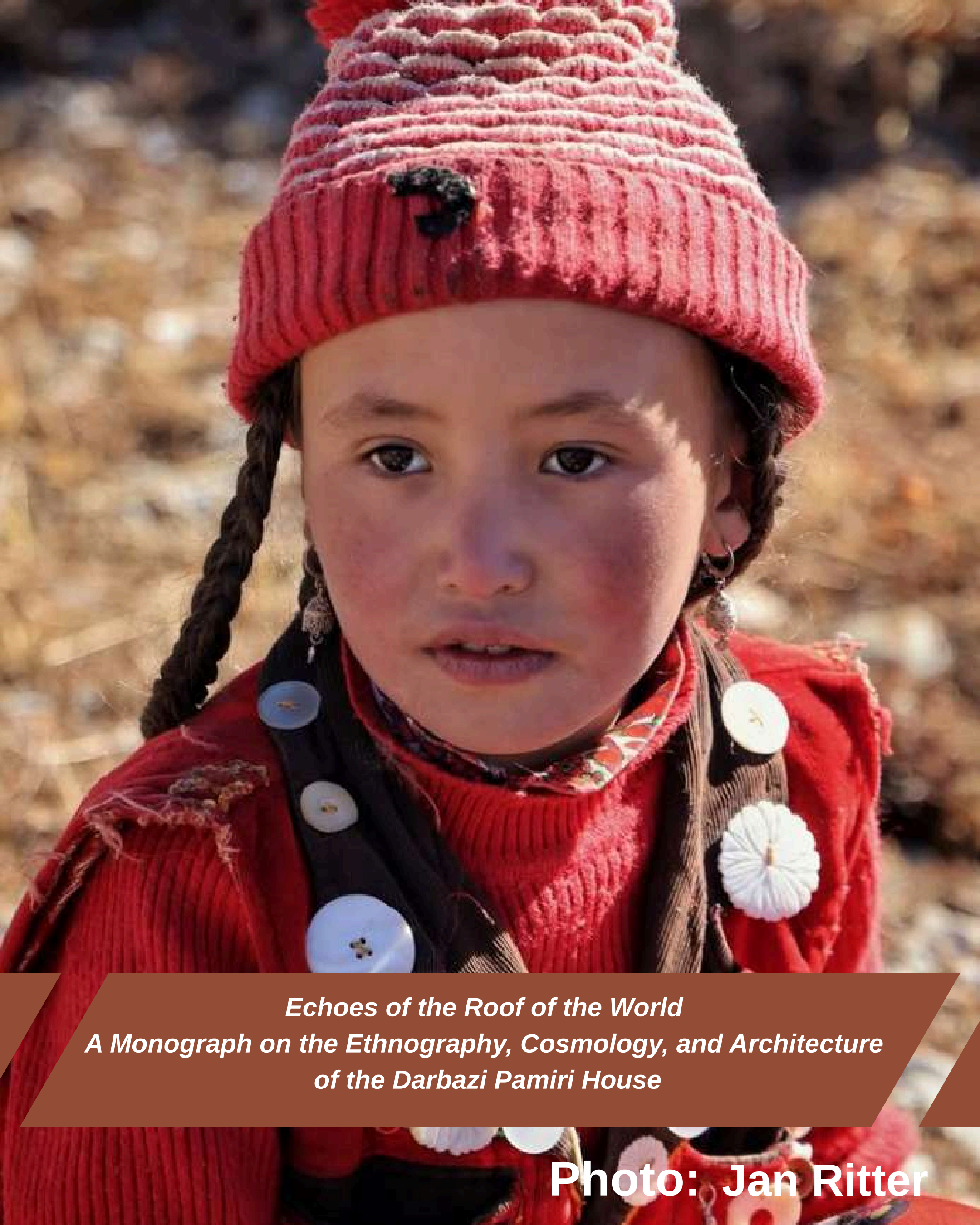


خانه زیبای من



Author
Ali Murad Khurasani
Year: 2026

1. Introduction
 2. The Pamirs: Land and People
 3. Ancient Beliefs and Pre-Islamic Traditions
 4. Arrival of Islam and Spread of Ismailism
 5. Rituals and Community Practices
 - Chiragh-i Roshan
 - Death and Mourning Rituals
 - Arwahani & Ispandur
 - Nowruz & Shab Yalda
 6. Music and Devotional Traditions
 - Maddahkhoni
 - Pamiri Rubab
 7. Architecture of the Darbazi Pamiri House
 - Structure
 - Roof and Beams
 - Seismic Aspects
 - Dahlanz
 8. Symbolism and Cosmology of the Pamiri House
 - Five Pillars
 - Chor Khona
 - Sacred Spatial Meaning
 9. Historical Continuity: Darbazi, Caucasus, and Göbekli Tepe
 10. Conclusion
- References
- Personal Reflection (optional)



Echoes of the Roof of the World
A Monograph on the Ethnography, Cosmology, and Architecture
of the Darbazi Pamiri House

Photo: Jan Ritter

INTRODUCTION

This monograph explores the Pamiri house , Pamiri house known as the Chid or Baypash is one of the most distinctive cultural and architectural traditions of the Pamir region more than a dwelling it is a symbolic space where spiritual beliefs, social life and ancestral customs come together for centuries Pamiri families have preserved rituals, cosmological ideas and communal practices inside this unique form of architecture

This study examines the Pamiri house not only as a structure built of stone and wood but as a cultural system shaped by ancient Zoroastrian ideas pre-Islamic mountain traditions, and later Ismaili interpretations elements such as the five pillars, the skylight (chorkhona) the hearth and the arrangement of space reveal a deep connection between home, nature, and spirituality

By exploring rituals, daily practices, and symbolic meanings associated with the Pamiri house, this monograph highlights how architecture reflects identity, belief and way of life. It also shows why preserving traditional houses is important for understanding the heritage and cultural continuity of the Pamiri people.

The *Pamiri people* belong to several linguistic and ethnic groups in ancient eastern Iran who despite the remoteness of the region, have preserved their ancient traditions of language and way of life. They speak Pamiri languages, which are part of the East Iranian branch of the Indo-Iranian language family the most famous of which are Shoghni, Wakhi, Rashani, Ishkashmi, Yidgha and others although many Pamiris are bilingual and also speak Dardic languages depending on their country of residence, Pamiri communities in Pakistan live in the upper valleys of Hunza, Gojal, Chitral Broghil valley, Lat Koh and in Tajikistan they live mainly in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region while small Pamiri populations are also found in the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan and parts of western China.



Chitral



**Wakhan Afghanistan
Jan Ritter**



Tajikistan

The *Pamir region* often referred to as the "Roof of the World" is a mountain range in Central Asia, spanning mainly eastern Tajikistan, north-eastern Afghanistan, northern Pakistan (particularly the Hunza-Gojal and Chitral valleys), and parts of western China the region is known for its rugged terrain with snow-capped peaks and deep valleys in the form of the Pamir Mountains the people of this region are known as the Pamirs and have a distinct cultural and linguistic identity that sets them apart from neighbouring groups *Pamir Mountains highest point*

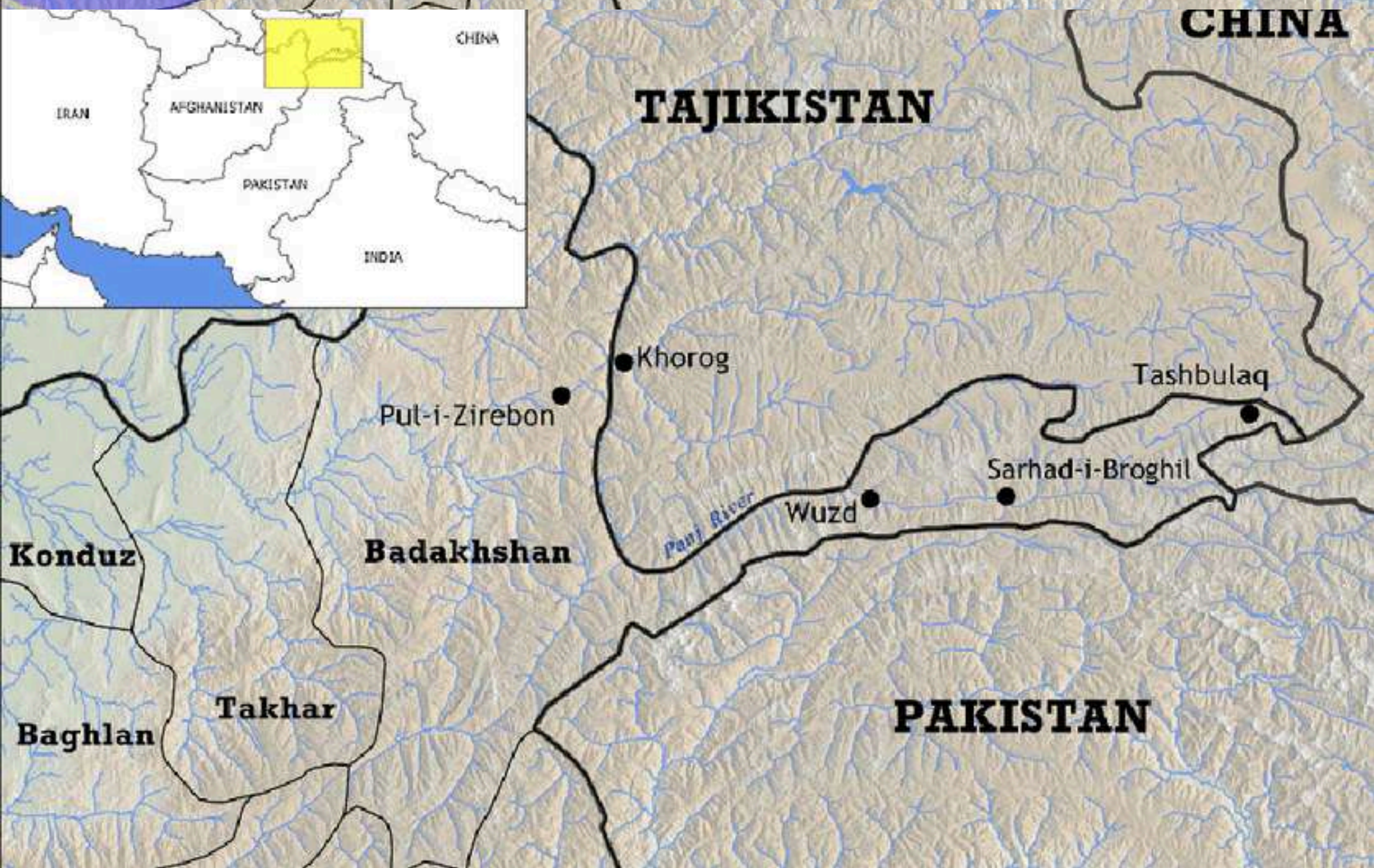
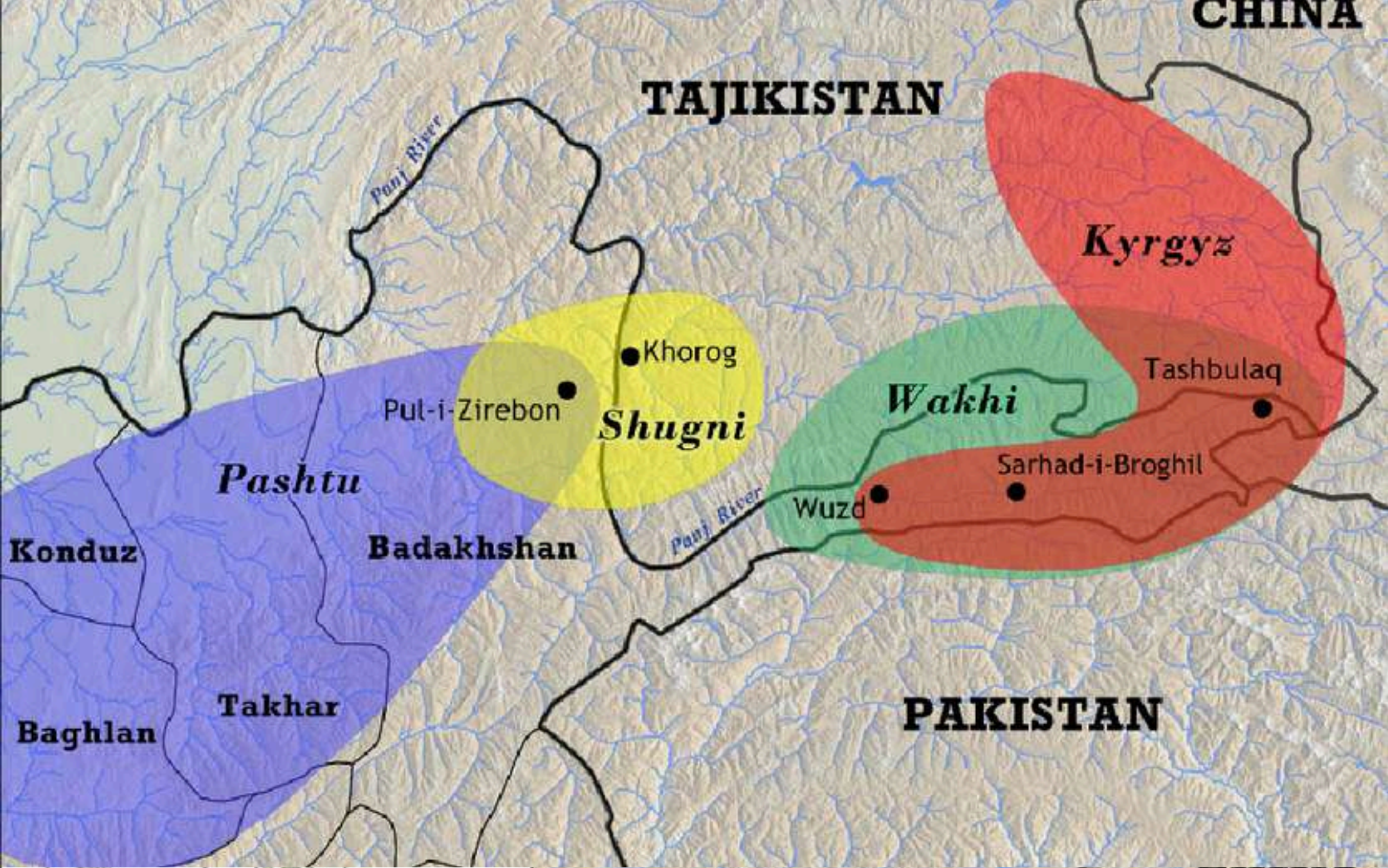
Kongur Tagh

Elevation

7,649 m (25,095 ft)

Coordinates

38°35'39"N 75°18'48"E



Geography of the Pamir Mountains

The Pamir Mountains form a crucial junction for several of Asia's major mountain ranges, including the Tian Shan, Karakoram, Kunlun, Hindu Kush, and Himalayas these are among the world's highest mountain regions

this range lies primarily in Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan region. It spans the borders of multiple countries

To the south, they connect with the Hindu Kush along Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor and the Badakhshan region, and extend into the Chitral and Gilgit-Baltistan provinces of Pakistan to the north, they join the Tian Shan mountains via Kyrgyzstan's Alay Valley.

To the east, they extend into China, where peaks like Kongur Tagh (7,649 m) form the "Eastern Pamirs" separated from the Kunlun Mountains by the Yarkand River valley.

Countries

Tajikistan

Kyrgyzstan

Afghanistan

China

Pakistan

States/Provinces

Gorno-Badakhshan (Tajikistan)

Osh Region (Kyrgyzstan)

Badakhshan & Wakhan (Afghanistan)

Chitral & Gilgit-Baltistan (Pakistan)

Xinjiang (China)



Chitral



**Wakhan Afghanistan
Jan Ritter**



Tajikistan

Ancient Beliefs and Religions

Before the advent of Islam the people of the Pamirs and surrounding mountainous regions followed a combination of **Zoroastrian**, Animistic and Shamanistic traditions that reflected their close connection with nature and ancestral spirits legends and some current stories about fire worshipping and veneration of the sun and the moon indicate the possibility of some continuation of pre-Islamic religious practices such as Mehrparastī (a pre-Islamic practice of worshipping the sun and the moon) Manichaeism and Zoroastrian customs and rites in the Pamirs One of the oldest organized religions was **Zoroastrianism** known as fire worship which originated in ancient Iran religion founded by Prophet **Zarathustra** emphasizing dualism between good and evil the importance of wisdom and the pursuit of truth with rituals like fire worship and a strong connection to nature and morality



Elevated outdoor worship area at Kofir-Kala, Bogev Credit: Pamir.Org



Zamr-i-Atish-Parast, or Fortress of the Fire Worshippers, at Yamchun

Animism was a strong part of the spiritual life of the Pamir, Badakhshan, Chitral and Gilgit regions. In these beliefs every part of nature—mountains, rivers, trees, animals, and even stones—was thought to have a spirit or soul. The people believed that these spirits could offer help or bring harm depending on how they were respected. In Chitral, traditional belief holds that the souls of ancestors continue to protect the household and livestock. These guardian souls are thought to watch over their descendants, offering blessings and protection. If family members forget them or fail to show respect, the soul may become unhappy or angry and bring misfortune to the home.

Rituals and shamanism

To maintain harmony with these spirits the people of Chitral observe a special ritual oral term, called *Arvaho Sheenjek* performed after meals During this ritual the family gives thanks to the guardian soul for its care and protection and to honor the ancestors who left their home and land for the living members offerings and prayers are made to keep the soul at peace and maintain balance between the living and the spirit world similar traditions exist among the mountain communities of and Gilgit, Badakhshan showing how ancient Animistic and ancestral worship practices remain deeply rooted across the Pamir cultural area

Shamanism has also been long practiced in these high mountain societies a shaman known locally as a *bitan or dehar* acts as a spiritual healer and mediator between humans and the unseen world using rhythmic drumming chanting and trance states the shaman communicates with spirits to heal illnesses, bless families and protect villages from harm traces of these shamanic performances continue even today in remote parts of Gilgit and Chitral often blending with later Islamic traditions



A dancer (shaman) imitating a supernatural character performs at the festival in Bagrot valley of Gilgit. — Photo by Jamil Nagri DAWN news paper



A musician playing music so that the Shaman enters trance — photo Youlin magazine

Islam spread to the Pamir region through a long and peaceful process that involved trade, travel and missionary activity rather than conquest, the Pamirs, located at the meeting point of Central Asia, South Asia and China were geographically remote but strategically important the first contact with Islam occurred during the expansion of the early Muslim empires in the 7th and 8th centuries under rulers such as the Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab and later the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphs although Arab armies reached Central Asia the high mountains of the Pamirs were untouched by direct conquest Islam gradually reached the region through the Silk Road which served as a vital bridge between the Middle East, Central Asia and China the Silk Road played a significant role in transporting not only silk and spices but also faith, science and culture Muslim merchants, travelers and Sufi missionaries used this trade network to exchange goods and ideas.

As they passed through towns such as Badakhshan, Wakhan, and Tashkergan, they brought Islamic teachings, values, and cultural practices to local communities. Peaceful interactions between Muslim traders and the Pamiri people allowed Islam to spread naturally and become a part of everyday life. The Silk Road also connected the Pamirs to great Islamic centers such as Bukhara, Samarkand, and Balkh, which were ruled at various times by Muslim dynasties such as the Samanids (819–999 CE) and later the *Ghaznavid Empire* (10th–12th centuries) under rulers such as Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni. These rulers supported Islamic scholarship, trade, and missionary work, which helped Islam reach remote mountain valleys.

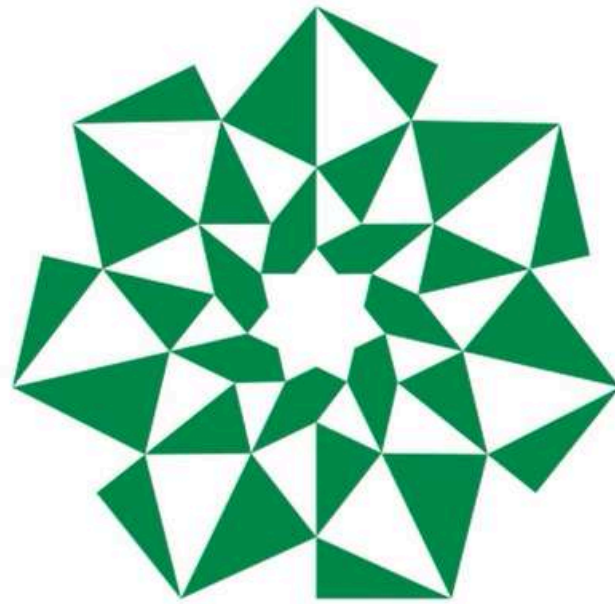
Most Pamiris believe in *Ismailism* a branch of *Shia* Islam that has deep historical and spiritual roots in the region. The spread of Ismailism in the Pamirs began around the 10th and 11th centuries when Ismaili missionaries known as da'is came from *Great Khurasn* to preach the teachings of Islam.

Ismailis regard their Imam as a living spiritual leader who continues the line of Imamate after the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) according to Ismaili belief divine guidance is passed down through a continuous chain of Imams descended from **Hazrat Ali** the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet and **Hazrat Fatima** the Prophet's daughter the current

50th Imam His Highness Prince Rahim Aga Khan V provides both spiritual and moral guidance to the community the Imam is seen as the interpreter of the faith, guiding followers to live according to Islamic values while adapting to the needs of the modern world although most Pamiris are Ismaili Muslims a significant number belong to other Islamic sects such as sunni Islam and twelver Shia Islam This diversity reflects the Pamirs long history of religious coexistence, tolerance and shared cultural heritage which continue to shape the identity of the region today



the.ismaili



AKDN

AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

Ismaili Da'is and Their Importance in Badakhshan

In Ismaili Islam a *Da'i* is a missionary and representative of the Imam responsible for the education, guidance and organization of the community in the remote mountains of Badakhshan. Da'is played a significant role in maintaining faith, education and unity among the Ismaili people; they not only disseminated religious knowledge but also served as administrative and moral leaders, maintaining the connection between local followers and the Imam.

Da'is were entrusted with the responsibility of collecting religious dues such as zakat (charitable contributions), khums (fifth of the annual surplus income) and Ismaili-specific offerings such as *Daswaan* and other community funds, which supported religious and social welfare through their leadership. The Da'i promoted learning, preserved Persian-Pamirian culture and upheld the values of peace, reason, and service. Their influence helped shape the strong spiritual and cultural identity that still defines the Ismaili communities of Badakhshan today.

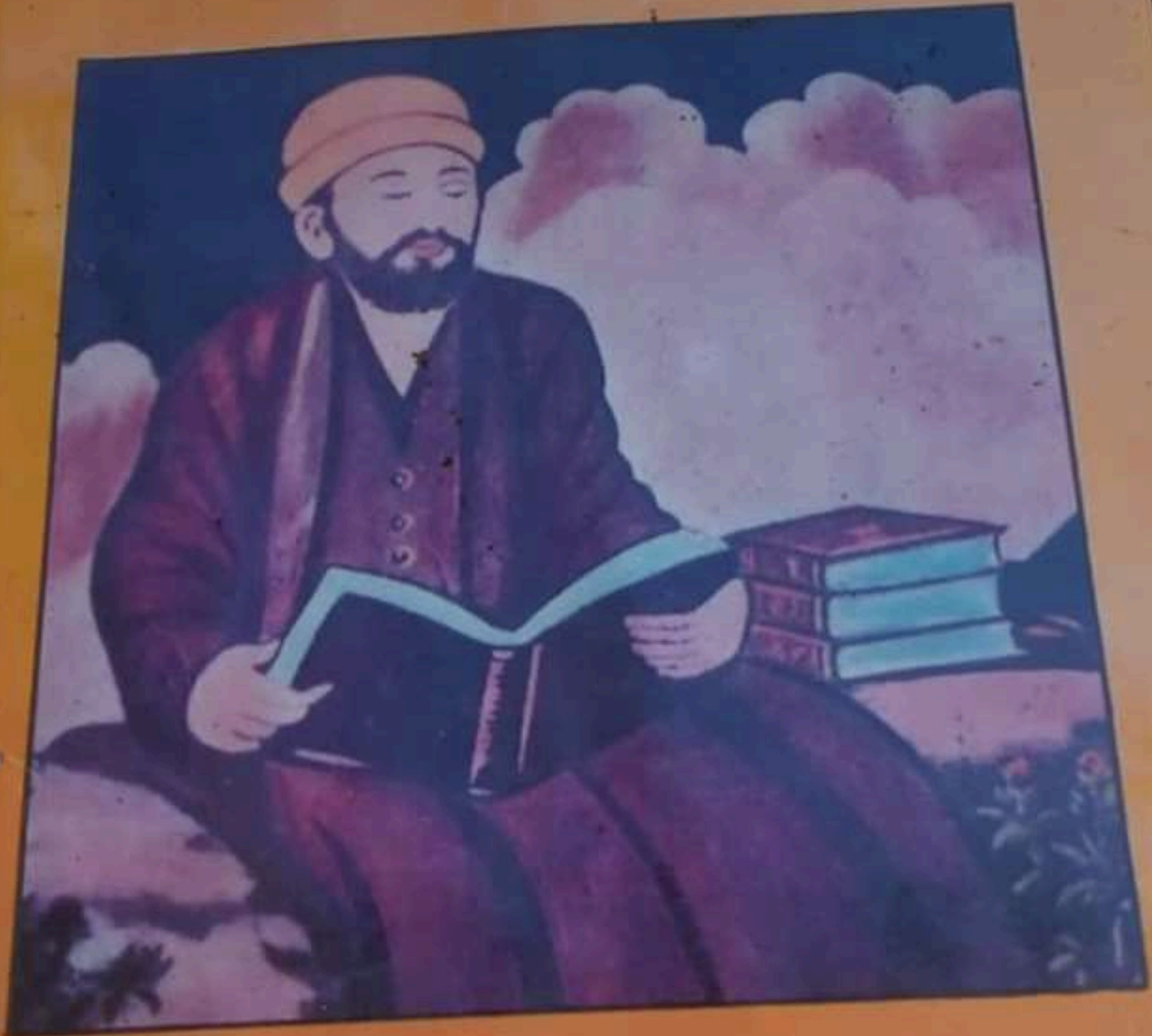
Nasir Khusraw: The Hujjat of Khurasan and Cultural Founder of Pamiri traditions

While one of the most prominent Ismaili philosophers and theologians of the Fatimid period Nasir Khusraw born in 1004 CE in Qubadiyan, Khurasan, Ghaznavid Empire (**present-day Tajikistan**) is best known to the wider public as a poet, thinker and traveller who passionately promoted Persian literature art and science while most Fatimid Ismaili works were written in Arabic Nasir composed all of his philosophical and religious writings in Persian a notable choice that helped preserve Persian as a major intellectual language

Nasir was born into a family of educated bureaucrats and landowners under the Ghaznavid Empire he worked initially as a writer and later as a financial administrator in Merv During his service he was exposed to the political and religious changes of the time. At about the age of **41** Nasir experienced a profound spiritual awakening an event he described as a lucid dream that led him to abandon his administrative career and devote himself entirely to the pursuit of divine knowledge this transformation marked his conversion from Twelfth Shiism to Ismailism

برہان الاولیاء

ناصر خسرو بدخشان میں



مؤلف

اسٹنٹ پروفیسر سید محمد ابراہیم "بامیانی"

پشاور ستمبر ۲۰۰۰ء

He traveled widely eventually reaching Cairo the capital of the Fatimid Caliphate where he studied under Isma'ili scholars there he was appointed by the Fatimid Imam as the *Hujjat* of Khurasan meaning the *“Proof”* the highest-ranking religious representative responsible for guiding and educating the Isma'ili community in the region upon his return he began spreading Isma'ili teachings throughout Central Asia especially in Badakhshan where his influence became deeply rooted

Among the Isma'ili communities of badakhshan (in present-day Afghanistan and Tajikistan) and northern Pakistan Nasir Khusraw is venerated with great reverence as *“Pir Nasir”* or *“Shah Sayyid Nasir”* he is regarded not only as a religious teacher but also as the cultural and spiritual founder of Pamiri Isma'ili identity his teachings introduced a tradition of literacy intellectual inquiry and moral discipline that shaped the distinctive Pamiri culture characterized by tolerance, rational faith and respect for knowledge



A ziarat (shrine) dedicated to Nasir Khusraw is located in Garam Chashma, a valley in Chitral, Pakistan



After the death of Nasir

After his death, the Ismaili *da'wah* (mission) although it continued to decline, as Sunni rulers came to power as a result of "economic, military and ideological rivalry for colonial expansion

Often referred to as the Great Game the Badakhshan region was divided into spheres of interest the British imperial, China, Sunni Afghanistan and Tsarist Russia from the writings of Russian orientalists of the period it is clear that for centuries after Nasir death the Ismaili faith and traditions were very much alive governed by a system of *Pirs* and *Khailfa* In the absence of contact with the Imam of the time

Although the Great Game cut off the pirs from their followers in parts of Badakhshan the British, Sunni rulers and Chinese rule also exposed the Ismailis to persecution and genocide at the hands of Sunni Afghans their former rulers

Pirs and Khalifa in Pamir

After the death of Nasir Khusraw the Ismaili *da'wah* (mission) in Badakhshan (Pamir) continued through a local system of spiritual leadership led by Pirs and Khalifas due to the lack of direct contact with the Imam of the time these leaders became the important representatives of the Ismaili community

A Pirs are senior religious leaders who are responsible for education, spiritual training and maintaining the moral and social life of the community

The Khalifas often working under the guidance of a Pir served as a local head or deputy in various villages or valleys both Pirs and Khalifa performing essential religious and social duties they are led community gatherings, conducted wedding and funeral ceremonies and offered prayers or condolences in times of loss they also helped resolve local disputes, taught basic religious principles and ensured that the customs and practices of the community followed Ismaili values although each region had its own Pirs their mission and goal were the same to maintain unity, faith and tradition among the isolated Ismaili population of the Pamirs

Auspicious dates

the Pirs and Khalifas of the Pamir region played a vital role in guiding their communities through significant life events and moments of uncertainty they were regarded as possessors of profound spiritual insight and wisdom capable of determining *auspicious dates* and times for major occasions such as house entries, marriages and agricultural activities before beginning any important work or new venture, people would first consult the Pir or Khalifa to seek approval and guidance regarding the most favourable date and time their advice was considered essential to ensure success, harmony and divine blessings in whatever task was undertaken in times of illness, misfortune or when individuals were believed to be affected by *evil spirits* the Pirs and Khalifa's would consult religious texts and astrological charts to interpret the situation and recommend suitable remedies these remedies often included the preparation of *Ta'wiz* (amulets) the recitation of *Du'a* (prayers) and the performance of *Dam* (spiritual healing through sacred verses) such practices reflected a deep belief in the interconnectedness of the spiritual and physical worlds through these actions the Pirs and Khalifa's not only offered protection and healing but also provided emotional and psychological reassurance fostering a sense of hope, unity and resilience among the Ismaili communities living in the remote and difficult environment of the Pamirs

Timur shah Pir



israr Khalifa



Chiragh-I-Rawshan

“luminous lamp” the *Chiragh-i Roshan* (or Rawshan) is one of the most significant and oldest religious ceremonies practiced by the Nizari Ismailis of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, western China and northern Pakistan the ceremony is generally performed on the *third night* after the **death** of a family member and is conducted under the guidance of Pirs or Khalifas who lead the ritual according to the authorised text known as the *Chiragh-nama*

This sacred text contains poetry, supplications and Qur’anic verses, which are recited during the preparation and kindling of the lamp the lighting of the lamp symbolizes the Divine Light (*Nur*) that is manifested through Prophethood and Imamat, serving as a reminder of the spiritual connection between the community and the living Imam. In addition to memorial purposes the ceremony is also observed during times of celebration, such as Id (Eid) when the community gathers to reaffirm its faith, unity and allegiance to the Imam of the time guided by the Pirs and Khalifas the *Chiragh-i Roshan* thus embodies both remembrance and renewal illuminating the enduring spiritual bond that sustains the Ismaili communities across the Pamir region

Chiragh-i Roshan ceremony

the Chiragh-i Roshan ceremony is performed with great reverence under the supervision of a Pir or Khalifa who leads the ritual according to established Ismaili tradition a white cloth is spread on the ground, and a lamp (chiragh) is placed and lit in the centre, while no other light is allowed to burn until the sacred lamp is extinguished the ceremony begins with the recitation of Qur'anic verses and religious formulas as the Khalifa prepares the wicks and fills the lamp with oil made from the fat of a sacrificial *sheep* with the chanting of *salwat*, a qadi stands before the Khalifa and lowers the lamp three times, symbolizing the Oneness of Divine Light—in relation to God the Prophet and the Imam of the age the lighting of the lamp signifies that the Imam is the bearer of God's living light on earth the ritual proceeds with a sacrifice known as *Dawati*, in which a fat, healthy sheep is chosen, as its fat (*Rogan-e-zard*) will later be used to fuel the sacred lamp the Khalifa blesses the sheep by mixing pieces of salt and grains of wheat and feeding them to the animal before it is sacrificed. Facing the qibla, the assistant slaughters the sheep after the Khalifa recites the takbir the sheep is then washed, and its purified fat is collected for the lamp this is followed by the cotton-making ritual (*Kar pakhta*) during which the Khalifa touches the cotton to his forehead, preparing a long *wick* (fatila) while chanting verses from the Chiragh-nama the wick is cut into sections, drenched in ghee made from the sheep's fat, and placed into a stone lantern (*Sang-i sanglej*) typically gray and shaped like a small ship. The lamp is then lit, radiating a soft light that symbolizes divine illumination and spiritual continuity

Processes from Death to the Chiragh-i Roshan

In the Pamiri tradition, from the time a person dies until the lighting of the lamp on the third day the deceased's family does not cook, light a fire or emit smoke inside the house during these three days, mourning takes place in the house, and the soul is believed to be in a fragile state because of this, neighbours take full responsibility for preparing food, bringing food for the family and serving all visitors who come to pay their respects or pray for the deceased the grieving family's focus is solely on prayers and preparing the lamp after the ceremony is complete the household resumes cooking and normal activities, ending the initial period of mourning this practice reflects the deep sense of community support and shared responsibility within Pamiri society



The ritual of Chiragh Roshan is being performed. The lamp is lit and the people recite Salwat :photo pamir time

Seven-Day and Forty-Day Rituals After Death

After seven days of a person's death Pamiri families prepare a meal and invite neighbours and close relatives in the name of the departed soul. This offering is believed to bring peace and rest to the soul with this gathering, the first stage of mourning ends and close relatives may return to their homes a similar ritual is performed on the fortieth day which holds special importance in Pamiri belief it is commonly understood that the soul **returns** to visit the house on the *40th* day after death so family members offer food and prayers once again to honour the deceased and ensure their peaceful journey these practices reflect deep communal bonds and the spiritual worldview of the Pamiri people

Arwahani Ritual

Among the Pamiri people an important household custom reflects their deep spiritual connection between the living and the departed when a family prepares a special meal in memory of deceased relatives, they invite neighbours and villagers to share the food after everyone has eaten an elderly family member usually the oldest man asks a woman of the house to perform a brief ritual of offering she takes a handful of *flour* (and in some regions isbandur or esfand seeds known for their purifying smoke) and places it in the fire as the *smoke* rises it is believed to carry the *essence* of the food to the souls of the deceased symbolically uniting the living household with their ancestors this act expresses gratitude remembrance and the wish for the peace of the departed spirit In the Gilgit-Baltistan region the use of isbandur is common while in Upper Chitral and parts of Badakhshan among the Khowar-speaking people of Chitral the practice is known as “Arwahani” derived from the word arwah meaning “spirits” or “souls” The ceremony is typically accompanied by short prayers or *Qur’anic verses* invoking blessings for both the deceased and the household beyond its religious meaning, the ritual strengthens community bonds through shared food collective memory, and mutual respect while preserving one of the oldest spiritual traditions still practiced inside Pamiri homes today

Ispandur and its smoke

The use of Ispandur (*wild rue*) among the Pamiri people has deep historical and spiritual roots that trace back to ancient *Zoroastrianism* where it was considered a sacred and purifying plant. In Zoroastrian rituals, the seeds of wild rue were burned to ward off evil spirits, cleanse the environment, and protect homes and families from negative forces. The rising smoke symbolized the triumph of *Asha* (truth and divine order) over *Druj* (evil and chaos). When Islam, particularly Ismaili teachings, spread into the Pamirs, the local people carried this ancient ritual forward, adapting it to fit within the Islamic spiritual framework. The practice of burning Ispandur was preserved and reinterpreted as a means of spiritual purification, blessing, and protection, now associated with the divine guidance of the *living Imam*.

Even today, Pamiri families continue to burn Ispandur inside their homes during daily life and special occasions. The ritual is most commonly performed when a baby cries excessively, believed to be affected by the evil eye. Women of the house or elders burn the seeds and allow the smoke to circulate around the baby and family members, removing harmful influences. The same ceremony is also observed when guests leave, before major family events, or during remembrance of ancestors.

Through this practice, the Pamiris maintain a continuous link between their pre-Islamic heritage and contemporary Ismaili faith, demonstrating how ancient customs were integrated and sustained within an Islamic context.



History of Nowruz and the Legend of Shah Jamshid

Nowruz meaning New Day is one of the oldest festivals in the Iranian world celebrated for over 3,000 years in Iran, Central Asia, Afghanistan and the Pamirs. It has its roots in ancient pre-Avestaan and Zoroastrian beliefs that celebrate the first day of spring and renew life according to Persian mythology preserved in the Avesta (*Vendidad*) and later in *Ferdowsi's Shahnameh*. The festival originates with King *Jamshid* of the *Pishdadian* dynasty. The legend tells that Jamshid saved humanity from a devastating global freezing cold by building *Vara -i Jamshid*, an underground shelter where he preserved the best of humans, animals and seeds. When the deadly winter ended, Jamshid ended the new winter and announced a new light to the people. Nowruz was celebrated on this day as the rebirth of nature and the triumph of life over centuries of destruction. Nowruz became a symbol of hope, renewal and spiritual enlightenment for communities throughout the region, including the people of the Pamiri.

In the Pamir *Nowroz* is celebrated as a cultural, seasonal and spiritual marker of renewal families begin preparations by cooking traditional foods such as *shoshp*, *harisa*, and sweet dishes made from dairy and wheat, along with dried apricots, mulberries, and nuts saved from the previous harvest. many Pamiri households also arrange a *Haft-Sin table* placing *seven* symbolic items that begin with the letter “**S**” such as sabz (sprouts) sib (apple) sir (garlic) sumac, sirkeh (vinegar), senjed and samanak to represent growth health protection patience love and abundance on the morning of Nowroz, people gather in the *Jamatkhana* for special prayers offered for peace and prosperity after the prayer service community members form small groups and visit homes throughout the village expressing greetings and receiving blessings from elders a practice that strengthens communal unity in some parts of the Pamir the arrival of Nowroz is also marked by the collective cleaning of *irrigation* canals that remain blocked after winter villagers remove debris and restore the flow of water symbolizing the reawakening of agricultural life and the renewal of spring throughout the day families continue visiting one another sharing meals listening to traditional music and celebrating the hopeful beginning of a new year



The Express Tribune



The First Visitor on Nowroz Morning

In many Pamiri communities the arrival of the *first* visitor on Nowroz morning holds special cultural and symbolic importance. It is traditionally believed that the person who enters the home first can shape the family's fortune, harmony and overall well-being for the coming year because of this belief households often make careful arrangements to ensure that a respected, positive or symbolically *lucky* individual is the first to cross their threshold. Families may invite an elder, a close relative or someone known for good character and success as their presence is thought to bring blessings and prosperity. If an unexpected guest arrives before the chosen person, families perform a small but meaningful ritual to protect the household from any accidental misfortune: a pinch of *flour* is placed on the visitor's right shoulder, symbolizing purity, nourishment and positive energy. *Flour*, being the basic ingredient of bread, represents sustenance and abundance; placing it on the shoulder is believed to neutralize negative influences and convert them into blessing. The visitor is then offered milk or a sweet dish, reinforcing themes of goodwill and purity for the new year. In some Pamiri villages, children also take part in *early-morning* Nowroz customs, holding a rope or string and going from house to house, and families give them sweets, dried fruits or food. This act symbolizes generosity, community bonding and the sharing of good fortune at the start of the new year.

On 20 March the Day Before Nowruz in the Pamiri Cultural Sphere Samun and Related Traditions

The day preceding Nowruz holds significant cultural and spiritual value across the Pamiri region while Nowruz marks the renewal of nature and the beginning of a new agrarian cycle the preceding day functions as a period of transition, purification, and preparation in Chitral within the different communities this day is known as ***Samun*** although terminology varies across the broader Pamiri world the underlying beliefs and practices exhibit strong cultural continuity

Terminology in Different Pamiri Regions

Chitral (Upper Chitral / Lotkuh) (Samun)

Wakhi communities in Gojal, Hunza and Wakhan (Shoghun)

Shoghnan Samuni, or Chilla-i Nowroz

Badakhshan (Tajik and Afghan) Shab-i Nowruz, Shab-i Khing, or

Chilla-i Khurd (the little winter's end)

Shughnan, Roshtqal'a, Ishkashim commonly referred to as Shab-e

Amodagi (the night of preparation)

Ritual Cleansing Practices During Samun Among Pamiri People of Chitral

Among the Pamiri people of Chitral the day before **Nowruz** includes a distinctive household ritual that symbolizes the transition from the old year to the new one on this day the male head of the family ties a *broom* to a long wooden stick and enters the house alone often after lunch when the household has completed its morning activities using this extended broom he carefully sweeps the ceilings, walls, corners and central spaces of the home, removing dust, cobwebs and any objects believed to carry the residue of the old year this *symbolic* sweeping represents the cleansing of past difficulties and the expulsion of stagnant or negative energy that may have accumulated during winter while this ritual is being performed no one else is permitted to enter the house The sanctity of the cleansing process must remain undisturbed once the initial sweeping is completed the women of the household enter and thoroughly clean all the items, utensils and surfaces that were touched during the ritual this sequence first a symbolic cleansing by the male head of the family followed by detailed cleaning by the women reflects the coordinated household effort to prepare for the spiritual and seasonal renewal of Nowruz

before beginning the ritual it is customary to consult the local *khalifa* who provides an auspicious time (*waqt-e-saad*) for performing the Samun cleansing selecting the proper time is considered essential as it aligns the household's actions with favorable spiritual conditions after the cleaning is fully completed the broom tied to the wooden stick is placed upright in the courtyard or near the entrance setting it vertically symbolizes the successful removal of impurities and declares that the home is ready to welcome the blessings, prosperity and new light associated with Nowruz.



A traditional Tajik Navroz meal. Photo: Mikhail Romanyuk



Post-cleansing rituals and the tradition of the first visitor

After the Samun cleaning is completed the household observes a period of ritual purity in which no one is allowed to enter the home until a suitable (*good-feet*) person is chosen as the first visitor. In Pamiri communities of Chitral and GB this individual is believed to influence the family's fortune for the coming year before they step fully inside the household places a **pinch of flour** on the visitor's right shoulder to symbolize purity and blessing and then offers a sweet dish or a special food prepared for this moment.

to maintain the purity created by the *Samun* cleansing certain activities are strictly avoided families do not sew clothes and do not use needles as these tasks are believed to "*cut*" or disturb the good fortune entering the home similarly cutting firewood or performing heavy household work is not allowed until the next day once these customs are respected, villagers begin visiting one another's homes sharing food and greetings as they prepare to welcome the new year.

Shab Yalda in Badakhshan Pamiri Culture

Shab Yalda is an important traditional celebration among the Badakhshan Pamiri people. It is celebrated on December **21**, the longest night of the year, and for Pamiri communities the night symbolizes unity, hope, and the return of light.

This night was called Yalda, which meant rebirth (*of the sun*), and it was celebrated for the triumph of light over darkness. They built fires at sundown of the last day in fall and kept them burning until the first rays of sun the following day. During this night, they gathered with family and friends, ate delicious food, drank, and sang happy songs all night and listened to stories about old times.

On Shab Yalda, families gather in their homes. Elders and children sit together, tell stories, and spend time in a warm and peaceful atmosphere. This gathering strengthens family bonds and shows respect for elders, which is an important value in Pamiri culture.

Traditional foods such as dried fruits, walnuts, raisins, apples, and pomegranates are shared. These foods represent the blessing of health and togetherness. Stories and poetry in Persian or local Pamiri languages help to preserve cultural traditions in Badakhshan. Shab Yalda is more than a seasonal event; it is a meaningful cultural tradition that reflects Pamiri values and cultural identity.

Maddohkhoni as religious education and devotional practice

The tradition of performing religious poetry known as *maddah* or maddahkhoni is both a devotional practice and a form of religious education among Ismaili communities the word maddah means praise and in maddahkhoni Ismaili teachings are expressed through poetry these teachings may be stated directly or presented in a general moral form encouraging a cautious pious and ethical way of life in Chitral this religious gathering is commonly known as *Khalifa basi* while in Gilgit and other regions it is practiced under different local names despite the variation in terminology the purpose remains the same which is the transmission of religious knowledge through music and poetry

During a performance long cycles of Persian devotional poems are sung usually by one to three male performers the musicians accompany themselves using traditional instruments most notably the *Pamiri rubab* locally known in Chitral as *Gharba* along with the *Daaf* which is similar to the Badakhshani Daaf these instruments play a central role in creating the spiritual atmosphere of the gathering

Many of the poems performed in maddohkhoni are mystical in nature a significant number are attributed to renowned figures such as *Rumi and Pir Nasir Khusraw* while others praise the spiritual and heroic figures central to Badakhshani and regional Ismailism. Although Persian is not the mother tongue of most people in Badakhshan Chitral or Gilgit it functions as a liturgical language in these traditions giving the poetry a sacred and unifying character



Locals read the devotional poetry of Pir Nasir Khusraw, the Fatimid era preacher and intellectual

Occasions for Performing Maddah

The performance of maddah is associated with specific and established religious occasions within Ismaili communities of Badakhshan Chitral and Gilgit one of the most significant contexts is mourning ceremonies during which maddah may be performed throughout the night these ceremonies are led by a *Khalifa* who provides religious guidance and explains the spiritual meaning of the poetry performed by the maddahkhons thereby reinforcing both devotion and religious education

Maddah is also regularly performed on Thursday evenings and Fridays as part of communal religious practice in addition performances may take place upon special request by individuals families or communities another important occasion is the annual commemoration known as *ayyam* which marks the remembrance of a saint Pir or other revered religious figure In Badakhshan these commemorations are commonly held at holy *graves or mazors* where saints or *Pirs* are believed to be buried these sites are usually small stone structures often marked by *ibex horns* and located near villages they are carefully maintained by the community and serve as important symbols of devotion and collective memory similar practices are observed in Chitral and Gilgit, in Chitral the annual visit of a khalifa to a villages provides an important occasion for communal gathering and the performance of maddah in Gilgit comparable visits and commemorations also involve maddah performances highlighting the shared religious traditions and cultural continuity across these regions.

Importance of the Pamiri Rubab

The Pamiri rubab holds a central place in the cultural and spiritual life of Pamiri communities. It is not merely a musical instrument but a powerful symbol of identity, continuity, and sacred tradition within Pamiri culture. In Pamiri cultural belief, music is understood as an essential element of existence, and the rubab is regarded as one of its most meaningful expressions. According to the Pamiri cultural worldview, it is believed that when the human soul first entered the human body, it was accompanied by sound and music produced through instruments such as the Pamiri rubab. For this reason, music is considered inseparable from human life, spirituality, and moral development. The rubab is therefore viewed as a medium that connects the physical world with the spiritual realm.

The Pamiri rubab plays a vital role in religious and communal gatherings, particularly in traditions such as *maddahkhani* and *Khalifa basi*, where it supports the recitation of devotional poetry. Its sound is believed to create a spiritual atmosphere that encourages reflection, emotional balance, and inner harmony. Through its continued use, the Pamiri rubab helps preserve collective memory, transmit ethical values, and sustain the musical heritage of Pamiri culture.

In this context, *music* is not regarded as entertainment alone but as a fundamental cultural practice deeply embedded in social, religious, and spiritual life. The Pamiri rubab thus represents the profound significance of music as a foundational element of Pamiri cultural identity.



Early ismailis footprints in Yasin Picture by Karl Jettmar Book: Beyond the Gorges of the Indus

Pre-Islamic foundations and Ismaili transformation of Shrines in the Pamir

The sacred landscape of the Pamirs is rooted in religious traditions that predate the advent of Islam in the pre-Pamir belief system nature was considered inherently sacred and spiritual power was associated with specific forms of trees, rocks, mountain springs caves and springs fire rituals involving the burning of aromatic herbs like *ispnadur* and animal fat reflect earlier notions of purity while the presence of *ibex* and Marco Polo sheep *horns* symbolize ancient notions of purity and protection sacred stones also occupy a central place in the Pamir shrine culture stones with natural imprints in particular are believed to have the power of the stones and are treated as tangible signs of divine or ancestral presence

After the adoption of Ismailism these pre-Islamic holy sites were not abandoned but reinterpreted within an Islamic framework many shrines were identified as *tombs* of Ismaili *Pir and Khalifa* or as sites associated with their presence the stones bearing symbolic inscriptions that gave them religious authority and historical legitimacy were reinterpreted as symbols linking them especially to *Imam Ali* while preserving the old material forms, the devotional meaning of the shrines served as informal religious centers where Ismaili beliefs, moral values and collective memory were transmitted through ritual and oral tradition integrating pre-Islamic symbols with devotion to the *Ahl al-Bayt* and the veneration of the saints and Khalifa became institutionalized to preserve key lineages of Ismailism



Hisor: Ostoni Nuri Muhammad Badakhshan Tajikistan



Zugvand: Ostoni Panjai Shoh



Afghanistan, Badakhshan photo by Matthieu paley



The Use of Horns on House Gates in the Pamir

The Pamiri worldview in particular has deep historical roots in the use of *ibex* and mountain *sheep* horns which go back to pre-Islamic belief systems in ancient Pamiri religion these animals were considered sacred because they lived in high mountains that were believed to be close to the spiritual world. *Horns* symbolize power, purity, fertility and protection and were believed to ward off evil forces and ward off illness horns were placed at important thresholds, including shrines and house entrances the house entrance was seen as a sensitive boundary between the *family's secure* inner world and the uncertain outside world and placing horns at this location protected both the home and its moral order

After the adoption of *Ismailism* this custom was not abandoned but reinterpreted the horns no longer had religious significance but became a symbolic reminder of gratitude for divine protection and harmony with nature. Their continued presence on the doors of Pamiri homes reflects the survival of ancient cultural traditions within an Islamic framework and illustrates how Pamiri society is adapting while embracing its historical traditions and ethics



Kariamabad Chitral



Gulmit GB

Roof Structure with Metal Connectors, Strengthening of Wall Corners and Static Design in Darbazi Pamiri Houses

The traditional *Darbazi Pamiri* house is typically constructed with a compact square floor plan measuring $8\text{ m} \times 8\text{ m}$ giving a total floor area of 64 m^2 this configuration provides spatial efficiency and thermal compactness it also concentrates structural loads on the surrounding masonry walls

The roof system in older *Darbazi Pamiri* houses consists of timber beams supporting thick soil layers the average thickness of the soil roof is approximately 30 cm when moist this soil layer produces a vertical load of 40 tons or more which is transferred directly to the load-bearing walls and columns while the walls can carry these vertical loads under static conditions, the heavy roof significantly increases seismic vulnerability

During earthquake excitation the mass of the roof generates large horizontal inertial forces the horizontal seismic load may reach approximately 10 tons equivalent to 25% of the total roof weight this force acts at roof level and produces overturning moments in the walls and columns

In traditional construction column-to-beam connections are not moment-resistant timber beams are typically placed on walls or columns without mechanical fasteners allowing rotation and sliding during seismic motion under strong horizontal shaking side walls are pushed outward and may collapse once the walls lose stability the timber roof frame falls sideways resulting in partial or total failure of the structure





Roof of Darbazi pamari house



To improve structural performance the roof system can be enhanced through the use of metal connectors steel plates, straps and bolts at *beam-to-column* and *beam-to-wall* joints significantly improve continuity and load transfer these connectors enable the roof to function as a diaphragm distributing horizontal forces to all walls and reducing the risk of localized failure

Wall corners represent critical zones in *Darbazi Pamiri* houses as intersecting masonry walls often lack proper bonding strengthening corners through mechanical ties wire-mesh reinforcement or integrated timber elements improves box-like behavior reinforced corners prevent wall separation and enhance resistance to horizontal seismic forces

From a static design perspective traditional *Darbazi Pamiri* houses were primarily designed to carry large vertical loads rather than combined vertical and horizontal actions. The interaction of a **64 m²** floor plan a **40-ton** roof load and a **10-ton** horizontal seismic force requires careful structural integration without adequate connections and reinforcement heavy roofs and unreinforced masonry walls become major sources of structural instability in response to material scarcity and changing construction practices new *Pamiri* house designs have emerged in the regions of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan these designs reduce dependence on timber by incorporating lighter roof systems improved connectors and strengthened wall details while preserving the cultural form of the *Darbazi Pamiri* house these adaptations improve seismic safety and structural reliability

The Dahlanz as a Transitional Space

A significant spatial feature of the *Darbazi Pamiri* house is the *Dahlanz* a small room or passage located immediately before the entrance to the main hall the *dahlanz* functions as a transitional space between the outdoor environment and the central living area it serves climatic, social and functional purposes by reducing heat loss blocking cold winds, and controlling direct access to the main hall from a structural perspective, the *dahlanz* contributes to the overall stability of the building by forming part of the continuous wall and roof system because it is covered by the same roof as the main hall it helps distribute roof loads more evenly across the walls the *dahlanz* also limits the size of the main entrance opening which is important for maintaining wall strength in *earthquake-prone* areas

Roof Structure and Load Transfer

The roof in traditional *Darbazi Pamiri* houses is typically supported by timber beams resting on thick masonry walls while this system provides adequate vertical load-bearing capacity its *seismic* performance depends on the roof's weight and connection to the walls heavy soil roofs generate large inertial forces during earthquakes, which often lead to wall cracking or collapse

a well-connected roof distributes horizontal seismic forces to all walls and transfers them safely to the foundation in older *Darbazi Pamiri* houses inadequate anchoring between roof beams and walls has been identified as a major cause of structural failure

Hunza



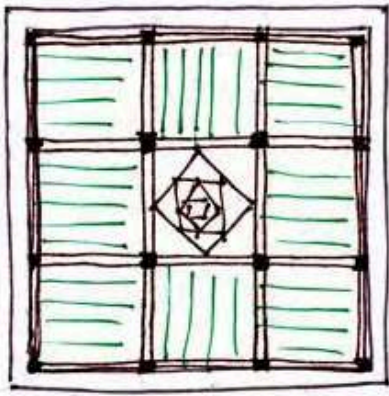
Karimabad chitral



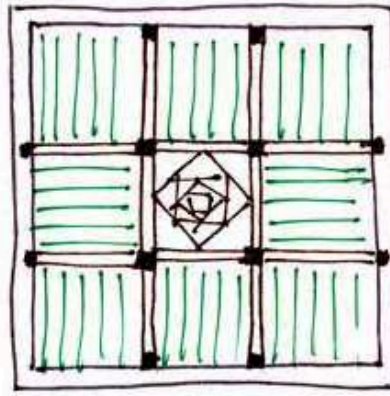
Karimabad Chitral

PAMIRI ROOM DESIGNS

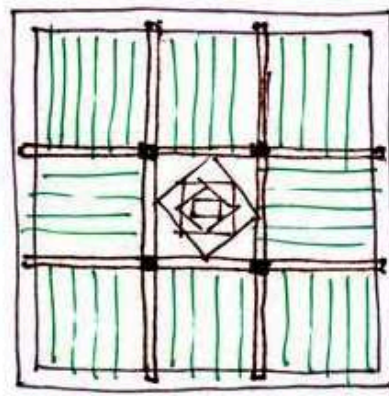
A: Support columns and beams around all the four walls



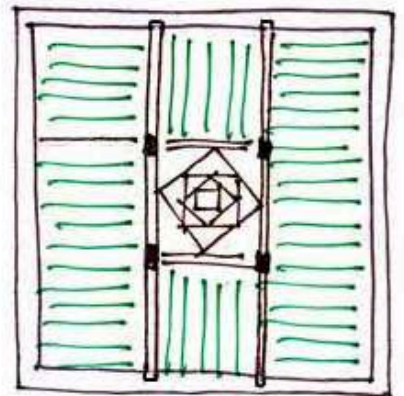
B: Only support columns against or in the walls



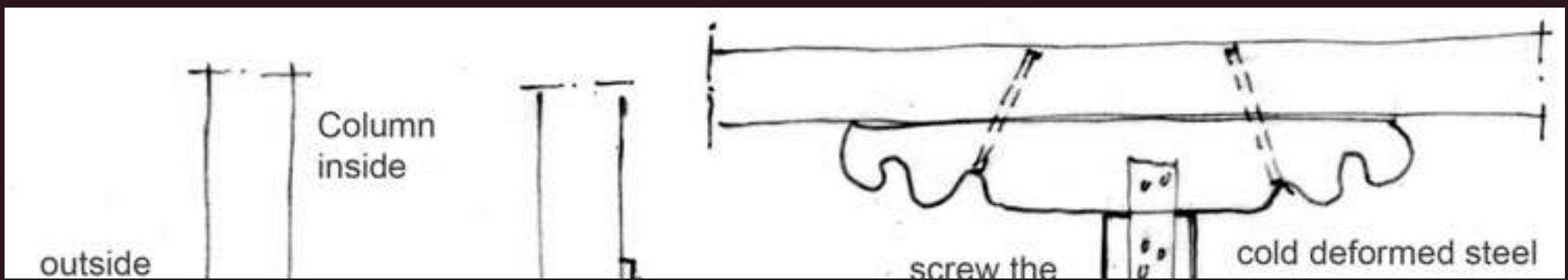
C: Both main beams through going and into walls



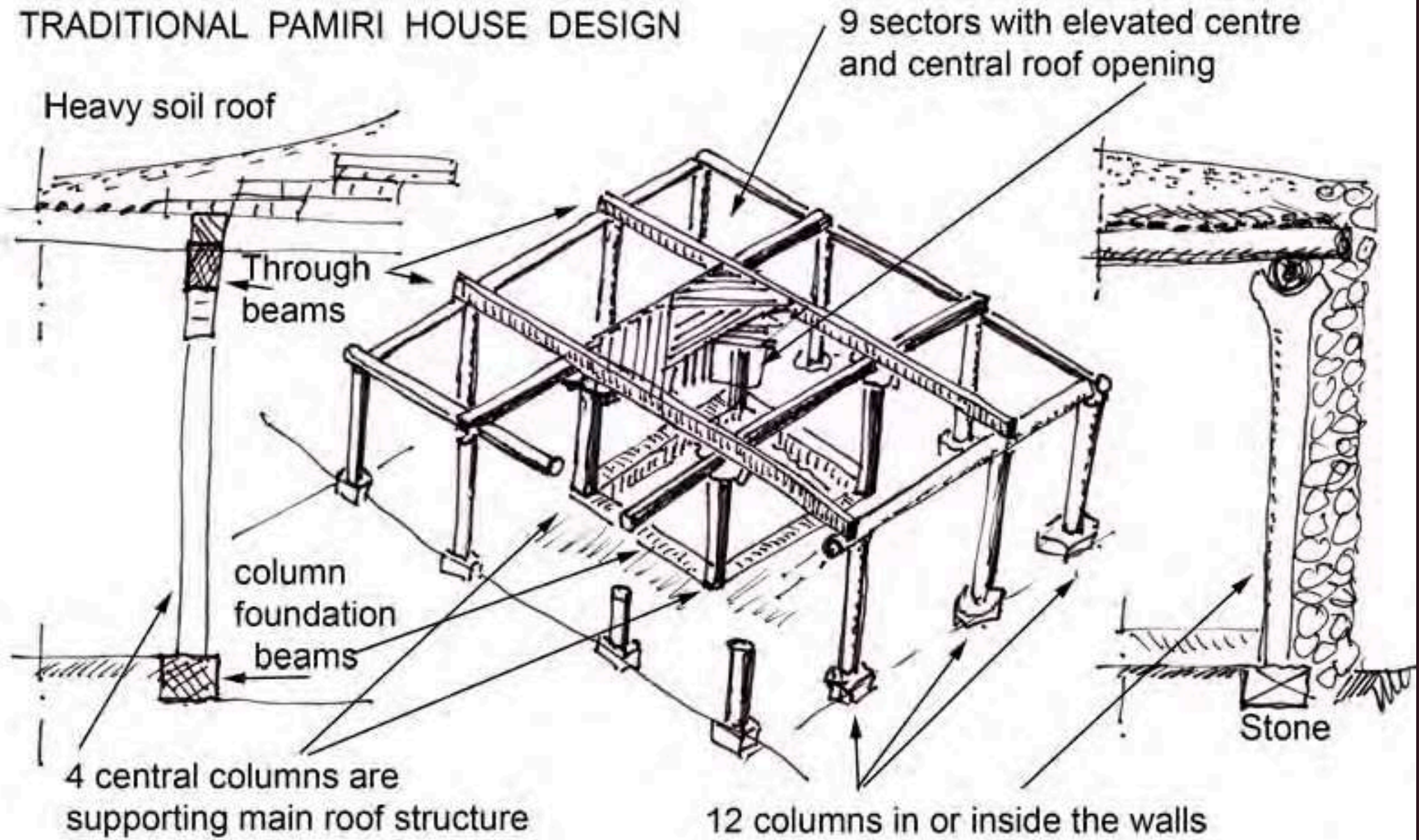
D: Only one pair of main beams through going



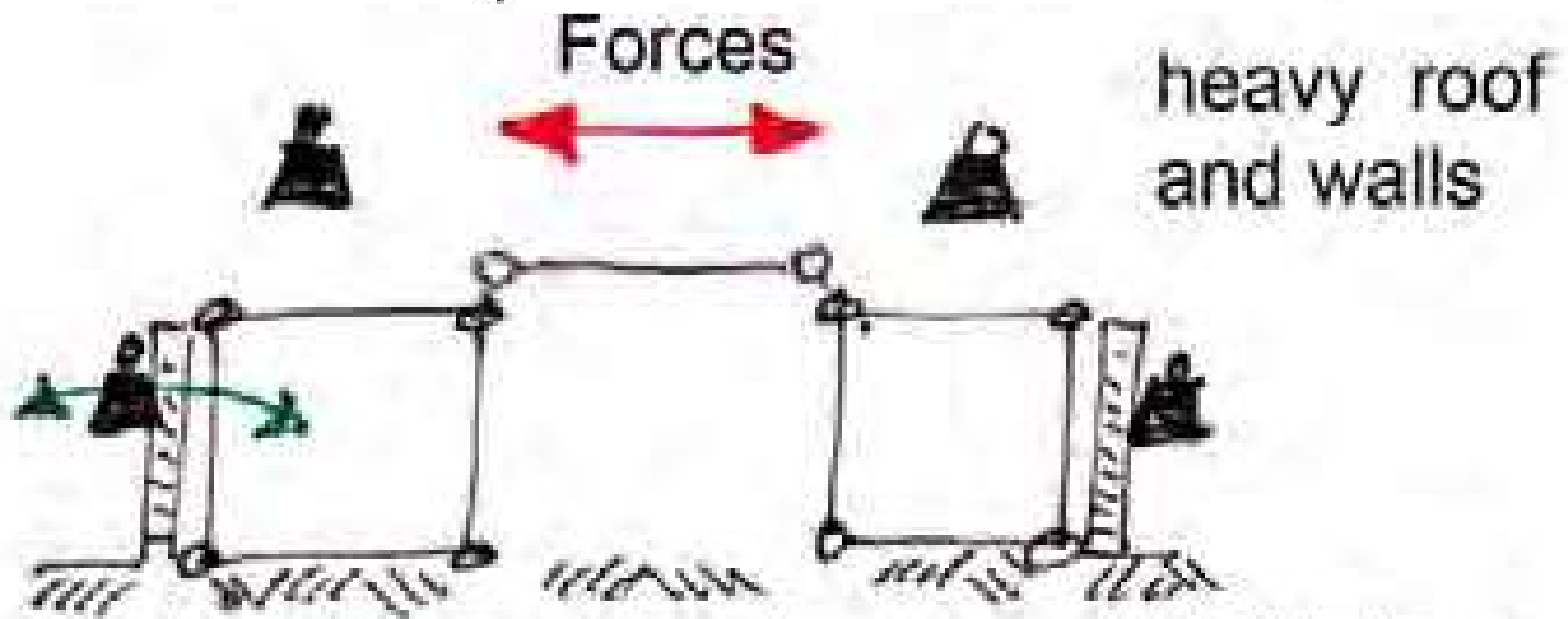
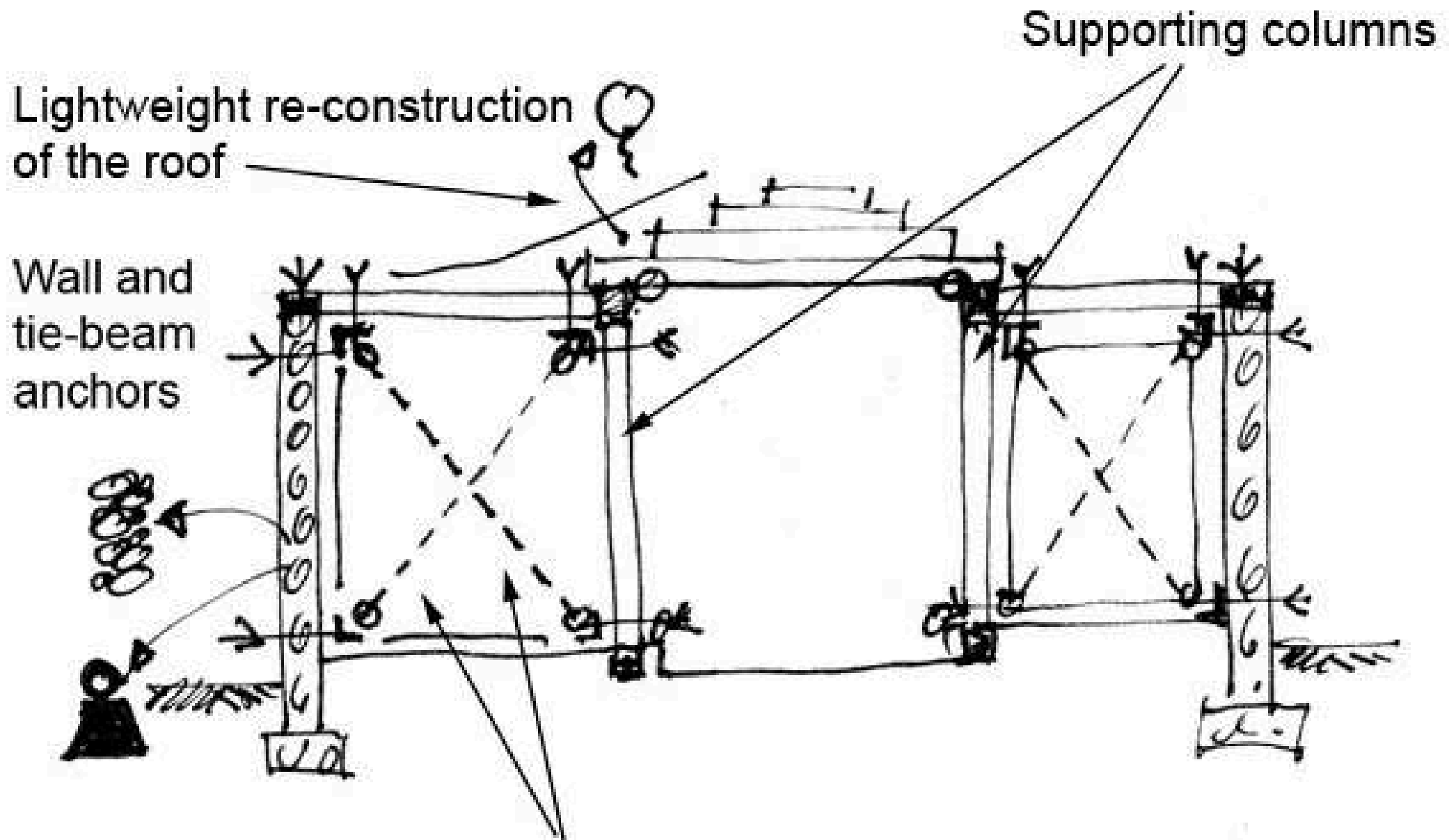
All central squares and diagonally closed roofs ("Gasirkum design") are loose beams layd each layer on top of the lower layer.



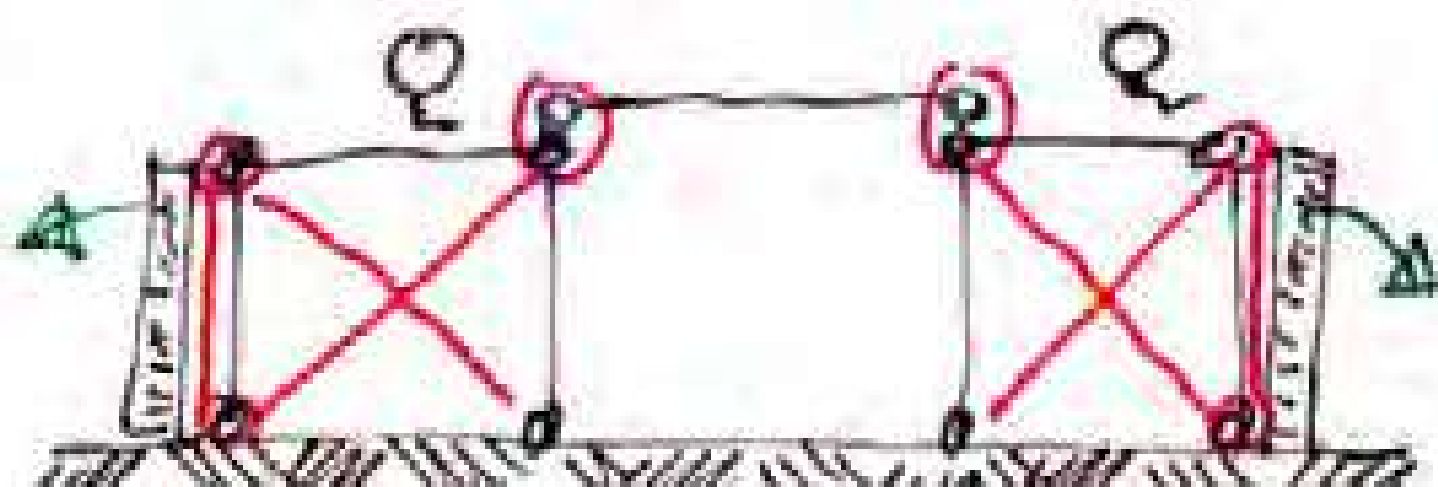
TRADITIONAL PAMIRI HOUSE DESIGN



PAMIR HOUSE DESIGN



When walls collapse, the structure will fold down.



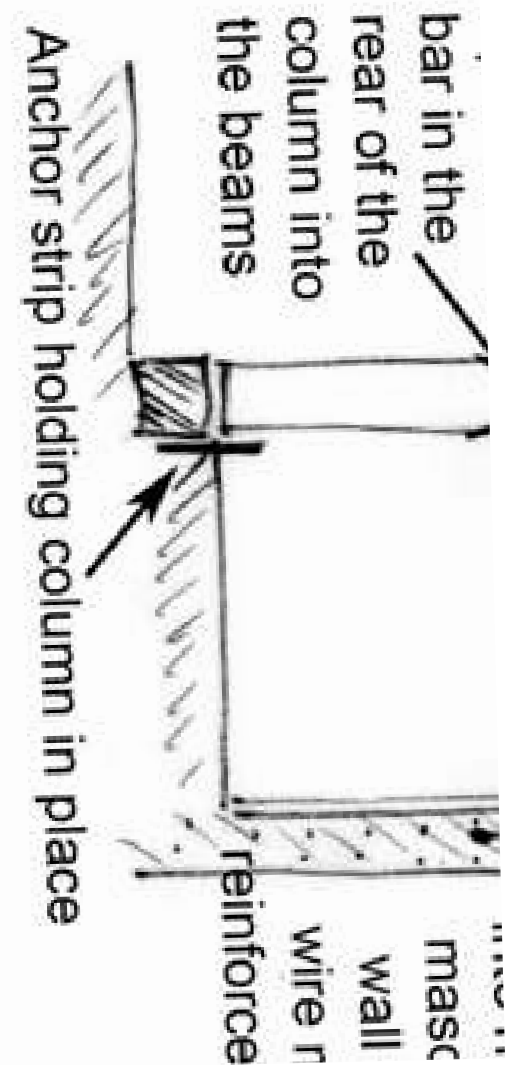
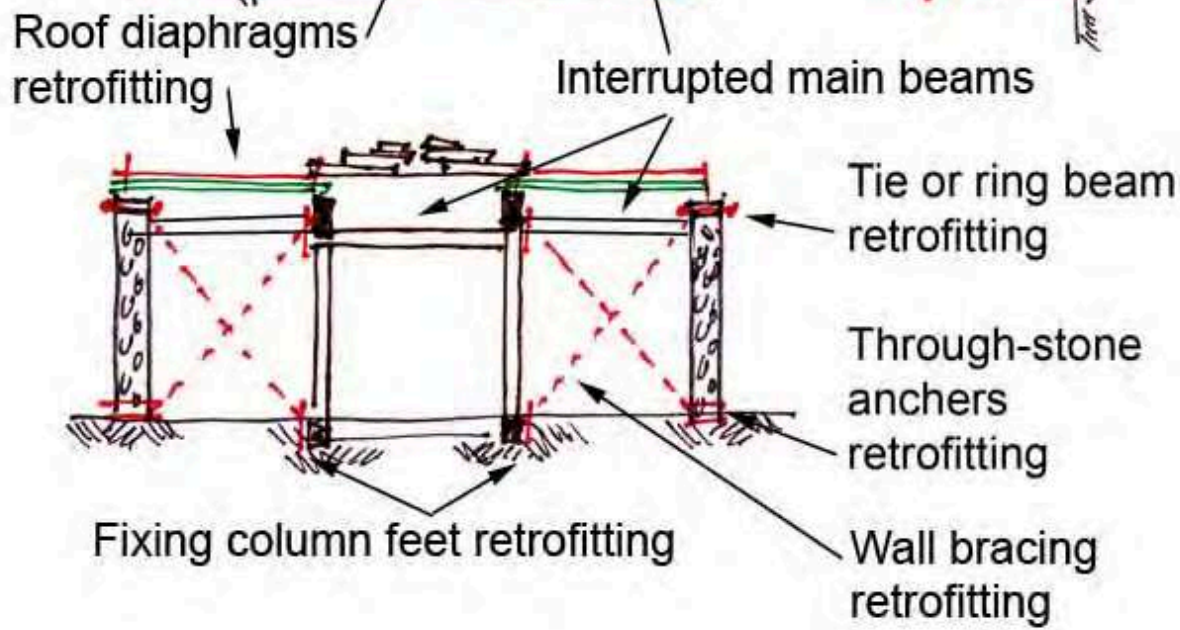
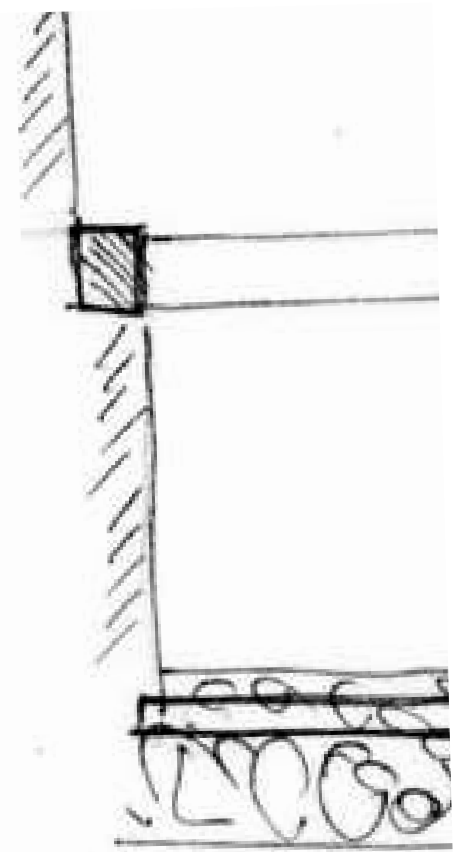
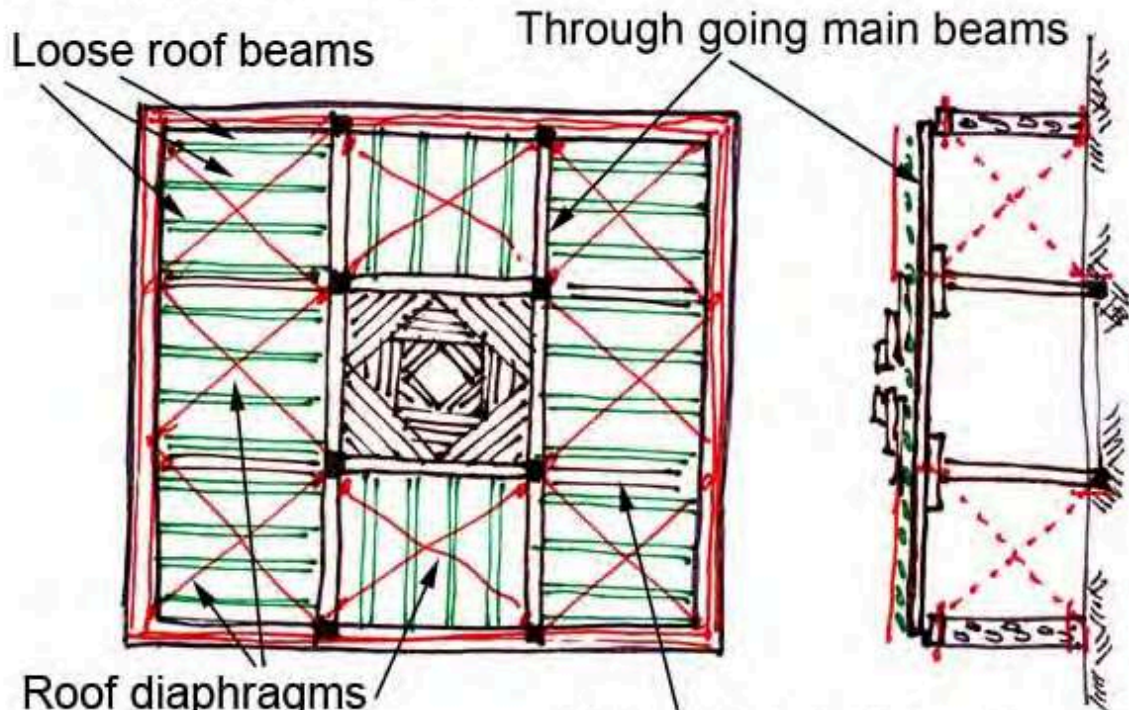
Single-Roof Living System in Old Pamiri Houses

Traditional Darbazi Pamiri houses are characterized by a single-roof system under which multiple functions of daily life take place historically *living spaces*, *storage areas* and *livestock* shelters were all accommodated beneath the same roof this arrangement was not only economical but also thermally efficient as the body heat from animals contributed to warming the interior during harsh winters this single-roof system resulted in a compact and integrated building form a continuous *roof* helped tie all walls together, allowing the building to act as one unit during seismic events the heavy earth-covered roofs commonly used in older Darbazi Pamiri houses significantly increased the building mass leading to higher earthquake forces acting on the walls

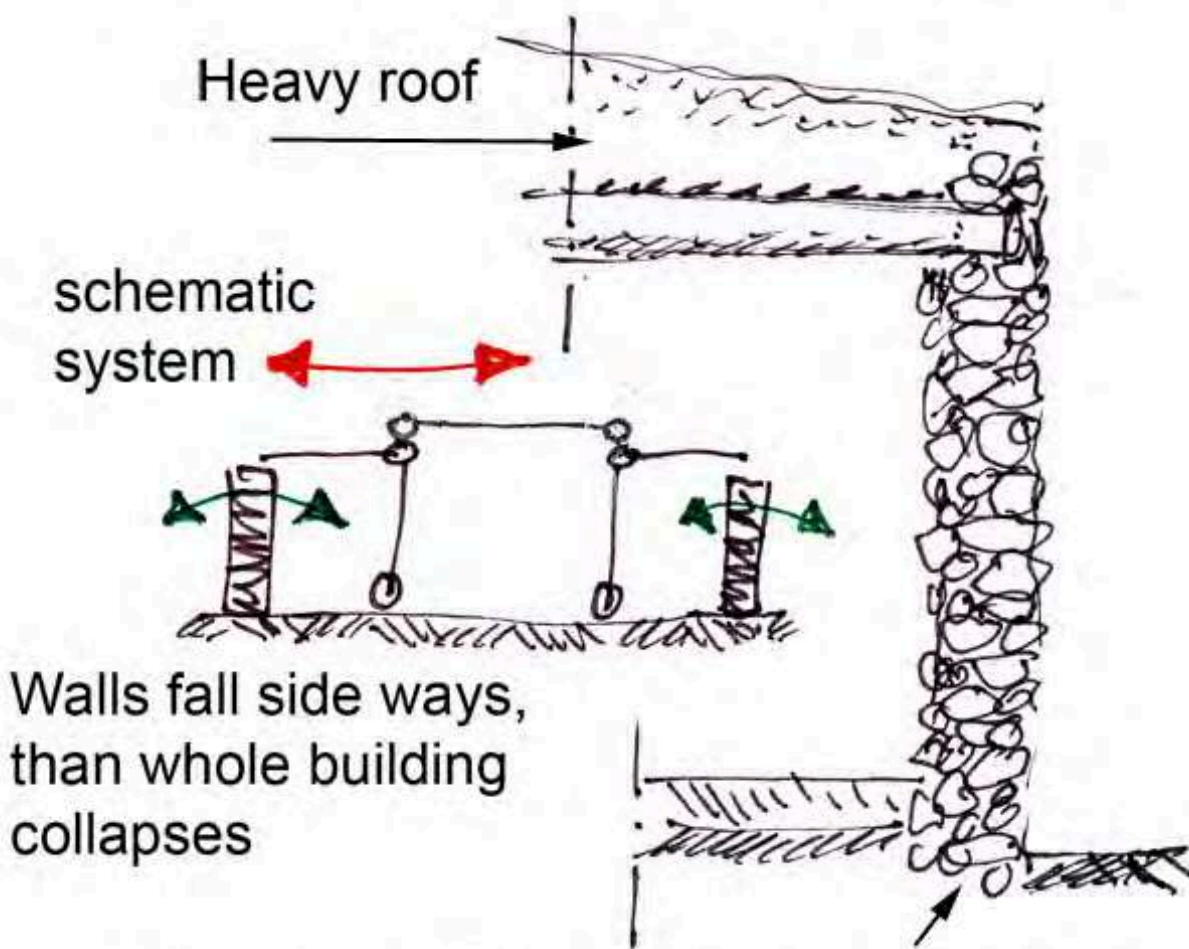
Beams and Wall Integration

Beams particularly tie-beams at roof level are essential for connecting the masonry walls of a Darbazi Pamiri house these beams prevent wall separation at corners and help resist out-of-plane wall movement during earthquakes in many traditional constructions the absence of continuous tie-beams has resulted in poor seismic performance properly integrated beams improve structural coherence by binding walls roof and internal partitions into a unified system this integration is especially important in Darbazi Pamiri houses due to the presence of openings *skylights* and thick stone walls with low tensile strength

PAMIRI ROOM DESIGN



PAMIRI HOUSE without side columns



Skylight and Roof Opening

The central skylight is a distinctive architectural element of the Darbazi Pamiri house serving as a source of natural light, ventilation and *smoke outlet* while culturally important the skylight introduces a structural discontinuity in the roof the skylight must be carefully framed and reinforced to maintain the integrity of the roof diaphragm without adequate reinforcement, stress concentrations around the skylight opening can cause cracking and localized roof failure during earthquakes

Corners and Wall Junctions

Wall corners and junctions are among the most vulnerable points in traditional Darbazi Pamiri houses poor bonding between intersecting walls often leads to separation and collapse during seismic shaking the paper recommends strengthening corners using through-stones wire-mesh reinforcement, or other *anchoring* techniques to connect both faces of the wall

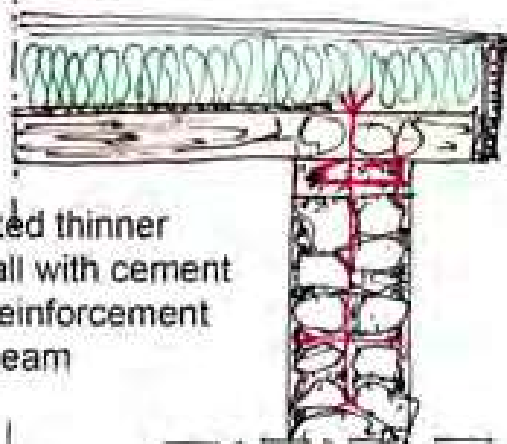
Strengthened corners significantly improve the building's ability to resist horizontal forces and prevent progressive collapse in traditional Pamiri houses, where thick stone walls dominate proper corner detailing is essential for earthquake safety

PAMIRI ROOF

Removed all soil layers

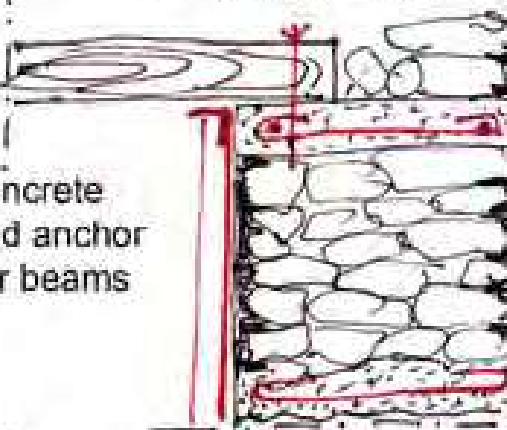
Apply insulation and water proofing

Re-constructed thinner perimeter wall with cement mortar and reinforcement and top tie-beam



All the roofing material removed for new roof.

Cast thin concrete tie-beam and anchor all perimeter beams

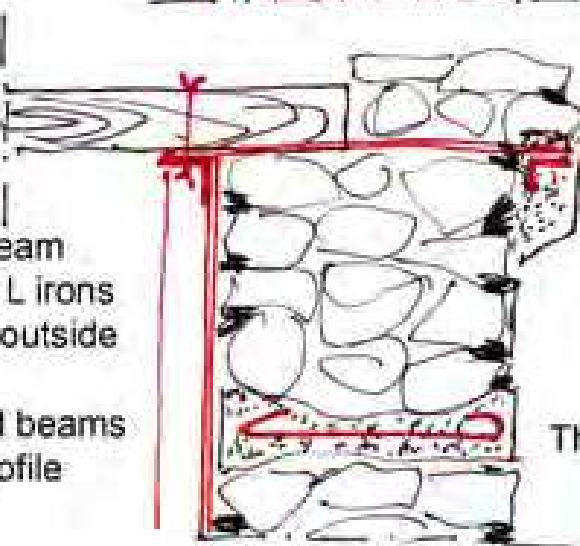


Through stones

Cast outside L iron in concrete

Make tie-beam from metal L irons inside and outside

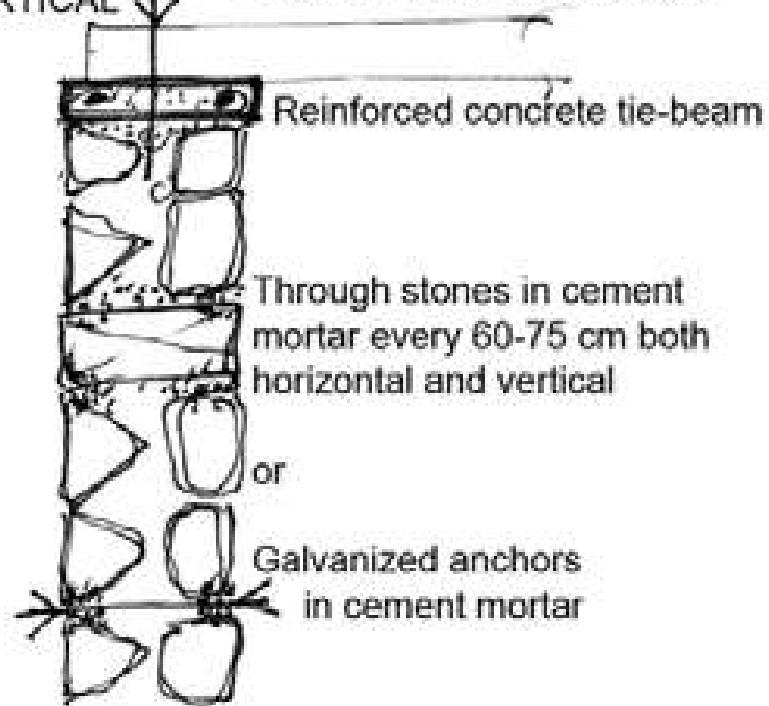
Connect all beams to angle profile



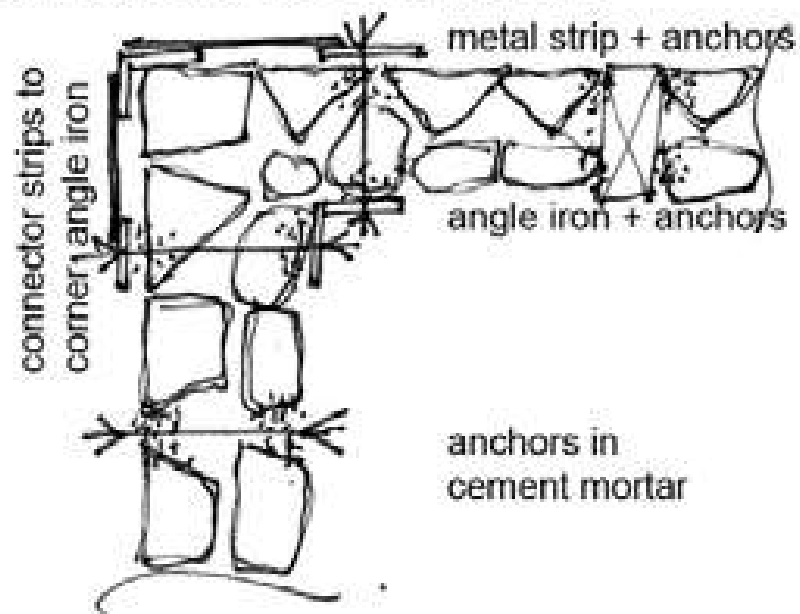
Through stones

SECTION VERTICAL

Anchor roof-floor diaphragm



CORNER SECTION HORIZONTAL





History of the Pamiri House

The Pamiri house locally known as the *Baypash, chid* has a long historical background in the Pamir region. Its origins can be traced to ancient *Zoroastrian traditions* the design dates back over *2,500* years, incorporating elements from Zoroastrianism a pre-Islamic religion *Darbazi style* of architecture (*5-6 thousand years old*). which later blended with Islamic and Ismaili beliefs over centuries the Darbazi Pamiri house evolved as a multifunctional space serving not only as a residence but also as a place for spiritual practices , social gatherings and cultural continuity traditionally the Darbazi Pamiri house was designed to support life in a harsh mountainous climate families depended on agriculture and livestock which made storage for winter survival an essential part of the house this historical need strongly influenced the internal design of the Darbazi Pamiri home ensuring self-sufficiency and sustainability .The house itself is the symbol of the universe and also the place of private prayer and worship for Pamiri Ismailis – the Ismailis have as yet very few mosques (*Jamat khan*) in Gorno-Badakhshan

Importance of the Darbazi Pamiri House

The *Darbazi Pamiri* house holds great cultural, social and spiritual importance culturally it preserves traditional knowledge, languages and craftsmanship that have been passed down through generations socially its shared spaces encourage family unity and cooperation especially in activities like food storage and preparation for winter economically and environmentally the house supports self-reliance, allowing families to store flour, wood and utensils efficiently spiritually the house serves as a sacred space where religious practices and daily life exist together

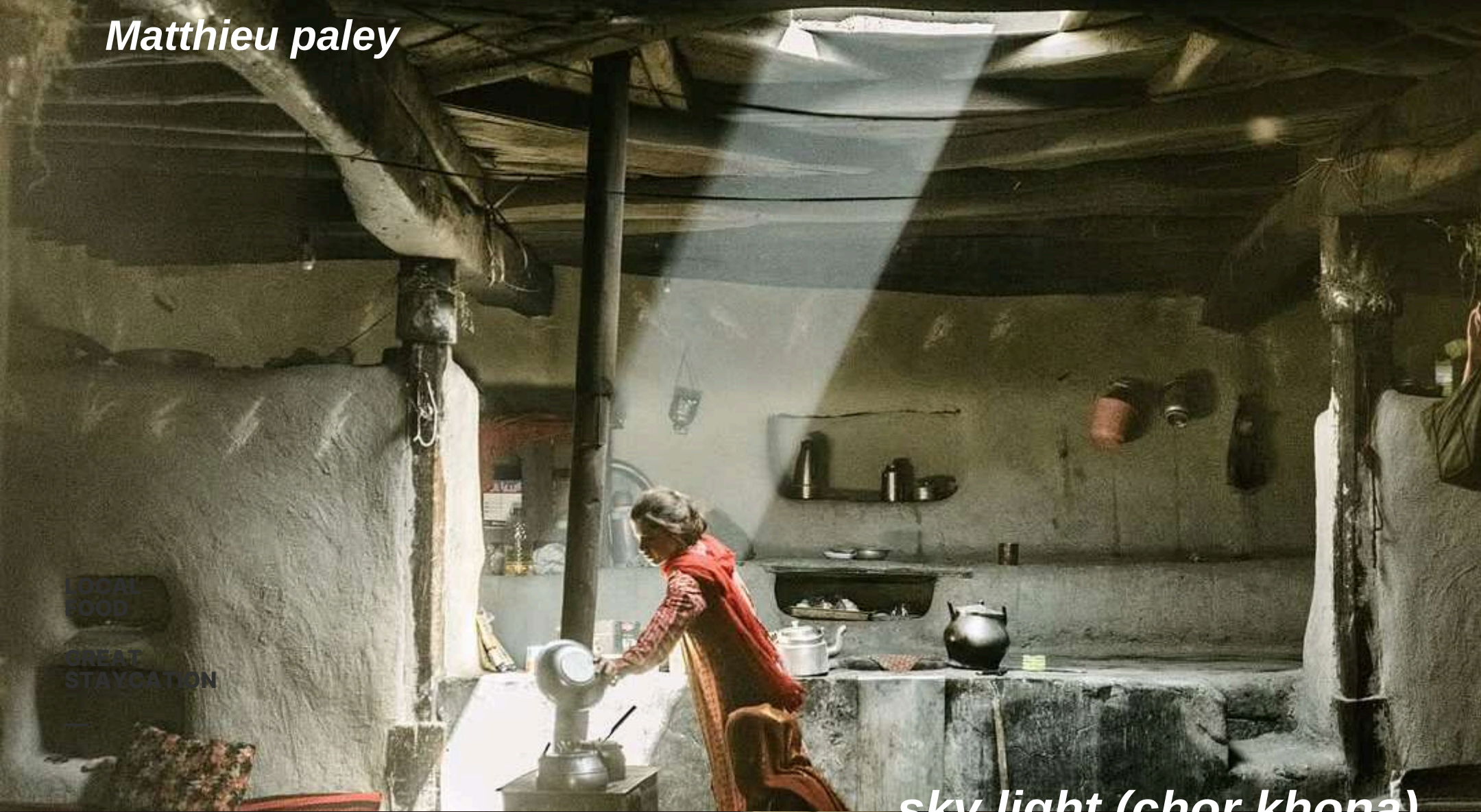
In today's world where modern housing is replacing traditional homes the Darbazi Pamiri house represents a valuable architectural heritage understanding its design and lived experience highlights the importance of preserving traditional houses that are closely connected to local culture, environment and identity

Design of the Darbazi Pamiri House

The Darbazi Pamiri house is built using local materials such as stone, mudbrick, wood and plaster although the exterior appears simple the interior is carefully organized and symbolically rich a central feature of the house is the *Chor khona* a roof with **four** concentric squares representing the four natural **elements: earth, water, air** and **fire** the roof includes a skylight that allows light and air to circulate throughout the house the interior is supported by five wooden pillars, symbolizing spiritual values in *Ismaili* belief

Wakhan Afghanistan

Matthieu paley



LOCAL
FOOD
GREAT
STAYCATION

sky light (chor khona)



Shughnon district Tajikistan

Pamir Tajikistan



SOLO
TRAVELING
LOCAL
FOOD

Gojal hunza Pakistan



Karimabad chitral Pakistan



Yarkhon upper chitral

Inside of Darbazi Pamari house

The house also includes important storage and functional areas, which reflect practical knowledge passed down through generations in the main hall there is a storage space called *Gonj* (in Khowar) where larger *Kash* (khowar) stock pots are made and used to store flour and edible items for winter the number of the Kash depends on how big the house is but it is usually designed 6 stock pots

Inside the main hall there is also a designated place for storing firewood known in Khowar as *Daranu* this area ensures that wood for heating and cooking is kept dry and easily accessible during cold seasons the cooking area in the Darbazi Pamiri house is called *Bukhari*(khowar) which functions as the main place for preparing food and heating the house it plays a central role in daily family life especially during winter

House hold items such as plates, glasses and other tableware are kept in a wooden dish rack, which is carefully designed and divided into different sections this wooden rack not only provides organized storage but also reflects traditional craftsmanship and practical design each of these elements shows that the Darbazi Pamiri house is designed to support daily living, seasonal needs and cultural practices within a single shared space

Hunza



khorog tajikistan



Chitral



*Photo by
damonlynch
on
flickr
Afghanistan badakhshan*



Chitral



Hunza









There are three living areas symbolising the *three kingdoms* of nature animal, mineral and vegetable the floor normally of earth, where the fire (or more frequently today, a cast-iron oven) burns, corresponds to the inanimate world the first raised dais corresponds to the vegetative soul and the third floor level to the cognitive soul

Five supporting pillars, symbolising the five members of *Ali's* family: *prophet Muhammad* his son-in-law Ali, Prophet daughter Bibi Fatima (Ali's wife), and their sons Hassan and Hussein – it has been suggested that in Zoroastrian symbolism the pillars may have corresponded to the major gods/goddesses (Yazata or Eyzads) Surush, Mehr, Anahita, Zamyod and Ozar

The pillar symbolising the prophet Muhammad to the left of the entrance, was traditionally made of juniper a sacred tree and symbol of purity the smoke of which has healing and disinfectant properties today, there are no longer enough junipers of adequate size for making this pillar in newly constructed houses the house (Baypash/child's) cradle will normally be put close to this pillar in Chitral this place is dedicated or honour to *Khalifa*

The pillar symbolising *Ali* is situated diagonally left from the entrance in Zoroastrian tradition, this pillar corresponded to the angel of love at weddings the bridal couple will be seated at this pillar, in the hope of being blessed with good fortune and happiness (Barakat)tradition requires that

Diagonally right from the entrance is the pillar symbolising *Bibi Fatima* it is the place of honour for the bride at the engagement ceremony and her engagement dress corresponds to the traditional perception of Fatima (and the goddess Anahita) red dress, bracelets, rings, ear-rings and this is the place where the meals is distribute. In *Zoroastrian* tradition this column corresponded to the angel who guarded the fire the stove or family fire is closest to this pillar and it serves also for fire-related rituals

The fourth *Hassan* and fifth *Hussein* pillars are joined to show the closeness of the relationship between Hassan and Hussein the crossbar is carved with Zoroastrian symbols, frequently including a central depiction of the sun and is sometimes decorated with the *horns* of a *Marco Polo sheep*

The Hassan pillar is the place of family and private prayer and is considered the place of honour for the religious leader (*Khalifa*) or a chief guest. The chief guest will normally leave a small symbolic space next to him/her against the pillar showing that it is reserved for the Khalifa in Zoroastrian tradition, this pillar may have personified

Mourning ceremonies of *Chiragh Roshan* with a ritual lamp or candle lit for three days are carried out close to the Hussein pillar . In Zoroastrian tradition this pillar could have been associated with Ozar



*A Pamiri
architecture in
Khorog Tajikistan*



*A Pamiri
architecture in
Gulmit Pakistan*





two main transversal supporting *beams* one across the Muhammad and Ali pillars one across the Fatima and Hassan/Hussein pillars for Pamiri Ismailis, the first symbolises universal reason (*Akli kul*) and the second the universal soul (Nafsi kul) in Zoroastrianism the two beams corresponded to the material and spiritual worlds.

Several groups of beams the total number varies according to the size of the house and local interpretation of Darbazi Pamiri tradition there are several different theories concerning their number for some the total must be the number of Ismaili Imams (**50**) for others they are equal to the number of *Hussain* Army **72** when they were killed in battlefield *Karbala* (Iraq) in most cases there are thirteen intermediary beams: six over the fireplace representing Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad the six prophets revered in Islam (in Zoroastrianism the number six could relate to East, West, North, South, Upper, Lower) and seven representing the first seven Imams. In Zoroastrianism the number seven relates to the main heavenly bodies (Sun, Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus and Mercury) and the seven principal Amesha Spentas or Holy Immortals)

Other beams on the ceiling may include groups of eighteen or seventeen beams corresponding to elements of Ismaili cosmogony.

A raised platform (approx. 50cm) around the inside walls of the house underneath the platform is a storage area but prior to the widespread introduction of metal stoves, which now stand in the open floor area it would have incorporated the family hearth as in the photo below.

A skylight, the design of which incorporates four concentric square box-type layers known as Kumall / chorkhona (four houses) representing, respectively the four Zoroastrian elements earth, water, air and fire the latter being the highest touched first by the sun's rays.



From Darbazi to Pamiri Houses Continuity of the Crowned Dwelling Tradition

The Darbazi house also known as the crowned or domed hall dwelling, represents one of the oldest continuous architectural traditions in the *Caucasus* region its origins extend back to prehistoric times, with archaeological evidence from sites such as Amirez Gora, Sholavirs Gora, Qoatskhelbi and Amiranis Gora, dating back *five to six* thousand years despite regional variations, Darbazi houses share a unified architectural logic and symbolic system that has survived for thousands of years this type of dwelling was not simply a shelter but a local expression of family lineage and the universe

At the center of the Darbazi house is the *Didabudzi* the *mother pillar* structurally it supports the roof, but symbolically it represents the axis of life lineage and continuity the pillar is usually rectangular in section and trapezoidal in height, widening towards the apex from an architectural point of view such a shape is inefficient and labor-intensive compared to cylindrical or square pillars the persistence of this form cannot therefore be explained by mere pragmatism it reflects the adherence to an inherited symbolic form which acquired sacred meaning long before technical efficiency became a concern

Above the Dedabodzi rises the Gvirgvini, the *crown-like roof* structure composed of multiple wooden *beams* arranged concentrically at its center is the *Erdo* the *zenith* opening or *skylight* this opening functions simultaneously as a source of light, ventilation, smoke outlet, and symbolic connection to the sky through the Erdo inhabitants could observe celestial movements, measure time, predict weather and perform rituals the crown itself was understood as a representation of the heavens transforming the interior of the house into a cosmological model rather than a neutral domestic space

The discovery of monumental *T-shaped* stone pillars at *Göbekli Tepe* and *Nevalı Çori* provides a striking prehistoric parallel to this tradition these structures, dating to the tenth millennium BCE feature twin T-pillars placed at the center of partially sunken buildings, surrounded by perimeter walls with shelving-like elements like the *Dedabodzi* these pillars are non-pragmatic in form massive, trapezoidal and carved from single blocks of stone weighing up to thirty tons their surfaces are decorated with cosmogonic and symbolic reliefs suggesting ritual rather than domestic function

The resemblance between these ancient stone pillars and later wooden pillars of *Darbazi houses* is not limited to form in both cases the pillar exceeds its structural role and becomes a symbolic figure possibly anthropomorphic, ancestral or cosmological the *T-shape* widely attested across cultures, consistently carries meanings associated with life, continuity and the connection between earth and sky the repetition of this form from *Anatolia* through the *Caucasus* and into the Pamirs suggests a shared architectural memory rather than isolated invention

Pamiri houses preserve this same spatial and symbolic logic the central pillars roof crown and skylight of the Pamiri dwelling correspond closely to the *Dedabodzi*, *Gvirgvini* and *Erdo* of the *Darbazi* the interior is similarly organized around a sacred center with light descending from above and structure arranged to reflect cosmological order decorative motifs found in *Pamiri* houses geometric patterns *solar symbols* and numerical arrangements echo the symbolic language observed on ancient T-pillars and Caucasian crowned dwellings



Gojal pakistan



Darbazi house Georgia

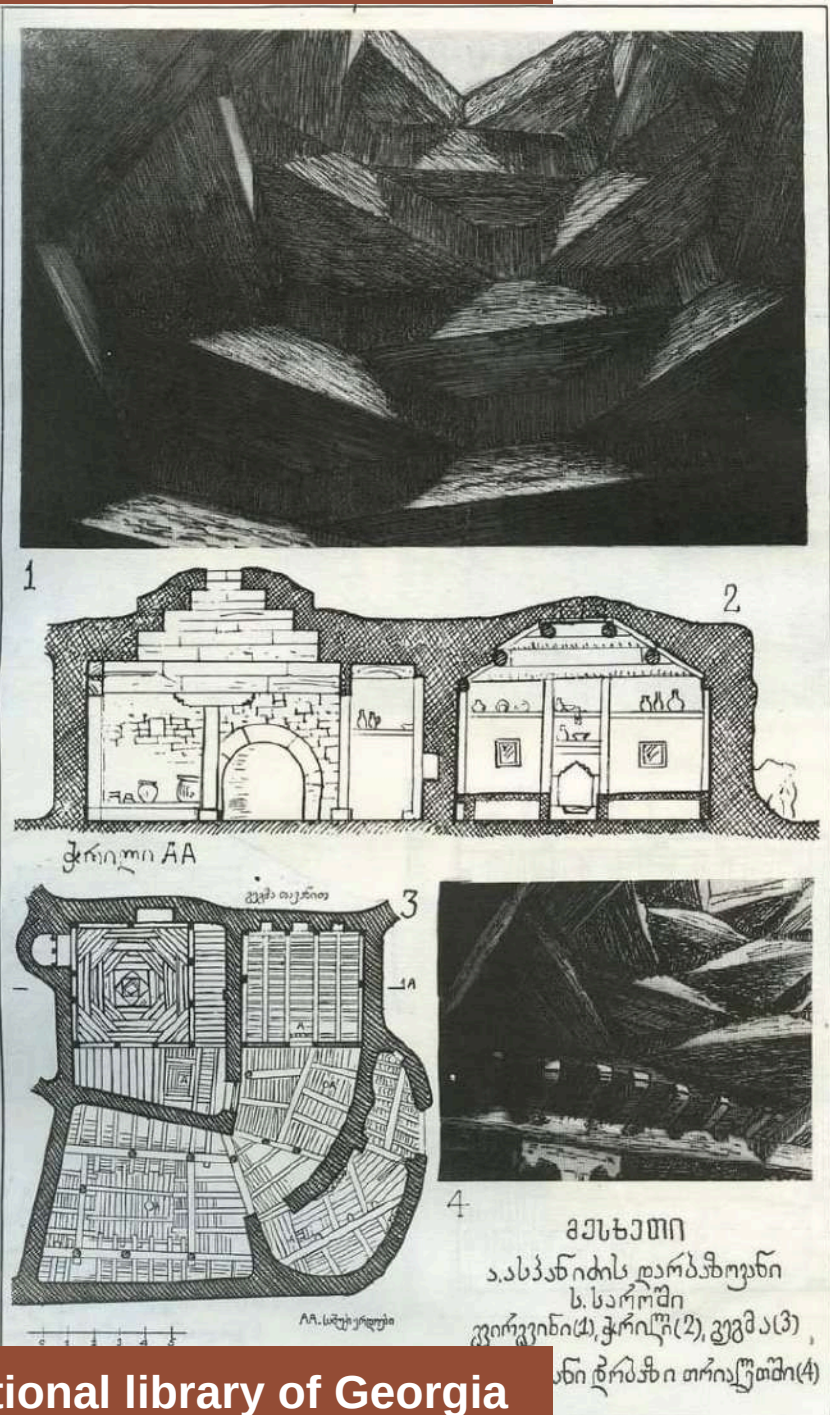


Pakistan



Khizabavra Georgia

Photo : Darbazi dialoguese



National library of Georgia



Aspindzis Georgia

The absence of roofing remains at *Göbekli Tepe and Nevali Çori* has long puzzled researchers however Caucasian ethnographic evidence provides a possible explanation in *Georgian tradition* when a family relocated it carried its *Dedabodzi* hearth and crown to the new settlement as an act of continuity and respect for ancestors this practice suggests that the wooden roofing elements of prehistoric crowned structures may likewise have been intentionally removed and reused, leaving behind only the stone pillars

Viewed through this lens the *Darbazi house* is not an isolated regional form but a transitional link in a long architectural lineage Pamiri crowned houses in turn represent a living continuation of this ancient tradition. From Göbekli Tepe and Nevali Çori to *Georgian Darbazi* and *Pamiri houses* the persistence of *T*-shaped pillars crowned roofs, skylights and sacral interiors reveals a deep cultural continuity that transcends geography and time

References

Eduljee, K. E. (n.d.). Zoroastrian heritage: Fire, light, and ritual symbolism. Zoroastrian Heritage. <https://www.zoroastrianheritage.org>

Pamir .org. (n.d.). Pamiri culture, Chiragh-i-Roshan, and local religious traditions. Pamir Times. <https://pamirtimes.net>

Pamir Cultural Heritage Project. (n.d.). Traditional Pamiri houses and architectural symbolism. Pamir Cultural Archive. <https://www.pamir.com>

Sehr Tejpar. (2011). Senses and perceptions of place in Khorog: A phenomenology of the Pamiri home. Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities. (Unpublished academic report, PDF file shared by author)

Unpublished Student Manuscript. (n.d.). Pamiri house, sacred space, and ritual traditions. (Unpublished PDF document shared by researcher)

Daftary, F. (2007). *The Ismailis: Their history and doctrines* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Niyozov, S. (2003). *Evolution of the Shi'a Ismaili tradition in Central Asia*. London: Institute of Ismaili Studies.

University of Leiden. (n.d.). Iranian, Central Asian, and Caucasus religious traditions. Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University. <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl>

van den Berg, G. (n.d.). *Light symbolism, ritual, and sacred space in Ismaili communities*. Leiden University.

Eliade, M. (1957). *The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion*. New York: Harcourt.

Heidegger, M. (1971). *Building, dwelling, thinking*. In *Poetry, language, thought*. New York: Harper & Row.

Chubinashvili, G. (1964). *Georgian traditional architecture and the Darbazi house*. Tbilisi: Georgian Academy of Sciences.

Makharadze, Z. (2009). Vernacular architecture of the Caucasus: The Darbazi house and its spatial symbolism. *Caucasus Architectural Studies Journal*, 5(1), 33–49.

CONCLUSION

The Darbazi Pamiri house is far more than a traditional form of architecture it is a living expression of the Pamiri worldview through its pillars, skylight, hearth, and internal organization the house preserves layers of ancient belief from Zoroastrian symbolism and animistic practices to Ismaili spiritual interpretation the rituals performed inside the home such as Chiragh-i Roshan, Arwahani, and the burning of isbandur, show how deeply connected daily life remains to ancestral traditions

By studying the Pamiri house through an ethnological lens, this research demonstrates that architecture and culture cannot be separated the structure of the home reflects the values of the community unity, spirituality, hospitality and respect for nature even as modern building styles spread, the Darbazi house continues to represent identity, memory and continuity for Pamiri families preserving and understanding this architectural heritage is essential it helps safeguard not only a traditional building style but also the beliefs rituals, and cultural knowledge that define the Pamiri people the Pamiri house stands as a reminder that homes are not only places to live they are cultural universes that hold the history and soul of a community.

Personal Reflection

My academic journey has been shaped not only by study and research, but also by personal challenges and difficult experiences. After completing my ADP program, I discovered a true passion for higher education and dreamed of studying at the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) for two years. I worked hard to meet the requirements: I studied my subjects deeply, committed myself to learning Persian, and prepared myself academically and spiritually just before my second-last semester exams. I received an unexpected email from IIS informing me that ADP and post-ADP qualifications would no longer be accepted. This news was extremely painful. After two years of dedication, planning, and hope, my path toward IIS felt suddenly closed.

Still, I did not give up. I applied for an internship program hosted by the Aga Khan Youth and Sports Board, which places students in different AKDN institutions. I reached the first stage successfully, and I prepared with great effort. My research on the Pamiri house—its sustainable architecture, earthquake-resistant structure, and potential for winter rooftop agriculture—was strong and relevant, but my interview experience was deeply discouraging. The panel members appeared uninterested and unprepared. Their tone felt disrespectful, and it became clear that some candidates had already been informally chosen before the interviews. The selection committee represented one particular region, and they prioritized their own students, even when those students did not understand the basic details of the institution they applied for. Highly deserving students, including me, were ignored. I was even asked questions such as “How Ismaili are you?” and “How will you prove it?”, which were inappropriate and unprofessional. Meanwhile, candidates studying aviation or MBBS were given top preference, even for positions unrelated to their fields. I know a friend who was selected in a second-priority institution while the first-priority candidate—with better qualifications—was rejected without explanation. These inconsistencies made me lose trust in the fairness of the process. This period affected me emotionally. I lost confidence, I became frustrated, and I even lost a person I cared about deeply because jealousy and stress influenced my behaviour. I was studying hard but receiving no opportunities, and I felt my efforts were invisible. Yet this disappointment became a turning point. Instead of stopping, I chose to build my own path. I travelled to Chitral and Gilgit-Baltistan, visited local communities, and collected real field data about Pamiri houses—information that is valuable internationally and is used by researchers in Russia, Canada, Tajikistan, and beyond. I learned directly from the living anthropology of the Pamiri world: their homes, their beliefs, their traditions, and their environment. During this journey, a teaching of **Aga Khan IV** guided me deeply.

“Everybody makes mistakes. Never regret them, correct them. There’s no such thing as a perfect world or perfect life.”

Through these experiences, I rediscovered my strength and my purpose. I learned that I do not need to prove myself to anyone or wait for an institution to validate me. My work, my resilience, my field research, and my commitment to understanding the cultural universe of the Pamiri house prove who I am today. I stand confident. I know that my path may be different, but it is mine—and it is built with honesty, effort, and a true love for knowledge.



