

Chapter 3

Women's Work

In the spring, after the winter snow separating the Kalasha villages from the Nuristani village up-valley has begun to melt, Nuristani women trek down to sell the *khawá* baskets they have made over the winter. These large conical baskets, made of sturdy wooden frames interwoven with alternating stripes of white and black goat hair, are used every day by every Kalasha woman, a remnant of the time when exchanges between these communities were more central to their economies. Kronza Aya bought one for me, saying that she thought I looked incomplete and if I wore my new *khawá* instead of my green nylon backpack tourists wouldn't recognize me since I would be "completely Kalasha" (*saw kaláṣa*). I felt silly and a bit conspicuous as I left to make my rounds that first day, but I was greeted everywhere with compliments on how lovely I now looked, how I now looked like a true woman (*sahí istríža*). A woman wearing a *khawá* is on her way somewhere, perhaps somewhere far away, usually either going to work in her fields or returning home with the bounty of her labor. Tucked in the basket are who knows what wonderful things, perhaps some walnut bread or pears, peaches, apples, or tomatoes. Besides being functional, comfortable, and graceful, *khawá* are thus evocative of the most celebrated qualities of Kalasha womanhood—freedom of movement, hard work, and the productivity that results from both.

Kalasha men and women do very different kinds of work, work that takes them in different directions, requires different skills, and encourages different sorts of sociality. In turn, what Kalasha women (and men, too, of course) are thought to be *able* to do is in large part understood through what they *do* do. This chapter makes one simple but fundamental point, a point symbolized for me (and also for

Kalasha themselves) by the *khawá*. The agricultural work Kalasha women do—the responsibilities they undertake in terms of production and distribution, their movement through and creative shaping of the landscape they live in, and, importantly, the value their work is accorded in the community and their own understanding of themselves as valuable, productive people—underpins (and limits) the agency women claim in other arenas of their lives.

Making a Living

Kalasha people, like most peoples carving out their lives in narrow valleys throughout the Hindukush, practice a mixed economy that combines transhumant pastoralism with small-scale agriculture. By creatively utilizing the range of resources available in their vertical landscape (cf. Brush 1977), the Kalasha are able to craft a living in an otherwise difficult environment. Livelihood practices encourage cooperation and interdependence between men and women but also a necessary division of spheres of influence. One of the first phrases I was taught in Kalasha was, *a may krom jhónim, may berú tása krom jhonúu* (I know my work, my husband knows his work). Men are almost entirely responsible for the care of livestock and for the resulting dairy production, while women do the majority of the agricultural work. As I discussed in the previous chapter, this division of labor echoes throughout Kalasha cosmology, so that ritual separation of things and places conceptually associated with men and women is one of the primary tenets of Kalasha religious life.

What Men Do

Pastoralism is prestigious because goats have social, ritual, and economic importance. The size of the family herd¹ (primarily goats, but Kalasha also keep a few sheep and cattle) is an important marker of wealth and status, and merit feasting continues to be one of the primary avenues through which men compete with one another for status within the community (Darling 1979). Goats are offered in sacrifice on important ritual occasions or during purification ceremonies, and the sacrifice of many goats is necessary for the proper funerals of both men and women. Finally, the many types of goat cheese that

men produce are a source of culinary delight and the staple protein food.

Men's role as primary pastoralists leads them on a seasonal transhumant migration that begins in June when they take their herds from winter stables near the villages to spring pastures at about 9,000 feet. The high pastures, or *son*, are located above the upper tributaries of the river that runs through each valley. The pastures are the collective property of each community, with rights at particular grazing sites inherited through male lineages (Parkes 1990b:643). Women and girls accompany men on the first day of the yearly trek to help coax and carry the young animals. All women thus have some experience of the high pastures and so can join men in waxing poetic about the beauty and freshness of the mountains. Men remain in the high pastures all summer, making cheese and butter (and eating a whole lot). They graze their flocks in still higher pastures as the summer sun uncovers tender alpine meadows at 12,000 feet, returning in autumn to lower pastures as these recover late in the season. Finally, as winter edges near, snow urges them back to the villages where the animals will be fed on fodder (collected and dried by women the previous summer) and taken to graze in the nearby holly oak forests until the next spring.

In addition to their pastoral responsibilities, men make sporadic, but intense and significant, contributions to agriculture. Men are responsible for building and maintaining the elaborate system of stone water channels and wooden aqueducts that trace across the valley from the central river, bringing the water that transforms the dry hillsides into productive farmland. Corresponding with this intensive agricultural commitment, men also invest a great deal of labor in constructing new fields by clearing boulders and creating terraces. Men carry load after load of goat and cattle manure to the fields, or spread the chemical fertilizer that has recently also become common. Men plow the fields using oxen and seed the crops. Men frequently also help with the harvest and are responsible for the final separation of wheat or barley from chaff and for removing kernels of corn from the cob. Men also keep bees and harvest the honey and harvest grapes to make wine.

Pastoral and agricultural responsibilities don't involve all Kalasha men all the time. Brothers and herding partners take turns, and some men don't like the herding life and rarely participate. There are a

couple of men who are master house and stable builders. One man is a full-time jeep driver, and several own small stores in the tiny bazaar in the center of the valley. There are two Kalasha schoolteachers. A few Kalasha men own hotels (though most hotels are owned by Pakistanis from outside the valley). The last twenty years have seen an increase in Kalasha boys who opt for formal education instead of contributing to herding or farm work, although there are few opportunities for educated Kalasha men either within or beyond the valleys (except as anthropological informants). Unlike Muslim neighbors, very few Kalasha men migrate out of the valleys to work. Within the last ten years, wage labor, readily available on the seemingly endless government and nongovernmental organization (NGO) development schemes, has become another important male activity, and most Kalasha men are involved in wage work periodically.

What Women Do

Men's pastoral work takes them away from the community during the summer for months at a time. When I conducted my pilot study in the valley, I was amazed at what seemed to me to be villages made up almost entirely of women. Kalasha women perform three types of productive labor: housework, childcare, and fieldwork. While much of everyday life revolves around the first two, it is fieldwork—the logistics of it, the skill involved, their acknowledged control over this domain, and the generally recognized value of their labor—that is most intimately tied to the concept of women's freedom.

Housework, or *dúray krom*, is almost entirely women's responsibility. Every one to three days, women take grain from the family stores and grind it into fresh flour at the mills that run, even in winter, on the water channels. Women do almost all of the cooking, baking *tasíli*, the staple pancakelike bread made of wheat or corn flour, three times each day. Interest in learning to efficiently and evenly spread the thin batter with the back of her hand onto a hot, convex griddle is one signal that a young girl is beginning to leave childhood behind. Women also organize some sort of side dish—usually beans, cheese, or greens—to accompany the bread. Women sweep the house, air out the bedding, do the dishes, make the tea. Women do all the laundry. Doing one's husband's laundry is one of the only domestic tasks that *wives* are expected to do (i.e., laundry is *wives'* work, not simply

women's work). One young man in the community consistently asked his sisters-in-law to wash his clothes, and this was taken as a sure sign that the marriage was in trouble. Women also card and spin wool, weave headdresses and belts and special ceremonial clothing for men, and sew dresses for themselves and their daughters. Men's everyday clothing is made by professional tailors in Chitral.

While most Kalasha fathers are attentive and loving parents, it is the rare man who would wipe snot from a kid's nose. The minute-to-minute needs of children—for food, warmth, clothing, and washing—are taken care of by women. Child care is so taken for granted, such a constant aspect of women's lives, that I couldn't find a general Kalasha word for it. In extended families, the care of children is shared by the women of each patrilineal, patrilocal household, although each mother devotes more energy to her own children than to nieces and nephews. Grandmothers tend to be especially devoted caregivers—even allowing their categorical grandchildren to nurse at their breasts—but all the women in the house take turns watching the children so that others will be free to do fieldwork or housework. New mothers (who live in extended households) are excused from almost all other domestic or agricultural responsibilities so that they can focus their attention on their infants.

In the summer months, when the goat stables are *pragata*, women take care of the family milk cows (during the *onjesta* months of winter, men take care of the cattle). Cows are milked each morning, and the milk is boiled, then used in tea or allowed to turn to yogurt. Surplus milk is churned (in a goatskin bag by women or old men) into buttermilk, which is an important part of the diet in the summer before fruits and vegetables have ripened. In 1995, 28 percent of Kalasha families owned no cattle, but most families with no milk cows receive some buttermilk from friends and relatives.

Women have little access to cash, although money is increasingly important to the Kalasha household economy. Some women sell part of their bean or walnut crops. Some make a few bottles of wine to sell. A few older women work as traditional healers and are compensated, sometimes in cash, sometimes with food, for their services. Some women keep chickens (although they are *pragata* in Rumbur and Birir and so were banned from villages recently [see chapter 2]). As of 1997, most women still believed that the time and energy they put into their crafts were quite valuable, and so they were not willing to sell their

handiwork for the bargain prices tourists find elsewhere in the country. As a result, there was only limited opportunity for women to market their textile work as souvenirs for tourists. One of my friends runs a small guesthouse, and one woman cleans the valley dispensary. One young woman, who completed her high school education in the valleys, now receives a monthly stipend from an NGO to be a women's community organizer. Any cash women earn is their own to keep and spend as they see fit, although it is a rare woman who earns as much as she needs. Men's far easier access to cash through wage labor, and the fact that money has not been incorporated into the shared household economy, is beginning to tip the balanced division of labor. Women (as well as "traditional" men who work as shepherds [*wal moč*]) are not *entitled* to a share of men's wages, as they are to the fruits of men's pastoral and agricultural work. Women increasingly find themselves dependent on the generosity of men for "gifts" of cash, and as money becomes ever more necessary I fear this dependence may increase, eroding somewhat the power and prestige women earn through their agricultural work.

At present, however, the Kalasha economy is still primarily subsistence based and women's significant contributions to the household economy are recognized as essential. Women are entirely responsible for the daily maintenance of their households' cereal crops, primarily corn and wheat but also barley and millet. Winter wheat is followed by a summer corn (or barley) crop that will be harvested late in the fall. The next year that field will be allowed to lie fallow until late spring, when it will be planted with a single crop of corn. Corn is intercropped with beans and squash. Each field must be irrigated every four to six days. Women release the water from the channel above and guide it down each row. Each cornfield is carefully thinned so that the strongest plants remain and are evenly spaced. Women frequently weed each field, and both weeds and thinnings are dried for fodder. Women take pride in this work, claiming that carefully tended fields produce much higher yields. Women keep small vegetable gardens of onions, tomatoes, carrots, and potatoes and sometimes radishes, broccoli, and okra. Women and men both participate in harvesting cereal crops. Women harvest beans and squash and walnuts. They also pick fruit as it ripens and dry apricots, pears, and mulberries for the coming winter. Fieldwork (*čet krom*) takes precedence over all other labor (except, as I noted, the care of infants). It also took precedence over my own field-

work, which I was expected to put aside when there was *real* fieldwork to be done.

I wouldn't argue that Kalasha women's housework is "invisible" (Moore 1985:43) since it is clearly thought of as necessary "work." But (with the exception of weaving and designing clothing) most housework is simply something women do, not something they think much about or invest much of their identity in. (In contrast, Chitrali women I know take great pride in keeping their houses immaculate and cook far more elaborate meals than Kalasha women do). Women's agricultural work, on the other hand, and the fact that their responsibilities are greater than those assumed by neighboring Muslim women, is a source of personal pride for most. The intelligence and skill necessary to balance the many tasks that make for bountiful harvests, their clearly essential contribution to the subsistence of their families, the power they claim to distribute food, and the fact that they feel physically and emotionally invested in the landscape in which they live are all directly linked to the idea that Kalasha women are free. Women's agricultural work is therefore both a model of and a foundation for women's agency.

I want to describe for you one of the days I spent with the girls in my family because as I was with them I realized that even as children—a time in their lives when the line between work and play is blurred—Kalasha girls begin learning to value their freedom to move about the valley, to think of themselves as autonomous decision makers, to take pride in their work, and to see that their significant economic contributions are valued by others. (I also want to show you the pleasure they take in their lives and their obvious appreciation of the natural beauty of Rumbur's landscape. For most Kalasha people, this, too, carries over into adulthood.)

Following the girls as they took the family's sheep out to graze on the intensely new green world that follows the muddy winter did not seem like field "work" but rather pure delight. Lilizar, at twelve, was lithe, quick, and agile and not quite aware of how beautiful she was becoming. As the oldest girl in her family, she was responsible for the sheep in the spring and fall, between the seasons when they are in the high pastures with her father and uncles and the cold winter when they are kept in the winter stables and fed dried grass.² A pack of little sisters and cousins trailed behind her. She was clearly in charge and

ordered the younger girls around ruthlessly. For the most part, they did what she said, just for the privilege of getting to go along. Lilizar told me that the sheep are wholly her responsibility. She said that she herself knows what to do with them and where to take them, scouting out which fields have good grass and alternating routes so that no one pasture will become too depleted. As we walked along, she repeated every few minutes that neither her father nor her grandmother tells her what to do with them. The sheep know the paths, and the girls skipped along behind them, hopping up hillsides and over rocks, shouting, “pppphhhuusshht,” which the sheep know means to move along (there is a different vocabulary of sounds for each species of animal).

The girls seemed really happy, and happy, too, that I was with them, so that they could point out all the potential treasures we would find. “*kutsí, kutsí, gok may mo pasháy!*” they called back and forth to one another, which means, “Morel, morel [a type of mushroom available in the United States in gourmet food shops], don’t show me a snake.” Bibi Han said that if you say these words you won’t see any snakes. Lilizar said that is stupid, since they are just words. “You still might see a snake,” she explained, but she repeated the words over and over anyway. I was reminded of the snake penises that Lilizar drew a few nights earlier when she was drawing pictures in the privacy of my room. At their age, when being asked for and given as a wife is a real and terrifying possibility, the girls certainly don’t want to see any “snakes.” On the other hand, there are poisonous snakes around, and I was just as glad not to see any either.

The girls sang a lot. They take great pleasure in knowing this landscape intimately. All the fields they passed belong to someone they know, and they told me little stories about what happened here or there, where mushrooms grow, and where you can find the *angár-bat* (quartz crystals) that they speculated I could take back to America and sell. Lilizar sharply posted the little girls at each corner of the field, with orders to keep the sheep out of the freshly sprouted winter wheat. She and Bibi Han took me to dig wild carrots on the riverbank. The girls had set up lots of traps and triumphantly killed a pretty little songbird (so much for Man the Hunter). The kids cooed over how bright its yellow feathers were. Lilizar instructed me to put it in my dress to take back to her baby sister.

As they hopped along, I thought about how joyful they seemed

to feel, with spring newly sprung and themselves old enough to have earned the freedom that comes with responsibility. The next summer, during Eid, Lilizar's Muslim uncle specially saved one of the legs of the sheep he had sacrificed and presented it to her—a great honor for such a young girl. "It's for all her trouble taking care of our sheep," he said, and smiled at her.

Freedom of Movement

The freedom to move is integral to Kalasha women's identity. The traveling about that Lilizar and her sisters do as children will gradually expand as they grow up and take on adult responsibilities, until their range extends the length of valley and for some women into the two adjacent Kalasha valleys. For Kalasha women, kinship, marriage, and inheritance patterns are all structured so that as their circles of association widen with adulthood their agricultural responsibilities become increasingly dispersed throughout the valleys. Much of women's work involves moving from one field to the next, from your own fields to the fields of your natal family to summer fields, from the site of one harvest to the next. Of course, there is a high degree of variation among women. Some travel about daily, some very rarely. But however much any individual woman *actually* moves about, Kalasha women *think* of themselves as mobile.

It is in direct comparison with their Muslim neighbors that Kalasha women assert that they are free, *azát*. In surrounding Muslim communities, girls also act as messengers and shepherds when they are young, but the circles through which they move as children are gradually tightened as they approach puberty. Eventually, Chitrali Muslim women spend most of their time near the family house, work only fields adjacent to their houses, and leave the property only when they are escorted by a male relative and covered with a large white *piték* (the type of veil commonly worn in Chitral, a square of cloth large enough to cover a woman's head and much of her body as well).³ Actually, the Chitrali women I know spend more time than most of my Kalasha friends visiting relatives in distant places, but the focus is on "being there" rather than "getting there." The actual journey involves a great (and exciting) effort to maintain *purdah*, bundling down narrow back passageways and hurrying into jeeps so as

not to be seen and therefore thought shameless (*bešárum*). No matter how much Chitrali women travel, they represent themselves as people who stay put.

And yet I want to be careful not to give the impression that Kalasha women wander about aimlessly, for this would be considered very bad behavior. While for young Kalasha men “wandering” (*kásik day*) is considered appropriate and expected (although often annoying to parents and wives), Kalasha women’s freedom of movement is always directly tied to *krom*—work or, more specifically, necessary activity. Visiting a friend who has recently had a baby in the menstrual house is *krom*, as is watering a distant field, helping with a friend or relative’s harvest, grazing the family cows, and attending funerals and festivals. Women with “work” to do, walk openly from place to place and stop briefly to chat with both men and women they meet on the path.

Marriage expands the scope of women’s *krom*, and the range and frequency of their travels extends accordingly. The complicated details and many variations of the Kalasha marriage system are expanded upon in chapter 6. Many girls are “given” in marriage when they are children. Girls marry outside of their natal patriline and eventually live in their husband’s household. Most girls therefore marry into a family that lives in an unfamiliar place, often another village or valley. Leaving home is always a tearful and traumatic part of growing up. But Kalasha girls don’t move into their in-laws’ house once and for all. Rather, becoming established in your marital house is a long process that involves many years of moving back and forth between your natal home and your marital home. During adolescence, Kalasha girls have equal responsibilities to both families and are frequently called back to help with fieldwork or harvests at home (often the work seemed to be just a pretense to call home a much missed daughter, but, as I said earlier, movement is thought most appropriate when it is tied to work) until they are sought again by their in-laws. After girls start menstruating, their lives become even less settled, as they begin spending a week out of every month in the *bashali* (menstrual house—see chapter 4) and splitting the remaining time between their natal and marital homes.

Women retain lifelong ties to their natal families and are always considered members of their natal lineage. Female patrilineage mem-

bers, *jamili*, are notified first in case of the death of a family member and come streaming in from distant valleys and villages to mourn and help with the extensive funeral preparations. Married daughters and sisters are asked to come home to help with harvests and very often choose to spend festival times with their natal families. Bread is baked for and carried to all outmarrying daughters on feast days.

Some Kalasha women have had the opportunity to travel outside of the valleys. Many women have been to the hospital in Ayun or Chitral. Several groups of women have been down-valley to Peshawar and Islamabad and Lahore to sing and dance in cultural festivals. Recently, one girl is said to have gone to England. But most women stay closer to home.

As women grow older, their sense of personal responsibility to the household into which they married, and their children who are a part of that household, increases. Women eventually come to think of their husband's house as their house and their husband's lands as their lands. Barzangia Aya told me once, "When you are first living with your in-laws, it feels as though you are living in their house, working in their fields. But later the house becomes your own house, the fields your fields. I sometimes long for my father's house, but it is no longer his; now it belongs to my sisters-in-law, and I am a guest there." As women become increasingly tied down by obligations to care for their own children and fields, and later for their grandchildren and daughters-in-law, they have less time and opportunity to visit relatives and friends in other places. Yet, while actual time spent moving through the valleys decreases, most women still express their freedom of independent movement as an essential cultural value, both in everyday discussion and in song.

Many lullabies begin with phrase, "Don't cry my daughter [or son], I'm not going anywhere (or I'll take you with me when I go)." Even caring for children, which inevitably limits women's opportunities to move about, is thought of as a choice—women feel that they *could* go, if they wanted to, but they don't. Freedom, then, lies not so much in actuality as in possibility, in choice. Women feel that they *choose* to be wives and mothers, choose whether to stay with their husbands and families or go. Most choose, of course, to stay, but the fact that this choice is theirs to make is an essential ethnic marker, something they feel differentiates them from other cultural groups.

Women's Freedom of Movement and Agricultural Productivity

In Kalashadesh, the way in which irrigated, prepared fields are owned and inherited, and the fact that there is no tradition of hiring wage laborers to work excess land, means that women *must* be able to travel in order to tend their fields, which may be scattered throughout the valley. While tracts of uncultivated land may be held as undivided "corporate" estates of descent groups, fields that have been cleared of rocks and trees and above which irrigation canals have been built are the personal property of individual households. Sharing a house, and particularly sharing meals around one hearth (and the sharing of food resources this implies), define the Kalasha *kušún* (household) (Parkes 1997). "Ideally," Kalasha live in large, joint, patrilocal families. Only two Kalasha men in Rumbur Valley had two wives. For some time after adult children marry, all the sons and their wives and children live in the same house or adjoining houses. Daughters-in-law share fieldwork, cooking, and household tasks and help one another with child care. The zany, constant chaos (*alagúl*) of such a large family is often idealized in songs and in their image of a vibrant household as a "beehive." But the reality is that as families grow older sons and daughters-in-law become grown men and women with diverse opinions about how things should be done. Few households remain undivided after all the brothers have children or after the father dies (*ibid.*). Of 104 Kalasha households in Rumbur in 1995, 54 were joint families—but of those, only 11 families remained together after the adult brothers' father died. Many Kalasha households (41) therefore consist of a married couple and their young children. (In most of these families, then, there is only one woman to do housework, fieldwork, and child care, a point I'll come back to shortly.) Nine Kalasha households did not fit easily into these categories.⁴

Once a household is "divided" (*dur pážik*), the land, animals, and trees the family owns are also divided. Only men inherit land, and there is tremendous pressure on fathers to see that each son and his family receive an equal share of the estate. Not all land is equal, however, as irrigation, sun, soil quality, elevation, slope, and distance all mean that some parcels are more productive than others. So as not to show favoritism, land is usually split into smaller sections, so that each brother receives a share of better land and a share of more marginal land. An important aspect of women's labor then becomes traveling to

and balancing responsibilities among distant fields, each of which needs to be weeded and irrigated to be productive in the harsh, dry climate of the Hindukush.

And Kalasha agriculture is enormously productive. Peter Parkes has demonstrated that Kalasha households hold on average only 0.6 hectares, less than a fifth of the average arable land reported elsewhere in the North West Frontier Province, yet they are compensated by grain harvests three or four times the yield elsewhere (1983:75–82). It is in large part the sexual division of labor in which women tend fields while men tend goats that enables Kalasha agriculture to be so productive. Animal manure greatly increases crop yield. Men transport manure in large baskets on their backs from stables and plow it into the soil before planting. Parkes has shown that Kalasha families that own large herds of goats will harvest twice or even three times as much grain as those without livestock (75). My own data show that this is still the case, even though chemical fertilizer is now commonly available. Kalasha households with herds larger than fifty goats harvest nearly three times the grain grown by families with no goats—even though these households have not quite twice as many members as households with no livestock.

Kalasha women's freedom to travel far from the home to manage disparate fields means that the allocation of household labor, and therefore the effectiveness of food production, is less constrained than in neighboring communities where women's labor (and therefore men's labor as well) is limited by their commitment to *purdah*. Allan has demonstrated that in Hunza, a similarly mountainous area that lies east of Chitral,

Women cannot travel far beyond the immediate confines of the steading to work in the tiny parcels of land farther from home.

TABLE 1. Goat Ownership and Agricultural Productivity

	N	Avg. Man of Grain ^a	Household Size ^b	Adult Men	Adult Women
No goats	24	15.95	5.63	1.79	1.38
Less than 50 goats	47	24.7	6.52	2.21	1.65
More than 50 goats	30	43.85	10.53	3.5	2.47

^aOne man of grain = 37.4 kg (Parkes 1983).

^bIncluding children and the elderly.

The net effect is low labor productivity, not only for women but also for children who perform minor tasks. It should be pointed out that in Hunza, under the strictures of Ismaili Muslims, women have much more freedom than they do elsewhere in South Asia, but the social constraint on movement nevertheless remains. (1990:404)

The fact that Kalasha women *can* travel beyond the immediate confines of the steading to work in the tiny parcels of land farther from home means that men are free to perform other tasks—such as herding and canal building.

Kalasha recognize that women's labor, rather than land, is the limiting variable in agricultural production. An essential part of the material basis for women's empowerment in Kalashadesh is the fact that there is commonly no use of wage labor for agriculture, so if men are going to get ahead they need women to do so. A family that holds more land than its women can work can lend land to another family (in exchange for part of the harvest), but each family depends on the labor of its own women for most of its staple foods. When coupled with the fact that, at least in Rumbur Valley, women are demographically advantaged in comparison with men (excluding children and elderly, in 1995 there were 256 adult Kalasha men and only 188 adult Kalasha women),⁵ it becomes easier to understand why women are perceived—and perceive themselves—as quite valuable.

Women often commented that the yields they receive correlate directly with the amount of attention a woman can give her fields. They say the hardest lives belong to "alone women" (*kawaliak istríža*), those who are the only women in their households. Alone women have no one with whom to share the work, no one to watch the children or cook the meals while they work in the fields. Their fields suffer for this, and my friends would shake their heads with pity when we passed Khana Aya's corn, which was noticeably stunted compared to theirs. It is not only sexism that makes both women and men yearn for sons, for sons mean daughters-in-law, daughters-in-law mean more women in the house, and this means prosperity. I wish that I had thought to test this empirically, for measuring the yields between the fields worked by a woman alone and fields in which the responsibility was shared would have been straightforward—and interesting to the Kalasha as well as to me. However, a comprehensive economic survey

of all Kalasha households in Rumbur Valley⁶ showed that households that produced enough grain to meet their consumption needs had an average of 2.24 adult women (defined as a woman who has begun menstruating), while households that bought grain had an average of 1.71 women.

Women themselves recognize that it is women's industry and self-motivation that allow a family to have a comfortable, even a beautiful, life. Women who can't work well, like Zar Begima Aya, who has been sick and weak for years, continually apologize for themselves and express sadness at not being able to work as hard as they would like. "Ah, sister," she would sigh every time I visited her, "You should have seen me before I was always ill. Oh how I would work! Up at dawn every day. My corn—how tall it grew! Now, look, my daughters have to do everything." Of course, not all women like to work, although those who don't come in for sharp criticism by other women (and men as well). Hard work isn't the only way Kalasha women gain respect in the community, but it is directly connected to women's identity.

I remember asking Saras Gula Aya about Bibizara Aya, a quiet and serious older woman who had been brought in as a second wife to Takat Jana Dada after his children were grown. It was rumored that Takat Jana Dada and Bibizara Aya were in love when they were young. She married another man, but only had one child, a daughter. After her husband died, she came to live with Takat Jan's family. I wondered if Takat Jana Aya, a woman with a notorious temper, was jealous of her cowife. "Why should she be jealous (*kháča jhoniú*)?" I was told. "Bibizara Aya does so much work for them. Takat Jana Aya knows lots of words [she is a renowned composer and has an equally

TABLE 2. Number of Adult Women per Household and Agricultural Productivity

	Households	Avg. Number of Women per Household
Purchased grain ^a	67	1.71
Did not purchase grain	33	2.24
All Kalasha households	100	1.9

^aOf 104 Kalasha households, 3 consisted of single men who did not buy grain but lent their fields to relatives and received a portion of the crop. One woman lives alone and receives all her sustenance through begging from friends and neighbors. These 4 households are not included here. Also not included are households of converted Kalasha, 9 out of 10 of which purchase grain.

renowned sharp tongue], but Bibizara Aya only knows how to work [meaning that she can't defend herself verbally against her cowife, but she doesn't need to because she works so hard]." She said that before Bibizara Aya came to live with the family they had nothing. Now, thanks to her hard work, the family has every good thing—"fruit, corn, wheat, tomatoes, pumpkins, every good thing comes to this family now, and all because of her hard work." Saras Gula Aya recalled that one year Bibizara Aya didn't come to her husband's house, choosing instead to stay in Bumboret with her daughter. That year again there was nothing. Takat Jana Dada was angry and blamed his first wife for chasing her off. The next year they talked her into coming back. Indeed, Bibizara Aya spends the summers alone on the family's summer lands, far from Takat Jan's main house, and does all the work herself, even the harvesting. Over the course of the two years I lived in Rumbur, four different women told me her story, always adding that her work had brought prosperity to a struggling family.

It is not simply the fact of working hard and being productive that is important to Kalasha women but that women's work involves considerable skill and judgment. Just as Lilizar asserts over and over that no one is telling her how to shepherd her little flock, so do adult women prize their autonomy in food production and distribution. Despite the fact that land is inherited only by men and held in the name of the father, in the Kalasha families with which I am most familiar it is the women who orchestrate the complex dance of producing and storing food over the summer and stretching their stores over the long winter.

In the summer, Saras Gula Aya worked twelve hours a day, rising an hour before dawn so she could avoid the heat of the sun at midday. She would water or weed for three or four hours before one of her grandchildren brought her breakfast of salted milk tea and cornbread to eat in the field. Only when the sun was directly overhead would she return to the house, where she would invariably find some other work to do. Her daughters-in-law complain that she works even when everyone else sleeps. Saras Gula Aya is far-sighted in her approach to farm management, thinking in the spring about the summer and fall, and in summer about the winter, and launching such projects as a tree nursery, which will take years to bear fruit. She does

more than her share of the unpleasant work rather than assigning those tasks to someone else (although she surely has the authority to do so). "How can I sit still and do nothing?" she always asks, "I have so many things to take care of—here are my tomatoes, there my corn, here the cows, there the trees. If I don't remember, no one else will."

On one particularly long day, Nizara Aya and I were pulling grass from beneath a forest of tall corn plants. We'd carry it to the roof of the stable, where it would be dried for the cows to eat in winter. I looked despairingly at the small patch we had cleared, and the endless sea before us, and lamented, "We'll never be able to finish all this. Look how much there is!" "I know," Nizara Aya sympathized, "My sisters [husband's wives] and I thought that, too. 'Let's wait until after the harvest when this will be much easier,' we told *isprés* [her mother-in-law]. But she said that Mohammed Aya [their Muslim neighbor] would get all excited seeing so much grass and come out here and pull it up herself to feed to her own cows." Anyway, "what could we do?" she sighed, since the work in the fields was organized and directed by her mother-in-law, who would do it all herself if they balked. She told me that she and the other daughters-in-law know how to do some things themselves and often make suggestions or take responsibility for smaller projects—Bayda Aya, for example, always plants the vegetable garden. But her mother-in-law has final authority, and no one ever contradicts her, including the men. She also directs their work in the fields, telling them when it's time to harvest and plow and plant. "What do our men know about the fields?" Nizara Aya asks, adding, "They always look to their mother also."

Distribution

Gulsambar is one of my favorite Kalasha children, as difficult as she is delightful, and I learned a lot by watching her grow up. When I first came to the valleys, she was about four years old and prone to the most outrageous temper tantrums. She would cajole and whine, "*may de, may de*" (give it to me, give it to me), and then start crying and screaming to get whatever she wanted—walnuts or fruits or bread or sugar, especially sugar. And she wasn't satisfied with her "share"—she wanted *all of everything*. Tired of listening to her, her mother would give in and hand it over. Gulsambar would sniff, wipe her tears on the

sleeve of her dress, and break into a wide grin. Then she'd cheerfully redistribute her hard-won loot, saving only the littlest bit for herself. I realized that already Gulsambar had learned the power of distribution, an important responsibility of adult Kalasha women.

Linked to the beaded necklaces that are so symbolic of Kalasha womanhood (chapter 3), women carry enough keys to make any janitor jealous. In addition to the keys to the family house, women carry keys to the *pasti* (wooden sheds for storing food), the *gonj* (storeroom) in each house, and numerous trunks. Although staple foods are shared by the whole "house," the woman of each nuclear family has her own private, locked space where she keeps special foods: pears, apples, dried apricots, wine, gifts from friends or natal family. Young wives have small trunks that are usually given to them by their natal family when they first marry. Husbands (never anyone else) build wooden storehouses for their wives after they have a couple of children. Having your own shed is an important symbol that a marriage has stabilized, that the young couple has begun to think of themselves as a unit in some ways separate from the larger family.

Each woman decides what will be eaten when and what will be given away, doling out treats to husbands and children and calculating which foods will be needed for special events—the birth of a child, festivals, visitors—as well as saving something for unforeseeable crises such as funerals. Men borrow and return keys to the storehouses, but they rarely carry them themselves. Allocating resources is a difficult job. Fall is a time of seemingly unlimited abundance. Wine flows, pears, apples, apricots, and walnuts drop from the trees, and children beg continually for *čičilak* (roasted corn). But the fall harvest has to be stretched over the rest of the year to avoid a hungry springtime. In addition, relationships between women and between families are continually shored up by the flow of gifts of food. The Kalasha pride themselves on being generous, and it is important never to appear stingy. Yet the line between giving all you can and saving what you must is pencil thin.

When I was recording the contents of Lilizara Aya's storehouse in late winter (one pear, three bottles of wine, a small sack of walnuts and a bunch of empty baskets), she told me some folklore that she said originally came from the Nuristani village at the end of the valley. Because the Nuristani village is at a higher elevation, colder winters mean that the water canals, and thus the mills that they power, freeze,

so Nuristani women calculate and grind the flour they'll need for winter in the fall. One young woman could never seem to make her flour stretch until spring. Every year she tried to be more careful, and every year she would fall short and her family would be hungry for several weeks. A wise old woman offered to watch what she was doing and tell her how she could improve. After observing her work for several days, the old woman noted that the younger woman would taste a small pinch of flour to see if it were rancid before she made it into bread for her family. This small amount, stretched over the year, accounted for the shortage every spring. While surely mythic, the story captures the seriousness with which women take their responsibility to ration food for their families over the long winter.

Control over food distribution requires skill and discipline and is an important area of autonomy that women claim for themselves. Mizoka Aya told me that when she fought with her husband it was inevitably because he thought she was too generous with their produce. She would never agree with him, she said. She knew how much they need and how much she could share. It was her "choice" to whom and how much she would give.

As Friedl points out (1975), and as four-year-old Gulsambar had already discovered, control over the distribution of food is an important power base. Like Gulsambar, Kalasha men also realize that control over the distribution of food is a powerful position. Men usurp this responsibility (along with the cooking) on prestigious ritual occasions.

Women's Work and Their Connection to the Landscape

Women's work and responsibilities tie them emotionally as well as physically to the land into which they pour their creativity and dedication. Women feel deeply connected to the landscape and see themselves as crafting it through the generations. That only men inherit land is a technicality—something taken for granted and not worth talking about. Women see fields and houses as their own. At first, a young wife talks of her "husband's" house and lands, but years of labor and deepening social connections transform it into her own. These are "my" fields, "my" cows, "my" house, "my" grassy spot, women assert. Bayda Aya's husband is a jeep driver, a prestigious occupation that means that he is rarely home. He suggested that they

sell their land in Rumbur and move to Bumboret to live near her natal family since he spends almost all of his time in the larger Kalasha valley. (It would be an unprecedented thing to do.) Bayda Aya refused. Later she commented to me, "It's strange. Since I first came here ten years ago, I've been so homesick and dreamed always of going back to Bumboret. But now I think that my place is here, my children's place is here. This place is in my body."

The stories women tell about places involve chains of women who worked the land and the changes each made. One of the most beautiful places in all of Rumbur is Sanduriga, a small, high, side valley with lush summer fields and a commanding view of Palar Mountain. After I returned from a visit, I told Saras Gula Aya about what and whom I had seen there. She said that she hadn't been there herself in thirty years. Her father used to have a tiny piece of land there. They would plant corn, and she would go back and forth to weed and water and harvest. At that time, there were very few summer houses, and women walked the steep five-mile trek every day. ("How soft women's lives are now!" she commented.) She began describing the land to me—where the pastures were and the grassy places for sitting and where the tall cedar trees were and who had how much land. As she talked, she named the women who were there then and remarked on what contributions each had made. Many of the women are dead now. She remembered what a hard worker Gillian's grandmother's mother-in-law had been and how Gillian's grandmother had taken over for her and made improvements also. She remembered how Nurshadin's mother's place was nothing but cedar trees and a little scrubby corn. There was no house and no stable. Nurshadin's mother herself had planted all those fruit trees to make a fine orchard and a beautiful little grassy spot (*bronzikik*) where you can lie back and see all the mountains. For Saras Gula Aya, even though the land is passed patrilineally from father to son, the changes in the landscape call back memories of the chain of women who lived there, molding the land as they made a living for their families.

Chet Guru, our family's summer land, changed remarkably even in the short time I lived there. One day Saras Gula Aya and I were sitting on a stone wall, watching her sons break up a huge rock with dynamite. It was backbreaking labor. The rocks were carried to the edge of the field where the master builder was constructing a wall. Later they would fill the wall with dirt, level it, and make a flower

garden—a concession the younger generation has finally won from their mother/mother-in-law, who says, “Since you can’t eat flowers, why plant them?” I said to Saras Gula Aya, who is about sixty years old, that it was amazing to think that only forty years ago Chet Guru had looked so different. This pleased her. She told story after story about how in her in-laws’ time there had been nothing—just some fields that were not very productive because you had to plant around so many rocks. There were no walls, no houses, no fruit trees and only two walnut trees. She pointed to each of the walls and remembered which field had been cleared to build them. She showed me the tree under which her husband’s mother used to cook. She showed me where there had been a little hut where she would stay the night with her children in the summer when there was too much work to walk all the way back to Kalashagrom in the evening. With a little ingenuity and patience, they had made this place beautiful and productive. She walked me around from tree to tree, telling me who had planted each one. The oldest ones were planted by her father-in-law but the others by her or by her sons on her instructions. She said that she missed her father-in-law. “He gave this land in my children’s father’s name,” she said, “but I feel that he gave it to me in spirit.”

As Marx has argued, in any division of labor human potential is carved up as each individual assumes identities and capacities associated exclusively with his or her particular sphere of activity (1965:45, quoted in Giddens 1971:63). Kalasha women’s agricultural work demands the capacity to assume near total responsibility for day to day maintenance of the farm. The capacities and identities associated with Kalasha women’s work—the decision-making ability required by their work and the freedom of movement demanded by their disparate obligations, autonomy, foresight, and creativity—form a template for agency in other arenas of their lives. The following chapter deals with the way in which Kalasha commitment to women’s freedom and choice (and the tacit comparison to women from neighboring Muslim communities such an identity implies) is made manifest through Kalasha women’s fashion.