

# **Establishing the Contemporary Issues of Kalash: Challenges and Way Forward**

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## **Abstract**

The Kalash, an indigenous ethno-religious group residing in Chitral, Pakistan, holds a significant attraction for tourists worldwide. Every year, a considerable number of tourists flock to the Kalash valley, which is frequently featured in various advertisements as a means of portraying Pakistan's soft image. The Kalash people live in three distinct Chitral valleys: Bumburat, Rumbur, and Birir. They have unique cultural practices, language, and history. Like many other indigenous communities, the Kalash people face many challenges that impact their social, cultural, economic, and religious worlds. The research aims to develop an understanding of contemporary issues and advocate for meaningful changes. A survey was conducted to gather information on social, political, cultural, economic, and religious issues. Carefully selected respondents (150 in total, including 50 from each valley) highlighted several major Kalash issues. Limited economic opportunities, coupled with environmental challenges, were cited as major concerns. Additionally, the Kalash people struggle to preserve their religious and cultural heritage amidst the influence of the majority and a changing world. They also expressed dissatisfaction with development projects in the region.

**Keywords:** Chitral, ethno-religious group, cultural heritage, environmental challenges, tourism, Kalash.

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## **Introduction**

The Kalash people are an indigenous ethno-religious group living in the mountainous valleys of Chitral. The community is distributed among the three distinct valleys of Chitral. The majority of the population is based in Bumburat, but a considerable number also live in Rumbur and Birir. The community is known for its unique culture, language, and history, which define it as an indigenous community. Like other indigenous groups, the Kalash encounter several challenges related to culture, religion, and economic conditions.

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The study aims to highlight the major challenges faced by the community. These challenges are expressed through a detailed questionnaire covering main themes such as economic issues, developmental challenges, provision of fundamental facilities, and cultural preservation initiatives. By delving into the different perspectives and experiences of individuals across various age groups (both female and male) within the Kalash population, this research seeks to gain a broader understanding of the contemporary issues faced by the community. Ultimately, the research aims to enhance knowledge about the Kalash community and raise awareness regarding the numerous challenges they encounter.

The conclusion of the study will prove instrumental in making informed decisions for development projects that the region is in need of. It will also aid in formulating policy recommendations and taking meaningful actions aimed at protecting the rights, culture, and religious heritage of the community. Additionally, the research may be seen as an effort to provide the Kalash community with a platform to highlight issues through a survey-based methodology.

Thus, the main objective of this research is to deepen our understanding of the contemporary issues confronting the Kalash people and to propose policy recommendations that safeguard their indigenous rights, which are vulnerable to violation.

### **Literature Review**

Inhabitants of the Chitral district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan, the Kalash, often referred to as the Kalasha, are a native ethno religious minority. The Hindu Kush region once had a sizable Kalash community, but as more people converted to Islam, their numbers gradually declined. Currently, more sheiks—converted people who continue to speak Kalash—are present than Kalash people themselves. 3,800 Kalasha were counted in the population as of the 2018 census.<sup>1</sup>

The Kalash people have a strong bond with nature, and they place a strong emphasis on the role that nature plays in their spirituality. Many Kalash people consider themselves monotheists and worship a single god named Dessau, with the other gods serving as his messengers, despite the Kalash being frequently classified as polytheistic. Festivals are celebrated to offer gratitude for the resources given to them, and ritual animal sacrifices are made to appease the deity. Ancient Greek mythology and Kalash mythology have been compared, but Indo-Aryan

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<sup>1</sup> 'The last of the Kalasha' (24 February 2019), *Dawn*, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1465752>

mythology has even more striking similarities. The distinctiveness and beauty of the Kalash culture are generally acknowledged and praised.<sup>2</sup>

There is no set standard for defining indigenous communities in Pakistan with regard to their legal status. The World Bank, on the other hand, describes indigenous communities as distinct, vulnerable social and cultural groups that self-identify as belonging to an indigenous cultural group, are acknowledged by others, have a shared attachment to ancestral territories, use customary institutions that are distinct from those of the dominant society, and speak a language that is not the official language of the country.<sup>3</sup> Although Pakistan's legal system and 1973 constitution do not specifically recognise Indigenous Peoples, there are some provisions for the local tribal population. Pakistan accepted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1966 and the International Labour Organization's Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Populations in 1957, according to the World Bank's Indigenous People.<sup>4</sup>

In the Chitral area of KPK, there are three mountain valleys called Birir, Bumburat, and Rumbur that the Kalash people call home. About 20 km south of Chitral, these valleys open up towards the Kunar River. While the Birir valley opens up towards Kunar at Gahirat village, the Rumbur and Bumburat valleys connect at Ayun village. These valleys are connected by passes that also go to the Nuristan Province of Afghanistan. The Kalash valleys are between 1,900 and 2,200 metres above sea level. These valleys experience warm summers and bitterly harsh winters, which is typical of mountainous areas.<sup>5</sup>

Numerous hypotheses have been put up to account for the ancestry of the Kalash tribe, but their origins remain a mystery. One theory holds that the Kalash are descended from Alexander the Great,

<sup>2</sup> A. Cacopardo, 'The Other Kalasha: A Survey of Kalashamun-Speaking People in Southern Chitral: Part I: The Eastern Area, East and West', 41(1/4), 1991, 273-310; New Statesman. (August, 2008), Kalasha Religion: The Last Pagans of the Hindu Kush. Retrieved from <https://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-faith-column/2008/08/kalasha-religion>; G. Scott Robertson, *The Kafir of the Hindukush* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Ancient Origins (n.d.), Are the Distinctive Kalash People of Pakistan Really the Descendants of Alexander the Great? Retrieved from <https://www.ancient-origins.net/history-ancient-traditions/are-distinctive-kalash-people-pakistan-really-descendants-alexander-great-021731>

<sup>4</sup> World Bank. Indigenous people planning framework. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/637091555578215632/text/Indigenous-Peoples-Plan-Framework.txt>

<sup>5</sup> G. Scott Robertson, *op.cit.*

who visited South Asia in 327 BC and is held by both the Kalash people and some Greek writers.<sup>6</sup>

Various narratives make assumptions about the Kalash people's ancestry. Some assert that they left a remote location named 'Tsiyam', which is mentioned in their folk songs. Tsiyam's precise location is still unknown; some experts contend that it may allude to contemporary Thailand, while others advocate Egypt.<sup>7</sup> The Kalash's physical characteristics, such as their blond hair and blue eyes, have fed rumours that the ancient Greeks who once ruled the area are their ancestors. The Kalash is referred to as the 'black Kafirs' in Pakistan, and Kafiristan is the name of their homeland.<sup>8</sup>

Parts of Chitral were dominated by the Kalash hundreds of years ago, and historical accounts describe important kings including Razhawai, Cheo, Bala Sing, and Nagar Chao. However, the Kalash were driven out of sections of Pakistan and Afghanistan with the ascent of Subuktagin and his son Muhammad Ghaznavi. They launched an assault on lower Chitral in retaliation, starting the Kalash Dynasty. Later, Shah Nadir Raees, the Muslim monarch of Kho, obstructed their rule and forcibly converted them to Islam. Similarly, the Afghan Amir forced the red Kafirs of Afghanistan, who belonged to the same tribe as the Kalash, to convert to Islam.<sup>9</sup>

The ancient Durand Line pact between the British and the Afghan Amir in 1893 can be partly blamed for the existence of the Kalash. The Afghan Amir protected the Kalash valleys from forced conversion by making them a part of India. On the Afghan side of the border, other Kafir tribes practised polytheism and shared a similar culture. Despite their opposition, the Afghan kafirs were eventually won over to Islam. Some people in the Kalash group have converted to Islam as a result of efforts to stop the spread of Islam, while others maintain their traditional religious practices.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> New World Encyclopedia. (n.d.). 'Kalash', Retrieved from <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Kalash>

<sup>7</sup> Ancient Origins, *op.cit.*

<sup>8</sup> A.W. Awan, 'An Ethnic Group: The Kafir-KALASH', Conference Paper 2014, Accessed 8 November 2023. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272696595\\_An\\_Ethnic\\_Group\\_The\\_Kafir-KALASH](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272696595_An_Ethnic_Group_The_Kafir-KALASH).

<sup>9</sup> *The Guardian*, 'Pakistan: A Journey to the Hindu Kush', 17 April 2011. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2011/apr/17/pakistan-taliban-hindu-kush>

<sup>10</sup> Alberto M. Cacopardo and Augusto Cacopardo, 'The Kalasha (Pakistan) Winter Solstice Festival', *Ethnology* 28:4 (1 October 1989), 317. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3773537>.

Since the 1700s, the Mehtar of the former princely state of Chitral, which later united with Pakistan, has ruled over the Kalash. The Kalash have staunchly guarded their distinctive culture and resisted assimilation despite coexisting with Sunni and Ismaili Muslims.<sup>11</sup>

### **Methodology**

Through a survey-based methodology, this research seeks to identify and comprehend the current problems facing the Kalash community. A thorough evaluation of these concerns will be gained by talking to 150 respondents, including 50 people from each of the three Kalash valleys. The study throw light on the social, political, cultural, economic, and issues that the Kalash people confront.

The survey questionnaire printed in Urdu language was used to collect information. It incorporated both closed-ended and open-ended questions, specific to the research problem. The closed-ended questions gauged participants' thoughts on issues, such as economic inequities, satisfaction with development initiatives, availability of basic facilities, and cultural preservation, offering prepared response possibilities. On the other hand, the open-ended questions enabled participants to share in-depth views, personal experiences, and speak about their greater concerns.

The results of the survey were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative data from the open-ended questions were analyzed for recurring themes, enabling a deeper understanding of the issues faced by the Kalash community. On the other hand, quantitative data from the closed-ended questions, was analyzed to observe patterns and trends.

Thus, the survey questionnaire, including both types of questions, enabled the researcher to highlight the current problems faced by the Kalash community while also generating some insightful qualitative feedback from the respondents.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

## Results

Table 1: Available Facilities

	Rumbur (f)	Birir (f)	Bumburat (f)	Total (f)	Percentage
Electricity	50	47	48	145	96.60%
Water	50	40	50	140	93.30%
Gas	0	0	0	0	0
Internet	16	17	15	48	32%

Table 2: Provision of Health and Education Facilities

	Rumbur (f)	Birir (f)	Bumburat (f)	Total (f)	Percentage
Medical Store	50	50	50	150	100%
Dispensary	50	50	0	100	66.60%
Medical Center	0	0	50	50	33.30%
Hospital	0	0	0	0	0%
Govt. School	50	50	50	150	100%
Govt. College	0	0	0	0	0%
Private School	50	50	50	150	100%
Private College	0	0	0	0	0%

Table 3: Source of Households Income

	Rumbur (f)	Birir (f)	Bumburat (f)	Total (f)	Percentage
Farming	35	23	25	83	55%
Govt. Services	17	23	3	43	28.60%
Labour	10	5	18	33	22%
No other Sources	6	8	9	23	15%
Live stock	1	3	1	5	3%
Business	0	2	2	4	2.60%

Table 4: Satisfaction over Government Project

	Rumbur (f)	Birir (f)	Bumburat (f)	Total (f)	Percentage
Yes	2	6	5	13	8.67%
No	45	37	31	113	75.33%
Not sure	3	7	14	24	16%
Total	50	50	50	150	100%

**Table 5: Expanses on Annual Kalash Festivals in PKR**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>0-50000</b>	22	25	11	58	38.67%
<b>51000-100000</b>	19	21	17	57	38%
<b>101000-150000</b>	5	3	3	11	7.33%
<b>151000-above</b>	4	1	19	24	16%
<b>Other</b>	50	50	50	150	100%

**Table 6: Ratio of Educated People Leaving Kalash**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Increase</b>	15	32	42	89	59.33%
<b>Decrease</b>	0	0	1	1	0.67%
<b>Same</b>	35	11	3	49	32.67%
<b>Not sure</b>	0	7	4	11	7.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 7: Non Local Presence in Valley Business**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Increase</b>	15	32	42	89	59.33%
<b>Decrease</b>	0	0	1	1	0.67%
<b>Same</b>	35	11	3	49	32.67%
<b>Not sure</b>	0	7	4	11	7.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 8: Change in Law and Order Situation Witnessed in the Valleys**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Positive</b>	46	30	24	100	66.67%
<b>Negative</b>	2	18	17	37	24.67%
<b>No change</b>	2	2	9	13	8.66%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 9: No. of Tourists Visiting the Valleys**

	Rumbur (f)	Birir (f)	Bumburat (f)	Total (f)	Percentage
<b>Increase</b>	19	48	43	110	73.33%
<b>Decrease</b>	3	0	1	4	2.67%
<b>Same</b>	28	0	6	34	22.67%
<b>Not sure</b>	0	2	0	2	1.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 10: Problems Related to Tourism**

	Rumbur (f)	Birir (f)	Bumburat (f)	Total (f)	Percentage
<b>Infrastructure</b>	41	47	29	117	78%
<b>Lack of hotels</b>	42	38	30	110	73.30%
<b>Poor marketing</b>	0	0	1	1	0.60%
<b>Others</b>	8	3	18	29	19.30%

**Table 11: Natural Disaster in Last 10 Years (2009-2019)**

	Rumbur (f)	Birir (f)	Bumburat (f)	Total (f)	Percentage
<b>Floods</b>	43	48	50	141	94%
<b>Earthquake</b>	44	46	50	140	93.30%
<b>Avalanche</b>	1	13	6	20	13.30%
<b>Other</b>	12	13	13	38	25.30%

**Table 12: Received Training to Cope with Disaster**

	Rumbur (f)	Birir (f)	Bumburat (f)	Total (9)	Percentage
<b>Yes</b>	27	15	18	60	40%
<b>No</b>	23	35	32	90	60%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 13: Deforestation in the 10 Years (2009-2019)**

	Rumbur (f)	Birir (f)	Bumburat (f)	Total (f)	Percentage
<b>0-30%</b>	17	15	19	51	34%
<b>31-60%</b>	22	19	8	49	32.67%
<b>61-90%</b>	8	16	8	32	21.33%
<b>91-above</b>	3	0	15	18	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Table 14: Causes of Deforestation**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Poverty or Joblessness</b>	31	35	23	89	59.30%
<b>Ruthless cutting by both locals And non-locals</b>	9	12	10	31	20.60%
<b>Timber mafia Or permit</b>	9	3	1	13	8.60%
<b>Other</b>	7	0	17	24	16%

**Table 15: Religious Conversion**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bummburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	10	12	18	40	26.67%
<b>No</b>	35	11	25	71	47.33%
<b>Not sure</b>	5	27	7	39	26%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 16: Conversion Ratio Age**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bummburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Old and Illiterate</b>	39	25	28	92	61.34%
<b>School Going kids</b>	10	9	17	36	24%
<b>Educated Youth</b>	1	16	3	20	13.33%
<b>Others</b>	0	0	2	2	1.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 17: Religious Conversion Reasons**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bummburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Preaching / teaching</b>	7	7	16	30	20%
<b>School Curriculum</b>	5	5	5	15	10%
<b>Not sure</b>	32	45	28	105	70%
<b>Others</b>	8	5	7	20	13.30%

**Table 18: Threat from Extremists**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	22	35	44	101	67.33%
<b>No</b>	0	1	2	3	2%
<b>Not sure</b>	28	14	4	46	30.67%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 19: Gender Equality**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	50	46	31	127	84.67%
<b>No</b>	0	3	4	7	4.67%
<b>Not sure</b>	0	1	15	16	10.66%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 20: Awareness of Human, Women and Religious Rights**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	49	48	43	140	93.34%
<b>No</b>	1	1	3	5	3.33%
<b>Not sure</b>	0	1	4	5	3.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 21: Violation of Women Rights in Valley**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	21	38	7	66	44%
<b>No</b>	29	11	28	68	45.3%
<b>Not sure</b>	0	1	15	16	10.67%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 22: Political Party Best Represents Kalash (2009-2019)**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>PTI</b>	12	4	19	35	23.33%
<b>PPP</b>	12	4	3	19	12.66%
<b>PMLN</b>	0	16	0	16	10.66%
<b>Not sure</b>	26	20	28	74	49.33%

**Table 23: People Participation in Political Activities**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	5	12	8	25	16.66%
<b>No</b>	41	29	27	97	64.66%
<b>Sometimes</b>	4	9	15	28	18.66%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 24: Should Kalash Reduce Expenses on Festivals and Rituals?**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	45	35	28	108	72%
<b>No</b>	0	3	6	9	6%
<b>Not sure</b>	5	12	16	33	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 25: Average Expenses on Death Occasion**

<b>Amount PKR</b>	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>000000-200000</b>	3	0	14	17	11.30%
<b>201000-400000</b>	12	2	6	20	13%
<b>401000-600000</b>	18	29	9	56	37.30%
<b>601000- 800000</b>	14	18	19	51	34.00%
<b>801000-Above</b>	3	1	2	6	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 26: Average Expending on Birth Occasion**

<b>Amount PKR</b>	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>0-50000</b>	4	2	8	14	9.30%
<b>51000- 100000</b>	29	41	34	104	69.30%
<b>110000- 150000</b>	11	3	2	16	10.60%
<b>151000-200000</b>	4	3	6	13	8.60%
<b>210000-More</b>	2	1	0	3	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 27: Ratio of Educated People Leaving Kalash**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Increase</b>	15	32	42	89	59.30%
<b>Same</b>	35	11	3	49	32.60%
<b>Not sure</b>	0	7	4	11	7.30%
<b>Decrease</b>	0	0	1	1	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 28: Suggestions to Preserve and Expand Kalash Culture and Religion**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Qazis need to Play positive role</b>	30	35	33	98	65.30%
<b>Awareness should be Given</b>	10	13	7	30	20%
<b>Unity among Kalash</b>	8	11	6	25	16.60%
<b>Kalash reachers Should work</b>	6	5	10	21	14%
<b>Non Kalash should not be allowed to live among Kalash</b>	5	6	12	23	15.30%
<b>Ban other Preachers</b>	3	4	7	14	9.30%
<b>Not sure</b>	6	4	2	12	8%
<b>Others</b>	4	7	9	20	13.30%

**Table 29: Respondent's Opinion to Preserve Kalash culture and Religion**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>I will advice</b>	17	15	24	56	37%
<b>I will write</b>	3	1	4	8	5.30%
<b>I will not Convert</b>	5	6	7	18	12%
<b>Not sure</b>	26	29	27	82	54.60%
<b>Others</b>	5	3	1	9	6%

**Table 30: Kalash Future After 100 Year**

	<b>Rumbur (f)</b>	<b>Birir (f)</b>	<b>Bumburat (f)</b>	<b>Total (f)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Optimistic</b>	20	28	37	85	56.60%
<b>Declining or Dying</b>	6	11	3	20	13.30%
<b>Same</b>	0	3	0	3	2%
<b>Not sure</b>	24	8	10	42	28%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Discussion**

There were 150 respondents in this survey-based study, 50 of whom came from each of the three Kalash valleys—Rumbur, Birir, and Bumburat. 42 single people (28% of the total participants) made up the participant distribution, whereas 108 respondents (68% of the respondents) were married. This illustrates the Kalash community's propensity towards young marriages. Fifteen percent of the population was female and 85% was male. Men are more accessible and willing to participate, which explains their larger representation.

Age-wise, 28% of participants were under the age of 15, 22.6% were between 26 and 35, 20% were between 36 and 45, 19% were between 46 and 55, and 9% were over the age of 56. Thirty-five percent of respondents had no formal education, 20% had completed high school, 14% had completed higher secondary, 8% had a bachelor's degree, and smaller percentages represented other educational levels.

For the Kalash community, it was determined that access to gas, water, electricity, and the internet was a must. The lack of this basic need in the Kalash valleys was highlighted by the finding that none of the respondents had a gas connection. Despite the fact that 93.3% of the respondents had access to safe drinking water, 6.6% had trouble getting it since there were no water pipelines that reached their residencies.

Ninety-six points six percent of respondents said they had access to electricity, while 3.3% still did not, mostly because of damaged power plants or a failure to restore connections. According to the survey, only 32% of respondents had internet connection, mostly through mobile networks and with subpar services from the local private telecom firm. With no hospitals in the valleys, health facilities were judged to be subpar. A medical centre was reported to be present in Bumburat valley and a dispensary was also available in Rumbur and Birir valley each, which were deemed inadequate.

Students had to travel to the town Chitral because there were no public or private colleges in the Kalash valleys for education. Higher

secondary schools were accessible in Bumburat and Birir. It lacked such institutions in Rumbur. There are reportedly both public and private schools in each of the three valleys.

The Kalash community was determined to have a difficult economic situation, as evidenced by their dependency on agriculture, high unemployment rates, and few other means of income. The majority's (55%) primary source of household income was farming followed by government employment which was reported as 28.06%. A significant portion (22%) household income was seasonal labours.

Only 8.6% of respondents said they were satisfied with government development projects, while 75.3% of respondents expressed displeasure with them.

The Kalash people celebrate their cultural and religious heritage through a series of colorful festivals held in all seasons of the year. Among these festivals, Chilimjust is the most popular, enticing visitors to the Kalash valley. It is held in May, and the celebration lasts for four days. Another important festival, Uchal, takes center stage in August, celebrating the ripening of fruits and the harvesting of crops. Following this, in the last quarter of September, the Kalash community observes a festival known as Pul, which coincides with the ripening of grapes and walnuts. The festival is obsolete in Rumbur and Bumburat but still being practiced in Birir.

Additionally, the Kalash observe the Chitimash or Chawmos festival, symbolizing the New Year celebration. It starts on December 21st annually and extends for a week. However, these festivals result in a considerable financial strain on the Kalash community, which needs to be reconsidered. The survey results reflect this financial burden. Survey data shows that 38.6% of respondents allocate Rupees (PKR) between 0 and 50,000 towards their annual festival expenses, while 38% spend between PKR 51,000 and PKR 100,000. Additionally, 16% of respondents incur expenses exceeding PKR 151,000, with only 7.3% allocating between PKR 101,000 and PKR 150,000 for festival expenses.

Not only during annual festivals, but the Kalash people also incur significant expenses during events such as births and deaths of fellow Kalash members. The survey results highlight that nearly 37.3% spend amount between PKR 401,000 and PKR 600,000 rupees for funeral expenses, while another 34% spend between PKR 601,000 and PKR 800,000. Moreover, 13% allocate between PKR 201,000 and PKR 401,000 for funeral arrangements, followed by 11.3% who allocate between 0 and PKR 200,000. Surprisingly, 4% report expenditures exceeding PKR 801,000 for funeral ceremonies. These expenses take various forms. For instance, when a fellow Kalash member passes away,

the community slaughters numerous goats, inviting Kalash from all three valleys. The collective cost of these sacrificial animals, coupled with other funeral arrangements, results in a significant financial burden. Neighbors and relatives support the deceased family if they don't have enough sacrificial animals.

Similarly, celebrating the birth of a Kalash child also leads to substantial expenses. The majority (69.3%) spend between PKR 51,000 and PKR 100,000 for such occasions, followed by 10.6% who spend between PKR 101,000 and PKR 150,000. Additionally, 9.3% allocate between rupees 0 and PKR 50,000, while 8.6% spend between PKR 151,000 and PKR 200,000. A small proportion (1.3%) of respondents report expenditures exceeding PKR 201,000 for the same purpose. These findings underscore the need for the Kalash community to reduce their expenditure and allocate resources to improve their overall quality of life.

Brain drain was noted as another major issue; according to 59.35% of respondents, a greater proportion of educated Kalash were leaving the valleys in search of better economic prospects while other differed.

Kalash valleys, as major tourist attraction points, receive a considerable number of tourists annually, which in turn should support the local tourism business. The survey results showed that the benefits of this were not reaching the local people, as non-locals had a significant presence in the tourism and hotel business. Fifty-nine percent respondents witnessed a surge in the presence of non-locals in tourism business in recent times, while 32.60% did not see any major increase of the non-locals presence in recent times.

According to 66.6% of respondents, the country's law and order situation has improved, which has had a good effect in the Kalash valleys. Seventy-three percent of the respondents reported an increase of tourists visiting the valleys, owing to the improved law and order situation.

However, the tourism industry also faces with other problems which significantly affects its output. Seventy-three percent respondents agreed on the lack of infrastructure and proper hotels as biggest hurdle. However, others cited reasons such as poor marketing and other issues.

Kalash Valleys are also disaster-prone. The valleys have been hit by different natural disasters at different times. Ninety four percent of respondents reporting having seen floods and 93.3% reporting having seen earthquakes in the previous ten years (2009-2019), dangers like natural catastrophes represent substantial concerns.

The residents of Kalash valleys need to be provided with proper disaster preparedness and coping training. The issue has not been addressed as 60% of respondents claimed they had received inadequate or no training in disaster management.

Kalash valleys face with a major challenge of deforestation. With 59.3% of respondents attributing deforestation to poverty and 20.6% to savage local cutting, it has become an urgent issue. The timber mafia was also mentioned as a factor in deforestation.

The survey's findings suggest that the Kalash community has varying opinions on the subject of forced conversion. While the majority of respondents (about 47.3%) disagree that forced conversions occur, it's crucial to note that a sizeable percentage (24%) did admit the presence of forced conversions to religion but attributed them to indirect rather than direct force. It was believed that elements including financial incentives, religious indoctrination through the curriculum, sermons by clerics, and other outside influences had an impact on these indirect conversions. The remaining respondents choose not to offer any additional commentary.

Sixty-one percent of the respondents claimed that the conversion ratio was highest among adult and illiterate people, while 24% stated it to be highest among school-going kids. Thirteen point three zero percent asserted that the tendency was highest in educated youth.

Sixty-seven point three percent of respondents said there are still threats from extreme organisations like the Taliban. Regarding the social status of women, positively, 84.6% of respondents agreed that men and women should be treated equally, showing that the Kalash community is becoming more socially aware.

Women's rights are being violated in the Kalash valleys, according to the poll, which found that 44% of respondents were aware of these infractions. While 10.6% of respondents are unsure about the situation, 45% of respondents think that women's rights are not being violated.

The Kalash population has a varied level of political knowledge; 58.6% of respondents said they cast ballots in past elections, while 41.3% did not. 49.3% of respondents were undecided when asked which political party best represents the Kalash people, followed by 23.3% for Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), 12.6% for The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and 10.6% for Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PMLN). Fifty-six percent of respondents said they wanted a political leader to have integrity, 32.6% said they wanted a leader to serve the people, and 26% said they wanted a leader to be trustworthy. Sixteen-point six percent of respondents engage in political activity actively, compared to 64.6% who say they don't.



The poll revealed the need for Kalash to reevaluate their festival and ritual spending, with 72% of participants advocating a decrease in costs.

Preservations of Kalash culture and religion is important. According to respondents, there are a number of actions that need to be taken in order to preserve and advance Kalash culture and religion. The active participation of Kalash Qazis (65.3%), community awareness-building (20%), Kalash unity (16.6%), and limiting the presence of non-Kalash people (15.3%) were among the suggestions.

Ironically, 54% of respondents were hesitant about their own attempts to uphold Kalash culture and religion and they could not think of anything they contribute to preserve the cultures. Thirty-seven percent said they could only offer advice to other Kalash, and 12% said they would not convert. Forming friendship partnerships, disseminating Kalash literature, and providing religious lectures were also specified as additional actions to preserve Kalash culture.

Fifty six percent of respondents were hopeful about the future of the Kalash community and thought that Kalash religion and culture will continue even in 100 years. In contrast, 28% were unsure, 13.3% were pessimistic about the Kalash's demise, and only 2% thought the community would remain unchanged.

The findings as a whole shed light on a variety of difficulties and problems encountered by the Kalash population, ranging from conservation and tourism development to religious and social concerns.

## **Conclusion**

The survey's results shed light on many socioeconomic, cultural, and religious factors within the Kalash group. The Kalash people undoubtedly endure numerous difficulties and dangers, which are highlighted by the survey.

The community lacks access to basic facilities. They have no gas connections, and medical and educational facilities are subpar. Moreover, the region offers limited employment opportunities, with the majority of people engaged in farming in mountainous regions, an unusual occupation. The study also highlights the impacts of climate change, as the Kalash-inhabited areas have experienced disasters and calamities that have further worsened their socioeconomic conditions.

The survey also underscores the growing influence of Islam within the Kalash community. While the majority of respondents deny forced conversion, a sizable proportion believe it as an indirect form of conversion. They considered elements such as religious leaders, non-Kalash students studying Islamiyat, and the impartiality of religious educators that support the

in-direct conversion. Protecting the Kalash religious freedom and liberties is essential, as it safeguards their cultural identity and rights.

In addition to the religious aspects, the research uncovered that the Kalash society see violation of women rights, highlighting the need of actions to address the issue and achieve gender equality. The study revealed that the Kalash people have varying degrees of political consciousness and engagement, emphasizing the importance of involving the community in political processes and making sure that their perspectives are heard and effectively represented. The survey also highlighted the community spend on religious and cultural activities significantly. An increased awareness about the importance of financial stability within the community was seen, as the majority of respondents acknowledged that spending for festivals and rituals should be less.

Another major issue highlighted was the preservation of Kalash culture and religion. They respondents suggested that Kalash Qazis play a proactive role, providing awareness, encouraging unity, limiting non-Kalash presence, supporting Kalash preachers, and addressing financial difficulties. These suggestions show that the Kalash people are determined to preserve their religious and cultural traditions. It is emphasized that the issues faced by the Kalash community, such as religious influences, women's rights, political engagement, and financial weaknesses, must be addressed. To ensure the prosperity of the Kalash community and preservation of their rich cultural and religious history, cooperation among the community, local government, and key partners is essential.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the research findings, the following initiatives can be taken to raise the quality of life and preserve the indigenous tribe's cultural and religious heritage.

Infrastructure is key for the development of any region. The Kalash valleys have poor infrastructure that should be improved to make them accessible for visitors, enhancing tourism potential. The valleys lack some basic facilities, with the most important being gas connections. Measures should be taken to ensure the provision of uninterrupted power supply, water, and gas to all residents to improve living conditions and economic opportunities.

Secondly, the area lacks institutions that provide quality education, especially beyond matric level. Quality educational institutions, including colleges, should be established to raise literacy rates and provide better learning opportunities. This will also alleviate the economic burden on poor parents who send their children to Chitral town for college

education. The curriculum should also offer civic ethics for non-Muslim students.

The majority of household income is dependent on farming in mountainous regions, indicating fewer economic opportunities. The government needs to introduce quotas in district-level jobs for Kalash people, in addition to the federal and provincial level minority quotas, addressing rampant unemployment. The government can intervene to ensure ownership of businesses by Kalash individuals to boost the local economy and employment.

Preservation of Kalash unique heritage will be a challenge. Religious conversion has been increasing, which can be addressed by taking countermeasures such as documenting Kalash literature and establishing centers for cultural studies to preserve and promote Kalash heritage. The government needs to provide support and resources to crucial Kalash religious leaders (qazis) to strengthen their role in community development and cultural and religious preservation.

Climate change is another major issue that, apart from posing an existential challenge, has also caused economic havoc to the people. The debris of flooded crops can still be seen there. The government needs to increase environmental awareness and implement measures for environmental protection to safeguard Kalash livelihoods and health. Disaster preparedness training and building disaster-resilient infrastructure can go a long way to help mitigate the issue.

In summary, addressing the diverse challenges and opportunities for sustainable development and cultural preservation in the Kalash valleys requires collaborative efforts between the government and the Kalash community.