

# KALASH DRESS ADORNMENT AS SPACE FOR IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY OF BUMBURET VALLEY IN DISTRICT CHITRAL, PAKISTAN

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**ABSTRACT:** *The basic purpose of the study was to understand the role and significance of traditions and customs, especially the costumes as a prime tool for establishing identity for the conventional people of Kalash. The present research was conducted in Bumburet Valley of Kalash, District Chitral Pakistan. Qualitative anthropological techniques were used for data collection, which mainly included participant observation and in-depth interviews. An effort was made to observe and document their dresses as an indicator of their traditional culture as a basis for identity. Religious importance of their dress code and how their females utilize these dresses and jewelry to recognize themselves as proud Kalash women was also taken into the account. These women are appreciated and respected in their efforts to keep the legacy and tradition alive. The natives have maintained their centuries old traditional culture despite the fact of current globalization, and modernization. Media is playing its role to introduce new ideas, and inspirations to the youth. Currently the society is passing from the phase of transition and transculturation due to the impact of modernization, and change, but still the people are trying hard to preserve and maintain their cultural identity.*

**Keywords:** aesthetics, traditions, symbols, expression, clothing, jewelry, colours, decorative emblem,

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Annette Wiener and Jane Schneider [1] have noted the tendency for clothing to be an emotive symbol of attachment that is common across many diverse cultures. Each Kalasha woman's clothing can be read as a map of her significant relationships across the valleys and across her lifetime – material manifestations of enduring ties with friends, bonds with natal family, acceptance into community of woman in her marital home, and reminders of her courtship with her husband and lover [2]. The object of adornment is to induce pleasant responses, but in fact it reflects the mood, and the inner emotions of the person. It is often used to create an illusion or opposite impression in the viewers. The adornment on the dress sometimes symbolizes the social status and stratification on the basis of bravery and heroic deeds of the ancestors or often due to economic prosperity. This exhibition is regarded as the expression of individuality of the wearer. The adornment has no significant social and religious meaning attached and is regarded as a healthy recreational activity to attain individuality and appraisal. Female utilize beads, buttons cowries and colored slivers for the purpose of adornment. These embellishments though appear to be very pleasing and interesting carry hardly any coded message regarding the status of women in the society.

Ila Pokornowski [3] interestingly added that the art historians, archeologist and anthropologists today are in consensus that study of decorative arts and beads as an intimate part of culture has a highly significant value both in the reconstruction of material culture, tracing trade contacts and a study as visual language. Beads found in ancient ruins not only aid in tracing and dating those ruins, but to shed light on the technological development of the people who made them or provide evidence of migrations, trading activities and cultural contacts. They can also mediate the taste of the viewer.

## 2. RESEARCH SITE

The study was conducted in Bumburet valley of district Chitral, Pakistan. The modern state of Chitral district is located in the Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa Province. This state was once an old country with its borders extending up to Badakshan and Bashagalin the North West and the Kunar Valley in the south all the way to Bilamand Chaghasswari. Most of these areas now lie in Afghanistan. The border of the state was not permanent due to the ongoing expansion of the neighboring state of Gilgit and Kashmir. Bumburet Valley of Kalash is situated some 35 kilometers to the south of Chitral, which opens towards the Kunar River. During 1959 the kingdom of Chitral was attached to Pakistan and therefore the Kalash people became citizens of Pakistan [4,5]. The total area of Bumburet valley is 180 Sq.Km out of which 51 Sq.Km is habitable and cultivable. There are six main pasture units at an elevation of 3500m above sea level and occupy about half of the total geographical area of the valley. The Kalash villages in all the three valleys are located at a height of approximately 1900 to 2200m [6]. The climate is generally semi-arid.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative anthropological research technique was adopted for acquiring the ethnographic data for the research in hand. The researchers lived in Bumburet Valley, and participated in their festivals, feasts, offerings and prayers. Thus a complete immersion in the said culture has been adopted for a very good rapport, acceptance and recognition by the society. The basic data was collected through the socioeconomic survey. The survey facilitated me to gather information about the village regarding sex, education, family system, caste, population, ethnic groups, occupation, and number of households residing in the village. The Bumburet valley is composed of 12 hamlets and through random sampling we selected few hamlets where both Kalasha and Muslims coexisted and shared the geographical space. We visited every house of the village Anish, Brun, Batrik and

Karakal and conducted in-depth interviews to collect detailed information about their religion. Audio recording was used during the interviews. The secondary data for this study was collected from library by reviewing, journals, articles and documentary programs about the mythical people of the Kalash. The data has been assembled in the form of photographs, maps, sketches, and floor plans.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Loude and Lievre [7] the prestige of a father and husband of a Kalasha woman is judged among other things, by the number of necklaces upon a woman's breast. This is very true because women used beads as a representation of wealth, whether she procures it from her family or through her own labor or social networking. There are several occasions when a woman receives beads as a gift. When women marry, she receives set of beads from each of the women in her In-laws. Sometimes the elder ladies take off beads from their own necks and give it to the bride as a symbol of welcome and whole hearted acceptance into the household. They believe that this will bring charm, prosperity and fertility for the new bride and their lineage. These beads are also used as souvenirs and during my fieldwork I received set of beads of different colours from the females and girls with whom I developed close association.

Zarkima a sweet nine year old girl has specially made a bracelet using orange and blue beads for me as a symbol of her friendship. She with her family came to visit me and brought traditional Kalasha head dress susit with Kupas for my niece and traditional neck beads for me. Maggi Wynne states that the cowries or shells used for decorations for the sunset and composer evocative example, linking Kalasha women to ocean and people they have never seen. Cowries are the most essential decorative element in women's head dresses, the one item for which there is no appropriate substitute. The species of shells used by the Kalasha "cypraeamoneta" found only off the Maldives. These shells are very expensive, and women go to great lengths to locate them for their young daughters head dress. Beads and bells came to the valley via trade routes from all over south, central Asia and Middle East [2].

##### **The Paran (Dress)**

The traditional Kalash dress is made up of woolen material and often known as "Cou" or "Paran" is derived from the word parahan i.e. clothing. The traditional dress of Kalash females in the past was a long pure black woolen kimono style dress. The women in the past were supposed to wear woolen cloth in all the seasons. They weave the fabric on a handloom and then stitch. The utilization of cotton fabric is a relatively new phenomenon. In 1974 they performed in Islamabad at the invitation of late Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Here they were supplied with the cotton dress specially designed for them according to their traditional style. This cotton dress was instantly rejected by the natives and was referred to as an ugly and lighter dress. The people resisted the idea of changing their traditional fabric as they regarded it a direct attack on their traditional heritage, but soon they realized the convenience and comfort allied with the cotton material. Now the woolen dress is a delicacy and

there are few proud owners who possess it. Normally it is seen in the Greek Museum of Bumburet valley. In the past customarily people donned new dress just once a year only on Joshi festival, but now due to some financial stability they can afford new dresses before every religious festival.



**Photograph:1 The Original Kalash Woolen Traditional Dress of the Past Worn With Metallic Jewelry, Photograph Taken in Greek Museum Brun, Bumburet Valley, Kalash**

The purest woolen dress is presented to a child when he/she is approximately three to four years old before the chelumjoshi festival. As the child grows older the same dress is altered. The child is informed about the importance and significance of the costume and is sworn in to keep the integrity and sanctified sentinel. In the past the dress was very plain simply adorned with metallic jewelry combined with a colorful kupas, but in contemporary period the neckline, sleeves and hemline are embellished with embroidery using bright vegetable dyed threads. The metal ornaments are also replaced with plastic beads and pearls preferably in white, black, yellow, orange, green and red color. There is no restriction of color for any female belonging to any age or social status. The woolen dress is now restricted to the commercial use only, especially manufactured for the tourists and foreigners, and are very expensive. The construction of the dress is more of Arabic style and bears absolutely no resemblance with Greek Ionic, Chiton and Draped fabric [8].

##### **Pati (Belt)**

It is a simple belt with borders and long fringes wound around the hip. The belt helps to keep the dress in place which otherwise hang loosely above waist as kimono without front opening. The loose fabric successfully serves as pockets in which they can keep small items like, cash, pins, friendship bands, dry fruits, and other utility items. This pati is often utilized as a souvenir for the guest.

##### **Susit (Minor Head Dress)**

The minor head dress, a less formal embellished item which is customary and females are not allowed to be seen without it. This headdress is constructed in two parts a ring with a long tail. The tail is approximately 10-15 inches in length, which hangs down the back. This headdress is given to the girls along with the "Cou" on her fourth birthday. The

headdress is the symbol of pride, integrity and respect to the family and their tribal identity in the region so they ensure that the child is capable of handling it with required grace and dignity. The dress and accessories have undergone several changes. In the past it was just a plain ring with fringes at the back and the sole purpose was to support the Kupas because Kupas were compulsory for these females. Now the Kupas are only restricted to special occasions and festivals. The girls are more conscious and are aware of changes which are taking place around them as they have easy access in areas which were previously beyond their imagination. So now they have developed a better aesthetic, and are using this facility to create individuality in conformity to their group.



**Photograph 2** Traditional *Susit* the Minor Head Dress

The girls used to embellish the long fringes of thread with beads, buttons, cowries and stones in rows and columns, but now instead of the thread they are using the desired piece of cotton cloth. Convenience and modernity are facilitating the perpetuation of the tradition. Regional differences can be observed in the susit. The people of Bumburet are more innovative in design and color scheming whereas the Birir valley is very conservative.

The changes in designs are only evident in the dresses and accessories of youth, the older generation is restricted to their older shield design because of the symbolic meaning attached to it. The Kalash women put an enormous amount of time, resources both material and human creativity into crafting their clothes. Maggi Wynne in her book states “that very little about women dresses is sensible, it is too heavy, too expensive, and growing more costly every year. They like to take fashion risks, trying out new patterns and colours. Old women as well as young take immense pleasure being beautiful not just for the festival, but every day [2]. It was observed that the females believe in conformity and are very

proud of their attire, and do not wish to bring any change despite all the difficulties. When I ask Koi Begum the mother of my key informant that your dress is too heavy and difficult to carry, are you comfortable in this dress? She smilingly pointed my jeans and said don’t you think it is way too tight are you comfortable? And then on a serious note she added that we are very comfortable in our traditional dress, this black colour and dress is our identity.

**Kupas (The Major Head Dress)**

The major head dress is an integral part of Kalash identity. This is a very heavy item without any strings or attachments and is a bit difficult to carry. The locals regard this as a very useful item because it provides shield from the sun rays. The Kupas are extremely formal in nature and are only used on feasts and festivals. It is similar to a scarf approximately 20 inches long and 10 inches wide and is heavily decorated with the cowries, seashells, buttons and decorative stitches. The front of kupas is called a horn [9] it covers the base of the head and its tussled tail hangs down the back. Kupas are placed on the minor headdress susit and are not stitched or tied to the base of the ring. They are supported by the balanced and erect posture of the females. Traditionally the girl receives her kupas when she is four years of age at the winter chamois festival.

Kupas is also like susit which, symbolizes their distinctive identity. They instruct the girls not to play with their kupas otherwise the deities will be angry and they might be cursed. The traditional kupas are similar in all three Kalash valleys. The only difference can be found in the way the cowries and embellishment are attached. The variations induced when liked by the masses later become the fashion. These fashions are simply created due to necessity like females by rolled the front of kupas for better stability. This has introduced a new trend in the region (Parkes) [7].



**Photograph 3** Traditional *kupas* the Major Head Dress

Kupas is usually made on handlooms. The warp and weft yarns are arranged on the loom and the plain weave is obtained. The warps are the longitudinal thread which is made up from the homespun yarn and is set in the holes of the loom in four or six sets of colour in a regular manner to attain a twill weave pattern. Weft thread is relatively finer and is wound on the shuttle and by lifting and lowering the hardness the weft yarn is inserted between the warp yarns and weaving is done. On the edges fringes are attached which not only give strength to the border, but also add to the length.

The cowries are attached in seven lines for adult's kupas and four in children. The cowries are not the indigenous product. They are imported from Karachi and are very expensive. The size and number symbolize the social status and wealth of the person in the society. On their kupas there are two popular designs manifested by the females; one is the shield design which is engraved on the walls of the temples. The other is often found on the kupas of a young girl, it is the floral arrangement of cowries. The people believe the symbolic shield design will protect them from the evil spirit and fend off bad luck. The sacredness is the cause of not applying it on the kupas and sus-tof young children because of their careless handling. Shield design is a sign of warrior hero status and heroic deeds of the ancestors, which the females espouse in commemoration. Myth is such that there was a famous female demon killer. The four cornered arrangement of cowrie shells indicates the festal rank of the owner's ancestor [10]. The buttons are also used as embellishment on the headdress which surrounds the cowries and only the daughter of the elites can adopt it. The common women can only attach two rows of buttons. The kupas made for commercial reason is identical to the one made for elites. Nobility is also enhanced by attaching a "cis" a braided straw along with a blue feather.

#### Night Dress

During night females change their traditional dress and wear normal cotton Shalwar Qameez with the instruction to refrain roaming around in the valley. The reason being is the preservation of their individual identity in their own cultural dress pattern. Muslim females wear Shalwar Qameez and cover their heads with a *dupatta* (headgear) draped around the shoulders to cover their bosoms. The females who are now converted to Islam have completely changed their attire and accessories which barely resemble with their original identity.

#### Jewelry

Traditionally metallic jewelry was used, but now it is substituted by string beads of bright colors. These beads were imported from Afghanistan or some parts of Pakistan. They love to wear beads in the same manner as the females of Thar and Cholistan adore bangles. These beaded necklaces are used to add color and enhance the complete look of the person. The choice of jewelry is entirely different from the Muslims of the region. The Muslim females are still fond of gold and silver jewelry.

#### Shoes

For the shoes now they prefer to wear joggers and leather chapaals which are most convenient. The traditional Kalash

handmade shoes are very rare to find. Only few exhibits are present in the Museum.

- NamerikKal`unis a leather shoe with colorful decorations.
- Sharakand`alia is a simple leather boot with high flaps.
- Kalun is leather shoes tied with a shoe flap (shumanechoyak). A kutapati is used to wrap around the flap of the shoes to keep it in place.
- Ghun Kulunhand woven shoes made of wool hair.
- Shula Kirmanis the traditional clogs.
- Zakinis a string made of leather which helps to tie the tacingso that it can remain in place.
- Tacingis a flat square piece of goat skin draped on the foot and is tied with the help of laces.

#### Men's Dress

Men's dresses are not very attractive and unique as found in the case of female's dresses. They just require a set of Shalwar Kameez with a waistcoat and a chatrli cap with feather on the top. In the past they used to wear black militia Shalwar Qameez with a Turkish style trouser (straight slack). The youth of today is aware of prevailing lifestyle and fashion trends and are more creative and innovative. Secondly, they desire to conform to the larger society so they have adopted the style commonly practiced by the Muslims of the region. Today there is a drastic change in the clothing requirement of boys; they now prefer jeans, pants with dress shirts and T-shirts because of the exposure to the surroundings. The traditional waistcoat is now replaced by both jeans and leather jackets. Following are the traditional dresses and accessories used by the Kalash people at various occasions.

- Ghuni Katohokiis a dress worn by the Sheperd in winter.
- Ghuni Bhutis a shalwar made of goat hair stitched like a pant. It is a shalwar like construction with amplegahir or gathers. The ankle girths are wound with as weaved kutapati.
- Kutapatiis a 4 to 6 inches weaved strip of identical to shuman (one they present as souvenir to honor the guest).
- Shualak is a woolen dress
- Danshak Bhut is a loosely draped woolen pant.
- Khas`ong is a woolen cap used by the shepherd.

The essential feature besides their distinctive clothing is lack of hygiene and cleanliness. They only change, when they think that their clothes are excessively dirty. The religion revolves around the basic principle of purity and they do take a bath and clean themselves only and especially when performing any major or minor ritual. The new clean clothes are only worn on special occasions or at the time of the festival. This personal hygiene serves as a parameter to distinguish Kalash men from the local Muslims. In Islam it is mandatory for the Muslims to pay special attention to their personal hygiene and cleanliness. This distinction in personal grooming serves as a space to identify Muslims from the local Kalash.

In the course of data collection the researcher compared the ragged appearance of the Qaziof Anishvillage with the clean appearance of Imam Sahib, which was of remarkable difference. The respondent, an 18 year old boy, compared it

with the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and said “why to consider the Imam Sahib as an example when your Muhammad (P.B.U.H) wore clothes which were patched and darned”. To these people, nobility and prestige are not associated with the economic prosperity. They give value to the symbolic status, which is acquired through generosity, awareness of cultural values, songs, customs, oral literature which facilitate the youth and others to recall and establish their cultural identity.

Art and design have no dimension, though they are culturally bound, but the artists communicate with each other through signs and symbols. Self-decorating, materialism and capitalism are a concept present in every society as Levi Strauss had been accused of developing a materialistic, idealistic theory of symbolic representation and practices through clothing. Innovations and modernization in clothing are essential for the survival of any cultural group, but only those changes are adapted and are allowed which have the capability of coexisting. Change is an external force which the societies inculcate and adapt to its liking. Innovation at times facilitate in preserving the original culture. Self-identification and individuality is the desire of every person, but simultaneously they desire to hold on to their values and traditions. This enables the society to construct a space where the negotiated traditions and modernity coexist.

In the Kalash region two separate strains of decorative arts evolved in the region, a figurative representation by using animal and plants as the inspiration of art created by the Kalash folk. In the past men were associated with the stitching of the garment as an entertainment [11] and females were responsible for the weaving. But in contemporary time, the females are linked with the field of textile weaving and dress designing. As mentioned earlier their traditional dress was a black woolen dress stitched without any decoration which is changed to a cotton fabric with very colorful and interesting pattern. These patterns are a modern innovation in the dress and bear absolutely no meaning and interpretation in the culture and nor does they symbolize the status of the wearer in the society. They are just acquired to enhance the personal taste and aesthetics of the wearer.

The Kalash traditional dress fulfills the requirement of *sattar* (Islamic code of minimum requirement of dress) but when a Kalash woman embraces Islam she is expected to change her dress and adopt the local Muslim dress pattern i.e. a shalwar, Kalmeez and a *dupatta* (headgear). This is meant to change their Kalash cultural identity and bring it in line with the Kalash Muslim cultural identity. Kalash people in retrospect have constructed and negotiated their personal and group identity by sharing experiences, storytelling, myth and setting themselves apart from other ethnic groups living in the same region. Their distinctive traditions and its patterns serve as a space to formulate a specific individual and cultural identity through which they can be recognized and continue the struggle of preserving their mythical legacy.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The people of Kalash have managed to maintain their identity through their unique and nonviolent way of life through centuries, which is based on their oral traditions, practiced,

belief systems, customs especially their dresses and ornaments made up of beads. These are the basic ingredients which instigate the desire and need to be recognized as a distinctive group. The research helped establish the fact that a culture is an actual ambient, legitimate and flexible space for the survival of the individuals.

It is a known fact that rituals, beliefs and practices which are based on religions survive the longest. The dress code of Kalash has a religious importance and their females are responsible to conform and utilize these dresses and jewelry, so that they can be recognized as proud Kalashwomen. These women are appreciated and respected in their efforts to keep the legacy and tradition alive.

The Kalash ethnic identity facing some survival problems as they are interacting with the modernization and technological advancement. The conversion to Islam started with the arrival of Arabs in the region and gradually it took the momentum though it had affected their religious ideology. They have taken great care in trying to eliminate all elements of material culture that may bore marks of Kalasha Identity, starting from their traditional dress patterns to the conformation of their houses, which are now changed to suit the chitrali model surrounded by high walls. The older women still like to braid their hair, as they find this habit hard to let go.

The concept of formulating identity through culture or religious beliefs is a reactionary phenomenon and people adapt it to guard themselves from the persecution and atrocities exercised by the powerful oppressor. They seek salvation in being loyal to their religious and cultural ideology. The Kalash people have maintained their centuries old traditional culture, despite the fact of current globalization, and modernization. Media is invading their privacy, esteem and societal norms by introducing new ideas, and inspirations to the youth. Albeit the people have subjugated to the latest trends of globalization and modernization, but are also striving to keep pace with their socio-cultural and religious traditions transmitted to them by their forefathers. Currently the society is passing from the phase of transition and transculturation due to the impact of modernization, and change, but still the people are trying hard to preserve and maintain their cultural identity.

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