

## KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA INVENTORY ON THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

**Name of the Element:** *Onjesta*: Concept of purity in the Kalasha tradition

**Brief Description:** Dialectically connected with the concept of *Pragata* (impurity), *Onjesta* is the Kalasha concept of purity, governing the lives of the entire community. The word itself is defined as pure, clean, moral, holy and generally good or positive. The extent of the use of the concept ranges from everyday use of trails to follow when travelling to and from villages to ritual purifications known as *ishtongas* for males and *shishau* for females.

The use of the concept in agricultural practices entails a ritual purification of fields before the sowing of crops. During harvest times, if corn cobs or wheat heads turn out unusually large they are considered *Onjesta*. Post-harvest, some crops and flour mills are purified by carrying out a ritual known as *Onjesta Suchek* before the crops are milled into flour.

Gender divisions in the concept in itself exist. Males are generally associated with the concept and men not found guilty of adultery and fornication are considered *Onjesta*. Exceptions among females (generally considered *Pragata*), exist as well. Women who give birth to twins and nurse them to good health are considered *Onjesta*.

The concept holds deep connections with rituals and emotional states. Celebrations and happiness is considered *Onjesta* whereas sadness and mourning is considered *Pragata*. Connected to this are men going through purification rituals (*ishtongas*) after the death of their wives. Entire mourning families purify village altars after a period of mourning. Connected to emotional states, bravery is considered pure, whilst being in the state of fear is considered impure. Secrecy is considered pure, whilst being out in the open for everyone to witness is considered impure.

The concept governs directional significance of places as well. Generally the rules are as follows:- Right = *Onjesta*, Left = *Pragata*, High = *Onjesta*, Low = *Pragata*. The direction of the West is considered *Onjesta* as it is the direction of *Tsiam* (the place of origin of the community as per the Kalasha tradition); all holy prayers are narrated towards the direction of *Tsiam*.

Certain times are considered *Onjesta*, such as the *Dic* period during the Chawmos festival (3 days in Bumburet, 7 days in Rumbur). A day prior to this period, the Kalasha community carries out ritual purification of their homes, and entire villages and animals such as chicken (traditionally considered impure) are driven out of villages. The Kalasha community members are not allowed to visit non-Kalasha households and may not even touch non-Kalasha people. The community members are purified through rituals in which a lamb or goat is sacrificed with blood being sprinkled on a gathered crowd of males whereas women go through a separate ritual known as *s'is' sucek*.

Examples of specific tangible spaces considered *Onjesta* include Altars (*Deva*), Pastures (*Son*) such as *Dizilawat* and *Otak* (but not restricted to), *Onjestakuy* –places in Birir valley where rock carvings exist, and temples (*Hand*). Water from certain springs e.g. *Suchipo* starting from a little further from the *Balanguru* village in Rumbur is considered *Onjesta* as well.