

Reprinted From:  
Pakistan Geographical Review, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1969  
Univ. of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

THE PEOPLE OF CHITRAL : A SURVEY OF THEIR ETHNIC DIVERSITY\*  
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ONE of the interesting features of Chitral State is its ethnic variety. There are a number of ethnic groups, varying in their population size. Each of the ethnic groups has its own specific culture and way of life. They possess different history, speak different languages and practise different customs. It is, therefore, useful to attempt to describe the behavioural pattern of the various people living in Chitral State. Thus the purpose of this paper is to present a coherent description of the main cultural aspects of the people of Chitral.

KHOW : THE PREDOMINANT GROUP

The majority of the people of Chitral are called the Khow, who make a population of 96,118, including 48,641 Males and 47,477 Females.<sup>1</sup> In their customs, culture, language and other ways of life, the Khow are different from their Pathan neighbours on the south. They are, however, more related to the people inhabiting the valleys of Gilgit Agency, Azad Kashmir, because of their long historical contacts with them.

The Khow, to-day, extend as far as Gupis in Gilgit Agency. According to Biddulph, they used to spread over much larger areas than they occupy now. This he has presumed from the appearance of their name in the ancient 'Kophen' (Kabul River), the Choaspes (Kunar River), the Choas (the combined Swat and Panjkora River) etc.<sup>2</sup>

The language of the Khow is called 'Khowar' which is spoken nowhere else except in Chitral and by the Khow settlers in Gilgit Agency and certain parts of Pakistan. According to Professor Morgenstierne, "Khowar is an Indo-Aryan language of archaic type..... But it contains, apart from more recent borrowings from Persian, Aryan and Hindi, also loan words from the Pamir dialects, as well as a number of words of Middle Iranian origin. Some words are borrowed from, or shared with Burushaski and Shina, and several of the common words are of unknown origin."<sup>3</sup>

As far as the origin of the Khow is concerned, they can be divided into two groups ;

- 1) The Original Khow, and
- 2) The Later Immigrants who mixed with the Original Khow.

\*The paper is a chapter from my M. Sc. Thesis : *A Social Geography of Chitral State* (London University of London, 1965). I am thankful to Professor Emrys Jones, who supervised my thesis.

<sup>1</sup>Census of Pakistan, 1961, Census Report of Tribal Areas, Part II, pp.

<sup>2</sup>John Biddulph ; *Tribes of the Hindu Kush* ; Calcutta 1880, pp. 160-161.

<sup>3</sup>G. Morgenstierne ; *Nam:s, Languages and Tribes of Chitral, The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New Edition) ; Vol. 2, Fasciculus 23 (London : 1963), p. 31.

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*The Original Khaw*

The Original Khaw are of Aryan stock. In the ancient times the region between the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas, was inhabited by a people called Ghalcha<sup>4</sup>. They were later exterminated or driven out or absorbed by the invading Aryans who came about three thousand years ago from the northern passes of the Hindu Kush and occupied most of their territory between Nuristan (Former Peshawar) in Afghanistan and Gilgit and Astor in Azad Kashmir. This area was occupied by a homogeneous race. But subsequently, as Biddulph suggests, the area was split into two parts "by a wedge of Khaw invasion, representing members of different, but related tribes coming from the north."<sup>5</sup> Grierson agrees to the suggestion and further adds that Khawar represents "the language of a later wave of Dardic<sup>7</sup> invaders, akin to the earlier ones".<sup>6</sup> We are thus led to the conclusion that the Khaw though came and settled in these valleys later than the first wave of Aryans, belonged to the same race. Whatever differences had occurred in them and in their language were because of their long contacts with the Ghalcha people of the north, before crossing over into Chitral.

These people to-day, form the Original Khaw of Chitral and consist of small groups scattered in various parts of the state. The interesting thing about them is their population, instead of increasing, is, to a certain extent, static. In none of the villages can more than four houses of the same family be found. The reason for this would be the circumstances in which they were put. They were subdued and subjugated by the different waves of immigrants and invaders, who not only treated them as their slaves but also seized their belongings, leaving them the bare minimum for sustenance. In such a condition, when a family grew in size, other members had to leave in search of a more reasonable livelihood in some other area abandoning their properties to the ones remaining behind.

<sup>4</sup> Sir George A. Grierson : *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. VIII, Part II ; Calcutta 1919, p. 1.  
<sup>5</sup> John Biddulph : *Dialects of the Hindu Kush*, *Journal of R.A.S.*, London, Vol. XVII, pp. 133-1334.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, *Tribes of the Hindu Kush*, pp. 157-61 ; and G.A. Grierson ; *op. cit.*, pp. 7-11.

<sup>7</sup> In ancient Sanskrit, Greek and Roman literatures the word 'Dard' has been used for the inhabiting the whole mountain tract between the Hindu Kush and the frontiers of India. Originally, the tract is called 'Dardistan' and the languages spoken in the area are generally under 'Dard Group' of Indo-Aryan languages. The present people are also, sometimes, referred to as 'Dard'. (J. Biddulph ; *Tribes of the Hindu Kush*, p. 155 ; and G.A. Grierson ; *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2).

*The Immigrants*

These include those who came to Chitral in different decades as invaders from the surrounding countries of Badakhshan, Wakhan, Russian and Afghan Turkistan, Gilgit Agency, Dir and Swat states of Pakistan and parts of Afghanistan. Many also came as invaders or as followers or scions of the ruling class, but at first "..... adventitious and sporadic squatters but they made themselves permanent by subduing, dispossessing and oppressing the existing primitive stock"<sup>8</sup>.

These clans and families who came later in spite of their different origins and backgrounds, absorbed themselves into the Original Khaw by living in the same villages, intermarriages, adapting Khawar language, Khaw customs and mode of life. The hostile surrounding conditions helped towards this development by creating a common purpose of defence for these different elements. After the advent of Islam, which they all had embraced, played an important role as a unifying factor. Thus these people, having ethnologically and historically different backgrounds and consisting of about two hundred different clans and families are one today and all called the Khaw.

*Characteristics*

The Khaw are described as dolicho-cephalic to meso-cephalic, of middle complexion and well built. The family organization is based on a patrilineal and patrilineal basis. An average family is made up of seven members which include father, mother, sons, their wives and children. In the case of upper class families the household members reach thirty or more which include father, mothers, sons, their wives and children and servants and their families.

The father is the head of the family and the mother plays a role of 'house minister' and is in charge of all the domestic affairs. The division of labour according to sex and age is as follows.

Men are responsible for all agricultural work (except weeding, which is done by women), storing fuel wood, fodder, looking after goats and sheep, marketing, and weaving and other manual work. The women do domestic work such as looking after children, preparing meals, cleaning the house, etc. They also look after and prepare dairy products and help their men in certain agricultural work like sowing, weeding, harvesting and threshing. They sew and embroider, which are important qualifications for a woman. They also help in weeding.

<sup>8</sup>R. C. F. Schomberg : *Kafir Glaciers or Travels in Chitral* (London ; Martin, 1938), pp. 209-210.

<sup>9</sup>G. Morgenstierne : *Op cit.*, footnote, p. 31.



The children in this and all other small tribes, to be mentioned later, work the age of seven by helping their parents in the fields by taking meals to them or by taking kids or cattle, scaring away birds, and watering the fields.

The most notable characteristic of the Khow is their cheerfulness, fondness of singing and merry-making. They are also good polo players, and keen sportsmen. Though certain writers have described them as "prone to cold-blooded cruelty,.....",<sup>10</sup> and ".....lazy.....",<sup>11</sup> but the conditions prevailing now do not support such accusations. They are, on the other hand, very hard working and peaceful minded people. The Khow women are experts in certain handicrafts such as embroidery works and weaving woollen materials. Unfortunately, due to lack of patronage, these crafts are not yet presented to the world outside Pakistan and so the Khow women have so far failed to get their due credit.

There are other tribes, though small in number as well.

Considering the population, the number of small tribes in Chitral is very high. There are ten in number and make a population of 16,726, including 8,840 Males and 7,886 Females. These tribes have immigrated from different surrounding countries of India and have settled in various parts of the country. They speak their own languages and, to a certain extent, observe their own customs. Though all of them, except the Kalash, are Muslims and there is a great deal of mixing and intercourse between them and the Khow, still they have preserved their identity. These tribes are:

1. The Kalash, 2. The Bashgali, 3. The Gowari, 4. The Damali, 5. The Bhat, 6. The Pathans, 7. The Gojar, 8. The Wokhi, 9. The Badakhshi or Badkhashti, and 10. The Mundiji.

#### THE KALASH

This tribe which comprises of about 2,500 souls, inhabits the three sides of south western Chitral, which are called Rumboor, Bumburat and Birir. They are pagans (in their beliefs), primitive in their ways of life and unique in their customs and traditions. They have, strangely enough, succeeded in maintaining their beliefs and culture in the face of increasing influence of Islam and centuries of domination by alien races. Not only that, they have also been successful in preserving "... the original characteristics of their race"<sup>12</sup> in pure form.

Sir G. Robertson : *Story of a Minor Siege* (London : 1896), pp. 9-10.

Schomberg : *Op. cit.*, p. 220.

B. S. Guha : "Racial Affinities of the people of India", *Census of India, 1931*, Vol. 1, part 3, p. xxi.

#### Origin

It has now been confirmed through traditions that the Kalash are immigrants but the actual place of their emigration is in obscurity. They themselves claim to have come from a place called Tsiyam, but it is not certain whether by this they mean the country of Thailand which used to be called by that name, or Syria which is also named Sham. However, in the light of certain Kalash festival songs, which describe places of battles between them and the then inhabitants of Chitral, it has been able to trace their route along the River Chitral down to a place called Waigal which is situated in Afghanistan. But in Prof. Morgenstierne's opinion Tsiyam is situated still further south, but, he also points out that ".....Kalash stayed for a few generations in Waigal....."<sup>13</sup> Beyond this no information can be obtained. Thus so far we are only able to conclude that the habitation of the Kalash was round about the area between the Lower Bashgal valley and Chagan Valley (in Afghanistan) before their arrival in Chitral.

#### Emigration

During the eleventh century of the present era, Sabugtagin and his son Muzaffar of Gazni, the Kings of Kabul, were waging wars against the infidel tribes in the north of Jalalabad and Lughman<sup>14</sup>. Those tribes who are now inhabitants of Nuristan (which was formerly called Kafirstan and the people Red Kafirs) in Afghanistan could not stand these attacks and so had to retreat, pushing back the tribes inhabiting the upper valleys between Lughman and Lower Bashgal. The Kalash who were living in this area could not face the invading tribes and so in their turn invaded the lower parts of Chitral which they occupied as far as the villages of Baranis or Rumburat (about thirty miles above Chitral Town). They remained rulers of this part of Chitral for about three hundred years, when in 1320 A.D. they were defeated and subdued by the Khow who had by then accepted Islam<sup>15</sup>.

With the passage of time, the Kalash who remained in the main valley with the Muslim Khow, were greatly influenced by them and so accepted their religion and adopted their customs and language. On the other hand, the Kalash who lived in these valleys and those who later retreated to these areas, were, to a certain extent, due to their seclusion and mainly because of the tolerant character of the Muslim neighbours, able to continue their old practices. They enjoyed every freedom under the Muslim rulers and remained totally unmolested in their corners. In their times they only paid certain special taxes or performed *corvée* as those in the other valleys who belonged to the lower classes, till the reforms in 1953.

<sup>13</sup>Siiger, H : *Ethnological Research in Chitral, Sikkim and Assam* : 1956, p. 34.

<sup>14</sup>Downes, E : *Kafirstan*, Lahore, 1873, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup>Murtaza, Mirza Ghulam : *Op. cit.*, p. 29.



*Characteristics*

The Kalash are described as Proto Nordic type<sup>16</sup>: "The inter-relationship between the Khow and Kalash race is", according to Guha, "very remote". In complexion they are fair but generally darker than the Khow and the Bashgali tribes<sup>17</sup>.

The religion of the Kalash is a mixture of idolatory and ancestor worship. They have numerous gods and goddesses who are worshipped by singing hymns, sacrificing goats according to fixed rituals and by spectacular dances in which both men and women take part. Fairies, demons and ghosts of ancestors are also propitiated in similar manner. They also believe in paradise and hell, and consider charity the best way to happiness.

An average Kalash family is the same as in the case of the Khow. Division of labour according to sex is, however, different from the other tribes. In this case men are responsible for looking after animals, preparing dairy products, farming and other outdoor work such as marketing or manual work. Women's duties are bringing fire-wood, grinding grain, weaving woollen cloth, certain agricultural work, weeding and watering, looking after children and other domestic work done by women.

The position of women is definitely low as is obvious in many ways. They are not allowed to visit most of the shrines and sanctuaries. They are also forbidden to go to the goat-houses and cannot milk goats and sheep. Women are not even allowed to put their feet between the hearth and the back wall where domestic utensils are kept. They must wash their hands in running water and then stretch to get what they need. If ever by mistake a woman puts her foot in the enclosure then all the utensils must be destroyed. Pure and sacred quality is, according to them, ascribed to these places and to guard them from pollution such precautions are taken.

Moreover, women are segregated during their monthly periods and during childbirth. They retire to a house called 'Bashalani' or women's house during these periods and confine themselves for seven days in the first case and for forty days in the second. They are strictly forbidden to do any work during these days or to come out of these houses. No man can pass by these houses which with their surroundings are thought to be impure, and if someone by mistake passes by, he has to offer a sacrifice to make himself pure.

These women are very industrious. They always seem to be doing some job or other. The Kalash men are thought to be good masons, though unfortunately they do not take much advantage of this, and skilful channel builders. They are also,

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though uneducated and totally illiterate, a very intelligent folk. They are also known for their cheerfulness, wit and generosity. They are fond of dancing, merry making and love their old religion and customs very much. As a supple people they are humble in their demeanour, but also friendly.

Their dress is also different from the other tribes. Men wear grey woollen trousers and a black-brown poncho called '*bore*' with a small woollen cap. The women wear black gowns called '*sangach*', with a belt at the waist. The most interesting part of the dress is the head-gear, hanging down the back to the waist, decorated with hundreds of shells and petty trinkets and is called '*kopes*'. The language spoken by the Kalash is called '*Kalasha*' or Kalashwar.

## THE BASHGALI

The Bashgalis or Shiekhan as they are called by the other Chitralis, live in different parts of Chitral such as: Gobor in the Northern part, Rumbor in the Bumbrate in North-Western, and Langur-bat in Southern Chitral. Their population number is approximately 2,000.

The Bashgalis are the descendants of those immigrants who were formerly pagans in their beliefs and lived in the Nuristan valleys of Afghanistan. They have been called Red Kafirs by the foreign writers to distinguish them from the Kalash who are also termed Black Kafirs, and the area was named Kafirstan. Their immigration took place in the last decade of the nineteenth century when the forcible conversion of this community was going on under the Amir of Afghanistan. As a consequence most of them were converted to Islam but these people took refuge in Chitral and settled in the areas mentioned. They had been practising their old religion until the 1920s after that all of them voluntarily embraced Islam.

The Bashgalis are different from other Chitralis not only in their language which is called Bashgaliwar, but also in many other respects. An average family is made up of fifteen members which includes father, mother (usually more than one), sons, their wives, children and grand-children. The different generations continue to live together, whereas, in the other tribes the families split up after the death of the father or after the third generation.

Division of labour is quite unique. For example, the duties of women include not only the domestic work but also all the agricultural work. They are practically household slaves and their life is one of incessant labour and trouble. They also do the carrying except such very heaviest which are left for men. Men only plough, in which also a woman's help is needed to steer the ox in ploughing. Men's job is threshing corn, looking after livestock and preparing dairy products.

<sup>16</sup>B. S. Guha : Races of Northern India.

<sup>17</sup>Guha: Racial affinities of the people of India, Census of India, 1931, part III, p. xxi.



As is obvious from the above, the women are industrious and work incessantly. That is why the whole economy of the Bashgalis depends on them and those who have much land marry more than one wife. Every wife's share of work and house is separate and the husband stays with them in turn and enjoys their 'hospitality'. The men are wonderfully helpful and kind among themselves and love their husbands devotedly. The men are lazy parasites and pass most of the time chatting. Once they are thought to be the best bowmen in these regions and now that is no more. Their favorite pastime in winter is snow hockey which they play with great zeal and enthusiasm.

#### THE GOWARI OR ARANDUI

These people, who make a population of about 800, inhabit the southern village of Chitral called Arandu which is situated, on the border of Afghanistan. They are further divided into three groups according to their place of origin :

- 1) The Suniardari,
- 2) The Sultana, and
- 3) The Afghani or Swati.

The first group, Suniardari, immigrated from the Asmar area of Afghanistan and claims to have settled here more than five hundred years ago. The second group came to settle here from Jalal Abad in Afghanistan about seven generations ago. The third one, according to tradition, emigrated from Dir-Swat area in Pakistan twenty generations ago. Later they split into two branches and one of them went further north to settle in the Damil valley.

According to Prof. Morgenstierne's informant, the third group had "....." immigrated from Gabar in Bajaur (Dir) in the time of Sultan Azdar Ali, sixteen generations ago. His four sons were expelled by the Pathans, and one of them came to Arandu from the Cafirs and settled there....." Further, Prof. Morgenstierne suggests that..... a Sultan Haider Ali is mentioned by Babur and if we allow sixteen years for each generation sixteen generations would carry us back to A.C.1450, the time of this prince and of the Pathan conquest of Swat and Bajaur (Dir). The village does, therefore, contain a nucleus of truth, and it is quite possible that the brother went further north to Damil.....<sup>18</sup>

All these three groups are now intermingled and speak the same language 'Gowar-bati' or 'Arandui-war'.

Morgenstierne, G. : Gowaribati Oslo 1950, pp.5-6.

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The ways of living of the Gowari are very backward compared with the Khow. Human beings and cattle live under the same roof. They are also unfriendly to each other and the most troublesome people in the whole state. Killing each other and stealing each other's property is their day to day practice, so every one lives in insecurity. That is why every precaution is made to safeguard the houses by building high boundary walls around. The houses also have no windows or ventilators except a small hole of six inches diameter in the roof which serves the purpose of letting in light and letting out smoke.

The causes of all this could be traced as follows :

First of all, the settlements of other tribes such as the Gujars and the Pathans who are recent settlers in this area cannot get along with each other. Also new fugitives from Afghanistan who come frequently, make the situation worse as they have to depend mainly on stealing. Old feuds and enmities continue for the generations and the methods of vengeance used are killing or stealing.

The international border line which separates not only the same village, but also the same families and old enemies, plays an important role in this regard. For example, nothing is easier than to kill one's enemy and slip across the border where he would have no fear of law to condemn him.

An average family includes five members, which is composed of father, mother and children. In division of labour they do the same as the Khow, but the only difference is that they have 'gobana' system to look after the stock. For example, a man is employed by the whole village for this purpose for only two months in a year when other villagers are busy with other agricultural work. In the case of the Khow one member of the family is assigned the duty of looking after the stock.

#### THE DAMALI

These people make a population of approximately 1,500 and inhabit the valley called Damal which is situated about twenty miles north of Arandu on the left bank of the Chitral river. According to their origin, these people are grouped into :

- a) The Shintari, and b) Swatis or Afghanis.

The two groups have by adopting the same language and customs and by intermarriages, become mixed and call themselves Damalis after the valley in which they live.

The Shintari claim to be the original or rather the earlier inhabitants of this area. Though not much anthropological research has so far been done on these people, the linguistic investigations by Prof. Morgenstierne give much food for thought. This shows that "the lexological accordances of Damia (language of the



malis) with Khowar (language of the Khow) and Gowar-bati (language of Gowaris) are relatively few, while those connecting it with Kalasha, and other Kafir languages are more numerous. "He further points out the importances of Kafir languages sub-, super-, and adstratum in this language and suggests that "... at least to some extent it (Damia) seems to belong to a form of Kafir" language different from those which exist now. He also puts forward the hypothesis that "this unknown language is the one once spoken by Jashis. At any rate, the morphological structure of Damia shows that it must have existed as a separate language for a considerable period."<sup>19</sup>

The Jashis lived in the upper reaches of the Bashgal and in other valleys before the arrival of the present inhabitants of those areas. After the present inhabitants invaded those valleys, as mentioned earlier, in the 11th century A.D., they subdued and enslaved the Jashis. It is tempting to suggest that this group could be fugitives from those people and retired to this secluded valley. The fact that friendly relations between this group and the Kalash, who were also fugitives and occupied most of the part in Southern Chitral, gives support to this idea.

The second group, *i.e.*, the Swatis or Afghanis, are a branch of Gowaris, as mentioned earlier, and had settled in this valley. They have now mixed with the previous group.

These people live in scattered houses and only in summer which they spend in their pastures with their livestock they live in groups. Thus the opportunities of coming together are very few and only on the occasions such as marriages, births and deaths, or during religious festivals. But their relations with one another are, compared with the Gowaris, very friendly and co-operative. They are very backward in education and take no interest in it. Instead of sending their children to the school they rather prefer them to look after the animals. A family generally consists of five members.

#### THE DANGARIK

It was about six generations ago that these people came and settled in the present valley. Later they spread to the surrounding valleys of Beori and today they have a population of about 2,500.

The place from which they emigrated is thought to be Chilas in Azad Kashmir. They still speak same old language, Phalura or Dangarik-war, which is the language of Chilas, though it has now a number of innovations "due to the influence of these surrounding languages."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Morgenstierne : Notes on Damali (Oslo 1940), pp.146-8.  
<sup>20</sup>Morgenstierne : Phalura (Oslo 1941), p.8.

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### THE PATHAN

The Pathans have immigrated from Dir, Swat (in Pakistan) and other parts of Afghanistan during the last hundred years. They came here as fugitives to escape family troubles, or as traders or as state servants, and then settled. Now they are found in different parts of the country but their main concentration is in Drosh, Dard, and Mustuj. Besides, they are found in Rashun, Petch Ute (Lut Kuh), Arandu, and Damal.

They make population of about 3,000 and all speak Pashtu. More than 85 per cent of them are engaged in trade and control eighty per cent of the whole trade.

They are very co-operative and helpful towards each other and try to dominate the rest of the population commercially. Though they live in the present village as the Khow they mainly keep to themselves. They also practise marriage among themselves and mainly avoid having close relations especially with the common Khow.

Their family structure is based on conjugal bases, except those whose mainstay is agriculture and who are consanguine, patrilocal type as other Khow. Thus their family includes four members on average, which consists of father, mother and children.

### THE GOJAR

The Gojar are originally from Dir, Swat and Hazara Kohistan in Pakistan. They have spread in the different parts of Southern Chitral during the last fifty years. Their main concentration is in the Shishi Kuh valley and they are also found in Damal and Arandu valleys. Main occupation of the Gojar is stock raising. As they do not have their own lands and pastures, so they have to take lands and pastures belonging to others, on lease. Except those who are settled in this way, the rest move with animals in search of pastures from place to place according to the seasons of the year. Due to this nomadic and scattered way of life they have no social organization. Their total population, according to the 1961 census report, is 2,910.

### THE WOKHI

These people live in the neighbourhood of glaciers on the north-eastern margin of part of Chitral, called Baroghil. They make a population of about 450.

The Wokhi are immigrants from Wokhan in Afghanistan but there are also some families who have immigrated from Russian and Chinese Turkistan and called Kirgiz and Sirguli, respectively. These two, though, have their own languages, which are Turkish and Tajik but the common language of all is Wokhi (language of Wokhis).



Baraghil was used as summer pasture before, but during the last fifty years people have been able to bring so many acres of land under the plough with hard work and so have started living permanently. Their main occupation is raising.

They live in scattered houses and only in the four months of summer they get opportunity of getting together in the summer quarters. A family is composed of members in average, which include father, mother, brother, sister-in-law and children. The elder brother is head of the family. The Wokhis are pleasant and friendly folk and fond of dancing and singing. According to Schomberg, "They never speak the truth, because under the conditions of their lives it does not pay to 'Don't quote me' is as much a Wokhi proverb as a Whitehall one. The Wokhi live in one country and have relations in others, so they have to be circumspect. They cannot learn to hold their tongues, they protect themselves by telling lies."

#### BADAKHSHIS OR MADAKLASHTI

These people live in Madaklasht village of Shishi Koh valley. Originally they migrated to Badakhshan in Afghanistan and came to Chitral about two hundred years ago. It is said that they were ironmongers and were invited by the then ruler of Chitral to make guns for his army. Their total population is now about 1,400. There is not much difference between them and the Khow, but their language, which is Persian. Their favourite sport in winter is skiing.

#### YADGHA

They inhabit the village called Parabeck in the Lot-Kuh Valley. They are immigrants from Badakhshan in Afghanistan. There is nothing much to say as the Yadgha people have adopted all the ways of life of the Khow. The only thing they have preserved is their language. There are about five hundred of them.

#### RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The above tribes form three religious groups: Sunni Muslims, Ismailia and 'Kafir' or Pagan. The Kalash are as has been mentioned, a Pagan tribe. The small tribes, except the Madaklashti or Badakhshi, and more than two-thirds of the Khow belong to the Sunni sect of Islam, while the remainder are Ismaili. The Ismaili inhabit mainly the valleys of the north-east and north-west, while the Sunni Muslims dominate the north-central valleys and the valleys of the western parts of Chitral. The Kalash inhabit some of the western valleys.

Islam was first introduced into Chitral through the northern passes of Badakhshan and Dorah, by the invaders and other immigrants coming from Badakhshan, Turkistan and other parts. Most of these areas professed, and still profess, the Ismailia sect of Islam. Islam did not, however, enter the Kalash occupied areas of the south until the thirteenth century conquest. Thereafter the southern valleys were not only open to settlers from the north but also to immigrants mainly Muslims, from the south. Later the establishment of the present Sunni government in Chitral also helped the religion to spread northwards. The Sunni concentration in the Mulikhow and Torikhow tehsils is also ascribed to the missionary activities of a famous Afghan divine, Mulla-i-Room, in the sixteen century.

Those of the Kalash who lived in the main valleys of the south have been influenced by their Muslim neighbours and have slowly accepted their religion (Sunnism). On the other hand those who lived in the secluded valleys have been able to continue their old practices without being molested or influenced by the others.

Also read

فہرست اقوام بیلار

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