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**Library Sources Available on Pre-Islamic Religious Traditions of the Eastern Hindu Kush
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Abstract

The shamanism is the oldest cult of human being, in Pakistan the Kalasha are the sole people in the (eastern) Hindu Kush region who have the tradition of shamanism alive though at the last breath. The Kalasha are Indo-Aryan people of Dardic branch and their religion has similarities with the religion of Vedic period. Shaman or dehar is one of the most significant institutions of the community and is the most spiritual in nature. However, for some decades the shamanism due to multiple reasons is towards the decline; impurity is the key reason. Though the Kalasha people does not have any prophet or the divine book therefore the dehar gets more importance which, according to the Kalasha traditions, is a coordinator among his people and the creator through supernatural beings like fairies. Recent times is not good for the community, there is no real dehar for some decades and community is without spiritual leadership.

Keywords: Kalasha tribe, Kalasha religion, Culture of the Hindu Kush, Shamanism, Dehar, Dardic People, Dardistan.

The Cultural Setting of the Kalasha People

Pakistan is a land of many cultures and people, this is much fertile land in the cultural diversity from the coastal areas of south to mountainous regions in the north and North West of the country. The Kalasha tribe of Chitral is unique in the culture and religion. The Kalasha belong to Dardic branch of Indo-Dardic people who are still observing and following their centuries old culture and belief and they speak the Kalashamun languages which belongs to Dardic group of languages (Ali and Chawla, 2019). Chitral is the most north-western district of Pakistan and the Kalasha people live on the western edges of the district Chitral, limited to three deep valleys named Rumbur, Birir and Bumburet (the Kalasha call collectively Kalashdesh). Bumburet is the largest and most progressive valley due to tourism exposure, Birir is the smallest valley and receives least tourists due to lack of the infrastructure while Rumbur is the more cultural valley and at least three chief cultural custodians were from Rumbur whom the primary author knows: Katar Sing, Qazi Khosh Nawaz and Shah Jawan. Primarily the Kalasha people rely upon their herds of goat and sheep and on small forms added with seasonal fruits. They keep large herds and small agrarian fields for seasonal crops. The tourism industry and employment in services is new addition in the Kalasha economy (Ali, 2019). The local myth says that the Kalasha are form Tsyam and nobody knows where the Tsyam is exactly. According to the French anthropologists Loude and Lievre Tsyam might be in the Eastern Afghanistan (Jean Yves Loude and Viviane Lievre, 1988) and later on migrated to the current valleys a long ago (Ali, 2019). Once the whole region was ruled by the Kalasha chiefs (Ali, 2019) and they were in greater numbers now the estimated population of the Kalasha people is about 4,000 (Kalash, 2017) to 4,100 (Rehmat, 2017) and they are being assimilated slowly and steadily.

Introduction

Prior to advent of Islam in the mountainous valleys of the Chitral including Kafiristan (now Nuristan in Afghanistan) was abode of Kafirs people who had their own belief, way of life and values later all converted to Islam gradually except Kalasha of Chitral who were strongly sticky to their ancient and indigenous beliefs. However, now their culture and religion commonly called *dastoor* is being assimilated and on way to decline for multiple reasons. The Kalasha religion is associated to the Early Vedic Period (1500 BCE to 1000 BCE) (Jamison and Witzel, 2003) and basically their religion is polytheistic in nature (Lines, 1996). As the result of field visits of a decade it has been, however, observed that now the religion of the Kalasha is under transitional phase and they claim to be monotheists and they claim that all their deities are in fact like messengers of Khudai or God towards the Kalasha people (Ali, 2019; Jan, 2007). Zaheer-ud-Din also gives an insight to the impact of the Muslims over the culture and religion of the Kalasha community (Din, 2016). If we study the Kalasha religion in depth we will find great similarities of rituals and deities with the Vedic religion of early phase especially shamanism (Witzel, 2004). Augusto Cacopardo, an Italian anthropologist, also in favour of the above-mentioned synopsis that the Kalasha religion and the cosmology of the ancient India was interconnected (Cacopardo, 2016). The last decade of 19th century was dreadful for the Kafirs of the Hindu Kush when the Kafiristan was raided by Amir Abdur Rehman, King of Afghanistan (Marx, 1999), and the region forcefully was converted to Islam and Kafiristan was renamed as Nuristan (Rehman, 1900) across the Durand Line which was demarcated in 1893 and signatories were Afghan king and the British government of India (Dodwell, 1932). However, the Durand Line was proven blessing for the Kalasha Kafirs of Chitral who were subject of Mehtar of Chitral in the British India and they remained to follower of their creed (Jean Yves Loude and Viviane Lievre, 1988) without any major pressure. Before the

conversion of Kafiristan almost whole region of the Hindu Kush had polytheist or pre-Islamic faith. However, now only the Kalasha people possesses the pre-Islamic faith in whole region of the Hindu Kush from Afghanistan to Chitral and Swat Kohistan. Once the Shamanism was a major religious trait of the region and of the Kalasha people as well and Fredrik Barth claims the existence of “priestly families in pagan times” (Barth, 1956). The Shaman or dehar, as the Kalasha call, was an important religious and spiritual institution of the Kalasha people this institution is taking its last breaths.

Shaman and Shamanism

Defining the shaman Michael Harner writes that a person who enters in state of trance, contacts with supernatural beings and has hidden knowledge is the shaman. He also adds that some supernatural being must be in the control of the shaman (Harner, 1980). Regarding the antiquity of the Shamanism Andreas Lommel believes that it was the cult of the early human of Stone Age to hunting communities (Lommel, 1967). Conard Philip Kottak claims and holds that a shaman is part-time religious entity and the shaman performs as the coordinator of his people and the super being or supernatural beings (Kottak, 2002) while defining the roles of a shaman Ferraro writes that a shaman may play multiple role like spiritual leader, oracle, witch doctor and spiritual healer (Ferraro, 2006). Margaret Stutley writes, “Shamans have long been associated with hunter-gatherers and members of nomadic societies. Shamans advise the community when hunting is unsuccessful, or whenever crises occur in the harsh climate of extreme cold and the ever-present risk of starvation and disease. These societies are the nearest one can get to a ‘classless’, loosely stratified society.” (Stutley, 2003) The shamanistic elements had been the prehistoric religious beliefs of our ancestors on the globe far in past. The evidences of the shamanism or shamanistic

elements can be traced in prehistoric and ancient societies of North Asia, Egypt, Iran, Celtic world, Europe (Walter and Fridman, 2004) and South Asia.

Dehar the Kalasha Shaman

At least two communities of Pakistan can be traced out associated with shamanism; the Kalasha of Chitral and Broshu people of Hunza. Both communities had been practicing the shamanistic rituals for a long. *Dehar* or shaman has enormous importance in the Kalasha religion. The locals have different words for shaman as the Kalasha call it *dehar* in Kalashamun while the Kho people and Shina people of Gilgit call it *bitan/betan* in Khowar and Shina languages, respectively. *Dehar* is spiritual and religious leader of the Kalasha community; he is approached for prophecies, avoiding evils, to cure of illness etc. The rank of *dehar* cannot be acquired by choice or struggle, it is considered the divine blessings. The *dehar* is revered in the Kalasha society and Halfdan Siiger considers him as ecstatic prophet (Siiger, 1956). Historical survey of the community and its faith affirms that it was the most revered spiritual institution of the community however now it is at brink of death for multiple reasons. R. C. F. Schomberg records, in 1930s, an alternative word *pshe* for *dehar* derived from Red Kafirs (Schomberg, 1938). The *dehar* was undoubtedly a source of unity and integration of the people. The *dastoor* of the Kalasha rotates around the *dehar* specifically two more powerful and revered *dehars*; Budha and Naga. Both are frequently discussed and mentioned in the legends. Halfdan Siiger, for their higher rank and esteem among the people, call them “ecstatic prophets” (Siiger, 1956) and they had been custodian of the Kalasha *dastoor*.

The tradition of shamanism among the Kalasha people in their religious sphere is stronger and important compare to priestly tradition, Peter Parkes believes it as he considered it the secret knowledge (Parkes, 1991). For example we can discuss the most celebrated Naga Dehar that how

he lead his people and settled in the current Kalasha valleys. The Kalasha legends read that Naga Dehar was called upon by the great deity Balumain in Tsyam¹ and ordered him to settle in the Kalasha valleys called Kalashdesh and he brought two deities of Sajigor and Mahandeo to Kalashdesh (Jean Yves Loude and Viviane Lievre, 1988) Naga Dehar was the first mentor of his people who taught them the *dastoor* and guided his people to perform the different rituals (Ali, 2019). Though, there is no prophet neither any divine book among the Kalasha but the Kalasha shaman "...alone could see the god and other supernatural beings and has the power to communicate with them. He could link man with Supreme Being through the power of speaking with heaven, and interpret their intentions." (Din, 2011)

Dehar its Nature, Phases and Roles

Jean-Yves Loude while discussing the nature of the Kaalsha shaman in *The Kalasha Shamans' Practices of Exorcism* writes:

The Kalasha oral tradition is full of stories of the ability of some men to enter into trance. At this time, those so inspired have asserted that they were able to communicate with the gods and spirits, who were using them to give advice for future and provide answers for any present community problems. The Kalasha society must have greatly respected and heeded these messages transmitted from the invisible world by these human go-betweens, whom they considered elected by those same powers. (Loude, 1996)

Possibly there may be thee stages during performance of a *dehar*:

¹ Tsyam is a mythical land which is considered the place of the origin of the Kalasha people, some scholars hold that it was situated somewhere in the eastern Afghanistan. For detail see Muhammad Kashif Ali, "A History of the Kalasha in Pakistan: Its Origin, Change and Continuity" (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Punjab, 2019), 49-51.

1. The dehar gets involve in parapsychological activates and he approaches the supernatural beings like fairies.
2. At the second phase the dehar is under control of supernatural beings and they communicates with each other.
3. At this stage the fairies or supernatural leave the dehar who gradually regain his normal state of mind and control.

Unquestionably, the second phase of all is the most important, in the second phase the Kalasha shaman is connected and communicate with divine forces of the Kalasha cosmology how a divine powers without trance also can communicate with dehar in his dreams (Siiger, 1967). Augusto Cacopardo writes about the becoming a *dehar*, “The call to be a *deh’ar* may come under any circumstance, but the more favourable time is held to be that o calendrical festivals when human beings are closer to the sacred.” (Cacopardo, 1999)

For the Kalasha shaman is mandatory to follow the indigenous *dastoor* in true spirit and if he fails to do so he won’t be the shaman of his community (Siiger, 1956). The Italian anthropologist Augusto S. Cacopardo, theoretically analysing the Kalasha shaman or *dehar* challenges it as shaman. Cacopardo writes, “The Kalasha *deh’ar* does not fully comply with some of the best known definitions of a shaman. There is no clear belief in departure of his soul from the body during a trance.” (Cacopardo, 1999) There are many famous the Kalasha shamans in the local history, Siiger records only three *dehars* in the Kalasha valleys in 1948 and smells the decline for the institution. Further he writes, “They act as ecstatic prophets, enjoy a general esteem, and are treated with sincere reverence, sometimes even awe”. (Siiger, 1956)

Based upon his field visit in the Kalasha valleys he recalls Rota *dehar* when he was at a funeral in Rumbur valley. Siiger records in his work that during the ceremonial dance at a funeral,

Rota was also entered in the dance arena while facing towards the west and shrine of Mahandeo (which is situated in Grom village) for praying in whispers. The *dehar* fell into trance after some time while dancing continually. In the trance, he was shivering and later running into the participants with least control over him and the participants were trying to save themselves from random blows of the *dehar*. He writes that the funeral dance was being performed and then Rota entered the dancing area and “turning his face towards the nearby Mahandeo and raising his arms ceremonially above his head, he murmured a long prayer.” Gradually he begun to enter in trance while his body was trembling. He, later, was running in trance all around and funeral participants were trying to secure themselves from punches of Rota Dehar, after some quarter of hour he was collapsed. Further he shares that the participants were trying to touch the back of Rota for gaining the spiritual share (Siiger, 1967).

Chitrali ethnographer and historian Wazir Ali Shah reports that the *dehar* had no fixed salary or any fixed amount acquiring from the community. He writes in his hand-written diary in 1948, “He is usually a landholder like other people and has goathouses or goat like the rest, and does not depend on the income he gets as the Dehar alone.” (Ali, 2019)

Prominent Kalasha Dehars

In the local and folk history of the people, Budha, Naga, Rota and Thanok are more famous and revered shamans. According to various field visits of the primary author from 2007 to 2017 in all three practicing Kalasha valleys (Birir, Rumbur and Bumburet) Qazi Khush Nawaz of Rumbur is considered the last known the Kalasha shaman. Qazi Khush Nawaz died after spending about a hundred good years in 2015. He was custodian of his *dastoor* and full of traditional knowledge as well as folk historian. As the *dehar* he was called the Kaga *dehar* (Ali, 2019). However, Akiko Wada, a Japanese who is leaving in Kalash from 1980s, does not believe that Khush Nawaz was a

shaman or *dehar*, she calls him *is'parap'shao* or raw *dehar*. She told to the primary author that no doubt Khush Nawaz was the most eldest person of the tribe but he was not respected as *dehar* neither he was acknowledged for the rank of shaman (Wada, Kalasha Dehar (Shaman), 2017). Another example of *is'parap'shao* is Watan Bibi from Bethet village of Rumbur valley. During a field visit the primary author visited Watan Bibi in her house. She communicated that she is not a full *dehar* but a raw *dehar* and sometimes she dreams which come true, later or sooner. The primary author is witness of the havoc flooding of 2015 in Kalash and Chitral. Watan Bibi told that a couple of days ago the first wave of the flood she was informed by divine forces about some great loss and threat. Next morning she conveyed to other tribe fellows to convince of the sacrifice but she was not taken serious and the next day whole region was hit by the most devastating flood (Bibi, 2015) of the region and near history. The primary author was stuck in Rumbur valleys for 22 days and in those days forty waves of flood hit the Rumbur valley. The jeep-able road was despatched and almost all bridges and watermills had been damaged. Due to continuous flooding and disconnecting Rumbur valley from Chitral town the shops got abandoned in couple of weeks and the valley was on brink to hunger when a chopper of Pakistan Army landed in valley to distribute relief ration provide by National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) (Ali, 2015). It was the most devastating flood after 2010, local told.

Decline of the Institution

For several decades, the *dehar* as institution is on decay for multiple reasons. According Shah Jawan, the key informant from Grom village of Rumbur valley, all *dehars* have been disappeared. During an interview he recalls the golden age of *dehars*. He recalls two great *dehars*

when he was young;² Bodok was greater shaman compare to Rota and both were from Bumburet valley though Rota's village was Palawandeh while Anish was the village of Bodok. He recalls another shaman named Jandoli from Rumbur valley and he was died in 1990s (Jawan, 2007). In another interview Shah Jawan told to the primary author that Jandoli Khan *dehar* was died in 2000s (Jawan, 2008). Discussion with Shah Jawan shows that his time was not much fertile in term of revered shamans and divine authorized spiritual leaders. Qazi Palawan (aka Fal-i-Azam) agrees upon that there is no pure shaman or *dehar* among the Kalasha these days. His father Baraman was also well praised Qazi or religious leader of Rumbur. Therefore, Fal-i-Azam has good folk history to share. He also recalls Rota, Khani and Bodok (from Bumburet) while Ango, Taktak Jaanak and Jandoli Khan from Rumbur as last proper *dehars* of his people (Fal-i-Azam, 2017). The most southern valley Birir seems more unfertile as both Qazis from Rumbur deny any shaman among the Kalasha of Birir in near past. Apart from the above-mentioned the Kalasha shamans Zaheer-ud-Din also lists some famous *dehars*: Murad Baig, Azer Malik, Rabadan and Wirishik (Din, 2011).

Studying the cosmology and religion of the Kalasha people we deduce that the concept of purity and impurity is very strict and important. The word *onjesta* is being used for purity while *pragata* for impurity. The whole Kalasha society is divided in two broader religious spheres; pure and impure. For instance men, upper valleys, stables, shrines, temples etc. are pure while women, *bashali*³ and lower valleys fall in the impure sphere. The upper valleys and high pastures of the Kalasha people are abode of fairies and fairies are pure. Therefore, according to their *dastoor* the Kalasha women are not allowed to visit the high pastures and stables because women are not

² He was born in 1937 as it was mentioned on his Nation Identity Card while died in 2011.

³ *Bashali* is a separate quarter out of the main village, the Kalasha women according to their *dastoor* spend their menstrual period in *bashali* moreover the lady who goes under labour pain stay some days in *bashali* until she gives birth and leave the *bashali* after some day when she gets purity through certain rituals.

considered *onjesta* (Ali, 2019). Wynne Maggi, American anthropologist, also notes that higher places are more pure while the places in the downstream and near the Muslims' settlement are *pragata* (Maggi, 2001). The concept of purity and impurity among the Kalasha can be compared with the Vedic religion as Witzel writes, "Purity is very much stressed, just as in the Veda or Hinduism. In Kalash religion it is centered around altars, goat stables, the space between the hearth and the back wall of houses" (Witzel, 2004). Peter Parkes gives a list of "pure" and "impure"; mountains, markhor, goats, honeybees, juniper, holly oak, goat stables, men and shrines are pure while lower valleys, garlic, onion, cattle, sheep, eggs, hens, *bashali*, cemetery and women are impure (Parkes, 1983). The purity is a serious matter in the Kalasha religion especially during the festivities and at the time of performing the rituals, if not comply properly the divine powers may get angry and may refuse to accept and acknowledged the sacrifices and prayers (Wada, Kalasha: Their Life & Tradition, 2005). Hence the belief of purity is utmost significant and in the Kalasha society to gain the spirituality and revered rank of shaman is associated with purity. For to be *dehar* it is mandatory to observe the *dastoor* in true spirit and complete comply the norms of purity. Annoyingly, Palawan told that with the change of time and exposure to the world the Kalasha people are least concerned towards the purity which lead the community towards infertility of *dehar*. Poultry or chicken is considered impure among the Kalasha but now, especially after exposure to the outer world due to tourism and infrastructure, they frequently consume the chicken which resulted impurity. Viviane Lievre brings into light the sole female *dehar* and legend of impurity of the chicken among the Kalasha people:

There has been one exception within the Kalasha oral tradition: a female Dehar called Mali. She lived in Drosh (south of Chitral) at the time preceding the first wave of Islamic conversion in Chitral area (thirteen or fourteen centuries)...She delivered prophecies: "in three years a materialized spirit will come with a bird. If

you accept this bird, it will mark the beginning of your decline and the community will vanish.” Three years later her prophecy came true. The Kalasha, having paid no attention to Mali’s advice, accepted the bird. From this time the Muslims assault and conversions. When they realized their mistake, the Kalasha declared a taboo on poultry, hens and considered them impure.” (Lievre, 1996)

During a field visit of summer 2015 the primary author came to know through the key informant Muhammad Khan that a young boy from Rumbur valley was potential shaman as he was dreaming frequently regarding his people and society but his educated father was not interested to have a shaman in his house. Therefore, one day he killed a hen over the head of his son, poured all blood on his head to make him maximum impure.⁴

Apart from disobeying the *dastoor* he claims that poverty is another reason behind the decline of this institution. In the Kalasha society *istongas* is ritual to get purity in different cases. For the potential shaman *istongas* is required and a male goat is sacrificed. Marshal Khan a potential *dehar* from Rumbur was not able offer the sacrifice due to his poverty so could not arrange the *istongas* for becoming the *dehar* (Fal-i-Azam, 2017). Luke Rehmat (aka Rustam Khan), a social activist and the CEO of sole media house of his community, adds Kalasha-Muslims jointly living model in the valleys as reason of the decline, according to the indigenous *dastoor* for a potential *dehar* the compliance of purity is essential which is not possible in joint living model (Rehmat, 2017; Ali, 2019).

Unfortunately, the revitalisation of the Kalasha shaman is a challenging and a hard job when we see that the Kalasha in all three valleys are about 4,100 and the Muslims are in greater number (about 8,000) (Ali, 2019) and both communities are living in jointly and in such model to

⁴ Though the primary author has met with the guy and his father but his father does not like to public the fact about his son. Therefore, ethically the primary author is bound not to share their identity.

acquire the ideal purity is impossible. Luckily, Kashkari, Morayok, Marshal Khan, Watan Bibi and Akbar Nawaz are *is'prap'shao*. *Is'prap'shao* is a person who dreams, which later become reality, unlike *dehar* the *is'prap'shao* never experience trance and communication with supernatural beings.

Conclusion

The institution of the *dehar* for the community has immense importance for their *dastoor*, psychic relief and source of inspiration, indeed he was source of unity as well as he was respected and acknowledged by the whole community. The non-existence of this spiritual institution in fact is a great loss for the community and for their future. He was the main body to announce and lead the festivals and different rituals from birth to death throughout the year. He was a unity symbol, the institution of *dehar* has been elapsed and his community is being assimilated. The Kalasha and the Muslims no doubt are living in co-existence but purity is impossible for the Kalasha in this mixture living model. The purity is the essential element for to be a *dehar*. The revival of the real *dehar* seems a gruelling job.

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Authors declare no potential conflict of interest for this study.

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