

An Ethnographic Analysis of Death and Burial Customs in Kalash Community of Chitral District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan

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Abstract: The current paper deals with the funeral and burial customs in Kalash Valley of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. The emphasis of the study has been given to study and analyze the unique and fascinating tradition of funeral rituals followed by inverting bed “Charpai or Sen” on the grave of the dead as a symbolic representation for the life after death. The papers has been extracted from a research study that has been undertaken in the year 2009 during a PHD field survey through anthropological techniques, using in-depth interviews, FGDs and participant observation as tools of data collection. The analysis of the field information reveals that this custom serves as a significant identity marker which makes it easier for the viewer to distinguish Kalash grave from the graves of Muslims in the region. The focus of the current paper is to describe the concept of death; soul and burial of Kalash people in detail and to examine the utility of such concepts and practices in the relative cultural setting.

Key words: Death • Funeral • Mortuary Rites • Identity • Feast • Soul • Mourning

INTRODUCTION

Death is a mysterious concept which influences every living mortal being. The impact, the despair, the helplessness and fear is evident in both the poetry and philosophy. John Keats, the famous poet of his time has his own significant way of looking at death in his poem “*On Death*” where he beautifully conceptualize his fear towards his expected death at very young age due to cancer [1-3].

*Can death be sleep, when life is but a dream,
And scenes of bliss pass as a phantom by?
The transient pleasures as a vision seem,
and yet we think the greatest pain's to die.
How strange it is that man on earth should roam,
and lead a life of woe, but not forsakes
His rugged path; nor dare he view alone
His future doom which is but to awake.
(John Keats)*

Events like birth and death are treated as special proceedings by the people universally [4] and every culture has their own distinctive way to depart their loved ones by utilizing conventional, collective sites like crematorium grounds, cemetery, church yard, in regard to their religious beliefs. Death is an important event in an individual's life although it is the culmination of a journey of the individual which started with the birth and through different stages and struggles ended in the death. For many it is not the end but the beginning of a new journey into an unknown path, a spiritual transition from one phase of life to another, a moment when an individual moves from fathomable universe in to unfathomable universe. People celebrate these events with rituals which are special to each ethnic group from the development of these societies. Death like birth and destiny is not based on personal preference of the person [5] and yet it is believed that “*men fear death as children fear to go in dark*” [6]. The identity of classical ethnic tradition is established through their distinctive sacrifices and rituals,

which they practice during the time of grief and mourning and at distinctive and unique marriage practices. In almost any culture, death provides a unique occasion for specialized ritual and symbolic representation. The most common underlying theme is that order, represented by life, becomes with death, disorder. The basic purpose of the funeral ritual is the restoration of order [7]. Raymond Moody (1975) states that *“There is a life after death, but one cannot fully realize it until one achieves a certain kind of maturity for one cannot attain the realization by applying ordinary rules of influence or through ordinary ways of learning. This knowledge is not for the nature”* [8].

In most societies dead are not only really “gone” but their spirits remain and are in constant interaction with the living. Occasionally these spirit are viewed as benevolent, but more often they are feared as dangerous or evil [9]. Death itself is regarded as a rite of passage in which the dying person becomes an ancestor who will continue to have a social personality. In some cultures dead are completely removed from the sphere of social life among the living. The general experience is that the body after death undergoes degradation would decompose into smallest components of which it is composed hence the body is perishable. The concept of soul exists because of the analytical capability of human beings, which gives rise to the conception of life after death. Heraclitus a Greek philosopher had his own unique explanation, for him “being and not being are equally real; one is as true as the other both are true, for both are identical. Becoming is the identity of being and not being. For becoming have two forms, namely, the rising of things and their passing away, their beginning and their end, their origination and their decease [10]. The scholar further argues that “A man is born. That is his origination. He dies that is his decease. Between his birth and death there are intermediate changes. He grows larger, grows older, grows wiser or more foolish, his hair turns gray so also the leaf of a tree does not merely come into being and pass out of being. It changes in shape, form, color from light green it becomes dark green and from dark green and yellow. But there is after all nothing in all this except, origination and decease, not all of the things itself but of its qualities” [11].

Every society has certain specialized ways and norms for treating the dead. Even in the prehistoric times the Neanderthal who had preceded the Homo sapiens did bury their dead and the evidence exist that they observe certain rituals. Several important sites are known in Europe and south west Asia, most of them in caves. A teenage boy has been found in a pit at Le Moustier, in the Dordogne. His head rested on a collection of flint

flakes and one arm placed rested under his head, as if he were in reclining position. A small burial ground has been uncovered at La Ferrassie, where two grown up individuals and four children had been buried in tightly placed pits [12]. The Tasmanians buried hurriedly, avoided the burial places, feared the dead and never mentioned their names [13]. The Tanala (Malagasy people living in south eastern Madagascar) honored their dead and inviting them to all the ceremonials of the living [14]. Eskimos buried their dead quickly but the burial is followed by a prolonged mourning. Samoa’s after a frenzy of lamentation at the moment of death and then followed the burial with a prolonged party with lavish feasting, games and songs [15].

The basic function of funeral in their society is to comfort the bereaved, to reintegrate friends and relatives into an active social life and to protect against the malevolence of the spirit of the dead. Funerals are the last rites of passage [16] which are very important and tend to establish the sociological and emotional superiority of the living with the dead. A lavish and elaborated funeral also serves as a statement that symbolizes the strong character or social position of the dead in his/her society. “Universally it has been experienced that the death is received by the family or individuals as a shock, surprise and definitely a new experience” [17]. The extent of grief and loss is also different based on the emotional attachment with the deceased. People however are powerless to comprehend the phenomenon of death logically and objectively. Here theology and mythology influence the comprehension and the concept is accepted without any contestation and confrontation. There is no space for argumentative discourse analysis. So to overcome the grief and loss the bereaved follow a symbolic ritual which helps them both in establishing their ethnic identity and providing commemorative sign to the dead one.

The Study Argument: Death is the permanent cessation of all biological functions that sustain a particular living organism. Phenomena which commonly bring about death include biological aging (senescence), predation, malnutrition, disease, suicide, murder and accidents or trauma resulting in terminal injury [1]. Bodies of living organisms begin to decompose shortly after death [2]. Everyone experiences death and such death and dying is inevitable part of human life. The non Muslims of Kalash had a unique and dramatic way to depart their dead, which complement in character and context with the symbolism in ritual and overlapping rites. The *Kafirs* (as commonly referred) of Hindukush are divided into many tribes and the *Siah Posh* Kalash (wearer of black) is one of them

residing in the three valleys, Birrir, Bomboret and Rumbour. Within these valleys, live people who follow the rites and celebrations of an ancient religious culture. The funeral rituals are bound to be different from tribe to tribe, village to village, the funeral procedure varies with the sex, age, social status, bravery and other achievement of the deceased. In Kalash the universe was divided in to three ranks, with the world of the divine at the top, the human world in the middle and the underworld at the bottom [3]. Hence the concept of death, soul and life after is also very enigmatic. The current study has been thus organized to know about the importance and significance of such rituals in the area of Kalash and to further analyze its relations with the socio-cultural and economic practices as well.

Objectives of Research: The current study is focusing on the following major specific objectives:

- To understand the concept of death and soul in Kalash religious dichotomy
- To analyze the identity markers they use to express their grief
- To understand the concept behind of upturned charpai on the grave
- To analyze the symbolic significance of red flag on Kalasha grave

Research Methodology: Qualitative and descriptive research technique has therefore been adopted for acquiring the ethnographic data from the field which is basically description of events, cultural phenomena and social organization and to derive a logical conclusion with respect to the current study. The field work for the current study was conducted for the period of a few months in year 2009 (which was a compulsory part of the PHD study). Participant observation was the primary tool for the collection of data whereas in-depth interviews were also conducted with the research participants. Besides, focus group discussions were also conducted and the data was then cross-checked to obtain possible results. The collected information was verified by drawing inferences from the secondary data collected from journals, documentary programs and ethnographic studies conducted by various anthropologists in various cultures. Further, a comprehensive discussion has been made over the field data to provide a clear picture of the local culture and to link the information with the social and cultural conditions prevailing in the area. In the current study, a culturally relativist perspective has been utilized with following to obtain the consent of the informants for utilization of the field data for further

publication and presentation with pictures and other cultural aspects.

Analysis of the Field Information

The discussion has been performed under the following headings:

The conception of soul in kalash valley: The concept of soul is relatively new to the Kalash inhabitants. Loude in this regard states that in former times no one knew where a soul went. They believed that the soul escaped from the body through the mouth and eyes after death; hence they are open when a man dies [18]. In the pagan times of Swat and Kohistan, some six to then generation ago, it is believed that the priests taught that there was no heaven and hell” and such nonsense, the terms good and bad have little meaning for the Kalash, the idea of punishment, of God’s avenging action means nothing at all [19].

The Kalash elders on the other hand insisted that the Kalash theology revolves around the concept of heaven and hell. When a man dies his soul or breath “*shon*” transform into a shadow and become “*partir*” and wander as the shades in heaven “*yurdesh*” and sinners will burn in “*zozuk*” hell. They owe this to Naga Dehar, the religious shaman, who proclaims that the soul went to the other world of peaks, mid way between the divine and human.” They regard it “*as a promotion, since it is at those altitudes that the fairies live*” [20]. According to Peter Parkes (1987) “the degree of pureness is calculated by the verticality, the bipolarities of purity and impurity encompass not only the specific altitudes, but also the flora, fauna and supernatural beings, inhabiting the respective zones and each pure creature, plant, or animal residing in the high mountain zones have their impure counterparts living in the lower zones, below in the villages of the valley bottoms” [21].

Kalash do not fear death but they reject the concept of suicide as no such case has been reported or documented at the time the research was being conducted. However numbers of accidental deaths have been reported in the area. They believe that the life given to them is a gift of god so they have no right to end it [22]. Life and death is a continuous cycle and one should celebrate the departure of those who had lived life to their fullest. Death is transition from one form of life to another. Therefore it is essential for every Kalash individual whether man or a women to die in accordance with tradition. The traditional funeral services help to guide the deceased towards the realms of survival [23]. They celebrate the funerals and spend on feast generously. People from all the three valleys are supposed to attend the funeral. They stay for three to four days at the house of the deceased. The family is supposed to supply food

for the guests. They munificently spend on sacrifice and funeral services and such customs are the outcome of their culturally approved traditions.

The Traditional Funeral Custom of Kalash: Historical accounts reveal that in Kalash funerals ceremonies offer a chance for display of wealth which will show the importance of the deceased and his or her family. Death is mostly celebrated as a joyous occasion where it is believed that it is a union of soul with the creator and is now seeking favors and blessing for their living relatives. The tribe is assumed to be regarded as the remnants of Alexander the great [24]. The religious observance of mortuary rites in rural Greece is very orthodox but is very different from the rituals and methods practiced by the Kalash. Cohen explains the burial and exhumation in Potamia, a village in northern Thessaly with a population of six hundred prosperous farmers. The village has its own very small grave yard, which is not unusual for rural Greece the graves are the temporary resting places for the remains of the dead before they are moved finally to the ossuary [25]. He quoted from the study of Danforth, 1982, that “Beyond a small floor space, a ladder led down to a dark, musty- smelling area is filled with the bones of many generations of villagers. Near the top of the huge pile the remains of each person are bound up separately in a white cloth. Towards the bottom of the pile the bones-skulls, pelvises ribs, the long bones of countless arms and legs -lay tangled disarrays, having lost all trace of belonging to distinct individuals with the disintegration of the cloth wrappings. Stacked in one corner of the building were metal boxes and small suitcases with names, dates and photographs identifying the people whose bones lay securely within”?

The mourning obligations and rituals are observe for the period of five years and the mourning females are considered responsible for the cleanliness of the graveyard as an extension to their domestic chores [26]. Where as in Kalash the graveyard is considered as an impure area and due to the concept of *Bhut* people are discouraged to go there alone. In the past, the Kalasha, used to leave the corpses in *Mandoajoa*” graveyard in open lid coffins for the vultures and wild species following a Parsi tradition¹ rather than burying them in the *Mandoajoa*” graveyards. They believed that by doing so they were being grateful to nature for the blessings that the deceased received in his life. The *mandoajoa*, cemetery is most often located along with the *bashalini* (Menstruation homes) the most impure² of places for the Kalasha [27] in a low position.

The wooden coffins were left unburied on the ground. A knife was put in one of the hands of the corpse and some food into the other hand. The cemetery was destroyed about forty years ago, sometimes after the total conversion of the valley. In pre Islamic Bashagal (Present day Nuristan) as quoted by Robertson (1974)... during the funeral celebration a man would dance holding the heavy effigy on his back: a custom not shared by northern Kalasha, who substitute for the wooden effigy in dance the much lighter *kumbreauki*, a cross shaped pole with a man’s head garbed in red clothes [28].

The Kalash people are sharing their geographical space with both the Sunni and Ismaili Muslims who assume a strong hold in the region on the basis of either economical or religious superiority cast their strong influence on the non Muslim Kalash [22]. This influence is evident in the form of constant conversion to Islam along with the drastic changes in their traditions and customs especially the burials and the funerals. The funeral ritual of Kalash was once a special testimony of their pagan religious identity held by the previous generations about which unfortunately the evidences are lost in the imperial period. It was customary in the past that they leave the coffin on the pastures by placing heavy stones on the top of the lid. The following picture will show some of the reality in the research area:

The tradition later has undergone various transitional changes due to the diffusion with the Muslim burial practice. But still they try to keep their ethno identity alive by departing their loved ones in a special way which distinguish them from the others in their shared space. Conventionally the Muslim believes in burying their dead ones by wrapping them in plain white unstitched neat sheets after “*ghusal*”. A *namaz Jinazah* is held and after wards the body is taken to the grave yard for the formal burial. Christian on the other hand clean and dressed the dead in his best clothes in a wooden coffin with a lid and bury them in the church yard in the presence of priest, family and friends. Hindus used crematorium grounds where they burn the bodies and later put the ashes in Ganges River. The underlying idea of consigning the ashes to the waters of a sacred river seems that, after getting mixed in the water, the ashes reach the ocean which, with its motion and violent rise and fall, is a visible sign of life [7]. The key informant Luke Rehmat philosophies death in his own words: “man cannot do anything against the will of god. As leaf falls from the tree, man also has to leave his family and friends and takes gods hand in the paradise. The dead one goes to a

¹The Parsi custom of the disposal of the dead is somewhat similar to the traditional burial of kalash in letter and spirit. <http://www.zeelearn.com/course/funeralmgmt/html/module4d.htm>



Photograph 1: The view of a burial site in Karakal village Bomboret valley, Kalash.



Photograph 2: The old graveyard of Karakal village Bomboret Valley Kalash.

better place than where we are, he is welcomed by those who are already there". He added that we should happily say goodbye to the dead. It is a sin to be unhappy on God's decision.

The Economic Disparity and Funeral Ritual: The basic reason behind their poverty and economic disparity is that they spend their entire savings, live stock for the feast and offerings just to cast an impression of their bounteousness and to seek gods favor and blessings for the deceased. The funeral ceremony is mysterious, curious and fascinating and is a blend of shrieks and thumping of drums and is attended by the family, friends and villagers. It is customary that the bereaved family announces the total expenditure of the feast to the villagers in order to establish their generosity and their unconditional love and respect for the dead. A first estimate indicated the participation in the feast of 130 Rukmala, 150 birila and distribution of 190 kg of butter, 240 kg of strong cheese, over a ton of wheat and 41 slaughtered goats. The feast had to be worthy of the great man [3].

Ancestors are worshipped by their descendents after they have satisfactorily made the passage from the realm of the living to the dead. They are removed in to the mythological world or time and, belonging to the prior realm, they exercise an influence on the world of the living

[7]. Kalasha ritual attitudes towards live stock, or competitive feasting for renown, or the religious principles underlying sexual purity and pollution which orchestrate and motivate subsistence, are rather apprehended as irrational impediments of indigent knowledge preventing enlightened economical and social planning, or else they are more respectfully consigned to a festive and folkloric dimension of cultural performance suitable for tourist development [23].

The Child's and Women's Funerals: The funeral of the child in Kalash is considered as a very sad and unfortunate event. The dead body of the child is simply taken to the cemetery and no special prayer or rituals are followed. The family is advised to remain compose, cool, calm and collected. The feasts are only reserved for the close family and relative. For them it's a sad affair the child is quietly put in the coffin in presence of few close relatives without any formalities.

The funeral ritual for the women is slightly different from the men. Since female is regarded as impure "*paragata*" and her status is secondary and dependent on the man they belong to. The funeral of an old woman wife of village elder *Torag Meri* [24] an important figure in the village was a huge affair. The funeral was attended by all the important and close family members. The body is clad in clean clothes and decorated the juniper leaves,



Photograph 3: The man dressed in colorful robe Chapan symbolizes that he has lost some loved one recently.

cedar leaves. The mourners are dressed in their usual traditional clothes. They dance and chant around the deceased for long hours. The sadness of the death is generally manifested by the weeping, always *orchestrated and organized where women of the community has the task to exhibit sorrow [25]*. The same pattern is followed nowadays and the proceedings last for three days. In case of the death of a common woman the burial customs are slightly different. Their burials are not accompanied by pomp and show; the dead bodies are kept for two days. The first day is reserved for the villagers of the concerned valley. This time there is no dancing it's just a simple arrangement without any dancing. The female is washed and cleaned, clad in new traditional clothes with accessories is presented before the villagers and the guest. Before the time of the burial the ornaments were taken off by the maternal uncles and handed over to relatives and close friends. Immediate family including both daughters and daughter in law is forbidden from keeping the jewelry. The females are buried with a freshly made traditional thread spinning instrument and a small animal bag full of food for their lonely voyage to the next unseen world.

It can be assumed that each and every ritual attempts to grant them a special space to exhibit their culture and claim a unique identity. After the feast the family is left alone to mourn "*Shok*" till the arrival of any festival or religious feast. It is believed that mourning is an impure thing in Kalash tradition. When a man's wife dies the man mourns in a special way known as "*s`unguna nisik*" which means to stay in isolation. He is dressed in sacks and hides his face from the people. He eats and stays alone to purify him seven goats are sacrificed and the person becomes pure "*onjesta*" and then can freely move in his community. Finally before the arrival of any

religious festival he is presented with juniper leaves, yellow flowers and a traditional garb "*chapan*" to break the mourning.

The Man's Funeral: Religious particularities are main part of the traditions which was allowed as an enrichment of Kalash oral traditions and which was held by those who anxiously tried to keep at least part of the old dignity, power and the traditional identity. Contemporary Kalash bury their dead and overturn the "*charpai*" on the grave which they use to carry the deceased to the grave yard. This unique tradition symbolizes as the "*akhari aramgah*" last resting place for the dead. A young man of village Burn died from a fall from the tree. This was rather a sudden and unexpected event for the villagers. The villagers of his clan send a message to the relatives of the deceased. The first day of the funeral is specified for the host valley. All the people belonging to Bomboret valley attend the feast and mourn. The deceased is washed and cleaned by the male family members in the absence of the women and place him on a *charpai*. The dead body is buried with new or at least clean clothes and then adorned with beautiful traditional robe *Chapan*, then put traditional shoes *Kaus* on the feet. Finally the *daster i.e. Tarban* is placed on the head. The dead body's face is turned towards west. In case of man *the left hand of the dead man is placed on his warrior's bow and the right hand is dipped in the flour to sustain him during the voyage and in his new existence [26]*.

In summer and pleasant climate they use open air verandah for the ceremony but in case of winters "*jestik han*" the Holy place is utilized. The females of the family undo their hair and occupy the place around the bed post of the deceased. This is done so that they can be identified as the close relative. The widow particularly



Photograph 4: Funeral Procession in Brun village Bomboret. Courtesy Luke Rehmat

removes all her jewelry and ornaments, undo her hair braids puts on an old dress without belt and covers her head with a gray rag. This is regarded as a mourning dress; she remains seated, weeping, besides her husband's dead body until he is taken away. The rest of the females in the village are in their traditional appearance. As for men folk in the past the immediate family removes their cap but today men do not wear *chitralli* cap necessarily. It has been observed that only the orthodoxy compulsorily follow the tradition. The rest of the villagers dance and sing on the thumping of the drums. One of the famous songs of death funeral is called "*Kanaa Bhum*" according to the myth the song is about the way death first came on man through a man called Kanna. The dead man and his ancestral greatness and bravery are remembered through this song².

A lavish feast is arranged and served by the effected family to the villagers. Now they have changed this tradition and the feast is arranged through the collaboration of all the relatives. The rest of the village contributes in cooking and distribution of the food. The flour required is distributed amongst the villagers and every household prepared at least 10-12 chapattis. The meat is cooked by the men folk. The second day of funeral is marked for the guests and visitors and the whole village acts as a host.

People from Birrir and Rumbour valley come to pay their respect to the dead. Again a generous feast is prepared and served to the guests. The situation of the close family members remains the same. The people gathered dance and thumped on the beat of the drum and sang traditional songs all day long. In the meanwhile the carpenter prepares the coffin and the selection of wood is dependent on the economic status of the dead man. Few accused the Muslims of stealing the wood for fire. Now they bury their dead and the grave is prepared on

voluntary basis even Muslims take part in burial proceeding based on his personal association. They bury the dead body before noon in graveyard "*Mandoajoa*". The male member's mostly young man use to carry the dead body on their shoulders to the burial site. In the grave yard they assemble for "*duya azeem*" a grand prayer for the deceased. Then the maternal uncle places the dead body in the grave and all the villagers cover the grave. In the end they invert the "*charpai*" of the deceased on the grave. The bed is left for the dead man's use in the other world. The bed is the personal property of the deceased during his lifetime. If a man had not stamped a bed as his personal possession than the *charpai* can be brought back to the house and after purification can be utilized mainly in such instances it is the decision of the close family. It is believed that life is a never ending phenomenon and death is a passage to another unseen wonderful world of heaven. The *charpai* symbolizes the worldly comfort and association to the living. The upturn *charpai* signifies that the dead is now part of another world and his physical contact with his home and hearth has ended. Although he is gone from the life, by upturning his cart they find solace in the belief that death is not the end but a beginning of a new life. It is also an expression that people are not willing to accept the finality of death and they seek succor in the knowledge of perpetuation of life. By upturning the *charpai* they imply the auspicious passing of a loved one so they rejoice for him by singing, dancing and giving elaborate feasts. This ritual helps the viewers to distinguish the graveyard of Muslims and the Kalash coexisting beside them.

The females are forbidden to attend or participate with the males in the burial proceedings. The men take the bed away from the weeping women, who then climb up on the roof top to watch the funeral procession as it moved

²This information is taken from the text book being taught to the student of Greek administered volunteer school located at Brun Village Bomboret valley.



Photograph 5: A Kalash graveyard at Burn Village Bomboret.

in the direction of the cemetery. At the removal of the body from the house, a sacrifice is celebrated inside the house of the widow. Myth gives the reason for this and lays down the first rules of widowhood. "Once upon a time, a man and a woman loved each other deeply. But one day husband fell seriously ill. His wife asked him: 'what can I do for you?' the dying man answered: 'after my death, you must shut yourself inside the house for seven days, without seeing anyone. After the man died, his wife complied and in fact stayed in the house stricken with grief, without leaving the house. By the end of that time, the smoke, darkness and tears had made her blind. Then she remained another seven days by the tomb of her husband. After that, Sherdast, the shaman revealed in the course of trance: 'she has become blind because her husband's soul remains welded to hers. A lamb or a kid must be sacrificed inside the house at the moment when the body is taken away; in order to cut the cord between the souls and free the widow [26]. In the end they throw pieces of bread and cheese on both the fresh and ancestral graves this is equivalent to "*sadqa*" charity for the dead and is believed that the crows carry off the crumbs to the dead man souls.

Another such cultural story exists as "Myth has it than in former times, a man went hunting in the mountains, but in his pursuits he fell in to a pit and was unable to climb out. After several days, it was assumed in the village that he is dead and the members of his lineage decided to celebrate his funeral. During the ceremonies, they saw crows taking away bits of bread. The crows were in fact stealing the galettes, but it was in order to drop them in to the pit, where the man was still alive. Thanks to that food the prisoner was able to regain his strength and free himself. When he returned to the villagers, everyone was overjoyed. He then told them about the providential help he had received from the crows; the community instituted the practice of throwing pieces of bread for the crows on the dead man's tomb" [26].

There are a few other stories which recount the familiar facts where crows facilitate by supplying the bread crumbs to the people who were assumed dead and that confirmed the custom of putting bits of bread for the crows on a dead man's tomb. A society's myth have two origins one, the transformation of other myths, endogenous or exogenous, the other, the transformation in to myth of data of another kind, both are attested and are accepted by the masses. The ritual and symbolism of the funeral ceremonies have long attracted the attention of the anthropologists, not because of any "inherently morbid tendencies" [27] in the discipline but because the social definition of death casts an instructive light on a society's attitudes to the relationship between the individual and society as a whole. These funerary rites are generally an important "sociological index" of deceased and the mourners. The fundamental basis of Kalash religious ideology is on the basis of mythical stories and oral praises which is transmitted to them by the older generation. There is no written document or testimonial present to claim the legitimation of their lords, customs and their past glory. Levi Strauss says that "the universe of primitives or those claimed to be such consists principally of message [27]. But still the Kalash are practicing their tradition with complete faith and sincerity without any shred of doubt.

Cohn believes that these funerary sites and ritual often tells us of the symbolic construction of the community, it reveals the fundamental basis, contextual realities and prejudices of the society from which it is drawn from. In many cultures, death, the subsequent mourning and disposal rites have been purely nonprofit affairs undertaken by the members of the family, friends and tribal associates [28]. Finally the Kalash place a red flag on the grave. This red flag serves as a marker of identification of Kalasha grave. The Muslim of the region use calligraphic marble slab with name of the dead as an identity marker to recognize the grave.



Photograph 6: A Kalasha Grave with an upturned sen anda red flag as an identity marker

Cross is the symbol of Christian religion because Christ died on the cross that is why on Christian graves we see a sign of cross as their identity marker.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that birth and death are treated as special proceedings in Kalash Valley due to its cultural and religious significance. The people of the area considered the soul and departed persons as gift of the God and a blessing. The inhabitants of the area celebrate death and soul and the departure of a person and related events, rituals with special arrangement and they believe that there is a life after death but one cannot fully realize it until one achieves a certain kind of maturity. Death itself is regarded as a rite of passage in which the dying person becomes an ancestor who will continue to have a social personality. The general experience is that the body after death undergoes degradation would decompose into smallest components of which it is composed hence the body is perishable. The concept of soul exists because of the analytical capability of human beings, which gives rise to the conception of life after death.

The study expounds that the basic function of funeral in society is to comfort the bereaved, to reintegrate friends and relatives into an active social life and to protect against the malevolence of the spirit of the dead. Funerals are the last rites of passage which are very important and tend to establish the sociological and emotional superiority of the living with the dead. A lavish and elaborated funeral also serves as a statement that symbolizes the strong character or social position of the dead in his / her society and same is the case in Kalash valley as well. The extent of grief and loss is also different based on the emotional attachment with the deceased. People however are powerless to comprehend the phenomenon of death logically and objectively. Here theology and mythology influence the

comprehension and the concept is accepted without any contestation and confrontation. To overcome the grief and loss the bereaved follow a symbolic ritual which helps them both in establishing their ethnic identity and providing commemorative sign to the dead one.

Finally the results of the study reveals that the community experiences death and such death and the non Muslims of Kalash had a unique and dramatic way to depart their dead, which complement in character and context with the symbolism in ritual and overlapping rites. The people of Hindukush are divided into many tribes and the *Siah Posh* Kalash (wearer of black) who are living in Birrir, Bomboret and Rumbour follow the rites and celebrations of an ancient religious culture. The funeral rituals are bound to be different from tribe to tribe, village to village, the funeral procedure varies with the sex, age, social status, bravery and other achievement of the deceased. In Kalash the universe is divided in to three ranks, with the world of the divine at the top, the human world in the middle and the underworld at the bottom. Hence the concept of death, soul and life after is also very enigmatic and plays a pivotal role in the socio-cultural and economic spheres of the lives of the people.

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