

**A Historical Narrative of the Bashali: The Menstrual House as Cultural Identity of the Kalasha Women of the Hindu Kush (Chitral-Pakistan)**

Dr. Muhammad Kashif Ali\*

**ABSTRACT**

*The Kalasha society (Pagan people of the District Chitral-KP) is divided into two spheres; onjesta (pure) and pragata (impure) by means of religion and culture (collectively called dastoor). According to the Kalasha dastoor the women falls in pragata sphere and most polluted during their specific days therefore they cannot stay at home during menstruation period each month and during giving the birth to child. This studies intend to explore and discuss bashali, the seclusion home for the Kalasha women with socio-cultural and religious perspectives. The bashali home is constructed exterior to villages, downwards of the valley as in the Kalasha dastoor upper valleys and villages are onjesta. A divinity of fertility is placed inside the bashali for blessing and comfort during the birth of child. This paper intends to trace the change in behaviours of the Kalasha women who, in limited numbers, are reluctant to attend bashali in their periods while majority enjoys to stay at bashali as they take it as the escape from routine life and spend a good leisure time there. This paper intends to discuss different rituals attached to bashali and the Kalasha women.*

**Keywords: Menstrual House, Kalasha People, Kalasha Women, Kalasha Culture, Kalasha Religion, Indigenous Culture, Dardistan**

Chitral is the most north-western valley of Pakistan (Fig. 1-4) in the Hindu Kush and the Kalasha tribe, today, is limited to three sub-valleys of Chitral and collectively three sub-valleys (Rumbur, Bumburet and Birir (Fig. 5-7) are called Kalashdesh by the Kalasha people. Rumbur is the most northern valley of all, Bumburet is central and Birir the most southern valley. Kalashdesh is a part of the district Chitral in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. According to latest census of 2017 total population of Pakistan is more than 207 million while the Kalasha population people is approximately 4000.<sup>2</sup> Kalasha is micro ethnic and religious minority of Pakistan and possesses a pre-Islamic faith and culture. They are the sole pre-Islamic people of the whole Dardistan,<sup>3</sup> once there were more pre-Islamic people, now all have been converted to Islam. They are the Indo-Dardic people and speak an endangered Dardic Kalashamun language.<sup>4</sup> Chitral is to most remote region of Pakistan and is connected with Pakistan through 3200 meter high Lowari Pass (Fig. 8), the difficult geography of the region and inadequate infrastructure (Fig. 9) was not less than a blessing in disguise for the cultural survival of the micro ethnic minority and now the community is under the rapid change and transition. The Kalasha is an agro-pastoral community and depends upon their smaller fields and herds of goats and sheep, tourism industry is an addition to their economy.<sup>5</sup> Due to non-availability of written recorded history least is known about the origin of the people or their early history. However, the Kalasha oral legends say that Kalasha were living in Tsyam, an unknown land, before migration to Kalashdesh.<sup>6</sup>

**Research Methodology**

To conduct the studies historical descriptive and analytical method was applied. For the qualitative studies of *bashali*, its myth, practices and rituals access was extended to primary and secondary sources and the current author had to spend plentiful time with the Kalasha people in all three practicing valleys (Bumburet, Rumbur ad

---

\* Lecturer, Department of History & Pakistan Studies, University of Gujrat, Gujrat (Pakistan).

<sup>1</sup> It is stated that a minor portion of this article is based upon my PhD dissertation which was submitted to Department of History & Pakistan Studies University of the Punjab.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Kashif Ali & Muhammad Iqbal Chawla "Socio-Cultural Life of the Kalasha People of Chitral: A Study of their Festivals," *Pakistan Vision* 20.2 (2019): 42.

<sup>3</sup> The areas stretched from eastern Hindu Kush (Kafiristan & Chitral) to Ladakh including Dir, Swat, Indus Kohistans and Gilgit-Baltistan.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Kashif Ali, "A History of the Kalasha in Pakistan: Its Origin, Change and Continuity" (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Punjab, 2019), 43-47.

<sup>5</sup> Ali, 171-172.

<sup>6</sup> Saifullah Jan, "History and the Development of the Kalasha," in *Proceeding of the Second International Hindu Kush Cultural Conference*, ed. Elena Bashir and Israr-ud-Din (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 239.

Birir) to observe their daily and social life and to conduct interviews after developing very good rapport. To understand the Kalasha *dastoor* the Kalasha *qaizs* or religious leaders were preferred to conduct interviews.

### The Bashali

*Bashali* (also called *bishalini* in Khowar; the lingua franca of Chitral) is the quarter or house (Fig. 10) for women who go there during the menstruation or before the childbirth. The women, in Kalasha society, are considered impure (*pragata*) and most polluted for certain days of menstruation and during the days for child birth, therefore in certain days the women go under the confinement in a quarter outside villages called *bashali*. The *bashali*, according to the Kalasha *dastoor* (religion and tradition), is the most *pragata* space.<sup>7</sup> Schomberg records in 1930s that rules of living in segregation for women in Birir valley were much strict compare to Rumbur and Bumburet valleys, he writes confinement in Birir was three months while one month and fifteen days in Rumbur and Bumburet, respectively.<sup>8</sup> Loude and Lievre record five days for menstrual period and twenty days for the process of childbirth.<sup>9</sup> However, Alaudin reports in 1990s that the woman live in *bashali* for about three weeks.<sup>10</sup> We can deduce that the time period can vary from valley to valley. Palao Graziosi surmises the segregation of the Kalasha women in a *bashali*:

The segregation of women during the menstrual period at the childbirth is of course practiced among many different peoples. The horror felt for their state, considered impure, leads primitive communities to take all the necessary precautions to avoid dangerous contacts between the impure women and all other members of the group. Thus, women in this state must not eat with the others, must not touch certain objects or common food or domestic animals, must abstain from certain kinds of food and must comply with other strict rules.<sup>11</sup>

### Myth of the Bashali

The myth of *bashali* is related with the great divinities of Kalasha pantheon; Sajigor, Warin and Praba. Wazir Ali Shah gives an account that Sajigor had predicted and told to *dehar* (also called *bitan* in Khowar, literally shaman) that the Bashagal (the abode of Kafirs) would soon to be Islamized. Raja Wai (the great Kalasha ruler) was informed by *dehar* to take Sajigor to Kalashgum (present day Kalash Valleys) and to construct her *nishani* (shrine). According to the legend, a bow and two arrows were offered to Raja Wai; one arrow was decorated with black thread and other with white. Raja Wai was instructed to throw both arrows and was directed to construct a shrine of Sajigor at the spot where red arrow fall and a *bashali* where arrow with black string fall.<sup>12</sup> Sahazada Hussam-ul-Mulk gives a slightly different account regarding myth of *bashali* that an old woman named Sondi was living in Bashgal valley (Afghanistan) with his nephew (Ratharie). They both were true devotees of Warin; a deity. Warin, one day, appeared in the personification of a man and he not only predicted a havoc earthquake but both were instructed by the Warin not to leave home. The havoc earthquake, the same night, hit the village to ruins. Sondi and Ratharie left the Bashgal valley for new destination. Warin, during the journey, again appeared and they were given three arrows with filaments of three colours; white, red and black. Warin instructed them to throw three arrows in the air and to build *bashali* where the black arrow would fall, a temple or a *malosh* at the place of red arrow while instructed to establish a village where the white arrow would fall.<sup>13</sup> In this way the Warin was brought in Birir valley, in account of Schomberg Sajigor was brought in Rumbur from Bashgal. During the field visit the current author collected another version from Birir as Qazi Mir Bacha, a key informant, told different name of the boy and

---

<sup>7</sup> Wynne Maggi, *Our Women Are Free: Gender and Ethnicity in the Hindukhus* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 118.

<sup>8</sup> R.C.F. Schomberg, *Kafirs and Glaciers: Travels in Chitral* (London, Martin Hopkinson Limited, 1938), 196.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Yves Loude and Viviane Lievre, *Kalash Solstice: Winter Feasts of the Kalash of North Pakistan* (Islamabad: Lok Virsa, 1988). 53.

<sup>10</sup> Alaudin, *Kalash: The Paradise Lost* (Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 1992), 150.

<sup>11</sup> Paolo Graziosi, "The Wooden Statue of Dezalik, a Kalash Divinity, Chitral, Pakistan," *Man*, Vol. 61, (Sep., 1961): 150.

<sup>12</sup> Wazir Ali Shah, "Notes on Kalash Folklore," in *Cultures of the Hindukush: Selected Papers from the Hindu-Kush Cultural Conference*, ed. Karl Jettmar and Lennart Edelberg (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974), 77-78.

<sup>13</sup> Shahzada Hussam-ul-Mulk, "Kalash Mythology," in *Cultures of the Hindukush: Selected Papers from the Hindu-Kush Cultural Conference*, ed. Karl Jettmar and Lennart Edelberg (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974), 82-83.

he claims that from Bashgal Praba was brought to Birir valley instead of Warin, the rest of the legend remains the same.<sup>14</sup>

### **Traditions of the Bashali**

At the age of puberty every Kalasha girl enters into the *bashali* for her first menstrual period and takes part in *tusulek*; a religious ritual, other women of the tribe, present in the *bashali*, also take part.<sup>15</sup> Any female (who knows the traditions) there in the *bashali* washes her hands to elbow and then some bread is offered to Dezalik, a deity. Prayers for health of the girl are asked and finally food brought from her home is eaten among the women residing inside the *bashali*. Similarly, a woman who bears a child also undergoes the same custom and stay at *bashali* until the birth of the baby.<sup>16</sup> Muhammad Parvaish Shaheen, an ethnographer from Swat, adds that first time *jamilis* (female relatives) go with the girl leave her at *bashali*.<sup>17</sup> The Danish anthropologist, Sperber writes that for menstruation the period of stay is five days while twenty days after the delivery,<sup>18</sup> in both conditions females are considered impure or *pragata*. The female relatives provide the food to mother of newly born baby at *bashali* but with intense care, they do not touch the mother or anything like dress or food dish etc. and at the sixth day of the birth of baby, a ritual called *Achanbi* (Fig. 11) is perfumed as described by a Japanese Kalasha Akiko Wada,<sup>19</sup> “After sharing bread and cheese with young girls, one girl from the baby’s clan purifies the mother and infant with water and holly oak smoke. Leaving outside of the *bashali*, the girls walk to the Jeshtak temple carrying torches, carefully held so that the flames join, while chanting “Achanbi, Yo”. At the temple, a bonfire is made on which one girl jumps over.”<sup>20</sup> Shah Jawan (Fig. 12), a key informant of the present author adds that when mother and new born baby is brought to Jeshtak Han an arrow and a knife is put in the hands of boy baby otherwise the screwdriver in case of girl baby. The arrow and knife denotes the hunting and agricultural behaviour while the screwdriver symbolize the domestic skills.<sup>21</sup> Shaheen reveals that if a girl or woman dies in a *bashali*, she is buried in specific and deserted corner of graveyard and in her burial ceremony only females take part, not males.<sup>22</sup> The kids who die shortly after their birth are buried in the *bashali* compound.<sup>23</sup> If a man enters this building he is determined as guilty and gets a penalty. The *bashali* is prohibited place for males in any case.<sup>24</sup>

Wynne Maggi gives a detailed account regarding the purification of the *bashali* as she records the twice *bashali* is purified in the spring. Once it is purified by the girls from upper valley and later by the girls from lower valley. The girls roam in the valley door to door to collect corn or wheat and later to purchase different articles for the *bashali* the corn is sold. Though now *bashali* gets some useful articles from the aids of the government or national and international NGOs. For ritual or ceremony of purification two naked girls run around the *bashali* while having the branches of holly oak in their hands. The smoke of holly oak purifies the *bashali*.<sup>25</sup>

### **Bashali and its Architecture through History**

---

<sup>14</sup> Ali, 138.

<sup>15</sup> Irum Sheikh, Hafeez-ur-Rehman Chaudhry and Anwaar Mohyuddin, “Religion as a Space for Kalash Identity: A Case Study of Village Bumburet in Kalash Valley, Chitral,” *World Applied Sciences Journal*, Vol 29, No. 3 (2014): 429, accessed March 26, 2015, [www.idosi.org/wasj/wasj29\(3\)14/17.pdf](http://www.idosi.org/wasj/wasj29(3)14/17.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Imran Kabir and Luke Rehmat, “The Kalasha and the Kalash Traditions,” accessed January 29, 2014, <https://thekalashatimes.wordpress.com/the-kalasha-and-the-kalasha-tradition>.

<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Parvaish Shaheen, *Kafiristan: Trikh, Nasal, Zuban, Saqafat awr Siahati Jaizat* (Urdu), (1993: repr., Lahore: Maktaba-i-Jamal, 2014), 153.

<sup>18</sup> Birgitte Glavind Sperber, “Nature in the Kalasha Perception of Life,” in Bruun, Ole and Arne Kalland eds. *Asian Perceptions of Nature: A Critical Approach* (London: Routledge, 1995), 134.

<sup>19</sup> Akiko Wada by nation is a Japanese and by heart is the Kalasha, she is living in Rumbur valley since 1980s, and she has adopted the Kalasha culture and married a Kalasha man.

<sup>20</sup> Akiko Wada, *Kalasha: Their Life & Tradition* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publishers, 2005), 106-107.

<sup>21</sup> Ali, 158.

<sup>22</sup> Muhammad Parvaish Shaheen, 154 and Zaheer-ud-Din, “Foreign Impacts on the Religion of the Kalash” (Doctoral dissertation, International Islamic University Islamabad, 2011), 83.

<sup>23</sup> Kabir and Rehmat.

<sup>24</sup> Mahmood Danishwar, *Kafiristan: Chitral, Dir aur Swat ki Siahat* (Urdu) (1952; repr., Lahore: Book Home, 2006), 76.

<sup>25</sup> Maggi, 151.

In 1960s Paolo Graziosi, an Italian anthropologist, recorded five *bashalis* in three practicing Kalasha valleys; Birir, Bumburet and Rumbur. One in Rumbur and two each in Bumburet and Birir. He reported the locations as one between the villages Guru and Gas Guru (in Birir), one near Karakal village (in Bumburet), one between the villages Anish and Brun (in Bumburet), one but abandoned in Batrik village (Bumburet) and one in amid the villages Grom and Bethet in Rumbur valley. However, he claimed to visit only one which was between the villages Anish and Brun (Graziosi, 1961).<sup>26</sup> Urtsun is a converted Kalasha valley in the southern Chitral, approximately a century ago the valley has abandoned its pre-Islamic faith. The Urtsun valley was a halting station of George Scott Robertson when he on his way to Kafiristan from Chitral in 1889 and he reports that residence of the Urtsun were the Kalash Kafirs.<sup>27</sup> Augusto Cacopardo, the Italian Anthropologist, due to his and his brother's extensive fieldwork in the southern Chitral is convinced that the process of Islamization in Urtsun valley was started in early Twenties<sup>28</sup> and was completed in 1938, when the last Kalasha of Urtsun named Chanlu was converted.<sup>29</sup> He described different pre-Islamic sites in Urtsun including the ruins old houses and a *bashali*, in Grompisht village.<sup>30</sup> Local history reveals that once Upper Chitral and Chitral Proper were also ruled by the Kalasha chiefs therefore there are still some remains of the Kalasha past as Shahzada Tanveerul Mulk describes that, in near past, some villages in Mulkho (Upper Chitral) were called as the Kalashadur or homes of the Kalasha and he also writes that there is a field which is famous as *bishalini*<sup>31</sup> and we know that *bishalini* is Khovar name of the Kalasha *bashali*. There is an abandoned *bashali* in Rumbur near the Palarog village when we travel towards Kunisht (new name Sheikandeh) in a cave above the ground level. One *bashali* was noticed by Schomberg in 1930s when he visited Red Kafirs' area in Rumbur<sup>32</sup>, obviously it was Sheikhandeh or Kunisht the village of Red Kafirs who had migrated from Kafiristan after it was Islamized.

The structure of the menstrual house is not much different from the Kalasha houses, in the Hindu Kush. Timber and stones are available resources to build the simple structure of the *bashali* which consists of one or two rooms with verandas around it. The stones are joint with mud and timber for the structure. Graziosi observed the structure of the *bashali* in 1960s and writes that general structure of *bashali* consists of 1 room and 2 verandas. There is no window or hole in room. The ceiling is supported by 4 wooden pillars. In centre of the room, there is a fireplace marked with some stones. In the right corner of the room, there is an un-plastered platform made up of stones. On this platform, goddess of Dezalik (Fig. 13) is placed. Dezalik is a pattern of woman in confinement and the wooden plank representing the goddess Dezalik was placed in the *bashali*. Dezalik is supposed to protect during childbirth. It is carved from a thick plank of deodar wood.<sup>33</sup>

Now, obviously, with passage of time and comparatively better education and resources have brought changes in the general condition of *bashali*. For instance the *bashali* of Karakal (Bumburet valley) is considered the most hygienic having four rooms, one bathroom and one toilet, this *bashali* was constructed with the assistance of a Greek NGO. The old *bashali* had almost only one room now it has more than one rooms, old *bashali* had no bed, lawn and water pipelines etc. Now, the *bashali* is more comfortable compare to near past of the society.<sup>34</sup> Alaudin also notices in 1980s that the *bashali* eventually was converting into mother and child health care centre due to increasing a light comfort along with trivial health facilities like trained midwife and some medicines.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Graziosi, 149.

<sup>27</sup> George Scott Robertson, *The Kafirs of the Hindukush* (London: Lawrence & Bullen Ltd., 1896.), 1-4.

<sup>28</sup> Augusto Cacopardo, "The Other Kalasha A Survey of Kalashamun-Speaking People in Southern Chitral: Part II: The Kalasha of Urtsun," *East and West*, Vol. 41, No. 1/4 (December 1991): 347, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29756981>.

<sup>29</sup> Shahzada Hussam-ul-Mulk, "The Cosmology of Red Kafirs," in *Cultures of the Hindukush: Selected Papers from the Hindu-Kush Cultural Conference*, ed. Karl Jettmar and Lennart Edelberg (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974), 26.

<sup>30</sup> Augusto Cacopardo, "The Other Kalasha A Survey of Kalashamun-Speaking People in Southern Chitral: Part II, 321.

<sup>31</sup> Shahzada Tanveerul Mulk, *Morkho: Tarikh kay Aieny Mein* (Peshawar: Directorate of Culture KPK, 2015), 13-14.

<sup>32</sup> Schomberg, 45.

<sup>33</sup> Graziosi, 151.

<sup>34</sup> Qazi Mir Bacha Kalash, interview by Muhammad Kashif Ali, August 24, 2007, Aspar village, Birir.

<sup>35</sup> Alaudin, 10.

The *bashali* of Rumbur had been under reconstruction for various times. The anthropologist Elizabeth Darling records in his work that Katar Singh<sup>36</sup> had promised to rebuild the *bashali* of Rumbur during the feast of merit he offered to his community, in 1977.<sup>37</sup> The Rumbur *bashali* again in 1994 was rebuilt and upgraded to two rooms, one kitchen and toilet as well.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Kalasha Dual Worlds of Onjesta and Pragata**

It is of immense importance to understand the Kalasha *dastoor* in the context of *onjesta* (pure) and *pragata* (impure) spheres to understand that why the Kalasha women spend their copiously time of their lives in *bashali*. Peter Parkes explains the *onjesta* and *pragata* domains. The mountains, juniper, holly-oak, markhor, goat. Honey bees, altars, stables and men fall in the *onjesta* domain while lower valley, onions, garlic, cattle, sheep, hens, eggs, *bashali* graveyard and women are *pragata* according to the Kalasha *dastoor*. The Mountains are sacred in the Kalasha society because the high pastures and peaks are abode of gods and *suchi* (fairies). The *saras* (juniper<sup>39</sup>) has most importance in the *onjesta* category, it grows at the high evergreen pastures and forests, and it provide fuel for everyday life while the branches are used during the performance of rituals.<sup>40</sup> The *bonj* (holly-oak<sup>41</sup>) is another sacred tree among the Kalasha people and its branches and smoke is also used during different rituals.<sup>42</sup> Both trees are considered sacred or *onjesta* and are used for purity during performing different rituals. In the Kalasha society where markhor is more pure, goats are stronger and intelligent like men and women and sheep are weaker and senseless, writes Peter Parkes.<sup>43</sup>

### **Dezalik as Custodian of the Bashali**

The goddess Dezalik is considered protector of babies and their mothers, she is patron of the Kalasha women. The goddess of fertility and protector women is considered the sister of Deza who is the Creator God of the Kalasha tribe and the Dezalik is only deity having anthropomorphic characteristics.<sup>44</sup> Tough Wynne Maggi is not convinced that the Dezalik is sister of Deza<sup>45</sup> however when Sayed Gul Kalasha, an archaeologist from the Kalasha community, was approached by the present author and she asserted that Dezalik is considered sister of Deza in the Kalasha pantheon.<sup>46</sup> Dezalik in the *bashali* is represented by a simple carved wooden plank. First ever it was observed in detail by an Italian Paolo Graziosi in his work which was published in 1961 and informed to the outer world that the statue of the Dezalik is installed in the *bashali*.<sup>47</sup> Before Graziosi it was the Danish Halfdan Siiger who describes<sup>48</sup> in a brief and he is convinced that it is representation of *yoni*.<sup>49</sup> The French anthropologist Lievre

---

<sup>36</sup> Katar Singh was one of the influential Kalasha from Rumbur valley who had offered on of the largest Biramore; the feast of merit in the Kalasha history in 20<sup>th</sup> century. For detail see, Elizabeth Gillian Darling, “Merit Feasting among the Kalash Kafirs of North Western Pakistan” (M.A Thesis, The University of British Columbia, 1979).

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Gillian Darling, “Merit Feasting among the Kalash Kafirs of North Western Pakistan” (M.A Thesis, The University of British Columbia, 1979), 142.

<sup>38</sup> Maggi, 123.

<sup>39</sup> Juniper (*Juniperus*) is an evergreen tree and locally it is called *saras* in the Kalashamun.

<sup>40</sup> Peter S. C. Parkes, “Alliance and Elopement: Economy, Social Order and Sexual Antagonism among the Kalasha (Kalash Kafirs) of Chitral” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oxford, 1983), 184-85.

<sup>41</sup> Holly oak (*Quercus ilex*) is an evergreen tree and locally it is called *bonj* in the Kalashamun.

<sup>42</sup> Parkes 185.

<sup>43</sup> Parkes, 189.

<sup>44</sup> Alberto M. Cacopardo and Augusto S. Cacopardo, *Gates of Peristan: History, Religion and Society in the Hindu Kush* (Rome: IsIAO, 2001), 70-71.

<sup>45</sup> Maggi, 140.

<sup>46</sup> Ali, 133.

<sup>47</sup> Graziosi, 149.

<sup>48</sup> Halfdan Siiger, *Ethnological Field Research in Chitral, Sikkim and Assam: A Preliminary Report*. Vol. 36. No. I Kommission Hos Munksgaard, 1956, 18, accessed June 7, 2017,

[http://www.royalacademy.dk/Publications/High/623\\_Siiger,%20Halfdan.pdf](http://www.royalacademy.dk/Publications/High/623_Siiger,%20Halfdan.pdf). and Wynne Maggi, *Gender and Ethnicity*, 139.

<sup>49</sup> Yoni is a Hindi word used for female genitalia and its most literal meaning is womb and is associated with generative power. Yoni or a human vagina is worshipped directly in esoteric ritual in South Asia. The association of female genitals with the divine female principle, and the correlation of women’s reproductive and sexual cycles with the Earth’s seasonal and vegetative cycles, have given the yoni cosmological significance. For detail, Lochtefeld,

perhaps the first non Kalasha woman who penetrates into the bashali to give details about the house and the deity.<sup>50</sup> Wynne Maggi also supports the idea that the plank representing Deزالik in the *bashali* is symbol of vagina.<sup>51</sup> Georg Morgenstierne compares the Deزالik with Nirmali goddess of Kafiristan and he is convinced that Deزالik is “the goddess of birth and the sexual functions of women”.<sup>52</sup> For comparative studies the Murkum can also be studied from Dardistan in Haramosh valley of Gilgit region. Murkum was a deity of women protection especially during the birth of children. She was also considered protector of wild goats and ibexes,<sup>53</sup> the sanctity of goats and ibexes is a common trait of the whole Dardistan. Augusto Cacopardo clarifies that the Deزالik should not be confused with mother goddess but merely protector of the Kalasha mothers in the *bashali*.<sup>54</sup> Though the *bashali* is most *pragata* space of the Kalasha community but the Deزالik lives inside it and women never touch until they are cleaned after their periods.<sup>55</sup> The Kalasha women during the stay in the *bashali* to give birth a child offer one walnut to Deزالik and pray for ease in the process and next day one walnut is added until the baby is born.<sup>56</sup> “Once a year, in spring, two prepubescent girls sacrifice a lamb on the roof of Deزالik’s house to protect both the women giving birth and their babies.”<sup>57</sup>

### **Women Socialization and Role of the Bashali**

*Bashali* is the place where almost all the Kalasha are born; in far and near past. This is the most *pragata* space as we have discussed but almost all women share their best moments of life in *bashali* of their respective valley or village. This is the place where they have nothing to do but sharing all their thoughts, secrets and experiences of every walk of the life. Here, they have plenty of time until their circle of menstruation is completed or baby is born. We can compare it with *baithek*<sup>58</sup> or *dera*<sup>59</sup> where men of different ages share their experiences. Wynne Maggi writes that this is the place where the Kalasha women recognize themselves a community, where diverse positions and opinions can be shared and seen, where the space, work and knowledge is shared.<sup>60</sup> Further she discusses the privilege of the *bashali* that the Kalasha women enjoy their privacy here and never discuss the inner world of the *bashali* with the Kalasha men.<sup>61</sup> The time the Kalasha women or girls spent in the *bashali* is not less than a treat where they can talk and gossip freely about their friends and foes.<sup>62</sup> The isolation in the *bashali* brings feminine solidarity and the Kalasha women share their health problems especially related to pregnancy, fertility, barrenness and also discuss their desires and relations.<sup>63</sup>

### **Development and Changes**

Once the *bashali* was a gloomy having one room with less facilities however with passage of time the *bashali* is being upgraded to more rooms, separate kitchen and bathroom or toilet. Alaudin notes in 1980s that the status of the *bashali* was changing into a mother and child health care centre.<sup>64</sup> Once they had nothing as

---

James G. The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism, Vol. 2. (York: The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc, 2002), 784. and Constance A. Jones and James D. Ryan, Encyclopaedia of Hinduism (New York: Facts On File, 2007), 515-16.

<sup>50</sup> Loude and Lievre, 53.

<sup>51</sup> Maggi, 139.

<sup>52</sup> Ali, 132.

<sup>53</sup> Karl Jettmar, “Ethnological Research in Dardistan 1958, *Preliminary Report*,” *Proceedings of American Philosophy Society*, Vol. 105, No. 1 (Feb. 28, 1961): 88-89, accessed January 09, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/985355>. and Karl Jettmar, *Bolor & Dardistan* (Islamabad: National Institute of Folk Heritage, 1980), 59.

<sup>54</sup> Augusto S. Cacopardo, *Pagan Christmas: Winter Feasts of the Kalasha of the Hindu Kush* (London: Ginko Library, 2016), 58.

<sup>55</sup> Maggi, 139.

<sup>56</sup> Loude and Lievre, 53.

<sup>57</sup> Viviane Lievre, “The Status of Kalasha Women in the Religious Sphere,” in *Proceeding of the Second International Hindu Kush Cultural Conference*, ed. Elena Bashir and Israr-ud-Din (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 338.

<sup>58</sup> Guest/drawing or living room

<sup>59</sup> A community sitting place in the Punjabi villages where men of all ages used to gather and share their different experiences of life, though *dera* system due to modernization is an institution of decay.

<sup>60</sup> Maggi, 153.

<sup>61</sup> Maggi, 153-54.

<sup>62</sup> Anwaar Mohyuddin, Irum Sheikh, and Hafeez-ur-Rehman Chaudhry, “Bashalini a Place for Biological Gender Impurities Segregating Women during Menstruation in Kalsah,” *Sc.Int.* Vol.27, No.1 (Jan-Feb 2015): 552.

<sup>63</sup> Loude and Lievre, 53.

<sup>64</sup> Alaudin, 10.

Mohyuddin writes about new born baby and cut of umbilical cord, “Traditionally the cord is cut off with the sharp edged rock and then tied with a fringe broken from woman’s belt. But today they have scissors and other surgical supplies for cutting the cords, which is arranged by the Government of Pakistan and some NGO,s [Sic.]”.<sup>65</sup> Compare to near past now *bashali* is comfortable place to live, in older days the *bashali* has no beds, no direct water supply. Now almost all *bashalis* of three valleys have water supply through pipelines.<sup>66</sup> While being interviewed by BBC Nasira Bibi is convinced that *bashali* is a fun place to live if you have good friends there to gossip.<sup>67</sup>

Meeta Gul (Fig. 14), a key informant of the current author, reveals that education is bringing the change in behaviour of the Kalasha women and some girls prefer to stay at home during their menstrual period. However, they eat or sleep separately at home.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps this trend was started by Lakshan Bibi, an educated and social worker from Rumbur, who has spent her most time out of the Kalashdesh, in Peshawar, Islamabad and these days living in the United States of America. Another informant Din Muhammad Kalash from Bumburet told the current author that she rarely attend the *bashali* in her menstrual period.<sup>69</sup> During an interview to present author Qazi Fal-i-Azam (aka Qazi Palawan) (Fig. 15) from Grom village of Rumbur admits that many girls or women do not go to *bashali* which is not according to the Kalasha *dastoor*. However, he reveals that in the Kalasha *dastoor* it is permissible to stay at home during the periods if the *bashali* is very far from the village or the girl/woman has important jobs at home.<sup>70</sup> However, Wazir Zada Kalash, key informant of the present author from Chath Guru and currently he is member of KP Assembly, sees it as *pragata* and is convinced that due to modern education many girls of new generation avoid to spend their menstrual periods in the *bashali*.<sup>71</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The basic aims of the studies was to analyse the two religious spheres of the Kalasha people; *onjesta* and *pragata* and status of the women keeping in the view the most *pragata* space of the Kalashdesh; *bashali* or menstrual house. Though all the Kalasha males are born in the *bashali* but according to the local *dastoor* no male can enter or touch the *bashali*. Though *bashali* is the most *pragata* place in whole Kalashdesh but it is protected by a divinity of fertility called Dezalik and on the same time socially it is the place where the Kalasha girls and women can talk and share their experiences of any kind, from family matters to their relations. There at the *bashali* they have abundant time for gossips, shared cooking, culture learning and sharing, making headgears, dresses etc. The *bashali* is the sole place where the Kalasha women have no male supremacy and they can freely spend time as they desired.

---

<sup>65</sup> Mohyuddin, 551

<sup>66</sup> Qazi Mir Bacha Kalash.

<sup>67</sup> Chiade O’Shea, *Looking Forward to a Retreat*, available from [http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4580159.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4580159.stm); accessed 26 April 2007.

<sup>68</sup> Meeta Gull, interview by Muhammad Kashif Ali, May 13, 2008, Grom village, Rumbur.

<sup>69</sup> Din Muhammad Kalash, interview by Muhammad Kashif Ali, Bumburet valley, August 23, 2007.

<sup>70</sup> Qazi Fal-i-Azam, interview by Muhammad Kashif Ali, 23 August 2007, Grom village, Rumbur.

<sup>71</sup> Wazir Zada Kalash, Muhammad Kashif Ali by author, May 16, 2008, Batrik village, Bumburet.



**FIGURES**  
 Fig. 1 Map of Pakistan (Adopted from <http://surveyofpakistan.gov.pk>)

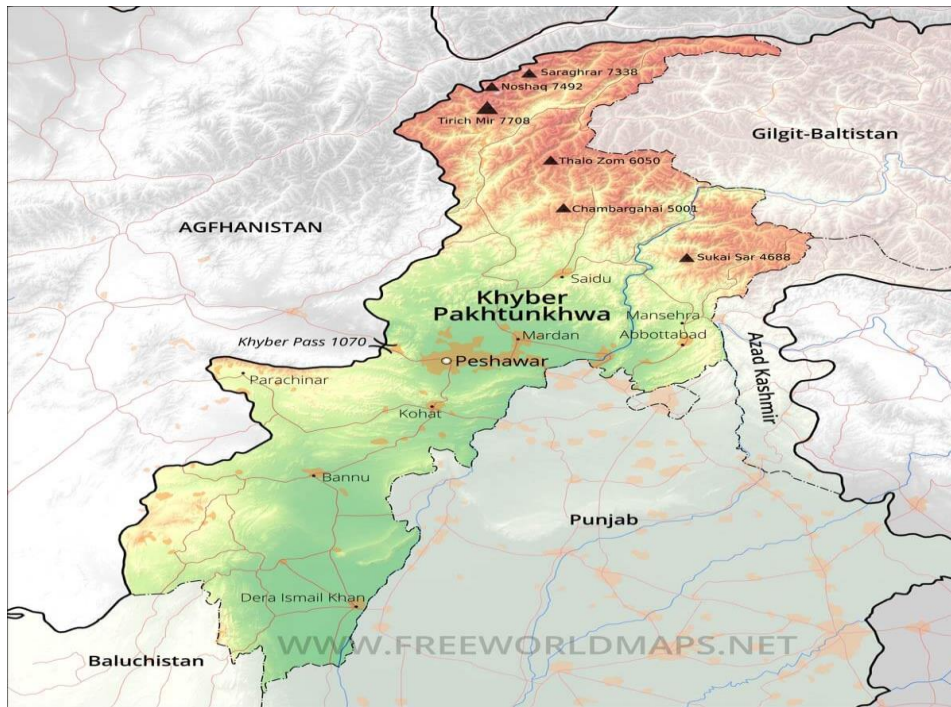


Fig. 2 Map of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Adopted from [www.freeworldmaps.net](http://www.freeworldmaps.net))



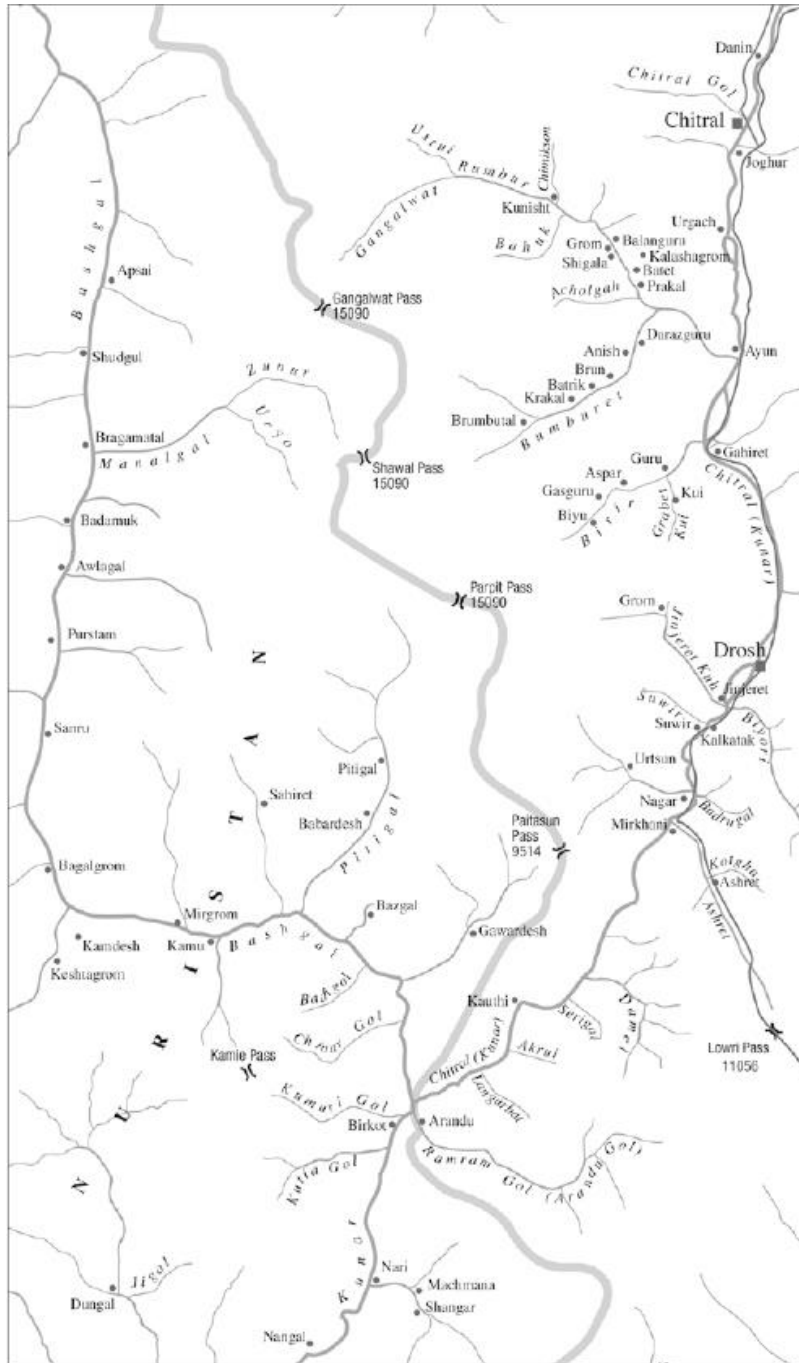


Fig. 3 Chitral valley and Nuristan, the thicker line in middle of the map is Durand Line, the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Adopted from *Pagan Christmas: Winter Feasts of the Kalasha of the Hindu Kush* (2016) with permission of the author. It was prepared by Alberto M. Cacopardo and drawn by Giovanni Mattioli.

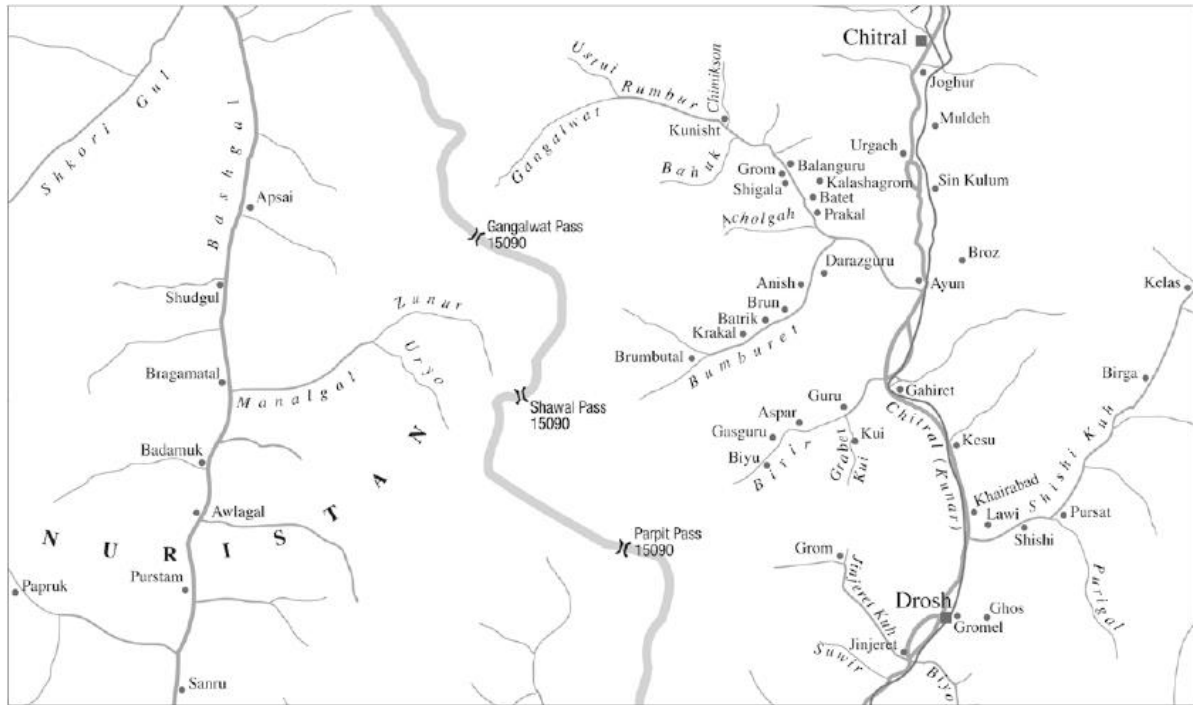


Fig. 4 Map of Kalashdesh

Adopted from *Pagan Christmas: Winter Feasts of the Kalasha of the Hindu Kush* (2016) with permission of the author. It was prepared by Alberto M. Cacopardo and drawn by Giovanni Mattioli



Fig. 5 Rumbur Valley (Photo: Muhammad Kashif Ali, 2015)



Fig. 6 Bumburet Valley (Photo: Muhammad Kashif Ali, 2017)



Fig. 7 Birir Valley (Photo: Muhammad Kashif Ali, 2017)



Fig. 8 Lowari Top (Photo: Muhammad Kashif Ali, 2008)



Fig. 9 Inadequate infrastructure in the Kalashdesh (Photo: Muhammad Kashif Ali, 2017)



Fig. 10 A Kalasha bashali from Bumburet (Photo: Muhammad Kashif Ali, 2017)

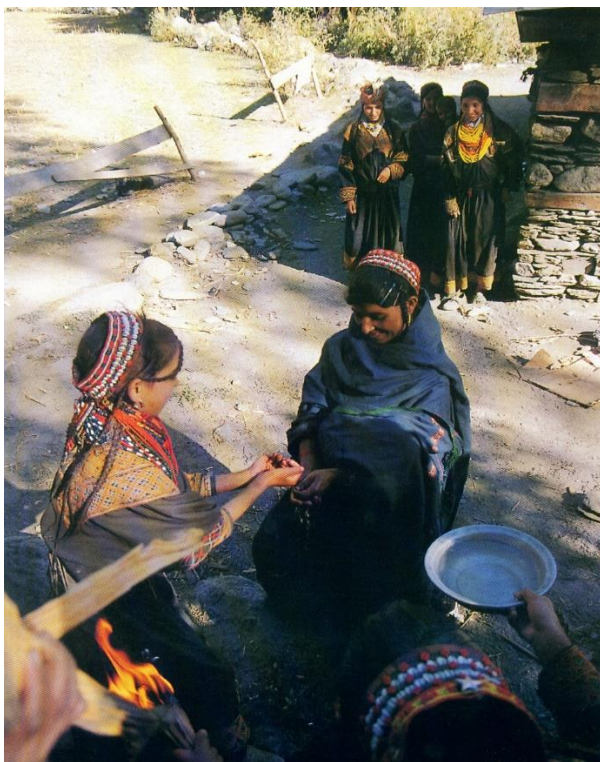


Fig. 11 Achanbi Ritual (Photo: Adopted from Akiko Wada, 2005)



Fig. 12 Interviewing Qazi (Late) Shah Jawan from Grom village of Rumbur (Photo: Idrees Atif, 2008)



Fig. 13 Wooden planks represents Dezalik (Photo: adopted from Paolo Graziosi, 1961)



Fig. 14 Interviewing Meeta Gul Kalash (Photo: Idrees Atif, 2008)



Fig. 15 Interviewing Qazi Fal-i-Azam (Photo: Feeman Ali, 2017)