

HISTORICAL DARDISTAN AND THE HERITAGE TOURISM: JINJERET KUH A FORGOTTEN KALASHA VALLEY (CHITRAL-PAKISTAN)

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ABSTRACT

In the Chitral region of Hindu Kush-Pakistan, the Kalasha Valleys are abode to one of the last remaining aboriginal communities in the world, the Kalasha people, who have a unique pre-Islamic religion, culture and traditions. Among these valleys (Rumbur, Birir and Bumburet), Jinjeret Kuh is among the lesser-known but culturally rich and historic valley. This comparatively unfamiliar valley is linguistically and architecturally substantial. This paper attempts to find the 'what' and 'how' concerning the importance of Jinjeret Kuh with regard to the history of Dardistan, the region, which, in ancient times covered parts of Northern Pakistan, Northern Afghanistan, and Ladakh in India. While the valley is still relatively isolated, there is growing interest in the preservation of the Kalasha's intangible and tangible heritage, including the iconic wooden homes and sacred sites. However, this potential for heritage tourism is not without its challenges, particularly regarding the preservation of cultural integrity and the impact of modern tourism. This study calls for a careful and responsible approach to tourism that respects the delicate balance between cultural conservation and economic growth, ensuring that the legacy of Jinjeret Kuh is passed on to future generations.

Keywords: *Dardistan, Kalasha, Jinjeret Kuh, heritage tourism, cultural preservation, Chitral, sustainable tourism, indigenous communities.*

INTRODUCTION

The Kalasha Valleys of Chitral, nestled within the towering mountains of northern Pakistan, have long captivated historians,

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anthropologists, and travellers due to their unique cultural and historical significance. The Kalasha people, regarded as one of the last remaining indigenous communities in the region, maintain a distinct pre-Islamic heritage, preserving customs, language, and traditions that set them apart from the surrounding societies. While much attention has been given to the more prominent Kalasha valleys of Bumburet, Rumbur, and Birir (Ali, & Chawla, 2019) the valley of Jinjeret Kuh remains largely unexplored in academic discourse.

Jinjeret Kuh, though lesser known, holds immense historical and cultural value within the broader context of Dardistan, a historical region that once encompassed parts of northern Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. This valley is not only an essential part of Kalasha heritage but also a significant site in understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of the indigenous Dardic people. The valley's architecture, linguistic patterns, and built heritage offer a glimpse into an ancient way of life that is rapidly disappearing due to modernization and socio-political changes in the region.

Heritage tourism presents a viable opportunity to both preserve and promote the unique identity of Jinjeret Kuh while contributing to the sustainable economic development of the local community. The preservation of Kalasha wooden architecture, sacred sites, and intangible heritage (oral traditions) is crucial for maintaining the authenticity of the valley. However, heritage tourism also brings with it challenges, particularly in terms of ensuring that the influx of visitors does not disrupt the cultural integrity of the Kalasha people.

This paper explores the historical significance of Jinjeret Kuh within the framework of Dardistan while analysing the potential for heritage tourism as a means of cultural preservation and economic sustainability. By advocating for a responsible and community-centered approach, this study aims to highlight the need for policies and practices that safeguard the heritage of Jinjeret Kuh while fostering respectful and meaningful engagement with its unique cultural landscape.

Kalasha Land and People

The Kalasha people of Chitral are considered Dard-Aryan in Pakistan (Ali et al. 2019; Ali, 2019) residing in three valleys of the Eastern Hindu Kush: Birir, Rumbur and Bumburet. Bumburet is the largest and most commercialized of the three and serves as the central valley. Birir, the southern valley, is considered the most traditional and orthodox, while Rumbur, the northern valley, is regarded as the hub of folk heritage. Rumbur has produced several custodians of the Kalasha *dastoor*[†] (tradition), including Qazi Khush Nawaz, Qazi Baraman, Katar Singh, Shah Jawan, Saifullah Jan, Muhammad Isa, Engineer Khan, and Fal-i-Azam, known as Palawan in Kalasha valleys (Ali et al. 2021a). Situated in the rugged Hindu Kush range of Chitral, Pakistan, the Kalasha valleys are fed by torrents bearing the same names as their respective valleys. The region's challenging terrain and difficult access have contributed to preserving the purity of their *dastoor*. The Kalasha speak Kalashamun, a Dardic language belonging to the Indo-Aryan family (Ali, 2019). According to their traditions, the Kalasha once ruled the entire Chitral region. However, they are now confined to the three valleys of Birir, Bumburet, and Rumbur in southern Chitral (Ali, 2019). Their total population is estimated to be between 4,000 and 4,100, while the combined population of the three valleys ranges from 12,000 to 13,000 (Ali, 2019; Ali & Chawla, 2021).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs a descriptive historical research method, adopting a qualitative approach. It is based on secondary data as well as considerable fieldwork conducted by the author, who visited the region multiple times between 2007 to 2024. During these visits, the author closely witnessed various aspects of Kalasha life, including their *dastoor*, festivals, and funeral rituals. The fieldwork also aided the author to understand the process of change in the Jinjeret, which once was a Kalasha valley and now has been converted to Islam. By

[†] The term is applied commonly on their faith/religion and culture or traditions.

nurturing a strong rapport with the community over the years, the author was able to stay in their homes, gaining first-hand insights into their cultural practices. This involvement facilitated in-depth investigative interviews with community members, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of their history belief system, and socio-cultural aspects. The study thus presents an authentic and comprehensive account of Jinjeret traditions, enriched by direct engagement with the people who uphold them.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The Process of Islamization of the Kalasha: A Historical Survey

This portion of the study aims to probe the historical survey of Islamization of the Kalasha Kafirs of Chitral in different valleys and sub-valleys; Jinjeret Kuh valley, Urtsun, Shishi Kuh valley, Kalkatak, Suwir and upper Chitral. The jargon 'Kafir' is considered negative by the Kalasha people as the literary meaning of the *kafir* is non-believer and the Kalasha had been and still are considered *kafirs* in Chitral. However, they claim to be believers who believe in one Supreme God (Dezau) (Ali, 2024). Being considered, Kafirs, they were converted, so in this portion I added the word "Kalasha Kafirs." Once the Kalasha were the rulers of whole Chitral (Ali, 2022) and later become the subject of Mehters the Muslim rulers of Chitral (Ali et al. 2021b).

In classical writings we find many areas of Chitral, inhabited by the Kalasha people, as Biddulph writes in late 19th century that in western side of Chitral were Birir (Bider), Bumburet and Rumbur (Kalashgoom) inhabited by Kalash or Siah Posh and he also reports the Kalasha villages of Suwir (Sawair), Nager, Shishi Kuh, Jinjeret (Jinjuret) and Lawi (Loi). He marks early conversion in southern valleys, but claims, the community was adhere to their language and ancient culture (Biddulph, 1880). Major Raverty had visited Chitral (Chitral) in mid 1880s, he documented that the region around Drush (Drosh) was infested by *Tor Kafirs* (*Siah Posh*), Harandu (Arandu), Damil (Damal), Naghar (Nagar) and Kalkanak (Kalkatak) villages are mentioned in his notes (Raverty, 1888). Gurdon documented in the

first decade of the twentieth century that people of Bumburet, Rumbur, Birir valleys and people living in side valleys between Drosh and Mirkhani were Kalasha and their valleys were called Kalashgum (Gurdon, 1905). It is narrated in *Nai Tarikh-i-Chitral* that remnants of the Kalasha rule and their material culture could be found in whole Chitral valley at the time of compiling latest edition of *Nai Tarikh-i-Chitral* (Murtaza, 1962).

Alberto M. Cacopardo and Augusto S. Cacopardo, Italian anthropologists and ethnographers, suggest a term “Peristan” to the region stretches from Nuristan (Afghanistan) to Gilgit-Baltistan. They reproduced that once the region was referred as Paropamisos[‡] by the Greek and local called it Bolor. Cacopardo brothers coined the term ‘Peristan’ based upon fantasy, literary meaning: land of fairies (Cacopardo and Cacopardo, 2001). They believed that Islam entered into Peristan or in Chitral and surrounding areas from west; Badakhshan which was Islamized in 8th Century A.D. and finally Islam reached Baltistan in 16th Century A.D (Cacopardo, 2016). Cacopardo and Cacopardo are convinced, based upon their field visits of Lower and Southern Chitral in 1990, 1993 and 1995 that the Kalasha tradition, regarding the Kalasha presence and their supremacy in Lower Chitral can be verified by traditions of the inhabitants (of Lower Chitral), who migrated from different corners of the Hindu Kush in different times (Cacopardo and Cacopardo, 2011).

Furthermore, Augusto writes that pressure over the Kalasha to convert into Islam was came from south rather than from ruling class of Chitral. He believes that around middle of 19th century, Pashtun tribes entered into the southern Chitral, they replaced tolerant Shia and Ismaili communities and they became the cause of the Kalasha conversion in the southern Chitral and “In the course of the second decade of the twentieth century the southernmost western valleys — Urtsun and Jinjeret Kuh — also began to convert” (S. Cacopardo, 2016). However, Prof. Israr suggests that *Mehatrs* of Chitral also had

[‡] Greek name of the Hindu Kush

been a reason of assimilation and conversion of the Kalash in south. Gromel, south to Drosh town, had been stronghold of the Kalasha for long-time, Israr-ul-Din writes that there was strong fortress, which had been difficult to capture. He adds that in Gromel village, there was a large dancing place (*charsu* in Khowar and *gri* in Kalasha) where great *Zhoshi* festival had been celebrated. Shero is considered the last Kalasha chief of Gromel; he was defeated by Shah Framurd in the second decade of 18th century. Shero, with his brothers, fled to Braol (Dir) where he later converted into Islam, Gromel was also Islamized gradually (Israr-ud-Din et al. 2016).

Augusto Cacopardo admits that in southern Chitral subjugation of the Kalasha was a lengthy process as they gave tough time to the rulers of Chitral. It was the time, when immigrants were settled in the southern Chitral. The Kalasha people were in great numbers, so they were “everybody’s enemy.” Therefore, Dameli and Palula people assisted rulers of Chitral to defeat the Kalasha (Cacopardo, 2008). Henrik Liljegren, a Swedish linguist, also indicates the arrival of immigrants, like: Palula or Dangarik, people in the southern Chitral in mid-17th century (Liljegren, 2008). Before assimilation, the Kalasha was widely spoken in the southern Chitral, on both sides of the river the Kalasha (of Jinjeret Kuh, Kalkatak, Suwir, Lawi, Uzurbekande, Birga and Urtsun etc.) converted gradually between 1920 to 1970 and discarded their religion and language (Petersen & Mørch, 2004; Kalash & Heegård, 2016), they completely assimilated in the south at least. Paolo Graziosi (1964: p. 59) while compiling his anthropological report of Chitral in early 1960s quotes Morgenstierne that, “When Morgenstierne visited the [sic] Chitral in 1929, the Kalasha language was spoken in the [sic] Rumbur, Bomberet and Birir valleys, as well as in those of Jinjoret and Urtsun and in few villages near Drosh by converts to Islam, where he would have expected to be assimilated by Khowar, the most important language in Chitral.”

The conversion is an on-going process in the Kalashdesh, each year, some Kalashas convert to Islam for different reasons. Kazmi,

however, convinced that Tablighi Jama'at is a major factor behind the conversion (Kazmi, 2016).

Jinjeret Kuh Valley

Drosh town is in south of Chitral proper at the distance of about 45 kilometres and west to Drosh is Jinjeret village and then Jinjeret Kuh valley. Jinjeret Kuh valley is in west to Drosh near Pak-Afghan border. Jinjeret Kuh should not be confused with Jinjeret which is a village near Drosh town; in fact, Jinjeret village is gateway to Jinjeret Kuh.

Today, the number of households in Jinjeret Kuh valley are 700, comprising of three major ethnic groups; Sheikhan (converted Kalasha), Gujar and Pashtun. The Sheikhan of the valley do not like to recall their Kalasha past, they do not want to recall that in past they were unbeliever. They are reluctant, especially youth, to talk about the Kalasha people and culture, they call the Kalasha language as language of *Kafirs* (Zafar Ahmed, personal communication, 2017) and has elapsed the Kalashamun; they have been shifted to Khowar, only very few old folks can communicate in Kalashamun.

Jinjeret Kuh Valley and Previous Work

Jinjeret Kuh valley had been neglected to study at large until Augusto Cacopardo and Alberto Cacopardo started to conduct research in Jinjeret Kuh in late 1980s. In last decades of 19th century, John Biddulph gives a brief reference when he writes that in south of Chitral there was a village (valley?) Jinjeret and was inhabited by Siah Posh who were practicing their ancient culture (Biddulph, 1880). Lockhart and Woodthorpe had also informed in 1880s that, then, from Bumburet, Rumbur and Birir to Drosh "Kalasha either Kafir by religion" were living and they were not converted (Lockhart and Woodthorpe, 1889).

They had discussed the State of Chitral in detail, not side valleys of the Kalasha community. In 1930s Jinjeret Kuh had not been converted completely, in 1929 a Norwegian linguist, George Morgenstierne, had

visited whole Chitral region to cataloguing languages of the regions. In his report, he had counted five Kalasha valleys (Bumburet, Rumbur, Birir, Jinjeret Kuh and Urtsun) which had preserved the Kalasha language and the culture. Further, he added that the social rank or social position of the Kalasha were low (Morgenstierne, 2015). However, he did not give any detail about the Kalasha population and culture in Jinjeret Kuh, his major focus was linguistic survey. Alberto M. Cacopardo suggested that till 1940s all Kalasha, including Jinjeret Kuh, other than Bumburet, Rumbur and Birir had been converted gradually (M. Cacopardo, 2016), in their earlier work they suggested “completely Islamized in 1930s (Cacopardo and Cacopardo, 2001). Ida E. Mørch and Jan Heegaard, based upon their field works in early 1990s state that the Kalashamun was spoken in their daily life in Jinjeret Kuh in 1990s (Mørch & Heegaard, 2008).

Ancestors of Jinjeret Kuh Valley

The people of Jinjeret Kuh valley claim to be descendants of Quresh. Muzaffar Khan, key informant of the author, from Jinjeret Kuh, tells that the Kalasha of Jinjeret Kuh had converted about a century ago. His father Zardullah Khan was born Muslim; however, his grandfather Bakhtawar Shah was a converted Muslim. According to Muzaffar Khan the people are descendant of Quresh and they came from “Arbaskan” a long ago. The ancestors migrated from “Arabsatan” to Chaga Sarai (eastern Afghanistan), from Chaga Sarai to Bajaur and finally reached Jinjeret Kuh valley (Muzaffar Khan, personal communication, June 28, 2017).

Alberto and Augusto Cacopardo also reported Kalasha/Kafirs oral traditions of Quresh origin, the Kalasha of Jinjeret Kuh valley migrated from Arabia at the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUP), however, the routes are slightly different; Kabul to southern Chitral and then to Jinjeret Kuh valley and to other Kalasha valleys (Cacopardo and Cacopardo, 1992). Oral Kalasha traditions refer King Chiu as ancestor of Jinjeret Kuh. Regarding the ancestorship of Jinjeret Kuh Bangush is considered the Kalasha chief of Jinjeret Kuh:

who established Grom[§] village (now Sheikhandeh) and built a tower (Cacopardo and Cacopardo, 1992) for security and as residence. Karl Wutt: an Austrian ethnographer, reported five *kot*** or *sun* in the valley in 1976 while Alberto and Augusto report only three remaining *kot* in 1980s (Cacopardo and Cacopardo, 1992), while, during my field visit in 2017 the present author found only two *kot* there, in Grom or Sheikhandeh village. Both towers are triple storey and intact, in one *kot* an ethnographic collection of old Kalasha objects is preserved, like: old wooden pots, metal utensils, sacred horn etc. The initiative was taken by a British activist: Maureen P. Lines, who died recently. She had appointed a keeper (Muhammad Iftikhar-ul-Din) of the *kot* and he was paid by Maureen.

According to Muhammad Iftikhar-ul-Din, Maureen had a plan to establish a mini ethnological museum in both *kots* (Iftikhar-ul-Din, personal communication, June 28, 2017). A mosque is nearby the *kots* and on one of the *kots* two loudspeakers of mosque have been installed. The major purpose of these *kots*, according to Muzaffar Khan, was security from Bashgali or Red Kafirs, who were used to attack Kalasha to swag their goats and sheep. The Kalasha of Jinjeret were less in numbers, they could not fight with Bashgalis. Therefore, they had to establish *kots* for the defence, where they used to hide themselves when they were raided by Bashgali. Sometimes burning logs were tossed on Bashgalis from top of *kots* and sometimes all the Kalasha community had to asleep in *kots* over nights. According to him, one *kot* could accommodate about fifty people, in three floors and the one basement (Muzaffar Khan personal communication, June 28, 2017). In 1980s Augusto and Alberto counted 120 households in Grom village (Cacopardo and Cacopardo, 1992) and in past it might be low so it could be possible that all five *kots* could accommodate the whole Kalasha community of Grom village during raids of Bashgalis from Kafiristan, later Nuristan.

[§] Its Kalasha name is Grom and Khowar or converted name is Sheikhandeh, still the Kalasha of Bumburet, Rumbur and Birir call it Grom rather than Sheikhandeh.

** Watching tower in Kalasha is called *sun* and *kot* in Khowar.

Kalasha Heritage in Jinjeret Kuh Valley

Muzaffar Khan conveys that *Devadur* (sanctuary) has been desecrated and a house has been built upon the land of sanctuary (Muzaffar Khan personal communication, June 28, 2017). Traditional open graveyard is taking its last breath, as during field visit (in summer 2017) the present researcher found just one coffin containing bones. To decompose dead bodies in coffins and placing them on high places has been the Kalasha tradition, such cemeteries (*mand'awjaw*) still can be seen in Bumburet and Birir valleys. The *mand'awjaw* of Jinjeret

Kuh was situated at Zozorik, opposite Grom across the stream. When Augusto and Alberto in late 1980s, paid visit to document Jinjeret Kuh, they added photograph of the cemetery, then it was fairly larger, though they also commented that the site had been shrunk in comparison to past and the “remains of cemetery were piled up in a rocky area unsuitable for cultivation” (Cacopardo & Cacopardo, 1992) while during my visit, I found that the place of the cemetery had been levelled for cultivation and only one coffin was placed aside with remains. They saw at least six well preserved coffins on the site, it shows the last one would also disappear in following years. The installing *gandau* or ancestral effigies in graveyards had also been the Kalasha tradition. Augusto and Alberto described that their informer told them that there were some six *gandau* in cemetery; however, they could not find even a single during their field visit in 1989. They asserted that when Karl Wutt visited valley in 1976 there was left one, which had been “thrown across a ditch to be used as a bridge!” (Cacopardo & Cacopardo, 1992). They have included a photograph of thrown *gandau*, however, the site is not mentioned by them. My informer, Zafer Ahmed, led me to Sheikhandeh village, where a pre-Islamic wooden effigy; a *gandau* was placed on a high trail, it was placed there to support the fragile piece of the path, it was not the same *gandau* Karl Wutt had seen in 1976.

Cultural and Linguistic Comparison of Jinjeret Kuh Valley

Cacopardo brothers believe that linguistically and culturally Jinjeret Kuh valley was well knitted with Birir valley rather than Bumburet or Rumbur. Therefore, Augusto Cacopardo recorded that the Prun festival is today celebrated only in Birir valley and it had been celebrated in Jinjeret Kuh valley as well before Islamization of the valley (S. Cacopardo, 2016). They also recorded that Cawmos and Uchaw festivals also had been celebrated in Jinjeret Kuh, but on patterns of Birir valley rather than Bumburet of Rumbur valleys (Cacopardo and Cacopardo, 1992).

Potential of Heritage Tourism in Jinjeret Kuh Valley

Jinjeret Kuh Valley, once a Kalasha settlement, preserves important leftovers of its indigenous heritage despite the community's conversion to Islam almost a century ago. The valley, with its unique blend of Kalasha and Islamic influences, holds enormous potential for heritage tourism. The preservation and promotion of these cultural elements could not only contribute to local economic development but also serve as a vital means of safeguarding the leftovers of Kalasha heritage.

Cultural and Historical Significance

Jinjeret Kuh Valley still carries the heritage of the Kalasha people through its historical sites, including the remains of the traditional open graveyard at Zozorik and the once-practiced tradition of installing ancestral effigies (*gandau*). These elements, though disappearing, offer a window into the rich past of the valley. Heritage tourism can play a crucial role in revitalizing interest in these traditions and ensuring their documentation and conservation.

The valley's Devadur (sanctuary), though desecrated and replaced by residential structures, can still be marked and commemorated as a historical site. Similarly, the *mand'awjaw* (traditional graveyard), which is nearly extinct, can be preserved through proper site management and informational signage. The graveyards in

Bumburet and Birir serve as examples of how such cultural landscapes can be maintained and promoted as heritage tourism sites.

Tourism Development Opportunities

Heritage Walks and Cultural Tours: Guided tours highlighting the valley's Kalasha heritage, including visits to the former sanctuary site, the graveyard, watchtowers and locations where ancestral effigies once stood, could provide great and lifetime experiences for visitors.

Cultural Interpretation Centres: Establishing a cultural centre or small ethnological museum in the valley could educate tourists about the Kalasha traditions, their transition over time, and the significance of sites like Zozorik and Sheikhandeh village where open graveyard and ancient watchtowers were found respectively.

Eco-Tourism and Sustainable Practices: Bridging the heritage tourism with eco-tourism initiatives can attract nature lovers and cultural enthusiasts alike. Trekking and hiking trails that highlight both the natural beauty and historical sites of Jinjeret Kuh could increase the overall tourist attraction.

Community Engagement and Handicrafts: Encouraging local artisans to revive traditional Kalasha and transformed crafts and sell them as souvenirs could provide economic incentives for the community while preserving cultural knowledge.

Challenges and Conservation Strategies

Erosion of Heritage Sites: The transformation of heritage sites into agricultural land and modern infrastructure threatens the survival of these cultural landmarks. The KP Government and heritage organizations should step in to document and conserve these sites before they disappear entirely, these sites belong to human heritage, human legacy.

Lack of Awareness and Promotion: Jinjeret Kuh is lesser-known compared to other Kalasha valleys like Bumburet, Birir and Rumbur. Planned promotion through tourism boards, heritage NGOs, and

digital platforms can help bring it into the spotlight.

Cultural Sensitivities: Meanwhile the current populaces follow Islamic traditions, it is essential to approach heritage tourism with respect for local sentiments and their consents. The consultations of the local community should be a fundamental part of any tourism development initiatives and projects.

CONCLUSION

Jinjeret Kuh Valley has great-untapped potential as a heritage tourism destination in Chitral, Pakistan. With careful planning, sustainable tourism strategies, and community involvement, the valley can emerge as a key destination for cultural preservation and economic growth at local and national levels. By protecting its Kalasha era heritage and promoting responsible tourism, Jinjeret Kuh can serve as a living demonstration to the region's rich and diverse history and culture. Improving the infrastructure and giving it suitable space in media and social media it can attract many tourists especially in summer when the valley offers a pleasant weather and abundant fruits. If the Kalasha era heritage is protected it can attract national and international tourists, historians, anthropologists and ethnographers.

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