



## Living Spirituality of Glaciers: Indigenous Cosmologies and Environmental Care in Hunza Hasina

PhD Scholar, National Institute of Pakistan Studies, NIPS - Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad

[Hasina\\_hasina@hotmail.com](mailto:Hasina_hasina@hotmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*Gilgit Baltistan is considered the hub of glaciers since the snow-covered mountain ranges of Himalaya, Karakorum and Hindukush are situated in the region. Though a lot of work has been done on the glaciers of Gilgit Baltistan but an important aspect of customary laws and rituals of celebrating, honoring and praising glaciers that is directly linked with the local narrative of the spirituality of glaciers is absent in the archives and in the process of knowledge production. The inhabitants of GB consider glacier as a living spiritual entity that is not 'nature' only. This paper can help us consider what the environment is (in a fundamental ontological way) in relation to what it means to people. This specific work presents the case studies of three generations how they perceive, praise and honor glaciers. Firstly, the story of a local spiritual figure (111 years old) explains his 85 years journey of meditation with glaciers and how he witnessed the impact of climate change on glaciers in the last eight decades. Secondly, a local environmental activist (spent 14 years in prison because of the ecological issues) explains the struggle of locals in saving the glaciers and thirdly, the story of a young local musician highlights how the younger generation pay tribute to glaciers by celebrating 'high- altitude' music festivals.*

**Keywords:** *Spirituality, Glaciers, Indigenous Cosmologies, Environmental Care, Hunza.*

### How glaciers are perceived

During a climate march in Islamabad, a renowned political activist sang a song with the lyrics, "Jab Hunza mein glacier phat-ta hai tou dharti ka dam ghut-ta hai," which means, "When the glaciers outburst in Hunza, the earth gets suffocated." This reflects the common understanding of glaciers—even among the educated class—by non-locals. It delves into the 'ways of knowing' that influence knowledge production, often provoking a reductively scientific and objectified understanding of glaciers as merely entities and manifestations of 'nature.' Knowledge articulates and circulates in different registers and equally generates geographies of ignorance, particularly in a region that persists in the mainstream imaginary as the 'Northern Areas.' Hence, the knowledge about glaciers, framed in colonial registers of archives, essentially displaces 'Chogori' as K2, meaning Karakoram Range No. 2. These colonial modern epistemologies see these glaciers as James Scott (1999) argues in *seeing like state* and reduce them to description of dangers associated with glaciers and highlights utilitarian aspects as how these specific glaciers are source of water for majority human population in Pakistan. A body of the literature focuses on the idea of the glacier that has been reproduced in colonial and post-colonial times. Most of the studies focus on the 'invention' of glaciers during colonial and post-colonial times. On contrary to this, the locals have had encounters with glaciers for centuries.

In her book 'Delusional states' Nosheen Ali states that nature is the main concern in understanding the region Gilgit Baltistan within Pakistan. It's known for its glorious peaks and spectacular valleys and this concept of natural beauty invokes a sense of affiliation and

ownership which allows them to claim that Pakistan is beautiful. This shows that the glaciers are considered the snow-covered mountains in Gilgit Baltistan which adds beauty to the landscape of Pakistan. For the rest of the world including Pakistan, the structure and outer magnificence of glaciers are considered significant just to claim that Pakistan is beautiful. Also, the snow-covered mountains are considered important because they provide water for almost the whole country.

Glaciers are perceived just as the source of water. Despite having a scientific and social understanding of the being of the glacier, people consider it as a source of water and also are aware of the dangers attached to the glaciers due to the global impact of climate change. Yet, the actual understanding of the glaciers by Hunzokux as a spiritual being is missing in the knowledge production as well as the general perception among people outside Gilgit Baltistan. This study solely focuses on the local understanding of glaciers and the kind of impression about glaciers that is still in the memory of locals. The cultural association and perception of glaciers among the locals are usually unknown by non-Hunzokux.

Glacier holds great significance in the history of Hunzokux. Locals are aware of the term *Ghamu* yet, the association with *Ghamu* (Glacier) is as old as the history of *Hunza* itself. Though there is not enough literature on the significance and affiliation of Hunzokux with *Ghamu* it is still in their memory. This study focuses on the local understanding of Glaciers and how it is different from the rest of the world. This study focuses on the everyday story of the glacier for Hunzokux and how the glacier is a spiritual entity in memory and practice. This specific work focuses on the oral history of glaciers in Hunza and it is fieldwork-based research. The participants of the research are the ones who have been actively engaged in the activities of glaciers.

The most important question that concerns researchers and policymakers in the current times is whether the glaciers are melting and disappearing with a higher frequency. The ice loss in the past few decades is alarming. In this critical time, it's so impactful to see the difference between different generations. By having this comparison, it will help us in a way to understand what is happening and often it is very much associated with local understanding of climate change and its very conventional explanation of why climate change is happening. This seems like a very powerful way to present how vast the damages are in just a hundred years period that too by having a comparison in three different generation.

This comparison is done keenly by having the case studies of three different generations and how they perceive, praise and honour glaciers. The first part highlights the story of a local spiritual figure (111 years old) that explains his 85 years of journey of meditation with glaciers and how he witnessed the impact of climate change on glaciers in the last eight decades. The second part focuses on a local environmental activist who spent 14 years of his youthful days in prison because of ecological issues and this part explains the struggle of locals in saving the glaciers. Finally, the third part focuses on the story of a young local musician that highlights how the younger generation pay tribute to glaciers by celebrating 'high- altitude' music festivals. Additionally, a local community worker who served the community for almost 80 years as a teacher is also interviewed to understand the general understanding of locals about glaciers.

The general lack of concern for the Glacier's melting condition did not mean that the locals I spoke with in Gilgit Baltistan had not noticed and were not worried about ecological shifts. Many commented on the growing water shortages and unpredictable glacier melting patterns. They noted that these phenomena inhibited the current negligence and disrespect to nature

by not celebrating the ancient rituals. Glacier melting and the dangers attached to it was a topic that many elaborated upon by sharing examples of GLOF from villages near and far. My conversations with people at Hunza, therefore, indicated that although people had observed environmental change, they often perceived that those transformations would not lead to a significant decline of water in Hunza. This meant that many people viewed the glacier as an exceptional entity that was independent of the variations in the climate change that occurred around it. Because of this perception, these glacier devotees did not perceive that the Glacier was threatened. To further explore this apparent lack of a preoccupation with the glacier's longevity, I tried to pose hypothetical questions about the kind of imaginaries about glacier people have in Hunza.

What is the historical, spiritual and cultural significance of glaciers in Hunza?

How do the spaces of Glaciers and lakes are used in shaping individual subjectivity and social being?

### **State of the art**

Highlighting the significance of 'traditions', there are some who hold the argument that religious practices can help in the pursuit of sustainability by making us believe to think about our intrinsic physical and spiritual interconnectivity with nature (Gosling 2001). The rituals and religious practices around nature are not only related to a specific community or religion but almost every religion guides towards respecting nature. Vandana Shiva (1988), for instance, states that Hindu reverence for nature is a counterbalance to the conceptual severance between humans, ecologies, and the divine that post-enlightenment modernity has helped to create and which has added meaning to humankind's widespread exercise of resource extraction and destruction. Although communion with nature is evident in many religious and spiritual practices, the case of ecological change in the patterns of glaciers shows that concern for a natural entity can be counteracted by numerous reasons and perceptions that have distinct historical, cultural, and political influences. Supporting this observation, Nagar-anjan (1998) argues that it is challenging to believe that ritual care for a place, object, or natural entity directly leads to 'ecological behaviour' and conservation.

This inspection confounds some of the research that posits that worshipping the natural world encourages sustainable ecologies. Sponsel, for instance, argues that the performance of religious reverence for the non-human could promote more environmental supervision since 'Religions are alternative ways of representing nature; affording it spiritual, moral, and cultural meanings and values; and defining the place of humans in nature, including how they should and shouldn't act toward nonhuman beings and other natural phenomena' (2001: 185). In an edited volume on religion in environmental and climate change, Vogt similarly argues that world religions play a significant role in nurturing sustainability as, along with other factors, 'All religions identify themselves as embodying long-term thinking' (2011: 76). My argument, conversely, has revealed how long-term ideas on the series of occasions and eras can also prevent practical ecological practices and plans.

In April, during the season of cherry blossom, *Burushoo*<sup>1</sup> men in Hunza move towards the hilly areas near the glaciers for *Rajaki*<sup>2</sup>. During this activity, they perform a special ritual of distributing food including bread and butter among the members of *rajaki* and leaving a large

<sup>1</sup> Local term for people of Hunza- Burushaki speaking

<sup>2</sup>Rajaki refers to the indigenous approach to communing in Hunza. It's a practice through which communities particularly men construct pipes or clean the water channels to channel water from the glaciers to their villages.

portion of food for other beings near glacier. This *Khudai*<sup>3</sup> is usually performed before supplying the water to the community for irrigation and other usages.

Thus far, I have highlighted the different arenas in which people of Hunza come to believe that beyond humans fairies and other beings exist near Glaciers and lakes. To grasp the nature of water-related rituals and emotional attachment in the case of considering glaciers and lakes spiritual, *Hunzokux*<sup>4</sup> practice some rituals as a form of meditation. There are certain local narratives about the spirituality of glaciers and lakes. Allision (2015) argues that the glaciers are the places of powerful sacred and symbolic meanings for local communities. In ancient times, *Hunzokux* used to follow and practice several rituals around these glaciers. In this article, I will explain the paradigm shift over the decades in the century's old rituals and to back this argument, I will present the stories of a local spiritual figure/mystic Muhammad Abad who spent more than 80 years in meditation around glaciers, a local environmental activist who spent 13 years in prison for participating in a protest during the formation of Attabad Lake and a musician who arranges high altitude festivals near glaciers to pay tribute to the Holy glaciers.

Gilgit Baltistan has witnessed a major shift in religious and cultural practices in the past centuries. As Nosheen Ali (2019) states in her work that in the very beginning, natives were the followers of animistic traditions and Buddhism but a major shift occurred during the 18th and 19th centuries. Currently, the region is dominated by Shia, Sunni, Ismailie and Nurbakhshi interpretations of Islam. The centuries-old rituals around glaciers are still practiced in Hunza and the only difference is that these rituals are Islamized after the religious shift in the region.

Karakorum and Himalaya offer a grafting performance of glaciers. This ancient matting technique of glaciers appears to assist the regions that have no direct access to natural glaciers. Locals identify these glaciers as male and female. Munir et al (2021) write in their article Karakorum and Himalaya offer a grafting performance of glaciers. This ancient matting technique of glaciers appears to assist the regions that have no direct access to natural glaciers. Locals identify these glaciers as male and female. Palmir (2022) states that the female category of glaciers appears to be white and clear while the male glaciers are darker with the debris and rocks on their beds. Munir et al (2021) write in their article that the local discourse suggests that, if 35 kg of ice from each glacier is kept nearer in a dry ravine, they will start to breed in a decade, consequently, increasing the size of glacier, and would be a source for supplying water to the villages. This technique is also used by AKRSP in various areas of Gilgit-Baltistan with 80 percent of success rate.

<sup>3</sup>Khudai or niyaz is a term used for an activity where people jointly prepare food and distribute among members in equal portions.

<sup>4</sup>Hunzokux here refers to the people who live in Hunza. These are the indigenous people of Hunza.



1: Map of Hunza and its northern frontier, circa 1880 (map drawn by Chris Milan)

Though Hunzakut embraced colonial bureaucracy which is still continued in the post-colonial times which consumed the energies and time of locals and they were away from their traditional rituals. Nosheen Ali (2019) notes in her work that in current times, the activists, community workers and intellectuals of the region are engaged in development programs. They introduced the concept of progressive seminars and literacy festivals. Yet, the youth of current times felt that gap and they are engaging themselves in paying tribute to the holy glaciers, hence the youth refollow the tradition of praising and honoring glacier with certain modifications and in their own way.

### Theorizing Relationship with Glaciers

To understand the relation between glaciers and society of Hunza it is significant to understand the balanced relation between culture and environment. Escobar and Blaser explain that the environment remained a distinct domain from culture and it was assumed that reality was accessible from the standpoint of the sciences. Consequently, some claim that while nature is a separate ontological realm, it has become inseparably blended with culture and technology and increasingly produced by our knowledge (Leff 1986, 1993, 2002). Escobar further highlights these stronger epistemological claims that the environment is always already cultural since we can only know it through meaning-making practices that are fundamentally cultural.

In order to clarify the claims and to understand the meaning making of glaciers in a society it is essential to understand the grounds of the constructivism. Escobar explains that constructivism accepts the certain association between subject and object of knowledge and, consequently, a challenging relation between thought and the real. Constructivist political ecologists have done a good job in terms of determining the numerous symbols or connotations given to nature by different cultures, the clashes that these variances beget, and the costs or influences that all this has in terms of what is actually done to nature (e.g. Cronon 1995; Hinchcliffe and Woodward 2000; Macnaghten and Urry 1998). In other words constructivist approach will help us in terms of establishing the several demonstrations or meanings given to glaciers by a specific culture of GB. This is very significant, yet constructivism inclines to neglect the question of the ontological character of biophysical authenticity specifically discussing physical beings as simple 'envelopes of meaning' (Pels et al 2002). This helps us in exploring the question of the 'real' that is still unaddressed, which

then adds to the power of epistemological realism. It simply means that glacier has different meanings for different cultures and societies. It is important to highlight how people in Hunza perceive glacier and what kind of meaning making they have in their imagination and memory. For this specific research the question of the significance of glaciers and its meaning making has been explored through a constructionist lens.

This study explores the question of spiritual ecology of glaciers in Hunza by using some intellectual sources including phenomenology, actor network theory and Deleuzian philosophy along with the ethnographic research with locals. All these approaches are perfectly fitted to highlight three different case studies to understand the spiritual ecology of glaciers and people living in Hunza. For instance, the lived experience of a local spiritual figure has been explored with the help of phenomenology. Actor network theory helps us in understanding the relational ontology. It proposes the ontology that inspire relational geography of Hunza and the constant shift in the living experiences of different generations. Furthermore, it proposes the struggles of an environmental activist in preserving their natural assets galceiers. Finally, deluezian philosophy helps us in identifying how a young artist practices his full potential of power and goes beyond to the limits set by the society to arrange high altitude festivals.

### **Methodology**

For this particular study, the qualitative research approach has been used. The researcher has collected data through primary sources where the researcher herself collected data from the respondents through a storytelling approach to depicting and exploring the story of a mystic Muhamad Abad locally known as Faqeer. The researcher identified further respondents through snowball sampling where the respondents who narrated their stories further identified and recommended people to engage in the research.

### **Spatial spirituality: How glaciers are space for meditational practices**

During the data collection, the most significant part was Muhammad Abad, 111 years old spiritual figure locally known as 'Faqeer'. We had consulted his family before visiting him and left for the field when we finally got permission after almost a month. Our whole field trip revolved around him. Since, he was not feeling well so we planned our trip accordingly. Finally, after waiting for two days, his family allowed us to interview him. I was accompanied by two of my friends Abdul Rehman and Mr. Abrar who were taking care of recording the interview. Mr. Abrar is an artist and a videographer who has worked on various national and international projects. He was kind enough to agree to our request to document the interview. My friend Abdul Rehman was taking notes. Also, Abdul was helping me in sequencing the questions. Faqeer explained his whole journey of meditation around glaciers and the purpose behind it. His family was extremely supportive, particularly his daughter-in-law who made him prepared and also translated some of his statements as we were unable to understand since he was speaking too slowly and his tone was shaking due to his age.

When Abrar made sure that the recording gear is ready, I could finally start I asked a general question about what made him choose meditation to break the ice. He responded:

"I believe each soul has its own specific purpose. Some specific souls have the same purpose that is to practice spirituality and to remember the divine and creator all the time....."

His voice was shaking, his tone was very slow but I understood him clearly and I asked him to continue. He moved his glasses, looked into my eyes and tried to move his hands. I asked him if he needs help. He simply nodded his head and tried to place his hand on my head. I bent down my head and moved a bit closer to him. He again tried to move his hand but this

time he was only able to bring it closer and then his hands started shaking. He smiled and said:

“You are going to be succeeded in your work. I pray for your success”. He then added, “are these your friends?” I responded, “Yes, Abdul is my friend and university fellow and Abrar is my ex-manager and an artist”. He nodded his head and replied, “I pray for all three of you. May success be yours”.

By this time, we made a progress in our conversation and also, we became comfortable with each other’s presence. Abdul placed a flash card Infront of me mentioning a question about his spiritual journey. I was about to ask but then I heard him saying,

“I usually do not give permission to random people who wish to meet me. Particularly when they are outsiders. I do not feel comfortable with their presence. My health is deteriorating with each passing day and I am dependent on my children to move myself from the bed. With this health situation, I do not feel comfortable in meeting people.”

I responded, “I can imagine that, thank you for allowing us to meet you. We are extremely grateful”. He gave me a sarcastic smile and said, “People come with different intentions. You do not need to worry, since I am aware that the friends to brought along with have pure intentions, I am fine with them”. He further added: “I wanted someone to document my life before I leave this world, I am glad that you became the reason”.

We both exchanged a smile and I threw my next question about his journey of spirituality. The journey of my spirituality and meditation started when I was 20 years old. I joined the British army when I was 18 years old. After serving for almost two years, I saw a dream. I was asked to practice meditation near glaciers in my hometown Yasin. So, I left without letting anyone know and ran away. I didn’t share it with anyone in my family. After a month they followed me and they searched for me everywhere. Finally, they found me after a few months and they asked me to go with them. I refused and told them that I need 40 days of meditation. They left and said they will be back after 40 days. After 40 days they came again and they asked me to follow them. When I refused to go back to my job, they threatened to kill me. I challenged them to kill me and told them that they are creating issues for themselves as I had devoted my life to God. They fired a bullet. They saw someone falling from the mountain and thought I was dead. They left.

During that time, I got so weak since I wasn’t eating anything. I was aware that I came to fulfil God’s command so I didn’t have any insecurity or worry.

He paused, took a deep breath and kept looking at all of us one by one. His daughter in law asked if he needed some water, he refused and added:

“There was an occasion when I went near a glacier with some companions. They saw a lake forming river all of the sudden and it took me away. My friends witnessed me sinking in that river. They declared me dead and left the place. I came out alive after a month. I was meditating in the river.”

He moved his head around different directions. Looked at us and said:

I can’t share much about spirituality since that is extremely personal and people misinterpret it. When you get to hear different misinterpretations of the spiritual aspect of human life it creates certain issues for people like me. However, I can tell you about the material aspect of human life.

My real name is Muhammad Abad. Very few people know me by my real name. I am known as Faqeer. Faqeer is a feeling that I had. I still remember my grandfather used to practice Faqeer and he asked me to keep his ‘Tasbeeh’, I refused but later on, I got to follow his path.

He asked for some water and then said. Is that enough? I replied: "we need few more mintues, please let us know what kind of difference you see in different generations. Do you think people and their practices are same?"

I have seen different aspects of human life. In ancient times, people were kind and innocent. They were like birds free of worries and social labels. They used to love every creature equally without thinking about the profit and loss. In current times people are calculative. Before meeting anyone they count the profit and loss. They only own the people and creatures that give them benefits.

By this time, he felt short of words and his tone became extremely slow. I asked Abdul if we should stop. He said it would be difficult to take another appointment so we should ask few more questions. Then Abdul placed another flash card with a question related to fairies in front of me.

I asked, "Do you still see fairies? Are they the same ones or the different ones?"

Just like human beings the fairies also have a life period. They come for a specific time and they get expired. They also have generations. I have witnessed their generations. In ancient times during the 1930s, there were different Fairies. Also, there is a type of these beings who practice spirituality. Not all of them do it. I encountered many Fairies who practice meditation and they are still with me. I can see them; I can interact with them.

He probed and asked, "how much time you still need?" I immediately replied, "just a few minutes and asked what is the major difference between these generations?"

"In ancient times people used to love everyone and everything. Love was dominant. In current times love has disappeared from the hearts and minds of people. This generation is hard to handle."

By this time, we felt that we should let him rest. This time I gathered some courage and said, "I think you should rest now, just one last question about the differences you witnessed in environment and climate change in the past century".

"I have witnessed climate change happening in the past hundred years. During my childhood, the weather used to be favorable in all four seasons but now it's extreme in both summers and winters. I have seen it happening gradually. This change wasn't sudden, it was gradual."

We concluded our interview with a specific question about his general understanding of water. He responded:

Just like human beings water also has life. It has different aspects of life and it has different layers of its identity. For example, it has a spiritual aspect, has material aspect and it has a social and cultural aspect. Also, water has a body and soul. It can sense the doings of people around it. It can sense the dangers and sometimes it appears dangerous that we can witness in the form of floods and other natural disasters.

We expressed our gratitude and told him that we are done with our task. He asked us to bring a bottle filled with water. He asked my friend Abdul to remove its cap. He recited few verses of Holy Quran and said a series of prayers. He then blew the air with the help of his mouth covered the cap and gave us to drink. He mentioned: "I have prayed for you; you can drink this water". We requested him to pray for the purity of water and for having enough water for everyone.

His family served us tea with local bread *arzog*.

### **Embodied celebrations of glaciers**

While sitting in the garden under the shade of a cherry tree, we were having a nice conversation with Baba Jan who is a devoted local environmental activist and spent almost

11 years in jail for speaking for the rights of the displaced people of Attabad who lost their properties and lands during an unfortunate incident of a massive land sliding back in 2010 that resulted in to making the current Attabad lake- also considered as the greatest artificial lake in Pakistan. When we asked about the contribution of government in the development work and schemes he stated,

“Government doesn’t take interest in the development activities in this region. The community works on their own. Hence most of the work is done by the community members. Government should take an initiative to supply water to the regions where there is not adequate water. There are regions where there is adequate water and there are regions where there is no water at all. Our trees are dying, our crops are dying. When we raise our voice for getting our rights, they label us anti-state.”

“During 1987, the government prepared a chemical for melting these glaciers. It took centuries to form the glaciers and the government was about to melt them in one day for addressing the water scarcity issues in Pakistan. All the important ancient heritage has destroyed according to ‘*Sochi Samjhi Sazish*’.

When I inquired about the spirituality of the upstream glaciers, Baba Jan mentioned that “In Hunza, glaciers are considered sacred from the very beginning. There were formal rituals in the region for purity of water before its usage and supply to the valleys and communities. There was a special ritual around glaciers that is called ‘Khudai’ where people used to offer prayers and distribute food on the hills near glaciers that are the main sources of water. A larger part of the food used to be kept on a stone or glacier for supernatural beings. Now, people have stopped following these rituals”.



Baba Jan further added:

“People of the region changed their religion over the centuries. In ancient times, the rituals around the water were associated with ‘Devi’, but after the arrival of Islam, the rituals were also Islamized and the same practices were named ‘Khudai’.

On our way back to Hunza from Gilgit, we decided to meet the renowned activist (Baba Jan) in his native village Nasir Abad Hunza. My friend Abdul Rehman had his contact number so he [Abdul] immediately called him and luckily, he [Baba Jan] attended our phone. He was more than happy to meet us and asked us to stop by his village. When we reached, we found him waiting for us on the main road near a hotel [Comrade hotel]. He asked us to follow him and we did. He took us directly to his garden and showed us the variety of trees. He explained how locals used to praise these trees for getting benefits from them in ancient times. We then followed him to his house where his family welcomed us and offered local food. There was

no electricity so the room we sat in was a bit dark. His family made sitting arrangements in his garden, placed chairs under a huge cherry tree. We started our conversation as soon as we sat down. We would talk, listen and eat cherries directly from the tree. We started our conversation with the historical background of Glaciers and lakes in GB and the rituals around these water spaces particularly in Hunza.

While answering a question regarding glaciers and lakes Baba Jan said:

“The source of water for these lakes are hidden glaciers and streams called ‘Mel Ghamu’ in the local language. Some of these lakes are natural and some are artificial. Our ancestors were aware of these lakes and they used to perform various activities around these lakes”.

### **What is the memory of glaciers?**

As Kreutzmann notes in his work Hunza Matters, Gilgit Baltistan is considered the hub of glaciers. The people of Hunza share a very intimate bond with water, particularly glaciers. One of the many reasons for considering the glaciers and lakes holy is the concept of supernatural beings [fairies] living around them. There are occasions when individuals who regularly practice meditation encountered these supernatural beings [fairies] and they started predictions for people.

According to the IUCN (2003) the rivers of Gilgit Baltistan add 72 per cent of their annual flow to Indus. Hunza has its own post-colonial and colonial history. When the Britishers visited the region, they got greatly impressed from the landscape of mountains, glaciers and rivers. Knight, (1893). during his little Hunza campaign of 1891, states that looking up the valley behind Nilt there is a breathtaking but very short view of Rakaposhi perfect from the fact that one suddenly turned a corner and there right before one is this enormous mass of snow and ice.

I wish to make this statement clear that People of the region and their knowledges were completely excluded in their early writings [archives]. They [foreign authors] used the term ‘discovered’ that too in the 1950s for the ancient lakes and glaciers. The fact that locals had constant interaction with these water sources and they had their rituals around them was completely ignored. Knight, (1893) argues that the people of Hunza were not aware of Rakaposhi by name but as Dumani, which means ‘mother of the clouds. Knights further adds that in early days an officer was touring in Bagrot and he was on the other side of mountain, that was the time when the name Rakaposhi was given to this mountain of glacier.

Upon asking about the history of ‘Borit Lake’ a 70 years old resident of Gulkhin Hunza said: “it’s difficult to trace the history of the ‘*Borit Xhui*’ (local name of the lake). My forefathers got settled here when they found this lake during tracking to the pastures back in the 18th century. The lake appeared to be significant in getting settled here. It also helped us to connect with the rest of the world as it attracted tourists resulting in generating many financial opportunities for us. Our lives were completely dependent on agriculture and animal farming, but now we generate revenues through tourists and we can afford a better living”.

During our fieldwork, some local respondents explained the narratives about meditation near glaciers and lakes. Zia, a local musician who has modified a local musical instrument Xhigini explained that some of the mystics and local spiritual figures used to meditate near glaciers and lakes since they consider them holy.

When we asked a 111 years old local spiritual figure [Faqeer] about the different sources of water i.e., glaciers, lakes and rivers, he responded:

“All kind of water is the same but every kind of water possesses different power. Lakes and glaciers possess more power as compared to streams and rivers. Water seems to be the same

but in reality, it is different. Water that is located at high altitudes is usually surrounded by supernatural beings. Fairies live around lakes and glaciers".



The spirituality and purity of glaciers are still in the memory of locals while there is no adequate academic work done. People associate the centuries-old rituals with the purity of water which has decreased over time.

### **Water spaces structuring individual subjectivity and social beings**

People of the region associate dangers with rivers and wells as there are certain stories of people who sank in the wells and the river flew them away. During a conversation a local community worker Darwesh states:

"The natives [*Hunzokux*] think that the river is aggressive and every year it takes its food in the shape of people which they call '*Maari*'. Mothers do not allow their sons to play around the river and they are not allowed to swim. On the other hand, people take pride in swimming in lakes and also, they celebrate events including sports and music concerts around the lakes in summers and on the iced lakes in winters".

For the last couple of years, residents are having ice hockey tournaments on these lakes. Hunza is considered to be rich in culture. Diversity is accepted among the residents and in the past few decades, a major cultural shift has occurred. Though the consciousness about water might have changed in current times, however, *Hunzokux* still believe in the spirituality of glaciers and lakes. The new generation is not much aware of the century's old rituals and their significance. The traditional consciousness has been replaced due to the new development discourse. The administrators of the region also do not take interest in these rituals but one thing is clear on the imaginary level *Hunzokux* identify themselves as a larger group with the loss of water centered rituals by owning the loss. Nevertheless, the deprivation sense merges on a generic level due to the dominant discourse of calling these practices myths. Darwesh is a 96 years old community worker who has served as a teacher for almost 80 years. We met him in his native house in his village Ganish which is considered Hunza's oldest village. Darwesh started teaching after 5th grade when he was around 14 years old. After serving for almost two years in his village voluntarily, he got a job in the government school Altit. Even after retirement, he kept on teaching in private schools and he stopped working when he was 80. Darwesh served the community and helped Hunza to become the region with the highest literacy rate. Darwesh is respected in the community as many of his students achieved a lot in life. They still visit him whenever they visit their villages. We had a very

detailed discussion with Darwesh. In response to a question about the relationship people share with water, he responded:

“Water comes in different forms. Historically it has a great significance. In old times when I was a child people used to honour and praise water through different rituals. We used to distribute food and milk before supplying water to the community. We used to leave a portion of food for other ‘beings’ near glaciers in the mountains every season when we go for ‘Rajaki’. In current times, people stopped following these rituals, hence the water has changed its properties. Water used to be pure and crystal clear but now it's muddy”

While answering a question about the significance of water in meditation practices and its spirituality Darwaish answered:

“I believe all kind of water is the same. Being a teacher, I was engaged with teaching and learning processes so I didn't get time to practice meditation, even though I was so interested so I am not the right person to answer this question but I strongly believe that people cannot perform spirituality without water since it is pure and it makes us pure’.

Some of the people who perceived that human activities near the glacier were partly accountable for its melting and outburst and advocated for people to change their behaviour in the interest of protecting the ecological context that is considered to be a spiritual entity. The points addressed reveal the different ways that people learn about and express concern for glaciers, their rooted ecosystems, and the divine entities with which they are associated. Although this discussion emphasizes how certain perceptions and interpretations of ecological change inhibited proactive environmental efforts, it also indicates the growing awareness of human responsibilities in relation to natural and sacred entities such as glaciers and lakes. This is promising as it indicates the development and the possible blend of epistemologies about climate change phenomena that are beginning to require people to act. These intricacies point out that religious veneration for nature does not always lead to the performance of ecologically sound behaviours, especially when multiple circulating epistemologies are covered in regional policies and politics.

Youatt (2017) in his work personhood and the rights of nature argues that understanding of persons as figures that are sometimes shaped by associations between human and nonhuman actors. It then proposes that the rights of nature are, ironically, not a politics over whether a singular nature should be a rights holder but, rather, are partial challenges to the universality of secular law and the sovereign state. As such, they raise important questions about the politics of translation and the commensurability of multiple conceptions of collective personhood.



### Music and Glaciers (Waters):

Just a day before our departure from Hunza, we requested a young musician Mujeeb Ur Rehman to accompany us to the Borit Lake to share his journey of music and how it helps him in connecting with nature. Mujeeb agreed and he brought along a friend Jameel who plays flute and practices near the lake most of the times. We picked Mujeeb and Jameel from their village Aliabad and left for the adventurous yet the most wonderful learning experience. When we finally reached Borit Lake, we found ourselves a very comfortable corner with a small hut. We ordered *pakoras* and *Chai*. Mujeeb and Abdul went for swimming in the Lake while Abrar and I chatted on how to document the event. After almost an hour Mujeeb and Jameel took us to the other side of Lake where they practice playing Rubab and flute. They shared their experience of how the lake is helpful for them in listening their music. Mujeeb stated that sometimes he listens to the Lake as it also creates a specific music.

### A conversation with a local artist Mujeeb Ur Rehman

“Glaciers and lakes have a great significance in music. It connects us with ourselves and our ancestors. I tune Rubab with the sound of water waves and sometimes, the silence of glaciers and lakes makes me discover more tunes”.

Upon asking a question about glaciers and meditation he responded:

“My journey of music started from glaciers. They are holy and I consider them sacred and divine. I was on expenditure on K2 Base camp almost 6 years ago and got a chance to spend a few hours with the glacier. I was craving alone time to spend with the ‘holy’ glaciers and to feel its power. Luckily, I was excused from my team and went to a corner and kept looking at the beauty, sacredness and power of the mighty glacier. I got goosebumps and felt a pull towards it. I felt that movement was magical and for the first time, I got convinced that glaciers are holy and offer a different aspect of life. I then thought about how to return the favour of peace and joy it offered to me and in that movement, I decided to learn a musical instrument and play music near the glacier to offer a tribute for the services it has been offered throughout the centuries. On the next trip, I learned to play Rubab and carried the ‘love of my life’ along with me. I played the music of game of thrones and made a video. The clip got viral and an actor in the series shared it on his social media page. I got a huge appreciation and glaciers changed my life. For the world, it was the music but playing this music for me was the tribute I gave to the glaciers and at that moment, I achieved solace, contentment, peace and pure joy”.



It was a wonderful experience watching the artists playing music for the Lake and feeling tranquility in that moment. Jamil shared his experience how he used to practice flute near this lake.

### Conclusion

This specific work focuses on the conversations embedded in oral history of glaciers in Hunza and fieldwork-based research. The participants of the research are the ones who have been actively engaged in the activities of glaciers. It is essential to understand the significance of glaciers and lakes as spiritual entities in the very structuring of individual subjectivity and social being in Hunza. The rituals around water reflect the life worlds of the *Hunzokux* and their frames of meaning and value. This clearly explains how cherished glaciers and lakes are through many forms of rituals of praising and honoring glaciers in Hunza. Alongside a devotional affection and life-consuming desire for the beloved 'glaciers', these factors take us closer to the argument I intend to make here: Given the historical, cultural and religious connections between glaciers and spirituality in Hunza since the very beginning, the comparison is perfectly fitted. In making the comparison, I am presented the stories of three different personalities who cherished the glaciers as a spiritual resource that reveals the rationality of the social processes. I deliver the case studies of the lived practices and rituals through which the spirituality of glaciers and lakes is made, sensed and redrafted. The central argument about glacier is that it's the main source of water and water is a resource for all kinds of living. In this study, I explained other aspects of the spirituality of water, that is practiced, praised, honored and celebrated by *Hunzokux* throughout the centuries. People of all age groups sense the denotation and often feel pride in explaining the rituals. I have sought to illuminate the contexts in which people produce meanings about environmental transformations. I did so while highlighting the faith in the glacier's perpetuity that a selection of people in Hunza expressed despite observations of ecological change elsewhere. I also showed that many of my informants believed pollution and environmental degradation to be a signifier of our moral corruption. We have lost respect for the world and the Gods that inhabit it, they argued, and these Gods have become angry with us. To correct this, some offered suggestions that exceeded the call merely to cut back on carbon emissions. Perhaps, as a local elderly man aged 96 asserted if we start respecting the glaciers and performing rituals every year the glaciers would surge again.

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