

Review

The ignored Dardic culture of Swat

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The Greek historian Herodotus of the fifth century BC used the term “Dadikai” for people now known as Dards or Dardic. He placed the land between Kashmir and Afghanistan as Darada. “Darada” is the Sanskrit term used for the inhabitants of the region. In Pakistan the region is rarely called Dardistan or the people Dard, a Persian word derived from the Sanskrit “darada.” A linguistic and ethnic mystery shrouds the term Dardic. The term was coined and used by colonial scholars. It was first used by the British orientalist Dr. Gottlieb Welhem Lietner (1840-1899). But no one in the region calls himself/herself Dard, as Dr. John Mock has noted in his paper, “Dards, Dardistan, and Dardic: an ethnographic, geographic and linguistic conundrum.” The Dard or Darada land in Pakistan includes Chitral, Swat, Dir, Indus Kohistan and Gilgit-Baltistan. The people spoke Dardic languages, one of the three groups belonging to the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages. The Dardic languages include Dameli, Dumaki, Gawri (Kalami), Gawar-Bati, Gawro, Chilsoso, Glangali or Nangalami (Afghanistan), Kalasha, Kashmiri, Kashtawari (Kashmir) Khowar, Miaya (Indus Kohistani), Pashai (Nuristan, Kunar, Laghman, Kapisa Nangarhar in Afghanistan), Palula, Shina, Tirahi, Torwali and Wotapuri and a variety of minor languages. The Darada people of the region are the least explored. Mainstream Pakistanis do not know about the unique identity, culture and languages of these people. No mainstream research by Pakistani scholars is available on them. The only exception was the late Dr. Ahmad Ahsan Dani who did some archaeological research in the Karakorum Range in his famous book ‘History of Northern Areas (Dani, 1989). Today the idyllic valley, Swat, is known all over the world as an Afghan or Pushtun Yousafzai society but fewer know the Dardic origin of Swat. Archeologists have since long focused their research on the popular Buddhist civilization, however, the Italian archeologists have recently pointed towards the Dardic origin of Swat. In main Swat many people think this a totally new discovery of an ‘extinct’ community in Swat which was known as Dard or Darada. They probably do not know that descendants of this unique extinct community still live in upper Swat—in Swat Kohistan—with the names of Torwali and Gawri, the two living Dardic communities in Swat.

Key words: Dardic, Swat, culture, community.

INTRODUCTION

The term ‘Dardic’ was first used by Dr. Gottlieb Welhem Lietner in his book “*Dardistan*” published in 1866, 1886

and 1889 (Lietner, 1893). Lietner writes, “Herodotus (III. 102-105) is the first author who refers to the country

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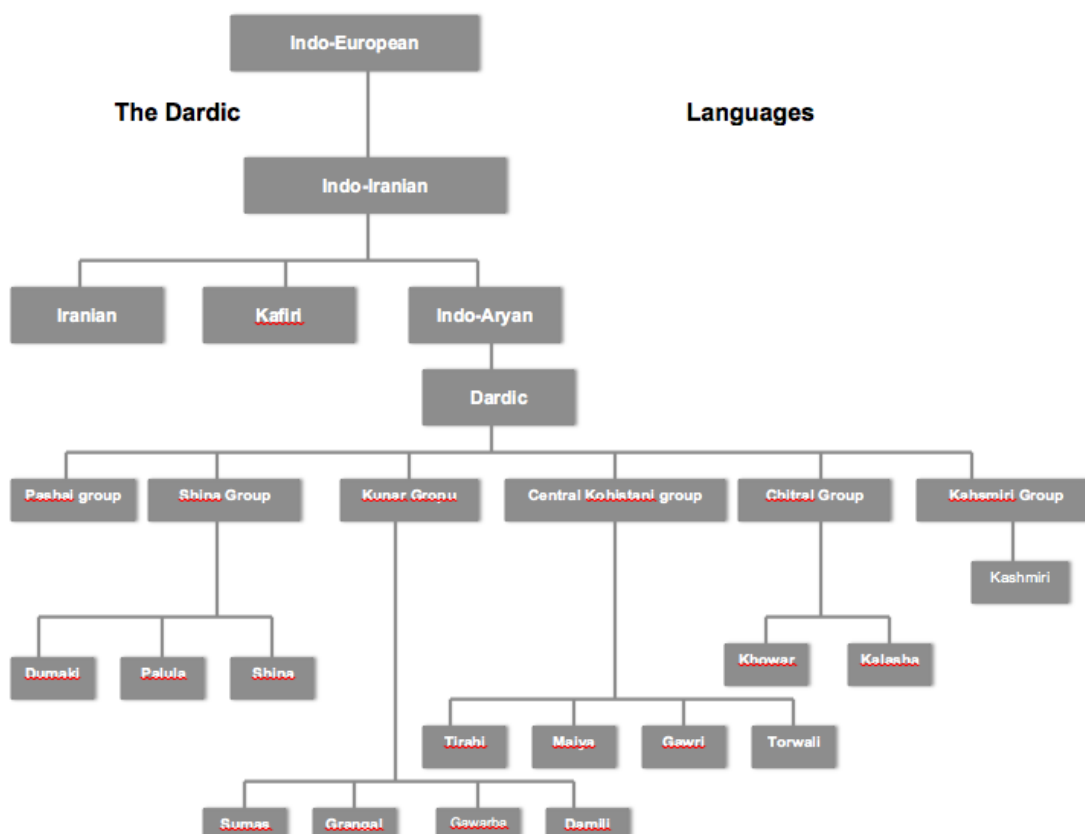


Figure 1. Dardic Languages “Dards, Dardistan, And Dardic: An ethnographic and linguistic conundrum” By John Moch and Kemberley O’neil.

of the Dards, placing it on the frontier of Kashmir and in the vicinity of Afghanistan” (Lietner 1893: 1-4). Lietner called the land from Kashmir to Afghanistan including northern Pakistan ‘Dardistan’ while the people as “Dards”—a Persianized word meaning ‘pain’ for what is termed as Dadikai by Herodotus in fifth century BC. It was ‘Darada of Painni’ which has been translated as ‘People of the cliffs’ (Luca, 2011), as almost all the Dardic people were, and are, confined to mountainous valleys (Journal of Asian Civilization, Vol. 34, No.1 p. 130).

“In Tibetan sources the Darada are known as Darta” (UNESCO, 1996: vol. III, p. 385) whereas “in their descriptions of India, the “Puranas” speak of the Darada as the inhabitants of Kashmir and Gandhara. They are repeatedly mentioned in the “Ramayana” together with the Odra (the Uddiyana)” (Inam-ur-Rahim and Viaro, 2002).

Dardic languages

All the Dardic languages (Figure 1) are not well studied and have no remarkable written traditions except the

Shina and Kashmiri languages. The latter is even recognized as a state language by the government of India while the former is well known to many American and European linguists and scholars. A glimpse of the Dardic languages spoken in Pakistan, Afghanistan and India is given below. These languages are usually divided into six groups as done by John Mock in his essay “Dards, Dardistan, and Dardic: an ethnographic, geographic and linguistic conundrum.”

1. Chitral Group

Khowar
Kalasha

2. Kunar Group

Dameli
Gawar-Bati
Nangalami-Grangali
Sumashti

3. Pashai Group

Northeastern Group
Southeastern Group

Southwestern Group
Northwestern Group

4. Central (Kohistani) Group

Gawri
Torwali
Maiya (Indus Kohistani)
Wotapuri-Katarqalai
Tirahi

5. Shina Group

Shina proper
Phalura or Palula
Dumaki

6. Kashmiri Group

Kashmiri proper

Dardic occupation of Swat

Today the Darada communities are predominantly Muslim except the famous Kalasha who live in the valleys of Brir, Bomborate and Rumbur in Chitral. They are hardly 4,000 in number and are socially under pressure to shift to the dominant culture and faith. They, however, still adhere to their own mythology, rituals, shamans and festivals and believe in their mythological pantheon.

The Kalasha and few other Dardic communities as Shina are well known to scholars because of their being geographically isolated from other dominant communities of the Gandhara area but the ones living in the Swat Valley are often ignored because of the overwhelming majority of Pushtuns in the valley. These are the *Torwali* and *Gawri* (*Kalami*) communities of the Central Kohistani Group of the Dardic communities. Today they inhabit the idyllic part of the Swat Valley known as Swat-Kohistan. When in early eleventh century Mehmud of Ghazna defeated Raja Gira, the last Hindu king of Swat, many of the indigenous inhabitants were either killed or driven away. "The Hindu and Buddhist local population had no choice, either to convert to Islam or to be killed. The part of population, which did not convert to Islam, was driven into the mountains north of Madyan" (Inam-ur-Rahim and Viaro, 2002). This area is called Swat-Kohistan and the people are generally called Kohistanis by the Pushtuns of Swat. Swat-Kohistan remained "Yaghistan" (lawless) till the rule of Mian Guh Abdul Wadud, generally known as Badsha Sahib, the first ruler of Swat during the state era, 1917—1969, captured the area in 1923 (Khan Asif, 1962: page 78).

The Torwali and Gawri tribes are said to be the ancient inhabitants of Swat. The Italian Archeological Mission found tombs in Butkara, near the present Mingora, showing a long occupation of the site. A scientific analysis of a skull carried out there indicates the Torwali

origin of the Swat Valley. "In Butkara, near the present Mingora, under the strata of Buddhist period, Italian archeologists found tombs also showing a long occupation of the site. Thus, the scientific analysis of a skull, probably one of the most ancient inhabitants of the valley, indicates a Torwali human type similar to the present inhabitants of the Swat Kohistan. From the findings, archeologists conclude that in the second millenary, or even earlier, groups of invaders entered the valley bringing with them Indo-Aryan and Dard languages" (Inam-ur-Rahim and Viaro, 2002).

Vestiges of Dardic culture in Swat

Torwali is one of the Dardic languages spoken in north Pakistan. It is one of a number of languages generally grouped together under the name of "Kohistani". According to George A. Grierson Torwali is a true Dardic language. He writes "In all its most typical features, it is a true Dardic language" (Grierson, 2001: p. 3).

Presently the Torwali tribe of the Dardic origin is estimated as 110,000 living in the area beyond the town of Madyan towards Kalam. A considerable number (about 30%) of Torwalis have immigrated to the cities of Karachi, Quetta, Hyderabad, Peshawar and Rawalpindi permanently.

The Torwali and Gawri communities share many things in their culture with a slight difference in the way each of these communities name their tangible and intangible culture. The lifestyle and culture of both the communities are fast shifting along with their endangered languages. Rapid changes are underway in their way of life because of a number of factors described later in the paper.

Below are given a few glimpses of the past and present practices of the Torwali community.

Home life in the past

The whole extended family members lived in a single room, which was large and divided into various portions according to the structure of the ceiling. This room was at the same time used as a kitchen, bedroom and dining room. The back of the room was also used as stable and storehouse. The room was actually a big hall with a single bathroom without a latrine.

The houses were usually made of mud, stone and wood. The front doors and pillars engraved (Figure 2). This was the decoration. It was not common. Only the well-to-do families could do so.

Food culture in the past

The food contained a simple dish mostly saag, spinach and corncakes. Wheat bread was not common, as this



Figure 2. Thun (Pillar).



Figure 3. Mhedaen (Cream Separator).



Figure 4. Shaen.

crop was not known. In its place barley bread was used. This was called *rhod*. Milk products such as curd, butter and cheese were used commonly. Butter was made by stirring the curd in a pitcher made of mud with the help of a wooden tool called *mehdaen*, or cream separator.

The food contained no spices. Stone salt was melted by rubbing it in the *saag* dish. Wheat bread and meat was served only in times of festivities such as marriages and *bilaeth*. *Bilaeth* is a term used for large meal gatherings during certain rituals such as demanding God's grace in after life. In *Bilaeth* pure ghee with honey was also served as an alternative of meat. The food was served in vessels made of either wood or mud. Utensils made of copper and other metals were very rare. Pots made of mud were used for cooking, keeping water and other liquids.

Tea was not common here in the past. Often melted clarified butter, *ghee*, was poured into the dish with the help of pans. A special pot *dhoan* was also used as a pot for carrying water or ghee.

The food was put into one of the large pots and people in groups ate from it. The corn cakes were soaked in the sauce. Some *ghee* was sprinkled over it and this was considered very delicious meal. Mostly there were woolen mats to set upon while setting to eat. Wooden seats were also used (Figure 3).

Furniture

In the past, furniture was made simply. Beds were made of wood stalks and ropes. These ropes, made from animal hides, were braided together to make the beds tight. Chairs were not common, used mostly by wealthy families. There were two kinds, both called *shaen*. Both sat low to the ground, about six inches, and made from rope. One kind included a straight back, made from engraved wooden planks. A simpler version had no back. *Shaens* large enough for two people were also made (Figure 4).

Maize grains were stocked in a large wooden box called *ashaan*. The flour was stocked in a smaller wooden box. These smaller boxes were often engraved with beautiful symmetrical figures. These were called *taen*. *Taens* were also used for keeping clothes. There were also *taen* for keeping money. In those days silver or copper coins were used as currency. There were no carpets. Woolen woven rugs were used instead. These were called *poray*. Then came a more refined woolen woven mat called *lamsay*. The rugs made of grass were also common in the past.

Shaens are still in use but *asshaan* only in more isolated villages situated far away from main roads. Mostly they are replaced by aluminum chests. The *taen* are no more in use. Rich luxury furniture such as sofa sets and dining sets is probably going to be common.

Clothing

Dress was usually very simple. Men used a couple of



Figure 5. Paen (Ladies' Shirt).

dresses. One was new for special events while the other one was for daily use. There was no use of turbans. Hard oval leather caps were worn by men. These were wrapped with long stripes of cloth. Common people could not wear such caps. *Pokhols*, woolen caps folded many times up to the blade; and *Kurakuli*, hard conical caps made of fur animal hides came later. A kind of winter coat called *goan* was worn by men. This was woolen and hand-woven. For sleeping the people used a mat made of goat wool. This was called *pelaes*. Women used to wear Shalwar Kameez. The shirt was embroidered with coloured thread and small pieces of silver.

These shirts had large wide sleeves and embroidered collar. The women's trousers were folded many times like the Balouch traditional men trousers are. On the head the women wore a black blanket called *taa*. This was both for decency, *purdah* and protection in cold climate. The old ladies also wrapped their heads with small scarves of black cloth called *shaeghaen* (Figure 5). Women used to braid their hair into a large braid. To keep hair open was not considered graceful. On special occasions women also wore colourful shawls as this Torwali old couplet tells us:

[*Huramza mozi ye daryiab si lal thua. Dhuth lhaghur*

asheem o sha zed zarin shawl thua.]

[[To the rival Huramza is like a pearl from the sea. She has red soft lips and wears a crimson shawl on head]

Footwear

There were no boots except the barge like shoes called *khoZore*. The rich men and women both used to wear them. They were decorated with silk thread. A type of wooden shoes was also used and an alternative to slippers. These were called *kharpa*.

Men also wore *thawat* in winter. The *thawats* were not shoes but animal hides which men wrapped around their feet up to knees. These were especially used when there was snow. A kind of special shoes made up of hay (rice crop hay) was also in use. These were also made for a bride. More braided these shoes were more graceful they were considered. The number of braids could exceed seven.

Several of these old shoe models are no longer used. *goan*, *khazore*, *kharpa* and *thawat* are no more in use. The embroidered shirts are not used. The headwear, *pakhol* is there but its use is not common; and is gradually replaced by white caps mostly made in Dir. *Karakuli* is now used by the few notables only. However, it is still regarded as a sign of grace.

Rituals

Marriage

Marriages were normally held in an early age. It was usually as low as thirteen years both for girls and boys. A girl could never propose her mate. Boys could do so through their mother. Even the girl's wish was not enquired. Her wish was what her parents especially father wanted to be. For proposing a delegation from the boy's family went to demand the relation. An engagement was made and the boy and girl were betrothed through *nikah* (*marriage bond*). Some time after this engagement marriage was organized. There were no *dolies* in first. These wedding cradles came later to the culture. The bride was led to the bridegroom's house by a close relative. This was usually done late evening or early morning. The *dowry* contained a wooden chest in which the bride's clothes were carried to her husband's house. The dowry also contained cattle, goat, cow or a bull. As there was no separate room for the newly married couple, hence the bride was seated on a mat stretched in a corner of the big multiple purpose room. The bride was also accompanied by one of her female close relative such as mother's sister, brother's wife and rarely by father's sister. This is still done. This special companion was/is called *saet*. Property right of the bride upon the

bridegroom called *mehr* (dower) was common but not practiced. The wife usually conceded the property of *meher* to her husband. Its amount was also little. The *mehr* in the form of jewelry was not much. The ornaments used then were of silver. It was not refined as it now. Gold was not used. There were no written agreements regarding *mehr* and *nikah*.

Now dowry is very large. It includes a lot of furniture and daily-use items. Gold jewelry is common, and its quantity is determined during engagement negotiations. People now tend to write agreements regarding *mehr* that include house, land and jewelry. In both the bride and bridegroom's houses, a communal meal was/is served to close relatives and friends in the village. The meal consists of a single dish and rarely includes wheat bread.

People were invited to the marriages by special envoys called *kotwaal*. Their job was not only to invite people at the time of marriages, but they also informed people of someone's death, a large meals and *ashar* (a local festival that will be described subsequently). These envoys, along with blacksmiths, drummers, pipers, barbers and circumcision surgeons were considered low caste even though they played an important role in the community. They are called *Qasab Go*, which literally means artisans. A formal of procession, called *jaen*, was usually organized by a close relative or friend of the bridegroom to his house soon after the marriage. It included scores of people waving large, colorful folded flags, called *tugh*. It was a way to honor the bridegroom. The more *tughs* visible in the procession meant the more social prestige of the family of the bridegroom or the bride as this Torwali **Zo** indicates:

*Kamal Tugh-a si bor sawad Anath si bawa
Mhi ghinu si samaam shid nu thu Aphara*

[Kedam (a village name) was made a bouquet of Tughs (flags) by Anath's father. It is the arrangement to marry me, and my detested friend is not informed]. i.e. The arrangement for my wedding is made so graceful by the great number of people with colorful flags who attended the occasion and my disloyal friend is not aware of it.

Local musicians accompanied this procession, playing their instruments. The piper played his pipe that was called *sumi* while the drummer played his drum, it was called *dhumaam*. All these instruments were locally made.

This procession also had cattle with them as a gift for the groom. No such procession exists now. In villages where there is the wedding cradle there exists the procession, *jaen*. The *tughs* are no more there. After a few, mostly seven days the bride's companion was/is led back to her home with many gifts including raw and cooked food. This was called *satama*. When the bride

was sent to her husband house by her parents after her coming on *satama* the practice was/is called *rukhsati* i.e, seeing off. There was a consistent custom of sending gifts, usually food items, to the married woman by her parents on special occasions as *Eid*. This custom is still practiced by mothers now. The gifts thus sent with the bride or her companion when the latter was 'seen off' by the groom's house, were/are distributed among the neighbors as *Naman*. *Naman* usually consists of wheat bread fried in ghee mixed with gur (raw sugar), fruits, checkins and other food items. Now the rich people make some jewelry for the *Saet* as well.

Welcome and greeting rituals

Barbarye was a common word to greet each other. *Kherset aap* was/is another word for greeting. Usual Pakistani peace greeting, *salam*, has by now replaced *barbarye*. The younger women used to bow when greeting the old ladies. They even touched their feet. The old lady in turn kissed the younger one on forehead. This practice is rarely observed now.

Social gatherings

People used to gather to a common-house usually owned by the chief of the village. This was called *bhetak*; and sometimes, *hujra*. People also used to sit around the fire pit in *mosques* when it was winter. In the mosques the elderly used to tell folk stories; share their experiences and discuss local politics.

In the *bhetak* people entertained themselves by music. It was very simple. The instruments used were *sitar* or *rabaab* and a mud pitcher with a neck.

The open end of the pitcher was tightly covered with either hide or other flexible material. Torwali *zo* was then the only song sung in *hujras*. Besides music jokes, anecdotes and riddles were also means of entertainment in the *hujras*. The *hujra* and *mosque*-fire-pits gatherings are not in existence now. Music is there but its use is less. The Torwali old *zo* gradually vanishes and is replaced by parody of Urdu and Pashto famous songs.

Festivals

There were no festivals except the two *eid* celebrations of the Islamic calendar. New clothing and *eid* greetings were common. No greeting cards were used. The village chiefs were visited and greeted on *eid* days. This trend gradually loses its importance. A small margin of people also exchanges greeting cards.

A kind of common festivity was in practice. It was

performed in the time of reaping and sowing crops, cutting hay, threshing maize grains from the cobs and building a house. It was called *ashar*. People gathered to work. It was circulated among the villagers. During this event music was played by the professional. The workers used to sing Torwali zo while working. For *ashar* of threshing maize grains special type of Torwali verse was made by poets. It was /is called *phal*. *phal* was/is sung differently from zo. Two examples of *phal*:

Yeyi sanam yeyi aaj me pande sanam yeyi-a
He yae Badakhshan si gha peshpesh te qadam dey-i-a

[There comes, comes my beloved along the way today.
 She takes steps like the mare from Badakhshan]

Hi shala si ka na thu a thung de de kiy juda.
Isi misaal alimo si ga sanam zid palara

[Heart is not like a piece of wood that I should chop with an axe. Its like *alimo* (a creeper/vine) went coiled around my beloved]

The *ashar* is not very common today.

Honour and family grace rituals

Tribal fights and generation to generation enmities were common upon issues such as land, girl elopement etc. As there were no courts the land related issues were settled by force. Before the government of *waali* (before 1925) the local *jirga* had the function of both police and court. After the *Waal's* government *hakims* (judges) were there to settle the disputes. In his government police was very powerful as everybody was used to fear the policeman called the *nowker*.

In case of a girl's elopement by a boy the couple was sought; and on finding shot to death. An enmity was going between the two families for generations. Often people tried to mediate and reconcile the dispute. The procedure for the reconciliation was to punish the boy's family indirectly. As the girl's elopement was considered a severe disgrace, her family was compensated by giving them some cash and a girl as well. This girl, in many cases would not be of age in the time of reconciliation. Only after the settlement the eloped girl, now married, was allowed by her father's family to enter their house. This was called *dar*. To have *dar* means to have reconciliation. If the mediation failed to bring a settlement to the dispute there would be a prolonged enmity between the families till there was a vengeance.

Now an elopement or court marriage cases reconciliation method is the same but no prolonged enmity. Only a stand-off between the families exists for a long time. People go to police in such cases. Honor killing is almost ended. It happens very rarely. The penalty for the recon-

ciliation is the same as it was before.

Rites of passage

Birth

In the time of male childbirth a feast was held in the house. This was to celebrate the birth. In this feast there was merry making, dancing, music and a meal. Relatives and neighbours came to congratulate the new birth. They brought gifts containing food items also.

Female childbirth was not celebrated, rather mourned. The mother was despised by her relatives and was considered responsible for the female childbirth. Even the husband would not enter the house. The mother was not treated well during her recovery period.

Now attitude of the people is changed to some extent but still male birth is considered superior to that of female. The new birth is congratulated as well. But the female birth gets less celebration. Mother of a female child is not now cursed by relatives. Gifts are now common on such occasions.

Circumcision

The child was circumcised at the age of two to five years. The professional drum player called *dom* did it. He was at the same time a musician and a surgeon of this special operation. In this time common meal was served to relatives and neighbours. Greetings and congratulations were also there. It is called *sunnat* in Torwali. Now children are usually circumcised at an early age. Doctors perform this operation.

Puberty

Here puberty means an age at which fasting and praying becomes obligatory on the child. This was not a special event in the life span and nothing has changed in this rite. However, in some families fasting of the child, even if he/she is underage, is now celebrated. This has obviously come from cities where the rich religious people do that.

Marriage

It has already been described in the previous pages. It was a custom that the young girl would adhere to the boy who tore her shirt.

Old age

This was, and is, considered an honour by the people,



Figure 6. Dar (door).

though not by old people. An old person was respected and was not supposed to do manual work. Very back in the history, more than a few centuries ago, there was a custom that old person was thrown from a rock called *maazulu/maaslu baat*. Along with the person a large basket made of the stems of certain shrubs, containing round pieces of maize or barley bread was also thrown into the river. It is a myth and there seems no evidence of it. But there are places—rocks and cliffs—in the Torwali speaking area, which have names like *maaslu/maazlu* or *maarthalu*. These words seem to be the derivatives of Maash Thalu i.e. to throw man.

The famous place near Mingora where now lies the public park is called *Fiza Gut* but in Pashto it is *Qaza Gut*. *Qaza* means death and *Gut*, in Pashto, is stone or rock. Maybe the stone/rock has the same story as the *maaslu/maazlu baat*. If it is true, this is another evidence to the claim that Swat actually belonged to the Torwali people.

Anniversaries

No birthday was celebrated. Now a very small number of population in the town celebrates it. Death anniversaries were common. A large meal was / is served on the death day by the relatives each year. This was / is called *tilaen*.

Death

When somebody died, a large number of people would go to his or her house; the women for mourning and the men for burial. The women cried in musical accents. The Islamic rites of bath, coffin and prayers were fulfilled and the dead body was laid to rest. There was a large meal served while the dead body was still lying at home. After

the burial there were seven smaller meals by the relatives in the successive evenings. These were called *niyashams* meaning simply evenings. There were considerably bigger meals in the evening of each Thursday for successive seven weeks. These were called *shugaer*, Fridays. It is perhaps due to the sacredness of Friday in the religion. Another reason is that here people regard the night with the next day. Friday night means the night following Saturday. In the time of the last Friday meal of *chehlum* was served. It is called *dubeshum*, fortieth. People would come to the house of the dead for three days and condoled with the relatives. The people gathered in the funeral were also paid either in cash or in kind such as *gur*, soap etc. This is called *iskhaat*.

Now there are more changes. The mass meal at the time of the burial is no more. Some people still hold the Evenings and Fridays giving a basis to this practice from their particular religious creed. The *tilaen* is rarely practiced. The *iskhaat* is not common but a few rich families still practice it; and most often distribute cash among the people (men and women) who gather for the funeral.

The dead is buried in rectangular wooden casket about 5 feet deep. The casket is open on two sides. The dead is laid on the ground inside the casket and on its upper side wooden planks are nailed. The tombs are sometimes surmounted with wooden structure around it as well (Figure 6).

Conclusion

Swat is rightly called 'paradise on earth' and almost everyone knows about the God-gifted beauty of this idyllic valley. Swat used to attract high profile guests. Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip of England visited Swat in 1962. Similarly, in the summers, thousands of tourists used to pour into Swat in search of solace from the scorching heat in their cities. Every visitor and resident of Swat is well aware of its azure lakes, waterfalls, crystal clear streams, lush green pastures and fields, fruit-laden orchards and the mild cool breeze during summer but what most of the residents and tourists miss is Swat's rich cultural and ethnic diversity which adds to its natural beauty.

Besides the majority Pushtun community Swat is home to the Dardic communities—Torwali and Gawri—that add to its history and cultural diversity.

These Dardic communities are under the threat of not only language shift but also of culture shift. Being ignored and marginalized these communities, like many other sister communities, regard their culture and language as 'barriers' in the way to their development. That is why they abandon their culture and language. This causes the death of not only of their identity but of an invaluable human heritage for which Swat is equally famous the world over.

Conflict of Interest

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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