

**MEMOIRS OF THE ASIATIC
SOCIETY OF BENGAL. VOL. I,
NO. 7, PP. 93-127. FESTIVALS
AND FOLKLORE OF GILGIT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649459292

Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Vol. I, No. 7, pp. 93-127. Festivals and Folklore of Gilgit by Ghulam Muhammad

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

GHULAM MUHAMMAD

**MEMOIRS OF THE ASIATIC
SOCIETY OF BENGAL. VOL. I,
NO. 7, PP. 93-127. FESTIVALS
AND FOLKLORE OF GILGIT**

MEMOIRS
OF THE
ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BENGAL

VOL. I, No. 7, pp. 93—127.

FESTIVALS AND FOLKLORE OF GILGIT.

BY
GHULAM MUHAMMAD,
Chief Clerk in the Political Office, Gilgit.

CALCUTTA:
PRINTED AT THE BAPTIST MISSION PRESS, AND PUBLISHED BY
THE ASIATIC SOCIETY, 57, PARK STREET.
1905.

Price Two Rupees; or Two Shillings and Tenpence.

Festivals and Folklore of Gilgit.

By GHULAM MUHAMMAD, *Chief Clerk in the Political Office, Gilgit.*

[Read July 5th, 1905.]

CONTENTS.

	<i>Page.</i>
Introduction	93
I. Spring festivals	95
II. Harvest festivals	97
III. Marriage	98
IV. The "Seat of Chastity"	102
V. Settling disputes.	103
VI. Magicians: their initiation, etc.	103
VII. Omens	107
VIII. Eclipses	107
IX. The Creation of the World	107
X. Sacred stones, trees, springs, etc.	108
XI. The <i>Ad</i> with the ass's foot	113
XII. Historical folklore	114

INTRODUCTION.

In introducing the folklore and old customs of Gilgit, I may mention that great difficulty was experienced in collecting the material in a country which possesses no written record of any sort. I had to go from village to village and from house to house to gain information from anybody. After four years of incessant labour I collected some notes about the folklore, old customs, administration, tribes, games and past history of the country. The former two subjects, being of special interest, are now dealt with through the medium of this Society; the others will be published later in book form.

The inhabitants always call their valley by the name of "Gilit," not Gilgit. The word Gilit is probably the corrupted form of a Sanskrit word "Girit," which means a mountainous place.

This secluded valley, which was half a century ago unknown, has now, owing to the recent disturbances in Hunza, Nagir, Chilas and Chitral, become so well known to the world that it requires here merely a brief description for readers to form an idea as to its position and character.

Gilgit is situated 228 miles (sixteen stages) to the north-west of Srinagar, at an elevation of about 4,400 feet above sea level. During summer the thermometer rises to 115° and during winter falls to 15°. It is surrounded on the north by the small States of Hunza and Nagir, on the west by Punial and Yasin, on the south by Chilas and Kashmir, and on the east by Skardu. The district extends along the Astor, Indus and Gilgit rivers

from the Burzil Pass to the Sharot village, a distance of 143 miles from south-east towards north-west with its small surrounding valleys of Kamri, Tarsing, Parising, Sai, Haramosh and Bagrot; and along the Hunza river from Gilgit to Guech, with its adjacent valley of Naltar, a distance of 24 miles.

The country was first conquered in 1846 by the troops of His Highness the Maharaja of Kashmir under Syed Nathe Shah from Gauhar Aman, the Khushwakti Chief of Yasin, who had usurped the district from Sikander Khan and his brother Karim Khan, the rightful rulers of Gilgit. Karim Khan had escaped to Kashmir to ask for help, and returned with a large force under Syed Nathe Shah. Hearing the news of their approach, Gauhar Aman fled to Yasin, leaving the country to be possessed by them without bloodshed. The country was restored to the rightful rulers, but some later events lead the Maharaja of Kashmir to keep the district under the direct jurisdiction of his own officials. The British Agency was established in 1889. The Political Agent, an officer of the Government of India, and the Wazir-i-Wazarat, an official of His Highness the Maharaja of Kashmir, have their headquarters at Gilgit proper. The latter has jurisdiction over the district only, while the former, in addition to his control over Gilgit, has political relations with the surrounding states of Hunza, Nagir, Puniial, Ishkuman, Yasin, Ghizr and the Chilas republic, which all acknowledge the suzerainty of the Kashmir Durbar. Gilgit is garrisoned by Kashmir Imperial Service Troops under a General Officer Commanding appointed by His Highness the Maharaja of Kashmir. The troops are relieved every two years.

A good pony road runs between Srinagar, Gilgit, Chitral and Hunza, remaining open for traffic from June to October. It is closed from November to May, owing to the heavy fall of snow on the Tragbal (Rajdiagan) and the Burzil passes. However, the ordinary letter post is carried across the passes at favourable opportunities by local runners. Kashmir, Gilgit and Chitral are also connected by a telegraph line.

The present inhabitants of the country are all Muhammadans, chiefly of the Shia sect, with a few Sunnis and Maulais. The principal tribes are Ronos, Shins, Yeshkuns, Kashmiris, Kramins, Dums and Gujars. They are again divided into several families called after the names of distinguished ancestors. I am of the opinion that the Kramins are the original inhabitants of Gilgit, while the Yeshkuns, Shins and Ronos came afterwards in the above order and conquered the former inhabitants.

The Yeshkuns are probably an Aryan race, having arrived from Central Asia *via* the Hindu Kush. Being stronger than the aborigines, they succeeded in conquering these districts, made the original inhabitants their servants and named them "Kramins" (attendants).

The Shins profess to be the descendants of Arabs. They are probably Jews, and have come *via* Afghanistan from either Persia or Turkey. They prefer a style of self-government, and endeavour wherever they settle to continue this form of their original government. It is of interest to note, however, that before embracing Islam the Shins, in this resembling the Hindus, disliked meat, milk or even *ghi* made from cow's milk, disapproved of the keeping of fowls and regarded even a fish diet with aversion. If a Shin had taken two wives, one of his own tribe and the other of the Yeshkun tribe, the children

of the former would be Shins and those of the latter would be Yeshkuns. This shows that their family system takes the mother into consideration.

The Ronos are said to have come from Rajauri, a district in Kashmir, where they belonged to a ruling family of the district.

The Gujars have recently come to these parts and speak the same dialect as in India. Besides these, there is another family of the former Muhammadan rulers of the country called "Rá." They originally came from Skardu about three centuries ago, and professed to be the descendants of Alexander the Great. The inhabitants considered them to have been born of a fairy, and this idea leads the people to think that their rulers were of a superior race touching on the divine, and that therefore it was necessary to honour and obey them.

The people live very simply, and their requirements are few. Each one is himself a cultivator, a weaver, a carpenter, etc. Their dress, which they weave from the wool of sheep and ibex, includes the *shuka* (cloak), woollen pantaloons, a woollen shirt and a rolled cap. The women wear loose trousers, a shirt and a cap, with a few silver ornaments and shell brooches. They wear on their feet a kind of leather socks called *paboo*, made either of ibex skin or of cow hide. For hill journeys they wrap their feet in pieces of goat or ibex skin which they call *thauti*.

The chief amusement of the people is polo, which they play with the utmost zest, and shooting markhor, ibex and orial with their matchlocks for the sake of meat, skin and wool.

The former language of the people was Sanskrit, but the dialect now spoken is generally called "Shina," though the Chitralis call it "Dangrik." It contains many Sanskrit as well as Persian words.

Such are the tribes to whom the folklore and customs appertain, but they have lived together for such a long period under the Buddhist and Muhammadan rulers that it is now difficult to know which of the ceremonies was originally observed by each separate tribe.

I.*

THE FESTIVAL OF "SHINO BAZONO."

The advent of spring in the Gilgit country brings with it the quaint festival of "Shino Bazono," which corresponds to the English May-day. It lasts about fifteen days, beginning in the middle of February and ending about the beginning of March. As indicating that the long cold winter is at an end with all its accompanying hardships, and that spring is nigh, bringing with it warmth and life and a renewal of the scanty stock of provisions which has run dangerously low during the past months, the festival is hailed with much rejoicing by the simple Gilgit folk. In order to observe this feast rightly, the people, twelve days before its commencement, put ten seers of wheat into a wooden basin. They fill this up with water and keep the mixture wet for five days, after which they take it out and place it in a small pit dug for the purpose in the ground, over which stones are heaped. The wheat is left in this pit for four days, after which the grain is seen

*[See also p. 119 *postea*.—Ed.]

to germinate. It is then taken out, dried and ground in one of the Gilgit water-mills. The flour so made is called *diram*, and of it a sweetmeat is compounded on the first of the month by adding some water, oil of apricots and walnuts to the flour and cooking the whole without the addition of any sugar. This sweetmeat has been tasted by the writer and is called *wailai diram*. It has a sweet flavour in spite of the absence of sugar, the fact being regarded as in a way miraculous. The remaining flour is utilized in making small flat loaves called *diram phiti*. This bread is eaten with raisins and oil. The combination is called *dracha bhat*. The feast is not, however, wholly of a vegetarian nature. In the month of "Nos" (about November) each family kills several sheep, and the meat is dried for future use. A leg and a tail are, however, set apart to be cooked on "Shino Bazono," and are then eaten with the *dracha bhat*.

The feast, which has been partaken of by all the members of the family together, being over, dancing commences and the following song is sung:—

- (1) Aju kal ootá la Drároo aju kal chirring ga ootá.
- (2) Goom ái chhani tharega, aju kal chirring ga ootá.
- (3) Ghi ái chhani tharega, aju kal chirring ga ootá.
- (4) Mos ái chhani tharega, aju kal chirring ga ootá.
- (5) Mon ái sarai tharega aju kal chirring ga ootá.
- (6) Ash to sho dez ik alo aju kal chirring ga ootá.

Translation:—

- (1) May this year come again, oh Brethren, may such a year come again!
- (2) We will have our stores filled with wheat, may such a year come again!
- (3) Much *ghi* will be produced, may the next year be such a one!
- (4) Quantities of meat will be stored, may the next year be such a one!
- (5) Our vessels will be filled with wine, may such a year appear again!
- (6) A blessed day has come to-day, may such a year appear again!

At noon all the fighting men assemble and make preparations for polo, while the women ascend to the roofs of the houses on each side of the road along which the procession to the polo-ground will pass. In their hands are long slender sticks, with which, as the procession passes, they belabour their heroes unmercifully. Koliwals are specially made the victims of this castigation. They are the trading community of the country, and the opportunity of paying off old scores is one not to be lost. An unpopular general dealer may consider himself fortunate if he escapes from the hands of these viragos with the payment of a forfeit of gold dust. Next comes the turn of the Rá or chief, who runs the gauntlet mounted. Galloping through, he salams with both hands to the women on either side, but even he is not allowed to pass without the bestowal of liberal largess on his fair subjects. It must be admitted that the ladies generally let him off lightly, for which no doubt they have their reasons. Possibly their position at court depends on it. On the arrival of the procession at the polo-ground, a goat is killed on one of the goal-stones. This sacrifice is called "Bazono-ai-Karai." The goat's head having been cut off, a rope is attached to it; the players then touch the head with their polo-sticks. After this a *doom* or drum-beater sets off at a run holding the end of the cord, to which the goat's head is attached behind. After him rides the raja or *trangfa* of the village, who strikes the head

repeatedly with his stick till they reach the opposite goal. This ends this part of the festival. Polo then begins, and, as is the fashion in these parts, is continued without intermission till the evening of the great day.

THE "AYI BOVI" CEREMONY.

Ayi Boyi is the name of a Gilgiti month falling next to "Shino Bozino." The day fixed for performing the ceremony was publicly announced by the Rá throughout the village. All the boys and young men of the village assembled in the afternoon at a place just below the Rá's dwelling. The Rá used to sit on the roof of the house surrounded by his private servants, and a heap of walnuts was laid before him, while his followers laid a heap of ashes near them. The Rá then threw all the walnuts among the people below, who scrambled for them. While they were thus employed a heavy shower of ashes was hurled down by the Rá's servants upon them. In the merriment which followed, the people would rush towards the Rá, endeavouring to seize him or his servants, if they were strong enough to do so; while if they proved to be the weaker, the chief's followers would turn the tables against them. Should the chief himself or any of his suit fall into their hands, he was only released on the payment of a suitable forfeit; but, should the struggle result in the favour of the chief and his party, the prisoners made from among the people were released after a few days' captivity.

II.

THE CEREMONY OF "GANONI."

The inhabitants of these parts are strictly prohibited from tasting any new crop before accomplishing the "Ganoni" ceremony, which is celebrated in the middle of June, when the wheat and barley are ripe. The Rajah or headman of the village fixes and proclaims throughout his district the days for the performance of this ceremony, which is carried out in the following manner. On the afternoon of the day fixed the people set out to their fields with loaves fried in butter, which are greedily eaten at a corner of the field by all the members of the family. After this they cut some ears of barley, bring them to their homes, and keep them for a while on a fire. These husked and roasted grains are now put in a small basin filled with milk or curds. Of this milk every member of the family takes three wooden spoons full. Then national dances and vainglorious songs continue till late in the night.

THE DUMA NIKHA CEREMONY.

When the people have finished the labour of reaping and winnowing their spring and autumn crops, and have put the grain into bags to carry to their homes, they recite the following prayer:—

- (1) Bismillah ya Khudaya Barakat deh.
- (2) Oosum, Doosum ai Barakat deh.
- (3) Kharki jawān ai Barakat deh.

- (4) Katawāl, Batawāl ai Barakat deh.
- (5) Gilit Malik ai Barakat deh.
- (6) Sharo ai Rat ai lo bu sing Barakat deh.
- (7) Owai ai sur ai Barakat deh.
- (8) Jakun ai shing nikkeh sang Barakat deh.
- (9) Gogo ai dayin o sang Barakat deh.

Translation :—

- (1) In thy name, O merciful Lord, give us abundance !
- (2) Give us abundance like Oosum and Doosum (remarkable men of ancient times) !
- (3) Give us abundance like the brave Kharki (Kharki, the people say, was $4\frac{1}{2}$ yards tall) !
- (4) Give us abundance like Katawāl and Batawāl (also ancient heroes) !
- (5) Give us prosperity like Malik, the Raja of Gilgit !
- (6) Give us abundance, so that we may carry our grain home throughout the long night of autumn till it is dawn !
- (7) Give us abundance like the long day of summer !
- (8) Give us abundance till horns grow out of the ass !
- (9) Give us abundance till a beard grows from the rocks !

After gathering their crops the inhabitants celebrate a festival called "Duma Nikha," an expression of their feeling of freedom from all agricultural labour, and indulge in recreations and games, the chief of which is polo. A goat is killed and roasted and the meat eaten at the place where they perform their dances, which continue late into the night. They also add to their enjoyment by shooting at a mark, after which the assembly breaks up.

III.

MARRIAGE.

When a boy reaches 16 or 17 years of age, his parents begin to search for a wife for him, and as soon as they hear of a likely girl, they summon the headmen of their own village, to whom they give food, and request them to ask such and such a person to give his daughter in marriage. The headmen carry this message to the father of the girl, who entertains them for one or two days. During this time he summons his relatives and the headmen of his own village, in order to consult them in the matter. In the case of consent being given, a prayer is read by both the parties as sealing the promise. The boy's father now presents the following things to the girl's father in token of their new relationship :—

Cloth	...	5 yards.
Needle	...	1
Knife	...	1
Rope	...	1