curriculum by the state for the students, and have never forcefully victimised a Kalash student to convert. Rather they said that Kalash are pride of our school system. If this was the case then by now, every Kalash student would have converted.

“Kalash youth have recently been targeted and are now converting to Islam due to outside pressure. Some convert of their own free will, but local journalists claim that some Kalash youth convert because of the economic incentives offered, as the community struggles financially. Children are required to take courses on Islam but are not permitted to receive education on their own religion or traditions. For women, the lure of conversion is more pronounced. Despite Kalash women having more freedom in marriage and divorce within their culture, the declining socio-economic conditions of the community is prompting many young women to marry Muslim men and convert to Islam.” (MEP, 2018)

Secondly, this article discusses about women converting because of their financial status. This is true and I would agree to this argument. Yet there are many other reasons for women of Kalash to convert. One reason is that there are no property rights for women in Kalash. They are not allowed to inherit lands for themselves. This aspect would be tackled in later topics.

“The unique culture and identity of the Kalash people is under threat of extinction according to the National Commission on Human Rights which launched its report on the Kalash in Islamabad on Wednesday. The report states that the Kalash population has been reduced to a mere 4,000 people, mainly because of forced conversions and the conversion of Kalash women by Muslim men who marry them. Rights activists have frequently pointed out that the divide between seduction and abduction is not large at all. The failure by the state to ensure that the Kalash people enjoy rights to their lands and forests has aided those seeking to force a Muslim identity on them. So has the failure to include material on the Kalash culture in school textbooks used at Kalash schools. Instead, Kalash children are forced to study textbooks attended for Muslims. Justice Ali Nawaz Chohan, the director of the NCHR, has also pointed out that since the Kalash have no written script, it is important to preserve their history and tradition through some mechanism which can ensure it does not die away.”
(Converting the Kalash, 2017)

The above article seems biased in its approach towards as it again emphasis about forceful conversion. Women are not forced but are arranged into a wedding first and then converted. Women convert on their own behalf and not forced. I would be pointing to this issue in topic of Kinship, where woman’s consent is most important before she is arranged into a Muslim household for marriage.

“Tablighi Jama’at, a predominantly Sunni denomination, which takes the Quran and the life of the prophet Muhammad as the ultimate model for the

interpretation of Islamic values. Naturally, every denomination of Islam wants increase the followers among their ranks.” (Kazmi, 2016)

This above snippet is from an interesting article which I had read before I left for my research. It projected the idea of Islamic preaching movements to be responsible for the conversion of Kalash community. But to my surprise the authorities have banned such activities by these religious factions. Moreover, one of my respondent elaborated that no one truly listens to these preachers if they do appear at our front doors. But what this article miss is the subliminal conveying of Islamic religious ideas through Friday preaching over loud speakers and soft influence by a Muslim convert upon his Kalash family members as stated by one of my respondent. This point will also be discussed in the following chapters.

The reasons for conversion were elaborated by few of my respondents to be of moral and ethical nature. The following literature highlights this in a general sense and emphasizes on the hygiene, which is indeed one factor but the literature fails to discuss the element of influence which Kalash members have from the general lifestyle of people. The article fails to pinpoint the sorts of immoral activities casted out by Kalash community. For instance, dancing in front of unknown people for the sake of cultural exhibition has become a matter of prestige and honour.

“The converts looked at their pre-conversion lives as a time when they were “not adhering to moral or ethical practices”. It was a time when the converts were jahil (ignorant), living lives of personal disorder. It is important to note that the practices only became “immoral” after conversion, hence a highlighted reason behind their conversion. Their “personal disorder” was because of their indulging in activities that were “sinful” and a “deliberate violation of moral norms.” The whole paradigm of moral and immoral was turned upside down. The converts referred to their previous lives as living in dishonour (darkness) and moral degradation. Most of the converts were contemptuous because they were

not as “hygienic” and “honourable” as they became after accepting Islam. “Hygienic” was the most frequently used word in the narratives of the Kalash. The differences between the unhygienic (filthy) and the hygienic were understood by them as the main difference between the old and new religions: as a binary opposition. The converts referred to the performing of ablutions (washing) that Islam emphasizes.” (Kazmi S. K., 2016)

I have related this debate to the argument of diffusion of ideas from dominant religion into the minds of the minorities. This phenomenon is also known as acculturation which ultimately results in changing one’s faith.

“Tourism poses another threat to Kalash communities. All three valleys now have several large hotels, mostly owned and managed by Chitrali Muslims. Foreign tourism remains undeveloped, still largely restricted to back-packers or small adventure groups who visit the valleys by jeep for one or two days, particularly during festivals like joshi. More problematic are local tourists from other regions of north west frontier, often lured to the valleys by sexual fantasies about the supposed ‘freedom’ of Kalasha women.” (Parkes, 1990)

Not just that tourism industry is falling out from the hands of the Kalash economically but it also brings along potential for converting the community members. Tourism is also influencing in the realm of conversion. People who arrive here as tourists, sometimes develop an understanding with the local Kalash women on personal basis and influence them into marriages.

5 Comprehensive Cultural dimensions and their relation to Proselytization

5.1 Stories of Origin

Kalasha history is enveloped in mysteries. The most popular held belief about their origins germinates from the time of Alexander the great. It is most commonly known that Kalash are the decedents of his army. Despite that, many of my Kalash friends including Arastu held a totally different belief. They proclaimed that Kalash is an indigenous tribe. Thousands of years old that had its roots across Northern Pakistan up till Kashmir, Gilgit and some parts of Afghanistan. They have migrated from a lost city of Tsiam which they believe can be somewhere around Syria/Sham. This could be quite probable as the earliest civilisations of mankind, during Neolithic Revolution, begins from middle East also known as the fertile crescent.

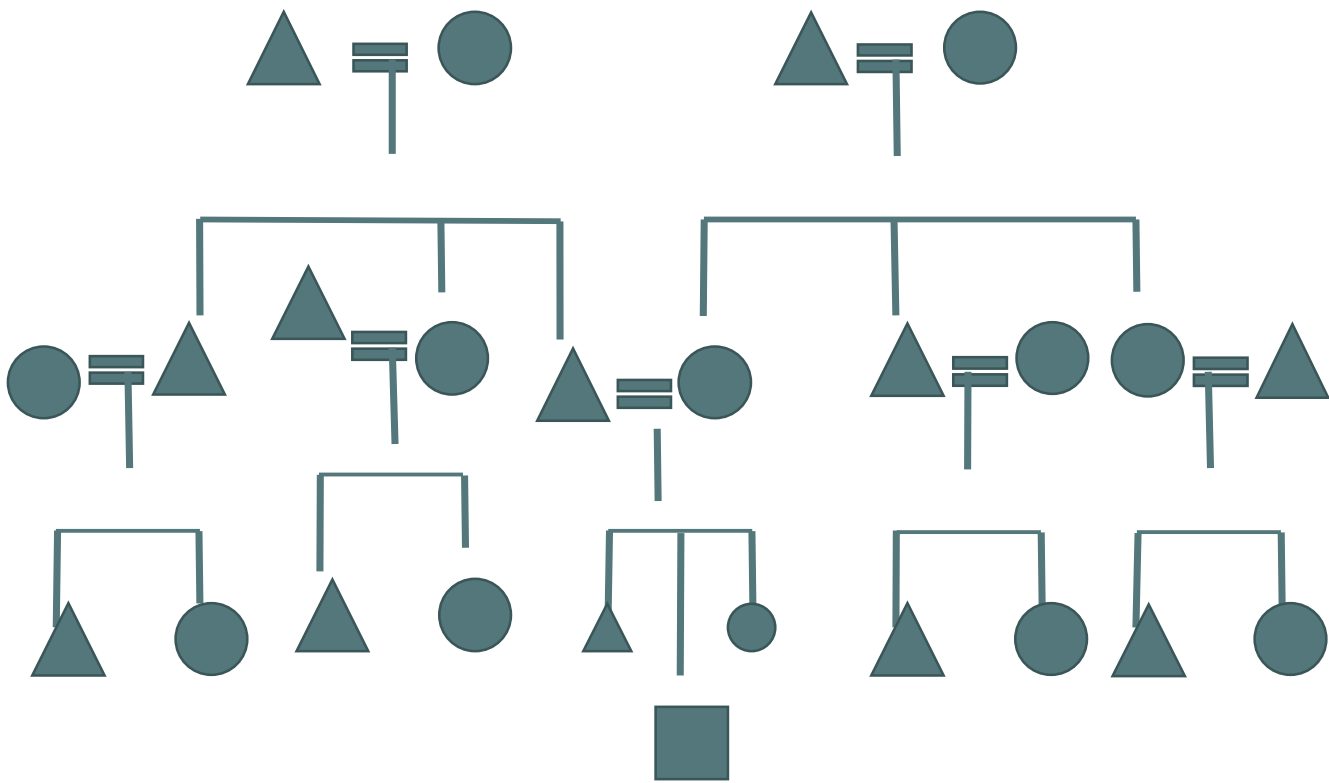
The DNA that Kalash people carry is unique. Professor Paulo Graziosi who is a professor of Anthropology and Pre-history has mentioned in London News, March 30th 1963 that Kalash have purely European traits. They reflect reminiscent of Mediterranean people or the Alpine race. This is a sub-race of the original Caucasian race which is believed to be the origins of the white race over all. Hence if Tsiam, was located somewhere in this region then these are very old people who migrated from central Asia long time ago and have no connection what so ever with Alexander.

Arastu, my fast Kalash friend and one of my key informant has told me that the story of Alexander basically is a commercial story developed organically for promoting tourism. He said that this story then has been deliberately popularised in order to attract tourists. People from as far as from Canada only come to visit this place to get to see the last survivors of the army of Alexander the Great. Greeks have taken up to this story quite seriously and have even established a preservation centre for Kalash community in Brun village.

I happened to have a detailed interview with one the locals who was a tour guide as well and was very informative, Ashfaq Ahmed. He narrated to me about the origins of Kalash and stories of Alexander to be half true.

“These are the indigenous people. They lived here long before Alexander the Great. This used to be one nation of Kafiristan from northern Afghanistan up till Gilgit. There were two types of Kalash which lived here, Red Kalash and Black Kalash. Around 1830, during the war of Ameer Abdur Rehman, some got converted by force, some on their will and others escaped. Alexander’s small troop did come here and crossed Afghanistan through kunar, but not Alexander himself came here. Among that troop some people were exhausted and injured. Kalash culture fascinated them as well. Few remained and got married. Only this part of the story is true. But there is not the case that these are purely people from Greece or remnants Alexander the Great.”

5.2 Kinship



Key:



Father F

Daughter D



Mother M

Brother B

Son S

Sister Z



The above kinship diagram shows a general family tree genealogy.

Following are the names of the relationships present in Kalasha community's families:

F	Dada	MZ	Nana
M	Aaya	B	Baya
FF	Waawa	Z	Baba
FM	Aawa	FBD	Baba
MF	Waawa	FBS	Baya
MM	Aawa	FZD	Baba
FB	Dada	FZS	Baya
FZ	Nana	MBD	Baba
MB	Moa	MBS	Baya
MZD	Baba	MZS	Baya

Fig. 5.

5.2.1 Marital Taboos and the Irony of Proselytization

Before I jump into the social structure of Kalash tribe, I would like to clarify here some misconceptions that irresponsible media has generated for cheap publicity of their production firms. A controversial image of Kalash tribe afloat regarding the practice of prostitution. Being a researcher for Kalash community and based on three months of my observations I have never seen a case like what the media portrays. I do not even feel to mention those Social media firms here as I believe it would be promoting their reach, and moreover my conscience does not permit as well. This is because I see the opposite of what I have heard earlier. Kalash is a value oriented community and has a concrete belief in marriages and commitments with spouses. During my research, I have even witnessed Pakistani tourists asking local Kalash people to provide them with prostitutes and to my surprise the respondent in a polite manner stated that we do not deal in such business. I heard this story about a Kalash woman as a prostitute which people later found out that she was a local Muslim woman dressed in a Kalash dress who entertained the tourists.

The Kalasha community is divided into clan system. Bullasing, Bazik, Rajaway, Bumbur, Shapey, Abudak and many more clans perform some assigned functions. My point here is not to discuss their functions, but to focus on the Taboos which are being practiced by the society. It is not permitted for a Kalashi to marry within a clan. If somebody does they become out cast and are cursed upon. They are not even called on traditional festivals and are frowned upon generally if they do appear on the scene. The purpose for not marrying within the cast is unknown. But one respondent of mine mentioned that it is for unity among the clans, which makes sense after pondering over the idea of exogamy. We can safely state here that Kalash is an exogamous tribe. Exogamy is considered as a social norm which makes a person marry another person from a different social group.

According to Claude Levis-Strauss, “Alliance theory” of exogamy is practiced to maintain strong alliances and unity among clans or other social groups. Kalash members are few and loosely structured already, this practice indeed promotes their solidarity and binds

them based on blood relations. This promotes indirectly peace, unity and furthers cohesion among the clans.

Figure 5 shows the relational genealogy of Kalash tribe. All the cousins are brothers and sisters. Which means they are prohibited to marry each other. Father's brother carries the same relational titles. In case of Mothers brother the title changes, it is Moa and for Mothers sister it is nana. Even in case of Father's sister the relation is titled as nana. Such a distribution of titles signifies the strictness the Kalash tribe has for marital taboos. It is ingrained deep in their family structure and relational associations.

I would like to open a discussion on the issue of proselytization, or conversion from one belief system to another, from here and would keep on relating other cultural articulations in the following headings. There exist various cases in which Muslim males fall in love with a Kalash woman and vice-versa. This is a sensitive issue. Within Bumburet valley, conversions for the sake of marrying locally are rare, but there still exist some examples. There are certain cases where women got converted and were married off to non-local Muslims. These were merely arranged marriages. Kalash community is poor and would not hesitate to marry off their daughters in return of a merchandise. But consent of the woman is considered as well. Women are never forcefully married; women consent is not taken for granted at all. If a woman appreciates and admire his future Muslim husband, only then she will agree to the marriage and convert her religion. This is where some concepts intertwine and project few causes of conversion. Kalash is a community which appears to be united and solid according to their kinship structure, yet they are poor and look forward to bettering their life styles and try to surface among those who have a common metropolitan manner of living. One way to achieve this is to marry off their daughters to a wealthy tourist who visits this place and receive an ample amount of dowry. This loosens the Kalash identity, as they no more value their traditional Kinship and marital laws. This process is not happening on the surface but subconsciously. One of my respondent, Badsha, stated that

“Poverty is one main reason for conversion. Girls need a better lifestyle here, as they see in dramas, hence their rate of conversion is more. If our own community men stable themselves through education, the rate of conversion will mitigate.”

Community is now sort of driven by the desires of material well-being. Such whims and wishes are not upsetting as this is what everyone around the world is endeavoring for. Nonetheless, for some worried people within Kalash community and those who are trying to conserve Kalash, marrying off their daughters into Islam in return for a significant amount of money indeed is not noble, honorable and reflective of Kalash’s ethos. This worrisome situation is exhibited by some sane elements of Kalash tribe, like Imran Kabir, who is a free-lance teacher and has been aspiring actively to preserve the culture himself. When asked for the reasons for conversion, he narrated:

*“When human becomes **materialistic**, as Guru Nanak once said that greed for materials makes man blind, those people who will keep on fighting over material resources, grab upon it will fall into a black hole and live in hell for eternity.”*

This is an individual act. Community at large has no system to rectify these community members’ slippages. According to Arastu who is a student in Lahore and a Kalash member, stated that

“I am not worried about those who leave Kalash religion. Rather this is a filtering process within Kalash. It filters out the weak links and quality remains and become purer.”

Therefore, it is sad to realize that people within Kalash has become weak. They are actively consumed into foreign influences. In common terms, we can state that Kalash members have an impetus to sell away their religion/identity. Receiving money as a compensation for changing the religion of their daughters is considered for many Kalash members as a disgrace for the whole community. In my opinion and counter to what my friend Arastu had stated earlier, this process of conversion is not making Kalash tribe

strong. There is a continuous drainage of Kalash mind. Strong communities require both, quality of the members as well as quantity. Constant dripping away of community members make the community weak, especially when the community is already detached from their unknown original teachings, which I would be attending to in the following section.

5.2.2 Soft Influence of Converted relatives upon their Kalash family

When one individual from a family converts to Islam he/she tries to influence passively his/her immediate relatives. As for instance, Ashfaq Ahmed, who is a well-equipped and informed local tour guide narrated:

“The number one reason that I see of conversion is the soft influence of the converted Muslims. One brother is Muslim other is Kalash. Not hard, because that would have completely eradicated the entire tribe.”

The blood bond does not break decisively after a member of a Kalash family is converted. The consanguine relationship does not break apart. Brother, sisters, children and parents maintain their relational social status and keep on to carry out the optimal socialization. Not only consanguine relationships are drastically effected by the conversion of an individual member rather affinal relationship i.e. husband or wife sometimes remain in a same household, one of which has converted. Although Islam does not allow to be married to a non-muslim woman or man, yet the family value system of Kalash religion overrides the Islamic indoctrination of marriage. I have been informed by many of my informants with such cases where husbands have converted to Islam yet their Kalash wives remain in the marriage bond. One of my respondent, Yusuf, who got converted at the age of 14, when asked about his current activity with his Kalash family, his remarks were quite positive. He narrated that

“Our relation, regardless of our religion, is superb. We visit each other without any hesitation. There is no problem between us. We live and coexist normally. We help each

other in demise whether it's a muslim or Kalash. We participate in weddings. I also contributed in the marriages of my Kalash siblings. What I like about Kalash is that they keep an affectionate relation with themselves as a tribe. Even if someone is converted to Islam, they will not feel separated from him/her at all."

Yusuf's brother, Sher Ahmed is a Kalash. Through Sher Ahmed I reached Yusuf. It was first Sher Ahmed that I interviewed in a casual manner. He seemed to be quite upset from the practices of his tribe and when I interviewed his elder brother Yusuf he mentioned that Sher Ahmed has a potential to convert and that he has taken him to various preaching centers and has often fasted during the month of Ramadhan. Yusuf unfolded that

"Sher is very against of some aspects of Kalash. He has some passion. He is a dignified lad and it is probable that God someday convert him. InshAllah I'm hopeful. I keep on advising him regarding this. He has spent a lot of time with me in Mardan, at a preaching center. Then in Lahore we had spent like six months."

This is a perfect example of soft influence which becomes a major reason for the conversion of Kalash tribe. This is like a gradual trickle-down effect and seems like a race between how fast Kalash community is reproducing and at what frequency the rate of conversion persists.

5.2.3 Remarrying after divorce and demise of the spouse

Another reason for conversion is when a Kalash member faces a demise of his/her spouse and it gets difficult to find another spouse from an already small community of Kalash. There is this stress of not having enough option of marriage partners, whereas the neighboring Muslims because of their majority has more options. Thus, to get into a marriage for a sustainable life style the unfortunate Kalash members turn towards Islam and marry into a Muslim community after converting. People who are still young and cannot find a match or those who have lost their previous spouse, turns towards Muslim community as females of Kalash would not like to marry an older man willingly but the

probability to get remarried grows if a Kalash converts. Many cases of disabled Kalash individuals are seen in such a manner as well. The disability becomes an organic variable that influences conversion of the disabled individual. This person will not have any future within Kalash community as probably most people would in Kalash community will not like to marry a person who is disabled, yet that person may find a match from a Muslim community which is significantly larger in number.

5.2.4 Naming conventions

This aspect of Kalasha religion is something that I found interesting. Kalash families are easily influenced by what they seem is aesthetically appreciable. Most of the names of their children are inspired from Indian film actors and actresses. Sushmita, Ashveria, Divia, Amitabh, Shahid Kapoor, Akshay etc. This convention does not rely limit itself to Indian movies but also adopts from charismatic political personality. My host in Brun village was named by his father as Bhutto after Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who at that time was at his peak level of political life. They do not possess any traditional or Kalasha culture names in their own language, at least of the young generation. Calling each other with names that are not engrained in their cultural past tends to further disassociate them from their roots and history.

5.3 Religion of Kalash

According to Kalash they are not a polytheistic religion. They worship only one God whom they call Dezau or the one who creates. All their prayers during festivals are directed towards this deity yet they claim that cannot pray to him directly. They are assisted by some intermediary deities which can also be related to as angels. When asked about the super natural deities Imran Kabir responded

“In various books people have constructed a pantheon (family of God and Goddess). We have four sets of alters where we go and pray. One set has Gods which has Gods that are related to Hindus. Then we have only one God which is the God of Mongol, Shinghan.

And our ancestors tell us when the last war we fought with Mongols in Mistuj, and when we pushed them away from Wakhan corridor, we took with us their God. Even today we have it in our custody. Kalashi use various names of Supreme God. On every festival it possess a different name. And these names are not associated with any place, stone, tree or a wall. Dizk is a common name which means to give a shape, to create. ' Dizi La Dizau ' means creator of all the creation. Mulavah which mean Maula. Balimayin is the name for the same entity Dizau which is used in only Chowmas. At Joshi Malihesh is used, and rest of the 12 months you wont hear this name. But at Joshi festival, the Qazi or priests who performs prayers and everyone says ameen behind him, and the name he is praying to is Malihesh. Mulawa, Paydagarrau, Dizau are names that go around the year. We don't claim that kalashi religion is the best. Kalash people state this explicitly that when someone claims that he is best then he becomes a beast. We think that all the people who are born, they know the right path right in front of their noses who have mind and two eyes. Kalash do not think about unification that everyone should be similar. In many other religions where there is no permission on certain participating in certain things, even within Kalash valleys, people don't enter in each other's certain rituals. We don't condemn anyone on the basis of Religion, yet on the basis of actions and works, we do condemn people and even have fought battles. ”



Fig 5. Imran Kabir while giving me an interview

Kalash pray to one God only, but has different names to it for every festivity. And pray to this God through subordinates. This does not make Kalash a Monotheistic religion. Yet they do not claim that they are pagans. Thus, this makes their religion more controversial and ambiguous.

I asked Imran Kabir that does a creation myth exist in Kalash religion? He responded

“Kalash relies on Abrahamic religion Myth. It is interesting that we call human body as ‘Adam’ and call grandmother ‘Awah’, hence a close relation with that Myth. More than half traditions have been vanished from Kalash religion. We don’t practice numerous rituals and traditions. For instance, beard used to be a traditional thing, now it only remains to grievance over a deceased person. In older times people used to put on beard according to religion known as ‘Bashara Chown’. As according to the surroundings, people tell us that you cannot put on a beard because you are Satans eggs. And we accepted this submissively in our subconscious, and left this trend of beard. Other than this Kalsah has no personal creation Myth.”

Creation Myths are certainly the foundations of any religion. Yet Kalash is relying upon the myth of Abrahamic Religions. This reliance makes Kalash religion weak or we can say that the Abrahamic creation myth subsumes the Kalash Myth. This generates a potential for Kalash members to convert to Abrahamic faiths as they find scripted philosophical groundings.

Later I asked him that does not lack of Kalash myth weakens the Kalash religion? He contended

*“There are robust evidence which state that Kalash people understand the creation myth proposed by Abrahamic religions. Like after the death of every community man we sing a song in the beginning of the funeral known as Kana Boom, which means **Kana’s Earth**. Then Death is defined within this, what is death. Over here everyone uses name Adam is a routine word, considering this it means that Abrahamic traditions have borrowed the story from Kalash.”*

This contention was quite subtle. Yet it did not reflect the true nature of Abrahamic creation myth. Which states that Adam was thrown down to Earth because of his disobedience to God. Merely supporting his argument over some linguistic links does not justify the creation myth of Kalash.

Hence, we can assume that Kalash somehow lacks in the understanding of the cosmology in terms of creation Myth. Their reliance for such a query upon Islam is justified and hence the probability of accepting Islam proliferates for some seekers of satisfying creation Myth among Kalash.

When I asked him, what do you think about Islam? He replied

“Islam is a universal religion. It’s a huge power. To consider Power is better. It is power that does all the worldly work. But every religion just gives only a thinking about

everything. Past, present and future. Nothing else, neither food nor clothes. Every religion defines life in a different way. Other than this religion does nothing, but we respect Islam. There are various practices similar within Kalash and Islam. That is why fifty percent of things have been eliminated in Kalash religion because most of them were similar with Islam.”

This gradual elimination of Kalash traditions is also causing to lose its own groundings.

Life after death

“Kalash has a concept of Paradise and Hell. But our hell does not consist of fire, and life of paradise is also different. Kalash has no faith in material life after death. Regaining body is not our faith. There are many other faiths who believe in this as well but Kalash are oblivious of this hence think that their faith is weak. Kalash in their prayers ask for abstract things like Peace, life, happiness, contention, Justice. They pray for this continuously. I don't feel regret that we are shrinking in size. We are not supposed to capture lands, oil rigs nor we intend to make a state. I will only teach my kids what my religion is and rest depends on their individual will. Kalash is basically 'Allah dy hawaly'.”

This is again part of Imran Kabir's interview. He acknowledges that their religion is weak and he admits that he would only tell his children about his religion, if they wish to change their religion, they are most welcome to.

5.3.1 Crisis of Identity in terms of Religious Ideology and its relation to Proselytization

“We live in a world where identity matters. It matters both as a concept, theoretically, and as a contested fact of contemporary political life. The word identity itself has acquired a huge contemporary resonance, inside and outside the academic world (Gilroy, 1997, p. 1). Identity is amorphous. It is like a marking on a totem or a genetic code. For the most

part, identity is a semi-unconscious acceptance of the norm. Identity helps to recognize those attributes that a person shares with the rest. It also recognizes differences among individuals, by which a person is accepted as a member of the society. Identity is a sense of location in a culture. It is a place where persons categorize themselves as different individuals.” (Kazmi S. A., 2017)

Every person on this planet has a world view. How they conceive this universe in terms of its purpose and their personal position in this apparently dynamic world. Some place their trust in science and are labeled as atheist, other place their trust in a commonly followed faith. These school of thoughts are responsible for providing answers to some fundamental questions about life and purpose of existence. People are flexible and tend to switch between worldviews if not satisfied with their current religious ideology.

When I asked Arastu about how does Kalash identifies itself he said that

“Its mostly related to our festivals. Secondly its women’s dress. Men dress has disappeared. There is a weather controller other than this. We give this weather control authority to a particular person. If weather becomes adverse, that is the responsibility of that authorized person. If the nature of that person is good, then there is smooth flow of seasonal dynamics and marriages and births are smooth. This authority keeps on changing from village to village. If weather gets extremely disrupted, in that case the authority is replaced immediately. There are also some miracles like our hotel was saved by a flood after we did a sacrifice. We believe that if you throw a sacrificed head in a direction where you want the flood to move, it moves, and that is what happened with us.”

For a religious community to remain strongly intact with their dogmas, history and teachings, it is necessary for them to possess a religious scripture. This scripture is essential for creating a stable and cohesive social group based on common beliefs. It helps the teachings and principles of a religion to remain pure and authentic. This is an established fact that Kalash community does not possess any written religious documentation. They holistically rely on oral traditions which they vocalize and express

only at festivities around the year. Oral traditions are volatile and has potential to bounce in different directions and possibly lose the original message being propagated through generation after generation. As for the reason, the brain of the community becomes ideologically weak and fail to keep up with the actual teachings.

Imran Kabir, being a Kalash member and a free-lance teacher and an activist, has an in-depth take over this issue. He believes that Kalash is altogether in an Identity crisis. There are innumerable versions of a single aspect of Kalash religion. Every member of the Kalash community has his own rendition and understanding of their religion. It might vary subtly but the apologists within the Kalash community states that every person is a priest on his own. They exhibit an attitude of self-authority and present slightly a different version of some religious attribute. Imran Kabir has narrated to me that

*“Kalash themselves don’t know about themselves. Kalash is disintegrating in a dangerous manner. Moving into different directions. Some people want to marry off to Hindus, other to Persis and Greeks. When a person doesn’t know himself (**Identity crisis**) then he can be anything. All parents make their children learn the thought process of their religion, what does their religion say. There is no system of preaching Kalash Religion. Neither at communal level nor in families. No father tells his son what their religion wants. People tend to blame our religion as the reason for our underdevelopment, thus even Christians and Parsi come here to preach their religion. Moreover, Kalash religion itself is ambiguous. When people ask me that do you have any book, I tell them that they are being published continuously. More material over Kalash on social media is causing Kalash religion to become more ambiguous. But these are not our people writing books upon us, God sends guidance via people. (Sarcastic remark), they write and we also read it if we have time. People write and say different things about us makes Kalash more skeptical and ambiguous.”*

Imran further carries on to criticize the behavioral pattern of his community which sort of depicts another reason for conversion. He said that Kalash have become more materialistic and are after money for most of the time. He narrated

“Kalash are salves of money. Nothing can be done. They are less in number, I know this for sure that if they are of total like 4000 people, within next ten years half of us will remain. Kalash are mostly responsible themselves for conversion.”

This is indeed true. It seemed that the original Kalash tradition of hospitality and free service is turning out to be of money mongers. From the kids who follow tourists all around asking for money. That was personally for me very embarrassing site. Children are inculcating from quite an early age the value of money in their minds.

Kalash religion is merely identified by the apparent dress women wear, joy at festivities and dances that strangely reflect grief at funerals. On the outlook, these are the only identifiable attributes Kalash possess. When we attempt to dive into the subtleties’ and nuances, the apparent robustness loses its foundation and the ideology slips away. What remains are just colorful women dancing on festivals and attending to seclusion homes during their menstrual periods. These attributes are not strong enough to let an identity structure stand for long. The foundations of Identity lay in the ideologies of a community. Kalash as whole lack this. Their direction is un directed and no leader or commander is in control of this ship. Everyone plays their part to organize festivals, few clerics fixes the dates of the festivals and it’s all done.

Arastu, my dear friend, who provided me with a lot of important information, stated that the only way to rectify these issues is to script out a personal Kalasha Law. He told me that

“The solution for this problem is Kalash personal law.”

Over and above that, living among majority Muslim community, Kalash peoples’ expression gets subliminal. They subliminally learn enough from the Muslims around them, whether they are kids or the adults. Except from the main December festival of Chowmas, where they prohibit the intermingling of non-Kalash individuals with Kalash at the time of festival which is for three days. For instance, the traditional dress of Kalash

men has been compromised for the past century now. They appear to have adapted the local Muslim majority male dress code i.e. Shalwar Qameez. Or else the young ones wear western clothes shirts and pants. On the other hand, women remain deprived of such luxury and are not allowed to change their dressing code. If they do, that will not be good for the community and any unwanted calamity may strike. This severe and harsh attitude towards women seems to make religion compulsory for women and tends to exempt men. I shall be dealing with this argument later when I talk about women of Kalash. For now, what is important is that they have lost various customs and tradition just because of the presence of Islam.

I would like to introduce a well renowned concept of Diffusion, which potentially explains the diminishing of Kalash people. The concept of *diffusion* inherently focuses upon *process*. Diffusion refers to the dissemination of any physical element, idea, value, social practice, or attitude through and between populations. Constant interaction with the majority populous of Muslims whether through loud speakers in Masjids or little Kalash students interacting with Muslim counterparts at evening Madrasa centres. A lot of Kalash mind is being absorbed into Muslim ideology and later becomes responsible for losing their own identity and ultimately results in conversion of few. I was told by the head of a Kalash household that her wife goes to Muslim clerics for rectifying the ailments and for the good future via the practice of holy chants locally known as ‘Dam durood’.

Therefore, we can conclude that, the crisis of identity among Kalash is merely a natural process. Acculturation leads to softening of Kalash principles, and proliferates the chances of conversion. This weakened identity becomes deprived of foundational roots. Supplemented by lack of written scripture, the situation gets further severe. Limiting the taboos mostly upon women makes male members more deluded of their identity. Further no preaching by Kalash parents to children about their religion loosens up the minds of the young ones and they become undefended when incidentally preached by Muslims, yet not forcefully. There has never been a case of forceful conversion. But still the shortcomings from the Kalash themselves regarding religious training constructs a platform for exposed Kalash mind from where they tend to swap their worldview.

5.4 Economics

5.4.1 Symbiotic relationship

Kalash is a community which practice herding animals i.e. goats for subsistence purpose only. They are not nomads, rather have a sedentary form of life style. Occasionally you can also see cows roaming around the homesteads of villages that are kept separate from the major goat herds and only milked for making tea. They are fed with pastures growing around their homes. Almost every family owns a huge number of goats that are herded by a close relative whose purpose is to take care of animals and herd them around. Their major reliance has been upon goats from a long time.



Fig 6. Moving to High pastures

During summer season, right after their main spring festival known as ‘Chillum Josh’ Kalash families who own huge lot of goats move their herd to the high land pastures where goats are fed with fresh grazing lands. This practice has a cultural as well as a religious

importance for the Kalasha community. This seasonal migration of the herds from lower areas to high lands are accompanied by the members of that homestead who stay for a night at fixed spot in the highlands which that homestead has allocated for themselves. This accompanying of the household members is a symbolic gesture to say farewell to their beloved herd. Almost all the daughters and sons of that single homestead who own that particular herd collectively take them along. I was fortunate enough to travel with one of the homesteads up to the high land pastures through quite a difficult terrain. We crossed glaciers, rivers, hiked on the edges of the cliffs and after 6 hours of adventurous travel reached that particular grazing spot fixed for only this homestead members. The rigorous travel by the members of the homestead along with the herd depicts a strong bond and association with their animals.



Fig 7. Transporting of butter from High pastures to Homestead

According to my friends, I was the first Pakistani researcher and second worldwide who had made to the high pastures. They sacrificed a baby goat for God the next day so that He may bestow blessing and good luck upon their herd. I was not allowed to be present at the time of the sacrifice within the premises of the grazing spot hence was tricked to

leave the spot for a while. They didn't want to directly command me to leave the place as it would have been unethical.

Hence, this dependence has been infused in their religion profoundly. They extract butter from goat milk and use it at almost every gathering. They slaughter goats for their meat consumption and for religious sacrifice. The significance of butter or 'paneer' in their culture is of enormous value. Their community meals are not completed without paneer. For instance, two days before the spring festival, Chillum Josh, the elders or the priests known as Qazis of a village go to each homestead and tell them to get the milk ready. As on the first day of Joshi, known as 'Peepee', the young ones and females circuit around every homestead of their village dancing and celebrating along the way in order to collect milk. The milk is distributed free of cost. Furthermore, at every marriage, funeral and other occasions 'Paneer' is a must on menu.

Also, they hang goat horns in their houses and temples and sprinkle the blood of goat for pulling away evil spirits. Sprinkling of goat milk over newly born babies is also for the purpose of purification. Moreover, hides of the goats are utilized to mend sitting stools and leather for making water storage bags. Although these are not now a days practiced intensely because of the borrowing of various global traits as free market economy has breached in to their culture.

Lastly, they reside in a semi-arid area, where they grow beans, walnuts, rice, wheat, maize. For a good harvest, they pray on festivals and ask for mercy and blessings for the whole community. They even have a religious position or authority whose mood tends to control the weather. As my friend Arastu narrated it to me that

“There is a weather controller other than this. We give this weather control authority to a particular person. If weather becomes adverse, that is the responsibility of that authorized person. If the nature of that person is good, then there is smooth flow of seasonal dynamics”

5.4.2 Tourism

Kalash is turning out to be a community that has enormously been dependent upon tourists. People from all around the world come to these pockets of Hindu Kush to experience their life style. The amount of affluence they have achieved so far is indeed because of the world-wide traffic hitting their spots, bringing in revenue. Not just that the Kalash are benefiting from this bounty, but even the Muslims of the area are also profiting from this business of tourism. People have turned their regular homes into Guest houses, like the one in which I was staying at. Many have constructed proper hotels for the tourists and are earning a lot from it.

Tourism brings not just the revenue but ideas, motivations, aspirations and dreams for Kalash onlookers. The life style and culture they see of the non-Kalash inspires their vulnerable minds. According to Badshah, one of my respondent, stated a similar sort of threat faced by young ones of the community. He said that

“People are losing the foundations of their own culture. They need to realize how dangerous it is for Kalash community to leave their place and settle somewhere else permanently. And most probably get convert.”

Tourism has a huge potential to mitigate the Kalash community. It can become a tool to further impact the already fragile minds of Kalash members. Pakistani tourist quite often come here to look for beautiful brides and some Kalash members do not hesitate to assist them in return for a fortune.



Fig 8. Sign for car parking depicting preparation for tourists to arrive the next day

On an occasion Arastu mentioned that people from outside come here and buy off lands from Kalash owners for commercial use. They are innocent and poor people and sell away their lands to them for money. He said that this trend has hollowed the community as land is the most valuable asset the Kalash member can hold. In this way, one is making his future generation poor. And Kalash is a local religion, which means that it is only practiced in the Kalash valleys and nowhere else. If people sell their lands to foreign elements, they would become weak as land is valuable for the Kalash community. It seems like Kalash is moving towards a collective suicide mission. Out of their innocence they sell their lands to non-local business person who construct hotels their and hire Kalash people to work there on low wages. According to Arastu, lately the authorities have banned for any non-local person to buy land in Kalash valley for commercial use. But still people find their way out. During my stay at Bumburet I witnessed a proper hotel being constructed which was owned by a non-local and whose son has married the daughter of a Kalash to whom that land belonged. Although the Land was owned by the Kalash himself yet the business running was in a partnership style.

Tourism further brings economic opportunities for local tour guides. Children as young as Twelve get hold of some tourists and tour them around the village, informing to them what they have learned from their elders inform their tourists and in return they receive a good fortune. Sometimes foreign travelers are very generous and pay the tour guides in dollars.

Ashfaq Ahmed, a local tour guide insisted that tourism has made Kalash feel about themselves as if they are trapped in zoo. People from all around the world come to see Kalash as if they are subjects of study and this make them feel belittle. They need their privacy. This is one reason why Kalash feel shy and sometimes are annoyed and irritated with the world seeing them as their amusement subjects. They feel like that they are being placed in a corner. NGOs are in a mission to contain Kalash. They have rights to go out, wear better clothes. He further said that why is it you want Kalash to remain this way. Tourist come and shoot their life styles and this truly hit their conscience and they become dishearten with their own religion. Hence, this becomes a reason for conversion.

5.4.3 Carpenters

The moment you enter the first village of Bumburet, you witness the odor of freshly cut Juniper woods. Sounds of machines and saw dust around wood workshops projects an idea about local economic activity. Yet again one can relate this activity with the available environmental elements. Juniper trees are abundant in the area and are utilized by the local people who are allowed by the government to use wood in a controlled way as all the forest land is owned by the Government.

5.4.4 Women handmade crafts

Women of Kalash are the only women who are seen involved in economic activity in the area. Other than the muslim women who are rarely seen outside their houses, Kalash women are categorized as bold and independent comparatively. One can observe a woman

of Kalash sitting at some utility stores and various souvenir shops, where they sell locally made ornaments like traditional caps and necklaces.

5.5 Education and its effects upon conversion

Kalash are more educated than they have been in their past. Parents want their children to receive optimal and standard education for their brighter future. The trend is spreading fast. Children mostly move to Chitral for their secondary education and are now filling up spaces in renowned universities of Pakistan. Few of them have also gone abroad for their studies.

Some religious NGOs are working to offer scholarships for economically weak students. I was told by a respondent that there is this Japanese Christian NGO who is residing in Peshawar and many of the Kalash people are targeted for free higher education on the cost of their faith. And so far, they have been quite successful to achieve their objective. Not only this but few Kalash families are directly cooperating with this NGO. This information signifies the lack of interest in the religion by such families, and highlights the gradual deterioration of original religious values.



Fig 9. Kalasha Dur complex at Brun Village

Education brings an exposure of the outside world where Kalash are continuously interacting now a days. Their experience with the outside world makes them more prone to accept foreign values, traditions, practices and ultimately religion. According to Badsha a BBA student who lives in Lahore is worried about this situation. He narrated that

“I have gone to Lahore for education purposes to groom myself. People there are smart. Our people are innocent here, very raw. Here we are united and affectionate, but in cities it’s not like that.”

My visit to the local secondary schools for both male and female provided me with some information which was satisfying over the issue of forceful indoctrination of Kalash youth as discussed in literature review. There were indeed few incidents which were alarming and were immediately taken care of. Imran Kabir stated that

“In our Government schools I have raised this issue many times. I went even to the police station. Kids must not be subliminally taught other religions about God and targeted as a minority with intent to convert. Kids are mocked passively in the schools by saying that we don’t have any foundations, books, no evidence, who are you, where are you going, who taught you this religion? Means that they do soft criticism upon Kalashi kids because kids don’t know what’s best for them. Over this reason I have been quarreling at police station over this issue. This thing has appeared on record. They used to directly call me Kafir. It is easy to criticize kids. Teachers think that it’s their ethical duty and God will ask them why you didn’t preach. My own cousin told me that we are being taken under oath that they will listen to what teachers are telling them. The next day I went to the police station and complained about this activity. I used to teach myself in this school. I have been a freelance teacher always. Not even in Bumburet but also in cities. The admin began to quarrel, as I was trying to object certain things. If they don’t want me to come in this Government school, I won’t come. We also ran a private school, Kalasha dur, even that was conspired by government teachers and other institutions to shut down.”

This contention presented by Imran Kabir is valid, and I agreed to his worries of weak minded Kalash kids to learn about Islam. Firstly, this is not the case for Kalash community alone. Everywhere in Pakistan kids of all faiths study Islamic studies. Yet I believe in order to preserve Kalash community, it is important to take a step to carve out a proper syllabus for Kalash religion itself. But this seems a fantasy so far. Kalasha Dur is a Greek NGO complex in Brun village. It has a museum that preserves many Kalash artifacts and its cultural life styles. There is a lot of work done upon scripting the Kalash language as well. The institution of Kalasha Dur was constructed after Kalasha people demand to preserve their tradition which they could see that it was going to disappear. Two NGOs were co-operated for construction of the building, ‘the Greek Volunteers’ and the ‘Kalasha people welfare society.’ The whole project was funded by the HELLENIC AID of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was constructed in the year 2004.

I happened to teach voluntarily in this school for three months. This was initially meant to be a secondary school that would teach Kalash students. But because of lack of funding the school came to halt and only primary education till grade five is being offered so far. This was indeed a great effort on part of NGOs to preserve Kalash but as Imran Kabir himself mentioned that they were biased in teaching. The Greek volunteers had introduced the Greek Pantheon (hierarchy of Gods) in their religious curriculum. It was because they misunderstood the origins of Kalash as from the army of Alexander. Imran narrated that

“This school is teaching us a Greek Pantheon rather our Pantheon. That is even more dangerous. Even children from this Kalasha Dur school got converted. Rather than teaching them about themselves, they are being taught about some other people.”

If the students of this school are not sticking with their religion, then this school is merely a failed effort to achieve the required preservation objective.

Imran Kabir highlighted a very important point about Kalash children being educated religiously. Or the initiation ceremony of kids during December festival when children become formally the part of Kalash.

“According to Kalash religion one cannot tell to kids about God. This manhood ceremony in Kalasha religion, traditionally should be in the age of 13 to 14 years. This ceremony or ritual signifies that the kid begins to participate in religious activities. He listens and sees and self-learn on later stages of life.”

Many of the concerned Kalash members have told to me about this soft preaching at schools. The claim that children are quite young to understand what is best for them when they are at their school level. Asmet Ali, a concerned Kalashi and a student of psychology stated that

“People in young age are influenced by the educational system, where passively teachers convey their message as if preaching them. They make kids fearful. Moreover they read Islamic books and Arabic. Some maulvi teachers produce fear in kids sometimes that they will be thrown in hell. Our religion doesn't have any books to refer to, we learn from our parents only. Kids are immature and hence convert to other religions. Whoever is converting its very secretive. Another reason is that as Kalash people are poor, they marry off their girls to Muslim families in return for a heavy amount of Dowry.”

Arastu had a same contention and stated that

“Mind wash in schools. It is not interest or bankruptcy which makes them convert. Conversion is practiced mostly under 18. Kid is not matured. In cities until 18years a kid is kid. At this age where does Kalasha kids learn what religion is good for them. School is a sensitive spot. It is compulsory to take class of Islamiyat and give vivas. Not even Islamic studies teacher but every other teacher influences the minds of the Kalsha students. Teachers think that its their ethical duty to preach Islam passively. This makes many students vulnerable, and most of them convert ultimately. The Islamic preachers

once came to schools preaching about Islam, after that the preaching was banned in this area. The solution for this problem is Kalash personal law. I believe that people who are converting is like helping to filter unwanted members of the community, who are weak links and are naturally filtered from our religion.”

5.6 Funeral practices

One of the strangest cultural practice that I happened to witness was during the funeral of a Kalash member. It is indeed an exotic experience and certainly a common man will find him/herself in a cultural shock. This is an excuse for a community gathering, feasts and an element of joy is also discerned amidst grief and sorrow. The dead body is placed in ‘Jastakhan’ a Kalash holy temple which is built in every village. Members from all the three valleys pour to the village of the demised member and initiate their ritual dance around the dead body. Kalash define this dance as not symbolic to joy but a sorrowful farewell. Drums in the background, swirling around the dead body with clutching and releasing of fists with raised arms symbolizes the life and death. For a non-local on-looker this activity casts a mystifying effect on their minds and they receive an exotic experience of their life time.



Fig 10. Kalash dance at a funeral

Qazis, or priests, who subsequently keep on coming from around the villages initiates a sermon pitching in the direction of the deceased and his ancestor's good deeds. Music and dancing stops for a while, and every-body listens to the priest quietly. The moment he is done, rolling of the drums begins again and people again starts dancing around the dead body. Until the next group from another village led by another priest arrives and the whole sequence begins again. Gun fires are shot in the honor of the dead one. Most of these activities are in the honor of the male demise.

Some Muslim members are offended by this activity. They think that it is disrespectful to dance around a dead body both ethically and religiously. Practices like these certainly make the vulnerable minds to change their religion. One such example is of Yousef, who was a convert and shared his story with me about his conversion. During my interview with him, he stated that

“But I have never contributed for funeral, as they drink and dance around the dead body which is a mockery. They further debate around the dead body narrating the attributes of the dead one and praising him. As all Praise belongs to Allah.”

It is a problem when it comes to serve the guests in huge numbers. A lot of money is required for this purpose. Earlier it was the duty of the demised household itself to pamper the guests. This became very exhaustive exercise for poor families, and is also one reason told to me by one of my respondent, Feroz shah for conversion. He said

“Funerals have been very expensive for Kalash in history. This had been a major reason in the past for the conversion. But now the trend has changed considering the economic situation of the most tribal members. Now the affluent factions of the village contribute in the funeral expenditures.”

Still some of my respondents stated that mostly people help in perks. Which does not help the poor family the way it is required to nullify at least one reason of conversion. People think about this before they die and mostly convert at an old age for Islam offers a modest funeral and only close family of Kalash then attends the funeral and not the whole community.

5.7 Women as a subordinate or a Privileged Social group

Women as a social group of Kalash community offers an identity based projection to the onlookers from other societies. They enormously contribute to the Kalash’s cultural value. Not considering the women of Kalash would make Kalash tedious or monotonous. They are dominantly responsible for the inflow of tourism and are practically the center of attraction for the worldwide tourists. The colors they cast upon the visitors truly leaves an exotic and transformational experience.

Kalasha women dress foremost impacts the ability of the community to associate itself with a certain identity. It plays an important role religiously as well as they are not

permitted to wear anything else once in the valley. Huge black drape loosely stitched is worked upon with colorful threaded embroidery from bottom of the frock and sleeves. It is then worn with a colorful belt that fits the frock and makes it easy to carry around. In addition to this, women are required to wear their hats 'Shushat', tail ended ring shaped hats all the time, except when they are sleeping. On special occasion, they wear over this an additional covering called 'Kupas'. Both the head gears are fancy and filled with embroidery with sea shells and other decorative pieces. They call it as the crown of Kalash, as one girl responded when asked about its significance.



Fig 11. A young Kalash girl wearing her head Gear

Women are found working at utility shops, police stations and own souvenir shops for themselves. Regardless of this vivid women attire and an overwhelming liberty compared

to the local muslim women Kalasha females unknowingly face suppression. They are at liberty to take divorce and run away with someone else if not satisfied with husband's behavior. But there exist certain hidden articulations that exclusively imply on women of Kalash concluding their subordination.

These are not mere observations, but this has been testified to me by the members of Kalash themselves on various occasions. Before jumping into interviews discussions, I would like to hereby brief some hectic routines women in my opinion face.

5.7.1 Washing hair

Women are not allowed to wash their hair at homes. They keep them knitted together in form of beads as per requirement of their religion. Women hair fall is considered impure in Kalasha religiosity which might cause harm and bring bad luck to the family. Whereas, males are not bound by this provision. Every other day women from villages come down by the stream to wash their hair with the cold water coming directly from the glaciers in order to swipe the fallen hair and redo their beads. Even they are not allowed to wash their clothes in homes and they take their dirty clothes along with them and wash them by the stream. During winters this process become more severe and troublesome because of the snow and cold weather.

Some household says that they no longer practice this activity. They wash their hair in their homes. But does not this mean they are not adhering to their religion's commandments? This again directs towards the idea of Kalasha religious values being compromised and making them weak. If no original values are maintained Kalasha community will keep on losing its grounds and ultimately disappear.

5.7.2 Bashalini

Bashalini is a place also called seclusion home, fixed for only Kalasha women catering during their Menstruation cycle and Pregnancy. Women with her periods, if stays home

might bring any tragedy upon the village like Rocks falling over the village. This seclusion home is constructed outside the village and women stays there for the period of her cycle is complete. She is not allowed to enter the village, but can roam around outside the village. Nobody is supposed to touch her or even the walls of the seclusion house. Things are thrown towards girls who are in the house if they need anything, mere touching them can cause a disaster or bad luck of any kind in near future. This is indeed taken very seriously and in my opinion, is the most important and highlighting feature of Kalasha religion, depicting the idea of 'Onjeshta' and 'Pragata' which means pure and impure. Kalash religion is surrounded by these two ideal features. I was told by Ishfaq Ahemed that

“Whole of Kalash is stuck in these two features. This is the main feature, pure and impure. These two concepts are involves in many areas of Kalasha life. In homes there is a place where women is not allowed to go. IN HOME, I mean there is this Jastak a praying spot, there are many alters or praying sites above hills where women cannot go. And Bashali center because of its impure nature, men are not allowed to go. Women don't eat honey and meat cultivated in their own homes. Everything ends and begins in Kalash with pure and impure.”



Fig 12. Kalasha woman resting in Bashalini

Later I asked Ashfaq Ahmed that with the foundations of Onjesta and Pragata, a certain rhetoric emerges which directs towards the conclusion that Kalash is a male dominant society and women are the subordinates?

“Yes. So far it is a male dominant society, we can say. There is this irony or contradiction that people believe women are free here and all but in many conditions, there are various restrictions upon women.”

At an occasion when I was interviewing with Yousuf his arguments testified my contentions that Kalasha religion revolves mostly around the regulating the women. Whereas men appear to be superior and pure ones and are independent of most of the boundaries drawn by the Kalash religion. He narrated:

“Their religion enforced all around women. Whereas, men have no extreme rules to follow. For instance, look they wear this huge cloth all the time, and keep hanging these

necklaces all the time which might weigh at least 10 Kgs. You have to wear these all the time. The cloak that they wear is like 10 to 15 Kgs as well. Do you understand? Other than this one cannot wear any sort of dress which is light in weight. During pregnancy women is supposed to spend their time in Bashalini with non-relatives who cannot affectionately help the pregnant women as the relatives would. Women cannot eat meat and honey of their own house. She can eat it from other places like markets or Muslim members, but not from their own house.”

According to some Kalasha members, Bashalini offers a women 5 days rest period after all the monthly chores she has made. But conception of separating them completely from the community does not make sense, they can remain in the house and continue with less hard work. As women in Bashali also are never free, they keep on doing some knitting and crafting. This is what Imran Kabir had to say:

“During special days of women, we prefer that women must rest during this period, but the world is changing and saying that no everything can be done. In any situation, you can do anything. Kalash women during their time in Bashalini, are not prisoners they can go out other than the village. Main reason for women is not that they have tough time in Kalasha religion, rather its because they are employees, more than a dozen were recruited in police, most of them converted. Maybe they had shown more love to them, or could have practiced Police Garddi/Towpi”

5.7.3 Inheritance laws

Last but not the least, the most disturbing cultural trait that I found which acknowledged women as a suppressed social group was when I found out that women have no share in property inheritance. Some members stated that there are certain cases where women receive the sole ownership but generally the trend is against women. This trait has a potential to develop into another reason for conversion of women, who might look forward for their future generation. Ashfaq Ahmed said that

“Females are not given a share in property. But all her life she is cared for economically. At her marriage, she is given Dowry and other stuff like cooking utensils and even she has a share from the goat herd. But a share in property is not given at all. One reason to convert is this lack of property rights. Whereas, Islam has a law for property inheritance by women of Kalash. They are forced not to possess a land for themselves. There is a mixture of reason and all these built up to make women convert.”

5.8 Case studies of Sher Ahmed, Yusuf, Rina and Imran Kabir’s Grandfather who converted to Islam

5.8.1 Yusuf and Sher Ahmed

The most interesting case of conversion that I found was of Yusuf. He got converted because of reasons that are based on the disliking of some cultural behavior of Kalash Individuals. Before jumping into his story, I would like to brief the emotional status of Sher Ahmed, who is younger brother of Yusuf. His remarks regarding his community depicted disappointment and he was fed up of the direction they were leading to. He was saddened by the fact that Kalash used to be a community of great family values but now face degradation and will ultimately result in full scale conversion. During his interview, he remained emotionally charged.

“I’m fed up of the emerging values of Kalash. Just go into the village, you won’t see any men of the village. They stand out here on the street, standing idle. The male tourist come and go inside the village and are disrespecting the decorum. They lie down and keep on staring at the Kalasha women and their men don’t bother to this. Is this a way? What are the tourist doing? Why don’t they go and watch the cultural places? What is the purpose to relax amidst women of the village? Watch Jastakhan, graveyards. How will these things be rectified? Men are totally disengaged from this ethical breaching by the tourists. I have personally tried to rectify this, but it’s impossible. Tourists come here for the purpose of entertainment. They drink local alcohol and wants to see Kalash women perform dance. And they do for few currency notes. I don’t like this where

Kalasha religion is heading towards. Kalash has made it a business. Some Kalash families invite tourists to their homes and give them alcohol to drink served by their women, which is shameful indeed. And this is enhancing. Kalash women are being abused. People are not bad here but have adopted bad habits.”

These remarks by Sher Ahmed show truly an alarming situation. This is related to tourism. He stated that People, to earn money are going to extremes. ‘Tarah’ the locally brewed alcohol he said is spoiling the Kalasha values, making them weak. Tarah is not a cultural beverage. Wine is our cultural beverage, which carries a little intoxication compared to Tarah. Its brewing mechanism was introduced by a foreigner and since then people are trying to establish this for business purposes. Tourists come here and demand for this and this is become a norm which is dangerous. Although it is good for the Kalasha economy but not at the expense of Kalasha honor and dignity.

Same type of story implies for the reasons for conversion of his elder brother Yusuf. He was a man who believed in modesty. At the age of 14 he did not like his wife to go around attending private tourist parties where they intoxicated themselves and were entertained with Kalasha women dance in the name of cultural projection. Yusuf was offended by this activity her wife took part in and objected her behavior. His father would snub him that Kalash is a liberal religion, we can do anything we want. He felt that this is not the religion that he wants if this is the case and converted to Islam and divorced her Kalasha wife and life.



Fig 13. Yusuf while giving me his interview

“I married from Rumbur valley. I brought her to Bumburet. When these dancing festivities at private gatherings began, I stopped her to avoid this activity. Our relation got intense. I did not like her taking money for dancing. This quite common now. Just pay anyone few thousand rupees and he will provide you with dancing Kalash women. I got fed up when I retaliated and no one listen to me. Hence, I converted to Islam. I could not control my wife. “I converted in the age of 14. There are certain disturbing things that I find in Kalash religion. Like at funeral, they dance. Some times in summer season the dead body inflates and burst open. They also worshiped statues which they claim are Gods. My intellect didn’t conceive this state of reality. When I got converted my community sobbed and grieved as required by community’s tradition. But afterwards we carry with our own lives, and live without any discrimination. I don’t like the culture of wine and alcohol brewing here. Living in an Islamic state it is mandatory over minorities to avoid such activities. People have vomited in masjids after drinking too much. Our homes are not safe. They drink and enter our homes at any time of the day. This is a problem for us. My reason for conversion was also related to the activities of my wife which I didn’t like. She would go and display in-front of unknown people at a special gathering in the name of culture

exhibition. I said that I don't like this. At that time we had a fight over this, I asked her why did you go there to dance in front of un known people? She replied that this is in our culture, I said I don't then consider this religion. I provided you with material needs fulfilled your requirements and you would go and dance in front of other people. This is a joke, why should my wife go and dance for strangers?"

What changes have you felt after conversion?

"I used to drink and smoke hash, after conversion I had left it all. Cleanliness is one thing which I believe is better within Muslim communities here, as Islam preaches Cleanliness is half of faith. We Muslims have cleaner life style than Kalash. If you see any kalash whose household is clean they have actually learned it from Muslims, they go out and see the general norms of cleanliness and then adopt it as a requirement. Otherwise they don't have any particular command in their religion which entertains cleanliness."

5.8.2 Rina and her story of conversion

"When they used to teach us Quran, it truly happened to resonate with me. For this reason, I converted. At schools we were taught Quran. I always liked the Quranic verses, and used read it when I was a Kalash. Other than this I have no other reason. Kalash has no book of their own. No one has forced me to do this. I always looked forward to Islam since I was a child. But people don't let children to convert to Islam, hence I had to wait for a while. I went to Mudrassa to convert to Islam. My parents supported me. My thought process was totally changed after I spent two months in the Madrassa at Ayuon. I'm married in Peshawar now, and I no more attend any Kalasha festivity. I did not like the way every Kalash would behave when they would enter the homes of other Kalash. They enter without permission and this is unethical."

Conversion of Rina was quite a controversial incident. She said the day she got converted, her parents came to her in Madrassa and asked whether she converted on her own will? She said she did and her parents were happy with her decision and did not create an issue.

But when she returned to her place, she innocently wore back her Kalash dress. Muslims who saw her that day got enraged and started throwing stones at her house. They claimed that convert to Islam is not a joke, one moment you are a muslim and the other you are not. Rina's case caught a huge media attention and she has pronounced on media directly that nobody has forced her to convert and that it was her mistake to wear Kalash dress after conversion and a misunderstanding.

5.8.3 Imran Kabir's story his grandfather's conversion and his views why people convert

Do you have any relatives who got converted to Islam? And why?

“My dada and dadi were converts. They raised me as my dad had passed away, when I was only 2 months old. My mother had remarried. Other than this my Phuphi is a Muslim, my Taya and few of my cousins are Muslims. At that time there was a quarrel in our family, my Taya jee was beaten a lot and got injured, he remained unconscious for more than two months. Then he was hospitalized. My dada and father was in Jail as they were also involved. My dada jee in Jail sort of did a votive offering, that if my son comes to his conscience then I will convert to a Muslim. Then after few days my Taya got to his conscience and hence my dada accepted Islam as hi religion.”

Why do Kalashi Convert?

*“First reason is that Kalash themselves don't know about themselves. Kalash is disintegrating in a dangerous manner. Moving into different directions. Some people want to marry off to Hindus, other to Persis and Greeks. When a person doesn't know himself (**Identity crisis**) then he can be anything. Or when human becomes **materialistic**, as Guru Nanak once said that greed for materials makes man blind, those people who will keep on fighting over material resources, grab upon it will fall into a black hole and live in hell for eternity. All parents make their children learn the thought process of their religion, what does their religion say. There is no system of preaching Kalash Religion. Neither at*

communal level nor in families. No father tells his son what their religion wants. People tend to blame our religion as the reason for our underdevelopment, thus even Christians and Parsi come here to preach their religion. Moreover Kalash religion its self is ambiguous. When people ask me that do you have any book, I tell them that they are being published continuously. More material over Kalash on social media is causing Kalash religion to become more ambiguous. But these are not our people writing books upon us, God sends guidance via people. (Sarcastic remark), they write and we also read it if we have time. People write and say different things about us makes Kalash more skeptical and ambiguous. Those Kalashi who don't have mind to think they will go astray. Those who look for leisure and easiness in life cannot carry the religion. Kalash is a difficult religion. In all these advance religions, the relation of God and mankind has become soft. You do any sin then beg for repentance during meditation, and you are pure once again. But not in Kalash. Whatever you sin you commit, you have to gather around people. You must admit in-front of them also that you have committed a sin and a sacrifice. For a small forgiveness, you must pay huge. This consumes time, economics and more over sin of that person are no more behind a curtain. Hence Kalash religion is difficult to handle. For instance, in case of adultery, the process of purification requires 7 animal sacrifices. Either one cow or 7 small animals. Their meat will even not be eaten. Either you will bury them or throw it in the river. Man needs to confess his sins in-front of an audience. All these things later make life difficult in future.”

5.9 Obscene language used in some festive songs

Most of Kalash festive songs, at Chowmas festival of December in particular, comprise of foul language. At the event there is a song competition between males and females in which they celebrate in a language which highlights a mockery over women body parts. The songs are sung directly towards each other openly. Kalash community members claim that it is just for the sake of fun and no personal attacks are made. It was quite shocking for me when I was provided with this information. Surrounded by a community that regards ethics, morals and modesty and chastity of women makes Kalash far behind the index of civility. Children present around are learning these norms. In a civilized western

states parents tend to avoid children from speaking such language and is termed as cursed words. The community of Kalash has no method to censor this, rather it is a practice that is adopted from a long time. I'm not here trying to be judgmental yet these practices cause Kalash members themselves to become dishearten and compile up to the reasons of conversion.

Sher Ahmed a Kalash himself does not like this activity. He says that he has often tried to get into a fight with those who carry out this uncivil practice. He said that

*“they sing shameful songs pointing at their fellow female members of the community in a form of group which might include their Mothers and sisters as well. Phrases like ‘Your sister has a big *’ makes me furious. I mean where has our family values disappeared to. Our forefathers have never written such songs. They always wrote about the heroic activities of our ancestors, but now a days this is what Kalash people are giving value to.”*

5.10 Preservation Endeavors by Kalash community

Government is not playing any distinct role in preserving the Kalash religion. NGOs work is not effective according to the infamous tour guide of Bumburet Ashfaq Ahmed. He said that if an effective role is to be played by any institute then it is the Government of Pakistan itself.

I was unable to decipher any form of preservation endeavors. The Kalasha Dur complex is running low on budget and is unable to maintain any sort of sustainable effort of preservation of language or culture in broader sense. In contrast, NGOs are rather paying some Muslim families who recently converted to raise their kids as Kalash. They transfer \$500 per child to their accounts every month. This is totally an unnatural way to stop people from converting. It makes the organic process of conversion interrupted. Just for

the sake of money families raise their Children as Kalash. This method adopted is not fair in my opinion and not effective as well. This is what Imran Kabir had to say about preservation:

*“Kalash community doesn’t do anything to preserve this culture. This school is teaching us a Greek Pantheon rather our Pantheon. That is even more dangerous. Even children from this Kalasha school got converted. Rather than teaching them about themselves, they are being taught about some other people. **Kalash are salves of money.** Nothing can be done. They are less in number, I know this for sure that if they are of total like 4000 people, within next ten years half of us will remain. Kalash are mostly responsible themselves for conversion.”*

At Chowmas festival some songs use foul language.

“There is indeed a dirty language song competition between men and women. It’s not a personal attack but rather a community fun, where everyone participates.”

How does Kalash people identify themselves? Main features of Kalash religion.

What is it that you like about Kalash?

“Their unity is remarkable. No matter what personal issues anyone has, but at a micro level it seems that they are strongly bonded and everyone knows everyone else. What we see is that they are extremely lovable with each other. Muslims don’t have this attribute. Although Islam emphasis upon this, but we don’t practice this anymore.”

6 Discussion and Analysis

Beliefs and dogmas are a part of human conscience and their identity. People of a community other than mundane or cultural expressions are identified by what they

perceive about the world around them. Culture must not be mixed with beliefs. According to E.B Tylor *“is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society.”*

What I have experienced is that there is this mundane culture and then there is this imaginative culture for lack of a term. Culture means cultivation and applying that upon ones' daily life to meet up with necessities. Muslims of the Valley almost eat everything similar with Kalash. Their houses are constructed from same elements. But the difference is between their belief systems.

So far what I have attributed to the reasons of conversion is majorly associated with the factor of majority Islamic Influence surrounding the Kalash community. This is known as a process of diffusion or acculturation. **Acculturation** is a process of social, psychological, and cultural change that stems from the balancing of two cultures while adapting to the prevailing culture of the society. Acculturation is a process in which an individual adopts, acquires and adjusts to a new cultural environment. Individuals of a differing culture try to incorporate themselves into the new more prevalent culture by participating in aspects of the more prevalent culture, such as their traditions, but still hold onto their original cultural values and traditions.

Kalash is a lost tribe. The inhabitants themselves are unaware of their roots and keep on carving out stories about their origins. This make them weak in retrospective context. And therefore, become vulnerable and exposed to cultures or communities that are quite well grounded in their history.

They do not possess any sort of scripture which is helpful in sustaining the religion. It is evident that religions who poses a scripture are in huge numbers. If only we take example of the Abrahamic religions whether it be Islam, Judaism or Christianity they persist. Even the Vedas carry a potential to keep intact the Hindu religion.

Kalash is a poor community. Not being economically sound sometimes make people to switch their faiths as it may offer them with better financial status. For instance, Women who seek forward to better their economic status and life style marry off to a Muslim and convert her religion.

7 Summary and conclusion

7.1 Summary

Kalash is a colorful tribe that resides in three gorges of Hindu Kush mountain Range. People from all around the world come visit this place out of curiosity. They comprise of almost only 4000 members. This is an alarming situation as the numbers are further falling. They are mostly influenced by the majority Muslim population in the vicinity. I had to face various barriers to start up with my thesis. From acquisition of NOC from district office Chitral to getting my reputé set up for an in-depth assessment of the community. My topic was quite sensitive. It carried research dimension that had ethical breaching as well. Asking people about why they consider to switch their belief system is not an ethical question. But still I managed to develop a significant rapport and extracted enough information. My methodology of investigation was simple. As it was an extended period of research in the field, I relied on observation and field notes and quite often participated as well in their daily life activities. Interviews were my main method. I also used voice recording and video recording equipment. Kalash culture has an ambiguous history. Historically weak communities are not able to survive that long. Women are more prone to convert as they are beautiful and Muslims who come to visit propose them and they in turn wanting to improve their economic status convert their religion and get married to him. Kalash kinship makes up a good mix of both the religions. A single household may carry two Kalash brothers and one Muslim brother. An interesting blend of both the communities develop which causes to further convert the remaining members of the family as well which can be termed as soft influence. Kalash religion is a paganist religion. It means they worship multiple gods. Yet they claim that they worship one God through angel like deities. This status remains ambiguous. Tourism is the main source of

income for the Kalash. Yet this comes with a price that they must pay obliviously in form of conversion. Education also plays an important role in converting the Kalash. Kalash students in Government schools are not forcefully rather compulsorily have to interact with Islamic beliefs, which later in life might inspire them. Moreover, there is this passive attitude of teachers to preach Kalash students about Islam. Women of Kalash, who apparently are liberal, yet in many of the practices remain suppressed. For example, they are not allowed to inherit property. This also motivates them to convert to Islam. Case studies of Yusuf and Rina explains a lot about the ground reasons of their conversion. Yusuf was fed up of the values that his community was adopting with the inflow of tourism and Rina was purely inspired by the teachings of Islam, teachings which were not being satisfactorily offered by Kalash. Converts are labeled as weak links by some Kalash members. The trend of mitigation and not expansion of the community in long terms predicts its ultimate demise as stated by various Kalash members themselves.

7.2 Conclusion

Kalash has already adopted passively many cultural traits of its neighboring Muslim community. They continuously interact with the Muslims. In result, they passively and obliviously adapt to the practices of Muslims. For instance, Kalasha women going to Muslim clerics for acquiring talisman. Their religion is not regulated in contrast to the Muslims. They possess no written scripture or law book that would manage, control and modulate Kalash affairs. This requires a central authority which the Kalasha community lacks as everyone has their own opinion related to various religious dogmas. Children and most adults are ill equipped with an optimal understanding of their religion which is required to execute an impactful and cohesive form of religious expression. Tourism is turning out to be suicidal for the Kalash. Although their economic conditions get more appropriate with the tourism but the hidden effects are alarming. It is accidently swaying them to a direction of material satisfaction at the expense of their religious health. Practice of producing alcoholic beverage through distillation for personal and commercial use as introduced by a foreigner is disturbing the values of Kalash. Islamic literature at schools as an inert supplement causes them feel insufficiently equipped with their own religious

ideas. Uncivility amidst their binary opposite makes few Kalash members feel ashamed of their practices. A continuous watchful eye by the world upon them makes them more insecure of their identity and portrays a message in their minds of being an artifact rather than a genuine culture. The major reason I came across of their conversion was their economy. Women are mostly impacted because of this short coming. Numbers matter a lot. Kalash is a small community surrounded by huge Muslim population. Passive influence from the Muslim culture initiates conversion of most of the already volatile links. Marital opportunities increase for certain unfortunate Kalash members who want to remarry or those who are disabled, if they convert.

Conversion in my opinion after what I have observed is purely organic in Kalash valleys. There is no visible or systematic form of conversion monitored by some sort of agencies. The community is steadily being absorbed into the major culture of Muslims. Lack of scripture make them oblivious of their own origins and connections with their past. Their religious low-profile status naturally crumbles under the pressure of a religion of high profile.

Imran Kabir mentioned:

“Kalash je Allah dy Hawaly hy” which means Kalash is entrusted to Gods Mercy.

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