

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Chitral, Pakistan
15 October 1991**AMONG THE INFIDELS**

by Carol Rose

Two British army deserters set out to become the kings of Kaffiristan in Rudyard Kipling's story, The Man Who Would Be King. They venture into present-day Afghanistan, a land of snow-capped mountains populated by pagans who worship "two-and-thirty heathen idols" and are renowned for their beauty. The story ends tragically, when one man returns from Kaffiristan carrying the decapitated head of his companion, himself lost in madness.

Kaffiristan has long since been engulfed in the tide of Islam that swept across Afghanistan. But just across the border, in three remote Himalayan valleys of northern Pakistan, live the last pagan people of the Hindu Kush. These are the Kaffir Kalash -- the "Black Infidels" -- a community of 4,000 shepherds who are named for the black robes worn by the women and their steadfast rejection of Islam. The Kalash worship instead a pantheon of gods and goddesses, a belief system that for centuries has enabled them to live in harmony with nature and one another.

Now their existence is threatened. Having resisted missionary efforts both of Muslims and Christians, the Kalash now are fighting for the legal right to their forest lands, the tap-root of their economic and spiritual life.



A young Kalash woman wearing traditional dress and special charcoal face make-up made from powdered goat horn.

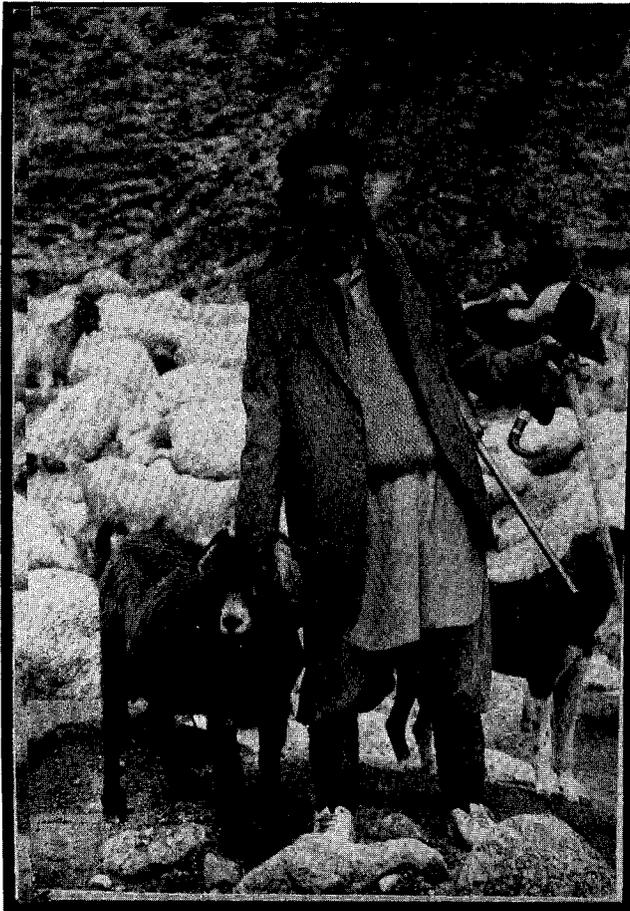
Carol Rose is an ICWA fellow writing about South and Central Asia.
Photographs by Carol Rose.

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

In mid-September I drove to the Kalash valleys, intending to spend a few days with the Kalash. I knew only a little about them: that they make wine and reject Islam. The day after my arrival in the northern-most Kalash valley of Rumbur, a torrential rain washed away the narrow mountain road leading into the valleys, leaving me stranded. It must have been an act of the benevolent gods. In the subsequent days I was welcomed into a Kalash family, where I was invited to participate in their daily life, hear their stories and songs, and begin learning about their gods. I left reluctantly, vowing to return as soon as possible, convinced that I have much still to learn from the Kalash and a moral responsibility to tell the story of their struggle to survive.

Brothers and Sisters

I am not the first westerner to write about the Kalash. The British anthropologist, Peter Parkes, the French anthropologists, Jean-Yves Loude, Viviane Lievre and George LeFebvre have written dissertations and books about the Kalash. In addition, film crews from Canada, Japan, Britain, Australia, Germany and France have produced documentaries on this fascinating people.

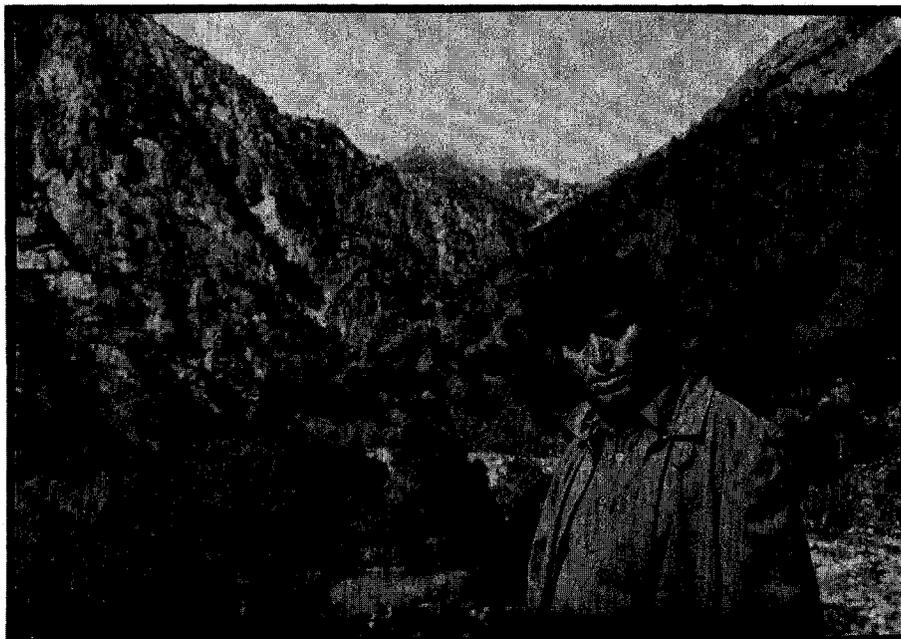


A Kalash shepherd with his prize goat.

All have worked with and most have lived with Saifullah Jan, a man in his mid-30s who speaks perfect English, the first Kalash to go to school, and now the elected representative of the Kalash people in the local council of the district of Chitral. I met Saifullah one morning in the district capital, Chitral, about an hour from the Kalash valleys. He had been summoned by the district commissioner to meet with Diana, the Princess of Wales, during her two-hour whirlwind tour of the northern areas of Pakistan. He was staying at a run-down hotel near the center of the city, sipping tea in the courtyard, surrounded by

Kalash
friends.

The first things I noticed about Saifullah were his pale green eyes and sandy brown hair, possibly inherited from the first Kalash man to settle in Chitral, whom the Kalash believe was a general in the army of Alexander the Great in the 3rd century.

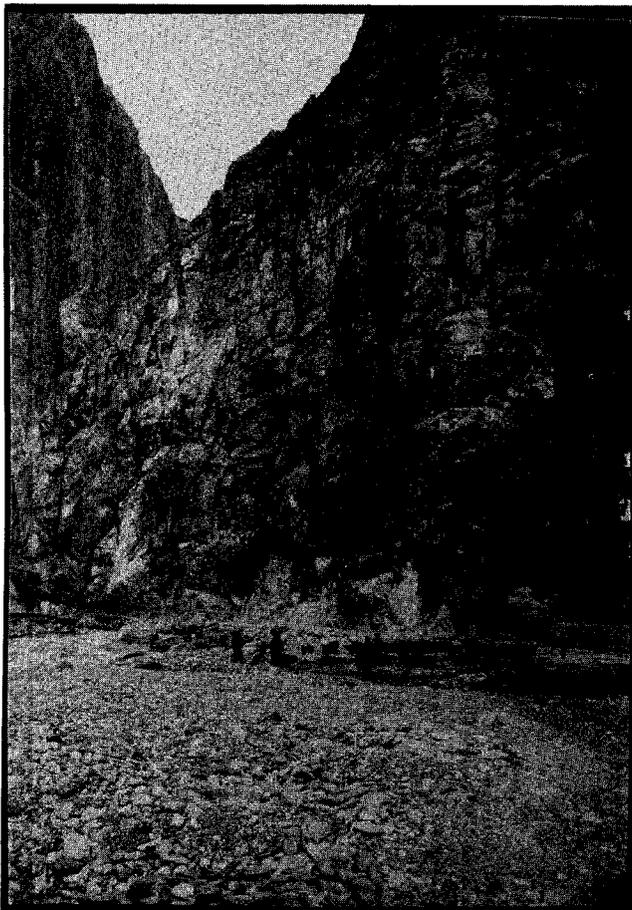


Saifullah Jan stands before the Rumbur Valley he is fighting to protect.

Saifullah is clean-shaven with high cheek bones and a hooked nose, resembling a Native American. He has a low forehead, full lips and straight white teeth. He wore pale gray baggy pants and a long tunic, or shalwar kameez, a gray jacket and red tennis shoes. Chain-smoking cigarettes, he eyed me suspiciously when I asked whether he would be available to work as a guide and translator. Later he thanked me for being so direct; most westerners, he said, befriend him first and then ask him to work for free.

"At the Hindu Kush conference in Chitral last year, all the university professors presented papers on the Kalash and were addressed as 'Doctors or PhDs'," he said. "When I worked with them they were poor graduate students, living in my home and eating my food. Now they are professors, famous and rich, but I am still poor Saifullah, the jungliwala [jungle man]."

Throughout the next three weeks, Saifullah and his wife shared their home with me, fed me, introduced me to their family and friends, taught me Kalash phrases, regaled me with Kalash stories and serenaded me with Kalash songs. Saifullah still referred to himself, jokingly, as a jungliwala. He referred, affectionately, to me as a sherwali [city woman]. But most of the time we used the traditional Kalash form of address, baya (brother) for men, and baba (sister) for women.



Kalash shepherds are dwarfed by the size of the Himalayan foothills as they return with their flocks from the high pastures.

Entering the Kalash Valleys

The day after I met Saifullah, we set off in a small jeep for the Rumbur Valley, one of three Kalash valleys. The other two valleys are Bumburet and Birir. Each valley has five Kalash villages as well as Muslim homes, set apart from the Kalash.

My Muslim driver, Noor ul-Amin, drove the jeep, while Saifullah and three other Kalash men squeezed in the back. It was by far the most harrowing drive of my life. The road to Rumbur was a dirt and gravel ledge about seven feet wide, blasted out of sheer rock wall, with a straight drop to the rushing waters of the Kunar river some 500 feet below. I felt guilty about Noor ul-Amin. He hadn't wanted to visit this land of pagans in the first place; now he was serving as chauffeur for them on this most dangerous of roads. After about 45 minutes of navigating the tortuous

climb, the road suddenly fell away down the cliff. Saifullah explained that it had washed out a year ago and that he was blocking its reconstruction until a court case over forestry rights was settled. No road means limited logging and no tourist development.

We parked the car off the road and began the final hour-long walk to Balanguru, the first village in Rumbur Valley. Fruit trees lined the road, ripe with mulberries, pears, peaches, plums and apples. Grape vines grew high into the holly trees, ready for picking. There were cedar trees for building homes and oak for burning fires to heat homes and cook food. Fields of golden corn awaited harvest and walnut trees rained their fruits on the road; we used rocks to smash open the hard shells, peeling the bitter skins and devouring the sweet nutmeat within.

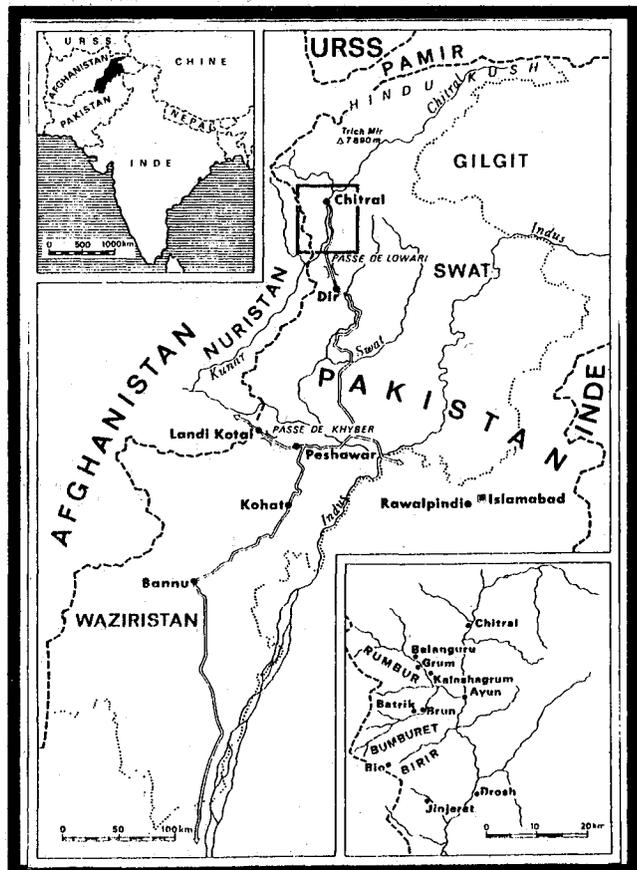
As we approached the village, we saw fewer Muslim homes,

characterized by high wall compounds, and began to meet Saifullah's Kalash friends on the road. The men looked Pakistani to me, except that all were clean-shaven and readily shook my hand in greeting (something a Muslim man rarely does), saying, "Ishpatl, Baba! Proosht as?" (Hello sister, are you well?) The men greeted Saifullah in the traditional manner, touching their right hands to one another's hearts, then shaking hands.

Kalash women also ran from their houses to greet Saifullah, often kissing his hands in female Kalash greeting of friendship. The women and girls wore black dresses decorated with red and green embroidery. Mounds of 20 to 30 plastic red, green and blue beads adorned their necks. Their hair was plaited in five sections, each braided, with one braid centered just above the forehead and held in place behind the right ear with a woolen headband. The headbands wrapped around the women's heads, extending in a single strip down their backs about two feet; they were decorated with cowrie shells, red plastic beads, buttons and bells. Other women wore a more formal Kalash headdress on top of their headband: a wide piece of wool that sat atop their heads and cascaded down their backs. These, too, were decorated with shells and buttons, but also had a large purple pom-pom on the top.

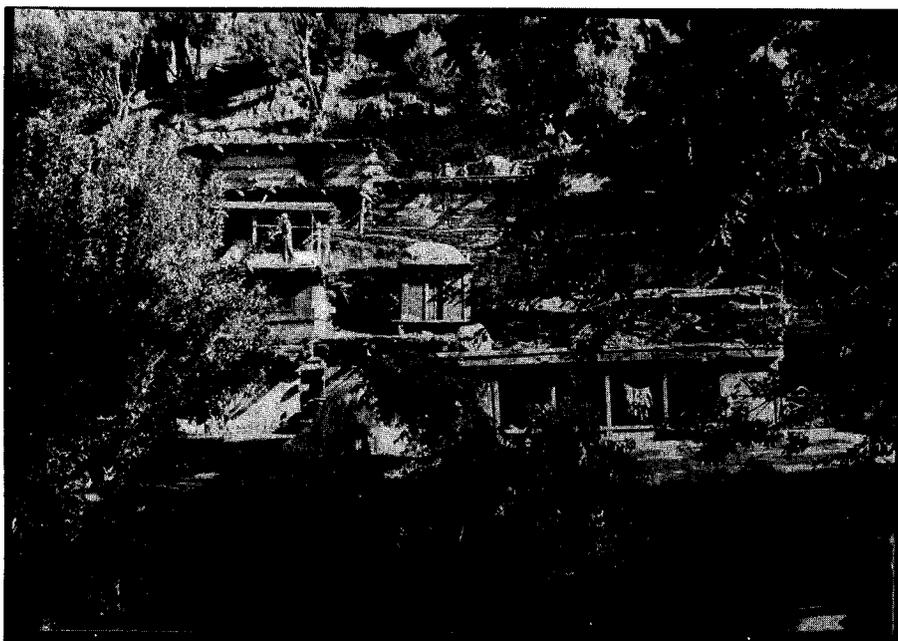
Before we reached the village, clouds gathered overhead and it began to drizzle, a rain that would turn into a downpour for the next four days. On the outskirts of the first village, we arrived at a hotel, a rickety wooden building furnished with woven-rope beds, named the "Rumbur Hilton." Saifullah suggested that Amin might be happiest staying there, insofar as there was a Muslim shopkeeper living on the ground floor. I was invited to stay with Saifullah's family.

At this point, I was worried about Amin. He was soaked by the rain, shivering and running a high



MAP OF THE KALASH VALLEYS

(Source: Loude & Lievre, *Kalash Solstice*, p. 9. Lok Virsa, Islamabad.)



Houses built up the hillside in the Rumbur village of Balanguru.

fever. He sat on the balcony of the hotel, gloomily watching the downpour, Saifullah went in search of tea, and I scrounged through my backpack for a hat and gloves for Amin to wear. Suddenly the peaceful sound of the rain was broken by the ear-shattering cry of a

muezzin -- "Allah ul-Akbar" -- calling faithful Muslims to prayer. "How strange!" I said, wondering why a mullah would be stationed in this Kaffir village. "Yes," Amin agreed. "He is 15 minutes early!"

Saifullah soon returned with a pot of hot tea, which improved my spirits immeasurably. Amin was worrying about making his prayers, so Saifullah suggested that he go to the village mosque while I accompany Saifullah home. As we crossed a slippery log that had been placed as a bridge over the rushing Rumbur river, Saifullah explained that the mosque had been built at the time of partition, when the government of Pakistan sanctioned forced conversion. There are four Kalash families in Rumbur that have converted to Islam, out of a total of 120 Kalash families in the valley. Many of them were forced to do so when one family member was convicted of a crime and given a light sentence in exchange for embracing Islam.

As we climbed the path toward the main part of the village, I saw a hillside covered with flat-roof houses constructed of wood logs laid horizontally and flat stones held in place with mud mortar. The houses were built one on top of the other up the steep hill. Most houses had many windows and some even had open balconies. A few had chimneys, but most let the smoke from cooking fires escape through windows and cracks in the stone walls.

Saifullah explained that all land within the village is communally owned; people build where they can find space. The high pastures, far up the mountains, also are communally owned. Only the fields, the forests and the walnut trees are privately held, each family owning one to three acres of land. Fathers divide their land equally among their sons and the youngest son inherits his father's house. Interspersed with the houses are square windowless pasti, or larders, where families lock away their foodstuffs for winter.

As we neared Saifullah's house, we were greeted warmly by a petite woman, who smiled shyly as we approached, kissing Saifullah's hands and murmuring a greeting. She also shook my hand, before walking down the path. A few minutes later, Saifullah remarked, "That was my wife."

Her name is Weshlam Gul (Milk of the Flower), but most people refer to her as Yassir Ayas, "Mother of Yassir," named after her eldest son. In the following days, she opened her home to me, taught me to make bread, braided my hair, introduced me to the women of the community, and began sewing a traditional Kalash dress so that I will be suitably attired for my next visit.

Mysterious Red Spots

The next four days it rained continuously. Poor Amin grew increasingly unhappy at being stuck in this "fasool" -- dead end -- so far from home, amidst these Kaffirs, cold from the constant rain and bored with "nothing to do". An attempt by the Kalash hotel-keeper to cheer him with offers of wine and hashish, strictly forbidden for devout Muslims but frequently used by Kalash, only increased his unhappiness. I decided after two days to send him out of the valley on foot, leaving the jeep for me to drive later. Amin was ecstatic. So



Weshlam Gul, mother of Yassir.

was the village of Balanguru, I later discovered; it seems everyone was aware that I was dragging around an unhappy Muslim.

In the meantime, I was having a wonderful time at Saifullah's house, spending the long days sitting by the fire, practicing the relatively easy Kalasha language, learning about the Kalash religion and listening to Kalash stories. Often I would play with Saifullah's four sons and one daughter, reciting ABCs with them in exchange for them teaching me the Kalasha names for everything in the house.

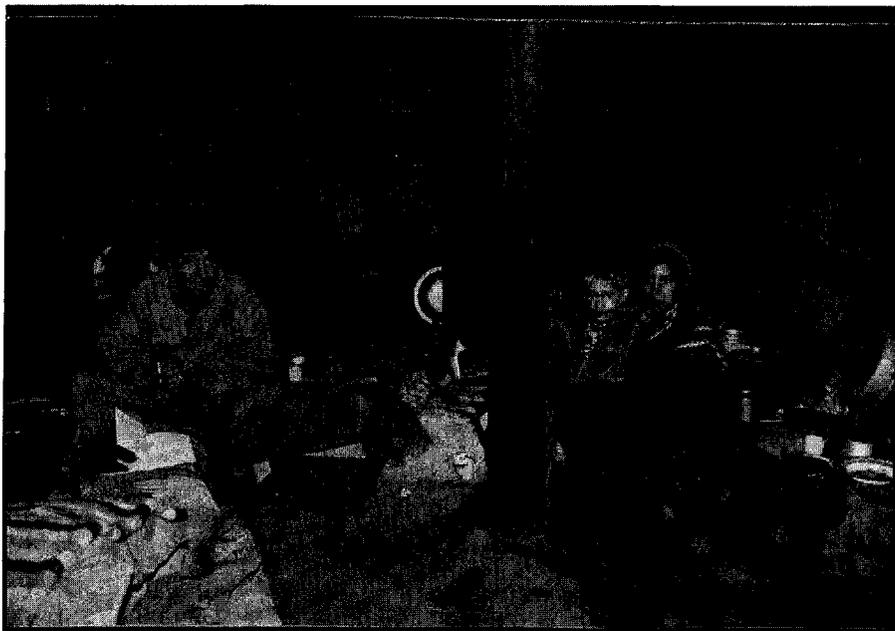
On my third day in Balanguru, I watched from Saifullah's house as a large section of the mountain across the river turned into a giant landslide. For more than an hour, a torrent of mud washed like a waterfall down the cliff face into the river below.

"Oh shit," said Saifullah. "This is going to close the road and strand your jeep."

Everyone gave me an apprehensive stare. To their delight, I replied, in childlike Kalasha, "Key Karik, Baya?" -- "What can you do, brother?" Realizing that it was going to take at least two weeks (actually, much longer) for the Pakistani government to open the road, I settled into Saifullah's home for a long stay.

The house itself was a typical Kalash home, built of alternating wood beams and flat stones, with a flat mud roof.

The house stood on top of another, so the front door was on the second floor, accessible by climbing a log notched with stairs that leaned against the wall.



Saifullah and Weshlam Gul sit around the fire in their home with their daughter Gulistan.

Inside there were two rooms: a back bedroom about 10 feet square filled with woven-rope beds and a front room, approximately

12 feet by eight feet, where the family ate and entertained guests. Like most Kalash homes, the floor was pounded earth. Four pillars held up a ceiling, which was supported by cedar-wood cross-beams.

In the front room was a mud hearth, around which guests sat on low stools made of wood with woven goat-leather seats. Everyone else squatted on their haunches around the fire.

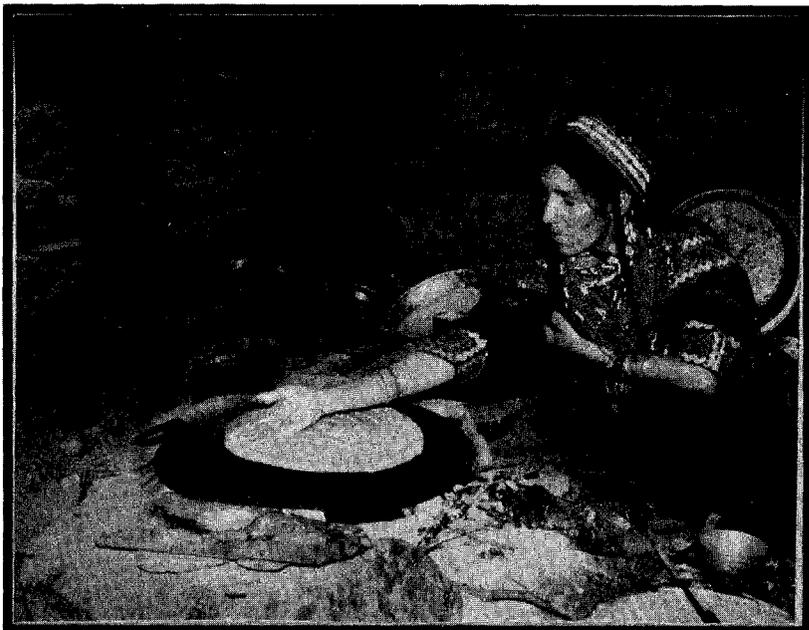
Hanging on the walls above the fire were Yassir Ayas' cooking utensils -- a metal spoon for turning bread, a concave metal pan upon which bread was cooked, and a metal triangular tripod for supporting saucepans over the fire.

In one corner of the room was a stack of oak firewood. In another corner, chickens roosted, when they weren't wandering around in search of food scraps. The family's pet goat, Jasmine, was tied to one of the four pillars in the room; no one seemed to mind when she defecated in the room.

I soon became accustomed to living so close to the earth. In many respects, mine was a life of luxury; Saifullah had built a guest room about 50 feet from the house, where I slept. There was no electricity and no toilet facilities in the village, other than a communal toilet ground behind the guest room. Still, I never once fell ill during my stay in the village.

Actually, the only sign of sickness while in Rumbur was the appearance of tiny red welts all over my body, which itched terribly. I refrained from mentioning this to Saifullah, until one day when I asked him what sickness most caused the Kalash to die. "They get red marks all over their body, then they die," he explained.

My heart leapt to my throat. "Do they look like this?" I asked, pointing to the tiny red marks on my arms.



Weshlam Gul prepares chappatis on a metal pan set over a mud hearth.

Saifullah laughed. "No, baba, what you have are fleas! What I am talking about are the measles."

Life Among the Kalash

As the days passed, I began to appreciate the rhythm of daily life in Balanguru. Each morning, a rooster's call would awaken Yassir Ayas. In the early morning darkness, she would rouse from her woven-rope bed, smooth the five braids tightly knotted on her head, straighten her black dress, and don her cowrie-shell headdress.

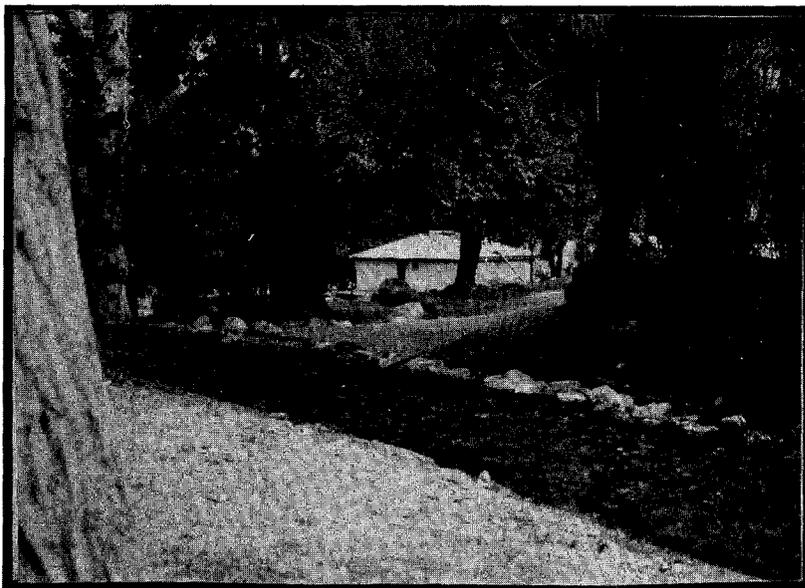
As Saifullah and the children slumbered in the back room, Yassir Ayas would stir the cinders in her earthen hearth set on the mud floor of the family's main room, adding oak branches to start the fire that would burn throughout the day. She shooed the chickens from their roosts in the corner of the room and freed the family goat from the pillar to which it has been tied all night, leading it outside to an earthen patio, which also was the roof of the neighbor's house below. In a large aluminum bowl she then mixed a thin paste of water and fresh stone-ground flour, milled the previous day. Using her hand as a ladle, she began pouring five-inch pancakes of watery dough onto a metal dome-shaped pan set over the fire, making 20 to 30 flat bread chappatis that, along with heavily-sugared black tea, she served her family for breakfast.

One by one, her children awoke. The youngest, a three-year-old named Gulistan (Mountain Flower) would cry to be held. Eight-year-old Masiar once complained that the school teacher had been beating him because his uniform -- a gray pajama-style shalwar kameez -- had not been washed (it had been raining too much). The other boys, Yassir, 13, Wasir Ali, 11, and Sher White, 4, would sit around the fire, rubbing the sleep out of their eyes as they drank tea and munched chappatis. After the older children went to school, Yassir Ayas served breakfast to Saifullah and an uncle who also lives in the house, as well as to me and any other guest who may have stopped by. When everyone else had eaten, Yassir Ayas tore off a piece of bread for herself, pausing to sip a cup of salted tea, which she drinks in order to save the expensive sugar for her children and guests.

During the day, Yassir Ayas would take corn or wheat from her larder to the local water-powered mill for grinding, she would wash the clothes for her family in the canal that runs through town, and she would cook meals consisting of tomatoes, potatoes, goat cheese, walnuts and onions, with rice or bread.

Twice a week, Yassir Ayas joined the other Kalash women at the river, where they would wash their hair. One day, she invited me to go along. We strolled down to the riverside,

stopping to chat with other women as we went. At the water, we collected flat stones; each woman pulled from her pocket a tiny piece of resin from the suchin tree and began to pound it on the stones until it became a gray paste. After combing out my hair in the water, Yassir Ayas began to work this paste into my scalp. She divided my hair into five



The Basholi, or menstruation house, in Bumburet.

sections, braiding each plait. The final braid, on the front of my head, she looped over my forehead and tucked behind my right ear. Then she gave me a Kalash headdress to wear and stood back to admire her work. All the women crowded around, smiling and telling me that it was beautiful.

After an hour or so of gossiping together, we returned to the house. I felt foolish at first with my hair styled like a Kalash. But Saifullah's uncle looked at my new hair-style and said, "That is such an improvement, sister," setting me at ease.

The Kalash Pantheon of Gods

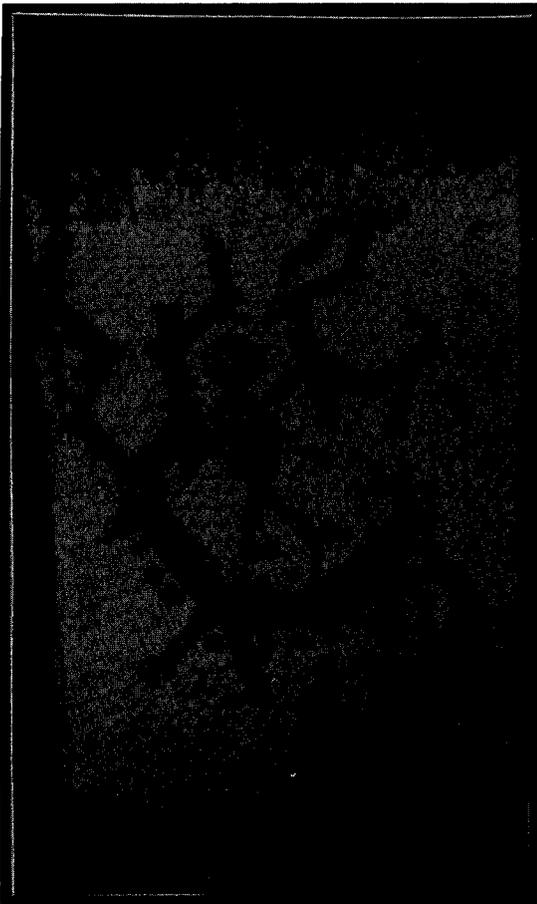
As the days passed, I began to inquire about the various gods and goddesses that rule Kalash life. I hesitate to write about this complex system of religion, for it would take many years of study to truly understand the entire pantheon of gods and festivals. Nonetheless, no report on the Kalash would be complete without at least attempting to give a rudimentary explanation of Kalash spiritual beliefs.

Central to the Kalash belief system is the idea of purity. Men are inherently pure, women impure. As a result, women cannot go to the central places of worship. Likewise, men are not allowed in the Basholi, or house of menstruation, where the women go each month during menstruation, for childbirth, and for 21 days after a baby is born. Any woman who enters the menstruation house must wash her entire body and her clothing before leaving. For most women, this is the one time of the month when they are

free from household chores of cooking and child-care. Surrounded by meadows and woods near the Rumbur river, the menstruation house is a peaceful setting where women walk arm-in-arm, often playing reed flutes and singing together in the open air.

Because they are considered impure, women also are forbidden to eat honey from household hives, although they can eat honey harvested in the wild. Likewise, they cannot eat meat from male goats sacrificed during festivals but can eat female goat meat. They are forbidden to enter the summer pastures during the winter months or the high mountain pastures throughout the year. They cannot touch the jugs in which wine is made, but can drink wine that has been bottled. They are free to walk in the village, eat with the men except during festivals, and dance freely during celebrations.

There are various gods and goddesses, and different Kalash valleys often have different names for similar gods. Generally, the gods are worshipped through seasonal festivals and celebrations that involve goat sacrifices and dancing. The Kalash believe there is one God the Creator, who reigns above all the minor gods and goddesses. Here is a partial listing of the deities:



Wall paintings of men and goats on the Jestak Temple wall in Bumburet.

Dezau/Khodai: The Creator and god of everything. He has no place of worship.

Sajigor: (Only in Rumbur Valley). A male god who protects everything. There is an open-air sanctuary in the summer fields, where goats are sacrificed during certain festivals. Only men can see this sanctuary.

Warin: (Only in Birir Valley): Similar to Sajigor, the god of everything, but most especially wine.

Praba: (Only in Birir Valley): Similar to Sajigor, a god of everything.

Mahandeo: A male god of the honeybees. There is an open-air sanctuary, decorated with carved

horses heads. Goat sacrifice is made here each spring, open only to men.

Ingao: (Only in Bumburet Valley): A male servant god of Mahandeo.

Jestak: A female goddess of babies and marriages. These are covered sanctuaries, open to men and women alike. During a marriage, the bride and groom are taken here, and blood poured into their ears.

Jatch: A female goddess of crop protection, who has an open-air sanctuary open to men and women alike. An offering is made to Jatch, of flowers and shrubs, each winter festival and also before the wheat harvest.

Greemoon: (Only in Birir Valley) A male god of goats. When coming from the high pastures to bring his goats to the valley, he was turned into a stone and is now worshipped.

Balimayeen: Female goddess of all things. A messenger to God the Creator, with a shrine in Bumburet.

Katsawear: (Only in Rumbur Valley), a male god for hunting Ibex during the winter.

Bhut: Demons found in all three valleys. The Kalash believe that half of all the products from the fields and goats are stolen by the demons. Every autumn, they make an offering of flowers to the demons by baking a big chappati and eating it with clarified goat butter, called ghee.

Suchi: Fairies populate the mountains; some are good, other evil. They originated when Adam made too many babies and Eve (Bibi Awa) refused to breast-feed half of them, throwing them instead onto the roof of her house. They became fairies, who don't need food and sometimes enter a woman's soul, putting her into a trance that only a purification ritual can rectify.

Festivals of the Kalash

There are at least 17 religious festivals in the three Kalash valleys each year. The four big festivals mark the plowing, the wheat harvest, the grape harvest, and the winter solstice (when all prayers are delivered to God the Creator.)

Each festival has its own rituals, but most include goat sacrifices and dancing. These are not mere symbolic acts, according to French anthropologist, George LeFebvre, but reflect a holistic system of wealth redistribution and political governance for the Kalash.



"The strength of the Kalash society depends on their capacity to produce a surplus," he said. "They do not sell their surplus outside of the valleys, but instead use the festivals to redistribute their wealth from the rich to the poor. The festivals also are the times for the big assemblies, in which basic decisions are made about the future of the Kalash. The bigger the surplus, the longer the festival, and the longer time there is to reach unanimous decisions that will affect the entire tribe.

"The problem now is that the Kalash population is increasing, but their fields are not," said LeFebvre. "If they don't produce a surplus, then they will be unable to feed the social, religious, political and economic mechanisms of their society."

In addition to the four big festivals, there are smaller celebrations to bless the seeds, protect the goats, purify the milk, welcome the women back to the summer fields, begin the plowing, and one festival in which all people get to make a prayer for anything they desire.

Marriage and Love

Again, I venture into little-known territory by attempting to explain what little I know about the Kalash customs. According to Saifullah, most children have arranged marriages from the time they are quite small. But if they grow up and

decide they do not like the arrangement, they simply break it off. The main reason for arranged marriages is that pre-marital sex is accepted as normal (as are adulterous sexual relations). If a girl or woman becomes pregnant at any time, she is officially married to the pre-selected groom, who will raise the child as his own.

In contrast to the Muslim customs of marrying first cousins, Kalash men and women are forbidden to marry within their lineage, dating back seven generations on their father's side of the family and five generations on their mother's side. Anyone who violates this rule is banned from the sacred places of worship.

Marriages are finalized when a man pays to a woman's father a bride price, consisting of goats, cows, and pots and pans. If the girl decides to marry another man, the second husband must pay double the bride price to the first husband. Once the transaction is completed the first husband is not allowed to carry a grudge. Twenty days after a couple decides to wed there is a purification ceremony at the Jestak temple in which blood is poured into the ears of both the man and the woman, the only time that a woman experiences a blood sacrifice for purity.

The Kalash Way of Death

Traditionally, elders give flowers to a surviving spouse as a sign of ever-lasting life. The surviving spouse must wear old, dirty clothes, and sit by the door of the house, not touching anyone for seven days, not building a fire, and only venturing outside of the house to make a toilet in the night. The house must never be empty during these first seven days, so the fire must be lit continually by visitors.

After seven days, a woman whose husband has died is given her first purification, far away from the village in the open air. She is fed five pieces of "pure" chappati bread, made by virgin boys whose hands and bodies have been washed. A juniper branch is turned over her head three times and she is given a slightly nicer set of clothing. After this, she can venture outside of her house.

If a woman dies, her surviving husband must grow a beard, shaving it only before the next festival ("cutting of the grief"). Men also go through purification far from the village. The other men sacrifice a kid goat and throw blood on the mourning man's face and also give him a nicer set of clothing.

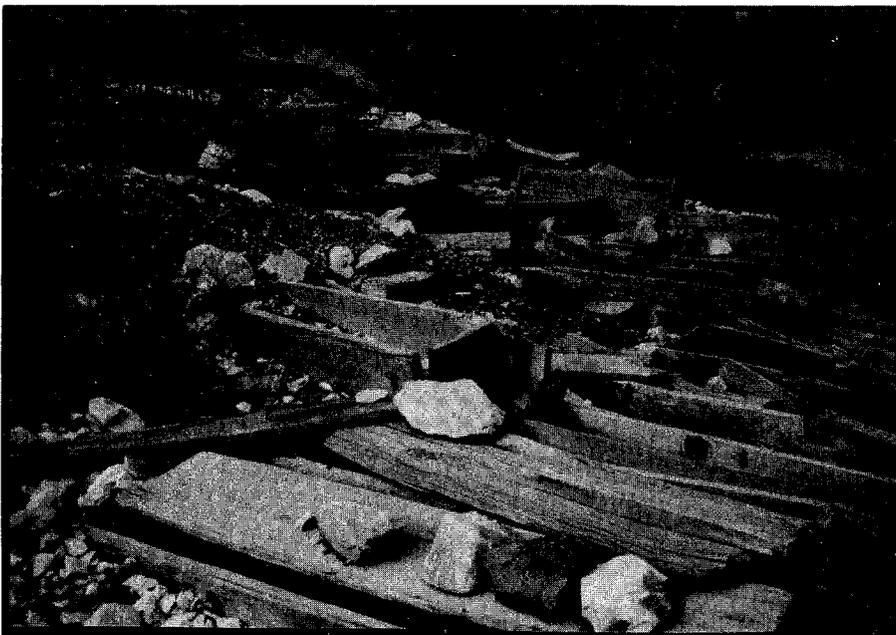
Each ten days, the ritual purification is repeated, each time a few steps closer to the village, each time with nicer clothing presented to the person. After seven such rituals, or 70 days, the mourning period is over and the person is expected

to return to normal life at the beginning of the next festival. The time between purification rituals may be shortened if a big festival is approaching. But if a death occurs during a festival, or within 20 days of a festival, then the purification ritual is postponed until the following festival.

Kalash believe that when people die they go to a mountain on the earth, where the gods judge their behavior. If they are seen as honest and meritorious, they go to a heaven beneath the Earth. If they have been dishonest or evil, they burn in a hell, also beneath the earth. In the past, children would host a feast upon the year anniversary of their parent's death, carving a wooden effigy of the person that is used in dances celebrating the person's life. Nowadays, few people have enough surplus food to hold such a festival.

In earlier times, the Kalash buried a dead person along with his or her most precious belongings in wooden coffins randomly strewn on the ground. Nowadays, most people are buried under the ground, with a woven-rope bed laid upside-down on the grave. The tradition changed because the burial grounds were plundered by local Moslems searching for Kalash artifacts to sell to tourists.

I asked Saifullah how he planned to be buried. "Oh, I want to be under the ground," he replied. "I smoke so much that I am sure to be buried with some cigarettes; I can't stand the thought of some Muslim swiping my last smoke while I'm moldering away."



A traditional Kalash burial ground in Bumburet, with coffins strewn above the ground.

A Sense of History

Jungle man or not, Saifullah Jan has had a fascinating life, which mirrors the recent history of the Kalash people in general. His father, Karsoom Khan, is a shepherd who remembers the years before 1959 when there were five Kaffir or

"infidel" valleys, all enslaved under the ruthless royal family of Chitral.

"When the Muslim empire took over they planned to finish our faith and culture," said Karsoom Khan.

"The Kalash had to pay tributes to the king. Even if a man was married, he had to give a bull to the king. And the king was such a cruel man. He would rape any woman in the kingdom and use the men as slaves to build his palaces in Chitral. The Kalash were not allowed to wear white clothing," [because they were considered "dirty", a myth that persists among many Pakistanis].



Plundering by Muslims of Kalash cemeteries has brought about changes in Kalash burial customs. Most Kalash are now buried underground, their beds placed upside-down upon the grave.

"The Shichikoo valley near here also was Kalash, but the royal rulers attacked during the spring festival and told the people, 'This will be your last dance before you convert.' After that, all of the people danced off of the cliff rather than convert," said Karsoom Khan. "Ours was the next valley to be forced to convert.

"At the time of partition [of Pakistan and India], all the Hindus left Chitral. So 60 men from the Kalash valleys went to Chitral for a year and formed a Muslim League, to fight the royal family of Chitral and become part of Pakistan [in 1959]," said Karsoom Khan. "I saw the sons of the Muslim men writing and speaking from books. They could fight for their rights. That's when I decided to send my son to school."

Saifullah, the eldest of Karsoom Khan's six children, was chosen for the arduous task of walking six hours daily to and from Muslim school in the nearby city of Ayun. He hated the long walk on cold winter days and remembers being teased and beaten by his schoolmates because he was not a Muslim.

"And I had to beat him to go to school," recalled Karsoom Khan, laughing. "But I said I'd cut his throat if he converted to Islam. Now I am happy because we don't need Muslims anymore for writing and speaking; Saifullah does that for our community. Sometimes I worry when I hear about bad plans that the Muslims have for him and I cannot sleep at night. But he must do this work for the Kalash; the Gods will look after Saifullah."

Saifullah's first plan was to be a medical doctor, to help treat sick Kalash people. He changed his mind one night after he decided to stay in Ayun rather than make the long trek back to his home; the local Muslim hotel keeper refused to give Saifullah a room, saying that the Kalash were "dirty." Around the same time, Saifullah decided to reject the Muslim order that Kalash men wear dark-colored *shalwar kameez* to hide their dirtiness and a woolen *pakool* cap with a feather in the front to show their identity. To this day, Saifullah wears pale-colored clothing and refuses to cover his head.



Karsoom Khan was the first Kalash to send his son to school, a six hour walk. Here, he holds his grandson, who will attend a Kalash school at home in the Rumbur Valley.

"I realized that saving lives meant nothing if the Kalash culture itself died," said Saifullah. "So instead of going to medical school, I decided to go to law school."

After one year studying law in Peshawar, Saifullah's family ran out of money to continue his education. He returned to the Kalash valleys, where he met a group of French tourists and offered to help them translate Kalash folk tales into English, a subject in which he had excelled in school. After that, he began working for a series of anthropologists who came to study the Kalash, enabling him to see his culture from the perspective of an outsider while still being very much a Kalash.

Fight for the Forest

Five years ago, Saifullah was elected to his first term as Kalash representative to the 32-member District Council of Chitral. As representative he helped to build three primary schools, two middle schools, and one high school in the



Kalash girls show a healthy distrust of foreigners with cameras.

Kalash valleys. He led an effort to raise money for a Kalash school for girls, which opened its doors one month ago with 60 students. He also obtained government grants to build roads, put in medical dispensaries, and construct fresh water pipelines into each valley.

But perhaps his most important work has been as legal advisor to the Kalash, helping to pass laws to prevent Muslims from buying more Kalash land and attempting to fight in court on behalf of Kalash whose land has been illegally encroached upon by their Muslim neighbors.

He also has been fighting against attempts by Christian missionaries to take Kalash children to religious boarding schools in the distant city of Lahore. These efforts have created powerful enemies for Saifullah: both of his opponents in his bid for re-election to the district council receive money from Christian missionary groups.

But by far the most important fight is Saifullah's eight-year battle to ensure the Kalash will maintain control over their forest lands in the coming years. The case concerns the rights to the forest in the Rumbur Valley. The Pakistani government is cutting the forest, with a promise to pay 60 percent of the royalties to those who own the land. Eight years ago, the people of the nearby Muslim town of Ayun claimed that they had equal rights to all the land and therefore royalties in the Rumbur

valley as far as the Afghanistan border. The issue isn't merely one of royalties, but of jurisdiction over the land.

"This case is everything; if I lose it, it will be the end of the Kalash life," said Saifullah, as we strolled through the wooded fields of the upper Rumbur valley. "If Ayun wins this case, then there is nothing to stop them from claiming jurisdiction over all of the land in all three Kalash valleys."

It will be an uphill battle in the courts. Pakistan is notoriously corrupt; bribes and family connections often carry more weight than legal evidence. And, of course, the judge will be a Muslim.

We walked together in silence, contemplating the possibilities should the Kalash lose their right to the land. In a nearby meadow, Kalash women collected walnuts that had fallen from the trees. In the forest beyond the meadow, men climbed the holly hock trees to harvest grapes, the vines of which grow high into the tree tops. They made wine by putting fresh grapes into a trough made from a hollowed-out walnut log and stomping barefoot on the grapes to squeeze the juice into a vat.

As we watched these simple pleasures of Kalash life, Saifullah told me that if he wins re-election to the district council and also wins the court case, he will push for the government to irrigate some 1,000 acres of land in the undeveloped mountain valleys upon which the Kalash people could expand their numbers and prosper, adding: "But now that is only a dream."

