THE KALASH POPULATION OF CHITRAL PAKISTAN: A CASE OF ISOLATION, INGENUITY, AND INTEGRITY

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ABSTRACT

The populace of Kalash in Chitral, Pakistan, also called, Black Robe and Siah Posh, dwell in the three sub-valleys of Kalash: Bumburet, Rumbor and Birir, in the modern-day District Chitral, Pakistan. Their ancestral root is the Kalasha, who were an ancient tribe of Pakistan. For centuries, they have posed their way of life, religion, language, rituals and distinct identity. Northern Pakistan hosting the Kalash is a well-preserved ethnic and cultural museum. Owing to this value, Kalasha culture has been listed by UNESCO for consideration as World Heritage Site. The Kalasha issue is unique, and the world remains in oblivion to observe the beauty of this unique tribe. Each year a handful of historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and photographers across the globe, focus on Kalasha society but, due to communication barriers, don't get acquainted with the issue. The numerical strength of the Kalasha people is about only 4,000 (as estimated in 2020). We bring to the knowledge of researchers the plight of the Kalash and, in due course, explore plausible solutions to their problems.

Keywords: Kalash, Human Rights, Isolation, Annihilation, Community Development

INTRODUCTION

Nestled at the foot of the mountain Tirich Mir (the highest peak of the Hindu Kush mountain range) lies the district of Chitral, Pakistan[i]. Somewhat isolated from the rest of Pakistan (and by extension, the global community), it remains a relatively undeveloped, picturesque region of steep mountains, pine forests and fertile valleys drained by the Kunar river[ii]. Chitral's history is rich, as it can be traced back several thousand years to the Indus Valley civilization, and it is varied for achieving fame and then infamy at different points in time. North-Western Pakistan served as the seat of the celebrated Greco-Buddhist civilization that flourished for eight hundred years, from the fourth century BCE to the fifth century CE[iii]. As for its notoriety, Chitral became infamous in the years leading up to the British Raj by serving as the region's slave trade centre[iv].

The name Chitral means 'field' in the native Khowar language and is located in present-day Pakistan's North West Frontier Province[v]. The mountainous district lies east of Afghanistan and south of the Wakhan Corridor (a narrow strip of Afghanistan that separates Chitral from present-day Tajikistan)[vi]. To its south lies the district of Swat (a region that now serves as a battleground in the war between the state-less Taliban and Pakistani government), and to its east lies the rest of Pakistan. The district of Chitral existed as a princely state under the rule of the British Raj, from the late nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century[vii]. It was ruled by Muslim rulers known as 'the Mehtars', and in 1947 the Mehtar of Chitral agreed to accede to the new state of present-day Pakistan. It wasn't until 1969 that Pakistan fully exercised its control over Chitral, and fully integrated it into its realm[viii].

Chitral is world renowned for a wide range of activities and attractions. Every year, spectators from around the world come to partake in the annual Shandur Polo Festival[ix]. A traditional polo match (i.e. few rules and no referee) is played by polo teams from the district of Gilgit (also located in Pakistan), and polo players from Chitral (home to the world's highest polo ground)[x]. The picturesque valleys and rugged mountains of the Hindu Kush Mountain range are a natural draw for avid mountaineers. Chitral lies at the base of the highest peak in the Hindu Kush Mountain range (Tirich Mir), and invariably Chitrali mountain guides and porters are hired by foreign mountain climbers. The natural scenery and annual festivals of Chitral

have always been tourist magnets, but the main attraction by far has been the Chitralis themselves.

Chitralis are ethnically and culturally diverse people that have been a source of fascination for the global community for centuries. The various ethnography of the region can be attributed to two factors: the first is a series of foreign invasions over the past millennium, and the second is the region's geographical makeup. The Persians, Greeks, Central Asians, Chinese, and Afghans are amongst the many foreigners that conquered (and sometimes settled) present-day Chitral[xi]. The mountains served as natural barriers that isolated communities, thus fostering the development of culturally and ethnically diverse populations that resided near one another[xii]. It is no wonder that a staggering number of fourteen languages are spoken in Chitral (ten of them being indigenous)[xiii]. According to the Norwegian linguist Georg Morgenstierne, Chitral is 'the area of the greatest linguistic diversity in the world'[xiv].

PROBLEM DEFINITION

In recent years, the former princely state has become a mini-Mecca for anthropologists who seek to study centuries-old indigenous cultures and religions. The Persians are amongst the many foreign invaders whose influence is still felt in present-day Chitral. The Persian Achaemenian dynasty stretched its empire into Chitral around 400 B.C.[xv], and ruled Chitral till it was routed from Central Asia by Alexander the Great[xvi]. It is said that Alexander the Great praised the people of the Hindu Kush as it took him two years to defeat them and only six months to conquer the Persians[xvii]. In present-day Chitral, the Persian influence is manifested in the native language Khowar (which is heavily influenced by Farsi) and the celebration of the festival Norouz (which marks the first day of the Persian calendar)[xviii]. Zoroastrian influences from the Achaemenian dynasty are apparent in cases where the dead are not buried and are left 'as is' in caves, or in the hollow of trees[xix].

The Mauryan king Chandragupta from the Magadha kingdom (the provinces Bihar, eastern Utter-Pradesh, and Bengal of present-day India) was able to wrest the Hindu Kush from

Macedonian control, and it was during the reign of the Mauryan dynasty that Buddhism put down roots in the region. Chandragupta, himself was an adherent of the religion Jainism. Still, his grandson Ashoka was a Buddhist who embraced the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama and introduced his kingdom to the Buddha's teachings[xx]. Buddhism flourished in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), of Pakistan when it was ruled by the Kushan dynasty. The Kushans were Central Asians who ruled the northern regions of Pakistan in the first to third centuries C.E[xxi]. The most notable Kushan ruler Kanishka, was a Buddhist who was credited for having Buddhist scriptures written in Prakrit translated into Sanskrit[xxii]. The Kashan people were either Zoroastrian or Buddhist in faith, and their culture was Hellenized to a great degree[xxiii].

A unique Greco-Buddhist culture flourished in regions ruled by the Kushan kings, and Mahayana Buddhism is said to have been the result of this cultural fusion[xxiv]. The decline of the Kushan dynasty resulted in the Persians encroaching on Kushan territory and acquiring some of their lands[xxv]. In the fifth century C.E., the Kushan rule was brought to a conclusive end by the Hephthalites (also known as the White Huns)[xxvi].

A people known as 'The Kalash' from present-day Afghanistan arrived in Chitral in the second century B.C., and ended up ruling a sizeable region of southern Chitral by the tenth century A.D[xxvii]. The Kalash were polytheistic animists, and their culture dated back to 3000 B.C[xxviii]. The Kalash rule and religion flourished in the Chitral region until 1320 A.D., when Shah Nadir Rais (a Muslim), supplanted the Kalash kings in Southern Chitral[xxix].

Islam had first arrived in the Indo-Pak subcontinent in the eighth century A.D., and it became the dominant religion in Chitral once the latter was conquered by Shah Nadir Rais. The Kalash culture and religion were marginalized, and the number of adherents to the Kalash religion dwindled as village upon village (present-day Drosh, Sweer, Kalkatuk, Beori, Ashurate, Shishi, Jinjirate), accepted Islam[xxx].

The adherents of the Kalash religion came to be known as the 'Kafir Kalash', and their 'cousins' in neighbouring Afghanistan came to be known as the 'Red Kafirs' of Kafiristan. The Red Kafirs and the Kafir Kalash were animists, and their belief systems were practically the same. By the late nineteenth century, the British effectively ruled what is now present-day

Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, and the region was collectively known as the British Raj. A border known as the Durrand line was agreed upon by the Afghans and the British[xxxi], and soon after it was accepted as a boundary between present-day Afghanistan and the British Raj, the Afghan Emir Abdur Rahman Khan brought the region of Kafiristan under Muslim control[xxxii]. The Red Kafirs were converted to Islam, and the land of Kafiristan (the land of Kafirs), was renamed Nuristan (the land of Light)[xxxiii]. The Kalash animists, known as the Kafir Kalash in present-day Pakistan, held onto their culture, religion, and language, and to this day, there are followers of the Kalash religion living in present-day Chitral, Pakistan[xxxiv].

It is this group of some three thousand individuals that have been a source of fascination for historians and anthropologists alike. An indigenous religion and culture that still exists in a region that is overwhelmingly Muslim is an unusual phenomenon indeed. When westerners discovered the existence of the 'Red Kafirs' and the Kafir Kalash of Chitral, they were amazed and intrigued. Some tried to gather information for the sake of academia[xxxv], others wanted to save the souls of the 'primitive pagans', and often, the colonizers sought to gage how the Kafirs might be used as allies against the native Muslim population.

A Rev W. Handcock's letter to London's 'The Times' in 1878 states,"...Sir, when living in Peshawar it was my good fortune to meet on several occasions with natives from Kafiristan,... in the event of war, they would gladly join England against the Muslims. Afghans with whom they are in perpetual enmity. It will be a happy incident of the *contretemps* at the mouth of the Khyber Pass if it should lead to Afghanistan being thrown open to Europeans; for then there would be some hope, not only of Christianizing and civilizing the brave though half-savage, Afghans, but also those interesting tribes living in countries on its frontier, like Kafiristan, from which we are now shut out..."[xxxvi].

Significance of the Kalash cult:

One point that was agreed upon was that not much was known about these pagans. William Crooke wrote in his book titled 'Natives of Northern India' in 1907 that, 'To the north of the Peshawar valley lies a region yet imperfectly explored. It is a paradise to the ethnologist, the one part of the borderland where important discoveries will certainly be made when the fierce tribes which now occupy it have been reduced to order. It contains extensive Buddhist remains

which will throw light on the early history of that faith. Of the Kafirs... among whom some survivals of Greek culture have been recognized, we possess, despite the researchers of Dr. Leitner and Sir George Scott Robertson, only imperfect knowledge.'[xxxvii] To the world that lay beyond the valleys of the Hindu Kush, the pagans of Kafiristan and Chitral seemed to have been overlooked by time and civilization. Their culture and religion were unique and mysterious, and lack of information led to the romanticization of these indigenous peoples. Local folklore claimed that the animists were descendants of the soldiers of Alexander the Great when the latter extended his empire into India. Such claims added to their mystique and the animists figured in novels such as Rudyard Kipling's 'The Man who would be King'[xxxviii], and in M.M. Kaye's, epic work 'The Far Pavillions'[xxxix]. In Kipling's 'The Man who would be King', the Red Kafirs (of what is now Nuristan, Afghanistan) are natives who accept the kingship of two British adventurers in the days of the Raj, after it is deemed that one of them is a deity as well as a descendant of Alexander the Great. There were actual occurrences of foreigners who had tried living amongst the pagans of Kafiristan during the days of the British Raj. One such case came to an unfortunate end when two westerners (who were thought to be missionaries) were either killed because they were suspected of being possessed by evil spirits, or according to another version, they were held as captives by the native population and had died in captivity[xl]. Recent attempts to live with the animists have been more successful and have gone a long way in demystifying their culture and religion. In modern times, a British woman Maureen Lines was granted Pakistani citizenship in 2004 after having lived with the Kalash of Chitral for almost twenty years[xli]. Ms. Lines, a social worker who is known as 'Bibi Dow' to the local population, is well respected by the Kalash of Chitral and has written books titled, 'The Kafir Kalash of the Hindukush' and 'Road to Jalalabad'[xlii].

The historical crux of the Kalash:

During and since the days of the British Raj, the Kalash of Chitral have been a hot topic for research for anthropologists, historians, and scientists (specifical geneticists) alike. Their way of life, language, culture and ancestry has been extensively documented, and one would agree with A.S. Ahmed when he writes, 'There has been, perhaps, more speculation on, and fascination with the Kafirs, than with any other race in Central and South Asia'[xliii]. The research topics have ranged from the style of Kalash dresses and textile design[xliv] to tracing the genetic origin of these people [xlv]. Most anthropologists focus on the Kalash religion, culture

and language. At present, one will invariably come across a few foreigners living amongst the Kalash, whose goal is to document and preserve culture and religion that may not survive the next half-century.

It has already been established that the Kalash religion is a polytheistic, pagan faith, and having expounded on the various factions that once ruled Chitral (the present home of the Pakistani Kalash), the jump to establish similarities between the Kalash religion and the religions of the pre-Zoroastrian and Vedic (Hindu) Indo-Aryans is not difficult to make. Along with Zoroastrianism and Hinduism, the Kalash religion is one of the last Indo-European religions still actively practiced today.

The Persian influence on the Kalash religion is easily discernable, as one of the main deities, the god of creation, is known as *Khodai* - a Persian term (the same deity is also known as *Dezau*)[xlvi].

One of the more prominent deities is the deity *Indr*. *Indr* is said to exist in many shapes and forms, each form representing a different characteristic and/or function. When *Indr* assumes the form of the deity *Warin,* he is said to be the mightiest and most dangerous of all the deities. When *Indr* assumes the role of *Balumain,* he is a cultural hero. It is *Balumain* who is credited for teaching the Kalash how to celebrate their winter festival *Chaumos,* and he is said to visit the Kalash valleys at the time of the winter solstice riding on a horse. Interesting trivia relating to *Indr* include the Kalash belief that when it thunders, *Indr* plays polo, and that the Kalash refer to rainbows as '*Indr's* bows'. *Indr* also has a counterpart *Jestan* who is an enemy to the gods and appears on earth in the shape of a dog. Shooting stars are believed to be the stones cast by the gods at *Jestan*[xlvii].

Another parallel between Vedic and Kalash mythologies is the belief in a deity known as *Munjem Malik* (middle king), who is said to have committed patricide. In Vedic cosmology, the Vedia *Indra* also killed his father. Other deities include *Mahandeo* who is the god of crops and war, and the one who negotiates with the highest deity. *Jestak* is the goddess of all things pertaining to domesticity, i.e. marriage and family life. Another goddess is the

sister of the deity *Dezau*, the goddess *Dezalik*. *Dezalik* is said to be the goddess of the hearth and life-force and the protector of women and children[xlviii].

AN OBLIVIOUS CULT PRACTICE

In short, the Kalash religion is an animistic faith based on worshipping twelve deities. It is characterized by a worldview of dualism (which will be expounded upon in the following section). Aside from the many deities, the Kalash believe in the existence of mountain fairies called *Suchi* or *Peri*, that help the Kalash against enemies and aid in hunting (the male counterparts to these fairies are said to be violent and are known as the *Varoti).* The abode of these spirits are the mountains (such as Tirich Mir), but they are said to descend down to the meadows in the autumn season[xlix]. It is rumored that the mountain Tirich Mir is impossible to climb, as jinns, fairies, witches and demons are said to reside there. In the indigenous language *Wakh*i, the word *Tirich* means shadows or darkness. *Mir* means king, so Tirich Mir translates as 'the King of the Darkness'. The King of Darkness was named as such because of the long shadows it casts on its *Wakhan* side, i.e. the side that faces Afghanistan. Mountaineers hire locals as porters and guides, but after a certain point up the peak, the latter refuses to go any further[l]. It seems as if Kalash folklore has had an impact on the non-Kalash populace as well!

As for the concept of dualism, the Kalash do not have a sense of good and evil parse. The world, according to the Kalash, is divided into two realms, the pure (*onjesta*) and impure (*pragata*)[li]. Locations at high altitudes, wine, water, holy sites, goats and men (especially pre-pubescent boys who have yet to have contact with women), are considered pure[lii]. The phenomenon of death and decay, women, Muslims and chickens are considered impure and fall into the *pragata* category[liii]. Lauren Stockbower, a journalist for the Christian Science Moniter, relates that when she went to visit the Kalash to witness the *Chaomas* festival, the Kalash lit a sprig of juniper, and encircled her three times with smoke from the burning sprig. This was a purification process as her association with Muslims had rendered her impure[liv].

The term 'kalash' means black, and the Kalash of Chitral are often referred to as the 'wearers of black robes'. The women wear black robes, and headdresses decorated with cowrie shells, beads and bells. Many women wear makeup, and they have their own unique style. Face painting is popular, and it is common to see young Kalash women with circles and starbursts painted onto their faces. In lieu of traditional eyeliner, Kalash women line their eyes with black powder made from the ground-up horns of goats[lv].

The Kalash Cultural values:

When it comes to marriage, the Kalash have a somewhat relaxed attitude. Both men and women are allowed to marry outside their faith and ethnicity, and polygamy is allowed, though it is rare[lvi]. Free mixing is common, except when women are sequestered in special houses known as the *bashaleni* during their menstrual cycles and childbirth. The *bashaleni* is the village's menstrual building and men are forbidden to approach it. Women are considered especially impure at such intervals, and a woman who has just given birth, must undergo a special purification ritual before she can return to her husband. If a woman no longer wants to remain married to her current partner, and wants to marry someone else, she simply informs the man she wishes to espouse how much her husband 'paid for her'. This is so the potential new partner can pay her current spouse double the amount the latter had initially paid for her. For instance, if the ex-husband had given the woman's family one goat when they had gotten married, the new husband would give the ex-husband two goats. This practice is called 'wife eloping' and is highly regarded as a 'great custom'[lvii].

One of the more peculiar customs of the Kalash is the way in which they don't bury their dead. When someone passes on, he or she is placed in an open coffin and is exposed to the elements. The belongings of the deceased are placed alongside the body and are invariably carried away by non-Kalash villagers. This leads the Kalash to believe that the dead person has departed with their belongings. Due to obvious reasons, these cemeteries are an open invitation for wild beasts to come and feed on dead bodies and are unsafe from yet another angle (the first being the unhygienic conditions). It isn't uncommon to see a skeleton draped in rotting clothing lying in an open casket in a Kalash graveyard[lviii].

Most people like to visit the Kalash when they celebrate their three main festivals of *Joshi, Chau and Chaumos*. The first festival of the year is the *Joshi* festival which is held in May. During *Joshi,* the Kalash offer libations (ritual offerings to deities) of milk to their gods and honor the deity *Goshidai.* The festival *Uchau* is celebrated in autumn, and the most important festival *Chaumos* is celebrated in December. The *Chaumos* festival coincides with the winter solstice. It is held in honor of the deity *Balimain* who is believed to visit the Kalash from the mythical land of *Tsyam* during the fest. There's singing, dancing and the free flow of wine at this festival, and outsiders are welcome if they respect Kalash customs and do not violate the rules pertaining to purity (*onjesta*) and impurity (*pragata)*[lix].

One of the troubling concerns for anthropologists is that the indigenous Kalash population is a soon to be extinct civilization. This is not to say that the lives of the Kalash are imperiled, but rather it is their religion and culture that is at stake (once a Kalash converts to another religion, he is no longer considered a Kalash). As Siraj Ul Mulk (a member of the once royal family of Chitral) puts it, "There are just 3,000 left (animists), the only pagans in a sea of Muslims from Turkey to Kashmir[lx].

The figure 3,000 is worrisome for conservationists and the Kalash, as it is indicative of termination of their culture, which is gaining ground in Kalash territory. At one time, the Kafir Kalash population was numbered a million strong[lxi]. In the past century, that figure has dropped dramatically - in the 1890s, the Kafir Kalash population in Kafiristan was estimated at fifty thousand[lxii]. By 1951, it had dropped to ten thousand[lxiii], and in 1998 the figure was three thousand seven hundred[lxiv]. The last figure reflects a slight resurgence of the Kafir Kalash population. The figure had harbored at the two thousand marks in the 1970s when local Muslim populations converted the masses of the kafir Kalash to Islam.

OPPRESSION AGAINST THE KALASH

Particular past studies revealed that the well-being of marginalized and minority communities was enhanced when they maintained their cultural values and affinity with their cultural traditions (e.g., Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Grouzet et al., 2005; Kasser, 2011). For example,

holding a strong cultural identity was shown to be associated with a sense of resilience and belonging in minority communities in the USA (e.g., Dockery, 2010; Zimmerman, Ramirez, Washienko, Walter, & Dyer, 1994). Costigan, Koryzma, Hua and Chance (2010) found that stronger ethnic identity was associated with greater achievement and self-esteem, and low depressive symptoms were identified as a strong protective factor against stress, fostering resilience. Furthermore, studies on well-being and resilience with marginalized populations have been conducted internationally, and all the findings point to the importance of taking indigenous beliefs into account. For instance, Ritchie, Wabano, Russell, Enosse and Young (2014) focused on the resilience and well-being of the aboriginal population in Canada, and highlighted the importance of developing culturally appropriate health measures. Kirmayer et al.'s (2011) study re-conceptualized resilience from an indigenous perspective. Their results revealed that for the Canadian indigenous participants they studied, the concept of resilience was embedded in the concept of their identity, culture, language and traditions. Nystad, Spein and Ingstad's (2014) study on the community resilience factors of the indigenous community of Norway found interconnectedness among community members and the environment as main factors promoting resilience.

The Kalasha are the last minority tribe having polytheistic beliefs in north Pakistan (Khan, 2008; Trail, 1996). They have maintained their unique traditions from even before Muslims arrived in the region. As historians have documented, they have only been marginally touched by the influence of Buddhism and Hinduism (Cacopardo, 2008). The Kalasha are known to be content and cheerful, as well as peaceful, showing gratitude and enjoying their simple pastoralist living (Reddy, 2011). The example demonstrated through the Kalasha may give a deeper understanding of minority communities and their survival and reveal clues as to how these communities maintain their resilience through times of social change. It would thus be an important task to explore the belief system of this unique group in order to develop an in-depth psychological understanding of their resilient worldviews. We believed that minority status and marginalization do not necessarily lead to lower wellbeing in these communities, contrary to some common beliefs and findings that have reported on the negative impact of rural lives and marginalization on wellbeing (e.g., Alexander, Kinman, Miller, & Patrick, 2003; Cleary, Horsfall, & Escott, 2014; Lynam & Cowley, 2007).

In an ethnographic study, Wynne (2001) described the freedom and liberty of Kalasha women and their openness and freedom in choosing life partners. However, there has not been any study that links such cultural traditions and norms to their well-being. We do not have much knowledge as to whether their cultural or ethnic identity affects their well-being in a positive or negative way. Also, limited information is available to understand the implications of the intergroup contact they have with the majority groups. Ethier and Deaux (1994), for instance, showed that weaker ethnic identity was related to a higher level of the perceived threat from the environment among Hispanic students, which further led to a reduction in self-esteem and lower levels of identification with the ethnic group. Therefore, we may argue that if the Kalasha holds a strong ethnic identity and pride in their background, they should be more resilient, regardless of the kinds and strengths of threats they may encounter.

Identity negotiation theory defines identity as the reflective self-images formed, practised and transferred by people of a certain culture and in a specific communication condition (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Social identity, associated with the interdependent self, includes various other aspects of the self, such as one's social class, disability, sexual orientation, age, cultural or ethnic membership, and professional or gender identity (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Cultural identity, a form of social identity, has importance at the emotional level, where an individual associates with the broader culture in which he or she belongs (Ting-Toomey, 2005). There is an association between national identity and state. National identity emerges from nation-building and the ideology of a nation. In the same way, national identity arises when an ethnic group focuses on the future and politicizes issues by sharing its homeland (Dahbour, 2002; İnaç & Ünal, 2013; Mandler, 2006).

Jenkins (2008) revealed that identity negotiation occurs in the minds of individuals under various social situations and influences their lives. For instance, collective or social identities have been shown to manage the anxieties of individuals living in a constantly changing and ambiguous world (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997; Smyth, 2002). Likewise, various researchers have shown a positive relationship between racial or ethnic identity and psychological well-being (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Lorenzo-Hernandez & Ouellette, 1998; Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Phinney, 1996; Smith, 1991). It was also shown that racial/ethnic

identity influenced the self-esteem of only those people who gave utmost importance to race/ethnicity in their identity (Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998).

The Kalasha belong to a distinctive cultural, social, and religious community placed apart from the majority. Despite the fact that people of Kalasha share the same national identity as other Pakistanis, they may endorse a distinct social and cultural identity arising from the cultural differences; Kalasha practice their own rituals, speak a distinct language and value their own traditions, customs and myths, and this can lead them to endorse and negotiate their identities in a way that may differ significantly from the majority. This is so especially as it seems the Kalasha own and value their cultural or social identity of being a "Kalash group" more than their national identity.

The above findings point to the importance of examining Kalasha's indigenous beliefs and understanding of resilience. Moreover, given the lack of knowledge, especially in understanding Asian marginalized communities, further investigation is needed. The current study thus aimed to explore the psychological resilience beliefs and lived experiences of the Kalasha and to identify cultural protective factors and indigenous beliefs that help them maintain psychological well-being and resilience. This minority group is reducing in numbers, and there is even a possibility that the majority Muslim population will completely overtake them. Despite the marginalization and socio-political exclusion, according to Reddy (2011), the Kalasha are often described as the happiest of communities in Pakistan and the most liberated of the Pakistani women (e.g., United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2015). We aimed to focus on the psychological mechanisms behind their resilience by identifying their perception and interpretation of the challenges and the coping mechanisms they employ to maintain their psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

Government protection afforded to the indigenous population (although many would complain it is lacking on several fronts) resulted in a doubling of the population by the end of the

twentieth century[lxv]. Proselytizing in the Kalash regions is officially outlawed by the Pakistani government[lxvi].

At present, the Kalash live in three valleys to the south of Chitral: Rambur, Bumburet, and Birir (these are the names of the valleys in the native Kalasha tongue- on the map, the villages appear as Rukmu, Mumret, and Biriu respectively). Bumburet is located at a distance of approximately forty kilometers from Chitral, and Birir and Rambur are thirty-four and thirty-two kilometres, respectively from Chitral[lxvii]. Unlike the rest of Pakistan, where wine production and consumption is strictly forbidden, the Kalash are fond of wine and produce their own brews from homegrown grapes. Other crops that are grown in the region are wheat, maize, apples, apricots, and walnuts[lxviii]. The chief source of income is agricultural revenue for these people, which is now under threat as outsiders have now homed in on Kalash territory. The Kalash way of life is inextricably intertwined with their land. If the land is under threat, then it naturally follows that the Kalash lifestyle is in peril.

In the 1970s, roadways were built linking the Kalash to the rest of Pakistan. Easier access to the largest Kalash valley Bumburet resulted in an influx of tourists, Muslim 'missionaries', and would-be profiteers who wanted to exploit the burgeoning tourism industry. Maureen Lines writes, "The road which opened up in Bumburet in the '70s soon brought this, the widest of the three valleys, to the attention of visitors, and before long unscrupulous entrepreneurs from outside the valley, ventured in, tricked the local people out of a number of their walnut trees..., and some of their lands, on which they built ramshackle and primitive hotels, and left the Kalash little chance to make even a few rupees from the new and meagre tourist industry. It should be added that tourism gives only a few Kalashes a second occupation worth mentioning; as Karl Wutt remarks in a letter, 'especially to those who are anyway relatively rich, for instance, some Christianized and a few persons converted to Islam who exploit their own people and present them to foreign visitors.' "[lxix]

Another account by a member of the once royal family that ruled Chitral till 1947 confirms these reports. Siraj Ul Mulk, a member of the once royal family of Chitral, reports that since the late 1990s, there has been an influx of Muslim missionaries who have set up camp in the

region[lxx]. Saifullah Jan, a noted Kalash leader, has led the effort to reclaim Kalash lands from unwelcome outsiders.

Saifullah Jan comments, 'I've been fighting in the courts to get back our land from Muslims for 13 years now, but the case still goes on... Pakistani justice moves slowly, I go to court once a month, but somehow the matter never gets revolved.'[lxxi]

This is not to say all converts to Islam are doing so out of compulsion. There are *shaikhs* (converts to Islam from the Kalash faith are called *shaikhs)*, who have accepted Islam due to a genuine shift in faith. Many converts because they want to marry someone who is a Muslim, and there are others who feel they can lead more prosperous lives[lxxii] if they do so (most Kalash people still live in archaic conditions without electricity and running water)[lxxiii]. Government schools that teach Islam as part of their curriculum employ Muslim teachers and encourage the Kalash women to observe the veil[lxxiv]. In order to preserve the Kalash culture, Saifulla Jan says, 'If any Kalash converts to Islam, they can't live among us anymore. We keep our identity strong.'[lxxv] Despite this stance, *shaikhs* still interact with their pagan relatives, and most of the Kalasha-speaking population is now Muslim.

As of now, the language of the Kalash, *Kalasha,* is only spoken by a mere five thousand individuals and is categorized by UNESCO as a 'critically endangered language'[lxxvi]. *Sheikhs* invariably adopt the language *Khowar* after accepting Islam. However, there have been instances where the new converts to Islam have tried to keep their culture alive by continuing to speak in their native tongue[lxxvii]. The death of a language invariably foretells the death of a culture and, in many cases: the demise of religion. Whether or not the Kalash religion will survive the next half century is a difficult question to answer. As of now, it seems as if history is ready to close the chapter on this ancient culture and religion. The degradation of the Kalash on the basis of their religious beliefs is a matter of concern for the rest of mankind. Their plight should be brought into the limelight via UN Resolutions.

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