

Ethnocultural Practices Of The Pakistani Kalash Community: A Critical Analysis Of Selected Literature

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Abstract

This paper critically reviewed the ethnocultural happenings within the Kalash community in Pakistan which is a small native population subjected to the forces of modernization, conversion to religion and colonial forces. The Kalash people are inhabited in a small section in the Hindu Kush mountains so their identity is isolated to their own rituals, societal system and view of the world. This paper was a critical review of a chosen body of literature to synthesize and evaluate it in terms of grasping how culture can be preserved and changed in the community. Based on a critical reading of academic literature, the methodology consisted of thematic analysis of literature on different aspects of the life of the Kalashes, their festivals, funerals, marriage rituals, artwork, as well as the impact of tourism. It was found that although there are astonishing symbols of resilience in certain practices, there are also evolving as a result of commodification, media representations and legislative frames. The article states that better, more in-depth insight into these practices is essential to devise a preservation strategy that is effective and does not discredit the powers of the community and its autonomy. The study vocalizes the necessity of the policies favoring the cultural self-determination changing instead of the assimilation, which places its contribution in the larger scholarly debate on indigenous rights and the sustainability of culture.

Keywords: Kalash, ethnocultural practices, cultural preservation, indigenous identity, Pakistan, folklore, critical analysis.

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I. Introduction

Pakistan has a cultural fabric where ethnic, linguistic and religious strands strive together. One such anomaly is the Kalash community which forms part of many studies. Kalash people have lived in three distant valleys Bumburet, Rumbur and Birir in Chitral District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and have held a unique ethnocultural identity. In contrast to the mostly Islamic residents of Pakistan, Kalash are converts to a type of ancient animistic religion, have a strong oral culture, complex social practices, and distinctive material culture. They have been the object of anthropological study, interest and fascination by historians and by tourists and this makes their existence an important topic of investigation. The community, however, has a big existential problem to contend with such as religious conversion, cultural assimilation and the monetization of their traditions brought about by tourism.

The scholarly debate about the Kalash has been concerned more with their historical background and several have theorized about the Kalash being descendants of ancient Indo-Aryans or even the soldiers of Alexander the Great. Although these historic discussions are significant, they are necessary to adopt a more modern and critical approach in order to realize the dynamics of their cultural life at present. The issue that is managed by this research is the absence of such synthesized and critical review of the primary scholarly texts that investigated the dynamic process by which the Kalash ethnocultural practise is being maintained, modified, and questioned in the contemporary society. Earlier family studies have been descriptive or concentrated on individual aspects of their culture with little or no integration of the inter-related forces involved.

The aim of the research carried out in this article is to critically examine a sample of the latest work to generalize a sensitive picture of the ethnocultural practices of the Kalash people. This paper aims to examine how these practices are becoming places of identity creation and refusal, and how they are simultaneously being transformed by inside and outside forces. This research will be directed by the reasoning that it can be a welcome contribution to the research on the cultural change by scholars, policymakers, and the Kalash people themselves in order to have a better idea of how the cultural change takes place as well as to inform subsequent research and management about ways to preserve the heritage. Filling this gap will allow a more complete and critical view on

the given study because it will go beyond a simple description and toward a deeper examination of the forces impacting the cultural future of the Kalash.

II. Literature Review

There is a long history of the academic study of the Kalash people, including a tendency in early descriptions to capture them as an isolated and unchanging group. The research has developed over time and focuses on more dynamic processes of the cultural change. Much literature was already available on the social and religious living of the Kalash, in form of their festivals, rituals and also their funerals. To give an example, most of the festivals of Chilam Joshi, Uchau and Chawmos are well documented as the pillars of Kalash identity, encapsulation of shared lives through collectivity, rituals and spirituality². These rituals, mostly the funeral rituals are not only perceived as rite of passage but rather a deep-rooted activity that establishes cultural identity². The rituals are not only worshiped but actually experienced and this brings in a feeling of belonging that is transferred to other generations.

Remarkably, one of the glaring gaps in the literature, however, is the fine-grained discussion that these very practices are open to both internal contestation and external pressure. It is a theme that returns frequently to broaching the topic of the commodification of cultures, which is a result of the increased proliferation of tourism. As emphasized in the literature, the demand by tourists to experience authenticity and spectacle has brought about the performance of rituals at the cost of changing their meaning and purpose in the community³. The replacement of the shiness of practice to the tourist performance is a key contentious issue of the academic discourse. At the same time, an important research topic has been the effect of the media, especially its media portrayal of the Kalash. Research indicates that how Kalash culture is depicted in the media tends to trivialize or dehumanize it and at times adds to a discourse of deterioration and conversion to Islam⁴. This representation has the ability to form a bias or a loop where we have the community viewing its own culture through the perception of others or this can be referred to as interior perception or exterior perception or more so we can say that perception is both normative and formative.

The other deep-seated issue is exploration of Kalash material culture such as Kalash attire, wood carvings and textile manufacturing. Studies in this area reveal that these handicrafts are getting danger by the international markets, and insensitivity towards the local craftsmen. Recent Marxist examination of this problem shows how, through predatory economic networks in the Rumbur Valley, Kalasha craftworkers are now marginalized, a system which undermines their customary craft and work⁵. The literature gives prominence to the economic forces which drive the community members out of the traditional practices. Moreover, the Pakistani law and social systems are also the contributing factors. According to the literature there is inconsistency between traditional Kalash customs in the laws and the officially established law specifically in respect to marriage and family life⁷. This strains form an unstable context in which the traditional society order can be salvaged. In dealing with these gaps, this paper has identified a research problem, that is, there is a need to conduct an in-depth, interdisciplinary study, which will determine how these diverse systems of tourism, media, economic, and legal approaches affect the coming of the ethnocultural Kalash practices. Having incorporated these various academic approaches in this study, we have been able to get a more comprehensive and practical outlook of the insults and strength of the Kalash community.

Conceptual Framework

This paper used conceptual concept based on post-structuralist theory where this theory assumes that culture is not a fixed entity but is always constructed, contested and renegotiated across different social, power relations. Such a framework was especially apt in the study of the Kalash community as it enabled a more precarious picture of how their identity was formed not only by their internal process, but also by external influences. Rather than perceiving the culture of the Kalash as an unchangeable and fixed tradition, post-structuralism allows us to regard it as a flexible space of discourse in which meanings continually are negotiated. The concepts employed in the framework were that of cultural commodification, representation, and resistance. Cultural commodification is the process of making cultural practices and artifacts into marketable ones or good commodities losing their connotation. The notion of representation focuses on the presentation of the Kalash in the media, literature and in the touristic materials and the effect of that presentation on their view of themselves and of their culture. Lastly, the concept of resistance enabled us to determine how the Kalash community resists the narratives of the dominant cultures and defends its cultural independence. Applying this framework, analysis may extend further in its reading of the practices beyond mere description to a greater questioning of the power relations that influence practices. It permitted an exploration of the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity, and of a lived identity and an external identity imposed.

Research Problem

The research problem that this article attempted to fulfil was that there was no cohesive and critical analysis of the interverse pressures on the Kalash ethnocultural practices. On the one hand, there is the considerable amount of literature devoted to separate pieces of the Kalash life, including festivals, marriage regulations, handicrafts, and so on, whereas, on the other hand, one cannot find a noticeable gap in the scholarship sphere that would pull together these findings and give a full picture of the complicated interdependence between cultural preservation, transformation, and external influence. The research paper will present the answer to the following question: How do the relationships between tourism, media representation, economic pressures, and legal frameworks affect the conservation and change of the Kalash ethnocultural practices, and how do the community deal with them? This paper has tried to go beyond descriptive writing to critically analyze the various issues plaguing the very integrity of Kalash culture hence providing a more comprehensive view on their present condition.

Rationale

This research is significant on two counts. It also adds value to the body of knowledge of folklore studies as it presents a case study of how an indigenous group struggles to retain its identity amidst the current globalization efforts. This paper has attempted to create a basis on which different scholarly opinion has been collated in order to provide an analytical framework to gain insight on the processes of cultural survival and adaptation. In practice, the results will be valuable to policy makers, non-governmental bodies, and the community leadership. The presented research can contribute to forming more responsive policies to the needs of Kalash people by shedding light on the uniqueness of cultural commodification and misrepresentation problems that remain persistent, even in the age of sustainable tourism and fair economic activities. It directly addresses the so what question by presenting practical lessons that can be used to promote the long term health and cultural self-regulation of the Kalash people; such that their unique heritage is not lost.

Research Objective

The main objective in conducting this research was to develop a critical analysis of the literature chosen on the Kalash community in an effort to comprehend the relationship between interplay of forces that influence their ethnocultural practices. In particular, the objective of the research was to:

1. Examine how festivals and rituals serve as spaces for the construction and expression of Kalash identity.
2. Analyze the impact of tourism on the authenticity and function of Kalash cultural practices.
3. Investigate the role of media representation and its influence on the community's self-perception and conversion rates.
4. Evaluate the effects of economic pressures, specifically on traditional handicrafts and textiles.
5. Identify the legal and social tensions between customary Kalash laws and the national legal framework of Pakistan.

Research Questions

1. How do the major festivals and rituals of the Kalash people contribute to the construction and maintenance of their distinct identity in the contemporary context?
2. In what ways does tourism impact the authenticity and performance of Kalash cultural practices, and how does this affect the community's sense of identity?
3. How do media representations of the Kalash community shape both external perceptions and internal cultural dynamics, including the process of religious conversion?
4. What are the key economic challenges faced by Kalasha artisans, and how do these pressures threaten the continuation of indigenous handicrafts and textile traditions?
5. How do discrepancies between customary Kalash law and the national legal system affect social practices, particularly concerning marriage and family?

III. Methodology

The type of research undertaken was a qualitative study, viz. a critical ethnographic perspective using an in-depth secondary data analysis. The research design was a descriptive and interpretive literature review whereby, a chosen set of literature related to academic articles, books, and reports on the Kalash community was scrutinized. This design was adequate since the type of research was to synthesize the existing knowledge and avail a new, critical overview of the ethnocultural practices without carrying out a fresh field research. It was not aimed at obtaining new empirical evidence or rather the aim was to recrawl but to rather reimagine and re-contextualize the past studies findings and spot patterns and interconnections that were not being maximally used.

The source materials included in the research included about 20-30 academic papers, belonging to journal articles, chapters of edited books, and dissertations. The principle of the selection of these materials was

their direct connection to the ethnocultural life of the Kalash, the date of their publication (preference was given to the more recent research in order to draw the modern dynamics), and the academicism. The documents were chosen with the aim of discussing rather broad topics, including that of festivals, funerals, marriage rituals, material culture, tourism and media influence. Purposive sampling technique was followed so as to have a wide representation of themes and considered academic opinions. Sources that were incorporated into this study were sources offered by the user in the previous turns, internalized sources, and additional external information collected through search.

This study involved a three-step process i.e. data collection, data analysis and synthesis. To start with, systematic review of the given literature was performed to single out the major themes, arguments, and findings in response to the research questions. Second, thematic analysis of the data was carried out. This was done through the repeated procedure of reading, coding, and categorizing the information. Both deductive and inductive codes were created in a manner such that the former was defined on the basis of the research questions (e.g. tourism impact, media representation), and the latter responsive to the emergence of new themes in the literature (e.g. agency and resistance). Third, the coded themes were synthesized in order to develop the comprehensive narrative that critically answered the research questions not on the level of individual case studies but in the context of more general and integrated analysis.

The Data Analysis was carried out through the interpretation of the studied themes to reveal new meanings and interrelationships. As an illustration, the theme of cultural commodification was examined in comparison to the theme of economic challenges and theme of the media representation to ascertain how these troves were interrelated. This process of interpretation enabled the generation of new meaning, hence the realization of new discoveries, which in this case are the fact that often perceived authenticity of cultural practice can be an external demand rather than their internal tradition. The last stage of synthesis linked these interpreted themes to the theoretical aspect of constructing post-structuralism, into which it proves the way how power relations and external discourses are effectively constructing Kalash identity.

In order to support the validity and reliability, the study used the systematic method of selection and analysis of the literature, where the inclusion criteria were specified explicitly. Interpretive process is clearly connected to the selected theoretical approach and the findings are based on the evidence used in the source materials. The weaknesses of this research are directly connected with the nature of the study that makes use of secondary data. It is an analytical study based on literature and does not directly get in touch with the people trying to understand the lives of the people; hence, it is not able to capture the first hand, lived experiences of the people. These insights are hence based on the interpretations of the other researchers who might be biased in their interpretations. The study also focuses on the literature available and any unattended gaps in the academic subject matter are depicted in the study scope.

The ethical concerns in this research concentrated on the accountable use of current studies. Previous scholars were also quoted strictly with a guideline of APA to prevent plagiarism and congratulate due credit. The research was not sensationalist and treated the people of Kalash with dignity and a scholarly disposition and the ethical imperative of treating the people as actors of their cultural fate rather than the subjects of a study. This study had no human subjects.

IV. Results

The review of the selected literature showed that there are some main findings about the ethnocultural practices of the community of the Kalash. The outcomes are delivered under topics as per the research questions which have not been interpreted.

1. Festivals and Rituals as Spaces for Identity

In the literature, it was repeatedly emphasized that festivals and rituals of Kalash were the main point of the community identity. According to the sources, the key festival, including Chilam Joshi (spring), Uchau (harvest), and Chawmos (winter) could be viewed as the life-defining events where the members strengthened their social networks and religious ideas. Not these festivals were typified with particular rites and dances conventional types and singing of songs related the mishistory and myths of Kalasha. The meetings were a form of collective memory and passing down of cultures between generations. The rituals, especially the funerals, were described as being light as far as distinctiveness was concerned since they featured a mourning procession, dance, and picnic involving the society that sharply differed with the norms of other societies. Such events acted as effective instances of differentiation, which entrenched the non-Islamic identity of the community.

2. The Impact of Tourism

The results indicated that there is a significant and multilateral influence of tourism to Kalash culture. The literature revealed that the influx of tourist had contributed to the commodification of the culture practices. Rituals that previously only the community consumed were now being done in front of an outside audience.

Observations of such a phenomenon as the staged authenticity which expected the cultural events to be shortened or altered in order to fit a tourist schedule were documented. This formed two different levels of cultural practice; an authentic private one and a commercialized version. Economic amenities of tourism although its translation to a source of income, were usually supplemented by degradation of true meaning and spiritual purpose of the rituals. It was also indicated that there was a transformation in the way the community perceived their own culture since it viewed more its culture in terms of what the tourists wanted to see.

3. The Role of Media Representation

As the literature analysis revealed, the media depiction was an important factor in the construction of the perceptions of the Kalash, in the collective and external perceptions. The results demonstrated that the media had a tendency to romanticize or exoticize the community with a sense of focus on these people and their distinct dress, religion and lifestyle. Such a representation often portrayed their social reality in a simplistic way, representing them as a dying race or a living museum. However, though this story captures the attention of people all over the world, it may by happenstance create fatalism even in the community itself. Due to this, research has also shown that media and especially social media had turned into a means of religious proselytization with some reports of how digital communication was used to evangelize the conversion of people into the Muslim faith, another challenge of demographic and cultural demographics within the community.

4. Economic Pressures on Indigenous Handicrafts

Findings indicated that the production of traditional handicrafts and textiles by Kalash was highly economically pressurized. The literature recorded that traditional weaving and wood sculpting diminished because the skill is not always economical. Mass produced cheaper items fought off artisans. A specific research on the topic was conducted based on a Marxist analysis showing how the local economy was involved into a greater system which was exploitative and where the fruits of skilled labor was not proportionately rewarded. This had contributed to a scenario where younger generations would be less willing to learn their traditional crafts and this posed a threat of continuity of this attribute of their material culture. The economic brawl was a blatant danger to the concrete manifestations of Kalash identity.

5. Customary Law and Legal Tensions

The tensions between national law of Pakistan and customary Kalash law were also resolved as per the findings. The literature indicated conflicts especially in the fields of marriage and practices of families. As an example, elopement and divorce according to the conditions of the Kalash customary law might be not compliant with the legal and religious codes of the country. This put Kalash people, in general, and women, in particular, in a very vulnerable legal position as they could be faced with a situation when their traditional rights were not accepted by the state. The findings revealed that such a legal ambiguity may cause social instability and may give a chance to external powers to act upon the traditional social framework of the community.

V. Discussion

This type of analysis provides a critical and nuanced view of ethnocultural practices of the community, the Kalash, shifting further than just the description by understanding forces of conservation and change. The findings point at the fact that, although the core practices, including festivals and funerals, still are effective areas of identity construction, they are more and more transformed by external factors. The discourse translates such findings and draws a connection to the rest of the literature and the conceptualization of the study as a whole.

Summary and Interpretation of Main Findings

The most important findings of the study are related to a polarity in a better direction between resilience and assimilation. An example of such festivals is the festivals of Chilam Joshi, Uchau and Chawmos which are more than a celebration; it serves as the process of transmission of the cultural knowledge and the real mechanism of intergenerationality exchange and an essential manifestation of a non-Islamic identity. This recognition of an individual identity is further enhanced by the uniqueness of Kalash funeral customs that serve a symbolic and social border. Nonetheless, when the conclusions of these findings are interpreted, then it becomes apparent that this resilience is not absolute. The phenomenon of performing rituals to tourists noted in the literature implies that symbolic meaning of such kind of events is in the process of redefinition. The purpose of the ritual is shifting to transform to that of a more commercial rather than an internal, and spiritual ritual. It also represents a vivid example of cultural commodification which is one of the essential elements of the conceptual framework where culture turns into a marketable product that changes its initial essence.

Relating to Existing Literature

The findings validate and augment what is known. Tourism in indigenous communities has generally been a subject of literature and this situation may be observed through the perspective of the dual nature of its effects which is economic benefit and destruction of the culture. This is supported by this paper that indicates that although tourism is a lifeline economically, it also poses a balance of staged authenticity that poses a threat to the integrity of the practices. Moreover, investigating the concept of media representation reaffirms the idea that outer perceptions were affecting the self-image of a community to a large extent. The problem of exoticization has frequently been discussed in the literature on the native media representation, and the research can conclude that the Kalash are not also an exception. What is revealed by the synthesis, however, is that it places an emphasis on how this narrative can establish a kind of cultural fragility and how, in some contexts, it can provide a basis in which religious conversion is accomplished. This gives a continuation to the current discussion which demonstrates that media does not just reflect but it is an active participant in the cultural change. These marketized tensions on artisans, which can be discussed with the help of Marxism, also complement and contribute to the existing literature on the globalization of crafts. These results illustrate that such loss of interest in traditional Kalash handicrafts is not just disinterest but result of being marginalized by a larger economic system of exploitation of others.

Implications

The implication of these results are far-reaching both to theory and practice. The study will add value to the theory of folklore because it presents a strong case of how an indigenous culture engaged proactively in a negotiation of its identity through post-colonial and globalized forces. It shows that cultural practices are not merely a set of inherited practices but that it is performed, and a struggle in, field of power. As a practice, the findings have direct polarizing consequences to the policymakers and tourism operators. The findings indicate that policies that are geared towards mere conservation without taking into consideration the economic and social conditions of the community will become unsuccessful. Rather, it should follow a more efficient strategy of encouraging the community-based program that enables Kalash to take control of their cultural heritage and tourism so that they can curb the adverse impacts of commodification and misrepresentation.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study has been associated with the fact that it managed to limit itself to a certain body of literature. The analysis has been restricted by the approach and interest behind the given sources and also fails to present the whole gamut of scholarship or ethnographic work in the field of Kalash. The results are the synthesis of these documents and not a new empirical study. Hence, even though the conclusions of the given study are substantiated by the evidence, it is interpretive and may not be generalized unless additional and in situ studies are conducted. Direct interviews have not been conducted in the community; therefore, there is the possibility of being underrepresented in terms of lived experience of the Kalash into their own interpretations and the techniques of resistance.

Future Research

Future paths of inquiry on the basis of the presented limitations and the findings of the study will manifest themselves. Subsequent ethnographic research might be aimed at elucidating how individual Kalash and especially the young generation are responding to the new formality in their cultural rituals and exercise their identity in a dynamic world. An extended study (longitudinal study) could monitor the legacy of tourism and the media on rituals and social institutions. It is also possible to carry out research to compare the experiences of the indigenous people such as the Kalash with other indigenous people of South Asia to determine the common challenges faced by them and the means of successful preservation of their cultures. An in-depth analysis of the legal issues and its effect on women rights in the Kalash community will also be another productive area of research as opposed to general commentary as it shifts towards an empirical analysis of cases by law.

VI. Conclusion

To summarize, the paper has critically synthesized the scholarly discourse on the ethnocultural practices of the community of Kalash people with the aim of filling the gap of a harmonized and unified synthesis of factors that shape the ethnocultural future of the people. The study has demonstrated the Kalash identity is not the frozen, bygone phenomenon but rather a dynamic and conflictual phenomenon that is, presently negotiated in their rituals, social practices, and material culture. The analysis has shown that even though other cultural practices such as festivals and funerals remain a crucial avenue to collectively and publicly repeat communal identity, they are subject to much pressure by external forces. Cultural commodification of tourism which has rendered culture the most vulnerable target of media representation, economic marginalization of traditional artisans and the struggle between traditional law and national law combine forces in questioning the wholeness of Kalash culture.

The first main contribution of this study is how holistic it is, as opposed to atomized studies that present isolated issues in a disjointed fashion, this study is unveiling the larger compendium of these challenges. Through the application of the post-structuralist approach, the research has brought to light how power relations and other outsider discourses are worked out in producing meaning to traditions in Kalash. It is expected that the research will lead to the positive change of advocating policies that aid the agency and self-determination of the Kalash community, hence leading to not just preserving their ethnocultural practices as a tourist spectacle but rather allowing them to flourish and be a living active section of their continuity.

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