

## ***KALASH COMMUNITY***

In the three remote valley of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, exists a small community (which is the smallest cultural and religious community in Pakistan). They claim to have an entirely different and distinct history regarding their origins and assert of having different form of cultures. They also witness distinct physical features from other ethnic groups of South Asia. For example, they have very fair skin and golden hair unlike other groups residing in plains in the surrounding region, even some DNA experiments made that evident that they share their DNA structure with people of the Persian region and Europe. They also practice very different cultural and religious rituals. They are known as the Kalash people. Kalash people claims to be the descendents of the invading armies of Alexander, who invaded the Indian subcontinent in fourth century B.C., after winning almost half of the known world at that time. Kalash community regard themselves as the successor of Alexander's soldiers in his army who instead of returning to Greece got settled in three remote valleys of Chitral namely Rumbur, Brumbet and Birir. They argue that because of the remoteness and harsh terrain of the valley and aloofness from the day to day interventions, they succeeded in protecting their culture. Different waves of invasions failed to made an effect on this community. They are the followers of the pagan religion wherein they worship various gods mainly the 12 major deities. They don't bury the dead body but keep their coffin in open ground as they believe that the soul would leave the earth and would eventually join the other departed soul in next world. They also have the tradition of making wine in a similar way as in Europe which is in a way unique in the country of Pakistan as it is banned for its Muslim population, although minorities can consume it. This community is very conservative in its approach and therefore maintains very limited links with the outside world. But, within the community, it is an egalitarian society where women are free to interact with males outside family and exercises freedom which is strictly prohibited in neighbouring Pakhtoon communities. They can marry a man of their choice and even can remarry a person of their choice. The only thing that they are particular about is that the new husband has to give a double amount of the bride's money to ex-husband, what he earlier had given to the girl's family. But they follow a very strong social practice of marrying within the community and are very rigid about it. They break all the ties with the person who

either marries a non- Kalash or get converted to Islam. Such people have to leave the village immediately. The main occupation of community is animal husbandry, farming and handicraft. Kalash women wear black robes decorated with colourful embroideries and shells. They never cover their face even in public which is quite different from other parts of Pakistan. Currently, the population consists of nearly 6000 people, in which nearly half of them have converted to Islam but rest who still follow their indigenous religion. Kalash people worship both male and female deities in their small wooden temples having wooden statues of their gods. They also have a practice of sacrificing goats to their deities. In recent years because of growing extremism in Pakistan especially in the nearby area of Swat, Kalash people face danger of forceful conversion and if not they are killed by various terrorist groups. Also, the intolerant behaviour of the Muslim community towards this peaceful community is increases considerably in nearby regions. Because of such threats, this unique community of South Asia is facing the threat and is at the verge of extinction.