Pakistan’s North-West Frontier has long been associated with Islamic fundamentalism and tribal politics. Magnus Marsden has spent several years living here amongst the people of Chitral. His experiences show that, in fact, most Muslims in the region are committed to leading their lives as good Muslims, and do not support the teachings of fundamentalist Islamist movements. This book explores their philosophy, which rests on the interaction between mind and spirit, enhanced through the creative force of poetry, music and dance. These celebrations form a central part of life in Chitral. Challenging assumptions powerful in both popular and scholarly work on Islam, the book makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the place of religion in Pakistani society, and in the Muslim world more generally. It will be of interest to scholars of Pakistan and students and anthropologists researching the nature of Islam and religion in the contemporary world.

MAGNUS MARSDEN is a fellow of Trinity College and the Graduate Officer in Research at the Centre of South Asian Studies, the University of Cambridge. He lectures on the anthropology of Islam, as well as on religion and politics in Pakistan.
LIVING ISLAM

Muslim Religious Experience in Pakistan's North-West Frontier

MAGNUS MARSDEN
University of Cambridge
Contents

List of maps vi
Acknowledgements vii
Note on transliteration x
Glossary of Khowar words used in text xi

1. Introduction 1
2. Rowshan: Chitral village life 37
3. Emotions upside down: affection and Islam in present day Rowshan 51
4. The play of the mind: debating village Muslims 85
5. Mahfils and musicians: new Muslims in Markaz 122
6. Scholars and scoundrels: Rowshan’s amulet-making ulama 157
7. To eat or not to eat? Ismai’lis and Sunnis in Rowshan 193
8. Conclusion 239

Bibliography 264
Index 290
Maps

1. Pakistan  
2. Chitral district
Acknowledgements

It is ten years since I first visited Chitral, and it would have been impossible to live there and complete the research on which this book is based without the friendship, hospitality and warmth many of the region’s people showed me. Unfortunately, I cannot name them all here. In Rowshan I have benefited from long lasting friendship with Muzafar and Jamila Hussein, Qamar-ul Haq and Habiba, Aziz Ahmed, and Shamsudin and Parvakichi Kai. Aftab Hussein, his mother, father and sisters were a constant source of affection during my stay in Rowshan, as were Charunaich Kai, Qazi Mehboob and their children. Tikadar Ghloam Qadir, Mawlana Sahib, Sultan Nigah and Amin Shah were all sources of valued advice and hospitality during my stay in Rowshan. Babu Lal, Fauji Lal, Collegie Lal, Jan Lal, Amin Lal and their families have for long welcomed me into their homes both in Rowshan and in Markaz. Subadar, his brother, Havildar, and their families showered me with unremitting hospitality, happiness and encouragement during my stay in Rowshan. Hazar Baig was and is a real friend, and he also gave me especially deep insights into the nature of Chitral life and the Islamic tradition.

In particular, it was Mir Hussein and his family, especially his brother, Sardar Hussein, mother, wife and sister, Hamida Kai, who have given me a house and a family in Chitral, and have done most to make my many stays in Rowshan both enjoyable and academically rewarding. In Markaz, Nizar Wali Shah was a source of boundless entertainment, friendship and amusement, as were other Markaz folk, especially Mansoor Ali Shabab, Aftab Alam Aftab, Manuwar Ghamgin, Jabar, Sa’dat Hussein Makhlfi, Shahid, and many more. Abdul Wali Khan and his family also showed me great hospitality on my visits to Markaz, as did Abdur Rauf, his brother, Subadar, and their sisters.

The research upon which this book was based was not, however, confined to the villages of Chitral. In Peshawar, after arriving late at night and exhausted from the daylong journey from Chitral, I was always given
gracious and unending hospitality by Zarak Saleem Jan and his wife, Palwasha. In Lahore, Alia Hamid and her husband Shehreyar Hamid helped introduce me to the Punjab. Whilst in Karachi, Sadiq-ur-Rehman, among many other Chitral friends, provided me insights into yet another dimension of Chitral life.

Two of my closest friends died during the writing of this book. In Markaz I benefited from great hospitality and conversation with Wali Ur Rehman. His death shortly after I left Chitral in October 2002, as my friend told me on the telephone when he relayed the sad news to me, means that the shade of Chitral will never be as cool again. He is sorely missed. Shireen Lal was also a man deeply loved by many in the region, and his death in February 2003 makes Rowshan seem an empty place. My thoughts remain with his wife and children.

On returning to Great Britain in the aftermath of 11 September 2001, I have been able to talk about Chitral and have been shown Chitrali hospitality by Sher Gul, his wife and children in London. Ali Sher has been a constant companion in debate and discussion, and Shah Hussein has offered great support with my work and helped refine my transliteration of Khowar words into English. Israr has always been ready to answer my questions and share his fascinating insights into Chitral life with me.

Financial support for this research was provided in the form of a research studentship by the Economic and Social Research Council. I should like also to thank Trinity College, Cambridge for making a number of further research visits to Chitral possible. Emma Rothschild and the Centre for History and Economics at King’s College have also generously supported the research on which this book is based. At the Centre, Inga Huld Markan, Sunil Amrith, Rosie Vaughan, Rosanne Flynn and Jo Maybin have offered great support. I have also received generous support from Peter and Azra Meadows at the University of Glasgow. And I am particularly grateful to Akbar Ahmed, who gave me my research visa while he was High Commissioner in London. At Cambridge University Press, Marigold Acland, Isabelle Dambricourt and Valina Rainer all helped greatly guiding the book into production.

Cambridge friends and colleagues, Vera Skirvskaja, Fiona Scorgie, Bene Rousseau, Mark Elliot, Nico Martin and Soumya Venkatesan have all offered invaluable companionship. Perveez Mody-Spencer has given ceaseless encouragement and advice. Tom Burston and Alex MacDonald have offered an unflinching source of friendship, as has William Fletcher who also helped produce the maps presented within.
The Centre for South Asian Studies at the University of Cambridge has provided an excellent setting in which to refine the arguments of the PhD thesis upon which this book is based, and I am grateful to Rajnarayan Chandarvarkar, Chris Bayly, Kevin Greenbank, William Gould, Rachel Rowe, Barbara Roe and Jan Thulborn for providing such a welcoming atmosphere there. Since joining the Centre, Kaveri Gill has witnessed the fraught final months of the preparation of this book, and given great boosts to my energy and perseverance.

The examiners of my PhD thesis, James Laidlaw and Michael Gilsenan, provided me with encouragement and greatly needed criticism, as have two anonymous Cambridge University Press reviewers. Above all, the supervisor of the thesis, Susan Bayly, has been an academic guide without comparison, and has constantly reminded me that there is something other than the anthropology of Islam: to her my sincerest and unending thanks.

Finally, there is a Khowar proverb, ‘parents’ hearts are on their children, children’s hearts on stones’ (nan-taatan hardi azhelian suri, azhelian hardi darbokhtan suri). This suitably reflects the support, during sometimes difficult times, my mother, father and brother have given to me during the course of my long interaction with Chitral and the region’s people, and it is to them that this book is dedicated. I, of course, take sole responsibility for the shortcomings and any errors that remain. Following anthropological convention, pseudonyms are used for all people and small places mentioned in this text.
Note on transliteration

Throughout this book I have sought to transliterate phrases and terms in a way that best reflects their pronunciation in Khowar. I have sought to keep to a minimum the use of diacritical marks. Khowar is above all a spoken language, and whilst there is a Khowar alphabet, many Chitral people themselves claim to have a less than perfect knowledge of it. Many Khowar words are also used in Urdu, Persian and Arabic (e.g. 'alim, madrasa, izzat, buzurg), yet there are differences in the way they are pronounced in Khowar, and Khowar also has several sounds and letters that are not found in Persian, Urdu, Arabic or Pashto. I have sought to reflect these differences in my transliterations of them.
Glossary of Khowar words used in text

- adamzada: true human being, nobleman
- aff: down
- aih: up
- 'alim: learned man
- 'amal: practice
- aman: harmony
- andreni: inside
- anparh: illiterate person
- 'aql: reason / intellect
- asheq: lover
- aurat: woman
- azadi: freedom
- azhelie: children
- badikhlaq: person of bad morals
- badmash: scoundrel
- bahus korik: to debate
- basheik: singer
- batin: concealed/hidden
- bazar: market
- berie: outside
- berozegarie: unemployment
- buzurg: holy man
- chit: choice
- chogh: thief
- chumutker: young unmarried woman
- daf: large tambourine
- damama: kettle drums
- daq: boy
- dar-ul uloom: mosque school
- dashman: learned man

xi
### Glossary of Khowar words used in text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>deh</td>
<td>village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demagh</td>
<td>brain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dor</td>
<td>home, household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dost</td>
<td>friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drocho ogh</td>
<td>wine (literally, grape juice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dunik</td>
<td>to think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>duniya</td>
<td>the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>falsafa</td>
<td>philosopher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fikr korik</td>
<td>to contemplate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghairat</td>
<td>honour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghalamus</td>
<td>serf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gham</td>
<td>sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghariban</td>
<td>the poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghazal</td>
<td>divine love song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghoto</td>
<td>deaf and dumb person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghurbat</td>
<td>poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hadith</td>
<td>traditions and sayings associated with the life of the Prophet Muhammad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hardi</td>
<td>heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hazir-e imam</td>
<td>the present Imam; the Aga Khan (see imam below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ikhlaq</td>
<td>morality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ilm</td>
<td>knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imam</td>
<td>for Sunnis: the person who leads prayers in the mosque. For Ismai’lis: the Aga Khan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insan</td>
<td>human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insaniyat</td>
<td>humanity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intiba pasand</td>
<td>extremists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ishq</td>
<td>divine love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>izzat</td>
<td>reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jam</td>
<td>good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jeer can</td>
<td>jerry can – used as drums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jezbat</td>
<td>emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jihad</td>
<td>holy war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kafir</td>
<td>infidel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kalam</td>
<td>Islamic theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khoaht</td>
<td>hidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khoshani</td>
<td>happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khulao</td>
<td>open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khulloose</td>
<td>affection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary of Khowar words used in text

kimerie  lady, wife
kushik  to slaughter
lal  lord
lotoran  elders
lu  words, talk
madrasa  religious seminary
mantiq  Islamic logic
mashkulgei  gossip, conversation
mawdana  an advanced religious scholar
mazadar  enjoyable
mazhab  religion
mash  man
mubhabbat  love
mulla  man who performs Islamic rituals and teaches Islamic knowledge
musulmani  Muslim practice
nafs  carnal soul, passions
nan  mother
nau juanan  the youth
nimez  prayer
nishie  outside
niyat  intention
pereshani  confusion, anxiety
pornik  to dance
pyar  love
qahar  anger
qur’an  Word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad
qur’an-e natiq  The speaking Qur’an, the Aga Khan
rigish  beard
rigishweni  the bearded-ones
shahar  city
shahzadah  prince
sharab  alcohol
shari’a  Islamic legal code and roles
sharif  polite
sharum  shame, embarrassment
sheili  beautiful
shirin  sweet
shum  bad, rude
sitar  four-stringed Chitral instrument
sooch korik  to think
sufi  person devoted to the mystical path
sukoon  peace
sunnat  customary tradition
surat  bodily shape
tahzibi yafta  sophisticated, cultured person
tait  amulet
tait korak  amulet-maker
talib-e ilm  religious student
taliban  religious students
talimi yafta  educated person
tara  alcoholic spirit made from dried fruits
tat  father
tazbeh  rosary beads
tsetsk  little ones (infants)
twreigh  open
zahir  revealed
zehn  mind

Glossary of Khwar words used in text
Map 1. Pakistan and neighbouring countries; shaded area corresponds to Chitral district
(see Map 2)
Map 2. Chitral district