

CHEEGHA

The Call

GHULAM QADIR KHAN DAUR



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The Call
from Waziristan, the last outpost

by

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l'Aleph

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CHEEGHA - The Call from Waziristan, the last outpost

Published by l'Aleph - Sweden

www.l-aleph.com

ISBN 978-91-87751-95-0

l'Aleph is a Wisehouse Imprint.

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www.thetribaltimes.com

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www.wisehouse-publishing.com

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Dedicated to Morr and Baba without whose sacrifice I would never have been able to read or write. To the brave and chivalrous tribes whose paradise was burnt to ashes by those known to them as friends.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Had it not been for the encouragement and appreciation from my dear friend Nazir I might have never attempted to write the book and without acknowledgment from Dr Akbar S Ahmed I might have abandoned it midway. They strengthened my resolve to introduce my land and people to the world. I thank them from the bottom of my heart for all their support and inspiration to write the truth fearlessly.

I also thank Afrasiab Khattak who was always there to share his knowledge and experience and from whom I learned much. My appreciations for Saif Usmani, Fayyaz Khan and Dr. Sam Vaseghi for the logistic support and Habib Afridi for helping in designing the cover page.

My brother Dr. Afzal was always there to read, appreciate and share experiences. My daughter Sonia read every page of the book and inspired me to write frankly especially about tribal women, thank you both. Though they did not contribute towards the book, I thank my son Hamza, brother Wahab and my wife for bearing with me while I was on the book.

FOREWORD

WAZIRISTAN REMAINS A MYSTERY AND A PUZZLE FOR most of the world. Reports of violence and terrorism are frequently associated with its name. Rumors and stories associate Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and other al Qaeda leaders with this area. For people living here, life has become a hell of uncertainty. A drone strike could kill them or their family members one day, a suicide bomber the next or action by the Pakistan army the day after. Is this all there is to Waziristan?

Waziristan has always had a special place in history. Its formidable tribes - the Wazir and the Mahsud - and its striking geographical features have added to its mystique. Waziristan is divided into North Waziristan Agency and South Waziristan Agency. Waziristan itself is named after the Wazir tribe, which is the most populous in the region. This was the area famous in history for having challenged every empire that attempted to control it - whether the Mughals or the British. At one stage during the British Raj, there were as many troops in Waziristan as the rest of the British Indian Empire. Between the two world wars in a classic ambush still referred to in military manuals, the Mahsud wiped out an entire British brigade.

Ghulam Qadir Khan, who is a wazir, sets out to show us the true face of Waziristan. He takes us to the heart of this society. We meet his family and those living in his village Darpa Khel in North Waziristan Agency. We become familiar with individuals. We meet and fall in love with members of his family, like his venerable father. We hear charming stories of family life. "My family is ordinary and wonderful," the author tells us, "and we are doing our best to be men like our fathers, to live with honor and pride. It's not only the immediate family that is loving and caring but even uncles and aunts are as good and when it comes to owning and protecting, especially the weak, the whole Khel becomes one big family."

We are also introduced to the essential features of tribal society: respect for elders and ancestors, the laws that govern the code of honor - the hospitality, revenge, dignity and the Cheegha, or the call. We come across the marvelous proverbs of this area, which reflect the wisdom and good common sense of the ages. Ghulam Qadir demands - rightly—reforms such as the archaic system of administration and rejects - again, rightly - the violence that is so widespread in the area.

The author is ideally placed to write on Waziristan. He is that rare tribesman from this area who is writing about his own people. Because Ghulam Qadir combines scholarship and experience in the field as an administrator, he is a trustworthy guide. Educated at some of the finest institutions of Pakistan - Lawrence College, Murree, and Edwards College, Peshawar - Ghulam Qadir joined the civil service of Pakistan in 1984. He has worked in the field as Deputy Commissioner and Political Agent in the Tribal Areas. In more senior postings, he has been in charge of the Tribal Areas in the planning department, and has also held the post of Secretary of Law and Order for the Tribal Areas. In addition, Ghulam Qadir is a passionate advocate for tribal people. He has founded the "Tribal Times", a weekly web magazine, and is Chairman of the Society for the Protection of Rights of Tribes.

This is not the first book on Waziristan. The area has generated books and manuscripts over the last century. Almost all these accounts have been written by civil or military officers. Some of the authors, like Sir Evelyn Howell and Sir Olaf Caroe have left behind valuable accounts, in which they reflect their affection for the tribes of Waziristan. I too am privileged to be in the company of those officers who have served and written about the area in *Resistance and Control in Pakistan* (2004 revised edition). Because of my fascination with Waziristan, when I was posted as Political Agent South Waziristan Agency, three decades ago, I have continued to remain interested in the developments in and around it. I still recall the people and places of Waziristan with a great deal of warmth. In my heart, I will always carry admiration and respect for the courage, honor, and dignity I saw in so many of the people of Waziristan. Hearing about the terrible challenges the people there face today therefore I cannot help but be dismayed.

However, unlike the previous authors, Ghulam Qadir is the only one from the area itself. What gives 'Cheegha, The Call-from Waziristan, the last outpost' its special strength is Ghulam Qadir's passion for his subject. He is opening his heart to us. This is a *crie-de-coeur*; he loves his land and his people passionately, and he is in anguish at their condition. Sections are titled "Forgotten Forever" and "Paradise Destroyed."

The book is a powerful plea to the world: Please treat us like ordinary human beings who feel pain and joy and fear just like you. We too have dreams, and we too love our families. Let me cite the concluding lines of the book:

"The story that I tell will reach every corner of the world, it will inform all humanity of our plight, a Cheegha for all those who understand the ways of the fathers, Cheegha is the calling, if you understand.

Everyone knows what they are supposed to do when there is Cheegha, so, do what you should, once you know my story, be part of the Cheegha, stay united and like always, together we will defeat the foe no matter how strong. Once the call is heard it won't be long, we will be marching back to our village, to

rebuild our Paradise.

I am out on a mission, not to avenge but to stop more bloodshed, to get for my people what is rightfully theirs. To resolve the issues of militancy through means other than killing, there shall be no more killings, for those who perpetuate destruction in the name of peace are enemies of peace and humanity. No one can bring peace through war.”

Ghulam Qadir has done a great service not only to Waziristan, but to all those who seek peace and harmony in our troubled world. If you wish to remove the veil of misunderstanding and obfuscation that hangs over Waziristan, read this book carefully. It will change the way you look at Waziristan.

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October 2011

PREFACE

CHEEGHA, THE CALL FROM WAZIRISTAN, THE LAST OUTPOST is about the tribal areas of Pakistan, separating myth from reality. With 27220sq km area and six million population, tribal areas share a long border with Afghanistan and many tribes live astride the border. There is so much disinformation about the tribal areas and no one seems to be looking in the right place.

I was asked by a friend from UK to send him a book on Pukhtun/ Afghan culture. To my utter surprise I couldn't find anything on the tribes of the hills. When asked about FCR (Frontier Crimes Regulations), US secretary of State, Hillary Clinton admitted she was ignorant about the law. I met a US army General at a dinner given by Lyn Tracy, then U.S. Council General in Peshawar, during discussion, I was surprised at the gaps in knowledge of the General about Khassadars, Levies and other administrative tools of the tribal areas. People responsible for taking decisions effecting millions are so uninformed about the ground realities.

There is little firsthand account of any tribal or even Pukhtun society after Sir Olaf Caroe, Evelyn Howell, James Spain and a few others. The effort put in by these scholars is appreciable but then their work has shortcomings. They saw tribal society from the position of administrators and research scholars. Their positions influenced decisions and situations; secondly, they were not exposed to the masses, to know the ground realities. Professor Akbar S Ahmed, an authority on Waziristan, saw the tribal areas as an administrator and lived among the Mohmands as a research scholar. But then he wasn't afraid of the FCR.

All books on Pukhtuns are practically about Taliban and Militancy, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and have been put together as research work by non-Pukhtuns, mostly in Afghanistan. None visited the tribal areas, the actual source of militancy. All writings on tribal areas are from hearsay and inferences drawn from events. Almost all books are written by foreigners who only talk of war and chivalry. I have tried to take the reader into tribal life, to live and talk to a poor and proud people and to know the softer side of tribal's life.

Recognizing the huge gaps in knowing the Pathan tribes, I have introduced the tribesmen and defined the instruments that regulate tribal life. I have given an insight into how tribesmen conduct their affairs and survive in such a harsh and hostile environment. By introducing their way of life, I have made the tribesmen accessible

to the world. The noblest of people, they are humorous, proud, brave, and trust worthy.

Before getting to the specifics we need to identify the fundamentals of Pukhtunwali referred to as, Nang (honor), Jaba (word), Tura (courage) and Pukhto (integrity) and spoken of whenever the Pukhtuns are discussed. These fundamentals cannot be measured in real terms and are accepted relatively. The underline outcome of all the fundamentals in play is the preservation of the vitals, Life, Rawaj, Freedom and Pride of the Pukhtun, as an individual, a family and as a tribe. In a Pukhtun society these are most important and all the instruments aim at achieving and preserving them.

I have talked of the instruments of administration which are specific and measureable, by which tribesmen manage their day-to-day affairs, including dispute resolution mechanism, share of each tribe, peace keeping and safety nets for protecting and preserving the weak. Some of them are: Nikkat (Share of The Fore Fathers), Badal (Revenge), Tiga (Limited Cease Fire), Nanawatey (Unconditional Surrender), Panah (Asylum), Milmastia (Hospitality), Maraka and Jirga (parleys and decision making), Cheegha (The Call), Barampta (Surety) and Badragga (Protection). I have narrated events to elaborate the instruments in play, enabling us understand tribal traditions and have an insight into how the tribesmen think and act.

I have introduced my beautiful village, our activities as children, the games we played, the festivals and ceremonies we had, the love and goodness we shared, the folk songs and stories and the dance and dhole, so that the world knows how we live. The reader is pleasantly surprised to know the softer side of tribal life, feeling the throb of his heart, knowing his dreams and aspirations, his love and care, his songs and music. He thought tribesmen talked to their children only of war and chivalry, death and glory, honor and pride, of strange morality and stranger beliefs. By explaining his relations with his kinsmen (even Hindus), his women and his rifle I have tried to make tribesmen as lovable and acceptable to the reader as they, in all fairness, should be.

Then, the Russians invaded Afghanistan after which life in this part of the world changed forever. War was imposed on us for no fault of ours; we never harmed or had enmity with anyone. For the last thirty years, we are in war. Large amounts of funds were pumped in for the Mujahideen, arms, ammunition, criminals and terrorists; scum of the earth was off loaded on our land. The international community in connivance with our leadership converted our innocent children into monsters, filled with hate and rage against everyone, everywhere. They converted anyone who could carry a gun into a mercenary, this was the Afghan Jihad and the whole free world was a party to it. Once their objectives were achieved the free world carelessly walked away.

We were betrayed and our Paradise along with our dreams and aspirations was burnt to ashes. Now the Russians have left, the US and NATO troops are in

Afghanistan since 9/11. Without going into the politics of who did what and why, I have detailed how the war on terror affected our lives, lives of common people. My peaceful village, my Paradise, Darpa Khel and our peaceful lives have been devastated by the War on terror while Taliban, Al-Qaida, Pakistan army and NATO forces have all contributed to our miseries. Faceless enemies are supporting the terrorist. They are getting funds, equipment and trainings and no one has been able to stop their access.

The situation in the village got bad; perforce we had to leave. Baba and Morr were completely devastated leaving the village and compared their exit to the exodus of Hindus. Our Hindu kinsmen left Waziristan at the time of partition and after the 1965 war, first to let us have a Muslim homeland and then out of fear of annihilation. We are no better Muslims today but our kinsmen are gone. Waziristan is condemned to repeat history.

Rather than have a dull and dreary academic book I have narrated my experiences to make it an interesting reading. It's a story of a lifestyle full of dhole and dance, of support and care and chivalry and honor, that of my women and children and family and friends. How peaceful and happy we were till war was imposed on us. Our way of life was shattered, we have been stripped of our pride and human dignity and we have been robbed of the two things we lived for, our culture and religion. People of Waziristan have suffered the most yet they are wrongly blamed.

Our culture which evolved over thousands of years is being systematically replaced by Arab Bedouin culture in the name of Islam. This book is a lone voice against the threat to the tribal way of life, the ways of the fathers.

Pukhtunwali cries for help before extinction, from the last outpost, Waziristan. Chagha in ordinary Pashto means a scream, a request for help by a victim in pain. Cheegha is a cry of support and reassurance from well-wishers, a swift and significant response by the Khel's war party, a first responder. While pursuing the perpetrator every individual in the Cheegha is yelling till the individual shrieks become a mighty roar, a Cheegha, The Call.

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PART I

INTRODUCTION LAND AND PEOPLE

CHAPTER 1

LAND OF THE FATHERS

Firing at Amin Piquet

IT WAS A LATE OCTOBER EVENING IN DARPA KHEL; THE SUN was sinking behind the parched and lifeless, barren and brown hills of Waziristan. The days were dull, dry and dusty; a time when children and grownups get cough and flu. The weather is changing and sickness is expected this time of the year like an annual ritual. Evenings are gloomy for no reason. The crimson evening sky indicated hours of loneliness, despair and longing.

Militants fired on Amin piquet, manned by Frontier Corp (FC), from village Darpa Khel, in Miranshah, North Waziristan. In response, the security forces gave ultimatum to the tribe to vacate the village as they were going to fire heavy artillery. The forces' strategy is to fire at the place from where it is fired upon, even if the tribe or village is supportive of the government. The law in vogue in tribal areas, Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR), lays down the principle of collective territorial responsibility, wherein if a person commits offense, the whole tribe is collectively punished. So, the security forces decided to take action against Darpa Khels, to bring them down to their knees. To punish them as they have never been punished before.

One could hear gunship helicopters hovering over Tochi Fort, getting an odd glimpse behind Sheikhadam and Torwarsak hills. Every time the gunships pulsating rattle got loud, it increased anxiety, not because tribesmen feared war but because they didn't want war, they didn't want to be seen siding with militants.

Militants take advantage of security forces' strategy and fires at them from villages. When asked by the village not to do so they fire on the army base in Tochi fort from nearby Kallinjar top. Every action, rather reaction to militants, result in casualties of innocent civilians and collateral damage. This leads to a rich harvest of hatred and revenge between the security forces and tribesmen, enabling militants find more recruits.

Wars have changed, fighting is not on the battlefield anymore, man against man, where legends were born and tragedies buried. These days every place is a battlefield; there is no chivalry in war, no loyalty or graciousness on the battlefield. Men sitting in offices can cause more destruction than the most valiant on the

battlefields.

This area has been in war for the last thirty years. First, it was the tribes on both sides of the Durand Line¹, supported by West and America against the Afghan government supported by Russia, and now it is Al-Qaida and Taliban, supported by faceless people, against West and America.

“Are you sure they are going to raze our houses”, Baba asked for he couldn't believe it. “We were friends with the security forces; we fought side by side against the enemy”. He looked up, gazing everyone in turn, wanting a response. “We were always by their side, never caring for our lives. We used our own arms and ammunition. I had no enmity; they said India was enemy, so enemy it was. They said Russians are godless people and need to be taught a lesson, we said let's do it. I didn't ask how or why, they said and we followed”. He nodded with every argument as if convincing the family and they nodded back assuring him they were convinced. “Now they want to raze our houses. The houses we worked for so hard all our lives, where we have so many memories, from funerals of our elders to marriages of our children”.

Baba shook his head in disbelief, “Our kids and grandkids were born here. We have spent many good and gruelling times with our families in these houses, times of scanty and plenty”.

Baba was the undisputed leader of Darpa Khels. Had he been the man he was, he would be sitting arguing with the Political Agent or the Div. Commander, flanked by the group of twelve, twelve Maliks, two from every Khel, the six Khels that inhabit village Darpa Khel. With a multitude of Darpa Khels dancing the war dance to the beat of drums in Rafiq Park, outside Tochi fort, ready to take on whomever was the foe. A raise of an eyebrow from Baba and there would have been flashes and fires, death and destruction in the name of honor and valor, grief and regret in the name of duty and law.

A tall slender physique with sharp visible bones, Baba has a long nose and small eyes; he has a stern face and though good at heart, he is seldom seen smiling. Always oiled and combed, he has a simple life style, wears simple clothes and a black Dastar (turban). Orphaned at a tender age, Baba is mentally and physically tough, down to earth and hard working. He has been through difficult situations in life and as luck had it, he was always successful. He never panicked or lose control. But now he was old and fragile, crossed ninety and was having problem with movement. His immediate memory was giving way, a gift of old age. Baba's five sons were well educated and well placed.

Baba, an angry man, with a small well-trimmed white beard was sitting in his charpoy with all the family around him trying to persuade him to leave the house. He took a deep breath staring in the dull grey sky, he said, “We aspired to preserve the traditions of our ancestors, trying to be men like our fathers, humane and honorable,

raising the name of family in the tribe and that of the Tribe in the nation. Our ideals”, he sighed, shaking all over with anger, “simple ideals, the ones by which we lived our lives”.

Lost in his thoughts, without talking to anyone in particular or expecting an answer he murmured, “Did we go wrong somewhere? We must have gone wrong somewhere. Where did we go wrong”? Talking to himself, Baba whispered in a low voice, “I don't know, I don't know”, shaking his head, he gestured with his palm to himself, “I don't know”.

One could see the disbelief and the pain in his eyes. He got lost in a spectacle of memories. Memories he shared with all so many times.

All-out war broke out against India in September 1965. The news from BBC was that Indian troops are in the outskirts of Lahore, the provincial seat of the biggest province Punjab. Baba was young and passionate and the most trusted leader of the tribe. He decided to raise a Lashkar and fight the enemy alongside the Pak army. He sent the Call and by next morning assembled a Lashkar of around a hundred odd men; ordinary men, armed with their own rifles and a belt full of ammunition.

Baba is going to beat up the Indians, it was so exciting. There were many Hindus in Darpa Khel but they were never seen as enemies they were friends and family and Baba took good care of them. Most of them were shopkeepers and brought lots of chow for the children; it worked magic, as the children loved them for this. Hindu children were as excited as the rest. For Waziristan it wasn't a Hindu Muslim issue rather it was an India Pakistan battle.

Baba looked like a war movie hero, for the first time grenades were seen hanging to the right of Baba's bullet belt and a big binocular case strapped across his chest. The pure silver case and the ivory handle of his dagger were so prominent to the left of his belt. He wore a fresh crisp saffron colored turban and new clothes. His faithful body guard Miram Khan was holding his gun along with his own.

Though the nights are comfortable, September days are hot. It was a bright sunny day, comfortable in shade but pretty hot in the sun. The older boys were running around serving the Lashkar, fetching water, Sharbat and tea, everything was in abundance. Those going with the Lashkar were seen as heroes and all the boys were craving to accompany them. The young, who weren't allowed to serve yet, ran after the older boys in excitement.

Boys love action heroes and were trying to know the warriors while serving them. The older boys had a story for every fighter and talked amongst themselves, this is Stone Head, that is Iron Man and the one with closed eyes is Unbreakable and so on. Yaw, they look dangerous, all of them looked real dangerous. The warriors were so proud and puffed-up, they were all extra-large, with long shoulder length hair and curled up mustaches, they laughed loudly and walked arrogantly.

Some women were crying while the Lashkar gathered at Baba's Hujra, which disturbed the boys every time they went in to fetch something. Why are they crying, they wondered? Our people are going to beat up the Indians, so why cry? There are so many warriors, there is drumming and dancing and there will be feasts and traveling all the way to Lahore and onwards, everything is so exciting, so what's all the fuss about? They are spoiling all the excitement.

The whole village, including Hindus gathered outside the Hujra, while women of the neighborhood gathered in the house, to see off the Lashkar. As the day matured the Drummers drummed the war dance. Men danced fervently; those not going to war also joined in the war dance.

When the count of his Khel was complete Baba got into the center of the group and announced, "We are complete".

"Our count is complete", said Malik Wresham and the six leading Maliks, of the six Khels, said, their count was complete. The Lashkar count was complete; the Maliks led the band followed by the Drummers. An enthusiast or two fired in the air to announce their movement. As the Lashkar moved, you could see sobbing women stealing a look through the cracks in the doors and the girls clapping and singing of the courage of the warriors and chivalry of the forefathers. The drumbeat got louder as the Lashkar passed through the village bazaar. Women peered from the rooftops, they yelled the war screech, they chanted prayers, clapped, sang and bid farewell to the warriors.

One could see the fervor and ferocity in the eyes of the fighters, fearless sons of Waziristan who never take cover in a fight, always laughing and singing when going to war. Brave men, strong and handsome, who know nothing of politics but love to laugh and fight, marched on India once again, kicking dust all the way.

People of other Khels and villages, who were to be part of the Lashkar, joined in on the way. The Lashkar trekked from the village to Miranshah; instead of the road they took the shorter route. The numbers swelled to a multitude not witnessed before in a tribal village. The drum beating got Joshi and the dancing got passionate.

Children ran ahead of the Lashkar shouting at each other for no reason. Every now and then, they held hands of their elders, receiving a smile in return. A few elderly people, whose sons were part of the Lashkar, were the only ones having a worried look on their faces all the rest were full of vigor.

The Lashkar assembled at Miranshah bazaar for a final count and from there on they were to move together. The whole bazaar gathered around the Lashkar.

Spirits were high and the youngsters danced their hearts out. The war dance, performed with swords in old days, was danced with guns and aerial firing. The adrenalin rush was uncontrollable. As if every dancer was saying, you won't see me fight but you can see my passion in my dance. That this might be my last dance, so

you tell my mother how fearless I was and you tell my beloved how passionate I was. I will not return to this land if I lose, I will come victorious or I won't. The war dance was danced like it was the last dance, the final farewell dance.

To understand the true spirit of a tribesman one has to witness the war dance. The way it starts, soft and humble, with a bit of poetry about the chivalry of the fathers, injecting an air of arrogance, and builds on to inexpressible fury and rage, the dancers shaking their heads, their hair flying in their faces, as if shaking away their fears and doubts, their weaknesses and mistrusts. The way they spin as if gathering courage and faith, trust and loyalty, the way they jump and hit their feet on the ground, as if they are going to move the earth. They feel the earth trembling and the shockwaves on the ground giving shivers to the enemy. It's their way to announce, "Enemy, we are coming".

The war dance works magic, like some kind of drug that hits the nervous system, once you get into the dance, the drum and dance makes you forget all your worries and all your fears, who you are and where you are. You become invincible, your strength and your passion multiply and the urge to outdo others overtakes every thought and every feeling. From a humble, humorous tribesman you become a fierce and ferocious fighter. In short, you go wild.

The whole atmosphere was so mesmerizing, no matter how much it was announced to board the Lorries no one wanted to move away from the dance. It was only when the drummers climbed the Lorries that the Lashkar followed. The ones who were dancing had to take their sandals and turbans in their hands and run to catch the Lorries.

Many brothers, father and sons, still argued on who should go with the Lashkar. They all wanted to go, to keep the others away from harm's way, there were people shouting all around, last minute advice or whatever.

Baba was sitting in the front seat of the lorry, his gun in his lap and his Lashkar raising the slogans of 'Allah o Akbar', God is great. The Lorry thundered giving out a cloud of smoke before it started moving and as it coughed and gargled, someone shouted from the top of the Lorry, "The next Attan will be in Red Fort, Delhi we are coming".

The whole scene was spellbinding, it was only after the Lorries left that people dispersed to their own affairs. Since the Lashkar left to the day it returned there was no other topic to be discussed in shops, houses, mosques and Hujras. Special prayers and sacrifices were made for the safe return of all warriors in every mosque and Hujra. The war lasted seventeen days and when it was announced that a truce was signed there were celebrations in all the villages. Pakistan had won the war; the climax was of course the day the Lashkar returned.

From the time, the Lashkar left to the time it returned, Baba shared so many stories, so many times in his Hujra with friends, guests and his children. He was so

proud to narrate the venture.

The Lashkar travelled to Peshawar by Lorries and busses and onwards to Lahore by train. It was early morning when they reached Lahore railway station, the biggest in the country. Enormous as it is, the station was full of people, especially women and children all eager to leave Lahore for safer places. The Indian army launched an offensive on Lahore front which was to be known as the biggest tank battle after World War II. BBC and All India Radio announced that Indian troops have entered Lahore, creating panic among Lahorites.

The atmosphere at the station was very distressed; everyone was quiet and anguished, their faces white with fear. Other than the occasional clink of cups and saucers at the tea stalls there was no sound at all. One could hear the whining of babies in the laps of their mothers. Even the hawkers weren't making any noise as if they were sold out and they had nothing to advertise. Fear was in the air, it was so visible and so burdensome.

Baba had to do something about it. Baba had seen many situations, much worse than the one they were in and he always had a solution. "These people have lost hope," Baba told Mian Din. "They are in a state of despair and we have to do something to raise their morale". Mian Din nodded, as if he already had a plan and was only waiting for permission.

Mian Din was a Khassadar in the Khassadar force and was always in the squad of personal bodyguards of the Political Agent. He was 6.6 or 6.8 ft. tall, fair colored very handsome, recently retired from service. By spending time in service of officers, including British officers, he could speak a little English and Urdu. He had a small trimmed beard which he dyed black and with his huge starched Dastar, he looked even bigger. His handsome features and huge physique gave him an air of arrogance and a careless gait.

Mian Din stepped down from the train followed by two, tall, fair, young men. They carried their guns in their hands and were strapped with leather bullet belts, with the Waziristan dagger on the left side of their belts. Mian Din pulled out his dagger and shouted at the top of his voice. "Kider hai Hindustani. Hum Waziristan sey pohonch gayai." Where is the Indian, we have reached from Waziristan. Like a thunderclap his voice rumbled, shattering the early morning silence. A man with long strides, he walked from one end of the platform to the other, waving his dagger in the air, shouting again and again.

"Wallah, teen din mai hum Deli ma attan karega." 'By Allah, in three days we will dance Attan in Delhi', he announced, standing in the center of the platform. Mian Din walked up and down the platform once again with the two young boys having difficulty keeping up with him, roaring and waving his dagger triumphantly all the while.

Macho of a man, Mian Din knew how to conduct business and he did it very well.

“It was like a miracle”, Baba use to say laughing. “It seemed as if people started breathing from that moment on, there wasn't a single woman on the platform that wasn't crying”.

Men, women and children shouted “Pathan aagaye, Pathan aagaye”, the Pathans have come, the Pathans have come, over and over again, greeting each other and running around to inform those who didn't know. It seemed as if there was no end to the excitement, people hugging each other and shaking hands and kissing their kids. People were congratulating each other as if they have already won the war. They were so sure they will win the war, now that the Pathans have come.

Mian Din after marching up and down a couple of times, assuring he had the attention of every one, came to where Baba was sitting. Having served with officers, Mian Din had the manners and style; he stretched his hand from the platform into the train requesting Baba to come out of the bogy so that people could see the chief of the Lashkar.

Baba, a young and handsome man, much more presentable than Mian Din, appeared from the train. Baba was ready for war, wearing his bullet belt, dagger, grenades and binoculars and Miram Khan, a young man, carrying Baba's rifle behind him. The shine of silver and the ivory grip of Baba's dagger caught the eyes. His turban clean and crispy added to the panache that comes with leadership.

The Lashkar was tired wanting to disembark to stretch. A few of Baba's warriors got down from the train and then a few more followed. Every warrior was a body of death and destruction in his own place. Families had enough food for the long journey down country. “They brought all the food and drinks and presented it to the Lashkar”, Baba said smiling “and while the Lashkar ate as if it was their last meal, the women didn't let me move from my place”.

The whole platform wanted to see and if possible touch the hands of Baba as if he was a Saint. They were crying and praying for the long life of Baba and victory for his Lashkar. They wanted Baba to assure them he won't let the Indians enter Pakistan. “Khan Sahib don't let them enter Pakistan,” the women said sobbing.

Baba tapped the grenades in his belt and said, “How can they”? When the people on the platform were sure Baba was going to sort out the Indians, they wanted Baba to touch their children and bless them.

People had so much trust and confidence in the tribal warriors. Simple, sincere people, they had come to rescue Muslims down country many times before and were trusted more than the regular army. In moments, the whole platform was reassured and was asking for blessings for their children.

Well, '65 war is history. Things have changed since then. Today we confront the security forces in a different situation. It seems that friends of yester years are foes today. The security forces have instructed everyone to vacate the village. Baba had

seen better times. Apparently he is healthy, he could hear and see without aid but age does show itself making him frail and weak. It was difficult explaining why the army wants to raze our houses.

Government gave tribesmen the title of, 'Pride of Kashmir', for their role in Kashmir war. Baba had led his own Lashkar in the 65 war. He was always loyal to the administration and had accepted the ways of the modern world. All his children are educated and well placed in life. Two of his sons are Doctors of medicine, another in the civil service (superior services) and above all one of his sons is a Colonel in the army.

The deadline was nearing; anxiety was rising but Baba won't budge from his stance. He didn't want to fight the security forces but then he didn't want to leave either. Probably he couldn't comprehend the fact that the security forces would actually raze his house, use heavy artillery or aerial bombardment against him and his people.

How could the security forces raze his house, it was difficult for him to comprehend. He always sided with the administration and many times his support almost cost him his life and everything he worked for so hard. He thought the village was unable to plead their case with the government.

Baba is fearless and truthful; his people listen when he speaks. He was always against the militants and believed they were planted by agencies. Had he been in good health and attending Jirgas he would've been a target of militants long ago. That's how the militants operate. Anyone who can mobilize a handful of people is a target.

It was getting late, October days are short so it was prudent to leave the village before sunset. Baba wasn't ready to leave and the rest couldn't leave without him. The only way out was to get the security forces action delayed if not altogether postponed. A last effort was made, the Political Agent was asked to restrain the security forces from taking action, as Darpa Khels are mobilizing a Cheegha party of a hundred youth to prevent militants from firing on security forces from the village. This will be in addition to the Calweshti. Political Agent had already discussed this with security forces authorities but they don't listen to anyone.

The armed forces react ruthlessly. Aerial bombing was recently experienced in villages of Haider Khel, Ippi and Hurmuz. People said, "they (armed forces) are worse than Perangi (British). The British at least fore warned us and they never targeted innocent women and children". Spine chilling stories came out of these villages. Hundreds of innocent people lost their lives, majority of them women and children who were caught unaware and couldn't make it to safer places. Many children were never found, remains couldn't be identified, legs were matched with legs, hands with hands and they all were buried in mass graves. Muslim men and women shared graves in the twenty first century. The best part being that not a single

militant was killed. Not one. People believe the leadership is doing this intentionally to produce more militants.

Baba was adamant he was staying back no matter what. People in the village were in a rush to leave their houses; taking what they could. No vehicles were coming towards the village fearing fire from the army. Men, women and children, whether in good health or poor, pregnant women or paralyzed folks, they all had to walk. Men carried the old and sick on their backs while women carried their young and few belongings. They carried whatever they could leaving all the rest behind.

They left their cattle, their frail family members and all their households, if they had any. A few neighbors jointly risked a person to stay back and look after the houses. Long lines of people could be seen in the rising dust, walking in the dry Tochi riverbed. They had to walk up to Mirali, some ten miles, from where they could get vehicles for onward journey in to the unknown. This had never happened before. As if Armageddon is unfolding and people were fleeing the one eyed Dajjal. Heart rendering stories came out of the village, where the weak and paralyzed could not be taken they were left with food and water to fend for themselves. Though majority evacuated there were few who stayed back.

No matter how much Baba was convinced he didn't budge. Before sunset, heavy machine guns supported by artillery started pounding the village. Everyone got behind shelters. The firing was indiscriminate and nonstop, as if Darpa Khels were the enemy. After the initial fear, teenagers came out of their houses, running around, searching for shell splinters. These boys were unbelievably daring and one wonders what else could there be to scare them. The firing went on throughout the night, indiscriminate as it started, indiscriminate it continued, without any let of.

With every burst of ammunition falling in the house, Baba was wondering, how could they be target of live fire just because a criminal fired on the army from our village? Is there any other country in the world that treats its people like this?

With Tore Warsak, Sheikhadam, and Tarakai Sar hills between the Tochi fort and his house, he wasn't expecting a direct artillery hit but the machine guns at Amin piquet fired at the houses indiscriminately, without any break, as if they were sure the militants were in his compound. Bullets landed inside the rooms smashing whatever came their way. By morning the firing subsided as if the security forces jawans got tired. The dark night had to end. The village smelled of gunpowder. People came to know that two laborers were killed and scores of innocent people injured, besides many cattle heads were killed and injured.

When Baba was informed that six houses were destroyed due to direct artillery hits and fires, that there were two casualties of innocent civilians while no militant was killed in the firing, he just sank in his charpoy with anguish and grief, insult and anger, disappointment and frustration in his eyes. Everyone was cursing the government for being so indiscriminate. They were as ruthless and as indiscriminate

as the militants. Both were declared, enemies of the people, worse, much worse, than British troops. For the first time in his life, tears rolled down Baba's cheeks. He didn't say a word; he just sat there staring at the sky.

It makes you realize that no one cares; everyone is pursuing his own agenda at the cost of such noble people who are suffering silently. No honorable man will allow such suffering on the people in his care but they were so helpless; they can neither form a Lashkar against their own government nor send a Cheegha. This is how sincere people are repaid in return for services and sacrifice. In reaction to acts of criminals, the administration is humiliating such decent and upright people.

Today Tribal area is a mystery for most of the world. Reports of violence and terrorism, presence of Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders, is all that's associated with it. The militants, military and the predator strikes, is the only news we get from the tribesmen. Poverty, terrorism and hopelessness, is all there is to the tribal areas.

We have heard so much about militancy and terrorism that we have forgotten the real tribesman. I, son of Baba will introduce the loving and caring side of the tribesmen. Their romance with the idea to be men like their fathers and do their best to live with honor and pride, their folklore and music, dhole and dance, their dreams and aspirations. Their romance with ideals of perpetuating traditions of their ancestors; raising the name of family in the tribe and that of the Tribe in the nation.

There were better times, when Darpa Khel was a paradise on earth. Land is like the lap of a mother, feeding and comforting. Darpa Khel was the most wonderful place on earth with food, happiness and love much in abundance, enough for all. Fertile land, abundant clean and fresh sweet water and one can count as many blessings nature bestowed on the village. Every kind of fruit and vegetables, migratory and non-migratory wildlife, hills full of medicinal, fuel and fodder plants and raw material for cottage industry and so on. Not only were the immediate families loving and caring but even uncles and aunts were as good and when it comes to owning and protecting, especially the weak, the whole Khel becomes one big family.

Land of the Fathers

Waziristan has always fascinated the world, a legendary land where myth and reality can seldom be separated. The Hindukush and Suleiman mountain ranges converge at this place. The land is a series of unending mountains of brown hard rock, with sky piercing peaks and unkind arid plains denuded of any vegetation. The harsh and scorched land has an equally cruel and adverse weather.

When God completed making heavens and earth, He dispersed the left over rocks and debris in Waziristan.

(Pushto proverb)

In the heart of the inhospitable, arid land one finds the pleasing and amiable Tochi and Shawal valleys known for their beauty and splendor, fulfilling and rewarding. Breaking the tedium, Tochi and Kaitu rivers cut through the rugged rocks, the resulting picturesque valleys are full of Oak, Chalghoza Pine and Mulberry, with cool fresh water streams in abundance. The land is full of contrasts, when one thinks he knows the area one finds new dimensions.

The tribal areas have always been the remotest corner of the world, not because they are far but because they are inaccessible. Bordering Afghanistan, nobody, visitor or soldier, wanted to venture into the hostile and forbidding tribal areas and no one was ever invited.

A mythical people inhabit the land, the children of Karlan, known for their Nang (honor), Jaba (word), Tura (courage) and Pukhto (integrity), where armies at the acme of their might were shattered, where great kings and their legendary generals had to come to terms with the forefathers to pass through these mountains. They claim they have never been defeated by any foe, ever.

Every outsider that ever came to this land waged war, so, the tribesmen are suspicious of all outsiders. They always welcomed those who came as friends for Panah (protection and comfort) with the proverbial Milmastia (hospitality) a corner stone of Pukhtunwali (Pukhtun code of life), where caravans of traders passed through its passes, to India, Persia, Turkey and Central Asia in peace.

It is a mysterious land, where empires meet on land and where continental plates cross paths beneath it. Every empire at the high noon of its might has contested for domination in this area, involving the British, Russia, China, Persia and lately America, generating great pressures, leading to wars first with the British, then Russia and now with America. No matter which empire one talks off, Indian, Persian, British, Central Asian or Chinese, Waziristan has always been the farthest end, periphery of the empire never subjugated and never ruled, never the center of an empire.

I was born in a Daur family of Darpa Khel village, on the banks of Tochi River, the heart of the beautiful Tochi valley. In a family of five brothers i was the third, Sher and Galli being elder while Wahab and Afzal younger to me. Children of Shatak, Daur, occupy the fertile valleys of Tochi and Bannu. They are lovers of religion and lovers of the way of the fathers; their way of life is a mix of the two, Islam and Pukhtunwali. They are a people who go dancing on the beat of drum, weapons in hand, to attend Jashne Quran (Quran festival).

Though children of the same ancestor, British writers have romanticized and glorified the Mahsud and Wazir tribes ignoring Daur because they have always been on the wrong side of the power base. They are very passionate and took on themselves wars they had no business with. The Mahsud, Mohiud Din (Mullah

Pawinda) came to Idak and the Wazir, Mirza Ali Khan (Faqir of Ipi) came to Ipi both Daur villages to promote their wars against the British. They knew Daur to be lovers of religion and were sure of support in Daur land. They raised potent Lashkars against the British Raj earning name and fame for themselves and their cause.

Khawra, land, to the tribesmen is sacred; it is termed as the lap of mother. Though land settlement, to determine individual ownership, has not been done, all tribes know their land and the tribe is collectively responsible for any commissions and omissions on their land. The tribes would go to any extreme to defend it.

Ka de zalmo na pura nashwa, Grana watana jenakai ba de satee

If men do not succeed, girls will win you, beloved land

Three miles to the East of our village is Miranshah, headquarter of North Waziristan Agency with Tochi fort as the seat of government, housing both the Commandant Tochi Scouts and the Political Agent. It is a small town with Darpa Khels having dominating ownership. Tochi scouts are the paramilitary force made up of tribesmen, to be used only in the tribal areas, primarily, in North Waziristan.

To the north of Miranshah is the Danday plain a vast expanse of wilderness. There is a landing strip for the Royal air force and parallel to the airstrip runs Miranshah-Ghulam Khan road right up to the border with Afghanistan, some twenty miles. Ghulam Khan post is the last custom and security post before Afghanistan. Miranshah- Ghulam Khan Road splits Danday between Darpa Khel Daur to the west and Bora Khel Wazir to the east. Darpa Khels have moved in great numbers to Danday plains, resultantly Danday Darpa Khel is bustling with activities and a whole town has come up.

Condemned to poverty

History is not the subject but to understand tribal areas I have to go back in time; the time the sun didn't set on British Empire. It was during the British Raj that the tribal areas, a Yaghistan, (no man's land) got some element of governance for the first time in its history. The British adopted a system of indirect administration through Maliks and Political Agents.

The tribesmen never accepted sovereignty of the British and fought them till the day they left India. The British did whatever was in their power to crush the proud and arrogant Pukhtuns but met the toughest resistance from the tribes on both sides of Durrand line. At one point the British army had more troops in Waziristan than the rest of India yet the indefatigable tribesmen didn't miss a single opportunity to settle scores with them. Lord Curzon, the viceroy of India, had to take direct charge of tribal administration. The mighty British army supported by the Royal Air force

fought the tribes with full might, destroyed their properties, burnt their crops, filled their wells and when they were satisfied that the enemy was subdued and planned to retreat, the mighty army would again be ambushed by the unforgiving tribesmen, giving the British army reason to restart the operation all over again. All this continued till the day British left India.

The British failed to control the tribes because they didn't invest much in development. Hence, the tribal areas were the most undeveloped part of United India. Except for the few strategic roads and Royal Air Force (RAF) landing grounds they didn't develop tribal areas into mainstream civilization. Tribal areas remained a mysterious black hole.

The administrative system was designed to keep the tribes primitive; the strategy was to keep the area as a buffer between Russia and British India and possibly use the tribes as their first line of defense. By drawing the infamous Durand Line, British divided the Tribes between two countries, laying the foundation of Balkanisation in this part. The line was drawn as a strategic instrument, designed to stop incursion into British India, then feared from Russia. All the valleys and resulting passes lay in Pakistan, then British India and the plains start as one crosses over into Afghanistan. There are a few passes, Nawa, Khyber, Tochi, Gomal which can be used for transportation through the area, the rest of it is physically inaccessible. This is the reason why every army was frustrated in this area. A few archers sitting on hilltops in these passes could stop a mighty army trying to cross in. To use this strategically important location to their advantage British drew the Durand line cutting right through the heart of Pukhtun territory, without respecting the boundaries of tribes, villages and even families.

The tribes living to east of the Durand line are the recognized tribes, these tribes had permission to travel freely, do business and acquire property in British India. They were not equal citizens, they were privileged aliens and their properties in India could be confiscated without any recourse to justice. The tribes living to the west of the line are the assured tribes. Most of these tribes live astride the border; they had access to limited privileges in India, like nomadic tribes moving with their herds across borders during seasonal movements. The influential elders of the assured tribes had stipends from the British. By influencing these tribes, the British interfered in the affairs of Afghanistan.

The Pukhtun areas falling in Pakistan were further divided into North West Frontier Province, Balochistan and Tribal areas. There were no direct links within the tribal areas, so, neither trade nor interdependence developed among the tribal agencies. It was ensured that all tribal agencies depend on the adjacent settled areas for their basic needs.

Besides under development, British left a legacy of unending tribal feuds, created to manipulate the tribes. Tribesmen inherited tribal disputes and family feuds which have to be settled through generations of bad blood.

If tribesmen don't have an external enemy to fight, they will find one within.

(Pushto Proverb)

That is why when left alone the tribesmen have their own scores to settle. Resultantly the tribal areas became a haven for gun totting youth who take pride in vengeance.

The colonialists created divisions among people; portrayed and sponsored some to be superior to others on the basis of bloodline. They created a privileged class and through them ruled the colonies, the basic tool of their administration, divide and rule. The institution of Maliks was an attempt to create an elite class in tribal areas through whom the colonialists wanted to administer. An effort was made to divide an egalitarian society into superior and ordinary but it didn't work. Maliks were never considered first among equals by their kinsmen. They were neither respected nor feared, the tools required for administration. They were addressed as government Maliks meaning they were government appointees and not local leaders or representatives of the people.

The tribes didn't have regular armies but by organizing Lashkars they gave a rough time to their foes. Tribesmen resisted every expedition and every operation launched by British. They loved their freedom at any cost and they didn't want to lose their country to anyone, least to the British.

First, comes one Englishman, as a traveler or for shikar (hunting), then come two and make a map, then comes an army and takes the whole country. Therefore, it is better to kill the first Englishman. *(Pushto proverb)*

British authors added much romance to their encounters with the tribesmen and only after years of warfare, they accepted tribesmen as their equal in chivalry and came to terms with them. Many British chronicles claim the Brits fell in love with the tribesman, their manners and the landscape reminded them of home.

An enormous man with a head like a lion, he trod my carpets like a lord. The Hindustani servants were struck dumb and expected the earth to open. A more splendid specimen of nature in the rough I never saw. He made no bow but with a simple salam alaikum took his seat.

Herbert Edwards, commissioner Peshawar - 1853

Tribal areas were kept in total isolation through, primarily, the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) 1901, the law designed to administer Pukhtun areas. FCR is a set of inhuman laws enforced by the British to keep the hostile subject's fierce opposition under control. Administration of justice was not its aim or purpose. It is extremely harsh and discriminatory, based on the premise of suppression of crime by inflicting severest possible punishment. It is deemed a black law as it violates human

rights and denies the accused due process of law.

Pakistan gained independence in 1947, Sir George Cunningham was called back from England to take over as Governor North West Frontier Province. The Political Agents were British and the law governing tribal areas continued to be the colonial FCR. The overall status of tribesmen in Pakistan remained the same as in United India, that of privileged aliens. At the time of independence, the tribesmen merely changed hands from one colonial master to another; suffering under the same colonial law.

After battling the British for a century, denying them sovereignty over their area and refusing to surrender to or obey the FCR, tribesmen gave in to accepting the sovereignty of the British and obeying the FCR. They forfeited their freedoms by choice.

After independence, the regimes religiously followed FCR and no effort was made to change or replace it with a more decent law designed by its own people. Even today, there is no recourse to independent judiciary in tribal areas and superior judiciary of Pakistan has no jurisdiction. Tribesmen are still governed by the FCR.

Under FCR, action is taken under collective territorial responsibility. The Political Administration doesn't take action against the offender; it takes action against the tribe on whose soil an offence is committed while the perpetrator continues committing crime. There is no responsibility on the administration in identifying, arresting, trying or in convicting the criminal. If a tribe is unable to fulfill its responsibility of identifying, arresting, trying, convicting and handing over of the accused to political administration then members of the tribe are jailed and their businesses sealed for no matter how long it takes the tribe to fulfill its obligation. People suffer fines, jails, attachment and confiscation of property for acts committed by others not even remotely related except for being from the same tribe.

Supporters of FCR add insult to injury by saying that it is codified Rawaj. They argue that tribal traditions have been made into a law on the will of the people. This is not true, FCR is inhuman, un-Islamic and against Rawaj, it has been declared so by Peshawar High Court.

It is better that many guilty may escape rather than one innocent should suffer, is the world accepted maxim and Islamic injunction for justice. The FCR is exactly opposite to the Islamic injunction and the world accepted maxim. The maxim is violated in every case because the Political Agent never tries to go after the criminal. He enjoys arresting the innocent, seizing their properties and collecting fines from the tribes, always ending up punishing the innocent and letting the guilty escape.

For themselves the British chose the maxim, 'it is better that all criminals may escape than one innocent man suffers' and for us they chose the FCR, how kind of them, what a way to show their love and admiration.

It was late evening, the sun searching for a place to rest for the night behind the Tatara hills, west of Peshawar. I met Master Sahib Gul, a primary school teacher in our village and a frequent visitor to our Hujra to tutor our boys. A very fine man, Master Sahib was tall and handsome, wearing crisp clean clothes and always shaved and combed. I loved the way he read aloud to the boys, literally hammering the lessons into their heads. I was a better pupil and for this he liked me much.

“Master Sahib, what a pleasant surprise. It's so nice to see you in Peshawar”, I said hugging him. Like always Master Sahib was fresh like a cucumber, shaved and combed, his mustache and hair dyed black.

“I retired from service and shifted to Peshawar the moment I got my pension. I love it here, Miranshah was unbearable. I bought a small hotel which keeps me busy all day. I have rented a small place in Hayatabad and if things go well I intend to buy a house and shift my family also”.

Master Sahib was a Saraf (banker cum moneychanger), his shop cum office was in the heart of Miranshah bazaar. Saraf give loans on interest, safe keep money for people, exchange currencies and launder money in whichever country or currency required. He was well established, with his good reputation and strong family background people trusted him. “You were doing well back in Miranshah, why choose going into hotel business”, I inquired

“Where is the choice, Marra? I had to leave Miranshah, this is what came my way and I didn't hesitate”. He took a deep sigh, “the government, it is terrible, they won't let you live in peace. Everyday something happens and the Tehsildar is roaming around in the bazaar locking shops and rounding up people of a tribe. Till I was a government servant he ignored me but now I am the first person he comes after”, he continued. “It's such a shame, we don't even know if something has happened and the Tehsildar will be standing in front of our shop. You feel such shame and rage when noble and respected people are rounded up for no fault of theirs. We've made commitments, fixed time with people and the administration, just for the sake of amusement, will hound us as if we are common criminals. You can't do business like this and there are a dozen other hurdles if I start explaining”, he shook his head, anger and disappointment visible in his tone. “Ghulama Khana, back home, things are very bad for a respectable person. The colonial black laws by which we are administered have broken our backs. Every afternoon you see respectable elders closing their shops hurriedly, leaving in a hurry, literally running. It's so shameful, so I decided to quit and come to Peshawar”.

“You did the right thing Master sahib”, I said, “You will enjoy your stay here, this much I am sure”.

“Marra, all I ask is a decent, respectable living. Just let us make an honorable living, nothing more. Look at Ajab Noor and his family, they were lucky they left Miranshah ten years back; today they own the best properties in Peshawar. I wish I

had done so earlier anyhow better late than never”.

“I hope you also own the best properties of Peshawar ten years from now”, I said laughing and slapping his out stretched palm.

“Your Baba was a wise man; he made you join them (the ruling elite) well in time knowing he won't be able to undo the colonial laws”.

It was nice seeing Master Sahib, we had small talk, laughing at every comment and after a good cribbing session we dispersed wishing well to each other.

People often ask as to why have tribal areas always been so poor and backward? The pet bureaucratic answer is that the tribesmen don't want administration to meddle in their affairs, meaning, the tribesmen don't want development. This is outrageously untrue.

FCR in its nature is retrogressive, repressive, anti-investment hence anti-development. The FCR discourages private sector which has a vital role in creating economic opportunities for the majority of people. Under the FCR Political Agent can order arrest of everyone from a tribe, order forced closures and economic blockades, attach and confiscate private property and all businesses belonging to a hostile tribe under the collective responsibility. There is no court a tribe can appeal to against the orders of Political Agent.

So, no sane person is going to invest his hard-earned money in the tribal areas, where it is at the mercy of one individual with the effectees having no recourse to justice against any wrongdoing. That's why there is no investment and private enterprise in tribal areas. In settled districts, however, the courts rescue tribesmen.

The Political Agent issues permits for import and export of all commodities to and from the agency. The permit has a price which is a source of income and spent by the Political Agent at will but more importantly it is a means to manipulate the market and businessmen.

There has always been a lot of hype about the long overdue reforms in tribal areas. All stakeholders realize that opposition to reforms is not from within the tribal areas, as the world is made to believe by the bureaucracy, rather opposition to it is from bureaucracy, civil and military. They would lose unbridled and unchallenged powers if full constitutional rights were extended to tribal areas. Powers to meddle in affairs of tribes, powers to meddle in affairs of Afghanistan, powers to create militant / terrorist groups that can make life miserable for all. All these powers and much more will be lost.

The FCR loving bureaucracy will not have front men in tribal areas whose name they can use for smuggling arms and narcotics, blame for killing high profile people and do the most notorious things. If full constitutional rights for tribesmen are extended, bureaucracy will lose the place to hide skeletons.

A full bench of the Federal Shariat Court (FSC) directed the federal government

to repeal the FCR, as it is against Islamic injunctions. The federal government has yet to implement the decision of the FSC. Fifteen identical petitions are pending with FSC seeking implementation of the judgment, but no one cares.

The British born Pakistan army chief, Douglas Gracey refused taking action in Kashmir in spite of orders from Governor General. Had the tribesmen not intervened, Kashmir would have been lost to India. The tribesmen were always proud of their role in liberating Azad Kashmir and we often hear them speak of their sacrifices. They claim that had the government not call them back they would have taken Srinagar.

Looking back at events that followed and having seen attitude of different regimes one suspects if the leadership was ever interested in liberating Kashmir. All hype was created to ensure tribesmen don't ask for self-governance, Islamic system and equal rights, promised to them by the father of the nation Mohammad Ali Jinnah, especially with Bacha Khan's Red Shirts, licking their wounds a step behind and the Faqir of Ipi having announced his independent Emerit in Waziristan. The best way to deny them all that was promised was to keep them busy in something they loved, something they were good at, something they were proud of. The tribesmen danced into a battle which was none of their business.

Tribesmen not only secured the countries Western border but went to defend the Eastern border as well. When called upon they fought in Kashmir and on Lahore front, they volunteered to fight in Kargil and spilled their blood and that of others whenever called upon. They had no enmity with anyone, no one harmed them yet they were always there to fight for the cause of nation and religion, even when those paid for the job refused to. Tribesmen were '*Guardians of the Frontier*'; unpaid soldiers of the nation.

Tribal areas were branded as hostile territory pre partition (in united India) and were dealt with an iron hand. The British left us a bad legacy, disrespecting our human rights, not accepting us as equals, denying us all forms of development and progress and closing all means to development through retrogressive laws. No legal, political, social or economic rights were recognized. Tribesmen were seen as hostile subjects, always at war with the British.

Unfortunately, tribesmen haven't fared any better post partition either. It remained a hostile territory even after becoming part of a free country. The tribesmen weren't given equal rights; they didn't enjoy the freedoms their compatriots did. It was ignored by successive governments but tribal areas particularly suffered because of national policies of the last thirty years.

Among the special areas under the constitution, Azad Kashmir (42% of special areas) has the status of a country, Gilgit Baltistan (12%) the status of a province, while tribal areas (46%) are left high and dry at the mercy of FCR loving bureaucracy. Tribal areas don't have a provincial government or a representative

council and there is no local government system hence no contact with the tribesmen at grass root level.

In short, we inherited the poorest area of the sub-continent. The administrative system should have progressed with time but it has not, the legacy of British Raj continues.



¹ Border between Afghanistan and Pakistan

PART II

RIWAJ WAYS OF THE FATHERS

CHAPTER 2

TRIBAL SOCIETY

TO UNDERSTAND THE TRIBESMEN, ONE NEED TO KNOW how the tribal society functions and how is it that the most ferocious people, who are known to always be at war have been able to maintain peace in their tribes. Let's introduce the instruments by which these people administer themselves and explain how the tribal self-governance system works successfully. Why are the tribes always on the wrong side of mighty empires? What does the future holds for them?

Ay watan na tashalai shey, ay narkha nashey tashalai.

One can leave the village but not the traditions.

(Pushto proverb)

Tribal Pukhtun is the most misunderstood nation on the face of the earth. Tribal areas have always been a mystery, misunderstood and misrepresented; non-tribals have been giving erroneous explanations and interpretations to the tribal instruments of governance and their use in different circumstances. It's like, the proverbial, blind defining an elephant. Everyone is giving his own meaning to his experience with the tribesmen. The media, research scholars and other concerned are discouraged and even prevented from visiting the tribal areas to find the truth for themselves; perforce inferences are drawn from events taking place. Scholars, doing PhD level research on the tribal areas have never visited them. Such a research can be close to truth but it will definitely not be the truth.

The tribal society functions under clearly defined parameters. Every individual entity, family, Khel or tribe have their specified roles and responsibilities to which everyone adheres strictly. The overarching entity is the Tribe. Tribe is the basic administrative unit; the tribesmen have established their administrative, judicial, economic and social systems and inter-tribal relations, working within and around the tribe. These systems have evolved over a period of many many years and have helped the survival and augmentation of tribal life.

The tribe has the overall responsibility towards the individuals so any issue whether intra tribe or inter tribes is dealt with by the tribe. The tribe is divided into sub tribes which are further divided into Khels. A Khel is normally a village but there might be more than one Khel living in a village. The smallest entity is the

family. No decisions are taken on the basis of individuals no matter how strong or influential an individual is. Villages of individual Khels have grown in size and because of their proximity have merged into one.

Every man in the tribal areas is equal, no blood lineage, no amount of money or position in worldly affairs makes one superior to the other. Every man has equal rights, he has to be heard if he has an opinion and if need be, he will fight for his right to be heard. No one can impose his decision on any person, every opinion is presented in a very respectful manner, without sarcasm or taunt and at the end of the day collective wisdom prevails. Any deviation from any of these norms by any party will lead to fight and enmities. Everyone understands this loud and clear so all maintain their dignity to avoid any mishap. The tribesmen strictly adhere to their customs and traditions, the way of the fathers, called Rawaj which is sacred and followed religiously and every tribesman endeavors, hopes and prays to be like the fathers.

Hujra

Every Khel has a Hujra, the Khel's community place, adjacent to their mosque. A few large families, who have moved out, might have their own Hujra depending on the distance of their new abode from the Khel's Hujra. Life in tribal areas is very simple. During day, there is a lot of activity, men sweating themselves in the fields, shops or whatever they are doing, trying to excel their equals in name and fame. Boys, eager to learn, going to schools, fields or shops. Women, busy with cooking and cleaning, caring for the household, tending their animals and collecting fodder. They spread love and goodness, while girls help in all the chores including looking after the young, learning household crafts, a life where much time is spent in fetching water and collecting fuel.

After a long day given to worldly affairs, every evening men get together in the Hujra to discuss the day's events, to share their experiences, gossips and plans. They have all programs, feasts, festivals and ceremonies in the Hujra. Besides being a place for sharing, comfort and hospitality, Hujra is also a place for music, singing and dancing, a place for storytelling and poetry, for marry making, Moj and Masti.

Sal satti warbashey kha de ka dwe guttey yarano majlass.

Are hundred bundles of Barley better or a while among friends?

(Pushto proverb)

The Hujra has its own budget, utensils, beddings and other services. All the utensils, lanterns, pots, teacups etc are cleaned, Charpoys with Takias are laid and the water pot is placed at one end. The youngest are told to do all chores that come

up. Everyone is eager to know if there is any new face, a guest, a wayfarer or a storyteller. If anyone is missing, everyone is concerned and asks about him. Every Hujra has a chelum (water pipe) and a box with a partition; half of it for fresh tobacco while the other half for used. The chelum smokers change the water, fill the chelum (bowl) with fresh tobacco and after the evening meal, they start smoking. The eldest has the privilege to start and then the chelum circulates. Smokers have their own tobacco bags also.

The Hujra normally has a big central room and smaller rooms adjacent to it. There is an open quadrangle and a Sapper, (covered area on pillars) in the center. The big central room has some kind of ground covering for sitting. In winters, the central room is used wherein fire is made to make it comfortable. The smaller rooms are available to guests, wayfarers and storytellers for spending the night. In summers, we sit in the open. The Hujra is sprinkled and swept, Charpoys are placed in a circle.

Summers or winters, Hujra gives away many secrets of the families in the Khel. It speaks volumes on relations among the families. A well-maintained and well stocked Hujra indicates the elder is in control, the youngsters are friends among themselves, and they use the Hujra frequently, shoulder their responsibility and desire to be known in good words. An ill-maintained and ill stocked Hujra shows the elder's weak control, the families don't want to sit with each other and nobody shoulders his responsibility or cares for the name of the family.

While at home, women and children have so much to share but the Hujra is for men only.

Hujra is the first training school of tribal youth, learning from their elders how to conduct daily affairs, how to greet people, offer them hospitality, make them comfortable, serve them and finally to see them off. We learn where to seat a person, how to keep them occupied, where to keep their weapons and all affairs important to tribal life.

One can tell in an instant, if a person has spent time in Hujra or not. That's why, I always wanted my children to know our way of life well. As boys we were expected to spend more time in Hujra, to learn from elders and to know people. From discussions of elders during all this time one understands how to approach an issue, where to give opinion, where to avoid speaking, where to delay, how to pass the buck and so on.

There is no written law of the tribes so Hujra is the place where one comes across all kinds of issues and from old precedents one knows of decisions taken in such matters. It is important that a boy's stay in the Hujra is properly monitored without making him feel that he is being spied on and given guidance whenever required. Normally people stay till late in the Hujra and go home to sleep. Once the elders leave, the youngsters play all sorts of games, music and once a week cook

halwa or whatever.

Dignity in Serving

Elders encourage children to take pride in service, selfless service to those who care for you. The first block of our character building was, I believe, to have pride in service. That's how our elders groomed us, able and humble in service. We took so much pride in serving the elders. Youngsters are taught to respect elders and thus authority from a tender age.

Pyaz de we, po niaz da we,

Serve with affection, be it an Onion,

(Pushhto proverb)

Every evening all seniors of a household get together in the Hujra and beside other things, have food together. Every grownup of the family presents himself before the elder at supper time, until he has a good reason not to which he would have shared with the Masher in advance. Supper is an occasion; while one may have other meals at his leisure, at time and place of his choosing, supper has to be served at a specified time and location and every grown up attends. What is served is not important; it's the occasion that matters.

Food is served as soon as evening prayer is over. Cooking is complete by then and women finalize preparations. By the time, children set the ball rolling the elderly women have offered their prayers and send food to the Hujra under their supervision. In winters, food is served indoors while in summers it is served in the lawn.

Children run to lay the Distarkhwan with nans (bread) wrapped in it. A senior supervises laying the Distarkhwan and distributes the nans equally on all sides. Dishes are laid depending on the number of people. A dish of curry/ vegetables is served along with fresh onions and tomatoes and, if available, a jar of Shlambey (curd drink). Whatever is to be served is brought by children. Every child, after handing over what he brought sits to one side.

I was always in a frenzy, jumping in front of my mother, begging her to move fast, as every kid wants to be first on the Distarkhwan. At times, while waiting on the sidelines, Baba would ask me for something. That was my day. "Baba asked me to bring butter or a toothpick or anything", there was so much pride and excitement in serving the elders.

All the seniors gather in the main hall of the Hujra. The Mashar relaxes against a Takia with a blanket on his legs, surrounded by others, talking about the day's events and converse on matters of mutual interest. Mashar directs the discussion and every one responds bringing every new event in notice of the Mashar. They discuss all

issues openly, without any reservations.

Fire burns hot and bright, ensuring the room is comfortable. The elder near the fire holds the poker and shifts a log up or down unnecessarily, the crackling sound of the dry wood, with sparks racing towards the roof and vanishing midway adds to the warmth. If there are guests then the fire keeps burning till late night and logs and poker are the items to be got hold of. While dinner is set, Baba comments on every child bringing food. "Afzali, what have you cooked for us today?"

"It is meet curry Baba" Afzal responds promptly.

"That's my boy; Afzal knows how to look after me. Wahaba what have you brought"?

"It is butter and chutney, Baba", Wahab answers, proudly.

"So you know I like chutney, good job".

Our eyes shone with pride, the comments are proudly repeated in front of all. If there was a sick child, he would show himself at the door. Baba would instantly call him, "O Matey, come here, sit with me", tucking the child in his blanket with him. "I heard you are sick, but you look OK to me. You will get well don't worry", Baba says patting his cheeks. "Did anyone show him to the doctor", Baba throws a question to all. Someone will give the details, what the doctor said, what medicine is to be used, for how long and whether any progress has been made etc.

Once Distarkhwan is laid, the elders start dinner while we stand by holding glasses of water and are privileged to serve them. I wonder why we had the jam (pot) or two for Shlambey, from which everyone sipped but had glasses for water. Why couldn't we use jam for water also? Probably, it was to keep us occupied. When the elders finish, we slip in their place to have food.

Irrespective of age, religion, rich or poor, everyone has the same food on the same Distarkhwan. Only guests get preferential treatment and are shown more hospitality. The only thing that determines whether one goes in the first shift or second is age. All the grownups take the first shift while children follow.

Baba invariably praised the food and appreciated us for doing a good job. We begged our mothers to give us something, anything that we could place in front of Baba and he gives us that extra comment. Whether it was time of serving dinner or removing the Distarkhwan, we moved like lightning, literally running once we were out of the room. We shared the comments with our mothers; they use to be so proud.

Women have meal only when the Distarkhwan is collected. Their concern is the uninvited, unexpected, odd time guest. They want to ensure that while their men are having food if a guest or two arrive, there is enough food in the house which can be served. It will be discourteous if the hosts are having food and the guests are asked to wait. Once meal in the Hujra is over and guests arrive they can wait till arrangements are made.

Mentioning him here is a little unfair but not mentioning him will be a sin. We look after our dogs as a member of the family. Rather all households treat their dogs with care as they are an important element of tribal life. Women feed Bragai while they eat. He will be sitting in his place and will move only when told to. A huge Ghaljai dog, white with black patches, was presented to Baba by a friend when still a pup. Bragai was a mild sleepy dog during day but a terror at night. One call and Bragai knows what he is expected to do. He is disciplined, intelligent and a good fighter. We made him fight every dog in the village and he beat them all.

Time flies by, without realizing you slip out of the gang of kids and join the group of elders. The in between stop is the laying of Distarkhwan and instructing the kids where to put extra bread or where to place the curry pot and other items. Now you don't run home to fetch food rather you collect it from the kids when they bring it. As time goes by new recruits join the gang of kids, the Mashar is gone, the second in line takes over as Mashar and as others move up, you become a part of the elders.

Women-Companions and Comforters

Tribal society is male dominated but women are not an outcast. The society in general is very egalitarian and gives great respect and importance to women. Many societies don't acknowledge women and a worse male is considered better than a female. It's not so in the tribal areas.

Kamzori nar na takra khaza kha da

A capable woman is better than a weak man.

(Pushto proverb)

Women are strong and dependable partners in tribal society. They are present on all occasions and where there is a gender segregation, which is in very few areas, they have alternate arrangements. They aren't considered inferior in any way and are always by the side of their men.

Every Pukhtun is duty bound to protect the honor and dignity of women from every kind of abuse at any cost, what so ever. Whether the woman is related or not, the *Namus*, dignity, of women is sacred in Pukhtunwali. Women are a source of inspiration and are honored when come across. It's common knowledge that the whole saga of the Faqir of Ipi started when a woman was denied her freedom of choice.

Many stories of female infanticide have come to light around the world but no such thing can even be imagined in the tribal areas. We do hear of second marriages and Swara among tribesmen but frankly these issues are blown out of proportion.

Women in tribal areas can inherit, own and operate any business or property other than tribal land. She cannot inherit tribal land, as land cannot be transferred to another family or tribe.

Tribal women are amazing; their day starts predawn and they are the last to go to bed. The most important woman in my life is Morr. Like any ordinary Pukhtun woman she observes Purda (veil) but I can introduce her. She is fair, tall with a strong build. She stays home looking after the household, cooking, washing, tending animals and looking after the children. Surprisingly, I never saw Morr asleep, if I got up in the middle of the night I saw Morr staring at me. "Are you alright", she would ask? She was always there, watching. If I was sick and needed comfort she was there for me. If I had to get up early to leave for boarding school, she will be up, packed everything, made tea and be ready to see me off. She knew exactly what was to be packed and she knew which day I will come back. She knew names of all my teachers, matron, friends and even the school cook. Morr is intelligent, authoritative and outspoken and leads the household very efficiently. She can read the Quran and has taught many to do so.

I have never seen a woman like her and I don't think I ever will. In winters, she told me stories of princes and princesses in our smoke filled room, while pressing clothes with a coal iron, clattering and clanking like back ground music. In summers, sleeping on the roof top, she told me stories of old times, pointing at the stars, showing me the old woman's charpoy, the wolf, sheep, bear, the prince wearing his belt and dagger and so on.

After giving me a rare bath, she will tie a towel over my head to keep me warm and tell me that it is to have a big Presley puff in vogue then. A meticulous women, from caring for Baba's weapons and allied equipment, to storing sweets and books, from keeping guests crockery and cutlery to stocking beddings and blankets, she knows where and in what state everything is. She watches over her worldly belongings like a tigress, one wrong move by anyone and she will pounce on the negligent, as if she was in the wild.

A remarkable woman, I saw her strong and graceful while sending Baba to war and I saw tears in her eyes when I was leaving for hostel. I saw her firing a gun when Baba returned from Hajj and I saw her slaughtering a sheep when unexpected guests arrived. I saw her running after poisonous snakes with a stick and I saw her mixing hey with clay, a strenuous job, to plaster the house. She pleaded with my uncles for us and on many occasions, I saw her sending threats to reasonable men.

She taught almost a dozen girls from the nearby houses to read the Quran and say their five times Selah the whole year round. She loves giving charity and sends food for wayfarers. She loves her children and being surrounded by her grandchildren.

She is an obedient and devoted wife and an affectionate and adoring mother. Such is my mother and such are women of my village, strong, obedient, benevolent,

intelligent and able to lead if circumstances require. Tribal women are as brave as men; they are honorable, having strong character.

A woman has the privilege to represent her family in village affairs including Marakas. My grandfather died early, Baba and my uncles were young at the time. My grandmother represented our family in all village Marakas till such time my father and uncles could do so themselves. My grandmother had a dominating personality and commanded great respect.

There was threat of dacoit gangs looting our village. The village Maraka decided that every family will depute two armed men to guard the village. Since there was no grown up male in our family my grandmother produced two rifles to the village council and announced that her children were young and unable to use a rifle. They are in no position to defend the village. She will contribute two rifles and ammunition, to be used by able men to defend the village. She asked that someone should try the rifles to ensure that they are in good working condition. The rifles were tried and accepted.

In Marakas women sit to one side and seem invisible but if required they can get up and speak out their hearts, even disagree.

It was routine late night gupshup in the Hujra when my uncle, in good humor, told us the story of how granny captured a thief. Warding off a thief is easy but catching a thief is dangerous, because, to free himself a thief might harm a person in desperation.

Ghal de kora pore ma takhta wa

Never chase a thief up to his house

(Pushto Proverb)

People in tribal areas in general are poor and there isn't much to steal from them but then there are poorer people and habitual thieves everywhere. It was Eid night, thieves know people have new clothes, jewelry, sweets etc and that people are tired and sleep late so Eid night is the best time to steal.

It was past midnight, my uncle narrated, a thief punctured a hole in the mud wall of our house and crawled into the room. The unfortunate thief didn't know, that granny had heard the scrapping sound and was ready for him. She had climbed the roof tiptoe, peeped on the other side and had seen the thief. To her good luck, he was a loner and granny knew how to handle loners. Granny blew off the lamp; it was pitch dark in the room and she stood against the wall, close to the hole, waiting for the wretched thief.

When the thief crawled into the room, he couldn't see a thing and waited for his eyes to get use to the dark. He was still on all fours when granny got him by his balls from behind. The poor thief froze with the mere thought of what was to come. In the

pitch dark of the room, he couldn't even guess what got him. Is it a man, are there more, is it a jinn, what got him? Should he scream or would he wake up others so he might as well try to endure the pain without a whimper. The first few squeezes he endured bravely and didn't make a sound.

A skinny boney man, with no outlines, no sound, no movement, he actually froze. It happens, with ones balls in someone else's hands one just can't move, nothing can move, nerves, blood, thoughts, senses everything freezes, for ages it seems.

Granny disturbed the stillness of night, she called Baba, just a boy then to light the lamp and as the room brightened, darkness crept into the thief's life. He tried to open his mouth to say something, as if his balls gave away his intentions, granny gave a squeeze and instead of saying anything, the thief cried "aaaooow". There wasn't anything to say there wasn't much to hear, the intentions were so clear on both sides. In the silence of the night after every few minutes there was an "aaaooow", like the hoot of a jackal, breaking the silence.

Baba gave a proper thrashing to the thief and after kicking him heartlessly, he was let loose, the begging the thief did on all fours was unbelievable. Granny felt sorry for the thief, perhaps she didn't want to hurt him so much. He couldn't even move his hands to protect himself which granny realized a little late.

To make up for it granny gave him food and instruct him never to show up in this area ever again. The thief swore on every religious item or related word that he knew, he swore on every relation that he ever had and tried to convince granny that this was his last theft and will never do so again.

When corn or wheat crops reach maximum height it is easy to hide in them, so people settle enmities during this time. Similarly thefts also increase when the crops mature. During such times, our women are extra vigilant.

Women of families that have enmities occupy watchtowers all night, guarding the house as enemies don't attack women. At times, this necessitates having a second wife. There were wars all the time so the widows if in marrying age were married to one of the brothers. Many married to have relations with a strong family to gain power and position in the tribe. All this was done to save a woman from becoming public property and secondly, it was a part of the overall strategy to survive. Now that things have changed, few people have a second wife and I have yet to see a person with three wives.

Similarly, in my whole life I have come across only one case of Swara in my village and all the rest is hype. Swara is where a family gives or accepts women in exchange for forgiving the commission of an offence.

It is cowardice not to avenge ones dead. If anyone accepts women to forgive his dead then it is impossible for that family to live in the tribal areas. It cannot be a normal practice, the one case that took place in our village was when a girl eloped

with a boy, and the boy's family gave the girl's family a girl in marriage. Such cases are not everyday occurrences but whenever they happen, they get a lot of publicity.

In families having enmity, women of the house come out to inspect the area, every nook and corner, to ensure no one is hiding to attack their men, the area is not mined and their men folk are safe. Under no circumstances can one fire at women, so, men come out only when the woman gives clearance.

Women work in the fields with men in sowing, harvesting and safekeeping of the harvest. They help men in construction of their house, tending and grazing animals and watching over the crop in the fields. The basic job of women is however to look after the house hold and the children. It's not that all women do all jobs, if she is working outside the house, which elderly women do, then she won't be working in the house. The younger women of the house look after the cooking and cleaning chores.

Elderly woman enjoy as much respect as its Mashar. She sits in a sunny corner, known as granny's corner, surrounded by her grandchildren. She baby sits the toddlers, find lice in children, that's if they can see any and braid hair of the teenagers. Everyone tries to keep them in good humor by bringing gifts like shawl or clothes and sweets, lots of them. The elderly women very proudly share the sweets with their grandchildren and win them over to their side.

Dum au Dhole - On the beat of Drum

Pukhtun society in general and tribal in particular moves around the beat of drum. Dance and Dhole (drum) are integral and vital parts of Pukhtun life, almost as important to them as religion. The man behind all occasions, festivities with singing and dancing or ceremonies with wailing and crying, is the illustrious Dum, the man who beats the drum.

The Dum is not just a person, he is an institution and that is why he deserves a special mention and a need to be known better. Second only to Mashar, is the role of Dum. He is a caretaker, a barber and a cook inside the house, a messenger and an ambassador in his own right; an announcer of the first response and a social mobilizer outside the house. He is the one who adds flavor to festivities and he is the one who manages all affairs for a family in grief. He has so many vital functions to perform and to do so he is given free access not only into every house but even into enemy territory. He is paid well for every service performed and is looked after by the Khel to ensure he does his duty honestly, with dedication. The Dum is always a soft spoken, non-violent, kind and dutiful person.

Since the role of administration is minimal in tribal areas, the community is responsible for all important assignments and community mobilization is initiated on the beat of drum. This increases dependence of the society on Dum. He is the focal

person when an announcement is to be made or people are to be collected, like for Cheegha and repair of canal or for a social cause and community work, like Bagarra for a mosque. His pivotal role as community mobilizer is irrefutable.

Dum is an enormous contradiction in Pukhtunwali. Unfortunately a person playing such important roles is looked down upon in a Pukhtun society. No one will like to be called a Dum among Pukhtuns. The only reason for this is that he is the only person in a Lashkar without a weapon. A Dum is never armed. He is a non-entity, women don't observe Purdah from him and they don't mind singing and dancing in front of him. Having said this, role of Dum is central to tribal life. He has exclusive roles to play, both in happiness and in sorrow.

Dum is a reservoir of valuable information. He looks very unassuming, which helps a person talk freely to him, allowing Dum to extract all from whom so ever he talks to. Even women speak their hearts to him; his heart is full of secrets which he shares only with the Mashar. He is the most trusted person with a message, one's secrete will always be safe with him. They are very dependable messengers and will take messages to and from the Maliks.

He is not considered equal, so, no man harms the Dum to to avenge Badal. This gives him free access to enemy territory and Dum takes the role of an ambassador of sorts. When there is tension in a family, Khel or the tribe, he is the person running around without fear, taking and bringing messages to the parties. Everyone is equal in a tribal society; such accessibility wouldn't have been possible without the non-violent, neutral Dum.

He has nothing to gain from war, as he has no Nikkat, hence he tries his best to avoid any clash between parties. He keeps shuttling till he is either successful in averting the situation or till open hostilities start between the parties. If hostilities start, the Dum is in the lead of the Lashkar of his faction beating the drum and inspiring his tribesmen.

Every Khel has its family of Duffman and it's their duty to make all kinds of arrangements, whatever the occasion, from childbirth to marriage, to death. Then there are tasks in a house which only a man can perform, so instead of letting in every available man at a certain point in time only the Dum is allowed. Among the many important functions Dum performs, his most common role is that of beating the drum.

On the birth of a child, when he gets the news the Dum immediately reaches the house and starts beating his drum. The next three days are for singing and dancing. On the seventh day of birth, the child will have his or her head shaven and the family will distribute Khwanai (good luck sweets). This again calls for celebrations. If it's a boy then seventh day onwards till the age of six months, depending on the convenience of the family, the Dum will circumcise the boy and from the date of circumcision festivities begin again.

From then on almost once a fortnight or once a month every child, boys and girls

have a haircut from the Dum for which the children hate him. We use to inform all the children if anyone saw the Dum with his bag near the house and went into hiding till he left. The small ones dread the Dum whereas the grownups love them because while giving a haircut to the children he has so much gossip to share with women.

At the time of marriage, the Dum plays the drum day in and day out. The Dumman elders are very good and extremely dependable cooks and will arrange the feast for guests. They will go around the Hujras, announce the feast and on behalf of the family, invite friends to attend. Everyone is invited to a marriage feast in the village.

He makes announcements on all occasions, he wakes people in Ramadan, takes out a procession throughout the village when crescent is sighted and Eid announced. For Bagarra like construction of a mosque or cleaning of a canal, he leads, motivates and inspires the youth to put in their best. Dhole is the motivation, it's because of the drumbeat that the youth participates in Bagarras, without it, Bagarra will be dreary, hard work which no one likes.

At the time of death of a person, the Dum helps the Mullah in giving the last bath to the dead, fetch the bench on which the dead is bathed, and after the dead is buried, will bring back the charpoy and all the other goods required at the time of burial.

Where as in most societies drumbeat might be associated with merrymaking only, in tribal areas drumbeat is serious business. Tribal life will come to a standstill without it. Drumbeat is a call to people, no matter what the occasion, every call has an exclusive, recognizable drumbeat and to every call, the response is different.

Among the many drumbeats, first and foremost is Attan, the beat of the war dance. It is known by many names; rather all tribes have given it their name, the Khattak dance, Waziri dance, Bhattani dance, it's every tribe's dance. Drumbeat and dance go hand in hand, but the age-old war dance, Attan takes precedence and needs to be introduced first.

In Attan people start dancing in a ring with Damman in the center. There are different steps, graduating from slow to fast. Tappas of the chivalry of the fathers are sung which elevates the mood and as the dance progresses groups of two's three's and four's or multiples show their styles and steps, speed and strength. The pace of dance increases till it reaches a blaring crescendo; the dancers get less in numbers till only the best are left in the ring. The rest support the dancers till the dance gets slow and they can join in.

As the beat changes and groups take the ground, people sit in a ring making space for the dancers to show their prowess. Dumman move to a corner to make space for the spinning and jumping of dancers. Groups and individuals dance with swords, showing their skill with swords or even rifles these days, including live aerial fire. Then there is the individual and pairs spinning. Every extra ordinary performance is appreciated by firing in the air.

There are as many variations in steps of the dance as there are tribes in the region. For every dance variation the drum beat changes so there are many variations in the beat itself to which the dancers respond as the beat changes.

While people sit in a ring and the valiant perform, the Dum suddenly changes the beat, all instantly rise from their seats and rush towards the Dum, hooting and yelling and return to their seats. The Dum might let them stay or he may call them again. Jumping all the way towards the Dum and coming back is favorite of modest and humble mortals like us. The Dum controls the whole affair, he ensures people enjoy the dance, so after a while he will play the slower beat where the whole village joins, dancing around the Dum.

At times there are singers, who sing Tappa, two liners, on the bravery of the fathers, followed by a song and after every Tappa the drum beat gets fast and people go crazy. Attan has so many variations; it is different in a village ceremony, different in a Lashkar and totally different when going to war.

Second to Attan is Cheegha beat. It is one of the rarest played beats and is taken very seriously by all who hear it. I have only witnessed the Cheegha beat twice in forty years. If there was a happening of a very grave nature, the Dum will beat the Cheegha Dhole. The drumbeat sounds like the heartbeat and it goes on and on till the Cheegha ends. It is different from any other beat and clearly recognizable. If a Cheegha party splits, the Dum will move with the main party and keep on playing the Dhole till the other party returns.

At times, the tribes need to form a Lashkar to handle something serious that is threatening the tribe; the Dum will be the person responsible to be present with the Lashkar all the time.

Then there is the Wailla (water lifting) beat. At times when there are floods in Tochi, the bund raised to divert water to the canal washes away, needing immediate raising. The drum beat announces raising bund, so, all interested will join. Men dance all the way with their spades to the beat of drum. Many without interest in raising bund join in just for fun and dancing. On reaching the venue the job is done very quickly as the manpower is much more than required.

There is Maraka beat which announces, that a Maraka is taking place at some pre designated venue and time. These are special Marakas to discuss inter-tribal or inter Khel issues. To these Marakas everyone is invited. Then there is the Dhandora (announcement) made on the beat of drum.

In addition to all these the Dum plays the Bulbula and numerous other dancing beats. Bulbula is the alternate of the Attan for women. They will dance the Bulbula, a happy beat, in a large group. Women compete against each other by singing and glorifying their families.

It goes without saying that the number of beats and other tricks the Dum has up his

sleeves and the amount of excitement that he can generate directly affects his income from an occasion of happiness. The Dum has a fix share in the harvests from the land whatever the produce. Besides the whole family receives clothes and other gifts on every festival be it Eid, marriage or birth of a child and so on.

Faith

The tribesmen strong faith in religion and love for their egalitarian culture are their strengths because of which they have always been victorious against external aggression, no matter how strong. The equality of man, advocated by the whole world and preached by all faiths is practiced more so by the tribesmen. It is the center point of both, religion and culture. It's the equality of man that gives them wisdom, compassion and strength.

Religion is intact in its true spirit in the tribal society because of its isolation from external influences and strong support of Pukhtunwali. If there is any semblance of an Islamic society in the world, it is in the tribal areas. Strengthened by Pukhtunwali it is more stringent and more practical than the Islamic way of life presented or practiced in any other place. Thus the tribal society is nearest to the Islamic way of life.

Tribesmen have generously mixed the ways of the fathers with religion. It has been tailored according to Pukhtunwali as the spirit of the two is the same. Some authors have tried to prove that all wars in tribal areas were inspired by religion which is not correct. The wars led by Mullahs were actually inspired by Pakhtunwali; the Mullahs who led those wars erased the line between Pakhtunwali and religion. No wars were fought on prayer timings or fasting or other religious issues. They were all Pukhtunwali related issues, only the tribes were mobilized by a Mullah, making the issue sound religion. They were mobilized for the Afghan jihad, first against the Russians and now against the Americans, in the name of religion, whereas the issue is political. Historically, Mullah Pawinda, Faqir of Ipi and others, all mobilized the tribes in the name of religion to resolve issues related to Pukhtunwali.

The religio-culture way of life adopted by tribesmen is far strict than religion in some cases where as in others it is much lenient. In cases related to women, religion gives much wider rights and privileges than Pukhtunwali, like the right to own landed property and the right to choose a husband. The tribesmen have denied them both. On the other hand, Pukhtunwali is much lenient towards stealing and robbing.

Going from Peshawar to Waziristan, one drove through the winding road of Darra Adam Khel, the gun-making town near Kohat. The beautiful poppy fields all around the road added stunning beauty and colors to the sharp gray ridges. A spectacular scene, like, out of the movies. Poppy was grown all around; the tribal areas were for

once a match to Holland's tulip fields in beauty. The tribal areas were a big contributor to world opium production with many families' livelihood depending on it. Many national and international agencies were busy trying to eradicate poppy production through investments in the productive sectors. In spite of the fact that no such investments were made in Waziristan, there was a complete ban on Poppy cultivation. The investment itself was a good inducement to grow poppy but nay, the tribes of Waziristan did not grow Poppy. Till date, no poppy or hashish is grown in Waziristan in spite of the fact that other areas are growing them and making huge profits. Besides, no factories manufacturing heroin are allowed. Religion doesn't permits growing or manufacturing intoxicants so people don't grow or manufacture them.

Education for the tribesmen is religion and all education begins and ends in the Madrassa. Similarly, healthcare is religion and for every ailment, they go to the Mullah for amulets, lucky charms and talisman. Whether it is physical sickness of the body or spiritual sickness of mind and even fate, like falling in love, the cure is with the Mullah. Children always have their chests full of amulets from different Mullahs and black strings tied around their hands and feet. They are all for protection from sickness.

The religious leaders were from the Mian and Mullah families living amongst the community since long, revered and respected. Most of them claim their ancestry to the Holy Prophet (pbuh), another reason why they were always able to mobilize people for a cause. They earned respect and trust of the people through their piety and service. They own land and work in different occupations for lively hood. They get alms and charity but they don't accept Zakat which is only for deserving poor. They teach the Quran and the saying of the five times compulsory prayers without any remuneration considering it their duty. They always make themselves available for the Adhan to newborn, Nikkah in a marriage ceremony and the funeral prayers at the time of death of a person from the Khel.

Majority of our people are poor, so, the focus of religion is on prayers and fasting and since prayers are a daily occurring there is more emphasis on it. For performing prayers the person's clothes and place of worship has to be clean. If anything unclean touches ones clothes, it makes them unfit for prayers.

One comes across elderly men holding their shalwar belt in one hand and the other inside their shalwar after relieving themselves. They are not satisfied that the urine is finished, so, they will pick up an absorbent gravel and will extract the last droplet of urine, pulling and squeezing the penis, the absorbent absorbing any drop that comes out, until they are satisfied that there is no urine left to unclean the clothes. This is acceptable in the village, since there are no women in areas marked for men, no one takes offence to it. Doing the same anywhere else makes a person look ridiculous.

We were in Lahore with one of my uncles and in the middle of bazaar he would

just face a wall, pee and start squeezing his organ right there. Walking in the bazaar with his hand in the shalwar made him look outrageous. It was so embarrassing for us but the uncle just didn't care.

There were many women out for shopping, work and routine chores; they were so embarrassed seeing a man walking towards them on a narrow footpath, shalwar open, playing with his organ. You could see the embarrassment in the blush on their cheeks. The best thing about the whole affair was that uncle stared the women right in their eyes. He was so excited to see so many women without Burka.

Some of the women were lost in their thoughts; they wouldn't notice and will only realize when they were crossing him on the footpath. The moment they saw him they almost jumped, about to let out a scream and you could see goose bumps on their skin. He gave them a scare of their lives but it could have been worst, he could have given pregnancies to many merely by staring them so intensely.

We didn't say anything to him the first time but then we told him to stay facing the wall till he is through with the job. For us it was a big embarrassment, for him it was supposedly an innocent religious obligation. In the village no one even notices, in the city everyone was staring at us.

Among all the religious rituals, fasting in the month of Ramadan is the most difficult. Many people down country ignore fasting. There is a saying:

Pathan janey te Ramadan janey.

Ramadan is for the Pathan.

For us fasting is more a matter of guts and manhood and less a religious concern. If you can't fast you are feeble and pathetic. That's the fine connection between religion and Pukhtunwali where one fades the other toughens, where one weakens, the other gives it strength. I confess missing prayers but fasting I have never. People go through great hardships; they work full time but never give up fasting. At times they cross limits as religion is not harsh and has given many relaxations but our innocent people have been so ingrained with the idea of suffering for a cause that they don't avail the relaxations.

Every evening of Ramadan is a festival. Everyone, poor and not so poor bring their Iftar to the Hujra, a few minutes before the Adhan. The prayer mat is full of eatables; it is nice trying to know what others have brought and naturally, the other's food looks tastier. All the eatables are same but there seem so much variation. Once Adhan is said, everyone breaks fast, sharing whatever is on the mat. We just have a few minutes before the Mullah gets up for prayers so just imagine the excitement, so many tasty things, so little time and people hungry and thirsty to their limit.

After prayer, some just cleanup the leftovers, others have supper. Every individual has his routine and one eats and drinks till he can't move from his place. This is the time when you find a charpoy for yourself, make yourself comfortable,

light a cigarette, take a deep drag and close your eyes. These moments you will not give for the kingdom of Suleiman. This is the time, peaceful, quiet and relaxed, the time when one feels noble, caring and forgiving.

CHAPTER 3

INSTRUMENTS OF ADMINISTRATION

IBELIEVE THE ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM PREVAILING IN THE tribal areas is the best local government system on the face of the earth. To know how the local government system works at its best, the tribal system is a textbook example.

There are well-defined instruments of tribal administration through which tribesmen manage their affairs and achieve their objectives. Some of these instruments are, Nikkat, Milmastia, Jirga, Badal, Cheegha, Lashkar, Nanawatey and Panah to name a few. The instruments of tribal administration can be used independently or in combination, in varying degrees, depending on the circumstances and crosscutting of issues. The objectives are, protecting Rawaj, the ways of the fathers, protecting their freedoms, peace and prosperity in the area, equality for all and honor and dignity of the tribe and the individual.

To have an insight into the tribal life and better understanding of tribesmen some instruments of tribal administration and elements of reward and punishment are explained in detail and the way they are used. An effort is made to remove the misunderstandings and wrong perceptions about the tribesmen and the tribal areas.

Before getting to the specifics we need to identify the fundamentals of Pukhtunwali referred to like, Nang (honor), Jaba (word), Tura (courage) and Pukhto (integrity) and spoken of whenever the Pukhtuns are discussed. These fundamentals cannot be measured in real terms and are accepted only in relative terms. Here I intend to talk of the instruments of administration which are specific and measureable, by which tribesmen manage their day-to-day affairs, they include the safety nets for protecting and preserving the weak and vulnerable.

If we talk of Nang we need to know how many Hamsaya one has, how much Panah is offered, how much Badal is pending or Cheeghas have been led, what is their Nikkat. When referring to Jaba we have to see how much Jirgas, Marakas and Nanawatey the elder has convened, how many verdicts of his Jirgas have been or not been accepted, how many Tiga have been handed over and so on. Once we understand these instruments which are measureable, we can construe the fundamentals.

The underline outcome of all these instruments in play is the preservation of the vitals, Rawaj, freedom, honor and pride of the Pukhtun, as an individual, a family and as a tribe. Honor and pride in a Pukhtun society are the most important things and all the instruments aim at achieving and preserving one's honor and pride. It starts from the individual respecting others and getting respect in return from his family and Khel. Respect and dignity have a very significant place in Pukhtunwali therefore throughout the working of tribal society, respect is fundamental and its preservation is taken very seriously.

A Khel is many families, all inter-related to each other through paternal lineage, the Khel is one big family. Because of the relationships an event in the village affects everyone hence every person is concerned for every event. From major issues like Badal, Panah and Nanawatey to minor issues like, who is coming or going abroad, who is doing good business and who is not, are matters of concern to the whole village. From the circumcision of a new born to the health of the oldest all information is common and shared. Every person or family takes a position on every issue. It is not possible to stay neutral on an issue within ones Khel.

The instruments that govern tribal life are good enough to take them into the twenty first century. The tribal Rawaj has evolved over a long period and has perfected into a strong governance structure. It has the potential to survive the onslaught of Turkish, Arab and Western cultures and is sure to support us live fruitful lives for generations.

Nikkat - Of the Fore Fathers

Over the years, every tribe and sub tribe has earned a place for itself in the overall affairs of the Tribes. Nikkat (of forefathers) is share of a tribe, Khel or family, in profit and loss in the affairs of the tribes. Nikkat of tribes was determined much before the British came to India or the tribal areas.

Nikkat is determined on the basis of fighting force the tribe is able to contribute in tribal affairs. It has been earned after great struggle and sacrifice and no family or tribe will let their share be changed at any cost. The shares so determined are accepted in official records and are strictly adhered to. Within the share of tribe, share of a sub tribe, the Khel and share of the family is known.

Khissa, means share in Pushto. When the government gives services to a tribe for protection of government installations, they are distributed according to Nikkat. Those getting a share are Khissa dar (shareholder) hence the community police, Khassadars. Khassadars are not government servants, they are community police and if a family's share in the services offered is less than one then the Khassadari is shared with another family, so, in a month we might see two or even three people perform service against one position. Similarly, government gives development funds

to the tribes as per their Nikkat.

On the other hand, if the tribe needs to form Lashkar or have to raise funds for some common cause, like fines imposed on the tribe by Political Agent, then every family contributes as per their Nikkat. That is why it is share in profit and loss of a tribe. At times even trenches or posts are distributed among Khels as per Nikkat and every Khel has to defend their post. Just imagine a Khel who vacated their post for fear of enemy and a Khel which over runs an enemy post. Never again can the two Khels be equal, so, a Khel will ensure they die rather than vacate a post. Nikkat is also a yardstick to see how strong a family, a Khel or a tribe was in old times.

Miranshah has been expanding at a fast pace, first, with the coming of millions of Afghan refugees, who needed housing and second, because of the increased business activity and setting up of industry, colleges and colonies. Many wastelands were brought into use but before these lands could be used, individual ownership was to be determined. Tribal lands were distributed according to Nikkat and each individual got his due share.

A committee of elders measured the area of Danday Darpa Khel with a long rope. Once the area was measured, they worked out the freeways and as the Nikkat of each family and Khel is predetermined, the area was first distributed among Khels and then the Khels distributed the area among families as per their Nikkat. Till date, I haven't come across a single dispute on the share of a family or a Khel.

Mashar - Leading Elder

Malik and Mashar are used interchangeably but they are not the same. Masher is from Mosh- Mosses, spiritual leader or leading elder whereas Malik is a nominee of the government. A Malik performs certain functions for the government for which he is paid an allowance. Mashar (leading elder) may or may not be selected by the administration as a Malik. He is the most intelligent and experienced person in the family, he knows when and how to reason, whom to flatter and whom to browbeat, he heads and represents his family; he decides the position of a family on issues within or with other tribes and with the administration. He takes all major decisions for the larger family which includes families of brothers and cousins. Elder of the family has a special place on all occasions whether executive, ceremonial or religious.

The British created a class of tribal elders, Maliks, designed to be an elite group through whom they were to administer the area. Loyalty of the individual was the cornerstone in selecting Maliks. Where the leading elder was not supportive of the administration he was ignored and someone loyal to the government in the Khel was made the Malik. They failed to create the elite group because most of the Maliks were not the actual Masharan and were considered thieves and thugs by their kinsmen and were never trusted as leaders. Maliki is hereditary and the second generation

might not be as competent but Mashar always commands respect as Mashari is not hereditary but the wisest among the elders becomes Mashar.

Every tribe has a Chief, designated and recognized as such by the government. The tribal Chief has no extra authority; he is first among equals and is spokesperson of the tribe, when among other tribes or political administration.

If you visit a village, you can instantly tell if the Mashar is a Malik or not. Where Mashar was Malik he commanded loyalty of his people and respect of the administration. Overall the area will be more developed. Where the actual Mashar is not a Malik, the Mashar doesn't allow the Malik to carry out development work even if he wants to. So practically, there will be no development in the village.

Mashar is usually the eldest of the family but it is not necessary. Some people are born leaders, they overtake their elders in day-to-day affairs and people from other families and Khels consult them instead of the eldest. Such circumstances might lead to mistrust and tussle within the family.

Immense responsibility lays on the Mashar, he keeps an eye on the young and judges every individual's potential, his likes and dislikes, his seriousness and keenness towards an assignment. He decides for all children, sons, nephews and at times, other children of the Khel depending how close family bonds are, as to what role is to be assigned to an individual when he is the right age. Mashar selects the right man for the right job, leading to specialization in its own way. Mashar maintains an overall discipline, advises the young on all affairs, keeps the family together and ensures everyone in the family is treated fair and given equal opportunity. He gives the final nod to marriages from and into the family.

The tribesmen have performed pretty well for the level and quality of education and the barriers in their path to progress. When one looks at how the tribesmen managed so well the only reason that comes to mind is that Mashar always selected the best man for the job. The most dynamic in the family are selected for leadership, decision making with regard to other families and Khels.

Though a lot of deliberations take place within a family, the final words are those of the Mashar, once he gives a decision there is no turning back. Words of a person (Jabba) are a matter of honor. Tribal elders are uneducated so there are no written agreements and all affairs are conducted through word of mouth, this is why one's word is the cornerstone of his trust and honor.

A family is lucky if their Mashar is strong and able, he keeps the family together and he can do so only if he acts fair. The bigger and united the family the stronger its position in the village. At times, the Mashar is not so strong or not so fair thus, he is unable to keep the family together. In such a situation, everyone is for himself and in the collection of families, his family stands weak and disrespected. Leadership has a major role in the strength and the position of a family viz other families.

Babajee, Baba's elder brother, was Masher of our family; he lived in his house in Miranshah bazaar. He was mostly out of the village, in Peshawar and Islamabad, so all decisions regarding tribe and village were assigned to Baba. Babajee had more interaction with the administration, locally with the Political Agent and Commandant Tochi Scouts and at the national level with the Governor, Prime Minister and the President.

Babajee was tall and handsome, fair color, with misty blue eyes, hardworking, straight forward and very outspoken. A brave and honest man he was picture perfect hero of a Hollywood movie. Malik Haji Saad Ullah Khan alias Babajee contested the '65 elections to the Provincial Assembly of West Pakistan and shattered the myth that a non-Wazir could not be elected from Waziristan. He defeated Wazir for the first time in spite of their numerical supremacy. Except for the '71 elections which he didn't contest, he won all his elections. He was elected Member of Pakistan Senate twice from the tribal areas since '85, when democracy was restored in Pakistan.

He was a strict disciplinarian and we were very careful in his presence. We never wore bright color or embroidered clothes or fancy chappals, never spoke amongst ourselves and never went bare head in his presence. We never walked ahead of him, if he stands we all stand behind him, when he walks we follow. We never ate or chewed in front of him, never sat if he was standing and while we sit, we ensured he had the best seat. He was always the first to go in for ablution while one of us waited on him with a towel. When he entered the mosque we collected his slippers, when coming out, we laid the slippers in front of him, toe side forward. We never switched on the radio and we never dared use the telephone in his presence. Everyone will be at peace when he was around, no fun, no laughter what so ever. We laughed only when he wanted us to do so.

Since there were no female folks in the bazaar house, everything about Babajee was fully exposed to us and I believe only a man of great integrity can leave his life exposed for all his children to see and follow.

Baba, an ordinary man, through sheer dint of hard work and sense of responsibility became Malik of the tribe. He then moved on to become a Member of Pakistan Senate after the death of Babajee, earning for himself the role of a leading elder not only of the Daur tribe but all the tribal areas. He was a man in love with challenges and had missed out the word 'failure' from his vocabulary. Even as a member of Senate he brought fodder for the animals and clean silt from the stream passing through the village as ordinary labor. He believed in dignity in labor and was like a river to his people, always there to help and support them. He adopted ways of the modern world and made it a point to get all his children educated in reputable institutions.

I was sent to boarding school at the age of five and was coming from boarding school on holidays, still wearing my school uniform when we reached home. Only children who have lived in hostels understand the excitement of coming home. The

freedom to do what you want, when you want, not having to do things yourself, going to bed and getting up when you feel like, all waiting to tell you funny anecdotes that happened in your absence. I was so excited and wanted to see Morr and others as soon as I could. Galli had come to the Kharzai canal to receive me, the farthest point from our house we were allowed. I had so many plans, so many things that I wanted to eat. Children living in hostels are always hungry.

It was a late summer afternoon and laborers were working on raising the outer wall of our house. The sun was like a red ball, falling in the hills behind the laborers. One could only see their bodylines silhouetted by the sun from the east of the house. It was a katcha wall and the laborers were working with clay. I wasn't paying any attention; I already had so much on my mind, preoccupied with all that had to be done. The door of our house was the target, I was walking straight towards it expecting Morr on the other side waiting as anxiously.

I was about to enter the house when a man called from the top of the wall "Ghulama". The voice sounded familiar, the voice of Baba.

"Baba", I called looking up, Baba was sitting on the top of the wall, all covered in clay, hardly recognizable.

"O bacha", he said and I ran towards him, he jumped down from the wall and before I reached the spot, he was there to hug me. We exchanged pleasantries and I went inside the house while Baba climbed back on to the wall to finish his work.

A Madda Khel Wazir, Lashkar stopped by our village. There were scores of drummers with the Lashkar and there were people everywhere, they were so many of them. The whole village was busy preparing food for the Lashkar, five oxen were slaughtered, truckloads of Nan were backed and barrels of ghee were off loaded. The baked bread was made into small pieces in big containers (Tarbal). Warm ghee was poured over the bread and lumps of sugar sprinkled on it. Around ten Tarbal were set and when the men came to eat, meat was served on the top of Nan. The drummers kept the people busy outside the Hujra while food was laid inside.

While the Lashkar had food we watched in amusement, wondering if they could ever be fed to their fill. They were huge and it seemed every one of them could eat a camel by himself. After having food, they had a glass or two of water but that wasn't enough. Those who finished eating headed straight for the stream, lay on the ground facing downwards and drank water direct from the stream without using a glass or even their hands. We loved it, we drank direct from stream but we were kids, seeing grownups do it was the first time and it was fun watching them. After having barrels of water they got up, drying their dripping beards they said, "My heart was burning but now I am OK. I still feel hungry but my heart started burning so I had to finish but now I am OK, I could eat more though".

When the Lashkar left, Miram Khan said laughing, had it not been for the oil and sugar it would have been impossible to feed the Lashkar. These Madda Khels are not

used to eating oil and sugar that is why they couldn't eat much. Had it been only meat and Nan they would still be eating.

Everyone praised the arrangements. Handling a Lashkar in one place was no mean feat. Before this the village distributed all big parties, Lashkar or Nandara among Khels. It's on such occasions that leaders are born and recognized in the tribal areas. Such events take place rarely but leave memories for a lifetime. Though the expenses were borne by the village but only Baba had the administrative skills and the wherewithal to feed a Lashkar. From then on Baba was recognized as the leading elder of Daur. From then on, every Lashkar was fed in our Hujra. From then on all external Jirgas where elders from other agencies participated stayed at our Hujra. The exposure and recognition of Baba went beyond the boundaries of the village and the agency.

After a long and hard struggle in a land with little opportunities, we, as a family, moved up the social ladder from the ordinary to the leading. We lived in a joint family with our two uncles, to the extreme west of the village. Our house was a small mud house with three or four rooms, one each for my father and uncles.

Baba rose from the ordinary through sheer hard work, honesty and dedication. He led every Cheegha that took place in his presence, he gave Panah to all who asked and no Jirga was complete without him, contributing positively to every Jirga. I never heard anyone refusing to accept his judgment in a Jirga or Maraka. He protected all who were in his care from harm's way and he never shied from un-slinging his gun when his pride and honor were at stake.

He participated in every Bagarra with his kinsmen; I can still see him standing on the roof of the mosque giving instructions when the mosque was being expanded. I have never seen him failing to get Tiga for a family in trouble or his Nanawatey failing to get forgiveness. He loved slaughtering sheep when guests arrived. His Hujra always had guests, for he loved it that way. His reputation of leading elder travelled beyond the boundaries of the tribe and agency.

He paid great attention to the ways of the modern world; educating all his children not only in schools but also in the Hujra. He kept the family together and maintained discipline. He led and represented the family on all occasions.

Father is a hero for every child, especially boys but Baba is a real life hero. He was not only keeping pace with the world but was practically leading the world, making many sacrifices on the way. That was the kind of man I had for a father, down to earth and hard working. What better Baba could a child ask for?

Milmastia - Hospitality

Milmastia is an important element of Pukhtunwali and one of the finest virtues of the

Pukhtuns. It is binding to show hospitality and sincere respect to all visitors irrespective of tribe, religion or social status. A guest is always welcome whatever the time or occasion. A guest is never asked if he will have meal, it is considered discourteous. If its mealtime, it is served, if the guest has had his meal, he says so. If it is not mealtime, the guest is asked where he is coming from and you know from his answer whether he has taken food. Guest is blessing of God and a matter of pride for the host, who tries his best to let everyone know that he has guests.

Milmastia is not limited to food, though unfortunately it has mistakenly been taken to mean provision of food only. When a guest arrives, we welcome him and straight away take his arms for safekeeping. We indicate to the guest that you have reached our place and now you are in our protection and we shall protect you with our lives. The guest hands over his weapon to indicate that he knows where he is, he trusts the family with his life and in this place, he is not afraid. From then on till the guest takes his weapon back and departs, he is the host's responsibility. No one can harm him in our place and no one dare try to because if anyone does the whole family will be in arms in support of the guest.

No guest is attacked in someone else's place but this protection is not limited to ones Hujra only. If there is someone in a group who happens to have enmity and if ambushed anywhere, it is binding on the group as a whole to respond to the attack.

A guest should not in any case be confused with an asylum seeker, someone who enters the Hujra or house with people pursuing him for an offence committed.

If a person says something which offends the owner of the Hujra, he does not respond, instead he reminds the guest that he is in someone else's place. A Milma (guest) has to behave according to the norms of the host family. Guests are given preferential treatment when it comes to serving food. Guest is served something special to give him a feel that he is welcome.

It was late in the evening we were informed that the leadership of Tanzeem Ittehad Qabail (Organization for Unity of Tribes) led by Wali Khan Kuki Khel of Khyber Agency was in North Waziristan and they were going to be our guests. They had planned to leave but for whatever reason they could not. It was a late decision to stay on for the night.

They were all elderly people; each commanded a fighting force of not less than ten thousand men. They were from every agency, represented all major tribes and were accompanied by their drivers, gunmen and personal servants. Every one of them was dressed in fine clothes, smart waistcoats, majority of them wearing Qulas and turbans.

The government had indicated political reforms in tribal areas and the elders were preparing for them. Babajee was a member of Tanzeem and they were here to plan the future. Accompanied by Babajee they arrived in the village just before sunset. They were made comfortable in the central room with Takias for each guest to

rest against. The central room was warmed with a huge fire. Loads of dry wood was burnt, the fire crackled, the sparks rushing through the chimney, the room was blazing and bright.

Baba was so excited, he was fond of guests and such guests get together in a lifetime. The whole evening he kept us on the run ensuring the guests comfort. Had the guests been from the village or tribe, even double the numbers would have been routine but these were people from outside the agency, the cream of tribal areas, to be treated as royalty. Nothing should go wrong. The huge feast that was prepared for the tribal leadership, asked for nothing less than complete dedication and full concentration.

Sheep were slaughtered; Tikkas (traditional tribal Bar B-que), white meat, Pullaw rice and nans were to be prepared in the house. Cooks were summoned from Tochi Scouts mess to make sweet dishes and fancy salad dressings. The best crockery and cutlery was brought out. Each plate, dish and cup was cleaned. The Petromax kerosene lamps were cleaned and pumped air in case electricity went out. Clean Distarkhwan came out. Normally when guests have food we stand behind, holding glasses of water but today, all the guests were to have their own glasses, some had two.

Lying Distarkhwan is expertly choreographed, once the women know how many Pullow rice is required they calculate the number of other dishes. Every plate and every dish has its specified place on the Distarkhwan. All the food is laid so tactfully that every dish is at arm's length. The sweet dishes were so colorful you wanted to sing Tappas in their praise. It looked like a luxurious dinner given by a king in some age-old fable.

While the guests had food, we stood behind with jugs of water and Shlambey and every glass was refilled the moment it got empty. There was a lot of have this and try this. The guests ate less and talked more, appreciating the luxuries and indulgence of the night. Once guests were finished, all those in service had our turn at the food and then, Distarkhwan was cleared.

After dinner, we brought in green tea in beautiful red and blue Russian teapots. Green tea was served in special teacups smaller in size. While the elders sipped jasmine flavored green tea, we had the privilege to sit in their company and listen to what they had to say. They were divided in small groups talking serious business. They spoke loud and laughed louder, there was motion and noise. Anxiety and anticipation filled the room.

The huge bedding trunk was opened, the best beddings were out, new mattresses, new velvet quilts with beautiful silk frills, pillows with silk ribbons and bed sheets with beautiful laces, and everything smelled new. The special beddings are kept under lock and key and are used only for such occasions.

The elders were all set to form a party and inform the government that they were

ready for reforms in tribal areas, to mainstream it with the rest of the country. It was a quantum leap; Tribesmen were marching towards a new dawn, a walk from darkness to light.

Women folk washed the crockery and cutlery till late, readying them for use the next morning. Women from neighborhood also came to help. I don't even know what time Baba was up but when I got up all the women were busy preparing breakfast for the guests, tea, eggs, parathas, malai, honey and so many home made things. Brand new tea sets were out; all the elders gathered around breakfast, Baba ensured every elder's teacup was full with hot tea. Baba, holding his hands at his back, strolled up and down, keenly observing all the guests and he kept saying, have more, try this, this is good to every guest. He was instructing us for refills wherever required, the elders enjoyed their breakfast while the fire kept the room warm and cozy.

Babajee kept sitting with the guests without interfering in anything, he didn't check the cooking, never directed the services, he was confident everything will be taken care of. He was in a good mood, relaxed and confident, he introduced the children to the guests, and their qualities well exaggerated, half fun, half real.

Everything passed very calm, very controlled, no panic, no breaking of crockery or dropping of cutlery, I believe all because of the calm attitude of Babajee.

After breakfast, the servants got busy threading crisp and clean shalwars, polishing guests' chappals, helping the elders get ready. It was a complete operation, conducted in accordance to the proverbial Pukhtun Milmastia. No need should go unattended. The whole act was a household affair, no shops to bring fresh bread or jams or any other requirement. Everything was to be prepared at home to the best standards.

People of the village came to know that their leadership was around, so, elders from the village started pouring in to meet them. With all the Maliks and others coming in, a second round of tea started. There was a lot of activity in our Hujra on that cold morning. By the time the sun got warm, the leaders were ready, Babajee and Baba accompanied them and as we moved people joined in and by the time we reached Miranshah we were a reasonable procession.

Badal - Revenge

Badal (revenge) is an important part of Pukhtunwali and essential element of keeping peace in the tribal area. Badal is, in a sense, retribution towards greater justice. Everyone knows that Badal will never be forgotten or forgiven, so, no matter how much arms or fighting force a family has, it is careful not to use it indiscriminately. From a mere taunt to the grievous of crimes, Badal is a debt which has to be paid. Nothing is ever forgotten and no debts are left unpaid. There is no time limit on

exacting Badal and it has to be in equal measure, proportionate to the harm done, neither less nor more.

Per de kwande ya na wrakezhi

All debt have to be repaid, even that of a widow

(Pushto proverb)

We say, 'if revenge is taken in a hundred years it has been done in haste'. The idea is to keep the opponent under constant fear, denying them free mobility. Secondly, they keep guessing as to who is going to be the target of Badal. While exacting Badal no woman, child or elderly can be targeted. The family taking revenge tries to target the most valiant in the family and at times even hire assassins to help them. If the target of Badal is in company, the companion will react to protect him, so while exacting Badal one tries not to harm anyone else and find the target alone. No excess can be committed while exacting Badal and no one can desecrate the dead once Badal is realized.

We have seen many good people die as a consequence of Badal, of acts committed ages ago where the person killed probably never even saw the person for whose actions he is paying.

One of Babajee's favored servants is Mashkalam, almost our age. Mashkalam is very energetic and hardworking, the round the clock present and ready type. He started working with us as a lanky, friendly boy and continues to do so. Mashkalam was more of a friend than a servant.

We were young when he got married and he loved talking about it. He enjoyed telling us how he spent the night when he returned from leave. Whenever he went to his village, he dressed up in fine clothes, shaved and washed and put on his coat he got from Babajee.

"Mashkalam, you are going in for a kill man, you seem to be ready already", I would say.

"Ready I am Khan; today is the day of the kill. And kill I will. You know they call me Malik Sahib in my village". He walked like Babajee, "Malik Sahib is going to give someone a rubbing tonight", he rubbed his hands in excitement. "Today will be two's day".

The next morning or the one after, depending on the leave, when he came back, I will be ready to listen to the long sexy stories he proudly shared with me. I wonder who was more excited among the two of us, Mashkalam telling the story or me listening to them.

"You look exhausted Mashkalam, I think you had a rough night", I said the first time he returned after getting married.

“I won't say that”, Mashkalam said with a broad grin, shaking his head “though I was up all night. It was a fleeting night, nobody in the Hujra wanted to go to bed and no matter how much I acted tired, those in Hujra won't let me go home. What a waste of time”.

“Don't bore me with your Hujra and God forsaken relatives, start from when you went home, skip the Hujra part”, I said.

“When I entered the house, I saw our dog lying in front of my room, very relaxed and content,” he said closing his eyes, acting like the dog. “I walked in casually and before he knew I kicked the poor thing, real hard and shouted at him, you rascal I will kill you if I see you lying here again, you lazy bum”. The dog yelped a loud, painful cry running to safety, without knowing what hit him”, he smiled deviously, “tcha”, as if showing remorse. “Then I turned towards my room and there I saw my moon of my dull and dark lonely nights”.

Why kick the dog, I wondered to myself, probably he didn't want to make love to his wife in front of the dog. It might have something to do with sniffing; dogs sniff different odors coming from wrong places. I didn't understand why he kicked the dog, so I asked.

“Khan, women are tricky beings, if you don't scare them in the beginning then you can't control them all your life”, he said grinning and shaking his head. “You have to scare them the first time you meet, then she is afraid of you and respects you all her life”.

“You kicked the poor dog to scare your wife?”

He shook his head smiling, “his bad luck, wrong place wrong time”.

“Unbelievable”.

He then got into minute details of every part of her body, his moon's body, the smoothness and whiteness of her skin, the sweet scent of her body, the curves of her bosoms, the hardness of her tits and the fullness and roundness of her bums and whatever. “Khan she is the best thing ever in the world. More lovable than a child can love his mother”.

“Wrak sha”, get lost, “you liar”, I said.

“By God Khan, why would I lie to you”, he said, shaking his head but the night was so short. I hadn't even started talking when the Mullah started the call for prayer.

He took out a small naswar box, put a pinch in his mouth and shook his head, “Akhaai, life could have been much better if I didn't have to come back for duty. Haji sahib must have seen these things, he should understand”, he said spitting naswar. “He should give me more leave, ka na, don't you think so”, he asked.

“I don't know, I haven't tasted what you have, lucky Mashkalam”, I said. “O-kho, Marra, she is so innocent, so shy and so obedient. The more I make her talk the more

diffident she gets”, his mouth drooled before he could spit.

Time flies by, Mashkalam had four boys and he wanted to educate all of them. Three showed interest in studies while the eldest didn't, so he was sent to work in Middle East. He discussed the future of his children with me, hoping they will become worthy men. One of his sons was doing his masters in English literature and Mashkalam was so proud of him. Things were going well for him until misfortune struck.

It was a late summer afternoon; the sun had left the lawn to us as shadows stretched across it. We were in the Hujra arranging charpoys for the evening when we got the news. Mashkalam's second son has killed a man. The news came as a shock; this was real serious. Mashkalam had worked so hard to enable his children out of poverty. Misfortune had struck and look which way fate took them. An effort of a lifetime was gone in minutes. All his hard work, his sacrifice for his family, was all gone.

Everyone was eager to know more but there weren't any details yet. I recalled the good times. Every time he had a son he brought Khwanai and boasted to us and now his son was old enough to take a life. Taking human life has become so inconsequential.

Life will never be the same for Mashkalam which made me sad. Mashkalam was poor, he couldn't confine his children and the moment they came out the other party will avenge their dead. Many change abode to safer places but he didn't have that capacity either. He spent whatever little he earned on his children's education.

The sun had gone behind the hills changing the western sky crimson. One after another, people started arriving to the Hujra. The elders discussed Mashkalam's misfortune and it transpired that it was a case of Badal. That was a small relief. If it really was so then probably the issue could be resolved, I hope the scores were even.

A week after the incident I met Mashkalam, he was unshaven, shabbily dressed, looking very miserable as if he hasn't slept for weeks. Sadness pouring out his eyes and in the way he talked, his voice was dry and husky, as if he needed to clear his throat every time he spoke.

Barely audible he said, “Khan, you can't do anything about the youngsters, they are unmanageable. Look at our poverty, our miseries, our lives and if today, after forty years of hardships and hard work, we had a chance to improve our lives, he does this”, referring to his son.

“It's the other boys”, he said looking back to see if anyone was there, “they taunt you and even if you don't care for Badal, the others push you into it. The nothing doers encourage the boys to avenge their dead”. He cleared his throat and pointing towards a young boy, he said, “Young boys can't stand the taunt, they have to do something to get rid of it. The boys think it's better to die than live in taunt and shame

of pending Badal. It's not only my children, Khan; everyone taunts everyone else. It is fashionable to taunt. We feared annoying Allah, so we never taunted anyone, even if we had good cause. We were careful in speech not to let anyone feel we are taunting them but now the youngsters find excuses to taunt each other. God knows what's wrong with them". He stared at me and said, "I think we failed in raising our children, there is no fear of Allah in them".

"You never mentioned you had a pending Badal, never in so many years that we spent together," I asked.

"Khan it is an old case", he responded, "of the times of my father, he along with my uncles couldn't exact Badal and I never planned to do so either, Badal is a costly affair and I know I couldn't afford it. I thought I will improve our livelihood, educate my children, make them into good human beings, successful, honorable men", he said spitting all the while. "It was a mishap long ago, a forgotten case but bad deeds follow you to the grave. Now that my son has avenged the dead, I can't disown it. I am afraid I don't have much of choice".

"The elders have given us Tiga of one year" he said in a dry husky voice. "We have surrendered ten Kalashnikovs each as Barampta if anyone violates the Tiga. I have asked a jirga of elders to resolve the issue now that the score is equal. I hope they will give us a good decision, it might cost me some money but hopefully in a period of one year the case will be resolved".

Tiga - Limited Ceasefire, Barampta - Guarantee

Tiga (limited cease-fire). Tiga or Teega is a temporary truce in a feud, arranged by a tribal jirga. Literally it means a stone, across which both the hostile parties make pledges to have no concern with the opposite party until a permanent settlement is reached or the time of Tiga expires. Whoever is wronged, gives Tiga and he who has wronged asks for Tiga. In case there has been a mishap, the aggressor asks for a Tiga. A Jirga of elders go to the aggrieved and ask for some time so that arrangements could be made for an amicable solution. Depending on the aggrieved party, they may or may not agree for seizure of hostile activities towards each other for a limited time. The aggrieved family will decide whether it is in their interest to give Tiga. They decide on the time frame as to how long the Tiga will last and they may ask for Barampta (surety in cash or kind) just in case Tiga is violated. Though the Jirga which manages the Tiga ensures it is not violated. During Tiga all hostilities cease and both parties are advised not to cross path with each other.

Getting Tiga is not easy, the aggrieved party is hurt and angry and they constantly refuse agreeing to Tiga. The offending party ensures they ask someone influential and having good relations with the aggrieved to convince them to give Tiga. Every now and then group of elders visited our Hujra to ask Baba get them Tiga. In some cases,

the offenders were so notorious and the offence so heinous that Baba refused helping them but then they keep on pleading until Baba gave them a nod.

The elders ensure their families don't get entangled in enmity. They make many sacrifices to keep enmity away from the family. Baba told me to avoid people who might offend you, it means they have offended many before and will offend many after you. Have a big heart and wait for the right time. Pre-empt them only when you feel they will hurt or humiliate you in public. For everything else, you just have to encourage someone who has been offended in public. Many times you won't have to do this either. Try your best never to entangle in enmity, especially with one from the same village.

Badragga - Escort

Traveling in the tribal areas is a difficult business. The area is unknown, the terrain is hostile with hardly any means of transportation. At times one needs some kind of guidance and protection to travel in the tribal areas, mostly the government servants, who go out in the field for surveys etc. They need a guide and protection because they don't know the area well enough and then there are notorious people around who might kidnap an official for ransom.

Tribes have agreements with government that it will not interfere in their affairs. If officials have to move in the area they will inform the tribe owning the area, who will provide security to the officials while they are in that tribe's territorial jurisdiction. The security force, four to eight men, provided by the tribe is Badragga. In good old days, the mighty British army would be led by a Badragga of a few tribesmen just to tell them that you have come to our area with our consent, we are there to protect you and we are taking you through the tribal area. As soon as the tribal limit of a certain tribe ends the next tribe whose area begins will take over by providing Badragga. Other than security and indication of ownership, it keeps unwanted elements out of the tribe's jurisdiction hence preventing commission of crime by outsiders. No one attacks a Badragga as it is the tribe not the individuals they would be attacking.

Nanawatey - Unconditional Surrender

Nanawatey literally means entering, like enter into submission or unconditional surrender. If an accident takes place, where a person did not commit excess or cause harm deliberately, then elders of the family and at times of the Khel of the offender get together, arrange two or four sheep and go in the form of a group as Nanawatey to the aggrieved party. On reaching the Hujra of the aggrieved party, the Nanawatey

slaughters a sheep at the Hujra and submit unconditional surrender. The Nanawatey will explain their position and ask for forgiveness from the aggrieved.

The aggrieved party looks at the incident, if there was no deliberate act, no intention and it was an unfortunate accident, the aggrieved party will invariably accept the Nanawatey and forgive them. If the act committed has cost the aggrieved party, like property damaged or an injured requires treatment, they may ask for funds proportionate to the costs incurred.

Intentional killing, kidnapping or abduction like crimes are not covered by Nanawatey and are unforgivable acts. These acts have to be accounted for and if a family tends to forgive and forget such acts then it is a black mark on the family and the family is accused of cowardice.

In very rare cases, a family might come in Nanawatey where a wrong was committed intentionally. If the offending family feels that it is in no position to continue enmity it will take Nanawatey to the aggrieved party and offer unconditional surrender. It mostly happens when a bravado in the family acts independently, without the knowledge and consent of others. In such cases, the whole family including women and children will go to the aggrieved party. The women will carry Quran, clearly displayed above their heads; the men are unarmed, led by elders, a Mian or a Mullah also accompanies them. Such cases are rare and I have come across only one in my life. It was an elopement case where the eloping girl was married to the boy and the boy's family gave a girl in marriage to a boy from the aggrieved family.

It was October, we had moved indoors, the evening breeze was dry and chilly. The corn crop was collected, leaving the lands brown and barren. It was dinnertime and family members were trickling in after having said evening prayers in the mosque. We were getting ready to have supper, when I saw my cousin who had just arrived from Karachi. He had purchased a pickup truck from Karachi and driven all the way. He looked a little pulled down, he was unshaven and his clothes were dirty, the long and tiring drive showing on him. Probably, he didn't get an opportunity to take a bath and change clothes on arrival.

I welcomed him and shaking hands asked about his journey, "man you look worn out", I said.

He shook his head and whispered into my ear, "I have messed up big time", continuously shaking his head.

As if he poured cold water in my color, a chill ran down my spine "What happened", I asked.

"I hit a girl on the road, on the way from Bannu, near Bakka Khel", he said, touching his ears. "My companion scared me into running from the scene, Toba Khudaya Toba" forgive me God. "I didn't stop to pick up the girl and take her to the hospital", he said, "There was a coach following us which stopped for the girl and

took her to the hospital”, still shaking his head and touching both ears with his right hand.

“So, was she alive?” I asked.

“I waited for the coach at Mirali and checked with them”, he stared at me taking a long pause, “they said, the girl died”.

My heart jumped to my throat, I felt as if I couldn't speak. “Good Lord, that's not good”, I said. Had he rushed the girl to hospital he would have done his part. Then even if she had died we could ask for forgiveness but running from the scene is too much. “Don't say anything till dinner is over, OK”, I said to him.

He looked at me and nodded. “OK”.

When and how dinner started, what was served, I don't remember any. I couldn't swallow a single morsel, as if the food increased in my mouth and I needed to chew more. Once dinner was over, general gupshup started and I was waiting for an opportune moment to disclose the misfortune when Baba asked me if everything was OK. He noticed the uneasiness from my body language. “Ya, all is well”, I said, “It's just that we had a small accident”, I murmured as an afterthought.

“A small accident”, Baba asked. I told Baba of what happened, little details of the small accident.

My God, Baba was furious, “Spai da, Spai da”, he is a dog, a dog surely, “how could he leave a bleeding child on the road, it is unacceptable, Toba Toba”, Baba was shaking all over, “this idiot of a man he doesn't has any common sense. And you call it a small accident”, Baba stared at me. “Who asked him to go to Karachi, by the way? Is he fit to travel on his own?” Baba was shaking with anger.

“I fail to understand”, Baba said, “Why this idiot thinks he is so smart. Have you seen the idiot talk, as if he has saved three lives and is risking his life to save a fourth. He left a bleeding child on the road; can any human do such a thing? I don't think so”. Baba was shouting. “This bloody fool is an animal; he is not human at all. He is so worthless and he behaves as if he is indispensable”.

No one dared to speak or argue with Baba. After abusing and cursing him, for what seemed to be ages, Baba asked for Miram Khan. He explained the situation to Miram Khan, every time the child was mentioned, Miram Khan gave out a loud, “O Kho, Tcha Tcha, poor girl”.

Baba asked him to take two elders with him, “go to the bereaved family early morning and tell them that we are sorry for what happened and ashamed of our chap's response. Tell them we know you are in deep shock and grief, that is why we didn't come today, we will come to them tomorrow”. Baba gave Miram Khan some money to pay the family for funeral expenses.

The next morning Miram Khan left for Bakka Khel along with leading elders of

Daur tribe. By late afternoon Miram Khan returned and informed us that they were unhappy more, over the driver not stopping than the death of the child. Shaking his head Baba said, "I knew it, I knew it. Accidents happen but anyone would be upset on what he has done. Heee, left a bleeding child on the road". The whole evening Baba kept cursing and abusing, getting annoyed over petty things.

Next morning Baba led the Nanawatey, we were a busload of people with four sheep. From Bakka Khel we drove on a katcha track towards the child's village. There were a few mud houses, a small mud mosque and Hujra. It was a poor family trying to put up a brave face. Charpoys were placed in a circle, with new sheets on them, the Hujra was sprinkled and tea was ready to be served. While we met the elders, the butcher slaughtered a sheep but before he could do so to the others, the Bakka Khel elders stopped him. They greeted and seated us in the Hujra, trying to be at their best. Baba signaled the Mullah accompanying us and he started reciting verses from the Quran and then prayed to God for forgiveness.

After the Mullah finished, Baba rose and started with praising the bereaved family. Baba spoke like a mother speaks to her sick child, "bad things do happen to good people and Allah tests good people for patience and steadfastness. Allah says that I test the believers and the biggest of all tests is children. It is hard on you, as you are in great pain but we do believe that Allah has determined the time and place of birth and death, which cannot be changed by a single second. In the world of cause and effect we are only the means, Allah has already decided. We know that there was no bad intention, why will anyone like to harm an innocent child and though we wish the driver had stopped, he got scared and only when he saw a coach behind him, he didn't stop. Had the coach not been behind him he would have to stop scared or whatever. This in no way exonerates the driver for not stopping; we are very sorry and ashamed for what happened".

An elder from the bereaved family, with a short white beard got up and spoke in a soft husky voice. "We know Haji sahib as an honorable man and all that he says we believe him". After a long talk, the family forgave us. Our elders gave them some additional money for funeral expenses and good will and we left back for the village. The bereaved family extended full courtesy to us but since the time I told Baba of the accident and till we reached the village Baba kept on cursing and abusing. "I have told this idiot so many times, when there are children or animals on the road, even if they are not crossing the road you should be very careful, slow down what's the hurry but heee! He never listens".

Many of the elders wanted to disembark en rout as their abodes were near but Baba didn't agree and insisted they came with us. When we reached the village, we had food together; those from outside village were paid kharcha and were seen off with many thanks.

Lal Zar Khan is a man of many colors, he loves pet animals, so he had the tallest horse, the most ferocious dog and every breed of chicken, pigeons and parrots. He is

a tall guy with thick lips and a big mouth with foamy corners, always smiling, showing his prominent yellow teeth. Very humble and witty and is always welcomed wherever he goes. He has a long unkempt, dirty beard, never combed or trimmed. Any money that he ever had he spent it on pets.

Babajee was very fond of him and got him and his son jobs in Town committee Miranshah. Having a job is like joining an elite group. Tribal life style is very simple and the pay of a person is enough for a family.

Lal Zar Khan has four sons, the eldest Maulla Khan was unfortunately in bad company. He roamed with a gang that had dangerous enmities. The enemy group appealed Lal Zar Khan to advise his son Maulla Khan to stay away from the company of the other gang as they feared Maulla Khan might harm them on the other group's instigation.

Maulla Khan didn't pay any heed to the request and continued with what he considered right. One fine morning, when the gang was on its way to Miranshah from Danday Darpa Khel, the enemy group was waiting in ambush. The gang was ambushed, resulting in two dead and as many injured from the gang, whereas the other group received one injury. Unfortunate for Lal Zar Khan, Maulla Khan was among the two killed.

Lal Zar Khan is a humble man and in no position to retaliate. His other three children were young so he had to wait till such time he was able to exact Badal. The other group sent him a message that we had no enmity with him and Maulla Khan wasn't target of the ambush. The ambush was for the enemy and it was unfortunate that Maulla Khan got hit. They conveyed that they will come to him in Nanawatey and request forgiveness.

It was evening; we were in the Hujra when Lal Zar Khan entered. He was half the man we knew, he looked sick, his face had gone pale, his lips were dry and torn and he looked very tired. There was no humor in him which we were so used to.

After making him comfortable Baba asked him how he happened to pass this way. He shook his head in dismay and said, "Haji sahib, you know all what happened, I need not repeat it. I have received a message that the other group intends coming to me in Nanawatey. I have come to ask you for advice".

Misfortune doesn't come alone; it transpired from the conversation that Baba had on some previous occasion advised him to restrain his son and ask him to stay away from the gang. That made Lal Zar Khan even more uneasy.

Baba gave him a long stare and shook his head, "I could see this coming that is why I sent for you then but you had no control over your son. I knew this was going to happen, I knew it, you should have been wiser".

Knowing that the poor chap has already suffered a loss Baba didn't say much. He looked at Lal Zar Khan and said, "I know your worth, you can't exact Badal and

living with a pending Badal will ruin your life and that of your children. You got advance warnings on the actions of your son; you should have acted more sensibly. They say it was an accident and it wasn't intended the way it ended. There will be responsible people in the Nanawatey who will say this. I think the best course will be to accept the Nanawatey and fix a charge for the children of Maulla Khan on them”, Baba suggested.

Lal Zar Khan seemed perturbed on the suggestion. He looked towards the sky and then looked down, “Haji sahib, I am your man and have always been behind you through thick and thin. I thought you will extend all out support to enable me exact Badal. They killed my son in broad daylight, on the main road”.

Baba probably wasn't expecting this, as if something stung him, he changed his position facing Lal Zar Khan and raising his voice, he said, “well if you so desire and you think you can manage it I will give you all the support you need. Tell me whatever you need and I will give you”.

“My son didn't harm anyone, if they were afraid it was their problem”, Lal Zar said.

“They are a bunch of Thugs”, Baba said, “they have many pending Badal blood on their heads, they will add another to the list. But you have a free life; check yourself, if you think it is wise to have enmity then, Badal it is. May God help us.”

Lal Zar Khan didn't say a word after that, sadness was so evident from his eyes; he got up as if his body was drained of energy and left, kind of broken hearted.

The next morning he came back to Baba and said that he gave it a thought, probably he got a second and third opinion which he didn't mention. Haji sahib, you are our Mashar, you speak wise, I am ignorant that's why I come to you for advice. I thought over it all night and now I understand what you said.

He agreed to what Baba had suggested. “Send them a message to bring the Nanawatey to my Hujra”, Baba said. Lal Zar Khan has shifted to Danday Darpa Khel from village Darpa Khel, arrangements in Danday aren't as good. People judge your strength from your men and material and Baba didn't want the other party to feel that Lal Zar Khan was weak on any count.

It was a bright morning, the sun was warm and pleasant, and we had the charpoys laid out in the lawn. Baba had asked all our Khel to be present. When the Nanawatey came, we were twice their number and Baba spoke from a position of strength. The opponents shouldn't think you are accepting Nanawatey out of weakness.

When all the guests were seated, Malik Darya Khan, a tall gangly man, well above eighty years of age, wearing a short black (dyed) beard and dark sunglasses with a silver frame rose to speak. He spoke of his great respect and age old comradeship with Baba. He said on authority that there was no intention, Maulla Khan wasn't the target and it was unfortunate that he got killed, they realized the

grave mistake committed and have come to ask for forgiveness.

Baba reminded the elders that Miranshah- Ghulam Khan Road is an international road, many people, including women and children, from many tribes and many places travel on this road. Anyone can company with anyone, laying ambush on such a major road was unwise.

After long deliberations, Baba accepted the Nanawatey. The party was forgiven for the unintended murder of Maulla Khan. For the maintenance of minor children of Maulla Khan, Baba agreed on fifty thousand rupees which were paid by the opposite party to the family of Maulla Khan.

There are many grey areas, where the decision of the elder can take you any way. In such cases the prudence of elders matters most. The basic responsibility of elder is to protect his people from harm's way in a graceful and acceptable manner, to enable those in their charge live a peaceful and fruitful life. Having a pending Badal is a serious matter, it affects ones whole life and many have left their villages because of Badal and have settle either down country or are living as Hamsayas with others.

Panah - Asylum

Panah is when someone under duress asks for asylum, especially when under hot pursuit. No family can under any circumstances refuse Panah. If a family is unwilling to give Panah, for whatever reason, they will make it clear to the aspirant and ask him where would he like to go and the family will ensure safe passage for the aspirant to his destination protecting him from harm's way. But this doesn't mean that a family says it and the aspirant will accept. If the aspirant says no I am not leaving then the family has no option but to extend Panah. The aspirant, however, will have to live by the rules of the family till he is in their Panah. Panah takes precedence over everything else. If a person, against whom Badal is pending asks for Panah, then Badal will be deferred and Panah granted. Badal will be postponed till the enemy is in their Panah.

We were sitting in our Hujra, it was almost sunset when four men of our village, fully armed with guns and bullet belts hurriedly entered our Hujra. They were known to us as good people. "Oo, Haji sahib, po khair raghley (come in peace)" and we all greeted them. They seemed worried and perturbed. We seated Haji Mir Nawaz Khan, the elder among them with Baba and the rest sat down wherever they could find a place. We changed our posture from leaning against the Takia to sitting upright on the charpoys, attention totally towards the guests.

"Haji sahib what brings you here at this time", Baba asked, knowing for sure they have a serious problem.

Normally people visit others either in the afternoon or after dinner, at sunset

everyone stays near his Hujra. An entry at such time gives out the urgent nature of the task in hand.

“Haji sahib, we have spent a lot of time with you, have we ever done anything to annoy you or anyone else in the village? Have you ever received any complaint against us?” Mir Nawaz asked, still out of breath from the brisk walk.

“No, never, you are an honorable man and you have a lot of respect with us. We know you very well and trust every word you say so just come straight to the point”, Baba responded.

Shadows had climbed the walls of the Hujra, chasing sunlight away. Mir Nawaz was a tall lanky guy, with a long grey beard. He was wearing a clean Dastar and clean clothes; he had prayer beads in his hand which he was constantly rolling. He took a deep breath, cleared his throat and said, “Haji sahib, this boy”, pointing to a young man sitting to the left of Baba and in front of me, “married a woman who wouldn't spend time as expected of our women, so, perforce he took a second wife. The woman that he left had many problems, always quarreling, always cribbing, she just didn't want to spend time with him otherwise who likes to wreck his own house, if I say the woman wanted to leave, it will be more appropriate”.

Mir Nawaz was rolling his prayer beads in his fingers as fast as he could, he would suddenly stop rolling the beads, stretch the string in his hand, and wrap the beads around his hand, all actions showing his frustration.

“Hmm, he is within his right to do so”. Baba chipped in nodding at the man pointed at.

“He has a son from the first wife, who has always been living with us and was being looked after very well”, Mir Nawaz continued. “The mother of the child never once tried to know the wellbeing of the child during all this time, not once, Haji sahib, not even in sickness. She didn't claim the child, as she has no claim over him”.

Mir Nawaz started rolling two beads at a time, one each from both sides of the string. “Today after almost a year the mother got a chance, she kidnapped the child and ran this way. Haji sahib, the woman cannot look after the child. We want to educate the child, to be identified with your children but with his mother he will become a good for nothing nobody, she cannot afford to educate him, she will grow him into a rascal. We are taking good care of him; he is our child”. Mir Nawaz pleaded his case as if he was going to lay his heart on the table.

He looked around as if counting the audience and resumed, “Haji sahib, all I ask is that for the future of the child, you should help us convince his mother to give up the child. She can see him if she wants, any time, Haji sahib, at your place if she feels threatened elsewhere. Haji sahib, if you talk to her she will listen to you. God has given you power and authority over people; they trust you and they listen to you. You be our guarantor”.

Mir Nawaz spoke with passion and earnestness. The other three accompanying him, a son and two nephews, kept nodding with every statement Mir Nawaz made. However, he never once asked to bring back the woman or hand over the child. He just wanted Baba to talk to the woman, to convince her.

Baba was listening with intent, nodding in agreement all the while. He looked at me, “go in and check if the woman is still in the house”, he said. “Check with your mother, she might be hiding her”.

I went in and asked Morr where Mir Nawaz's woman was. She said, “The woman had come but I told her that I can't keep you. We know these people and we don't want to annoy them so you should go and find some other place. The woman understood our compulsion and immediately left from the back door. She didn't say where she was going”.

I returned to the Hujra and narrated verbatim what I was told. She has left this place without disclosing her destination. Baba cut a sorry figure because the woman wasn't around. A woman can claim her children, especially infants, if she doesn't remarries. If she remarries, she loses claim on her children from the first husband.

Everyone knew where the woman was but without saying another word Haji Mir Nawaz and the others thanked Baba and though we requested them to stay for dinner, they shook hands and left. They knew it was against Pukhtunwali to hand over someone who has asked for Panah. They had conveyed what they wanted us to say to the woman which they were confident will be conveyed to her. They were sure of the outcome so they didn't argue over anything.

Later in the evening, after dinner was over, I saw the woman and her child. She was sitting on a mazri matt in the verandah surrounded by women of our house. The light of the lantern was dim, I could hardly make out her feature in the dim light. Moths and beetles flew towards the lantern making big shadows, adding to the darkness. The woman seemed young and strong, with sharp features, her clothes dark and worn out, her child was clinging to her with eyes wide open, clueless why everyone was surrounding them.

On my enquiry, she said, “I was after the child for the last one year. They were always so close to him. They didn't let the boy out of their sight for a single moment. One year, Khan, it was like a hundred years, for the last one year, every day I have been watching my son without being able to talk to or touch him, every day, Khan, for a whole long year. Eid or Ramadan, summer or winter, sunshine or rain, I didn't miss a day, I couldn't miss a day”.

“Every day I went to where their houses are and the children come out to play. Every day I used a different route, dressed differently, not to arise suspicion, not to be recognized, as in a small village everyone knows everyone else”.

I nodded at her, “*Che rezha nassey po Eid ba warshey*”. *If you fast, Eid will surely*

come.

(*Pushto proverb*)

“Khan”, she said, “a failed attempt was instant death, punishment for kidnapping a child, punishment for kidnapping my own child. How many times I came so close to picking him up, that I could feel the heat of his body and as many times I had to walk away, for not attempting was much better than a failed attempt”.

“So many candies that I got for him melted in my hands. My palms sweating, my hands trembled and my knees refusing to take my weight, my fear stopped me from picking my child so many times. Khan, every night I slept to one side of the bed keeping his side vacant for him. One day God will give me my son”, she said, “I was sure of that”.

The woman broke into tears, her voice started quivering and after every few words, she cleaned her running nose with her chaddar. Her face towards the child, tears rolling down her cheeks she was trying to explain her ordeal. “Today, when I lifted my burqa and told him that I was mother and asked him to come with me, I was terrified. What if he doesn't recognize me or refuse to come with me. It has been a long time for a child of his age. Thank God, he didn't hesitate for a second and ran into my arms. I don't know how I did it”.

“The moment he came into my arms and I picked him up my mind went blank. I didn't hear any voice or see anyone, everything blurred as if it was just me and my son in the whole world. I was running like crazy, holding my son tight in my arms. It was only near Khan Akber's shop that I realized what had happened and where I was. They are going to get me I thought and they will kill me for sure. Near Khan Akber's shop I heard someone call, ‘what happened’? I think someone ran after me shouting, ‘what happened’? I didn't stop, didn't look back, I didn't respond, just kept running”.

“No matter how hard I ran I felt as if my feet were sinking in the earth, like in soft mud. The other kids must have told the family by now and they must be close behind with guns in hands. Men run fast, they are going to catch up, I ran as I had never run before. The distance, it just wouldn't finish. I kept running as hard as I could but I felt my legs couldn't carry me fast enough”.

She cleaned the tears from her chin and said, “Khan, till a step short of your house I was expecting to hear a bang and a bullet hitting me from behind, ripping through me and my child. It was only when I crossed over to this property that I thought; now they can't do anything. Now I am safe, in Haji sahib's place, I am safe. Now I am safe and my son is safe. Yes, I am safe with my son. They can go to hell, now they can't harm me or my son. We were safe. I looked back and there was no one following me”.

She took a deep sigh, “Khan, some feelings are beyond explanation. For the first time I saw the face of my child properly. For the first time, I talked to him and he

responded, he could talk, he had grown so much in one year”.

“So, bad times are over”, I said, “you have your son, you should be happy now”.

“God is just and kind”, she said, “He listened to a poor woman like me”, she clinched her child tight against her bosoms. The boy looking at his mother and looking at me alternately, with wide eyes not knowing what was going on. Mother and child were so happy together. The child's hands full of candies, which his mother had been keeping for him, God knows for how long.

“Haji sahib said they wanted to send the child to school to help him become a good man, an educated man and probably you won't be able to do so”, I said.

She shook her head, “for sake of God, you tell me how many of their children go to school, why aren't they sending the other children to school? They are liars, they just said this because Baba appreciates children going to school and they were trying to outsmart Baba. They were never going to send the boy to school; it was an excuse they thought might work on Baba”.

She looked at me and said, “Why did I run all the way, from one end of the village to the other? I didn't enter Malik Wresham Khan's house or other houses nearby. I would have got Panah in any of the houses. You know why I came here, because I knew these people cannot fool Baba. They are very cunning and can influence anyone. But Baba”, she said shaking her head, “I knew, will take good care of me and my child; he will not abandon me for any reason. Why do you think God has given him so much respect? Because he looks after the poor”, she sobbed.

We always had five or six women in Panah at one time in our house, women, who had left their abodes for different reasons. Some had children with them, others had left their children behind, and there were even pregnant women among them. They all had issues back home with their husband or in laws and left their houses in distress. They all had terrifying experiences, their nightmares from which they wanted liberty. Some were lucky their problems could be resolved others weren't so lucky and they had to live with their misfortune.

Such women present at the time were more interested in her story than us. Every time she spoke, she reminded them of their misfortunes and they all wept with her all through her ordeal. Some of our faint-hearted women also joined in, so many women crying at a time created quite a scene.

The next day started with a bright and sunny morning and we started as if nothing happened. The woman wanted to go to her parents. We disguised the lady to look as one of ours, Morr and I accompanied her to a certain point and when we were sure she has reached safety we said good bye.

The woman prayed for us all the while, her excitement was evident from every action, every gesture she made and when we were parting, she looked at Morr and said, “God protect you from grief and may He bless your children to lead all people.

May you always be surrounded by many loving grandsons.”

She then looked at me and said, “God will surely reward you for helping a poor woman, I will pray for you and your children my whole life. God has blessed you much and I will beg Him for more blessings on you. You will never know the condition of my heart, when I reached your place with my child, as if I am in protection of God”. She was holding her child in her arms, she held him tight against her chest, covered him with her burqa and walked off, never looking back.

Many times, people have been told to go back when in hot pursuit of someone wanted to them. “He has crossed into my land, no man is to touch him”, says the owner of the land. Those hounding him stop on the boundary and give up the chase.

Our house is to the extreme end of the village, which is an added reason why so many people have entered our Hujra or house, asking for Panah but the main reason was Baba's reputation. There were times when we had more asylum-seeking women in our house than our own. Men get Panah only for small durations and as soon as the immediate threat is over, they leave, until of course they opt to become Hamsaya. Women on the other hand don't have any place to go, so they might be staying for years.

One comes across events in life unseen and unheard, unexpected events at unexpected places. We were travelling in a wagon from Bannu to Miranshah. It was noon, on a blazing hot day, the wagon was stifling and stuffy. Enroute the wagon stopped at Mirali, some passengers got off while others boarded and after all seats were taken we resumed onwards journey to Miranshah.

We crossed Idak, the road was empty with not a soul in sight. It was somewhere near Naurak, when two armed men who had boarded at Mirali stopped the wagon and desired to disembark. The hills and road were shimmering in the sun. Traffic normally thins out by noon and there was none from either side.

As the two got off, they cocked and pointed their guns at the wagon. Not addressing anyone in particular, one of them said, “The Punjabi sitting in the back of the wagon owes us money, the Punjabi should come with us”.

The Punjabi had also embarked the wagon at Mirali and was being followed by the two desperados. The instant Punjabi came to know the men were asking for him, he grew pale, his lips dried and he started sweating. He said in a dry inaudible voice, “I don't know these people and don't owe them any money. I am here to collect my monthly installments from shopkeepers, for the supplies that I have made to them. People owe me money I don't owe money to anyone”.

Without arguing whether the Punjabi owed them money or not, the driver jumped out of seat in a flash, slammed the door behind him and challenged the armed men. The driver was a young man in greasy clothes with prominent moustache and an unshaven face. “It is against Pukhtunwali to take away a person from my protection”,

he said, “You will do so over my dead body. I am not going to let you take away the Punjabi. If you had a problem with him, you should have settled it in Mirali, before he boarded my wagon”. The driver shouted at the offenders while he walked towards them, to their side of the wagon. The desperados chose a good location for the job ensuring no help arrived but they never expected this.

Two elderly people with grey beards, sitting in the wagon also joined the driver. One of them said, “You cannot take away the Punjabi”, and they snatched the guns from the desperados. One of the elders even got hurt during the skirmish but both criminals were over powered. Ordinary people risked their lives for someone they didn't know and they unarmed and restrained criminals from harming him.

The desperados were seated in the wagon by force and taken to Esha check post where they were handed over to the Khassadars. The driver and passengers not only saved the Punjabi from being abducted but the kidnappers were also brought to justice. This is the kind of respect and protection one receives when we talk of Panah in the tribal areas.

Cheegha - The call

Whenever there is gross injustice against an individual, a family or a group in the tribal society, the elders sanction and organize an emergency party to take immediate cognizance of the situation. This emergency, task specific, first responder is called a Cheegha party. The call sent through the beat of drum to gather people is the Cheegha Dhole and the whole act of cognizance of the injustice is called ‘CHEEGHA’. The whole village or tribe is together in a Cheegha.

To assemble people in enough strength to face a strong adversary, the perpetrators of pain, a special beat of drum is played. Everyone recognizes Cheegha Dhole and understands their responsibility when heard. It takes priority over everything else. Many times I saw elders stare in the sky or listen to the wind, “something real bad has happened somewhere” they would say shaking their heads. The next morning or the day after, we will get news of terrible things having happened. How did they know? Instinctively, it is in our blood. When the Call is sent the wind carries it much farther than the ears can hear, nature responds to it, the birds and animals react to it, the rhythm of nature is breached and our instincts know, something bad has happened.

The effected party narrates its ordeal; the drummer is instructed to beat the Cheegha Dhole. People are mobilized to a meeting point, which is the point from where the sound of drum is coming, to take cognizance of the situation. At times, if situation warrants the Cheegha Dhole is played even before the elders are informed and once people gather they are informed of what happened, of the blatant injustice which needs to be corrected.

Chagha in ordinary Pukhto means a scream or a cry, a scream in pain, a request for help by the victim, a cry of support and reassurance from the family and well-wishers. Cheegha is derived from Chagha, a cry in response to a scream, a swift, strong and significant response. While pursuing the culprits every individual in the Cheegha is yelling till the individual shrieks become a mighty roar, a Cheegha.

Cheegha shows concern of those who care, a sense of belonging and being part of a caring family, for the aggrieved. For those responding to Cheegha, it means standing up united against tyranny and to convey the message that no one can get away with injustice. In modern terms, it is a social safety net against exploitation of the weak and vulnerable and in tribal life, it is brotherhood in blood.

The cause of Cheegha can be an individual, a group or even a tribe. The scale of the injustice determines the size of the Cheegha party, the more appalling the injustice the bigger the Cheegha party. When the whole tribe is affected, the Cheegha party becomes a Lashkar.

The essence is the urgency to respond to an urgent situation, Cheegha is the first responder, an emergency response team. It responds to correct a wrongdoing on the spot where related issues are sorted out through Jirgas later on. The Cheegha beat of drum, like the smoke signals of the Red Indians, is played in emergency and every one, young and old has to rush to the spot from where the sound is coming with whatever weapon and transport he can get hold of. There is no question of choice, it is binding on every able bodied man to reach the spot.

It was early summers or should I say, late spring, when the sun starts pinching, pushing people under shade, the time when one feels hot out in the sun and cold under a shade. It was afternoon; people had said their prayers after the short mid-day nap. We were in the house when we heard drumbeat, we listened carefully, Morr looked at me, "it is Cheegha," she said. "Cheegha indeed," I said, and got on my feet. Baba had just gone to his room after saying his prayers and was waiting for his afternoon tea.

How religiously we have our afternoon tea, every day after noon prayers, no matter what. Normally Baba is in Miranshah bazaar at this time but on that day there was a Jirga between two parties in the Khel. Baba was happy and in high spirits, the Jirga had finally decided the case and both the parties were happy on the judgment.

Baba peeped out of the door, his head out, the rest of him still in the room. "Isn't it Cheegha Dhole," he asked. "It is we said together," Morr and me. "What are you waiting for then, let's move, let's see what has happened". Baba came out of the room, "does anyone know what has happened?" "No", I said, "not yet".

He started walking towards the Hujra. I passed by him, went into his room, picked up his Kamarband (bullet belt) and rifle and followed him. The Cheegha could be heard clearer every moment, it was from the bazaar side and was coming our way.

Instead of waiting for the Cheegha to arrive Baba started walking towards the bazaar from where the sound was coming. We had hardly covered fifty yards, near the mosque of Alizai, when the lead people of the Cheegha party, rifles in hand, became visible.

Rifles in hand, rifle slung from ones shoulder, rifle wrapped in a piece of cloth to protect from dust, these are all signs which the tribesmen understand. If a rifle has no sling then the carrier will carry it in his hand indicating that the carrier has enmity and is ever ready to respond. If anyone without enmity is carrying his weapon in hand, we taunt him, "Allaka, boy, since when have you made enemies". If you see an unknown person with a rifle without a sling, stay to one side and keep a close watch.

Normally people avoid carrying the rifle in their hands, they prefer slinging it. Many who like to take care of their rifles keep it in a case made of cloth. They only remove the cloth when they mean to use it. Elders keep their rifles this way.

Baba loved his rifle and always looked after it like his baby. He kept it in a case while carrying it, he cleaned it before monsoon rains started, oiled it thoroughly and once the rains were over he cleaned it again. Walking towards the Cheegha party, I pulled the rifle out of the case and tied the case in the strap of the Kamarband. Normally the elders wear their own bullet belts and their gun is carried by a junior who walks a step behind him, as a mark of respect and of course the burden of weight.

The Cheegha reached us, crossed by and Baba joined in with the elders at the end of the party. While walking with Cheegha the situation was explained to Baba, I walked close behind.

The Cheegha beat was on, young and old, weapons in hand, were joining in and the procession was swelling by the minute. A Cheegha of Darpa Khels was on its way to initiate action against a person in Pallangzai just across Tochi. The person had killed an innocent man who had no successor, to grab whatever little property he owned. Action against cold blood murder of innocent is clear, kill the perpetrator and burn his house.

When the only son dies issueless and there is no successor, then his property goes to his cousins. In this case, the cousins killed the man so that his property is transferred to them. The village elders considered this gross brutality and decided to take action against the culprits. The sound of the Cheegha Dhole was moving from Darpa Khel towards Tochi. Those who couldn't reach the village followed the sound of drumbeat to join the party en route wherever they could catch up. The drumbeat continues till the mission is complete, so people keep on catching up.

Splashing through the cold, crystal clear water of Tochi, rifle in one hand, sandals in the other, the party crossed Tochi. All the dogs in Pallangzai came out barking at the Cheegha. They stopped at the bank of Tochi when they saw the horde, looked around and started fighting among themselves on retreat. On reaching Pallangzai, the

party assembled under the shade of dense trees, their feet wet up to their shins and the panchas (lower leg) of their shalwar wet from running in the Tochi riverbed. The youth had left the elders behind reaching Pallangzai way ahead. They were discussing further course of action, while waiting for the elders. The cool Tochi breeze and the shady Pallangzai grounds failed to cool the anxiety of the hot blooded Darpa Khel youth.

We joined the group waiting for action; I stood behind Baba during the discourse. The party was still deliberating next steps when a strongly built, young woman came to the center of the Cheegha party with a sheep lead in one hand and a large knife in the other. She wore a long, worn out dress with the colors faded beyond recognition but with all decoration, coins, beads etc intact. She wasn't wearing any shoes and had a big chaddar covering her head and bosom. It covered half of her face and bit on it to make it stay in place. Her long frock swung back and forth with her movement.

As she came close to the elders she lobbed the sheep on the ground. Pressing down the sheep with her knee to control it, she held the head of the sheep in one hand and with the other she slaughtered the sheep. The whole act took less than a minute. She wiped the bloodstained knife on the sheep's hairy skin, stood up in front of the elders and while the sheep was still bleeding and beating its feet, she announced that the Cheegha party is her guests, no one leaves until she has served them meal. The woman walked back to her house looking everyone in the eyes without a blink.

When she left, Baba asked Miram Khan and me to go after the woman and ask what she has to say. We followed instructions and went to the house of the woman.

She was expecting us and when we called at the door, she showed us in. She was bitter, sad and in despair. She asked us to sit on an empty jute sack spread out in a small veranda. The small mud house, shared by two brothers had two adjacent rooms. It had a small cooking area at one end, an eating and sitting space between the doors of the rooms and a few animals in the corner at the other end. There was a small boundary wall, more to determine ownership than veiling or protecting the inmates.

Miram Khan did all the talking while I witnessed. This is the standard procedure, to have all the facts there are always two persons, the second to remind if the first forgets, to cool if one gets angry and prompt if correct issue is not discussed.

She looked us straight in the eyes and said in a cold, insensitive voice, "I am wife of the murderer. He and his brother heard the Cheegha Dhole; they knew Cheegha was on its way so they left the village long before you arrived. The blood sucking scoundrels killed my only brother, in spite of all my persuasions, I was unable to desist them from committing this heinous crime".

"They had been looking for excuses to kill my brother for some time now and all the while, I was trying to protect him". She sat there, motionless, cold and expressionless, "they made me believe they gave up the idea of killing my brother,

that's why I took less care and so did my brother. Today they got the opportunity and did what they did, what they had always been planning for”.

“I have three children to look after and if the Cheegha decides to demolish my house, I will have nowhere to go”. The strong woman started breaking down, every time she mentioned her children her voice quivered; her hands and edges of mouth trembled. She was trying to stay strong.

“I am a victim on all counts,” she said taking a deep breath, tears dancing in her eyes, “first I lost my only brother, then my husband becomes an absconder, who is as good as dead and now I am going to lose my house”. She sighed, as if she will lose control, “Had I been around, by Allah, I would have killed them both. I slaughtered the sheep as Nanawatey to the tribe, to have mercy on my children and not demolish our house”. Her eyes overflowed, tears rolled down her cheeks and waning into her chadder.

Without breaking eye contact for a single moment, we heard what she had to say. We returned to the elders and while I stood silent behind Miram Khan, he narrated her ordeal to the Cheegha. The elders looked at each other and discussion on her plea started. Some people join Cheegha for looting houses to be demolished and it was becoming impossible to abstain them from demolishing the house. I stood aloof, without speaking a word, feeling sorry for the woman and her children, such a brave woman, such helplessness.

After lengthy discussion, Baba made the announcement, “The criminals are absconders and will be dealt with as and when they are caught. The woman and her children on the other hand are innocent. The woman has lost a brother and she has decided to part ways with her husband, so, punishing her I think will be injustice. So, it is decided that her house will not be demolished”. There was a lot of commotion and exclaim, some happy with the decision, others not.

Baba raised his hand for silence and continued, “Her husband and his brother are declared fugitives and will never be allowed entry into the village. If they do, they shall die. If the woman or her children keep any relations with them, we will demolish their house and ask them to leave the village. For now, the woman and her children shall live in peace, they will be extended all support by the village and if the husband intimidates them in any way, the village will take action against him”.

Like a breeze of fresh air, I was so glad to hear the decision. How much I wanted to go back to see the woman's expressions and her feelings. The decision must have come as a consolation to her in her hour of crises. “Some of you stay back and have food, the woman has prepared,” Baba said, he turned around and we started back homewards. I followed Baba with a few others, wondering if there could be any other people nobler than these men. If there could be any other women stronger than the one we just left behind. This is the kind of women, who can sit in a trench, ward off attacks and protect not only herself but also her children and her house.

Teenga - Accord and Nagha - Fine

The tribe resolves its issues through Marakas, consultations. If it is felt that certain element is creating problems for the people, the Maraka decides on a course of action to prevent the element from causing problems. These measures are precautionary, for the good of the village and the Khel. A decision taken by a tribe or village as a precaution is Teenga or Taroon.

Teenga is against acts normally permissible, as, the village imposed a Teenga against selling of land in Danday Darpa Khel to non Darpa Khels, when they saw that many Afghan Refugees have purchased land in Danday Darpa Khel. The village Caleweshti ensures implementation of Teenga. It has to be ensured that Teenga is fool proof; if it is not well thought-out then people find ways around it.

It was during such a Maraka when someone complained that when Laiqshah, Darpa Khel was killed at Tarakai Sar, we heard the gunshots but it didn't occur to us that it was enemy fire. Laiqshah didn't have time to respond and since the fire was from one weapon we thought someone is announcing birth of a son, celebrating the occasion. Had we known it was enemy fire we could have caught the culprits. They pleaded at the Maraka that no one should fire a weapon between sunset and sunrise so that such incidents can be avoided in future.

The Maraka after detail deliberations decided that, as of today 'there is a village Teenga, no one will fire after sunset till sunrise. If anyone violates the Teenga he will be Nagha, fined, rupees 500. The decision was conveyed through the beat of drum and after that, no one was allowed to fire after dark.

Over time, people fired at night, especially during marriages and when the Caleweshti came to collect the fine they were welcomed, offered food and paid the fine. The Teenga was ridiculed, as the Nagha was small and people could pay. So, if anyone had five hundred rupees, he could violate the Teenga. The Caleweshti didn't take much note of the intentional ridicule of the Teenga because for them it became a good source of income.

Besides the government paid Khassadars, responsible to look after government installations, there is a tribal force nominated by the tribe. It has representation from every Khel as per Nikkat called Caleweshti (of forty) because they are a party of forty men. Caleweshti is an implementation force for the decisions of village elders; they look after local village issues and work under the command of the tribal elders. They implement decisions taken on minor day to day issues and if there is a problem in implementation and more force is required the village elders call for a Lashkar. In a Lashkar every able bodied man of the tribe has to participate. Caleweshti don't get a regular salary but manage a stipend from the fines collected.

I was present in the second Maraka where the same issue came under discussion. Lal Zar Khan was very angry on the violation of the Teenga, "this is unacceptable",

he said, “the rich fire for the fun of it and pay the meager fine which means nothing to them. They are ridiculing the decision of elders”.

I was sitting next to him and I started pumping him up, “Nee (uncle), you are right”, I said, “there should be some arrangement to stop this or the Teenga should be called off”.

In his enthusiasm, Lal Zar Khan said, “next time when we go to collect the fine we will abuse the mother and father of the person who violates the Teenga, a simple fine is not enough”.

“Yes, we will shame them”, I said, “We will abuse the mother and father of the violators”. My cousin sitting next to me leaned forward sticking his head out to see across me and said, “Nee, don't you think we should abuse the wife of the violator instead of the father”?

“I think you are right”, I said, “We should screw the wife and mother of the violators”. Nee was shaking his head in assent and the top end of his turban shaking with it as if waving good bye.

We started enjoying the comments of Lal Zar Khan and after every few minutes we called out, “please listen to Nee, he has something important to say” and Nee will look at us not knowing whether we are messing with him or were really impressed with his intelligence. That day Nee was representing our Khel and there weren't many elders from other Khels either, to cut it short the Teenga was called off.

On another occasion, the village elders had gathered in the Hujra of Ghalji Khan to look into the affairs of people who won't fast and openly violate the sanctity of Ramadan by eating in public. The elders won't allow this and were discussing what action to take against the culprits. In sheer arrogance the offenders appeared in the Maraka and told the elders they had no business with their fasting, it's between them and God, the elders should mind their own business and the Maraka should be called off.

The elders opined that the issue is not your fasting; it is your disrespecting the sanctity of Ramadan by eating in public. You are offending people. An argument started which turned into an altercation with the felonious refusing to accept a word the elders said. By then, the elders lost patience with them and that was the end of the argument.

The elders just signaled and the offenders were given a thrashing of their life that none will ever forget. After the thrashing episode was over and the half-dead offenders dragged away, the village announced the Teenga, ‘no one will violate the sanctity of Ramadan and if anyone did, the whole village will come out after him and this will be the Nagha, the condition of the ones thrashed’. After that, no one ever dared to violate the sanctity of Ramadan by eating in public.

Similarly there are Teenga against keeping or giving protection to dacoits and

thieves, 'who ever gives protection to dacoits or thieves their houses will be burnt and they will be fined half a million rupees'. There is Teenga against the administration when on strike; 'who ever opens shop will be fined hundred thousand rupees', and so on.

Hamsaya - In Protection

Surviving enmity in the same village is very difficult. When people have enmity within the family, with cousins, Turbur or someone in the same village and are unable to continue the enmity, they migrate. They leave the village and become Hamsaya of some strong family in another village, another tribe.

Once a person is accepted as Hamsaya, no one can attack him in the vicinity of the village where he has protection. We had Tabbiwal Wazir, as Hamsaya, as they had enmity back home. If they go back to their village and are harmed then we are not responsible but if in tribal territory of Darpa Khel anyone harms them then it will be binding on our family to rise in arms with them and the attack will be considered an attack on us. In return the Hamsaya will be in service of the family with whom they stay and within the village if any kind of disaster strikes the host family, Hamsaya will be there as one of them. Hamsaya aligns himself with a strong family and with the support of that family he can live in peace. One cannot just live on another tribe's soil; he is not accepted, until he is a Hamsaya with someone.

Turbur - Second Cousins

There is a grave misunderstanding about Turbur. I have heard many people call the cousins as Turbur which is incorrect. Cousins are family and viewed as ones strength. Paternal second cousins are Turbur and are potential enemies.

Independent life in tribal areas is very difficult so people live in joint or extended families. It is very rare that brothers distribute family assets and live independent. Mostly it is after the death of the brothers, their children who are cousins distribute family assets amongst them.

Many family disputes arise after the second generation (children of the cousins), when Turbur takes control. That is why Turbur is a potential threat and has a special mention and special place in Pukhtun family life. One always endeavors to stay upright in front of his Turbur and outdo them in daily life.

Maraka - Parleys, Jirga - Council of Elders

Many of our friends refer to Maraka and Jirga as the same, which is not so. The two are different, Maraka (parleys) is when elders get together to thrash out an issue. It is a consultative process, all the participants are on the same side and even women can participate in Maraka. Jirgas are groups of elders trying to decide a dispute, each group representing a party to the dispute and there can be any number of parties to a dispute. Normally the Jirga gives a consensus verdict; if for some reason consensus cannot be reached then the Jirga is replaced with a new Jirga.

There is no written legislation by which Jirgas decide cases, it is all verbal and most decisions are reached at from old precedents. The Jirga members take guidance from Islamic Shariah and Rawaj. The parties are given option, whether they like to decide the case according to Shariah or Rawaj.

If both the parties agree on one code then experts of that code are called upon, like, if they agree on Rawaj, Maliks will be called upon as members of the Jirga and if they agree on Shariah then Mullahs will be on the Jirga. However, if both the parties don't agree on one code, let's say one asks for the case to be decided according to Shariah and the other according to Rawaj then the Jirga will have a Malik and a Mullah representing each party.

Both the disputing parties have already consulted people and know where their benefit lies so they will ask for the law that benefits them. In such cases the issue is reconciled; the Jirga members try to come up with a solution acceptable to both parties.

The Jirga may or may not reduce the verdict in writing depending on the issue. In smaller, family disputes, the Jirga members call for Wak, authority, from both the parties. Once the parties give Wak to the Jirga they don't have any recourse to backing out or asking for a fresh Jirga.

In smaller, family dispute, the Jirga members get the verdict implemented, since it is within the family no force is required. If the dispute is between Khels or parties from different Khels then the Caleweshti will get the verdict implemented, if any of the party is not complying with the decision of the Jirga. If it is a dispute between tribes, then, either a neutral tribe or the administration is involved in deciding and implementing the verdict. I have never come across any decision for the implementation of which a tribal Lashkar has been formed.

Women normally don't sit on Jirgas which involve external parties, they do however sit in Marakas and in Jirgas involving internal family disputes specially those related to issues involving women.

At times, it is not possible for local Jirgas to resolve a dispute because all the tribes are involved, one way or the other. In such a case neutral tribes from other agencies are called in, tribes that have no interest in the issue.

Masheran avoid leading their tribes in to war. Tribal wars are initiated in

extreme cases and many times, though trenches and hilltops are occupied and there might be some firing also, tribesmen avoid hurting each other. Both sides know the intentions of the other but if God forbid, the tribes get entangled in a battle, then it is very indiscriminate, ruthless and bloody.

Jang treekh, Manjlass ye Khazh da

War is bitter, talking chivalry is sweet.

(Pushto Proverb)

I was in college and along with Miram Khan, accompanied Baba to a Jirga; unfortunately, we were a party to the dispute. Neutral elders with long grey beards, from other sub tribes were called in to resolve the dispute. During deliberations tempers ran high and at one point, in the heat of the moment, the other party hurled a few curses.

Miram Khan got up to respond. He had a Bannuci sickle, much bigger in size than ordinary sickles, specially designed for such occasions. Waving his sickle very threateningly at the audience he started accusing, abusing and cursing.

People sensed danger, within seconds they started taking cover; I immediately cocked the rifle and sat with my left knee on the floor in front of Baba, sheltering him from harm. While everyone took shelter, only a few of us held our ground. Miram Khan was growling and waving his sickle, while the angels of death kept circling above our heads. They say you can see the angels when its time but I didn't see any.

The elders immediately jumped to their feet and came in between the parties. They waved their chaddars and shouted “everyone stay calm, don't fire, nothing has happened, for God sake stay calm” and they kept on running towards everyone concerned begging the elders to command their young to step down.

After a while the hyper ones backed off. The elders didn't let anything happen; they were able to control the crowd. Had there been one fire we would have been in trouble, big trouble. I had already marked the persons I was going to take out and so had all the others. But then it's the job of the elders to ensure nothing of the sort happens.

After the incident was over and we were returning home, one of the Maliks said, “Haji sahib, I was surprised to see your son, he didn't take any cover and was right in front of you. We thought the educated ones avoid these things”.

Miram Khan gave out a hearty laugh, “I was observing him all the while to see his reaction because he hasn't been in situations like this before”.

I could see the pride in Baba's eyes. Yes, I haven't been in such a situation, never seen the horrors of such situations; perhaps that's why I wasn't afraid. Besides it all happened so fast I had no reaction time.

There have been rare occasions where mishaps took place but if there is a threat or apprehension, then the neutral Jirga meets both parties separately and if their presence is required then the Jirga fixes number of people that will attend and unarm them before attending the Jirga.

Whenever one accompanies an elder to a jirga, the standard procedure is that the youngsters spread out just in case there is any eventuality. One has to pay attention to the proceedings, observe the positions and mark the opponents, stay close to the elders for their protection and be ready because it's all a matter of seconds and if one is out to take a pee or doing anything else, he will regret it all his life.

Serving as Political Agent in Orakzai agency gave me the opportunity to have Jirgas with the tribes as a representative of the government. These Jirgas were testing but memorable.

I was Political Agent Orakzai Agency when we got information that a German national working for an NGO was abducted from Peshawar and taken to Khyber agency. I instructed all checkpoints in my agency to be vigilant and if the kidnappers try to cross over to Orakzai, we should nab them. Late in the evening, I got news that the jeep of the German national was found abandoned in Orakzai agency. That really pissed me off.

I issued orders for arrest of elders of the tribe on whose land the jeep was found, under collective territorial responsibility and summoned elders of tribes through whose area the jeep had passed. Since a foreign national was kidnapped, the governor's office and Islamabad were very restless and asking for progress by the hour.

A grand Jirga of all eighteen tribes of Orakzai got together and after having detail parleys amongst themselves, came to me with a proposal. They requested attendance for the jirga. I agreed to their request and the Jirga was fixed for ten in the morning.

It was a bright sunny day, the late summer's sun felt very pleasant. I got the Jirga assembled in the jirga hall. When they settled the Assistant Political Agent (APA), a young Wazir from Bannu, came to inform me at around half past ten, "We are ready sir".

Getting up from the seat I said, "We will try to isolate the criminals by not letting them make it a tribal issue".

We walked towards the jirga hall discussing the issue; we passed the offices with all the clerks and superintendents on alert, trying to steal a look at the Political Agent. All the people in the office premises, loitering or waiting in the verandas were shooed aside and made invisible, not to be seen. Anything on the floor was disposed to ensure the path was clean.

We must recognize the unbridled and unlimited powers of the Political Agent. He has extensive powers, with no recourse to any court of law against his decisions.

With every power comes responsibility and accountability but here we have a position where there is no responsibility or accountability. All the raw power is just to be enjoyed by being ruthless, to be as dehumanized as an alien colonial master, who only wants to scare and scar the subjects.

We walked into the jirga hall packed with elders. There is so much excitement in meeting the Political Agent, you could see it in their sparkling eyes. The elders start preparing for the meeting the evening before, dying, washing, oiling, readying clothes and turbans. I had seen Baba do so and I was sure they must have done it. Now when I see the elders clean and crisp, I smile in my heart. They put in a lot of effort to make themselves presentable.

Almost all the elders had beards of different sizes and shapes and colors, mostly different shades of Hina and of course the white beards which had passed their dying days. All the Maliks wore their best clothes, their newest Qullas (high cap with gold or silver embroidery with turban wound around it) and turbans of different colors, different stages of starch on them some very crisp, others just crisp. The wealthier ones wore gold watches and waistcoats. All of them had a chaddar, all different colors but same size.

Orakzai Agency was the last agency to be created, so it has the maximum number of Maliks. Most of them live in settled area of Hangu and are financially better off than those who live in Tirah tribal territory. There is a visible difference between the Hanguwal Maliks and Tirahwal Maliks, as we call them depending on their place of residence. The Maliks who live in Tirah, (half of Tirah falls in Orakzai agency while the other half falls in Khyber agency) feel offended when the Maliks residing in Hangu talk about issues related to Tirah. The Hangu Maliks, however, are more influential and have more accessibility to the Political Agent. On the other hand, the Tirah Maliks have more influence in Tirah and action required in Tirah is done through these Maliks.

Unlike other agencies, Orakzai doesn't has its own scouts and depends on Tall scouts, for any action required. This is a cumbersome process because over the years the Inspector General (IG), Frontier Corp (FC) has taken over as Commandant and the actual Commandants in the field, who take orders from Political Agents, have no powers to take action. To fire an artillery round the Commandant has to take permission from IGFC. Without his own scouts, the Political Agent's dependence on his Maliks increases even more.

When in front of the administration every tribe has to be represented, if elders of a tribe don't get a chance to speak they are considered unimportant, so the elders distribute the talking. Even if the first speaker has said it all, the others have to repeat and reiterate. The Maliks are not there in their individual capacity, they are representing the tribe.

Malik Ghazi Said Jamal, Mulla Khel, ex MNA from Orakzai, whose father

retired as a general from Pak army, was the first to speak. A tall handsome man, very soft spoken, trusted by all the agency elders, he always had a rose in his waistcoat collar. He got up to thank the PA for giving them time at such short notice and reiterating that the good and bad of the agency is the dual responsibility of the tribes and the administration and one cannot do much without the support of the other. He reiterated his full support to the Political administration in fighting crime.

Malik Afzal Khan, Ali Khel, the sitting MNA, was a young shy gentleman with not much experience in agency politics. He made money in the Middle East and was more of a business-person than a politician. He introduced the issue, why they were all here and what they thought should be the way forward.

Malik Hamesh Gul, Mishti, a very down to earth person, most of the people identified themselves with him. He is one of the most influential of the Tirah Maliks. He spoke very passionately of Pukhto and Jabba and towards the end of his speech; he laid the proposal before the jirga to discuss.

Hamesh Gul was followed by a malik from every tribe of the eighteen tribes of Orakzai, mostly repeating what had already been said.

All the while I had to nod at the speakers to let them know that I am listening, I understand what they are saying and somewhat agree to what they said. At times, I scribbled on a piece of paper, noting down what was said, at times I just scribbled without noting anything, for the satisfaction of the Maliks.

The proposal was that all tribes will search for the kidnapped German and if anyone of Orakzai agency is found to be involved in kidnapping or extending help to the kidnappers in any way the tribes will burn down his house and fine the family of the culprit one million rupees. The tribes guaranteed that the kidnapped will not be brought or kept in the agency. In return, they asked me to free the detainees. "It is a good proposal", I said "but what about the jeep, what should I do to the tribes that gave free passage to the jeep".

After detail parleys, the tribes assured me that when the jeep entered the agency there was no foreigner in it that is why it wasn't stopped. That they will take up the matter with the people who brought this shame (jeep) on them. That they guarantee no one will be allowed to bring in and hide the foreigner in Orakzai agency.

"That's OK, you won't allow the criminals with the foreigner in the agency, maybe they don't want to come this way. Say something about the jeep", I said, looking towards Malik Hamesh Gull. He once again rose to his feet and said, "Sahib, give us three days to find out who brought the jeep to the agency and if the tribe on whose land the jeep was found is not able to take action against the criminals, all eighteen tribes will come in support of that tribe and take action against the criminals. Give us three days if you are not satisfied you take action as you deem fit".

This was a good proposal, a bold decision and I liked it. I have an undertaking

from all eighteen tribes for a joint action against the culprits if they are identified. I gave them three days and after that, I will reevaluate their performance and sincerity towards the issue.

It's such a pleasure talking to Masharan, they start with an anecdote and after the anecdote they make their plea expecting a decision similar to the conclusion of the anecdote. "Sahib, you know the donkey is a very strong and resilient animal yet the good for nothing wolf kills it. Sahib if the donkey knew its strength and was imaginative do you think the wolf could come near it. Sahib, the tribe is like a donkey, strong and resilient, if it has a good Political Agent, like your esteemed honor as its commander, then who can defeat a tribe. But if you abandon it then wolves and Hyenas will rip it apart". Meaning, you have to be on our side or else we are doomed.

Being from the tribal area, I use to beat their anecdote by an anecdote. You beat them in their argument which is more a game of words and anecdotes and they will do anything for you.

Awal mey parh ka bya mey marh ka.

Beat my argument and you can kill me.

(Pusho Proverb)

Malik Hamesh Gul was a bold man, I have rarely seen such Maliks, he said, "Sahib, you know that long time back, when there was no written record and everything was conveyed through word of mouth, so the elders say. Once upon a time, long long ago, there was peace in the Jungle; there was justice and fair play, the Ant and the Elephant, the hare and the hound, the Lizard and the Lion, the ones high in the trees and the ones deep underground, in water and on land, all had equal rights. The intelligent Fox was the chief justice of the jungle supreme court. Every animal was happy and was getting what was rightfully his".

Everyone listened with intent staring at me without blinking. "Then, one day, there was a dispute between a Jackal and a Lion. They argued among themselves for some time but when they couldn't resolve the issue they decided to take the matter to the court to be decided according to the jungle code".

He leaned forth, took a deep breath and continued, "The Fox was presiding the court, both the Jackal and the Lion presented their cases. The Fox after hearing their arguments with great intent, put on its spectacles, opened the code of the Jungle, the supreme book of the jungle law. The Fox turned to a page, then another and then another and after going through all the laws and provisos and rules and sub rules, annexures and schedules at great length the Fox put down the Jungle code. He stared at the jackal from above the rim of his spectacles, then took off his spectacles and said, dear Jackal, I have gone through all the laws and provisos and rules and sub rules, annexures and schedules but every page that I turn in the book says, you are at

fault. Every page that I turn in the book, says you are at fault”. “So, sahib no matter what we say we are at fault, that's how the laws are”.

“What has the law to do with it”, I said. “You don't know the criminals, you don't know if the abducted is in the agency, you give free passage to the jeep with or without the abducted in it, so what do you know? This land is our mother and we don't know what is happening with our mother”.

“Sahib, then you give us a proposal and we give you our word we will do whatever you say”, said Malik Hamesh Gul. That's how they behave when you beat them in argument, they will do anything for you. After making them realize where the fault is, I always supported the tribes.

“I agree to release the elders on bail and if they don't take strict action against those who brought the jeep to our agency, as promised, I will impose heavy fine on the tribe. I grant you three days for search and confirmations and you will report back to me after three days”. I said, “Rest assure, I am releasing these people on bail and if in three days I don't get results I will review my decision”.

I got all the tribes on my side, their commitment that they won't allow the criminals to hide in Orakzai agency and they will make sincere efforts to my satisfaction to apprehend the culprits, if anyone abetted he will be given strict punishment. In return, I was releasing the elders on bail and can re-arrest them if I was not satisfied. I believe it was a fair bargain.

After the Jirga was over, I received a call from Commissioner Kohat, my immediate boss, asking me not to release the tribesmen on bail. He thought that since it is a high profile kidnapping at least we show people in Islamabad that we have taken action.

The Interior and foreign ministries, the German embassy and Governor House were constantly breathing down our necks. The press was following events by the minute. The Commissioner insisted that at least we can give them figure of people arrested in connection with kidnapping. If we release them, we have nothing to show, to those in Islamabad.

By now, we had preliminary reports on the location of the kidnapped which was not in our agency. I told Commissioner that I have made commitments with the Jirga of eighteen tribes so there was no backing out and if I have support of all these tribes, I have limited the mobility of the culprits to Khyber Tirah and once they are away from my jurisdiction, let PA Khyber worry about Khyber Tirah.

I explained my position to Governor who appreciated my action, as I was moving faster than PA Khyber, in whose area the actual criminals and the kidnapped were. Though the jirga asked for three days, they reported back on the second day informing me that the kidnapper is Stori Khel from Khyber agency, that he is on bail with PA Khyber and PA Khyber should ask his sureties to produce him.

They also gave me location of the kidnapped, that he was in Tirah of Khyber agency. I shared the information with the Governor and Commissioner Peshawar and within the next two days about a week in all, the German national was recovered.

As Political Agent, one represents the government, so, one can be magnanimous because the tribes are like its children, though unfortunately many Political Agents don't think so.



PART III

GROWING UP CHILDHOOD IN PARADISE

CHAPTER 4

DARPA KHEL – MY VILLAGE

MY VILLAGE, DARPA KHEL, I BELIEVE IS THE BEST PLACE to be born in and to spend childhood, in the whole wide world, even better than the fairy tale, candy land, it's a paradise on earth. The thing I liked most about the village was that our mothers believed bathing in winters causes cough and flu, so we were never asked to take a bath in winters. What place can be better for a child to grow up than a place where he doesn't have to take a bath? Where no one chases him around the house forcing him to take a bath, no bath the whole winters, can anyone believe this. If only, there was no occasion like Eid, marriage or some other festival falling during this time. In summers though, we were allowed to swim in the streams, canals and later in the river.

Life in the village is carefree and slow, moving at its own leisurely pace. The people are friendly, caring and concerned, like one big family. Mashar is respected, Kashar is cared for, discipline is maintained, and the weak are protected. It looks after the wayfarer, challenges enemy as one, honors and appreciates every individual. We share amongst all, whatever little we have.

Village life is so fulfilling, so satisfying, we have everything in our village that a child can wish. Long rows of fields and orchards full of crops and shady trees laden with fruit, small hillocks for sheep grazing and for francolins and hare hunting. Canal, always full of water, shady streams crisscrossing the fields, every kind of bird and insects and every kind of flora and fauna, that one can imagine is my village.

People in the village are poor and like all others we bought clothes one Eid and the other, rarely having an extra pair. It's presumed a religious obligation to buy new clothes for children on Eid and we always looked forward to it. If we had an extra pair of clothes, for whatever reason, our parents thought they were extravagant. Clothes were not made on need basis, they were bought for occasions, like Eid and marriage and one could only wish there were more of these. Baba decided on the quality of cloth, color and even the measurements. We had long loose shirts, (kamees) and baggy pants, (shalwar) and the tailor made them larger under the plea that children grow and clothes should not get short in a year.

Same was the case with shoes, they were always loose for the same reason, children grow. "Shoes should be a size or two larger so that you can wear them next

year also”, Baba use to say without realizing that bigger size shoes can't be worn, you can't walk in them. We stuffed cotton in the shoes for a few days when they were new, trying to make them fit but then we used them as slippers, crushing the back of the shoe. This happened to every pair of shoes, yet the next pair we bought was a size or two larger. Like the rest, I never enjoyed wearing shoes. We couldn't play in shoes which weren't our actual size. We took them off when playing and put them on ceremonially when in bazaar, in front of our elders or visiting relatives.

I still can't figure out, weren't they watching?

Miranshah bazaar is the hub of activity; we go there every morning and come back in the evening using Miranshah- Datta Khel road. The village Tonga (horse cart) was my favorite mode of transportation whether coming or going. Even when taxis were introduced I preferred the old means. We hired a Tonga and traveled in style and luxury. It was the best way to kill time especially the long summer afternoons. Sitting in the Tonga one has full view of all that's going on and the driver of the Tonga has a lot of gossip to share. The moment the Tonga moves the driver starts talking and continues till you reach your destination.

The Tongas were old battered carts with nuts and bolts piercing every joint. Only the seats were cushioned but even they were in a very poor state. Who cares, we enjoyed the driver's gossip and anecdotes which he narrated to keep us occupied. Enjoying the leisurely pace, we saluted and wished every individual we crossed.

Toghri Lala had the slowest horse and the slower the horse the better storyteller the driver. Toghri was a small man with a small trimmed, dirty yellow beard. He was more of miser than he was poor and he always had so much to say. With a small dark face and shirt buttons like very small eyes, he was without much expression, always shaking his head while talking. He had small yellow teeth corroded right up to the gums because of Naswar (snuf).

His grayish white horse was as small and Toghri insisted that the horse is not weak or malnourished rather the horse's pedigree is small and he claimed it to be from the family of the great Arabian horses. I asked Toghri, “Lala why don't you feed your horse well and take good care of him. He looks so miserable”.

Lala responded with a sarcastic grin on his face, “Malik sahib, this horse is too choosy with his food; he just won't eat anything on the offer like other horses. Believe me Malik sahib he doesn't like hey or Channas (chick peas) from the west of the village, he likes food originated from Punjab and no matter how much I try to feed him with food from other areas he isn't interested”. “See”, he put a hand in his pocket and pull out a few Channas, “I have them for him all the time, I carry Channas for him in my pocket but he isn't fond of food”. He fed the few Channas to the horse, put his hand in his pocket again and pulled out a few more Channas, “look, I carry so much Channas in my pocket for him but he won't eat”, feeding the few Channas to the horse.

On way to the village, as soon as the town limits end and it is a small town for

that matter, the Kallinger hill stands majestically right in front of you, a brown giant challenging any vegetation to show resilience and grow there. The smaller mounds at its base are dotted with graves, new and old with colorful flags fluttering in the wind. Graves with flags indicate martyrs. A little further, to the left is the chocolate dark Tor Warsak, shorter in height than Kallinger but as lifeless, with Amin piquet (FC post) on its top, observing all activity, it looks more prominent. Once we cross Tor Warsak, the road is flat, both sides of the road are barren, with graves scattered for the next mile.

Every mound, every ditch and every prominent tree in our village has a name, so if someone says that I will wait for you near Sher Khan don't be surprised to find a tree named Sher Khan or a ditch called Dingar wara. Small shrubs and Darga grasses grow by the graves. From Torwarsak to Sheikhadam is a straight section of road.

Toghri knew his horse well so whenever there was a climb, he jumped of the Tonga and pushed the cart till the climb was over. At times, we also joined in the pushing, "come on Daldal", we called. "You can do it Daldal, only you can do it Daldal".

'Daldal is prince Shahpur's horse, which has no equal in strength and beauty. He gallops faster than the wind and can jump from the front of the army to its rear, giving the prince an opportunity to kill the enemy general. When he jumps prince Shahpur's head touched the clouds, when the prince fights he fights along with him, biting the enemy in front and kicking the enemy at the rear, a Pushto folklore'.

At times, you had the feeling that the bugger of a horse wasn't pulling the cart at all and was enjoying himself while we pushed the cart for him. As if he was looking from the corner of his eyes and saying, "come on suckers push, push harder, you can do it". He must have been enjoying it without us knowing.

The best is when we are coming out of town. We push the cart to help Toghri's horse gain momentum and once the cart moves we climb to our seats. Misfortune always strikes unannounced, if Toghri had to stop for something, like traffic or a stray animal or anything, his horse will not be able to move the cart again.

At the stand, Toghri's horse stands still like a Buckingham guard. I believe, he had the capability to dose of in that position, like a third generation electronic device which goes into sleep mode to save energy if left unused for a while.

If we forced Toghri to go fast, he made the horse gallop and it seemed he was going very fast but surprisingly, the horse jumped in the same place. His speed was the same, only shaking more. The rascal of a horse was bluffing us, how could he do this?

On the outskirts of the village greenery starts to the left, while the right of the road is barren hills all through. The town air changes to fresh, cool, river breeze of Tochi valley. At the start of mile three, a road turns left to our village which ends at

Tarakai Sar, the last stop of the village and from here everyone walks to his house.

Short of Tarakai Sar to the left is Sheikhadam, the hills that house our ancestral graves. Opposite Sheikhadam, is Darpa Khel Eidgah, a large ground for Eid prayers. The village spreads down South and West from Tarakai Sar top. Standing at Tarakai Sar facing South one can see the residences of Mirjani Khan to the left and Wrasham Khan to the right standing majestic, dominating the entire village. To the extreme West, Marghi Kot of Malik Saad Ullah Khan can be seen peeping from above the tree tops. The rest of the village is small mud houses mushrooming in a disorganized manner.

Men and women work silently in fields, all you can hear is chirping of birds or the hissing sound of Tochi. Waves of the fresh, cool, Tochi breeze can be seen in the way crops dance. The fields are like a green sea with the grasses dancing to the breeze like ripples in the water and the heads of those working in the fields popping out and dipping back at intervals. One second you can see them, the next you can't. You think you are alone but if someone was to call out, invisible men and women will appear, all facing towards where the call came from. Women and children collect wild plants used as vegetables or collect fuel while minding their livestock. Men and women with scythes are busy in the fields collecting fodder. The elderly do the cutting, the boys and girls help them collect it while playing around. Dressed in bright clothes children run around catching Turingai, (butterflies), Taztazakia (dragonflies) and Babazherea (ladybirds). Every time you pass by they raise their heads above the green sea to know who it is. They carry the fodder, some on their donkeys, and others on their heads, big bundles for the big sturdy man and big sturdy woman while the little ones have little bundles over their little heads and they walk in a line. Even with their bundles, they stop and turn around to see who is passing by. They are all our men, women and children so when we pass by we have to make a comment just to reassure them that we know them and we care for them.

Once you enter the village, the scene changes. Small oily children, unwashed and uncombed, wearing soiled clothes, with chests full of amulets are running behind their mothers whichever way they go. A couple of dogs lay panting in the shade, boys and girls running around playing and fighting, snatching and screaming, with small pups joining in the chase. Livestock, tied under the shade, lazily munching all day and going home, snorting and bleating, thumping, and pushing, as if in a hurry in the evenings.

There is a whole new world in the small village bazaar. Youngsters are making all sorts of noise in the adjacent Hujras, playing music, laughing and shouting and doing everything under the sun. Goods laden donkeys and men carrying loads, children coming and going from the side streets with pots and pails in hands to be filled or emptied in the bazaar. Shopkeepers are making all kinds of sounds to attract people. There is so much activity for a small village bazaar.

From the main road the fields up to our house belong to us, which is a small

distance of course. Farms and orchards surround our house to the North and West of the village. Kharzai canal passes through the village lands, when we weren't allowed to go to the river Kharzai was our place for a dip. Exactly opposite our farm, there was a natural depression which formed a small lake, big enough for us to swim.

The village Lakhtai "stream" runs along the main street where it twists and turns into the smaller streets, Hujras and mosques. Women have designated places to fetch water for household use, wash children, clothes and dishes on the street where the stream touches it. The Hujras and mosques of all the Khels are also on the main street and the stream provides all the water for washing and ablution.

To the south of our house, we have a big ground, used for practically every activity, like thrashing after wheat harvest and storing of hey for later use. Huge piles of hey are made and covered with mud so that it is not blown away by the wind. At times people bring out manure and spread it on the ground to dry out before it is taken to the fields. Young boys come out to play in the evening and as many as ten different groups will be playing different games at one time. All festivities, drum and dance for any reason are held on this ground.

Across the ground is the Tochi River and across Tochi is a mass of green trees dotted with houses, Khuszai and Palangzai villages. The small independent houses have high watch towers. Behind the villages are hills, gradually rising in elevation. The majestic Vizhda is the highest peak, reaching the clouds, as if whispering something to them.

Drinking water is drawn from the wells by hand, while, for all other purposes, stream water is used, to feed animals, for washing and cleaning. During the summer rains, the streams become very muddy then even animals get well water.

Before the Afghans refugees came all fuel was brought from the nearby hills, full of trees and shrubs. Grownups took a donkey to the hills, cut a donkey load of wood enough for a family for almost a month. There was rarely a family who bought wood. There was a quami, tribal, ban on rooting plants so the forest replenishes quickly and easily.

Tribesmen build houses on hilltops, height is always preferred for security reasons as it is the prime concern in the tribal areas. Height gives us a sense of domination and freedom, though life becomes much difficult by being away from the source of water and communication.

Winters in village are comparatively dull and gloomy but spring and summers are loaded with activity. We have religious and seasonal festivals, family celebrations and many other activities all year round. Life is so committed, too many activities and too little time. There is always some excuse to celebrate.

Childhood itself is a long festival to be enjoyed and cherished forever. We had nothing to do yet we had so much to do.

Ozgar tolo na Naozgara we.

Who has nothing to do is the busiest.

(Push-to proverb)

Youthful Spring

Spring in Waziristan is unbelievably beautiful. The wild iris, Deelay, blooms in the midst of a green blanket of wheat plantlets in the fields. Purple-blue, they stand tall among the green plants, dancing in the spring breeze. In the heart of green fields are orchards full of white blossoms with shade variations in color, of apricot, apple, plum and almonds, all having their own shades of white presenting their charm.

We don't have the regular chores, rains irrigate fields, fodder for livestock is in abundance, there is no harvesting or picking of crops. Yet this is the busiest time with so many festivals and celebrations.

Everything dead seems to come to life. The hills are full of wild daisy, crocus and narcissus and so many other native plants, having different size, texture and color. There are all kinds of flowers, small and large, short and tall, big leaves and small leaves, few leaves and many leaves, scented and unscented, in so many different colors, white, pink, blue, yellow and variations in shades of all the colors. Fresh green shoots of Darga grasses invite livestock and wild birds alike. Tender sprouting leaves on Willows and Mulberry add a beautiful bright, fresh, pale green color to the landscape. Spring water tinkles as the snow melts in the nearby hills, the fresh Tochi breeze sings of youth and happiness, birds of all colors and size join in the singing, the trees dance to the rhythm and the branches rustle as if clapping and the flowers blush when the breeze kisses them. Spring rains sprinkle its magic on the overall ambiance.

Spring not only fills the landscape with beautiful colors but also with sweet fragrance of flora and fauna in fields and the hills. The fresh spring air, enriched by the sweet fragrance of Sanzalla, wild roses and Jasmine compelled us to stop and take deep breaths. When we were out we stopped, the smell of Sanzalla, no talking, take deep breath and another and another. We will stop to smell the wild roses, take deep breath and another wow, its great and it goes on, early morning fresh air full of all kinds of fragrance.

Every morning, green plants are washed with diamond like dew drops. We understand walking bare feet on dew-laden grass improves eyesight, so every morning after prayers we all walked bare feet on grass, some in the Hujra lawn, others in the orchards, making footprints in the dew as if walking in snow. The village is surrounded by snow-covered hills with their peaks kissing the clouds

above. The cool Tochi breeze, giving us shivers in early morning required wrapping in a chaddar. It's the time when mornings are chilly and afternoons are pleasant.

Continuous rains induce children to wear jute sacks as raincoats, going from house to house, singing 'Aal aal wair wakey', and collecting gur for making gur-lollys. It's like, "Rain rain go away, come along another day". The song is for the rains to stop and come after intervals as Landai the Ox wants to go out. The whole atmosphere is washed clean with not a particle of pollution. The sun gives a crimson touch to all colors adding to the beauty of the plants, making them look brighter and greener. The whole world feels so youthful, the air is fresh and the day is bright and at every rainbow, against the blue sky, we danced and jumped and shouted

"Shna lika ameezh ke sra lika e indwoney"

"Green line is ours the red is for Hindu's".

When out of the house our chappals got wet with dew, our feet got sticky in Chappals, prone to slipping. Shalwars got wet with dew rubbing in from the green fields. We kept walking, taking deep breaths, enjoying the luxury of the extra oxygen, a mood elevator in itself. Those wearing rubber moccasins got dew inside their shoes which made funny farting sounds while walking, giving us ample excuse to laugh and make fun. Always giggling, pushing and shoving, that's how childhood was.

The elders told us that body rejuvenates in spring, to properly replenish body eat honey, butter and fruits. Some crushed the thorny bush, Spellazghai, growing in the hills around the village, kept it under stars for the night and took the sour juice on empty stomach in morning to cleanse and restore body systems. Khapyanga seeds were for stomach ailments of grownups and Garnalai was for children. The hills, among others, are full of medicinal plants tried and tested for ages.

The welcoming sight of flocks of migrating cranes, 'Zonia' forming different formations high in the bright blue sky and ducks, 'Alai' landing in the lakes in Tochi announce the arrival of spring. I can still see myself standing on the banks of Tochi shouting at the top of my voice, asking the cranes to change formations. 'Zonia Zonia parai parai', cranes form into a rope, I shouted and the excitement that came with every change in formation that they made. We asked them to make a rope, an arrowhead, a single file or a square and if by any chance the bird's formation changed to the one requested that's it. We danced and jumped and boasted that the birds accepted my request, the birds know me, they recognize my voice, they are my birds, my family.

For hours, we stood on banks of Tochi watching groups of birds pass by. They made a lot of noise up in the sky, as if showing their excitement on coming to our land, as if it was just like coming home for them. We responded in a similar manner, making a lot of noise by shouting at them, to tell them how welcome they are to our beautiful land and how happy we are to have them. They made noise we made noise back, as if we knew each other very well and were meeting after a temporary parting.

House Martins appear from nowhere making Igloo shaped nests in the roof. Along with the sparrows they chatter and chirp the loudest. The magnificent Shankesai, a green, pigeon size bird with long wings, soared over Tochi, with tens of boys, catapults in their hands, running along with it, trying to hide their heads in their shoulders, bent low to camouflage themselves. With every dive the green bird made, the boys increased their speed and with every height it took, they slowed down. They tripped over and bumped into obstacles but they didn't care, their eyes fixed on the bird.

Its breeding season of Chukar, Partridges and Francolins, chicks in the hundreds start hatching in the bushes on the nearby hills. All the birds come down in search of food and make captivating sounds, especially in the mornings. Boys go in search of nests, identify them and at appropriate time, when the chicks hatch, they steal a few. While going to Miranshah, many times we saw francolins on roadsides, standing high on the rocks, head raised, neck stretched as if on a watch out, like standing on guard duty, chest out, eyes up, ready and alert, observant of every movement, prepared for any eventuality.

Many times, we ran after the hare that came down to the road and the jackals who ventured too close to the village. We shared the hills and village with them and the Squirrels and Mongoose and all. The drivers consider the Jackal lucky and the hare a symbol of misfortune and unlucky if it crossed their path. Any unfortunate event and they say, 'it seems a hare crossed his path'. There was so much wildlife, birds and animals living in hills across the road, crossing the road between the village and the hills frequently, in search of food.

At night, we heard hooting of jackals, whole packs of them, as if right outside the door. Once there was this gallant boy, who saw a jackal on air force's landing ground outside Tochi fort. He knew the Jackal didn't have a place to hide as he had ventured a little too close to town. Right in front of our eyes, the boy took off his chappals and ran after the Jackal. The whole town watched and the Jackal in spite of all his tricks couldn't beat the boy in speed. The boy beat the Jackal on his home ground and caught it alive.

Many times, it rained while the sun shone bright in the sky. It's a Jackal's marriage day, a jackal is getting married somewhere when it rains with the sun out. To celebrate the Jackal's marriage in the rain, we dance the Jackal marriage dance. We put on jute sacks and dance in the rain till mothers bring gur-lolly or something as feast of the marriage. We believed, if a child didn't dance in jackal's marriage, he will have flu and fever all summers.

No one told us to avoid rain for fear of catching cold or getting sick. Spring rains are good for health, so we believed and mothers encouraged their children to dance in the rain so that they won't catch flu in summers. The jackal marriage dance worked like vaccination against allergies, because we never had any of them.

As days get warmer and longer, our activities and festivities set rolling and they were so many of them. Before one festival was over the next was already there. I believe the maximum number of festivals and games played were in spring. The season where you feel cold at night and early morning and warm during day, when you can neither sit in the shade nor in the sun. Where half the day is bright sunshine in a spot less blue sky and the other half is cloudy and rainy.

Besides celebrating many festivals we loved the many games of spring. We had been waiting for them all winters. Before boarding on a journey of childhood memories let me at the outset, spell out that all games were born from nature. We didn't have toys other than the dolls made for girls by women. We created our own toys, from what nature had to offer, a genius passed on through generations.

Tippiky

From Topak (gun), Willow trees line streams in the farms and we made shooters from willow branches, called Tippiky. The skin of the willow branch loosens before sprouting new leaves in spring. We find a straight green branch, the bigger in diameter the better, cut it on both sides to have a straight stick of about twelve to sixteen inches. We beat the skin of the stick very tenderly being careful not to damage it and then twist the skin to loosen it from the wood. When the skin moves over the wood throughout the length of the stick, we gently pull the wood out. We are left with a hollow willow skin or skin tube. Tippiky were decorated with handgrips, flash hidens and aiming points all made of clay.

We take clay, not very soft, make balls the size of the tube's diameter put them in the tube and shoot like darts through the Tippiky. Some boys were so expert, they could put ten clay balls in mouth and shoot at target without the balls either sticking to each other or saliva dampening them. If saliva mixes in, it dampens the balls and they get stuck in the tube. If it so happens, the hard wood pulled out of the Tippiky, is used to flush it out. Boys keep their Tippiky in water at night so that they don't dry and shrivel, replacing the wood that was pulled out, so a Tippiky lasted longer.

We fight with Tippikys, individually or in teams, have target shooting or even compete as to who can throw the ball farthest. The best was when we shot boys passing by while hiding from view, especially if they weren't expecting. The time frame for this game is short as the willow leaves came out soon and one cannot make Tippiky once leaves grow on the willow branch.

Tiplye (sand dunes)

To play Tiplye, we divide in two teams; one team gathers lots of sand in their shirts and makes small sand dunes in places where they can't be found. The other team waits at a designated point and a certain time is allowed. After the first team avails time and return to the designated place the other team searches for these dunes and destroy them within a stipulated time.

Dunes destroyed are points scored by the team seeking dunes and dunes left undetected are score of the team which made dunes. Then the later team makes dunes and former searches and destroys them. There could be any number of turns for each team, both having equal chances to make and destroy the dunes.

In the end, team scoring more points wins. The trick is to make as many dunes as possible, so that the other team, after destroying some, feels that these were all. Secondly, we change place for making sand dunes as frequently as possible so that if detected all eggs are not in one basket. There are many arguments on size and spacing of dunes as to whether it is a separate dune or not. We even try to misguide the opponents by looking towards or making gestures which gave the opponents an impression that they should look in a certain direction.

Catapults are in great demand in spring for hunting birds, having marksmanship matches and at times having enmity with rival groups. Every boy wears a catapult around his neck, as if it is a part of the dress. Catapults come in many sizes, strength of the rubber and design variations. Girls make beautiful covers, grips and other decorations for catapults. They sow beads and small mirrors and some of them are a feast for eyes. I always had the most decorated catapult in the village but was a lousy user of it.

Boys gather clay on roof tops and roll it into small balls called, 'Ghundari' to be used as ammunition for the catapult. The girls extend help, not only in rolling the clay balls but also in watching over them so that no one steals them. The balls lay in the sun till they dry, after which, they are shifted into a clay pot for safekeeping. Every afternoon boys fill their pockets and go out for the kill.

They are in seek and destroy mode the whole afternoon, trying to camouflage themselves whenever near a target. They chase the birds with catapults ready to shoot, as if they just have to aim and the bird will fall in their laps. Shankesai was the favorite. It was so beautiful and soared majestically over the Tochi, hide in the Pallangzai trees, by the time boys reached Pallangzai it will again be soaring over Tochi towards our village. Running after it splashing in the Tochi was so much fun.

When boys run out of ammunition 'Ghundari' they collect small round stones for the purpose knowing that near round ball is not as good as a round ball to hit a target. 'Ghundari' are preferred for specific targets like hunting birds as they are too precious to be wasted on other events, stones are used for shooting aimlessly.

Boys have their local rivalries, with children of other Khels and villages. At times, war is declared on a certain group called Badi, 'the enmity'. The rivalries, leading to enmity are fought gallantly but are always temporary and cease immediately after a session of skirmish.

An enemy in one session is an ally in another. The family feuds are over if another Khel messes up and the whole Khel stands united against the other. It is no less than a war, the yelling, the running, the strategy to beat the enemy. The older ones

in the heart of pitch battle and the younger in their support, everyone is in frenzy. War it is, at stake is the honor of the family or the Khel. The best thing about the whole affair is that everyone says they won the fight. I have never heard any family or Khel admit they lost a battle.

Real adventure starts when some bravados attack another village. Then all the Khels in the village unite, Boys from all Khels get together to defend the honor of the village. Some aggressive girls also join in defending the village but girls don't join boys in an attack. A lot of screaming and yelling takes place when in attack to make the opponent believe we are more than we actually are. The war cry is:

'Ya ba de barom khlossawe, Ya ba de mashom khlossawe'

'Only rain or the sunset can rescue you'

It was in one such battle that I got hit right in the center of my forehead. It was early afternoon; we came to know that enmity with boys of Alizai has started. We rushed to the spot in support of our boys and after fighting for a while the Alizai boys took to their heels. We were chasing the boys on the run when suddenly from nowhere a stone banged against my forehead. I was nowhere near the leaders and I don't recall the pain or the blackout the hit might have caused but shock of the hit really gave me a scare. As if everything stopped moving, no sound, no movement, enemy and friends alike, dead silent. It was like a hero in a Hollywood movie getting a hit.

The understanding is that we fight on periphery of the village, not getting inside a village in pursuit and after a while, we disperse on our own. Boys do get hurt but never seriously and I wasn't hurt bad but since the blood ran on my face it scared the shit out of the boys especially Galli. The older boys got mad and they went into the village after the culprits, hands full of rocks to hit anyone they can find, breaking all rules of not entering the village after the defeated. Badal was all they wanted.

The other gang, which was on the run anyway, realizing what happened, vanished in thin air. I don't even know if they hit me at all, my own team might have hit me. But the rival gang knew their own parents were going to give them hell if they came to know. In every street of the village Galli stopped and on the top of his voice cursed and abused the boys of those houses, challenging them to come out. But nothing happened, no sound, no movement and no response. All of them were hiding under their beds in their houses.

When women came out, he explained the whole episode to them and in the end asked if the boys had been fair in hitting Ghulam. All women said, "the boys have done very wrong, how could they hit him, Musafir, poor chap", and added that, "it must have been unintentional, why will anyone like to hurt him". From street to street, he searched trying to find the boys, any boy he could blame it on, because he knew them all. He had brought it into notice of the women and all of them sympathized, many even promised to take their boys to task.

It's the time when you just go blank, you don't know what to do, you really wish you could blame it on someone, beat the shit out of him and have something to say back home. But there was nobody around so that option wasn't available. If there was a way the event could be undone Galli would have done anything to get it all undone but that wasn't possible. There was absolutely nobody he could pick up a fight with, I am sure he wouldn't have mind even if he was beaten but not doing anything was unacceptable.

He had done all he could to avenge me if only Morr would know, yes, that was his biggest desire to convince Morr that he had done all that was possible. Will it convince Morr, if not then he has to stay on for a while till he had something to convince Morr.

It was a small bruise so we washed the blood as clean as possible before coming home. The blood had stopped and we tried our best to make it look as a small cut. To comfort me he insisted on carrying me on his back all the way. He thought if Morr saw him carrying me on his back she might pity him and forget cursing. All our boys gathered around us and we were leading a small procession homewards.

As soon as we entered the house, Morr instantly saw the wound and without waiting for any explanations, she started cursing Galli. His carrying me on his back gave an impression as if I was badly hurt. It was bad planning, had I entered casually I might have gotten away with it.

She instantly knew it was a war wound and we didn't have the opportunity to make up a story of falling down or hitting my head with something. "I told you not to go out with him", she said, "He is incompetent and cannot take care of you". Then she screamed at Galli, "how could you take him to war, do you have any brains. Grownups lead, small children stay back, why aren't you hurt"? Galli looked at me hoping I will say something to save him but even I wasn't given a chance to speak.

Galli knew what was coming so he just slipped out of the house without even trying to give an explanation. Morr scolded me also but since I was hurt she didn't say much. She started applying local remedies on the wound and kept on cursing Galli all the while. She burnt a small piece of cotton cloth mixed the ashes with oil and applied it to the injury. All the while, she kept on asking, "Did you have a blackout, does your forehead hurt". I tried to down play the injury, "I am ok, it's just a small cut".

"Look at your face as pale as egg yolk, you have lost blood you go and lie down", she advised. Lie down, I thought to myself, no way, the moment I lie down Baba would know and that will be worse than the hit itself. No matter what, Baba shouldn't know.

The wound itself was very small but since it was me and the wound was on my forehead it became a big issue. There was very little pain, if at all there was any and pain was never an issue, the problem was with parents, what to do about them, how

to hide it from them.

The episode with Morr was over after a lot of cursing and threats but it is a universal fact that children are not afraid of their mothers, they somehow manage to make it up to them but fathers only few couldn't be afraid of them. The whole day Morr's threat that, she will tell Baba hung over my head like dominical sword. I had to avoid Baba for the whole day, by next morning the injury was history. I wore my cap low and the cut was so small that Baba didn't notice.

This wasn't the last battle I took part in. I have been in the heart of real battles, battles with real enemies and real ammunition but this was the only battle in which I got injured and to this day I carry the scar on my forehead.

Village Baddi, enmity, is the first training in strategizing war, personal bravery aside one knows how to plan an attack, how to engage the enemy, surprise and surround them.

Spring invites flocks and flocks of birds of every kind and species to the valley, mostly for breeding and of course the abundance of food. Boys gain expertise in catching birds and making bird traps. Many birds, trained and untrained, chicks and full-grown are out for sale in spring. Bird catchers know where the partridges nest and as the chicks hatch, they catch the chicks, keep them for a few days and then sell them. People prefer buying chicks because they can be trained. That's not all they also trap the grown birds. Zark (choker) is a good watch bird, Sanzarai (francolin) has a beautiful voice and is very intelligent. I have seen many people with their Sanzari walking beside them when going out. Torai (black Francolin) our people believe brings good luck because he praises Allah in the mornings. I owned one and the sounds it make are enchanting.

Then we had the Bulbul, nightingale, which has a beautiful voice and sings all the time. Bird trainers are busy training their catch and once they are trained they are out for sale as trained birds which obviously fetch a better price but training one is a gratifying experience in itself.

Bird lovers can be seen all along Kharzai gathering insects for the caged birds, allowing the trained ones to catch some on their own. Their pockets are full of crushed almonds and raisins to feed them.

The trained Bulbul sits on a beautifully decorated stick. As one moves the stick the Bulbul follows in flight till it is allowed to sit on it. Toss a raisin in air and the Bulbul will fly to catch it in flight. Birds are available, in all ages, levels of training and all kind of prices.

People go across Kalinger, into the next valley to catch birds. The valley is a jungle of Mazri palm and other shrubs and bushes and the numbers of birds are limitless. They have trained birds which decoy other birds to come in and are trapped. The birds trained for decoy are the most expensive and prized possession.

Some bird catchers stay overnight and come back next day with their catch.

Dog loving boys walk their dogs every evening on the banks of Kharzai. There are many breeds of dogs as there are dogs, Bull dogs, Bull Terriers, Alsatians, Retrievers, Spaniels, the skinny Tazhee, the huge Ghuljai and Waziri dogs all are out to stretch their muscles. There are no patronized dogfights, the elders discourage them as they consider dogs a part of family.

De Gulluno Nandara - Festival of Flowers

When orchards are in bloom and the hills and plains are full of color, it's the time for Gulluno Nandara. Gulluno Nandara (flowers festival), is the hallmark of all seasonal festivals which starts with the advent of spring. The Nandara means more to us than the Rio Carnival. Youngsters start the festival by dancing to the Dhole from Idak village of Mir Ali sub division, east of Daur land. Idak youth are known for their colorful personalities; they keep long hair, oiled and combed, apply collyrium on the eyes and Hina on their hands. They wear bright colorful clothes and have all the small items of daily use, like comb, snuff box, tobacco bag etc. lavishly decorated.

Idak had a big Hindu population, a sign of its openness and welcoming nature. The lovers of Dhole and dance start showing their skills from early morning. The village Caleweshti makes all arrangements for men and women. Women have their side in the village and spend the day singing and dancing.

The village is busy cooking, making Sharbat and tea while Damman play the Dhole non-stop. Mashers and Maliks join in with special contributions, like a lamb or a calf for the village feast.

Spring sun has started warming up the weather but it is pleasant and dancers sweat it out in the sun while the cool Tochi breeze keeps spirits soaring. After a passionate dance in the village till noon, the group including almost everyone moves from Idak, upstream Tochi. Diehard girls and women follow close behind but women normally only go up to the next village and turn back.

The next village eagerly awaits the troupe and on arrival, garlands Dumman, dancers and the rest, with flowers, treat them with tea and Sharbat and if it is mealtime, provide meal. The party dances enthusiastically and moves on to next village using Tochi riverbed. All villages on banks of the river prepare to welcome the Nandara, each aching to outdo others.

As the group moves, dancers and Dumman of villages they cross join in and the group swells. Villages away from Tochi bring in their share of food and other supplies along and welcome the party in the village nearest to theirs, designated for a stopover on banks of Tochi.

Dancers and Dumman of these villages are already sweating in the circle and as the main party approaches local Dumman and dancers heat up things to welcome them. The welcoming village, showers fresh flowers on the visitors, garlands them and presents them fresh flower bouquets, necklaces, wristbands, posy for the turbans, you name it.

The dancers of the visiting group and the welcoming group face each other as if challenging the other to a dual. They dance aggressively towards each other and there is fierce spinning of the dancers from both sides. Damman stand on opposite sides and as the main body of Nandara reaches, the Dumman of welcoming village mix with those of visiting party and all becomes one big bash. The numbers of Dumman and dancers swell to a throng and the Dumman after taking the show to the pinnacle slow down the drum beat to general Attan which all the people join in before breaking up for refreshments. The refreshments are tubs of Sharbat and big kettles full of tea.

The main procession is that of men but women also follow and at every stopover women have their own corner where women of welcoming village look after them. When the Nandara moves on, the women of the previous village return while women of the welcoming village accompany the procession to the next village. When there are relations, women might go with the procession a couple of stops and then stay at the relatives and such cases are many.

It is time of display, pomp and show and elders of every village try to outdo their competitors because they want to be remembered as the generous ones, after the festival. They want people to remember the stop at their village. Food, Sharbat and tea is enough for all, there are no complaints of shortages.

The participants are invariably presented flowers, all collected from the wild. Youngsters wear flower necklace and wristbands, elders place flowers in their turbans or caps, Dumman stick them in strings of their drums and place them on their ears. Dancers and Dumman get special treat, they are garlanded the most in every village.

Public movement is properly managed so that the procession stops for night only at larger villages, where guests are split into small groups and each group is assigned to a different Hujra. Every Hujra prepares a feast for its guests and after dinner Nandara starts again which goes on till late at night. The Guluno Nandara continues for days with major stop at Darpa Khel and concludes at Boya.

The stop at Darpa Khel is highlight of the festival. Darpa Khel is the largest and leading Daur village. It's richest economically and easily accessible as the main road passes through the village. Preparations for the party start well in advance and people eagerly await the Nandara, the more the merrier. The whole village is taken by passion. Darpa Khel has always surpassed every village in welcoming the Nandara and will do so again.

Every Hujra is cleaned and sprinkled, beddings are made available and extra charpoys are brought from the houses. Proper arrangements for lighting are made, along with alternate sources. Baraq Jan, the only electrician in the village is called in. Wires from the mains are stretched out to the wooden stands designed for outdoor lighting, the stands are placed on the roof of our Hujra with light focus on the ground outside. Petromax lamps are cleaned and filled with kerosene oil, incandescent mantle is replaced and air pumped. Only grownups do the cleaning and pumping, we were not allowed to touch them as if it was something very fragile and we might break it. They pumped air, pre heated and again pumped air and they seemed to be doing everything in a much synchronized manner.

We watched them do the job and every time they asked for something, we were too happy to help, the grownups focus on the job while we fetched anything required like retrievers. Normally people use lanterns when there is no electricity; its light is no more than a candle, so when the Petromax lamps were lit they seemed so bright, "looks like Eid", we said. All the lamps had red tops and when ready they shone like crystal and we could see our images in the red tops. Once ready, all arrangements are tested.

Somehow Galli was always among the grownups and I was always among the children. Whenever Baba wasn't around Galli assumed authority and become team captain and though I got important jobs because of him, I was counted with the kids. The main Nandara takes place on the ground outside our home, it is sprinkled and swept, stones and all unwanted articles are removed.

Galli made me in charge of water supply as drinking water for the Nandara was supplied from our well. I was to ensure the Dum and dancers had plenty and children of the village were not allowed to come near. With authority comes responsibility. The clay water containers were filled and we were to ensure they were refilled timely. At night, Galli brought out loads of colorful, thin rice paper. He was going to make Fanoos, hot air balloon. We were up in the Hujra till late night, with loud music on making Fanoos. Innovative as Dada was he first made the sresh, bond, then cut the paper to various sizes laying it carefully and ultimately we had the Fanoos ready. A few grownups helped him; I was running around fetching water and tools for the team of engineers.

Finally, the day arrived, Duffman of six Khels of our village were out with their Dholes, the best dancers were bought white Shalwar Kamees for the occasion. They started the day by dancing casually, on the slow Attan beat. Young boys danced while the specialists saved energy waiting for the guests.

Then we heard the Dhole and saw dust and then people, to the east end of Tochi, hoards of people. My heart started jumping out of my body. The feeling is unexplainable, excitement, frenzy, craze none of these words can describe the feeling. It's like a mix of all these coupled by anticipation and expectation. They are here, the Nandara has arrived. Spring has arrived in full bloom.

You just go blank, you don't know what to do, some of the kids leave everything and run towards the Nandara, others take off but stop midway looking towards both groups, should I go or should I stay, go, no, stay and they are indecisive till the end. The children are calling each other for no apparent reason each asking the other to come over. Their eyes wide open, gleaming in excitement. This frenzy goes on for a while till our Dumman get ready to receive the group.

As the group reaches the village, still in the riverbed the boys and girls of every Khel shower flowers on them, loads of flowers, all collected from the wild, they sing and welcome them. Women have been working on the flowers, making them into small bouquets, necklaces and wristbands. Some even have blossom laden sticks in their hands which are offered to the elders the rest of the flowers are given to the whole party lots of them for all of them. By now everyone is wearing a flower, either as a necklace, or as a wrist band or in his cap or turban or all of them together.

Darpa Khel is the first village of Bar Daur or west Daur, and for the first time east meets west. This meeting of east with west gives an extra sting to the festivity making it look like a competition. The Nandara party climbs from the riverbed to the village and then moves towards the ground. All the women, local and guests climb to the rooftops of the houses near the ground to have a view of the Nandara. The hosts move to one side to make space for the incoming guests, led by the best dancers the group moves in.

Their Dumman stop and so does the crowd behind them and only the dancers move forward, we hold our breath many miss a heartbeat. It's a display which can only be experienced by being there. The game begins, the casual slow beats turns in to adrenaline pumping machines.

First go is for the guest dancers, they move in a much synchronized manner, as if practiced for years. The dance is very well choreographed, they change steps, they shake their heads, locks flying, they move forwards, they move backwards, they spin jointly, they spin individually, they sit after a spin and they jump after a spin. They spin and jump over the drummers, they spin with one leg, they spin on their hands and they do 'the scorpions' run. The dancers spin as they have never spun before as if this is the dance they had been waiting for their whole life. The dancers move in groups, they show their best steps, their best moves and many jumped higher than me and I am sure if measured, they might have had new records. As if, their life depends on this one dance. They dance passionately, for them it is like today or never.

During the final spin of the final guest dancer, you hear names called from the host side, "Pama, Bacha tayor shah", 'Pama son get ready', each of the host dancers make a call. The host dancers, our dancers, there is so much anticipation and excitement.

I still had the can of water in my hand from the place of my duty which I had left and moved forward for a better look, my heart totally out of control jumping up to my

throat at will. The host dancers are on their feet, only the Darpa Khel dancers had similar clothes, all white Shalwar Kamees with a large red scarf belted around their waists. While the dancers take position we start jumping and shouting calling every dancer by name. It's our turn, our dancers taking the ground. We hold our breaths.

The response starts, they make a line, take a step, jerk their heads to the left and stare at those to their left, then take another step jerk their heads to the right, their Saniye covering their faces and stare at those to the right. After a few steps, the beat of the drums got faster and where one step was taken a whole spin is made, and then, a spin with a reverse spin, a spin and a reverse spin with sitting down. The crowd is mesmerized while the dancers spin like tops, in every direction on every individual part of the body. They move as a group, they change steps and move in pairs and they move individually. New steps, never seen before are introduced.

Then someone places a Shkore in the ground, a two feet diameter round, Mazri made shallow container, the dancers spins on the Shkore to show the control they have and it continues till the final individual spins, a jump in the air to be caught by friends in midair and brought and seated near the Dumman.

The dancers know that women are watching and they will give their lives than be second best. They sway and swirl, they spin and jump, they danced in circles, they danced in lines, in pairs and all together. We clapped and laughed and hooted and shouted for no apparent reason.

Once the host dancers have put up their show they team up like four guest and four host dancers and put up a joint display. The two group of dancers on opposite side, they jerk their heads and stare at each other, they spin and stare at each other and as the drum beat gets faster their movements gets faster but after every move they stare each other. Then the final spinning starts from both sides.

By then the crowds have melted into each other and the distinction of yours and ours blurs. The dancers who were challenging each other become partners and the Dumman move to the center and the big, all inviting Attan starts, for all to join in. A multitude of people, hands raised to show the flowers move in a synchronized manner like the waves in a sea of flowers.

The Gulluno Nandara has reached Darpa Khel.

This is the only Nandara in which every person has a silk scarf, Bandana or handkerchief, (no guns or swords). They dance with the colorful scarves to add to the color of flowers. Some lucky ones get their silk scarves as gifts during the Nandara while passing through the villages. Some of the scarves are perfumed and have some kind of flower or any other sign on a corner indicating the appreciation of the one gifting.

As the sting of the initial Nandara diminishes, my duty on the water begins. My boys are ready with mugs and cans and bowls for drinking water, we start serving

water to the dancers, and this service continues till the grownups bring tubs full of Sharbat and people of the party are offered Sharbat.

Its guests first and then local grownups also have Sharbat and whatever is left the younger ones might sweeten their lips with it.

The party divides into small groups and every elder is handed his group to be fed and looked after. Lavish feasts are prepared in every Khel and everyone is invited. Women get together at Kamar Sar for their festivities and singing and dancing, even shopping as small stalls are set up for them. Though groups of people continue to have fun the actual Nandara resumes after evening meal. All Darpa Khel residents bring in food to their Hujras. Once the feast is over an all-night carnival starts.

Many people join in by road, especially women and children, they don't have to have relatives or know anyone in Darpa Khel. They are all welcome in every house, the doors of Hujras are open to men, and those of houses for women and children.

The best thing I like about the carnival is that even the elders join in the Attan which shows its significance. This was the only time I saw Baba join in the Attan otherwise he was always so serious. Seeing him in the Attan was such a great encouragement.

Nandara in every village is as good but somehow in Darpa Khel it seems that there are twice as many people and twice as much activity. Our boys are so innovative, by the time Nandara starts, they will have put 'Fanoos' and kites with small paper lanterns in the air. There will be as many Fanoos in the air as the number of Khels. Tochi winds carry them back to Idak from where the Nandara started just to let people of the villages enroute know that the Nandara has reached Darpa Khel and is progressing in full fervor.

It's not only dancing and singing in the Nandara, when the drummers or dancers get heated and instead of enjoying people start competing, something will happen from nowhere to cool the aura. A man walked in wearing a khaki suit and a hat, with a stick in his hand posing to be an Englishman. With a signal of his hand he stopped the drummers. There was complete silence, he raised his stick and announced loudly, "the Political agent has called Titee Khan's granny for advice and she will go by Tonga, tomorrow morning to meet the Political Agent".

We laughed and clapped excitedly, trying to recognize him. The drummers started the Dhandora beat and he signaled them again. In pin drop silence, he announced, "Titee Khan's granny is so old the doctor says he can't repair her, the Nandara will stay in Darpa Khel for seven days to see if we can do something about it".

Again, we laughed and clapped and he made a few other announcements till a chair was brought and he was made to sit in a chair. He sat like an Englishman all the while, enjoying the crowd and the crowd enjoying him.

The cool Tochi breeze doesn't let anyone tire of and no one wants to sit on the

sidelines. Every man is out to show his strength and significance, his nerve and his charms. There are men from many villages and to be on top is an uphill task which has to be achieved at any cost. Man verses man an opportunity if missed will come only after a whole year so give it all that you have. The youth is like an eagle in a dive, mind fixed on the target.

Baz che po ghuta she, marg ye wyer she.

An Eagle in a dive, disregards death.

(Pushto proverb)

Darpa Khel women are up all night scratching every bit of information and squeezing every bit of gossip from the women guests. The girls watch the Nandara from rooftops and many one-sided love stories are born that evening. If you do well in the Nandara, you are talked about for the whole year till someone else takes your place in next year's Nandara. All the families know each other so you get to know the softest of whispers.

The next morning activities start slow and celebrations gain strength as the day matures. There is a flurry of activity in the areas marked for women. Besides singing and dancing they are shopping for items they are normally shy to ask for. There is horse racing, tent pegging, marksmanship and other sports tournaments. Every event is for fun and conscious efforts are made that fun doesn't convert into competition or disappointment. People have fun and the procession starts moving on its course. During all this time, the drum beat stops only at prayers time otherwise though the drummers and dancers keep on changing, the beating of the drums never stops. Since drummers from all villages enroute have joined there are no less than twenty or more drums at one time and another equal number resting.

The procession travels throughout Daur area and conclude at Land Mohammad Khel near Boya the farthest Daur village on the Tochi. After days of festivities, the 'Guluno Nandara' comes to an end. The villages show their Milmastia, dancers show their strength and skills, the marksmen display their rifles and their marksmanship, vendors sell lots of food and sweets and the people, Lar (east) and Bar (west) Daur, come to know each other.

The whole festival is a package to showcase the skills and unity of the Daur tribe. In spite of the fact, that many have set their eyes on the fertile Daur lands they have not been able to capture the fertile Tochi valley from Daur. Daur have been able to survive in Waziristan only because of their unity.

Once the Nandara is over, everything gets quite. Every evening we have a leisurely stroll through the orchards, green fields and the banks of Kharzai canal. Mulberry trees of many varieties are laden with ripe Mulberries, their branches hanging so low we have to bend to avoid the mulberries falling on us. No one collects the black, maroon, red, Mulberries which fill the banks of Kharzai. You walk

on the Mulberries, squashing and bleeding the earth red, as if spring is offering a red carpet welcome. The sweetest of all is a seedless variety of Mulberry, Bedana, favorite of all. Bedana is shared among families and sold in the market.

Boys stretch a chaddar maximum, holding the corners and a third shakes the tree for the Mulberries to fall into the spread chaddar. Except for the few milk white which are raw, all pink, red and purple Mulberries are collected. The boys have the first right and they have the berries to their hearts content. The remaining, also a lot, are packed in a container with Mulberry leaves laid under and on top of the berries. If they are to be sold they are packed in small Mazri baskets. You cross people coming from the fields, having the finest Mulberries or Loquat or other seasonal fruits which they offer to share. It's like going to the Mall; you meet so many people with loads of fruits and vegetables. Children are busy catching butterflies, dragonflies and ladybirds while the bigger boys collect grasshoppers for their pet Chokar and Francolins and quills.

Kite flying is introduced before wheat harvesting. The bright blue sky is full of colors with numerous shapes and sizes of kites, every shape of kite having its own name.

In all the games we played or the festivals and ceremonies we celebrated, no one was excluded. Hindu children were as much part of the village as anyone else. It was quite late in life that we understood the differences between the Hindus and us, that we had separate religions and way of life. Otherwise, we lived together and were good friends.

Girls have their own games to which boys are not invited. Since girls, play indoors there isn't as much variety. Even if the girls weren't exactly inside a house, they would be together at a corner in the street. The corner is designated as the girls' corner. They don't have the luxury to go anywhere they want to but they never take notice of this. There is this understanding that no boy will go to the girls' corner. The girls baby-sit their younger kin and while the toddlers are seated to one side, the girls play games, babysitting of course being their prime responsibility. They play many games but hide and seek, Lash hiding, tag and hop scotch are the favorite. When confined indoors due to rain or winds, they play with beads, shells and stone picking.

Girls and boys shepherd their sheep and goats in the nearby hills. They collect Ber and gurgurey (blue berries) in the hills while the livestock graze. Groups of girls get together and play with dolls while the day passes. Grown-up girls stay home, they won't leave without prior permission and proper arrangements. They spend most of their time at home helping their mothers in tending animals, cleaning the house, washing clothes and cooking utensils. They keep themselves busy in making beautiful articles for self and family. They adorn shirts with beads, coins and colorful threads. When they show their shirts, women praise their workmanship and effort. It is an indicator of how hardworking and talented a girl is.

The girls weave Shalwar-belts by weaving thread. They make and decorate Tobacco bags, decorate Combs, Naswar boxes, Pocket mirrors, catapults and dolls, for their family members. Ones that are good at the job decorate bullet belts and dagger handles, fixed in the bullet belts. The girls make attractive Amulets, good luck charms and friendship bands. All the effort that the grownup girls put in advertises their talent for all to see, which leads to determining their place in the house, in the village, their marriage in a family and so on.

Goodar has a special mention in Pushto folk poetry and songs. It is a designated place on a stream or karez and lately a well, from where women and girls fetch water for the household. No man goes to this area, especially in the afternoon when women fetch water. While filling their containers, they sit by the stream and gossip to their hearts content, sharing what they have seen or heard. Fetching water is a ritual not to be missed by girls. Secrets are shared messages are passed and if there is something to show off, like new ornaments or dress, well, this is the place.

Then there is the Dewri, where women get together after work in the morning and spend the summer noon. They bring handicrafts like making Mazri baskets, embroidery or other activities to the Dewri where they work on them and share their favorite past time, gossip, exchanging notes, match making of boys and girls, progress made on issues of interest to them.

Tribal girls are fond of Tattoos. They have beauty marks tattooed on their face, the most popular being on the chin. The Tattoo has only two designs, either one round spot called Khall or one round spot with smaller spots surrounding it. Besides the chin, they might have one on the fore head between the eyebrows or on the cheekbone or they may like to have all of them or a combination. They also like designs on their arms. Tattooing is done in the crudest and most unhygienic way.

Girls love to wear jewelry from head to toe. Wearing jewelry on ears and nose is common for which they pierce the skin. The nose has two punctures, one on each side but there can be any numbers of perforations in the ears. The more well off girl's family is, the more jewelry she will wear. More jewelry is a sign of pride, so, rings, necklaces, bangles, anklets and toe rings, just name it and they have it.

Girls always wear long hair and they go through great trouble to make it so. Besides oiling it almost daily and shampooing it with egg yolk, they wear heavy hairdo at the ends to give the hair more volume. They braid their hair with silk strings and beads which takes the older women more than a day to complete. They have special jewelry for hair, Tangiwalay, which they wear in their hair.

The girls chew walnut bark to clean their teeth and redden their lips, use Ranja (colleyrium) on the eyes and to make the eyes look bigger they extend the line of Ranja to the sides. Lovers call this 'tail of the tale' and there are many tales of the tails.

The start of wheat harvesting indicates that spring season is on its way out. After

harvesting the crop and laying it in the sun to dry crisp, the Ghobal (thrashing) of the crop starts. Animals tread on the wheat stalks, blind folded, to thrash wheat. We wait till the grains are separated from the hay, the Usher (religious levy) from the grain is separated and the grain is put in sacks. The left over grains, full of dust are spared. All the kids sit in a row waiting for the farmer to complete his chorus and of course, the older boys extend a helping hand. We wait, well behaved and in the end each one of us gets some grain, Chingai, from the left over. Wah wa, we run to the bazaar where most of the shopping is on barter and spend whatever the grain was worth. Chingai is not limited to the harvest, when we visit relatives, the women of the house don't have cash to give us so they will give us grain, Chingai which we barter in the bazaar. The best value in the bazaar was that of wheat though at times we got corn Chingai. Once in the bazaar shopping, whatever we purchased, we asked for Jingai from the shopkeeper. Jingai was that little extra of something like peanuts, ber or sweets that we got in addition to our purchase.

Ballodukky - Thanks Giving

After the spring harvest is over, we go out on Ballodukky. Ballodukky is a praise and praying song sung by children of the village at the door of every house, to congratulate the household for the good fortunes and happiness it has received, thanking the Lord for his bounty and mercy. It's 'Thanks giving' at the village level, the group of children is from one Khel but they go around the whole village.

Children of the Khel, boys and girls, gather at a house after supper, from where they go out on Ballodukky. There is so much excitement, running, screaming and jumping waiting for friends, mothers giving last minute advice to the younger kids to stay safe. The older girls are told to hold hands of the smaller ones. Every child is in frenzy. Boys upto the age of ten are

allowed in the group whereas all unmarried girls join

irrespective of their age. Therefore the group is mostly controlled by the girls.

My partner Gul Dodi, a skinny lanky boy whom I never saw in shoes, summers or winters, rain or hailstorm, was always by my side. I often use to say to him, "Gul Dodi, what will I do if you get married", and the poor soul will shy away. He was always charged with carrying the lantern in front of the girls or the sack to start with. At times, we argued as to who will carry the sack because no one wanted to.

Everyone wants to be in the guard squad leading the group, free to do mischief, shouting, poking everyone and the girls giggle all evening. Boys have beautiful sticks painted in every color to do all kinds of naughtiness and ward of dogs. There were some real ferocious dogs around and with most of them we had personal enmities. Since the gang was large, we had a chance to settle scores with them.

The girls have a good size, homemade Doll, the center of attention of the show, having the most beautiful clothes and jewelry. The Doll is treated as if it were a living being.

Wahab was young, always running to catch up, always asking so many questions. I and Gul Dodi were neither leaders nor amongst the young ones needing protection so we had the freedom to move wherever we desired. The group went to the door of every house in the village, rich and poor, to sing Ballodukky. Women knew Ballodukky was coming as their children were also part of it so they were practically waiting for us.

Boys lead the group, doing all kinds of wickedness till we reach a house, then the girls take lead in entering the house. The girls stand in a group and sing Ballodukky, "O Ballodukky give me Kajjal for my eyes so that I wear kajjal and look beautiful because Kakajee is blessed with a daughter who is the angel of the house and will bring opulence and good fortune".

"O Ballodukky give me some oil for my hair so that I may oil my hair and look beautiful because Lalajee is blessed with a son and may his son grow brave and strong like his elders and carry their name aloft".

It goes on, "O Ballodukky bring me new clothes, so that I wear new clothes and look beautiful for this year Mamajee has got married to the most beautiful bride who will bring peace and comfort to the groom and good fortunes for the family".

Ballodukky is not limited to good harvest, for every event that has taken place during the year, whether a child is born, a marriage has taken place, someone has returned from far away, we congratulate the household and pray for the individual and the family. We remind them of the blessings bestowed upon them. The pray for each event is separate and pre-determined and we all know what to say.

The group has children of every household, so it is impossible to forget anything the house is to be congratulated for or forget names. Ballodukky is primarily a girl song, so the girls do most of the singing and we have them encircled to protect them from dogs etc while we join in the singing also.

We believe that children are innocent angels and so many children praying together, their prayers can't go unheard, so, women take it very serious. The lady of the house appears with her donation of grains. The children keep on singing till the lady of the house gives them lots of grains. Some women were very kind; they treated the whole gang to Sharbat or fruit.

While we sing, the women try to recognize every child, they observe the children closely, especially girls and at times lift the lantern to see us properly. Many a times they are trying to find a bride for their sons. They pass comments on every child, this is the son of Gulokan and that is the daughter of Shanagul. O Baran is also here (for children from other villages). O, you have grown so big or look at you, you have

changed so much or you look so much like your father and so on. They recognize all the girls and most of the boys yet there will be a new face or someone they haven't seen for a while, like me.

I was quite popular in the village, all for right reasons and women were so keen to see me. Most of the times I was noted by them but if some didn't recognize me they asked, "Where is Ghulam" or "where is Baba's son who lives away" and once they know, they all make different comments. Some said, he is the intelligent son of Baba or the boy, who has gone far to study. Some were afraid for me that I was going to become a Christian while others called me the musafir, poor chap.

Some women pitied me for having to live without a family. How lonely I must be, they wondered. Few women understood the importance of education and the ones who did quietly gave me colored eggs, dry fruit or anything they could manage. They will whisper in my ear not to tell the other kids because there weren't enough for all. They were so kind, so concerned, all feeling sorry for me trying to compensate me for my loss. I pocket the gift without looking at it for fear someone might know and share the news with Gul Dodi only once we left the house. Gul Dodi and I stood close by the girls with that innocent look for anyone who wants to pity me.

The focus of the whole affair is the Doll which the girls have prepared. The more beautiful a groups' Doll is the more appreciation the group receives. No effort is spared to ensure the Doll looks superb and without any exaggeration, at times it was ornamented with real gold jewelry. This shows the importance of the occasion and the support of the elders. The most efficient girl is in charge of the Doll and she will show the Doll very carefully as if not to hurt her in any way. The girl carrying the doll is most protected and no one is allowed near her. The girls behave as if it is a real baby, they will stop and say that the Doll is tired or it needs fresh air and we follow instructions whatever the girls say.

All women in the house take a long look at the Doll and comment on it. The comments a Doll get are a reflection on the workmanship and efforts of the girls. While women look at the Doll or select girls for their sons, the boys are busy making all kinds of mischief, putting dirt in the drinking water pots or grabbing a sleeping hen.

The group visits the whole village, door to door and the whole exercise takes about a week. It starts with the houses close by and as we go farther preparations increase and the gang swells. If another gang happens to cross path with us we hoot and jeer each other.

With every passing day, the girls add more ornaments to the Doll to make it look more attractive. The activity starts after sunset so it is late when we return and the farther we go, the later we return. We start with an empty sack or two every evening and come back with loads of grain which is collected at a designated point in a house. After the last day, the grain is valued and sold. A feast is prepared with the

money, to which everyone is invited.

On day of the feast action starts at sunset, we remove all the clothes and ornaments from the Doll, take the Doll in a procession to the Tochi riverbed and in midst of wailing and crying bury the Doll. All the boys stand solemnly with their heads resting on the sticks in their hands and the girls holding each other cry their eyes out as if a real friend has died. The burial symbolizes the Doll taking all evil omens that were to fall on the village on itself and has sacrificed for the well-being of the village.

We believe that if someone has anything extra ordinary then evil eye will fall on them and something bad will happen in that household. We say that 'bud nazar' (evil eye) has struck. All the happiness of a household is saved from the evil eye as the Doll, supposed to be the most beautiful thing in every house, has sacrificed itself by taking the evil eye on itself.

After burial, the feast starts and carries on till late night. The whole Khel is present, grownups help in cooking and other arrangements. After the feast is over the boys place their sticks in the roof of the house and they are not used till next Ballodukky. Once I asked Baba about Ballodukky and he said it was the same ever since he knows. This festival is from old times probably even before Buddhism came to this part.

By the time we are through with the harvest and Ballodukky, its ripe and sweet apricot picking time, to be followed by plums. Every evening, boys coming from their orchards have water pot full of fruit. There are so many varieties, getting ripe at different intervals, different size, colors and flavors. Along with the fruits there are lots of vegetables. It's rare that one buys fruits or vegetables in the market, every family harvesting them send generous shares to all family and friends. This is natural village life, everything is in abundance and everyone is sharing. Everywhere there is happiness and satisfaction. This is my village, everything and everyone full of energy, revitalizing and refreshing, joyful, jovial and jubilant, a Paradise on earth, where Youth is overwhelming.

Summers on the banks of Tochi were always so pleasant, satisfying and rewarding, with all shades of green around us and the cool Tochi breeze, whispering through the trees and cornfields, pushing back the heat. Pallangzai and Khoszai on the other side of Tochi are almost invisible, hiding in dense green trees. Families move up to their hills abode, right up to Razmak, the summer camp of the British military.

The mid-day break was compulsory in the long summer days. We were properly monitored and it was ensured that we have the mid-day nap and avoid the sun at its might. One can see animals and men sleeping under the thick shade of Mulberry on a hot summer afternoon.

Sun rises early and every day when I opened my eyes Morr would be shaking curd in animal skin, to extract butter and get Shlambey. She would take a big helping

of butter, put it in my mouth and announce, “The day has begun”. A big morsel of butter, the first thing to have in the morning, Yuk, I swallowed it like medicine, without even trying to taste it. Mothers wanted to oil our machines from the inside for better performance.

Every evening women sprinkle the mud rooftops and the family moves upstairs. The Tochi valley breeze is so cool and refreshing. The night sky is full of stars so bright and so many. Laying on the charpoy and looking at the sky is leisure. Mothers narrate story of the old woman, her sheep and the wolf to every child, showing them the charpoy of the old woman with the sheep and the wolf tied at opposite ends of the charpoy. Gazing at the stars children go to sleep amazed by the immensity.

Laying on the rooftops lovers hear the heart throb of their beloved in the sweet melodies of the love songs sung to them by the cool Tochi breeze.

We went for swimming in Kharzai canal till we were allowed to go to Tochi for a dip. If at all, though rarely, we tried to bunk and go for swimming at noon somehow Baba would know it and he will be very cross. In the evenings, we went for swimming and after having a dip, we played kit kat, Meesay or Guracha or watched the grownups play volleyball or foot ball.

Women weave beautiful baskets from Mazri palm during the long summer afternoons. Mazri is an important article in our lives having so many uses. When all others are having mid-day nap, women spend the noon gossiping and weaving Mazri baskets, mats, ropes, hand held fans and sandals. There are different sizes, shapes and uses of Mazri baskets. The flat one, used for serving Nan at mealtime is Shkore, the one like a dish, with a separate cover, keeping Nan warm till it is served is Tokar. In which clothes and other garments are kept is called Powna. Then there are large Mazri containers to store grains, to be used throughout the year, called Tratur. Mazri mats are made to be laid on floor or the charpoy. Smaller mats are woven for praying. They also make Mazri sandals for the family members.

Summers have its own set of games and activities for the boys. The ground in front of our house has almost ten different teams playing kit kat. Every time the small piece will fly by just missing a boy. All the boys play their own game dodging the shots played by others. I wonder why but I never came across anyone hurt while playing any of the games. Small falls, scratches and bruises are of course normal. No one ever left the field for fear of being hurt. The younger kids have their own area, their own teams and their own games.

Boys have nets to trap quail which are in hundreds during this time of the year. The net is spread at the end of the corn field in a manner to ensure once a bird gets to this end there is no way out for it. From the other end of the field, two or more boys hold a rope standing at opposite sides of the cornfield. The boys move towards the net end of the field tugging the rope and shouting “hey ha haha” making noise throughout the field. The quail runs from the noise made by the rope and the boys

towards the net end and get trapped.

The boys are so excited and move fast to catch the birds. In the end the birds are distributed equally.

The older boys played Kabbadi, football or volley ball. There were proper tournaments of volleyball in the village with hundreds of people coming from far and wide to see the games. Football tournaments were played in Miranshah under administration's sponsorship but volleyball and Kabbadi tournaments were held in the village. Neutral referees, proper arrangements for seating, refreshments for the players are arranged and of course Dhole is the icing on the cake. Win or lose dancing has to take place but if our village wins then it's a real jashan. Love is in the air.

When the June, dry gust of wind blows they say it is ripening Gurgura. Gurgura is a small berry the size of a pea with a big solid seed, like blue berries. The hills of Pallangzai are literally a jungle of Gurgura. They have their tribal Teenga against cutting them, that's why their hills were always full of Gurgura trees. They are sold fresh during the month of June and are dried to be sold later. Wheat is bartered for Gurgura equal in weight. There is very little flesh on it so it is a good time pass, especially during stories in the long winter nights.

Beautiful She Is - The Bride

Crimson fall brings abundance, harvests of many crops, leading to family unions and reunions. Engagements lead to marriages and marriages give birth to new families. We always had an excuse to sing and dance but spring and fall were overloaded. The number of drums and drummers determine the significance of the celebration. From the huge Sher Dali's Dhole which was like a base drum to the small Gul Maroti's they have all kinds of Dholes. As the big ones are for the Attan, the smaller ones are for women Bulbulas. The weather during spring and fall is pleasant, so, they are marriage seasons but fall takes preference. You ask any woman in the tribal areas when her child was born and she will say, "During harvest time".

All marriages in the tribal areas are arranged marriages, even if a boy likes a girl the marriage has to be arranged. The groom's family bears all the expenses of marriage jewelry, clothes and the rest. The groom cannot ask for dowry rather the bride's family asks for gold and other expenses of the wedding, notoriously known as Walwar. Family marriages are preferred but majority are within the Khel and very few outside the tribe.

Walwar (bride money) which gained notoriety has mostly been misunderstood. Many consider Walwar as the sale price of a girl to the groom which is not true. The Walwar money is to be spent on the bride's marriage expenses. The more

arrangements the groom's family makes the less Walwar money the bride's family will get. Where the bride's family wants to spend money on the needs of the bride, they ask for funds, Walwar, to be spent on gold, clothes and other requirements of the bride. There have been savings to the bride's family after meeting expenses, which brought bad name to the concept. The bride's family mostly spends more than what they get in Walwar but then there are all kinds of people.

First there is an engagement and then the date for wedding is fixed. Once the marriage date is fixed, the marriage arrangements start. A week from the wedding, informal singing starts in both houses. Women from the neighborhood visit to show support and share the happiness and have long evenings of singing.

A few days before the wedding, the bride leaves her house and stays at a relative's place with her relatives and friends. These are the last days of bachelor life and meant to be enjoyed. Four days from the wedding, the bride's gifts are displayed for family and friends at her house. Two days before wedding the Nakreezey night is celebrated in which family of the groom bring Nakreezey (Hina) for the bride. The bride returns to her house which is by now full of friends and relations. Every effort is made to make the bride look beautiful. Beautiful designs are made on the hands and feet of the bride and the girls in attendance with Hina. Braids of the bride are undone and oil is applied.

There are many activities in tribal life which have to be experienced to know them, they are very hard to explain. Even the best explanation will be far from what is intended to convey. One such experience is Chargeerai, literally meaning a chick, a pleading and prayer song.

On the wedding day, early in the morning, before dawn, a few elderly women, (not old women) of the groom's house get together on the rooftop. They sing Chargeerai, a very high pitch song, where every word is lengthened as much as the lungs permit, so there is less speech and mostly high-pitched notes. They sing Chargeerai on the analogy of the village waking up when the rooster crows.

Literally, the song means, you are a small chick, not supposed to crow, you crowed and announced morning to us. The message is that you were a small sweet child; we don't know when you became a man. To us you are still a child, it is difficult to recognize you as a man but we know you have become one. We taught you to love and care by loving and caring for you, now you will love and care for those who are about to come in your life. They continue singing Chargeerai till dawn.

It was Galli's wedding, when I woke up to the sound of Chargeerai. The predawn silence made the sound so overwhelming and so humbling. There was so much love and longing, hope and anticipation, pleading and prayers in the song. It is a happy occasion yet it filled my heart with so much sadness as if I was losing someone. I felt like crying in bed and couldn't get up till the Chargeerai was over. If one asks, I will categorize Chargeerai as the climax of the occasion. The Chargeerai declares to the

village, that the boy has become a man.

Women put on their best clothes and jewelry and anything new that they possess. The hot weather will not stop them from wearing a cardigan if it is new. On reaching the bride's Hujra, the party is treated food and drinks. The groom's family shows their forte through dance and firepower while the bride's family shows their by giving a good meal. The bride's family plays all sorts of tricks and mischief planned for the occasion.

In the house, women of both families sing Tappey, each establishing their family's superiority telling the other they are lucky to have become their relative. The bride's friends and relatives, after teasing the groom's family for a while will allow the party to seat the bride on horseback, behind a rider, (originally the groom but mostly a young brother) and leave for home.

People welcome the party on the way by making colorful gates and at every gate the wedding party stops, dance and sing and before leaving they pay tea money to those welcoming them. On reaching home the first ritual is the showing of the bride to family and friends who have come to the wedding.

Supported by an elderly woman, the bride is made to stand on a charpoy, with her face covered by her palms. The elderly lady opens the bride's palms, thumbs against her cheeks and asks the crowd, who is anxious to see the bride, "Pakka do ka kushalia do", 'is she beautiful or is she not beautiful'?

The whole crowd responds in one voice, "She is beautiful, she is beautiful".

The bride closes her palms over her face, the old woman repeats in a singing voice while opening the bride's hands, "is she beautiful or is she not beautiful"?

The bride's palms have beautiful Hina designs, she is wearing her special bride's dress and whatever jewelry her family has given her. She is looking her best and the crowd responds "She is Beautiful, She is beautiful".

This is repeated a couple of times. She then receives gifts from friend and relatives who have come to attend the wedding. The bride is made to stick a nail at the chokat (frame) of the door, a sign of permanency of the bride in the house and is introduced to the members of the grooms family, males and females.

After supper, the illustrious Mullah comes in and the Nikah takes place where the groom and the bride are declared husband and wife. The Mullah is enjoying the company of so many women and is giggling like a baby in their company. Suddenly he will get serious and say that this is serious business and we should do it properly as per the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh).

To err is human, no matter how much the Mullah controls himself he gets carried away and in a while, he is giggling again. Other than the bride and the groom, Mullah is the happiest person for those few moments. The mischievous girls intentionally do things to draw attention away from the Nikah and have fun.

First the bride is asked if she accepts the groom as her lawful wedded husband, the friends of the bride tell her not to speak while the elderly ladies, the Mullah and others beg her to say yes quickly. "Say yes", one tells her, "no don't say it", another whispers, "come on do it", another voice comes, "no don't, another whisper's" and in this war of yes and no the Mullah, is having the time of his life surrounded by so many girls.

The Mullah keeps on talking and the more the girls giggle the merrier the Mullah giggles back. The Mullah starts with the Hadith of the Prophet (pbuh), but the girls lead him to anecdotes and ultimately jokes, till he realizes he is here for serious business.

After a lot of persuasions when the bride says yes, some say "we didn't hear it", others say, "she should go the whole way, yes I do". At times another girl says, yes I do, to tease the bride. When the bride ultimately says, yes I do, the Mullah turns to the groom.

The whole episode is repeated, the 'don't say yes', the giggling, the begging, the jokes, the anecdotes and all. Once the Nikah is over the Mullah, it seems, is reluctant to leave the company of so many beautiful women. So we ask the mother of the groom to bring tea for us and we ask the Mullah who is not exactly an outsider, to stay on for the tea and that's the time the Mullah is at his weakest. He would have given his life for this cup of tea. After an elaborate cup of tea the Mullah is shown out. The night belongs to the youth and the whole family sings and dance and have fun till the last joint in their bodies refuses to function anymore.

The next evening a feast is given to the village, in which the groom is congratulated by relatives and well-wishers. This is the Valima, which is a religious obligation and all friends and family is invited to the feast.

After spending three days at the husband's house, the bride goes back to her family which is called Salwora, from salore meaning four, the fourth day.

On the third day of Salwora, the groom goes to the bride's house to collect her. This visit of the groom is called Zumawal, Zum (son in law). Till now, the bride was on the receiving end but now it's the groom's turn.

The friends and relatives of the bride are anxiously waiting to see the groom and have many pranks up their sleeves to tease him. The family of the bride gives presents to the groom depending on the family's status. Whereas the in laws try to pamper the groom, friends of the bride try to fool him. When leaving, the bride gets Khwanai to take with her. On return from Salwora, she becomes an active member of the family and joins the household. She is addressed as Nowye, bride, till her first born where after she is called mother of so n so.

Pushto music is at its best during weddings. A wedding with all activities normally lasts for around a week and throughout the drum dominates all music. The

drum starts from the house of the groom, women actively start singing and dancing, Bulbula is accompanied by singing, mostly Tappay. Women form a ring and they sing and dance, moving in a circle on the beat of drum.

The migratory birds that announced spring, on their return, reveal that winters are close behind. Caravans of Kuchis, indifferent to the complexities of life move at a leisurely pace whether going up or down the land. They pass by leaving behind loads of wool, dried curd, sheepskins, lambs and goat kids. They station for a few days outside a village, rest, replenish and move on. Groups of four or five Kuchi families move together. Huge, seemingly sleepy dogs but actually the best guard dogs guard the cluster of tents.

Kuchis are physically fit and their women are beautiful. Since men can't enter houses their women do, provoking youngsters to sing songs of falling in love with Kuchi girls. There are many stories, songs and Tappay, of young boys falling in love with Kuchi girls, who leave the boys heartbroken once the Kuchis are gone. A few days near the village and so many memories.

It was a bright sunny day and while I was on my way from Miranshah bazaar, late in the afternoon I saw a marvelous pup in a Kuchi camp outside our house. The Kuchi dogs are bigger in size and though the pup was hardly a month old it looked tremendous. It was white with yellow orange patches like St. Bernard with lots of white. Everyone in the tribal areas wants to have a pair of Kuchi dogs.

The Kuchis knew me since they had spent a few days at the place. It seemed as the elders had just arrived from whatever they were doing as they had gathered outside their tents under the shade of a tree. I salaamed the group and joined in. After shaking hands, I asked the eldest of them to give me the pup and I was ready to pay for it. The elder smiled, and said, "That's not mine, you have to ask my mother", a polite way of refusing.

"Ok", I said, "I will ask your mother".

His mother was old but very fit for her age. So I asked the woman, "Neo (granny) I have to have this pup, you find another one for yourself".

She smiled, "no, not this one, I can promise you another one but not this one. Next time we pass by, I will bring one for you".

"Come on Neo, you can keep the other one. Give me this".

The more I asked the more she shook her head, left to right. I knew she will not give the pup at any cost but I kept on insisting. I had found something to tease Neo. Every time I passed by her I complained, "Neo, you didn't give me the pup", and she would smile and shake her head. "I will bring you a better one, I promise".

Neo was a frequent visitor to our house so whenever I saw her I told Morr, "feed Neo well and look after her, she is going to give me the pup". I will show her all the money in my pocket and say, "Neo, you just have to fix a price", and Neo will laugh

at me, “You think you can buy anything, not this pup”, shaking her head.

It was a bright sunny day, full of energy and excitement, I stopped by the Kuchi tents, “Neo”, I called, “the pup, I am going to steel it if you won't give it”. Neo looked at me shaking her head as if saying why you don't understand. It was early and I didn't have much to do so I sat by her, “Neo, you have no choice, you have to give me the pup”. She smiled, took a deep sigh and shook her head, she looked the other way and called, “Sheen Khalai, O Sheen Khalai”.

Lo and Behold, Sheen Khalai, a very beautiful girl, fairest of them all, one of her nieces appeared. She was wearing the long Kuchi dress, her front hair was cut above the eyes covering her forehead, the rest of her long black hair was combed backwards, braided with silk. She had beautiful big black eyes full of innocence.

I was surprised, I hadn't seen the girl before. Probably they hide such beauty from public eyes. Its girls like Sheen Khalai that cause so many folk songs and as many heart breaks.

Neo held her by her hand and said, “Khan, this is the most beautiful and the sweetest girl in my family, if you like her, I will give her hand in yours right away, without even asking her father but the pup I just cannot”.

I froze in disbelief; my heart missed a beat. I looked at Neo and then the girl, I was stunned, it took me ages to find words to respond. The poor girl was even more surprised, she was looking at her feet without lifting her eyes, drawing lines in the earth with her toe. Neo had that victorious grin on her face starring me right in the eyes. The other women started peeping out of their tents to see what was going on. Sheen Khalai raised her eyes for the first time and I stole a look at her black eyes. After waiting for countless moments, which seemed as years, Neo said, “Khan I promise you I will bring you another pup, as good or even better”. I looked at Neo and all I could manage was a feeble OK.

We had a lot of mutual respect for each other and in the next few days, the Kuchis left. They moved on vacating the place for another family to come by stay for a few days and move on.

Gowasht - Harvest Festival

The Gowasht festival follows the fall harvest. It is the last festival before the harsh winters. Corn has been harvested, persimmon and apples have been packed in big crates made from poplar wood, truckloads of grapes and Garma have been collected and sent down country. The crop was good and the prices were good, so all the farmers, owners or tenants, are happy. When the elders are happy, there is no reason why children shouldn't be. It's time for the children to claim from the farmers what is rightfully theirs, theirs because they had prayed for a good harvest.

During corn season, we select the best corncobs in the fields, make a small fire and roast the cob without stripping the skin. The corncobs are most delicious when had in the field, tender and creamy. The ones in bazaar are roasted without skin making them lose moisture and taste dry and brittle. Having corncobs on the banks of Kharzai with the sun falling behind the hills is a simple village luxury not to be missed.

Once the harvesting is over, all the children of the village, boys and girls, Hindus and Muslims get together and sing the Gowasht song at every door of the village just like Ballodukky. The song is an asking and wishing song. Whereas Ballodukky is thanks giving for what has already been received the Gowasht is a pray, a longing song. When we reached a house, we knew what the house yearns for so we prayed for them, like for young men we wished a beautiful bride, for newlyweds we wished sons and so on.

Days are fleeting short and busy, nights are getting cold and the air is dry, crops have been harvested leaving the land brown and barren. Green, the color of life is replaced by red, yellow and brown; leaves have started falling making the plants look low and lonely. The autumn evenings make you feel sad and scared for no reason. Still it is good enough to keep us busy, to enable us enjoy.

As the last light is out and the world steps into darkness, when the redness in the sky is gone and we have had our supper, we all get together. "Come on Gul Dodi pick up the sack", someone shouts.

"It's not my turn; I carried it yesterday today its Khatali's turn".

"Ok Khatali, pick up the sack and Gul Dodi you hold the lantern", another voice comes.

Gul Dodi always wanted to be by my side but since I was a little scared of the dogs, I always tried to walk in the center.

"Come on Gul Dodi", the girls shout at him, "hurry up, bring the lantern in front".

Grumbling all the way Gul Dodi had to lead the procession followed by the girls. The poor chap was losing on two counts, one he had to walk with the girls, secondly he missed the fun we had by teasing each other and doing mischief all the way.

Like the Ballodukky, we have the Gowasht song mostly sung by the girls, with boys doing all the mischief, hitting dogs being on top of the list.

The song is like, 'The Gowasht angel has preferred Ghanam Gul and found him a perfect bride for it is time he got married and may the bride be the most beautiful and provide him all the comforts of life'. When we reached Ghafoor Khan's house, who didn't have children after many years of marriage we sang, "The Gowasht angel has selected Ghafoor Khan, to bless him with a son bright like the stars, who will grow up to be like him and raise the name of the family aloft".

The women folk of the house sometimes ask for specific pray and the children oblige. The girls are pretty good at it and every time they sing, they make the prayer more emotional to ensure it touches the heart of the lady of the house. Many times the lady of the house gets so emotional she will try to hide her tears.

When the songs are over the lady of the house gives the children a share in whatever has been harvested. Occasionally we ask for more where we think that the lady of the house is not generous. The girls will start the Gowasht song all over again and will ask for the stars and the moon for the family. Then the boys take over and praise the uncles and aunts for their goodness and generosity till they give more.

Two or three boys carry sacks, one for corn another for beans and yet another for gur etc. When the woman comes towards the Gowasht group, the boys with sacks move to the front and accept the contribution. Every day the collections swells and we know if we are doing well or not. After going to every household, we bring the collection together, dispose it off and use the receipts to have a huge feast in which the elders also join.

Gowasht is the last of the seasonal festivals and a harsh winter follows. People endure the tough times in high spirits. The nude trees are hardly a barrier and we are left at the mercy of the dry and dusty cold winds. The lush green valley turns brown and boring. The sweet songs of Bulbul are replaced by coughing and sneezing. Winters are knocking at the door. All the horror stories, of the evil and wicked are related to the cold winter nights so along with winters come sickness and fear.

All day, we wrap ourselves in shawls, coats, and jackets fighting the unsympathetic winters. The long cold nights we spend in prayers and contemplation, in care and comforting. In between the long coughing sessions, we could hear the howling of the jackals all night as if outside our door. We heard of visits from wolves, panthers and leopards during night and at times, some unfortunate livestock got killed.

On the other side of Tochi, behind the Pallangzai hills, majestic Vizhda, the highest peak, stand covered in snow. Survival against the cruel winters is in unity.

Sal rupai po pare ka, de zhamy shpa po kare ka.

Borrow a hundred rupees but spend winter night at home.

(Pushto proverb)

At night we stay indoors. We try not to get sick because we believe that if someone does, then there is no getting well, he stays sick for the whole winters. Before going to bed we are made to drink milk with Khashkhash (poppy seeds) boiled in it. We sleep so well or are we just knocked out the whole night and get up fresh in the morning.

The dry windy weather is un-forgivingly harsh so we are only allowed to come

out once the sun is out and warm, we sit in the sun behind a wall to save us from the wind. Towards the end of winters the dry and dusty Sindak bindak (west winds) caution that if you survive this you have survived the winters.

We spend the whole day playing marbles or with sea shells in that one place soaking in the sun. At night when it is late, we make 'papri' from gur. We take gur in a pan add some water and heat the pan till the gur melts and the liquid thickens to a point where the gur paste sticks to a wood stick, the size of a spoon. At this point, we add almonds, peanuts or pine nuts to the paste. We roll a lot of gur around a stick and then suck it like a lollipop. The milk, Khashkhash and gur work wonders together.

We try to stay out of harm's way; sickness is the biggest enemy of children, as there are very few and very primitive health care facilities. Mothers are very concerned about the health of their children. They try to keep them away from cold, away from dust and feed them with lots of honey, eggs and khashkhash milk.

If in spite of all care someone got ill, the poor chap had it. The local remedies are terrible. They start with a local dispenser preparing a black mixture for cough, a red mixture for stomach and some other colors for fever etc. No one knows what is in that mixtures but they work.

If the mixtures didn't work then we have egg yolk on a piece of paper stuck to our foreheads. Once this happens the paper remains on the forehead for the whole season. There are many kinds of plasters pasted to different body parts of the patient.

Last and the most dreaded of them all is the wearing of sheepskin. If a person is not getting well, all other remedies tried, he is asked to put on a sheepskin. Either a sheep is slaughtered, the skin is asked for or purchased. The patient puts on the sheepskin at night and stay in it till morning. I wore it once, long time back and I preferred the sickness.

At night Morr helped me put on the sheepskin. The neck, the sleeves and the legs were cut bigger for easy wear and sown in later. The whole night the sheepskin was stinking and I could barely breathe or sleep. They say one should perspire in the skin as that's when the skin is most beneficial.

I was miserable until Galli came and referred to a Pushto movie in which Badar Munir, the John Wyen of Pushto movies wore a sheepskin jacket. He gave me a gun and said I looked like Badar. Morr kept on cursing him and warned us of dire consequences but I liked the idea. At least I slept like Badar.

As the night crept in, it got even better. I was not allowed to talk and was told to sleep it out. To avoid the stink I wrapped a bed sheet around the sheepskin so it wasn't visible and the stink was reduced. I was not allowed to take water till late in the morning. Morr ensured the room was warm and the fire never died through the night. Past midnight I started perspiring in the skin. I couldn't move, a slight movement and the skin made filthy farting sounds.

I wasn't allowed to take a bath after this stinking undertaking. One is powdered with wheat flour and dry-cleaned and is allowed a bath the second morning after stinking for another twenty-four hours. Bad times don't end here. One is not allowed to go out, no lifting of anything heavy, no exertions, no running and to top it all no normal food, only mixture of bread, milk and ghee, day in and day out for seven days. I was always a weak child and had lots of amulets, lucky charms, talismans tied to my hands and legs and the yolk paper stuck to my forehead throughout winters. But sheepskin, what can possibly be worse?

Winter nights are dreaded, cold winds slap you the moment you are out, the whistling winds dare you and stories of Jinns and princes are born. We use to light fire in the Hujra and sit around it gossiping till late night. We have a Bagarra, where people of a Khel get together for a collective cause, in this case to bring wood for the Hujra. We all got together in the morning, the grownups took their axes, ropes and donkeys and we carried water or food items and went to the nearby hills. The grownups cut lots of wood till afternoon while we kept serving water and did what we were asked to. Only men participate in Bagarras but there are occasions where elderly women also join. Their duty is however limited to cooking food and fetching water. In the afternoon, all wood is bundled, loaded on the donkeys and brought to the Hujra. We have a few Bagarras before the winters set in. By the time winters become inhospitable the wood is dry and ready to burn. If for any reason we feel that the wood will not last for the winters then we go for another day of Bagarra to fetch more wood. That takes care of the fuel requirements of the Hujra.

Story Tellers - Night of the Prince

The best past time for the long winter nights is storytelling. We had storytellers whom we loved and personally, I was very fond of them, though it's quite a while since I heard the last story. I have seen so many movies, read many storybooks but the stories these people tell are incredible. They are from within the Khel or the village who just like to tell stories to kids. They have a new story every time we got a story session. Normally it was on weekends, when children didn't have to wake up early for school that we sat the whole night listening to stories. We were totally captivated in the story and the illustration of minute details showed the storytellers' extraordinary imaginations.

Illiterate people who never left the village had so much imagination, it was unbelievable. We knew all the storytellers and most of the stories were of a prince falling in love with a princess abducted by the evil giant or Jin or some other creature. There would be so much anticipation so much excitement, the storytellers won our hearts and for their stories, we loved them even in summers. The way they explained the strength and good looks of the prince, his generosity and kindness and

the beauty and charms of the princess, defining every part of her body were out of this world.

“The sweet was so tasty and so light on the stomach”, they said, “that if you had a morsel you will only feel your fingers were oily, the taste came to your mouth but you won't feel you swallowed anything. You could eat a whole dish and still want more. The rice was so tender, if a grain fell from your finger it will roll on the table and vanish. The weight of the shield of the prince was equal to the weight of hundred buffaloes and nothing could penetrate it. When the prince ran, the earth shook and trees were uprooted”. Such was their imagination. With such stories, how could a child even blink?

Once or if lucky twice a month a professional storyteller will stop by to spend the night at our Hujra. That will be the night of all nights. The professional storytellers move around a lot and hear about many things from people in different Hujras. Their extensive touring and keen observation gives them that extra imagination.

Wanderers as they are, the story tellers have unkempt dirty beards and uncombed short grey hair, they are shabbily dressed with a heavy chaddar, covering an overcoat. Under the coat, they had some kind of a jacket with scores of pockets full of everything they need to survive. At times they find a beautiful glass with lovely colors or a colorful marble and they will pull out the glass or the piece of marble in the midst of the story claiming it to be a piece from a fountain of Shahpur's garden or a Jinn's residence. They had these small harmless tricks up their sleeves to keep the interest of the kids alive throughout the story.

Once I saw a lovely, bright colored, glass paperweight in Morr's collection. On enquiry she told me that a snake charmer gave it to her. “It is from the garden constructed by Prophet Solomon,” she said and she was advised to lick the paperweight every evening for good health. Till she had possession of the paperweight, she and her family will be safe from sickness, she was told. Morr held to the paper weight in great esteem and in all sincerity.

The storytellers are nice humble people loved by children. The elders know them as they keep passing this way and don't take offence to their visits even if it is more than once in a season. The stories were always decent and parents never complained on the quality of the story. No parent ever tried to spy on the boys or persuade them not to listen to the story. Parents know if they ask children not to attend a story session they are asking for rebellion. Rather they encouraged children to attend and enjoy the story. As for the kids, they loved all the stories. No one ever asked the children to go home because it was late, only the younger ones who fall asleep are picked up and made comfortable around the fire because no one is ready to miss any part of the story.

Anticipation was always high, the excitement was unexplainable and we wished it was night soon. Once the act was about to start a huge fire was lit, the flames

literally touching the ceiling, the wood cracking and sparks racing towards the roof, sticking to the roof for a while before vanishing.

Every boy wanted to hold the poker and be in charge of the fire, pocking the fire now and then, throwing in extra wood needlessly, ensuring the flames blazed along with their passions. Our pockets were full of pine nuts, raisins or dry mulberry to help us stay awake and enjoy the story. Tea for the storyteller and water for the others was available at the stretch of arm.

Almost every child ensured he is sitting in the right place before the story begins. Once the storyteller starts, honestly you didn't feel like blinking right till the end of the story. The story starts very soft and pleasant and as the younger ones start falling asleep, the story heats up.

Some of the storytellers have a Benjo (guitar like) or Sarinda (violin like) and play it along. Their voice, full of emotions, when there was sorrow they sounded as if they were about to cry and when there was happiness the enthusiasm was evident in their voice. As the night grows, the love in the story blossoms, the beauty of the princess becomes breathtaking, the prince grows stunningly strong and courageous, the villain repulsively horrendous and the story turns melodramatic. So many times, the storyteller brings us to the verge of crying and as many times he makes us laugh. Many times, he makes us sink in despair and as many times he makes us sit upright in excitement.

It was the story of Adam Khan Durkhanai and in the last scene of the story, when Durkhanai's seven brothers attack Adam Khan together, seven hands holding seven daggers, all strike at once, at one body, one helpless, harmless body and kill him. One of the chaps listening to the story picked up his gun, fired in the air and started yelling, "wasn't there any one to help Adam Khan"? That's how professional the storytellers were and that's how we got carried away.

Daldal was snorting and beating the ground with his front leg, Shahpur patted him and he shook his head violently as if telling Shahpur he can take on the army by himself. Or when Saif ul Maluk pulled his sword, the lake started rippling as if the earth had started trembling. Or Meeru was in no mood to kill so he fought and unarmed the soldiers and by the time, he unarmed half the army one painfully unfortunate soldier hit Meeru on his toe and that's when Meeru got angry.

At times a rascal makes noise or giggles or keep going in and out of the room, we cursed and abused even fight with him. Disturbance of any kind was like 'over my dead body' and we hated anyone who created it.

The next morning all the kids tell the story to their mothers. Girls are not allowed in the Hujra, not even to listen to the story, they miss a lot but then there are old women in the house who tell them stories, for whatever their stories worth is.

Not mentioning Babar will be unfair on my part. The only storyteller our girls had

the opportunity to listen to. He was a brilliant storyteller. His wife use to work in our house so we had given them a small hut to live in. Babar was a very decent man and use to buy and sell guns and gun spares.

After supper was over and dishes brought back from the Hujra we sneaked in to Babar's house. Babar came home late after closing his shop and by the time we turned up he would have said his prayers and will be preparing to have food. His wife served him food in their dark and smoke filled room, the lantern light was barely enough to prevent us from colliding or stepping over each other. We never knew exactly what was cooked but we always imagined he was having potato and meat curry.

Babar was big, sturdy and overweight, he would tell the story while having food, starting both at the same time. He shifted food around with his plump fingers while preparing a morsel. I wonder if he could see what he ate but it always seemed he was choosing what to start and what to finish with.

Bread with a little curry with a small piece of potato and a piece of meat and putting them altogether and then guiding the big morsel into his mouth, he would be quite for a while, unable to speak, adjusting the morsel, starts chewing while we are waiting impatiently and after a while he makes enough space to start speaking. When ready to swallow, he would um um for a couple times, swallow, food going down, another swallow food going further down and then um um food gone down and he starts again. He then had water or Shlambey and again um um and then have a sip of Shlambey um um swallow and start again. It wasn't only the story that we enjoyed, by the time he finished his food we were hungry once again.

At times, he also gave us sweets he brought for his children that made the story much more interesting. A kind man, he always had a small story that didn't take longer than his meal. His wife was his exact opposite, thin lean with a long pair of front teeth, resting on her lower lip, always grumbling and asking us to leave, always asking our mothers not to allow us out after dark.

Besides the storytellers, we had the poet singers. They turned up once in a while to be our guests. They were not my favorite and I didn't have the craving I had for the storytellers but they were OK to kill a long winter night. The poet singers always came in pairs and got into contest trying to outperform each other. I don't know if it was preplanned but the impression was as if everything was extempore and they were trying to beat each other. They were simple village folks and so was their poetry. Poor people, they made themselves welcomed through these performances. They moved in a group, two or three poets and a drummer. In the morning before they left they received some grains. The poet singers' visits were not limited to winters like the professional storytellers, rather their performance was enjoyed more in summers where boys from other Hujras also join in.

A poet starts by saying Tappay (couplet) in praise of his friends, selected from

the audience, which will be responded to by the other poet by saying Tappay in praise of his friends trying to outperform the first poet, implying that he has better friends. The evening starts very peaceful and slow, “I am old in this profession and have seen the world, you are young, the age of my son and you haven't seen much” one poet will say.

The other responds, “look at my hair and my clothes, they are worn and battered for I went to places like the mountain of Kaaf² to perform and receive praise”.

First poet, “My friend is so handsome, girls cutting vegetables cut their fingers if he happens to pass by”.

The other responds, “no girl in the village is cutting vegetables today as they have all gone to see my friend who happens to be in the village”.

“It's not your friend they have gone to see, it's the doctor living next door whom the girls have gone to with injured fingers”, the first poet replies.

On every Tappa that is said the friends of the poet dance on the beat of drum. For every outstanding Tappa the poet repeated the verses and the youngsters, who are clearly divided by then, shout and dance to the beat of the drum.

As the night matures, the poets get heated up, their groups get heated up and of course, the drummers get heated up. With every couplet they shout, yell, and dance like crazy. With every point scoring, there will be a lot of hooting and jeering. There is no single topic for the poets, its open ended poetry competition. The poet praises his friend, beloved, the country or he will ridicule his opponent and his friends and his beloved and so on. Once the party warms up the poets start saying whole poems in praise of their friends. After a while, the praise of friends is replaced by ridiculing the opposition.

“Why don't you take your friend to a doctor to reduce the size of his long nose”, one will say.

“The doctor is not available today, he is busy repairing the ears of your friend which are craggy and tattered because of old age”, the second responds.

The drum beat and the dancing, hooting and jeering goes on and on. This continues till late at night, long winter nights are made for such pastime.

For Each Other

The village was so poised and peaceful, without any fear of mankind. Boys were only afraid of dogs and many houses had very scary ones. Some even had more than one, each more ferocious than the other. If a boy needed to cross them he would wait for some grown up to come his way and start walking behind him till he crossed the

dogs. The man was protection. Showing fear is unmanly so the boys pretend as if they are just looking around. The moment they are out of danger they overtake the man, free to move at their pace. Other than dogs boys feared Jinns and witches and anyone wanting to cross a creepy area needed some kind of support and protection. Again, they wait till some grown up is going their way and then follow him. Even women wait till someone was going their way and followed him close behind. They didn't differentiate between known and unknown persons. Without knowing a person, he was recognized as protection, a defender of the weak. Women weren't scared of men, without knowing a man, they felt safe in his presence, it was assumed he is on our side.

It was just before sunset, women were busy preparing supper, men were trickling in towards the Hujra, the year was 1965, when we got the news that Babajee won the elections. Winning elections instantly calls for jashan, celebrations but before we could plan any, we got better news that our aunt was going to Miranshah bazaar to congratulate Babajee.

The men of the house will do so in the morning. Since there will be many people coming to acknowledge Babajee next morning it was better the women did so this evening, when most of the people haven't heard the news yet. A few of the grownups fired aerial shots so that all and sundry know of the great achievement a son of the village has made. A great achievement indeed, Babajee was the first Daur to have challenged the Wazir and won.

As per the NIKKAT of the agency the Wazir are sixty percent and Daur's forty, so Wazir have a twenty percent vote's advantage in electing parliamentarians. A twenty percent advantage forever, in every event, which led to the saying:

Khudai yo da, Wazir dare de.

God is one, Wazir are many.

(Pashto proverb)

To announce good news, firing gun shots and drum beating at sunset is normally avoided but today was different. Exception could be made rather it had to be made. A great achievement calls for great celebrations. We were always ready to accompany any one going anywhere; the only condition was whether the person was ready and willing to take us along. It will not be fair if we don't offer company to aunt, we said to each other. We all got together, around six boys and girls to accompany aunt to Miranshah bazaar, where Babajee was staying, to congratulate him on his success.

Jumping and running around had started, some were changing clothes, others putting on their sandals, a few even washed, as if they were getting married. Some excited they were going with the troupe others begging their moms to allow them. "No, they are too young they can't be allowed to leave the house so late, we might have to stay overnight", those going argued.

Last minute instructions on how to behave in presence of Babajee were given by mothers, walking with them right up to the main door, some even called out instructions when we were out of the house, I have my doubts if anyone listened. “Look after the small ones”, was the last shout for the grownups. Women know their children are their emissaries and Babajee will make impression about them by looking at their children, the way they dressed, the way they behaved and all the women wanted to look good.

We stay in our house at Miranshah during day, everyone doing his own business, boys and girls coming from school, have lunch, stay for a while and leave for the village. Only Babajee resides permanently in this house. Babajee's wife and children also live in the village while he visits only on special occasions like Eid and marriages.

Then, we didn't have a road to the village, so we walked on the track in the fresh green fields up to the road. The sun had set, the sky had turned purple and a few stars blinked. We had to be careful with every step, not to step on a toad or unfortunately a snake. Our house is surrounded by fields and orchards spawning so many snakes. We killed them by the dozens and were lucky no one was ever fatally bitten. They were frog and mice eaters, not those dangerous cobras. The night was still, there was no breeze, the green paddy fields were full of frogs croaking without a break and it sounded as if they were all saying “Babajee Zindabad, Babajee Zindabad”, long live Babajee. We added our voices to the croaking frogs, shouting Babajee Zindabad, Babajee Zindabad raising the right hand with every Zindabad. In the silence of the night it all sounded so exciting, so overwhelming. Trees and shrubs looked as dark shadows standing still as if waiting to catch something. Every now and then, we heard a splash in the water.

By the time we reached the road, it was dark, the sky had turned black and the stars and milky ways filled the clear sky above. They gave out enough light for us to see the road. Once we crossed the fields, we could hear the crickets, which were always there but the toads won't let us hear them. A few bats were swooshing in the air just above our heads, mostly towards the paddy fields and back. There were many insects the bats could see but we couldn't, yet we call them blind. Bats are a bad omen; despised and avoided. If they ever happen to fall on you they don't harm you much but scare the daylights out of you.

We came across the few dimly lit, isolated houses, a small mudroom, surrounded by dry thorny branches for the boundary. There were a few animals and some animal feed to one side. The dogs start barking when they heard us to inform the owner, someone is coming. The man of the house coughed to let us know he is awake, in return, we spoke loudly to tell him we are not hiding.

Village life closes up early and though there is activity in the village, there is seldom any activity between villages after dark. From outside, it seems the village is asleep until you enter the village and see groups of boys sitting in the Hujras.

Across Sheikhadam, the greenery and the isolated quarters were left behind. The road was very quiet and with no breeze, a serene calm prevailed all around. There is no traffic at such hours so we walked all the way. Walking was fun, rather more of an adventure, as we had never been on the road at such a late time. We weren't afraid of people, everyone was a friend but like all children we were apprehensive of Jinn's and witches and of course the wild animals.

With graves on both sides, we were practically walking through a graveyard. Graves are scary places with all horror stories beginning and ending there. A faint breeze started near Sheikhadam making the walk more pleasant. We prayed for the dead while passing Sheikhadam.

Shrills of the crickets were replaced by a quite hissing of the breeze. A small movement in a Darga, bush or a tree was a witch or a Jinn waiting for us. Jinns and witches can take up any shape so every tree or a bush looked like something, a donkey, a cow or like a woman dancing or anything the mind can come up with. The rocks formed different shapes, changed shapes, Jinns in the form of men sitting waiting for us. A dog, a cat or any stray animal was surely a Jinn and we recited verses from the Quran to ward them off. The whole group started getting closer and tighter. A faint rustle of a grass blade or a fallen leaf was a snake or poisonous latakka lizard. All our senses and all our reflexes were on full alert while we kept on moving towards our destination, full of apprehensions rather than of fear.

I had learnt a few suras, chapters, of Quran by heart and started reciting them for protection. My aunt was surprised to know, I had learned so many suras, so all the way, I was made to recite the Quran. Once I got appreciation and importance, I wasn't going to let anyone down. I kept on reciting to their satisfaction right till the time we could see the bazaar lights. We took all shortcuts on the way, once we crossed Torwarsak we could see the lights blinking. What a relief, Jinns and witches and wild animals are all afraid of light, so we were out of reach safe and sound.

At the base of Tor Warsak is the traveler's graveyard. When an unidentified body is found in or around Miranshah, arrangements for proper burial are made. The expired person is kept in the town committee, an announcement is made for people to see and if possible identify the dead. If no one is able to identify it, the village Calweshti will arrange for a proper burial. Once we crossed the traveler's graveyard we could giggle and push around once again, now that we were almost there. Hope is such a strong support, the bazaar lights signaled our safe arrival and the Jinns and witches may take a hike. I was the most relieved person as I could stop reciting verses. No one asked me to but once in safety no one paid attention.

Babajee was so glad to see us and insisted we stay for the night and leave early in the morning. We couldn't refuse Babajee and decided to stay on and give him the opportunity to look after us. He showed kindness and humility but in his humility was an air of triumph and magnanimity. We were so pampered that evening, for the first time Babajee was serving us and not us serving him. He was so content, forgiving

and happy and laughed loudly at the smallest occasion. When aunt told Babajee how I rescued them from Jinns and witches by reciting from the Quran he appreciated it. Thank God he didn't ask me to start reciting. People had brought Babajee many gifts and we had the privilege to have a little bit of everything.

Babajee wasn't annoyed over our coming at such odd hours. A woman with young children could walk all the way to Miranshah after dark without any fear. So peaceful was our village. Trivial affair as it might seem it gives the idea of the kind of village I lived and grew up in.

There were many Hindus in our village, who were always the first to open shops in the bazaar. It will still be dark when they went to the karez on the far bank of Tochi, the Pallangzai side, for a bath. They would be ready to go to Miranshah by the time people came out from morning prayers, before sunrise. By the time, people arrived they would have cleaned their shops, set them up and be ready for trading. In the evening Hindus closed their shops by evening prayers and by the time they reached the village it will be dark. Then travelling wasn't all that easy. If someone had to go far like Peshawar or Rawalpindi they had to rise very early and catch the first bus which left at or even before dawn. They had to walk up to the bus station in Miranshah. Movement was never restricted because of fear, people moved without fear whether day or night.

Many farmers got their turn to use water from the Kharzai canal that feeds the village, at night. They irrigated their crops all night without any fear. Except for petty thefts, we never heard of people being robbed on the way from Miranshah to the village, never heard of tribesman being kidnapped or any other major offence committed. Theft of livestock was I think the biggest offence that I heard of during those days and for such offences, the village immediately called a Cheegha.

The only fear we knew was an attack by wild animals or a snake or the showing up of Jinns and witches. Other than these we knew no fears. Every now and then, we found a huge snake killed by a farmer, his only fault being that he was at the wrong place at the wrong time. Frog eaters, the farmers said they weren't dangerous but they were huge.

Such caring are the people of my village and such loving are the families, closely bonded, all living together, sharing every happiness and sorrow, sharing every produce harvested and recognition earned, contributing towards every event of village life, trying to make every event their event, a successful event. We recognize and respect each other and watch the backs of our kinsmen.

How many things can I thank Allah for? Am I wrong in calling my village a piece of Paradise?

The village had a big Hindu population which deserves a separate mention in a little detail. It's not that we had a separate tribe or group of Hindus; they were a part of every Khel and tribe. My Khel had its Hindus, another Khel had theirs, who were

a part of the Khel and enjoyed all the rights and responsibilities of the Khel.

In good old days some of the family members changed their religion while others didn't. They were of course smaller in numbers than the Muslims and over the years, there had been no inter marriages among them because of the religion but at the same time they were a recognized body in the Khel. There were no people of other faiths, Hindus and Muslims were the only recognized religions and the two had been pulling on together for ages.

²Koh e Kaaf. peak where the angels live

CHAPTER 5

BROTHERS IN BLOOD

Hindus - Brothers in Blood

AMONGST ALL THE FRIENDS AND RELATIONS, THE ONES that deserve a special mention were the Hindus. All friends in the village are also family but unfortunate for the Hindus, since they had a different religion, we discontinued having marriages from and into Hindu families. This is why Hindus were only friends and not relatives. They were isolated in the regime of relationships to an extent of condemnation and had to go beyond the area to find relationships.

The affairs between Hindus and Muslims in other areas might have been different but in Waziristan, they were exceptionally cordial. History is not my interest; but the general belief is 'that the Pathans were Buddhist before they converted to Islam and Hindus before they became Buddhist'.

In an area where tribe is the basic unit of identification and administration, blood lineage plays the most important role. Hindus were from our Khels and tribes so you couldn't declare them a minority on the basis of religion. Blood lineage determines minority and majority in the tribal area, hence Wazir are a majority and Dauris a minority. Saidgi, Gurbaz and Kharesin are a minority. Hindus were as much tribesmen from the tribe and Khel to which they belonged but over a period, due to their relatively small numbers, they lost Nikkat within the Khel.

There was a big Hindu population in our village occupying the center of the village. They were comparatively better off financially and better educated, which gave them additional import as a community, as such they weren't a minority in the first place as many think and secondly they commanded great respect and authority.

They weren't weak in any way than the rest of us because of their religion; rather they were a kind of an elite wealthy class. They were friends and equals and both the communities respected each other. Baba said he didn't recall a single incident where they had an issue with the Hindus; they were all very balanced people.

It was basically the partition of India which created distances between Hindus and Muslims of Waziristan. We were two different entities on the same side, against the British colonialists but the partition made us into enemies. Somehow, the British

were encouraging the partition and converting friends into foes. They manipulated the whole situation and made religion a central issue. For the first time religion overwhelmed blood lineage.

The Political Agent planted Maliks not to allow Nehru speak to the jirga. Whether his point of view was right or wrong is secondary but not allowing a guest to speak was against Pukhtunwali and unfortunately, some elders committed this un-Pukhtun act in the heart of Waziristan. Not respecting a guest was unheard before this.

A good majority of Hindu population left for India at the time of partition, still many stayed back. They left not because they were under some kind of threat but because of the hype and fear created by massacres of migrating Hindus and Muslims on both sides. Hindus were against partition, they sang:

Banni bazor mey de indwoney na khali da. Pakistan jori zhy, zrah may zakhmi da.

Bannu bazaar is empty of Hindus, Pakistan is being created, my heart hurts.

In the heart of the village bazaar signs of a big Hindu population can still be seen, the Dharamshalas and other Hindu buildings are still intact. The old houses have signature Hindu architecture, multiple story houses, narrow streets, all contained in an enclosure. The Hindus occupied the center, with their shops close to their houses.

We never tried to know whether the Hindus who left at the time of partition reached India or not, whether they were happy in India or otherwise but we are concerned only with the ones who stayed back. Those who had reposed their confidence and trust in their kinsmen. Their staying back was a clear indication that they were happy here. Since they reposed trust in us we were even more obliged to ensure they were comfortable, that they were safe and looked after. Once religion got center stage and most of them left, the remaining were ultimately converted into a small minority in an Islamic state.

I didn't have the privilege to see the village before the partition of India, when we had a big Hindu population but I had the opportunity to live amongst those who stayed behind. They left only after the 1965 war between India and Pakistan. The way I saw things as a child, let me say out rightly that there was no difference between a Hindu and a Muslim. We all had equal opportunities to practice our religions and culture, as we desired. No one interfered in the other's religion or way of life. Hindus were a recognized part of our community but since they were less in number, they kept a low profile.

The elders say that once a Mullah, who use to shop for his daily groceries from a Hindu's shop got annoyed with the Hindu. To avenge, whatever he was not happy about, the Mullah announced in the mosque, during his Friday sermon that, "the Hindu from whom he and others purchased their daily utilities has converted to Wahabi". He announced that, "People of the faith should boycott him for this act".

The people of the village started looking down upon the Hindu for converting to Wahabi and boycotted his shop. They even stopped talking to him.

After suffering losses in his shop the Hindu went to the Mullah begging him to forgive him and promised to look after him in future. In the next Friday prayers, the Mullah, announced in his sermon, "I have good news for all the believers, the Hindu has repented; he has renounced Wahabi religion and has returned to his old faith, Hinduism". "All Muslims can now interact with the Hindu". People greeted the Hindu for choosing the right path of reverting to his faith.

People accepted Hindus as an integral part of the society and this anecdote indicates how close the Hindus were to the rest. They were closer than a different Muslim sect, any sect for that matter. They were considered as our Hindus, if I may say so, accepted and recognized. Hindus were side-by-side and shoulder to shoulder with the others on every occasion, happiness or sorrow. We have our separate houses now but Baba said that when they were small they lived with Hindus on the same premises, in one compound.

We were invited to every wedding of the Hindus and Morr mostly led all ceremonies in Hindu weddings similarly Hindus had their role in our weddings. We attended all functions in Hindu houses like celebrating Holly and throwing paint on people. We had good Hindu friends who showed us around whenever we visited their houses.

A child's birth in Hindu house brought as much happiness as in any of ours. Birth of a son was a secret and every woman assisting the childbirth tried to inform her own child first so that her child could break the good news, Zarai, to the elders and get reward for bringing good news. At such a time we stayed close by and when we knew that a son was born we made a dash to search the father and break him the news. If no one brings the good news then it is understood that a girl has been born.

Baring a few rituals related to religion all the functions and festivals were the same in both the communities. Many activities were shared by both communities; there were areas where lines blurred between the two communities and the festivities were equally important to both.

Celebrating Holy in the village and throwing paint on people was as much our festival as it was Hindu's and same goes for Eid. While celebrating Eid, Hindus wore new clothes with crisp, silk turbans, apply henna on their hands and sit with us in the Hujra receiving guests. Fireworks were common to both the communities whether it was Shabe Barat or Dewali; both communities commemorated the occasions with fireworks together. We didn't bother to know whether it was a Hindu or a Muslim festival; we just celebrated. As long as it was enjoyable, it was good for us. It never happened that one community is celebrating while the other has gone to their routine work.

Hindus didn't have their independent Hujras or its equivalent where only Hindus

from different Khels could get together; they were a part of their Khel's Hujra. The Khel had all the paraphernalia for religious activities of their Hindus, like the Dharamshallas. Only the place for cremation of the dead was shared by all Hindus of the village.

The Hindus spoke Pushto and wore shalwar kamees, lungis and waistcoats like our elders. Our women not only dressed in similar clothes but also wore similar jewelry and make up, right up to the red sindur in the hair and bindiya on the forehead. One couldn't differentiate between the Pukhtun and Hindu girls, they all looked the same. Hindu women were stricter in observing Purdah. Our women collect fuel, took grain to the grind mill and fetch water but no Hindu women left the house. They were financially better off so they always had someone to do these chores for them.

Hindus were allowed entry into tribal homes. They were allowed to visit and work with women. Some say Hindus weren't considered equal, which is why they were allowed entry into the house. This is not so, Hindus were comparatively rich and more educated, many of our people performed menial jobs for them and if this was the case, they would have avoided, rather, refused the privilege. Hindus had more access to our homes because they were more skilled, they worked as Hakims (homeopathic doctors), veterinary doctors, teachers, astrologers and such other occupations which enabled them have access to our homes. Their expertise in human and livestock ailments gained them a lot of respect in a livestock herding society.

Hindus were equal because if a Hindu was killed, his Khel had to take Badal by killing a Pukhtun. If they were lesser men then their Badal would be lesser.

Hindus contributed more financially to every joint cause of the Khel as they were wealthier which made them a prominent part of the Khel Hujra. Finally, they were all businessmen and weren't around most often.

The whole saga of the Faqir of Ipi, Mirza Ali Khan, started over a Hindu girl who converted to Islam. That made Hindus an active party to the issue. During the movement of the Faqir his comrades started kidnapping and even killing Hindus to create trouble for the British.

Most of the anti-state activities took place in the settled areas but then there are people who get overzealous. It was during this movement that some of the fighters, of the Faqir killed a Hindu, Duedyal, of our village. He belonged to the Mana Khel of Haji Wresham Khan. It was a difficult call, the Faqir's movement was at its zenith and any confrontation could lead to trouble. The Mana Khels didn't have much of a choice, they had to exact Badal and one fine morning the Mana Khels got together and went after the Mujahid. Haji Wresham Khan and his relatives, in Badal of Duedyal, killed the Mujahid of Faqir of Ipi. Had it been any ordinary man probably it might not have been important but killing a Faqir's Mujahid was like challenging the Faqir at the acme of his power. The point is that Hindus weren't just anybody they were an

equal and dear part of the tribe, worth taking risk for and giving sacrifice for. Hindus were good friends, trusted as much as anyone else.

Hindi de yar de para de ghwa ghweshwa khwarele da.

Hindu, consumed cow flesh for a friend.

(Pushto proverb)

A couple of burglars tried to break into a Hindu house. The Hindu challenged the burglars, gun in hand he climbed into the trench on the roof of his house. To terrorize the Hindu the burglars cried out that you are just a Hindu and we will burglarize you.

The Hindu responded, "I may be a Hindu but the steel in my hand (rifle) doesn't know that".

The Hindu fired at the burglars and the burglars knowing that people will come out after hearing gunshots, escaped from the scene. There are many such events which show how normal lives the Hindus had and how integrated they were in the society.

Many Hindus had their shops in our Sarai, a huge market in the heart of Miranshah. They were our tenants so whenever they went to Afghanistan or Punjab to bring goods for their shops they brought lots of dry fruit and other sweets for us. When they returned from a trip, they came to our Hujra to pay respect to Baba and bring along a small portion of almost everything they purchased for their shops coupled by many gifts. Baba heard stories of their travel, asked many questions and congratulated them on their successful trip.

On crescent night, Hindus brought a large amount of Hina for almost every house in the Khel. All men women and children applied Hina and the children danced around a fire singing, 'lagey lagey'. The singing and dancing continued till the Hina on their hands dried and was ready to be washed.

My favorite among the Hindus was Rambael, a young boy who had a shop right in the center of the village bazaar. I didn't go to any other shop; it seemed he had everything I ever needed. I had just joined the boarding school (1964) and when I was in village, Ramble had so much to show me. Hindus were more into education so I had a special status with the whole lot of them. Like the rest of his community, he was also interested in reading and writing and since I was the only one going to a decent school we became natural friends. Raimble always had something special for me hidden somewhere. Every time I visited the bazaar, I called on him even if I wasn't buying anything.

If it was kite-flying season, he will make a special kite for me, kite with big eyes on it, or frills or a tail with a paper lantern. If it was Eid, he will have a special toy for me.

His younger brother Bogh and nephew Chami were my age and we use to argue on every small thing especially when Ramble was out of the shop. At times Galli and

Ramble will make us compete which always ended in an argument. The good times we spent together are pleasant memories to be cherished.

After the partition of India, the two governments had nothing better to do but to fight and propagate against each other. The British left many unresolved issues which the two governments didn't have the capacity to resolve among themselves. At times remarks against Indian Hindus offended our Hindus. Though they never showed it, they were scared of what might happen.

The 1965 war was the straw that broke the camel's back. Our leadership mistrusted and ridiculed Hindus without giving them any space. After the war, the Hindus didn't feel safe and decided to leave Pakistan for India. It was no doubt a tough decision; to leave the place they were born and brought up, the only place they had known as home.

Leaving for India was a joint decision of the whole community. A lot of deliberations took place and some just didn't want to leave; ultimately they decided that they all will leave. They started planning where to go in India, when to leave, how to leave and so on. They started selling their lands and properties at low prices and every day when they sold a shop or a piece of land it was like a part of their being was dead. As if they were selling the remains of their ancestors. Every day when they came back to the village (from Miranshah) they would be broken, especially when they sold their houses towards the end. Their women felt so helpless and all they could do is cry and cry.

Our women visited their houses in the evening to console them. Hindu women will narrate tragic incidents that took place those days; someone would claim Shufa, (first claim) on their property to hamper a sale or to get it cheap as the Hindus had to sell anyway. Many times people won't turn up on due time to create anxiety and lead them into desperation. As if, they were surrounded by vultures tearing them apart and were being scrapped of every bit of flesh on their bodies. They squeezed out whatever they could from the Hindus.

It is a long tale of crying, wailing, praying and last moment bailing. There was no fixed date for their movement but they tried to move out together. This restricted their freedom. They couldn't wait indefinitely for anyone or for a property to be sold and they couldn't leave half prepared.

For the Hindu children these were exciting times, they didn't know what was awaiting them in India and they never cared either. All they knew was that they were going to India pretty soon and that India was the land of great palaces and gardens and forts. Their parents told them stories of the opportunities awaiting them in India. The children didn't care what was going on around them, all they knew was that something has happened and they will be going new places pretty soon.

By the end of year Hindus had sold out whatever they owned; that they weren't able or willing to carry with them. Their leaving the area created many opportunities

for the local people, majority of who were doing menial labour. They bought good properties at cheap rates and started doing business themselves.

Overall the Muslims were economically better off when the Hindus left. I feel this was the reason why nobody made any serious effort to make them stay back. There was no pressure from the administration on them to leave because if there was then all the Hindus would have left (a few are still around). But there was no effort from the administration to persuade them to stay either, had the administration made an effort and assured them safety many might have stayed back.

By early 1967 they had left the country. I still recall the Lorries they boarded, such respectable people cramped into Lorries along with their belongings. Had there been trains or separate cars for people probably we wouldn't have felt so bad. But the manner in which they were leaving was heart breaking.

It was my fourth year in boarding school and third winter vacations and all I remember of those vacations is the leaving of Hindus. Just a year ago when I had come to the village on winter vacations everyone was so happy to see me, so proud of me and now, everyone was so unhappy. The bazaar was so drained and quiet; the streets were all deserted, so lonely.

It was a bleak and sad day as if the village has been cursed. There was no sun, it was cold and quiet, all you could hear was the sound of dry leaves swirling in circles, babies whimper and women sobbing. The wind spewed dust and dirt to erase footprints of Hindus, forever. You could see all the Hindus, men and women choked with mistrust, dejection and despair. The tribal elders were conspicuously absent as if hiding in shame for not effecting their commitment. Other than the elders the whole village was present trying to comfort the departing Hindus and making them comfortable in the Lorries. Tarakai Sar was full of people who came as helpers and to see off the departing and the Lorries were full of our brothers in blood.

I didn't know, why they had to leave or why Baba can't persuade them to stay on but the whole atmosphere was that of grief and disappointment. Our women were weeping while seeing off the women they knew their whole lives along with their children who were born in their arms and had grown up in front of their eyes. The Hindus also cried, probably not so much for leaving but for the fact that they were so helpless.

I felt something real bad has happened. They didn't say a word against Pakistan or against our people but one wonders how terrible it must have been, when they had to leave the place they had lived in for centuries, to leave forever, never to come back. The land that was theirs since history, their tribes they were so proud of. They were leaving everything behind.

They had to leave their homes only because they didn't convert, because they thought different from us or just because a few politicians on both sides of Wahga or in the heart of London wanted the two countries to stay as enemies for as long as they

live. There were Hindus in all the villages but Darpa Khel being the biggest and most prosperous had the maximum. They moved from the villages to Miranshah and from there moved on in the shape of a convoy. Idak is the next big village enroute where there were many Hindu families. They joined in when the convoy from Miranshah reached Idak and moved on.

The Hindus left for a whole new world, where they had to start all over again. Which place in India did they choose to live, what business did they choose to do, did all of them stick together or each one headed his own way? No one had any clue. During all these years we never got any news from any of them. I would love to know if they are doing well, if they are happy to have taken this decision, Ramble, Bogh, Chami, Sodial, Gobeen and so many so close to us.

It must have been a very difficult decision to give up the land of the fore fathers for an unknown future. They must have been terrified of our people to have taken such a drastic decision. And what did our people do? Did they make an honest effort to persuade them not to leave? Were they more interested in the properties the Hindus were leaving behind? Was the Hindu religion or their way of life worth all this?

Their religion and way of life were surely of great importance to them as ours is to us but I am sure they left because they were born and bred tribesmen, people from the same stock, tribesmen like us. Their sincerity and commitment had to be of the same standards, it had something to do with their Pukhto that they left this land to show solidarity with their brethren.

Religion, one can understand, they were different but the way of life I still don't understand because I think their way of life was similar to ours. Rather, their way of life must have been different from that of the Hindus they joined, so practically, it was religion which pushed them into exile.

They did not accept forgoing their religion at any cost, a typical Pukhtun trait, because they were like us, rather they were us. Pukhtuns to the core and they must be proud of having taken this decision no matter how difficult it was at that time.

We were young and not much concerned with what was going on but I do remember when the Hindu elders of other Khels accompanied by Gobeen (our tenant) and others came to our Hujra. I don't think it was their farewell visit but it was surely around the time. Dinner had been cleared when the group walked in. It was the large size of the group that got our attention. Many were familiar because we had seen them in their shops and we tried to be nice to them.

Those not willing to leave had by now agreed to leave once they realized they will be isolated if they didn't. Not leaving wasn't an option anymore. We served them green tea and remained close by just to know what they had to say. They stayed till late and discussed their migration to India. They talked of missing the village and friends. "Haji sahib you don't have to worry about us, we have seen over many years that wars bring displacements", one of the elders said. "Twenty or so years ago the

family of Akob Khan and Alematey left amid such sadness and sorrow. They didn't want to leave but as fate had it, they had to. Their relatives in Kabul were leaving and Akob Khan joined them. Haji sahib, we were sad for Akob Khan when he was leaving”.

“Hardly a few years and majority of our community had to leave after the partition of India. We tried to be brave and stayed on not knowing it will be our turn to leave some twenty years later. No one knows what fate has in store and what will happen in future, we hope we are the last ones who have to leave the land of their fathers under compulsion”.

Baba had a blank look on his face while the elder continued, “Our people settled in Hyderabad Deccan and are doing pretty well but they miss the land of their fathers, they miss their friends over here. Let's hope and pray luck is on our side and we are able to settle well. We have a difficult task ahead of us”.

Baba didn't talk much that evening, we started clearing the tea cups and the rest. They talked about the arrangements they have made and are making for their journey onwards. They praised Baba and the people of the village for having looked after them; they had earned a lot of respect over here and they wished every one well.

I had never seen Baba so quiet, like he was that night. He didn't even make any unrelated comment that people make just to show their presence. He seemed very sad as if he had a great burden on his heart.

We had to part with our brothers in blood just because they had a different religion. If someone had to leave it should have been us as we were the actual converts, not them. They were steadfast to their religion. Allama Iqbal said, ‘if a Brahmin is more loyal to his religion than a Muslim is, the Brahmin deserves more to be buried in the Holy Kaaba’.

And did we get an Islamic state? Or was it just a ploy to divide us? I can speak for the tribesmen and they are disappointed because at the end of the day we didn't get an Islamic state and we have no hope we will get it any time soon. The tribesmen kept their part of the bargain but the state of Pakistan did not.

I heard that in the 1980,s Laxman, one of the Hindus who had migrated from our village, came to visit all the way from India, his reason of the visit was that he missed old times.

“The land of the fathers called me”, he said, “so I had to come. They were all so unhappy in India, in spite of the fact that they were reasonably well off. All those who left the village cursed the day they decided to do so and are missing old times, old friends and the land of their fathers. In such a big India they feel so lonely”, he said, “It doesn't feel like home. Home is here, home is Darpa Khel.

The guest, I was told, was given a royal reception, everyone was so glad to see him and dinners were given in his honor by all the families of his Khel and the poor

guest, instead of enjoying the hospitality of old friends, kept crying, cursing why they decided to leave. The more they looked after him the more he regretted leaving and more miserable he got. What a tragedy, dividing families for one's political gains, making ordinary people suffer on such superficial issues.

Lonely Without You

After joining the civil service my first posting was Assistant Commissioner, Usta Mohammad, district Jafferabad in Balochistan province. Usta Mohammad has a big Hindu population and when I mentioned this in my village everyone got excited, especially the elderly, they recalled their Hindu friends.

I was in the village for Eid when my maternal granny, may Allah bless her soul, asked me if it is true that there are many Hindu families where I was posted?

“Yes grandma”, I said “and they are all very fond of me because I am just and kind to them, grandma, Just and kind I am, to the entire Hindu lot grandma”.

Grandma was a village woman; she wore old clothes saying that the Prophet's (pbuh) daughter Fatima did so. If my uncles brought her new clothes she would be very upset and find someone to gift the clothes saying that Fatima had only three pairs of clothes and granny wouldn't like to have a fourth one. She was tall and strong once upon a time and she had a fair complexion but now she was old. Her sight and hearing were amazingly good for her age and she was always on the move, summers or winters she visited her fields to bring fodder for the animals. The size of her fodder bundle got smaller all the time but she never missed going out to her fields.

Grandma gave me a long look as if checking whether I was serious and telling the truth. She smiled at me lovingly, “I know, I know, just and kind you are by nature. I am sure they love you. Hindus were good people”, she held my arm and said, “We lived together for many years without having any problems with them. Not a single altercation, no disputes, they were peace loving people. We grew up together always looking after each other, I have many good memories of them. Those, were good times”, she said shaking her head.

It was a bright summer morning and we were sitting on a charpoy, in the shade of the veranda. Grandma was very fond of me because I was the Musafir, grandson having lived a lonely life without the family ever since I was a boy. This extra love gave me the privilege to take liberties with her. I took advantage of the concession and played pranks on her which she enjoyed and be amused. My uncles also enjoyed the pranks and joined. Well, they were innocent harmless pranks.

To incite granny I told her that some of the Hindus had lived in Waziristan prior to coming to Usta Mohammad. They all speak Pushto and have good memories of Waziristan.

My uncle whispered a name into my ear and I said to granny, “Grandma there was a lady by the name of Teetri who had some official business in my court. Just and kind as I am grandma, I decided the case in her favor and helped her get her right”.

“On the day I was to announce the judgment, the court room was full of people, everyone wanted to know if the Hindu woman will get justice. Grandma you know Hindus are peace-loving people but the other party was Baloch and they were very tough nuts. The poor woman thought she had no chance against the other party and was very afraid of them. I read out the case and then announced the judgment. The woman fixed her gaze on me all the while I announced the decree. Almost your age grandma, she didn't blink the whole time she was in the court room. I thought probably she has problem with her hearing and vision that's why she is staring at me. Grandma, when she knew she had won the case she couldn't believe it, a poor Hindu woman winning a court case. The other party was very angry and unhappy and left the courtroom immediately but she was standing there awestruck. Her companions were waiting for her and asking her to move out but she was like frozen. After she took her time she addressed me, “Your honor do you mind if I ask you something”.

I gave her a nod to go ahead, “You know grandma I don't talk unnecessary”.

She said, “Your honor I hear you are from Waziristan”. Granny was staring at me, her mouth open, jaw hanging, listening with intent.

Again I gave her a nod, without looking at her pretending I was reading the next case file. She came closer and timidly asked, “Do you know anyone by the name of Jamal Khan in Waziristan” (Jamal Khan is my eldest maternal uncle).

“You know grandma, I am very strict when sitting in my court, the no nonsense type magistrate, still I looked at her and told her smiling, I know thirteen Jamal Khans in Waziristan, so?”

“Nothing your honor, just asking”, she said.

The lady prayed for me and left my court room hurriedly, while exiting, she remarked that, “We love everything about Waziristan and you look as if I know you since ages”.

Honest to God, the things I couldn't understand as a child I understood that day. Granny was all trembling, the shine in the eyes of granny, the unstoppable flow of tears down her cheeks, the dry lips, the shaking of her hands, my God, it was unbelievable how excited she was, shaking her head to every word I said. She listened so attentively as if I was reading the numbers of a big lottery and half of her numbers have already matched.

She slapped me on my thigh leaving her shaking hand where she slapped me and said, “Teetri lived with us in the same house, they occupied the portion to the south and we to the north. We grew up together; we tended our animals and played together all day. She was my best friend and you don't know how much I cried when they were

leaving”, and she wiped her tears from her chin and cheek, “they told us they are going to India and will never come back”.

I was shell shocked, I looked towards my uncle, what have you done, this old woman is going to die of grief if I tell her it was just a joke. I tried my best to close the chapter but she only wanted to tell me about Teetri and her family, she didn't want to talk of anything else but Teetri.

The actual Teetri must have been her age and they had lived together for a long time. One always wants to remember good times and good people. She wanted to say everything in an instant; she wanted to talk about Teetri the whole day. Every time she spoke she would shake me by my arm, her head shaking, her hands shaking, she would laugh for old time sake, raising her face with every laugh covering her mouth to hide the few corroded teeth left in her mouth, wiping her tears and cleaning her nose. Grandma was so intensely and so emotionally charged I feared she might have a headache.

My granny was an old lady and I loved her a lot, it was just meant to be an offhand teaser. Had I known she would get so emotional I would never have said it. I was in the village for about a week and normally we go to pay respects to our elders but here my granny came to our house every day on one pretext or another and I knew she wanted me to talk to her about Teetri and so I did. I made up so many stories for her and I am pretty good at making stories. Everyone in the house knew I had made up the story as an innocent prank on granny which backfired and I couldn't tell her but now I was afraid someone might tell her the truth and that would really break her heart.

On the day I was to leave the village early in the morning I was shocked to see granny walking towards our house. An old woman as she was, her pace was slow, her back bent low and I saw something glow in her hand. I waited for her at the door to welcome her, I bent before her and she patted me on my back praying for me. I walked her into the house and made her comfortable in the charpoy in the veranda.

When I sat beside her, she gave me a pack of candies, with the shiny wrappers, the most expensive ones you can get in a village and cookies to give to Teetri and her family and advised me to take good care of her. She was my best friend she reiterated, hiding her mouth in her chaddar, laughing and shying, looking the other way.

I knew this was coming from the moment I saw her. From then on till I was posted out of Usta Mohammad I had to bring gifts supposedly from Teetri to granny and take gifts from granny to Teetri. This was the kind of affection shared between Hindus and Muslims in village Darpa Khel.

Yar mey Hindu za Musalman yum, de yar depara darmisal jaroo kawama.

My friend is Hindu, I a Muslim, for my friend I sweep the Dharamshala.

(Push to Tappa)

There was large Hindu population in Usta Mohammad, they were respectable people with established businesses, they kept to themselves and rarely had anything to do with the administration except when there was Holy or Deewali or some other festival when they would come in the form of a delegation to invite me. They were all very well behaved and I never had any administrative problem raised by the Hindus. In Waziristan their numbers were even smaller so it shouldn't be difficult to understand that a small minority will always try to be on the right side of the administration and the local population. The people living in Hindu majority areas of India might have different experiences than we had with our Hindus.

Accept for the Hindus no other religion was known or recognized in the tribal areas. There was another class of people, who didn't have any faith, they were wanderers always on the move and they lived by begging house to house. They were poor, small in numbers, scattered in the area and they are called Kotanyan. They don't belong to any tribe of the tribal area and they don't live in any village of the tribal areas. They are nomads roaming from place to place living in tents.

The men of the Kotanyan don't work and loiter around, look after the children and do the shopping whatever they can afford. The women of Kotanyan go out in small groups of three or four women. They go to a house and ask for flour, sugar, oil and everything they need. The women of the house make them sing songs, Kotanyan women have beautiful voices and they sing a few songs for which the lady of the household would give them whatever their songs were worth for. The better they sing the more goodies they get or the more they get the better they sing.

We didn't like the Kotanai as the women were called, so whenever we saw them we called Bragai and Bragai gave them a tough time. They however never missed a house for fear of dogs or any other reason. We heard so many stories about them, that they were cannibals, that they dance when their family member dies and that they are evil. So it was not only the dogs chasing them, the boys will also pelt stones at them.

Kotanyan are the only people whom our people look down upon. We never ate with them, never let them use our utensils, never asked them to sit on a charpoy and were always treated as lesser people. The Kotanyan for their part would do anything that came their way, they would steal, they begged, they cheated, they fooled our women into selling them medications, they sold women things, like hair removing creams and other necessities which women couldn't ask anyone to bring them from the bazaar.

Kotanyan come to a village, live there for a few days and will move on. No one knew where they came from or where they were going. We often heard our women ask them where they have been and they weren't around for quite a while. At time our women enquired about a particular Kotanai, "Haven't seen her for such a long time, is she all right". But no matter how many questions asked no one could really make

up as to who these people are and what is it they ultimately wanted to do. Kotanyan weren't important at all but they are mentioned just because they were there.

Kotanyan were looked down upon and they shouldn't be confused with Hindus, who were brothers in blood. We were small when the Hindus left but they left everlasting impact on our lives. Many Hindu traditions continued in our village till long after the Hindus were gone.

CHAPTER 6 EDUCATION

First Light

TILL EARLY 1960'S PEOPLE IN THE TRIBAL AREAS WERE against education and they considered it a tool of the devil to lead us astray. Then there was a sudden change of hearts, as if something new dawned upon them. Something happened and people's attention was drawn towards education. Children education became an important concern, as if they were in a race to be the first to establish their claim to it.

With the establishment of a primary school in the village and a middle school in Miranshah, education became accessible but more important was the change in attitudes. Instead of calling it a tool of the devil, it attained central status. Previously only religious education in Madrassas was permissible but now people wanted to send their children to schools. Those who could afford started looking beyond government schools for better education.

There were only government schools in tribal areas and that too very few and far. The teaching standards were abysmal; teacher absenteeism was prohibitive, resulting into high dropouts. Those who couldn't afford school education sent their children to Madrassas, religious seminaries, where education along with boarding and lodging was free. Then there were the very young Channi, who didn't live in Madrassas but lived in the Khel mosque with the Mullah. They helped the Mullah collect food and other items of daily use from Khel houses and received free boarding and education.

Channis were from outside the village so the women ensured they were looked after, that they were not sick or mistreated. They loved them as their own children, shared whatever food was available, gave them sweets and make them sit and talk to them when they visited the house to collect food.

Baba sent us to boarding schools, the best he could afford. With a little support in form of merit scholarship, I was able to get into one of the most prestigious college of the country, Lawrence College in Murree, an hour drive from Islamabad. I was hardly five at the time, no one had heard about it and when the village came to know, it caused many ripples.

My admission had a very profound influence on the village. All news in the village is shared property, so, everyone had the right to comment. The foremost comment was that my teachers were British and that I was too young and innocent to protect myself. Some women were sure the cunning British were going to convert me to Christianity.

Women sympathized with me, as if someday I will be converted and without any fault of mine, I was going to suffer. That sooner than later, I was going to become their enemy and they were wondering what they would do to me if I was brought in front of them in chains, as a captured enemy from some battlefield. Many women cried for me and cursed my parents for sending me to boarding school; they gave me Chingai to spend in the bazaar out of pity. It was fun to cash the sympathy. Every time such a situation arose, I looked at the women with wide open eyes trying to look very innocent, wondering if any of them is going to give me something to barter in the bazaar. I never realized the seriousness of the situation and like all kids, my focus was on cashing the opportunity.

Only the headmistress and one or two teachers were British in my new school, the rest were Pakistani Muslims yet the focus was on the Perangis. No one mentioned the Muslim teachers. Only Morr knew this but she didn't want me to leave, so she didn't say anything hoping that this might cause me to stay back.

Even when I was able to recite more Quran than all the boys of my age, when I knew more about religion than any of them, still the village could smell a conspiracy. They were always on the lookout for something they could quote as Perangi Influence. They even mentioned a Perangi who came in the garb of a Mullah and lived amongst the tribesmen for years. I wonder if this is correct but they said so.

Those who understood the importance of education and hoped I will avail the opportunity also sympathized with me. They did so for the fact that I will have to live alone in some far off place without a family. Women of the family gave me small presents because I was to leave soon and live alone. "How can such a young boy manage without his mother, an orphan with living parents", women said. I would bring an innocent look on my face; staring at the lady like an innocent, scared squirrel. I seldom cared for what they said; my focus was the present I was going to receive.

As the time of my departure neared the excitement increased, new school uniforms, new shoes, toothbrush and toothpaste, soap, handkerchiefs and so many things, all brand new were bought. This is the school dress, this is sports kit and this is night suit. Wow, I will be changing more suits in a day than presently I had for a year. It all sounded great. I had never seen a toothbrush, toothpaste or a nail clipper. In the village, we had a rod hanging from the roof and all quilts were piled on it hanging throughout summers but I had a separate holdall for my bedding, it was all so exciting.

On the last evening, before departure all relatives gathered to see me off. Being younger and physically weak, every woman that came pointed at Galli, “why didn't you send him instead of sending this poor chap”, they asked Morr.

“The men should know, it is their decision”, Morr would say.

There was a mix of anxiety and fear, everyone was trying to comfort me but I was clueless, why are they sorry for me and why are they trying to comfort me? I had so many dresses and shoes and other goodies yet everyone pitied me. I had no idea of what to expect and I was cashing on the fact that I am leaving.

Morr cooked a special farewell Painda. I was given the day off and didn't serve dinner in the Hujra. Galli and others also got the day off as all claimed they were helping me pack. We spent the evening with Morr, talking, helping and packing. After an evening of sympathetic looks, women started taking their leave. It was late; when we came across Baba he didn't say anything just nodded and smiled and we smiled back.

Malangi rule starts as soon as the elders leave Hujra, as the saying goes, ‘during day rules Perangi, during night rules Malangi (outlaw). The elders had left and Malangi rule started. Miram Khan, Miraj, Galli, a few cousins were already in the Hujra and they decided to make a farewell Banuchi halva, sweets, for me. Two boys ran to the bazaar to fetch sugar, oil and flour, Miraj made fire, someone brought the cooking utensils and with loud music on the radio we started making the Halva. Miram Khan was the expert Halva maker, “white or red”, he asked.

“Red”, we all cried.

Red Banuchi Halva was prepared amidst hooting and singing. We were up till late, playing songs on the radio at full blast, making jokes on each other and doing what boys do when left on their own. Everyone was trying to keep me in good humor. It was early March, the air still had a wintery chill but Banuchi Halve helped us cope well.

I was to leave early in the morning; Galli was to accompany me to the bus station. The first jolt I got was when we were taking leave of friends and family, my God, the looks on the face of women were absolutely blank. I will never forget them, they looked so pale and colorless, all of them. Were they afraid or were they sad, I don't know but for the first time they made me realize that I had been wronged in some way. That something real bad was going to happen to me.

This realization scared me, I felt my heart sinking. I had a lump in my throat, I couldn't speak. The early spring morning still had the cold sting. I started shivering; I don't know whether it was from cold or fear, the ends of my lips were trembling out of control no matter what I did to control them, I couldn't. I felt cramps throughout my body.

No one spoke for all knew we were on the brink of a break down, if one cried all

will start crying. When I went to take leave of Baba, he embraced me, patted me on my back and prayed for me but didn't say much, it is against chivalry to show emotions.

Morr had a straight face and I could see how she was controlling her tears. She was avoiding eye contact with me and trying to keep herself busy. She didn't want me to see her crying but I know she must have wept once I was out of the house. I know Morr so well, a mere glance and you get the message. But that morning we didn't glance or talk because we knew if we did, we will lose control and that would be the end of it. Once out of the house we walked silently towards the bazaar and before turning left at the short cut I turned around for a last look and saw Morr standing in the door, staring at us, pretending to feed her ducks.

We bypassed the bazaar, walked up to Tarakai Sar and from there boarded Sodial's Tonga to the bus station in Miranshah. It was just Galli and me and as the Tonga moved towards the bus stop I shuddered, what if I fell sick, what if someone bullies me, who will be there for me? Galli was trying to raise my moral by cracking silly jokes with Sodial but I wasn't cheering up, no matter how hard he tried it wasn't hard enough. My uncle was to take me to school and was waiting for us at the bus stop.

We reached the bus stop early; the driver had started the bus and after every few minutes accelerated the engine, making it cough up a cloud of smoke. There was a small tavern where sleepy passengers were having tea. The ground was wet and oily; two Lorries were parked at the back of the tavern cum ticket house.

When uncle saw me having such a long face, he realized the gravity of the situation and asked Galli, "why don't you come with us, you will help him unpack his bags and bedding". Galli was too glad to join us on the journey and was all smiles to hear this. The driver was instantly informed that we are three passengers. My trunk and bedding had already been loaded on the bus. Miraj brought them on the donkey earlier.

This was the best thing that had happened since we started from the village. I was so happy Galli was going with me; he had always been my patron, the wise guy, resourceful, the captain of the team, the elder. With him on my side I could manage without Morr and Baba. He was happy to be there for me, to support me, his obedient kid brother, his messenger and spy on Baba. It was a big consolation; I realized that at least I started breathing and talking after that. I think I had stopped breathing since I left the house. I saw cake pieces, Rusk and Buns on the shelf, also being served with tea, which I didn't see before, like I just came to my senses.

The Adda Munshi, station clerk, had reserved the seat exactly behind the driver for us. We climbed up to our seat while my uncle sat on a charpoy to have tea. The bonnet of the bus was up, the cleaner splashed water onto the engine where the fan sprinkled a thin mist all over. Activity at the bus station increased with every passing

minute but some seats were still vacant so the bus waited for a few more passengers. There was no specified time for the bus to move, it moved only when all seats were taken.

The bus was to take us to Bannu from where we were to board another bus for Rawalpindi and then a third one to Murree. Every person at the Adda, the driver, the cleaner, the Munshi and almost every passenger knew my uncle. He told them where he was going and why, so, every person he talked to would turn around to see us, many even moved left or right to see us clearly.

At last the bus took off; it was a long journey towards a totally new world. We reached Bannu by late morning, the sun was bright and warm, the day full of energy. Bannu is an old city and for us it was full of surprises. For the first time we saw scooters, motorbikes and rickshaws, we saw huge containers of halva and pullaw being sold and chicken being cooked fresh in front of you. We have a few Bannuchis in our village who crossed over to the tribal areas for asylum after committing a crime.

We changed bus at Bannu and while waiting for the bus to take off uncle gave us a few coins to have food and sat down to have his tea. Galli said we should have chickpeas, from the pushcart. The choley walla put some cholay on a banana leaf, sprinkled them with salt and pepper, squeezed a lemon on them, tore a square piece of cardboard collected from shop fronts, folded one end of the cardboard making it into a spoon and stuck it in the middle of choley. With our disposable spoons and dish in hands we sat to one side and enjoyed our choley till the bus was ready to move.

It was a long journey. We talked, slept, talked again and slept again and reached Rawalpindi late in the evening, totally exhausted. Though Pindi was a bigger city than Bannu and had many more things to be explored, we could hardly stand up. The earth beneath my feet was spinning and I couldn't walk straight. We booked into a small hotel and after freshening up and resting for a while we went out to buy a few things for me, which couldn't be bought earlier. The shoes and cloth stores were so huge with so much variety and designs, much much bigger than we had ever seen, making a choice would be impossible in these shops, I thought.

After dropping our shopping at the hotel we headed for a restaurant. The site and smell of chicken being fried and roasted was so tempting and inviting. The illustrious Galli instead of asking for the sizzling chicken, very innocently asked for vegetable. It was wicked; I was dying to have chicken. Uncle ordered for a plate of chicken, a vegi and lentils and we shared the three. I suspected big brother had something on his mind. During supper he was extra courteous to uncle, presenting him the towel when he returned from washing hands, presenting him toothpicks and straightening his chappals and when uncle asked if we wanted to have sweets he said he was so full and obviously I had to follow suit. I didn't like it at all. What was on his mind, I wondered, what is he thinking? Through with supper we started back towards the

hotel, uncle leading.

We had hardly walked a few paces when Galli whispered in my ear, “Ask uncle if we could roam around in the bazaar for a while, just to look around.” Yes, big brother has a plan, I knew it, he always has one. I walked up to uncle and put up the request. Of course he knew, so he turned around and looked at Galli, “you want to go to the cinema?”

Galli was taken by surprise and fear, if he said yes and uncle said no then there is no film. If he said no then there was no film either, so he mumbled and fumbled till uncle, who couldn't wait for him the whole evening, in his magnanimity said, “OK, go but know the hotel well, don't get lost”. This was the second time since morning uncle breathed life in me. When we thought we had the permission he unexpectedly asked, “What is the name of our hotel? “Madina hotel”, Galli shot back. Uncle gave a nod turned around and started walking towards the hotel.

Big brother was taking me to our first movie ever. I was like jumping out of my skin. I had no clue what to expect. There were two cinemas just around the corner, we had seen while shopping. We were so excited, Galli walking ahead and me catching up. The entrance to the cinema was huge, hundreds of people lined up for tickets. There were giant hand painted posters on the outside of the cinema and shops selling peanuts, cold drinks, ice-creams, cigarettes and a world of things. The front of the cinemas was sparkling like a star with zillions of lights, big and small.

Inside were huge printed posters of the actors all around the entrance hall, with as many dazzling lights flashing on the posters. Lower, on small caged boards were smaller pictures of the movie that was being shown giving an idea what to expect. We glanced through the posters and the pictures in both the cinemas and then Galli decided, “This one seems better, it has more fights”. I agreed and followed him. Inside it was an out of this world experience, the size of the hall, the huge screen, the loud music system, the number of people, the hooting and clapping by the audience, it was awesome. It was so overwhelming that for the first time I forgot the village and Morr and everyone else. All I wanted was the hero to beat the hell out of the villains.

Coming out of the cinema was another out of this world experience. Tongas, rickshaws, cars, wagons, buses, all shouting different destinations, were waiting at the gate. We talked about the movie while walking back to the hotel and entered tiptoed not to wake up uncle who was snoring like a roaring lion in a jungle. I lay in my bed wondering how many things I had seen for the first time in life, new things I could never have imagined. I wished Morr was here, I would have told her the story of the movie like I told her the stories of the story tellers. We had a long day and I was asleep within seconds. The whole night I saw people running, screaming and fighting in my dreams.

The next morning we started early; all the way to school Galli was praising how beautiful the area was and the nice school building we had and all the things he

thought might elevate my mood. He started explaining the story of the movie we saw last night hoping it will take my mind of the school. But I was quiet all the way.

Galli calculated the days I was to spend in school. "Just six months", he said. In these six months there were around thirty Sundays, so one month gone and a few other holidays and the last ten days he deducted for planning holidays and he came up, I don't know how but he came up with actual time spent in school, three months. Yes just three months and they will pass by like three weeks, you will feel you spent only three weeks in school. I looked at him with the same wide eyes, innocent look, come on brother, you are better than that.

"Mara, (friend) why do you worry, I will write you letters", he said, "one every week with all the news that is happening in the village. Just imagine you enjoy every event without any responsibility, no serving dinners, no bringing fodder for the animals". "So", he looked at me, "what do you say". I was quite, I had nothing to say.

When we reached school, he made silly comments at the bearers and boys. He even joked at the teachers, "look at this one, she looks like Babar's wife, she thinks she can impress us with her sari. Next time I will bring Babar's wife along in a sari" or he will comment on the bearer, "Chacha looks as if he has received a beating from his wife", then he asked the bearer, "wahalai ye", (did you get a beating)? The bearer didn't get a word and asked very courteously, "je sahib", yes sir? "See he says yes, I told you", Galli said. But laughter was nonexistent for me, I couldn't even talk, he did all the talking with his arm over my shoulder, till it was time to say good-bye. The moment I had dreaded since morning.

My uncle kept himself busy with the teachers avoiding any conversation with me. He talked to me once and though I responded, my lips were trembling, my voice shaking and tears flooding my eyes. He realized I was going to break down. He wanted to leave before a crisis took place, so as soon as he could, he announced, "Galli it is time to leave".

After trying his best to cheer me up all the while, it was time to say goodbye. "OK, sherina wrora, sweet brother", he said and hugged me, "God bless you". I couldn't speak a word and stood there watching them leave. I know Galli was sad to leave me alone in an unhappy state, it never happened before. Before this, whenever I was upset he will cheer me up, he never ever left me sad.

He knew I was watching, so, he aped my uncle walking behind him and would scare someone by quick, unexpected movement or do something he thought would make me laugh. After his desperate last attempts failed, tears blurred my vision and I cried for a while, hiding my tears from the boys.

We are told we are the bravest of all and it is against Pukhtun pride to cry, to cry in pain or a loss. It is against manhood to cry; girls cry, boys don't, they endure pain. One cannot cry in public so you have to cry in hiding and pose you are all right.

It was a scary moment when I first walked towards the boys, who were playing in the playroom with their toys. How am I going to live alone, without Morr? Can a child survive without his mother to look after him and care for him? I thought I couldn't breathe, I wanted to scream and cry and run away but there were many boys and teachers and I couldn't move for fear I may annoy them. In the village, boys who missed classes were picked by their classmates and carried to school by force. The boy threatened, yelled and kicked desperately to free himself but to no avail. For us it was amusement, we walked behind the procession till the boy was presented to the teacher. Will they do the same to me if I was to run away?

I had entered a new world. The people were new, I didn't know anyone, I couldn't talk to anyone and I didn't like anyone. I couldn't speak a word of Urdu and never heard of English. The children were so different, small, skinny, oily brown boys. I was physically the weakest in my family yet I was bigger than majority of them.

The boys had tuck and toys. I wasn't from a poor family yet I had never heard of buying tuck and toys. We had sweets but they came our way occasionally at times more at times less but we never had planned tuck. Here it was different you had tuck for you in safe custody so that one could have his daily treat.

The older boys knew each other, they were already friends and that scared me more because I thought they were making friends so quickly and probably I was an outcast. I had always been the darling of the family and always received maximum attention but today I was so lonely. If only the boys knew me, if I could just make one friend. I had never felt so miserable in my life, I wished Galli was also with me. If only Galli was with me.

The senior boys called me 'new boy' for the first few days. It was like we refer to our chicken back in the village, hairy feet, clean neck, short tail or the way we refer to our cattle, broken horn, long horns and Bragai.

The first night was epic misery, boys breaking ice with each other, talking of their homes and parents and everything. I was deaf and dumb, nothing to say, nothing to understand. At night boys wept in their beds but I had such a long day that I was asleep before I could decide I was feeling lonely and wanted to cry.

The funniest of all was the fact that even Meeru, the Pukhtun in my class didn't understand me. He spoke the hard dialect of Pushto so even we didn't understand each other. The teacher in her kindness seated me with Meeru so that I feel comfortable but he wasn't much help. We were completely blank, as good as the rest of the lot.

Our head mistress, Miss Glegg paid special attention to me because of the remote area I came from. I started learning both languages Urdu and English simultaneously but since most of my classmates were more comfortable with Urdu we spoke Urdu. Boys made a lot of fun when I spoke wrong Urdu but by and large I adjusted pretty well.

During course of the year, I learnt speaking Urdu, though I wasn't as good as my classmates. On the other hand, English was a new subject for all of us and within no time, I was miles ahead of my classmates. I could read, write and speak much better English than the others. The British teachers were very fair, they not only treated us equal, rather in most cases gave me a handicap. I recall going to the English teacher's house after supper to play games with her. It was an additional effort, to encourage students like me learn English fast.

Giving me admission in the school was a great favor which of course I repaid by doing well. On the first founders day of my schooling career I was awarded a prize for making the most progress. General Musa Khan, Governor West Pakistan was Chief Guest and I received my prize from him. It was a storybook with a card pasted on the inside of the cover saying that I had been awarded the progress prize.

During holidays I showed the book to Baba and explained why I got the prize. "Baba, I shook hands with Gen Musa Khan and received the prize from him" I said. Baba was so proud and he talked about my prize practically to everyone he met. I showed my prize to Galli and he showed it to the whole village explaining to them what the card pasted on the inside cover said.

Initially he put a small cross on my name, to indicate to the people that this was my name, after a few days he underlined it and then he put a circle around it and after that there was a new circle around my name every time I opened the book. He informed everyone, that none other than General Musa Khan, awarded me the prize.

The first evening of the holidays was always full of excitement. In addition to what Morr or my sisters had for me, Galli had so much to share. Big brother, Galli, would show me a quail, "Bacha (son) this is the best fighter in town", he will start stroking it, hiding it from view. He will show me his collection of marbles or the goodies for his new project, like a kite or Fanoos. I made it a point to bring him gifts when visiting the village and shared all the gifts people gave me. Like all other children we were always broke, rarely having money to spend. Baba thought money spoils children and made it a point that we never had enough. Necessity is the mother of invention, so the tighter he held to his purse the better and innovative excuses we invented to get funds out of him. Galli controlled whatever little money and everything that we had, he was the custodian of all our possessions, he was the captain.

He took me around to all the uncles and aunts, he showed me to all the shopkeepers, Tonga drivers and the rest of the village folks and told them how hard I worked. He introduced me to all his teachers and classmates, showing them my prize book. He started arranging English competitions for me with senior boys in his school in which of course I didn't disappoint him. He told everyone that I beat such and such in studies and people were amazed, "how could I beat the grownups at such tender age".

I was like his quail the best fighter in town and in tribal societies best fighters are always pampered. By now I had established myself as the intelligent one. He looked after me as his lost kid brother that he has found after a long time.

During holidays, we went to the mosque to learn Quran from the Mullah. Galli and others were already pupils of the Mullah, a very humble and decent person. On our first day in the mosque the Mullah presented me with a Qaida, the Arabic alphabet book and started teaching 'the Qaida'. Since I already knew Urdu alphabets and Arabic alphabets are almost the same, it was easy for me. The Mullah said the first two alphabets and I read the whole page to him. The Mullah looked at me, quite surprised and turned over the leaf. Then he started the next lesson with a dash on the alphabet, like an alphabet with a vowel 'A' in English. Again the Mullah said the first two alphabets Aa Ba and I read the whole page right up to the last alphabet. There were around 20 to 30 pupils, boys and girls, reciting their chapters loudly, they stopped doing so and started taking interest in what was happening. A boy can read without any instructions from the teacher. We turned to the next page.

This time the alphabet had a dash under it like vowel e with an alphabet. I just had to know the sound the alphabet made with a zair and once the Mullah said it I completed reading the whole page. This went on for the equivalent of all the vowels, like ba, be, bo, half of the Qaida I knew without any instructions. I just had to know how the Mullah pronounced an alphabet with a certain sign and apply it to all the alphabets. It was so simple but with every reading, the children came closer and wanted to listen.

Galli took his position by my side as if telling every kid in the mosque that this is my puppy, my kid brother, I own him, I am the one you should be looking at and praising. All the boys and girls got around us, looking at each other, getting closer with the turn of every page which normally takes a month to learn. They wanted to see the mystery boy who could read a year's hard work in a sitting. They were dumb struck in wonder and amazement, looking at each other in disbelief.

Anything out of the ordinary sends vibes in the village and this was something extra ordinary for all. They had never seen such a thing and instead of appreciating, the whole village saw a conspiracy behind this. No one realized that it was all because I already know the Urdu alphabets. Many boys went to the village school and knew the Urdu alphabets but they couldn't benefit which speaks volumes of the quality of education in the village. Boys and girls stared at me as if I was an Alien. Anything out of the ordinary was work of the devil or the jinn. For them I was possessed.

After the session, we were passing by the Hujra, Galli in the lead, when one of the elders called me to where he was sitting with other people and asked me, "son is it easy to read Arabic or is it easy to read English"?

"I find it easy to read English", I replied innocently. Never realizing what it

meant and spoke the truth.

The elder looked at the others, “you see, this is what we were afraid of”, nodding at them and they all nodded back and nodded at each other.

O my God, I gave them what they had been looking for since long.

In schools of tribal areas English is taught as a subject after fifth grade, so, for them, English is the toughest subject but for me it was the other way round, English was the academic language of the school, all subjects were taught in English. By next morning the whole village knew English was easier for me than Arabic, the language of the Prophet (PBUH), that I enjoyed reading English more than Arabic, the language of the Quran. It meant that I was half converted. I have accepted Christianity as my new faith but have not renounced Islam as yet.

Our Mullahs make a lot of deductions, they deduced that I will ultimately be converted to Christianity, drawing inferences from events that came my way and they noted. The conspiracy theorists whispered in dark corners. In spite of Baba's reputation in the village people had something to talk about. Perception is stronger than reality and no one was interested to know the truth.

“I told you he is going to convert, the Perangi has his way to influence children”, men and women whispered to each others. My aunts wept for me, “poor chap, I knew it”, they said. People were waiting for me to openly renounce Islam and they thought this is going to happen soon. One Mullah stood outside our Hujra and openly claimed that this child will convert and the responsibility will be on his parents.

A couple of years in school and I started giving the call for prayer, Adhan, children my age never had the courage to do so, then, I started reciting chapters from the Quran, which totally stopped all the rumors.

A Mullah can say anything standing on the pulpit of the mosque and no one interferes. This not only holds good for religion but even for subjects like geography. If a Mullah has his geography wrong no one corrects him because a good majority won't know and the few, who know, don't care. On a couple of occasions when I corrected a Mullah all he had to say was, “it is the Parangi inside you who is speaking”.

Baba never had the opportunity to get education; he could neither read nor write. The worst part was that even Morr could read the Quran. He made it a point that his children had the best possible education. He made us go to the Mosque for religious education, made us sit and serve in the Hujra to know the ways of the fathers and sent us to the best schools for learning the affairs of the world. He taught us personally to be honorable men and always believed in fair, hard work.

Baba kept proper record of the time we spent studying. Every evening after dinner, we got together in our room in the Hujra for studies. At times, we didn't want to, so we pretended we are studying even if weren't. We read poems on the top of our

voice so that Baba could hear us and know we are studying. At times we desperately wanted to get away from studies, especially if there was some event going on. We came up with innovative excuses and tricked Baba quite easily; or that's what we thought. Parents do so much pretending, the compulsory sitting in the evening to study was as much to make us study as it was to keep us away from undesirable people and undesirable activities which we might have been part of if we were free. That was intelligent.

Growing up

As times rolled on things started changing for the better, me the intelligent and Galli the man of the masses, we were a typical movies combo. I was in tenth grade, when I came to the village on holidays instead of showing me kites and marbles and other tit bits he routinely saved for me, Big Brother secured the room door and took out a gun from the almirah, neatly wrapped in cloth in a leather holster.

“Bacha, this is English”, he pulled the gun from the holster, unwrapping the cloth. A charcoal grey, spotless piece of metal shone in his hands, he pulled out the magazine from the gun and showed in me the bullets inside it, then he pushed out a bullet from the magazine, all to impress me and assure me that he knows what he is doing. I was so scared to see a gun in his hand; I could hear my heart pounding.

He posed as if it was normal and started telling me, very casually, of a fight he had with a group of boys in the village. “They were five, armed with rods and cycle chains; they obstructed my way en route to Miranshah. It was because of this, Bacha, no one could come near me”, he said kissing the gun. I told them, “By Allah, one move and you are dead, they were stone cold, no one dared to move”.

“What if Baba knows about it”, I asked in a whisper not to let the secret out. He looked at me with a taunting face, as if saying, who cares. After a long stare he said, “He knows eet”, putting the bullet back in the magazine, the magazine back in the gun, wrapping the gun and putting it back in the holster. It was only when the gun was back in the holster that I dared to touch it. I was so impressed and so proud of him. He looked so macho.

We stayed up till late night talking, he shared news about all that was happening in the village, he knew everything. I was always amazed how resourceful Galli was. He brought pages of third rate Urdu magazines with semi-nude photos of ugly Indian and Pakistani actresses, he had playing cards with nude photos, he knew girls in the neighborhood and showed me the gifts he exchanged. He knew all the secrets of everyone, what every boy or girl, man or woman was up to.

I called him Dada when I got very excited. “Dada”, I asked, “how do you know everything, where do you get all this information from.”

“Bacha”, he pretended to be casual, “you have to know these things if you have to live in the village”.

By now I was known as the most intelligent boy. Every one admired and respected me for that. I wore my blue college blazer with college crest which further boosted my repo. I had my own casual ways of the modern world, disregarding the village traditions; after all I was in the village only for a few days.

It was late after dinner; we were in our room in the Hujra laughing and arguing when Galli suddenly said, “you listen well to what I tell you”, waving his finger at me. I was stunned because we had always been the best of friends and I had never annoyed him, at least not knowingly. I always did things I thought will make him happy, many times against the wishes of Baba. I wondered, what have I done, why is he waiving his finger at me so threateningly. “When we are alone, do whatever you like, say whatever you like but when we are in public you will behave properly”.

“OK”, I said obediently.

“You will follow the village norms and ways, you will respect me and treat me as your elder and not as your friend, not in public, in private we are good friends”.

I nodded a yes.

“You will always walk behind me, if I have anything in my hand you will take it from me and carry it for me”.

“OK”, I said, smiling at him, by now the initial danger was over because till then I thought I had done something which has offended him. “Don't you see how the others behave, in private do what you like but in public be careful. You ignore one norm of the village and you will get it from me.

He gave me a long lecture of dos and don'ts and I said Ok when required, “I will do whatever you say”. He nodded in satisfaction and concluded with a Pukhto proverb, “A rich man, humble in prayers and generous in charity, a poor man, clean in person and good in serving, are the best”. This was the time, I believe, when we stepped out of boyhood into manhood, we had grown up.

Home Coming

Once in service I had many opportunities to travel abroad and visit different places and after seeing the world I came to the conclusion that our life style was the best. Though there is urgent need for reforms in the administration but otherwise the tribal system is the best form of self-governance, independent, caring, honorable and full of pride. The concept of living together, being a part of a large family and tribe, united and strong against enemy, the system of self-governance, the instruments of social and administrative control and justice, totally independent of outside world and all

dependence on each other are the finest attributes of tribal life. My motherland is full of songs, drumbeat and dance. The people are honorable, proud and chivalrous, together in prayers, sharing all that they have.

Equality of mankind is preached in religion, every law demands and every culture boasts so but I haven't witnessed equality of man anywhere like the tribal areas. Mashar commands respect because of his virtues and wisdom which only makes him first among equals, otherwise all are equal.

There isn't much wealth in a tribal society, so there aren't many rich or poor among them. All are poor by worldly standards and the richest in heritage and pride. The tribesmen adore their religion and they love Pukhtunwali. They never miss a prayer and they never miss Attan. The family and Khel are one for whatever fate has in store. They won't bend to any threat and will always stand together, proud and unafraid.

I wanted my children to know the ways of the fathers, experience village life, know the area and the people, the family and relatives and make friends with them. Enabling them recognize the strength of living together in a family and a tribe. To accept the good things of modern living without letting our values fall apart. Offer them an opportunity to learn the village dialect of Pushto, so that they maintain their roots in the village.

Coming home was always full of excitement for me and the children alike but on Eid, it is extra ordinary. I looked forward going to the village; the mere thought was so pleasing and engaging. My first posting was in Balochistan, which was a long drive from my village; the road was out of repair, single lane. I started before dawn and reached the village after sunset, driving the whole day.

Neither distances nor the bad road could dampen our excitement of going to the village. The road from Usta Mohammed right up to my village, was perfectly safe and one could travel without fear. We will be up before dawn, the sky still dark and full of stars and the Mullah sound asleep. By early dawn, we are bundled in the car, ready to start. By the time, we cross Jacobabad in Sind province, the world starts moving and one can see, sleepy early riser sitting by the roadside emptying their bladders into a mound of foam. By the time the sun comes out we would have crossed Kashmore, from Sind into Punjab.

An old road, broken more than the dreams and aspirations of the people in the area, connects the two provinces. All the rural areas of Pakistan are poor but south Punjab is poor real bad. All around there is nothing but sand and wild grasses. The road is so bad you don't have the opportunity to see anything. You steal a glance and the road will toss you in the air. The driver has his sight fixed on the road so intently that you start having pain in the neck. You won't know when the sky changed from black to blue or when the stars disappeared from the sky.

I drove around seven hundred kilometers with just one break for lunch. The drive

was terrible, literally back breaking but nothing could fade the excitement, rather it increased the closer we got to the village. I would cross Bannu by sun set, people packing up and leaving for home. Shadows of the date palms were stretched longest before vanishing and the golden horizon was evidence that the sun wasn't far. By the time I was out of Bannu the sun would have fallen into the lap of Waziristan hills. The sun is just across these hills, I will tell Sonia, if we cross the hills we will catch it and Sonia searched for the sun every time we crossed over to the other side of the hills, practically chasing the sun all the way.

Bakka Khels are the most notorious people on this road and I tried to get out of their area before the sky changed from golden red to purple. The road in this part is the worst with speed breakers and pitfalls but I never bothered about the few extra bumps and shakes. By now, my body was numb anyway and the bumps didn't have much of an impact. There won't be anyone on the road, empty and quite, even the youngsters loitering on roadside would have left.

We would reach Khajuri check post after sun set and drive onwards after dark. Khajuri is the first check post, start of North Waziristan Agency while coming from Bannu and once you cross into North Waziristan then you can travel within the agency, otherwise the gates close after sunset and no one is allowed to travel into or out of the Agency.

I never asked my family or the Political Agent to send an escort for safety. The road was safe and I drove home without any fear of being abducted or looted. This was not a onetime adventure rather this was my routine till I was posted out of Balochistan. Most of my postings, however, were in or around Peshawar, a five hours drive from our village. Coming home from Peshawar was easy and frequent.

Visiting the village on Eid was festive. By the twenty eighth of Ramadan, exhausted of fasting, we are eagerly looking forward to Eid. Normally we arrive in the village on crescent evening and the next day is Eid. I always made it a point to bring lots of sweets for the children and sweet meat for the family members in the village. I told my children never to come to the village empty handed as children don't appreciate it and they will tell it to you on your face. Children of the family, nephews and nieces, and they were many, would know that we will arrive by evening so they get ready to receive us. They are at their best behavior, every child is told, "what Hamza will think of you if you don't behave or if you are not clean" and they have to remain on their best behavior throughout our stay in the village.

Pacing up and down, they wait for us at the parking area; they don't even sit that their clothes might get dirty. As the children wait at the parking their numbers keep creeping up. After waiting for a while they start walking towards the canal, about two hundred yards from our house, to get a clear view of the road so that they can see us from a distance. There are no houses between the canal and the main road making the road clearly visible.

Kharzai canal is the farthest point our children are allowed to go, it is a natural and psychological boundary which children don't cross. After waiting at this point for a while they walk to where the village road branches off from the main road, another two hundred yards as now we have a road right up to our house. They take this liberty because of their numbers and because everyone is in the knowledge that they are awaiting the arrival of guests. By now children of the neighborhood also join in to share the excitement.

As one leaves the main road one drives through winding lush green fields and orchards, over Kharzai canal and into the village. The only dust free road I know in the country. The first few houses belong to us. In the village we see brick and mortar houses, a large brick paved street, tube well, electric and telephone poles, a pretty developed village on tribal standards. The road ends at our Hujra with a reasonably big parking area. Many people use this road while commuting, so we have spared this place for vehicles to load, unload, pick and drop passengers, park for prayers, wait for passengers and other small intervals. Gates to the parking area and our houses are closed after sunset after which the taxi drivers or others cannot use it.

I always caught the gang, around ten to fifteen children, between the canal and the main road. The moment they see us they start running and jumping and shouting. I start honking and put on the music loud just to confirm that it is really us. When I reach the gang, I stop and shake hands with all of them one by one. My God, the excitement is un-explainable, their cheeks going red, their eyes shining bright and their hearts literally jumping out of their chest, every one trying to ensure I notice him. Lines are breached because the younger ones can't wait for their turn.

While I shake hands with every child, my wife introduces the younger ones whom I don't recognize. Each one of them is sparkling clean, all freshly bathed, wearing clean spotless clothes and their white, talcum powdered necks making them smell roses and lavender. They hold their oiled and combed heads high, their eyes looking bigger and brighter because of the collyrium and the excitement. My children, who are as much excited, get off the car to walk the remaining distance with the gang and in their place I give a ride to the smallest ones freeing the girls carrying them. My wife babysits them till we reach home.

Another group of grownup girls is waiting for us at the parking. Someone takes control of the main gates, not allowing other vehicles to enter till we have off loaded and the car is parked. The girls welcome us, collect all our baggage and follow us. They are all so happy to see us, you can practically feel their happiness, the way they giggle and make jokes on each other to amuse and occupy us, the way they pick up every bit of luggage that comes their way, the way they hug and kiss the children. From the immediate family one can expect such love but from others, honestly I have never seen anything like it.

When we reach home Morr and other women of the house, who had been waiting impatiently, greet us at the entrance. Men travel more so one gets an opportunity to

meet them but women seldom get the privilege to travel. Our coming for Eid is a great experience for the women and they eagerly await Eid holidays.

I embrace Morr, she pats me on my back praying, “May Allah always protect you, may Allah bless you with sons and may Allah make you the leading light for the people”, she keeps on praying till we all settle down.

I embrace my sisters and greet the other women with salaam and a nod or a handshake while Morr is busy with my wife and the kids we picked en route. I walk Morr to the veranda where a charpoy is set and we all sit together. My wife hands over the load of sweets to Morr. By then the gang of children is surrounding us.

Morr hugs and kiss and prays for my children and as they move to greet the other ladies, she distributes sweets among the children, commenting on each child's behavior. Some of the children get a few extra, for good behavior or as share of their absent family. The children try to get my attention, some of them start reciting English alphabets, ABCD to be recognized and to let me know how accomplished they are, another jumps in by reciting the numerals or reciting the alphabets faster. From here on it becomes a competition and whole poems are recited. Within seconds an argument starts as to who has performed better in the class. I am amused and enjoy every second with the children, they are so innocent.

I try to pass a comment on each child so that they can share among themselves what I said to them. I know the happiness we got from every comment Babajee made on us. The news of our arrival spreads like jungle fire. Every child of the village has to see me as if I was Spider Man.

After staying in the house for a while we pay a visit to Babajee. As the Mashar of our family, presenting ourselves in front of him is serious business. This visit determines how well the coming Eid will be. It is like a competition amongst not only brothers but also cousins, second cousins and anyone in the Khel who desires to be noticed as a man worthy of Babajee's attention.

Everyone tries to impress Babajee and get his appreciation as this will determine ones place in the family and Khel hierarchy and the kind of tasks he is going to be assigned in future. It is a real test for the ones in college and university; the ones on jobs are a little independent and can take some liberty with the elders. Even our parents would be excited to know what Babajee has to say about their children. Every favourable comment elevated them and an adverse remark pulled their hearts out.

To score points we brought Babajee clothes, waistcoats, perfumes, shoes, honey and anything that we thought will be appreciated. We assemble outside the house, have a last look at our clothes, check our gifts just to know what the others are presenting and after reciting a few verses of the Quran for protection and success, we make the dreaded entry. Yes, it was a dreaded entry till the time I got a job and was able to talk to Babajee.

In the house we make a single file, age determining ones position, eldest first. It's not necessary that all wait till the quorum is complete, a group or individual who arrived early might have already made their appearance. Each one keeps the gift on the table in front of Babajee and embraces him. He responds to the salutations, ask how things were and then look at the gift. Each one explains as to what a valuable thing he has brought. Babajee always paid special attention, "Achhaa, shaa, dera shaado", OK, good, very good to whatever was gifted to him, praising all the gifts to show his appreciation.

I made up stories to make the gift more interesting and likeable. "Babajee this is very special honey, a man brought it from Tirrah valley, he said this breed of honey-bee is only found in Tirrah". "Achaa", "yes Babajee, most of this honey is exported to Arab countries", "Achaa" he would say and make me feel he liked my gift the most.

I always took the nearest chair after greeting Babajee, waiting till everyone met him. Once the salutations are complete and Babajee takes his seat we take ours. So, how was your journey, he would ask. Everyone will respond in his turn. Gupshup continues till we disperse, leaving for the village. The amount of attention a person gets during this gupshup indicates how one is doing. All praise is for Allah, I always beat my competitors by miles in impressing Babajee. Was I good at making stories or was I plain darn lucky, who knows.

By the time we return home, it is iftar (fast breaking) time. Iftar is an occasion in itself and since it is our first day in the village and hopefully the last of Ramadan, special arrangements are made. After breaking the last fast, we line up the bank of Tochi trying to find the new crescent in the sky. People know the exact location where the crescent will be born and if it is out there, they will surely find it.

Once sighting of crescent is announced people fire in the air, light fires on hilltops and Fanoos are left in the air. At times, the announcement comes late but this in no way stops them from the activities they planned for 'crescent night'. Celebrating Eid is proverbial, we say there is Eid after Ramadan. After facing a testing Ramadan, everyone is too excited on Eid.

The whole night kids run around, yelling on the top of their voice and no one except them know what games they are playing. By night, everyone is showing his or her new clothes and other paraphernalia that is to be shown off on Eid day. Traditionally, everyone wears Hina on their hands on Eid night, the girls however have very elaborate designs made on their hands and feet.

On Eid day, people wish each other by embracing. We visit the graveyard to pray for the departed, visit all elderly family members and exchange Eid greetings, Babajee being the first one of course.

Many, in service elsewhere or in colleges and universities have arrived, so for us meeting all the village people is a big treat. Many of them, specially the expats, one

meets after a long time. Baba will have visited the graveyard before Eid prayer so he comes home and take his place in the Hujra. People of the village start coming to wish Eid, tea and sweet meat keeps coming for the guests the whole day.

Egg fighting is a popular tradition of Eid. Boys have beautiful silk scarves, the opposite ends of the scarf are tied together forming into a sack. Colorful eggs (like Easter eggs) are put in the scarf and egg fighting begins. The strength of the eggshell is checked by lightly taping the egg against ones front tooth. One has at least three colorful eggs in each Hina dyed hand and lips colored blue or green from checking strength of the egg. If still in doubt the egg is tapped against the forehead. The ones that feel heavier have a weak shell and those feeling lighter have a stronger shell. Whose egg shell breaks loses the egg.

By late afternoon youngsters climb Spiron top, the hill to the north of our village and by keeping stones on top of each other make a target for marksmanship. For better visibility, they whitewash it. Once they are down from the hill, they wave a white Chaddar to signal, all clear. The marksmen gather around a small hillock just across Kharzai. The distance of the target is around two hundred yards. The marksmen take their positions and fire at the target. The elders oversee the marksmanship event and will occasionally comment on the quality of rifle and give advice where and how to aim. Looking at the spot the marksman hits, they help him zero his rifle.

The evening belongs to the youth and they proudly display their rifles. The winners of the day are the real heroes. Some guys aim at the targets looking at the target in a mirror facing the opposite side.

On second day of Eid, youngsters climb Palangzai hills to the south of our village with Tochi flowing in between. The targets made are bigger in size and the distance between the target and the marksmen is well above three hundred yards. The distance is more than live hit range of the rifle, with wind blowing west to east in Tochi. This is real test of marksmanship as dismantling the target from such a distance requires special skills. The whole village gathers around the marksmen, people are not allowed to go in the riverbed.

Changing Times

I qualified the Central Superior Services (CSS) exam in 1982 after completing my Masters and got into the most prestigious Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS). The night result was out, my roommate Bali informed me, “congratulations, the result is out and you have qualified the CSS. The best part is that all others from our university failed”.

“So now we know who is the best”, I claimed.

I couldn't sleep the whole night wondering how happy Baba would be when he gets the news. All the sacrifice that education demands had at last paid off. Sacrificing ones childhood, the festivals, the occasions, the scarce funds that could have been utilized elsewhere, all that we missed was for this day and if today's happiness outweighs the sacrifices then probably it was worth it. Throughout the night I tossed in bed unable to sleep.

Tomorrow everyone in Waziristan will talk about me and Baba will be felicitated by all the leading elders and the young professionals and the government servants and the businessmen. He will be so proud. In Peshawar University getting into superior services was the most coveted position, by qualifying for it I had conquered the world. My position both at home and the university was elevated. In a society full of injustices, people start looking upto you when you are well placed.

In the village Baba was glowing with excitement, he wanted to talk of nothing else but the CSS and my selection in the PAS, the training in the academy and my future plans. In the Hujra there was no other topic, the hot topics of the war in Afghanistan and influx of Afghan refugees had been overshadowed. Baba always found a way to divert whatever topic was under discussion to discuss civil service. Every time I saw him with the elders, he was talking about the civil service. Every time I passed by, Baba would expect me to go to him to talk of whatever, so that people know his son is now a civil servant. I had never seen any topic discussed at such length for so many days but then Baba was happy and that's what mattered. When I wasn't around Baba explained to whomever he could get hold of, how difficult the selection process is and how only the finest are selected, how he always persuaded me to join the civil service and how hard I worked and the amount of money, time and affection he sacrificed. Political Agent in the tribal areas is next to God, he can make and break a person or family so they all thought of nothing else but of how their lives might be affected by my becoming a Political Agent.

Galli had gone to Dubai to make money. He would come after two or three years, spend a couple of months in the village, make his wife pregnant and go back to work in Dubai.

My position in the Hujra changed, instead of sitting at the far end I was elevated to sit to the right of Baba on the next charpoy. I started sitting with elders rather than the boys and also started chipping in with comments. Baba valued my comments and like other elders who are quoted in households, people started quoting me

My success was common property of the village, everyone I passed by wanted to shake hands with me, those who knew me would explain to those who didn't of what I had achieved. Getting into the civil service, an ordinary achievement elsewhere, created ripples in the village signifying the lack of opportunities.

Baba got elected as Senator and I was Political Agent in 1995. The Governor, General (rtd) Khurshid Ali Khan arranged lunch for all the tribal parliamentarians,

Senators, MNAs and Political Agents in Governor House. I was sitting with Baba over lunch peeling an apple for him when the Governor noticed us and said, "Haji Sahib, this is not fair, my officer is serving you whereas he should be serving me".

Haji Sahib was so excited, the pride in Baba's eyes, he just didn't know what to do or say, he just kept smiling and nodding at the Governor and the parliamentarians. He was speechless, moving in his chair changing postures, fidgeting with the cutlery and though everyone was attentive, expecting a response, he couldn't say a word, just smiling and nodding at everyone.

Education for boys took center stage in the early sixties, everyone wanted to send their children to schools but for girls it was a different story. No one realized that education for girls is as important. It took another ten years for people to realize that girls also need to be educated. First, a few of our boys who specialized as doctors or engineers married outside the tribal areas. They wanted to have an educated wife and since there was no educated girl in the village, they opted to marry outside tribal areas.

As more boys got into professional colleges and services the demand for educated girls increased which prompted people to send their girls to schools. Yet, only a few families could do so. It was only when girl's schools came up in the village that an opportunity for the masses to educate their girls arose.

People from tribal areas went to work as labourers in the Middle East. Within a span of a few years, there were more tribesmen in the Middle East than any other nationality. Our people worked hard, they made money with which they started buying properties and making houses in their villages. People working in the Middle East also wanted a wife that could differentiate between a passport, driving license and an ID card, who could write a telephone number and take a message. So, as the demand for educated girls increased, so did the school enrolments. In a situation of high unemployment, girls' recruitment as primary school teacher is a good source of support for the family which further encouraged girls to get education.

Today, highly educated girls might not be there but surely there are many primary educated girls and the demeaning stigma attached to girls' education is no more there. Visit any family and they will show the desire to educate their girls.

When light comes darkness vanishes. Where does it go? Nowhere, it just vanishes. Darkness can't stay where light comes, the smallest of lights eradicates the darkest of darkness. At last, light came to the tribesmen.

The parking area in front of our Hujra was a sight to be seen in the mornings. Boys and girls dressed in smart clean uniforms of different colors and designs waiting for their transport to take them to schools. Every private school has a different uniform and women identify schools by the uniforms. They don't know the names of the schools because they all have high sounding English names, like Cambridge and Oxford but they know the color of the uniform of a school.

Every morning, boys and girls alike, get ready to go to school, dressed in school uniform. They look so smart and proud. Their small bags, with Spiderman or Barbie pictured on them are packed with a few books and a small lunch box. Their hair, oiled and combed, their hands and nails clean, all ready for inspection. All waiting in groups, you can identify the family to which the group belongs. They have different uniforms, yet they look as one big family.

The people are very dynamic and the village very peaceful, a rare combination for the tribal areas. It has always been like this since I remember. In earlier times, things might have been different but ever since I remember the village has been very peaceful. The tribal areas were one of the most peaceful areas of Pakistan, the crime rate of a police station of Peshawar was more than the crime rate of whole of tribal areas. Elders of the tribes have been maintaining peace without any help or support from the administration.

Pukhtunwali embellished with modernization is ready to take us into the twenty first century. These are the people; to whom, we owe allegiance, for whom little is much. They are so content; an ordinary bureaucrat is a hero for them. They have no ambitions to rule the world, no ambitions to become the richest on earth, small desires of being able to give, to share what little they have. All that they want is to be respected and recognized, to live by the ways of the fathers, to raise the name of their family and to be known by their ancestry.

Here we are, having the best of worlds, an area that has fascinated the world throughout history and a people who have through bloody encounters and honorable deeds established a romantic image of themselves. A people embodying the finest qualities of loyalty, courage and honor, who are not impressed by or attracted to alien cultures and aim to be like their fathers as none can surpass their Nang, Jaba, Tura and Pukhto and who want to pass on such noble attributes to their children.

A family that is united, that loves and cares for all, with malice to none. Our survival is in unity and humility. Well equipped with the attributes of our elders and the education of the 'enlightened' we are ready to step in the world of limitless opportunities of the twenty first century.



PART IV

RUSSIAN ADVENTURISM RISE OF MILITANCY

CHAPTER 7

THE AFGHAN JIHAD

THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN WAS A TURNING point in recent history. The invasion and the ensuing Jihad saw the downfall of a super power; it saw the liberation of scores of states from Russian dominance in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. It saw a unipolar world come in existence and it saw Afghanistan turn to ashes.

The Berlin wall had fallen and the new independent states were focus of world attention. There was a frenzy of activity, new political entities were created, alliances were made, social rights advocated and claimed. New initiatives were being introduced and new agreements were inked. Everyone was so busy, so committed to cash in on the opportunities that lay waiting for them in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The free world celebrated their success, a triumphant end of the dreaded cold war.

In the zeal of success and ensuing opportunities, they couldn't see the destruction of a nation. The nation that had made the victory possible, the nation that sacrificed all it had, the Pukhtuns, tribesmen in particular were gone and forgotten. Even after the so-called liberation, Afghanistan was enduring a terrible civil war.

Our lands will never be the same. Our peaceful motherland became an international playground for the notorious "Great Game".

The cold war was over, there was no threat to the lifestyle of free world, so there was no need to look after friends any more rather there was no need to have unnecessary and unnatural friends.

No matter what historians say, it was just the tribesmen standing between the Russian Red Army and the hot waters.

All this was made possible by the illusions created by the illustrious Charlie Wilson and Co. They said Russians were Godless people and need to be taught a lesson; we didn't have enmity with anyone but we said, "Let's do it". To defeat Russia the scum of the earth, thugs, criminals, gangsters, drugs, arms and ammunition from around the world was offloaded in our area for the jihad, all in the name of brotherhood, of religion and nationhood, by our government and the International community. Funds started pouring in, sacks full of dollars, all for the Mujahideen,

only for the Mujahideen.

Big, shining new, purpose built madrassas started coming up at a very fast pace, overtaking all the existing madrassas, government and private schools put together. Millions of dollars were pumped in and hundreds of madrassas constructed throughout the tribal areas to produce zillions of Jihadis.

The Jihadis and friends favorite project was to invest in Madrassa with staff qualified in spreading hate rather than religion. The more volunteers to jihad that these Madrassas could supply the better it was. They did not invest a single penny in health, education, women development or any other project of benefit to the tribesmen.

There is a misunderstanding that Madrassas imparted training in warfare, not at all. Madrassas were the recruiting agency for militancy. Innocent children were indoctrinated in Jihad and when they volunteered they were sent to training camps. It was so awkward; people visiting a Madrassa come back saying they didn't find any clues of military training being imparted.

Every time I visited the village, I found new madrassas, adjacent to a beautiful mosque having newly painted minarets, complete with loud speakers and all, dominating the village. Initially we were made to believe that it was all Arab money being passed on as charity but later it transpired that Arabs were not alone in the scheme. Some constructed madrassas, others provided arms and ammunition while still others provided military training to the volunteers.

War affected everyone; women and children are always the first victims of war. The children directly affected saw total destruction, with no one to look up to. They saw blood and tears from too close, they heard their women weep and mourn. These innocent children, weak and helpless, left unprotected were exploited, molested and mistreated, filling their tiny innocent hearts with fear, anger and retribution. They were filled with hate and vengeance against the world. Their only desire was to perish and finish the world along with them.

The purpose-built Madrassas, run by Afghans and Arabs, took in the most vulnerable, unwanted poor, the orphans, the displaced and everyone who had nowhere else to go. Children were indoctrinated against others, irrespective of religion, color, nationality or any other distinction. The hate spreading teachers filled them with hate. They were trained in death and destruction, total annihilation without any remorse, giving them a hundred justifications for their acts against anyone and everyone. Anyone who could carry a gun was converted into a mercenary.

The International community, America, Britain and their allies, in their enthusiasm to defeat Russia created monsters that would haunt them for the rest of their lives. Monster making wasn't limited to Afghan and tribal children, any Muslim child they could lay hands on was game. They brought in whole families from around the world, branding it a pan Islamic jihad. Funds were thrown around unchecked, and

to cash on the opportunity boys quit schools, skill development centers and their parent's vocation. The only lesson to learn was hate and the only skill required was, to kill. Instead of going to school or skill development center, they started providing logistics and other services to the Mujahideen.

A new Jihadi religion was propagated in the training camps different from the religion we knew. Arabs were brought in to show that this was the true religion. Once indoctrinated, these boys were given control of the most important job in town, Imam, (prayer leader) of a mosque. It is unfortunate that such important business was handed over to the weakest and most vulnerable segment of society. They misinterpreted and used religion to spread the message of hate and fear within and outside the tribe and the society. A political issue was presented as a religious obligation, Jihad.

Criminal gangs recruited Afghan Jihadis for their nefarious activities. They carried arms and ammunition at will, retained them in their camps, far from where the war was. Their camps in settled areas, even Peshawar, were out of bounds for police, so, they became criminal dens. If police wanted to search the area, they couldn't because the Afghans were better equipped and better trained than our police. The Mujahideen could kidnap, ask for ransom and even kill at will. They did everything that a citizen of this country couldn't even imagine.

All this was sponsored by the state of Pakistan with Gen Zia smiling his sunshine smile, aspiring to become Ameer ul Momineen, leader of the faithful, of both Pakistan and Afghanistan. By '84 Hikmatyar's group had become so powerful that they could kill Afghans without fear of Badal. They started lining people in front of firing squads without any fear or remorse. Badal, is central to keeping peace in a tribal society. With fear of Badal gone, Tribal life was practically over. Till the Afghan Refugees are here we have to improvise. The old system was redundant.

Hikmatyar's Hizb Islami was the favorite of our government, the Arabs and the West. The group had so much funds that their Madrassa in Danday Darpa Khel was recognized as the best because of the provisions it made for the students and the number of volunteers it produced. Haqqani, a stalwart of Hikmatyar group, virtually took over the leadership of Waziristan and beyond. The partners against Russia banked on this group for their designs and it is no secret that Hikmatyar received maximum support and funding from CIA and the Arab states.

With Russian withdrawal in '89, Hikmatyars' group was geared up to take Kabul but in spite of full backing of Pakistan, they could not. The obsolete Afghan army foiled every attempt. This resulted in total destruction of Afghanistan and rightly pointed out that Afghanistan saw more destruction because of the infighting of the Mujahideen than the Russian occupation.

Hikmatyar defeated the well-equipped and well trained Russian army but couldn't defeat a primitive Afghan army with outdated weaponry. Many attribute Hikmatyar's

defeats to the inefficient planning of Pakistani agencies, however, the actual reason for his defeat was losing support of tribes on both sides of the Durand line. We know from history that no one can hold Kabul without the support of the tribes. History was repeated once again. Hikmatyar's Hizb e Islami commanded great respect among the tribes but once that respect and support was lost no matter how many men the Pakistan agencies provided, how much funds CIA or the Arab states provided, he stood no chance of running over Kabul and so the war continued.

In sheer arrogance, the International partners in Jihad converted innocent children into hate machines and unleashed them against humanity. How carelessly they walked away once their objectives were achieved. They didn't feel any responsibility towards these children, nor so for the population of the area. All they cared was that their purpose was achieved no matter what the cost.

The Jihadi Raj started the day Russia pulled out from Afghanistan. Instead of joining hands, the Jihadis fought each other. Having been coached in the same Madrassa and trained in the same training camp, why did they start fighting amongst themselves? Did, they have different agendas?

Death and destruction was followed by loot and plunder, tyranny of unimaginable proportions, unexpected and unaccepted to mankind. The whole free world watched in amusement, death and destruction dancing in the blood stained streets of Kabul, to be followed by the blood stained deserts of Waziristan, my beloved motherland.

The people they had trained into killing machines had all the resources of the Russian war at their disposal, from mines and missiles to underground bunkers, from satellite communications to established media strategies and treasure chests full of dollars, all were left behind in the hands of the ruthless killing machines. The international community left behind monsters, armed to the teeth with funds beyond their wildest imaginations and the moral high ground of beating a super power into retreat. There was no one to stand up to them, able to challenge their authority.

The free world shouldn't have done so because I wasn't the enemy. Today, we stand alone, friendless and penniless, among a group of dangerous psychos. Each one full of hate, hate against the free world for his troubled life, hate against the society for molesting and ridiculing him, hate against his parents for abandoning him and hate against himself for having such a fate. They know nothing but hate, they don't cherish human values, they don't love their own lives and they don't care about anyone else's.

Till the war was against Russia things were manageable because everyone was on the same side but when the free world's designs were achieved, they walked away leaving us alone to deal with the mess created by the whole international community. They left Afghanistan to bleed for years to be ultimately taken over by the Taliban. They didn't even try to undo what they had done.

Among so many wrongs done to us during the Afghan Jihad, the most alarming was when our religion was discredited and a new religion was pitched against ours.

In support of the Jihadis, Tablighi Jamaats (missionary groups) were introduced and unprecedented investments in Tablighi markaz were witnessed. Women were told to recite hundreds of thousands of times, selected Arabic verses not necessarily from Quran and men were told to spend time in the way of Allah, which they spent in mosques. They were neither taught to read or write nor were they taught the meanings of the glorious Quran. People recite words and verses they don't understand, believe or follow.

Focus was shifted from community life of helping and supporting each other to individual, repetitive rituals, creating doubts in the minds of innocent tribesmen and shielding the true spirit of religion. They created divisions between the ordinary and the exclusive, going totally against the spirit of Islam. Tablighi jamaats were patronized and extended all out support from government exchequer. Zia ul Haq, aped by others, attended their Raiwand gatherings regularly.

Arab lifestyle had started dominating our way of life; we started celebrating Ramadan and Eid with Saudi Arabia long before 9/11. The fine balance or the fine blend of religion and Pukhtunwali was disturbed and un-Islamic rituals in the name of religion started overshadowing our way of life. Alien culture started creeping into our affairs in the name of religion.

Religion and culture, that supplemented each other were separated and pitched against each other. Religion overtook culture and within a span of a few years, a new religion dominated our lifestyle. We saw the rise of religious leadership against tribalism. The relationship between the Malik and the Mullah was overturned in favor of the Mullah.

After Jihad

Afghan Jihad is history, our problems started after 9/11, when US and NATO troops invaded Afghanistan to oust the Taliban, when Pakistan took a U turn and declared the Mujahedeen as terrorists. Al Qaida and Taliban crossed over to Pakistan, Pak army followed them to the tribal areas and after that, life became living hell for us.

To appreciate situation of the tribesmen we need to understand that the ordinary man on street cannot differentiate between Russian and US invasion of Afghanistan. For them both are the same, foreign invaders. They don't accept Security Council or its resolutions and see it as a gathering of non-Muslim states. They see the invasion as a war between Muslims and non-Muslims. A crusade as Mr. Bush said and jihad as Mullah Omer puts it. When the US and NATO forces landed in Afghanistan, Pakistan army moved into the tribal areas to stop Taliban infiltration into Pakistan. The timing was such that tribesmen viewed Pak Army as an extension of American Army and as good an enemy.

Tribesmen view Afghanistan as their country. Durand line is an unacceptable artificial line, for tribesmen, the whole of Pukhtunkhwa (Pukhtun land) is home. The notion of Afghan tribes interfering in Pakistan and Pakistani tribes interfering in Afghanistan is neither understood nor accepted by the tribes. This has always been the most porous border of the world, never controlled by either side.

Slaughtering innocent people started for no reason, some were branded as American spies, others were branded supporters of Taliban and still others were just collateral damage. No matter what people did, the killing never stopped. For the first time slaughtering and cutting humans into pieces was witnessed in tribal areas. The militants pick up people at will and throw their dead bodies on roadsides. The security forces destroy whole villages during military operations without getting a militant worth his name. US drones kill civilians as indiscriminately as the militants or the security forces.

On the other hand breeding militants continues to this day. Some train them, others fund them, yet others protect them. Who is doing all this, no one knows. Faceless people provide them all the support they need; even manpower is imported to join their ranks.

The militants are out to destroy our way of life, the ways of the fathers. They neither talk to us nor listen to us. Most of the foot soldiers belong to the tribal areas but who is making them do things that have no parallel in human history? Who is this faceless enemy, bent to bring death and destruction on us? What is the agenda, why is the faceless enemy destroying schools and hospitals, determined to send us back to Stone Age. Why is he terrorizing us, we don't have enmity with anyone.

The Afghan Taliban disowns them, the army and intelligence agencies disown them and the international community disowns them, yet neither their ammunition exhausts, nor their funds diminish, neither their numbers dwindle nor their trainings weaken.

We are converted into a minority on our own land. The faceless enemy took over our land from us through the treachery of friends whom we trusted and to whom we had not caused any harm. They took our land by betrayal and intrigue and secretly converting our poor vulnerable children into demons.

The land we cherished so much wasn't our's anymore.

How could we be so careless to let this happen, probably, because we didn't have any enmity. Only those having enmity unsling their guns and are on the watch out, always ready.

Our land has become an international playground. We believe the militants are planted and supported by external agencies, many supposed to be our friends. There are Arabs planted by the Israelis; Uzbeks and Tajiks planted by Russia; Kashmiri planted by India and Afghans planted by the Americans. The Arab countries and Iran

have their favorites and keep funding them. Pakistan has its favorites, the Punjabi Taliban.

Every nation involved has its own interest. The Americans want to stay here; probably they don't want China to use Pakistan as a trading route or to keep a watch on Iran. The Russians want to bleed the Americans, Iran wants to entangle America, India wants to destabilize Pakistan, our leadership wants strategic depth in Afghanistan and the Arabs want their fighters to stay committed here. So, it's in the interest of all countries, including ours that this war keeps on dragging.

The militants are highly organized, trained and battle hardened. They are highly mobile, very well armed and very resourceful. They have unlimited supply of sophisticated weapons and funds and have comprehensive knowledge of military tactics. Above all, they have full support of the faceless enemy. They have no kin bonding and their loyalty is only to the Ameer. Their relationships cut across ethnic and tribal lines having no affiliation with their tribes. They are not limited to operate within their tribal boundaries like the tribes are. They have foreign fighters and funds from a spectrum of donors from around the globe.

Many groups identify themselves with Taliban. All the criminal gangs, banned religious outfits and agents of hostile international agencies have joined hands under the guidance of the faceless enemy. The banned religious outfits under their nonlocal leadership have dominated the Pukhtun militants on this side of the border. The enemy is supporting, funding and arming the militants and no one in the whole wide world has the will or the means to stop the flow of funds and arms. We have landed ourselves in a mess trying to install a puppet regime in Afghanistan. We created religious fanatics and now we don't know what to do with them. The world knows that our government is playing a double game, that it is taking sides instead of eliminating the menace.

It was a hot summer evening; Baba was relaxing against a Takia. Staring at the sky, waving his finger he said, "You remember when I sent Miram Khan to Haqqani to return Gul Jaman safely or I am coming with my men."

Gul Jaman was accused of spying for the Americans and was picked up by militant from the main road in Danday Darpa Khel. Anyone accused of spying for America is eliminated. He is tortured, made to give a confessional statement and slaughtered in front of a camera. Militants don't have to prove them guilty and they are not answerable to anyone, claiming they do this for God. They circulate the CDs in the market as evidence against the dead, to terrorize and make a statement to the public.

"Gul Jaman was my man", Baba said with sarcastic twitch to his lower lip, "the militants knew I will retaliate. They know I have never abandoned my men no matter what". With an angry sneer on his face, Baba continued, "I told Haqqani I will throw you out of Danday Darpa Khel and will make you long for an insignificant onion. The

militants knew it wasn't in their interest to annoy me, so, they released Gul Jaman unhurt". Baba looked at each one of us as if asking, 'any doubts'.

Saifullah, a young boy was picked by militants for spying and I shuddered listening to his ordeal. "There were two other men in the room in which I was locked", he said with tears running down his chin. "One of them couldn't move, the other was killed the same evening by putting red-hot iron bars through his body. I can still hear his screams, may Allah have mercy on him", the boy broke down and started sobbing, "It was so terrible, I see him in my dreams every night, I can't sleep because of him. They asked us to read confessional statements. I was given a list of twenty names, which I was to read in front of the camera, admitting that we were all American spies", the boy said, terror still in his eyes.

We believe that the one giving life is mightier than the one taking it. The militants left the room leaving the boy unconscious, when he couldn't take the torture anymore. To his good luck, a drone struck. The militants were killed on the spot. The boy regained consciousness and escaped. His feet were all burnt; I wondered how he managed to walk away from that place.

Never in my life have I heard of anyone being slaughtered in Waziristan. The man with the knife and the one under it are both reciting Allah o Akbar, both think they are innocent. The man with the knife doesn't know why he is killing and the one below doesn't know why he is being killed. They don't know each other and have never come across each other in their lives.

It's the cowards, scared of wars that do terrible things to terrorize people. Tribesmen are great fighters, they sing and dance into war, they stare death in the eyes and love doing so, they will never do such things.

Oh God, what have they done to our children?

Without Pukhto

Look what three decades of war has done to a proud nation. The nation full of dance and music, a nation that is as chivalrous as it is humorous, that is humble in service and proud in dealings, that took pride in Pukhtunwali, the code of honor, the way of the fathers, such a beautiful nation is being annihilated. A complete way of life is being lost. The human cost is high but the destruction of a way of life, the culture is the real issue. Besides the destruction of physical infrastructure and cost of lost opportunities, Pukhtun nation is undergoing an irreparable damage, losing the ways of the fathers.

The tribesmen never accepted foreign ways as they were never impressed by them. They romanced the idea to be like the fathers. Going through the writings of British officers who served on the frontier one realizes that the British liked the

simple ways of the Pukhtuns and saw more commonalities than differences with them. The landscape of Pukhtun territory reminded them of home; the fair, blue eyed people looked like kin. They saw a proud nation, equal to them in chivalry, who always stood tall, never impressed with foreign ways and worshiped the idea to be like the fathers.

I was surprised, nay, shocked, when I saw tribesmen disguising as Arabs. I believed Pukhtuns were the proudest nation of the world. Of all our possessions, the faceless enemy has taken away our pride. Layer by layer, act by act, the enemy has stripped us of our pride. Today we hide our nationality we were always so proud of. In the tribal areas, we try to look like Arabs whereas down country we pose to be non-Pukhtuns.

God, we must have committed great sin to have fallen from grace like this. It was like yesterday, my classmates envied us and wished they were Pukhtuns.

Gul Dodi was my childhood friend, the one whom I never saw in a pair of shoes. As children, we went out on Ballodukky and Gowasht together and the poor chap was always made to carry the lantern and walk with girls or carry the sack of grains. He was very obedient and easy to push around but he never complained. As if just yesterday, I was asking him, "Gul Dodi, what will I do if you get married." He always tried to be close to me.

He has changed his name to Abu Daud, dresses like an Arab and speaks in Arabicized Pashto. When I met him last he was wearing a check scarf on his head like Yasir Arafat, and a long shirt. When I saw him, I wondered why? Is there no pride in being a Pukhtun anymore? Have the Arabs done something great which we don't know about? Why, of all the nationalities would anyone like to be identified as an Arab? And of all the people, the Pukhtuns, who brought the British and Russian, super powers of the twentieth century, to their knees in a span of just fifty years. Whereas Arabs lost every war they fought in these fifty years. Then why forego Pukhto to look like an Arab? Arabs had impressed a nation that could not be impressed by the West.

We had a long gupshup session when Gul Dodi came to see me, the last time I visited the village. I was surprised to see him changed from a lanky poor villager to a sturdy, well to do Arab. After the initial pleasantries, frank and candid, he said in visible excitement, "Yar (friend), your brother is now commander of the faithful, you just say it and I will roger anyone in the village that you want me to".

"Wow, hold on man, that's great and why would I like to do so"?

"I know", he said, "you wouldn't like to, the whole village likes you. You were always the darling of the village. It was us, the forgotten ones, we didn't have many options".

"Why change your appearance; I liked you more as before, why look like an

Arab,” I asked.

“It's a matter of survival. Only the Arabs and the Punjabi Taliban have large amount of funds, they receive outside support. The Pukhtuns are not equal to them, we don't have any national or international entity to fund or support us, so they treat us like sepoys just to loot and get killed. Arab countries are the biggest financier of Jihad, their governments are against the Arab Jihadis and want them to be eliminated, they don't want them to come back to their countries and create problems for them”. He gave out a loud laugh, “we tend to show more Arabs than there actually are to scare the shit out of their weak and corrupt governments and squeeze whatever we can out of them”.

“But they must know you are not Arabs”.

“Everyone knows what's going on, they all seem to be on the same side. Anyway, it's their plan, we don't know much about it. We just follow instructions, if we don't we lose our jobs with hundreds waiting to replace us”.

“You are bringing a bad name to Islam and Pukhtuns”. “Can't you talk to Hafiz Gul Bahadur or Maulana Sadiq Noor to stop killing innocent people.”

He smiled and said, “They are just tea boys, the actual people are the ones standing behind them, the ones masking their faces. It's not even the Afghan Taliban, there name is being used. For a little support, they are enduring the bad name. Things might be different in Afghanistan but here they don't have much influence. Those taking decisions, don't want the Taliban to be as strong in Pakistan as they were in Afghanistan. These Mullahs are just the face of the Jihadis the actual people are Punjabis. They make all the decisions and they have all the support. They have been brought here for a purpose and if anyone doesn't toe the line he is eliminated”.

Gul Dodi (or should I call him Abu Daud) searched for his snuff box in his pocket, opened it and took a large helping of naswar, pressed it in his palm with his fingers and fixed it between his gums and cheek and while adjusting it he said, “You tell me, If you were fighting regular armies and planning attacks and retreats, hiding from drones, always on the run, you won't have time for rest, food or family, would you? These Mullahs have got themselves a second and a third wife, meaning they have nothing to worry about. They eat to their fill and enjoy their night, whatever its worth”.

“So, who should one talk to if he has an issue with the militants?”

“No one, you shouldn't have an issue with the militants. If you have any, forgo it”, Gul Dodi said very coldly spitting out the naswar.

Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Maulana Sadiq Noor are tea boys, I repeated to myself, slapping Gul Dodi on his back, I said, “I like that”. After a long session, including sharing childhood memories we parted with a promise that we have another session soon. I told him to stay out of harm's way. Holding my hand in one hand he patted the

back of my hand with his other and said, “look after yourself, you are safe in Darpa Khel but be careful while coming or going from the village”.

I laughed at him, “Wraksha Marra, get lost friend, I can raise a bigger Lashkar than you can imagine, if I were to come back to the village”.

Gul Dodi laughed back, “I know, I know and if there weren't enough men, girls will join your Lashkar. I know, they all love you”, and we laughed and parted for the last time.

A proud nation is forced to disguise for fear of coming in harm's way. A Pukhtun took more pride in being a Pukhtun than being a Muslim. We believe that Pukhto language is alive only because of the pride of Pukhtuns in their mother tongue, because of their pride in their nationhood. Had it been for state support or academia's role the language would have been lost by now. Pukhtuns have started speaking Urdu down country, their pride in Pukhto gone and forgotten.

Sindhi nationalists refused to allow Swat and Waziristan IDPs in to Karachi claiming that militants might join them. The Pukhtuns already settled in Karachi are discriminated against because they might have relations or links with militants. They are mistrusted and refused any service in government on the plea that they are a security risk.

Punjab started a crackdown against Pukhtuns to weed out militancy. The only option left with the Pukhtun within the system is to look like a non-Pukhtun. Why would anyone want me to lose my identity, that's what I don't understand?

Just twenty years back, Lahoris were relieved to see Pukhtuns amongst them. Didn't they congratulate each other crying “the Pathans have come” as if they have won the war? They trusted people from Waziristan more than they trusted their regular army. In such a short time we have become villains and deserve weeding out. Can there be a bigger loss to a nation?

Alone Among Enemies

Today my beautiful motherland is a no man's land. None less than the President of USA declared it the most dangerous place on earth. The next great disaster to happen in Europe or USA will be planned here, they say.

But we have no enmity with anyone, why would we do so? Others attacked us many times, we just fought back. They were always the aggressors, we were defending Motherland and we were the ones forgiving, yet they fear us of an attack? Sounds absurd.

Did we ever attack any other nation in history? Other than the local skirmishes, we never attacked anyone and have no cause or intentions to do so now. It has always

been others who came here and brought death and destruction along. We were always threatened in our own land.

In recent history, it was the British, then Russians and now Americans who invaded us. When the British came, the Germans followed and wanted to help us fight the British out of the area. When Russians came, Americans and their friends came to help us fight the Russians out. Now that Americans are here, there are many helping Taliban fight the Americans out.

The only difference is that in previous wars there were clear sides, this time there aren't any. Many posing as friends and partners of US have their own interests and are supporting Taliban in secret to throw US out of Afghanistan. So many faceless people disguising as friends are supporting the fighters.

They are all fighting proxy wars on my land, posing to be friends with the US and Afghans but they all have different agendas, different interests and secretly, they are fighting Americans and Afghans and they are fighting each other and in the course, they are destroying Afghanistan and the tribal areas. We are stranded in the cross fire, providing foot soldiers, vulnerable that we are, every group is exploiting us, hiring us as gun fodder.

Who is fighting who, we don't know as there are no clear lines. Enemy of one is an asset for the other. Their weapons and funding keeps on coming, no one has been able to stop them, that is if there is anyone trying to stop them.

As for the tribesmen, some are hired as Militants, those who aren't most likely become collateral damage. There is a big number of tribesmen who are not with militants and have luckily evaded becoming collateral damage, they are Internally Displaced Persons, homeless in their own country. Like the homeless, Kotanian, going from aid agency to aid agency, gathering foodstuff and whatever they can lay their hands on. No food or shelter of their own, they depend on handouts of the generous.

Allah, have mercy on us. Pukhtuns converted to Kotanian, the only people looked down upon in a Pukhtun society are the Kotanian because they are beggars and thieves as a community. They have no pride and no shame hence Kotanian is synonymous with insult and shamelessness. Ah, when I see the Pukhtuns, a noble people, queuing to be stripped of their human dignity, their pride and their honor.

We are not scared of war; the world knows that, war brings the best out of us. It's the destruction of our culture, customs and traditions, which took thousands of years to evolve that we are concerned about. Our way of life is under attack. Our very existence is threatened.

We are not afraid of Taliban, neither are we afraid of Pakistan or NATO armies and they all know it. Each one of them is posing to be on our side, to be our protector and friend. If they are all friends then who is the enemy? We have no declared

enemies, yet we are the ones facing all the destruction. Europe, America and rest of the world fears us, knowing well that we never attacked any one. We are the ones who should be afraid yet we are being blamed for all the militancy.

The noble Pukhtuns disregarded and disrespected for no apparent reason, for no fault the proudest nation on the face of earth hides behind shadows. The enemy is bringing us a bad name by doing things totally against what we believe and what we stand for and the whole world is dancing to their tune, intentionally or unintentionally, knowingly or unknowingly.

It is so unfair; everyone is inducing the tribesmen to pick up arms and fight against militancy. Fight for God, fight for motherland, fight for your honor, fight because you are good fighters and fight because this is an opportunity to make a name for yourself. All meaningless rhetoric one can imagine.

When one looks around one finds the tribesmen left all by themselves surrounded by so many enemies. They are the only nation on the face of earth kept away from modernization as a policy of its government, to be used against aggression or as aggressors, to use them as front men for their nefarious activities and to blame them when intending to commit high profile crime. The enemy of tribesmen is the isolation of tribal areas from rest of the country and rest of the world. The enemy is the grinding poverty of the tribesmen with no hope in sight for their children's tomorrow. The government won't even let them make an honest effort for a descent livelihood. The leadership not only failed to provide anything but is squeezing out whatever they can from the tribesmen. Barriers upon barriers are created to ensure they stay poor and vulnerable to exploitation.

The enemy is the lack of opportunities for the tribesmen. There are no education, training or skill development opportunities. International trading routes have not been developed, electricity, roads and other infrastructure has not been provided. Natural resources, marble, coal, copper and others have not been exploited. All Banks and financial institutions are told to stay away from the tribal areas. In Islamabad we talk about cost of doing business, efficiency and competitiveness, we are establishing institutions to increase business efficiency and here in the tribal areas we are not allowed to do business with the neighboring village. Here we ensure no one can have two square meals.

The enemy is the prolonged injustices and discriminatory laws against tribesmen. They are still living as privileged aliens, with no recourse to justice. The enemy is the frustration and desperation caused by lack of development, sixty seven years of criminal neglect of investments in social sectors are coming back to bite.

The enemy is illiteracy, tribesmen are living in darkness. They are misguided cheated and betrayed all because of illiteracy. Even the few pathetic schools have either been blown off or closed down because of militancy. The enemy is the lack of voice of the tribesmen; they have no provincial representation and no local

government. All laws for tribal areas are designed and promulgated by people in Islamabad, who have no clue about them. No local or foreign media is permitted in the tribal areas to bring out the truth. It is not allowed to show the true picture and there is no civil society in the area to speak for their rights.

The enemy is the great divide. Our nation has been divided into provinces and special areas so that we can never get together on one platform or speak with one voice. A conscious effort to make us look smaller than our actual size, to ensure we are just a small minority. The disputes created among tribes have resulted in enmities and bloodshed. No government tried to help resolve major tribal disputes through Jirgas to give the tribes a fresh start even after the Brits left.

The enemy is the bad governance the Political Agents have thrust upon us, whose focus is fleecing the poor tribesmen without giving anything in return. The enemy is the hostile agencies who have planted so many local and foreign terrorists in the garb of Taliban. Agencies who are apparently friends with America but actually want them out of Afghanistan.

The enemy is cultural imperialism. The world wants us to do away with Pukhtunwali, our culture, the ways of the fathers. The government is trying to indianise us by giving us scholarships to schools down country. Others are trying to arabize us by making Mosques and Madrassas for us, persuading us to accept Arab Badoin culture as a religious obligation. Yet others are persuading us to ape the West. Each inducing us away from Pukhtunwali. I wonder why we can't be mainstreamed as Pukhtuns.

The governments propaganda is terrible, every movie, every TV program depict the tribesmen as villains, thieves and terrorists. Every anecdote and joke of stupidity is about the Pukhtuns. The government has taken it on itself to eliminate tribal culture, to mainstream the tribal areas only if indianised. The only pukhto TV channel is owned by Punjabis, they have systematically purged our music and fouled pukhto language.

The enemy is the free world, who made monsters out of our innocent children. Who armed and funded the monster and then just walked away.

Militancy brought the tribal areas into world focus, everyone wanted to know the root cause of militancy and find solutions to it. There came a strong realization that tribal areas need to be mainstreamed and to do so reforms in all sectors needed be introduced. The colonial laws like FCR need to be amended and tribesmen given equal rights. The judiciary, politicians and civil society added their voice to the demand of the tribesmen. Favoring reforms didn't come out of good heart; militancy had started hurting down country.

Sahibzada Imtiaz, an old bureaucrat, was commissioned by federal government in 2003 to review the existing administrative system and give his views on reforms in tribal areas. After detail parley with stakeholders, he recommended administrative,

judicial and economic reforms in tribal areas. Along with Sahibzada Imtiaz report came a wave of reports from national and international bodies all recommending reforms.

But then all the reports are gathering dust. The government was never serious in implementing the recommendations or to resolve the issue of militancy. It is disheartening to learn that people in responsible positions don't know much about the tribal areas. In a town Hall meeting in Islamabad, when questioned by Fayyaz Khan about FCR, Hillary Clinton admitted her ignorance and said, she had no clue about the law; no one ever brought it into her notice.

It was late afternoon when I received a call from Lyn Tracy, Council General at the US consulate in Peshawar, inviting me to dinner the same evening. "We are not issuing invitation cards for security reasons", she told me.

I agreed to attend the dinner and reached the venue at around 8.00 p.m. There were a few invitees, all friends but no guests. Council General informed us that security protocols have delayed the guest and apologized for it. So, we gossiped while waiting for the guest.

To my disbelief the guest was a US Army General. It was late so dinner started almost immediately. The Council General introduced me as a tribesman from North Waziristan and asked me to sit with the General.

During dinner, we had a very frank discussion and I was surprised at the gaps in knowledge of the Army General about Khassadars, Levies and other administrative tools of the tribal areas. The General listened to every word I said about the tribal security apparatus with great attention and asked many questions showing his keen interest. I was amazed, they were sending young men and women in harm's way without basic information about the people they are going to confront. They had rudimentary knowledge about the tribes and their way of life. His desire to know more about tribesmen was one of the reasons I thought to write this book.

David Milliband, then UK's foreign minister, was assured by Governor KPK that by August 2009 he will be taken to Waziristan. I was wondering what impression Milliband must be having when by August Milliband was sweating in the midst of three million IDPs from Swat. This is the kind of knowledge people in responsible positions have about the ground realities.

What choice does the hungry, empty handed tribesman has? When the system is unable to provide, he tramples it, when it discriminates against him he shoots holes into it. That's what he has known. Even if he knows that the first bullet fired is going to hit him, he thinks it will relieve him of his miseries. Let me take my chance, I have nothing to lose but misery. Do we give such a person a lecture on morality or pray for him that he stays out of harm's way?

Po jahan de nangyalo de da dwa kara, Ya be okhre kakarai ya be kamran

shey.

In world of the brave, are two acts, they lose their life or they succeed.

(Push-to verse)



PART V

PUKHTUNWALI PROSCRIBED

CHAPTER 8

PARADISE DESTROYED

WAR DESPOILS A COUNTRY, IT MAKES THE NOBLEST OF ITS people its meanest, thus do wars beget. War means destruction, prolonged war means total destruction.

The prolonged war of the last decade has played havoc with our lives. We lived in a land that was surely our piece of Paradise on earth. Our Paradise has been destroyed. In addition to our sorrows and sufferings, destruction of our land and properties, sights and sounds of Waziristan have been ravaged to extinction and one feels sorry that children will never have the opportunity to enjoy all that was theirs. Life will never be the same.

The destruction witnessed over the last few decades makes it difficult to decide where to start from. There is destruction everywhere, waste, misery and hopelessness. But then, we have to tell our part of the story, the world deserves to know.

Since slaughtering of humans started a decade ago, the area is having the worst drought of its history. There are very few rains, most likely because of the environmental degradation but more so because of the inhuman acts committed. Spring in Waziristan was the most beautiful time of the year, full of activities and festivities. Whatever the age, male or female, they were so committed, they had so much to do.

Weather patterns have changed globally but not as drastically as in these lands. These days spring never comes by, as it use to. No one realizes when the harsh winters ended and summers set in. The snowfalls and spring rains are missing altogether. There are no flowers or foliage on the hills, as there use to be once, all the plants, grasses, shrubs and trees have been uprooted for fuel and fodder by millions of Afghan refugees and their place has been taken by the refugees to make dwellings.

Children haven't seen Shundi gul or Della dancing in the fields and they haven't seen, gems like, wild crocus or daisies on the hillside, they were so prominent, jewels in the wilderness. They don't know Spelazghai, Khapyanga, Garnalli and host of other medicinal plants.

They will never get a chance to see the Oak and Chalghoza (Pine) forests as they

are all gone, right up to Shawal valley, all forests are gone. The owners disposed off whatever little forest was left on private property for economic reasons, as there is no economic activity in the area. The prices of pine nuts soared more than a thousand percent. The nuts people had sacks full in their houses are all gone.

The refugees cleared the hills of trees, shrubs and grasses, whatever little was left was cleared by the militants and the army because they were a security risk, a cover for the adversary laying in ambush. There are no orchards on the way to the village, no blossoms to feast the eyes. The only dust free road in the country spews dust right into one's eyes if caught off guard.

The valleys across Kalinjir where families went for Bagarra and bring loads of firewood and Mazri, where people were afraid to go in search of strayed animals for fear of wild animals are now brown and barren with absolutely no vegetation and no wild animals. Where one couldn't walk through the Mazri there is not a single Mazri leaf. It has not only added to the fuel prices but has also denied women the few extra rupees they earned from making baskets and mats and other items of daily use from Mazri.

The green fields lay brown, barren and thirsty, with stray animals strolling lazily trying to find something they can chew. The top layer of mud in Kharzai is cracked open with the sides of every crack raised in, to form a bowl, as if begging for a drop of water.

There is no smell of fresh grasses or wild flowers and there is no croaking of the toads, buzzing of the bumblebee or singing of the birds. There are no children running after Dragonflies or telling the ladybird to go to Mecca. All, the village orchards, fields and streams have to offer is dust. All the beautiful sights, the sweet smells and soothing sounds are taken over by dust and dirt; there is a deep silence, a silence experienced before a storm.

Migrating birds don't come our way for they have seen killing fields and have changed course for fear of annihilation. In the initial days, when they still came our way, instead of letting the children welcome them back home and cry at them to change formations, the grownups pulled out Kalashnikovs and fired tracer bursts at the birds. They felt so proud doing this, ammunition was cheap and abundant and while the boys fought over the empty shells, they would reload the magazine ready to strike terror in the hearts of the harmless birds. There was so much pride in owning a Kalashnikov and firing tracers, knowing the birds are out of range. Humility was replaced by pride, our values were changing.

Its ages, since the cranes came this way or the waterfowls landed in Tochi. It's so long since Shankessai was seen soaring in the sky above Tochi or land in the dense trees of Palangzai.

So many times I complained, "Maray, O Maray, You have got Turkeys again. I told you not to accept them from anyone".

“What can I do”, she would say, “people bring them, I can't tell them to take them back. They know we don't eat Turkeys yet if they bring them it's their choice”. Women brought eggs of migrating ducks which were laid under a hen to hatch, the ducklings grew with chicks and domestic ducks and in the end, we had our own flock of water fowls. Many people brought us domesticated Chukar and Francolins which roamed freely. Our house was full of birds, Cranes, Pheasants, Partridges and flocks of Turkeys and Ducks, you name it and they were there.

Our days started with the sweet melodies of birds and ended with flocks of crows crowing on treetops announcing nightfall and Morr securing her birds from Jackals.

They are all gone, not only from our house but from every house. They are gone from the orchards and the fields, from the hills and the valleys across the hills. They are gone from Tochi and the skys above Tochi, gone for good. Today, there is no wild life in the wild, as they have been eaten or scared away by millions of hungry refugees. All the Turkeys, Chukar, francolins, water fowls, have vanished; even crows and vultures have disappeared. The wildlife has been guzzled by the Gog and Magogs, by the bombs and missiles, by the hate and violence, merciless and ruthless tempers. The only expertise we have gained in the last three decades is taking life.

The Bulbul³ has stopped singing, for it sings when there is peace and quiet, serenity and contentment. Today there is no peace and no quiet, no serenity or contentment; they are replaced by bomb blasts and bullet bursts, by pain and panic, so, what options are there for the poor Bulbul. It has to sing for that's what a Bulbul does and if it can't sing it will perish. Alas, it couldn't sing and perish, it did.

Young boys gathered to catch quail in the cornfields and after every catch boasted the number of birds. They shared the birds with friends as there were so many. The strong ones were trained to fight; the rest became food, there couldn't be better days. Now there are no cornfields, only weeds and brown patches of grass and dusty pit holes exhibiting scars of what happened in the area.

We searched the skies for new flocks of cranes and water fowls and when we saw one, we followed it. It was funny how we ran from one end of the ground to the other shouting at the cranes high in the sky to change formations. The cranes responded with as much noise as if showing their delight.

No jackals hoot from nearby farms and no visits of Wolves or Cheetahs have been reported in years. No more now, those days are gone. There are no children with jute sacks on their heads, dancing the Jackal marriage dance in the rain. There are no jackals in the wild so the question of a jackal marriage doesn't arise. Of late even the sky has been miserly; it won't rain with clouds all around what to say of rain while the sun shines. No Jackal marriage dance means no gur lolly for the children.

Carcasses of dead animals lay stinking and rotting for weeks on as there are no scavengers to get us rid of them. We have to hold our breath to pass by the Sanzalla,

roses and Jasmin. Places we use to stop for deep breaths to enjoy the sweet smells are vanished forever.

“Badi, Ya Badi, can you ask someone to drag the dead animal and dispose it off somewhere. Breathing has become impossible”.

“Shado, sahib, I will”.

“Don't just leave it there, bury it”, I begged him.

There are no sweet smelling orchards full of blossom and smell of water falling on dry earth. They reminded me of my village wherever I had the pleasure of sensing these scent. All that is replaced by stinking carcasses of skinned and unskinned animals.

Oh my God, what on earth has happened to my beautiful motherland? How much I wish and pray it's just a bad dream. Ya Allah, what sin have we committed to deserve all this.

There are no school going children waiting by the Hujra in the mornings because there are no schools, they have mostly been blown off. The few remaining girl schools are closed indefinitely; they have been out rightly stopped from attending school. Boys' schools have no schedule, since the last few years, they open and close at will. Children don't know when there will be curfew on the road and when they will be allowed.

Every time army convoy moves, mothers hold their breath and pray for safe return of their children. Convoys are attacked without warning and they respond as indiscriminately. Many children never make it back home. They leave for school giggling all morning, finding excuses to make noise and delay getting ready. Their mothers tell them stories, calling them doctors and engineers, bribing them with extra sweets, scolding them and when nothing else worked telling them to shut up and never to speak to her. Many come back never to speak again. The luckier ones lose a limb or two but survive, to live a miserable, dependent life. Young children are blown off in suicide attacks. They are terrorized into mental sickness. Children start screaming when they hear anything that sounds like a jet or a helicopter or artillery. Small children, two or three years of age, talk of bombs and IEDs and being blown off.

Among the schools that are blown off, those for boys might be repaired and reopened at some point in time but those for girls might never come up again. The present three percent literacy rate for women was achieved in sixty years, let's see how many more years will be needed to regain this rate. Another generation of illiterates is in the making, a whole generation of illiterates.

Walking on the frozen lakes, burning Dargas are all gone and forgotten. The lakes have dried and Dargas uprooted.

Women don't sweep and sprinkle rooftops, on summer evenings. No one moves

upstairs to have dinner and sleep on the rooftop in the cool Tochi breeze. Where we saw shooting stars falling from the sky, we have falling stray bullets. We can't sleep outside, on the roof or in the lawn of the Hujra for fear of bullets falling from the sky. Countless have been hit, many of them fatally by stray bullets.

No one appreciates the Tochi breeze because people prefer staying indoors for safety. They prefer hot and humid indoors, without electricity, day or night. No one wants to gamble his life for a few pleasant moments. Children don't see bright stars before going to sleep and it's such a shame that they don't know the old women's charpoy in the sky. They don't know the story and they can't tell the wolf from the sheep.

One wonders if the stars are missing the children on rooftops, who always stared at them from below with their mothers pointing towards the sky, introducing the stars as lifelong partners. So many tales were attributed to the stars, 'how many are they', children asked. 'Equal to the hair on your head', the mothers responded drowsily. 'Can I count them', 'yes go ahead', and they never counted up to ten. Instead of counting sheep they counted stars.

The stars must have got use to looking at children from above, smiling at them, talking about them, blessing them. They must be missing the children, not knowing what stories their mothers were telling them indoors and wondering if the mothers ever mentioned them. One wonders if the stars can do anything about all that has happened, whether they have any plans to make corrections. Astrologists always speak of stars and the way their positions influence us. Its time, they moved into positions to influence events for the better, to line up for peace.

The Karez, have dried up and so have the fields the Karez fed. The farmers who use to irrigate their fields all night are afraid to come out in broad daylight. The lush green fields of Tochi valley give the look of a wasteland. The water level in the village wells has dropped and many have gone dry.

There is no harvesting of fruits and veggies, nothing to bring to the market for sale. Hunger, fear, unemployment and under employment are norms of the day. People are leaving the area because of fear and hunger. The militants hide in the fields to ambush security forces and the security forces react under territorial responsibility, so, having a crop is inviting trouble.

The security forces have issued instructions that crops near roads are security hazard hence there will be no cultivation on road side. In hilly areas, you don't have big fields, by issuing such instructions farmers have been driven out of work. Whatever little farming was left is missed because of the indiscriminate artillery and rocket fire from both sides. The green fields are all ditches and trenches, bare and barren.

The paddy fields full of toads shouting 'Babajee Zindabad' and crickets making noise all night are barren and quite. The stage is all set for a long miserable famine.

Beautiful green valleys have been turned into a lunar landscape.

Visit to the tribal areas is not a choice anymore. Security personnel are deployed at checkpoints on the main route to ensure no one carries weapons and to make tribesmen miserable. The unfrequented routes are neither manned nor monitored. People have to go through the ordeal of checking at five places by security personnel, not normal checking but as done by occupational forces. Ordinary people using the normal routes are unarmed whereas the criminals, who use the unfrequented routes, have all the arms and ammunition they can carry.

While going to Waziristan commuters are asked to disembark the vehicle, first at Darra Adam Khel in Kohat Frontier Regions (FR) then at the friendship tunnel and finally at three different points on entering Bakka Khel tribal area. Throughout the route, they have loaded and ready to fire machine guns pointing at them. An untimely sneeze to a soldier could lead to an unintended squeeze of the trigger, costing lives.

Around twenty soldiers man every checkpoint; they are in full combat gear, wearing bullet proof jackets, helmets, with rifles in hands. Some search people; others search vehicles with gunpowder detectors and vehicle base screening mirrors.

Passengers are asked to raise hands and place them in clear view holding out their original national ID cards. They are instructed to walk some three hundred feet while the vehicle is driven empty. The security personnel search them, question them and check their IDs and search the vehicle. After being satisfied, they are allowed to board. The same exercise is repeated five times on the route and on the way back.

Children start crying the moment they see security personnel while the elders try to comfort them. Men women and children, are thoroughly searched. Pukhtun women searched by men, rather disgraced by them. What a shame, so unfortunate.

On curfew days, people cannot travel on the road. Many were killed because of their ignorance; they don't know the meaning of curfew. So, even if they know that curfew is imposed, they won't know what to do.

The Political Agents, their families and their bags of money, travel by helicopter. The army officers and their belongings travel by helicopters.

The pleasure of going to the village has become a painful ordeal. You can't argue with the security personnel, they don't care if you are traveling with a dead body or a dying patient. They have to observe their protocols. An army convoy was passing near Sheikhadam. Mirakob shah, an innocent person, hardly twenty years of age, mentally challenged, peeped from the roof of his house to have a look at the passing convoy and 'bang'. As if the man was ready and waiting for him, one clean shot in the head and Mirakob shah was collateral damage. An unarmed man, on the roof of his own house killed in cold blood for no reason.

Yaqoob shah, an elderly man was going to Miranshah bazaar with his two children on Miranshah- Ghulam Khan Road. Near the Chungi, on the outskirts of the

town, an Improvised Electronic Device (IED) exploded when the army convoy was passing and they retaliated with indiscriminate firing. Yaqub Shah and his two children took shelter by hiding in a nearby street. When the firing stopped and the area was secured, Yaqub shah peeped from the street to see if he could come out and proceed towards Miranshah. As if they had seen some one taking shelter in the street and were ready and waiting. As Yaqub shah brought his head out to see, bang, one clean shot, blowing off his head and Yaqub shah, still holding the hands of his children, was marched into eternity. His children were in a shock, they couldn't comprehend what happened.

The children were covered in blood and brains of Yaqub shah, they saw their beloved father, head shattered, lying in a pool of blood with no one to help them. Sitting by their motionless father, motionless children holding each other tight, afraid the same might happen to them, hoping their father will live, knowing he is dead, wishing their mom was there.

The security forces follow their own protocols, during battle they shoot anything that is moving, so no one could come to help the innocent children, to wipe their faces of the blood and brains of their father and hold them, to comfort them. For hours the terrorized children sat in a pool of blood, by the dead body of their father, eyes wide open, not able to cry, not able to speak. They couldn't clean themselves, couldn't speak to each other just held each other tight. Innocent angels were made to undergo the trauma of their life.

They moved only when the father moved and the father wasn't moving any more. It was ages before people reached the children and relieved them from their agony. They were able to cry, only when they reached the lap of their wailing mother.

These two persons I know personally, they belonged to my village, my Khel and both were killed in cold blood. They were both unarmed at the time they were shot. One clean shot and they were collateral damage. The job can be repeated any time anywhere by militants and security forces, no questions asked.

The last time I visited the village, the road was empty, there was no traffic, no livestock, no stray animals, there was an empty road ahead of us and a ball of dust behind us. It was all so lonely. Ah, I missed the crazy driving, saluting people enroute, playing music at full blast and playing baby sitter for the last few yards till we reached home. At last when I reached the village it was so quite. The land was all brown and barren with dust and debris blown around. The whole atmosphere was so sad; the main street that use to be full of people and livestock was empty, littered with debris. The Lakhtai was stinking.

There were no children running behind us, no one came to claim their sweets, they have all shifted elsewhere. How much I missed them, all washed up, wearing clean crispy clothes, their necks white with talcum powder, putting up their best behavior while waiting for us. Once we arrived, the noise, the hassle, the pushing

and shoving and coming to shake hands with me, all of them, one at a time. Where are the children who ran around breaking the news of our arrival? I must be dreaming. Could I imagine this, ever? Children are angels and all the angels have taken flight from my village, now a cursed village.

As I exited the vehicle, a gust of wind spewed dirt and debris at my face and I had to close my eyes and turn my face away. Even nature doesn't like us anymore, we are uninvited. As if hate and despair are left to rule, as if love and affection have been banished from earth.

When I entered the house Morr was waiting in the verandah with my sisters but it was all so quite. The dusty cold wind started scorning us so we went indoors. Winters were always harsh in the village but this time they were inhospitable rather hostile.

The scene in the Hujra was the same. It was dark and cold; there were no lights, dry leaves made a hissing sound swirling in the veranda. There was a lantern in the main room and a few youngsters sitting around a dying fire. It was all so quite. No one had dinner in the Hujra, no one to share, no one to talk to.

There is no point in visiting a dead village, a place where only death and destruction rules. Human life is not sacred anymore. Innocent people are made to suffer without any fear or shame. They kill innocent civilians without a fair trial, without a chance to prove their innocence. They are all together in the kill.

Hujra is the first training school and the elders earnestly wanted the children to attend it. You learn culture, etiquettes, business and all. Alas, it is no more the same. The elders are not there to lead and oversee activities; no one preserves honor and dignity, no issues of Khels and tribe are discussed. Hujra boasted the best beddings and sparkling clean utensils, overflowing with water, fire wood and other services, a symbol of the unity and strength of the Khel and family. It is not so anymore. The inmates of the Hujras are hungry and cold in the heart of Pukhtun land where Milmastia is a basic pillar of Pukhtunwali. There were no Inns or taverns in the tribal areas, you could just walk into any Hujra and all arrangements for the night were made, even for accompanying women. For now Milmastia is out and without a vital organ Pukhtunwali is surely going to die.

Hujras have become dens for gambling, smoking pot and all. The elders felt offended if they knew someone had a pack of cards on him. Now there is active gambling going on. Militants come and stay as long as they want, they ask the surrounding houses to feed them and if they like the place, they might prolong their stay to their hearts content.

There are no Bagarras to gather fuel for the Hujra. With the elders gone the Hamsayas and others don't really care. They don't want uninvited guests so even the manageable are ignored. There is no food for the wayfarer, no charity for the poor and no fuel to warm the Hujra. Knowing that nothing is available, the wayfarer

doesn't stop by. If unfortunately someone happens to, there is no warm food, no firewood for hot water or warming, so the wayfarer might as well spend the long winter nights, hungry and cold.

There are no visits of storytellers or poets to the Hujras for a nice warm all night story. No excited boys running around, filling their pockets with chalgoza, dry mulberry or kishmish, telling their mothers not to close the door as they will be late. No late sittings on any pretext whatsoever. Only we know what our children have missed. The time to listen to stories has passed and for them it will never come back.

While going to the village, there were colored flags on some graves fluttering in the breeze but now it seems all the graves have flags. Flags indicating graves of martyrs. Majority of the graves are those of war dead, an indication of the numbers of casualties this area has endured. The sun has faded the colors of the flags and the dust has made them look dirty. The route to the village, which used to be bright and colorful, is dull and gloomy, like the hearts and minds of those living around. The dirty, colorless flags look as if the martyrs are not happy, as if telling us that they were cheated. As if they trusted the wrong guys and sacrificed their lives for no good cause.

Ways of the Infidals

The militants have declared everything important to us un-Islamic. Our culture, our education, our way of life, right up to the Islam we practiced, everything has been declared un-Islamic and unacceptable. They are imposing their own ways, a culture alien to us in the name of religion.

“They are the ways of the infidels”, they say. The ways of our fathers, something we were so proud of, something we romanced with all our lives have been declared the ways of the pagans, the infidels. No discussion, no opinion and no convincing, they say it and that's how it is. The romance we had with perpetuating the way of our fathers is un-Islamic, unacceptable.

The tribal life revolves around Mashar. The militants have very systematically eliminated every Mashar in target killing. Almost six hundred elders, important Chiefs and not so important elders, from all the tribes and all the agencies have been killed.

Masharan eliminated in target killing include Malik Fareed Ullah Khan, Chief of Ahmed Zai Wazir, who served as federal minister and was killed on the main Indus Highway. Malik Shah Jehan of Bajaur Agency was coming to attend a grand Jirga with Prime Minister at Governor House Peshawar when he was ambushed on the main road.

Dum and drum were the focal point for tribe's mobilization. Drum was not just

for singing and dancing it was central for all tribal activity. The militants have forbidden drum beating as un-Islamic, without any distinction of purpose and occasion. All drums have been destroyed and the Dum has been banished. With the Dum and drum gone all community-based activities are affected.

In better times when Dum stopped beating Dhole, for a cup of tea or whatever, girls started clapping and singing in one voice, “is your Dhole damaged or are you tired while we dance or why have you silenced the dhole”. Alas, now they have to live without the Dhole. Age-old traditions, Dhole and dance, are gone.

There is no way to mobilize the community. There are no Cheegha parties going out in search of robbers and bandits. Dum had free access to every house but now, since he is not family, he cannot enter any house. He performed many important services, when he left the area all those services are left unattended.

There are no festivals, religious or seasonal; they have been declared improper and objectionable by the militants. Singing and dancing has out rightly been banned, replaced by Jihadi anthems. One wonders what festivities can be had without music and dancing?

There is no festival of flowers any more. Yes, the Gulluno nandara is prohibited but even if it wasn't, where are the flowers? There are no flowers in the villages or the hills or the valleys beyond the hills. How can you have a flowers festival without flowers? Even if flowers could be arranged, women are prohibited from going out to collect them, to make them into posies, necklaces and armbands, to shower flowers on unknown men. No love stories will ever be born in Darpa Khel because no one is sending flowers or special bouquets or perfumed silk scarves to anyone. The young will not be able to show their passion in a Nandara.

The area reserved for women during Nandara stares at the emptiness from its lonely solitude. The areas specified for men are even worse; they don't exist anymore. Probably that's why spring has refused to come this way.

There is no Ballodukky and no Gowasht. How much children longed for Ballodukky, even when they couldn't pronounce the word they knew the festival and anxiously waited for it, asking mothers, “When will the days of coloring sticks and decorating the doll come, when will we sing to every house and gather gifts”?

“After collections”, (collecting harvest) they would say and children waited for collection time.

There is no happiness, nothing good, nothing special has happened for which people need thanks giving or need to felicitate anyone. There are no get together of families as they have all scattered, beyond visits. There are no people in the houses, for whom one can pray and ask for blessings and plenty. There are no harvests from which to claim a share. People are starving and one would sound ridiculous asking the starving to give something for marry making.

The long colorful sticks, the punishment meted to the notorious dogs, women trying to recognize children and passing comments on them and their families, are all banished. Girls can't go out during day; going out at night is out of question. Pagan customs they call them.

God has mysterious ways, since the festivals of Balloducky and Gowasht have been banished the seasons in which the festivals were held never come, it is always summers or winters. No thanks giving activities, Ah, as if, the Merciful and Bountiful has forgotten us. As if, we have been forsaken, cursed, never to be graced any favor again.

The ferocious dogs don't bark at anyone, as if they are not interested. Rather they are happy they have seen someone, instead of scaring him away they are glad to have company. The new religion prohibits having dogs in the house. Dogs that were treated as members of tribal family have to be shown out, for angels don't visit the house having dogs.

Women who sat on Jirgas and Marakas, who challenged and even threatened men on issues of interest to them, who carried and even used the family guns, have been locked up, no education, no health, no rights and no voice, nothing for the lesser beings. Women had almost equal rights to men and if by any chance a woman became head of family, she enjoyed all the rights a man had. Militants have denied them any rights, social or economic.

Women and children are always the biggest sufferers of wars. Poor souls, like always, they got the roughest deal. For them leaving the house, offering flowers or garlanding unknown males is unimaginable. Singing and dancing with Dhole is banned even in the privacy of their homes. Singing is forbidden in family occasions like childbirth or marriage or other occasions. Even folk songs and anthems are forbidden, praise of Allah and the Prophet (pbuh) is prohibited in female voice. No matter what, no outsider should hear their voice. They had the flashiest clothes, decorated with silver ornaments, getting all the attraction when they moved. The sound of their decorations and their anklets announced their arrival way ahead of them.

The all-powerful, equal partner has been converted into baby producing machines with no rights or privileges, no wishes or desires. They are cold meat to provide pleasure to the lustful. Women are not allowed to move freely, they cannot indulge in any kind of economic activity. Every act of women is closely monitored; a single step out from the normal and she had it.

The Arab Baduin culture of women bashing in public places, in front of an audience has replaced Pukhtunwali. Gone are the days when no one could dare look at Pukhtun's woman. Women worked shoulder to shoulder with men in their fields and homes, at times worked more. They were fully involved in harvesting, packing and safekeeping of the harvest. They helped their men folk in construction, grazing

livestock and watching orchards in lean times. All these activities, if any, are left to men. Women who wore bullet belts and used guns have to be properly clad. They are banned from leaving their houses without a mehram⁴ and if found without one they get a beating of their life. They are banned from going to the graveyards to pray for their loved ones. Those sponsoring militancy bought and sold women like cattle. They had no respect for their women why will they respect ours.

People with women and children always had the first right. A person with women and children could not be stopped; Badal could not be exacted from him at such time, no one ever kidnapped or snatched vehicle from someone carrying women and children. Now women are kidnapped, shot at and treated as scum. Poor women like polio workers and eleven year olds like Malala are shot point blank. There is no code of honor for the cowards.

We never heard of stoning or cutting nose and ears of a human being. Lashing, stoning, hanging and slaughtering in public places are the new ceremonies to watch and be awed. You can be next they tell you, learn from the mistakes of others. When the show is over the attendees can't move, as if paralyzed.

Militants have caged (married) girls by force, terrorizing and threatening them for their lives and those of their loved ones. Husbands lost their lives because at some point in time the wife's hand was asked by a good for nothing bum and her parents had refused him. These good for nothing Thugs joined the militants and killed the husband to marry the girl and avenge the disgrace. A few girls preferred suicide to marrying the killer of her husband. Many left the area in the middle of the night to avoid a fate worse than death.

Still there are a few unfortunate ones, who had nowhere to go, who had no choice but to succumb to the lust of these rogues. I can't call it marriage by force, as there is no such thing.

Boys have been scared away, told to keep praying nothing bad happens to them. Don't expect any good; just make sure nothing bad happens. There is no happiness but please stay away from harm's way.

The marriages, in which festivities continued for days are over in hours. There is no Wero in a marriage; the decorated gates to welcome the Wero are not there anymore. Masked men stop the Wero and ask for monies unbelievable, unbearable and unacceptable. Rocks have replaced the gates, blocking the road to blackmail people. The same happens at the birth of a child as if nothing happened, nothing to write home.

Dead bodies of those dear are desecrated, pulled out from graves, hung from trees. This heinous act is committed to let people know that there is no peace for ordinary mortals even after death. Who on earth will allow or sanctify slaughtering of humans, no matter from which religion, cast or color. The terrorist do so, in the name of God and religion.

In Pukhtunwali it is intolerable to fire at a person's face. If anyone does it intentionally, it is condemned and disapproved. People respect the dead, pay regular homage to their graves and pray for their forgiveness and happiness in the hereafter.

During pitch battles, there are brief cease-fires to collect the dead, because if not properly arranged on time it becomes difficult to arrange the dead body. Here the terrorist kills a man, throws him in an ugly position and then leaves a paper by the dead that the person is punished for spying and no one is allowed to touch his body till such and such time. No one dares to disobey.

Jirgas and Marakas are banned, declared un-Islamic. Militants have scared Maliks away never to call or attend a jirga. They started deciding all issues on their own. They don't require any expertise or consultations, whatever they say is the law. Religion is misinterpreted at will and decisions are taken by the hate spreading Mullahs. The Masharan who upheld Pukhtunwali are replaced by Mullahs who interpret alien culture as religion and replacement of Pukhtunwali. Now we have no dispute resolution mechanism. Every dispute ultimately leads to enmity.

All government efforts are misguided; non-tribal functionaries encourage formation of tribal Lashkars. The international community is so excited by the idea, not realizing they are supporting war. By supporting formation of Lashkars at tribe level, violence is being promoted. Our government and the International community want to convert innocent civilians into combatants and fight amongst themselves. They did this during Afghan Jihad and are doing so again.

Nikkat has been proscribed, now the militants decide every ones share. The share earned by the forefathers through struggle and sacrifice and practiced unchallenged for centuries is gone. The determined shares have been discarded while new portions have not been determined. The responsibilities are not according to one's capacity nor are the profits, according to ones needs. You get whatever you can lay hands on.

Share is not determined by tribal divide any more, it is determined by affiliation to militant groups. The political administration has submitted to all these distortions because if it refuses to go by the militants divide the militants will stop all development work and the administration loses all funds. At the end of day, those who had no worth have become worthy, the noble are disrespected and disregarded.

There is no Panah, anyone wanted to the militants has to be produced. All Panah is with the militants. The only Panah one can get other than with militants is to leave the area. That's why the Masharan have left. Those who were to give Panah have none for themselves. Pukhtunwali without Panah is not Pukhtunwali.

Tiga, is privilege of the militants and once they give a decision, like it or not that's it, there is no appeal and they don't need to hear the other side of the story. The militants are mere Thugs; they are not scholars, so the verdicts they pass have nothing to do with justice.

It's not only the instruments of Pukhtunwali that are lost, the language, respect and honor have all been lost. Pukhto, a complete code of life is lost altogether.

The culture we shared with our Indian, Iranian, Turkish and Central Asian kinsmen is unacceptable. We should have a pan Islamic culture, more akin to the Arabs. Our history starts from Qais, we needn't know our history prior to Qais, forget the Buddhist and Hindu or the Greeks and Jews ancestors, they were pagans.

No matter, what we do or say the killings will take place. It seem as if the killings are to make sacrifice to some hungry god of the unknowns. As if the faceless enemy has to kill to feast something they are hiding from the world. Are they nourishing something like Dajjal or an Alien life form, the information of which they can't share with the world and are waiting for the opportune time to bring him out? One fails to understand, if people agree to all their conditions, accept them as undisputed authority, tremble at their sight and surrender all their belongings then why should people get killed? Why kill innocent children? Why terrorize people? Is there something people don't know? There must be something which people don't know yet.

One fine morning they might bring out this 'Whatever' or precursor of the 'Whatever' it is they are hiding and announce:

“O chosen people of Waziristan, O children of Karlan, rejoice, for your blood and flesh has not gone in vain. The great 'Whatever' chose you 'the chosen ones' as his feed”, probably then we might curse ourselves for being so bitter about it. Why did we, those left alive, not sacrifice ourselves and how lucky are those who gave their blood and flesh to the mighty 'Whatever'. How could we not have understood? How could our selfishness blind us to an extent that we couldn't see it coming? We should have drawn inferences from events. Why will anyone in the whole wide world kill innocent children? Why would every one unite against us? Why would they kill us for no fault? There was nothing common among them, no common cause except the desire to serve the 'Whatever'. Ah, but we thought we are mistreated.

Such things do happen in movies and anything that happens in movies becomes a reality after a while. This is the farthest my imagination can go. Other than this I don't find any reason good enough to kill innocent women and children day in and day out, indiscriminate and without any remorse. Above all, why slaughter and bleed them?

Every party is in for the kill, kill and kill. Militants kill, security forces kill and US and NATO kills. Why kill? Is this the only solution? Has it improved the situation? How much more killing will be needed to improve things? Can none from the sane world come up with any other solution?

When one looks around tribesmen are total losers, they have lost their livelihood, their way of life, their culture, their environment and above all their honor and pride, Pukhtunwali. We have lost all their friends and their trust, they all think tribesmen are terrorists.

The entire world thinks tribesmen are terrorists, Pakistanis down country think so but above all the Afghans think tribesmen are terrorists. The entire leadership of West and America believes that the source of all militancy is the tribal area. They have declared the tribesmen terrorist. The policies of the partners in the war against terror have depicted tribesmen as terrorists around the world.

Every Pukhtun, in any part of the world is suspected to be a terrorist or a Talib. They categorically say that 'Taliban are Pukhtuns and they have family ties with each other, they are all interconnected'. A whole nation has been alienated and is being destroyed, in the twenty first century, in front of the whole world rather with the whole world together in the kill.

No one is even trying to differentiate between the militants and the tribesmen. Tribes are targeted just because of their proximity to the war zone, a geographical misfortune. In their enthusiasm to fight terrorists, the partners in war against terror are fighting a war of extermination against the tribes. Whole tribes are being wiped out; entire villages are laid waste, changed into lunar landscape by the Pakistan army. Hundreds of thousands IDPs are on the move because of indiscriminate military actions. Tribesmen are dubbed terrorists, their women and children are being slaughtered and shamed in front of the world.

The tribes are totally unrelated to militant politics. No Jirga has ever sanctified terrorism, no Jirga has ever condoned militancy as Jihad, why then are the tribesmen considered militants or friends of militants? Why such indiscriminate annihilation of whole villages and tribes? A whole way of life is rooted out under the pretext of the war against terror. But that's not all, the worst is that terrorists see tribesmen as sympathizers of the government and the US led coalition forces.

The tribesmen have suffered most at the hands of militancy, the world should sympathize rather than blaming and bashing them.

We the proud tribesmen, the proud Pukhtuns are not terrorists, rather we are the ones terrorized, the ones suffering. When army was busy ruling the country and the agencies were bribing politicians, Indians were stealing our water; they were bringing the war to us, to the tribal areas. This time we didn't go to Kashmir to fight, the fighting came to us from Kashmir. *India has very skillfully brought the proxy war between India and Pakistan from the Indian held Kashmir to our tribal areas. Apparently, they have beaten Pakistan in its own game.*

Pukhtunwali has been destroyed systematically, it was weakened long before 9/11 by pitching against religion but since then it has altogether been scrapped. Our sleeping government doesn't have a new administrative system to replace the old. There is no tribal way of life, the ways of the fathers and there is no new system of administration to replace it.

Even a jungle and the oceans live by laws of nature, the stronger eats the weaker, the big fish eats the small. In tribal areas, even the law of the jungle is not there, it is

worse than the jungle.

Our lands were called Yaghistan when there was no semblance of civilization, when everything was free for all. We heard about 'Yaghistan' from the storytellers, but we never in our wildest imaginations thought we will have the opportunity to live in Yaghistan.

The storyteller dramatized Yaghistan so much that we use to wonder how fearsome such a place must be, people killing each other, looting at will, no Mashar, no control, he who has power has all the authority. It was full of intrigue every person is an opportunist and waiting for his chance. The word of the strongest is the law. The one strong today is hanged tomorrow because he is betrayed and someone else is stronger. Yaghistan is a place with total freedom to do whatever you can, whether religion, Rawaj, humanity or law allows it or not. Don't worry about anything; if you can do it, go for it. Just do it.

"Khan Tartar Khan rode in to the village with his men", the storyteller would say, "the whole village hid behind closed doors, fearing the tyranny of Khan Tartar Khan".

We looked at each other in disbelief, how can a whole village hide behind closed doors? How can there be no man to challenge him and his men? How can he pick the most beautiful girl in the village by force and everyone in the village say nothing? These things were beyond comprehension just a few years back but now, we have seen all this for ourselves.

Militancy in the tribal areas has been debated too much. There are as many opinions as there are scholars. If anyone tries to understand the issue, ask too many questions or even think of an attempt to resolve the issue he is putting himself in harm's way. Many give free advice, to stay away from the issue of militancy before you become collateral damage. They are right in their place because events show that whoever has tried to understand the issue or tried to play any role in resolving it have unfortunately been harmed by the faceless enemy, harmed, like being eliminated.

I tell friends who want to keep quiet, what Baba told me, what he would narrate on such occasions, the anecdote of Landai the Ox.

There was a man in a village who had a small piece of land on which he use to work. He had a well-built, handsome Ox, Landai. Landai ploughed his land and bred cows un-tiring. The man was very proud of how hard working and strong Landai was and would never tire telling stories of gorgeous Landai which he loved no less than a family member.

Time went by, one day the man had to go out of village for some work. He advised his wife to take good care of Landai and never to let him out of her sight.

The wife tried her best to ensure that their prized possession is well looked after, once the man left the village. She promised to herself, that when her husband comes

back, Landai will be smarter, well groomed and well looked after.

Misfortune strikes unannounced, it was hardly a week since the man left the village, when to the bad luck of the woman Landai strayed and didn't return home. The poor woman ran from village to village, north to south, east to west, asking people if anyone came across Landai but as fate will have it, no one had seen Landai. The search went on for many days without any luck. The woman cried and wailed and sent messages far and near hoping to hear news of Landai. She spent funds, she had saved for rainy days, sending neighbors around the area in search of Landai but as if the earth had opened and swallowed Landai there was no news of the Ox. After trying for weeks on to find Landai, the woman at last gave up and waited for the day her husband will return. She cursed herself wondering what her husband will think of her.

Months later, when the man returned to the village, the first thing he saw was the empty place of Landai. He was not there and wasn't to be seen around.

The woman was sad for the Ox and now she was sad for her husband. She was sad because she knew how much her husband loved Landai and she could imagine how unhappy and hurt he would be to know the fate of Landai. The woman started crying and told him the whole story, how Landai didn't return home, how she went to every village searching for Landai. She sent out people to search for Landai and she tried her best for weeks on to find Landai, sobbing all the while. You told me to look after one thing and I failed you in that, she said cursing herself.

The man didn't hesitate for a moment, without waiting for water or food he got up from his seat. The woman looked at him, wondering what he was up to. "Bring me my gun", he said, "I have to go out to search Landai". The woman tried to explain that she searched every possible place and it is months since Landai is missing. "There is no point in going to search for him but if you still think you should, do so the next day. You are tired from travelling and need food and rest".

The man said, "Nothing doing", he picked up his gun went eastwards, fired aerial shots in a village. People gathered around him asking what the matter was. He asked if they had seen Landai, his Ox. They all said they had heard of his loss but none had seen the Ox. He went to every village in the east, asking people if they had seen Landai but got the same response.

Then he went westwards, fired aerial shots in every village and asked if anyone had any news about Landai his Ox but got the same reply. He ran north and he ran south firing aerial shots in every village and asking everyone he came across if anyone had any clue or any news about Landai his Ox. But there was no news and no clue hence nothing to share. By nightfall, the man returned home, tired and broken with sadness.

His wife brought him water and food and tried to comfort him.

“I told you”, she said, “we had done all that we could to find Landai, we all loved him and his loss was a great loss”.

“Ya, I know”, the man said with a deep sigh, “I am sure you did your best to find him but this much I owed him. For the services he rendered, for the pride he brought to my house, he deserved, at least one effort from me. This much I owed him”.

The man knew his effort was not going to bear any fruit but he thought, he owed one last effort, no matter how feeble, to Landai. He was sure everyone tried their best to find Landai but was he going to let it pass or he also had to do his bit.

I have to tell my story to the world, at least this much I owe to my land that gave me so much. I consider it my duty to at least let the world know our plight, how we have been mistreated, by all in whom the tribesmen reposed their confidence. To let the world know what people of tribal areas are enduring and what they think of events happening around. We know what the world thinks about the tribesmen but I have to let the world know what the tribesmen think about them. I am duty bound to make an effort to remove the misconceptions the world has about the tribesmen and correct the wrong impression that has been intentionally created for the world.

We, the tribesmen, sons and daughters of Waziristan, we are not terrorists. We love our people, we care for them and we desire the same for the entire world. We love our way of life and we will not give it up for anything. We will never become Indians or Arabs, we are too proud to do so.

Never to Return

It was a bright sunny morning, we sat in the sun surrounding Baba, resting on his charpoy. Afzal asked, “Baba what was that problem with Sheikha, a Hindu convert, when her son started Salah (compulsory prayers)”?

Baba gave out a burst of laugh, pulled himself up to sit straight, cleared his throat while shaking his head. “Sheikha”, Baba got lost in thoughts, “There was this Hindu girl, Sheikha, who converted to Islam. She married, had children”, Baba said, trying to adjust his position. “Her eldest son had started Salah (entered adulthood). You know when boys start five time prayers, the Dum is ready with his drum and jashan starts right away but it wasn't so with Sheikha's son. There was no Dhole this time”.

Sheikha, came to my house with sweets and said, “I bring good news, my son has started praying” and presented the sweets. It was a pleasant early summer evening; I had just arrived home.

“Your son has started praying and there is no drum beat, why is it so? Baba asked accepting the sweets.

“I am a poor widow having no relatives”, Sheikha said (her Hindu relatives had

dumped her), “I don't have family to celebrate with, so, there is no point in asking the Dum to beat the drum”.

“Why do you say so, we are your family”, Baba said, laughing heartily looking at all of us sitting around him. We smiled back acknowledging his greatness and humility.

“I immediately called the Dum and the drumbeat started. We went through the village beating Dhole, stopping at every Khel to announce that Sheikha's son has started praying, so there will be Jashan which everyone will attend. Jashan for Sheikha's son will be seven evenings I declared (normal Jashan for child starting prayers is three evenings). If anyone fails to turn up I will never attend any of his revelry. We completed round of the village before sunset and were ready for Jashan after supper”.

“The whole village turned up for Sheikha's jashan and for seven evenings we danced to our heart's desire. All arrangements were on me and they were better than any. We called the professional dancers, the ones who jump over the drummers while spinning. People only need an excuse to dance but in Sheikha's Jashan we danced from our hearts. I danced as if it was my own child's party. We swayed and swirled, we spun and jumped, we danced in circles, we danced in lines, in pairs and all together. We clapped and laughed and hooted and shouted for no apparent reason. There was so much excitement everyone wanted to make the revelry special. The weather was pleasant, the summer night was young and engrossing, the sky was bright, full of stars, the village was washed silver by the almost full moon and Tochi breathed a cool breeze. As if the angels were celebrating with us.

“Though worn and faded, Sheikha wore her best clothes and her newest chadder. I made her sit near Damman where everyone could see her. She was a chief guest receiving praise and prayers from the whole village felicitating her”. Baba laughed biting at his prayer beads, wiping his nose. “Poor Sheikha, she didn't know what to do, she could neither cry nor laugh, she couldn't speak, like a newly caged bird she just moved restless, praying for the people all the time. No matter what people said to her she responded with the same prayer”.

Baba was glowing with excitement recalling those times, shaking his head, he took off his cap, then put it on and then took it off, we kept on asking and he kept on talking, adjusting himself in the charpoy, most of the time repeating what he had just said.

“I told Sheikha”, Baba said, pointing his finger, “that you are my family and in future you should be present in every function of my house and invite me to every program of your house. Never think you don't have anyone, we are one family. Poor Sheikha, she was so over whelmed she started crying. She tried her best not to but she couldn't hold it anymore”. Baba shook his head, “she started crying out of sheer excitement”, he murmured to himself, “poor Sheikha, so excited”, and tears rolled

down Baba's cheeks.

“Those were good times”, Baba said, wiping the tear of his chin and cleaning his nose, “There was so much trust, so much confidence and care. People weren't so selfish and believed in sharing whatever little they had. People loved each other looked after them. We achieved so much together, so many Bagarras, making a small one room house for newlyweds, building a mosque, bringing wood even plowing and harvesting land together. People were truthful and sincere. We talked straight and believed others are doing so. We didn't have much to do with the government but we trusted in whatever the administration told us. We did what the administration asked us. We considered ourselves honorable people, respecting those in charge”.

Inside the four walls, every family is closer and more concerned for each other today than ever before. But outside, the world is showing its worst forms. Things are practically out of hands; the faceless enemy is all the more aggressive. There is fear all around, everyone is afraid, for himself and for his loved ones. There is fear in the house, the mosque and in the fields, while going to the shop or coming from job, the only thing common is fear.

There are no human values; there is no decency, no regard of Mashar with Kashar, no love for children and no respect for women. Fear, hate and violence dance in the empty streets, they come in unannounced and they don't leave as if they intend to stay for eternity. Like the war dance, danced for ages to get rid of all human weaknesses and to gather courage, faith, and loyalty, whenever the tribesmen faced a strong adversary. Yes, just like the war dance, fear, hate and violence are dancing back at us, all around us. The enemy has disgraced and dishonored any and every person in the area. Barbarism of no parallels is unleashed on innocent people. How or why, no one cares to know.

The intentions of our leadership are clear; they have declared the masked men an asset to the country. Our government has been accused of supporting these groups, especially the ones in North Waziristan. The government maintains strategic depth as the corner stone of its national security policy. All these indicate that militancy is here to stay for some time.

Masked men are abducting, rich and poor, Wazir and Daur, Afghani and Pakistani, killing them for no apparent reason. The security agencies are doing the same, without any distinction. There is no count of the killings in drone attacks. All one can do is avoid getting in harm's way.

It was a lazy morning, nothing much was going on since we were confined to stay indoors. Going out is risky so we avoid it. Living in such fear was not acceptable so we decided to move the family to Peshawar. Resting in his charpoy Baba was surrounded by women. I occupied one of the chairs in front of the charpoy. The sun was up but there was no light or heat, a yellow ball in a dull grey sky. There was no wind but a low breeze made the dry leaves dance around from one corner to the other

and helped a few dusty leaves fall from the trees. “Baba is going with me to Peshawar”, I announced to the women. All of them knew already but they showed surprise. There is no electricity here; the roads are blocked by curfew day in and day out. Baba would be more comfortable in Peshawar.

Baba didn't like the suggestions at all. He stopped rolling his beads, stretched them as if he was going to pull the string apart, “I think I am better off here, in my own charpoy. I am very comfortable and don't need any more comfort. I am not interested in leaving the village; the weather is fine so even without electricity I am comfortable. I don't go out so curfew or no curfew it doesn't matter”. He pulled himself up against the Takia, removed his cap and started looking around as if asking for support, some support.

Baba looked at the sky and looked at me and he looked at the others surrounding him, he took a deep sigh and shaking his head he said, “Once we leave the village we will never be able to return to our own land, I have seen many leave before us”, he said. “Many left before us, they were wise people and they never returned. They could never return. Once we leave we will never be able to return even if we want to. We are no stronger or wiser than the ones who left before us. They could never return”, Baba repeated to himself. “Leaving the village is not a good idea, rather it's no option at all. We stay on and fight out whatever comes at us, sickness or anything”. He was making restless movements shaking his head helplessly and he looked at me as if saying, “Don't do this”.

“The whole lot is not leaving”, I said, “Many are staying back. We are evacuating only the sick and old because if someone falls sick and there is curfew then they will undergo unnecessary trouble, it's a temporary arrangement”.

Baba looked at me with so much pain in his eyes, “When the Hindus were leaving for India at the time of partition they also left many behind hoping that the ones left behind will be their link with each other and with the land of their ancestors. They thought it was a matter of a few years and they will return but they never did, they couldn't. They were wise people, they had seen the world, they knew what they were doing. It was difficult for the ones who stayed back to pull along with us. No matter how much we looked after them and how much we cared for them, they just wanted to leave. They felt they were a small minority and will be annihilated either by destroying their way of life or by converting them by force.” “We didn't bother much”, he continued, “if they want to leave it's their call, it was their decision. It wasn't a person or a family; it was a whole community that wanted to leave. Those were volatile times and whatever happened to anyone, no matter how far, it scared the Hindus, till a time came that the ones left behind also decided to leave us, leave the land of their fathers”. Baba took a deep breath, “We showed weakness, I think. We shouldn't have allowed the first batch of Hindus to leave. This was their land. We lived together for ages, in peace and harmony. The two communities had accepted each other into co-existence. Had we been able to persuade them to stay back things

would have been different. We should have persuaded them. We should have been wiser”.

“They were afraid of what other Hindus had done to Muslims, they feared reprisal”, I said.

“The behavior of Hindus in Delhi and Mumbai might be different but those living with us were fine people. We didn't have any problems with them or because of them. They were an integral part of our lives, our next of kin. There were contradictions in what we said and what we did. I think our going to Kashmir and fighting for Pakistan army scared them”. Baba said shaking his head in regret. “If we could go to Kashmir after the Hindus what would stop us from eliminating them next door? They were in their right to mistrust us. It was none of our business. We shouldn't have gone to Kashmir. We should have acted wiser”. Scratching his head Baba said, as if to himself, “we should have been wiser”.

“The administration planted a few amongst us to abuse and disgrace Jawahar Lal Nehru when he came to us. It was against Pukhtunwali to dishonor a guest, not allowing him to speak but we kept quiet. The people planted by the administration disgraced an honorable guest. We shouldn't have remained quiet”, Baba shook his head, “we shouldn't have kept quiet but what could you do with the administration”?

“It wasn't your fault, the leadership betrayed your trust”, I tried to defend his actions.

“At the time of partition we could have stopped Hindus from leaving but we didn't. I can't be blamed for that for I was too young but for the last one, after the '65 war, I think, we should have done more, I could have done more but we didn't”.

“All those who migrated showed their will and desire to return to the land of their fathers when things improved but none of them could, so what makes you think that we will be able to return. We will never be able to come back, I am sure of that so, we must stay on”. Baba was shaking with anger. “No one should be leaving the land of their fathers just because they worship differently, because they think differently, this is not right. It has to stop, someone has to put his foot down and let me be that someone. I want to fight it out”.

Baba had so much sadness in his eyes. He was sure, the day he moves out of the village those staying back are going to follow suit. Majority of the elders had already left the village and Baba knew it. In his heart he knew there was no coming back once he left.

“We accepted what the government said, they wanted us to fight over Kashmir and we formed Lashkars to oblige”, Baba said. “When our army refused to fight in Kashmir⁵, we”, Baba took a deep breath, waving his finger, “we were the unpaid soldiers of the country. We were promised freedom, equality and an Islamic state”, Baba gave a sarcastic hunch, “but then they called in the Perangi to rule us, under un-

Islamic laws. What a contradiction. We should have understood, we should have known. We should have been wiser”.

I remember the day we were moving out of the village, the sadness I had seen as a child in the eyes of migrating Hindus, I saw the same pain in the eyes of Baba, pain, helplessness and hopelessness. November is dry and dusty like the rest of winter months but more windy and cold. Every day is as dull and depressing as the previous. The sun, obscured by the smog was unable to give warmth or light, it was a cold yellow ball in the dull gray sky. It was a bleak sad day, worse than the day we were seeing off our Hindus, leaving the village some forty years back. Then we had all gathered to say goodbye to them, today we were hiding our departure time, we didn't want people to know what time we will leave. There was no one to bid us farewell. We were low and lonely, pitiable, depressed and desperate. This was the worst day of my life. Today I had to put up a brave face, try to convince the family, that they have got it all wrong, it's just a matter of time. We will outlive all the tyrants and return triumphantly.

On departure day, Morr was sitting on the floor of the veranda and was crying her heart out. She was staring and touching, feeling every stone and wood, every crevice and corner, every wall and window and she kept repeating to herself, “This is the last time I am seeing all this. I will never get a chance to see it again. Baba said it time and again, if we leave we will never be able to come back, I know, I will never come back to my house”.

She picked every scrap of paper, from the ground or in a crevice, she picked every piece of wood or anything she found and wanted to carry it along.

I couldn't see Morr sitting on the floor, so in sheer frustration I announced, “I make this commitment with you, no matter what happens, I will bring you back to the village”. I got some attention but it was far from over.

A sad, cursed day it was indeed. My sisters also joined in the wailing and crying. No matter how much I tried to convince them, nothing would comfort them. Since early morning, Morr had visited every room of the house, sat in every room for a while and repeated so many stories, events and anecdotes related to each room.

As departure time came close, the wailing and crying became more upsetting. I was afraid Morr will not be able to take the sorrow and anguish, she might get sick. I wanted it to be over with as soon as possible. We boarded our vehicles, Morr was fading and fainting and I wanted to leave before she collapsed.

Baba sat cold and motionless, like a stone. Tears seeped up in my eyes, a lump formed in my throat and I was unable to speak. Cold sweat trickled from my armpits down my ribs and my palms were wet. Sad and scared I stared at our house's blurred view. We sat silent, all lost in our own thoughts. Passing the graves of our ancestors I heard Morr sob, reciting the Kalima loudly while Baba sat still lost in his thoughts.

We passed by Ramble's shop, it was ages since Rambel had gone but I could see Ramble shaking a toy in his hand making a rattle to get my attention. I never cared to know the occupants since Ramble left but I still used his shop as a reference point in the bazaar.

We were leaving the paradise we were born and raised in. We were leaving behind all the memories we were so fond of. The Cranes, Waterfowls and Bulbul never returned; the Della, Shundi gull and Sanzalla all left long ago, they were followed by the Vultures, the Jackals and the Wolves; then the storytellers, Damman and the poets also left. Today it was our turn, at last we are also forced to leave the village, the home of our ancestors.

We were leaving the only dust free road I know, to IEDs, dust and debris; the fresh Tochi breeze to smoke and gunpowder and the few families of friends and relatives, at the mercy of human skinning monsters. The wind blew dust and dirt all around, there was smoke and fire ubiquitously, our paradise was on fire and we could do nothing but abandon it. The politicians and security forces keep parroting tirelessly, that the back broken militants have nowhere to hide but here we were being thrown out of our village. The back broken militants were striking at will.

Waziristan is condemned to endure destitution. How many wars have been fought in the name of religion and how many times have brothers migrated because of religion. Why has religion brought only misery to the people, how can people be in love with something that only brought misery? How much more misery will it bring to the people? Isn't religion supposed to bring peace and contentment? Is this what religion is or is someone manipulating us in the name of religion?

Alas, my village and the whole of tribal area is another Paradise lost. I sit on the ruins of my village, mourning the death of innocent people, their world destroyed, people who were my responsibility. I am unable to perform the functions assigned to me, I am unable to protect my people. I am unable to protect myself and my family. I am so helpless, I don't see any help or any hope, anywhere.

Way Forward

Tribesmen are perpetually under attack from world capitals. Our leadership has its own interests and fears, so we don't see the right response. There is no forum, which can respond to these attacks and accusations and present the true picture, as the tribesmen see it. They create monsters to do their dirty work, when the monsters bite back, they initiate military action against the tribesmen as if the tribesmen are the evil. The world only knows one side of the story. No one knows of the miseries of tribesmen. No one knows our part of the story.

Tribesmen have to find their own voice to ward off these attacks, to respond to

every accusation. To have their own voice, tribesmen have to reiterate local, independent system of governance, as agreed to and promised by the father of the nation. Instead of being free and Independent we have been enslaved by the neo colonialists ruling us from Islamabad. The tribesmen have to demand greater autonomy, empowerment and self-governance and not to be ruled from Islamabad. This is not something new; it mirrors our loose historical links to the area and a global trend among unrepresented societies. All governments ignored tribal areas, disenfranchising tribesmen, it's time we voice our desire for equal rights and greater freedoms.

We do not intend to go it alone; we only reiterate the agreements with the Qaid, empowered and independent tribal areas, as part of Pakistan. We want the agreements implemented in letter and spirit through a new social contract.

Every stakeholder has identified urgent need to bring meaningful administrative, judicial, economic and political reforms, to give tribesmen equal rights and mainstream tribal areas with rest of the country. Reforms in the tribal areas are the cornerstone for lasting peace and we will not accept reforms as a favor rather we demand reforms as a right. The overdue reforms have to be introduced without any further delay. There should be no second thoughts on the timing and other excuses. Status quo is no more an option.

No one has the right to keep the tribes as a buffer to be used as mercenaries. No one has the right to make monsters out of innocent children. No one has the right to keep the tribes away from progress and modernism. The government can win hearts and minds only by acknowledging tribesmen as equal Pakistanis, giving them equal rights and opportunities and a promise of a better tomorrow. Tribesmen cannot be kept as slaves; they will not live as slaves any more. Discrimination in any form is unacceptable.

The ongoing militancy, among others, is the tribesmen's frustration with discriminatory laws, denial of rights, wrong policies and all out neglect of the last seventy years. The administrative system being the root cause of this frustration, FCR needs to be repealed or drastically amended, shifting the onus of cognizance of crime from tribe to the administration and extending the writ of superior judiciary to tribal areas.

Other areas, requiring immediate action are, implementing of the Political Parties Act in true spirit as announced by the President. To have a strong voice, tribal areas need extending full provincial rights, as part of KPK or as a separate province and the local government system. Without the two, they will never have a voice which can make itself heard.

Extending provincial rights will enable tribes identify and mobilize new social groups; it will pull the youth out on the streets to serve people rather than kill them. These young people can be mobilized through the political parties. Extension of

provincial rights will encourage youth take interest in their affairs. New leadership will emerge in the process which might or might not be descendants of the Maliks. Tribal areas already have the world's best local government system in place, extending the local government system will enable the tribes groom their youth as champions of change. Training and grooming of the new leadership will start from the village level. Once the mobilization process initiates, new leadership and civil society will emerge.

We know the tribals well enough; once given a little importance and responsibility, tribesman will sacrifice himself to get the job done in a manner that will bring him fame. Every youth has the desire to be recognized at the family, Khel and tribe level and for this he will go to any extent.

In 1905 a young Mahsud attacked the officer's mess inside Wana fort and killed a British officer Col. Richard Herman, Commandant of the scouts. During trial, when the Mahsud youth was asked why he killed the officer, he said very simply, without any remorse that Lashkar of Mahsuds had gone to fight in Kabul. Everyone was talking about those who had gone to Kabul. The girls were singing praise of the chivalrous men who were in the Lashkar. "I wondered", he said, "what could I do to make people talk about me? I wanted the Mahsud girls to talk about me instead of those who had gone to fight in Kabul. It came to my mind that I should kill a British officer and if I am able to do it then people will talk about me, the Mahsud girls will sing about my bravery".

The chronicles further say that during the whole trial and the wait after the trial till his hanging the Mahsud youth was always seen applying surma on his eyes, oiling and combing his hair and making himself presentable to the virgins in the hereafter. Here I disagree with the writers of the chronicles. I feel, he was making himself presentable, more so to the virgins of his tribe, the Mahsud girls. So that when his dead body is brought to his village, he looks handsome and peaceful. From a mere mortal he will become a legend. They will sing songs of his bravery, his handsome body and his laying in peace and grace when seen last.

Knowing he had no way to escape from the fort once he committed the crime and that his act will lead to sure death, yet he committed the crime. That's the kind of desire the tribal youth has for recognition. Recognition at any cost, even death.

Tribesmen need to be involved in development plans for the tribal areas. The grinding poverty resulting in the vulnerability of tribesmen need to be looked at closely. Student Scholarships is a successful scheme but those who win scholarships never return to tribal areas. Rather it is encouraging brain drain. It is time to establish Mega projects, like universities and professional colleges in the tribal areas, a big project in an area can be provided security and the local population can benefit from the economic and social activity so generated. Such projects will increase the awareness level of the tribesmen. One good project can alter the whole demography of an agency for the better as one big refugee's camp altered the demography of

Darpa Khel for the worse.

Following the gateway policy government needs to develop and open trade routes with Afghanistan and Central Asia through tribal areas, which will generate funds for the government and a lot of economic activity and opportunities in the tribal areas.

Major wars against foreign occupations originated from Waziristan. Even when they didn't, somehow they shifted to Waziristan. So was the case in wars against the British, with the Afghan jihad against Russia and so is the case with the war against US and NATO.

To finish the war against terror the partners have to talk to the owners of the Khawra (land). At present, the actual warring people are sitting in Danday Darpa Khel so, all talking should start from here. Talk at the Khel level, the tribe level, the agency level and thus move upwards. Until the Dauris in general and the Darpa Khels in particular are on board nothing is going to come out of the talks, as the militant headquarter is on their land. The initiative needs to be from grass root. We need to build bridges between the tribes, bridges between Pukhtun provinces and the nation on both sides of the Durand line. It's not that we want to capture parts of Afghanistan or leave Pakistan, rather we appreciate free mobility, free trade and live as good neighbors.

All talking has to be done by a tribal Jirga. The earlier agreements were made from a position of weakness, to placate the militants. Taliban were accepted as equals and the government was ready to give away any concession to get the peace deal. Worst of all the government was only interested in safeguarding government property and personnel and wasn't in any way concerned about the loyal elders or general population. By signing agreements with individuals Pakistan's military undermined the centuries-old Tribal Jirga, recognized as the only means to resolve disputes. Nek Muhammad and Baitullah were immediately elevated to the position of undisputed leaders of the area, ending the importance of tribal elders. The army and intelligence agencies have done enough, its time they are at the back and call of the Jirga. Any Jirga not backed by force is mere gupshup. There has to be a strike force at disposal of the Jirga so that anyone who violates the decisions is punished severely.

We appreciate the efforts made by the Wilton Park conferences and the Dubai process to bring the tribesmen together, to at least listen to them and know their plight. Killing should be replaced with talking. Talking can be coordinate for the stakeholders if required. There isn't going to be any solution without talking, so let's start with the Dauris, whose land is the epicenter of all militant activity. What harm can talking do? Let's talk and if it doesn't work you just walk away. With the tribes as guarantors, the talks will surely be a success.

India has skillfully shifted the war to tribal areas; let us have good neighborly relations. To start with, let's talk to the Hindus who left Waziristan, both our elders

showed weakness; yours, for leaving the land of their ancestors and ours for letting them leave. We are from the same stock and so shall we remain. We regret the weakness of our elders for not having stood by Pukhtunwali and not allowing a guest to speak to a tribal Jirga, for not listening to what Nehru had to say, condemning him unheard. We disgraced and ridiculed a guest on the instigation of administration in utter disregard of Pukhtunwali.

The leading elders have left the tribal areas; the more they need to get together the more the faceless enemy ensures they are unable to. The more they need support of the government the difficult it gets to reach it. Locating them will be a task but it can be managed and the time is not far when they will be on board. Elders need to be mobilized to reclaim what is rightfully theirs and contribute to tribal life.

Amends need to be made with the tribes, take Nanawatey to them for all the damage done and start all over again. Yes the tribesmen are hurt, they are unhappy and very angry but they cannot return a Nanawatey, they have to entertain Nanawatey of elders from all tribe's and forgive and forget whatever damage has been done.

All those who thought of tribesmen as terrorists know now that they have lost much more than anyone realizes. Governments and their bureaucracies have their own priorities so I call upon my people to stand up. We want the leadership to understand our plight, it is already late. It's time for a rethink or we go it alone. The international community should support us in getting our rights. I call on the people of the world to support us reclaim our lost Paradise. We ask for help and support to a decent life, for us and our children. We want support to revive our way of life, our Rawaj, the ways of our fathers. The world cannot watch a two thousand years old way of life succumb to alien cultures.

Now that Baba is not around I have to take lead. Where my people have been wronged I shall speak whatever the cost.

Per de kwande ya na warke zhi

All debts have to be settled, even that of a widow

(Pushto proverb)

Those who have wronged the tribes will pay a heavy price. The sufferings of the tribesmen will not go unnoticed. If a widow can take her due, tribesmen can. They are many who know how to die for a cause but don't know how to fight. Tribesmen know how to fight and how to die for things more important than life.

Words like genocide and holocaust were created in similar situations but I wonder if any word can describe our situation, where a proud Pukhtun nation is exterminated. A Pukhtun stripped of human dignity and Pukhtun pride, a Pukhtun without Pukhto is a dead, naked non-entity. Pukhto for us is a complete way of life. You miss one element of Pukhtunwali and you are without Pukhto, excluded from Pukhtunwali. A Pukhtun is not a Pukhtun when he has no pride in being one. Without

Pukhtunwali, a Pukhtun is as good as dead. The world is killing a nation, by killing its pride, by killing its identity.

We feel as if everyone we trusted betrayed us, as if we were not wise in selecting friends. One wonders if every relationship that we ever had was a marriage of convenience. As if, we never had any true friends.

Today the injustice against, the tribesmen, is bigger and deeper in scale than ever seen in history. Bigger than the attacks of Alexander from the west or the whirlwind hoards of the Mongols from the North and more grotesque than the bombardments of the mighty British army from the east. The pain caused by the injustice is extreme as if it has exceeded the pain threshold where the pain doesn't feel any more, when instead of crying from pain and screaming for help, you just go numb, eyes wide-open one lays oblivious of time and space. Such ruthless injustice, such extreme pain, yet no Cheegha, it seems we have all gone numb from pain and not able to cry for help, something is not right. Something bad has happened, real bad.

In old times the elders would say, "Make the Cheegha; let's gather against the evil forces, let the Maraka decide. Our fathers left us a legacy of an egalitarian culture and a classless, simple religion. Let all the people, led by their elders from every Khel be present. Let brothers stand united and let collective wisdom triumph".

The Cheegha dhole beats, a sure sign to dance their fears out to the beat of drum. Let's dance the war dance, let's muster up courage from our faith and the ways of the fathers, from our unity and oneness and let's pray in humility for guidance and forgiveness.

The eldest among the elders with not a single tooth in his mouth, with a long white beard dancing in the Tochi breeze would say, "By Allah, I see no man with stronger faith than ours or more courageous than us. Children of Karlan, rise in the name of the fathers for they sacrificed many men better than us for this land and we will not shame them. We will not bring dishonor to the house of Karlan, never at any cost".

A younger and more energetic elder will rise, "We will not leave our women unprotected. We will not tolerate women bashing or locking them up as lesser beings. We will not accept dishonoring our elders or making monsters out of our children. We will not accept alien ways. If the scorching, colorless earth calls for color, let's color it. Let the girls sing songs of our courage, our gallantry, our enterprise and our unity. Was not this always the desire of our hearts, girls singing songs of our chivalry"?

Then the final verdict would be announced by the Maraka spokesman, "The dry riverbeds of Tochi call for sacrifice, sacrifice of our best men, handsome, heroic and honorable. If they ask for war than be it, if the color so desired is red than be it, we will not leave our land without a fight".

But alas, the elders are there no more and neither are my people around. We are left orphans, people along with their elders have been hounded out of their abodes, scattered all over the country and beyond, so, they can't get together against the injustice. The drum and the Dum have been banished so that there is no Cheegha to bring people together. A faceless enemy is destroying us, destroying our way of life, threatening our very survival. The enemy is distressing every component of our way of life. Like poison in a body which can be felt, creeping into every part, overtaking all the senses, the body getting numb, unable to move, unable to scream and unable to fight back.

Like a dying body beating limbs, trying to hold on to life, my nation is running from pillar to post trying to survive, trying to save its way of life. The enemy is powerful, they have trampled our way of life, our hopes and aspirations. They are trampling the ways of the fathers and the future of our children, rather our destiny. I ask, where are the people who stood up against tyranny and genocide? Where are the proponents of human rights? Did we harm anyone, do we deserve all this?

Allah is not answering our prayers, has He forsaken us or is He testing our resilience? I ask the world to stand up for the voiceless, help us out of this quagmire, that we had nothing to do with. We have to respond before Pukhtunwali is completely eradicated, for if it is, Cheegha will die along with it. This is the final attempt to rescue Pukhtunwali from being replaced by alien ways of life, aliens in the garb of religion. If we lose Pukhtunwali, we have the free world to blame; who will the free world blame?

We will not let go, no matter how many shadows stretch towards us, scare us or tear us apart. No matter how much funds the faceless enemy spends to buy our vulnerable youth. We will not let go of the way of the fathers, we will either come out victorious or die fighting. This is my call, the Cheegha.

Let the arrogant mothers of the valiant cry in humility for we know very well; when war knocks at the door, mothers of the valiant live childless and die issueless, old parents carry their young to the graves on their shoulders. We have lived honorably we will die with honor. We are in bond all brothers, martyrdom of one is protecting the honor of the rest. Girls will kiss every scar of the valiant received in the battlefield and they will sing songs of their bravery.

Mothers will sing the saga to the ones they rock in cradles. The legends of our gallantry will survive the test of time. The romance will live long after we have perished.

People wronged us earlier, we forgave them, they wronged us again, we forgave them again and now you, faceless enemy, are on the path of doing wrong, if we forgive again it will show weakness and will appear in history as surrender. Let it be known there will be no forgiveness this time; the fight will go to the end. We heard from our elders and they from theirs:

Forgiving is human, forgiving the second time is Godliness but forgiving the third time is cowardice.

(Pushto Proverb)

Sons of Karlan, we have to stand together to protect our women and children, to secure our houses and villages and to defend our way of life. Our unity is our strength; the way of the fathers is our strength. Our faith in religion and the courage, honor and chivalry in our blood is our strength. Our inner strength is enough for us let them depend on their wealth and weaponry.

Baba is gone forever and so have many elders, but don't worry my people I am with you. Don't despair if the Dum and the Drum are banished, if the people are scattered far and wide and are unable to hear the Cheegha. I will make sure that all hear our Call. I will take the Cheegha to every home to be heard and to be responded. We will bring our people together, for this is how our fathers did. The council of elders will take position and set course, correct course, for this is what our fathers did.

Our way of life is better than any other lifestyle known to us. We will not give it up for any other way of life, neither to be so called, better Muslims nor to be better human beings. We will not give up our way of life for anything. Not by force at all, never ever.

We have always strived to be like our fathers, brave and free, with cohesion and union as one, with our own ways of sharing and caring and honor and humor and that's what we are going to do, perpetuate the way of the fathers, for this is the best way of life known to us. We want to be simple men, known for our pride and chivalry, like our fathers. People have admired our sense of honor and know us as honorable Pukhtuns. The way of the fathers is dear to us, dearer than life. We will not accept cultural imperialism in any form. We will not give up Pukhtunwali, never ever.

I bring Cheegha to all through my plight. When my kinsmen get the Call, they will respond, they know what to do and how. This time the Call is not only for my kinsmen but for all God fearing people who despise injustice, who want to help and support those striving against injustice. The story that I tell will reach every corner of the world, it will inform all humanity of our plight, a Cheegha for all those who understand the ways of the fathers. Cheegha is The Call of the bleeding Pukhtuns caught in the gory great game of the great power centers.

We know what to do when there is Cheegha, so, do what you should, once you know my story, be a part of the Cheegha, stay united and like always, together we will defeat the foe no matter how strong. Once the Call is heard it won't be long, we will be marching back to our village, to rebuild our Paradise.

I am out on a mission, not to avenge but to stop more bloodshed, to get for my

people what is rightfully theirs. Our first choice is to resolve the issue of militancy through means other than killing. There shall be no more killings, for those who perpetuate destruction in the name of peace are enemies of peace. No one can bring peace through war.

We will give identity to our people and bring peace and justice to them. We will ensure no one denies progress and modernism to the tribesmen anymore. We will not let anyone exploit them in the name of religion or nationhood. Tribesmen will not be vulnerable to exploitation anymore.

No, we are not terrorists. We are as loving and caring as anyone else, rather more. We hurt and feel pain as anyone else.

I send a Call to all who think that injustice in one place is injustice everywhere, to all who will not surrender to enemies of humanity, the enemies who will not let others live in peace simply because they think differently. I send a Call to those who believe in every nation's right to live by their way of life, to those who oppose anyone imposing their will on others, assuming their way of life to be superior for any reason in this world or the hereafter. I Call the people opposed to tyranny to stand by our side against the tyrants, to look them in their eyes and face them like we faced them before. People have much wealth, businesses and properties, science and technology, armies and partners but all we have is a village, a family and Pukhtunwali. Please help us keep them.

I announce the Cheegha and ask the Cheegha party to be ready to undo all the injustice done to us by anyone and everyone in the name of anything and everything. This is Cheegha, the Call against the faceless enemy. A Call against proscribing Pukhtunwali, replacing it by an alien culture in the name of religion.



³ Nightingale

⁴ Immediate family, brother, father, son or husband

⁵ British born Pakistan army chief, Douglas Gracey refused action in Kashmir in spite of orders from Governor General.

APPENDIX

Adhan: Call for prayer

Alim /Ulema: Religious Scholars

Ameer: Leader

Angesh: Long stick with a hook

Badal: Revenge

Bagarra: Getting together for a joint cause

Barrara: Tall bush with green shoots as branches and leaves, weaved into basket

Bulbul: Nightingale

Bulbula: Women dance without spinning

Caleweshiti: Group of forty

Chalghoza: Pine nuts

Channai: Young kids living in mosque, dependent on khel for boarding and lodging.

Channa: Chickpeas

Charpoy: traditional hand woven bed with wooden frame

Chashma: Fresh water spring

Chargirai: wedding song. Chicken

Chingai: Grain or eggs given to children to barter in bazaar for sweets

Chokat: Door frame

Dajjal: Antichrist

Darga: Tall wild grass

Darpa Khel: My village

Dastar: Muslin turban

Deegar: Time between late afternoon till sunset

Distarkhwan: Cloth on which food is served

Dum / Dumman: Beats drum and takes massages

Garma: Variety of Water melon

Ghani Khan: Poet philosopher from Peshawar

Ghee: vegetable or butter oil

Gund: Group

Gur: Raw sugar extracted from cane

Gurgura: Small, blue/ purple, sweet berries, fresh and dried

Hamsaya: In protection of someone

Iftar: snack for breaking fast

Imam: Prayer leader

Jaba: Word

Jashne Quran: Quran festival

Jawan: Soldier

Ka na: Isn't it

Karez: Fresh water underground spring

Karlan: Fore father of tribal Pukhtuns

Katcha: Raw, unbaked clay

Kharcha: Money to spend

Khwanai: Sweets distributed on childbirth and other happy occasion.

Kishmish: Raisines

Lakhtai: Small stream, feeds water to the village

Lashkar: Tribal war party

Lonely nightingale: Iqbal's poem on jugnu

Lungi: Silk turban

Lungi: Governments recognition of individual, by giving him lungi allowance

Mashar: Elder

Mazri: Wild palm

Milmastia: Hospitality

Moj and Masti: Happy time, having fun

Momin /een: Faithful

Mullah: Unqualified prayer leader

Nans: Bread

Nang: Honor

Naswar: Tobacco crushed with ash, used in Pukhtun society, snuff

Pushto: Language of the Pukhtuns (integrity)

Pukhtuns: Descendants of Qais Abdul Rehman

Pukhtunwali: Pukhtun code of life

Perangi: Slang for Caucasian, British

Painda: Bread in curry, specialty of our villages

Qaid / Jinnah: Mohammad Ali Jinnah, founder of the nation

Qais: Qais Abdul Rehman, father of Karlani Pathans who accepted Islam.

Qulla: Turban wound around high cap with gold or silver embroidery

Ranja / Surma: Something like kajjal/ Mascara, collyrium

Sehr: Pre dawn meal in Ramadan

Shalwar Kamees: Dress of Pukhtuns, baggy pants like pajama and shirt down to knees

Sharbat: Homemade sweet cold drink

Shatak: Descendant of Karlan, father of Daurs

Sobat: Cooking for partying

Speen: White

Square of land: About twenty acres

Swara: Giving girl to forgive excess committed

Shuntalla: Fodder for animals

Sarai house: Our house in Miranshah bazaar

Tablighi / Jamaats: Preaching /party

Takias: Large size pillow

Tapa: Two verses said in a specific format of Pushto poetry

Tarpal: Heavy cover used by truckers to protect goods

Tehsildar: Junior government official

Tochi and Shawal: Valleys of North Waziristan

Tochi scouts: Paramilitary force of NWA

Tonga: Horse cart

Tor: Black

Tura: Courage, Sword

Ustad: Teacher

Vizdha Mountain: Highest peak across Tochi, visible from Darpa Khel

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