Indigenous Pathways to Peace: An Exploratory Study of the Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Practices of the Kalasha People of Pakistan

by

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Abstract

This study explores the peacebuilding practices of the Kalasha people, an Indigenous community residing in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. The study focuses on uncovering peacebuilding practices rooted in cultural codes and oral laws that govern conflict expression and resolution within the community. The study is theoretically situated in the paradigm of critical, emancipatory, and Indigenous peacebuilding.

The main objective of this research was to delve into how the Kalasha people resolve conflicts and uphold a community marked by rare instances of crime and violent conflict. To achieve this objective, the study used a qualitative approach informed by critical and Indigenous research paradigms. Thirty-three participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data were generated through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation and analysed using an inductive thematic analysis approach.

The study findings highlight several factors contributing to the peacefulness of the Kalasha society. Peace within the Kalasha community is not just a concept but a dynamic and fundamental principle that shapes its people's very existence. Their approach to peace extends far beyond the mere absence of violence, reflecting a profound understanding that peace is an ongoing journey and demands unwavering commitment at all levels of society. They employ divinity, peace education, cultural norms, interdependence, non-aggressive conflict resolution processes, vibrant festivals, songs, and stories, as well as the dedicated roles of men and women mediators using traditional peacemaking methods to actively maintain peace. This holistic practice powerfully demonstrates their dedication to nurturing peace within their community and contributes to the rarity of violent conflict, resulting in what can be described as a peaceful society.

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I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Supreme Being, who rekindles hope within us during our darkest times. It is through this hope, along with the wisdom, strength, and fortitude granted by Allah Almighty, that I find the resilience to navigate life's most challenging moments. Without these gifts, enduring this journey through life's crises would not have been possible.

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lives from within and allows us to learn from and celebrate marginalized individuals and communities.

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Dedication

To my late grandfather, Ch. Hakim Ali, a dedicated community peacebuilder and a beacon of wisdom and unity. And to all community peacebuilders worldwide, whose invaluable contributions often go uncelebrated.

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Note on Transliteration

The transliteration of Kalasha words used in this study was carried out with the assistance of Bakhtawar Shah, a research participant and the principal of Kalasha Dur School—the only Kalasha-medium school in the valleys. Kalasha Dur School employs the system developed by Ronald Trail and Gregory Cooper (1999) to teach the writing of Kal'as'amondr. However, some modifications have been made by Kalasha teachers to better reflect the phonetic characteristics of Kalasha words.

Glossary

Azat	Free
Azat moc	Free people
Azat mashab	Free religion
Aphiati	Literally means "hurdle free" but denotes "serene environment marked by non-interruption"
Áya	Mother
Ac'uaga kuy	Acholgah valley
Adrahak ona Anghar	Forest on fire
Al'as'ing	Marriage by elopement
Ajhona karik	Hospitality
Ajhona baya and *Ajh'ona babak*	Literally "guest brother" and "guest sister" but refers to call-and-response songs performed by teams of boys and girls before the *Cawmos* Festival
Anac'u	Impure sections of graveyards where women who pass away during menstruation or childbirth are buried
Awata	Seasons
Asheki Gho'n	Love songs

Baba	Sister
Bashali	Menstruation and maternity home
Bo shum	Very bad
Beitiphaki	Relational disruption/disharmony
Be gharazan	Neutral people, used for witnesses and third-party mediators
Bewat	Evening time, holds cultural significance for being *onjes't'a* time period
Biramor	Great merit feast/prestige feast
Ca'ani gho'n	Short songs performed along with fast-paced *Cá* dance
Cawmos	Winter Solstice Festival
Cikpak	Uproar
C'hirikpipi	Milk-drinking ritual performed during *Zoshi* Festival
Cu'ibut'ikein	Dedicated spaces near the river for women to wash clothes, bathe, and comb hair
Ca'	Fast-paced dance
Chik	Funeral ceremony
C'it	Choice
Chu	Daughter
Dau' tatu	Bean-gathering ritual performed during *Cawmos* festival
Dur	House
Dewadur	Altar, open-air sanctuaries dedicated to religious figures and only accessible to men

Dic'	Purest period, during the *Cawmos* festival, marked by purification rituals for peoples and places
Dihar	Shaman
Dezau	Supreme being/God
Dastur	Cultural Code of Conduct/custom
D'ongriik	Conflict resolution method for wife elopement; it means to reclaim double the bride price from the new husband as compensation
Dur phazhik	Distribution of houses/Kalasha Code of Property Distribution
D'onwal'I Al'as'ing	Remarriage by elopement/wife elopement
D'ushak	Form of songs and dance
Darazhelak	Slow beat played on drum, slow dance and lengthy folk songs narrating deeds of people
Gad'a áya	Big mother/title used for a child's midwife
Ghil'ai	Complaint
Gho'n'	Songs
Ghona dastur	Great custom
Gos'	Cattle house
Giwgaw	Brawl
Gri	Dance pavilion
Gad'ara bas'	Firstborn's special share in property
Gad'erakan	Elders
Ghand'aw	Funerary effigies

Ingaw	Altar in Mumuret Valley
Ishperi	Special food (wheat pancakes topped with cheese) prepared for charity
Iste'n'ik Karaw	Bangle searching: A ritual performed by expert women to diagnose problems and identify solutions
Istongas	Men's purification
Istam saras/Kil'ahsaras	A ritual observed in the last week of March, before cultivation; involves prayers to ask for the Creator's blessing for good crops
Ishpata	Greetings/to salute/to give respect
Istrizha	Woman
Itiphak	Cooperation
Janjal	Kalasha word for conflict meaning "entanglement"
Ja'n'u'n'	Walnut bread
Jamilisher	Daughters of clan
Jes't'ak Han	Temple
Kahar Giraik	Tolerance
Kun'durik	Life-sized wooden effigies placed at entrance of village in memory of deceased ancestor
Kazi	A Kalasha elder with religious knowledge
Kaw	Year
Kal'as'a mondr	Kalasha language
Khal xha rakum	Kindness and compassion towards relatives
Khaltabari	Ritual of tying knot/marriage

Khaphagi ani gho'n'	Sadness and resentment songs
Kho'n'marat'	Ritual to break a curse
Koshani	A happy occasion
Marakha	Kalasha word for jirga or conflict resolution process, meaning "gathering of people"
Maklis	People gathered for *Marakha*
Mand'awjaw	Graveyard
Mocnat'aikein	Outdoor funeral spaces
Madhaik	To arrive from graveyard/Ritual in *Cawmos* festival to honour deceased ancestors
Mastruk	Moon/month
Naumiti	Disappointment
Nahang	Demon
Najoge	Name of clan
Namus	Renown
Nanawati	Conflict resolution process in which a "delegation with gift" visits another party to convince them to resolve conflict and reconcile difference
Ne prus't'	Not good
Onjas't'a	Pure
Pasti	Storage unit
Pu'n'	Autumn festival in Biriu Valley
Pragata	Impure

Prus't'ek	Reconciliation ceremony
Paidagaraw	Creator
Ratnat'	Nocturnal dances
Saras	Juniper, a sacred plant for Kalasha
S'is'a au	Women's purification ritual
Son	High pastures
Shuman/ Shokhek	Knit garland used for welcoming and honouring people
S'abas!'	Bravo!
Sariek	Wedding and dowry feast
Suri Jagek	The practice of observing the sun
Suri Jagaikein	Dedicated sunrise and sunset observation spots
Shat Dek	Swearing ritual
Shat chawas	Asking someone to swear an oath
Tsiam	Kalasha place of origin according to Kalasha folklore
Tshatarabas'	Youngest son's special share in property as per Kalasha Law of Property Distribution
Tyek tyek	Conflict that involves physical action such as slapping/pushing someone
Ucaw	Summer Festival/celebration of the harvest season
Zoshi	Spring Festival
Zhontar	water-powered grinding mill

Chapter 1

Introduction: An Encounter with a Peaceful Society

My first introduction to the Kalasha, an Indigenous community in northwest Pakistan, was through a captivating documentary in the summer of 2017. What caught my attention the most was their peaceful way of life, the central role of women in the community, and the scarcity of crimes and violent conflicts. As I learned more about the serene Kalasha valleys, my fascination grew, inspiring me to undertake a personal journey to experience their culture firsthand.

Upon my arrival, the sense of peace was almost palpable, as if the entire valley resonated with tranquillity, a sentiment deeply ingrained in the fabric of the Kalash community.

Figure 1

Peace Café



Note. A café in Karaka village in the Mumuret Valley. The photograph was taken during my visit in 2017.

My guide through this insightful journey was Imran Kabir, a Kalasha teacher and activist who dedicated his spare moments to reading books about history and Kalasha traditions in the Kalasha Dur library.[1] With his profound knowledge and gentle demeanour, Imran became not just a guide but a window into the soul of Kalash culture.

While enjoying the sweet mulberries under the shade of the trees one afternoon, our conversation shifted to the impact of external initiatives in the valley. I asked Imran for his thoughts on the matter, and his response was both simple and profound. "What do you think painkillers do to your immunity?" he asked. He compared external interventions to painkillers, offering temporary relief but failing to address the root causes of the problem, often resulting in side effects that weaken the community's resilience and capacity to address its challenges. This compelling analogy has since infused my thinking as a graduate student of Peace and Conflict Studies. It is no myth that external interventions not only often fall short of achieving long-term peace and development but also undermine communities' ability to tackle their own issues. These well-intentioned yet prescriptive interventions frequently overlook local wisdom, cultural knowledge, and particularly the voices of women within the communities they seek to support. This thought-provoking conversation with Imran further fuelled my desire to delve into the wisdom, skills, and cultural resources utilized by the Kalasha to navigate through conflicts, forming the basis of this thesis research.

Yet, my journey was not just an academic pursuit. It was also a personal exploration of identity and privilege. My visit to the valleys made me even more aware of my privilege as a Punjabi Muslim. This prompted me to question why I was drawn to study the Kalash people. My experiences, influenced by various aspects of my identity within Pakistan and as a Pakistani Muslim abroad,

[1] Kalasha Dur (house of Kalasha) is a Kalasha cultural center in Mumuret Valley with an in-house museum, library, and Kalasha-medium school. Its construction was completed in 2004 and was entirely funded by HELENIC AID of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

exposed me to challenges that made me increasingly empathetic for those who are marginalized and stereotyped. However, what settled this question for me was the understanding that "it is not possible to unlearn one's privilege because privilege is historically given... but one can use it against the grain."[2] *Using it against the grain was a way to amplify voices and make the wisdom and knowledge of people who have historically been marginalized and othered more visible. This realization changed the way I approached learning, turning it into a mutual exchange of knowledge and understanding. I set out to learn about and shed light on the wisdom and unique approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding among the Kalasha. In return, this experience provided me with invaluable insights into humility, privilege, and the transformative potential of cultural exchange, culminating in a truly inspiring research encounter with a peaceful society.*

Purpose and Research Questions

The study explores conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes among the Kalasha, a community of just over 4,000 individuals, located in the three mountain valleys of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province in northwest Pakistan. Much has been written about the Kalasha (e.g. Alauddin, 1994; Ali, 2018; Ayub et al., 2015; Bashir, 2003; Biddulph, 1880; Cacopardo, 2011, 2016; Crowley, 2021; Darling, 1979; Di Carlo, 2007; Maggi, 2001; Mansoor et al., 2004; Morgenstierne, 1973; Parkes, 1983, 1994, 2000; Robertson, 1896; Rose, 1992; Wada, 2003). However, there has been no detailed study about why crime is so rare in their community and what methods they employ to resolve conflicts.

The scarcity of crime and violent conflict within Kalash society (Zahiruddin, 2015) intrigued me to study their cultural practices of conflict resolution. Hence, the main purpose of the thesis

[2] These comments were made by Dr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 2017 at the ceremonial opening of *Die Akademie des Verlernens* (The Academy of Unlearning) in Vienna City Hall. For details, please visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f199qcIDZxw.

research was to investigate the Kalasha peacebuilding practices rooted in the cultural codes and oral laws that govern and guide behaviour regarding the expression of and resolution of conflicts within the community.

To accomplish this objective, the study aimed to address the following questions:

1. How do the Kalasha navigate through conflicts within the community?
2. What is the role and position of women in these peacebuilding practices?
3. What insights can we garner from these processes and gender roles regarding conflict transformation and social justice within the Kalash community?

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis comprises ten chapters. After an introduction to the study in Chapter 1, the second chapter focuses on the context, providing a detailed description of the research location and population. It focuses on the Kalasha people's origin, history, culture, and issues they address daily. Chapter 3 reviews the academic literature related to the themes discussed in empirical Chapters 5 to 8, including Indigenous peacebuilding, women and peacebuilding, religion and peacebuilding, and art and peacebuilding.

In Chapter 4, the study's methodology and research methods are thoroughly explained, including the study's location, the participants, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and the researcher's positionality. It also provides a detailed procedure for data analysis. The findings generated from these processes are discussed in empirical Chapters 5 through 9.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed discussion of the community's perceptions of peace and conflict and of their three primary conflict resolution processes: *Marakha*, *Nanawati*, and *D'ongriik*. Chapter 6 provides an in-depth exploration of the influence of divinity and cultural traditions in fostering peace and harmony within the community. It underscores the notion that peace is an ongoing endeavor, driven by the embodiment of religious beliefs and traditional values. Chapter 7 delves into

the role of Kalasha festivals in promoting peace. It emphasizes how these festivals serve as artistic platforms for expressing people's grievances through songs, fostering communal accountability, and discouraging direct confrontation, among other things.

In Chapter 8, the focus is on the role of Kalasha women in peacebuilding. It highlights how the role of women in traditional and Indigenous societies is often overlooked and misunderstood. This chapter discusses the perspectives of Kalasha women, portraying how they view themselves and how they contribute to peacebuilding as healers, nurturers of inter-familial bonds, and custodians of communal safety through active adherence to *onjas't'a/pragata* (ritually pure/ritually impure) regulations. In Chapter 9, I explore the future hopes and dreams shared by the participants as they envisioned peace in the valleys. Wrapping up the key themes from the empirical chapters, Chapter 10, the "Conclusions" chapter, highlights major key findings and outlines considerations for future research.

Scope of the Study

To clearly define the scope of this study, it is crucial to consider key terms and caveats.

Indigenous

The term *Indigenous* often elicits diverse interpretations, contingent upon cultural, social, and political contexts.[3] An official definition of the term has not been adopted by any United Nations (U.N.) system body due to the diversity of Indigenous peoples (UNPFII, n.d). In Pakistan, the specificity of Indigenous identity remains obscured by the government's preference to acknowledge tribal affiliations, a taxonomy predicated on colonial legacies.

Pakistan ratified the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention 107 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and voted in favor of the adoption of the U.N.'s Declaration on the Rights of

[3] For a summary of different interpretations of the term Indigenous, please refer to Kyoon-Achan (2014, pp. 20–25) and Maybury-Lewis (2005).

Indigenous peoples (Wagha, 2012). However, it does not officially recognize Indigenous peoples. The government of Pakistan focuses on minorities within the country as religious minorities and does not classify them based on race, language, or Indigenous status (Cultural Survival, 2017; Hameed et al., 2021). This lack of recognition has led to the absence of a national policy regarding Indigenous Peoples (Wagha, 2012) and no clear definition of Indigenous status.

In Pakistan, the concept of Indigenous identity is different from that held in North America. It revolves around unique cultures and beliefs rather than Indigenous–settler dynamics. Through the course of this thesis research, I have been asked several times, mostly by Pakistani people, to explain what I mean when I refer to the Kalasha as Indigenous. The Kalasha community meets almost every definition of the term according to the U.N. criteria. However, I use and respect this term because the community identifies itself as Indigenous due to their unique culture.

While speaking at the 18th session of the U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Wazir Zada—a member and representative of the Kalasha community—emphasized that the Kalasha are Indigenous people with a distinct heritage, belief system, and cultural practices (ARY News, 2019). Self-identification is one of the key criteria according to the United Nations. During my fieldwork, when I asked some Kalasha individuals what being Indigenous meant to them, they emphasized the distinctiveness of their culture, practices, and the preservation of traditions that date back more than three thousand years. Some Kalasha mentioned that they were the original inhabitants of Chitral, and historical records indicate their rule over the region until around the 16th century (Parkes, 2000). However, this historical context was not mentioned as the defining marker of their Indigenous identity.

As per the U.N., another crucial aspect of Indigenous identity is the deep connection that Indigenous communities have with their land and natural environment (UNPFII, n. d.). In 2018, the United Nations Economic Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognized the Kalash

custom of *suri jagek* (observing the sun) as an intangible heritage in need of urgent safeguarding. *Suri Jagek* is an astronomical and meteorological practice used to observe the sun, moon, stars, and shadows to predict the weather, anticipate natural disasters, plan the Kalasha's calendar for farming, and determine the timing of major religious festivals and ceremonies (UNESCO, 2018). "The practice of *suri jagek* uniquely connects the Indigenous identity construct of the Kalash people with their land" (UNESCO, 2018, 2:37).

This thesis research explores the conflict resolution process of the Indigenous Kalasha community. However, it does not claim to represent all Indigenous peoples and their conflict resolution processes. Nonetheless, some parallels can be drawn. As I will show in the empirical chapters, the Kalasha people, while unique in their own right, share similar characteristics with other Indigenous societies in their perception and construction of peace, conflict, and conflict resolution processes.

Peaceful Society

In referring to the Kalasha as a peaceful society, it is important to note that I am not trying to romanticize the community or argue that there is a complete absence of conflict, even though violent conflict and crimes due to cultural and religious beliefs are rare among them (discussed in detail in Chapter 6). According to Boulding (1998), "Peace culture, neither a fantasy nor accident, is as central to human nature as war culture. The creative management of differences is at the core of peace culture; in other words, it is not a culture without conflict" (p. 445). In accordance with Boulding, Kemp and Fry (2004) defined a peaceful society as one that does not necessarily lack conflict but rather employs non-aggressive conflict resolution methods to maintain peace. I employ this definition of a peaceful society.

Finally, even within this small community of only 4,000 people, significant differences exist in various cultural practices, for example, in festivals.[4] While the study found no major divergence of views in terms of the people's beliefs regarding peace and conflict, it is important to note that this study does not claim to represent all Kalasha people or offer a comprehensive understanding of their culture. Instead, it focuses on conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes and practices, based on the experiences of the Kalasha research participants and the researcher. Like any other community, the Kalasha are inherently dynamic and fluid, and a nuanced understanding requires recognition of this evolving nature. Efforts to comprehend their social and cultural fabric often reveal deeper layers of complexity, prompting further inquiry rather than offering definitive explanations. Therefore, this research contributes to an ongoing discourse between previous and future research.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study have important implications across various domains. First and foremost, the research participants emphasized the importance of this research in documenting Kalasha peace processes and sharing the profound knowledge and wisdom of the Kalasha community with the global community. Their generosity offers readers a chance to pick up lessons from this peaceful society to expand the range of instruments for fostering peace and cultivating peaceful cultures. Fry and Souillac (2022) echoed these sentiments: "Indigenous knowledge about the creation and maintenance of peace can shed light on foundational paths to local, regional, and global peace" (p. 124).

Additionally, the study holds pivotal importance within in the context of Pakistan, where informal, traditional, and Indigenous methods of conflict resolution are widely used. This variation arises from the difficulties of cultural unfamiliarity, inaccessibility, and affordability associated with

[4] See, for e.g., Cacopardo, 2016; Di Carlo, 2007.

the formal justice system imposed during colonial times. The system is very slow in dispensing justice and is burdened by millions of pending cases. A comprehensive examination of these peacebuilding processes provides a better understanding of their importance and value at the grassroots level. It aids in shedding light on how formal and informal justice systems can collaborate to ensure swift justice, complement each other's weaknesses, and contribute to building an inclusive and peaceful society.

Of utmost significance is the growing consensus among scholars and practitioners in Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) regarding the necessity of locally owned, inclusive, and culturally relevant sustainable peacebuilding interventions (Augsburger, 1992, Avruch, 1998; Beyene et al., 2024; Lederach, 1995, 2003a; Lidén et al., 2009; Mac Ginty, 2015; Richmond, 2007; Thiessen, 2011). It has been posited that external interventions frequently fall short in achieving long-term peace and development and may impede communities' abilities to address their own issues. Therefore, it is crucial to explore Indigenous peacebuilding practices to understand their potential contributions and challenges to sustainable peace, social justice, and human rights in local contexts (Fontan, 2012; Funk, 2012; Mac Ginty, 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Nepram & Schiwal, 2024). However, the neglect of Indigenous wisdom, knowledge systems, and conflict resolution practices in peace research has resulted in a void in the literature (Boege, 2011, 2006; Rice, 2011; Tuso, 2011, Tuso & Flaherty, 2016). This thesis research addresses this gap by examining the peacebuilding practices of the Indigenous Kalasha people.

Although the current body of literature on Indigenous peacebuilding is expanding (e.g., Adebayo et al., 2014; Benjamin & Lundy, 2014; Clarke, 2022; Fry & Souillac, 2022; Kemp & Fry, 2004; Kyoon-Achan, 2014; Mac Ginty, 2008a, 2010, 2011, 2016; Rice, 2011; Stobbe, 2015; Tursunova, 2014; Tuso, 2011; Tuso & Flaherty, 2016; Witty, 1981; Zartman, 2000a), there remains a noticeable dearth of literature concerning peacebuilding practices of Indigenous groups in South Asia.

This research project enriches scholarly discourse in the domain of Indigenous and local peacebuilding and contributes to the existing literature on Indigenous peacebuilding, gender and peacebuilding, and critical and emancipatory peacebuilding. The insights derived from this study are invaluable to both PACS practitioners and scholars and Indigenous scholars, offering a unique perspective on an underexplored group and region.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the main theme and structure of the study, which aimed to uncover how the Kalasha people resolve conflicts and maintain a harmonious society. Chapter 2 provides a descriptive overview of Kalasha society, including its rich history, unique culture, and socio-economic structure, to set the context of the study population.

Chapter 2

Research Context

This chapter explores the Kalash people's history and culture, as well as the issues they face today. My work primarily focused on learning about the Kalasha's ways of making and building peace. However, during the interviews, some participants raised topics of history, culture, serfdom, and their views on ongoing developments and issues facing Kalash people today. I listened to those perspectives respectfully, as they seemed important to the community members I interviewed. This chapter is a perfect place to include a few of their quotes to provide an authentic view of the topics discussed. They corroborated and challenged what I found in the literature written about them. Chapter 2 provides a descriptive overview of the Kalasha people, their origin, their culture, and the issues they face as a minority.

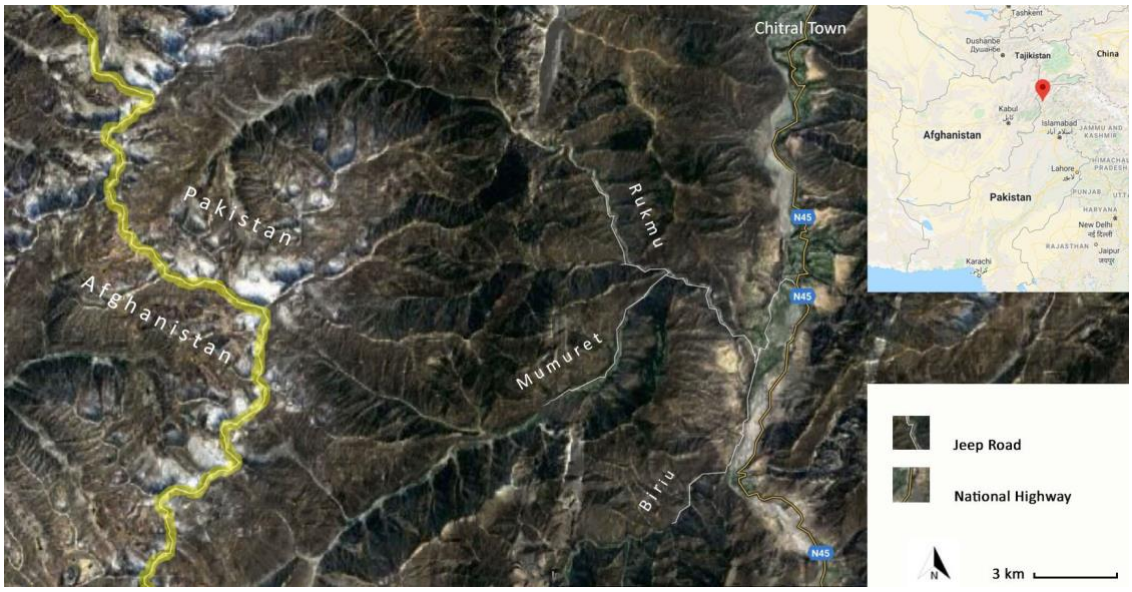
The Kalasha

The Kalash people are located in three scenic valleys known as Mumuret, Rukmu, and Biriu[5] surrounded by the Hindu Kush Mountains in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Northwest Pakistan. The Kalash people had no history of literacy before the year 2000 (Heegård Petersen, 2015). They have orally transmitted and preserved their culture and unique way of life for the past two to three thousand years (Malik & Waheed, 2005; UNESCO, 2018).

[5] These are Kalasha names of the three valleys. The Urdu and English denominations by the non-Kalasha are Bumburet, Rumbur, and Brir respectively.

Figure 2

Map of Kalasha Valleys



Note. From *To Change Is To Be: The Kalasha of Pakistan's Afghan Frontier and the Age of Heritage* (p. xi), by T. Crowley, 2021, University of Cambridge (adapted from Google). Reprinted with permission.

The Disputed Origin

The question of the Kalasha people's origin has been a subject of extensive scholarly debate and remains a matter of contention (Pir, 2019a). The widely held belief that ascribes their genesis to the military forces of Alexander III[6] is prevalent, particularly in Pakistan and Greece (Crowley, 2021; Pir, 2019a). Almost every documentary or news article discussing the Kalasha people acknowledges this connection, except for some of those produced by the Kalasha community members.[7] However, it

[6] Commonly known as Alexander the Great.

[7] See, for e.g., documentaries produced by Kalasha social activist and founder and CEO of Ishpata News Network Luke Rehmat on his YouTube channel, Ishpata News Network: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCC89mflWiT60XQDEoQvInPg

is worth noting that the attribution of this myth to the Kalasha people has only emerged in recent decades and mainly in non-academic literature. Early research conducted by linguists, anthropologists, and ethnologists did not make any reference to this connection (Cacopardo, 2011). Scholars like Cacopardo (2011) and Bakker and Daval-Markussen (2016) have provided counterarguments to this thesis, drawing upon linguistic and genetic findings. A second hypothesis has emphasized the Indo-Aryan lineage of the Kalasha people, as supported by a linguistic analysis of the Kal'as'amondr (Kalasha language) spoken by the community (Morgenstierne, 1973).

In their scholarly examination of the linguistic research on Kal'as' amondr, Bakker and Daval-Markussen (2016) asserted that Kal'as' amondr is classified within the Dardic branch of Indo-Aryan languages. Further, they affirmed that mutual intelligibility between Kal'as'mondr and Greek is almost non-existent. In addition, the genetic investigation conducted by genetic researchers has demonstrated that the Kalasha population does not possess a Greek ancestry, as evidenced by the distinctiveness of their gene pool in comparison to that of individuals of Greek descent (Ayub et al., 2004; Mansoor et al., 2004). According to the genetic analysis conducted by Ayub et al. (2015), the attribution of the Kalasha people's origin to Greece is incorrect. These scholars "observed that the Kalash share a substantial proportion of drift with a Paleolithic ancient Siberian hunter-gatherer, who has been suggested to represent a third northern Eurasian genetic ancestry component for present day Europeans" (p. 781).

Notwithstanding these assertions, the Kalasha people maintain the belief that their presence in the region predates the arrival of Alexander III.[8] In a recent podcast, Kalasha archaeologist Syed Gul Kalash expressed her dismay at researchers' attempts to impose their views on the Kalasha people instead of consulting the Kalasha themselves. She emphasized that Kalasha folklore traces its origin

[8] However, some young Kalasha working closely with Greek organizations seem to promote this connection. For a detailed discussion, please see Crowley, 2021.

to Tsiam (Khan, 2023). The Kalasha folk songs and stories do not make any reference to Alexander III. According to their folklore, their origin can be traced back to a remote area called *Tsiam*, the precise whereabouts of which remain unknown. However, it is believed to be situated in the western direction, where the sun sets (Pir, 2019a; Rehmat, 2023). Numerous academics have endeavoured to ascertain this enigmatic place of origin.

According to the French anthropologists Loude and Lievre (1988), Tsiam may possibly be situated in eastern Afghanistan. On the other hand, Trail (1996) suggested that the Kalasha community may have ancestral ties to native Syrians who underwent a process of assimilation, adopting certain cultural elements of the Greeks during the reign of Seleucus I, the successor of Alexander III. She paralleled Tsiam with *Sham*, the latter being the Arabic, Urdu, and Persian term for Syria. However, other scholars have argued that the location of Tsiam can be traced to the territory currently inhabited by the Kalasha people, suggesting that they are indigenous to the area rather than immigrants (Cacopardo, 2011). The Kalasha people themselves believe that they ruled Chitral, as Bashgali Khan told me: "We were the first ones to inhabit Chitral. Our ancestors ruled here. They moved into these valleys from Chitral. We have neither seized anyone's right nor murdered anyone."

The Kalasha people ruled Chitral and inhabited a large region known as Kafiristan[9] that stretched from present-day northwest Pakistan to eastern Afghanistan (Maggi, 2001).[10] They ruled until around the 14th century before it was conquered by the Rais of Chitral in 1320 and then the

[9] *Kafir* in Arabic means "non-believer," and since many independent tribes who adhered to polytheistic beliefs lived in that region, it was called *Kafiristan* (Land of Pagans or Non-Believers). The term also has derogatory connotations.

[10] Some scholars believe that Kalasha occupied a much larger area than this (Cacopardo, 2016, p. 65)

Katur dynasty[11] in 1570 (Parkes, 2000). Two famous Kalasha kings mentioned in oral traditions are Rajawai and Bulasingh (Maggi, 2001).

Historically, the term "Kalasha" was used as a generic label for the various non-Muslim tribes of Kafiristan. These tribes, including the Kalasha, lived independently in the Hindu Kush mountains, with their territory extending from the modern-day Kalash valleys in northern Pakistan to areas now part of Nuristan province in eastern Afghanistan (Maggi, 2001). However, these nearly impenetrable mountains, home to the Kalasha people, could not escape from the impact of the expanding British Empire.

In 1893, to safeguard British India's Northwestern Frontier (NWF) against potential Russian invasion and expansion, British representatives drew the Durand Line that divided the NWF from Afghanistan. This decision changed the fate of independent tribes living in the area forever. The territory west of the Durand line was ceded to the Amir of Afghanistan even though neither the British nor Afghanistan had jurisdiction over that independent territory. In addition, Kafiristani representatives were not even present at the time when the deal was signed (Maggi, 2001). [12] Paterson (2014) rightly observes that "the motives flowing from a need to perpetuate an empire are not usually those that have the preservation of cultures and communities at heart" (pp. 177–178).

In the winter of 1895–1896, Amir Abudr Rahman of Afghanistan invaded Kafiristan and forcefully and brutally converted independent tribes to Islam within forty days of the massacre of local people. The name Kafirtistan ("land of pagans") was then changed to *Nuristan* or "the land of

[11] The Katur dynasty was established in 1570 by Shah Katur and continued to rule Chitral for about 450 years. It ended in 1947 with the division of sub-continent and later annexation of Chitral to Pakistan in 1969.

[12] Different scholars have different positions on this incident in their writing about the Kalasha. Some scholars think of this territorialization as a "positive" incident for the Kalasha people, stating that it protected them from religious conversion (Cacopardo & Cacopardo, 1989; Crowley, 2021; Pir, 2019a). However, given the impact this border had and continues to have on ethnic groups of the region and how it sowed the seed for so many conflicts facing the region today, it can rightly be labelled as "ethnic horror" (for details please see Schetter, 2013).

the enlightened." The five Kalasha valleys on the other side of the Durand Line came under the jurisdiction of the then princely state of Chitral and their overlords (the British) and escaped Amir Abdur Rahman's religious zeal. The Kalasha people, like other subjects of the Katur dynasty, had to pay a significant amount of honey, walnuts, and livestock to the Chitrali rulers in tribute (Maggi, 2001). They were compelled to do "arduous Corvée labour" (Parkes, 2000, p. 252) and at times their young children and widows were sold as slaves. This oppression and serfdom continued until the 1950s (Parkes, 2000). The stories of serfdom have been passed down from generation to generation and are bitterly remembered by the community members. One community member told me:

> During the construction of Chitral Fort, the Kalasha were directed to knead mud barefoot. The mud, containing fragments of shattered glass, was intended for use in constructing walls. The belief was that the infusion of Kalasha blood would enhance its strength and imbue it with colour.

Even after their serfdom ended, the Kalasha had to pay heavy taxes to the Chitrali rulers until Chitral was officially annexed into the newly created state of Pakistan in 1969 (Maggi, 2001).

Unique Culture

No matter how disputed their origin and history might be, the culture practiced by the Kalasha distinguishes them not only from their neighbouring ethnic groups in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province but also from the mainstream Pakistani culture. According to Sheikh et al. (2014), the Kalasha religion can be classified as a variant of animism, as it encompasses belief in natural forces, supernatural beings such as fairies, and a pantheon of multiple deities. Nevertheless, the modern-day Kalasha assert that they adhere to a monotheistic belief system. They hold the conviction that there exists a singular deity referred to as *Dezau*. Crowley (2021) and Cacopardo (2016, 2011) contended that the Kalasha oral traditions contain references to polytheistic beliefs, suggesting a historical presence of multiple deities. They argued that the transition from polytheism to monotheism might be

attributed to the influence exerted by neighbouring Muslim communities. However, Yasir Kalash and Luke Rehmat argued that Kalasha folk songs and stories do not make any explicit reference to the existence of numerous deities. Instead, these narratives portray multiple supernatural beings as messengers or intermediaries who facilitate the transmission of individuals' supplications to *Dezau*. Luke Rehmat posited that this scholarly interpretation emerged from cross-cultural comparison and is the product of viewing the cultures of the region through a single lens (personal communication, October 2023). Rehmat (2018) argued that various Kalasha altars and temples have been misinterpreted as places of worship for distinct Kalasha deities. While it is true that the Kalasha people use different names for altars, such as Sajigor, Indrain, and Warin, all of these altars ultimately serve as places to offer sacrifices to *Dezau*. The Kalasha religion centers on the concept of cosmic balance—a harmony between humans, nature, spirits, and the divine. This balance is upheld through rituals, purity laws, and moral conduct. At the heart of Kalasha cosmology lies the concept of *onjas't'a* and *pragata* (ritually pure and ritually impure). This foundational idea shapes the Kalasha's relationship with the land, nature, and the environment, as well as gender relations (explored in detail in Chapter 8). It is continuously reinforced through purification rituals performed during festivals.

Another feature that marks the uniqueness of the Kalasha is the centrality of various celebrations and festivities. There are several year-round festivities, but three major festivals are *Zoshi, Ucaw* and *Cawmos* (discussed in detail in Chapter 7; Pir, 2019b). A fundamental element of festivals is redistribution and sharing (Cacopardo, 2016; Rose 1992). Families with excess butter, wheat, or milk donate it to needy families. They believe that the gods will be angered if surplus food is stored rather than shared (Rose 1992c). Drawing on Douglas's (1993) concept of "enclave culture," Parkes (1994) characterizes the Kalasha society as an example of such a culture, describing enclaves as "determinedly egalitarian in principle, where all members are supposedly alike in status and moral evaluation" (pp. 159–160). Parkes further supports this view by highlighting the Kalasha's rejection

of “hereditary status grading” and their belief that “all Kalasha are poor, all are equal” (p. 160). This statement reflects the Kalasha’s commitment to equality, where social status is not determined by inheritance or wealth, but rather by a shared sense of community and collective identity. The acquisition of prestige and honour is not contingent upon the amassing of wealth, but rather on one’s commitment to serving the community and adhering to the idea of sharing, as exemplified by the practice of the big merit feast known as *biramor* (Mustafa, 2019; Pir, 2019). However, it should be noted that possessing prestige does not necessarily confer political influence upon an individual (Cacopardo, 2016). The Kalasha internal political structure can be described as a form of “direct democracy,” wherein decision-making occurs through informal assemblies open to everyone (Cacopardo, 2016, p. 36).

The traditional economic structure of the Kalasha community is characterized by the practice of transhumance pastoralism and subsistence farming (Pir, 2019). It is marked by gendered division of labour. Men are exclusively responsible for the seasonal movement of livestock, ploughing, and harvesting. The irrigation and tending of fields are the responsibility of women (Cacopardo, 2016; Pir, 2019). The Kalasha community stands out because of this cultural uniqueness. However, this distinctiveness has subjected them to various challenges they face today.

Contemporary Challenges

More than a decade after the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), marginalization, discrimination, and violence against Indigenous peoples remains a perennial concern. Indigenous peoples have always demanded recognition of their unique identities and rights to natural resources and traditional lands but have historically faced a violation of those rights worldwide. Today, they are one of the most deprived groups and make up 15 percent of the world’s poorest, while they account for only less than 5 percent of the world’s population (United Nations, 2017). Loss of control of traditional lands has threatened their livelihood

and way of life. At the same time, their culture and language are endangered to the extent of extinction for some tribes (Zukang, 2009). The case is no different for the Kalasha people. Pakistan has ratified ILO Convention 107 on Indigenous and Tribal peoples and voted to adopt UNDRIP (Wagha, 2012). However, tribal and Indigenous people of Pakistan continue to face violence and marginalization, and some are near extinction, such as the Kalasha people (UNESCO, 2018).

The annexation of Chitral to the newly created state of Pakistan in 1969 encapsulated the Kalasha people in the modern state system, which brought challenges that were not existent before. Before Chitral was incorporated into Pakistan, the Kalasha culture remained mostly undisturbed because the region was relatively isolated until the 1970s, which helped protect them from external influence (Maggi, 2001). The first and still the only single-lane jeepable road was built in the 1970s, which ended centuries-long isolation. However, at the same time, it exposed the Kalasha to new challenges that have hampered their ability to practice and preserve their culture.

Although much has changed in the region since 1969, the relationship between the Kalasha and the Chitral administration has not changed much (Maggi, 2001). The reason behind this is the continued dominance of the same influential families of Chitrali *mehtars* (prince) and *wazirs* (court advisors) that once ruled Chitral. Although they cannot demand unpaid labour from the Kalasha anymore, they still retain power as government officials and contractors of development projects. Thus, the old structures of dependence still dominate the relationship between the Kalasha and Chitrali officials (Maggi, 2001) in Pakistan, where they remain a politically irrelevant, tiny religious minority (Malik & Waheed, 2005). One community member highlighted this persistent power dynamic during our conversation:

> In approximately 1320, we were confined into these small valleys. The period from 1320 to 2020 encompasses 700 years. We have endured this protracted era of subjugation and

> servitude. We were required to pay ten to twelve different taxes and the *Jizya.*[13] We identify ourselves as Kalash, but there exists another term, Qalash (قلاش), in Urdu, that has the connotations of being unclothed, malnourished, and impoverished. Regrettably, that's what we have become, but with the grace of God we have managed to survive.

Hence, new power structures give rise to different forms of political and structural violence, resulting in various contemporary issues discussed in subsequent sections.

Rejection of Identity

Despite voting in favour of the UNDRIP, Pakistan still needs to implement practical policies to deal with the problems faced by Indigenous peoples (Cultural Survival Report, 2017). The Pakistani Constitution does not explicitly recognize Indigenous peoples. It primarily acknowledges religious minorities and Scheduled Castes, while certain tribal communities have been governed under special legal provisions—an approach inherited from British colonial rule. The constitution primarily defines these communities in terms of religion and economic status, rather than recognizing their distinct ethnic or Indigenous identities (Cultural Survival, 2017; Wagha, 2012). In the population census, tribal peoples are mentioned literally as "others" (Wagha, 2012).

Recognition of people's identity is a key basic human need (Burton, 1997). The Kalasha people have long been demanding the recognition and protection of their identity as an Indigenous people with distinct religion and culture (Rehmat, 2023). Article 260(3a) of Pakistan's Constitution recognizes religious minorities, but it does not explicitly mention the Kalasha religion (Ali, 2013). The Kalasha are often categorized under the broader Hindu minority, despite their unique religious practices. In the 1980s, General Zia-ul-Haq's regime made it mandatory for people to declare their

[13] The *jizya* was a yearly tax imposed by Muslim rulers on non-Muslim populations in their territories. In exchange for paying the *jizya*, non-Muslims received services and protection and were exempt from paying *zakat* (alms tax) and serving in the army, both of which were considered religious duties of Muslims.

religion on their identity documents. Reporting religion on national identity documents is essential even today. The Kalasha were forced to choose Hinduism or "other" as their religion. According to Kalasha representative Wazir Zada,[14] "the census and other forms don't include our religion because we are considered part of Hinduism and Buddhism. But in fact, our religion is separate" (Shalmani, 2018, para.7).

In 2013, the Kalasha boycotted the national election in protest and asked the government to recognize their religion officially (Ali, 2013). They submitted a petition to the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and demanded that their religion should be added to the list. However, it was not until 2015 that NADRA changed their religion on National Identity Cards and subsequently on birth certificates. However, they are still fighting to change it on their passports, where it says "other." Luke Rehmat, a social activist from Kalasha community, has fought ceaselessly for that change. Former Pakistani chief justice Mian Saqib Nisar visited the Kalasha valleys during his tenure and committed to address this matter. He presided over a three-member bench on this issue upon his return. Instead of seeking a resolution to this matter, he stated, "Since they constitute such a negligible minority, what difference does it make?" (Rehmat, 2023a, 5:37). "It was utterly disappointing to hear these words from the mouth of the chief justice," (Rehmat, 2023a, 5:32) noted Luke Rehmat in his recent documentary on the Kalasha identity crisis.

Religious Conversions

Articles 20 and 25 of Pakistan's Constitution guarantee religious freedom and equality for all citizens, while the Penal Code prohibits acts that disrespect religion or religious beliefs. However, these laws carry little, if any, meaning for minorities who face such violence quite often and do not have equal access to the law. The Kalasha, for instance, were not spared the religious zeal of

[14] In 2018, Wazir Zada became the first Kalash community member elected to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly, thanks to a party ticket from the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for a reserved minority seat.

missionaries. Both Muslim and Christian "modernizing missionaries" saw the Kalasha as an opportunity to preach religion by turning remaining "pagans" into "enlightened" ones (Rose, 1992a, p. 7). Christian missionaries came as far away as New Zealand disguised as artists and linguists because missionizing was illegal in Pakistan at that time. They promised the Kalasha a better home, debt relief and provided electricity to converts as a reward for conversion. The Kalasha boys were offered $1,000 a month to live among Christian communities in Lahore and Islamabad, to learn English, and to tutor missionaries in the Kalasha language. Converts looked down upon their culture and usually stopped practicing Kalasha traditions. In 1985, Kalasha social activist Saifullah Jan prevented the construction of a bible school in Rukmu Valley (Rose, 1992a).

Although the threat of Christian missionizing was averted, the Kalasha could not completely resist the impact of Muslim missionaries. The Kalasha have been historically subject to religious conversion since the 19th century. Many Kalasha people were also converted to Islam during General Zia-ul-Haq's government in the 1980s (Ahmed, 2011). This has not changed much today, and there have been many incidents of conversions, which is evident from the Kalasha's continuously declining number (Rehman, 2016). They lost two valleys and a significant chunk of population and land to conversions. Muslims have now outnumbered the Kalasha, and more than eleven madrassas (Muslim religious schools) have been built in the valleys (Walsh, 2005). Apart from overt proselytization, there are also socio-economic factors involved that indirectly force the Kalasha to convert to Islam. They are offered material benefits and the possibility of clearing their debts (Gul, 2016; Rickett, 2011). Walsh (2005) wrote that Muslim missionaries prey on weak Kalasha by offering them "money, clothes, land, and educational scholarships in exchange for conversion" (para. 10). In the absence of meaningful opportunities for social and economic advancement, some Kalasha have sought to improve their status by aligning themselves with the privileged Muslim community.

(Rehman, 2016, para. 5). Due to a lack of oversight by government authorities, conservative Muslims have taken it upon themselves to convert the Kalasha to Islam, viewing it as a religious duty.

Political leaders have usually refrained from publicly condemning discrimination and forced conversions due to fears of an Islamist backlash and the potential loss of support from religious political parties and conservative Muslim voters during elections (Gul, 2016). In February 2014, the Taliban published a forty-minute video asking the Kalasha people and Ismaili Muslims to convert to Sunni Islam or be ready to die. Besides, they threatened NGO workers and asked them to stop protecting the Kalasha people (The Guardian, 2014). In the same year, the Supreme Court of Pakistan took suo motu notice of the threat. However, the court accepted the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government's explanation, which claimed that the threat highlighted in the news reports was not a new issue, but rather an old matter that had been "picked up by some sections of media for vested interests" (Rehman, 2016, para. 7). In 2016, clashes erupted between Muslims and the Kalasha. The incident occurred when the Kalash community resisted the conversion of a 14-year-old Kalasha girl, who was said to have converted to Islam and then changed her mind (Rehman, 2016). Although there were no casualties, the government intervened to end the clashes (Shamsi, 2016). Nonetheless, fear of religious conflict remains present in the region and is the most common future fear among many community members.

At present, evangelist Muslim organizations are not allowed to operate in the Kalasha valleys (Crowley, 2021). The recent cross-border attack by the Taliban on military checkpoints in Chitral on September 6, 2023, has instilled fear in what was once a peaceful region, particularly among the Kalasha community. As a non-Muslim population, the Kalash people are especially vulnerable to the Taliban's influence, providing the group with a significant opportunity for a major propaganda victory (Aamir, 2023).

Violation of Land Rights

Land holds special meaning for Indigenous peoples, and they consider it an essential part of their identity, epistemology, and ontology (Meyer, 2008; Smith, 2012; Whitt, 2009). The United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations analyzed the root causes of Indigenous conflicts and concluded that two features distinguish Indigenous conflicts from other conflicts. First, Indigenous people have a unique relationship with their land, which differs from the non-Indigenous idea of legal ownership and treating land as a commodity. For Indigenous peoples, the land is for "collective material and spiritual benefits" and must be saved for future generations (Lutz, 2005, para. 2). Second, Lutz explained that Indigenous people want self-determination to have sufficient "political authority" and "enforcement power" (para. 2) to safeguard their rights to their lands, resources, and cultural practices. However, the violation of traditional land rights is one of the greatest hindrances to Indigenous people's sustainable development (Carino, 2009).

The Kalasha people have faced the same violation of traditional lands and exploitation of natural resources as other Indigenous peoples worldwide. In a seminar organized by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, the Kalasha representative claimed that outsiders occupied Kalasha land, and the names of Kalasha places are now being replaced with Muslim names (Junaidi, 2017). In 1900, the Kalasha were a majority in the Chitral district; now the trend has reversed (Barijo, 2016), and Muslim immigrants and converts have outnumbered them in two to one (Walsh, 2005). Shah Feroz, a Kalasha teacher, said that "we have been turned into a minority on our own land" (as cited in Khan, 2012, para. 6).

In addition, the neighbouring Muslim community has challenged the Kalasha people's right to the traditional forest for the last three decades. This started in the 1980s when the government allowed private companies to log the forest in the Rukmu valley. The constitution of Pakistan stipulates that 60 percent of royalties would go to people who live in those forests, and 40 percent

would go to the government (Roopali, 1994). Since Pakistan's constitution does not recognize Indigenous peoples, there is no guarantee regarding Indigenous people's special right to their traditional land and the meaning that it holds for them. Consequently, this led the neighbouring Ayun valley, inhabited by Muslims, to declare themselves co-owners of the forests and entitled to half of the timber profits (Roopali, 1994, paras. 1–2). This resulted in a court battle between the two groups, and eventually, the court decided in favour of the Kalasha after a decade-long battle (Rose, 1992a).

However, the case persisted because it was referred thrice to the High Court and twice to the Supreme Court. During the case proceedings, the Kalasha people faced direct violence from Ayun residents. The Ayun residents attacked the Kalasha people, protested the court decisions, and threatened the district commissioner by setting his record office on fire (Parkes, 2000). Eventually, after 17 years of a legal battle, the court again favoured the Kalasha people. However, despite the court's decision and the constitutional right of the Kalasha people to their ancestral land, the government has failed to ensure that right. In 2011, for instance, the people of Ayun held four Kalasha people hostage and blocked the road when Forest Development Corporation (FDC) contractors tried to reach the forest (DAWN, 2011). For the Ayun residents, the issue has primarily been one of money, as they sought a share of the royalties in court. However, for the Kalash people, the stakes are far higher: it is a struggle for their home, livelihood, cultural identity, and the future of their generations (Rose, 1992a). As Saifullah Jan, a Kalasha activist, said:

> My main interest is not in the money. I would never sell the forest for money. But I want this valley for the Kalash. If we win the case, we have jurisdiction and we can tell the government not to cut any more trees. (as cited in Rose, 1992a, p. 3)

However, though Saifullah won the right to land, he could not stop the government from the commercialization of forests and excessive logging. This situation has resulted in massive natural disasters in the past few years, such as the 2010, 2013, and 2015 floods, which destroyed roads,

homes, and crops in the Kalasha valleys. The Kalasha believe deforestation is the leading cause of these floods, as many trees in high pastures have been cut down. However, the Kalasha people fear that it is not only their home and crops that are in danger but also the Kalasha people and culture itself. They insist that the government must control deforestation (Khan, 2015). They have repeatedly protested against the land and timber mafia that operate in the region with impunity (Ebrahim, 2012; Farooqi, 2012).

In 2022, the district government of Chitral banned the sale and purchase of land and new constructions in the Kalasha valleys to preserve Kalasha culture and restrict outsiders from buying land for commercialization (Mashriq Vibe, 2022). However, the ongoing dispute over Ac'uaga kuy (Acholgah Valley), recognized by the Kalasha as their fourth valley, remains unresolved. The conflict has evolved from a broader confrontation between the people of Ayun and the Kalasha of Rukmu into a more direct and localized struggle between the Kalasha people of Anish, Batrik and Darasguru (villages in Mumuret) and the prince family. Particularly, Prince Maqsood-ul-Mulk and Prince Masood-ul-Mulk[15] have laid claim to the entire valley, continuing a legacy of aristocratic control over Kalasha land that dates back to the princely era, while disregarding the longstanding Kalasha presence. For the Kalasha, Ac'uaga kuy is not just land, it is vital communal pasture and an integral part of their traditional territory[16]. One community member told me that "there is a history of forceful seizure of Kalasha land by the Mehtar family when Chitral was a princely state. They took all good things and the land forcefully. Whatever they have today was forcefully taken from us."

[15] Grandsons of Mehtar Sir Shuja ul-Mulk, who ruled the princely state of Chitral from 1895 to 1936.

[16] This information was shared by a Kalasha community member who chose to be anonymous because he feared a backlash from Prince's family. This speaks of the ongoing power-over relationships. I must acknowledge that this was not the concern of all Kalasha, but some were very vocal about historic and recent oppression at the hands of the prince family.

Again, for the Kalasha people, it is a matter of survival, as I was told: “Our problem is that if we lost these forests, this land and these grazing pastures, then we cannot live here. Our culture cannot flourish.” Hence, the violation of land rights poses a serious threat to the Kalasha culture.

Insensitive Tourism

Indigenous peoples have also been exploited due to their “exotic” appeal, often as a result of insensitive tourism (Settee, 2008). “The Kalash people, their unique way of life, festivals, music, folklore, ancestor worship and their primitive culture are a huge lure for the tourists” (Wagha, 2012, p. 8). The promotion of the Alexandrian myth has aided in attracting tourists. Valleys are regarded as significant sites for Pakistan’s tourism department, as exemplified by the visit of Prince William and Kate Middleton to the Kalasha valleys during their five-day royal tour to Pakistan in October 2019.

The Kalasha people, however, are not able to fully benefit from tourism (Wagha, 2012). Almost all the hotels, restaurants, and food stores are owned by Muslims or outsiders (Walsh, 2005) who have found their way into the valleys in the wake of growing tourism, which has led to increasing control by the outsiders (Gul, 2016). The insensitivity of tourists towards Kalasha cultural rituals and the intrusion on their privacy have caused psychological suffering among the Kalasha people (Junaidi, 2017). The Kalasha culture places significant importance on the notions of ritual purity and ritual impurity, which entail certain restrictions on the visitation of specific locations by both men and women. However, tourists often disregard these restrictions, causing mental distress among the Kalasha people. This distress stems from their belief that adverse consequences may occur if an individual enters the village after visiting an impure place (Junaidi, 2017). A Kalasha girl also expressed her feeling to me that some tourists often treat the valleys as a “zoo” rather than approaching them with respect and cultural sensitivity. They sometimes force Kalasha girls to take pictures with them and enter houses without permission (personal communication, July 2017). In recent years, the Kalasha community has encountered a range of prejudices propagated by tourists,

leading to the dissemination of inaccurate information about their culture and practices. Luke Rehmat has been actively engaged in efforts to prevent the dissemination of propaganda targeting his community. In recent times, he has made formal requests to various institutions located in prominent cities in Pakistan, seeking permission to present a lecture to their communication department students. The purpose of this lecture series has been to address and challenge prevailing stereotypes of the Kalasha people (personal communication, October 2023).

A Threat to the Traditional Knowledge System

Kovach (2009) argued that "cultural longevity depends on the ability to sustain cultural knowledge. At the heart of a cultural renaissance, Indigenous or otherwise, is restoration and respectful *use* of that culture's knowledge systems" (p. 12). Indigenous knowledge systems, however, have historically been ignored and relegated to the margins, if recognized at all (Hart, 2010). The Kalasha people have demanded the inclusion of their language in school curricula, along with the teaching of ethics to Kalasha children, rather than Islamic studies (Barijo, 2016), as is already practiced for other minority communities in other provinces. Speaking of the impact of Islamic education, Akram Hussain, a Kalasha social worker, remarked, "When a Muslim teacher warns you that you are an infidel and will be burned in hell, a kid can't evade this threatening influence" (as cited in Khan, 2018, para.12).

The Kalasha language has been declared one of the world's most endangered languages by UNESCO. Once spoken by around 50,000 people, the number of speakers has now declined to fewer than 4,000 (Khan, 2017). Although the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the province where the Kalasha valleys are located, has approved the inclusion of 12 regional languages in school curricula, Kalasha was not among them (Barijo, 2016).

As discussed earlier, in 2018, UNESCO recognized the Kalash custom of *suri jagek* (observing the sun) as an intangible cultural heritage in need of urgent safeguarding. *Suri jagek* is

considered a foundational aspect of Kalasha culture and is described by the community as a "ruling custom" (UNESCO, 2018, 2:20, 2:37). However, this traditional knowledge system, once essential for determining time, weather patterns, and key events in the Kalasha calendar, is now in decline. Younger generations increasingly rely on mobile phones for weather updates, while the government has introduced fixed dates for festivals to streamline planning and improve security for both domestic and international tourists (UNESCO, 2018).

In addition, the government and various NGOs have attempted to apply their expertise in building floodwalls, constructing irrigation channels, and safeguarding natural resources. Prior to these interventions, the community took care of these issues through collective management and traditional institutions. For example, Parkes (2000) described that an annually appointed youth constabulary took care of irrigation channels, the regulation of goatherders, and the imposition of the closed season for the harvesting of fruits and walnuts in the summer. Moreover, elders put rotational bans on cutting down trees in specific regions for a period of 5 to 6 years. Also, the Kalasha were "renowned artisans" (p. 262) known for constructing dry stone floodwalls that were strong and durable. However, all the development projects that have been taken up by NGOs have been based on an external engineer's survey, have been built in poor cement rather than the traditional method of dry stones, and have not lasted long. The use of traditional institutions to regulate forests and agriculture also has ended because of the Kalasha peoples' declining influence in the valleys. Contractors have been concerned with their profits instead of sustainable and culturally relevant development (Parkes, 2000).

Moreover, nearly all the temples and dancing pavilions have recently been renovated in ways that fail to respect the cultural significance of these structures. Contemporary architectural advancements ignore the traditional architectural expertise of the Kalasha community in constructing dwellings on cliffs as a strategy to alleviate the consequences of environmental calamities (Mustafa,

2019). The new dancing pavilions with cement floors and tin roofs block the sky's view, thus impeding the Kalash people's many cultural practices (Rose, 1992a). These structural changes in architecture to facilitate tourism at the expense of Indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions reduce "rituals to mere performance" (Mustafa, 2019, p. 47). Mustafa explained further that, "Commercialization and appropriation of Kalasha culture, triggered by the development and exploitation of tourism industry, has not only embedded shops, hotels and new settlements in the Kalasha landscape but has also improvised the significance of its built heritage" (p. 68).

Saifullah Jan, a Kalasha activist, believes that NGOs often act without consulting the community, involving only a few token individuals and creating internal divisions. He voiced his ongoing dissatisfaction during his address at the Third International Hindu Kush Cultural Conference. In his impassioned remarks, he challenged regional specialists, "We don't need to be told what we already know ourselves! We don't need to be shown pictures of what we can see every day! We need no more NGOs!" (as cited in Parkes, 2000, p. 253). Two decades later, Saifullah Jan briefly expressed the same concern to me when he remarked, *"*Someone might want to build a road with good intentions, but it might just be a pure disaster for us.*"* However, it was Daud Shah who more eloquently questioned the intentions behind these projects. This is what he had to say on the issue:

> The English ruled here for 200 years. What did they do? Now, in the 1990s they started saying they wanted to undertake some projects here. They will have their own motives, that's what I think. When they were here, they only wrote books about us and did not do anything else. What intrigues them now? They even took our things [material artifacts]. If those things were here today, we could benefit from them... Some of those are now in Denmark.[17] Some are

[17] The Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus Denmark has an extensive collection of Kalasha artifacts that includes more than 200 ethnographic objects of cultural significance including funerary effigies (Khan & Heegård, 2016)

elsewhere in the world. We will bring this issue to the Minority Commission to bring those back. We will try our best but bringing them back seems difficult.

Another significant concern is the intra- and inter-ethnic divisions such projects can create. Greek NGOs have been actively helping the Kalasha valleys because of the myth that the Kalasha are descendants of Alexander III (Khan, 2015). Greek interventions have also been a source of resentment because of the aid Kalasha people have received from NGOs and the government. In 2004, the Greeks built Kalasha Dur (Kalash cultural centre) with a built-in library, museum, hospital, and school for Kalasha children (Rickett, 2011). Saifullah Jan projected his concern that such interventions are designed to help the community, but such help can hurt them. Many Kalasha community leaders believe Greek projects have been "good hearted but wrong-headed" (Walsh, 2005, para.7).

Such damage was then later manifested when the Taliban attacked the museum and kidnapped a Greek volunteer, Athanasios Lerouins, in 2009. He was released after seven months of traumatic ordeal (Crowley, 2021). It has been rumoured that a substantial amount of ransom, along with the freeing of some Taliban members from Pakistani jails, ensured Lerounis' release from captivity. After his release, he returned to Greece and was not allowed to come back by the Pakistani government. This incident depicts the security threat that a lavish Greek-looking building poses for the Kalasha people (Rickett, 2011), as the Taliban have threatened to blow up the building (see Figure 3). However, the impact has not only been limited to the security problem; the Kalasha Dur has also created tensions with the Muslim community. The exclusion of Muslim children from the Greek-built school has been fuelling the resentment. A Kalasha teacher, Wali Khan, worked with Greek volunteers to create and compile Kalash alphabets.

Figure 3

Kalasha Dur, Mumuret Valley



However, he abandoned that work because he was unhappy with the division that Kalasha Dur created between the Kalasha and Muslim communities. Furthermore, the Kalasha people oppose the culture of dependency that such interventions foster (Rickett, 2011). The Kalasha believe that such efforts make communities depend on outside help instead of helping themselves. If something is broken in the community and there is too much money coming from outside, people will wait for others to come and fix it (Khan & Heegård, 2016; Walsh, 2005).

Conclusion

To sum up, Kalash people have a rich, unique culture and distinct way of life, and "the Kalash ethnic identity has survived the double phenomenon of fundamentalism and colonization" (Sheikh et al., 2014, p. 432). Now they are fighting a commercial onslaught, climate change, insensitive tourism,

and modernization, as well as cognitive and material oppression, which pose a severe threat to their culture. Nonetheless, they remain resilient in the face of these challenges. The steep mountain topography surrounding the Kalasha valleys, which limited their contact with the outside world, is often regarded as the reason their culture survived. However, as Pir (2019a) suggested, attributing their existence to their geographical location would be unfair because the resilience of the people and their culture must be recognized and celebrated. Choudhry et al.'s (2017) study of the Kalasha people found that there are many cultural protective factors, such as intercommunal bonding, sharing, and mutual help, among other things, that make the Kalasha people psychologically resilient despite their ongoing oppression. Crowley (2021) believes that an acephalous societal structure and pragmatic approach to conflict have contributed to their resistance and survival.

While a cursory reference was made to Kalasha conflict resolution processes by some scholars (e.g. Mustafa, 2019; Naz et al., 2015; Parkes, 1994), no comprehensive analysis of these processes can be found in the literature. In later chapters (5–8), I explore this under-researched practice of the Kalasha culture. Based on the research findings, I share what peace and conflict mean to the Kalasha people, how conflicts are prevented, managed, and resolved, and what cultural traditions make the expression and resolution of these conflicts unique.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Culture, conflict, and peace are interconnected aspects of human society that play a crucial role in shaping our world. Conflicts are deeply rooted in culture, making it a vital factor in their perception, expression, and resolution. Despite being often overlooked in international peacebuilding endeavors, culturally relevant conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies are gaining increased attention in PACS, as the universal approach (liberal peacebuilding) has failed to achieve sustainable peace. With a growing awareness of the failure of externally imposed solutions and of the importance of culture in conflict resolution, Indigenous peacebuilding processes are gaining recognition, particularly in critical and emancipatory strands of peacebuilding literature.

This chapter delves into the literature concerning the neglect, emergence, and resurgence of Indigenous peace processes while highlighting their key features and holistic nature, which utilize various elements such as religion, the arts, and women's roles among others. It further explores the literature in these three areas regarding their potential and challenges in peacebuilding. Hence, this chapter is divided into four sections and reviews four strands of literature on Indigenous peacebuilding, arts and peacebuilding, religion and peacebuilding, and women and peacebuilding, which parallel the themes highlighted in the four empirical chapters.

Indigenous Peacemaking and Peacebuilding

> The capacity to resolve conflict, reconcile disputing parties, and balance accountability with forgiveness is not a 'Western' capacity. It is a human capacity. (Wanis-St. John, 2013, p. 365)

Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of human life. Throughout history, people have successfully managed conflicts using methods deeply rooted in their specific socio-cultural environments like *panchayat, jirga, mukhiya*, and *anjuman* in South Asia, *gacaca* in Rwanda, *nahe biti* in East Timor,

ubuntu in South Africa, *gaada* in Ethiopia, *judiya* in Darfur, and *bicaara* in Malaysia among others. These approaches have helped communities thrive by allowing for the expression, ventilation, and resolution of conflicts but have remained undervalued in peace literature.

Neglect, Emergence, and Resurgence of Indigenous Peace Processes

Indigenous peace processes have been undervalued and ignored in alternative dispute resolution (ADR), peace research, and practice (Boege, 2011, 2006; Rice, 2011; Tuso, 2011, Tuso & Flaherty, 2016). This neglect can be attributed to many factors, such as the historical Western view of Indigenous and traditional cultures as backward, uncivilized, and dangerous (Brown, 2013; Mac Ginty, 2015; Tuso, 2011; Tuso & Flaherty, 2016), as well as the Hobbesian view of human nature as inherently aggressive that is ingrained in dominant strains of Western thought,[18] making peaceful society seem to be a nuisance and contradictory. Consequently, non-confrontational and nonviolent ways of making peace have been ignored and challenged from ethnocentric standpoints in order to obscure such peaceful societies (Fry, 2004). For example, there has been a disproportionate focus on war and violence in non-Western societies (Osaghae, 2000; Sponsel & Gregor, 1994; Tuso, 2011; Tuso & Flaherty, 2016) that has led to the depiction that "the traditional society is not only in a perpetual state of the war of all against all, but that warring is an integral part or instrument of conflict resolution and management" (Osaghae, 2000, p. 206).

The third reason for the neglect of Indigenous peacemaking and peacebuilding practices has perhaps been the Western view of the state as the "ultimate form of human organization" (Tuso & Flaherty, 2016, p. 4) that remains at the core of peacebuilding interventions. This way of thinking is evident from the idea of the "powerful aggressive state" (Newman et al., 2009, p. 7) as a threat during

[18] See, for e.g., Ghiglieri, 1999; Wrangham & Peterson, 1996, as cited in Fry, 2004, pp. 188–189.

first-generation peacebuilding[19] to "fragile state as a threat" (p. 9) in the post-cold war era.[20] Hence, peacebuilding interventions have been too state-centric (Campbell & Peterson, 2013; Tschirgi, 2020) and have failed to consider that "beyond the state there is a host of actors and institutions, customary ways and means of maintaining order, controlling violence and resolving conflicts" (Boege, 2006, p. 18)

Fourth, in traditional societies, urban elites have tended to prefer Western legal systems over traditional justice mechanisms (Tuso, 2011). During colonization, the introduction of individualism, modernity, and the legal justice system eroded traditional structures of collective organization, and conflict resolution (Issifu & Asante Jr, 2016; Sekhon, 2000; Tuso & Flaherty, 2016). Urban elites, mostly Western educated, preferred the Western legal system over traditional justice mechanisms in newly independent states (Issifu & Asante Jr, 2016; Tuso, 2011). As a result, while the Western legal system is taught everywhere, there is a lack of institutionalized efforts to teach and promote traditional peacemaking and peacebuilding processes (Bamidele, 2014; Tuso, 2011)

However, non-Western cultures have gained attention due to developments in various disciplines. In anthropology, the concept of cultural relativism[21] challenged the ethnocentric view of European cultural superiority (Tuso & Flaherty, 2016). Cultural relativism emphasizes understanding an individual's beliefs and activities within the context of their own culture, opposing ethnocentrism, which evaluates other cultures against the standards of one's own culture (Hanson, 2013). However,

[19] Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall (2011) termed the 1918–1945 period as "first generation peacebuilding," an era largely dominated by realists' propositions of conflict prevention and resolution.

[20] This view has been reinforced with full force since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the United States because terrorists are seen as a product of "failed states."

[21] This point was introduced by Franz Boas' students. In *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911), Boas himself noted that "too many investigations relating to mental characteristics of races are based on the logical fallacy of first assuming that the European represents the highest racial type and then representing every deviation from European type as a sign of lower mentality" (p. 30).

soon after the emergence of this approach, the eruption of the Cold War between superpowers with competing ideologies somewhat subsumed that debate. Thus, it was not until the 1990s, which were two decades after the field of conflict resolution was institutionalized, that culture began to receive attention (Tuso, 2011; Tuso & Flaherty, 2016) in understanding conflict patterns and their resolution processes across different cultures (e.g., Augusburger, 1992; Avruch, 1998; Lederach, 1995; Sponsel & Gregor, 1994).

Second, the United Nations' designation of 1995–2004 as the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples brought attention to Indigenous peoples, their rights, and traditional knowledge. Additionally, the "Restorative Justice" and "Justice as Healing" movements further contributed to the interest in Indigenous forms of peacemaking (Mac Ginty, 2008a, 2008b; Tuso & Flaherty, 2016). Third, the resurgence of interest in Indigenous peacemaking practices in the field of PACS has been driven by the perceived potential of these practices to complement and improve conventional approaches to peacemaking (Byrne & Senehi, 2010). This interest has arisen due to the continuous failure of conventional approaches to achieve sustainable peace in various contexts (Mac Ginty, 2008b). In addition, there has been a growing recognition among donor organizations and intervening states regarding the complexity of conflicts and the need for interventions at multiple levels to also include local people's knowledge and wisdom (Byrne, 2023). There has also been an understanding of the importance of tapping into existing local resources for sustainable peacebuilding interventions (Mac Ginty, 2008b, 2010; Funk, 2012). Hence, these practices are gaining increased attention, particularly in the critical and emancipatory strand of the peacebuilding literature that not only seeks to outline their potential to complement conventional approaches but also regards local people, local knowledge, and peacemaking practices as fundamental to local ownership, emancipation, and social justice.

The critical and emancipatory peacebuilding literature broadly covers two themes. First, it focuses on ideological flaws and practical shortcomings of liberal/Western peacebuilding,[22] and second, it advocates for local ownership and agency that underlines its (emancipatory peacebuilding) foundation (Byrne & Thiessen, 2019; Richmond, 2007; Thiessen, 2011, 2013). In the post-Cold War era, the United Nations conceived a multifaceted approach that encompasses multiple actors and strategies seeking to build peace, not only between but also within states. Based on the new notion of "fragile states as a threat" (Newman et al., 2009, p. 9), peacebuilding aimed to restructure post-conflict countries to create liberal states based on a free-market economy and democracy (Byrne & Thiessen, 2019; Debiel & Rinck, 2016; Newman et al., 2009; Paris, 2002); this was called "liberal peacebuilding." Liberal peacebuilding has become the dominant form of peacebuilding since then. However, in recent years and mainly because it has failed to bring about sustainable peace, it has been subjected to critical scrutiny by PACS scholars and practitioners.

Critics have argued that this linear, standardized, universal, one-size-fits-all peacebuilding approach based on the Western idea of liberal market democracy has failed to achieve sustainable peace and is top-down, prescriptive, culturally insensitive, exclusionary, and inconsistent with local needs (Campbell & Peterson, 2013; Fontan, 2012; Hyde & Byrne, 2015; Jacoby, 2007; Lederach, 1995, 2003a; Mac Ginty, 2008a, 2011; Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009; Newman et al., 2009; Paffenholz, 2021; Richmond, 2011; Roberts, 2011; Selby, 2013; Turner, 2012). They have contended that liberal peacebuilding not only neglects different socio-cultural contexts, but it is also a form of neo-colonialism and liberal imperialism (Duffield, 2007; Jabri, 2010). By exporting Western ideas of appropriate governance and conduct, "peacebuilding resembles an updated (and more benign) version

[22] Since liberal peacebuilding is largely based on Western ideas of the state and liberal market democracy, it has also been referred to as "Western peacebuilding" (e.g., Turner, 2012).

of the mission civilisatrice, or the colonial-era belief that the European imperial powers had a duty to 'civilize' dependent populations and territories" (Paris, 2002, p. 637).

This critique has culminated in the discussion of the importance of local culture, local agency, and culturally relevant and contextual conflict resolution practices (Augsburger, 1992; Avruch, 1998, 2009; Beyen et al., 2024; Lederach, 1995, 2003a). There has been a growing awareness regarding the failure to export conflict resolution strategies to other cultures (Lederach, 1995). Scholars have argued that instead of thinking of culture as a stumbling block, culture should be considered as a resource, a constructive "seedbed" of implicit information and knowledge (Funk, 2012; Lederach, 1995; Värynen, 2010) and that local knowledge should be included in peacemaking and peacebuilding (Lidén et al., 2009; Senehi, 2009a, 2009b). Scholars have insisted that local contextualization requires local inclusion and ownership (Mac Ginty, 2015; Richmond, 2007; Thiessen, 2011). Even though the United Nations conducted a critical self-assessment in 2015, there is still a need for structural change and for translating recommended ideas into policies. To date, changes have been largely cosmetic, as peacebuilding continues to be predominantly shaped by the liberal peace paradigm (Paffenholz, 2021). For example, liberal peacebuilders usually collaborate with a like-minded Western-educated elite rather than with ordinary people at the grassroots level to deal with the aforementioned criticism (Sedra, 2013; Mac Ginty & Wanis-St. John, 2022). Peace Inc. and peace landers continue to ignore the local and cause havoc on the ground (Autusserre, 2014, 2021). The emancipatory strand in the peacebuilding literature again has criticized this rhetorical inclusion. Although both *local* and *local ownership* are contested[23] concepts, and there is debate

[23] While some have questioned the *local ownership* of foreign ideas and interventions (e.g., Mac Ginty, 2015; Jabri, 2010), others have questioned the term itself and have proposed using *local leadership or authorship* instead (e.g., Donais, 2012; Hellmüller, 2018).

surrounding what is *local*[24] (Debiel & Rinck, 2016; Mac Ginty, 2015, 2016b; Öjendal et al., 2017; Paffenholz, 2016), emancipatory peacebuilding denounces the idea of using the local to implement externally devised solutions (Jabri, 2013; Mac Ginty, 2015) and asks for recognition of local agency. It seeks to empower ordinary voices from below instead of the local's "rhetorical inclusion in policy papers" and consideration of local-elite and civil society as representatives of the local (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015, p.832). It emphasizes bottom-up approaches to peacebuilding where actors design and subsequently own peace (Chandler, 2017; Donais, 2009, 2012; Hellmüller, 2018). These bottom-up approaches have called for attention towards Indigenous cultures to understand the ways conflict is understood, experienced, and resolved at an everyday, grassroots level (Mac Ginty, 2014).

Rooted in local cultures, Indigenous approaches to peacebuilding play an effective role in peacebuilding in conflict-affected communities (Boege, 2011; Fry & Souillac, 2022). With the growing emphasis on the inclusion of local knowledge, the need for local ownership (Byrne, 2023; Curle, 1994; Mac Ginty, 2013, 2015, Senehi, 2009b), and cultural relevance of peacebuilding ventures (Augsburger, 1992; Autusserre, 2021; Avruch, 2009; Beyene et al., 2024; Lederach, 1995, 2003a), there is a resurgence in research regarding Indigenous approaches to peacebuilding in different parts of the world (e.g., Adebayo et al., 2014; Fry, 2006; Kemp & Fry, 2004; Kyoon-Achan, 2014; Mac Ginty, 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2011, 2016a; Rice, 2011; Stobbe, 2015; Tursunova, 2014; Tuso, 2011; Tuso & Flaherty, 2016; Witty, 1981; Zartman, 2000).

What is Indigenous Peacebuilding?

It is challenging to define something as an inherently Indigenous peacemaking practice because there is no singular definition or understanding of the term "Indigenous," which leads to

[24] What is local? Is it a fixed spatial unit like local government, an institution (as perceived in liberal peace theory), or a fluid deterritorialized unit embedded in a network, relationships, or an activity (e.g., Lambek, 2011; Mac Ginty, 2015), or something in between (e.g., Öjendal et al., 2017)?

varying interpretations of "Indigenous peacemaking" and "Indigenous peacebuilding." For example, Mac Ginty (2016a) argued that the term "Indigenous" can be applied anywhere because it is a geographical term, referring to a place-based activity. In that sense, liberal peacebuilding is Indigenous to the West because it originated in the geographical West and arose out of the "West's contextual and historical experiences" (Boege, 2011, p. 434).

However, the term "Indigenous" has not been understood in a spatial sense; rather, it has been recognized that "epistemologically, juridically, and in terms of contemporary political economy, the concept and category of 'Indigenous' is inextricably linked with modernity, as it was constructed in Western thought specifically to signify its antithesis" (Benjamin & Lundy, 2014, p. 9). So, the term "Indigenous" has been broadly conceived in two ways. First, it has been used to refer to marginalized native peoples in the geographical West and elsewhere who are encapsulated in modern state systems formed mostly without their consent. Second, it has been used to refer to cultural practices and products outside of Western influence, hence the terms "Indigenous," "primitive," and "savage" (Benjamin & Lundy, 2014; Tuso, 2011).

Indigenous peacemaking practices are then cultural practices found in non-Western societies, also sometimes referred to as traditional societies (Zartman, 2000). Indigenous peacebuilding, according to Mac Ginty (2008a), can be defined as "dispute resolution and conflict management techniques that are based on long-established practice and local custom" (pp.145–146). Boege (2011) noted that "traditional institutions and mechanisms of conflict transformation are those that have their roots in the local Indigenous societal structures of pre-colonial and pre-contact societies" (p. 436).

It is important to recognize that the term "Indigenous" cannot be fully captured by a single, fixed definition. Indigenous identities, experiences, and practices are diverse and cannot be reduced to a homogenized, pan-Indigenous category (Benjamin & Lundy, 2014; Boege, 2006). This diversity is particularly evident in the multiplicity of Indigenous peacebuilding and peacemaking practices, which

are deeply rooted in localized worldviews and relational ontologies. However, Indigenous peoples and their peacemaking practices do share some common experiences, such as colonization and marginalization, as well as certain characteristics. In strategically essentialist terms (Spivak, 1988), it can be argued that, despite their internal diversity, Indigenous peacebuilding and peacemaking approaches share more affinities with one another than with dominant Western paradigms.[25]

Key Assumptions and Features of Indigenous Peacemaking and Peacebuilding

Today, it is difficult to separate Indigenous and liberal peacebuilding as distinct and unchanging categories (Boege, 2011; Mac Ginty, 2008a, 2016a, 2016b). Although Indigenous peacemaking processes vary across cultures and involve different customs, ceremonies, and rituals, these approaches share certain assumptions about conflict and its resolution, as well as distinct features (Benjami & Lundy, 2014; Boege, 2011, 2006; Kemp & Fry, 2004; Tuso, 2011; Tuso & Flaherty, 2016; Walker, 2019; Zartman, 2000b) that contribute to their effectiveness and uniqueness.

Indigenous societies view conflict as an unwelcome disturbance in relationships and harmony among people and between people and nature (Faure, 2000; Pranis et al., 2003; Tuso & Flaherty, 2016). In contrast to the Western perspective that views an act as a violation of an individual's right or state law requiring punishment or definitive agreement, the focus is on restoring harmony and relationships through compensation and reintegration (Boege, 2011; Mac Ginty, 2010; Pranis et al., 2003; Tuso and Flaherty, 2016; Zartman, 2000). Because of these underlying assumptions, Indigenous methods are typically holistic, process-oriented, context-specific, inclusive, people-centred, therapeutic, accessible, and cost-effective. They are bottom-up approaches based on rituals that emphasize relational harmony and healing by focusing on community (Boege, 2006, 2011; Fry,

[25] In this dissertation, "West" or "Western" doesn't refer to a geographic region but to a set of political, economic, and social worldviews rooted in capitalist Europe and adopted by settler societies. It specifically refers to "the Western approach with its globalized form, which presents itself as the universal, 'self-evident' manner of thinking about and of doing politics in general and conflict transformation in particular, hiding or ignoring that it is itself culturally constructed within the West's contextual and historical experiences" (Boege, 2011, p. 434).

2004; Mac Ginty, 2008b, 2010; 2011; Tuso & Flaherty, 2016; Uwazie, 2000; Wanis-St. John, 2013; Zartman, 2000). Without assuming that these features are evenly distributed among Indigenous practices worldwide, this section explores in detail the characteristics that make Indigenous peacemaking effective and distinct.

Cultural Relevance and Legitimacy

The importance of culture and local context in conflict and peacebuilding processes is increasingly apparent (Funk & Said, 2010). "Culture is the soul of the people" (Nkwi, 2014, p. 159) because people shape themselves and their reality through cultural meaning-making. Beyene et al. (2024) defined "culture as a socially complex symbolic system that encodes the social knowledge, values, and practices for a particular community" (p. xii). Culture serves as an interpretive lens for society's perceptions, beliefs, behaviours, scarcity, and power (Avruch, 1998, 2016; Mazuri, 1990). As Cohen (1996, as cited in Gellman, 2007) argued, "culture constructs reality; different cultures construct reality differently; communication across cultures pits different constructions of reality against each other" (p. 13). Therefore, the factors causing conflict and their understanding are usually culturally perceived and constructed (Avruch, 2016; Bräuchler, 2017; Brigg, 2010; Cormier, 2012, 2016; Värynen, 2010). Thus, cultural sensitivity and relevance are crucial in conflict assessment, resolution, peacebuilding, and training (Augsburger, 1992; Avruch, 2016; Lederach, 1995; Schirch, 2013) because "the landscape of one society is not always visible to members of another society due to differing perceptions, values and political interests" (Davidson-Hunt, 2003, as cited in Cormier, 2014, p. 167). Failure to understand the culture and context in which conflict takes place results in failed attempts to resolve it, as evidenced by the failure of liberal peacebuilding interventions.

Liberal peacebuilding views conflict-affected communities as "virgin territories" where liberal norms can be nurtured (Newman et al., 2009, p.23) and hence ignores local context and socio-cultural capital (Mac Ginty, 2011). It promotes liberal market democracy as the sole legitimate solution

without considering cross-cultural differences, leading to what LeBaron (2004) termed "automatic ethnocentricity" and the "universalism trap" (p. 34) of culture. Given the consistent failure of liberal peacebuilding efforts, scholars have proposed an approach that is elicited, locally inspired, bottom-up, and based on sustainable local knowledge (Byrne, 2023; de Coning, 2013; Funk, 2012; Lederach, 1995, 1997). Indigenous peacemaking practices are effective because they are culturally situated, context-specific, people-centered, and bottom-up (Boege, 2006; Mac Ginty, 2008b, 2010). They have culturally embedded values that guide conflict resolution. As Zartman (2000) noted:

> Traditional methods depend doubly on integrative values. Such values define the positive-sum context that infuses practices with a peculiar direction, establishing the spirit of the endeavor. More precisely, they also determine what is fair and legitimate and what is expected, and so set the parameters and the perimeters for solutions. (p. 225)

The peacebuilding practices of Indigenous communities are deeply rooted in their culture. These practices not only share a common set of values but also require minimal resources to operate (Mac Ginty, 2008b). These resources are readily available within the community, making them "effective, accessible, and affordable" (Alemie & Mandefro, 2018, p. 16). One key resource is the presence of respected elders, who hold moral authority within the community, unlike foreign "experts" or neutral outsiders (Mac Ginty, 2010). In Indigenous communities, elders acquire their conflict resolution skills through experiential learning based on their life experiences, culture, and everyday interactions, rather than through formal professional training or institutionalized degrees (Mirsky, 2004, 2009). Their understanding of the cultural environment and customs, combined with their knowledge of human psychology, makes them adept at communication and conflict resolution (Augusburger, 1992; Boege, 2006; Rice, 2011; Tuso & Flaherty, 2016). The important characteristics of elders in many Indigenous societies are wisdom, cultural knowledge, integrity, generosity, and age (Kyoon-Achan, 2016; Osaghae, 2000; Tuso, 2000).

In traditional societies, communication is often indirect. Elders play a crucial role as a third party in resolving conflicts. The involvement of a third party helps to save face, reduce threats, balance power, and equalize differences. The third party is usually someone respected by both parties and helps them reach an agreement (Augsburger, 1992). Elders act as mediators and arbitrators in some conflict situations, offering support and wisdom to the parties. This differs from the formal justice system, which is often seen as an intrusion into individuals' lives. In contrast with the justice system, elders focus on mediation rather than adjudication, connection instead of conclusion, and resolution instead of coercion (Augsburger, 1992; Pranis et al., 2003). Elders do not force people to conform to laws but reflect people's opinions through bottom-up processes (Rice, 2011). An elder does not act alone and is considered a "moral mediator rather than a mediator with muscle, or in more standard terms, a mediator as formulator but not as manipulator" (Zartman, 2000, p. 222).

Second, in addition to having respected individuals available to intervene in conflict situations, the necessary resources for conflict resolution processes are also present within the community (Mac Ginty, 2008b, 2010). For example, in Northern Kenya, the community performs a miss ceremony, a ritual to resolve inter-tribal conflict, by slaughtering animals and burying weapons. This ceremony is conducted by community elders, and the community provides food, animals, and weapons for the peace ceremony (Mac Ginty, 2008b).

Therefore, one of the key advantages of Indigenous approaches is their culturally intuitive nature. These practices do not rely on material resources or external expertise for explanation and implementation. Instead, resources are readily available, and the process is easily understandable because it draws on "popularly held and accepted norms and expectations" (Mac Ginty, 2010, p. 350). Their cultural relevance makes them legitimate. However, most importantly, their legitimacy comes from their public dimension, as it is a communal activity to be witnessed by the public, not something that happens behind closed doors or in the courtroom (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Mac Ginty, 2010).

Indigenous methods do not impose a state-centric alien intrusion that forces people to conform to Western notions of the state, nation, and justice (Boege, 2011; Nkwi, 2014). For this reason, Indigenous approaches are considered legitimate, culturally acceptable, and effective ways of addressing conflicts in Indigenous communities.

Conflict Transformation

Another significant feature that accounts for the effectiveness of Indigenous peacemaking practices is conflict transformation. Conflict transformation, instead of managing conflict or resolving conflict through a win-win solution, focuses on long-term, structure- and process-oriented peacebuilding endeavours (Miall, 2004; Reimann, 2004).[26] Lederach (2003a) argued that "conflict transformation views peace as centred and rooted in the quality of relationships" (p. 20) both in interpersonal interactions and in socio-structural contexts. Hence, conflict transformation has two phases: the first is to end the violence, and the second is to strengthen peaceful relationships by dealing with the root causes of conflict (Kriesberg, 2011). Conflict transformation requires a process-oriented and holistic process to heal and transform conflictual relationships and address the root causes of conflict. In this sense, conflict transformation is part and parcel of Indigenous peacemaking processes because they are usually long-term and process-oriented; they seek to heal and transform relationships and are holistic.

Process Orientation. Indigenous peacemaking practices are process-oriented rather than product-oriented (Boege, 2006; Faure, 2000; Menkhaus, 2000; Mac Ginty 2008a, 2008b, 2010). Indigenous practices do not view peace as an event or a static end state that can be achieved through a

[26] Some scholars have considered conflict transformation an extended version of conflict resolution (e.g., Miall, 2004; Reimann, 2004; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2011) while others have considered it to be different because it deals not only with immediate issues but also seeks to transform relationships, structures, and underlying causes of conflict (e.g., Francis, 2002; Galtung, 1996, 1969; Jabri, 1996; Jeong, 2009; Lederach, 2003a; Rupesinghe, 1995; Värynen, 1991).

transactional exchange resulting in a definitive agreement between two individuals or parties within a given time frame (Boulding 2000; Mac Ginty, 2008a, 2010). Instead of focusing on a series of technocratic exercises, Indigenous peacemaking emphasizes ongoing relationships, reciprocity, and a shared sense of resources and land (Mac Ginty, 2008b). Indigenous peacemaking does not align with the business management culture prevalent in liberal peacebuilding interventions (Mac Ginty, 2016a) where timing is of utmost importance. The fundamental difference lies in the conception of time and the goal of the process. With the introduction of monochronic and synchronic forms of time under industrial capitalism (Thompson, 1967), time has become equated with money and is therefore "not passed but spent" (Augusburger, 1992, p. 202). Hence, the emphasis is on "the need for timely, definitive, written deals" in Western societies (Mac Ginty, 2010, p. 351). In contrast, time in Indigenous societies is cyclical rather than linear, and it is viewed as "people and relationships to be explored and experienced" (Augsburger, 1992, p. 202). Mac Ginty (2008a) rightly noted that: "Having little conception of state sovereignty, modern bureaucracy, written covenants, formal participation structures and linear, sequential notions of time, it is unsurprising that traditional societies found, and still find, Western versions of peace alien" (p. 149). In traditional societies, peacemaking and peacebuilding take days, sometimes months and years, to conclude, as is evident from the case of the Bougainville (Papua New Guinea) peace process that has been going on for almost two decades now because customary law requires that it must be formulated as a long-term process (Boege, 2011).

In addition, the process orientation of Indigenous peacebuilding is also evident from the cultural emphasis on nurturing peace values in children (Fry, 2004; Kyoon-Achan, 2014; Rice, 2011) because "like war peace has essential preconditions: a structure, an organization, and values, attitudes, and emotions that sustain it" (Sponsel & Gregor, 1994, p. xv). Hence, socialization through oral tradition and by elders serving as role models to set a positive precedent for peace values is

considered significant among Indigenous societies (Kyoon-Achan, 2016). For example, the Semai people of Malaysia use harangues in Bicaara, a communal meeting set aside for conflict resolution, to encourage wrongdoers to set a good example for children and others (Dentan, 2004; Fry, 2004). In East Timor, there is a traditional conflict resolution process called *nahe biti*. The customary phrase that ends *nahe biti* is "What is bad should be forgotten and not taken home with you. However, you may take the good things to tell and teach your children" (Babo-Soares, 2004, p. 21). This phrase reflects the importance of nurturing peace values and the dynamic nature of traditional peacebuilding processes.

In traditional societies, peace goes beyond the absence of violence. As the peacemaker told the Iroquois, maintaining peace involves taking care of the needs and interests of everyone (Rice, 2011). This implies that there will always be "unfinished business" and "your job will never end. It will never end" (Mohawk, 2008, p. 56). Hence, Indigenous societies maintain their peacefulness through an ongoing and active process that involves keeping a check on conflict and violence through built-in socio-cultural norms, control mechanisms, and non-aggressive conflict resolution processes.

Transformation of Relationships. The conflict resolution practices of traditional societies may seem like Western mediation and arbitration, but the process, outcome, and objectives are quite different. Because the Indigenous worldview is relational, the primary goal of Indigenous peacemaking processes is to transform and heal relationships (Rice, 2011). This is done to restore the community's harmony and balance, not only with animate and so-called inanimate elements, but also with the creator, ancestors, and spirits (Alemie & Mandefro, 2018; Little Bear, 2000; Mac Ginty, 2010, 2008a; Settee, 2008; Tuso & Flaherty, 2016).

Relationships form the core of the Indigenous worldview. For example, when a crime or conflict occurs among the Hualapai of Arizona, people say, "he acts like he has no relatives" (Mirsky, 2004, p. 5). Similarly, the Cree culture has a ritual called smudging with sage, which is performed to

purify one's thoughts and actions to care for all relationships (Settee, 2008). Among Indigenous societies, the importance of relationships in preventing and resolving conflicts is evident. In African traditional societies, when warring clans lack relationships, they establish them through marriages and alliances, believing that interdependence makes conflict mutually destructive (Brock-Utne, 2001; Zartman, 2000). Relational harmony is essential in traditional societies, and in rare cases where relationships cannot be restored, the parties move away to avoid constant friction (Alemie & Mandefro, 2018; Zartman, 2000). As Meyer (1995) noted about *ho'oponopono*, a Hawaiian conflict resolution process,

> Although every *ho'oponopono* must end in resolution the path to that ending is not always amicable. There is an option in *ho'oponopono* called *mo ka piko*, which means "to sever the umbilical cord." An example of when *mo ka piko* might be used is a situation in which one member of the family refuses to participate in the problem-solving process or to embrace the family with any sense of *aloha.* (p. 34)

International peacebuilding does not deal with intergroup trust-building beyond handshakes and high-profile truth recovery. In contrast, Indigenous peacemaking prioritizes reconciliation to heal conflicting parties mentally and spiritually. This process aims to address the deep psychological harm that can sustain and reactivate conflict (Irani & Funk, 1998; Mac Ginty 2008b; Nkwi, 2014). Rituals of reconciliation like breaking bread together, sharing drinks, praying, shaking hands, embracing, and animal sacrifice to reconcile ruptured relationships (Faure, 2000) mark the end of Indigenous peacemaking processes in many societies. These rituals are aimed at healing and transforming relationships among humans, creators, ancestors, and spirits. Examples of such rituals include *arara* among the Oromo in Ethiopia, *soukhan* in Laos, and *musalaha* in the Middle East (Irani & Funk, 1998; Stobbe, 2011; Tuso, 2016). For example*, nahe biti*, a customary mediation method in East Timor, ends with the offender and victim's statements, followed by a ritual of sharing food and drink

among the disputants to reconcile them with each other and the wider community (King-Irani, 2000; Mac Ginty, 2008b). Among the Acholi of Uganda, *mato-oput* involves the drinking of a bitter herb as a symbolic way to cleanse bitter emotions and to emphasize the "psychological bitterness" that took over the parties' minds during the conflict (Brock-Utne, 2001).

The Western and traditional approaches differ significantly in their perceptions of justice and punishment. Indigenous processes prioritize healing over punishment, emphasizing values like respect, consensus, solidarity, and mutual relationships to achieve healing (Zion, 2005). In contrast, the Western legal approach is adversarial, focusing on punishment without much concern for the victim or the possibility of reintegrating the offender into the community in the future. This often encourages offenders to lie and deny responsibility. On the other hand, traditional methods encourage offenders to take responsibility, recognize harm, compensate for loss, and seek forgiveness and reconciliation (Mirsky, 2004, 2009; Pranis et al., 2003; Tuso & Flaherty, 2016). The Western legal system is competitive and focuses on "fault-finding, the blame game and winners take all syndrome" (Issifu & Asante Jr., 2016, p. 14). The Western view of violence is individualistic and conservative. It believes that an individual makes a rational choice to opt for violent behavior after weighing the costs and benefits of certain actions. Therefore, the criminal justice system is considered the primary means to address the problem by ensuring certainty and severity of punishment that also acts as a deterrent (Iadicola & Shupe, 2013). In contrast, the Indigenous perspective sees such punishment as oppressive (McCaslin & Breton, 2008). As Harold Johnson, a Cree, (2005) argued:

> The act of oppressing by imposing punishment destroys peace. It is not a good order to use violence to maintain the appearance of order. Punishment is violence. Incarceration is violence. The violence of incarceration maintains and is maintained by the economic system of the industrial capitalist criminal justice system. (p. 67)

The Indigenous approach focuses on healing and addressing the root cause of the problem rather than seeking retribution (Mirsky 2004; Zion 2005; Pranis et al., 2003). It aims to heal both parties through compensation, restitution, and reconciliation (Mac Ginty, 2008a; Mills, 1994; Mirsky, 2004; Tuso, 2016; Zartman, 2000). This contrasts with the Western view, which prioritizes punishment through the criminal justice system. The Indigenous perspective is often misunderstood as promoting impunity (Boege, 2011, 2006; Mac Ginty 2008b,), but it seeks culturally relevant punishment that encourages behavioural change and reintegration into the community. "Justice is very much part of the exercise, but as a compensation for loss, not as retribution for offense" (Zartman, 2000, p. 222). The Indigenous view is concerned with "getting well not getting even" (Pranis et al., 2003, p. 15). Victims or their families are not forced to accept the decision. For instance, the principle of *diya* (blood money) cannot be imposed in Ethiopia or elsewhere. Recognition and acceptance by the victim's family must be obtained for it to be used to resolve the dispute (Irani & Funk, 1998). Additionally, among the Oromo of Ethiopia, apart from paying one hundred cattle as compensation for murder, families are reconciled either through lifelong service to the family of the victim by the offender or through the adoption of a new member from the offender's family (Tuso, 2000). The culturally relevant punishment discourages the escalation of conflict, as compensation and restitution replace revenge and violence (Boege, 2006).

A Communal Approach

The relational aspect is essential in Indigenous peacemaking processes, emphasizing communal and consensual dimensions. These processes prioritize harmonizing a broader network of relationships over individual satisfaction (Augsburger, 1992; Benjamin & Lundy, 2014). In Indigenous societies, communal goals take precedence over individual aspirations.[27] The individual is

[27] However, it is important to note that each individual's personal autonomy and free will are also respected (see, for e.g., Brody, 2001; Lee, 1967). This also emerged in this study. (Please see Chapter 8.)

expected to control their inner feelings in order to put the group first and to desire for the good of the larger group (Little Bear, 2000).

In Indigenous societies, "one finds, almost by definition, a lack of the concept of 'the individual,' as reified, fixed, and isolated or separated from other levels of society" (Benjamin & Lundy, 2014, p. 11). Self is understood with relation to a group where an individual has freedom with responsibility, most clearly articulated by terms reflecting collective personhood such as the Navajo word *k'e*, the Lakota word *tiospaye*, the Zulu word *ubuntu*, the Yourba word *kparakpor*, and the Kiswahili word *ujamaa* (Brock-Utne, 2001; Masina, 2000; Zion, 2005). In this sense, no one's right to freedom of speech is superior to another's right to dignity and respect. Freedom of expression and individual freedom are connected to others' dignity and respect. Sensitivity toward others' reputation, honour, and face is highly important in traditional societies (Faure, 2000). This communal understanding of self leads to shared responsibility for harm as well as for compensation and healing (Murithi, 2006).

While suppressing an individual's desires for the larger group may seem like a violation of individual freedom in the Western context, in reality, the group also takes care of the individual's needs. For instance, among the Inuit, individuals were discouraged from openly manifesting conflict to maintain relational harmony. However, they had a non-confrontational conflict resolution mechanism called Song Duel, which provided a culturally relevant platform for venting negative emotions without resorting to violence (Briggs, 2000). The Oromo people of Ethiopia embrace collective responsibility for crimes (Tuso, 2000). As Zartman (2000) put it, "Shared responsibility for the conflict becomes the basis for shared responsibility for the resolution" (p. 221). Similarly, among the Kalahari bushmen, harm to any individual is viewed as harm to the entire group, and seeking forgiveness from the whole group is necessary (Faure, 2000).

The Holistic Worldview

The holistic worldview of Indigenous peacemaking is a distinctive characteristic that transforms conflict (Cormier, 2016; Litte Bear, 2000; Pranis et al., 2003). According to Rice (2011), one of the most challenging aspects for the dominant Euro-Western society to grasp is the holistic worldview of Indigenous peacebuilding, which sees all things as interrelated. Unlike Western peacebuilding, which focuses on the direct parties to the conflict, Indigenous peacemaking involves "collective responsibility" and is a communal activity that seeks consensus-based decision-making to reconcile the interests of all parties and the broader community (Alemie & Mandefro, 2018; Mac Ginty, 2008a; Menkhaus, 2000; Zartman, 2000). It encourages people to be flexible and value the relational context instead of having a fixed notion of a win-win outcome or carefully gauged "best alternative to negotiated agreement" if negotiation fails (Fisher et al., 2011, p. 49). In Indigenous peacemaking, consensus is not about achieving a win-win outcome through coercion or submissive compliance but rather about considering everyone's interests by thinking creatively and setting aside "personal agendas and fixed notions about outcomes" (Pranis et al., 2003, pp. 120–121). This approach discourages assertive individualism and insensitive competition while encouraging flexibility and valuing relational context (Masina, 2000). Moreover, Indigenous peacemaking emphasizes addressing past wrongs to reconcile the past, present, and future, rather than applying band-aid solutions (Boege, 2006; Zion, 2005).

In contrast to the Western perspective, which views humans as rational beings based on Cartesian dualism, the Indigenous worldview, as represented in the Medicine Wheel, sees humans holistically as "physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual beings" (Pranis et al., 2003, p. 70). In Indigenous thought, each aspect is valued because often humans "base their decisions on emotive or some other cognitive criteria rather than rationality" (Byrne & Senehi, 2010, p. 6). This holistic view

of a human being translates into a holistic view of conflict and peacemaking involving factors beyond reason and rationality, such as emotion, symbols, imagination, and spirit (Boege, 2006; Nkwi, 2014)

While symbols, rituals, emotions, and spirits are often seen as "deviations" or "irrational forces" in Western peacebuilding, they are considered integral to Indigenous thought and peacemaking practices worldwide (Allen, 2008; Mac Ginty, 2008a, 2013, 2010; Zion, 2005). For this reason, "traditional approaches cannot be compartmentalized into 'political' or 'juridical' or other, rather they are holistic, comprising also social, economic, cultural and religious-spiritual dimensions" (Boege, 2006, p. 9). For example, praying, singing, dancing, and other ceremonies may seem unnecessary in Western societies, but they have a significant impact on the negotiation process and its success in traditional societies (Boege, 2006) because "symbolic acts can penetrate the impenetrable, overwhelm the defensive, and convey complex messages without saying a single word" (Schirch, 2005, p. 4). Rituals have a transformative power that transcends oppositional binaries of good/bad and victim/offender, creating possibilities to think outside the box (King-Irani, 2000, p. 134). Many animate and so-called inanimate things hold significant symbolic value in peacemaking ceremonies (Uwazie, 2000), for example, a green stone for the Māori or cattle for the people of Africa (Mac Ginty, 2010). Feathers also hold high symbolic value for the native peoples of North America. Eagle down, for instance, is considered a symbol of peace among the Gitksan and Witsuwit'en and is used in the conflict resolution process, especially to sanctify the initiation of the peacemaking process (Mills, 1994).

Holistic peacemaking utilizes religion, culture, custom, spirit witchcraft, and many other rituals and practices (Osaghae, 2000) to establish control mechanisms that discourage conflict and violence and draw on values for their resolution. However, not all societies equally adhere to such control mechanisms or core values, and therefore Indigenous peacemaking practices also have weaknesses.

Weaknesses of Indigenous Peacemaking Practices

Indigenous practices have numerous advantages, but they are not immune to power abuse, exclusion, and injustices. At times, they may contradict international conceptions of human rights and justice (Boege, 2006; Thiessen, 2013). Scholars have cautioned against idealizing Indigenous peacebuilding practices and have suggested avoiding the assumption that they are inherently good or of "high normative value," or that local methods are superior to foreign ones (Donais, 2009, 2012; Mac Ginty 2008a, 2013, 2016a; Öjendal et al., 2018; Paffenholz, 2016). Indigenous peacemaking practices also have shortcomings that need attention. One significant aspect of Indigenous peacebuilding is local agency or ownership of the peacemaking process. However, it is important to note that "local agency can also be exclusive, discriminatory, violent and patriarchal" (Mac Ginty, 2016a, p. 139).

The main concern is gerontocracy and the exclusion of women (Merry, 2005). Women are sometimes victimized by these practices, being scapegoated to resolve conflicts between men. In some traditional practices, women are used as compensation for rape or even exchanged between conflicting parties because of decisions made by male-dominated councils (Boege, 2006). For example, *jirga*, an ancient Indigenous approach to resolving conflicts among the Pukhtoons of Pakistan and Afghanistan, sometimes relies on the practice called *vani* or *swara* to end inter-clan blood feuds (Gohar & Shirch, 2016). Although illegal in Pakistan, *swara* continues to be practiced in some rural areas. This custom involves forcibly marrying off young girls, typically between the ages of 2 and 14, to settle disputes or compensate for serious crimes—most often murder or honour-related offenses—committed by their male relatives, in an effort to prevent cycles of revenge between families (Walsh, 2006). However, *swara* should not only be understood as gender violence, as it is often mandated by powerful councils or tribes without the agreement of the weaker party and hence multiple forms of subordination are also at work.

The second issue with Indigenous approaches is the misuse of power. In traditional societies, like in all societies, there can be a power imbalance that leads to traditional mediation processes being used to benefit the powerful and harm weaker parties (Boege, 2011). For example, in 2002 in Pakistan, Mukhtar Mai survived a gang rape ordered by the powerful and wealthier Mastoi clan as an honour revenge against her Tatla clan due to her brother's alleged affair with a Mastoi girl.

The third problem is that Indigenous practices tend to be conservative, valuing unquestioned conformity and prevalent power structures and suppressing social activism that demands change (Mac Ginty, 2008a, Zartman, 2000). Additionally, they may involve violent and extreme practices such as lynching, vigilantism, the use of hot metal on the tongue to ascertain truth, and walking on burning coal to prove one's innocence (Birmani, 2013; Farid, 2018; Mac Ginty, 2008b; Mac Ginty, 2010).

Fourth, the traditional practices face challenges due to the impact of colonization and the modern state system. These societies, which used to be small and homogeneous, have been geographically and demographically reconfigured, making it difficult for these practices to be as effective as they once were (Briggs, 2000; Kouassi, 2000; Tuso, 2000). Additionally, challenges like the breakdown of traditional structures during conflicts, as well as the influences of modernization, commercialization, and the availability of weapons, further hinder the effectiveness of these practices. The involvement of traditional leaders in corruption and favouritism has also diminished the effectiveness of these methods (Hellmüller, 2018; Mac Ginty, 2008b; Menkhaus, 2000; Osaghae, 2000).[28] As Osaghae (2000) observed:

> The co-optation of traditional rulers as agents of the state, and their manipulation to serve partisan ends, which dates back to colonial times, not to mention the corruption of modern

[28] For e.g., the 1999 conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was caused by corruption and favouritism among local chiefs regarding land issues. The commercialization of land led to the deprivation of people's traditional land rights. Local chiefs sought benefits from selling land as part of new patronage structures, which restricted their ability to use customary law for impartial conflict resolution. At times, they even encouraged the use of weapons by youth and formed their own militia groups (Hellmüller, 2018).

> traditional rulers, have considerably reduced the reverence and respect commanded by this institution and, therefore, the ability of traditional rulers to resolve conflicts. (p. 215)

Fifth, according to Briggs, Indigenous practices have less purchase in cross-cultural settings (Briggs, 2000). Traditional peacemaking is usually guided by local traditions, cultural norms, and values that cannot be easily applied to other cultures due to variations in the ideas of face-saving, honour, harmony, and community across societies (Augsburger, 1992). Additionally, these practices have limited applicability during acute crises or on a national level, especially in modern conflicts involving a range of actors, including foreign ones with different agendas and views of conflict resolution (Mac Ginty, 2008b; Osaghae, 2000). Further, globalization and the affirmation of universal human rights challenge traditional societies. Finally, Boege (2006) argued that Indigenous approaches lack a "monopoly over the legitimate use of violence" (p. 9) available to the modern state and cannot ensure compliance. They rely solely on social and supernatural sanctions (Boege, 2006), which do not necessarily work all the time. However, Indigenous processes are resilient (Byrne, 2017; Nkwi, 2014), and in most societies, Indigenous processes play a very positive and effective role.[29] They have much to teach to other cultures because having access to *legitimate violence* has not made the world more peaceful either.

Arts and Peacebuilding

> "In the process of professionalization, we too often have lost a sense of the art, the creative act that underpins the birth and growth of personal and social change." (Lederach, 2005, p.73)

Arts have the power to transform and can be a valuable tool for conflict resolution and peacebuilding by providing a platform for dialogue, healing, and transformation (Lederach, 2005,

[29] For example, the power of the *panchayat* was significantly encroached upon by the colonial government in the Indian subcontinent (Sekhon, 2000), but it has survived and is still utilized by millions of people, mostly in Punjab, in India and Pakistan.

2020; Shank, 2004; Shank & Schirch, 2008). Although the use of artistic expression for conflict resolution has been observed in many Indigenous societies (e.g., traditional stories, song duels, mock battles, dance, and singing as discussed above), it has often been overlooked in formal peacebuilding settings as a superfluous accessory or soft approach to hard issues (Shank & Schirch, 2008). However, art has always been a way for people to express themselves, especially in times of war, as it provides a means of "expressing essential human experiences" (Premaratna & Bleiker, 2016, p. 82). Therefore, its role in promoting peace is receiving attention (e.g., Aguiar, 2020; Cohen, 2019; Cohen et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2015; Lederach, 2003b, 2020; Mandić, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2020; Senehi, 2002). As Appleby (2020) pointed out,

> Enduring peace among longtime enemies cannot be built through a formal process alone; a change of heart and a renewal of hope is necessary. Such interior transformations can only unfold in the depths of the soul. And such depths are plumbed most creatively and thus most powerfully in and through the arts. (p. 444)

There are numerous forms of art, such as visual, literary, and performing arts, each with its distinct aesthetic domain and ways of contributing to peacebuilding. Art does not follow strict rules; instead, it is rooted in creativity and the desire to challenge traditional perspectives on the world (Premaratna & Bleiker, 2016). Art intersects with peace in various ways, such as by providing an opportunity for self-expression, bearing witness, healing, empathy, awareness, and the desire for reconciliation and peace. It is impossible to capture how different art forms contribute to peace in this condensed section. However, the general themes regarding the remarkable qualities of artistic expressions in promoting peace are discussed.

Like any other tool, art can be constructive or destructive[30] depending on its purpose (Cohen, 2019; Hawksley & Mitchell, 2020; Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2019). As Senehi (2002) noted, stories can either be constructive, helping to transform conflict, or destructive, consolidating stereotypes, divisions, and exclusion. However, if done strategically,[31] art can play an important role in peacebuilding in various ways.

The Arts and Transcendence

The most peculiar aspect of art is its ability to transcend because "the artist transcends the immediate, transcends the here and now, transcends the madness of the world. The artist thinks, acts, performs music, and writes outside the framework that society has created" (Zinn, 2004, p. 531). It also transcends communal, linguistic, and cultural boundaries, providing liminal, safe spaces to encounter the "other" (Ross, 2011) by "drawing on physicality, spirituality, and emotionality, creating spaces for developing trust among people who might not otherwise trust each other" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 7). Artists can bridge divides and attract people from different backgrounds through their craft. Engaging with various art forms as creators, spectators, and spec-actors provides opportunities for empathy, self-reflection, learning, and creativity. Art's impact goes beyond language and rational thought, connecting with us on emotional levels (Shank, 2004; Shank, 2023). John Paul Lederach (2003b) used storytelling and music with high school students to foster empathy, connection, and understanding of the "other" in the aftermath of 9/11, experiencing the transcendent power of art, which he referred to as the "wow factor" (p. 121) and which he explained more fully here:

[30] For e.g., hate radio in Rwanda, Jewish caricatures in the Nazi publication *Der Stümer*, and political murals in Northern Ireland. For details, please see Chaplin, 2020 and Johnston, 2020.

[31] Strategically means "that arts-based methodologies be conceptually grounded, coordinated with other forms of peacebuilding approaches, infused with a long-term perspective vis-à-vis the nature of social change, and serious about evaluating their effectiveness and impact" (Shank & Schirch, 2008, p. 218).

> I would call this the wow factor. It can only be understood in parallel with the arts and the creative process, as opposed to sciences and the analytical process. Understanding in the sciences comes, for the most part, through cognitive processes of breaking phenomenon down into parts that can be studied. We 'see' analytically by pieces. The artistic process, on the other hand, goes beyond the view seen through a parsimonious lens to capture the whole.
>
> It provides a way for us to 'see'—to discern and grasp—what is visible but not seen with the eyes. That is the capacity of a painting, poem, play or photography. In its small wholeness, a deep truth about something is revealed and understood. When applied to peacebuilding, such a process is not set into motion by logical intent and cognitive design, but rather as many artists would say, by intuition and an 'I feel into it' quality…It is the intervention of an energy that goes beyond cognitive understanding and penetrates to a new level of understanding, motivation and action. (pp. 121–122)

Artists have the remarkable ability to use their craft to bring people together, foster empathy, and promote understanding across divides.

Arts Can Heal and Transform Relationships

Dealing with the psycho-emotional impact of violence is an important step in creating empathy, bearing witness, and opening people to others' stories to transform conflictual relationships. Art is therapeutic (de Botton & Armstrong, 2013, Rolling, 2017). It has the power to mend the social fabric torn by violence. Art can tap into both cognitive and emotional aspects of one's personality, both of which are vital for healing (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2019). Kim et al. (2015) have written about the qualities of the arts as a therapeutic tool: "art, music, and film can help victims regain their own sense of worth, dignity, identity, and purpose, as well as repairing the breakdown of social trust within and between people" (p. 2).

One important way art heals is by providing an outlet for self-expression and sharing. Sharing stories of trauma, loss, and grief can be important for personal healing because "performance spaces are venues where repressed and suppressed stories and perspectives can be brought to light, given a hearing, and joined with the social imaginary" (Cohen, 2019, p. 288). For example, storytelling empowered women who suffered from the effects of war in Northern Uganda, enabling them to assert themselves, demand their rights, seek justice, and find meaning in their ordeals. By engaging in storytelling, these local women found a platform to express and process their harrowing war memories. This process alleviated their sense of isolation, shame, and guilt, ultimately equipping them with confidence and liberty to engage in their local communities (Anyeko & Hoffmann, 2020). Likewise, playback theatre enables the expression and witnessing of people's stories on the spot, honouring the storyteller and the narrative, making them feel understood and respected (Salas, 2011). Also, Mitchell (2020) pointed to the possibility that "visual representations can be a channel by which anger and grief are expressed" (p. 6).

Particularly, the arts have served as a significant expressive outlet for young individuals whose voices remain frequently unheard (Hunter, 2011). Whether this has involved creating a platform for youth expression through involvement in hip-hop to combat marginalization and oppression in Ghana and South Africa (Banks, 2011), or utilizing various art initiatives like videography to address conflict, foster understanding, and establish connections across different cultures in Australia (Hunter, 2011), there is evidence to suggest that art-based methods have a profound impact on local people and their peacebuilding practices.

Using the arts in peacebuilding allows for the portrayal of diverse realities and expressions of the complexity and intractability of various forms of everyday community conflict (Hunter, 2011). All art forms have the potential to help divided communities understand their shared humanity, grieve losses, confront injustices, and grapple with the complexities of regret and forgiveness (Shank, 2023).

Through their work with communities impacted by political and identity-based violence, Volkas and colleagues (2016, as cited in Senehi et al., 2024) found that exploring our own and others' stories through drama therapy approaches are valuable tools to facilitate personal healing and social change. Performances can attract people's attention and penetrate through defensive barriers such as guilt, shame, and rage. They can help restore a sense of control, transform relationships, question existing beliefs, and suggest new ways of approaching issues, among other things (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 191).

The Arts Create Awareness

The arts can play a crucial role in creating awareness and engaging with taboo topics constructively, which may not be possible otherwise. Using humour and constructive elements, they can simultaneously engage in social commentary, providing a mirror for the community to question and rethink their beliefs and ideas. According to Culbertson (2020), "Theatre can function as a mirror on society, as commentary, as an escape or diversion, as catharsis, as a reflective space, or in myriad other capacities" (p. 372). This awareness is the cornerstone of providing stimulus for social change. As Ross (2011) asserted, "Theatre and the arts cannot stop war, but they can expose it, laying violence bare to be examined, explored, debated, and discussed—offering new insights into the experiences of the oppressed and the motivations of the oppressors" (p. xiv). The arts can also build capacity. Artists can use various art forms to help individuals build self-confidence, express themselves, and use creative problem-solving (Shank & Schirch, 2008). An example is forum theatre, created and used by Augusto Boal's (1993) Theatre of the Oppressed.

Arts Can Wage Conflict Nonviolently

The arts have the potential to engage in conflict using nonviolent methods. Through artistic expression, individuals can peacefully protest and express anger, disappointment, and disagreement. For example, in Mexico, public murals have a long history of employing nonviolent strategies to communicate dissent against social, political, and economic structures (Shank & Shirch, 2008). Oyola

and Rios (2020) illustrated how dance is used to both commemorate and protest through funerary rituals commemorating the Bojayá massacre in Colombia. They described it as "a shield that allows people to speak about violence and injustice in a non-confrontational manner" (p. 401). The music of the Civil Rights movement in the United States expressed hope and called for justice, demonstrating how the arts have been used in creative, nonviolent protest (Hawkesly & Mitchell, 2020).

In short, the arts are powerful tools. In various parts of the world, creative arts have played a vital role in promoting healing, dialogue, and social change. In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, young people have used hip-hop to engage with political and social challenges. In Batticoloa, Sri Lanka, communities have turned to music, art, and yoga to aid in trauma recovery. In Israel, the Peres Center for Peace has encouraged conversation and connection through collaborative theater. Venezuelan youth have found social inclusion through orchestras founded by Dr. Jose Antonio Abreu. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, theater practitioners have worked to foster peaceful relations among diverse groups in Mindanao (Shank & Schirch, 2008).

In their anthology *Acting Together on the Global Stage*, Cohen and colleagues (2019) examined fourteen art-based peacebuilding performances and observed three directions of change. First, previously suppressed emotions were expressed. Second, there was a nurturing and restoration of underdeveloped capacities. Third, there was an infusion of moral imagination into imperatives such as justice, memory, and resistance, resulting in more nuanced understandings and expressions. However, Shank (2004) cautioned that art-based approaches "must be done strategically and systematically. The responsibility of the art activist, after accessing the emotional pathway, is to carry the social justice message from the observer's emotional self to the observer's cognitive self" (e.g., through talkback sessions, forums and facilitated dialogues; p. 534). In addition, art may not do wonders when there are "strong feelings of unresolved injustice" (Michell, 2020, p. 61). Like any other approach, artistic peacebuilding endeavours need to ask critical questions, such as how to

navigate the ethical terrain when working cross-culturally, as well as when, where, and how to intervene. Additionally, thinking about the integrity of the process to avoid reinforcing an "us vs. them" binary and causing re-traumatization, among other things, is critical (Afolabi, 2019; Cohen et al., 2011).

Religion and Peacebuilding

> "Religion…is here to stay, and the myth that it would leave is now simply a myth." (Gopin, 2000, p. 223)

Religion is undoubtedly one of the most enigmatic yet fundamental aspects of the human experience. Religion holds immense cultural influence, shaping the outlook of millions of people worldwide. Anthropologist Jack David Eller (2007) suggested that religion offers hope, alleviates fear and despair, explains the origins and causes of things, establishes human rules and norms, acts as a form of social control, provides solutions through prayer, and promotes social integration. It serves as the guiding framework for people's lives (Gopin, 2000; Tuso, 2014), governing morality, behaviour, and politics (Appleby, 2011).

When examining the link between religion, conflict, and peace, religion often "conjures up the proverbial image of a double-edged sword" (Creamer & Hrynkow, 2014, p. 13). It can play a dual role in conflict, serving as a source of violence and as a tool for conflict transformation, reconciliation, and peace (Appleby, 2000; Gopin, 2000, 2002; Kilonzo & Chitando, 2023; Matóyk et al., 2014; Omer et al., 2015). In a document published by Peacebuilding Initiative (2009), the role of religion in conflict is reported: "Religion has long been, however, and will probably continue to be, a contributing factor in some violent conflicts, whether in its own right or as a proxy for political battles, in places as widely scattered as Northern Ireland, the Middle East, the Balkans, Sudan, Indonesia, and Kashmir" (para. 2). Furthermore, the modernist idea of religion as "irrational" and

therefore problematic, especially as a source of violent conflict, has gained more attention, particularly since the post-Cold War era and especially after the tragic events of 9/11 (Abu-Nimer & Nelson, 2021; Omer, 2015).

Marxist analytical traditions rigorously critique religion as a tool of violence, oppression, and subjugation, and rightly so. Religion has historically been wielded by the powerful as a political instrument to oppress, ostracize, subjugate, and demonize the poor and powerless (Cormier, 2014; Creamer & Hrynkow, 2014; Tuso et al., 2014). This is evident from the role of religion in perpetuating colonization, oppression, and violence against Indigenous peoples in North America and elsewhere (Brody, 2001; Cormier, 2014; Deloria, 1988, 2003). Religion was also used as a political tool to create divisions in communities that had coexisted harmoniously for centuries to consolidate colonial empires (Rahman et al., 2017).

The British, for instance, used a divide-and-rule strategy, which was first perfected in Ireland and then also applied in the Indian subcontinent (Rahman et al., 2017). According to Creamer and Hrynkow (2014), contrary to the Western belief that Europe was the birthplace of enlightened thinking, the Muslim emperor Akbar had already initiated a tradition of interreligious debate and dialogue in the Indian subcontinent in the mid-16th century. However, to strengthen their empire, the British manipulated religion to stoke hatred between Muslims and Hindus. It is interesting to note that Hinduism emerged as a "word" and "religion" only in the nineteenth century, after being brought to the attention of Western scholars of comparative religion (Creamer & Hrynkow, 2014, p. 22).

In the post-colonial era and particularly the post-Cold War era, Omer (2015) indicated that Huntington's (1996) *Clash of Civilizations* thesis led to an essentialist view of religion as inherently bad, negative, and divisive. This idea resulted in the belief that religion should be kept away from the public sphere (Cavanaugh, 2009). Consequently, a liberal secular state based on a market economy was seen as the ultimate solution (Gopin, 2002). Likewise, even though PACS had origins in faith-

based traditions, it initially disregarded religion and was predominantly influenced by liberal ideas (Gopin, 2002; Matyók & Flaherty, 2014). Hence, one factor contributing to the failure of the liberal peace framework is its universalistic, secular problem-solving approach, which overlooks the potential of religion and cultural traditions as a valuable resource for peacebuilding (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2015).

The overall approach is to identify the religious, ethnic, and cultural origins of violence, eliminate them, and then emphasize the benefits of rational, democratic problem-solving (Gopin, 2002). However, the events of 9/11, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, civil wars in the Middle East, and the overflow of refugees into Europe have highlighted the need to engage religious actors (Abu-Nimer & Nelson, 2023). As a result, there has been a significant increase in literature, policy, and research on religious violence and peacebuilding (e.g., Gopin, 2002; Kilonzo et al, 2023; Matóyk et al., 2014; Omer, 2019, 2023; Omer et al., 2015).

While some have highlighted religion as a source of dangerous violence (for e.g., Juergensmeyer, 2003), others have highlighted its transformative potential for peace (for e.g., Abu-Nimer, 2003; Appleby, 2000; Gopin, 2000, 2002, 2015; Lederach, 2015; Little & Appleby, 2004; Matyók et al., 2014; Sampson & Lederach, 2000; Tomalin et. al., 2019). Schirch (2015) contended, "Peacebuilding and religions share common traits: they include a set of values, methods, and rituals that create connective tissue between groups of people torn apart by structural or direct violence" (p. 517) and a shared task "to overcome the similar concepts of 'sin' and 'violence,' which divide and break relationships between people, their environment, and their creator and sacred values" (p. 519). Hence, religion can play a role in peace in various ways.

Peace Values

All religions contain and express peace values (Gopin, 2000, 2002).[32] The Abrahamic faiths, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, all emphasize mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice,[33] providing moral and ethical frameworks for reconciliation and conflict resolution. As Appleby (2023) suggested:

> The religions command us: Deal honestly and fairly with one another. Do not steal, exploit, bribe or become corrupt. Respect and love one another: do not abuse anyone's dignity or honor. The noblest religious consensus hold that peace is no longer to be seen as the absence of war imposed by force or established through political exertion, but as an act of justice inscribed in today's reality. (para. 14)

Despite their differences, people of faith often find connection through a shared spiritual foundation that transcends religious boundaries. Recognizing a shared concern for developing honest, loving, and holistic relationships with God can form the basis for rebuilding constructive relationships damaged by violence. Consequently, religious leaders and faith-based NGOs advocate for nonviolence, provide training in nonviolent methods, and promote reconciliation based on their pacifist convictions rooted in their faith (Peacebuilding Initiative, 2009). For instance, religion's capacity for inspiration and its promotion of selfless values has given rise to exceptional leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, the Dalai Lama, and Bishop Tutu. These leaders have had a profound impact on the global community, encouraging greater commitments to human rights and

[32] For a detailed discussion of peace values in Abrahamic religions, please refer to Heft (2004), and for all major faiths refer to Naber and Watson (2006).

[33] For e.g., Islam prioritizes forgiveness over retribution and sees justice as indispensable. The Qur'an advises, "O believers! Stand firm for justice as witnesses for Allah even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or close relatives. Be they rich or poor, Allah is best to ensure their interests. So do not let your desires cause you to deviate [from justice]. If you distort the testimony or refuse to give it, then [know that] Allah is certainly All-Aware of what you do" (Qur'an, 4:135). For details please see Abu-Nimer (2003), Funk (2014), and Kadayifci-Orellana (2015).

compassion for all forms of life, regardless of race or nationality (Gopin, 2000).[34] Religious peacebuilders like Quaker mediator Adam Curle and Mennonite peace activist John Paul Lederach have significantly contributed to the development of PACS theory and practice (Sampson, 1997).

Religious leaders and institutions have historically played a crucial role in mediating conflicts and promoting peace such as ending apartheid in South Africa. The World Council of Churches and the All-Africa Conference of Churches mediated a peace agreement in Sudan in 1972, while the Community of Sant'Egidio helped end the civil war in Mozambique in 1992. Additionally, religious leaders, faith-based organizations, and NGOs have been involved in track II diplomacy efforts, supporting interreligious initiatives in the Balkans, Africa, and the Middle East (Hayward, 2012; Omar, 2015; Peacebuilding Initiative, 2009; Smock, 2002). Many faith-based groups have been actively involved in relief works addressing issues like poverty, education, and healthcare, which are crucial components of sustainable peacebuilding.

In the realm of Indigenous peacebuilding, spirituality stands as a cornerstone openly woven into the fabric of the peacebuilding process (Fry & Souillac, 2022; Walker, 2019). It holds a pivotal role in Indigenous peacemaking ceremonies, encompassing prayer, reverence for ancestors, and fostering mutual respect within the living world (Walker, 2019). The Iroquois Great Law of Peace, enshrined in the Longhouse, embodies a governing philosophy bestowed by the Creator (Tuso et al., 2014). For Indigenous societies, spirituality is inseparable from the fabric of existence; that is not the case in Western cultures (Brody, 2001; Lee, 1967; Magesa, 2013). Religion and spirituality play a huge role in conflict resolution and reconciliation in Indigenous societies (Irani & Funk, 1998; King-Irani, 2000; Zion, 2005). For example, Islamic religious teachings play a key role in *judiya* in Darfur (Irani & Funk, 1998; Wahab, 2018). In addition, because Indigenous peoples respect the animate,

[34] Omar (2015), however, using the "crisis mobilization" idea of Appleby (2000), argued that these leaders mobilized during a crisis; nevertheless, the impact of those struggles did not take root in societies at large beyond those crises.

inanimate, and supernatural, there are diverse parties to conflict resolution such as gods, spirits, ancestors, and supernatural forces (Benjamin & Lundy, 2014; Boege, 2006; Faure, 2000). Among the Igbo of Nigeria, for instance, ancestors are thought to be offended by a conflict and must be pleased by reconciling the conflicting parties and spilling blood on the ground (Uwazie, 2000).

Hence, there are both social sanctions (shaming, ostracizing) as well as supernatural sanctions (sorcery, cursing, natural calamity; Boege, 2006), but the purpose is not "to encourage stigma and violation of the wrong party, but to expose a wrongdoing for what it is and how it affects its victim" (Kyoon-Achan, 2014, p. 218). Among the Nuer of South Sudan, Osaghae (2000) has explained that a religious figure known as "man of the earth" was sometimes able to stop fighting parties "by threatening to curse them by the earth" (p. 209). Briggs (2000) conveyed the following point about the Inuit of Canada: "Indeed, stories were told of people who had killed or threatened to kill, in grief following an accidental death" (p. 111).

In addition, punishment by nature is used as "conscientious deterrence" against the misuse of power, especially against the poor. Among Indigenous societies (e.g. Tiv, Inuit, Igbo),[35] there is a strong sense that people who have done wrong to others will eventually be held responsible by nature (Kyoon-Achan, 2014; Uwazie, 2000). Uwazie (2000) asserted that this is best captured in the Igbo proverb "whoever cheats the poor would answer to god" (p. 26) because making the gods angry would result in some natural calamity (Faure, 2000). Also, stories are told of people who faced severe punishment from god for being arrogant and doing wrong to others, especially the innocent and the poor. What may be perceived as taboo and superstitious by outsiders are beliefs and rituals that carry profound spiritual significance and transformative power, as "none can transform deeply held traumas, beliefs, and fears like religious ritual" (Schrich, 2015, p. 516).

[35] The Kalasha people also have a strong belief in natural and divine retribution. (Please see Chapter 7).

Religion involves the responsibility of fostering a harmonious relationship with the creator and all creations, emphasizing mutual respect for personal autonomy and a sense of accountability (Brody, 2001; Tuso, 2014). Take, for instance, African traditional religion, where God is revered as the "god of justice" (Tuso, 2014, p. 155), holding individuals accountable for wrongs committed against others (Kyoon-Achan, 2014) and serving as a deterrent against unjust acts. Among the Anishinaabeg of Canada, there are seven guiding teachings: respect, truth, love, honesty, wisdom, humility, and courage (Benton-Banai, 2010; Raven & Bjarnadóttir, 2013; Rice, 2011). These values form a moral and ethical framework for living one's life, especially in relation to all other living beings.

One reason for the success of Indigenous peacebuilding is its holistic approach, which considers the emotional and spiritual aspects of humans. In this holistic approach, the creator is involved in conflict resolution, encouraging people to consider their responsibilities and expected conduct. In his seminal work *God is Red,* Deloria (2003) asserted, "The task of the tribal religion…is to determine the proper relationship that the people of the tribe must have with other living things and to develop the self-discipline within the tribal community so that man acts harmoniously with other creatures" (p. 87). By emphasizing teachings like harmony, forgiveness, and reconciliation and involving the creator in the process, parties become willing to surrender to something bigger than themselves. While secular approaches to conflict resolution can be effective, they often lack a certain depth of moral authority that religious frameworks provide. As noted by Philpott (2015), "To be sure, secular versions lack the divine justification and enablement offered by religious rationales" (p. 349). This underscores the distinctive role of religious teachings in promoting a transformative process of forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation.

Constructive Hermeneutics

Apart from possessing rich teachings and traditions, religions' contributions to peacebuilding lies in constructive hermeneutics (Gopin, 2000), its inherent flexibility as multifaceted and adaptable in different contexts, and its continuous reframing and reinterpretation. Omer, Appleby, and Little (2015) argued that viewing religion as "illusionary," "pathological," (p. ix) just a tool of manipulation, or a reified construct with essentialist characteristics is reductive and misleading (such as in the clash of civilization thesis). In contrast to a reductive understanding, Appleby (2000) argued that religion is "ambivalent" and internally plural, with contested interpretations. This argument continues with the notion that, in any society, individuals who choose religious militancy for either violence or peace will be found together. He further explained:

> Ambivalence provides an opening, an opportunity to cultivate tolerance and openness toward the other; indeed, religions, despite the shameful record of a minority of their adherents, are strikingly accomplished in developing their own traditions of peace-related practices and concepts. Lifting up, celebrating, and empowering those elements of the religious community are acts of civic responsibility in today's world. (pp. 306–307)

It is in this constructive hermeneutics that Gopin (2000, 2002) sees the potential of religion for peace. The reinterpretation of religion and multiple interpretations that support peace, along with the active teaching of peace values by religious scholars, have played and can play a constructive role in peacebuilding (Gopin, 2002). In her recent book, *Days of Awe: Reimagining Jewishness in Solidarity with Palestinians,* Atalia Omer (2019) provided an example of such rereading in Judaism. Through her work with a progressive synagogue community in the United States, she explained a shift from Zionism being a central tenet of Jewishness in the mid-20th century to an increasing number of Jews questioning Israel's illegal occupation and showing solidarity with Palestine. Similarly, the apologies issued by Catholic and other Christian churches to Indigenous peoples in Canada for the harms

inflicted, as well as the apologies from Southern Baptists to African Americans for slavery and Jim Crow laws, are all indicative of a shift, reframing, and recognition of the role of religion in wrongs committed in the past (Tuso et al., 2014).

Issues Surrounding Religious Engagement

In a world where secular institutions often struggle to address the deep-seated issues of morality and community, religion emerges as a beacon of hope, "stepping into arenas where the secular has failed" (Matyók & Flaherty, 2015, p. 5). However, some scholars like Omar (2023) have argued that the engagement with religion has been co-opted into liberal peacebuilding and point towards "religion's neo-liberalization and securitization in the service of neocolonial agenda" (p. 2), where religion is used as a bureaucratic tool.

First, scholars have warned against religious–secular binaries (Cavanugh, 2009; Gopin, 2015; Omar at el., 2015). Cavanaugh (2009) believed that religious violence is a myth because the religion–secular divide has been constructed by the West to underwrite its secular violence implicated in its foreign policy. He argued that secular violence is far larger than religious violence. Likewise, Shakman Hurd (2008, as cited in Omar, 2015) suggested that portraying religious resurgence as "subversive" and "threatening," and associating religious violence mainly with Islam, reflects Euro- and Judeo-Christian-centric perspectives and underlying orientalism (p. 11). Recognizing the internal plurality of all religions, Funk (2014) argued,

> just as Christianity can be used and abused to either oppose or support apartheid in South Africa, and just as Buddhism can be alternately enacted as a contemplative path of peace and tranquility or manipulated as an exclusive external identity as has occurred in the case of Sri Lanka, so too can Islam be lived in ways that are life-affirming and in ways that divide the world into hostile camps. (p. 123)

Hence, there is a need for a more inclusive and balanced approach to understanding religious movements in relation to conflict and peace.

Second, the constraints of religious peacebuilding stem from "the secularist framing of religion as a belief and as a distinct variable, empirically manifest but thoroughly ahistorical and transcultural" (Omer, 2015, p. 9). Separating religion from its historical and cultural context to emphasize its role in conflict can be problematic (Abu-Nimer, 2013). Religion is not a static concept and may not necessarily be problematic.[36] It is important to understand the complex interplay of various factors that influence human behaviour. As described by Omar et al. (2015), "Humans are embedded within and inhabit historical, religious, social, political, and cultural imaginations and contexts that inform their motivations and commitments to various forms of violence and, potentially, to various modes of peacebuilding and resistance" (p. ix). Oversimplifying religious conflicts as mere resource disputes and focusing solely on religious differences while ignoring other contributing factors leads to a unidimensional understanding of conflicts, as seen in post-Saddam Iraq (Abu-Nimer, 2013) and in the case of Northern Ireland (Tuso et al., 2014). It also reinforces communal identities along religious lines, limiting imagination beyond those boundaries (Hedges, 2021; Omar, 2023) and hence focuses on singular causes that lead to singular solutions (Gopin, 2002). Religious peacebuilding with this narrow focus can often undermine the pursuit of justice. As Omar (2015) pointed out, "When religious peacebuilding in Israel glosses over the hermeneutics of citizenship,[37] it appears as a good force for peace and justice, despite operating within meta-injustice" (p. 12). Hence,

[36] For example, Neziri (2019) demonstrated how the Albanian people have always coexisted harmoniously despite religious plurality.

[37] The *hermeneutics of citizenship* involves acknowledging that religion can serve as both a justification for violence and a catalyst for peaceful conflict resolution and healing. It also emphasizes the need to incorporate post-colonial perspectives and the voices of marginalized groups in religious peacebuilding. By broadening the discussion, this approach challenges traditional views on how national identity is linked to religious or ethnic identities and power structures (For details, please see Omar, 2010).

there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of the interplay of actors and elements that cause conflict. Abu-Nimer (2013) highlighted the need for a more holistic and long-term engagement of a host of religious actors on different levels, starting from the introduction of interfaith education for children instead of narrowing down the focus to what works or can work in the case of religion and peacebuilding.

Third, with religious literacy recognized as a "core competency" for peacebuilding (Matyók & Flaherty, 2014, p. 4), increased investment in high-level religious engagement has led to the rise of "religiocrats"—figures who claim to represent religious interests but lack genuine legitimacy (Omar, 2023, p. 5). The commendable efforts of those involved in spiritually inspired initiatives on the ground often go unnoticed and unappreciated. Besides, engaging more with religion does not necessarily mean having religious literacy unless one understands religion as a dynamic tradition with historical arguments and interpretations (Omar, 2023).

Gopin (2002) emphasized the need to understand and respect the uniqueness of every encounter and how it intersects with underlying larger trends of culture, religion, economics, and psychology, especially when intervening in the conflicts of others. Moreover, Gopin (2015) advocated for the inclusion of religious actors not only for what they can do but because they deserve a seat at the table. He rightly suggested that religious radicalization is likely to persist "as long as the range of human needs, physical and especially spiritual, continue to be unmet by the evolving global civilization, whose principal offering to a human being is the promise of a materialist civilization in which few become wealthy, some are reasonably comfortable but very insecure, and most are poor" (Gopin, 2000, p. 223).

In conclusion, failure to adopt an intersectional perspective on religion will inevitably limit our ability to confront and understand the complex layers of violence—be it structural, symbolic, cultural, or direct—that persist in the society (Omer, 2023). The relationship between religion and

peacebuilding is intricate and multifaceted. By examining it through an intersectional lens, adopting an *elicitive* approach (Lederach, 2003) to religious mobilization for peace, harnessing the positive attributes of religious traditions, and fostering interfaith collaboration, it is possible to promote a culture of peace that transcends religious divides and contributes to the well-being of individuals and societies worldwide.

Women and Peacebuilding

> "In war-torn societies, women often keep societies going. They maintain the social fabric. They replace destroyed social services and tend to the sick and wounded. As a result, women are the prime advocates of peace." (Kofi Annan, 2001, as cited in Abuelaish & Godoy-Ruiz, 2019, p. 162)

Discussing the role of women in peacebuilding in general and Indigenous women in particular is nothing short of a challenge. Despite the saying "women hold up half the sky," (Senehi, 2011, p. ix), they are underrepresented in positions of power and social control compared to men. This inequality is also evident in peacebuilding, where men typically occupy formal roles as peacekeepers, negotiators, politicians, and leaders. As a result, women's voices are often marginalized in decision-making processes (Beyene, 2024; Munro, 2000; United Nations, 2018). Moreover, women, particularly Indigenous women, have been largely overlooked in peacebuilding theory, practice, and research. Indigenous peacemaking literature also has tended to focus on male elders, further marginalizing the role of Indigenous women in peacebuilding practices (Stobbe, 2011).

The role of gender in PACS started gaining attention in the 1980s (Boulding, 1990; Brock-Utne, 1985), especially with the adoption of UN Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security in 2000 (Snyder, 2003). However, this resolution has not achieved much, and official peace initiatives still ignore women and their experiences (Conciliation Resources, 2014; Flaherty, 2012; Graham, 2015; Krause & Olsson, 2022), while gender stereotypes continue to persist (Jenne & Ulloa Bisshopp,

2020). Much of the PACS literature has focused on violence against women as a weapon of war—a phenomenon that, admittedly, manifests in various forms (Abuelaish & Godoy-Ruiz, 2019; Leatherman, 2011). Consequently, women are often viewed solely as victims of conflict, while their roles and potential contributions to peacebuilding remain overlooked (Beyene, 2024; Conciliation Resources, 2014; Duncanson, 2016; Flaherty, 2012; Manchanda, 2005; Schnabel & Tabyshalieva, 2012; Stobbe, 2011). Despite being neglected, women have played and continue to play a significant role in peacebuilding (Bedigen, 2021; Flaherty et al., 2015; Mazurana & McKay, 1998; Merry, 2005; O'Reilly, 2013; Snyder & Stobbe, 2011). Their role is worth exploring to understand their contribution to peacebuilding in different cultures.

Women in Indigenous Peacemaking

Though women in Indigenous societies are often labeled as victims of customary practices (Boege, 2006), they have historically played and continue to play a significant role in peacemaking and peacebuilding within their communities (Bedigen, 2021). For example, in some Indigenous societies like the Oromo in Ethiopia (Tuso, 2000) and the Biak in Papua, Indonesia (Wospakrik & Reed, 2016), women are considered sacred and are not to be involved in conflicts or subjected to physical violence. Instead, they contribute to peace by intervening in conflicts, providing moral guidance, and mobilizing their communities (Tuso, 2000; Wospakrik & Reed, 2016). There are numerous examples of such contributions.

First, Indigenous women are playing a crucial role in peacebuilding by advocating for the rights of children and future generations. They rely on traditional knowledge and storytelling to promote peaceful and positive life experiences for children. From Onondaga clan mothers[38] and

[38] For example, in Haudenosaunee culture, the Clan Mother holds significant authority, raising and naming children of each clan and serving as a leader for her clan and the entire nation. She selects a Chief to represent the clan in council and has the power to remove them if they fail to represent the clan effectively. For details, please visit https://www.onondaganation.org/government/clan-mothers/.

Kookums (grandmothers) in Winnipeg, who campaign for children's rights, to Otins (women spiritual leaders) in Uzbekistan, who use stories from Islamic teachings to emphasize the importance of treating children well, Indigenous women are at the forefront of nurturing peace values in children (Flaherty et al., 2016; Tursunova et al., 2016). Their aim is to raise a generation that feels valued, loved, and respected, ensuring that children's needs are met. This approach is essential to breaking cycles of suffering rooted in relationships governed by manipulation, fear, and anger, rather than love and care (Ross, 2014).

Second, women have been instrumental in ending conflicts. In Kenya, Luo and Fulbe women have used preventive diplomacy and have urged elders to make peace. When elders were unresponsive, women formed networks and alliances to exert pressure on both sides, at times even engaging directly with the opposing clan. They also arranged cross-lineage marriages to build relationships between warring clans and secure future alliances to prevent conflict (Brock Utne, 2001; Wilson-Fall, 2000; Zartman, 2000). Similarly, Masai women in Kenya have used various methods to stop fights and make peace, such as leaving their homes and refusing to return, removing their skirts and belts and throwing them between warring parties, using words, and even intervening in the battlefield to stop warring parties (Stobbe, 2011).

Third, in many traditional societies, women play an indirect role in peacemaking that may not be apparent to outsiders. For example, in Laos, women are involved in the reconciliation ritual, like the *soukhan* ceremony, which helps to reconcile parties and build relationships. The *soukhan* ritual is completed through the involvement of women, who have the knowledge and take charge of arranging the ceremony. They are responsible for food, seating arrangements, and, importantly, the handmade flower arrangement called *makbeng*, which represents important values (Stobbe, 2011). Similarly, among the Biak people of Indonesia, practices such as *ararem* (bride price) and *binbabyak* (woman as atonement), which may be seen as oppressive by outsiders, are considered by women themselves as

important contributions to peacemaking between two groups (Wospakrik & Reed, 2016). These roles are significant and should not be easily dismissed or criticized without understanding their cultural context. Therefore, it is important to approach the understanding of women's roles in Indigenous and traditional societies with caution.

Issues Surrounding Understanding the role of Women in Indigenous Peacemaking

Gender and gender roles are socially and culturally constructed, and they are continuously redefined and renegotiated over time because of social interactions (Butler, 1990; de Beauvoir, 1949/2010; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Harris, 1995; Jenne & Ulloa Bisshop, 2020; Lerner, 1986; West & Zimmerman, 2009). Cultural sensitivity is crucial for understanding women's roles and experiences in different societies because their "role cannot be understood without understanding their context" (Wospakrik & Reed, 2016, p. 416). The role of women in Indigenous societies has not only been ignored, but they have usually been considered as passive victims because "custom is often pitted against women's rights" (Boege, 2011, p. 451). Without outright denial of the problem of exclusion and scapegoating of women in some Indigenous peacemaking practices, several issues require serious attention both in theory building and practice in PACS when considering women's role and position in traditional societies in general and Indigenous peacemaking in particular.

First, the issue of women's exclusion or mistreatment is not only a problem for Indigenous communities, as it is a global issue and should not be seen as a problem of other places (Nader, 2013). As Brown (2007) pointed out, "the realities, rather than the ideals, of relations between men and women in liberal states, are themselves marked by significant problems of violence, marginalization and exploitation" (p. 5). Therefore, it is not accurate to assume that tradition has subordinated and suppressed women and that moving towards liberalism and modernization will automatically set them free (Brown, 2007; Rogers, 2016). In her study of French peasant women, Rogers (2016) discovered that women had real power while men had symbolic power in the peasant village she studied. She

argued that, to an outsider, it might seem like men held dominant positions, but a closer examination of women's roles proved that male domination was a myth in that society.

In addition, almost two decades after the adoption of Resolution 1325, women's participation in formal peace processes remained very low. Women only constituted two percent of mediators, eight percent of negotiators, and five percent of witnesses and signatories to major peace processes between 1990 and 2017 (United Nations, 2018). Thus, it is important to be cautious, as suggested by Boege (2011):

> [A] polarized view that regards traditional societal structures and custom as expression of male domination and suppression of women (and hence "bad") and the western liberal societies as guaranteeing comprehensive women's rights and liberties (and hence "good") fails to reflect reality and is not very helpful. (p. 451)

The second point to consider is the frame of reference and starting point used to understand women's exclusion. In many Indigenous societies, gender imbalances are not inherent but are instead consequences of colonization and the influence of Western cultural norms. This imbalance led to the imposition of Eurocentric values that undermined women's authority and established the custom for men to be chief (Boege, 2011; Rice, 2011; Smith, 2012). Colonization, the modern state, and the government system disrupted the gender balance in Indigenous societies (Boege, 2011; Rice, 2011).[39] Rice (2011) made the following observations about the Rotinonshnonni:

> Before the imposed systems of government came into effect, the Rotinonshonni had leaders who acted on the decisions of their people. Leadership evolved from an equal distribution of power between men and women by way of consensus. Women chose the male representatives

[39] For example, in 1871, the colonial government in the Indian subcontinent passed a law that criminalized transgender individuals (*hijras*) with the explicit aim of eradicating them. They were considered an "opprobrium upon colonial rule," and their existence was seen as a "reproach" to the British government. (Please see Hinchy, 2019)

> of the people and if the men did not do the will of the people after three warnings given to them by the women, they had the power to dismiss them. At Onondaga, it is still up to the women to ensure that the voice of the people is heard. (p. 200)

Women still play a central role in some Indigenous societies like Bougainville (Boege, 2011) and Onondaga. They have influence on decision-making in customary practices, like in the *panchayat* system. For instance, outspoken women may choose to be physically present, depending on the nature of the dispute, and express their opinions, while those who are more reserved might convey their views to elders or mediators and through other women before the formal discussion takes place. It is important to note that physical absence should not be equated with a lack of voice and influence in decision-making. Margot Wallström, former Swedish Foreign Affairs Minister, cautioned the UN Security Council about increasing women participation simply to inflate numbers and pointed out that "participation is not about counting heads, but about having influence" (United Nations, 2018, para. 10). Indigenous women are actively involved in decision-making processes in many societies, even when they are not physically present. Thus, the issue of incorporating women's voices without physical presence, as compared to having physical presence without voice and influence, is debatable.

Third, women in Indigenous societies are diverse, with varying experiences and needs, and their roles should not be determined through "monolithic construction" (Mohanty, 2016, p. 130). Women in traditional societies are not simply passive victims. They have agency and resist oppression through either subtle act of subversion (Senehi, 2009c)[40] or outright rejection of social norms. For example, the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) has been active since 1977 (Abu-Lughod, 2016), and there was also a women's *jirga* in the Swat valley of

[40] However, such subtle acts of agentic expression are often dismissed because agency is only seen as overt opposition to patriarchy as per traditional Western feminist theory (see Mahmood, 2005).

Pakistan in 2013, challenging male dominance in conventional *jirga* and advocating for women's rights (Gohar & Schirch, 2016).

The monolithic construction of the "third-world woman" (Mohanty, 2016, p. 128) is not only associated with "epistemologically embedded imperialism"(Sen et al., 2014, p. 228) but also leads to unintended consequences such as creating macro-level distinctions between the First World and the Third World (Mohanty, 2016; Nader, 2013), the North and the South.[41] These distinctions are often used to justify imperial humanism and war (Bhattacharyya, 2008; Nader, 2013). For instance, the portrayal of the "third-world woman" as a passive victim in need of masculine saving has led to the misuse of feminist discourse for purposes other than women's rights like in the War on Terrorism (Bhattacharyya, 2008; Nader, 2013; Väyrynen, 2010). O'Reilly (2013) observed:

> Stereotypes of women as potential/actual victims of violence in need of masculine protection by foreign interveners are often found in the policies, statements and reports of organizations such as the UN, resulting in the reproduction of patriarchal relations of power. Worryingly, after 9/11, feminist discourse was often invoked to legitimise neo-colonial wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the name of women's rights. (p. 64)

Masked under the pretext of "white men are saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak, 2006, p. 33) or "dangerous brown men" (Bhattacharyya, 2008, p. 1), universal humanism has been used for neo-colonial and neo-imperial missions in Afghanistan and Iraq (Bhattacharyya, 2008; Kulchyski, 2013; Nader, 2013). While female genital mutilation and the burqa are not of serious concern for many women in Kenya and Afghanistan (Abu-Lughod, 2016; Sen et al., 2014), they

[41] Luna (2024), citing de Sousa Santos, made a valid point that "the Global South is not a geographical concept, even though most of these populations live in Southern Hemisphere countries. Instead, it is a metaphor for the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on a global level and the resistance to overcome or minimize it. This is why we refer to the anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist South. It is a South that also exists in the Global North in the form of excluded, silenced, and marginalized populations such as immigrants without papers, the unemployed, ethnic or religious minorities, and victims of sexism, homophobia, and racism" (p. 9).

remain of paramount concern to the West because they help in concealing real issues of Masai underdevelopment in Kenya and neo-imperial motives of interventions in the Global South (Abu-Lughod, 2016; Sen et al., 2014). For example, RAWA, the most radical feminist organization in Afghanistan, has not only opposed U.S. bombing but also has directed attention towards "the ways policies are being organized around oil interests, the arms industry and drug trade" (Abu-Lughod, 2016, p. 156).

Worse than women who are being saved are those who are not even part of debate or strategy making. For example, how many Muslim women with or without a scarf are part of the debate seeking to liberate them by banning the *hijab* in Europe or by bombing their countries elsewhere? Peacebuilding, too, then becomes "a form of imperialist subject constitution that renders the subaltern women as mute as ever" (Väyrynen, 2010, p. 148). Hence, Indigenous women's roles, positions, and experiences must be contextualized and understood through them, not through Western perspectives (Mohanty, 2016). Both theory and practice must pay attention to unique cultural contexts, cultural nuances, and differences within the cultural setting in which such practices take place and be cautious of the idea of essentialist, totality views of local culture and gender roles because culture is not homogenous, uniformly distributed, deterministic, or reified; instead, it is in constant flux (Avruch, 2006; Byrne & Senehi, 2009; Funk, 2012; Funk & Said, 2010).

Tension also remains regarding applying universal human rights in Indigenous contexts in general. Aboriginal rights cannot solely be understood as "human rights" based on "philosophical precepts of liberal enlightenment" (Kulchyski, 2011, p. 35). Applying universal rights in the context of Indigenous communities denies their customary and cultural rights, which are essential for their survival (Kulchyski, 2013; Zion, 2005). Denying these rights is a "genocide" (Zion, 2005, p. 70) and "ethnocide in its effect" (Nader, 2013, p. 179) because it forces people to adhere to rights defined by others. The notion of collective rights contradicts individual rights, insensitive competition, and

development. Therefore, when Indigenous peoples advocate for their customary rights, they may be unfairly labelled as violent, terrorists, traitors, superstitious, or anti-development, among other things.

The question then arises: Who should decide and define whether the Biak[42] woman is an active peace weaver or a victim of an oppressive culture? Or whether respecting and preserving land, water, and mountains is a sacred right or a superstitious intrusion into others' right to property and unimaginable economic development and profit? Why is violence inflicted by foreign powers, like bombings, often framed as humanitarian or liberating, while similar abuses carried out domestically are condemned as savage or inhumane? The point here is that decontextualized, insensitive criticism can hurt already suffering Indigenous peoples whose culture is being destroyed by such "normative blindness" in the name of development and modernization that seeks to civilize so-called "backward" Indigenous cultures to "modern ethos" (Falk, 1992, as cited in Nader, 2013, p. 179).

However, this is not to say that cultural relativism should be used as an excuse to justify or disregard cultural violence that may exist in societies. Funk and Said (2010) reinforce this point: "No society is perfect or completely harmonious, to such an extent that it has nothing to learn from others or internal critics" (p. 125). A nuanced and balanced approach that recognizes both cultural relativism and universalism is needed (Duquette, 2005; Johansson Dahre, 2017). Indigenous approaches should not be romanticized as a "rosy alternative" or vilified as inherently evil or "antagonistic" (Öjendal et al., 2017, p. 36, 40). Critical feminists have argued that both "imperial feminism" and "patriarchal nativism" must be questioned (Bhattachryya, 2008). Culture must not be used as a shield to justify practices that violate human rights and universal humanism must not be used as a "weapon of moral imperialism to oppress other communities and ways of life" (Nader, 2013, p. 191).

[42] Among many other roles, Biak women play a vital role in peacebuilding as *binbabyak* (women as atonement). "According to Biak traditional beliefs, when there is a death through killing which is not atoned through *binbabyak*, then the soul (*arwa*) of the person who is killed will disturb the health of the killer's family" (Wospakrik & Reed, 2016, p. 424).

This balanced and nuanced approach can help to engage liberal and Indigenous practices in a constructive and transformative way instead of viewing them as rigid, mutually exclusive binaries (Heathershaw, 2013; Hellmüller, 2018; Mac Ginty, 2008a; Menkhaus, 2000). Since culture and customs are fluid and adaptable (Boege, 2011), middle-ground perspectives can also help in finding culturally appropriate and relevant ways to balance "cultural innovation with cultural continuity" (Funk, 2012, p. 400) and to engage with culturally grounded internal change movements (Senehi, 2009b; Zartman, 2000). It is essential to avoid studying them only in comparison to liberal peacebuilding (Cooper et al., 2011; Hellmüller, 2018) or criticizing them for the sake of criticism. It is essential to learn to "speak to" instead of "speak for" (Spivak, 1988, p. 308) other cultures in order to be ethical and responsible when speaking and writing about them.

Conclusion

The Indigenous peacemaking and peacebuilding field is receiving increasing attention in the field of PACS. Scholars have highlighted their cultural relevance and relational, holistic, and bottom-up nature, which enables them to transform conflicts. While they have also pointed out weaknesses, they have emphasized their great potential to contribute to the field of PACS overall.

However, epistemological limitations remain, and these approaches need to be studied independently and critically within their context, not in comparison to or as a deviation from liberal peacebuilding, to avoid simple romanticization or vilification. Similarly, religious conflict as well as religious and art-based endeavours for peace must be understood and used contextually, strategically, and constructively. Additionally, Indigenous women play a key role in peacebuilding, which may not be readily visible. Therefore, gender roles, as well as human rights violations, must be explored with sensitivity and an awareness of the context in which they are enacted. The simplistic and essentialist view of culture, gender roles, and human rights, as well as the oppositional categorization of Indigenous and liberal, is reductive, misleading, ethnocentric, and problematic. It is crucial to address

the “most salient silences in conflict management” (Sen et al., 2014, p. 231). A peacebuilding approach that continues to marginalize Indigenous peace processes, Indigenous voices, and epistemologies by relying on dominant, hegemonic Eurocentric language and discourse to celebrate the local can be anything but *emancipatory*.

Chapter 4

Methodology

This chapter provides an in-depth description of the methodology and the methods used to explore the Kalasha ways of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The chapter starts by elucidating the rationale behind selecting the qualitative approach and storytelling methodology. Subsequently, it discusses the methods used for data collection, data analysis techniques, the research setting, ethical considerations including the researcher's positionality, and the limitations of the study.

Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research is best suited for examining subjective human experiences, so multi-method qualitative research was employed in this study. For example, Fine and Wiese (1996, as cited in Fine et al., 2003) argued that "methods are not passive strategies. They differently produce, reveal and enable the display of different kinds of identities" (p. 187). Therefore, researchers working with Indigenous and marginalized people and communities must exercise great care in selecting the research methods and methodologies that guide their work, considering the history of epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988), cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2008), and scientific colonization (Chilisa, 2012) that has marginalized Indigenous people and their knowledge, wisdom, and voices.

Qualitative methodology and qualitative research methods are particularly considered a more suitable tool for conducting research in settings marked by conflict and marginalization (Miller, 2018) and where researchers seek to understand people's experiences from their standpoint (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008). Given that qualitative methods are grounded in the socially constructed, fluid, and contested nature of reality, and can encompass multiple realities and forms of knowledge (Charmaz, 2011; Healy & Healy, 2015; McDermott et al., 2015), Indigenous scholars have emphasized the importance of qualitative methods for conducting research with Indigenous peoples. For example,

Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005) emphasized the importance of qualitative research approaches in Indigenous contexts using the following words:

> Qualitative research is an important tool for indigenous communities because it is the tool that seems most able to wage the *battle of representation*; to weave and unravel competing *storylines*; to situate place, and contextualize; to create spaces for decolonizing to provide frameworks for hearing silence and listening to the voices of the silenced; to create spaces for dialogue across difference; to analyze and make sense of complex and shifting experiences, identities and realities and to understand little and big changes that affect our lives. Qualitative research approaches have the potential to respond to epistemic challenges and crises, to unravel and weave, to fold in and unmask layers of social life and depth of human experience. (p. 103)

Qualitative methods are particularly adept at unravelling power dynamics, amplifying marginalized peoples' voices, and unearthing the knowledge and wisdom of marginalized communities. Qualitative inquiry was the most suitable approach for my research, as it sought to capture the rich and diverse subjective experiences and stories of individuals within the Kalasha, an Indigenous and marginalized community in Pakistan.

Methodological Approach: Storytelling

Qualitative research allows researchers to immerse themselves in their participants' worlds; however, the depth of understanding gained largely depends on the methodology and research methods employed. For example, Dunbar et al. (2002) contended that questions need to be culturally sensitive and must also be "culturally relevant and explicit" (as cited in Liamputtong, 2008, p. 5). Hence, researchers must ask themselves questions about the compatibility of their research methods with participants and their culture (Ford et al., 2008).

The storytelling methodology was chosen for this study, as it was the most suitable method to utilize in the research setting (Senehi, 2002, 2019) and it is an important method in decolonizing PACS (Te Maihāroa et al., 2022). Stories and the process of storytelling are a way of generating and sharing knowledge in Indigenous cultures around the world (Cruikshank, 1992; Kovach, 2009; Whitt, 2009). The Kalasha, like many other Indigenous communities, have an oral culture. Before the year 2000, the Kalash culture did not have a literacy history (Heegård Petersen, 2015). In oral cultures, people connect things through their stories. Stories provide the context in which to situate thinking, action, or events (Dunbar, 2008). The importance of stories became evident during the data collection process, as participants consistently referred to a story linked to a certain concept that arose during the interview. Subsequently, they would proceed to narrate either traditional stories or accounts of their experiences to elaborate on the topic being discussed.

Narrative and story are subjective terms that are frequently used synonymously (East et al., 2010; Kim, 2016). Since storytelling is a component of the narrative genre, conceptual overlap is not surprising. Some writers,[43] however, have preferred a clear distinction between the two and view stories as a separate unit of analysis, without considering other narrative forms in which they may be embedded, like interview transcripts (Rooney et al., 2016). On the contrary, others have recognized the interdependence of both (Kim, 2016; Rooney et al., 2016). Hence, the concept of a story can be examined and interpreted in various ways. There are diverse opinions about what truly constitutes a story (Stein, 1982). For instance, Polkinghorne (1995) described stories as "sustained emplotted accounts with a beginning, middle, and end" (p. 12). Rooney and colleagues (2016) differentiated between a story and a narrative by stating that "a story is something that someone tells, whereas a narrative is the researcher's interpretation of what someone tells" (p. 148). In contrast, Frank (2000)

[43] See, for example, Webster (2020) and Wiatr (2020).

emphasized that, while story and narrative are used interchangeably, it is important to note that "people do not tell narratives, they tell stories" (p. 354). Meanwhile, Wiltshire (1995, as cited in East et al., 2016) outlined the distinction between the two, defining stories as informal and subjective retellings of personal experiences, and narratives as organized and formal accounts. Hence, a story can be both an informal, subjective account of personal experiences as well as a structured account with a clear beginning, middle, and end. This research applied this fluid definition of story.

However, there are generally two types of stories in Indigenous epistemologies. The first category includes stories that incorporate mythical elements like creation myths and instructional anecdotes, and the second category includes stories about places, events, and personal experiences (Kovach, 2021). According to Little Bear (2004), the English term "story" literally translates as "involvement in an event" in the Blackfoot language. When a Blackfoot person asks another Blackfoot to tell a story, they are essentially requesting the storyteller to share their personal experience or "involvement in an event" (as cited in Kovach, 2021, p.157). Both forms of stories surfaced during this research.

According to Ryan (1995, as cited in Senehi, 2019), storytelling is a social interaction, involving a teller and at least one listener, through which an oral narrative is shared. While there are similarities between narrative inquiry and storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kovach, 2010), storytelling is rooted in Indigenous epistemology. It is seen as a decolonizing practice, purposeful, relational, informal, flexible, collaborative, dialogic, and reflexive (Kovach, 2010). Storytelling values what is shared rather than how meanings are constructed, as is often done in narrative inquiry (Senehi, 2019). Hence, it is congruent with Indigenous axiology that stresses respect, regard for what is shared, non-intrusive observation, deep listening, and Indigenous control over research (Hart, 2010). The storytelling methodology not only honours oral tradition but also addresses power dynamics in the research process, which were essential considerations for this study.

Since my first visit to the Kalasha community in 2017, my attention has repeatedly been drawn to the historical misinterpretation of the community's culture in most literature produced about the community. Storytelling holds a central place in the Indigenous research paradigm (Kovach, 2000; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008) because "story as methodology is decolonizing research...that gives voice to the misinterpreted and marginalized" (Kovach, 2000, p. 98). Indigenous scholars see storytelling as a strong tool to construct "counter-narratives" (e.g., Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2018; Dunbar, 2008) and contest the dominant representation of Indigenous peoples and their cultures (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2021; Q'um Q'um et al., 2022). That said, Bishop (1996, as cited in Smith, 2012) contended that "storytelling is a useful and culturally appropriate way of representing the 'diversities of truth' within which the storyteller rather than the researcher retains control" (p. 242). As a result, storytelling has the inherent capacity to "de-silence, to center, and to make visible the knowledge of people who have been silenced, marginalized, and invisibilized" (Senehi, 2019, p. 46).

Storytelling shifts study participants from objects to a "humanizing role" as storytellers, positioning them at the centre of knowledge generation (Senehi, 2019, p. 46). It is empowering because it allows participants to share their knowledge on their terms, countering the "agenda-setting power" of the researcher (Hoffman, 2007). Senehi (2019) observed that the storytelling methodology[44] is naturally evolving as a guiding framework for PACS research. She further noted that "the plain-spoken nature of the word 'storytelling' resonates with valuing local, traditional, and/or Indigenous knowledges, as well as the role of everyday people in everyday peacebuilding" (p. 46). In my research, I had the privilege of working with the Indigenous Kalasha community. Using the storytelling methodology allowed me to gain valuable insights into their conflict resolution

[44] Storytelling as an innovative methodology is gaining acceptance in qualitative research across various fields, including business (e.g. Rooney et al., 2016) and health (East et al., 2016). For details, please see McCall et al. (2019).

processes and to develop a deep understanding of how community members actively engage in everyday peacebuilding.

Participants and Setting

The research was conducted in the Kalasha valleys from October 2020 to August 2021. Data were collected in the three Kalasha valleys of Mumuret, Rukmu, and Biriu, located in the Chitral district of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. The study participants were Kalasha Kazi (knowledge bearers), elders and other people directly involved in peacebuilding in the Kalasha valleys. A total of 33 participants (14 women and 19 men) took part in the study. (Please refer to Table 1 below.) The participants were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling tool of participant recruitment that enables researchers to intentionally recruit participants that "can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 148). Additionally, some snowball sampling occurred during the data collection process based on recommendations from participants who suggested individuals with more knowledge on the topic of discussion.

Table 1

Participants' Profiles

No.	Name	Gender	Age
1	Kazi Mir Kay	Female	60
2	Kazi Khosh Ahmad Khan	Male	70
3	Akram Hussain	Male	33
4	Kazi Shahi Gul	Female	55
5	Milad Gul	Female	50
6	Bakhtawar Shah	Male	38
7	Kazi Sher Ahmad Khan	Male	60
8	Shakbar Khan	Male	51

No.	Name	Gender	Age
9	Faizi Khan	Male	55
10	Yasir Kalash	Male	37
11	Imran Kabir	Male	38
12	Kazi Sher Bibi	Female	60
13	Hazrat Gul	Female	35
14	Saif Ullah Jan	Male	60
15	Akbar Bhutto	Male	42
16	Engineer Khan	Male	57
17	Zar Philim	Female	65
18	Zarmaz Gul	Female	50
19	Kazi Mashor Gul	Female	45
20	Bashgali Khan	Male	70
21	Kazi Ghulam Hussain	Male	60
22	Daud Shah	Male	47
23	Kazi Malom Zar	Female	50
24	Rehmat Wali	Male	39
25	Kazi Mariam	Female	48
26	Unat Baig	Male	62
27	Kazi Danok	Male	56
28	Kazi Sichen Gul	Female	61
29	Turab Khan	Male	53
30	Kazi Mir Bacha	Male	65
31	Kazi Zar Gul	Female	60
32	Kazi Mani	Female	72
33	Kazi Dinar Bibi	Female	63

The recruitment of participants was facilitated by Kalasha research assistants who signed an oath of confidentiality and went through the ethical considerations and ethics protocol of the University of Manitoba before the recruitment process began. To be inclusive, potential participants were approached in person or through phone conversations due to the oral nature of the Kalasha culture, where the literacy rate among elders was limited. The recruitment script, along with my contact information, was translated into Urdu and shared with my research assistants to be distributed orally to potential participants. Most of the participants who were interested in joining the study directly informed my research assistants, as many of them were not fluent in Urdu and found it more comfortable to communicate in Kalasha. In addition, I personally contacted some members of the Kalasha community whom I had met during my visit in 2017 to request them to participate in the study. In 2017, I visited Mumuret Valley and had the opportunity to build connections with local people. In 2019, I had the chance to communicate with Luke Rehmat, the founder of Ishpata News and the Kalasha People's Development Network (KPDN). He generously affirmed his support for my research and assisted me throughout the research process. As a result, I was able to conduct my research and maintain access to the community, especially during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sources of Data

The storytelling methodology allows for the use of open-ended and informal data collection tools (Chilisa, 2012; Senehi, 2019) to encourage the organic unfolding of people's stories. These tools often include conversations, interviews, and research or sharing circles (Kovach, 2000). Consequently, the data were predominantly gathered through interviews and complemented by [non]participant observation.

Interviews

Interviews are frequently employed as the principal data source in narrative research approaches (Kim, 2016; Polkinghorne, 1995). Storytelling is woven into spoken exchanges during interviews (Senehi, 2019), as interview responses serve as personal stories that illuminate individuals' experiences (Thomas, 2003, as cited in East et al., 2010). Hence, "researchers who are mindful of storytelling and their relationship with participants often take a very open-ended conversational approach to interviews" (Senehi, 2019, p. 49).

Thirty-three semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (Appendix I) were conducted for this study between October 2020 and February 2021. The interviews typically lasted 70 minutes, except for two interviews that lasted just 30 minutes. Semi-structured interviews are valuable for data collection, as they allow researchers to adapt questions based on participants' responses (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Further, semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions empower participants to freely express their interpretations of the subject (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Druckman, 2005). Polkinghorne (1995), citing Mishler (1986) and Kemper (1984), asserted that, if researchers do not impose narrowly defined questions, participants' stories flow naturally, as storytelling "is part of their cognitive repertoire" (p. 13).

During my field research, however, I discovered that the term "interview" conveys a sense of formality that may have hindered open communication with some participants. As I generated data, I encountered hesitancy among some individuals about how much they should share. For example, one participant expressed, "I am not sure if I have extensive knowledge, but I'll do my best to respond to your questions," while another expressed doubt about sharing his experience, saying that he had "a story, but I'm uncertain if there's time for it." To address this issue, I made it clear to participants that I was keen to learn about their personal experiences and insights and encouraged them to share as much as they felt comfortable sharing with me. For subsequent interactions, instead of using

"interview," we used the term "conversation." At the outset, I emphasized our goal of having an in-depth conversation to learn from the participants' experiences and knowledge regarding the processes of peace and conflict in their community, including personal stories, anecdotes, proverbs, or any information they wished to share. This strategy proved highly effective, with participants displaying their enthusiasm in providing comprehensive answers and delving into cultural norms and values that I had not anticipated exploring in this study. These conversations uncovered intriguing and unexpected practices, ideas, and processes.

The interviews were conducted both remotely via phone and in person, with the assistance of my research assistants, and were audio-recorded with participants' consent. After successfully defending my thesis proposal in May 2020 and receiving ethics approval in July 2020 to conduct the field research, I decided to postpone my fieldwork trip to my research site in Pakistan until September 2020 due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As flights to Pakistan resumed after months of hiatus, I was able to travel to Pakistan toward the end of July 2020, hoping that I would be able to journey to the research site by September and reasoning that, if the study had to be conducted remotely, I would be much better off being in Pakistan in terms of the time zone difference. However, it became clear that conducting in-person field research would not be possible due to the COVID-19 situation, and such activities were suspended by the University of Manitoba.

Initially, I started generating data remotely through phone interviews with the assistance of my Kalasha research assistants. However, I encountered problems with remote data generation due to poor communication networks in the valleys. Many areas also had unreliable phone service, which made it difficult to speak to individuals in those areas. It became clear that the unavailability of good communication networks in the valleys would seriously undermine data generation. I initially planned for my Kalasha research assistants to conduct interviews that could not be done via phone. However, my concern was that something that might seem obvious to cultural insiders might not be articulated

or fully explained, leading to my lack of understanding of the nuance of that story. I knew from my previous experience that it would take a lot of work to reach out to people for clarifications and explanations, as it would require hours of walking or considerable travel time due to the poor road conditions. Therefore, I made every effort to conduct the interviews by myself. With the help of my advisor, I obtained special approval for myself and my research assistants from the University of Manitoba's COVID-19 Research Recovery Team (CRRT) to conduct in-person interviews. I had already received ethics approval from the University of Manitoba's Research Ethics Board for both in-person and virtual interview plans in July 2020.

Although internal travel to the northern areas of Pakistan had resumed by that time due to the controlled COVID-19 situation with no cases in the Kalasha valleys, I still needed a no objection certificate (NOC) from the district commissioner of Chitral to conduct my research. The NOC was issued for only one month. I had to deal with limited flight availability and mandatory COVID-19 testing, so my fieldwork was restricted to three weeks only. During that time, I interviewed people who could not be reached remotely in each valley. Those who could be reached remotely and were not available during the trip were interviewed via phone upon my return.

Almost all conversational interviews took place in participants' homes, in a very informal setting. During the interviews, participants would sometimes excuse themselves to attend to a crying grandchild or speak to a family member. These conversations allowed for mutual learning and reflection about the knowledge and ideas that emerged during the interviews. Sometimes, I was tasked with reflecting on the participant's stories. After sharing two stories, one participant said, "You will find a lesson if you think about it." When we talked a few days later, he confirmed that I had understood what he wanted to convey to me through these stories. By actively listening and showing respect for the participants' knowledge and culture, as well as providing them with the chance to express themselves in their own language and having Kalasha research assistants as a part of the

research team, I was able to cultivate trust that led to rich conversations. The interview transcripts were reviewed during member checking sessions conducted both over the phone and in person. I handled the phone sessions, while in-person sessions were conducted with the assistance of research assistants.

Non-Participant Observation

I had initially planned to conduct participant observation to supplement the interview data and to better understand the context, yet due to the limited time to facilitate the fieldwork combined with the COVID-19 restrictions, I was unable to do so. Instead, I observed activities as a non-participant observer in their natural settings and took field notes using an observation tool (Appendix II). My research assistants, however, took part in and collected visual data and recorded Kalasha songs. Since peoples' ordinary conversations and stories shared organically can provide rich information (Angrosino, 2007), I availed myself of the opportunity to engage in these discussions where possible. While I was particularly interested in observing peacebuilding and conflict resolution practices, festivals, ceremonies, and gender roles, no conflicts occurred during my time there, so no conflict resolution ceremonies took place. However, I did have the opportunity to observe a funeral ceremony in Rukmu valley and to observe a *Pu'n'* festival, which naturally coincided with my fieldwork in Biriu Valley. I was also able to visit other important cultural and religious sites, except for the altars that were off-limits to women. However, my male research assistant was able to access these areas and collect visual data. While the data generated through observation was limited, the experience of being physically present was highly enriching for me. For example, the funeral ceremony and festival provided me with a sense of communal bonding, collectivism, equality, and absence of gender segregation, and it also showcased a rich culture. Even though I was not able to observe conflict resolution processes, the personal stories shared with me by the participants provided practical examples of peacebuilding processes.

In addition, during my fieldwork, I had the privilege of accessing the Kalasha Dur Library and Luke Rehmat's collection in his office in Mumuret Valley. His library contained unique, limited-edition books like the Kalasha *matal* (proverbs) with an Urdu translation. Although I did not find detailed material on conflict resolution, I discovered valuable books on topics such as *onjas't'a/pragata* (ritually pure/ritually impure), Kalasha festivals, and Kalasha women that enriched my understanding. These resources were purposefully selected to enhance the depth of my study and are referenced throughout my empirical chapters.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis that is in line with Polkinghorne's (1995) paradigmatic method of analyzing narratives. This practice involves identifying common and contrasting themes across participants' narratives. According to Kim (2016), qualitative research typically uses a "paradigmatic" approach to analyze narratives to identify common themes and conceptual patterns within the "storied data."

Qualitative data analysis is inherently a non-linear endeavour, necessitating multiple iterative cycles for coding and recoding, which sharpens the analytical focus and ensures a thorough comprehension of the dataset (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña , 2021) To navigate the overwhelming question of "what now?" following the completion of data collection, the application of the analytical steps outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018) alongside the coding strategies proposed by Saldaña (2021) served as a foundational guide for my analysis.

The process of analyzing the data was an overwhelming, intriguing, and immersive journey. I commenced the analysis by deeply engaging with the data, starting right from the data collection phase. Each day, I took the time to reflect on the interviews, carefully discerning the major ideas and insights unfolding through the participants' compelling narratives, and adapted my questions. Once the data collection phase concluded, I transcribed the interviews verbatim. I transcribed the interviews

conducted in Urdu myself. For the interviews conducted in the Kalasha language, I collaborated with transcribers from the community to ensure accurate transcriptions and to address any translation gaps during the interview sessions.

Subsequently, I organized the data into working files and secured a copy on a password-protected hard drive as a safeguard before diving into the inductive analysis. Then I spent significant time acquainting myself with the data. I read and reread the transcripts multiple times and began writing analytic memos to capture my initial impressions and highlight the striking elements as suggested by Saldaña (2021). This immersive process enabled me to truly grasp the overall essence of the data.

Then I manually coded the transcripts to analyze the data. To lay the groundwork for a comprehensive analysis, I employed the holistic coding method (Saldaña, 2021), a form of exploratory coding, to segment each transcript. Holistic coding assigns a code to a large unit of data instead of "line-by-line" analysis to capture the true sense of the overall content in a particular segment (Saldaña, 2021). I created a table for each participant, placing them on the left side and holistic codes in the right columns. Creating a table of holistic codes for each participant's data provided me with a visual snapshot of transcript summaries and major ideas, as well as an opportunity to draw on similarities and comparisons across the participants' narratives. I then pulled together segments with similar themes. I read through them multiple times and re-coded them using in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2021). This method involves using the participants' own words, such as a recurring word or phrase that best represents the data unit. In vivo coding is especially suitable for "studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 138), which is the case in this research. In vivo coding was particularly helpful in shedding light on the participants' understanding of peace, conflict, cultural nuances, and peacebuilding. I found that by assigning In vivo codes and

reflecting on the participants' words, I gained a profound understanding of various concepts like peace being perceived as a verb rather than a static noun, encapsulating the dynamic essence of peace.

While I initially segregated data from the three valleys to explore potential divergences in individual views, I discovered an intriguing alignment in beliefs concerning peace, conflict, and peacebuilding. Hence, I combined them into a single, cohesive data corpus. This allowed me to discern recurring codes across the data corpus from the three valleys. When it came to synthesizing and condensing codes from the previous coding cycle, I employed pattern coding to group similar codes, culminating in the development of "meta codes" representing categories and conceptual labels in similarly coded data (Saldaña, 2021, p. 321). These categories were subsequently distilled into themes that captured deeper insights from the rich tapestry of participants' narratives. As Saldaña (2021) notes, patterns "become more trustworthy evidence for our findings since patterns demonstrate habits, salience, and significance in people's daily lives. They help confirm our descriptions of people's 'five Rs': routines, rituals, rules, roles and relationships" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 8). The initial findings were then confirmed with participants through in-person validation workshops conducted with the assistance of my research assistant in August 2021.[45]

Srivastava and Hopewood (2009) highlighted the overlooked yet pivotal role of analytic reflexivity in qualitative research, advocating for a concerted reflection on the part of the researcher. They argued that analytic reflexivity is essential in recognizing that our ontological and epistemological foundations, as well as our research questions, influence the themes and codes we identify. As Saldaña (2021) pointed out, "Themes do not mysteriously or magically 'emerge,' as some writers state in their reports; themes are researcher constructions and interpretations" (p. 259). Hence, in pursuit of methodological rigor, I maintained a practice of writing analytic memos

[45] The REB 2 and the CRRT at the University of Manitoba approved these workshops.

throughout the data collection and analysis phase, attentively considering potential assumptions and biases. This reflective practice was deepened before the commencement of thesis writing in September 2022 through an additional iterative review of the data. This review incorporated feedback and insights from validation workshops and a critical examination of my assumptions and biases. The guidance offered by Srivastava and Hopewood's (2009) framework proved invaluable at this stage. Their recommendation to consistently interrogate the data through three critical questions—"What is the data telling me? What do I want to know (research questions/objectives)? And what is the 'dialectical relationship' between the two?" (p. 78)—facilitated a meticulous refinement of analytical focus, the distillation of meaning, and the logical integration of seemingly disparate ideas into a cohesive narrative for devising the empirical chapters.

The transcription and initial analysis of data were conducted in the Urdu language, with translations into English reserved for the final stages of writing. This deliberate methodological choice stemmed from a commitment to preserve the cultural nuances and intricate meanings that are often lost in translation. Given that the research already involved bilingual data (Kalasha and Urdu), it was imperative to mitigate any further dilution of depth that translating raw data into English might entail. Despite these measures, conveying the authentic essence and nuanced meanings of certain terms in English was challenging for me.

Trustworthiness of Findings

In qualitative research, the assessment of the trustworthiness of research findings and interpretations involves various qualities like transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Thomas, 2006). As this research focused on community-specific knowledge related to peacebuilding practices, transferability was not a primary concern. However, as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018), researchers can enhance transferability by providing a "rich" and "thick" description of the study's context (i.e., of the

participants or setting under study) to enable readers to draw comparisons, which is what I aimed for in this dissertation (p. 263).

Additionally, to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the research findings, this qualitative study employed data triangulation, member checks, participant feedback, and reflexivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba, 1981, as cited in Mills, 2011). For example, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argued that, while there is no "objective reality" to capture, employing multiple methods contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of phenomena that bolsters the research's rigour (as cited in Fine et al., 2003).

Due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, conducting prolonged participation and persistent observation as originally planned was not feasible. However, member checks and validation workshops were carried out to obtain participant feedback on the findings and data interpretations, ensuring dependability and credibility. Throughout the research process, meaningful discussions with participants were undertaken to establish accuracy and negotiate meaning, with participants regarded as "partners in analysis" (Senehi, 2019, p. 54). Lincoln and Guba (1985), for example, claimed that the involvement of participants in the analysis is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261). Moreover, a journal of recorded reflections was diligently maintained to identify underlying biases and ensure reflexivity, aligning with the method outlined by Guba (1981, as cited in Mills, 2011).

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to the Canadian Tri-Council Policy statement on ethical conduct for research involving humans (TCPS 2, 2022). The research was reviewed and approved by the University of Manitoba's Research Ethics Board 2. Ethical research is respectful, reciprocal, accountable, and beneficial for individuals and communities (Fitzpatrick, 2016; Smith, 2012). In this thesis research, the following ethical concerns were addressed.

Respect for Participants

Showing my profound respect for participants, their knowledge, and their culture and building trust were the top priorities in this study. Engaging in research with communities, particularly communities where the researchers do not belong, is "a privilege, not a right" (Sánchez, 2019, p. 1653). These communities generously provide researchers with access to their invaluable and resilient knowledge and experiences, which can be very personal and painful, yet also sacred. However, this access can be denied if the researchers disregard their needs and concerns in an arrogant, dismissive, or patronising manner (Jayawickrama & Strecker, 2015; Sánchez, 2019) and fail to demonstrate respect and sensitivity toward the people and their culture. Regardless of how researchers perceive themselves as experts armed with theoretical tools to "extract" data, participants have just as much agency as researchers do in terms of "drawing a line around us" (Tomaselli et al., 2008, p. 350). Our "presumptive agency" as researchers, evidenced by a single signature on a consent form, to capture the entirety of participants' experience and lives can very well be challenged if the participants choose to use their critical agency by withholding information or remaining silent (Bhattacharya, 2009). Silence is not just a sign of being marginalized, but it is also a form of deliberate resistance against manipulation and disrespect, creating a space for the enactment of the research participant's "critical agency" (Bhattacharya, 2009, p. 114).

Therefore, I dedicated myself to learning and understanding the Kalasha culture and traditions to conduct my fieldwork with utmost cultural respect and appropriateness. I was mindful and adhered to the cultural protocol regarding *onjas't'a/pragata* (ritually pure/ritually impure) places. I always sought permission from individuals before generating any data in the field, except at public events where privacy was not anticipated, like during a festival where it would have been culturally inappropriate to interrupt an activity to ask for permission to take a photograph or record a song.

However, all data were generated transparently and conscientiously, it was ensured that individuals were aware of data generation, and absolutely no data was generated covertly.

Informed Consent

The participants in the study were provided with complete information about the purpose, nature, benefits, and risks of the research to ensure that their participation was voluntary and informed. They were informed about how their data would be recorded, stored, and used. Participants were also informed about their rights to choose whether to be identified or remain anonymous in the data analysis, alter their statements, or withdraw from the study anytime before January 2022. Oral consent was obtained from each participant before data collection commenced. Although their consent was obtained orally, each participant was given a translated copy of the consent form, along with the researcher's and her advisor's contact information, for their records and so they could reach out to the researcher and her advisor in case they needed to withdraw from the study. However, none of the participants chose to withdraw from the study.

Benefits and Risks

The research topic was not sensitive. However, I considered the unforeseeable risk that some participants might become emotionally distressed while sharing their experiences and stories, especially those that involve painful experiences. Therefore, information about counselling centers was included in the consent form that was shared with all the participants. No participant showed any visible signs of distress. At the same time, however, the documentation of cultural practices is of utmost importance to the Kalasha community due to the endangered nature of their culture. My research provided the Kalasha people with an opportunity to share and document their knowledge and wisdom. I felt a great sense of gratification knowing that the participants saw the benefit and significance of this research, which they also verbalized during data generation. For example, during an interview, Kazi Danok made these remarks:

> Everyone in Chitral knows that the Kalasha people don't lie, steal, or commit murder. However, people in other parts of the world [and Pakistan] are not aware of this. Therefore, when sister [referring to me] writes about it through the work she is doing, these practices will be documented. This will enable others to learn about the peacebuilding process here, and people from other areas can also learn from it and adopt it.

Privacy, Attribution and Confidentiality

I ensured the privacy and confidentiality of all participants throughout the research process. The interviews were conducted at the participants' preferred locations, and the interview recordings were listened to in a private setting. Both research assistants who served as translators during the interview stage of the field research signed a pledge of confidentiality. All data were securely stored on a password-protected drive on my computer in an encrypted format to ensure the safety and confidentiality of the participants. When I asked whether the participants wanted to be identified or remain anonymous in the thesis write-up, some participants were surprised and would ask "Why not"? I explained to them the importance of confidentiality as recommended by the University of Manitoba to protect their identity. However, one participant humorously remarked, "I am not leaking secret government information here, just sharing my knowledge about my community." Attribution emerged as a key concern. Therefore, I prioritized respecting their choices and attributing them with their real names, which I considered more ethical than assuming that they would be best served by masking their real names.

I have encountered several studies (e.g., Kyoon-Achan, 2014; Maggi, 2001[46]; Maiangwa, 2019) in which researchers decided to anonymize participants, even when those participants

[46] Maggi, who also studied the Kalasha people, acknowledged the "agony" of using pseudonyms, stating, "Remembering people's names is important to the Kalasha people, a sign of respect. I hope that my friends will understand that I have changed their names only to protect their privacy" (p. 229). Likewise, Maiangwa notes "Despite the plea to publish their names, I consider it my own ethical responsibility as a researcher to use pseudonyms to mask their identities for security

expressed a desire to be identified. I asked myself, is it ethical to disregard a participant's choice to be attributed for their knowledge and instead mask their identity to adhere to ethical standards? How ethical is it to decide to mask their names for their protection when they choose not to, despite being more aware of their environment and navigating through it every single day? The challenges of applying standardized and externally generated ethical frameworks in cross-cultural settings have been noted by various researchers (e.g. Eide & Allen, 2005; Honan et al., 2013; Jayawickrama & Strecker, 2015). In this research, privacy and confidentiality were generally not major concerns for most participants. Family members and community members would often join us out of curiosity during the middle of interviews. In one instance, two participants arrived together and preferred to be interviewed together. Considering the cultural context, I prioritized ensuring that participants were comfortable by confirming with them instead of insisting on confidentiality and asking people to leave, which would have been highly disrespectful in that cultural setting.

Having agreed-upon values that can be negotiated in different settings instead of a rigid one-size-fits-all approach to ethics is important (Lincoln & Denzin, 2008). However, it is crucial to have these values in place. I felt good about being accountable to the community and fulfilling my responsibilities while respecting their rights in the field research. I believe that this has helped in building trust between myself and both research assistants and the Kalasha community.

Researcher's Role and Positionality

The researchers' positionality and role in qualitative research are crucial since they serve as key tools for data generation and interpretation (Holmes, 2020). Although identities intersect, being mindful of one's positionality aids in reducing bias, building trust with participants, and centring their

purposes, confidentiality, and in accordance with the ethical principles of the University of Manitoba" (p.14) see also Kyoon, p. 38.

voices (Martin et al., 2022). Various elements like the researcher's social location, values, religion, language, region, political affiliation, and training significantly influence how data is generated and interpreted (Dunbar, 2008; Ford et al., 2008; Law & Bretherton, 2015; Meyer, 2008).

I embarked on this research with a profound appreciation of the communal peacebuilding processes that have been a fundamental part of my upbringing. Growing up in a small village in southern Punjab, Pakistan, I often watched my grandfather at a community center, where he attentively listened to and resolved people's issues. My academic journey in the PACS doctoral program further exposed me to Indigenous and communal peacebuilding practices worldwide. This broadened my understanding of the vital role communal and Indigenous peacebuilding processes play, both within my own community and in other cultural contexts.

In 2017, I encountered profound inspiration through my interaction with the Kalasha community. Their steadfast dedication to peaceful coexistence and the conspicuous absence of violent conflicts within their society prompted a deliberate redirection of my research focus towards acquiring comprehensive insights within their community. During the research, I approached the Kalasha community with an open heart, eager to learn about their culture and practices rather than seeking comparisons with my own community or others.

In the research setting, I found myself being both an insider and an outsider. As a Pakistani citizen proficient in the national language (Urdu), I and many Kalasha people engaged in meaningful conversations and formed strong bonds. People commonly said, "You understand how things work here," referring to the socio-political environment in which we found ourselves. However, as a cultural outsider, critical reflection was necessary to address the inequalities caused by my identity as a member of the majority Muslim and Punjabi demographic. Hence, I was careful of power dynamics, and cultivating trust with the community was primary concern. Ride (2015) suggested that researchers working with Indigenous and marginalized communities should involve participants in

finalizing the research process, giving them a "voice"[47] through narrative storytelling and including them as equal participants in data interpretation, among other things. In so doing, she argued, the methodology will be robust, reflective of "insider thinking," and culturally responsive, and this practice will also be helpful in presenting honest analyses and "righting the historical inequity of the researcher and participant" (p. 218).

To overcome power dynamics, I made connections in the community and approached people through trusted insiders. I demonstrated tremendous respect for their knowledge, wisdom, cosmology, and culture by involving local Kalasha people throughout the research process, from design to data collection and analysis, and I used a storytelling methodology to centre their voices. I employed critical reflexivity, asking questions about the purpose of research and how the data might be interpreted by others (Fine et al., 2003). Throughout my analysis, I was mindful of not engendering stereotypes about any community, and I questioned myself about why I was including or excluding specific information.

Throughout my research, I actively immersed myself in the community, developing a close relationship with the participants. It is true that "knowing and being known" hold significant importance in Indigenous culture (Eide & Allen 2005, p. 49), and that the individual receives consent, not questions (Smith, 2012). People only learned about the specifics of my research before an interview, and they agreed to partake in the study because I was well-known to community members. I was invited to share meals with community members, and I was greeted with *shuman and shokek* (knit belt), which signifies honour, warm hospitality and friendship. One of my fondest memories is

[47] It is important to note, however, that Indigenous scholars have critiqued terms like "empower" and "give voice to others," arguing instead that participants already possess agency, knowledge, and the power of self-determination. (e.g., Bishop, 2005)

when Kazi Zar Gul greeted me with a walnut garland dyed with red wine when I arrived for my interview with her. This garland is traditionally used to welcome special people (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Kazi Zar Gul and me in Biriu Valley



When I thanked Saifullah Jan, a community elder, for his time, he said, "I should thank you for taking the time and painstaking effort to come here and talk to us. Otherwise, people often phone or speak with others to learn more about us." He also told me that there was no need for member checks for his interview. I interpreted all his feedback as a sign of mutual trust and respect. These signs demonstrated to me the community's trust and enabled me to generate rich data and have an emic representation of the cultural process.

However, I wholeheartedly agree with Pir's (2019a) assertion: "…although we may be careful about not consciously providing false representations; we, yet again, as others have done throughout history, represent positioned realities, positions which 'outsiders' aiming to understand 'insiders' cannot escape" (p. 33). Throughout my research, I have made a concerted effort to provide an authentic depiction of the Kalasha people and their conflict resolution methods. This has involved

establishing mutual trust, respect, and deep connections, as well as involving community members in data generation and interpretation. However, it is important to acknowledge that my own personal experiences, like those of other researchers, have unavoidably influenced the way I have portrayed the Kalasha community. Therefore, this thesis should be read as a reflection of both me and the Kalasha community, my story interweaving with their stories.

Limitations of the Study

The participants' enthusiastic participation in my research exceeded the target number of recruited participants and allowed me to successfully complete the research despite the challenges posed by the unpredictable COVID-19 situation; those were all remarkable accomplishments. This thesis research, however, faced challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and a language barrier, which added to the study's limitations.

First, the COVID-19 epidemic posed a major and challenging hurdle. Because of the health risks and travel restrictions caused by the epidemic, I could not go to the research site for the planned period to conduct the field research. If I had been given the opportunity to extend my stay, I could have gained a much deeper level of understanding of the Kalasha community and their culture. Due to the COVID-19 limitations, I was unable to conduct participant observation, which I considered as an essential data source for my research as a cultural outsider. In addition to conducting in-person interviews, I had to obtain specific approvals from the University of Manitoba's CRRT and the local administration at the research location. Occasionally, I was advised to postpone my research work and submit a new application for potential future consideration. This process was incredibly time-consuming and frustrating. The COVID-19 pandemic extended the completion time of the thesis, delayed the research process, and hindered my thorough understanding of the local context.

Second, the language barrier presented quite a challenge to me. Cross-language translations are challenging, yet Indigenous modes of knowledge are difficult to translate into English, as there is

a danger of losing the essence of the original meaning embedded in the language (Kovach, 2015; Little Bear, 2000). In addressing language issues in cross-cultural research, it is recommended that local interpreters and translators, particularly those from the community, engage in various processes like translation, transcription, and interpretation (Chilisa, 2012; Ford et al., 2008; Hennink, 2009), as their involvement at various stages of the research process can enhance the researcher's comprehensive interpretation of the data. This can help identify any errors or omissions in the translation and enhance the researchers' understanding of cultural concepts and nuances (Collison et al., 2016; Miller, 2018). To implement these recommended strategies, I brought on board two interpreters and translators from the community and worked closely with them throughout the thesis research. To achieve the utmost precision in translating Kalasha songs, I enlisted the expertise of two different translators. However, as a speaker of four languages, I fully understood the challenges translators faced when trying to convey the original aesthetic appeal in their translations. Overall, working with three languages (Kalasha, Urdu, and English) in this research project was quite challenging for me.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 thoroughly explored the qualitative methodology and the research methods that have guided the exploration of the Kalasha people's peacebuilding and conflict resolution practices. Qualitative methods combined with storytelling techniques allowed for a thorough exploration of the research topic. Ethical considerations and a keen awareness of the researcher's positionality were integral throughout this study, ensuring respect and integrity in the research process. Despite inevitable limitations, the qualitative methodology and research methods employed provided profound insights into Kalasha peacebuilding and conflict resolution methods, paving the way for further research and cross-cultural comparisons. The findings generated from these processes are discussed in empirical Chapters 5 through 9.

Chapter 5

Getting Together for Peace: The Kalasha Ways of Conflict Resolution

Every culture and society has its methods for addressing conflicts. The literature review chapter highlighted many Indigenous practices that are deeply rooted in the culture of specific communities and play a significant role in resolving conflicts and fostering peace. This chapter provides a detailed discussion of findings related to the Kalasha people's perceptions of peace and conflict, as well as their communal approaches to conflict resolution (Figure 5). By analyzing these unique cultural phenomena, the goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the Kalasha people's views on peace and conflict, along with their strategies for navigating and resolving disputes within their community.

Figure 5

The Kalasha Perspective on Peace, Conflict, and Conflict Resolution



Kalasha Conceptions of Peace as a Verb

Every society possesses its own notion of peace and conflict. My first interview question was aimed at learning the conceptualization of peace and conflict within the Kalasha community, as well as gaining insight into the corresponding terminologies employed by the Kalasha people. The participants explained their understanding and interpretation of the concept of peace. Nevertheless, they encountered some confusion when asked for the Kalasha word for peace. I initially thought my question might not be clear enough, so I reformulated it and discussed the most effective way to articulate this query with my Kalasha research assistant. I was hoping to learn a linguistic counterpart to the English term "peace" or the Urdu term "*aman*." However, I could not locate a singular term denoting the concept of peace among the Kalasha. Upon further reflection came the aha moment that no static term exists for peace. The Kalasha people perceive peace as a dynamic concept that necessitates active engagement with people in everyday peace. Peace for the Kalash people does not function as a noun, as it possesses an inherent action component. When the community members involved in this research were asked about their understanding of peace, their responses encompassed notions such as "to be compassionate," "to accept others," and "to tolerate," among other things.

Several participants frequently mentioned the Islamic principles of *rawa dari* and *silah rahmi* when discussing peace. *Rawa dari* (tolerance) refers to the practice of exhibiting tolerance and providing fair and equitable treatment to individuals, irrespective of their religious beliefs, skin colour, linguistic background, or ethnic association. *Sila rahmi* (kindness and compassion to kith and kin) refers to the act of nurturing and preserving familial relationships, demonstrating benevolence towards one's relatives, and being mindful of the rights of all relatives, including immediate and extended. Similarly, the research participants frequently used the term "Allah" to refer to *Dezau* (God). I wondered whether they employed these terms due to their awareness of conversing with a Muslim. Nevertheless, I was informed that these words are employed even during inter-Kalasha

communication. The incorporation of linguistic terminology in the Kalasha language is a consequence of the reciprocal influence between the Kalasha community and neighbouring Muslim groups, as well as their shared education in schools. The Kalasha equivalent for *rawa dari* and *sila rahmi* are *kahar giraek* and *khal xha rakum* accordingly. Peace is referred to as various things, such as a serene setting, relational harmony, tolerance, compassion, and positive interpersonal connections, among others.

Peace is *Kahar Giraek* (Tolerance)

The Kalasha language defines *kahar* as "anger" and *giraek* as "to endure." Several participants expressed that peace involves tolerating others' mistakes and managing anger. For example, Zar Philim stated that peace requires the ability to accept and tolerate the mistakes of others. The Kalasha people place significant importance on tolerating the mistakes of others to prevent conflict and maintain harmony. For instance, Imran Kabir believed that peace is not solely about tolerance; it also involves respecting people's rights and practicing self-restraint. He stated, "In my opinion, peace means exhibiting tolerance, acknowledging and honouring the rights of others, and refraining from exceeding one's boundaries." By fostering a culture of tolerance and mutual respect, the Kalasha people exemplify the essential values needed for a harmonious coexistence.

Peace is *Khal xha Rakum* (Love and Compassion)

In the Kalasha language, the term *khal* translates to "love," while *rakum* means "compassion." Some participants described peace as *khal xha rakum*. For example, Kazi Shahi Gul explicated that "peace is the state in which individuals coexist harmoniously and lovingly. Peace is *sila rahmi* [*khal xha rakum*], which refers to the state in which individuals display compassion and kindness towards one another." Likewise, Kazi Sichen pointed out that "peace is to resolve conflict, to live together in a good way, to build good relationships, and to spread love." Kazi Sher Bibi's definition of peace, however, encompassed both *kahar giraek* and *khal xha rakum*, as for her, "peace is a brotherhood,

compassion, *rawadari* [*kahar giraek*], and taking care of each other." In essence, the diverse perspectives shared by the participants underscored that peace is fundamentally rooted in love, compassion, and harmonious coexistence.

Peace is *Tiphak* and *Aphiati* (Relational Harmony)

In the Kalasha language, *tiphak* refers to the concept of relational harmony, while *aphiati* literally means "hurdle-free" but signifies a state of uninterrupted well-being and serenity. Turab Khan, Hazrat Gul, and Kazi Khosh Ahmed Khan equated peace with a serene environment (*aphiati*). When I inquired for further clarification about *tiphak* and *aphiati*, Hazrat Gul explained it as follows:

> The Kalasha people define peace as a state of tranquility devoid of any conflicts, envy, theft, or violence. We have *tiphak*, which refers to the state of relational harmony. What are the reasons for conflict to arise in the absence of theft and jealousy? Within our households, there is a significant amount of collaboration. We prioritize the well-being of our neighbors and elderly people. You can witness a great deal of peacefulness here.

Centred in these definitions is the idea of nurturing good "human relationships." Nevertheless, it is not sufficient to merely attend to human relationships, as Kazi Zar Gul, a resident of the Biriu valley, stated explicitly at the very beginning of her interview:

> The human being is the most merciless creature on this planet. He exhibits extreme cruelty, which triggers his fury and prompts him to engage in a fight. Basically, humans have wisdom and power over relationships with other creations. We use land and say this is for us. We use animals and say this is for us. We take them, slaughter them, and say they are for us. We cut trees and say they are for us. They all are living things and have life, but we do not think about them because we are cruel. We have wisdom, but how do we use it? Whatever is under discussion, humans say it is made for us.

> The animals that we slaughter also have a family. They also cry. Have we not seen it? Humans exhibit cruelty due to their ability to assert dominance over other creatures, as other creatures are incapable of verbal communication. A human is the cruellest among all the creations because he oppresses, but others don't. You have a pet in the house; you feed them, and they don't get wicked, we do. We are cruel towards humans, animals, and all other creations… So, the quality of a peaceful human being is to take care of all things. Live well, take care of his society, people, animals, and other things, and never hurt anyone.

Kazi Zar Gul's perspective on anthropocentric viewpoint highlights a profound critique of human attitudes toward nature. She points out how humans have often seen themselves as superior to nature, resulting in exploitation and disregard for the interconnectedness of life. Her call to shift away from this mindset towards an *ethics of care* suggests that true peace can only be achieved when we recognize and respect the intrinsic value of all beings—not just humans. This approach encourages an understanding that all living beings and the natural world have inherent worth and are deserving of care, respect, and protection. The Kalasha hold nature in high regard. They consider livestock, juniper, walnut branches, and grape wine among other things as *onjas't'a*, which means to be pure and sacred. The Kalasha community places significant value on animals, as they believe their entire life cycle is closely tied to them. Kazi Dinar Bibi further emphasized the ethics of care with the following words:

> You tend to the tree by watering it, and in return, it yields benefits. In the same vein, animals rely on you; by caring for them, you reap their benefits. We only cut down trees when it's absolutely necessary, like when constructing a house. Otherwise, we protect them. It is critical to care for all living things, including birds, trees, and animals. It is crucial that you nourish them. They cannot be treated cruelly. It is essential to look after them.

While the absence of violence and conflict is crucial to the Kalasha worldview, the Kalasha people do not define peace solely as the absence of conflict. Instead, they view peace as encompassing a variety of conditions, including compassion, love, tolerance of mistakes, and the cultivation of positive relationships with all living beings. Additionally, peace involves safety against any disruptions that may arise to create a serene environment that promotes optimal living conditions. Akram Hussain referred to this as an "environment where life can be enjoyed to its fullest potential." His definition of peace instantly reminded me of Johan Galtung's idea of positive peace. This is possibly why Kazi Mir Bacha referred to peace as a process rather than as a product or an object when he said, "Talking about peace takes a long time. Starting conflict is easy: You swear at me, and conflict begins." Similarly, Kazi Sichen Gul believed that "destruction is easy, and doing bad things is much easier. It is easy to destroy, but it is very hard to sustain and uphold good things. There is nothing more important than sustaining peace; that is why it is important to [continuously] work towards it." So, peace for the Kalasha is not just the absence of conflict; it encompasses a wide range of qualities, such as love and compassion, the ability to tolerate mistakes, the cultivation of positive relationships with all living things, and the guaranteeing of everyone's safety from all disturbances.

Kalasha Conception of Conflict as a *Janjal*

Conflict within the Kalasha community is seen as an undesirable disruption of relationships, like it is in other Indigenous societies. The adjectives used to describe conflict include *ne prus't'* (not good) and *bo shum* (very bad), in contrast to peace, which is referred to as *prus't'* (good). Although there is no distinct word for peace, participants provided various words to describe conflict, such as *giwgaw* (brawl), *c'ikpak* (brouhaha, uproar), and *janjal* (entanglement). For instance, Kazi Danok explained, "There is no specific word for peace. But for conflict, if it is verbal, we use *janjal*. If it involves physical actions, like pushing or slapping, we refer to it as *tyek tyek*." The Kalasha community's nuanced understanding of conflict highlights its emphasis on maintaining harmonious

relationships, reflecting a broader cultural value placed on relational harmony, peace, and its intricate social dynamics.

Conflict is an Entanglement of Relationships

While *giwgaw*, *c'ikpak*, and *tyek tyek* denote the expression of conflict in various forms, the term *Janjal* is commonly used for conflict. Akbar Bhutto disclosed, "We use the word *janjal* for conflicts. *Janjal* means conflict, differences, distance, and entangling with each other." This entanglement is thought to result from disrespecting boundaries and losing self-restraint. For example, Imran Kabir remarked that "conflict refers to the act of transgressing someone's boundaries, rebelling, and causing harm." That said, Kazi Sher Bibi perceived conflict as "*beitiphaki* (relational disruption), which means to overpower and not to accept each other."

In contrast to viewing peace as *tiphak*—a state of relational harmony within the Kalasha worldview—conflict is perceived as *beitiphaki*, a disruption of that harmony. This disruption is believed to arise from non-acceptance, domination, and a lack of respect for personal or communal boundaries, among other things. The Kalasha term for conflict, *janjal*, conveys this vividly, referring to the entanglement of relationships that must be carefully untangled and straightened in order to restore and sustain peace.

Conflict as *Adrahak ona Anghar* (Forest on Fire)

An interesting analogy was used by Zar Philim to explain her view on conflict. She believed conflict is like *adrahak ona anghar*, which means "a forest on fire." She elaborated on the issue as follows:

> Planting a small seed can yield a plentiful crop. Similarly, when you sow a seed of agitation that inflames, it becomes like a fire in a forest; it burns everything regardless of what comes its way and quickly encapsulates its surroundings. It doesn't differentiate between wet trees and dry trees. It burns everything down. Conflict is the same thing. You will attack me; I will

attack you. Our relatives will take our sides. Then there will be a fight, then war, so it's important to contain conflict immediately before it escalates.

Zar Philim emphasized the significance of containing conflict and the capacity for it to affect the locale in which it occurs. Her point emphasizes the urgency with which conflicts in the community must be resolved. Zar Philim's, Kazi Mir Bacha's, and Kazi Sichen Gul's perspectives make it clear that conflicts are simple to instigate and capable of wreaking havoc in the community and require immediate and devoted attention to prevent their escalation. For this reason, the Kalasha have established highly effective conflict resolution mechanisms in which elders (*gad'erakan*) and Kazis[48] play a substantial role. The subsequent section elaborates on these conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes.

Kalasha Conflict Resolution Processes

Conflict is an inevitable part of human life, and nearly everyone encounters it at some point—whether on a personal, familial, communal, intergroup, local, or even international level. Although serious and violent conflicts are rare among the Kalasha, they are part and parcel of social life, as they are in other societies. For example, Kazi Mani emphasized the inevitability of conflict, observing that "conflict can arise over your house, a nearby street, land, or property. Even something as simple as cleaning can lead to disputes—like questioning why someone made a mess. How can there not be disagreements when people live together? Even inanimate objects, like household items, make noise when they collide—so why wouldn't people?

Although trivial arguments may arise frequently, Kazi Mani noted they are promptly resolved by family members and neighbours, ensuring that they are resolved and settled on the spot.

[48] Kazis are respected elders with profound religious knowledge of Kalasha rituals. While elders hold high respect, anyone from middle to old age in a gathering may be referred to as *gad'erak* (elder), and it is not a special title for the Kalasha.

Nevertheless, the participants highlighted two categories of conflicts that require communal attention, namely,

1. Conflict over *dur phazhik* (property distribution);
2. Conflict over *d'onwal'I Al'as'ing* (remarriage by elopement or wife elopement).

D'onwal'I Al'as'ing (wife elopement) has become a rare occurrence due to changes in the institution of marriage. This topic is further explored in the section on *D'ongriik*, a conflict resolution process specifically designed to address disputes related to *d'onwal'I Al'as'ing* (wife elopement). Additionally, conflicts over property distribution are infrequent. As Hazrat Gul explained, "There are very few conflicts in the Kalash community. Only 20–30 percent of conflicts occur over property distribution, and this is often due to people being unaware of the rules and rights established by Kalasha *dastur* [code]. They insist that if one person received something, they should also get it." The *dur phazhik* principles outline the norms and rights concerning property allocation. In the Kalasha language, *dur* means "house," and *phazhik* means "distribution." *Dur phazhik* refers to the patrilineal code of passing down property from fathers to sons. This process is usually recognized with a festive gathering, during which Kazis and respected elders from the community are invited to oversee the property distribution. Elders and Kazis serve as witnesses during this procedure and play a crucial role in conflict resolution should any issues arise in the future. Women are usually excluded from the process of distribution and inheritance.[49] Imran Kabir explicated the oral set of traditions of *dur phazhik* in the following manner:

> Our law is slightly different because we don't distribute property among women. It is distributed among children. For example, if someone has married twice and had two sons from one marriage and one from another, then the property will be divided into three equal shares. But

[49] Women's perspectives on inheritance are discussed in Chapter 8.

again, there are more laws…. In the past, women used to inherit property. They still do; my maternal and paternal grandfather gave the property to their daughters, but now it has been restricted given the too many marriages out of the community. Otherwise, our ancestors have always given to them, but our law says if a daughter asks for it officially, the father is obliged to give her a share.

Officially, this means there is a ritual where she makes five or six loaves of wheat bread, takes them as a gift, and asks for a share. Sometimes, they give on their own. Sisters are summoned over property distribution, and property is distributed in front of them. If they want, they can ask for anything they need. Otherwise, the property is distributed among brothers. Especially if a sister is firstborn, she must be called because the firstborn has a separate law, whether male or female. Sometimes, the firstborn daughter is given property because her parents think she has served everyone and has taken care of the whole family.

So, often, she is given walnut trees and a piece of land to build her house or a share in a forest. Likewise, the firstborn son is given a slightly larger share in property, known as *gad'ara bas'* (firstborn's share). He usually gets a cattle house. Similarly, the youngest son also has a special share known as *tshatarabas'* (youngest's share). He inherits his father's house. Everything else, i.e., trees, land, livestock, etc., is distributed equally. Whenever there is a violation of these rules, conflict occurs.

Conflicts arising from violations of these principles or ignorance of these regulations are handled through communal conflict resolution methods. Property distribution is the leading cause of conflict among the Kalasha and is addressed quickly by communal conflict resolution practices such as M*arakha* and *Nanawati*, depending on the nature of the conflict. *D'ongriik*, on the other hand, resolves conflict over *d'onwal'I Al'as'ing* (wife elopement). These three common conflict resolution processes are explored in depth below.

***Marakha* (Gathering of People)**

Violent conflict manifestations are nearly non-existent among the Kalasha. The community members who took part in this research were generally in their fifties and sixties and told me that they had never witnessed or heard of a serious conflict or murder in the community in their lifetime. For example, Shakbar Khan remarked, "We are peace-loving people. We don't fight with each other. If we do get into a conflict Kazis get together and resolve it..." The process, as Kazi Shakbar Khan explained, translates literally as "gathering of people," which is known in the Kalasha language as *Marakha*. *Marakha* is also referred to as *jirga*, which is a communal conflict resolution process used by various groups in the region, such as the Kho and Pashtun. Imran Kabir explained that *jirga* in the Kalasha language is a verb that refers to the discussions and debates that take place during *Marakha*, which is a gathering of people. I prefer using the term *Marakha* over *jirga* because it is a Kalasha word specifically for this process.

Marakha is also featured in Kalasha folk songs. I was eager to collect a few songs about *Marakha* to gain insights into the procedure. However, Luke Rehmat informed me that these songs are considered *onjas't'a,* meaning they are sacred, and cannot be shared with anyone outside the Kalasha community. These songs are exclusively performed during the *Cawmos* festival, which is the most significant event in the Kalasha calendar, occurring from December 7 to December 22. They cannot be shared orally or otherwise outside of the *Cawmos* setting.[50]

Marakha functions as both a dispute resolution and communal decision-making process. The process resolves disputes involving property issues between two parties, forest encroachment between

[50] This belief is strongly held among the Kalasha, as documented by Elizabeth Darling (1979). They attribute the death of German anthropologist Adolf Friedrich in 1956 to his unauthorized recording of sacred *Cawmos* hymns. While observing the *Cawmos* festival in the Mumuret Valley, Friedrich was reportedly seen behind a tree with his tape recorder running. By the time the Kalasha realized what was happening, it was too late to intervene. Friedrich became seriously ill during his fieldwork and died a few days later in a hospital in Rawalpindi, where he had sought medical treatment (Darling, 1979).

two villages, or any other issue that necessitates the community's use of *Marakha.* Additionally, it functions as a decision-making process for matters and operations in various other domains, including constructing bridges and water channels and distributing forest royalties. If the subject under discussion impacts the entire valley, a representative from each household must be present (Cacopardo, 2016). *Marakha* is generally a six-step process. However, these steps are not rigid; depending on the outcomes and the nature of the problem, certain stages may be omitted or supplemented.

Step 1: Getting Engaged in the Process

The conflict resolution process begins promptly when one party indicates that there is a problem. Initially, the primary mediators are family members, particularly parents, who clarify why an older brother will receive a larger share of the property. They explain the privileges conferred by the oral tradition of *dur phazhik.*

If the issue remains unresolved after the involvement of immediate family members, neighbors are then included in the process. Should the problem persist, Kazis (elders) and the wider community become involved in resolving the conflict. Their participation typically occurs in two scenarios. One of the parties—often the one who feels wronged—extends an invitation for assistance, usually phrased as *ew, nisik jagek kia eia hak ona shiaw e*? (Come, sit, and see if this is fair?). This phrase demonstrates an awareness of the contested positions in the conflict, allowing an impartial third party to determine whether the situation is fair for both parties. Additionally, without an invitation to an external third party, Kazis actively intervene in conflicts as soon as they notice any relational discord. For example, Kazi Khosh Ahmed Khan described the process in the following way:

> When we notice that members of a certain family are not communicating or have strained relationships, a group of Kazis convenes a meeting to intervene and offer to counsel, as this

situation is unfavourable. We kindly request that they work to resolve the conflict and restore normalcy in their relationships.

In this way, the parties become engaged in the conflict resolution process either through their own request or a request and efforts made by the community such as parents, relatives and elders.

Step 2: Shuttle Diplomacy

This stage may be unnecessary in certain instances and depends on the escalation level of the conflict. When one of the parties calls for a meeting, the elders and Kazis visit that party's home and notify others to attend. If the other party shows up willing to discuss matters, shuttle diplomacy is often not needed.

I asked about the potential consequences if the parties did not comply with the Kazis' invitation. The respondents confirmed that they would almost certainly attend the meeting. If they do not, it signals to the elders that they are clearly on the wrong side. They further remarked that there is no reason to avoid attending, as no one is going to kill or harm them during the process. All parties are allowed to present their perspectives and narratives.

However, in situations where a conflict escalates to physical violence (pushing/slapping) or when the parties involved are unwilling to resolve their differences, the first step is often to de-escalate their anger. This usually involves shuttle diplomacy to prepare them for a gathering where they can have a conversation to address the conflict. The Kalasha Dastur strongly discourages lying, and it is widely recognized that the Kalasha people in Chitral do not tell lies. However, to resolve conflicts and maintain peaceful relationships, white lies are considered acceptable tools for pacification at this stage. Negative remarks are transformed into positive ones when communicated to another party. Kazi Danok remarked on this issue as follows:

We occasionally tell lies for peace. Let's suppose we go to one party, and they swear a lot and say awful things about the other party. So, when we visit party B, we say positive things such

> as party A used kind words about you, and he thinks well of you. This softens party B, and one feels like, "Yeah, he said a good thing, I should say a good thing, too." So, we gradually improve the situation to bring it under control and make it better.

Effective communication skills are crucial at this point. This is an opportune moment for the third party to reiterate the importance of inner goodness and interpersonal relationships. The conflict over property often involves siblings. Therefore, they are often encouraged to think of their relationships. As Kazi Mir Bacha indicated, "As Kazis, we typically know what belongs to whom, so we advise them, 'Why are you claiming this property? If you need something, it is better to ask your brother for it instead of fighting over it.'" This step is crucial as proficient communication skills have the potential to resolve conflict by making both parties recognize that the conflict may be unnecessary.

Effective communication skills are essential for Kazis and elders involved in conflict resolution processes. Specifically, an experienced individual who can persuade others is invited to participate. An elderly woman, Zar Philim, from the Rukmu Valley, shared her experience of successfully resolving a conflict at this particular stage. She expressed great pride in her ability to reconcile a dispute between a Kalasha woman and her brother over a walnut tree. In the following story, she highlighted how she convinced the woman to resolve the conflict:

> A brother and sister got into a conflict over a walnut tree. According to the sister, her father gave her the walnut tree. The brother claimed ownership of the tree because it was located right in his field. They were not on talking terms. So, I visited both sides. Whatever they told me about one another, I retained in my heart and listened to them without sharing any wrong words expressed on both sides. One day, I visited her again, and she started talking too much. I also gave her a chance to vent her feelings.

Eventually, she said, “My brother is not giving me a walnut tree. Thus, my father-in-law purchased two *maunds*[51] [approx. 176 lbs.] of walnuts from the Mumuret Valley.” I replied, “Okay, you can buy walnuts with cash in your pocket, but can you purchase your brother in the market?” When she heard this, she burst into tears and told me that no one had ever mentored her in such a way. “You are correct. I can’t buy my brother.” So, she ended the conflict by giving the tree to her brother. I then advised the brother to send produce from the walnut tree to his sister’s house for the next two years.

Zar Philim was justifiably happy regarding her dialogue, considering the sagacity of her judgment. The sister realized that relationships hold greater significance than material possessions. Zar Philim’s request that the brother send walnuts to his sister’s house for the next two years could lead to his realization that sharing with his sister is not significantly burdensome and may establish a healthy norm in the family.

However, some conflicts may still require further steps for resolution. During shuttle diplomacy, parties might express their positions regarding the conflict, but these views are not shared with others. At this stage, the third party’s role is to help soften the parties’ stances and encourage them to see alternative perspectives before the main meeting takes place. The actual discussion about the conflict happens in the presence of both parties.

Step 3: Getting Together

At this stage, a gathering of community elders is organized, and both parties involved are summoned. There are clearly three parties: two conflicting parties and a third, impartial party consisting of Kazis and *gad’erakan* (elders), referred to as *be gharazan* (the neutral individuals). This term also applies to witnesses, as it literally means someone without a stake or greed. Kazis are

[51] *Maund* is a varying unit of weight in some Asian countries. In Pakistan, one *maund* equals 40 kg (approximately 88 lbs).

elderly, knowledgeable individuals from each clan. While Kazis are also considered *gad'erakan*, they differ in that they possess extensive knowledge of the Kalasha religion. Their role is crucial, especially in addressing issues related to religious practices, such as violations involving the *onjas't'a (*ritually pure) and *pragata* (ritually impure) realms (discussed in detail in Chapter 8).

Although age is a factor, it is not the sole criterion for selecting and nominating Kazis and elders who frequently participate in conflict resolution processes. Instead, individuals are selected and nominated based on their wisdom, knowledge, communication skills, dispute-resolution abilities, and community service. Some issues require the participation of a larger group, including Kazis and *gad'erakan* from all three valleys and occasionally notable people from Chitral. Therefore, individuals who demonstrate resourcefulness, possess ample seating capacity for accommodating large gatherings, and can arrange for meals are also considered.

Daud Shah, however, asserted that when a young person attempts to organize a meeting, they are often put off, and the gathering is postponed with statements like "let's do it tomorrow" or "day after tomorrow." However, individuals who are in their late forties or older than fifty are regarded with significant seriousness. Kazi Unat Baig, on the other hand, commented on this issue, recognizing that "age is not a crucial factor in the selection of *gad'erak*. The essential requirement is that a Kazi must be well informed as per his locality. He possesses problem-solving skills and has a linguistic command to persuade someone."

Initially, the gathering entails the participation of Kazis and elders from a certain village where the conflict occurred. However, in the event of a conflict between two villages, such as the dispute over forest encroachment in Mumuret and Rukmu Valley, where the forests at higher altitudes are communally owned, neutral people from third or fourth villages are involved. There are two options regarding individuals who establish a third party.

Conflicting parties have the option to appoint representatives before the gathering. By doing so, they undertake to abide by the decisions made by the *maklis*[52] (gathering). In this scenario, the conflict likely persists, as both parties strive to promote their interests. Efforts are typically made to establish a committee of elders through voluntary participation rather than nomination by the parties involved. Nevertheless, if permission has not been granted and elders have voluntarily been involved, the parties are not obliged to accept the judgment of the *maklis.* The decision can be contested or declined. Typically, the oldest individual present initiates the proceedings by stating, "We have assembled here to address a specific matter. We commence this procedure by invoking the name of *Dezau* (God), our creator, and seeking his assistance in achieving a prompt resolution." Then the probing begins.

Step 4: Probing

Following the opening statement, the probing process commences. Probing is only conducted when both parties are present. As Kazi Mir Bacha pointed out, "We sit them both together and listen to their problems because, if done separately on a one-on-one basis, there comes a communication gap that impedes the conveyance of the complete perspective of each party. Therefore, sitting them together is essential." The basic purpose of this step is to name the problem, listen to and understand the parties' perspectives, and collect relevant facts and information from the people gathered. Here, questions relevant to the conflict at hand are posed. The parties take turns and have the right to uninterrupted speech. If someone gets emotional and interrupts, they are requested to remain silent and await their turn. Once the parties have conveyed their narratives, the elders then reiterate them to ensure they comprehend their positions. Thus, a third narrative is then formed, which is substantiated by the parties.

[52] Basically, the people gathered during the *Marakha* process are collectively referred to as *maklis*, which means "gathering."

Subsequently, the parties are asked about whether they desire the presence of any witnesses at the gathering. Residents of the specific hamlet where the conflict occurred are also questioned by the elders. Kalasha villages are typically small, usually consisting of 50 to 60 households. This fosters a close-knit community where individuals are generally well-informed about each other's possessions. While anyone present in the gathering might express their opinion, taking sides is not allowed, as it complicates and prolongs the process, so anyone who seems to go on that route is reminded "*hak as mond dy, kas bal'i o mo ha*[53]*"* (be fair, don't take sides). After probing the matter at hand, exploring it from different angles, and considering witnesses' accounts, the next step is decision-making.

Step 5: Decision-Making: Finding a "Middle Ground"

At this step of the process, the conflicting parties are asked to temporarily leave the gathering, after which the attendees engage in a discussion to determine the optimal and most efficient approach to resolving the issue at hand. Typically, a committee consisting of three to five individuals is promptly established to evaluate the decision. This process usually takes 30–40 minutes. Decisions are determined by three principles: the nature of the disagreement, the relative accuracy of different perspectives, and the most crucial factor that underlies most decisions of the *Marakha*: *kia dayo kia o'ghreak* (give some, take some/ reciprocity).

Initially, the Kazis evaluate the fundamental basis of the conflict. For instance, in a dispute between an older and younger sibling over the ownership of a house, the Kalasha tradition of *dur phazhik* ensures that the elders acknowledge the house as the rightful property of the youngest sibling. Conversely, if the younger sibling questions why the elder received a larger share, it is understood that, according to customary law, the firstborn is entitled to the *gad'ara bas'*—the portion specifically reserved for them. The Kazis explain the principles of *dur phazhik* to the parties involved,

[53] The literal translation of this phrase is: Speak the truth, even if it damages a relationship.

emphasizing that these rules are rooted in longstanding Kalasha tradition. If a discrepancy in measurements is reported, a further measurement is conducted. Should there be any disparity between these two measurements, a decision is made based on the Kazi's findings. If the disagreement arises from a different issue or if one party attempts to claim everything while neglecting the other, then additional considerations come into play. The final consideration relies on the most accurate perspective based on witness testimonies. However, the guiding principle for decision-making is reciprocity (*kia dayo kia o'ghreak*). Both parties are encouraged to demonstrate flexibility, engage in compromise, and make concessions. Typically, the decisions made are mutually beneficial. As Kazi Mir Kay stated, "We try to find a middle ground so that peace can sustain, and conflict can be resolved."

Subsequently, the parties are summoned, and the Kazis and elders inform them of their decision. If their decision is accepted, they proceed with the reconciliation process (discussed in detail below). If one party refuses to accept the verdict, or if there is a disagreement between the parties, the elders reassess and evaluate the conclusion. Why are both parties, or only one party, refusing to accept this decision? What is the underlying cause of the reservation? The Kazis inquire with one another about the possibility of an error being made on their behalf. The parties are also questioned about the factors that are causing their hesitancy in accepting the elders' ruling.

If one side refuses to comply, they are discreetly approached by one of the mediators and asked if there is anything they would like to communicate privately. Individuals who persistently neglect the other party and refuse to make any concessions are admonished by the *maklis* (gathering). They are further advised that "your claim is not fair enough, so it would be advisable for you to make compromises." If the elders feel that the persons involved are experiencing stress, they are given time to contemplate and ponder upon their judgment. This could range from a few hours to a few days.

Following this, the parties report back with their agreement or disagreement. If disagreement persists, a *Marakha* is convened two or three more times, each involving a wider circle of elders—including those from other villages, valleys, and eventually neighbouring communities such as the Kho and Sheikh (converted Muslim) groups. These gatherings make repeated efforts to persuade the parties to resolve the conflict. As Kazi Mir Kay explains, if someone remains unwilling, they are urged to reconcile for the sake of the *maklis* (gathering) and *Dezau* (God). Kazi Khosh Ahmed Khan further elaborated on this issue in the following manner:

> We specifically emphasize that we approached you in the name of God. If you cannot forgive for our sake, then do it for the sake of *Dezau*, your *paidagaraw* (creator). Avoid escalating the situation. We strongly recommend that you promptly address the issue, as failure to do so may incur the displeasure of Allah and humanity. Forgiving will please both God and the elders. This is essential for sustaining a peaceful environment. Therefore, we reiterate these points throughout the process: For the love of God, refrain from escalating this conflict; doing so will only agitate *maklis* and God.

Conflict resolution then transforms into a spiritual endeavour that involves embracing the divine. The participants mentioned that the parties rarely disregard their elders while resolving problems, likely due to their respect and dedication and to save their face. For this reason, many individuals submit to decisions made in the name of God and *maklis*. One such instance was provided by Turab Khan who reported on the issue on the following way:

> A dispute arose between two brothers regarding ownership of a piece of property. One brother relayed that their father had told him that this parcel of land would be transferred to him after his father's death. The second brother became infuriated, asserting that the property in question rightfully belonged to our father and should be equitably divided between the two of us. So, we told the brother who was claiming the land that your father might likely have been

extremely pleased with you and given you this property. But we ask that you share it for the sake of *maklis* (gathering) because he is, after all, your brother. As a result, he agreed, and the problem was solved.

In the exceptional instances when the conflict parties fail to reach an agreement despite repeated efforts, they are left alone, as per the Kalasha saying *tay kay mondr dai kawa ne as't'aw*, which suggests that "if you throw a walnut against a wall, it won't stick." No matter what one says or how much effort one puts in, the individual in question will not listen, and persisting in something incorrect will not make it correct. Subsequently, individuals are recommended to proceed to the court, with the caveat that if the Kazis are summoned, they will disclose the outcome of the *Marakha* deliberations. There is a prevailing belief that individuals who opt to go to court are typically those who assume that their financial resources can secure a favourable outcome. However, in certain instances, individuals realize that they are wrong in their decision to pursue legal action, prompting them to retract their actions and once again seek the assistance of elders for reconciliation.

Alternatively, in an unusual scenario, an individual who firmly believes that a certain property belongs to him may choose not to pursue legal action. Instead, he may request another person to swear an oath (*shat chawas*), confirming that the property indeed belongs to him, after which the property will be transferred to the person who took the oath. Swearing an oath, however, entails a highly intricate ceremony referred to as *Shat Dek* (swearing ritual). Daud Shah explained the *Shat Dek* procedure as follows:

> Muslim people take solemn oaths using their holy book, the Qur'an. Our community engages in the ritualistic sacrifice of either goats or sheep. A hole is excavated, and an individual taking oath sits in the hole and sacrifices the animal. Some radical individuals believe that he should also drink a little blood since he is swearing an oath. Typically, after making a sacrifice, the individual affirms three times that the property in question belongs to him.

> Subsequently, he departs from that location and proceeds towards the grazing pasture. He must choose a path that ensures he avoids encountering any other individuals and sleeps outdoors. He is expected to return home the next morning after performing a purification ritual.

According to the Kalasha tradition, *Shat Dek* is strongly discouraged due to the belief that it brings about natural disasters and problems for the individual's family and the entire clan. It is believed that those who swear an oath are at a high risk of danger and may experience loss of life and property caused by natural forces. As a result, children are taught from an early age to refrain from swearing oaths. There is a belief held by some that if a person who is swearing an oath is truthful, then no consequences occur. However, there are dissenting opinions that argue against it. Daud Shah narrated this as follows:

> Around fourteen to sixteen generations ago, or possibly even earlier, our *dihar* (shaman) instructed us to refrain from swearing an oath. This is because this land and all other things are the rightful property of Allah. Hence, anyone who solemnly declares entitlement would face utter destruction and perpetual unrest in the present life and the afterlife. There have been six to seven occurrences of *Shat Dek* in Rukmu Valley. Its impact is evident, as the properties for which oaths were taken either vanished or were completely devastated by floods.

The participants reflected on families whose ancestors took oaths, discussing how their lives were affected by natural disasters and sudden deaths. These events hindered the prosperity of their clans. Many believe that the consequences of *Shat Dek* are passed down through generations. This belief is why elders and Kazis often encourage individuals to give up their property instead of asking the other party to swear an oath. The Kazi claims that they will be compensated by *Dezau* (God) and assures that the other family will be spared any hardship. The Kalasha people are quite compassionate, and Mustafa (2019) rightly noted that "the Kalasha culture is rooted in material sacrifice for the sake of

individual and communal prosperity" (p. 29). For example, Hazrat Gul recounted a conflict in which the opposing party intended to take an oath, but Gul's family surrendered at the request of the elders to avert adverse repercussions for that family.

When the Kazis become aware of a family's suffering due to *Shat Dek*, they encourage the other clan or family involved to consider extending forgiveness to the individual who took the oath. To seek this forgiveness, the individual must perform a releasing ritual called *Shat Marat'*, which involves sacrificing an animal at an altar (*dewadur*) while pleading for forgiveness. However, the person granting forgiveness must follow a complex and challenging process. They are required to fast continuously for ten to twelve days and engage in day-and-night worship of God to offer forgiveness to the family seeking it. These complex rituals act as deterrents against greed and dishonesty while promoting and upholding the truth. Conflicting parties often accept the *Marakha*'s decisions, allowing them to proceed to the next step of reconciling their relationships.

Step 6: Reconciliation Ceremony

After all parties involved consent to the resolution and accept the decision, a reconciliation ritual called *Prus't'ek* is conducted. The term *prus't'ek* translates to "relations restored." This ritual concludes the *Marakha* procedure. The entire village gathers to participate, creating a wave of joy, as conflicts are viewed as sources of sorrow that transform into happiness upon resolution. Both parties are congratulated and appreciated by everyone present. An animal is sacrificed, a feast is shared among all attendees, and prayers are offered for the hope that such conflicts may never arise again, allowing the community to coexist harmoniously. For example, Kazi Sher Ahmed recounted what happens after the conclusion of a *Marakha*. "When conflict is resolved, we sacrifice a goat and reconcile relationships. We celebrate that a conflict has been resolved, and we eat together as an expression of happiness and ask both parties to shake hands and let go of all hard feelings."

This stage is considered crucial, as a *Marakha* would be incomplete without it. This is because, in times of conflict, the parties tend to nurture negative emotions and openly express their anger towards one another. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a sense of normalcy in their relationships since they will inevitably have to deal with each other in the future. It is imperative that these negative emotions do not dominate their thoughts and emotions in the future as they coexist together in the community. An animal is arranged to be sacrificed by one of the conflict parties. Both sides engage in the act of embracing and kissing hands, symbolizing affection and respect. The elders offer prayers, expressing the hope that their familial ties remain unbroken and that conflicts cease indefinitely. Music also finds its healing place during the ceremony. Everything seems to return to normal in their relationship after the ceremony, as if there had never been any tension between them. The feast serves two purposes: repairing relationships and drawing in a larger crowd. Food naturally brings people together. In future disputes over the same property, this event allows the involved individuals to inform the decision-makers in *Marakha* about how the issue was resolved and the consensus that was reached by everyone. Kazi Milad Gul elucidated the religious significance of animal sacrifice and feast in the following way:

> This has been done since ancient times. The Kalasha's religion places a high value on livestock. It is significant from birth until death. We sacrifice an animal when a child is born. When someone dies, many animals are sacrificed to feed everyone. We sacrifice an animal to restore relationships when a dispute is resolved. It is very sacred to sacrifice a goat and feed everyone.

Unlike formal Western conflict resolution methods or court decisions, which often do not take future relationships into account (Fry & Souillac, 2022), the *Marakha* process aims to do more than just reach a decision. Instead of merely accepting an outcome and returning home, it actively transforms relationships and fully resolves conflicts to promote future amicable interactions within

local communities. Without this relational focus, as Imran Kabir put it, the process would be "incomplete." So, animal sacrifice establishes a sacred covenant for resolving conflicts, fostering unity among parties as they share food and blood. This profound act signifies a commitment to harmony and connection.

***Nanawati* (Delegation with Gift)**

The second method of conflict resolution used by the Kalasha is called *Nanawati*, which refers to a plea for forgiveness or reconciliation through a delegation that presents gifts as a gesture of goodwill. When a dispute can be resolved without a formal gathering, one party may acknowledge that it is in their best interest to end the disagreement or realize their mistake. In such cases, they visit the other party with a delegation that includes Kazis, elders, and close relatives. As a gesture of goodwill, they bring a gift such as an animal, a household item, or traditional food. Subsequently, one party expresses remorse for instigating the conflict and requests to end the dispute, seeking to restore normalcy and harmony to the relationship. *Nanawati* serves to reinstate and harmonize relationships in situations including guilt, humiliation, regret, shame, hurt, reconciliation, and the pursuit of forgiveness. For instance, when an individual trespasses on another person's property or appropriates something without compensation, the person experiences a sense of shame and endeavours to reconcile with the trespassed party.

Nanawati can also be used to address conflicts between a woman and her family regarding her decision to elope and marry, particularly when she chooses a partner from a different community, such as a Muslim boy. Parents generally become more accepting of the marriage after the woman has children. However, she may also seek to mend the relationship with her family through *Nanawati* in other situations. Additionally, *Nanawati* is also organized by the boy's family when a girl elopes with a Kalasha boy, and her family has concerns about either the boy or her future in-laws. In these cases, the girl often tries to persuade her family to accept both the boy and his family. If her family remains

resistant, the boy's family typically arranges a *Nanawati* visit to the girl's parents in an effort to gain their approval of the relationship. In this instance*, Nanawati* initially inquires if the girl came by her own will into the relationship without any element of force. After receiving confirmation that it was her independent choice, they pay a visit to her parents and persuade them to bless the wedding through a ceremonial gathering called *khaltabari* (symbolizing the act of tying the knot).

The *Nanawati* process involves a delegation, typically consisting of 10 to 15 individuals such as Kazis, elders, family relatives, or others. The delegation visits the other party's house with a gift, usually an animal such as a goat, sheep, or bull. In Kalasha tradition, it is customary for younger individuals to bring *Nanawati* to the elders, fostering a sense of respect towards elders and seniors. Kazi Noor Baig explained it in the following way:

> If the conflict involves two brothers, the younger brother typically takes *Nanawati* to the older brother and does *ishpata*, which means to give respect, to salute. And then the older brother, in turn, gives something made of iron, such as a gun or a cooking pot, to the younger brother and prays for the younger brother that he may never face any problem, may he be blessed with children and stay happy. "The incident that occurred was the result of satanic influence, and I have chosen to grant forgiveness."

If one *Nanawati* is not accepted, another *Nanawati* is arranged—this time with a larger gift and a different set of people. After a few *Nanawati* attempts, the party agrees to forgive, accept apologies, and reconcile relationships. In most situations, once an agreement is reached, the gifted animal is typically slaughtered, cooked, and served as a feast. Additionally, individuals from the village also participate in the process, and the entire group remains together throughout the night, engaging in casual conversation and sharing a meal.

Although anyone can arrange a *Nanawati* at any time, it is worth noting that it is more successful during the evening time (*bewat)*. The reason for this is the significance of *bewat* (evening

time). The period of darkness throughout the night is characterized as *pragata* (ritually impure), but the moment when the sun is setting is regarded as *onjas't'a* (ritually pure) and holds cultural importance for the Kalasha. Engineer Khan stated that this is a period when the deity of protection is highly active. Kazi Unat Baig provided further details to explain the significance of this timing for conducting a *Nanawati:*

> If someone demands something possible and fair, then he/she is particularly listened to at *bewat*. Or if someone asks to accept a marriage/proposal, this is often acknowledged, too. The *Nanawati* is accorded due consideration due to the presence of elders and the belief that in the evening, messengers and the spirits of the ancestors accompany them; thus, they should not return empty-handed.

According to Kalasha tradition, sending *Nanawati* away in evening can lead to negative consequences for the family. Therefore, if an animal, such as a dog, appears at a person's home in the evening, it is given food rather than being chased away. Efforts are made to help anyone who arrives at someone's home during *bewat*. Hazrat Gul, a lady health worker in the Kalasha Valley, shared her story of conflict resolution and how *bewat* helped in restoring relationships. This is how her story unfolded:

> My cousin (paternal uncle's son) was born Muslim as a result of my uncle's conversion to Islam. Yet, my cousin was in a relationship with a Kalasha girl. The girls' parents did everything they could to keep their daughter from marrying him [since it meant the girl would have to convert and leave the Kalasha culture]. As a result, the couple eventually eloped and married in a Muslim way. The boy's family planned *Nanawati*, and the elders failed to persuade the girl's family. After seven months, the couple returned, and the girl was pregnant with twins and had a breech presentation.
>
> So, I visited her family and informed them of the issue. I said, "There is no point in repenting afterward if something happened during labour. Accept her because she is your

daughter, even if she is someone else's wife. She will be your daughter today, tomorrow, and forever." As a result, some family members agreed while others did not, and the situation could not be resolved. Then, one day, I helped deliver that girl's niece. It was a golden chance; this was an event of happiness, as the whole family was overjoyed at the birth of the girl's niece.

I advised her to get some sweets and visit them. So, she prepared traditional food and got some gifts for her brother's baby girl. Accompanied by another older woman, she got into the house with all these gifts. Her family was taken by surprise and couldn't say no. It was *bewat* [evening time], an event of joy, so they had to accept her. Even if an enemy comes in the evening, he is forgiven, and she was their daughter... So, they accepted her, all Kalasha wedding rituals were performed, and she was eventually sent to her in-laws with a dowry.

Nanawati plays a vital role in the Kalasha community by preserving healthy relationships, promoting forgiveness, and fostering accountability through culturally accepted methods of acknowledging and apologizing for one's mistakes.

D'ongriik (Reclaiming Double the Bride Price)

The third process of dispute settlement is known as *D'ongriik. D'on* means "material items in double amount" and *griik* means "to take." So, *D'ongriik* means to take things back in double amount. This method is exclusively dedicated to resolving conflict over *d'onwal'I al'as'ing* (wife elopement). It can be considered a version of both *Marakha* and *Nanawati* because elders and Kazis get together to negotiate, and *d'on* is granted in double quantity to the offended party. Some equate this process with *Nanawati,* but others, such as Yasir Kalash, say it is a process on its own since in *Nanawati*, one takes a gift, while in *D'ongriik*, it is a fine that it is imposed on a new husband.

There are three wedding traditions among the Kalasha. The first, which is virtually extinct, was used in the past, whereby the parents used to get their daughter engaged at a very young age and

gave her in marriage once she reached puberty. However, once married, in many cases, the husband and wife could not get along very well because they did not choose each other. Therefore, the wife would elope with someone else. Bashgali Khan, who is in his 70s, remarked that "in old times, conflicts were usually over women. When a woman did not like her husband, she would elope with someone else. In our time, there were at least ten *D'ongriik* a year. These conflicts were resolved peacefully, so peace largely prevailed. Now, conflict over women has become rare."

The tradition of arranged marriages has evolved due to the familial issues that elopement can cause. Nowadays, most marriages are conducted through elopement, which is widely recognized in society as a great custom (*ghona dastur).* Some Kalasha individuals, like Luke Rehmat, argue that labeling it as "elopement" is inaccurate. They believe that the parents of both the groom and bride are fully aware of the relationship, as the couple typically has been together for four to five years before making this decision. Taking a girl home signifies that she is ready to live with the boy, and in Kalasha culture, this act is considered part of the wedding rites.

When she is escorted to the boy's household, a Kazi and/or an elder go to confirm if she came of her own free will and was not forced by the boy or his family. They confirm that she is comfortable with her new family. Wedding rites begin after the couple verifies their decision. There may be friction if the girl's family has a reservation about the boy or his family. Therefore, the girl usually persuades them that she is fine, and they eventually accept the situation since the girl has decided. If the girl does not like her new family, she can return home with her parents. When both families are satisfied, the boys' family visits the girls' parents' home, where the groom presents a gift also known as the bride price. This typically includes animals, cookware, cash, guns, and household items. A large celebration follows with feasts, dancing, and music, and the groom's family usually leaves the next day.

After the wedding, the bride departs with her dowry, which may consist of cattle (around 30–40 goats and four bulls), cookware, and possibly furniture. The community helps arrange these gifts on both sides, but there is no obligation to provide them. The entire community is involved on both sides in arranging these gifts, although immediate relatives make significant contributions to the dowry. Marriage by choice has become a common practice, as Bakhtawar Shah explained as follows:

> Considering the issues that an arranged marriage brings about, parents have allowed their daughters freedom of choice, although they still offer their advice. Thus, when someone approaches parents to ask for their daughter's hand, they reply, "Now that she's an adult and can make decisions, you should ask her. We cannot make choices on her behalf." Thus, if they can persuade her, she will accept it; if not, the answer will be no. However, these days, the couple typically have a relationship before the boy's family speaks with the girl's family.

D'onwal'I Al'as'ing (wife elopement) may still occur, albeit quite rarely. If the husband or wife believes that their marriage is not progressing in the right direction and that he or she is unhappy, the wedding may be called off. There is no legal divorce procedure among the Kalasha. However, different scenarios with distinct sets of applicable oral codes might result at the end of the wedding. Imran Kabir described this ritual practice in the following manner:

> There are many situations. If a woman leaves her husband because of his mistake or behaviour, such as that he swore at her, particularly using a swear word to her parents, which is religiously illegitimate, then she can leave him. If the husband is unhappy and brings another wife home, the first wife can go to her parents or marry a person of her choice. However, if a wife elopes with another man without any reason or information, then the new husband will have to double the amount the old husband gifted to the girl's family at the time of the wedding as a penalty…However, whatever the girl has received as dowry presents from her parents is subtracted from it.

D'ongriik refers to the practice of paying double the bride price to a former spouse. Kazi Unat Baig explained the *D'ongriik* process in the following way:

> Basically, when someone remarries, the elders and Kazis then went and asked the girl if she wants to return. She can return if she is not at ease. If she says she made a decision based on her choice and has left her old husband, the Kazis go to the old husband's family and ask for a list of objects and an estimate of the family's expenses on the wedding. The list is then sent to the new husband's family, who must double the sum listed on it. If he cannot arrange it, he can offer his land or a piece of the forest, but he must contribute something.
>
> He [the old husband] can, however, forgive if he so desires. The conflict is then over. However, before *d'on* is negotiated and approved, the new husband and his family/clan are forbidden from confronting the previous husband and his family/clan for fear of sparking emotions and escalation. If they do it and get beaten, it's acceptable since they triggered the emotions. Still, murder or fighting at gunpoint are prohibited.

In the past, when a girl's family discovered that she had eloped, parents would make efforts to persuade her to return, as they felt a sense of shame that their daughter had abandoned her spouse because that spouse had served the father-in-law by helping with various chores even before the girl started living with him and had built connection through the exchange of bride price. Occasionally, they attempted to coerce her, but the villagers promptly intervened to prevent this action. In recent times, the couple usually leave the valley for some time and return once *D'ongriik* arrangements are almost complete.

When a list of things that are needed for *D'ongriik* is exchanged, the entire clan of the new husband collectively assists in organizing a *d'on*. Everyone contributes to the best of their ability. After the arrangement is made, a location for negotiation is selected. Arrangements are made in the new husband's village for the meals and accommodation for individuals from the former husband's

village because the negotiation process may take a few days. That becomes the appropriate moment for the former husband and his family to express and release their feelings and frustration. They may express their displeasure by stating, "This pot is of inferior quality; mine was superior, I demand an identical one," or "I don't want this or that, please make the necessary alterations" (Figure 6). If negotiations regarding *d'on* reach a deadlock, very elderly members of the community (*gad'a bas'ara*), who are no longer active in politics or communal activities, step in to resolve the issue. These elders sanction the *d'on* to bring an end to the ongoing quasi-feud between the two clans—the clan of the former husband and the clan of the new husband. As a result, the situation evolves into a tripartite structure: young males involved in the conflict due to elopement, active elders who negotiate, and the elderly who provide the final sanction (Parkes, 1994).

Once the *d'on* is successfully negotiated and approved, both spouses are requested to engage in a handshake, during which the new husband expresses apologies and acknowledges that the former husband has recovered his right in the form of *d'on*. When the previous husband returns to his village with *d'on*, he slaughters an animal and provides a feast for the villagers. He also shares his *d'on*. The *jamilisher* (clan's daughters) receive a selection of pots and pans. Additionally, as a sign of respect and recognition for their involvement in mediating the *D'ongriik* and settling the conflict, some items may also be gifted to the Kazis and elders. Saifullah Jan shared the reasoning behind *D'ongriik as* follows:

> You know we have so much freedom here, even married women elope. This is not a new phenomenon. These traditions and rituals have been practiced since the time of our forefathers. Our ancestors did these things to prevent feuds and murders. So, double of what the old husband paid is given by the new husband as compensation.

In an event like this, it is possible for a man and a woman to be killed for honour in the same province and elsewhere in Pakistan. For the Kalasha, however, it is not taboo, and honour is not

attached to the event or any one person. For the girl's parents and former husband, shame and anger surface. However, they dissipate when *d'on* is accepted. Engineer Khan clarified, noting that "if the former husband has taken it a bit too seriously and held a grudge, then the most he can do is convince a woman from the new husband's clan to elope with him, and that's it." Naz et al. (2015) erroneously stated that wife elopement is a contemporary trend among the Kalasha due to their education and exposure to outside cultures. In fact, wife elopement is a centuries-old custom that has become uncommon due to changes in the institution of marriage that have allowed young people to choose their companions. The custom of *d'onwal'i al'as'ing* (remarriage by elopement) guarantees free will and allows a woman to terminate a matrimonial union with which she is not content, and a feud is prevented through the process of *D'ongriik.*

Figure 6

D'ongriik Delibrations







Note. Elders negotiating *d'on*, as other individuals of various age groups witness the proceedings, and pots arranged for a *D'ongriik* are being loaded. Photographs with kind permission of Luke Rehmat.

Factors Impacting the Effectiveness of Kalasha Conflict Resolution Processes

The preceding analysis of Kalasha conflict resolution practices reveals key characteristics that align with those found in other Indigenous conflict resolution methods discussed in Chapter 3, highlighting shared elements that contribute to their overall effectiveness. First, these practices hold cultural significance, as they are deeply rooted in Kalasha traditions and are fully understood and embraced by community members. These processes are informal and do not necessitate any specific formal technical arrangements. A meeting can occur at any location and time (Figure 7), and conversation takes place over food provided by the host family, where the *Marakha* is held.

Figure 7

Marakha



Note. A *Marakha* over property conflict in village Anish, Mumuret valley. Photograph with kind permission of Luke Rehmat.

Second, these are collaborative processes and are open to everyone in the community, and parties are entitled to unimpeded expression of their thoughts and ideas. The sole permissible disruption is when an individual possesses specific information about a particular topic. Individuals of all ages and genders are welcome to attend, provided they refrain from causing unnecessary nuisance and there is sufficient capacity to seat them. Bakhtawar Shah added, “It is not that only elders and Kazi are allowed; whoever is capable of resolving conflict can participate.” Therefore, young people also play a role. As Turab Khan noted, “If a young person provides a valuable proposal for a resolution, it is duly considered.” However, if they attempt to escalate or take one party’s side, they are reprimanded by elders, as maintaining neutrality is crucial to prevent escalation.

Third, these processes provide a quick resolution and speedy justice by preventing conflict escalation. In addition, they are positive-sum, and decisions are made based on the idea of reciprocity.

In formal conflict settlement processes, if a tangible asset is involved, one side acquires the material possession while the other remains dissatisfied. In these processes, one party emerges as the winner while the other party becomes the loser. However, Kalasha processes are considered win-win since they strive to achieve a mutually beneficial compromise for both parties.

Fourth, they are completely free of cost, with dedicated elders playing a vital role in the conflict's resolution. The success of these Kalash conflict resolution processes can be attributed to the unwavering commitment and dedication of the elders and Kazis. They dedicate significant time and effort to these processes without expecting anything in return. Kazi Khosh Ahmed Khan pointed out the following in his story:

> Upon receiving notification of a conflict, we immediately abandon whatever we are doing and address it altruistically, free of any greed or anticipation of compensation. We are not concerned about our pending tasks or time invested in the process. We participate in a fruitful endeavour to enhance the betterment of our community and thereafter gather to tackle and resolve issues actively.

When I asked the Kazis and elders about their feelings in situations where one or both parties rejected their decision and chose to pursue legal action instead—despite the considerable time and effort they had invested in the resolution process—I was surprised by their response. Rather than expressing frustration or resentment, they said they felt sorry for those individuals. They believed that taking the matter to court would ultimately lead to wasted time and resources. The Kazis emphasized that they did not feel self-pity, as their efforts were not driven by personal gain, but by a sincere desire to please *Dezau* (God) and to serve the community by helping resolve conflicts. They were also concerned that individuals are compelled to allocate their financial resources and time towards legal proceedings, where lawyers impose substantial fees and resolutions are rarely achieved. They frequently commented on the prolonged duration it takes for a Pakistani court to reach a verdict,

expressing their hope that God may never take anyone to court. No one expressed disappointment in investing significant time and effort to assist in resolving local conflicts. Rather, they felt a sense of obligation to assist the parties in dispute resolution. According to Kazi Sher Bibi, “This is a matter concerning the reputation of a Kazi. They strive to ensure that conflicts within their villages remain unknown to everyone outside their village community. They make every effort to fix the issue within their villages.”

Kazis frequently express their concerns regarding the conflict parties’ resources. They make a concerted effort to reverse their choice to pursue legal recourse. The Kazis approach them and advise them that their resources would be squandered by going into the Pakistani legal process.Occasionally, a Kazi may engage with the parties pursuing a legal battle and intervene to resolve the conflict. Kazi Mir Bacha recounted the following in his story about conflict intervention and resolution:

> I successfully resolved two cases. Two close relatives had been involved in a protracted legal dispute for the past two decades. Despite numerous attempts by others to persuade them to end it, they remained steadfast in their disagreement. I summoned both of them and sat them together. I explicitly asked about the sources of their expenditures during the 25-year-long legal battle. I explained that it came from your pocket, whether by selling goat, beans, or walnuts. This expense was incurred at the expense of your family’s budget.
>
> “Why do you put less money into your family and more into lawyers and court?” I asked them. The cost is born by one family because you are both brothers (first cousins). Consequently, I persuaded them in such a manner and escorted them to the Chitral court. I proceeded directly to the courtroom during the hearing and addressed the judge. I, as a Kazi from the Kalasha community in Biriu valley, successfully mediated and resolved the issue among the parties involved.

Initially, the judge inquired whether I was allowed to do this task. I affirmed to him that it is indeed possible for us to decide such matters. Subsequently, he requested the submission of written statements from both parties. I had a stamped document stating that this matter has been dismissed, and if any of the involved parties reinitiate the dispute, they will be subject to a penalty of Pkr 500,000. Therefore, I presented that to the judge. The judge became happy and commended me for successfully resolving the long-standing disagreement that had remained unresolved for the past 25 years.

Finally, relational harmony is the desired outcome of these processes, as it fosters the continuation of community relationships and solidarity. These processes transform relationships and completely resolve conflicts, ensuring amicable interactions in the future. For example, Kazi Danok recounted, "What could be a more compelling reason than this [reconciling relationships], given that both happy and sad occasions require you to visit each other? You are unlikely to attend these events when you are angry. Then, the environment as a whole will be unfavourable, harmony will not prevail, and the consequences will not be good. Therefore, striving for the resolution of these conflicts is critical."

In short, Kalasha dispute resolution methods prioritize relational harmony over material gain because they are process-driven, open, positive-sum, and cost-free. The success of these processes can be attributed to the commitment and expertise of experienced elders.

Key Findings

Chapter 5 presents and discusses findings about the Kalasha notion of peace and conflict, as well as the dispute resolution mechanisms used in the community. Some key findings are outlined below.

First, the Kalasha people have a unique understanding of the concept of "peace," which they see not as a static state but as an active, ongoing process that requires continuous effort to maintain

harmony within their community. Unlike many cultures, the Kalash do not have a single word to encapsulate the idea of peace. For them, peace transcends the mere absence of violence or conflict; it embodies a rich tapestry of conditions that foster a harmonious existence.

At the heart of their understanding is the presence of compassion, love, tolerance, and good relations, which serve as foundational pillars for interpersonal relationships. The Kalasha people emphasize the importance of tolerating mistakes, embodying a spirit of forgiveness that allows community members to learn and grow together. They advocate for an ethic of care that emphasizes cultivating positive relationships with all of God's creations, recognizing the deep interconnectedness of all life.

The Kalasha people also prioritize the safety and well-being of everyone, ensuring that everyone is protected from disruptions that could disturb their tranquility. This commitment to well-being is encapsulated in their concept of *aphiati* (non-interrupted well-being), which promotes not just survival but a flourishing existence. Furthermore, peace is intricately linked to the establishment of a serene environment—one that invites individuals to enjoy life to "its fullest potential."

While the terms "peacebuilding" and "conflict resolution" are often used interchangeably in broader discussions, they take on distinct meanings within the Kalash context. Kalasha practices can more accurately be described as conflict resolution processes, as the Kalasha view peace as a journey rather than a product of a single event or events. In the Kalash worldview, the quest for peace is a continuous endeavour, deeply woven into the fabric of their communal life.

Second, the Kalasha use various terms to describe conflict depending on its nature (i.e., physical, verbal), with *janjal* being the most common. The Kalasha conception of *janjal* can be understood as a relational disruption, often referred to "entangling with each other." This entanglement typically arises from violations of boundaries, intolerance, and disrespect. Addressing this tangled state requires thoughtful untangling and realignment to restore and maintain harmony

within the community. Consequently, the aspiration for relational harmony emerges as the most desirable outcome in any conflict resolution process.

While it is widely recognized that conflict is an inevitable aspect of social life, it is often viewed as extremely bad or *bo shum* due to its potential to escalate quickly. This unpredictability highlights the urgency for immediate intervention by respected local elders and Kazis, who play a crucial role in mediating and resolving disputes to safeguard communal coexistence. However, violent conflicts are almost non-existent in the community. Conflicts that do arise, such as over *dur phazhik* (property distribution), *al'as'ing* (marriage by elopement), and *d'onwal'i al'as'ing* (wife elopement), are resolved amicably through communal processes of conflict resolution.

Third, according to Kemp and Fry (2004), peaceful societies are not devoid of conflict or violence; rather, they maintain their peacefulness through an ongoing, active process. This process keeps conflict and violence in check through built-in socio-cultural norms, control mechanisms, and non-aggressive conflict resolution practices. By this definition, the Kalasha can be considered a peaceful society. The Kalasha employ three primary non-aggressive conflict resolution approaches. I could not witness the conflict resolution process during my fieldwork, but Naz et al. (2015) observed a *Jirga/Marakha* over a property inheritance dispute between a Muslim convert Kalasha girl and her paternal uncles. The dispute arose after the death of her father, who had severed ties with his daughter due to her conversion to Islam, but she was entitled to the property according to Muslim law. The case was discussed in the *Jirga/Marakha* for three days without reaching a resolution. Naz et al. noted, "The whole thing was conducted with a detached approach without the tempers being lost of any side and in a very peaceful manner. To witness this is something very rare since we are aware of reactions regarding such situations in the so-called civilized world" (p. 67).

The first process is known as *Marakha,* which translates to "a gathering of people." This process consists of six steps: engaging in the process, using shuttle diplomacy, arranging the

gathering, probing the parties involved, making decisions, and finally, reconciliation. *Marakha* usually addresses issues related to property distribution and serves both as a conflict resolution method and a decision-making approach. Any gathering for a specific purpose is referred to as *Marakha*, while the people who come together for deliberations are called *maklis*. This process is utilized for any communal concern, whether it involves conflict resolution, developmental work, or community initiatives.

The second approach to conflict resolution is called *Nanawati*, which refers to a plea for forgiveness or reconciliation made through a delegation that presents a gift. In this method, one party, often the one who has wronged or recognizes a mistake, visits the other party with a gift, such as an animal, a household item, or traditional food. They are typically accompanied by important individuals like elders and relatives to encourage reconciliation. *Nanawati* is a means of reclaiming and restoring harmony in various situations, including guilt, humiliation, remorse, shame, hurt, and the pursuit of forgiveness. It plays a crucial role in maintaining good relationships, promoting the practice of forgiveness, and developing accountability by providing a culturally acceptable way to admit and apologize for one's mistakes.

The third approach addresses sensitive issues, such as *d'onwal'i al'as'ing* (wife elopement), through culturally established customs and a conflict resolution process known as *D'ongriik.* In this process, the former spouse receives double the bride price as compensation. This process ensures that a woman can express her free will and end a marriage she is unhappy with. Furthermore, the *D'ongriik* procedure helps prevent feuds and reaffirms connections within clans and communities, as the arrangement of bride price involves the entire clan and villagers. Wospakrik and Reed (2016) argued that studies on bride price have underscored its essential role in establishing economic and social bonds through marriage. They emphasized that both marriage and bride price are crucial for creating alliances, fostering peace, and nurturing connections. Their analysis highlighted the

significance of bride price in Biak culture, where the substantial bride price often requires the engagement of a wide network of family and friends to successfully gather and present it (p. 413). This is also true in the case of the Kalasha, where—whether it is a first marriage or a remarriage—the entire community, especially the clan, comes together to organize wedding gifts. This practice reflects their strong cultural ties and communal support, emphasizing the importance of unity not only in celebrating significant life events but also in resolving conflicts involving clan members. Although the situation may initially resemble a quasi-feud between the clans of the former and new husbands, the process of *D'ongriik* helps normalize relations, allowing members of both families to once again participate in communal activities together.

Fourth, in the context of conflict resolution among the Kalasha people, elements such as divinity, rituals, emotions, and spirits—often dismissed as superstitions in formal Western conflict resolution methods—hold profound significance. These elements are also common in other Indigenous societies, as discussed in Chapter 3, and play a crucial role in shaping Kalasha's conflict resolution practices.

For instance, *bewat* signifies that the evening is not merely a time like any other; it is a sacred moment imbued with deep significance. The community firmly believes that ancestral spirits and messengers pay visits during the evening and the deity of protection is highly active. Forgiveness during this time is essential, and the requests made for conflict transformation deserve serious attention. Furthermore, the *Shat Dek* ritual is pivotal, as it entails swearing an oath that invokes natural retribution for deceit. This practice not only emphasizes the community's commitment to truthfulness but also discourages dishonesty as well as greed for material accumulation. By integrating such rituals into their conflict resolution processes, the Kalasha people effectively address and resolve conflicts, demonstrating the profound importance of their cultural traditions.

Fifth, the Kalasha people's approach to dispute resolution is marked by openness, a positive-sum mindset, the absence of financial or punitive costs, and a strong emphasis on the process itself. These principles contribute to the swift and effective resolution of conflicts within the community. Their conflict resolution processes demonstrate a notable inclination toward compassion and a holistic perspective, effectively preventing the escalation of disputes. They consider not only the immediate circumstances of individuals but also the potential impact on future interpersonal connections. Like in other Indigenous peacebuilding practices, the primary focus is on mending relationships, in contrast to courtroom decisions that often overlook the future dynamics between people (Fry & Souillac, 2022).

Yazzie (2005, as cited in Walker, 2019) elaborated on Navajo peacemaking terminology, highlighting that Navajo values embody the positive forces of *hózhóójí*, which aim to achieve a state of harmony. At the conclusion of this peace process, the embodiment of *hózho* signifies that the individuals involved are in good relations and that all aspects of reality are aligned harmoniously, with everything in its rightful place and relating to one another in *hózho*. In a similar vein, the Kalasha term *prus't'ek* refers to a reconciliation ceremony that embodies the concept of reconciled relationships. Literally, it means "good achieved"/"relations restored." The Kalasha conflict resolution approach emphasizes interpersonal harmony, coexistence, and cohesion, valuing these qualities over the pursuit of material gain.

Sixth, the dedication, commitment, and wisdom of Kalasha elders play a key role in the success of conflict resolution processes. Their respect, earned through years of experience and community service, enables them to effectively mediate disputes. Elders invest significant time in conducting *Marakha* and often initiate requests for reconciliation through *Nanawati* to encourage healing between involved parties. If necessary, unconcerned about their own pending chores, they invest time and energy conducting several rounds of *Marakha* and *Nanawati* to encourage parties to

reconcile their relationships. For instance, when a wife elopes, it often leads to a quasi-feud between the clan of her former husband and that of her new husband. The intervention of elders from other clans is essential, as they facilitate resolution through skillful mediation and negotiation over the *d'on*, which always remains a contentious issue. This situation can become quite controversial, prompting the involvement of *gad'a bas'ara* (very old elders who have retired from active roles in communal politics) to sanction *d'on* (Parkes, 1994).

Even in cases where parties may not heed their advice, elders remain concerned about parties' resources and time that will be wasted in court instead of feeling sorry about the time and energy they have dedicated to the process. Thus, the dedication and involvement of elders play a significant role in the conflict resolution process.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 provided an in-depth examination of the research findings on the Kalasha community's understanding of conflict and peace, as well as their methods for settling disputes. It examined the intricate dynamics involved in resolving conflicts within the Kalasha's society, focusing specifically on the traditional methods of *Marakha, Nanawati*, and *D'ongriik*. While these methods are indeed vital in resolving conflict and averting its escalation, they do not encompass the entirety of peacebuilding strategies within the Kalash community. A comprehensive examination of the impact of cultural tradition and divinity on conflict prevention and avoidance, as well as their function in assuring the rarity of conflict in general and of violent conflicts in particular in Kalash society, are presented in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6

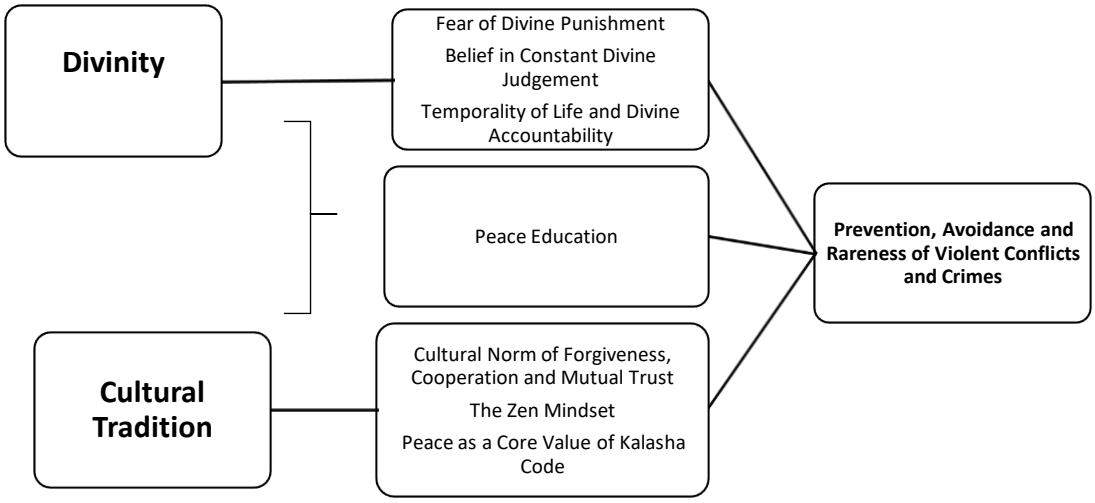
The Role of Divinity and Cultural Tradition in Sustaining Peace Among the Kalasha

Culture and religion play a crucial role in conflict resolution, as they significantly influence people's mindsets and perspectives on how to express and resolve conflicts. Cultural capital and religious traditions can greatly aid in navigating and resolving conflicts effectively (discussed in Chapter 3). This chapter clearly demonstrates how the Kalasha effectively leverage their religious beliefs and cultural norms for peacebuilding.

When I asked the Kalasha people about the most prominent forms of conflicts that occur in their community, their immediate response was that there are very few conflicts and major issues are nearly non-existent. For example, Turab Khan, who is in his fifties, told me, "We have never, in fact, encountered or heard of a serious issue. It is indeed true that we have never heard or seen any instances of murder." When asked about the reason behind the rareness of conflicts, participants expressed their perspectives on the factors that ensure conflict prevention and avoidance within the community. Cultural tradition and divinity are the two main themes that emerged from the participants' perspectives regarding the factors responsible for the rareness of conflict among the Kalasha. In essence, Chapter 6 answers the research questions regarding why violent conflicts are rare within the Kalasha community. Figure 8 presents a visual snapshot of the key themes that help explain the unique social dynamics contributing to this phenomenon, which are discussed in detail throughout the chapter.

Figure 8

Factors Contributing to the Rarity of Violent Conflict and Crime



Divinity

The Kalasha religion is defined as a kind of animism due to its belief in nature, supernatural beings like fairies, and a pantheon of several deities (Sheikh et al., 2014). However, the Kalasha people maintain that they follow a monotheistic religious system. There is no specific name for the Kalasha religion; however, spirituality is an integral part of Kalasha life. From sowing seeds to harvest, from birth to death, and throughout the changing seasons, everything involves rituals and prayers. Their religion, like their ethnicity and language, is termed as "Kalasha." While connections have been made between the Kalasha religion and Buddhism and Hinduism (Cacopardo, 2016), the Kalasha believe that their religion is distinct.

They firmly believe in the existence of a single deity called *Dezau*, with the other beings acting as messengers who assist in conveying people's prayers to *Dezau* (Rehmat, 2018). Nevertheless, Crowley (2021) and Cacopardo (2011, 2016) argued that the Kalasha oral traditions have references to polytheistic ideologies, indicating the existence of numerous divine entities in the

past. They contended that the shift from polytheism to monotheism could be ascribed to the impact of neighbouring Muslim populations, who believe in a single deity like other followers of the Abrahamic religions. Yasir Kalash, however, informed me that the Kalasha people acknowledge the presence of fairies, but they do not worship them. They hold the belief that their *dihars* (shamans) possess the capability to communicate with fairies, as well as receive divine messages through fairies and direct communication with supernatural beings during a shamanic trance that informs the Kalasha code of conduct. Consequently, they are regarded as messengers as opposed to deities. The most revered shaman, who is believed to have established most of the Kalasha customs, is known as Naga Dihar.

During my research, participants consistently referred to a singular divine being, using names such as *Dezau*, *Paidagaraw* (Creator), as well as the Muslim term Allah or the Persian term *Khudai.* There was one exception, as Engineer Khan indirectly suggested that there might be more than one deity when he remarked that "at *bewat* [evening time] the *Dezau* of protection is more alert." Participants also often referred to divinity as the most important aspect of conflict and crime deterrence. Divine fear and divine justice were identified as the most significant factors in both conflict avoidance and prevention, as well as in deterring human rights violations.

Divine Fear and Divine Justice as a Binding Force

The Kalasha people firmly believe in a supreme being who holds individuals accountable for their actions. Whatever people do has consequences in this life and hereafter. The Kalasha people do believe in life after death. According to Luke Rehmat (2023b), the belief in life after death is evident from the ritual of *Madhaik* (to arrive from the graveyard), which is held annually on the night of

December 15 during the *Cawmos* festival. The *Madhaik*[54] feast is given to spirits of the ancestors. The whole community prepares food for their ancestors, particularly things that they used to like, as well as bringing fruits and store-bought cookies for the children attending the festival. The food is placed outside *jes't'ak han* (the temple), and the people gather inside. Then the ancestors are called: *"O gad'a bas'ara ew zhuy zhi pi o para* ('Oh elders, come eat and drink, then leave)" (Pir, 2019b, p. 123).

Inside the *jes't'ak han* (temple), the community observes silence in the ancestor's honour while holding lit pine wood torches. After the ancestors are thought to have left, then the food is distributed among the children and all the community members. This is a way to honour one's deceased ancestors. Further, it connects the deceased with the living and acts as a reminder of the inescapable reality of death as well as belief in life after death.

For nearly all participants, the fear of divine punishment emerges as the most significant factor, fostering a sense of accountability and ensuring respect for human rights, while also helping to avoid and prevent conflicts. Kazi Khosh Ahmed Khan explained it in the following way:

> We do not fear humans, we are afraid of Allah. We have complete faith that Allah is observing our actions and behaviours. We abstain from engaging in inappropriate behaviour or committing crimes that may go unnoticed by people out of concern for *Dezau's* approval, as such actions are inappropriate, and we ought to refrain from them. This is a *binding force* that prevents us from committing wrongdoing. It is a fear of the force of nature.

This point was further elaborated upon by Turab Khan, who explained how divine fear prevents people from committing serious crimes. This is what he had to say on the issue:

[54] *Madhaik* is similar to Anishinaabe ghost suppers. For details please see https://www.lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/local/2021/11/04/anishinaabe-honor-dead-annual-ghost-suppers/6267534001/

> We don't get into fights because we don't like it. We settle disputes amicably and are afraid of committing big crimes. We are afraid of Allah. Allah did not say, "I created you so that you could take Allah's laws into your hands." This is something we never do. Murder is prohibited under Kalasha law. We are afraid of Allah. Whatever Allah says is a command. We can't take his authority into our own hands. Allah has stated this clearly in the Qur'an too, and it is as clear and bright as the sunshine. So, if something is forbidden, it is forbidden.[55]

The act of bestowing and receiving life is an inherent attribute of a divine being and is regarded as such. Ending a life would involve encroaching into the sacred domain. Divine fear serves to avert disputes and safeguard human rights. As Kazi Mir Kay remarked, "Basically, we are afraid of infringing on someone's rights. We cannot take someone's right away. We have a tradition that if we do something bad or steal, we will be held accountable. We fret that if we do something wrong, a [supernatural] force will punish us."

The Kalasha people also fear natural calamities. They are adamant that natural calamities are the outcome of human activities and are a type of heavenly retribution for people's mistakes. Thus, divine justice not only prevents conflict but also resolves it when people are unwilling to do so. Imran Kabir shared the following compelling story of divine justice with me:

> When I became a minority counsellor, I found out that two brothers from my village were conflicting over an orchard. They were summoned to the police station, so I accompanied them. Then we walked to the orchard and asked them both what the problem was. They both shared their issues. The younger brother was enraged and said, "I will do this and that, and I will shoot." So, I asked him, "Are you taking human life for the sake of the land? Is it more

[55] Turab Khan's words made me wonder whether he was a Muslim convert, which he was not. Many other participants, however, also made references to Qur'anic principles. I came to know that, apart from learning it in schools and from Muslims living inside valleys, many Kalasha households now had convert-Muslim relatives living under one roof.

valuable than human life? And if you do this, your land is close to the river. As a result, flooding might devastate it. Because what you're doing is extremely bad. This is God's land, and there will be consequences if you try to usurp it."

But that person was egoistic, and he said things like, "If my older brother set his foot here again, I will do this and that." He refused to agree. So, we said, "We'll talk about it again later," but he refused and left. That place was completely devastated by the flood a few days later. It was a tiny orchard that was entirely finished, and the area was filled with huge stones. As a result, the conflict ended automatically. These are the mistakes that cause us to become ill or have an accident. Otherwise, nature does not disturb us; in fact, nature loves us. It is our own mistakes that get us into trouble.

Natural calamities are believed to be the consequence of human errors. This is regarded as a heavenly method of administering justice and serves as a reminder to individuals of their mistakes, while also establishing an example to deter others from engaging in similar behaviors. An instance of this was observed in Chapter 5 during the occurrence of *Shat Dek* (swearing an oath), where the land for which the oath was taken was entirely devastated by floods.

Continuous Judgement

The Kalasha belief in constant judgment is an intriguing feature of the Kalasha religion. The Kalasha do not believe in a single day of judgment, which may look like a distant or uncertain event to some people. They believe in continuous judgment that corresponds to the actions of humans. Whatever is done is visible in the here and now. Imran Kabir expressed this idea in the following words:

Peace can only be achieved when individuals place complete trust in God, surrendering control over all aspects of their lives—be it food, life, or their challenges. Even if someone quarrels with you, the best course of action is patience. That person will be held accountable

> by God, for we do not believe in just a single day of judgment. Our core belief is that as soon as a person commits a wrongdoing, they begin to face the consequences, which persist across seven generations. [56] Similarly, when a person does good, they begin to receive its benefits. As a result, no one can escape the power of God Almighty, whose grip is so strong that He remains omnipotent, and people will always remain in His dominion, both in this life and the next.

Saifullah Jan also expands on how the belief in constant judgement plays a crucial role in preventing violence, particularly murder, in the Kalasha community:

> We have compulsion as well, which is why murder does not occur here. Every religion has its own rules. In ours, if someone murders a relative, they are all wiped out. In the past, when one brother killed another, it prevented their clan from thriving as it could. This punishment is predetermined by nature—Allah becomes enraged, and their numbers do not grow. I'm not sure why Allah did this to our nation, hahaha; it should happen to majority groups and large nations so that they refrain from committing such crimes. … For us, retribution begins immediately; if someone kills today, the punishment starts the very next day.

The Kalasha belief system, as outlined by both Imran Kabir and Saifullah Jan, underscores the immediate and generational consequences of one's actions. This sense of divine judgment serves as a powerful deterrent to violent behavior and conflict within the community. Another idea that was frequently brought up and aids in the mitigation of conflicts is the temporality of human existence.

[56] Quite interestingly, this is also part of the belief system of the Indigenous peoples of Canada, as one Indigenous scholar remarked: "As Indigenous Peoples, we believe that our actions today have an impact on the next seven generations. We need to be mindful of how we walk on our Mother, the Earth and treat all living beings with respect." (For details, please visit https://www.queensu.ca/indigenous/ways-knowing/about).

The Temporality of Life

The idea that one should refrain from disrupting the course of this existence, given its transient nature and impermanence, serves as a stimulant for the prevention, avoidance, and resolution of disputes. Kazi Sher Bibi's words are noteworthy and deserve to be shared here:

> We do not perceive this world as a sweet entity. This is a transient existence, encompassing a mere handful of days. So, when we quarrel, we worry that because a person is upset with us, *Dezau* (God) will be angry as well. We can't anger *Dezau* or His creation in this short existence, meaning, this period will pass; it is a formality of a few days with a short time of youth followed by old age. Whatever it is, our days after the conflict are not spent well.
>
> We can't stand seeing each other angry for a long time. We attempt to immediately reconcile in whatever way possible so that we can accept and meet each other. This is not a permanent state of being. We will not live here forever, so what's the point of causing a squabble or grabbing someone's property? As a result, we avoid prolonging conflict and fights. This is why disputes are rare here: We strive not to enrage mankind because doing so would enrage *Dezau.*

The connection between the Creator's anger and the anger of His creation, along with the belief in life's transience and the certainty of facing one's Creator, are key to *conscious deterrence*. The Kalasha people understand that material possessions are temporary, and that engaging in wrongdoing during this brief life is unwise. This awareness serves as a powerful reminder of life's deeper reality, especially in times of conflict. Kazi Dinar Bibi shared her experience with me in these words:

> There was a land dispute. We went there and advised them, "Look, if you are fighting over land, land will not help you. You can benefit from it right now. You will not be unemployed if you both use it. But if you both argue about it and then take each other's life, this land will remain here. So, instead of benefiting from it, the land will eat you [you will be buried

beneath it]. So, you need to understand that this land will not be yours after death. It won't be useful anymore.[57] The government may then take it. You ought to think about it."

A death ceremony, which is a communal event and a vital aspect of the Kalasha *dastur* (code), serves to remind people of the temporality of life. The entire community, including people from three valleys, gathers for a funeral ceremony that includes expensive rituals, traditional dances, music, and sumptuous meals. The funeral rituals are arranged by the entire community, and especially by the clan of the deceased and the hamlet where the death occurred. The deceased body is kept for one or two days, during which songs and folklore are performed, detailing the individual's life and her or his ancestors. The act of compassion and the good deeds performed by the deceased are remembered. This is a stark reminder to the Kalasha that life is short. Our existence as humans begins with birth and ends with death; therefore, it is critical to avoid negative activities so that the community will remember us positively. These songs and stories do not end with a funeral; rather they are then repeated at festivals and funeral ceremonies and become a part of Kalasha folklore. These reminders during a conflict situation and through death ceremonies seem to work, as is evident from the story of a young Kalasha community member. He reported on this idea in the following manner:

> I owned a property. Someone else had been encroaching on it. When the elders learned of the situation, they called a meeting and arranged for both of us to sit together to make a decision. We agreed and shared the property equally between him and me. I originally owned the property, but to avoid future disagreements, they gave him half of it. I replied affirmatively, suggesting that it is fine because this property will stay here, but we will no longer be here [die]... This is how some individuals, including me, think…. the land in question was mine, but he sought to acquire it. It's okay, I said. I am willing to let him do so.

[57] Kalasha do not use the land for which people have sworn an oath (*Shat Dek*) or for which human life is taken, out of fear of *Dezau's* wrath.

Decisions of this nature serve as a commendable exemplification of the primacy of relational harmony over material entitlements, for regardless of the multitude of material possessions one amasses, they shall inevitably remain confined within the realm of this temporal existence. Death is an inescapable reality, and everyone is aware of it, yet not everyone is willing to give up their possessions for the sake of peace and prosperity. I was curious as to how divine fear is nurtured or how the feeling of rigidly considering something forbidden as forbidden is maintained. I was curious as to how these principles are instilled in the Kalasha, as I have seen that, while other religions teach similar ideas, not everyone appears to adhere to them in the same way. This was reaffirmed by Saifullah Jan in the following words:

> Crimes are infrequent in this area, particularly among the Kalasha, because they are very simple people. There is no fraud, deception, or lying; hence conflict is minimal. In reality, all other religions state that people should not tell lies or steal, but people do. What we do not do, we do not do [No means no]. I mean, Muslim people have a pretty authentic book, yet people make mistakes. We don't have anything like that, but we're concerned that because Allah says don't do that, we shouldn't. He sent a very big Holy Qur'an to Muslims. Everything is written in it. Even then, they do not comply, so what can we do?

I inquired about the socialization method the Kalasha use to cultivate these values that set them apart from other communities, given the high level of importance placed on them by the Kalasha. Most of the participants pointed out that the principal practice of socialization into the culture is peace education.

Peace Education

It is fascinating that for Kalasha the process of peace education commences before the birth of a child. It begins as soon as the child is conceived. According to the Kalasha tradition, women are regarded as *onjas't'a* (sacred/pure) during pregnancy and during the first few months of

breastfeeding. The husbands of expecting women are forbidden from picking up and using weapons, including knives, even for animal slaughter or hunting. According to Imran Kabir, the core principle of this belief is that "when anticipating the arrival of new life, it is impermissible to terminate life." Yasir Kalash provided a detailed explanation of the reasoning for this tradition, noting that, "It is not only prohibition of picking up arms, but a pregnant woman must not swear and must avoid engaging in physical and verbal fights. Likewise, other people are prohibited from engaging in fights or mistreating a pregnant woman. It is believed that such behaviour may have a detrimental impact on the child and make them more prone to aggressiveness. As a result, the child may be inherently pugnacious." So, to promote the development of a child with a solid basis of peaceful values, these values must be expressed to and embodied by the mother throughout her pregnancy.

Teaching children from the very beginning regarding these foundational principles, embedding them in the community through personal behaviour, and explaining the consequences that ensue from violating these values all serve to instill the belief in divine justice. Turab Khan remarked on this point in the following way:

> It is Allah's special kindness on us that with His grace we teach our children to avoid doing wrong things since it enrages Allah. We tell children that these behaviours are detrimental to human ethics. We advise children to do activities that will not cause harm to others. We tell them that, whatever you do, be sure it is not painful, disturbing, or offensive to anyone. Because that is the biggest sin. It is wrong and should never occur.
>
> These teachings are from our ancestors. It is not a novel concept. It has been practiced since prehistoric times. We are, indeed, [considered] backward and illiterate, but this conversation continues in our households. We admonish our children that you did this wrong. Allah will not be pleased with you. We tell them, you can do as many good things as you want

but don't do anything wrong. In other words, our elders continuously taught us that living a peaceful life is a good thing.

These teachings have been transferred from generation to generation orally. As Kazi Sichen Gul noted, "The act of spreading and exchanging love was instilled in us by our ancestors. All subsequent generations learned from them. The positive aspects were valued, and the negative aspects were discouraged. The positive features refer to peace, exemplified by leading a virtuous life and fostering harmonious relationships."

After I inquired regarding the methods and customs through which these peace values are imparted to children, I was informed that parenting serves as the foremost institution for peace education. These peace values are transferred from parents to their children. As Kazi Mariam indicated in her story, "We advise our children that they should not fight because it is a bad thing. This is frequently done by parents. So, by the time the child reaches adulthood this thing [that conflict is bad and detrimental] is deeply ingrained in their minds." The parents often reiterate these teachings to their children, who are warned against committing crimes such as theft. They are also frequently reminded that engaging in a conflict is undesirable. This is taught to them from the very beginning of their lives. As a result, they often stay away from negative activities and behaviour. Divinity serves as the point of reference in these teachings, as Syed Gul expressed in her thoughts in the following way:

> The child's upbringing includes a mother explicitly conveying to her child that committing murder is a transgression that will incur retribution from Allah, resulting in damnation to hell. The child becomes terrified and follows this. Likewise, she cautions the child from engaging in physical violence, as it may result in rivalry. The child then follows this. She then informs the child that stealing is a sin. If you bring harm to others, Allah will harm you.
>
> In other words, everything relies on the mother. If she strictly prohibits her child from engaging in theft, adultery, robbery, or murder, to the extent that she explicitly advises the

child against even harming a bird, let alone taking a human life, so, how will terrorism occur? There have only been two incidences of terrorism in Kalash valleys, both of which were carried out by Nuristani [Afghan] people. Near the border, two Kalash brothers were murdered, and their livestock was seized.

Besides, there have been no recorded instances of anyone shooting or inflicting injury upon others, even with a knife. No girl has ever experienced any form of harm. Only a small proportion of conflict arises from property distribution. They [some people from other religions] do it for money or because they believe it will make them martyrs if they kill their enemies. However, Kalasha people believe that no one should ever be killed. Even if someone has wronged you, Allah will hold them accountable. This is what our culture has taught us.

Embodying these values is thought to be the most effective way to teach children. For example, Saifullah Jan articulated that "you know very well that whatever is a norm in society gets followed. I have seven children. Whatever I do in life, how I conduct myself affects them. I don't tell lies, I don't steal, I don't rob; why would my son? Kids see their parents and they learn from them." The pedagogical endeavour of instilling these principles in the minds of children through repetition, admonishment, clarification of the consequences of transgressions, and, most importantly, embodying the said principles was regarded as an indispensable element in the cultivation of children's divine fear, fostering a sense of responsibility, promoting pacifism, and nurturing a profound regard for the rights and dignity of other living beings.

However, the participants' responses still left me with the lingering question of "How?" Similar ideas were taught to us by our parents when were growing up, and while parents normally teach and often embody great values, children do not always hold onto them as much. Upon reflecting on and evaluating the participants' responses and stories, I determined that there is another element of

peace education that appears to be responsible for maintaining compliance: strong belief in divine accountability. The portrayal of God as merciful and forgiving is almost absent among Kalasha.

There is a clear distinction in Islam between *haqooq-ul-Ibaad* (human rights) and *Huquq-ul-Allah* (the rights of Allah). It is often stated that violations of human rights require forgiveness from the individuals whose rights have been infringed upon, along with compensation. Allah may forgive infringements of His rights, such as neglecting prayer or fasting, but violations of human rights demand that the wrongdoer seeks forgiveness from the affected individuals. However, at the same time, there is this image of God being most benign, merciful, and forgiving, which is nearly non-existent among the Kalasha. The most prevalent idea among Kalasha is "*Dezau* will hold you accountable; He will punish you." This difference becomes evident in the following story that Hazrat Gul shared with me:

> We firmly believe in and uphold this principle [divine accountability]. Once, my Muslim colleague engaged in an activity that I found objectionable. I told him that it was a sin. Allah, he replied, is exceedingly forgiving. I responded, "Okay, he will pardon you once; what about a second time?" In response, he stated, "He is extremely beneficent." I replied, "Okay, he will forgive you a third time; what about a fourth?" He replied, "No, Allah is the greatest." I replied, "Okay, then continue." I mean, I am not saying I am a hundred percent right. Everyone is capable of making mistakes; both I and you can make mistakes, and Allah knows who the better person is, but mistakes are only ever made once.

Gul's story illustrates that the Kalasha do not believe that God is benevolent, beneficent, or forgiving if someone continues to do bad. They are certain that He will hold people accountable. Gul went on to say that "contrary to some fundamental Muslim interpretations, that killing an enemy will take them to paradise, and martyrs will be rewarded, we don't believe that murdering or hurting others will

bring us any rewards." Rather, it is a widely held view that human rights violations are unforgivable. Imran Kabir went on to clarify this point in the following story:

> Our law is very rigid. The problem is that not everything can be forgiven. It is a bit strict. Because this religion is quite old, it expels people. According to the law, certain people cannot be forgiven because their eligibility is finished.... Some transgressions and crimes are unforgivable. These violations necessitate long and difficult processes in which you must gather people and simultaneously seek forgiveness from *Dezau* and people, which seems quite difficult.

One such instance is *Shat Dek* (swearing an oath, discussed in Chapter 5), which calls on *Dezau'*s wrath in the form of natural disasters and necessitates a very intricate releasing ritual. Engineer Khan emphasized this notion, saying, "Peace has been an integral aspect of the Kalasha faith since its inception. You will not be forgiven if you violate someone's rights; if you anger someone, you will be held accountable. Killing someone will result in eternal unforgiveness. We believe that being a human one should never offend anyone. This is our religious motto."

Saifullah Jan concurred with this perspective, as he proceeded to explain the matter of homicide, asserting that, "when someone gets murdered, we don't accept blood money or seek revenge, even though it hasn't happened yet [in my lifetime]. If it does, our religion says, that that individual cannot remain a Kalasha. He should be outcast. He won't be Kalash anymore. The society will not accept him. He will have to leave our community." Kazi Noor Baig also underlined that engaging in wrongful actions not only prevents a person from being pardoned but also hinders their ability to worship God and visit temples. He noted that "we dislike these negative behaviours because anyone who commits them, such as stealing or murdering, is barred from entering *Jes't'ak Han* (temple). He cannot sit or stand for worship. He cannot attend a place of worship since he has done something sinful. It is viewed negatively."

Thus, the belief that God will not forgive individuals for transgressions and violations of human rights serves as a useful tool for preventing people from committing serious crimes or violating human rights. Further, in this manner, divinity functions as the most important component, a binding force, to prevent, avoid, and resolve conflicts.

Cultural Tradition

The entire Kalasha *dastur* (code) is centred around the concept of the divine. Defining the boundaries between religion and cultures can be quite challenging, given their interconnected nature. For the Kalasha people, the Kalasha *dastur* encompasses both cultural and religious teachings, which are inseparable from one another because there are no distinct scriptures to observe the variations. The following sections explore Kalasha cultural norms that contribute to the prevention, avoidance, and rareness of conflicts within the community.

The Cultural Norm of Forgiveness

The Kalasha law is rigid when seen from a religious standpoint. It explicitly indicates that God considers crimes and human rights violations to be unforgivable and that such activities draw the anger of *Dezau,* which manifests as perpetual judgment. Asking for forgiveness of God is quite hard if not impossible in such instances. However, on a people-to-people level, forgiveness is highly encouraged and actively practiced. Kazi Sher Bibi told me that the "Kalasha dastur (code) acknowledges that humans are prone to making mistakes. If someone acknowledges their mistake and seeks forgiveness, we forgive them. We do not aggressively focus or make a big deal about the mistake." The cultural practice of *Nanawati* (discussed in detail in Chapter 5) exemplifies the tradition of forgiving and seeking forgiveness. It is a practice for reclaiming and restoring harmony to relationships in several situations, including guilt, humiliation, remorse, shame, hurt, and the pursuit of forgiveness. Regarding the Kalash people's propensity for forgiveness, Engineer Khan offered the following insight in his story:

> One noteworthy characteristic of our people is our ability to quickly recover from offence and avoid perpetuating conflicts or erecting barriers because we feel that the instant you become obstinate, your life becomes terrible. Humans make mistakes, and if someone makes a mistake and another responds with stubbornness, then we are a small group of people living together in this area. We have to visit each other all the time, so how will we do it if the disagreement persists? So, when someone apologizes or sends *Nanawati*, we accept it.

Even in the face of a serious issue, people frequently opt to forgive, possibly because they believe in natural or divine justice. Akbar Bhutto highlighted the Kalasha community's rich tradition of forgiveness and tolerance in the following statement, "When a sad tragedy occurs in the Kalasha community, people usually accept it as written by Allah ... They usually avoid turning it into animosity. Because *kahar giraik* [tolerance] is considered very important among the Kalasha, they usually forgive and avoid animosity."

The significance of forgiveness and reconciliation is demonstrated by the fact that angry people cannot worship together. Visiting temples and participating in religious ceremonies is prohibited until and unless disputants have settled their dispute and reconciled their relationships. The Kalasha people do not undertake daily prayers or other regular religious activities. Their primary worship takes place during festivals, particularly in the *Cawmos* festival in December of each year. The Kalasha regard those religious rituals as extremely sacred. Hence, persons who have been involved in *Shat Dek* (swearing an oath) or have been embroiled in other disputes and have not reconciled their relationships are not permitted by the Kalasha law to attend the festival together. This is because discord in interpersonal relationships is believed to mirror and disrupt one's relationship with the Creator. Imran Kabir explained this law in these words: "We have several festivals that involve our major worship, so if two people have quarrelled, they cannot participate in these because reconciliation is mandatory. The reason for this is that according to Kalasha law, people who have

quarrelled and have not mended their relationships cannot stand together in a place of worship." Yasir Kalash further elaborated on this position, observing that, "The reason behind this law is that when someone is in conflict and sees the other party, their mind will be preoccupied with different thoughts. They will be distracted from their prayers. Second, *Dezau* will be unhappy if they are not in harmonious relationships."

Participants shared that provoking another person is believed to anger *Dezau* as well. Therefore, forgiveness and the cultivation of harmonious relationships are considered essential for establishing a sincere connection with *Dezau* through worship and prayer. Like Muslims, the Kalasha people also believe that if one harbours anger for more than three days, it will displease Allah. So, efforts are made to let go of hard feelings and forgive others as soon as possible.

The Zen Mindset

While sharing some of the factors responsible for the low incidence of conflict and crime within the Kalasha community Imran Kabir commented that "the attitude and mindset of the people in this area are different from those in other regions. The environment of a specific location undoubtedly influences people's lives and shapes their perspectives." Akbar Bhutto, a Kalasha teacher hailing from the Rukmu Valley, elaborated upon this point, noting that the "absence of conflicts can be due to the distinct mindset of the Kalasha people. We have an aversion to competition and do not believe in surpassing others. Each one of us is fully engrossed in our own tasks. Irrespective of the circumstances, we express gratitude to Allah for our financial independence and self-sufficiency. Besides that, if others own less or more, people do not try to outdo them. Therefore, serious disputes are infrequent among Kalasha."

The Kalasha appears to be on "a zen road to affluence," a term used by Sahlins (1972) in his influential essay *The Original Affluent Society*. Sahlins' main argument was that hunter-gatherers' societies are the original affluent societies, a phrase he borrowed from John Kenneth Galbraith's

(1958) *The Affluent Society*, in which Galbraith referred to the United States as an affluent society. In contrast to the "Galbraithean way," which assumes that people's wants are unlimited and resources are insufficient, Sahlins contended that hunters-gatherers follow a "zen road to affluence," which assumes that "human material wants are few and finite, and technical means unchanging, but on the whole adequate" (Sahlins, 1972, p. 2). In other words, Sahlins believed that hunter-gatherers have limited wants that can be readily satisfied due to their trust in the environment. Affluence could be achieved either through producing too much or desiring little. While the essay was originally on hunter-gatherer societies, it appears to be equally applicable to the Kalasha. The Kalasha appear to be on a Zen path, with a minimal need structure that can easily be met using locally available resources for both building homes and obtaining food. As Imran Kabir said, "This is an extremely resource-rich location; therefore, no one needs to seize or fight over resources." Rehmat Wali, a differently abled man, also believed that the true source of conflict is endless desires. He shared his thoughts with me in the following story:

> Conflict often arises from an insatiable desire to provide for oneself—when someone insists, *"I should earn this and that,"* or *"this is mine, that is mine."* Consider my own example: I am disabled, yet I do not lay claim to things by saying, *"this is mine"* or *"that is mine."* What I claim as mine is only this hand, and my brain. If I had both hands and brain, then the task would be mine to accomplish. Conflicts tend to emerge when people fail to understand this distinction and do not use their intellect wisely, ultimately leading themselves into conflict.

Mr. Wali maintained that if individuals utilize their own capabilities and fulfill their modest needs, there will be no grounds for conflict. He exemplified this by personally employing his skills to earn a livelihood, despite physical limitations. Polio ended up leaving Mr. Wali unable to stand or walk. To meet Mr. Wali in his little studio where he carves wooden effigies (Figure 9), one must climb more than 400 stairs to the village of Kalashagrom in the Rukmu Valley. The wooden effigies known as

ghand'aw are part of the Kalasha custom of remembering ancestors and are placed on the outskirts of villages in commemoration of individuals who have done outstanding community service. [58]

Figure 9

Ghand'awa Artist, Rehmat Wali Working in his Studio



The Kalasha Tradition of Cooperation and Sharing

The Kalasha choose the "Zen Road to affluence" by desiring little and expressing gratitude for what they already possess. Yasir Kalash stated that "we do not value big cars or a big house, we value people." Therefore, the act of sharing is deeply ingrained in their mindset. The importance of relationships surpasses material acquisition, as the accumulation of wealth does not confer social status upon a Kalasha person.

Kazi Sher Ahmad explicitly stated that the Kalasha people lack any idea of what poverty is or social hierarchy based on caste. Every individual belonging to the Kalasha community is regarded as equal. Individuals who gain recognition and admiration are those who demonstrate sincere generosity

[58] For more information, please visit http://www.walikalash.com.pk

and actively contribute to the improvement of society. An illustration of such magnanimity and customary practice of communal sharing is apparent in the tradition of a great merit feast called *biramor*.[59] *Bira* is a term that refers to a goat, whereas *mor* means "feast." The host of the *biramor* is typically the individual with greater resources, such as livestock, who volunteers to organize a feast that includes the sacrifice of one goat for every household in the village. This normally results in the sacrifice of approximately 50 to 60 goats for the feast. Apart from the merit feast, Kalasha festivals are also platforms for the circular flow of wealth (discussed in Chapter 7). For example, Kazi Mir Bacha noted that "I have goats, cows, corn, and wheat. I have everything, but one brother doesn't, so if he needs something, whether for his children or at the *Cawmos* festival or the *Zoshi* festival, we share whatever we have, whether it's a goat, cheese, or whatever. We share our resources with him. That way, we take care of each other."

Reciprocity helps in ensuring people's survival as well as nurturing and strengthening communal bonds and cooperation among people, which in turns prevent conflicts. The Kalasha people emphasize collective welfare over individual aspirations, as Kazi Sichen Gul pointed out in her narrative: "We have an ample space within our hearts for our children, relatives, and fellow villagers. We think a lot about them." Kazi Shahi Gul further explicated the role of reciprocity in nurturing compassion and communal bonds. She reported on this stance in the following way:

> We engage in reciprocal visits during times of both celebration and grief. This facilitates the cultivation of understanding, often referred to as *sila rahmi* (kindess and compassion towards one's relatives) .... So, when people visit our house, we make every effort to treat them well. Even if an animal appears, we regard it with dignity and strive to help it, such as feeding it or giving it something.

[59] Please see Elizabeth Darling (1979) for details on Kalasha merit feasting.

The Kalasha tradition of *tiphak*, which refers to relational harmony, and *itiphak*, which denotes cooperation, were also identified as important factors in conflict prevention. For example, Zar Philim observed that "whereas individuals in other places tend to keep their distance from each other, the Kalasha community is characterized by their compassion and willingness to collaborate for communal activities." Moreover, Kazi Mashor Gul offered death ceremonies as an example of communal collaboration:

> The Kalasha people exhibit a high degree of collaboration, engaging in collective activities and working together in many endeavours. For instance, in the event of a person's death, the entire village unites and collaborates. Each individual contributes flour, a cow, a goat, clarified butter, and milk, to the best of their ability. Therefore, they contribute to the expenditure.

An interdependent way of life necessitates cooperation and sharing; in turn, these practices reinforce that very interdependence, helping to preserve social ties and discourage conflict-prone behavior.

The Kalasha Tradition of Mutual Trust

The Kalasha tradition is characterized by a deep sense of mutual trust. Individuals who work for the well-being of the community are held in high esteem, and trust is actively upheld within the group. They maintain the conviction that the principles of peace within the Kalasha culture have broad applicability within the group. For example, Kazi Mir Bacha described this principle in the following manner:

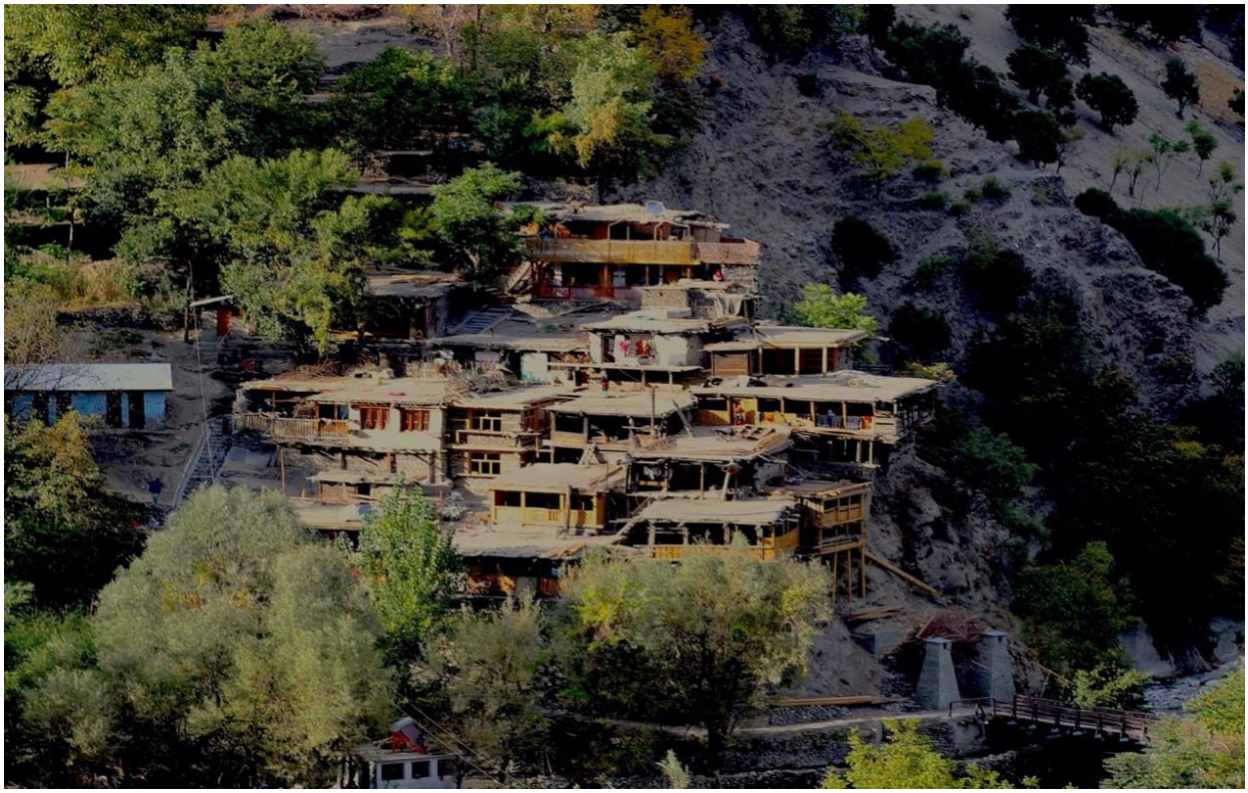
> We Kalasha don't lie. We don't make false claims to others' property. We don't steal others' riches or money. This is motivated by our fear of being held accountable by Allah. He created human beings and bestowed them with riches. Everything is under the control of Allah. For instance, Allah has given us animals, whereas others have been granted somewhat fewer

animals. If one of them were to steal our animal, would that be pleasant? Therefore, we don't like it.

Consequently, the Kalasha consciously avoid actions that might undermine trust within the community. This deep-rooted value is even reflected in their architecture: Kalasha houses are intentionally designed so that the roof of one home often serves as the veranda for another. There are no main entrances or physical barriers, symbolizing the openness and interconnectedness that mutual trust sustains. (Figure 10).

Figure 10

A Typical Kalasha Dwelling Settlement



Note. Guru village in Biriu Valley

Hazarat Gul recounted that "nobody can steal here. Our houses don't have boundary walls. Our belongings are outside in the veranda, but no one takes them because we teach children that

stealing is a sin...” During my fieldwork, I observed that walnuts and other crops are typically left to dehydrate in open areas—such as verandas or exposed sections of rooftops—without any apparent concern for theft. This everyday practice reflects a deep reliance on communal trust and a shared commitment to upholding it, both of which are fundamental values within the Kalasha community.

Peace is a Core Value in the Kalasha Dastur

Finally, it is evident from the discussion above that peace is seen as a core value, as a part of the Kalasha identity. Participants often mentioned that it is not new because it is who they are, and it is integral to Kalashaness. Kazi Khosh Ahmed Khan explained this value in this manner:

> Since the Kalash people came to this planet and their religion began, they have not had a tendency to fight or quarrel; they prefer to live together in peace and love; this is their religious value that they don’t like to fight or quarrel. Because these are bad things, they are not given preference and are seen as such. That is why we are peaceful. And this is not a new concept; it has been practiced since ancient times. It is ingrained in Kalasha values and blood. As a result, we shun these things to keep the peace so that people’s ability to conduct themselves and interact with one another is not jeopardized. Peace is an important aspect of our religious values, which is why we emphasize it.

The significance lies in the prioritization of human relationships and life over material possessions, as well as the perpetual pursuit of peace as the ultimate goal. Along these lines, Daud Shah further elaborated on this point:

> Peace is very important to the Kalasha tribe, which means we cannot touch anything without permission, we cannot murder or rape, and all of these things are included in peace. We never murder. We can die ourselves, but we cannot murder others. This is proof of peace. Our land and trees have been seized from us, yet we cannot take them back. People are encroaching on our lands and plucking walnuts off the trees. Do you believe they would have allowed it if it

had been a different community from Chitral or Ayun? Do you have any such evidence? Isn't there going to be a conflict? We consider them brothers; therefore, when they visit, we let them come in. This is proof that we only want peace.

Thus, the focus on upholding human rights and prioritizing peace over material possessions contributes to the prevention of interpersonal and intercommunal conflicts. Whenever there is a relational disruption, a group of dedicated elders and *Kazis* promptly addresses the issue and strives to resolve it expeditiously using culturally appropriate methods of conflict resolution (discussed in detail in Chapter 5). Resolving conflicts quickly holds significant cultural value. As Kazi Mariam noted, "Conflicts within the Kalasha community are indeed rare. When they do occur, they are mostly related to property distribution. Swift resolution is prioritized, as differing viewpoints can quickly escalate into confrontations or even physical harm. Therefore, we work diligently to address disputes before they intensify." As a result, maintaining peace in the community depends not only on swift conflict resolution but also on a broader range of influences—from spiritual beliefs to a collective commitment to harmony.

Key Findings

This chapter explored two prominent themes, that is, divinity and cultural norms, in relation to the rareness of crime and conflict within the Kalasha community. The key findings are summarised below.

First, the Kalasha hold the belief that divinity is the paramount factor in deterring, preventing, and avoiding crimes and conflicts. The Kalasha people hold a belief in a divine entity referred to as *Dezau* or by the Muslim name Allah. They hold the belief that God is observing all human behaviours, even in instances where people are unable to do so. Therefore, the presence of the divine prevents individuals from engaging in criminal activities or behaviours that could disrupt peace and

harmony in society. The concept of divinity encompasses profound aspects of divine fear, divine justice, and the temporality of life.

Second, natural punishment serves as a powerful form of "conscientious deterrence" against the abuse of power, particularly towards marginalized individuals in many Indigenous cultures. The Tiv, Inuit, and Igbo hold a deep-seated belief that those who inflict harm will ultimately confront repercussions from nature (Briggs, 2000; Kyoon-Achan, 2014; Uwazie, 2000), often manifesting as natural disasters (Faure, 2000). This notion also resonates strongly among the Kalasha community. The concept of divine fear and divine justice is perceived as a binding force that inhibits the occurrence of serious crimes. The Kalasha people retain a deep reverence for the Divine due to their belief in its supreme power and His capacity to hold people accountable. They believe that divine fear is a potent force, as it surpasses the fear of mere mortals. They hold the belief that no one may ever elude divine wrath. This, in turn, acts as a deterrent for crime and violent conflicts, as evident in the examples in this chapter regarding murder and theft.

Third, the Kalasha people do not believe in the concept of a single day of judgment, which may seem distant and uncertain to some individuals. They maintain a belief in a continuous divine judgment that aligns with human actions. The Kalasha people interpret natural calamities and the occurrence of sudden and multiple fatalities within a specific family or clan as a manifestation of divine retribution. They firmly believe that everything in this world is the rightful property of God, and anyone who tries to unlawfully usurp it for themselves will face consequences. The participants recounted stories of divine justice, specifically in the form of floods, that occurred because of taking an oath for land or harbouring malevolent intentions towards others. According to Kalasha law, when an individual partakes in bad actions, they subsequently encounter the ensuing repercussions from the divine. This cycle continues for seven generations. Likewise, when an individual partakes in

constructive behaviours, the same principle applies. Hence, despite the temporary evasion of repercussions, people remain certain that a person will ultimately be held responsible.

Fourth, the temporality of life plays a crucial role in preventing crime and violence within the Kalasha community. The Kalasha hold the belief that life is fleeting and should be lived with purpose and integrity. They view life as a transient experience, where accumulating wealth and engaging in conflict over material possessions is ultimately futile, as all will be left behind in this world. This perspective fosters a mindset that prioritizes human relationships and communal well-being over material gain. For instance, it is not uncommon for individuals to share their property, rather than hoarding it. This belief, rooted in the understanding that life is not permanent, encourages a focus on good conduct and mutual respect, making wealth accumulation and conflict seem inconsequential in comparison.

Fifth, Kyoon-Achan's 2013 comparative study of the Tiv of Nigeria and the Inuit of Canada reveals a shared cultural belief that "parenting is peacemaking" (p. 168). This finding also emerged in this study. For the Kalasha, parenting is the most effective socialization institution for teaching peace values and nurturing reverence for the Almighty God. Further, it contributes to fostering people's faith in divine justice and divine fear to ensure their compliance and to maintaining peace and harmony in the community. The Kalasha proverb *aya a khu'yakani pi, Dada a khu'yakani pi* (Drink from your mother's cup, drink from your father's cup) implies that parents are the best teachers. The process of peace education commences before the birth of a child, as the Kalasha community holds the belief that when a pregnant woman engages in conflict, it affects the child, perhaps leading to their inherent future pugnacity. To provide a solid foundation for embedding peace values in a child, these values are expressed to the mother and embodied by the mother in her everyday actions during her pregnancy.

The process continues from birth until the child reaches maturity, at which point it becomes deeply ingrained in the child's psyche. Parenting practices play a critical role in promoting peace within the community by instilling peace-oriented principles in children. Embodiment is considered the most effective way for parents to teach these values. Parents, in this sense, become living symbols and expressions of these principles, modeling peace and harmony through their actions and behaviors. In his book about Canadian Indigenous people's epistemologies and practices titled *Indigenous Healing: Exploring Traditional Paths*, Ross (2014) astutely observed that individuals inflict the same sufferings upon others that they have endured due to their exposure to relationships founded on manipulation, fear, and anger, rather than care, respect, love, and humility. Due to the nurturing environment provided by the Kalasha community, children internalize and perpetuate principles of love, respect, care, and affection throughout their lives. The participants frequently emphasized that these are not novel ideas; rather, they are enduring intergenerational values and teachings that are passed down from one generation to another. In addition, the practice of reiteration through frequent communication about the consequences of violations is an additional peace education technique.

Sixth, Kalasha teachings use divinity as a point of reference and regard it as the most important factor in fostering compliance. Parents teach their children about the ramifications of breaching human rights or committing crimes, such as divine justice and retribution. What sets the teachings of the Kalasha community apart from others is their steadfast commitment to upholding the image of God as a symbol of justice. They portray God as a supernatural judge who administers justice and holds individuals accountable for human rights violations. Children are taught that human rights breaches, particularly murder, are unacceptable and result in eternal punishment and banishment from communal activities. Nonetheless, people are urged to place their trust in God for all things, including punishment, because He will ensure that individuals are held accountable. There is no need to seek vengeance or prolong conflicts unnecessarily. The Kalasha law is quite rigid and does

not tolerate everything. Certain acts, such as murder, are unforgivable. As a result, the Kalasha refrain from engaging in criminal activity and avoid becoming embroiled in conflicts, particularly violent ones.

Seventh, a cultural tradition of the Kalasha people is based on profound oral codes embedded in stories and local folklore that intricately guide and shape their way of life. This is referred to as *Kalasha dastur* or *homa dastur* (our code). Typically, it is challenging to define clear boundaries between culture and religion. Understanding the differentiation between the Kalasha religion and culture poses a significant challenge, as they are intricately intertwined and lack any written scripture to delineate their differences. Kalasha *dastur* regards peace as a vital aspect, highlighting its significance at every step of the way. The Kalasha tradition places great emphasis on the values of forgiveness, mutual trust, reciprocity, harmony, cooperation, reconciliation, and the pursuit of peace as its ultimate objective.

Eight, the Kalasha tradition of forgiveness facilitates the swift resolution of conflicts. The Kalasha law appears rigid when seen from a religious perspective because seeking forgiveness from *Dezau* is quite hard if not impossible. However, forgiveness is highly encouraged and actively practiced among individuals. Kalasha individuals abstain from assuming the role of enacting retribution or perpetuating hostility since they believe it is the prerogative of the divine to hold individuals responsible for their actions. In their study involving five different groups, Lauren et al. (2012) discovered that a belief in divine punishment tends to discourage interpersonal punishment. They argue that "the more people believe in divine punishment, the less they will feel altruistic punishment and state-sponsored punishment are worth investing in" (p. 3,273). Further, they note that this is because "the threat of punishment from powerful, omniscient and intervening Gods can be even more effective at deterring counter-normative behaviour than the threat of punishment from one's peers" (p. 3,278). This idea also applies in the case of the Kalasha.

Therefore, the Kalasha seek to promptly normalize and restore their relationships, as this is also desired by the divine will. The tradition of forgiveness is evident from the customary practice of *nanwati*, which exclusively deals with hurt, shame, accepting one's mistakes, and the pursuit of forgiveness. In addition, the significance of forgiveness and harmonious relationships is apparent in the fact that individuals who harbour anger towards one another cannot worship together in temples. It is essential to reconcile their relationships to establish a connection with *Dezau*. Like their Muslim neighbours, they also hold the belief that prolonged anger, beyond three days, also incites the wrath of *Dezau*. Hence, to guarantee *Dezau*'s happiness and facilitate the collective engagement of individuals in communal prayer and celebrations, the promotion of forgiveness and reconciliation is highly advocated.

Ninth, the Kalasha reject the notions of poverty and social hierarchy based on caste, clan, or wealth. It is accurate to describe their preference for a Zen mentality and belief in an alternative form of well-being, one that is rooted in social and cultural wealth and relationships. They eschew competition and the act of surpassing others. They possess a minimalistic lifestyle and have mostly a straightforward need structure that can be easily fulfilled with the resources at hand. When others possess either more or fewer financial resources, there is typically no inclination to outdo them. In Kalasha society, the acquisition of material possessions such as having a bigger car or house does not contribute to an individual's prestige. Those who are honoured are those who have made notable contributions to their community by acts of generosity, such as throwing grand merit feasts like *biramor*. However, they do not acquire political authority based on communal service. Direct democracy is used to make all decisions at informal gatherings open to everyone (Cacopardo, 2016). Nevertheless, *biramor* promotes egalitarianism and mutual reciprocity through the deliberate sharing of surplus resources, thereby sustaining social harmony.

The Kalasha is a collective society where the act of sharing is deeply ingrained in their thinking due to their belief in the philosophy of achieving affluence through a state of Zen (limited wants). The individualistic economic model undermines the sense of communal obligation, as individuals prioritize wealth accumulation over mutual care. Sharing or reciprocity is a crucial element of collective life. The notion that "all Kalasha are poor, all are equal" is widely held among the Kalasha community, as observed by Parkes (1994, p.160). Additionally, I was informed that despite their poverty, the Kalasha people have a kind spirit, as expressed by the saying, "We may be poor, but our hearts are rich." This signifies their willingness to assist and share their resources and wealth with others. Particularly, festivals, weddings, death ceremonies, and great merit feasts are the main occasions to observe this tradition of sharing. Sahlins (1972) accurately observed, "The world's most primitive people have few possessions, *but they are not poor*. Poverty is not a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all it is a *relation between people* [emphasis added]. It is a social status. As such it is the invention of civilization" (p. 37). Hence, for the Kalasha, the amount of material possessions does not determine the poverty of people, nor does a bigger number of financial resources provide them with social prestige.

Tenth, individuals participate in communal activities by offering reciprocal support to each other. They preserve social ties by periodically visiting one another throughout times of joy and grief. This behaviour establishes interdependent relationships through social interactions. Interdependence ensures mutual understanding and compassion, which in turn prevents disputes. Interdependent relationships and economic cooperation, such as sharing forests and grazing pastures, encourage people to work together rather than against each other. Moreover, the Kalasha people strongly support a sense of mutual trust, which is evident in their conviction in the universality of peace values among the Kalasha community, as well as in their dwelling structures. The absence of the main gate and

boundary walls as well as the placement of valuable items on the exposed area of the verandas and rooftops, without any concern of theft, serves as evidence of their mutual trust.

Finally, the Kalasha *dastur* demonstrates that peace is the fundamental principle. According to the Kalasha, peace is not merely the outcome of conflict resolution. Instead, they perceive peace as an ongoing endeavour to lead a virtuous and fulfilling life. It encompasses various integral components, like displaying affection for others, demonstrating compassion, fostering cooperation, exhibiting trustworthiness, practicing tolerance, and showing generosity to others. Avoiding criminal activities such as lies, theft, homicide, sexual assault, or infringing upon the rights and boundaries of others are all included in the Kalasha conception of peace. Hence, they consistently strive for the most vital component of Kalashaness, which is peace. Therefore, in cases of conflict, Kazis and elders address the issue with great dedication, bringing in the creator, emphasizing the transient nature of life, and promoting forgiveness, as well as prioritizing positive human relationships over materialistic pursuits.

Conclusion

Chapter 6 examined the key factors that contribute to the rareness of crime and violence among the Kalasha. The rarity of violence and crime can be attributed to two primary elements: divinity and the norms embedded in Kalasha cultural tradition. These ideas and practices encompass concepts such as divine fear, divine/natural justice, the temporality of life, and the traditions of forgiveness, mutual trust, a Zen mindset, reciprocity, and cooperation, among others. Nevertheless, the Kalasha hold the belief that peace is a continuous endeavour that requires daily commitment and encompasses various aspects. Chapter 7 explores the significance of Kalasha festivals as unique artistic platforms for conflict expression and resolution. These festivals also serve as important venues for cultivating and preserving peace values, alongside the safeguarding of Kalasha culture.

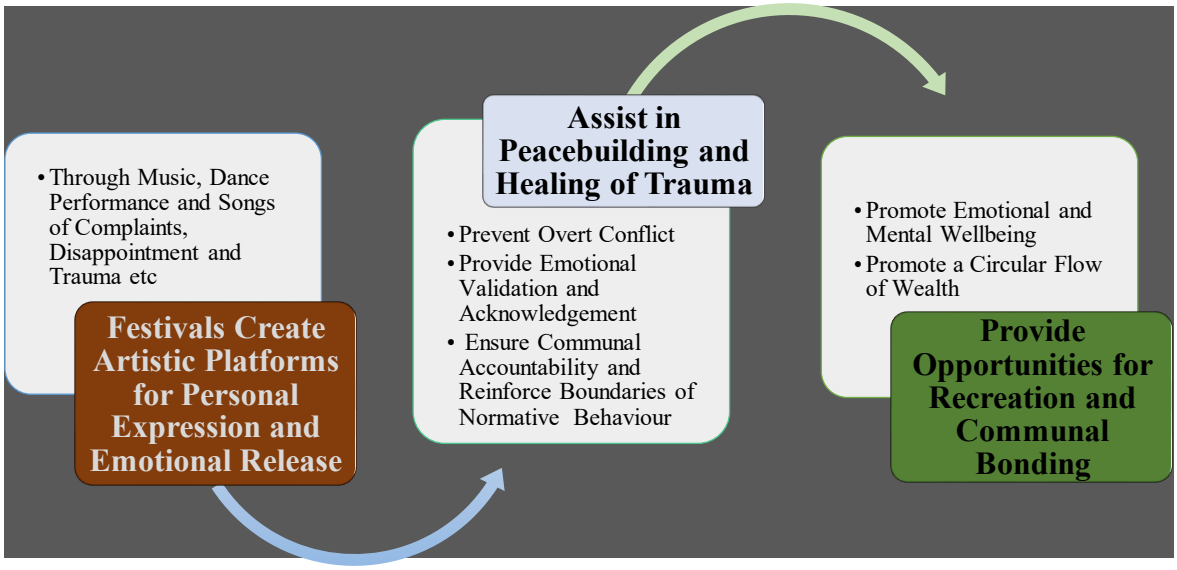
Chapter 7

Artistic Platforms for Airing Grievances: Kalasha Festivals as Grand *Marakha*

The literature review chapter included a section that illuminates the transformative power of the arts, showcasing their remarkable ability to heal relationships and trauma. Artistic expression transcends emotional and cognitive pathways, paving the way for profound healing. In this chapter, I delve into how the Kalasha harness the power of the arts for peacebuilding, focusing particularly on their vibrant festivals. These celebrations are not just events on the calendar; they serve as vital catalysts for conflict resolution and the promotion of peace within the Kalash Valley (Figure 11). These festivals hold great importance in the Kalasha calendar, preserving cultural traditions by passing down knowledge of the past through songs and stories, ensuring its continuity for future generations.

Figure 11

Festivals as Collective Spaces for Healing and Peacebuilding



Culture of Festivities

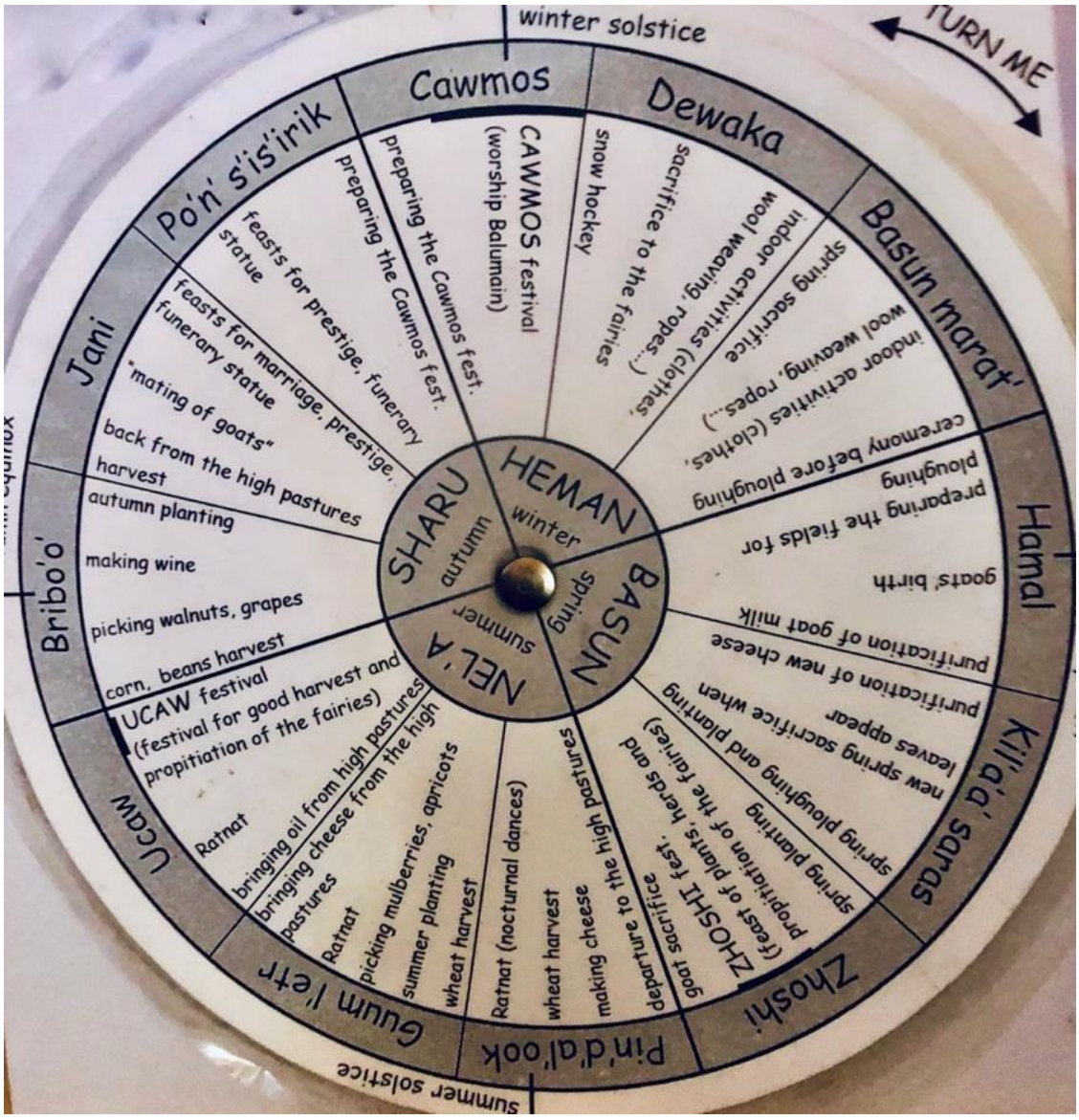
The Kalasha culture is rich in vibrant celebrations and festivities. According to Imran Kabir, the Kalasha religion is often referred to as a "religion of dancing and drinking" due to the multitude of festivals and the drinking of wine and dancing that occurs during festivals and funerals. The Kalasha calendar documents numerous festive occasions (Figure 12).

Kalasha people think of time in circles because they see it as a series of seasons, lives, and generations. Hence, the Kalasha people's way of life is intricately intertwined and organized around cultural ceremonies and festivals. While the Kalasha year (*kaw*) commences in the spring, the seasons (*awata*) and months (*mastruk*) are determined by the phases of the moon. These phases correspond to natural occurrences. They compare nature to a timepiece that functions primarily through the sun and moon. Months are based on natural events such as the "month of falling leaves" or the "month of the wheat harvest." Kalasha months vary in duration from valley to valley and year to year, contingent upon the length of time these activities persist. Kalasha tradition does not require the use of the Gregorian calendar[60] (Figure 12). The festivals are not simply random gatherings; rather, they are meticulously planned events that hold cultural significance. In addition to fostering cultural continuity, festivals create shared spaces for healing and peacebuilding. They are inclusive of all age groups and offer cultural activities that are suitable for everyone. While there are numerous year-round cultural celebrations, four prominent festivals are *Zoshi*, *Ucaw*, *Cawmos,* and *Pu'n*.' *Zoshi* is celebrated in May to welcome spring, and *Ucaw* is celebrated in August and signifies harvest season. In October, the harvest seasons for grapes, walnuts, and winemaking are celebrated with a separate festival called *Pu'n'*, which is only observed in the Biriu valley.

[60] This information is based on a note regarding Kalasha time that is displayed in the Kalasha Dur Museum.

Figure 12

Kalasha Calendar



Note. Calendar of Rukmu Valley. Copyright, Kalasha Dur Museum.

The most important and sacred festival is called *Cawmos*, which coincides with the winter solstice and is celebrated in December (Pir, 2019b). The *Cawmos* festival includes various ceremonial events such as the rites of passage for children, rituals that pay tribute to ancestors, the establishment

of a strong connection between humans and nature, and purification rites that reinforce the concept of ritual purity and impurity (Cacopardo, 2016; Pir, 2019a).

Due to the wide range of cultural activities facilitated by the Kalasha festivals, they can be regarded as institutions in their own right. These festivals facilitate the transmission of cultural knowledge, engagement in religious and social rites, and access to leisure activities. They foster social interactions and bonding, promote the circulation of wealth, and provide a platform for emotional expression. A central aspect of these festivals, as highlighted in this research, is their role as collective spaces for healing and peacebuilding, which will be further explored below.

Platforms for Expression and Venting Emotions

An important and intriguing feature of the Kalasha festivals is that they offer an opportunity for community members to express their concerns and to lodge complaints. Festival songs serve as a brilliant and artistic medium for conveying emotions to the community like love, happiness, gratitude, anguish, disappointment, grievance, displeasure, and sadness among others. These songs provide an ideal platform for registering a complaint with the entire community, which aids in preventing direct confrontation and the escalation of overt conflict, as well as facilitates the process of repairing relationships. For example, Imran Kabir referred to the festivals as *Grand Jirga* (*Marakha*) due to their substantial role in fostering peacebuilding. While expressing his viewpoint that the Kalasha festivals are a forum for voicing grievances, he stated that "people ought to express their concerns and complaints and should hold each other accountable. Clarification leads to resolution of issues. And articulating your concern in the presence of the entire community means that it then becomes a *Grand Jirga* [or *Marakha*]." *Marakha* refers to a "gathering of people," and it is a communal conflict resolution process (discussed in detail in Chapter 5). When individuals express their grievances through a song amidst a huge crowd during a festival, the gathering indirectly transforms into a *Grand Marakha*. For example, Kazi Sher Bibi shared a similar perspective in the following remarks:

> This is a great platform. This is an excellent opportunity. Informing someone in a gathering of attentive listeners is more significant than telling them personally. So, these festivals provide you the opportunity to prepare and sing a song about your offence, complaint, or grievance. Then they [the person to whom the song is directed] realize and feel that it should not be this way. I should visit this person [to reconcile our differences].

Festivals are open to people of all ages, who are free to express themselves. Various kinds of songs (*gho'n')* are sung at the festivals. Folk songs tell stories from the past, whereas renown songs (*namus gho'n'*) are panegyrics that speak of noble deeds and achievements and praise people's courage, kindness, and generosity. Love songs (*asheki gho'n'*), complaint and disappointment songs (*ghil'ai zhe naumiti ani gho'n'*), and songs of sadness and resentment (*khaphagi gho'n'*) aid in expressing one's emotions. Apart from the *Cawmos* festival held in December each year, which is solely dedicated to religious songs and prayers, other festivals and cultural events feature a variety of songs. Songs and storytelling are the most significant activities and practices held during the festivals. They contribute significantly to the preservation and promotion of Kalasha culture and traditions. For example, Bashgali Khan emphasized their significance in the following words:

> People are told about a person's feats during *koshani* (a happy occasion). Songs of happiness are sung. These songs are our recognition, and our religion has survived because of them. Songs and stories are components of religion to preserve Kalasha tradition. For example, stories of my family [clan] are shared in deaths and joy so that they don't end, and people continue to learn about the good and bad of each other.

Singing, drumming, and dancing are coordinated according to the genre of the song being performed. The controlling point, as I observed at both funerals and festivals, is a singing circle made up mostly of elderly people. Anyone who wants to sing or has prepared a new song, whether they are *ghil'ai* (complaint), *namus* (renown), or love must sing in that circle. Two drummers stand behind the

singing circle while dancing groups dance around the singing circle and drummers in the form of concentric arcs. Dancing groups repeat the songs conveyed in the singing circle and coordinate their dance, while the drummers adapt their rhythm (please see Figures 13 below). The acephalous social structure of the Kalasha community fluidly gives way to a ceremonial authority during festivals, where respected elders inaugurate each genre with a resonant song. These festivals play a crucial role in reinforcing a collective Kalasha identity, especially in a society that is otherwise shaped by clan-based factional politics, due to its egalitarian values and lack of centralized traditional authority (Parkes, 1994).

There are three types of dances. *Ca'* is a fast-paced dancing form in which three or more individuals, usually three to six, spin left, right, and then left again while holding each other by the waist or shoulders (Figure 14). *D'ushak*, on the other hand, is a dance performed at a moderate tempo by a large ensemble that creates a beautiful configuration by linking arms (Figure 16) and synchronizing their movement, stepping with their right foot in front and left foot behind. *Darazhelak*, the third genre of dance, is similar to *D'ushak* but performed at a much slower tempo (Figure 15). These three dances have associated song sets.

Ca' and *D'ushak* are typically performed alongside short, joyous songs (*ca'ani gh'on'*) that have been passed down through generations. Their lyrics often speak of festivals, seasons, livestock, and produce, among other topics. *Ca'* and *D'ushak* songs are often upbeat and fast-paced, expressing joy and love. The *Darazhelak* category includes lengthy folk songs that elegantly narrate people's deeds such as panegyrics and complaints. In addition to *Darazhelak* dance, these songs "typically consist of ten or more lines of verse, each composed in a regular seventeen-syllable meter and sung in a prolonged, predominantly two-tonal chant" (Parkes, 1994, p. 168). Songs expressing grievances, sadness, and resentment fall into the *darazhelak* genre.

Figure 13

Illustration of Festival Performance





Note. Festival performance at *Pu'n'* Festival 2020, Biriu Valley.

Figure 14

Kalasha Women Performing Ca'



Note. Ucaw celebrations in Grom village, Rukmu valley. From "Kalasha: An Overview," by G. Pir, in UNESCO and THAAP, *From Tsiyam to the Hindukush: Kalsha People and their Culture* (p. 15). Copyright 2019 by UNESCO & THAAP. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 15

Kalasha Women Performing Darazhelak at Pu'n' Festival 2020, Biriu Valley



Figure 16

Women Performing D'ushak at Pu'n' Festival 2020, Biriu Valley



These three genres help festival attendees express their emotions, hold people accountable, and transform festivals into "community ministering," as elaborated in the following sections.

***Ghil'ai zhe Naumiti ani Gho'n'* (Songs of Complaint and Disappointment)**

These songs are crafted to convey the deepest emotions and articulate people's grievances. They are the most effective means to indirectly prompt individuals to recognize their faults and encourage them to improve their behaviour. For example, Turab Khan expressed his thoughts on the *Ghil'ai* songs in the following way:

> Both men and women publicly express their frustrations through [the] *ghil'ai songs*. For example, you may have a complaint against me because I failed to uphold a promise I made to you, or you requested something from me that I did not do, and you were disappointed. You will prepare a song for me. This penalty, a song delivered in front of a large crowd, acts as a lesson for me and makes me feel ashamed. So, I recognize that I made a mistake.

In Kalasha songs, the sun and moon symbolically represent women and men, respectively. This poetic metaphor reflects the community's connection to nature and their expression of gender through cosmological imagery. During a song performance, individuals are usually not directly addressed or referred to by their given names. They are often identified by their lineage, like being the grandson of a certain individual. Individuals have the freedom to voice their concerns, reservations, and disappointments, yet it is essential to refrain from using derogatory or abusive language towards others. Songs often carry deep meaning and are a form of resistance and accountability within the Kalash culture.

That said, Kazi Sichen Gul recounted a song she performed at one of the festivals, expressing her disappointment and sadness over her oldest son. He had feelings for a girl, but another family convinced her to marry within their own lineage instead of with him. Afterward, her son remained unmarried, whereas his siblings all got married and had children approaching adolescence. She was concerned that her son was unable to establish a family or move on following the incident.

Consequently, she vented her emotions and expressed her displeasure with that family through a song amidst community gathering. She shared with me the following song:

Go, oh bird, and explore the entire world,[61]

Every being is living peacefully with the grace of *Dezau*

Among the flowers in your pasture, hunting butterflies

committed such a big sin that shook the courtroom.

I knew that they were your true friends,

it was a truth that reached your beloved.

I am a sinful human of God,

If mercy be shown, my stove will be above (my home shall prosper).

Kazi Sichen further shared with me that her song was not well received by the family, who persuaded the girl to reject her son's marriage proposal because it shamed them in public. However, other Kalasha people attending that festival appreciated her song and agreed that what happened to her son was unfair.

Naumiti gho'n' (songs of disappointment) also serve as a medium for couples to express the challenges they encounter in their marital relationships. For example, Zar Philim shared with me the following song from her great-grandfather, in which he voiced his resentment towards his wife over an alleged extramarital affair:

O full sun upon the mountain (referring to his wife)

Gather the fairies and the aliens and embark on ziarat (pilgrimage).

If accepted, the *nahang* (evil spirit) shall retreat,

[61] Translating songs from Kalasha to Urdu and then English was quite challenging. As a non-native English speaker, I can attest to the difficulty of conveying the true meanings and beauty of songs in another language, as they appear to lack depth and aesthetic appeal. I and my Kalasha translators tried our best to preserve their poetry and make it intelligible for non-Kalasha readership.

And the world shall remain in peace.

But if rejected, the *nahang* will eat,

Which path will you then seek?

Zar Philim explained the meaning of this song to me. Her great-grandfather sent a message to his wife that if she chose to go to her lover, he would leave her. However, he also posed the question: If her lover did not accept her, what would she do? After this song, his wife ended up marrying someone else.

Another ballad about romantic heartbreak was collected during the *Pu'n'* Festival in 2020, which I observed. It was originally sung by a woman after giving birth at *Basahli* (a menstrual/maternity home), where her sister was caring for her. Unfortunately, her husband did not come to check on her, and there were rumours that he was having an affair with another woman. Deeply disappointed with her husband's actions, the wife expressed her heartache through the following heartfelt song sung to her baby boy. The song was subsequently repeated by someone else during the 2020 *Pu'n'* Festival:

My sister is very dear to me, my sister is good,

she is like the heart of my brother-in-law.

As I gaze upon the tranquil waters, a sense of longing fills my throat, leaving it parched.

As I cast my eyes upon the ethereal wind traversing the sky, a whispered wish escapes my lips, "Oh, I wish."

Keeping in mind your father's deed, I will not look at any stranger's face.

I am feeling lonely, I have no mother.

Singing *ghil'ai* and *naumiti,* as the Kalasha call it, offers a beautiful opportunity for individuals to open their hearts to the community. It is a powerful way to share feelings and foster connection.

Songs as a Medium for Expressing Trauma and Grief

In addition to songs that convey grievances and disappointment, other songs articulate profound emotions in response to the loss of a loved one or a traumatic event. These songs, known as *khaphagi ani gho'n* (sadness songs), are performed during both funeral ceremonies and festivals to express grief and depressing thoughts. For example, Akbar Bhutto described the several categories of songs that can be performed at the festivals. He noted the following in his story:

> There could be a variety of songs, such as those dedicated to someone's memory or love. For example, a young lover who is unable to explain himself might compose a song by imagining how he would like to express himself. If he is unable to sing, he can have someone else perform on his behalf. If someone fails to attend a loved one's funeral, they can create a song to express their sentiments.
>
> The song could potentially be about a domestic dispute. It might be about animals being stolen from high pastures or about shepherds being treated cruelly. Sometimes, shepherds also get murdered, and their livestock is confiscated in high pastures. People who are with them become defenceless as their weapons are seized. So, they sing about the cruelty and violence they faced.[62]

A song can serve as an important medium for expressing emotions and grievances, fostering a sense of belonging, and sharing personal stories of trauma and loss. For instance, Kazi Mir Bacha shared with me a touching ballad performed originally by a woman in memory of her deceased husband. In her song, she praised the deep generosity of community members Babar and Raisa after her husband's passing while also conveying to the community the difficulty she faced in coping with the loss of her life partner:

[62] These attacks were common in the past, but they have reduced significantly due to improved security on the Pakistani border with Afghanistan. However, they still remain a concern.

I'll say a little bit, lend me your ears, my sun and moon [women and men].

I have become deaf to manage my fields and home chores.

Babar and Raisa brought forth such abundance

that the river was sealed shut.

As I gazed westward, clouds graced the peak of Sumancai,

And as my eyes wandered, I noticed Shishi's shade descending upon the earth.

Where shall I await you, when will you return,

my beloved shadow and mulberry shade?

What makes festivals a truly communal platform for expression and accountability is that all types of emotions and people of all ages are welcome to open their hearts to the community. For example, Chilo and Habiba, two adolescent Kalasha girls, prepared a song to perform at a festival dedicated to their friend, Shahzadi, who tragically drowned in the Mumuret River. The song evokes strong emotions and touches the heart because Shahzadi was not just a classmate but also their close friend:

Your voice constantly echoes in my thoughts.

As I step into the school, thoughts of you flood my mind.

I walk into your classroom, only to find empty desks staring back at me.

As I looked around, all my friends were saddened.

You mentioned that the handkerchief is your memento.

But, your friends did not trust you.

Oh, Shahzadi dear, you are gone to the river.

In an instant, news broke and trembled our hearts.

God's favorite human, you left on Friday.

Some ventured to the Ayun to find you, while others scoured the riverbanks in a frenzy.

Your loving parents received the sudden news at home.

Ah Shahzadi, you are heart of your friends.

When memories flood my mind, tears flow uncontrollably.

As I wander through the places we once shared, my heart grows restless.

I can't find a beautiful girl like you in this vast and stunning world.

Whenever you come to our minds, our hearts get wounded.

This song was originally posted on the Ishpata News Facebook page. Luke Rehmat, director and producer of Ishpata News, who originally collected and published this song, graciously allowed it to be reproduced in my dissertation. It struck a chord within me as I recalled the sudden death of my friend from pneumonia during my B.S. honours studies at Lahore College. Like Chilo and Habiba, I consistently anticipated meeting her in the hallway as I made my way to class. I endured numerous sleepless nights and was traumatized upon learning of her untimely demise. This song also made me wonder if having the opportunity to express my emotions, as Chilo and Habiba did, would have helped me cope with tragedy. A 2019 study published by the Australian National University (ANU) found that trauma from the death of a close friend lasts longer than previously thought. This impact can be especially deep if the bereaved person's needs are not adequately addressed following the loss (ANU, 2019). Additionally, a study by Johnsen and Tømmeraas (2022), which examined bereaved friends after the 2011 shootings at Utøya, Norway, found that the death of a close friend affects an individual's emotional, mental, and social life. They found that these effects can still be felt even four years after the loss.

That said, festivals create a platform for individuals to express their emotions through the power of music. This expression can positively impact mental well-being and aid in healing both individual and collective trauma. This effect is often supported by the responses and guidance of elders, as will be discussed in the following section.

Acknowledgement and Emotional Validation

When I asked the participants how the person against whom complaints are made would respond to a song, Kazi Golam Hussein told me, "When someone sings a song, everyone comes to understand their feelings and emotions. There won't be a counter-complaint to the original complaint, but those who are present will record it and continue to share it from generation to generation." However, it is not only that the song will be kept alive, but there is also a comprehensive process that ensures acknowledgement and emotional validation. Akbar Bhutto explained to me the detailed process of performing a song and its validation. This is what he had to say on the issue:

> There are various options [for conveying feelings] through singing because everyone is present, including the elderly, women, and young people. So, if someone is unable to express themselves directly, the best solution is to go there and sing it, where everyone can listen to it together. The procedure is to hold a stick in your hand and sing a song there [in the singing circle]. Then you will repeat it [typically three times] so that people can remember or record it. Following this, the people in the small singing circle are given the opportunity to take a talking stick [one by one] and analyze the song.
>
> They give a hint by raising their [talking] stick and making a motion to analyze or respond to the song. They make comments and share their opinions about song, such as what the song's purpose was. What are my perceptions, or worldly impressions about this? Whether a person is singing about life, heartbreak, hurt, or in someone's memory. The song's duration is also noted [to ascertain its genre]. In response to that analysis, another individual raises a stick to talk about the song.
>
> At least two or three people comment on the song right amidst the crowd, and everyone pays attention. The dancing people [concentric arcs] on the sides of the singing circle listen to the song and then begin to repeat it slowly by performing [a] slow

dance (*Darazhelak*). When you sing and repeat a song, some individuals quickly absorb it. Some people often record it because they can't remember. It was recorded with tape recorders in the past.[63] So it's not like you sing a song once and it's over. You sing the song at one event, and then another person will repeat it at another event, and so on.

In this way, individuals' feelings are acknowledged and validated. Participants in the singing circle pay close attention to the singer, often encouraging them with expressions like "hey-ya" and "S'abas!" (bravo!). Those who sing newly composed panegyric or repeat one have a *Shuman or Shokhek* (knitted garland) wrapped around their necks by a member of the clan that the song is about. Recently, it has become customary for cash to be placed in the singers' caps as a token of appreciation (Figure 17).

Figure 17

Singers' Caps Adorned with Cash as Appreciation





Note. Kazi Mir Bacha (left) at *Pu'n'* Festival in Biriu Valley.

[63] More recently, songs are recorded on cell phones and swiftly spread across the community.

However, presents are not given to someone singing a *ghil'ai* (a complaint song) because doing so can create strife or division among individuals. Instead, their feelings are acknowledged through a response to the song and guidance from elders, which helps prevent conflict from escalating. These songs evoke responses from the elders present in the singing circle, acknowledging these emotions and helping people find solace in their grief.

Participants who shared their songs with me were unable to recall the responses of others in the singing circle. However, Carol Rose, a fellow at the Institute of Current World Affairs in Pakistan in 1992, published several songs along with their replies from a tape recording of the 1992 *Zoshi* Festival. She translated these with the help of Saifullah Jan. The following three songs are reproduced here with the kind permission of Ms. Carol Rose and the Institute of Current World Affairs.

Dramuchiki, an elderly woman from the Rukmu Valley, expressed her disappointment about her brother's indifference after she was robbed by a Kati man from a Nooristani village at the head of the valley near Afghanistan. She also praised another villager who came to her aid:

One word I say, I am speaking

Listen to me, Moon and Sun (man and woman)

Into my honeybee hive (my house)

A wild man did enter

A dead Kati man.

But you had no honour, my brother,

You grandson of Sumbara:

Our house of hope has become large

And we became but distant relatives.

But your steps were clear, my sweet,

Oh, my big grandson of Bakar.

Oh, my God maybe it is just my luck and fortune

That life goes like a water channel.

A village elder, Saidan Shah, responded to Dramuchiki by praising her entire clan and recounting a tale of an ancestor who, with the God's intervention, thwarted a robbery.

Bravo to you, my sister!

Granddaughter of Sumbara

Life is like this:

From mountaintops we come down,

To mountaintops we climb.

Your grandfather was one of two brothers

A family of old wealth, (livestock)

When in the middle of a generation (14 years)

People from Werdesh (robbers from Nooristan)

Came to Rumbur through a narrow valley.

Against your grandfather Sumbara

The robbers made a siege.

Around your house they gathered

But your Grandfather Sumbara

Put his son Shartu under and escaped.

He opened the door to male goat pen

And let the goats flee to the forest.

The goats went to Ramadeer

And from this place, the goats appeared

To be *marquotes* (prized mountain goats).

But when the thieves climbed there

They found your grandfather's wealth (goats)

Had turned to white stones.

Wandering, Wandering

The old wealth (goats)

Appeared again the next morning.

To the thieves. It was as before,

The thieves saw something on hill,

But when they went to see

The wealth became invisible.

In that time, it was known that

Your grandfather's wealth was hidden.

By the god Jach (protector of crops).

After that, your grandfather Kasoom

Your grandfather Sharuta

Divided the kingdom of your grandfathers into two.

Your grandfather Malik became headman of your household.

From there are two sons,

Matisa and Saidaman.

Look! Yours is an ancient household!

Your grandfather Sharuta settled there

A seven-story house he built!

A seven-story house!

And your grandfathers put an altar (place of worship for men)

High in the valley

A place called Sajigor (protector of all things)

In this way, every generation of descendants

Has earned a good reputation.

And nowadays, we live under the strong hands

Of Shah Juan (present lineage leader).

What a big talk I have given,

Oh, sister.

The speech from your tongue has told us all.

Diwaki, who had been grieving the loss of her 16-year-old son to leukemia for a year, sang about her struggles to cope with the pain. Notably, she concluded her song with the words, “Have a thought, oh elders of the valley, and give me an answer for my grief.” This implies that such responses can offer both counsel and healing. In reply to Diwaki's plea, Saidan Shah sang the following:

There are four children in your wealthy house

Father Mir Alam (father of the dead boy)

hunts the *marquort*

And makes the children drink the marrow (i.e. he takes care of his children).

He looks after, my sister,

The *Doni Cheemitsun* (hunting place)

Hunting the *marquort* and bringing it to the summer place.

Sorrow remains, my sister.

For wealth makes you smile,

And poverty makes you cry.

But in this world

Sorrow should not linger

For your husband gathered three valleys (for the funeral of the son)

And turned your son into flower.

It was decision of God

So don't make your heart defeated

Look also in heaven.

It is a blessing for fathers and mothers to have a son in heaven

Shining like the sun upon them.

Let no sorrow remain.

For strong Shah Juan (lineage leader)

And Mir Alam (boy's father)

Took out their wealth and spent it here (on medical bills)

But God did not accept that and took the life away.

Your lake of ghee (clarified butter)[64] drained away
Flowing to the pleasant place
In the village of Balanguru
Making headmen of your fathers and brothers.

But if you make your heart still defeated
It will bring harm to your son in heaven.
To hear from your tongue
All that you have said
We are surprised.

Saidan Shah reminded Diwaki that she was blessed with four children and that the boy's father had done everything possible to save him. However, he emphasized that ultimately, it was God's decision. He cautioned that continuing to mourn and question God's will might cause harm to her son's spirit. The Kalasha people believe that mourning for an extended period is inappropriate. Luke Rehmat explained, "We celebrate death because failing to do so opposes and interferes with God's will, and we believe that people go to a better place after death." For this reason, there is a ritual called *bandek*, where people visit all mourning families at the start of the *Cawmos* festival to help them let go of their grief and participate in the celebration. In conclusion, cultural festivals provide individuals a platform to express their emotions and grievances, while also receiving

[64] Served as a part of a funeral feast.

validation and responses that positively impact their emotional and psychological well-being, aiding in their healing from trauma.

Festivals Act as Platforms for Accountability and Encourage Positive Behaviour

Festival songs serve not only as an outlet for emotions but also as a delineation of acceptable and unacceptable conduct in the Kalasha community. “The songs are the main way that people open their hearts to the community about what they think and expect from people” (Saifullah Jan, cited in Rose, 1992c, p. 2). The participants reported that there is a chance that some *ghil’ai* song might not be well received, but most songs usually influence people’s behaviour positively. In addition to aiding in the restoration of relationships and preventing overt conflict, they set an exceptional example of what is considered acceptable conduct in the community. Individuals are explicitly reminded before a festival commences that engaging in fights is unacceptable and is not the conduct that the community expects from them. For example, Turab Khan informed me that “People are reminded not to let quarrels arise, for we drink homemade wine at our festivals. Kazis tell young people to ‘drink to your own hands,’ which means to drink sensibly. You shouldn’t drink too much and engage in fights.”

In addition, by transmitting people’s good and bad behaviour through *namus* (renown) and *ghil’ai* (complaint) songs, the message about the boundaries of what is considered acceptable and expected behaviour is indirectly reinforced. When I asked Bashgali Khan about the impact of songs on Kalash people, he noted, “Their impact is that because of them, people don’t do bad things, and they realize [their mistakes] and improve themselves.” Remembrance is very important to the Kalasha people. Consequently, individuals try to do good to be remembered in positive words because these songs are passed down from generation to generation.

That said, individuals strive to make a significant impact on the community. Bashgali Khan recalled the oppression faced by the Kalash people in Chitral when it was a princely state. His father approached the Mehtar (prince) to discuss the community’s issues and concerns. The Mehtar replied,

"I will create a silver room for you. Stop worrying about the people." In disappointment at being unable to help the community, Bashgali's father declared, "I don't want silver and gold" before jumping into the river, where he was subsequently rescued by other community members.

Bashgali Khan, with a deep desire for his son to serve the community, wished for Wazir Zada to grow into a leader who could make a meaningful impact. To help him achieve this vision, Bashgali Khan sent Wazir Zada to Peshawar for his education. In 2018, Wazir Zada made history as the first and only member of the Kalasha community to be elected to the provincial assembly. His achievements didn't stop there. In 2019, he represented the Kalasha people at the 18th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), bringing the voices of his community to an international stage.

The Kalasha community hold individuals in high esteem for their bravery, courage, and exceptional community service through *namus gho'n'* (renown/pangeyrics). People who have done exceptional community service are commemorated through songs and *kun'durik* (life-sized wooden effigies). Effigies of those who have done outstanding community service are placed on the periphery of the village to remember them forever (Figure 17). According to Yasir Kalash, individuals who are honoured with *kun'durik* are typically those who have made significant contributions to the community—such as offering a *biramor* (a grand merit feast), presenting a substantial dowry feast (*sariek*), or displaying notable strength and bravery. These life-sized wooden effigies serve as lasting tributes to their social merit and legacy within the Kalasha tradition.

Figure 17

Kun'durik (Wooden Effigies)



Note. Kun'durik installed on the outskirts of Brun Village, Mumuret Valley. From "The Kalasha Art of Dwelling: Built Heritage of Kalasha Valley," by M. Mustafa, in UNESCO and THAAP, *From Tsiyam to the Hindukush: Kalsha People and Their Culture* (p. 26). Copyright 2019 by UNESCO & THAAP. Reprinted with permission.

Kazi Danok shared with me a song of praise about a shepherd who was celebrated for his bravery in defending himself against attackers in the high pastures. After the *Zoshi* (spring) festivities in May, the Kalasha shepherds annually move their livestock to these high pastures, where they stay until mid-September or early October, depending on the weather conditions. The song recounts an attack on shepherds by Nuristani individuals from Afghanistan. During this incident, one shepherd was killed, while another bravely defended himself despite having his weapon confiscated by the

attackers. The song not only describes these events but also honours the courage of the surviving shepherd:

Bravo! O grandson of Gilasor
You were flung from the Asiret pasture into the mountains.
After the thunder roared and the storm raged on,
a rainbow emerged in the yard of Basir Sanhesh [cattle house].
From the cloud above, a voice did call, "Where are you heading, oh son?"
Without access to a weapon, you turned the enemy's neck and went to *Ghanda'la'zho* [pasture].
The news was written on Kabul's doors, and a message was sent to the town's prince.
In the early morning, the prince of Chitral called for an explanation;
When you did not respond, he gifted you a gun.
After the news spread, then became silent the rest.

Similarly, ghil'ai *and naumiti* (complaint and disappointment) songs are composed for those who have hurt the community and are subsequently passed down from generation to generation to discourage future harmful behaviour in the community. For example, Imran Kabir, who could not recollect the song, narrated to me that "some Kalash individuals, along with government officials, were accused of corruption in relation to forest royalties and ended up in jail. After two months or so, the community forgave them. In the subsequent festival, an elder had prepared a quite 'VIP' song for them. They did not react well to the song. However, no one allowed them to approach the elder and said, 'Isn't it enough that the community has forgiven you? Now you're being rough again.'" As a result, people's positive and negative qualities are communicated in such a way that their expected behaviour is reinforced by singing songs imbued with morality to socialize people into behaving in the right way.

Tools of Recreation and Communal Bonding

Kalash cultural festivals have a good impact on individuals by serving as a recreation and bonding tool, which reduces conflicts and promotes the people's emotional and mental well-being. While offering his perspective on the rarity of disputes among the Kalasha, Imran Kabir stated, "There are plenty of recreational opportunities for individuals. Every fourth day,[65] a celebration or festival takes place. This creates more options for relaxation, outdoor activities, leisure, and recreation. So, many factors contribute to peace." Akram Hussain also elaborated on this idea with the following words: "We have several festivities. Everyone attends these gatherings and shares their problems with one another. That is why we have fewer conflicts. There are more opportunities for gatherings. The more gatherings you have, the more it *fosters and builds love and compassion among individuals*."

Apart from four major festivals, the Kalasha calendar (Figure 12) shows that many events take place in between these festivals to enable people to relax and unwind. Between *Zoshi* (Spring festival) and *Ucaw* (Harvest festival), *ratnat* (nocturnal dances) lasts three months. *Rat* signifies night, while *nat* means dance. After a long day of working in the fields and carrying out other manual labor and work activities, people meet at dancing venues at night to unwind, dance, and sing. The primary objective of these nocturnal dances is to prepare for the upcoming *Ucaw* festival.

Similarly, before *Cawmos* (the winter solstice festival), young boys and girls get together in one village or the other to sing songs from mid-October to mid-December, before the *Cawmos* celebration begins. These songs are known as *ajh'ona b'ayak* (guest brother) and *ajh'ona babak* (guest sister) songs.

[65] In the Urdu language, "every fourth day" is an idiomatic expression to describe something that occurs frequently.

Figure 18

Celebrating Zoshi Festival



Note. Walnut branches being waved at *Zoshi* (Spring Festival). From "Kalasha: An Overview," by G. Pir, in UNESCO and THAAP, *From Tsiyam to the Hindukush: Kalsha People and Their Culture* (p. 13). Copyright 2019 by UNESCO & THAAP. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 19

Decorating Temples for Zoshi



Note. Kalasha children decorating temples with yellow flowers and walnut leaves for the *Zoshi* (spring Festival). Photograph with kind permission of Luke Rehmat.

These songs are usually short, lively call-and-response songs performed by teams of boys and girls and are composed on the spot. They range from love to various other topics. The following *ajh'ona b'ayak gho'n*' was sung by one of the festival attendees at the *Pu'n'* festival, 2020:

My hem, [once whole], now bears a hole. [66]

Very tired of this world,

I will take you to Iran my sister [fulfill all your wishes].

Do not become a Muslim.

[66] When a girl abandons the Kalasha culture and converts to Islam, they usually become cut off from the Kalasha people, and their loved ones experience grief because it feels as if a piece of flesh has been severed from the body. So, to communicate this message to the community, the singer utilizes the analogy of a hole in the hem.

In addition, the traditional game of *ghal* (the ancestor of snow hockey) is played for many days following *Cawmos*, and the losing team hosts a banquet (Cacopardo, 2016), offering another chance to the community to gather and socialize with each other. Numerous studies[67] have suggested a connection between recreation and enhanced mental health as well as social bonding. Consequently, cultural festivals and events not only promote social connections but also offer everyone a chance to relax and improve their mood.

Circular Flow of Wealth

Reciprocity and sharing are essential for sustaining collective life, strengthening communal bonds, and fostering interdependent relationships. In Chapter 6, I explored how reciprocity and sharing contribute significantly to the rarity of conflict among the Kalasha. Festivals play a vital role in this process by promoting the sharing of resources and facilitating the continuous circulation of wealth. In addition to individuals who own surplus resources and provide them to those in need (Rose, 1992b), there exist rituals that guarantee the equitable distribution of communal wealth. One such rite is called *Gulparik (*bringing flowers)*,* which involves gathering all the babies born after the preceding *Zoshi* and sprinkling milk over them and their mothers to purify them. During this event, the entire community contributes food items like walnuts and mulberries as gifts to the mothers and babies. These offerings are gathered in one place and then distributed equally among everyone present (Figure 20).

Similarly, at *Madhaik*, a yearly ceremony conducted on the evening of December 15th to honour deceased ancestors, each household brings a variety of food items to the community gathering like walnut breads, fresh and dried fruits, and even tobacco or any other items that were favoured by their deceased ancestors. The offering is placed outside the clan temple, and once it is believed that

[67]See for example, Litwiller et al. (2016) and Takiguchi et al. (2022).

the ancestors have eaten the food and departed, it is then distributed among all the individuals present at the gathering. These food baskets are also placed outside of people's houses as a tribute to their deceased relatives and as a means for individuals to freely acquire any items they desire or require.

Figure 20

Gulparik Ritual, Zoshi Festival



Note. Distributing walnuts and mulberries during the *Zoshi* festival. Reprinted from *Chilim Jusht Spring Festival Concludes in Chitral* by Dawn News (2018). https://www.dawn.com/news/1408154. Copyright 2018 by the Dawn News. Reprinted with permission.

In addition, milk is also collected during the *Zoshi* festival and stored for ten days in cattle houses. It is then distributed at the beginning of the event through a ritual known as *C'hirikpipi* (drinking milk). The milk is particularly distributed among *jamilisher* (daughters of clan) and anyone

who shows up at the gathering. During the *Cawmos* festival, children visit each household and gather beans and walnuts while singing religious songs. This ritual is known as *Dau'tatu* (bean gathering). The collected beans are then cooked at night in the temple and distributed among the village's residents the next morning (Rehmat, 2023b). During the *Ucaw* festival in August, shepherds bring cheese, butter, and milk products made and preserved in the high pastures. These items are then distributed among all the festival attendees (Rehmat, 2023c). These are just a few of the numerous cultural rituals that ensure the continuous circulation of wealth, reciprocity, and communal bonding.

Key Findings

Chapter 7 explored the significance of Kalasha festivals in promoting peacebuilding and resolving conflicts. Four main findings were identified inductively through the data analysis process.

First, festivals serve as artistic platforms for personal expression and emotional release, thereby contributing to peacebuilding and the healing of trauma. Festivals offer the Kalasha a collective space for expressing concerns and releasing emotions. The Kalasha people partake in numerous festivals throughout the year. There are four major festivals and numerous other cultural celebrations throughout the year. During these festivals, the entire community comes together to participate in cultural rituals, gather in dancing pavilions (*gri*), and engage in singing and dancing. Individuals can express themselves through songs. Rose (1992c) explained the power of songs: "In addition to recording history, festival songs enable the Kalash people to express their grief, their gratitude, and their anger with neighbours and relatives. Often one song elicits a reply from another singer, providing a sort of community ministering" (p. 1). At festivals, a variety of dances and songs are performed, each falling into distinct categories.

For example, *Ca'* is a dynamic dance form performed by a group of three to six individuals who spin rapidly in alternating directions—left to right—while holding onto each other's waists or shoulders. In contrast, *D'ushak* is a moderately paced group dance performed by a larger ensemble.

The dancers link arms or shoulders to form graceful formations and move in unison, stepping forward with the right foot and back with the left. The third genre, *Darazhelak*, resembles *D'ushak* in style but is characterized by a much slower tempo. Each of these dance styles is accompanied by corresponding song sets. *Ca'* and *D'ushak*, in particular, are typically performed with vibrant traditional songs—*ca'ani gh'on'*—that have been passed down through generations.

The *Darazhelak* category consists of lengthy folk songs that skillfully narrate the deeds of individuals. These songs are characterized by a prolonged recitation and a slow drum rhythm. They convey themes such as panegyrics, complaints, grief, sadness, and resentment. When performed in front of a crowd, these songs promote communal accountability, serving as valuable lessons for individuals who recognize their mistakes and work to mend and reconcile relationships. In this way, festival songs contribute to the resolution of conflicts.

In addition to empowering individuals to publicly voice their complaints and pressure wrongdoers to make amends, these songs serve as a powerful medium for expressing deep emotions, sorrow, and the effects of trauma. They delve into themes such as romantic heartbreak, the pain of losing loved ones, and experiences of unfair or cruel treatment. Singers receive appreciation and encouragement from the audience during their performances, often using phrases like "S'abas" (bravo) and "hey-ya."

In a singing circle, the presence of elders enhances the experience by responding to the songs with care and wisdom. This community ministering serves as a vital act of mediating and peacemaking, as these elders acknowledge and validate the singer's emotions. Their thoughtful examination of the songs, accompanied by shared insights, provides essential guidance and comfort to those grappling with sorrow. Importantly, this engagement also plays a crucial role in de-escalating conflicts within the community. Peace theorist and practitioner Lederach (2020) powerfully highlighted the transformative nature of music, asserting that it empowers individuals by providing a

unique avenue for creative agency—something fundamentally human. Music not only allows people to express themselves, but it also creates a vital space for them to be heard and recognized by others (p. 148). Moreover, he argued that "the aural nature of human experience illustrates that music, in its entirety, has the capacity to evoke, provoke, and invoke processes of meaning-making and action, arising from the dissonance and consonance that lie at the heart of conflict and peacebuilding" (p. 154). Hence, music is not merely an art form; it is a powerful tool for fostering understanding and healing and for showcasing collective identity. Parkes (1994) also averred that the role of Kalasha music is vital in transcending factional politics and segmentary alliances through collective performances governed by the ceremonial authority of elders. He noted that "by asserting a musically manifest sense of social solidarity, song performance enables a relatively harmonious integration of normally competing personalities during festival celebrations, at least temporarily overcoming the inter-lineage and factional animosities characteristic of daily social life within this egalitarian enclave" (p. 181).

Individuals of all age groups participate in the festivals and can freely express their emotions, whether it be love, grief, complaints, gratitude, or admiration. All are welcome to open their heart to the community and to receive the community's love and support. These songs serve as a community safety valve and provide a way for individuals to express their emotions and communicate their aspirations to the community. Having a public platform for individuals to express and validate their emotions promotes their psychological well-being and healing as the community supports them. A study conducted by Choudhry et al. (2017) on resilience factors among Kalasha youth revealed the significant impact of Kalasha cultural festivals on their mental well-being. These festivals provide opportunities for the community to come together and express gratitude to both the Creator and people. In his acclaimed book *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, therapist and trauma specialist Menakem (2017) underscored the

transformative power of gathering, singing, and performing together. He emphasized that harmonizing our bodies fosters healing from trauma, creating a communal bond that rejuvenates the spirit. Menakem also highlighted the opportunity for "healing in community" and advised seeking help from a "trusted community figure—such as an elder, a spiritual leader, or a community activist—to listen, support you, and offer their guidance" (p. 306). This is exactly what the Kalasha festivals accomplish, making them a transformative tool for fostering emotional well-being and trauma healing. They harmonize participants' bodies through collective dance and singing, creating a sense of community. Guided by the wisdom of elders, these festivals beautifully weave songs into a transformative experience that uplifts and heals the participants.

Secondly, Festivals promote positive behavior among the Kalasha people. Before each festival begins, Kazis and elders remind the community to perform rituals calmly and peacefully, to drink responsibly, and to avoid conflict. By acknowledging and praising good deeds, these cultural events indirectly encourage virtuous conduct. They also offer a public platform for expressing grievances against mistreatment, which serves to discourage harmful behavior. Through songs and performances, the community reinforces shared values and expectations, making clear what constitutes acceptable behavior in Kalasha society. Thus, songs are used to convey various aspects of human behavior and to set moral boundaries for future generations. Their enduring nature—preserved through recordings and continuous performance—ensures that these messages are passed down over time. By highlighting virtues and criticizing wrongdoing, the songs positively influence behavior, encouraging individuals to act responsibly within the community. Many are deterred from negative actions, knowing that such behavior may be remembered and immortalized in Kalasha folklore through song.

Individuals who have demonstrated exceptional community service or have displayed bravery and courage are highly respected in the Kalasha community. They are honoured through *namus* (renown) songs and by placing their *kun'durik* (wooden effigies) on the outskirts of the village.

Similarly, individuals who have done something negative are often subject to criticism in songs as they are shamed into possibly righting the wrongdoing and discouraging bad behaviour. The Kalasha people place great importance on making positive contributions to their community and being remembered fondly. Hence, they strive to engage in acts of kindness and generosity, hoping to leave a lasting impression on others.

Third, Kalasha cultural festivals serve as a means of leisure and social cohesion within the community. Participants highlighted the importance of these gatherings and celebrations in promoting peace. Festivals provide individuals with opportunities to engage in leisure activities, unwind, socialize, and build social connections. For instance, Takiguchi et al. (2022) found that participation in leisure activities positively impacts mental well-being. This impact is likely connected to resilience, as suggested by the broaden-and-build theory, which posits that positive emotions triggered by leisure activities enhance individuals' cognitive resources, enabling them to better cope with stress (Takiguchi et al., 2022).

In addition to the four main cultural festivals, the Kalasha calendar indicates that several events also occur in between these festivals, providing opportunities for individuals to enjoy themselves and relax. For example, the *Ratnat* is a series of night dances that spans a duration of three months, taking place between the *Zoshi* (Spring festival) and the *Ucaw* (Harvest festival). Following a strenuous day of working in the fields and engaging in various manual labors, individuals convene at nocturnal dancing pavilions to relax, partake in dancing, and engage in singing. The main purpose of these nighttime dances is to get ready for the forthcoming *Ucaw* festival.

Similarly, prior to the commencement of the *Cawmos* festival, young boys and girls convene in various villages to collectively engage in singing activities from mid-October until mid-December. The songs are referred to as *ajh'ona b'ayak* (guest brother) and *ajh'ona babak* (guest sister) songs. These songs are brief, spirited, call-and-response compositions spontaneously performed by groups of

boys and girls. Moreover, the ancient game of *ghal* (a precursor to snow hockey) is played for many days after *Cawmos*, and the team that loses the game holds a feast (Cacopardo, 2016), providing an additional opportunity for the community to gather and socialize.

That said, several research studies have indicated a correlation between recreational activities and enhanced mental well-being and social bonding (e.g. Litwiller et al., 2016; Takiguchi et al., 2022). Hence, Kalasha cultural festivals and festivities cultivate social cohesion while simultaneously offering people a chance to unwind and enhance their emotional state. There are activities available for individuals of all age groups. Children are responsible for many activities during the *Zoshi* festival, including collecting yellow flowers from the mountains and adorning temples, homes, and cattle houses with them. During the holiest celebration, known as *Cawmos*, children remove the temple drawings they made at the previous year's festival and create fresh ones. During *Cawmos*, in addition, children around the age of ten embark on a profound journey, taking part in the initiation into the vibrant and rich traditions of the Kalasha religion. This rite of passage marks a significant milestone in their lives as they step into a realm filled with culture, spirituality, and community celebration. All individuals are cherished, and the rituals encompass a range of events, beginning with the celebration of newborns and extending to honouring the deceased, while also fostering a connection with the divine and the natural world.

Fourth, festivals promote the ongoing exchange of wealth. The practice of reciprocity and sharing is vital for sustaining communal life and enhancing social cohesion and interdependent relationships, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflicts. In addition to individuals with surplus resources helping those in need before festivals (Rose, 1992), the rituals conducted during these celebrations also facilitate a more equitable distribution of wealth. An example of such a cultural ritual is known as *Gulparik,* wherein all infants born after the previous *Zoshi* are assembled and milk is sprinkled over them and their mothers to purify them. At this ceremony, the entire community

donates food items, such as walnuts and mulberries, as gifts to the mothers and babies. The offerings are consolidated in one place and then distributed equally among all individuals.

Similarly, the *Madhaik* is an annual ceremony performed on the evening of December 15th to honour deceased ancestors. Every household contributes a diverse assortment of food products, including walnut breads, fresh and dried fruits, tobacco, and any other items that were liked by their deceased ancestors. The offering is placed outside the temple, and once it is presumed that the ancestors have consumed the food and have left the temple, then the food is distributed among all the persons in attendance. Food baskets are left outside residences as a tribute to deceased relatives and as a resource for individuals to freely obtain any foods they need or wish to eat.

Milk is gathered during the *Zoshi* festival, and it is preserved for a duration of ten days in cattle homes. At the commencement of the event, milk is offered through a ceremonial practice known as *Chirikpipi*, which translates to 'the ritual of drinking milk. The milk is primarily distributed among all the people and specifically the daughters of the clan. At the *Cawmos* festival, youngsters go to every household and collect beans and walnuts while singing religious hymns. The practice is commonly referred to as *Dau'tatu*, meaning collecting beans. The gathered beans are then cooked during the evening at the temple and subsequently redistributed to the inhabitants of the village (Rehmat, 2023b) the following morning. At the *Ucaw* festival in August, shepherds bring cheese, butter, and milk products that are handmade and conserved in high pastures. These products are then distributed to all the festival participants. In addition to sharing with people who are physically present, offerings are often made to deities, fairies, birds, and the deceased, among others. These cultural rituals play a vital role in maintaining the ongoing flow of wealth, reciprocity, and communal bonding.

Conclusion

Kalasha festivals serve as an essential tool in promoting peacebuilding in the community. They provide a platform for people to express their emotions and affirm their feelings, as well as support the preservation of historical and cultural connections. Additionally, they encourage people's virtuous behaviour by setting a standard for positive conduct. Festivals also contribute to mental well-being by giving individuals a chance to express themselves and heal from trauma and by providing leisure activities that foster social connections. Further, they emphasize the importance of collective existence and interconnected relationships by ensuring a constant flow of wealth throughout the community. Kalasha festivals have a deeper purpose than just being mere occasions for people to gather, celebrate, and rejoice with each other. Peace among the Kalasha is a dynamic process that draws not only on spiritual, cultural, and festive practices but also on dedicated gender roles. The following chapter 8 explores the vital role Kalasha women play in peacebuilding

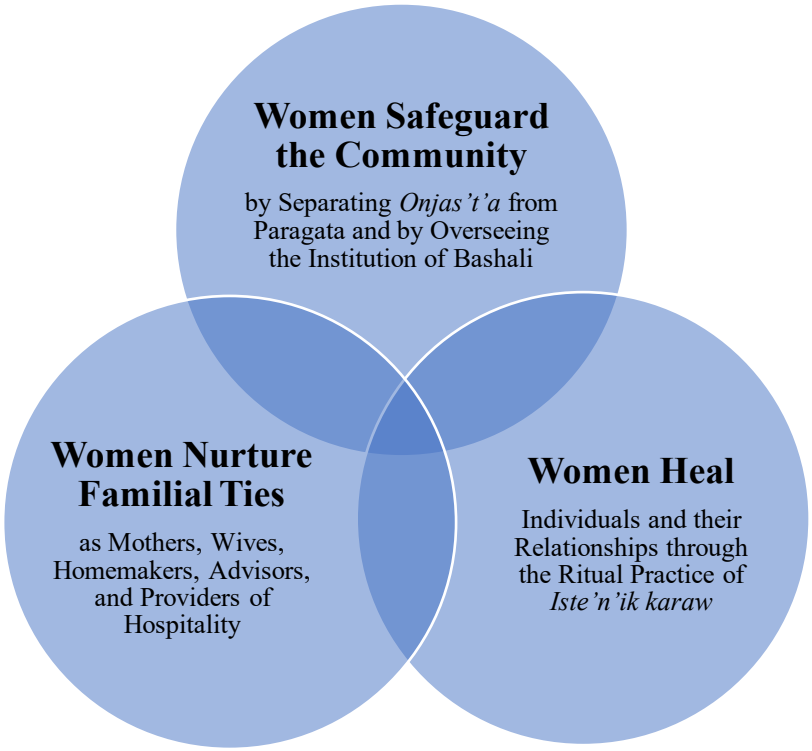
Chapter 8

Women as Healers: Role of Kalasha Women in Peacebuilding

The literature review chapter highlighted the important role that women play in peacebuilding within their communities, a role that may not be readily apparent to outsiders. It is important to understand the role of women within their own context, and this research makes a conscious effort to do so. This chapter highlights the significant contributions of Kalasha women to peacebuilding (Figure 21) in their community and presents findings that underscore the vital role women play in fostering peace.

Figure 21

The Role of Kalasha Women in Peacebuilding



My first encounter with the Kalasha *bashali* (menstruation and maternity home), and the concepts of *onjas't'a/pragata* (ritually pure/ritually impure), which do not carry connotations of

privilege, prestige, shame, or moral judgment for the Kalasha, occurred during the summer of 2017. While walking towards Iran Bibi's residence, we approached the village of Brun in Mumuret Valley. As we made our way through the valley, I saw a woman seated on the ground holding a teapot, while another woman poured tea into it. I noticed that the woman pouring the tea was careful not to make any contact with the woman sitting down. Yasir Kalash, my guide and assistant, said, "This is *bashali*," pointing to the building where the woman was seated at the entrance. This is where women who are menstruating or about to give birth go due to the ritual impurity associated with those times. He explained that because of Kalasha cultural beliefs, the woman who brought tea from her home avoided physical contact with the other woman, who was spending time in *bashali*, in order not to become ritually impure.

It appeared that my initial impression of Kalasha women's supposed freedom was now shattered. One might question the validity of the claim that Kalasha women are free, given that they are considered impure and required to go to *bashali* during menstruation and childbirth. As is the case with many outsiders, my thoughts hastily formed conclusions without attempting to comprehend the cultural significance and meaning of this cultural ritual or the *bashali* institution before consulting the women involved in the ritual. While I was still processing this information, we had reached the staircase leading up to Iran Bibi's house. From Iran Bibi's terrace, the view of the *bashali*'s interior was clear. I observed a veranda, several rooms opening onto it, and a front yard. There were women seated on the lawn, engaged in conversation. They appeared quite content, to say the least. Despite my determination to learn more about *bashali,* I was unable to do so, as it was my final day in the valley.

While I acquired extensive knowledge about *bashali* from documentaries and books, I was keen on learning directly from women. I was unsure if the participants would address it when I interviewed them for my dissertation. To my surprise, the research participants brought up *bashali*

during their interviews. When I asked about the role of women in peacebuilding, the participants emphasized that women primarily address women's issues, especially those related to *bashali*. This response provided an opportunity for me to delve deeper into this institution and women's perspectives about it. It allowed me to gain insights into this institution, its significance to women, and how ritual impurity during menstruation does not affect social relationships or women's status in the community.

The published literature on the Kalasha people often translates *onja't'a* and *pragata* as "pure/impure" or "purity/pollution." However, these terms should not be understood as simple dichotomies of good and bad. Their meanings are much more nuanced and deeply rooted in the Kalasha worldview, reflecting complex spiritual, social, and cultural values. To fully comprehend these concepts, it is essential to look beyond literal translations and explore the intricate beliefs that shape the Kalasha understanding of balance, harmony, and the sacred. The following sections explore the Kalasha notion of *onjas't'a* and *pragata,* as well as the position of women in Kalasha society and their role in peacebuilding.

Kalasha Women and Peacebuilding

Kalasha women actively contribute to peacebuilding efforts in various roles. These roles can mainly be understood in three areas: safeguarding the community, nurturing familial ties, and serving as traditional healers.

Women Safeguard the Community

Women have a vital role to play in promoting peace within the Kalasha community through several strategies. One interesting practice that women revealed to me in our interaction involves shielding and protecting their community from natural calamities by observing *onjas't'a* (ritually pure) and *pragata* (ritually impure) regulations, such as by secluding themselves into *bashali* during menstruation.

According to Kalasha tradition, transgressing the boundaries of *onja't'a* and *pragata* does not only affect the individual, but can also bring consequences for the entire community, often believed to manifest as natural calamities or spiritual imbalance. As a result, women must take on the crucial role of safeguarding their community by actively participating in the observation and enforcement of *onjas't'a/pragata* separation. Prior to exploring their contribution to peacebuilding, it is crucial to comprehend the *onjas't'a /pragata* dialectic within the Kalasha community. It is nearly impossible to delve into the complexities of this dialectic, as doing so would require an entire dissertation.[68] Instead, a concise and straightforward explanation is offered to assist in the comprehension of women's position in Kalasha society and their role in peacebuilding.

The social organization of the Kalasha community is characterized by a division of roles based on gender. Men and women are assigned distinct yet equally important roles, which are largely influenced by *onjes't'a/pragata* dialectics. The dialectic concept of *onjas't'a* (ritually pure) and *pragata* (ritually impure) is central to the Kalasha way of life. This single principle governs the Kalasha religion. The Kalasha religion revolves around the idea of cosmic balance—a delicate harmony between humans, nature, spirits, and the divine. This balance is preserved through ritual observance, spatial boundaries, purity laws, and ethical conduct. Transgressions, particularly those that violate the sacred divide between *onja't'a* and *pragata*, are believed to disrupt this harmony and invite divine retribution, often in the form of natural calamities, illness, or collective misfortune.

Most of the literature often has glossed over the simplistic point that women are impure, and men are pure, without acknowledging the complex nuances and multifaceted aspects involved, including temporal, spatial, emotional, and locational components of this concept (e.g. Ballesteros &

[68] For a detailed discussion of this concept and *Kalasha Bashali*, please refer to Maggi (2001), specifically Chapters 2 and 5, as well as Mustafa's (2019) analysis of the spatial division of *onjas't'a* and *pragata*. For detailed information on the life cycle of a Kalasha woman and the relevant *pragata* and *onjas't'a* restrictions, please refer to Ubaid (2019).

Celis, 2022; Mohyuddin et al., 2015). It is important to note that the *onjas't'a* (ritually pure) and *pragata* (ritually impure) dialectic is not restricted merely to gender, nor are men and women essentially pure or impure.

That said, nature is generally seen as pure. Particularly, goats, juniper trees, walnut branches, and wine are considered *onjas't'a*. At the same time, the natural phenomenon of women's menstruation is regarded as ritually impure, as is the consumption of poultry and eggs. The *onjas't'a /pragata* concept is also closely linked to rituals and emotions. Celebrations and happiness are referred to as *onjas't'a,* whereas grief and mourning are referred to as *pragata* (Mustafa, 2019). This is the reason why a person who dies during a festival, especially at the beginning of the festival, is buried quickly without performing a death ceremony. The spatial landscape can be split into three categories: pure, impure, and non-binary spaces (please refer to Figure 22).

Pure spaces include high pastures (*son*), altars[69] (*dewadur*), cattle houses (*gos'*), and dedicated spots for observation of sunrise and sunset *(suri jagaikein*). On the other hand, *bashali* (menstural home), *anac'u*[70] (sections of graveyards), and *cu'ibut'ikein* are examples of impure spaces (Mustafa, 2019). *Cu'ibut'ikein* are designated locations adjacent to rivers and near *bashali* that are exclusively utilized by women for activities such as bathing, hair combing, and washing clothes. Historically, these have been employed for ceremonial purification after menstruation, in addition to laundering women's clothes and bathing. Men are prohibited from entering the premises, and those who do so have to undergo ritual purification and pay fines for violations.[71]

[69] Altars are open-air sanctuaries dedicated to specific religious figures in each valley. They are primarily used for sacrifices and prayers during festivals and are only accessible to men.

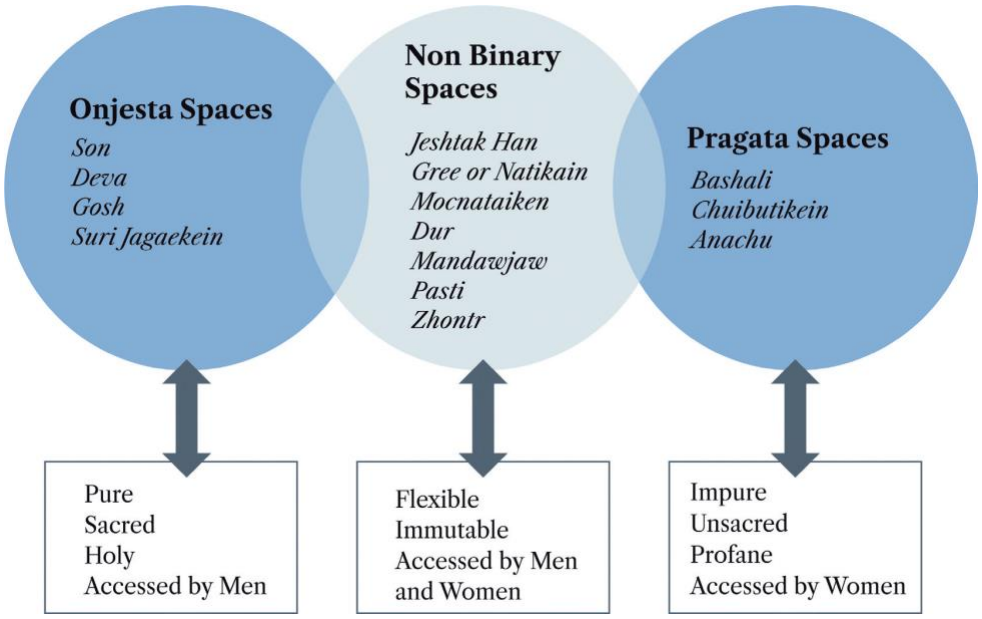
[70] *Anac'u* is a section of the cemetery where women who die in an impure state such as during menstruation or childbirth are buried. Men are not allowed to visit that area.

[71] Recently, the post-menstruation and after-birth cleansing ritual has been carried out in newly constructed *bashali* buildings equipped with washrooms. Homes situated far from *dewadur* (altars) now feature en-suite bathrooms, while toilets and bathing facilities are constructed near rivers mostly by non-governmental organizations. The large influx of

Non-binary places, on the other hand, are typically found between pure and impure spaces and are open to both men and women. These spaces include temples (*jes't'ak han)*, dancing pavilions (*gri*), graveyards (*mand'awjaw),* funeral spaces *(mocnat'aikein)*,[72] houses (dur), storage units (*pasti)*, and water-powered grinding mills (*zhontr)*, among others (see Figure 22).

Figure 22

Onjes't'a, Pragata, and Non-Binary Spaces



Note. From "The Kalasha Art of Dwelling: Built Heritage of Kalasha Valley," by M. Mustafa, in *From Tsiam to the Hindukush: Kalsha People and Their Culture* (p. 33). Copyright 2019 by UNESCO & THAAP. Reprinted with permission.

While typically reserved for men, women do occasionally have access to pure spaces during certain times. However, altars remain strictly off-limits to women. These sacred open-air sanctuaries,

people relocating to the valleys, as well as an increase in tourists, have impeded seclusion and prevented the observation of traditional rituals in a customary manner.

[72] During the winter, funeral rituals are carried out in a lineage temple called *jes't'ak han*, while in summer they are conducted outside, and those funeral spaces are known as *mocnat'aiken.*

dedicated to Kalasha messengers/deities, are the site of sacred prayers and rituals, particularly during the *Cawmos* festival. The reason for the restriction is perhaps to avoid the possibility of a woman unknowingly starting her period and touching the altar while in a state of impurity, Yasir Kalash told me.[73]

Nevertheless, women accompany shepherds to the *son* (high pastures) once a year on the very first day they move livestock there. Almost the whole village accompanies the shepherds. All families prepare walnut bread and other food, which they take along with them while singing and beating drums. Yasir Kalash explained that the entire family spends a night there and celebrates in a process that is like having a picnic. Some prayers are offered on that night, and other rituals are performed by the shepherds after the families have left. After those rituals, the women cannot go back to the high pastures and must wait until the next year. Likewise, the women are not allowed to enter the *gos'* (cattle house) during the sacred winter months, typically until late March, before an *istam saras* ritual is performed (Maggi, 2001). However, once the ritual is completed, women are allowed to enter the cattle houses but not the roofs because the roofs of the *gos'* are considered a sacred space, where sacrifices are made.

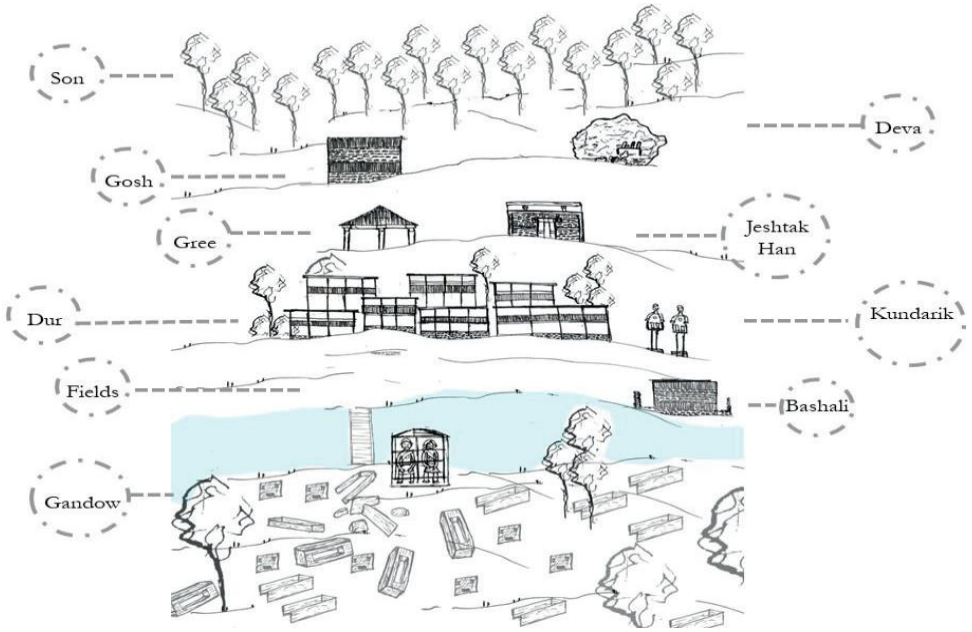
The *onjas't'a /pragata* concept also determines the directional importance of sites. In this sense, right corresponds to *onjas't'a*, left corresponds to *pragata*, high corresponds to *onjas't'a*, and low corresponds to *pragata*. Therefore, the Kalasha people's settlement pattern follows a distinct spatial organization, consisting of pure and impure areas that are demarcated along an elevation gradient. Specifically, the pure zones are located at higher elevations, the impure zones are found at lower elevations, and the non-binary spaces are situated in intermediate elevations (Figure 23). A

[73] The same principle applies to the *jestak* altar for prayers and offerings located in each household. Women are not allowed in this part of the house, but they can access the rest of the house. Interestingly, a wooden statue of the goddess *dezalik* who protects *bashali* women is located right in heart of each *bashali*, the most *pragata* place, and offerings are made to her for easy labour and delivery (Maggi, 2001).

gendered division of labour thus also corresponds to this concept. Men are typically responsible for ploughing, harvesting, and herding, including relocating animals to higher pastures and taking care of cattle houses. Women, on the other hand, focus on activities such as hoeing, tilling, and watering the soil (Pir, 2019a), as well as child-rearing and homemaking.

Figure 23

Settlement Pattern Along Elevation Gradient



Note. Pure places are located on high land, non-binary places are in the middle, and impure places are near rivers on low land. From "The Kalasha Art of Dwelling: Built Heritage of Kalasha Valley," by M. Mustafa, in *From Tsiyam to the Hindukush: Kalsha People and Their Culture* (p. 33). Copyright 2019 by UNESCO & THAAP. Reprinted with permission.

In addition, the west direction is known as *onjas't'a* because it is the direction of *Tsiam*, which is regarded as the location of the origin of the community according to the Kalasha oral tradition. All sacred prayers are conducted facing west (Mustafa, 2019). In terms of time, *bewat* (evening time when the sun is setting) is considered *onjas't'a,* while the night is *pragata* (Pir, 2019b).

The most *onjas't'a* of all periods is called *dic* and is observed during the *Cawmos* festival. It lasts for seven days in *Rukmu* (15–22 December) and three days in *Mumuret* (18–21 December)[74] and is not observed in the Biriu Valley because they follow a different set of purification rituals. During this period, the Kalasha people practice sexual abstinence and seclusion from non-Kalasha people,[75] and they are prohibited from eating chicken and eggs and from braiding women's hair (Pir, 2019b). This time is marked by purification rituals for villages, cattle barns, and humans. As part of the purification ritual for women, male members of each household prepare five walnut bread loaves for every woman in the family. A designated male relative then washes the woman's hands and forearms, distributes the bread loaves, and completes the purification by circling her head three times with flaming juniper branches (see Figure 24). This ritual is known as *S'is'a au*, and only women are allowed to consume those walnut breads.

The male purification ritual, *Istongas*, involves sacrificing a goat and sprinkling its blood on the men's faces. Before the sacrifice, the site and the men's heads are purified by circling a flaming juniper branch. Only men are permitted to eat the sacrificial meat. Individuals who are not part of the Kalasha community honour *dic'* by leaving the valleys or by avoiding entering or traversing the primary Kalasha villages in the valley during *dic'.* The restriction of *onjas't'a* and *pragata* does not apply to children (both girls and boys) who have not yet been initiated into the Kalasha religion.[76]

[74] For a detailed explanation of purification rituals in both valleys during this period, please refer to Cacopardo (2016) and Pir (2019b).

[75] All Kalasha are considered pure compared to non-Kalasha.

[76] Kalasha children need to be initiated into the Kalasha religion during various stages of childhood. For a detailed description of these initiation rituals, please see Cacopardo (2015) and Pir (2019b).

Figure 24

Women's Purification Ritual (S'is'a au)



Note. A woman undergoing a purification ritual (*S'is'a au)*. Photograph with kind permission of Luke Rehmat.

It is important to clarify that the terms *onjas't'a* and *pragata* do not accurately reflect the power dynamics in the social structures. For example, in the Kalasha community, uninitiated virgin boys are considered the most spiritually pure beings, second only to supernatural entities. However, despite their elevated spiritual status, they do not have exclusive land rights, a higher social status, or involvement in decision-making (Pir, 2019a). This highlights that power dynamics in the Kalasha's social structures are not tied to notions of purity or impurity. According to Maggi (2001), "In Kalasha thought, the concepts do not imply moral judgements, nor are they tied to honour, shame, or prestige" (p. 49). For the Kalasha, *onja't'a* and *pragata* are neutral and functional concepts. Rather than reflecting moral judgments, these terms express a cultural understanding of one's alignment with the

spiritual and cosmic order, as well as with the rhythms of community life. In this context, ritual purity and impurity are not about labeling actions as inherently good or bad, but about maintaining spiritual and social equilibrium. As Douglas (2002) argues, the ideas of purity and pollution are not irrational; they serve meaningful, functional roles in sustaining social order across many societies.

Therefore, ritual impurity induced by menstruation does not devalue Kalasha women, prevent them from making life-altering decisions, or affect their social standing in the Kalasha community. Although more impure things may be associated with women since one of their main biological traits is considered *pragata*, and women need to be mindful of separating *onjas't'a* and *pragrata* in their everyday lives, men are not inherently pure. There are circumstances in which both men and women become impure. A mourning spouse, for example, is regarded as impure irrespective of gender, as are both companions following sexual intercourse.

Figure 25

Soholak Ceremony (Flower Cap)





Note. During the *Pu'n'* festival in Biriu Valley, non-menstruating girls typically between the ages of 3 and 10 are dressed in traditional shiny gowns and crowned with flower caps made especially for them. Special prayers are offered for their development and growth.

Men also require annual purification (*Istongas*) during the *Cawmos* festival as do women. Both women and men must also be aware of the spatial layout of the Kalasha valleys while moving through them. Men are also barred from accessing *pragata* locations that are off-limits to them (for example, *bashali*, *anac'u*), and they must be cautious of altars while choosing a spot to bathe. They are subjected to fines and required to complete purification rituals as do women in case of violation. Therefore, the depiction of women as impure and men as pure oversimplifies Kalasha beliefs and does not accurately reflect their cultural logic (e.g., Ballesteros & Celis, 2022; Mohyuddin et al., 2015; Ubaid, 2019).While the Kalasha people appear to have embraced a straightforward scholarly translation of these concepts, when asked whether women are impure, they often respond, "It's not that they are impure or lesser than men." They then proceed to explain the centrality of this dialectic to the Kalasha code of conduct and the negative power or forces associated with the concept of *pragata* (ritual impurity). So, neither are men essentially pure, nor is their mobility as unrestricted as seems to be indicated in the literature (e.g., Maggi, 2001). There are "no go areas for both" to put it in Imran Kabir's words. In the following statement, Imran Kabir elaborated upon *onjas't'a /pragata* restrictions, the gender equation, and whether men are pure and more significant actors than women:

> In our big worship, in the very first religious song, we ask God to give us *chu* (daughter), pious and good daughters. When that ritual begins, three names are chanted in the sequence of *chu* (daughter), *baba* (sister), and *áya* (mother). These are three sacred names. Those worships and prayers are regarded as exceedingly sacred, meaning you are told that women are life givers; essentially, they are created by God to nurture life [become mothers]. There are various means

for women to become sacred, but none for men. Women do not mourn the loss of a close family member when pregnant, [since mourning is regarded as impure but being pregnant is considered sacred].

Breastfeeding women are also considered sacred. Traditionally, nursing mothers' blessings were sought by asking them to pray by laying their hands on a weapon. Similarly, for five months after birth, some laws proclaim her sacred. According to Kalasha law, women are regarded as sacrosanct. Therefore, they are not allowed to touch males except those with whom they cannot marry [Kalasha law strictly prohibits incest and marriage within one's clan dating back at least seven generations]. Men and women are equal in certain aspects. For example, regarding decision-making power and free will, a daughter's first right is free will…. This is her first and most important right, more than a claim to property or other assets. Her independence, which the creator has given her. Taking away her freedom is sinful, a violation of God's principles, and an infringement on His boundaries.

Then women have their own world, and no-go areas are for both men and women. *Bashali* and where women used to wash clothes, braid hair, shower, and sunbathe are no-go zones for men as per Kalasha law. Little girls were their guard. In the case of a violation, and if someone interfered with such spaces, women complained, and men were subjected to a penalty. Likewise, women cannot go to altars where men worship and sacrifice.

Temples (*jes't'ak han*) are for both men and women; everyone visits them. Funerals are held there, wedding rites are held there, and children's rituals, such as the first sacrifice at the age of 7–8 years and subsequently at 13–14 or 10 years, are performed there. Similarly, everyone may attend a festival. So, both have their own no-go areas. I do not believe women are undervalued in any manner. They have importance. They are not subjected to severe labour in comparison to women from our neighbouring tribes. But, of course, with the passage of time

and after 700 years of serfdom and servitude, people's behaviour has changed to some degree, and they can no longer strictly adhere to Kalasha law.

Imran Kabir's perspective is compellingly supported by Elizabeth Darling (1979), who revealed that the prayers of Kalasha women—particularly a man's wife and the women of his clan—were considered essential to his success and prosperity. As a result, the *jamilisher* (daughters of the clan) were generously gifted, and their prayers were actively sought by men, underscoring the deep-rooted belief in women's spiritual influence on the clan's fortune.

In addition, Kalasha people take great pride in their "heritage of free will" (Crowley, 2021, p.87), and when questioned about their unique cultural characteristic, they often remark "*hóma istrížha azát ásan*" (our women are free) (Maggi, 2001, p. 32). Kalasha women's freedom is typically understood in relation to the constraints that most Muslim women[77] endure in neighboring communities in the region. In contrast to women from other tribes, Kalasha women do not wear veils or cover their heads, they may openly chat to males who are not their relatives, and they do not need male permission to leave the home (Crowley, 2021). They are also not burdened with the demanding tasks of chopping wood or grazing cattle. The freedom to pick a life partner and elope if they no longer wish to remain with their spouse is also an accepted norm among the Kalasha, which may lead to honour killings in some other ethnic groups but is viewed as "*ghona dastur*" (a great custom) among the Kalasha. However, "it certainly is not the case that men and women live in balanced harmony. But rather, for Kalasha people, comparing the relative positions of men and women—ritually, socially, politically—is not very interesting, is not a focus of identity for Kalasha, as it is for many Westerners. On the other hand, the related concepts that Kalasha women are 'free' (*azát*) and

[77] It is important, however, to remember that mutual stereotypes exist in both the Kalasha and Muslim communities. As Maggi (2001) noted in her fieldwork with the Kalasha, she also had an opportunity to live with a Muslim Chitrali family. She stated, "Without this glimpse behind the walls of Chitral, it would have been much more difficult to dispel Western stereotypes of women in purdah as passive or oppressed" (p. 229).

have 'choice' (*čit*)—especially compared to women from neighboring communities—are compelling concerns" (Maggi, 2001, p. 17).

At the same time, however, the *onjas't'a /pragata* world is far more intricate than it may appear. Hence, documentaries and articles that aim to garner subscribers and readers with catchy taglines like "Free but Impure," "why kalasha women are expelled from their homes every month" or "Kalash people imprison their women"[78] fail to accurately portray the Kalasha community and engage in intellectual dishonesty, to say the least. Likewise, "the anthropological literature assumes that *bashali* is a place where women are exiled, confined and restricted"[79] (Maggi 2001, p. 117) and that it is a patriarchal institution (Ballesteros & Celis, 2022) by dismissing women's active agency in observing and administering *pragata* (Maggi, 2001). Talking about other people's perceptions about *bashali*, Kazi Shahi Gul told me, "Outsiders will say a lot, but we are not bothered about them; we are concerned about our beliefs and traditions, which we must uphold. Regardless of whatever they say, we will abide by our *dastur* and customs. Spending time in *Bashali* is an excellent idea. We feel comfortable there since we are provided with facilities. Because our faith teaches us that violating customary law causes problems and may lead to issues such as natural disasters and snowstorms, we have no reservations about going to *bashali*."

Maggi's (2001) observation that "for Kalasha women *paragtaness* is not a construct of denigration imposed upon them, but a concept shaped by women's own active agency, which they conceptualize as being free (ażat) or having choice (*čit*), runs through many dimensions of their lives" (p. 46) aligns with my comprehension, which is derived from the accounts of Kalasha women who

[78] See for example, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZPC031p2CE. These videos promote stereotypes and lies about Kalasha women's sexual life and marriage traditions and have hurt the community, Luke Rehmat told me.

[79] Menstrual customs in Indigenous societies around the globe have been portrayed as archaic and superstitious. European settlers and Christian missionaries shamed and primitivized menstruation practices among Indigenous communities in North America, which many Indigenous communities (for e.g., Hupa, Ojibwe) are currently attempting to revitalize (see Baldy, 2018).

shared their sentiments regarding *bashali* with me. When queried about their sentiments regarding going into *bashali*, women used words such as safety, privacy, relaxation, comfort, enjoyment, cooperation, and support among others to describe their experiences. Zarmaz Gul, who operates a guest house in Rukmu valley, expressed her feelings about going to *bashali* as follows:

> It is very, very good. It is part of our faith. When we finish menstruation, we stay for another two days to relax, hahaha. You don't have to do any work there; food is provided from home, and there is no work. If we wish, we can weave a basket. We go there and play cricket and ludo. When you give birth in *bashali*, there are many women and girls to care for you.
>
> You simply eat and sleep comfortably while they take care of a newborn, bring [special] meals from home, and take care of hygiene. It's so relaxing. They help you when you need to use the toilet. Even when we return home, we relax for forty days, as opposed to our neighbouring Sunni women who begin house chores seven days after giving birth, which seems to be quite difficult. We relax for three months. In *bashali*, we sing, dance, and enjoy ourselves and *never engage in fighting*.

In the past, and still now, women whose fields are located near *bashali* went out during the day to work. In recent times, women who work in other spheres, such as schoolteachers, leave *bashali* during the day to carry out their responsibilities and thereafter return to *bashali*. It is a women's cultural centre where women converse, support each other, weave baskets and headdresses, and do bead embroidery, as well as play games, sing, dance, and just enjoy themselves.

Figure 26

Kalasha Bashali



Note. Women chatting while weaving in Bashali, Brun village, Mumuret Valley. From "The Kalasha Art of Dwelling: Built Heritage of Kalasha Valley," by M. Mustafa, in *From Tsiyam to the Hindukush: Kalsha People and Their Culture* (p. 61). Copyright 2019 by UNESCO & THAAP. Reprinted with permission.

While discussing Ojibwe menstrual tradition of staying in moon lodges, Patty Smith of the Minnesota Ojibwe described that "our moons are a time of cleansing and renewal. Recognizing this cycle helps keep us healthy in body and mind and reminds the community of our significance as women…. Our moons are an opportunity to take a break from our everyday lives. This is a time to honour ourselves and spend time with our daughters and other women, a time to pass on teachings and words of support" (quoted in Pember, 2019). Like the Ojibwe moon lodges, *bashali* is a place that fosters a community of women by providing a venue for passing on knowledge, rejuvenation, and support. *Bashali* provides women with the opportunity to have both individual and collective space,

allowing them to transfer knowledge about self-care, reinforce boundaries of *onjas't'a /pragata*, and to contemplate and make choices about their reproductive and marital lives (Maggi, 2001). Hazrat Gul, a lady health worker in Mumuret Valley, helps women during childbirth in *bashali*. She expressed reservations and shared her positive impressions regarding *bashali* as follows:

> *Bashali* is a place where women from different villages, as well as your neighbours and distant relatives, come, rather than women from your own household. We look after each other for five to seven days like a sister, mother, and younger sisters. There are *no confrontations amongst women in bashali since we go there as guests*, and the government has now facilitated such that rooms are large, have beds, and the only thing required is food, which is also supplied from home. After spending five to seven days enjoying themselves and unwinding, women return home. They live there in peace, chatting, gossiping, and inquiring from one another about their families and villages.
>
> You know that women need to rest during menorrhea, and our Kalasha women indeed spend five to seven days at *bashali* doing nothing but resting. After seven days, they return home. *Bashali*, in my opinion, provides both privacy and safety. It is not seen favourably if a baby is delivered at home and the male family members witness it. In *bashali*, everything happens in privacy and a woman only returns home after cleaning. I enjoyed it with my firstborn, but God forbid if a woman develops a fever or gets into other complications [during or after delivery], and her family is unaware of what she is going through; that part I dislike, that she has to go through it alone [in the absence of her immediate family].
>
> Another point is that women all over the globe want to keep their periods secret, but our culture tells us to go to *bashali* and everyone knows we are on our period. However, if we look at it from the perspective of relaxation and privacy, it is best because one does not need to do anything there, you just eat and sleep, eat and sleep. But I don't want everyone to know

> that I am on my periods. However, if I said something along these lines, Kazis would say something like, "Oh, she has read a lesson now [become educated], so she is forgetting her own culture," so I don't like to share such things with them.

Women generally feel positive about *bashali*, but that does not mean they have no concerns. For example, Hazrat Gul had concerns about confidentiality and not being with family during a baby's delivery. Others miss home, and some simply find it difficult to get to *bashali* (Maggi, 2001), especially in Rukmu Valley, where there is only one *bashali* and women from all around the valley must trek to get there. Young women and girls sometimes find older women being too critical when they blame them for troubles in the valley for bringing cell phones to *bashali* (Ubaid, 2019). Anything that enters *bashali* must undergo a rigorous washing and ceremonial purification, which mobile phones are unable to pass through. It is crucial to keep in mind, however, that going to *bashali* is not a forceful obligation. Women do it with their active agency, and occasionally they break the rules and opt to merely remain at home while being mindful of *onjas't'a /pragata*. When a woman chooses not to observe a particular custom, she just says "*may čit*" (my choice). Although others may disapprove of her action, they also remark "what can we do, it's her choice," (Maggi, 2001, p. 61). The Kalasha community's emphasis on personal agency is further highlighted by Crowley (2021), who stated,

> One of the fundamental concepts of Kalasha self-definition is that they are '*azat roi'*, a 'free people', the followers of '*azat mashab'*, a 'free religion', a belief which is a source of significant cultural pride. More important than the act of obeying society's rules is the belief that when they follow the rules, they are doing so of their own free will, as opposed to Muslims, whom are argued to have little choice in whether or not to honour their religious obligations. (p. 88)

Kalasha women assertively claim that *onjas't'a* places are not off-limits to them. They confidently express, "We don't just go there," powerfully employing active verbs to convey their

stance (Maggi, 2001, p. 60). Interestingly, they make a similar assertion about the patrilineal code of inheritance (*dur phazhik*), in which property is mostly handed down to male offspring. Women told me, "We don't ask for it [a share in property]," and they often asked, "What is my husband for?" stating that their spouse's property was their own. I was informed that women themselves do not ask for property since they are showered with love, care, a magnificent dowery, and substantial gifts throughout their entire lives, and they wish to see their brothers happy. Men also seem to acknowledge this agency since women can request a share from their fathers' wealth if they so wish. As Akram Hussain communicated to me,

> The property is divided among the sons. Daughters get a dowry and ongoing support throughout their lives and the lives of their children [such as substantial gifts for different rituals and ceremonies]. Occasionally, properties have also been offered to them, but because of the small size of our community and limited availability of land, our girls do not show interest in acquiring it.

Therefore, women make a conscious choice when they go to *bashali* or abandon their share in property to safeguard the community. Kalasha women treat menstruation and childbirth with a sense of normalcy rather than associating them with shame or disgust. They take active responsibility for the community's well-being by observing the separation between *onjas't'a* and *pragata* (Maggi, 2001). Kalasha women view their stay in the *bashali* as a vital practice for maintaining peace and balance within the community. In Kalasha worldview, transgressing the boundaries between *onjas't'a* and *pragata* is thought to invite calamity. Thus, by upholding this separation, women play a crucial role in ensuring the safety and stability of the community. As Kazi Dinar Bibi affirms, "We choose to go to *bashali* in accordance with our *dastur* [code] and tradition as a means of averting natural calamities, hazards, and unforeseen events."

Bashali is a place exclusive to women, and everything is overseen by women. Women take this obligation seriously, even if it means killing a demon by a single woman to protect her community in general, and the *bashali* women in particular. Kazi Sher Bibi, a member of the Najoge clan, told me a folk story of Shuragali, a Najoge woman known for her outstanding courage and important role in communal safety:

> This is story of my own family, the Najoge clan. There is a tale and a song about it. One of our Najoge grandfathers was Bara Mukh, who had just one daughter, called Shuragali. She played an important role in fighting a *nahang* (demon). In Bara Mukhs' time, humans, animals, and genies could communicate and could see each other. Bara Mukh was a hunter. One day, when he was going to hunt a hawk, the bird laughed. Bara Mukh inquired why he was laughing. He answered, "Don't hunt me; I will give you something," so the hawk handed him his feather, a grape seed, and a wheat seed.
>
> The feather was buried in the ground and grew into a tree, while the grape became grape vines, which are used to produce wine. The hawk requested that Shuragali eat wheat seeds. So, when Bara Mukh gave Shuragali the seed, she got pregnant. There was a *bashali* near Anish village's primary school. At the time, the population was very small; therefore, there was only one *bashali. Bashali* often had just one woman since the village only had three to five households. So how could a woman spend time there alone? Women used to sleep outdoors in the fields, while a man would sleep a short distance away to ensure their safety, as being alone made them feel uneasy and frightened.
>
> But how could she deliver a baby in an open area? She had to go inside *bashali*. A woman who went there had to handle it all alone. So, whenever a woman gave birth to a child, a demon, whom we call *nahang*, would appear and ask, "Would you come out, or should I come in to eat you?" He would then devour both the mother and the child. As a result, the

Najoge clan was unable to grow, and their numbers shrank significantly. Then came Shuragali's delivery time. So, when Shurgali's parents dropped her there, they were crying, "How would you do this? He will eat you."

But she answered, "Don't worry. Go bring me two to three loads of oak, one load of bamboo straws, and a spade." The night before her delivery, she dug a large hole in front of *bashali*'s door. Then she lighted the oak and created ashes. Oak is very tough and cannot be readily extinguished. Then she closed the hole with bamboo straws and covered them with soil. Then she delivered a baby. Nahang would arrive at the first glimpse of light in the morning. So, he came and said, "Shuragali, would you come out or should I come in to eat you?" "Now that you're here, just come in and eat me," Shuragali answered.

As he stepped inside, he fell into a pit, and Shurgali covered him with blazing oak and burned him to ashes. Shuragali's parents came back in the morning, wailing, but Shurgali informed them that she had killed him. Shuragali's son was given the name Jibrail [Gabriel]. After that, the Najoge clan prospered. When a member of the Najogeh clan dies, this song is repeated. The Kazis of Rukmu Valley are familiar with this song. Biriu Valley Kazis are also aware of this. Her role is recognized and remembered. Shuragali's clan brother, first, sang a song about her role. Since then, this song has been performed at almost every funeral and festival to honour her contribution to the community.

So, women personally take care of everything that happens in *bashali*. When participants first informed me that women's issues are addressed by women, particularly those that arise in *bashali*, I thought they were talking about mutual disputes among women in *bashali*, which often drew a chuckle from women. It turned out that there are no fights, but rather they are referring to other issues, as outlined by Kazi Shahi Gul when she reported, "Women make a society and discuss women's issues, developmental issues, and do savings. They save some money, and when there is

some problem, they use it to resolve it. This society is on the village level and is only made by women. Women's issues are resolved by women only. In *bashali*, women counsel youngsters and teenagers on which areas they cannot go and don't talk to and meet someone at night." However, Kazi Sher Bibi explained to me that when a violation does occur, then "women are responsible for settling any issues related to *bashali*, such as if someone is not attending or spending less time in the *bashali* after giving birth. Women have their own ways of debating the matter, conducting *Marakha,* administering penalties, and purification. Similarly, if villagers have not made monetary contributions,[80] or if someone is provoking tension because they feel their land is being wasted due to water flowing from *bashali*, or if someone violates *onjas't'a /pragata* rules outside or inside *bashali*, women have a role in disciplining and fining them."

This disciplining, however, means highlighting the need to keep *onjas't'a* and *pragata* separate, as well as mentoring women on the repercussions of violations. The fine involves sacrificing animals to purify the area. Women Kazis are often listened to, but if they are not obeyed, they cannot resort to coercion or punishment. Crowley (2021) noted, "In the end, however, disapproval is the only consequence imposed by Kalasha society on violators" (p. 87). For example, Akram Hussain commented on this issue in the following manner:

> We certainly respect religion, but we don't carry it on our shoulders. Religion has its own path. We believe that people are made for religion, but religion was not made for people. Religion is something people can handle. We do not punish violations or disagreements. It is totally up to them to follow religion properly. If someone fails to comply, we do not pursue him or her. People have the freedom to live their life as they see fit, unlike other faiths that encourage others to join their faith or ask them to do certain things.

[80] Each home contributes a small amount of money, which is subsequently utilized to perform communal sacrifices to avert natural disasters or to address other concerns that arise in the community.

In a nutshell, women play an essential part in the process of peacebuilding by consciously choosing to maintain balance and prioritise the safety of their community through the separation of *onjas't'a* and *pragata*.

Women Nurture Familial Ties

Most participants believed that women play a significant role in sustaining peace in the family and cultivating intra and interfamily relationships. While some women did acknowledge this, Kalasha men often considered the importance of women's work as peacebuilders at the domestic and family level to be more crucial than the women themselves did. Women perhaps took it for granted. For example, Kazi Noor Baig believed that women have a vital role in promoting peace in both family and society by ensuring harmony within the home. He emphasized the importance of women's roles in the following way:

> A mother plays an important part in developing children's relationships so that they live in love and affection, and have no problems, and if they do have problems, a woman solves them to keep the peace. A house is a unit where families live; if it is not peaceful, it will eventually engulf the whole village and cause problems. So, it's a mother, a woman, who does and can handle it.
>
> It's women who care for their husbands' property and keep all their relatives together [nurture inter-family ties]. A woman carries a child in her womb for nine months before giving birth and raises the child in a challenging environment after delivery. Children may not listen to their father, but when a mother effectively advises them, they cannot ignore it. So, in terms of peace, mothers play a significant role in educating their children on how to live peacefully.

Maintaining a sense of unity within one's household is vital for promoting harmony throughout the wider community, and mothers play a pivotal role in this process. Mothers are held in

high regard. In Kalasha culture, while seeking to convince someone to reconcile through *Nanawati*, it is customary to bring along either the mother or midwife who assisted at that person's birth. This is done to convince the individual to engage in the process of reconciliation. The Kalasha children call their mother's midwife *g'ada áya* (big mother), and they share a special lifelong bond with her (Maggi, 2001). Kazi Mir Bacha also recognized the significant role women play in promoting peace by acknowledging their role as homemakers in the following way:

> In her capacity as a mother, she guides her sons, brothers, and spouse. The involvement of women in peacebuilding at the domestic level is considerably greater, as they are entrusted with immense responsibility for managing the entire household. Men come just for food; during the day, they pursue goats, scavenge for timber, or travel to Chitral. The whole household is the duty of the women.... Women are not seen as being lesser to men since the entire world exists because of women, yet a man's home is sometimes destroyed because of them, hahaha.

It is believed that women are responsible for maintaining harmony within the family. Most of the time, women strive to prevent conflict and try to keep it at bay by counselling the male members of the household. They dislike commotion, conflict, and arguing in their household. As Kazi Danok shared his view, "women play an active role in addressing family issues, and if men do not listen, they resort to acerbity and take a stand, which is critical for promoting peace. They also stop and warn their children and spouses not to engage in disputes, explaining that it disturbs the home atmosphere." Many women shared with me that they generally avoided getting involved in conflicts between men. However, if they did come across such a situation, they intervened and tried to put an end to it. Kazi Dinar Bibi believed that "a household where women are heard is serene, vibrant, and peaceful. A house where women are not listened to becomes desolate and gets into trouble. We counsel and urge men in our homes to live peacefully." However, Turab Khan told me that "it entirely

depends on the role of women, as some women also incite their spouses." He further asserted that "women's contribution to peacebuilding is *ajhonakarik* (hospitality). As the primary caretakers of the household, women are responsible for receiving guests and visitors. When carried out with care, this role strengthens social bonds and fosters harmonious relationships within both the family and the broader community."

However, a woman does not have to have conflicts specifically linked to her family, husband, or children to play her active role in peacebuilding. When the role of a woman from another household seems to be negative in the community, other women in her household, with the support of female Kazis, urge her to reconsider her role. Hazrat Gul disclosed, "Of course, she becomes emotional, insists, and gets annoyed, but women finally try to intercede and convince her." Likewise, women play their peacebuilding role in many other spheres. Women also serve as Kazis and elders, playing a crucial conflict resolution role in the community. They also contribute by serving as elected village councillors, forming part of a governmental body that aims to provide local representation to the community at the grassroots level. For example, Kazi Milad Gul enthusiastically shared with me her achievement of being elected as a councillor, winning over three male candidates. Kazi Shahi Gul, on the other hand, received recognition from the government for her role as a mediator in facilitating a discussion between the Muslim and Kalasha communities, along with government officials, in response to a threatening video released by the Taliban targeting the Kalasha community (discussed in Chapter 2).

They are also respected figures with a wealth of knowledge and experience, sought after for their wisdom in various domains. In addition to having the authority to address their problems, women also take on the role of observing, discussing, and offering comments on situations that arise outside of the village. Their viewpoints are given due attention. Traditionally women have not actively participated in *Marakha*, particularly in the actual gathering. This non-engagement is not

due to their lack of capabilities, but rather because they often had no personal stake in the issues being discussed, such as conflicts over land. Additionally, their limited knowledge and information about specific conflicts at hand have also contributed to their lack of involvement in *Marakha*. Imran Kabir explained this issue in the following manner:

> Women have been performing different roles. They have the opportunity to participate in *Marakha* and share their perspective. There are no restrictions or prohibitions imposed on them … you know, we have a very free environment [no gender segregation]. Of course, they are the party in conflict involving them. Women have a more significant role in marital conflicts.
>
> For instance, if someone enters a second marriage, women tend to have a significant part in the decision-making process. They conduct *Marakha* to discuss the topic of child-rearing. However, when it comes to conflicts involving distant forests and high pastures, their role is minimal due to their lack of familiarity and knowledge of these areas [because those are *onjas't'a* where women usually don't go]. They are heard when it comes to property distribution, and they have played an important role.

So, women can lead and participate in *Marakha* about matters that are of concern to them. Nevertheless, women play a significant role in family disputes because "they can devote time to this activity. Men are typically gone as they lead livestock to high pastures. After working in the fields, women return home and spend most of their time in the village. Thus, women are afforded additional time to address issues like family disputes," Kazi Mir Kay told me. Additionally, their role as a homemaker and their oversight of the entire household also allows women the chance to have greater involvement in domestic problems and nurture intra- and inter-familial relationships. Overall, they contribute positively to their family, village and community.

Women Are Healers

Kalasha women also serve as healers through the ritual practice known as *Iste'n'ik Karaw*. It is a skill that entails the process of identifying and diagnosing a problem, and then devising a solution for it, along with the ability to exorcise, if needed. *Iste'n'ik* specifically refers to bangles, while *karaw* implies the act of practicing. Therefore, the practice could be translated as bangle practicing/searching. Men conduct a similar procedure called *thom kuchek* (bow searching), in which they utilized a bow rather than a bangle to detect problems (please see Figure 27).

However, there has been a higher proportion of women who have been engaging in and excelling in this domain compared to men. *Iste'n'ik* is exclusive to those with supernatural abilities, which are acquired through the process of dream-based learning. For example, Kazi Sher Bibi from Mumuret Valley is an *Iste'n'ik Karaw Istrizha* (bangle-practicing woman). She provided me with a detailed explanation of the practice and process, as well as insights into how its role in peacebuilding can be understood:

> *Iste'n'ik* is an extraordinary knack, and not everyone is capable of doing it. An animal [that is incapable of speech] will converse with you in your dream, such as a dog, cow, or any other creature belonging to the animal kingdom or supernatural world. You must recall and practise it as soon as you wake up, without revealing it to anyone [since it is secret knowledge]. Then you become an expert in *Iste'n'ik* or exorcism, which you also learn via having an animal communicate to you in a dream.
>
> The procedure of Iste'n'ik involves using specific sheep wool to make thread, which is placed in the Iste'n'ik (a bangle). Various names, including those of deceased family members, are then recited to determine the cause of an issue. This may involve identifying whether a person encountered an animal, a demon, or any other circumstance [someone is upset with them, or they offended someone]. The bracelet remains stationary, and the name

under which it begins to move is identified as the source of the problem. A solution is then determined based on this finding.

Iste'n'ik's role is similar to *Marakha* [i.e. to resolve people's problems]. During times of crisis in the village, such as disturbances, illnesses, or unexplained crying of children, individuals seek my assistance and wake me up, even at early hours like 2 or 3 a.m., to accompany them to their homes. Wherever I go, that kid heals. Similarly, if there is a chance of snakes and scorpions entering an area, I exorcise. Even if they show up, they will move about and not bite you. [We have seen this in our real life. There is a chance of them arriving every year at the beginning of summer, but people take exorcised sand from Kazi Sher Bibi and toss it in corners of their homes, so they no longer show up, the translator added].

Figure 27

Iste'n'ik Karaw and Thom Kuchek



Note. Left: *Thom kuchek moc* (bow searching man), copyright Kalasha Dur Museum. Right: *Iste'n'ik Karaw Istrizha* (bangle searching woman). Photograph with kind permission of Yasir Kalash.

Iste'n'ik Karaw's assistance is sought when there is a crisis within the household, such as chronic illnesses or unforeseen events like children falling and breaking bones or crying abruptly or individuals experiencing unfortunate incidents such as accidents or other unforeseen events that catch everyone off guard or someone unexpectedly experiencing a headache or toothache. Once the specific reason behind the crisis is identified and the prescribed steps are followed, immediate relief is said to be obtained.

While there are instances where an *Iste'n'ik* finding may be linked to the evil eye or demons, its role is similar to that of Marakha (a peacebuilding process). It often reveals that the root cause of a crisis lies in relationships. This could involve a person offending or hurting an elder by ignoring their advice, neglecting a relative during a joyous occasion, or failing to honuor a deceased family member. Therefore, the conflict necessitates reconciliation and compensation for the parties to heal from and resolve the crisis at hand. It is fascinating how *Iste'n'ik Karaw* may cure people physiologically while simultaneously improving their interpersonal relationships.

The Kalasha people seem to link good health with good relationships, which seems to be a fair argument considering the significant influence that positive relationships have on individuals' mental health. Therefore, negative relationships may be a cause of health issues. Kazi Mani also emphasized this point in the following words:

> We have learnt from our tradition that quarrelling is what dogs do, not humans. The greater the extent to which you coexist with and spread love, the greater the amount of blood that your heart receives. You experience an improvement in your overall well-being, an increase in your level of happiness, and a boost in your energy levels.

Typically, *Iste'n'ik* findings often include phrases such as "your grandfather or maternal uncle is displeased with you, or you have ignored their feelings." An example of such a finding is *Kho'n'marat'* with *kho'n'*, referring to anger or curse, while *marat* signifies the act of sacrifice. To

alleviate the anger or dispel the curse caused by the harm that a person has done by words or actions, one must offer an apology. Kazi Sichen Gul provided an interpretation of *Kho'n'marat'* as follows:

> Once *Iste'n'ik* Karaw has identified a problem, she will explain the whole process that must be performed to address the problem at hand, for example, a married girl who is suffering from chronic illness, is unable to carry a child, whose children die after birth, or whose children remain ill. *Iste'n'ik*, for instance, discovered she needed *Kho'n'marat'* since her parents [or another individual whom *Iste'n'ik* discloses] was displeased with her for defying them through words or actions that caused them hurt. The *Kho'n'marat'* procedure include baking a large amount of special walnut bread (*ja'n'u'n'*), taking elders from her in-laws and community, and visiting her parents or anybody who has been reported to be displeased with her.
>
> Then she asks for forgiveness. The parents then donate an animal for sacrifice before imploring *Dezau* for forgiveness, claiming that they had reconciled their emotions and forgiven their daughter. Furthermore, they ask their daughter's forgiveness for the challenges she has faced because of them. The situation at her household then significantly improves. If someone you have hurt is not alive, you should feed birds and humans in his or her honour. If they are still alive, *Kho'n'marat'* is performed and all participants, including neighbours, are fed.

Iste'n'ik Karaw's solutions prioritize individual well-being and community care through initiatives such as organizing social gatherings, preparing meals, and hosting feasts. Their efforts extend to philanthropy, providing food not only to people but also to birds, reflecting a deep commitment to kindness and inclusivity. Depending on the identification, Kazi Khosh Ahmed Khan

remarked that it may be essential to "perform a religious ritual, undergo purification,[81] or, if someone is upset, provide food as an offering in remembrance of your departed relative or to feed your relatives and others who are in need. There is some correlation between completing this action and experiencing quick relief, which is often not achievable through medical means. Identification might be hard but if it is precise, it brings about immediate relief."

Solutions based on *iste'n'ik* often require animal sacrifice and *ishperi* (charity feeding of traditional meal to birds and people) because they are believed to play a significant role in preventing disasters and solving problems. For example, Yasir Kalash elaborated upon their importance in the Kalasha tradition in the following manner:

> Kalash culture places a high value on animals. We adore them, especially goats. They are responsible for our whole system and life circle. Whether its sacrifices, major prayers, calamities, diseases such as the COVID-19 epidemic, or outside threats, sacrificing an animal transforms the whole scenario. For example, if it is raining heavily and there is a threat of loss, sacrificing an animal and praying from the heart clears the clouds from the center. We have seen this in real life.
>
> This is a strong concept among the Kalasha. Even our Muslim neighbours ask us to make sacrifices in our way because they believe that our prayers are heard. When COVID-19 arrived, we performed communal sacrifices, and thank God it did not cross into our valleys. In such cases, collective sacrifices are often performed at the Ingaw altar [in the Mumuret Valley] or on the rooftops of *gos'* (cattle house).
>
> Aside from sacrificing animals, we also do *ispheri*. Almost every household keeps one *maund* (40kg) of wheat harvest and keeps it in a pure state [for *ishperi*]. Nobody touches it in

[81] If the origin of the problem is believed to be the result of the evil eye or a demon, the victim must undertake a purifying rite such as *istongas* and *S'is'a au.*

an impure condition. Then, you take it separately to the grinding mill and grind and knead it with clean, untouched water. Then, you cook flatbreads and top them with untouched cheese. This is called *ishperi.* Then you keep some of it on your house altar and consume the rest. The portion on the altar would be served to neighbours as an act of charity. When someone is in pain or disturbed at home, we do *ishperi.*

Iste'n'ik Karaw women play a vital role in the process of healing. Through their secret healing knowledge, they heal not only physical ailments but also interpersonal relationships. The *Istenik Karaw*'s role is akin to that of a mediator in *Marakha*, who attentively listens to people's concerns, finds solutions, and helps restore relational harmony. The *Iste'n'ik Karaw* goes the extra mile as she carefully navigates the realm between the human and supernatural worlds to effectively manage both bodily and psychological challenges and aids in the restoration of peace in people's lives.

Key Findings

The role of Kalasha women in peacebuilding cannot be overstated. Kalasha women have been at the forefront of healing and reconciliation efforts in their community. Their unique position as caretakers of the community's cultural and spiritual heritage makes them natural leaders in the peacebuilding process and their contributions are invaluable. Three major findings emerged inductively from the data.

First, Kalasha is a gendered place where men and women have separate and equally important responsibilities. Women enjoy respect and a great deal of freedom in making their own decisions. Women have a significant role in protecting their community by separating *pragata* and *onjas't'a*. The notion of *onjas't'a* or *pragata* has a key role in Kalasha cosmology and serves as the governing principle of their religion. This one idea defines the gender and spatial landscape of the Kalasha valleys. The intricacies and multifaceted nature of this belief system—encompassing temporal, spatial, emotional, and locational dimensions—render it challenging for non-Kalasha individuals to

fully grasp its significance within the Kalasha cultural context. Altars, the natural world, high pastures, livestock, juniper, and wine, among other things, are recognized as *onjas't'a*, while *bashali, anac'u*, and *c'uibutiken* are regarded as *pragata*. Regardless of its ritual impurity, *bashali*, like a ritually pure altar, is a site where a person cannot be violently attacked if they seek refuge during a fight. Such violations result in a communal fine paid to the Kazis for purification arrangements.

Due to the cultural belief that women are ritually impure during menstruation and childbirth, they go to *bashali*. This has led outsiders to mistakenly see Kalasha women as inferior and impure while considering men to be pure. Contrary to popular belief, neither men nor women are inherently pure or impure, and the Kalasha *bashali* is not a patriarchal institution that men force upon women. Wright (2003) noted that Indigenous women of the Pacific Northwest Plateau (North America) utilized menstrual lodges as vital spaces for actively shaping their gender identity and defining womanhood. These lodges were not just physical structures; they symbolized a profound strength recognized by the community, showcasing the power women wielded in society. Likewise, the *bashali* serves as a critical institution under women's control, where they define what it means to be a Kalasha woman and reaffirm their indispensable roles as life-givers within the community.

Kalasha women are held in high regard for their role as life bearers—a status considered both significant and sacred, particularly during key stages such as pregnancy and nursing. It is more accurate to state that both men and women may enter states of ritual purity or impurity depending on specific circumstances that indicate a misalignment with the social order. As a result, individuals of both genders must remain conscious of these conditions when moving through the spatial and ritual landscapes of the Kalasha valleys. Further, power dynamics within social systems are not associated with concepts of *onjas't'a* and *pragata* because these concepts do not bring honour, shame, or prestige to any Kalasha individual, regardless of their position on the *onjas't'a* radar. It is also interesting to note that neither men nor women think that women are essentially "impure." For the

Kalasha, it is a neutral and functional concept, not tied to moral judgment, but rather aimed at maintaining cosmic balance and sustaining social order.

Due to the potential safety hazards caused by violating *onjas't'a* and *pragata* norms and the cultural perception of women's menstruation as ritually impure, women often play a significant role in maintaining the separation between *onjas't'a* and *pragata*. The women participants in the research noted that it is not a mandatory requirement for them to be secluded in *bashali* due to inferiority or impurity. Instead, they willingly chose to be there, exercising their agency, to safeguard their community and to experience a sense of safety, relaxation, privacy, support, enjoyment, and camaraderie with other women. This is a location where women are provided with the opportunity to exercise both their individual and collective agency. *Bashali*, like the Ojibwe moon lodges, is a cultural centre that cultivates a community of women by offering a setting for their exchange of information, revitalization, and support. *Bashali* offers women the chance to have both personal and collective space, enabling them to share information on self-care, reinforce the boundaries of *onjas't'a /pragata*, and reflect on and make decisions about their reproductive and marital lives (Maggi, 2001). It is also a space where women confidently define and express their femininity.

Although women may sometimes have concerns about attending *bashali*, it is important to remember that going to *bashali* is not a forceful obligation. Women exercise their active agency when they choose to breach regulations and decide to stay at home while being cognizant of *onjas't'a* or *pragata* by simply asserting *may c'it* (my choice). Despite potential disapproval from others, they also acknowledge that it is a woman's prerogative to choose whether or not she will go to *basahli*, and there is nothing the other people can do to intervene. Darling (1979) highlighted perspectives about *bashali* that align with those expressed by participants in this study. She regarded *bashali* as an institution that exemplifies women's freedom. Both Darling (1979) and Maggi (2001) viewed it as a

springboard for the elopement of Kalasha women, making it a significant space for them to reflect on and assert their freedom.

One of the core principles of Kalasha identity is their freedom and free will to choose whether they want to follow society's rules. They believe that they follow free religion, which allows them to sit, stand, sing, dance, and drink according to their own free will. That is why disapproval is the sole sanction Kalasha individuals face when they choose to bend or disregard certain customs. One possible explanation why an individual often passionately adheres to the Kalasha faith is the lack of communal coercion and their strong belief in individual free will. Kalasha women find tremendous fulfilment in asserting their freedom and choice in comparison to women living in adjacent communities.

In addition, women believe that attending *bashali* helps maintain peace by averting catastrophic incidents like floods, landslides, and snowstorms. According to the Kalasha tradition, the breach of *onjas't'a* or *pragata* might result in disastrous consequences. By maintaining the separation between *onjas't'a* and *pragata*, women play a crucial role in ensuring the safety of the community. They have sole authority over matters concerning *bashali*, even if it involves the extraordinary act of killing a demon to protect the *bashali* and the community.

Second, due to a gendered allocation of labour based on *onjas't'a /pragata*, women are responsible for child rearing and homemaking and spend most of their time living in the villages. As a result, women possess the necessary time and expertise to address familial conflicts and foster relationships within and across families. However, this does not imply that Kalasha women lack professional skills in professions outside their traditional lives. They also excel as health workers,

archaeologists,[82] singers,[83] pilots,[84] cricketers,[85] teachers, mediators, guest house operators, and shopkeepers, among many other professions.

Due to the great importance of Kalasha women as life givers, their position as mothers has a profound influence on their children when it comes to matters of reconciliation, socialization, and peacebuilding. This is apparent from the fact that when an individual has engaged in a dispute and someone wishes to persuade them to reconcile, it is customary to bring along their mother or a midwife to assist in convincing them to reconcile their differences. While women may get into petty domestic fights over children or cleaning, they generally dislike household conflicts and actively participate in resolving them, asking men to abstain from engaging in domestic conflicts. When men engage in a domestic conflict, women generally do not participate. However, there are instances when some women may instigate the dispute while others willingly intervene to break it up. According to the Kalasha men who participated in this research, the importance of women in nurturing strong family relationships is heavily dependent on their role as homemakers and as *ajhonakarik* (hospitality providers).

Nevertheless, this does not imply that women are only capable of settling problems that pertain to their families and fall within the domestic realm. Women can actively participate in and lead peacebuilding initiatives about matters that directly impact their lives. They may participate otherwise too, as there is no gender segregation that would hinder them. They often engage in observing, debating, and commenting on situations that arise inside or outside their community. Their opinions are also carefully considered by the male Kazis and elders. The prevailing principle among

[82] E.g., Syed Gul Kalash: https://explorers.nationalgeographic.org/directory/sayed-gul-gul

[83] E.g., Amrina and Ariana: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Pvs8X8wvIU

[84] E.g., Lakshan Bibi: http://www.the-south-asian.com/April-June2011/Lakshan_Bibi.htm

[85] E.g., Saira Jabeen: Her passion for the sport landed her a contract with the Pakistan Cricket Board as a part of the women's cricket team and then with a cricket club in Australia. https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=313600014770870

the Kalasha people is that women's concerns are addressed by women, men's issues are addressed by men, and other matters are settled collectively. The issues pertaining to no-go zones need relevant competence by both genders. However, matters such as marriage, remarriage, development, and sometimes property distribution may be addressed jointly since they affect both parties. Participants frequently used the terms "right" and "capability" to highlight the importance of each gender having control over their own affairs. Since 2018, when the government led by former Prime Minister Imran Khan further decentralised authority to the village level, Kalasha women have been elected as councillors and formally appointed as Kazis alongside men. They have since been contributing their knowledge and skills in these areas to the community.

Assuming the job of a homemaker and being responsible for managing the whole household also provides women with the opportunity to actively engage in resolving domestic issues and fostering positive and constructive relationships within and between family members. Ensuring cohesion inside one's family is crucial for fostering peace in the broader community, and women, in their roles as mothers, wives, and sisters, play a major part in this endeavour. In general, they make a beneficial contribution to their families, villages, and communities.

Third, women in the Kalasha community also play a significant role as healers through a ritual practice called *Iste'n'ik Karaw* (bangle searching). The *Iste'n'ik Karaw* expert acquires her knowledge through dreams, which she keeps strictly confidential to master the knack of *Iste'n'ik*. This knowledge is non-transferable. It involves the ability to identify and diagnose problems and thereafter devise remedies for them, including the possibility of exorcism if necessary. The Kalasha people seem to associate good health with robust relationships, a valid observation considering the significant influence that healthy relationships have on individuals' psychological well-being. There are cases where certain findings may be associated with supernatural beliefs. However, they often reveal the root cause of a crisis within local people's behaviour and interrelationships. This could

include instances where someone has caused offence, disregarded the advice of an elder, neglected a relative during an occasion of joy, or failed to acknowledge a deceased family member. Rituals like *Kh'on'marat'*, which involve performing a ritualistic sacrifice of an animal to appease and alleviate the wrath or curse of the aggrieved party, can achieve this goal of reconciliation. Additionally, it indirectly sends a signal to the community, particularly the younger generation, about the significance of exhibiting thoughtful and empathetic conduct in their interactions with others, the antithesis of which might potentially precipitate a catastrophe in their lives.

Several therapies derived from this healing tradition often include rituals such as animal sacrifice and charitable feeding of needy community members and neighbours, since they are thought to have a significant effect on preventing disasters and resolving problems. *Iste'n'ik Karaw's* solutions are often people centred. This includes responsibilities like organizing social gatherings, preparing meals, and actively engaging in charitable endeavours by generously offering food to both birds and humans to get rid of problems.

Hence, it is crucial to acknowledge the substantial role played by *Iste'n'ik Karaw* women in the community's healing process. Utilizing their profound comprehension of human behaviour and Kalasha customs and rituals, they function as psychoanalysts and possess the capacity to not only treat physical problems but also to repair and foster positive interpersonal relationships. Their position is akin to that of a mediator in *Marakha*, where they attentively listen to people's issues, identify resolutions, and aid in re-establishing harmonious relationships between individuals. An *Iste'n'ik Karaw* demonstrates outstanding skills in managing the intricate equilibrium between the mortal and ethereal domains, adeptly tackling both physical and psychological challenges and significantly contributing to the restoration of peace in individuals' lives.

Conclusion

The role of Kalasha women in promoting peace is quite noteworthy. Women have a substantial influence on their society through actively advocating for harmony and making valuable contributions to peacebuilding initiatives in several domains. They claim to protect their communities from natural disasters and crises by purposefully separating *onjas't'a* and *pragata*, in which female Kazis play a significant role in disseminating knowledge across the valley. Women, in their roles as homemakers and as mothers, spouses, and sisters, play a vital role in fostering family connections through their acts of guidance, counsel, and hospitality. Ultimately, *Iste'n'ik Karaw* women use their profound comprehension of traditional healing methods to reinstate balance, wellness, and peace in people and in their interpersonal relations.

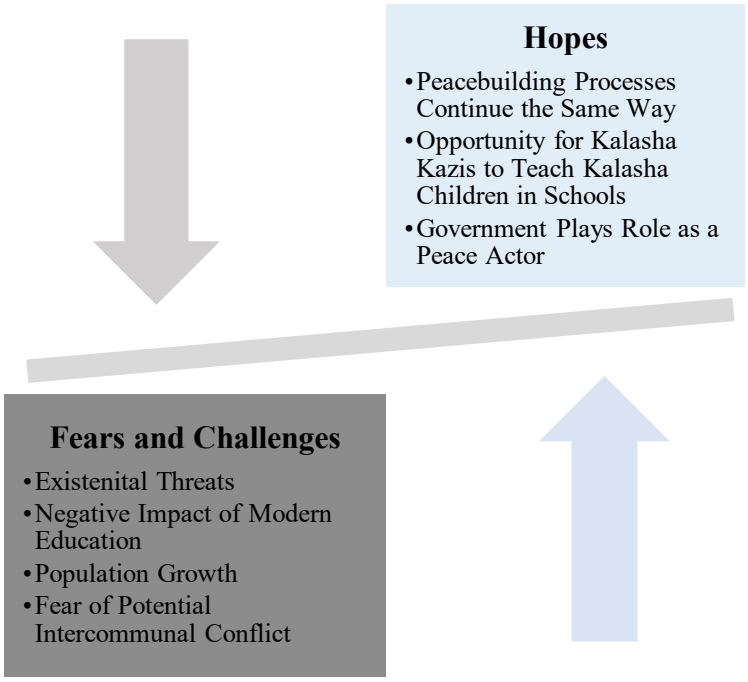
Chapter 9

Challenges, Hopes and Fears: The Future of Peace in the Kalasha Valleys

The Kalasha people, known for their rich culture and practices that unite them, remain hopeful for a peaceful future. However, the rapid changes brought about by increased contact with the outside world have raised concerns among community members about potential threats to their peacefulness. Chapter 9 explores the hopes and fears of the participants, along with the challenges that could jeopardize Kalasha culture and their prospects for a harmonious future (Figure 28).

Figure 28

Hopes, Fears, and Challenges for a Peaceful Future



Potential Challenges, Hopes, and Fears

When questioned about challenges related to peacebuilding, participants applauded Kalasha methods of conflict resolution. According to Daud Shah, the Kalasha people's practice of resolving conflicts through gatherings and communal forums is the best approach. They are aware of

the challenges that come with their work, including the dedication and time it demands, as well as the occasional derogatory remarks directed at peacebuilders in moments of intense emotions. However, these challenges do not concern them, as their focus is on the important task of fostering peace. According to Daud Shah, the only real obstacle and challenge that may impede a conflict resolution process—especially in intercommunal disputes—is instigators and agitators who vent their own resentment by making the parties fight. These agitators prevent the third-party intermediaries from reaching a resolution. He likens their role to that of a cunning fox, who lured all the animals into a house with the promise of cheese. Inside, however, there was nothing but a white stone. As the animals fought over the cheese and started murdering one another, the fox continued to eat her portion quietly, and when they were all dead, she just piled up their skins and jumped out of the house. While there remain foxes in each community, the Kalasha are determined to overcome them through the dedication of their elders, who continually strive for peace. However, some participants made suggestions regarding the changes they wished to see in the peacebuilding process.

Some younger participants proposed two key changes to the peacebuilding process: creating a communal space for *Marakha* (conflict resolution gatherings) and documenting *Marakha* judgments in writing, which has already begun. Currently, there are no restrictions on attending a *Marakha*. However, the number of persons who may attend can be restricted due to space constraints, since the event is often held at one of the parties' residences or at a location with more sufficient room. Establishing a communal spot in every village for a *Marakha* is advantageous for anyone seeking to expand their knowledge of the peacebuilding practice. It also allows for a greater number of local people to attend a *Marakha* gathering.

In addition, creating a shared space specifically for resolving conflicts might also help Kazi Mir Bacha achieve his goal of arranging monthly meetings for elders, Kazis, and young people to have discussions for fostering understanding of peacebuilding practices and for mutual bonding.

Moreover, it would enhance the implementation of Bakhtawar Shah's desired awareness program, aimed at helping individuals comprehend the repercussions of prolonged conflicts for interpersonal relationships, as well as the financial burden that results when these disputes are brought to court. Overall, participants expressed their trust in the effectiveness of peacebuilding practices as well as conflict resolution that facilitates the prompt and localized handling of conflicts.

Participants also expressed their aspirations, concerns, and various challenges that threaten the Kalasha culture and the prospects for a peaceful future. These challenges include existential threats, the impact of modern education, fears of intercommunal conflict, and population growth, among others. The following sections will explore these issues in detail.

Existential Threats

"Upon your next visit, you may find that only colourful attire[86] remains in this place," said Yasir Kalash, and it broke my heart. It is distressing to see a community with a wealth of knowledge in peacebuilding being confronted with a substantial threat to its existence, both in terms of its tangible and cultural heritage. The Kalasha people have 4,000 members and are facing an existential threat, as they have lost a significant portion of their population to religious conversion (discussed in detail in Chapter 2). For example, Kazi Noor Baig expressed his fear of communal survival and a peaceful future, stating:

> When there will be no more Kalasha people, their values, ways of life, and peacebuilding processes will all come to an end. Given the present situation in Biriu Valley, survival seems difficult. People are abandoning Kalasha culture and converting [to Islam], which leads to

[86] He referred to the colourful clothing of Kalasha women that distinguishes them from their neighbours. The distinct attire serves as a key identity marker for their community. Kalasha men, however, have stopped wearing traditional dress for decades, making it difficult to differentiate them from their Muslim neighbours.

changes in their manners, habits, rituals, and thought patterns. Various influences come into play, and the original Kalasha ways then no longer remain intact.

In addition to the threat of religious conversions to Islam, there is also a sense of alarm about how quickly Kalasha cultural traditions are diminishing due to various changes in the valley like education, jobs, and the influence of Islamic culture. Daud Shah, who served as a member of the National Commission for Minorities, described these challenges to me as follows:

> It is predicted that by 2040, around sixty to seventy percent of cultural traditions and rituals will disappear. The younger generation may abandon some traditions that seem odd to them.... The Kazis do not have any agenda on how to preserve this culture and protect it from the changes that are now affecting it. This is an ill culture that needs to be attended in order to grow. Just like a person who is ill, when they are taken care of, they tend to heal and grow. Some traditions that used to happen during the day are now taking place at night, and by 2040, they may cease to exist entirely.

This unfortunate situation in the valleys can be attributed to several factors, including religious conversions, insensitive tourism, the influx of non-Kalasha people into the valleys, land loss, and external development interventions (discussed in Chapter 2). However, much of the intergenerational tension stems from the influence of modern education on Kalasha culture. Many participants expressed doubt about the possibility of a peaceful future for the Kalasha people, attributing their skepticism largely to this cultural shift.

The Impact of Modern Education

Participants had varied opinions about the impact of state-sponsored education on Kalasha children and youth. Some believed that education has endowed Kalasha children and youth with the ability to read, write, and converse in Urdu and English, which has partially resolved the representational predicament that the Kalasha were experiencing. Historically, researchers recruited

people from other communities to serve as translators and research assistants, a practice that has frequently been reported to have resulted in misinterpretation and inaccurate portrayals of Kalasha culture. Now, they believe that the Kalasha have grown astute.

To tackle the issue of misrepresentation and counteract prejudice faced by educated members of the Kalasha community in schools, it became crucial for them to bring schools inside the Kalasha valleys. Engineer Khan, a Kalasha man with a tremendous sense of humour and one of the first Kalasha graduates, shared his story with me. He told me about his challenging journey, his unwavering determination, and his remarkable devotion to education and to establishing the first Kalasha primary school in the valleys:

> I was the first from my community to graduate, studying among Muslims in Ayun[87] and Chitral[88] . It was a lonely and difficult path—many teachers and students treated me with prejudice. But over time, I saw that education gradually reduced fundamentalist attitudes and brought more respect toward us. Back then, Kalasha parents were hesitant to send their children to school because teachers often preached Islam all day, which confused the children and led many to convert. Out of six of us who started, three converted, three dropped out—I was the only one who stayed.
>
> That experience inspired me. I dreamed of a school where Kalasha children could be taught in their own language by Kalasha teachers. In 1989, I had the opportunity to meet Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto as part of a minority delegation. I proposed the establishment of a Kalasha primary school, and though our own elders initially opposed the idea, it was approved. I was later asked to run the school myself.

[87] This town is located at the gateway to the Kalasha valleys.

[88] The main city of Chitral is 36 kilometers from the Kalasha valleys.

> I started with just one rented room in Karaka village and moved from place to place for three years without a proper building. Eventually, a Greek musician researching Kalasha-Greek connections helped secure funding, and with support from an NGO, we built a school.
>
> Today, some of my former students are doctors, engineers, and teachers. For a more peaceful future, we must prioritize education—but not at the expense of cultural identity. Education should empower communities, not erase their culture.

Schools have always been a source of uncertainty for Kalasha children due to the overt proselytization by some teachers, particularly those from outside the valleys (Crowley, 2021). Kazi Khosh Ahmed Khan mentioned that education has been used to manipulate the minds of Kalasha children. He shared his perspective in the following words:

> When we encourage young people to learn about Kalasha traditions, they often don't see the value in them. From another perspective, this attitude stems from the type of education they receive in school, which emphasizes that our traditions are not based on divine scriptures. As a result, they tend to disregard our customs, viewing them as unimportant. Education plays a crucial role here—when it conveys negative messages, it fosters negative perceptions. Our children are not exposed to Kalasha traditions early on in any structured or compulsory way. Instead, they learn them voluntarily as they grow older, learning through oral transmission rather than a formal system.

Another concern raised by Akbar Bhutto, a teacher from Rukmu Valley, was regarding the curriculum provided in schools. He expressed his perspective by stating, "Education is important, but Pakistan's education system often focuses solely on Islam, impacting individuals of other faiths. The curriculum promotes a single perspective, leading to children, as young as five, being misled and losing their sense of balance."

To address this issue, the Pakistan National Commission for Minorities proposed the idea of government-run Kalasha primary schools in 1990s. These schools were meant to enroll only Kalasha children and be staffed by non-converted Kalasha teachers, like the school founded by Engineer Khan. Instead of Islamic studies, these schools would teach ethics as it is offered to non-Muslim students in other schools across Pakistan. However, these schools could not remain exclusive to Kalasha children, and they now admit students from mixed ethnicities living in the valleys (Crowley, 2021). They still require the mandatory study of *Islamiyat* (Islamic studies) and have raised skepticism among Kalasha children since their inception, leading them to question their traditions and culture. The younger Kalasha generation has been impacted by criticism of their practices, which are seen as inauthentic and not grounded in divine scripture. For instance, some Kalasha view the improvised singing competition with obscene songs during the *Cawmos* festival as inappropriate. Unlike the older generation, many young, educated Kalasha feel embarrassed by this tradition, which conflicts with the moral values influenced by their Muslim neighbors (Crowley, 2021).

Nevertheless, the elders are firm believers in preserving this tradition, which they consider to be a valuable custom passed down through the generations. However, the ritual is now only performed during *dic*', the sacred period of *Cawmos*, when non-Kalasha people are prohibited from attending (discussed in detail in Chapter 8). Some members of the Kalasha community, like Sher Hardi, advocate for the complete discontinuation of this ritual due to concerns that it leads to negative stereotypes about the community. As he noted in his story, "For me, the song… is normal… no problem, my wife is there, my daughter is there, the man who is performing, he respects a lot all Kalash families, he is just acting like this…. I know his heart, it's clear… but I can't tolerate outsiders thinking [that] something [is] wrong about my community" (quoted in Crowley, 2021, p. 79).

Likewise, during a funeral ceremony at Rukmu valley, I had the opportunity to meet a young Kalasha who was studying in Islamabad. He expressed his strong disapproval toward the extravagant

funeral ceremonies, considering them a waste of money and resources. He believed that the money spent on these ceremonies (approximately CAD$ 20,000–25,000) could easily provide education for three to four people. However, the older generation sees it as an integral part of Kalasha collective life, solidarity, and cultural continuation. For example, Saifullah Jan from Rukmu Valley lamented the role of modern education in making individuals selfish, insensitive, and disconnected from their culture:

> Education is bringing about changes... Because of religious restrictions, we do not grow beards. We only grow a beard for 7–20 days during the mourning period. Today's educated youth see growing a beard as a fashion trend that is not appropriate for our culture. I cannot say that education is bad. Everyone should receive education. However, educated people often spend their lives with their eyes closed [i.e., self-centred]. They think just for themselves. When individuals get educated, they concentrate on themselves, a good job, a great house, and good food. We had been eating stale food. We don't care about these things.
>
> Young educated folks typically dislike our old-fashioned codes. They recommend that we make some changes; if it seems difficult, make it easier. If it's costly, make it cheaper. However, I think that even if an educated person becomes Prime Minister, they should respect their religion and culture. In our culture, we have the practice of inviting everyone from three valleys to a funeral ceremony. If one day we were to abandon this custom or merely lower the number of attendees, it wouldn't be good.
>
> We now openly welcome as many people as want to attend, but if we limit the number to 20 from Biriu, 20 from Mumuret, and 15 from Rukmu, we will be unable to celebrate death. The whole clan and village come together to share funeral expenditures, which are not solely the responsibility of the deceased's family. Therefore, there is no financial loss for that one family. So, who am I to tell them to spend less? Let them carry out what they are willingly

doing. One could argue that they should not perform the death ceremony or lessen expenditures if it burdens one family or requires them to take out a loan.

Some elders, like Faizi Khan and Kazi Noor Baig, believe in being flexible to the needs of new generations and investing in their education. As a result, the mourning period was reduced from 20 days to just seven days, and the funeral ritual has been shortened from a span of two days and two nights to a single day and night. Nevertheless, it can present difficulties when an individual passes away later in the day and individuals from neighbouring valleys are unable to arrive in time. Given the meticulousness of the invitation process, where a deceased family's representatives must personally meet with the chief Kazi of each village in the three valleys to formally invite each village to the funeral ceremony, the duration can still be extended to two nights. Elders did not adopt young people's suggestion to phone the chief Kazi in each of the three valleys because they considered it inappropriate, as it has been historically the chief Kazi who then visits the people door to door in his village to make sure each household is individually invited.

However, Kazi Mani told me that she "desires an increasing number of social gatherings where individuals can converse and engage in dialogue. As the level of affection between them increases, so will their level of understanding, which will serve to further mitigate conflicts." Thus, Kazi Mani and Saifullah Jan's perspectives imply that a mindset that challenges Kalasha traditions like the funerary ceremony would severely undermine communal gatherings, mutual support, and interdependent relationships that foster harmony, peace, and nurture communal life.

As more and more young Kalasha people become educated, these young Kalasha individuals are leaving their valleys for higher education and taking on roles in different fields. This has caused more and more people to abandon their traditional occupations as shepherds and subsistence farmers and to work in other parts of the country. As a result, they find it challenging to commit to and observe all the rituals and customs that coincide with the traditional Kalasha calendar. Consequently,

practices like *ratnat*, months of nocturnal dances for the preparation of festivals and the people's unwinding, are now drawing fewer and fewer people, as their jobs have changed. Crowley (2021) wrote, "The practice withers and then disappears completely, recorded only in the memories of elders. As the generation which remembers the practices dies off, a new generation grows up with no knowledge of what has been, and what it is to be Kalasha is irrevocably altered. We see this process underway in the case of the *Cawmos* songs and as *a fait accompli* in the shift from polytheism to monotheism" (p. 80).

Young Kalasha adults working in the capitalist economy are unable to attend cultural events, which hinders knowledge transfer and might give way to a clash of worldviews. For example, Kazi Sichen Gul feared that spending time away from the valleys and learning new ideas might not be conducive to a peaceful future. She related the following to me in her story:

> We are now experiencing a period in which children are receiving [modern] education in various areas and travelling outside of their district or country. So, how will they witness and join in the many customs, traditions, and practices that will take place here? Even if someone dies, how will they attend? They cannot. They will not attend or observe *Marakha.* Then, how will youngsters learn and understand these principles? How will they practice it? So, undoubtedly, there will be a gap. There is concern that it may cause problems in the future. Because they will not learn Kalasha values and principles, they will bring with them freshly acquired views and principles, which will produce uncertainties, concerns, and conflicts. Then the peacebuilding [process] will have problems because they will perceive and look at the issue from a new angle and approach that they have learned [through modern education].

Moreover, Kazi Siachen Gul's apprehension towards the intergenerational differences in perspectives is evident in the way some young individuals view the role of elders in conflict

resolution. For example, Bakhtawar Shah, the principal of Kalasha Dur School,[89] shared with me, "Our Kazis and elders are often illiterate and sometimes are unable to perceive an issue holistically. At times, they take sides and support each other. Then the young and educated people, who value both parties equally, offer their suggestions." On the other hand, Daud Shah, an elder from Rukmu Valley, expressed his belief that young people may not have a comprehensive understanding of the consequences of an issue, as they tend to be more emotional. He reported on this issue in the following manner:

> Young people can disagree and critique judgments … But they usually lack complete information. They only run and tumble; they lack experience. They may accuse you of making a mistake, but they are unaware of the underlying issues and the potential problems it can create in future. They often act on emotions in that moment, saying, "We want to do it like this" [without considering the context of the problem and its repercussions].

Likewise, Turab Khan informed me that often the young people dismiss dream-based warnings about disasters and the need to engage in charitable acts to prevent them. They say, "It is nonsense." He believed that when respected individuals like Kazis or those with secret knowledge dream about the community or a specific family, these dreams often manifest as accurate predictions of what will unfold. Kazis instruct individuals to engage in charitable deeds like making sacrifices doing *ishperi* and providing food to others. However, when a communal disaster is anticipated like floods, earthquakes, or epidemics (for example, COVID-19), the Kazis travel from village to village, engaging in communal sacrifices and prayers to prevent the calamity from occurring. In addition, Turab Khan informed me that "when they do so, with *Dezau*'s grace the torrential rains become a blessing rather than a calamity." During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to speak with some

[89] This is the only private school, located in the Kalasha Dur (museum) building in Mumuret valley, and is exclusively dedicated to Kalasha children. However, it only serves a small number of children from the adjacent three villages.

young individuals. One young Kalasha informed me that when an elder had a dream about the 2010 floods, he believed it was unlikely to materialize. He noted, “At the time, I was studying at Mumuret, and I was on my way to Rukmu when it came true. So, I think people can sometimes predict.”

As I was writing this chapter, one of my Kalasha friends sent me a message informing me that flash floods, landslides, and heavy snowfall took place in the Chitral district between April 12 and 16, 2024 that closed roads, destroyed communication networks, homes, and fruit, and caused casualties. He informed me that “an old woman with secret knowledge warned people about a probable disaster in the Chitral district. She advised both the Muslim and Kalasha communities to do charity in their own religious ways. Charity needs to be performed as soon as you get a warning. However, many people did not start doing it until they saw indicators. It was late by then. There were casualties in other parts of the region, but not in the valleys, thankfully.”

In addition, some older persons, and even those in their late thirties, have shared with me that during their childhood, their preferred winter evening pastime was gathering in homes to engage in traditional games and listen to the stories told by their elders. Nevertheless, because of the prevalence of mobile phones and the Internet, individuals no longer congregate for such activities, which is a matter of worry for the elderly. For example, Kazi Khosh Ahmed Khan expressed his concern about this loss, stating, “If they won’t listen to us, how will we be able to pass on knowledge? Some young people say they don’t want to listen and don’t pay attention. Then how will they learn about the good things and values we have if they do not listen and comprehend them through folk stories?”

Some advocates of cultural preservation have suggested establishing dedicated schools for Kalasha children. For example, Yasir Kalash claimed that speculations were circulating about an imminent government initiative to segregate schools. Nevertheless, considering the current circumstances and given that some Kalasha are against modern facilities that can create or deepen division between Kalasha and Muslims, Kazi Mir Bacha suggested that it would be very wise to

include Kalasha Kazis in the Kalasha youth's modern education practices. He expressed his thoughts in the following words:

> I hope that Kalasha Kazis will be included in the school education system. If authorization is granted to hold a one-hour class for Kalasha pupils to learn about Kalasha values and traditions, it will have a positive impact on them. We'll take them to the altars and other key sites. We will teach them about the processes that kept the Kalasha community peaceful .... I am afraid that children attending schools will not be educated about their own cultural history, especially the Kalasha *dastur,* and may so leave their traditions in favour of other values taught at school. There is a danger that individuals may lose their own cultures and forget about peacebuilding methods. This may cause problems in the future.

It was heartening, however, to witness the presence of educated youth who took pride in their culture and actively strove to save it. For example, Yasir Kalash considered mutual respect and solidarity to be the most important and distinctive characteristics of his society. He expressed to me that "the aspect that I value the most is that there are three valleys and hundreds of Kalasha homes. There are no restrictions for me on visiting any of them. If I visit any house, I will be respected and accepted." The appeal for Luke Rehmat lies in the egalitarianism and collectivism of the society. During a funeral ceremony in Rukmu Valley, I observed the whole community coming together to participate in the funeral and assume responsibility for the costs and preparations, including cooking, organizing seating arrangements, and serving food to all those present. Wooden logs were promptly used to create seating arrangements outside the *jes't'ak han* (temple) where the dead body was kept before burial (see Figure 29). Luke Rehmat also told me, "You'll notice that everyone is treated equally, and we don't have to worry about making specific arrangements for preferential treatment of fewer individuals. The Kalasha dislike it when people flaunt off. They remark, 'Look, he's acting like the prime minister.'"

Figure 29

Funeral Ceremony



Note. Food is about to be served to community members at a funeral ceremony in Grom village, Rukmu Valley.

During one of my interactions with Yasir Kalash, he also underlined that everyone is treated and viewed the same, regardless of their wealth or other factors. Kazi Milad Gul also expressed to me, “When children receive education, they don’t say that our culture is bad. It aids them in understanding their cultural customs. They even tell us that these customs are great and should continue.” So, modern education is a source of both fear and concern, as well as a channel through which opportunities to better represent and protect the culture may be found.

Fear of Intercommunal Strife

Participants generally believed that the Muslim people who have lived with them from the beginning, as well as the overall population of Chitral, are peaceful neighbours. Since the 1970s, when the first road was constructed, the valleys have become more accessible to the rest of the country. Further, the completion of the 11-kilometre-long Lowari tunnel in 2017 has provided a year-round connection to the Chitral district, where these valleys are situated. Increased accessibility has led to a rise in tourism and interconnectedness, which has sparked a fear of foreign influences, both from within Pakistan and the ever-present threat from neighboring Afghanistan. This apprehension stems from the possibility of clashes between these two groups because of foreign meddling.

For example, Kazi Unat Baig expressed this concern: “Currently, both communities cohabit amicably, but there is concern that outsider interference may provoke and generate conflict between the two groups.” Similarly, Kazi Dinar Bibi expressed her fear, saying, “I hope the locals will listen to us and there will be no disruptions, but I am concerned about foreign meddling, which may cause disputes and troubles. We are not afraid of the locals, and no alarming incidents are likely to happen here. We [Muslims and Kalasha] respect each other, but if a foreign hand is involved, it could cause issues.”

An example of foreign interference may be seen in the incident that took place in 2010 when the Taliban entered the Mumuret Valley and kidnapped a Greek volunteer from Kalasha Dur

(discussed in Chapter 2). Subsequently, in 2014, the Taliban issued a fifty-minute video in which it threatened Ismaili Muslims and the Kalasha to either convert to Sunni Islam or face annihilation. The video also highlighted the Kalasha's manufacturing of alcohol (Crowley, 2021) and requested Sunni Muslims to join in their proposed armed struggle against the Kalasha.[90] The Kalasha people and other non-Muslims have legal permission to drink alcohol. "Drinking means the local moonshine, *tara*, which tastes like schnapps, or homemade wine, which tastes like sherry. The Kalash dealers routinely and illegally sell both drinks to Muslims" (Rickett, 2011). The Kalasha elders brought to my attention the problem of some Kalasha individuals engaging in the manufacturing and unlawful trade of *tara* and wine to Muslims. They expressed strong disapproval of this behaviour and shared their concerns with me. Daud Shah voiced his concern in the following statement:

> Now, crimes are being committed. The population is growing, and other people are living beside us. Initially, we lived in the valleys with just Kalasha and a few Muslim people. Living together, we learnt whatever good teachings our Muslim brothers had. Our people listen to them, and even if they did not become Muslims, they learn about practices that are not acceptable from a Muslim standpoint. Now I am not sure what happened to people because of money. Certain individuals engage in inappropriate behaviour. More and more people are coming to [the] Valleys from the outside.
>
> Kalasha people also go to different cities [for work and education] and some run businesses. We can notice things that are not right. We have reservations about the future. One of them is that the Kalasha people shouldn't manufacture alcohol [*tara*]. This will lead to

[90] The Pakistani Supreme Court took *suo moto* notice of the incident, ordering an inquiry and increased protection for the Kalasha and Ismaili Muslims. On February 21, 2014, a grand peace *Marakha/Jirga* (like an Afghan *jirga*) involving Sunni and Ismaili Muslims, Kalasha, local government officials, and officials from the Pakistani army was convened in Mumuret valley. The officials ensured the local elders that they were safe and encouraged communities to coexist peacefully and not allow foreign hands to disrupt their peace. For details, please see https://clarionindia.net/grand-peace-jirga-held-at-kalash-valley-after-taliban-video-threat/

strife. It is impacting Kalasha culture negatively…Additionally, it harms the society of our Muslim brothers. This has been my point of disagreement with them from day one. If you study world history, you will see that drinking devastated societies. I repeatedly questioned them, "Do Kalasha people have a certificate from God"?

The homemade wine, which we make for special occasions, lasted barely two or three months. Okay, prepare that and drink that, but what you're up to these days is not good. Then they sell it, which has caused considerable humiliation and embarrassment for the residents of Rukmu Valley. Women also buy *tara*, and it was often detected at checkpoints. As a result, we are perplexed as to what should we do. If we make a mistake, it might cause problems. If we don't, it won't. If we create issues for ourselves, they will increase. Otherwise, they will not. If we are careful, no difficulties will arise. Muslim brothers support us, as does the government. Because of this, we are not fearful. In other countries, haven't you seen the cruelty minority groups are subjected to? However, we live here freely and practice our faith freely. If we make a mistake, an issue will arise; otherwise, it will not.

One day, as the sun began to set, we were enjoying tea in a guest house in Rukmu Valley, lovingly managed by Engineer Khan's wife. The air was filled with lively conversation as we shared stories. Among us was Engineer Khan himself, one of his former students, and my research assistants. Engineer Khan, who is a teacher by profession, recounted a story about his name. He went on to tell us, "Once a diplomatic staff from either the French or German embassy visited Rukmu Valley and decided to stay in my guest home. When we all sat down for dinner that evening, they asked me, 'Sir, what sort of engineer are you?' I responded, 'Engineer by name,' and the whole room burst into laughter." It was during one of these moments that the topic of *tara* manufacturing emerged. Engineer Khan suddenly stood up and exclaimed, "Come with me to the *tara* factory. I'll give you a firsthand tour of how it is made." With everyone on board, we squeezed into his 4x4 jeep, carefully

manoeuvring it to navigate the narrow mountain path. As Engineer Khan reversed it well up on the mountain to make a turn, I could not help but be apprehensive about falling, although it seemed like everyone else was unfazed, as if it were a routine occurrence in that place. In a matter of minutes, our journey led us to the *tara*-producing facility in Kotdesh, nestled within the picturesque Rukmu Valley. We strolled straight into the distillery and met with no resistance or objections. The room was not that big and did not seem quite hygienic. Engineer Khan explained the entire process to us, which I struggled to fully comprehend, having had no exposure to alcohol or its production in my life. However, during the walk to and from the that room, we happened to cross a sitting hall where a group of 15 to 20 young men was indulging in smoking and drinking. Most of them seemed to be outsiders, which gave me insight into Daud Shah's worries about the societal consequences and potential conflicts between communities.

Bashgali Khan also informed me that his sole concern was a potential clash between Muslims and the Kalasha, yet he believed that if the Kalasha cooperated with Muslims, then Muslims would continue to cooperate with the Kalasha as well. Mutual respect and cooperation were identified as critical to continuing the peaceful relationship between the two communities. While the onus is on both illicit vendors and alcohol drinkers to stop distributing alcohol to Muslims, Saifullah Jan believed that the minority community must be very cautious since their very survival is dependent on the majority. He shared his perspective with me in the following words:

> In general, there is no basis for discontent, and peace will always prevail here since the Kalasha are simple people. However, these days we are sensing something [potential trouble]. People come from outside to our region and get drunk. I have warned Kalasha people multiple times to be careful since this may lead to religious conflict. You know that Mullahs [clerics] want individuals of other religions to remain at their feet. They are always ready to find a

justification and excuse for disturbing the peace. We minority groups particularly need to consider our future.

All minorities in Pakistan should completely respect the majority's opinions and faith so that peace may reign. Chitral has a population of 500,000. There is barely 3,000 to 4,000 Kalasha [living there] out of 500,000. We should care about them. They should also care about us, but they can survive without caring for us, whilst we cannot. This is the main thing minorities ought to think about. They are a hundred percent wrong [sometimes], yet we can only survive if we respect them. Even if they use bad words for us, we should apologize because if you don't have a remedy for something, you don't want to die, hahaha.

Several attempts have been made by the elders to convince those Kalasha individuals to stop engaging in the illicit selling of alcohol to Muslims. For example, a Kalasha woman living in Mumuret Valley engages in the sale of wine and hosts visitors. The house is situated at an elevated level, offering an unobstructed view of the *bashali* [menstrual/maternity home]. It feels as if one is sitting on one's balcony, gazing downward at one's yard. This house has generated privacy concerns among *bashali* women. Although the elders may only try to convince others to opt for what they think is good conduct, the Kalasha firmly uphold the principle of free choice, and they cannot enforce obedience on others. I asked whether they had made any effort to reach out to the authorities. Kazi Shahi Gul told me that she was concerned about possible problems if communities do not listen to one another in the future, yet she was not afraid because she believed that "even if no one else does, the government supports and protects the Kalasha."

Conversely, another member of the Kalasha community explained to me that the government intervenes in the valleys when safeguarding its own interests is paramount, as in the case of promoting tourism in the region. For example, during the construction of an unauthorized hotel that obstructed the view of Karaka, an important Kalasha village in Mumuret Valley, which Prince

William and Kate Middleton also visited during their royal tour of Pakistan, the authorities dismantled the hotel and bought the land back from the proprietor. Nevertheless, no concrete measures have been implemented to address the sale of illicit alcohol to avert potential intercommunal clashes and safeguard the privacy of *bashali* women, since the Kalasha persons in question are believed to have connections with certain government officials who are suspected of being complicit in the alcohol sales. During a planned raid, individuals are given advance notice, and those officials provide specific instructions on what to say to avoid any complications. They usually tell interrogators that this is simply their residence, they are not entertaining guests, and they are Kalasha. This enables them to avoid censure since drinking is allowed for non-Muslims. Thus, the absence of an independent investigation into the matter is the cause of the failure to address this problem.

Population Growth

Some participants identified population growth as a possible factor influencing the continuation of peaceful relationships in future. For example, Kazi Malam Zar expressed to me that she was "concerned about the rising population and the potential for conflicts to arise over land, forests, and during the construction of houses." Imran Kabir also informed me that one of the issues contributing to peace in the valleys is the region's plentiful resources and trust in the environment.

Nevertheless, considering the expanding population, an increase in tourism resulting from the valleys' connectivity to the rest of the country, and the continuous transition from a traditional to a cash-based economy means that the Pakistani government must be an active peace actor. For example, Imran Kabir articulated:

> If the government plays a role, peace could be promoted by providing resources and building connecting roads. We only have one [primitive single-lane] road in our valley [Mumuret], which was completed in 1985. This is suboptimal from a tourism standpoint since people

> come and only see the valley from one side; they have no idea how the valley appears from the other side. So, only those on one side of the valley gain from tourism, while no one on the opposite side does. Then individuals feel helpless because they lack employment opportunities. So, if individuals have more positive opportunities, they will have no time to dwell on negativity.

Likewise, Akbar Bhutto held the belief that individuals would be less inclined to engage in futile arguments and disputes if they were provided more employment opportunities. Even though many of the participants expressed fears and reservations, others still thought that the Kalasha will have a peaceful and prosperous future. For example, Kazi Sher Bibi, who claims to have secret knowledge and practices *Iste'n'ik Karaw* (bangle searching), predicted a bright future for the Kalasha people. Speaking about the future of Kalasha culture, she shared the following insight in her narrative:

> Every person, community, and religion have defects and imperfections. Despite conversions and the Kalasha culture's neglect and oblivion, our youngsters are more interested in it. The educated are following up. There won't be many changes. When we find an opportunity, we also guide the younger generation. We suggest they maintain their cultural identity, preserve their tribe, believe in and uphold traditional Kalasha rituals, and so on. We hope that it will survive and grow. I can see it clearly: The Kalasha have a bright future ahead, free of any hurdle.

Whether the Kalasha culture will endure and remain as peaceful as it has been in the past depends on several factors. Given the Kalasha culture's resilience and survival so far in the face of external forces, as well as Kazi Sher Bibi's prophecy, I really hope that it will prevail.

Key Findings

Four key findings emerged inductively from the qualitative data, reflecting participants' perceptions of the challenges, hopes, and fears they held for the future of the Kalasha people and the preservation of their culture.

First, the participants had a deep conviction about the Kalasha methods of resolving conflicts and promoting peace. They believed that no significant changes are necessary. The elders and Kazis acknowledged the challenge of forsaking all chores to attend to conflict parties and fully commit themselves to addressing the conflict issue at hand. Thus, they saw the resolution of people's conflicts as paramount since peace has the utmost significance for them and the Kalash society. The primary obstacle to peacebuilding is reported to be the presence of external instigators and agitators who seek to disrupt conflict resolution, particularly in intercommunal disputes. These individuals are said to benefit from the continuation of conflict or use it as an outlet for their anger, provoking others to prolong the fighting. Nevertheless, despite the agitators' disruptive behaviour, the challenges can be overcome through the Kazis' active and skilled peacebuilding efforts.

The only improvements desired by some young participants in the *Marakha* process were the establishment of a community space and the creation of written records for *Marakha* judgements. Although decisions are currently recorded, it would be advantageous for the Kalasha to have a communal place dedicated to the *Marakha* in each village or valley. This platform would benefit individuals who wish to learn more about these processes and those who intend to hold monthly meetings. It would also serve as an ideal platform to educate people regarding the conflict resolution processes as well as the financial burden that arises when conflicts are escalated to the legal system, which often demands substantial payments to lawyers and operates at a sluggish pace, sometimes taking decades to reach a resolution for the conflict parties.

Second, most participants believed that as long as people continue to live their existing lifestyles, both inter- and intra-community interactions will remain harmonious and peaceful. However, they raised concerns regarding a peaceful future due to existential threats, contemporary state education, intercommunal strife, and population growth, among other factors. The survival of the Kalasha community is at risk, with only around 4,000 members remaining. Ongoing conversions to Islam, along with other challenges facing the community, have created a precarious and deeply concerning situation. If the community cannot survive, its knowledge systems and peacebuilding mechanisms will also be lost. In addition to the numerical decline, there is a growing concern over the rapid erosion of cultural traditions due to modernization and the influx of an ever-growing number of visitors into the valleys.

Another significant negative factor with a broad and profound influence on the erosion of the Kalasha culture is contemporary education from the Pakistani state. Due to the impact of modern education, an increasing number of young people are adopting new ideas, and the result is that they are losing their sense of balance between the Kalasha culture, and modernity and religious socialization. Proselytization is prohibited in the valleys. However, the mandatory inclusion of Islamic studies in schools often causes Kalasha students to question Kalasha tradition or convert to Islam, since certain instructors claim that the Kalasha religion lacks legitimacy because it is not embedded in a divine scripture. As a result, many young Kalasha people, whose values have been heavily influenced by neighbouring Muslim communities, are questioning or advocating for the prohibition of their own customs and beliefs like polytheism, reliance on dream-based warnings, and a need to engage in charitable acts to ward off disasters among others. They perceive practices like the competition of obscene songs between genders as disgraceful and immoral. Although some elders and young people enthusiastically endorse *Cawmos* songs, Kalasha people today embrace monotheism as a norm. Some individuals acknowledged the presence of different spiritual beings but

referred to them as messengers and shamans rather than gods or goddesses. Instead, they seem to believe in a single ultimate creator known as *Dezau*, often referred to by the Muslim name Allah or the Persian term *Khudai*.

Educated people were reported to often lack sensitivity and care for others. They had become individualistic and self-centred, which led them to oppose traditional practices that promote community, interdependence, and solidarity. Despite certain changes, the elderly remained steadfast in their opinion that traditions like funeral rites must be preserved to ensure the continuance of the Kalasha culture. The growing popularity of modern education and the introduction of new vocations has been luring an increasing number of people away from the valleys, limiting their capacity to engage in traditional Kalasha calendar-based activities. This hinders the transfer of intergenerational knowledge and might lead to divergent views, particularly with regards to peacebuilding. The Kalasha people prioritize giving up material possessions to protect human life, restore relationships, and promote peace above personal gain or loss. Contemporary ideals may cause people to question whether sacrificing personal interests for communal prosperity, solidarity, and peace is a fair exchange, potentially contributing to intergenerational conflict and undermining Kalasha unity. However, several educated persons applauded Kalasha society's collectivist principles, including equality, mutual respect, and egalitarianism, and they are making concerted efforts to maintain and preserve these values. Even educated youth who opposed extravagant funeral ceremonies believed in giving up their personal wealth to foster positive relationships and maintain peace in the valleys (in an example of young Kalasha discussed in Chapter 6)

Further, some participants claimed that modern education has effectively solved the problem of representation for the Kalasha people by empowering the community to converse in the languages used by researchers. This allows people to serve as research assistants, conduct research, and write about their community. Therefore, modern education is a source of both fear and concern, as well as a

channel through which opportunities to better represent and protect the Kalasha's culture may be found.

The third concern relates to the Kalasha people's fear of intercommunal violence arising from the involvement of external actors like fundamentalists, instigators, and aggressors, who may foster and disseminate prejudice leading to the escalation of conflict between communities. Most importantly, external influence was feared because certain Kalasha persons, allegedly supported by some politicians, have been illegally trading wine and *tara* to Muslims in the valleys. The participants believed that the illegal selling of alcohol is wrong and can potentially be exploited by those who are constantly seeking opportunities to instigate conflict. Despite the Kalasha elder's concerns, they have been diligently endeavouring to resolve this issue by using persuasive tactics with those persons manufacturing the *tara* and the wine. The Pakistani authorities have not given due attention to the situation since certain officials are allegedly involved, so the illegal sale of alcohol continues unfettered to Muslims, who are legally prohibited from drinking alcohol due to religious restrictions.

The last source of the participants' fear for the future was population growth, which was perceived as capable of precipitating conflicts related to land, forests, and the construction of new homes. The influx of external individuals and businesses into the valleys, driven by the valleys' emerging tourism potential, has also contributed to population growth. Although the government has now explicitly prohibited external individuals from acquiring property and land in the valleys, other measures need to be taken to increase local ownership over resources and businesses in the valleys. This is particularly important in addressing land issues and deforestation that are causing concern within the Kalasha community.

Finally, the participants expressed their ambitions and wishes for a harmonious and peaceful future for the Kalasha people. While Kazi Sher Bibi envisioned a bright future for the Kalasha based on her secret knowledge, many others hoped for the continued flourishing of Kalasha culture. They

hoped that people continue to practice their rituals and customs, establishing peaceful relationships in the valleys by actively listening to one another. Individuals, particularly those from minority groups, are expected to avoid activities that may cause harm or offence to the majority population to preserve the region's safety and peaceful coexistence. Some participants pointed out that it was critical to establish schools specifically designed for Kalasha children or to integrate Kalasha knowledge bearers like Kazis into the education system to enhance the learning experience for Kalasha children and to ensure the transmission and preservation of Kalasha culture.

In addition, they urged the government to take tangible measures to play an active role that benefits the community, rather than only focusing on tourism, and that considers the constantly evolving multi-ethnic environment of the valleys. Some of the participants also expressed optimism that the Pakistani government would also enhance the development of the valley's infrastructure and amenities to provide employment and income opportunities that would empower a larger number of people in the valley. I am optimistic that this exquisite and rich culture, despite encountering several hurdles, will persist and flourish, as foreseen by Kazi Sher Bibi.

Conclusion

Chapter 9 explored the participants' aspirations, hopes, concerns, and challenges that threaten Kalasha culture and the potential for peace in the valleys. Overall, the participants believed that Kalasha peacebuilding and conflict resolution methods are effective and that they provide hope to the Kalasha for a peaceful future with their neighbours in the valleys. However, they also highlighted obstacles that impact the Kalasha culture and that might hinder a peaceful future for Kalasha people like existential threats, contemporary modern state education, the danger of intercommunal strife, and population expansion. Therefore, the preservation of Kalasha customs and their longevity is contingent on the tolerance and protection ensured by external forces like the Pakistani government, as well as the commitment and conviction of the community members themselves.

Chapter 10

Conclusions

This exploratory study aimed to examine how the Kalasha people resolve conflicts and sustain a peaceful community characterized by rare instances of crime and violent conflict. Through semi-structured interviews, as the primary data source, the study revealed the multiple factors contributing to the rarity of violent conflict, fostering what can be described as a peaceful society. The following section presents the main findings from the thesis research.

Overview of Key Findings

This research unveiled numerous elements that foster a peaceful environment within the Kalasha community, as visualized in Figure 30.

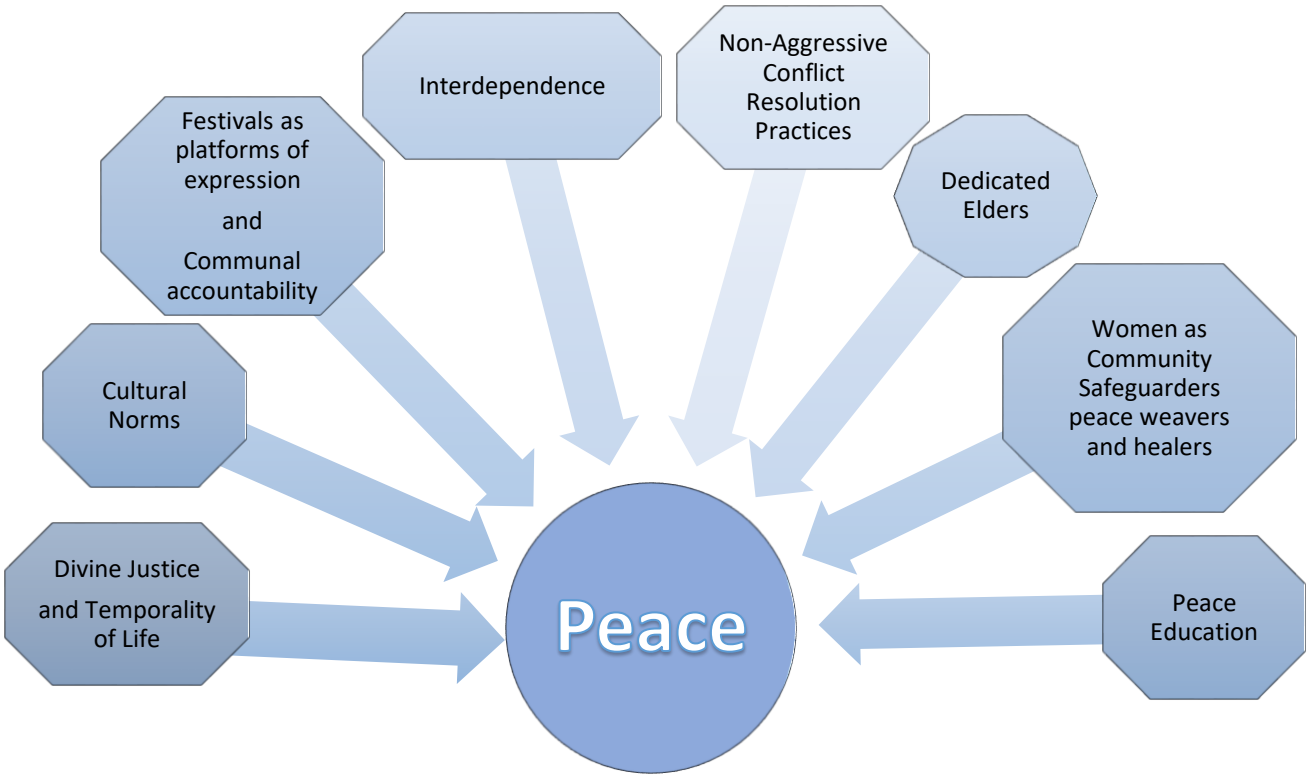
Peace: An Integral Component of Kalasha Dastur

The essence of peace within the Kalasha community is not merely a concept, as it is a living, breathing principle that defines the community members' very existence. Peace is integral to *Kalashaness* and is said to be "ingrained in Kalasha values and blood." However, it is fascinating that there is no single word to encapsulate its essence in the Kalasha language. This absence of the word "peace" speaks volumes, suggesting that, for the Kalasha, peace is too vast, holistic, and dynamic to be encapsulated in a single term. It is a way of life that necessitates continuous effort, encompassing love, compassion, tolerance, forgiveness, respect for free will and the rights of others, and nurturing positive relationships, not only with fellow human beings but with all of creation as well as with the creator.

The Kalasha community embodies a profound commitment to peace as an ongoing and active process. The community's approach to peace goes beyond the mere absence of violence or resolution of conflict, reflecting a deep understanding that peace requires continuous ongoing effort at all levels of society.

Figure 30

Factors Contributing to the Peacefulness of the Kalasha Community



The Kalasha use divinity, peace education, cultural norms, interdependent relationships, non-aggressive conflict resolution processes, festivals, songs, stories, and have dedicated roles for elders, men, and women to maintain their peacefulness. This holistic approach powerfully demonstrates their dedication to fostering peace within their community. This aligns perfectly with Kemp and Fry's (2004) definition of a peaceful society, which emphasizes the importance of maintaining peace through built-in socio-cultural norms, control mechanisms, and non-aggressive conflict resolution processes. The Kalasha, with their intricate practices of everyday peacebuilding and conflict resolution that aim for relational harmony, embody this definition in its purest form.

Divine Justice, Peace Education, and Cultural Norms are the Bedrock of Peaceful Behaviour

Peace education, divinity, and cultural norms form the foundation of everyday normative behaviour and life within the Kalasha society. Much like in other Indigenous societies discussed in Chapter 3, peace education occupies a pivotal role in nurturing harmony among the Kalasha community. Peace education begins with the conception of a child, and it is a cultural tradition to show peaceful behaviour towards expectant mothers, who are also expected to avoid conflicts and arguments. It is also believed that this helps the child to be born with a peaceful attitude, and doing otherwise is thought to make the child pugnacious. This emphasis on peace continues from early childhood and is reinforced through parental guidance and by the Kazis through religious teachings. The goal is to instill peace values in every member of the society by the time they reach adulthood.

A core principle of Kalasha teachings is the belief in divine justice and accountability. The Kalasha religion revolves around the idea of cosmic balance, which is the harmony between humans, nature, spirits, and the divine. This balance is maintained through rituals, purity laws, and moral conduct. Disrupting this balance is believed to bring divine retribution, such as natural disasters, misfortune, or illness, underscoring the role of divinity as a moral compass guiding adherence to social norms.

Parents, as educators, teach their children about the consequences of violating human rights or committing crimes, often invoking the concept of divine justice and retribution. Like traditional African religion, which perceives God as the "god of justice" (Tuso, 2014, p.155), holding individuals accountable for norm violations and wrongdoings, the Kalasha community also strongly advocates for divine retribution and accountability. They uphold the image of a just God, portraying Him as a supernatural judge who ensures individuals are held accountable for their actions. They believe that the supernatural being, *Dezau*, holds people accountable and rewards their actions, be they good or bad, through continuous judgment that aligns with their actions. What sets Kalasha teaching apart is

strong belief in divine accountability. The image of God is not presented as forgiving or merciful but rather as one who will punish and ensure accountability through continuous judgment and ongoing retribution, often manifested in the form of natural calamities, diseases, or other means (see Chapter 6). Contrary to the notion of a single day of judgment, the Kalasha believe in continuous judgment of one's actions, the effects of which extend to seven generations.

Since *Dezau* is the God of justice, seeking forgiveness from Him for a transgression is deemed quite arduous, if not impossible (for e.g., in the case of *Shat Dek*, or oath swearing, mentioned in Chapter 5). However, the cultural tradition places great emphasis on the values of forgiveness, mutual trust, reciprocity, cooperation, reconciliation, and relational harmony, as these are the ultimate objectives. Therefore, forgiveness is highly encouraged and actively practiced at the interpersonal level.

Relational harmony is accorded significant importance, as individuals with strained relations cannot partake in communal worship because their relationship with God is also perceived as being disrupted. The right relations with God necessitate the right relations between and among people. Therefore, while people may express anger or disappointment momentarily, they do not harbour grudges or transform these emotions into animosity in the long term. This stems from the belief that life is fleeting and should be lived virtuously. The acute awareness and reminder of life's transience underscore the importance of cherishing meaningful connections over material wealth, as everything will be left behind upon passing, with only good deeds remaining.

Further, the collective nature of Kalasha society ensures interdependent relationships mutual sharing, attending to the needs of the less fortunate and fostering mutual trust. The Kalasha *dastur* (code) encapsulates both cultural and religious norms and teachings that form the basis for the inculcation of peaceful values like divine justice, forgiveness, sharing, and cooperation among others.

Festivals Provide Platforms for Expression, Communal Accountability, and Social Bonding

It is important for the Kalasha people to maintain peace and good relations. When someone behaves in a way that is not expected, instead of engaging in open conflict, they are reminded of their expected behaviour by the community, and they are held accountable through song performances at festivals. Festivals serve as a communal gathering for conflict resolution, as the entire community is present. People who have been wronged prepare a song and sing it in front of a large crowd to express their disappointment, grievances, and hurt. This makes the individual(s) accountable to the whole community. These songs serve as a conflict deterrent, as they are repeated by different people on various occasions, reminding everyone of their expected behaviour and reinforcing the boundaries of good and bad behaviour. Remembrance is very important to the Kalasha people, and being remembered in good words is integral. Conscious efforts are made to embody good behaviour by engaging in community service, charity feasting, and other actions that bring honour to oneself and one's clan. In addition to songs expressing disappointment, various other types of songs are sung at festivals to allow for expression, opening one's heart to the community, and making the community aware of one's emotions, like love songs and expressions of grief and loss among others.

The elders respond to the songs by validating the emotions and offering advice for coping with the situation, thus helping in healing trauma and providing a form of community ministering. Elders' responses can serve as guidance and bring comfort to those experiencing sorrow, disappointment, and hurt, thereby de-escalating conflict.

Festivals bring the community together, highlighting collective identity and solidarity through shared celebrations, expression of emotions, and the redistribution of wealth through rituals. In short, Kalasha festivals serve as an essential tool in promoting peacebuilding in the community. They provide a platform for people to express their emotions, affirm their feelings, and support the preservation of historical and cultural connections. Additionally, they encourage virtuous behaviour

by setting a standard for positive conduct. Festivals also contribute to mental well-being by giving individuals a chance to freely express themselves, heal from trauma, and engage in leisure activities that foster social bonding. In addition, they emphasize the importance of collective existence and interconnected relationships by ensuring a constant flow of wealth throughout the community and providing a platform for showcasing collective identity. Kalasha festivals serve a deeper purpose beyond simple gatherings for celebration and joy; they function as collective spaces for peacebuilding and communal healing.

Quick Resolution of Conflict Through Non-Aggressive Practices

No society is free from conflict. Conflict is inevitable and functional due to individual uniqueness and differences in people's wants, needs, interests, perceptions, and aspirations (Boulding, 2000). Therefore, in cases of overt conflict that rupture relationships and require communal attention, the Kalasha have established highly effective conflict resolution mechanisms to resolve issues, prevent escalation, and reconcile relationships quickly. For example, swift intervention becomes necessary in disputes over property or wife elopement. Community elders (*gad'erakan*) and elders with religious knowledge (*Kazis*), along with other socially active individuals, intervene to remind people of their relationships and connections to the community, and they facilitate discussions to restore balance, heal broken relationships, or disentangle relationships, as captured by the Kalasha word *janjal* for conflict, which means "entanglement." The resolution of conflicts involves three key processes, depending on the specific nature of the conflict: *Marakha* (gathering of people), *Nanawati* (delegation with a gift), and *D'ongriik* (to get things in a double amount). These processes aim to bring people together, facilitate discussions, seek forgiveness, and restore balance through compensation. *Marakha*, for instance, is a six-step process encompassing engagement, shuttle diplomacy, gathering, probing, decision-making, and reconciliation, culminating in the *Prus't'ek* or "relations restored" ceremony.

Nanawati is a traditional conciliatory practice when one party admits a mistake or wants to convince the other to make amends. It involves bringing a gift along with a group of elders and relatives who can help persuade the other party to accept the gift and reconcile, particularly in the evening time (*bewat*) when ancestors' spirits are thought to accompany the delegation. This process contributes to maintaining good relationships, promoting forgiveness, and establishing accountability through culturally accepted means of admitting and apologizing for one's mistakes. On the other hand, *D'ongriik* is a process where the elders from the new husband's clan negotiate to pay double the bride price as compensation to the former husband in case of wife elopement. The conflict is mediated by elders from clans other than the conflicting parties. This process aims to prevent feuds and provides an opportunity to dissolve a matrimonial union freely. These processes are holistic, communal, open, and positive-sum, prioritizing healing over punishment, reciprocity over strict justice, and non-aggressive conflict resolution.

Dedicated Elders: Key to Conflict Resolution

The dedication of elders plays a pivotal role in conflict resolution, as their wisdom and experience serve as invaluable assets in promoting peace and harmony. In the Kalasha community, elders—both men and women—are deeply respected. However, while age is an important factor, it is not the only criterion for selecting Kazis and other elders who participate in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. These individuals are chosen based on their wisdom, knowledge, communication skills, dispute-resolution abilities, and community service, showcasing a holistic approach to leadership.

The dedication of the elders to maintaining peace is truly admirable. They selflessly prioritize conflict resolution over their own responsibilities, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to the betterment of the community. Their willingness to intervene, invest time, and display utmost dedication makes the resolution process a resounding success (please see Chapter 5). In the case of

wife elopement, tensions between the former and new husband's clans take the form of a quasi-feud, and it is the intervention of elders from other clans that ultimately brings about resolution through skillful mediation and negotiation of *d'on,* (double the bride price as compensation), which is always controversial. Therefore, older elders who are no longer active in communal politics, known as *gad'a bas'ara,* become involved and sanction the process (Parkes, 1994). Elders' ability to rise above, even in the wake of occasional insults and derogatory remarks during the heat of moments in peacebuilding efforts, is a testament to their unwavering dedication to resolve conflict. Additionally, during festivals, elders demonstrate the ceremonial authority and the collective identity of the Kalasha community. This display of leadership and unity is especially significant in a community that is otherwise characterized by factional politics between clans due to its egalitarianism and absence of traditional authority.[91]

Women as Healers

Both men and women play vital roles in peacebuilding, serving as respected elders, social workers, mediators, and advisors. However, in this thesis research, there was a conscious effort to understand culturally grounded contributions of Kalasha women to peacebuilding within their community. This focus brings attention to a critical yet often overlooked dimension in Indigenous societies. Neglecting women's perspectives and culturally embedded roles can lead to the misguided assumption that Kalasha women are passive or play a minor role in peace processes—an assumption this research directly challenges (see Chapter 8). It was found that, apart from resolving their own conflicts, Kalasha women play a pivotal role in three significant ways.

First, they safeguard the Kalasha community by actively maintaining the *onjas't'a* (ritually pure) and *pragata* (ritually impure) separation, a key tenet of Kalasha *dastur* (code). It is believed that

[91] For details, please see Chapter 7 and Parkes (1994).

violating these ritually pure/ ritually impure restrictions can lead to natural disasters and cause harm to the community. Therefore, women play an active role in ensuring this separation to avoid such consequences.

Second, women serve as homemakers and play a crucial role in nurturing relationships both within and beyond the family through their guidance and hospitality. Interestingly, this role was more frequently acknowledged by male research participants than by female participants, who may have taken it for granted due to its deeply embedded and normalized presence in daily life. Men, however, believe that by maintaining peace within their households, women contribute to broader communal harmony through the way they manage their homes and treat visitors with respect and hospitality. When there is conflict in the home, they advise male members of their family to refrain from engaging in fights and discourage conflict-prone behaviour. Given the significant role of Kalasha women as life-givers and primary caregivers, their influence as mothers profoundly impacts their children in matters of reconciliation, socialization, and peacebuilding. For example, when someone is involved in a dispute and reconciliation is sought, it is customary to bring along their mother or a midwife to help persuade the conflict parties to reconcile their differences.

Third, some expert women engage in the ritual practice of *Iste'n'ik Karaw* (bangle searching), using it to heal individuals by drawing on knowledge acquired through dreams. This knowledge is kept strictly confidential, as it is considered non-transferable. This practice involves the ability to identify and diagnose problems and devise remedies for people, including the possibility of using exorcism if necessary. Diagnoses often identify the root cause of the issues as a problem in interpersonal conflicts, which are addressed through seeking forgiveness, charity work, and purification to resolve the issues at hand.

In summary, Kalasha women protect and heal their community by separating *onjas't'a* from *pragata* and by taking necessary steps to address any violations in order to protect the community

from potential harm. They also nurture and heal relationships within and between families by promoting peace and offering advice to the male members of their families. Additionally, they engage in the ritual practice of *Iste'n'ik Karaw* to provide healing to people. Their secret healing knowledge not only addresses physical ailments but also interpersonal relationships. The *Iste'n'ik Karaw Istrizha*'s (bangle-searching woman) role is akin to that of a mediator who attentively listens to people's concerns, finds solutions, and helps restore relational harmony. However, the bangle-searching woman goes the extra mile as she carefully navigates the realm between the human and supernatural worlds to effectively manage both bodily and psychological challenges and aids in the restoration of peace in people's lives.

All the factors mentioned above contribute to the peacefulness of the Kalasha community and help foster harmony within the community. Overall, the Kalasha's peacebuilding methods are highly effective and offer hope for a peaceful future for the community. However, it was also found in this study that participants feared potential hindrances to a peaceful future for the Kalasha people, like existential threats due to their small population of only 4,000 remaining individuals, the impact of contemporary modern state education on the mindset of some young Kalasha individuals, which has caused them to question their traditions, the lingering fear of intercommunal strife between Muslims and the Kalasha, and population expansion in the valleys. Therefore, the preservation of Kalasha customs and their longevity depends on the celebration and protection ensured by external forces like the Pakistani government, as well as the commitment and conviction of the community members themselves and their neighbouring communities. However, given the resilience of the culture, it is expected to survive and thrive as anticipated by some community elders (please see Chapter 9).

While the steep mountains, remoteness, and low population of the Kalasha community might be cited as factors contributing to their resilience and peacefulness, these elements alone only partially explain their resilience. It is clear from this study that the community's internal peace

mechanisms, which emphasize diplomacy, pragmatism, internal solidarity, and a non-aggressive approach to conflict resolution, play a crucial role in maintaining their resilience and peacefulness. At the core of their peacefulness are cultural and religious values that prioritize an ethic of care, peace, and harmonious relations. These values, combined with a history of peaceful relations both within the community and with neighbouring groups, truly set the Kalasha community apart.

Limitations and Future Research

Research studies involving human subjects may encounter several limitations like self-selection bias, social desirability bias, the horn effect, and the halo effect, among others. It is essential to recognize and report these limitations to ensure the rigour, reliability, and accuracy of the results (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). Table 2 discusses the limitations of this study, the approaches taken to minimize these limitations, and how these strategies strengthened the study's results.

Table 2

Limitations and Strengths of Study Results

Limitations	Strengths
1. **Researcher Autonomy**: The study was conducted by a single researcher, which may have compromised the depth of analysis and interpretation. Collaborating with additional researchers typically enhances the richness of insights gained from data.	1. **Local Research Assistants**: Utilizing research assistants from the community helped foster trust and rapport, leading to a more engaged participant pool and potentially richer data.
2. **COVID-19 Restrictions**: The inability to conduct prolonged, participant observations due to COVID-19 limited the opportunity for triangulation of findings, which would have added further validity to the research outcomes. I believe that if I had been granted more time to immerse myself in the community, observing conflict interactions and resolutions firsthand, the insights gained would have significantly enriched the research, which can be a consideration for future research.	2. **Semi-Structured Interviews**: Using a semi-structured interview guide with neutral, open-ended questions allowed for flexibility and deeper exploration of participant responses, facilitating nuanced insights and potentially alleviating concerns of self-reported data.

3. **Language Barriers:** While translators were utilized, the possibility of gaps in translation may have impacted the accuracy of the data collected during interviews.	3. **Attention to Translator Diversity**: Employing different interpreters for interviews and transcribers for the interviews conducted in the Kalasha language helped to mitigate potential gaps in translation, ensuring a more accurate representation of participant perspectives.
4. **Limited Youth Perspectives**: The study did not focus significantly on the perspectives of younger individuals, leaving an important gap in understanding their unique experiences and perceptions of conflict resolution. Overall, findings reflect participant views and insights but do not claim to encompass every facet of the subject matter or represent the entire community.	4. **High Participant Recruitment**: Successfully recruiting more participants than initially intended enhanced the study's internal validity and provided a robust data set for analysis.
5. **External Validity**: This study is context-specific, focusing on the peacebuilding processes within the Kalasha community. As a result, the findings may not be broadly generalizable to other contexts. Nevertheless, the findings reveal important insights that resonate with similar processes in other Indigenous communities, offering valuable lessons that can significantly contribute to the field of PACS.	5. **Cross-Case Confirmation**: The substantial number of interviews conducted allowed for effective triangulation, enabling the identification of recurring themes. For instance, divine fear and retribution appeared 118 times in the interview transcripts, indicating strong thematic presence.
	6. **Credibility of Results:** I conducted a planned, meticulous qualitative data analysis with significant effort, time, and dedication. To ensure accuracy and reliability, I validated findings through validation workshops with participants, allowing their insights to enhance the accuracy and credibility of the results.

While this study sheds light on the Kalasha peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes and uncovered compelling factors contributing to peace, there is a need for further in-depth exploration of each finding to enhance understanding. For example, a study focusing on the intersection of Kalasha religion and peacebuilding, as well as the role of communal peace education

in shaping the behaviours of young people, would be invaluable. Similarly, a study centred on healing women also presents an attractive avenue for deeper exploration.

In addition, the peacebuilding tools employed by the Kalasha community, like the use of songs, proverbs, and stories for conflict expression and resolution, as well as for teaching acceptable behaviour, warrant further investigation through active participation in festivals, observation of conflict resolution practices, and the study of day-to-day communal interactions over an extended period. Lastly, given the diverse settings in which the Kalasha people live and their peaceful relationships with neighbouring communities, delving into communal codes and mechanisms for nurturing peaceful intercommunal relationships and resolving intercommunal conflicts would be highly valuable.

Afterthoughts and Conclusion

The thesis findings make it evident that achieving peace in a community goes beyond band-aid approaches and quick fixes for arising issues. It is about intentionally focusing on peace as an essential societal quality and bringing together various actors and processes to maintain it. Recognizing the potential of all individuals in society, honouring their contributions, and learning from their wisdom are all crucial (Byrne, 2023). It is essential for everyday people to take ownership of peace, rather than relying solely on international or national efforts. As Mac Ginty and Wanis-St. John (2022) asserted, “While peace might be made nationally and endorsed internationally, it is lived and experienced locally. While a peace accord might be negotiated and agreed in a capital city, or endorsed in a parliament, to take effect it must be enacted through the everyday speech and actions of people in all walks of life. Ultimately, peacemaking is the collection of human endeavours that resolves and prevents war,” (p. 12) making it a “whole-of-society endeavour” (p. 11).

This study emphasizes the possibility of resolving conflicts peacefully, prioritizing cooperation over competition, and promoting peace values throughout society. The work with the

Kalasha has revealed that peaceful coexistence is not just a distant dream but a tangible reality for many Indigenous societies. Their approaches to conflict resolution offer valuable lessons and tools for fostering peace, contradicting "presumptions in Western thought that competition, violence, and mayhem are the default reactions of Homo sapiens to conflict" (Fry & Souillac, 2022, p. 122).

Before these teachings and wisdom are dismissed as "backward" and superstitious, there must be an honest assessment of whether modernity, individualism, capitalism, and colonial and neocolonial efforts toward universalization and totalization have truly improved our world? Sadly, these forces have enriched the richest, impoverished the poorest, made war lucrative and profitable (see Mayanja, 2024), and relegated collectiveness and mutual care to a secondary thought compared to individual desires and achievements. The only guiding force seems to be more, more, and more profit, prioritizing individual gain over collective well-being. As Kyoon-Achan (2014) warned, "When people stop believing in the forces[92] that ground them and regulate behaviour, a lack of restraint gives way to a lack of self or social control resulting in wanton and poor conflict behaviour" (pp. 73–74). Hence, to create a better world, it is important to humbly learn from communities like the Kalasha and reorient the worldview that intentionally favours a few at the expense of the majority of the world's people.

Therefore, this work calls for heightened attention to Indigenous worldviews and peacebuilding processes and the adoption of Indigenous people's teachings on peace. Most importantly, the vital role of peace education for future generations must be recognized—a fundamental value in many Indigenous societies worldwide, yet often overlooked in formal education systems. The voices of children and programs aimed at instilling peace values in the next generation are unfortunately also sidelined in peacebuilding efforts. Children have consistently been the most

[92] E.g. taboos, "superstitions," and belief in curses, sorcery, and divine punishment, among others.

vulnerable and deliberately targeted group in efforts of assimilative colonization and genocide. However, directing attention toward children also presents the most significant opportunity for achieving "structural transformation" (Clark, 2022, p. 211).

Michael Karlberg (2005, as cited in Cromwell, 2022) argued that Western liberal norms prioritize competition as a fundamental societal force, limiting the ability to envision cooperative societies. In post-peace-accord societies, governments and international actors tend to focus on simply getting students back into schools, with the sole purpose of preparing these students to compete in the economic marketplace. Doing so misses an opportunity to repair relations across conflict differences and to teach peace-oriented values to the children (Cromwell, 2022).

The traditional, exam-focused education system is highly competitive and often fails to promote values of peace in children, as noted by Gurmeet Kaur (2019) in the context of the United Kingdom. Kaur emphasized the need to shift towards peace education, which fosters an understanding of our shared humanity, a sense of responsibility, and respect for the global community. While there has been significant discussion in recent years about embracing diversity in schools, the mindset must evolve from merely tolerating differences to actively celebrating them. As Indigenous scholar Vine Deloria stated, "To exist in creation means that living is more than tolerance for other life forms—it is recognition that in differences there is the strength of creation and that this strength is a deliberate desire of the creator" (Deloria, 2003, p. 88). This perspective highlights the importance of not just tolerating but embracing diversity, a principle that peace education should instill in future generations.

However, despite the appearance of "inclusivity" in educational settings, children struggle to respectfully navigate differences, whether it is in the simply distinct food aromas or cultural

diversity.[93] This underscores the pressing need to overhaul education systems and prioritize research and practical application in the realm of peace education. Dr. Inaya Ezzeddine (2019), the chairperson of the Women and Children Parliamentary Committee in Lebanon, compellingly asserted, "It is true that the task is not easy because planting thoughts of peace and its values in new generations constitutes a threat to a system of evil interests that lives on wars and their disasters, but it is not impossible…" (p. 7) because it is not just the culture that shapes people; people also shape it. It is entirely within our reach to transform from a culture of violence to one of peace by wholeheartedly embracing traits such as "compassion, empathy, love, cooperation, altruism, solidarity, dialogue, healing, negotiation, reconciliation, and new paradigms" (Beyene et al., 2024, p. xiv).

In short, "Indigenous knowledge in its variety and wisdom presents a treasure trove of peacemaking lessons from which to learn, including how values, worldviews, practices, institutions, and effects are culturally intertwined and how Indigenous knowledge can be applied in various ways to promote the peace" (Fry & Souillac, 2022, p. 126). The example of the Kalasha community encourages us to look beyond the surface and appreciate the complex web of relationships and interactions that underpin a truly peaceful society. It is a call to action to nurture the conditions for individual flourishing and communal harmony, demonstrating that peace is not a static state but a vibrant, ongoing journey. Let's take inspiration from the Kalasha and other Indigenous societies and endeavour to live a life that actively contributes to the tapestry of peace, weaving threads of compassion, tolerance, and love into the world around us. Without a comprehensive, continuous, and long-term approach, achieving peace for future generations will remain a distant dream because superficial changes *have not worked, cannot work, and will not work.*

[93] Take, for instance, the opening story of Beyene (2024), recounting her struggles with bullying and stereotyping in a Winnipeg school. Her narrative resonates deeply with my own recent experience in Ontario, where my child was subjected to hurtful comments. The sad truth is that the continuation and replication of similar attitudes of bullying in schools regarding differences shows that educational approaches dealing with diversity are not good enough.

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Appendix I: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Thank you very much for your time and for agreeing to participate in this study. We have already gone through the consent form, correct? Do you have any questions?

As we discussed, you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to, and you can choose to withdraw from the study at any time before January 2022. I will now ask you some questions. Please feel free to switch to Kalasha or Urdu whenever you prefer during the interview. Are you comfortable and ready to begin?

1. What do you understand by conflict and peace? What does it mean to you?
2. What kind of conflicts usually occur in your community?
3. How are those conflict resolved? What processes are in place to address them?

    - What is the role of Kalasha kazis and elders?
    - Who else contributes to, and participates in the conflict resolution processes?
    - What cultural/religious norms guide the conflict resolution process?
    - How are decisions about resolution of conflicts reached?
    - What are some of the challenges faced by the peacemakers (e.g., Kalash Kazis)?
    - What happens if one party/individual is reluctant to make peace?

4. What kind of roles do women play in peacebuilding?

    - Do men and women work together to build peace/solve problems in this valley/village or do women do one thing and the men do another thing?
    - What kind of issues are resolved only by women?
    - What kind of challenges do women face in doing this peacebuilding work?
    - How they overcome these challenges?

5. What happens after a conflict is resolved?

    - Are there reconciliation ceremonies/rituals that take place afterwards?

6. Is there an individual or group that might not be included in the conflict resolution process?

    - If yes, why? If not, why not?

7. Why do you think violent conflict and crime is so rare in the Kalash community?

8. Can you share with me your personal experience/story of how you helped people in this village overcome challenges they have faced in making peaceful relations with people from this village and from other villages in the valley?

    - How do people who have personally experienced conflict deal with, and experience your peacemaking approach?
    - Why do you think the work that you do is important and what does that mean to you?

9. If you were able to change anything in working peacefully with people in this village/valley, what would you change?

10. What are your own personal hopes and dreams for facilitating peaceful relations in this village/valley for the future?

11. What are your worst fears and worries for relations in this village/valley for the future?

12. Would you like to add anything else?

Appendix II: Observation Protocol

Location:

Date and Time:

Role as Observer:

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Type of Activity: Actors in Attendance: Setting: Process: Gender Roles:	

Appendix III: Oral Informed Consent

Peace and Conflict Studies Graduate Programs

252 St. Paul's College
70 Dysart Road, University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 Canada
Phone: 204.474-8894 Fax: 204.474.8828

Informed consent for Interviews

Research Project Title: Indigenous peacebuilding: An exploratory study of the conflict resolution practices of the Kalash People of Northwest Pakistan

Researcher Name and Contact Information:

Principal Investigator: Sehar Mushtaq, Ph.D. candidate Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Manitoba, Canada
Email: [redacted]

Advisor: Dr. Sean Byrne
Email: Sean.Byrne@umanitoba.ca
Address: Room 304
St. Pauls College,70 Dysart Road,
University of Manitoba, Winnipeg,
MB R3T2N2, Canada

Research Project Purpose and Objectives:

The focus of this research study is to learn about the conflict resolution methods used by the Kalash community and the role of the Kalash women in these peacebuilding mechanisms. To develop a deep understanding of the topic I wish to conduct interviews with Kalash *Kazis* (elders), village

representatives and other community members who have a direct role or experience in conflict resolution. The objectives for this exploratory study are: 1) To learn about conflict resolution methods used by the Kalash people; 2) to understand the role of the Kalash women in these peacebuilding practices; and 3) to understand the impact of such methods on conflict transformation, and social justice in the Kalash community.

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please listen carefully and make sure that you completely understand the information presented to you.

Study Procedures:

I am inviting you to participate in an in-depth interview/conversation about your experience and role in community peacebuilding. If you consent to participate in my research, I will conduct an approximately 60-90 minutes one-on-one interview with some guided questions to learn about conflict resolution methods in your community, the Kalasha women's role in peacebuilding in general, and your experience and role in such mechanisms in particular. If you agree to be a participant in my research, the interview would take place at the time and location most convenient to you. The interview would be documented through an audio recorder, and the data will be carefully saved on my password protected laptop computer to ensure your privacy and confidentiality. However, if you do not wish to have the interview recorded, I would take notes that will be kept in a locked cabinet, in my office in my home. If you want to be interviewed in Kalasha, my Kalash research assistant will help me with the interpretation of our conversation. This

Kalash interpreter has signed an oath of confidentiality, and he will be responsible for keeping your information heard during the interview strictly confidential. The interview will then be transcribed, at which point you will have the opportunity via email or phone to review and confirm or change any of the information contained therein. You have the right to identify yourself or to remain anonymous. If you chose to be anonymous your real name and any identifiable information will be masked in the final research report. Identifiable data will be destroyed or rendered anonymous as soon as it is no longer necessary to link data with individual participants, which will approximately be by 10/2021. If desired, the final report can be sent to you via email or by regular post at the completion of the study by approximately 01/2023.

Benefits:

You will have an opportunity to share your knowledge and stories. You may also benefit by knowing that you are contributing to an effort to learn, document and share knowledge about your culture as well as Indigenous peacebuilding processes and their significance and potential.

Risks:

It is not likely that there will be any serious harm or discomfort associated with this interview. The risk will be no greater than in everyday life. Although no questions are intended to make you feel distressed in any way, should you find yourself uncomfortable with a question that is asked, you do not need to answer the question and you can also withdraw from the interview at any time. The potential harm from the interview could include remembering a traumatic or painful event from your past while sharing your experiences with me. If at any stage, you feel distressed you are

encouraged to contact any of the following free counseling services that are available to you. Please feel free to ask if you need to use my phone to make a free phone call to counselling services.

JHC Counselling, Islamabad

Direct helpline: +92-51-2850574

PsychAid, Islamabad

Helpline: +92 51 2615858

Confidentiality:

Your confidentiality will be protected throughout the study and no identifying names or markers will be used in the final research report except if you choose to be identified and wish your name to be included in the final report. I would like to record the interview. However, if you do not wish to be audio recorded, I would like to take notes of our conversation. The interview will be recorded through an audio recording tool which will generate a digital audio file. This file will be transcribed, at which point you will have the opportunity to review and confirm or change any of the information contained therein. You will be contacted within one month of the interview via email or phone to review the transcript. Once approved, identifiable data will be destroyed or rendered anonymous as soon as it is no longer necessary to link the data with individual participants, which will approximately be 10/2021. The digital files of the recorded interviews will be stored on the principal investigator's password protected computer. The transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet in her office at home. No one other than the primary investigator, and her advisor will have access to the data. All files, digital and otherwise, will be destroyed after the research study has been completed (Approx. 01/2023). The University of Manitoba may look at the research records to ensure it has been done in a safe and proper way.

Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation is voluntary. You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study in which case any data you provided will be erased and eliminated from future analysis. You may also refuse to answer questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. If you decide you would like to have your data removed from this study, you can email or phone the primary researcher ([redacted]) and state that you are withdrawing from the study and to remove your data from the study. Your decision would be respected and would not be shared with anyone. However, please be informed that nature of data analysis might make it impossible to identify or exclude your data from the study after January 2022.

Rights of Research Participants:

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics approval through the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122, or e-mail humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Dissemination:

After the completion of this project the findings will be translated into a thesis for my Ph.D. degree in Peace and Conflict Studies (https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca). Papers resulting from the findings of this study might also be published in journals and presented in conferences. I also intend to send a copy of the final report to be kept in the Kalasha Dur (museum) library for the Kalash community members and researchers interested in knowing more about the Kalash culture.

I thank you kindly for your consideration and time.

Consent Questions:

1. **Do you agree to participate in this study knowing that you can withdraw at any point and with no consequence to you?**

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. **Do you want to be attributed with real name or pseudonym?**

   ☐ Real ☐ Pseudonym

3. **Are you comfortable with audio recording? Yes ☐ No ☐**

4. **Would you like a copy of the final research report?**

If yes, how would you like to receive the report? Please provide your address (email or postal) so that I can send you the report.

Has Oral consent been audio recorded?

Yes ☐ No

I have read and explained this consent form to the participant before receiving the participant's consent, and the participant had knowledge of its contents and appeared to understand it".

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

Appendix IV: Informed Oral Consent for Visual Data

Peace and Conflict Studies
Graduate Programs

252 St. Paul's College
70 Dysart Road, University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 Canada
Phone: 204.474-8894 Fax: 204.474.8828

Informed Oral Consent for Visual Data

Research Project Title: Indigenous peacebuilding: An exploratory study of the conflict resolution practices of the Kalash people of Northwest Pakistan

Researcher Name and Contact Information:

Principal Investigator: Sehar Mushtaq, Ph.D. candidate Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Manitoba, Canada
Email: [redacted]

Advisor: Dr. Sean Byrne
Email: Sean.Byrne@umanitoba.ca
Address: Room 304, St. Pauls College,
70 Dysart Road,
University of Manitoba, Winnipeg,
MB R3T2N2, Canada

Research Project Purpose and Objectives:

The focus of this research study is to learn about the Kalash people's peacemaking practices, reconciliation rituals, and the role of the Kalash women in these peacebuilding processes. To develop a deep understanding of the topic I wish to conduct semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and to collect visual data such as photographs and videos. The objectives for this exploratory study are: 1) To learn about conflict resolution methods used by the Kalash people; 2) to understand the role of the Kalash women in these peacebuilding practices; and, 3) to understand the impact of such methods on conflict transformation, and social justice.

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only one part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details about anything mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please listen carefully and make sure that you completely understand the information presented to you.

Study Procedures:

To supplement interview data and add depth to my study I wish to conduct participant observation and to collect visual data such as photographs and videos of peacemaking practices, reconciliation rituals and ceremonies. Some data might be selected for publication in my Ph.D. thesis after you

have reviewed and approved it. You will be contacted within one month of data collection to

review your photographs/videos. At that time, you will have an opportunity to review, approve or

disapprove publication of all of your data or for any item specifically. The video and photographic data collected will be under the protection and secure control of the researcher and will not be disseminated without your permission. All visual data will be carefully saved on a password protected computer to ensure privacy and confidentiality. However, if you do not wish events to be photographed or video recorded, I would take notes instead that will be kept in a locked cabinet in an office in my home. If desired, the final report can be sent to you via email or post at the completion of the study by approximately 01/2023.

Risks and Benefits:

No risks are anticipated. You may benefit by knowing that you are contributing to an effort to learn and share knowledge about your culture as well as Indigenous peacebuilding processes and their significance and potential for conflict-affected communities.

Confidentiality:

Confidentiality will be protected throughout the study and no identifying names, markers or data will be used in the final research report without your approval. The information contained in videos and photographs is considered non-anonymous information as they present recorded information

in which people may be identified. Visual data will be addressed with strict confidentiality. Within

one month of data collection you will be given the opportunity to review, make suggestions, and

express approval or disapproval of the photographic and video data collected. The digital files will be stored on the principal investigator's password protected computer that will be kept in her office at home. The transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet in a study room in the researcher's home. No one other than the primary investigator, and the thesis advisor

will have access to the data. All files, digital and otherwise, will be destroyed after the research study has been completed (Approx. 01/2023). The University of Manitoba may look at the research record to ensure it has been done in a safe and proper way.

Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation is voluntary. You can choose whether to accept or reject this request to participate in the study. If you consent, you may withdraw from this study at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study in which case any data collected will be erased and eliminated from future analysis. If you decide you would like to have your data removed from this study, you can email or phone the primary researcher ([redacted]) and state that you are withdrawing from the

study, and to remove your data from the study. Your decision would be respected and would not be shared with anyone. However, please be informed that the nature of data analysis might make it impossible to identify or exclude your data from the study after January 2022.

Rights of Research Participants:

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation in the study without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics approval through the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204- 474-7122, or e-mail humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep

for your records and reference.

Dissemination:

After the completion of this project the findings will be translated into a thesis for my Ph.D. degree

in Peace and Conflict Studies (Thesis will be available at https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca). Papers

resulting from the findings of this study might also be published in journals and presented at conferences. I also intend to send a copy of the final report to be kept in the Kalasha Dur (museum) library for Kalash community members and researchers interested in knowing more about the Kalash culture.

I thank you kindly for your consideration and time.

Consent Questions:

1. **I provide consent for collection of visual data knowing that I can withdraw at any point and with no consequence. ☐ Yes ☐ No**

2. **I am comfortable with the collection of Photographs Yes ☐ No ☐**

3. **I am comfortable with collection of Videos Yes ☐ No ☐**

4. **I understand I will be shown my photographs and videos before dissemination and that I can withdraw consent for any item specifically, and at any time before the deadline (approx. Jan 2022)**

☐ Yes ☐ No

5. **Knowing that I may be visually identifiable I agree to the release of the visual data solely for the purpose of this study only after my review, and with my permission. I understand that my permission can be withdrawn for any reason at any time without negative repercussions.**

☐
Yes
☐ **No**

6. Would you like a copy of the final research report?

If yes, how would you like to receive the report? Please provide your address (email or postal) so that I can send you the report.

The oral consent has been audio

recorded Yes ☐ No ☐

"I have read and explained this consent form to the participant before receiving the participant's consent, and the participant had knowledge of its contents and appeared to understand it".

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date