

# **Cultural Commodification and Tourism in Kalash Valley: A Case Study of Bumburet Village, District Chitral**

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## **Abstract**

*Cultural commodification is a process in which cultural items and artifacts such as cultural dresses, customs, rituals, and expressions are brought to the market and sold to the tourists for money. Cultural tourism is one of the key players in the commodification of tangible and intangible cultural artifacts in the market. Through a qualitative research strategy, this paper examines cultural commodification and cultural tourism in Kalash Valley. The data were collected through in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions for this study, and the respondents were sampled using convenient sampling, purposive sampling, and simple random sampling techniques. Thematic analysis was used for generating themes using framework analysis. Through thematic analysis of data with a descriptive case study, this paper shows us the impact of cultural tourism and cultural commodification in Kalash valley in district Chitral Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. The study shows that cultural commodification and cultural tourism have uneven benefits for the stakeholders involved in it by benefiting the privileged ones while exploiting the underprivileged and the poor section of the society.*

**Keywords:** Cultural tourism, Commodification, Kalash valley.

## **1. Introduction**

The high mass consumption capitalist society has commodified every aspect of the human way of life whether it is the tangible aspect such as clothes and intangible aspect such as expressions. Marx some 150 years ago predicted that this capitalist society will commodify every aspect of human life. Marx (1867 Ed. 1951) also observed that raw materials, labor, and manufactured products were commercialized and commodified in the market which helped the traders and merchants to make a fetish out of commodities. Wright (2000) states that in the 1950s, lifestyle and art were commodified and commercialized and sold in the market for price due to

mass consumer culture. Cultural commodification helps in the marketing and selling of cultural items and artifacts of indigenous people in society. According to Greenwood (1979) when the behaviors, practices, customs, rituals, and expressions of indigenous local people are marketed and sold to the tourists it is called cultural commodification. When these rituals, expressions, practices, and behaviors are sold in the market for the price they lose their authenticity and become meaningless to their local people. Cultural tourism helps the commodification process and has its impacts on the economy and social life of the society. According to Tillotson (1988), cultural tourism in Britain contributes positively helping in the conservation of traditional heritage sites and boosting the economy. Whereas in India tourism has more negative effects on the heritage sites due to short term profits rather than long term planning and investments. Rahman (2012) Cultural tourism impacts the social life of the country and also it boosts and develops the economy of the country. Stebbins (1996) cultural tourism takes place due to the interests of tourists to explore and participate in new and deep cultural artifacts which may be tangible and intangible such as emotional, intellectual, psychological, or maybe aesthetic. Pigliasco (2010) states that the commodification helped the Fijian people to portray their fire walking traditional ceremony across their country which strengthened their social capital and they gained more respect for their culture. Whereas on the other hand according to Ziolkowski (2004) the process of cultural commodification created pathologies and rigidities among the subsystems of the country. According to Srisontisuk (2002), cultural commodification and tourism helped the Chiang Khan district in Thailand to sell their cultural artifacts to other parts of the world which helped to boost their economy.

According to Hussain (2010) in the mountains of the beautiful district of Chitral about 3000 or more Kalash people live who are different from the majority of Muslims of the district. These Kalash people have blue-eyed and are blond-haired and are completely anomaly in the country. Their ethnic origins are unknown but according to the Kalash people they belong to the family of Alexandre the Greats army. They follow multiple gods, are polytheists, and follow completely different folklore as compared to the neighboring Muslim majority. Hussain (2010) further states that the Kalash people are the indigenous people of the area and are one of the first people who came to this part of the country. In the past, these people were in majority in this area and according to them, they have remained in power for many years. According to Snoy (2008)36,

today those Kalash who have not become Muslims live in three remote valleys of southwestern Chitral i.e. Birir, Bumburet, and Rumbur. Moreover, he states that to the south of Urtsun valley, there is another group of Kalash, who still live in the closed settlement, speak their language, but are completely Islamicized. On their language, Snoy (2008:36) argues that they have their language, known as Kalashamun, a part of broader family of Dardic languages, which is spoken in each of the four valleys in different dialects.

Every year thousands of foreign and local tourists visit the Kalash valley to explore the unique culture of the Kalash people in the district Chitral in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. This study studies the consumption of the tangible and intangible Kalash cultural items by the tourists and the impact of cultural tourism on the indigenous people of the Kalash valley, particularly the people of Bumburet village. There is a debate among scholars regarding cultural commodification and cultural tourism and their impacts on the indigenous local communities. According to some scholars, cultural commodification and cultural tourism help to improve the quality of life of the local individuals by enabling them to sell their cultural and traditional products to the tourists to earn their income whereas some scholar argues that cultural commodification and cultural tourism negatively impacts local indigenous people through exposing those parts of the culture which are considered to be sacred and religious to the indigenous people. There is a shortage of literature regarding cultural commodification and cultural tourism in Pakistan particularly regarding Kalash people and their indigenous culture. So in this paper, we focused our study to examine the process of cultural commodification and cultural tourism in Kalash valley. In the light of the above discussion we have narrowed down our research topic to Cultural Commodification and Cultural Tourism in Kalash Valley: A Case Study of Bumburet Village, District Chitral and operationalized our research topic into the following research questions: What are the impacts of cultural tourism and cultural commodification? What are the risks and opportunities in instrumentalizing culture as economic good or resource?

## **2. Power, culture, and inequality: a review of literature**

According to Marx (Ed. 1951), people use culture to legitimize the class formation within a society due to economic conditions and inequalities.

Through false consciousness, culture acts as an instrument to inculcate social divisions and class formation in the minds of the people in the society as natural. Culture also facilitates the dominant class to keep the marginalized people away from resistance against them through the concept of ideology. Culture helps in naturalizing the nature of exploitative systems in the minds of the people by considering it as a natural thing so that protest may not occur against this inequality system of social class. Marx and Engles pointed out by analyzing the factors of production, the relationship between the labor and the product, and the surplus that culture helps to facilitate this exploitative system to move forward. This socially divided system helps to form such a culture in which the dominant people become able to justify that this inequality is natural. In this way, the structure of society is influenced by the dominant class. This structure further creates the working class and the capitalist classes and the marginalized class then considers this exploitation as natural and doesn't think they are exploited. According to the Marxist school of thought ideology and false consciousness are facilitated by culture and culture further is determined by the social structure of the people in the society.

### **3. Cultural industries**

According to Adorno (2001), cultural industries help to promote culture through mass media upon the masses. This imposition functions in such a way that masses don't recognize its imposition upon them through centralized governments in the capitalist society. Individuals don't determine culture for themselves rather cultural industries determine culture for the individual through capitalist mode of production and consumption by building consumer culture in the society. The modern capitalist society inculcates false needs in peoples' minds and shapes their preferences and tastes. The goods produced in capitalist societies are manufactured according to a plan through technology and also economic and administrative interventions.

### **4. Cultural commodification**

The local community participation in cultural industry facilitates them to commodify their cultural products and benefits them in sustaining these cultural items or products (Bunten, 2008). While doing so there is always

a risk to lose those cultural items or traditions which the local communities previously protected from the process of commodification. The tourism industry workers have to keep a balance between the requirements of the tourists and the local knowledge about these products as of the local people which plays a key role in the sale of these cultural products. In Poland, the process of commodification resulted in creating tensions and pathologies between the subsystems of the society which further caused market imbalance and inefficient democracy (Ziolkowski,2004). The cultural commodification of the local customs of the indigenous people has hurt their feelings which resulted in conflicts and the tourist spot was closed. Market forces have increased cultural commodification but these forces faced resistance from the local people in sharing their cultural items with them. Cultural commodification has resulted in the objectification of the local cultural heritage (Tabani, 2017). Cultural commodification pollutes and results in losing the authenticity of the previously untouched ethnic cultures. Local people try to develop a phony folk culture <sup>1</sup>to attract tourists which negatively affects the authenticity of the indigenous local culture (Yang, 2009). Cultural commodification impacts the stakeholders unevenly by benefiting the privileged ones more whereas adversely affecting the poor or marginalized section of the society. These uneven results make the capitalist class penetrate more the local culture through the consumption of various cultural items according to their taste and terms. In this way the local people device their cultural items according to the tourists in the market (Jackson, 1999).

## **5. Cultural Tourism**

Over a few decades, the production of cultural tourism in European countries increased dramatically due to more heritage sites in these countries. The increase in education level and income level has fostered the growth of cultural tourism in these countries (Richards, 1996). Through cultural industry by promoting tangible cultural artifacts such as clothes and intangible cultural artifacts such as rituals, customs, etc. the local people can be benefited (Mousavi, 2016). Cultural tourism comprises every aspect of human life therefore every aspect of tourism is called

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<sup>1</sup> Phony folk culture means artificially constructed cultural behaviors to attract tourists for financial gains

cultural tourism. Cultural tourism is the temporary and brief movement of people to new places, performing their activities, and staying there for a short period. According to Tiwari (2014) tourism impacts the local people both positively as well as negatively. In a positive sense, the local people earn by selling their cultural products, lands, building but on the other hand, it impacts the local people negatively by pushing them to work in those buildings and lands which were once their possessions.

## **6. Methodology**

A qualitative research strategy was adopted for this study as this study deals with the interpretation and understanding of cultural commodification and cultural tourism. A descriptive case study research design was used for the study keeping in view the research questions of the study. A descriptive case study was used as it facilitates the researchers to acquire accurately a particular characteristic of the group or process which is under study. It also determines the frequency of events or features that occur within a population. The techniques which are used to collect data are called research methods. Unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, rapport building, and participant observations were used to collect data from the respondents. Convenient sampling, purposive sampling, and stratified random sampling were used to collect data from various units of data collection UDCs. A total of 50 interviews were taken from the respondents of which 20 in-depth interviews were taken from UDC 1 ( Kalash people), 25 semi-structured interviews were taken from UDC 3 ( Tourists and shopkeepers), 5 in-depth interviews were taken from UDC 5 (Owner and personals of cultural institutions) whereas 2 focus group discussions were taken from the UDC 1 (Kalash people). The data collected through these UDCs were analyzed using thematic analysis and the tool used for the analysis was framework analysis. All the six steps involved in the thematic analysis were followed in generating themes.

## **7. Privacy breaching, disturbance, and pollution: impacts of cultural tourism**

According to the Kalash people they face the problem of privacy breaching, disturbances, and pollution when huge no of tourists come to the area. The design of the houses of the Kalash people is different from

the design of Muslim houses in the Chitral district and their house doesn't have a boundary wall around them. Due to the lack of boundary wall, anyone can go inside of their houses which causes the problem of secrecy. A respondent said that;

*“We face some problems as some people come directly to our houses without asking ourselves. We have very small houses where we live collectively and we face secrecy problems. They take pictures whenever they see us take selfies and disturb us. we didn't wear dupatta but due to the tourists, we wear them to avoid photographs by them. In this way to avoid these things, we are compelled to cover our face and upper part of our body.”*

The Kalash people are very much disturbed by the irresponsible behavior of the tourists which causes the problem of disturbance, pollution, and secrecy issues for the local community not respecting local norms and traditions. Another respondent said that;

*“We are very much disturbed by these tourists and their behaviors. Our houses don't have any boundary walls due to which they come directly insight our houses without any permission. We have freedom in our religion but it doesn't mean that we are free for everyone, some of us get benefits by promoting these religious activities for money but a majority of us are disturbed.”*

As the Kalash people rely on subsistence farming and women usually work in the field performing agricultural works the tourists also disturb their everyday field works in the field by going there to meet them and for the sake of taking photographs of them. One of the respondents said that;

*“Our females cannot go to the fields due to these tourists because the tourists follow them whenever they see women and try to take pictures and try to talk to them. With all these things our daily work is disturbed in the fields we heavily rely on these subsistence crops for our survival.”*

So the Kalash people instead of gaining benefits from the tourists face the problems of secrecy, disturbance, and pollution. According to them some

tourists also try to flirt with women and girls. Another respondent said that;

*“They try to talk to our daughters and try to flirt with them. If they come and sit at any place and see our culture like good people we don't have any problem with them but if they come and try to flirt with us then this is not acceptable to us.”*

## **8. Violation of sacred places and unlawfulness**

Kalash culture and religion are based on the concept of purity and impurity. In Kalash culture, women are associated with impurity and there are certain religious places where women cannot go and vice versa there are places where men cannot such as the Bashaleni <sup>2</sup> where men are not allowed to go. According to them when these principles are violated then there come disasters in the village in the form of floods, earthquakes, etc. Due to a high number of tourists in the area then these sacred places are violated which is a great concern for the local people. A respondent said that;

*“They should know about our culture before they come because our culture is based on the concept of purity and impurity and when these are violated then there is a cultural and religious loss for us. There is Bashaleni where men are not allowed and when men go there will be a violation and similarly, there are alters where women are strictly prohibited but the tourist women go there which causes issues for us.”*

The tourists also visit their religious places such as altars, temples, and graveyards violate their norms and customs and don't respect their rituals. Another respondent showed his concern and said that;

*“Our tangible cultural artifacts such as graveyards, alters and temples are treated as an ordinary thing and people don't respect them. For example, a medical student came here and he lived inside the graveyard alongside the skeleton of someone in an open coffin. People mix our tangible items and disturb them they should not touch them.”*

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<sup>2</sup> A house where Kalasha people keep their women during the last stages of pregnancy and menstruation.



The concept of purity and impurity is not only for the local Kalash people but for all the women whether they are a tourist or local people. But the tourist women visit their sacred places which hurts the sentiments of the local people. One of the respondents said that;

*“Besides that, we have such religious sacred places where women are not allowed to go but the tourist women go to these places due to which the secrecy is not maintained and it causes impurity to the places and we get difficulties. We also go to other places in the country but don't hurt any local people similarly people should not harm us.”*

### **9. Perceived as Kafir<sup>3</sup> or exotic**

According to the Kalash people, most of the tourists come there with a perception that these people are non-believers, and there will be more freedom in the valley for them. A respondent said that;

*“When people come here they come here with their concept of perceiving us Kafir or non-believers and they believe that there are no rules and regulations here and they can do anything they want and they consider us ignorant and they believe that there is no concept of good or bad in the community. By considering us non-believer or Kafir who ever come here they preaching us and they try to become God for us.”* means

According to them most of the people come to the valley not for traveling but they go there with a negative concept. They consider it as a place where they can get women and wine and they can enjoy. Because of this perception, they treat the women as free and vulgar which is wrong. One of the respondents said that;

*“During Eid days I was sitting here in front of my guest house with my colleagues one old man with a bear came in without any*

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<sup>3</sup> Literally “Kafir” is a person who refuses to agree, or from Islamic perspective this term refers to as a non-believer, meaning a person who does not believe in the oneness of God.

*permission and said to me to talk to him. I said to him uncle I call you uncle because you are my father's age and I am amazed how are you talking to me in front of my colleagues. These are my colleagues and I know them who are you I don't know you and then you are trying to flirt shame on you. We are very much disturbed by these tourists and their behaviors.”*

According to them, there are good and bad people in every culture. Similarly, there are also bad people in Kalash culture as well who are involved in alcohol production and other immoral activities. One cannot judge the entire culture based on these people. A respondent said that;

*“Due to some people who are engaged in alcohol producing and taking people to their houses the rest of the community is disgraced and faces problems. They use alcohol as a means of income for them and the outsiders go to these houses. The tourists who come here consider that all the Kalash people are like them and they believe that they can go to every Kalash house. Due to all these things the whole Kalash community faces problems.”*

People are misguided that there are free wines and women in Kalash valley and they come in the valley having this concept in their mind about them. Most of the guides available to the local tourists are non-Kalash guides who don't or have little knowledge about the Kalash people and they miss guiding the local tourists coming from different parts of the country. Another respondent said that;

*“Tourists are misguided and they come with negative thoughts. These are done by no other than our neighbors but when the tourists come here and see the reality then they come to us say sorry to us”.*

## **10. Social pressure and change in cultural activities**

Kalash culture and religion are based on oral traditions and customs, and they don't have any religious book. These people are only living in three small valleys surrounded by a non-Kalash community. They are the endangered tribes and their number is decreasing with time. These people

due to social pressure have amended their culture and religion to cope with it. One of the respondents said;

*"Many cultural rituals have been cut off in the past and many cultural rituals are also being cut off nowadays. This is risky for the concept of our culture as Kalash culture is a whole way of life. If the half code of conduct is lost, then the remaining code of conduct will seem weird and you will try to leave the remaining part quickly. If the whole way of life is not present and half of the ingredients of the way of life are missing then it will become difficult to understand it and in this way, the remaining way of life will make you nervous you will ultimately say quit it yaar(friend). This is the present situation of our culture. If in future steps are not taken, then the situation will be worse for our culture."*

The Kalash people have been in political power in the region in the past and according to them they had their culture and religion in documented form but after their rule ended they lost their documented material because they remained a slave for 800 years. According to Kalash people, their number is decreasing whereas the surrounding community is increasing day by day. One of the respondents said that;

*"Due to some social pressures, there are minor changes made to our culture. Our surrounding community is growing day by day whereas we are decreasing and they exert pressure on us such as in school there is pressure, in the market, there is a pressure whenever you go you have to undergo social pressure. It is a big challenge for us to maintain our culture under this social pressure and if we have maintained it which we have then it is a big deal."*

## **11. Religious rituals "Not for Sale"**

Kalash culture and religion are full of cultural and religious rituals which take place throughout the year based on four seasons. According to them these rituals which they perform during their festivals are basically for them. As these are religious and are for the specific people of the valley therefore they cannot be performed at other places than their sacred places. One of the respondents said that;

*“Our rituals and cultural dances are not for stage performance there should not be stage performance here and also in some other place. If you want to see our dance, then come here at the festival time and see it. These dances are not for you these are for us we don't like to use us and perform these at other places. When these less educated or uneducated people perform dances somewhere else then they are exposed to other threats. This will cause damage to our religion or culture.”*

Similarly, another respondent said that;

*“We don't celebrate our festivals for the tourists we don't invite them. They come their own we have our religious festivals we are not happy from the tourists they can come and go but they should respect our religion and culture. Our festivals are decreasing due to tourism and security reason. We are not in favor of advertising our religious rituals.”*

According to the Kalash people, the stage performance of their culture poses a great threat to their culture and they feel difficulty and uneasy when there are many people during their cultural and religious festivals. Another respondent said that;

*"The cultural dances performed in front of outsiders or other people pose a great threat to our culture and religion. Because people don't like to see their families dancing in front of other people in such great numbers with everyone trying to get a picture with them, trying to flirt with them. Due to this thing, people are not allowing their females to participate in our cultural and religious festivals which is a great threat for our culture to survive.”*

Tabani (2017) revealed that the commodification of the customs of the local people has hurt their sentiments. As a result, the tourist spot of the volcano was closed for the tourists which resulted in several conflicts for almost nine months. The locals concluded that their customs do not need money. Similar nature of tensions was also evident in the Kalash Valley

among the local people regarding the impacts of cultural commodification and cultural tourism in the area.

## **12. Lack of communal economic benefits**

The benefits of the tourists and tourism are mostly obtained by the outsiders in the form of having hotels and transport vehicles. The Kalash community has only four hotels here whereas the other 90% of hotels are owned by the outside community similar position is in transport. Benefits are obtained by outsiders mainly whereas the locals are left with the negative consequences only. Those drivers who take the tourist to the village negatively brief them about the Kalash people. One of the respondents said that;

*“We Kalash people don’t have benefits from them the benefits are to the Kho people<sup>4</sup> or the Muslim people.”*

Economic benefits are obtained by the people engaged in business activities like hoteling and restaurants and also the local shopkeepers. But maximum benefits are obtained by the outsiders and the government. Only 20% of people get benefits while the rest of the 80% of people remain disadvantaged rather they get difficulties and problems. A respondent said that;

*“There are benefits when some big people come in the valley. Nowadays there is money involved in Chelim Josht, Chitermas and Uchal<sup>5</sup> and have separate funds for all these. Those people who are involved and are in front get benefits and get money whereas the poor people are not considered. Actually, this money is for the whole community but who cares for the poor people nobody cares. The leaders who are in front take benefits whereas the majority of the benefits go for the Muslims because a majority of the hotels are of Muslims, they have motors. Benefits are obtained by them what benefits we obtain nothing. But our neighbors are jealous with us due to these tourists we are not asking them to come here for us*

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<sup>4</sup> Kho people are the Muslim majority people living in district Chitral, Pakistan

<sup>5</sup> Chilem Josht, Chittermas, and Uchal are the cultural and religious festivals of the Kalash community.

*they come on their own and if they come then you people obtain the benefits.”*

The economic benefits are obtained by those who are engaged in business or who are involved in the management of these festivals which take place in the valley while a majority of the Kalash community remain less benefited.

Jackson (1999) argued that the process of cultural commodification does not take place evenly in society. Those people who are advantaged and possess capital can afford the process of commodification while for the disadvantaged or the poor people this process has negative effects. This process of cultural commodification enables the capitalists and outsiders to penetrate the local cultures on their own terms by consuming different cultural products. In this way, the tourists assert their power over the locals by consuming their culture. Similarly, the capitalist class in the Kalash valley exploits the local Kalash people by penetrating deep into their culture and getting maximum benefits through the sale of the tangible and intangible cultural products of the Kalash community.

### **13. Lack of performativity of religious rituals as a result of religio-cultural tourism**

Kalash culture is full of religious and cultural rituals which take place throughout a calendar year but according to the Kalash people, the performing of their cultural rituals has decreased over the last three decades due to various reasons. These reasons include security situations, cross-border threats, increase in non-community members, converting of Kalash people, modernization, poverty, etc. A resident said that;

*“People can come in huge number we don't have any problem if they follow the roles and be responsible but if they show irresponsibility as they do these days our people don't send their families to perform our cultural festivals. Along with our religious rituals, they start to dance or follow us they don't understand that we are performing a religious ritual.”*

A huge number of tourists in the valley compels the local population to abandon their females to participate in their festivals which hurt their

religious sentiments and also cause loss to their culture. Another respondent said that;

*“In the past, there were fewer people in our valleys and there were also fewer outsiders due to which we were relaxed to perform our cultural and religious rituals and there was full participation but now there are thousands of individuals who come here and in their presence, it becomes difficult to participate in our festivals and we limit our self.”*

Similarly, another respondent said that;

*“People come here in huge no and they come to talk to us directly for which our husbands and brothers and fathers instead of telling them they became angry upon us and limit our participation in these festivals.”*

#### **14. Objectification of culture**

The presence of a significant number of tourists and their irresponsible behavior makes the Kalash people feel like objects when they are performing rituals in their festival. People treat them as objects gazing at them as if they were not from this planet. This behavior of the tourists has compelled the Kalash to participate less in their cultural and religious rituals. A respondent said that;

*“We don't feel easy to carry our religious rituals in the presence of other people looking at you and sometimes they try to mix with us. You are encircled in a ring and are gazed at by many people like an object we condemn this before and we will condemn this in the future as well. The irresponsible behavior of tourists and people discourages us to perform our cultural rituals which ultimately damage our religion and culture.”*

Similarly, another respondent said that;

*“In Chelim Joshi festival we make noises and sing and dance which is a religious ritual it is not done for entertainment purpose*

*whereas it is believed by the outsiders that everyone can go there and take the hand of women and marry her it is not like that and journalists also show this in the print and electronic media which ultimately build a narrative about us in the minds of the people that there can be everyone and we can marry them and they come here with that frame of mind. Print media especially those who write in Urdu are propagating negatively about our community.”*

It is also evident from the study of Tillotson (1988) that cultural tourism benefits economies by conserving traditional tourist sites and making them museums and hotels to attract tourists in the United Kingdom whereas the negative aspects of tourism were more prominent in India where there were known no conservation of the old traditional building sites and the tourists involved in the commodification were looking for short-term profits. It is also evident from the field that tourism in Kalash valley is based on the short-term profits motto and the stakeholders are not paying attention to long-term investment. Thus it also confirms the local people face the negative impacts of cultural tourism than its positive impacts.

## **15. Security reasons and decrease in cultural rituals**

Kalash culture is full of cultural and religious rituals which take place continuously during a calendar year. But in the last few decades, the Kalash religious and cultural rituals have been shortened or decreased due to worse security situations in the nearby areas of Nuristan<sup>6</sup> Afghanistan. In the past, our cultural or religious rituals used to occur starting from July and they used to continue at the end of August but when the terrorist activities spread the adjacent region to us then these rituals were reduced and in this way, certain rituals were abolished or limited. A respondent said that;

*“Due to security conditions, there is an adverse effect on our culture, for example, we had a festival called ragnet<sup>7</sup> which means dancing at night which was used to be performed in July and August. But now we don't perform this festival due to the fear that the situation may not become difficult for us because we have received threats from the terrorists across the borders. We are not*

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<sup>6</sup> Nuristan is the adjacent province of Afghanistan to the Kalash valley.

<sup>7</sup> Ragnet was a festival which was used to be performed in the past by Kalash people.



*performing it anymore so when you do not perform it the future generations will not be able to know about it but we hope for the best. But if you don't let your offspring about your religion and culture then they will not know about it.”*

The Kalash community is surrounded by non-Kalash communities which are growing day by day whereas the Kalash people are decreasing due to various reasons. This increase in outsiders in the valley increases intolerance among the non- Kalash community regarding the various religious and cultural activities and their performance during the calendar year. The Kalash people have cut off their various rituals and now they are not performing them in the festivals. Another respondent said that;

*“Our main festivals are the same as our ancestors performed them but some of our rituals are limited I remember when I was in fifth class our parents performed the ragnet festival as that time there was no terrorism here in the valley. There were no such issues of Taliban and also there were fewer outside people in the valley. But nowadays there are issues of security they say that there is this threat that threat etc. and also there are many tourists in our festivals due to which it becomes difficult to go there and perform.”*

The Kalash people have been threatened in the past by the Taliban<sup>8</sup> from the cross border area of the Nuristan region which is part of Afghan province. They have taken the cattle and animals of the Kalash people and they have killed shepherds in the past. According to Kalash people in 2016, they have killed two shepherds from the Kalash community and took cattle with them.

## **16. Nostalgia and ritual performance**

As compared to the past people are reluctant to allow their family members particularly women to participate in their cultural and religious festivals. According to them in the past, their cultural or religious rituals were being celebrated in a more relaxed way, and the whole community used to be part of the festivals but nowadays people are not allowing their

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<sup>8</sup> An extremist religious group of the Afghanistan region.

family members to participate in the festivals due to the huge no of outsiders. A respondent said that;

*“In the past, all of our females used to take part in our religious rituals due to fewer tourists and were relaxed to perform our rituals. In the past, fewer people or no people were coming to our place and festivals and we had no issues of performing our festivals but nowadays due to fixing these festival days’ huge no of visitors come due to which we come across difficulties in performing our rituals.”*

Modernization has also impacted the Kalash cultural and religious rituals. People in this fast life are unable to take time for these festivals which takes place during a whole year. Young members of the community try to introduce new moves by watching television stars. Another respondent said;

*“In the past, our dances were performed with great zeal but now women watch TV and less participate, and if they participate they perform like these Panjabi women in the television and try to introduce new things or moves. Our original dance is by rising our hands which we call bazum<sup>9</sup> but the young ones try to move their hands in a low direction. We used t avoid other people and dancing in front of them but now people dance for money. We were forced to perform in the past by the police personnel.”*

Similarly, another respondent said that in the past we used to have our religious and cultural dances for the whole year but now we face fear because we are becoming less and less and also our culture is deteriorating and our festivals are vanishing (It may also be due to modern world where people have less time and people have other things to do).

Due to the commodification of cultural and religious rituals many Kalash men have limited the participation of their women in performing their rituals in front of many tourists. It is also evident from the study of Chhabra (2010) which showed that cultural commodification jeopardizes cultural traditions and social relationships. The host community uses cultural rituals and commodifies them to earn economic benefits.

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<sup>9</sup> The musical program of Kalash people.

## **17. Economic gains for some and losses for others**

According to the local people the maximum benefits of tourism and development are obtained by the neighboring communities. Very small no of the local people get benefit and are those people who have some business or are involved in the management of their mega festivals which involve money. A respondent said that;

*“Hotels are theirs, transport is theirs, fruits and vegetables are theirs, chickens are provided by them what benefits we are getting. They come here on our names but benefits are to the other people. "when huge no of tourists come here there will be change inside our community our women and young ones try to copy them try to be like them they sit like them move like them and this will change our behavior and change may occur. People buy all these dresses in the market. I don't sell rather I just make these things for our use only. People sell them for thousands of rupees whoever made them they get money but we are engaged with our own field works and don't have any time.”*

For the Kalash people benefits are in the form of money earned by selling their cultural items whereas for the neighboring communities benefits are in the form of hotels, transport, and guide. So most of the benefits are obtained by the outside communities instead of the local community. A respondent said that;

*“They come here and buy our items and we get the benefit not only us get the benefit rather it is good for the whole country Pakistan. We Kalash acts as an asset for the country as these people come here to see us. But not all of us get benefits some of us get benefits and they obtain money from the funds for the festivals whereas most of us are not involved and don't know about that money involved in the festivals. Few people here and some in the Chitral district take the money while giving little to some of our people as well. But overall you can say that something giving to us in some form.”*

The majority of benefits are obtained by the hotel owners and the shopkeepers and also to the whole valley in the form of transport and guiding. It was evident from the field that the majority of economic benefits were obtained by a small number of both local and outside communities whereas the majority of the local Kalash people were obtaining nothing except negative benefits from the tourists. Jackson (1999) also argued that the process of cultural commodification does not take place evenly in society. Those people who are advantaged and possess capital can afford the process of commodification while for the disadvantaged or the poor people this process has negative effects. This process of cultural commodification enables the capitalists and outsiders to penetrate the local cultures on their terms by consuming different cultural products. In this way, the tourists assert their power over the locals by consuming their culture.

### **18. Economic benefits for capitalists**

There are many benefits of tourists for the community and for the people who are engaged in shops, hotels, transport, and guidance. People get monetary benefits by engaging themselves in some activities. According to some of the Kalash, people tourism brings development for the whole community as there is no other source of livelihood opportunities in the valley. People sell their cultural items such as cultural dresses and other items and earn their living. A respondent said that;

*“People get many benefits from tourists as you know our people are very weak financially and through these tourists, they manage to earn some financial benefits. People get many financial benefits by selling their handy crafts and other cultural products and then spending them for the education of their children in the past there used to be only one simple cap in our cultural dress but now due to modern world and availability of materials there are differently colored and designed and matching caps now available. I think it is good for us because to update our but should focus on our core values as well.”*

The Kalash people perceive them as an asset for the whole county due to which national and international tourists are attracted to come to Pakistan

and leave here for months. Tourism also helps to generate economic activities in the valley during their main festivals which continue almost during the whole year. One of the locals said that;

*“There are a lot of benefits not only for us but for the whole country. When people come here from different countries from Europe and other places then the whole country is benefited because didn't come directly to here they come in Islamabad and other cities and stays there in hotels and use transport to come here and in this way the whole country is benefited.”*

Similarly, another respondent said that;

*“There are many benefits of these tourists for us. When they come here every one of us gets benefits for example shopkeepers like me sell their things, people who have vehicles they get benefits for them, local guides earn some money and the whole Chitral gets benefits instead the whole country is benefited from the tourists.”*

Things are sold and shopkeepers earn profit in this way there are benefits for them. People don't have enough land for the cultivations of crops and people earn their living by selling these products. Those who have vehicles, who are guided, and also those who have hotels make profits and earn their living. Whereas the majority of the locals remain marginalized and remain exploitative. A respondent said that;

*“People come to here in huge no due to which they have to stay in hotels and consume different things including cultural items and tara<sup>10</sup> for enjoyment which gives benefits to the people. Many people produce cultural dresses, cupusi, shoshot<sup>11</sup>, pati<sup>12</sup>, peran<sup>13</sup>, purses and shemano<sup>14</sup> which are purchased by the tourists. Similarly, many people produce Tara which they sell and earn*

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<sup>10</sup> Tara is a Locally made alcohol used to serve guests by the Kalash people.

<sup>11</sup> Cupesi and Shoshot are locally made cultural headdresses of the Kalash people.

<sup>12</sup> Pati is a traditional belt made by the Kalash people.

<sup>13</sup> Peran is a traditional hand-made dress of the Kalash people.

<sup>14</sup> Shemano is a handmade raw string worn by Kalash people.

*huge money. Some have hotels and they also earn money in this way. I earn 22000 rupees during only two days in my shop. So there is a lot of benefit for us.”*

Another respondent said that;

*“There are many benefits because many foreigners come here, many officers come here due to which there benefits for the shops for the hotels and the people having vehicles. We people also get benefit by selling our cupesi, shoshot, and other cultural items and earn money and we all get benefits. We should feel good for others.”*

The extract above shows the voices of those individuals of the Kalash people who are engaged in business activities through the production and selling of Kalash cultural goods in the market. They are getting the economic benefits through cultural commodification but they are less in number and the majority of the community remains unbenefited. Middlemen from the surrounding non Kalash communities also obtain the benefits of commodification. Wallace (2009) explains that many communities in the world try to make economic benefits and increase their income through cultural commodification. It is also evident that such business can only be sustainable and beneficial for the local communities only if the local communities are involved in the process and control of the production of these cultural products.

## **19. Conclusions**

Cultural commodification impacts local communities both positively and negatively. In positive terms, it helps the local communities to sell their cultural items such as cultural dresses (*shoshot, peran, shemano, shawai, khapol*<sup>15</sup> etc.) to tourists and earn their incomes whereas in negative terms it results in generating conflicts between the subsystems of the communities by reaching those parts of the culture which were not previously commodified and have some sacred values for the local people. The impact of cultural commodification and cultural tourism in Kalash Valley shows that the local people experience the negative impacts of

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<sup>15</sup> Khapol is a cultural cap worn by Kalash and the local Chitrali people.

cultural commodification and cultural tourism. The local people face the problems of 'privacy breaching, disturbance and pollution, violation of sacred places and unlawfulness, perceived as *kafir* (non-believers), social pressure and change in cultural activities, lack of communal economic benefits, and objectification of culture' whereas a minority of capitalist people get positive benefits by selling the cultural items of the Kalash people to the tourists.

### **Editorial Note**

It is unique to the people of Kalash that after accepting Islam they do not participate in their traditional rituals, not continuing the dress as they do before, even prefer to speak Khowar. This is different than other Muslim Cultures of South Asia. However, several communities in this mountainous area still continue their customs beside Islamic traditions.

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