

*give in  
sacrifice*

WILD HERBS  
&  
SACRED GRAINS



What happens when artists and academics meet in one of the most geographically and historically rich regions in Pakistan?

To explore and document the lower region of Swat, a chef, a photographer, an illustrator, and an anthropologist came together for the Wild Grains and Sacred Herbs Residency.

The residency was shaped by different ways of listening to the land ~ through cooking, imagining, drawing, walking, observing, and conversation. Instead of approaching heritage as something fixed or monumental, the work focused on lived rhythms and everyday practices: food prepared by season, knowledge shared in homes, and gestures repeated across timelines. These ways of working allow heritage to be re-membered through use and presence, grounded in daily life rather than distant histories.



# SWAT: THE GARDEN AND THE SNAKE

## A reflection on a story of food



It is certainly no coincidence that Oḍiyāna or Uḍiyāna, the ancient mystical name of the Swat Valley (or the region in which this valley is located), has been interpreted as “garden”. The term Oḍiyāna actually predates the arrival of Buddhism in the 3rd century BC and means “land, or way of the Oḍi”, the ancient dynasty of Odi or Odirajas whose first known ancestor, Utarasena, participated in the Buddha’s parinirvāṇa. However, it was natural for the Chinese travellers to explain to their readers (Tang court officials and librarians) that Uḍiyāna, read as Udyāna, in Sanskrit means “garden”. A kind of Edenic garden guarded by a tyrannical serpent (the nāga’s name means “without sprout” – apalāla). A luciferian spirit tamed by the Buddha: as a sign of the latter’s spiritual power, Swat became a garden rich in rice and wheat, perhaps one of the largest granaries in South Asia – for the joy and wealth of its blessed people. Apalala’s daughter, the first nāgin to follow the living words of Buddha, Udiyana was the mother of Utarasena, second king of Odi. It should be remembered that it was the resources of the “garden” that made the kings of Odi so rich and powerful, and it was at their court that the unique Buddhist art now known as “Gandharan” was actually created and patronised.

Over the next 2500 years, this uniqueness remained, as evidenced both by the uninterrupted archaeological evidence of Swat and the words of Babur and Kushal Khan Khattak. 130 years ago, Alexander Caddy, sent from Calcutta to Swat to collect sculptures, wrote:

There is no natural feature of the country [i.e. Swat] which has not been turned to advantage. The immense flats are flooded periodically as of old, and produce a rice harvest second to none in India.

(From Alexander E. Caddy Esq. on special duty to the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal. Dated Camp Chakdara [Swat], 13th May 1896)

LUCA M. OLIVIERI

Director, Italian Archeological Mission in Pakistan

# THE MOUNTAIN IS GREEN AND THE RIVER FLOWS

Zen saying (Kwan Um lineage)

An expression of great love, great compassion  
and the great Bodddhisatva way

MIRACLE

It means being

being together

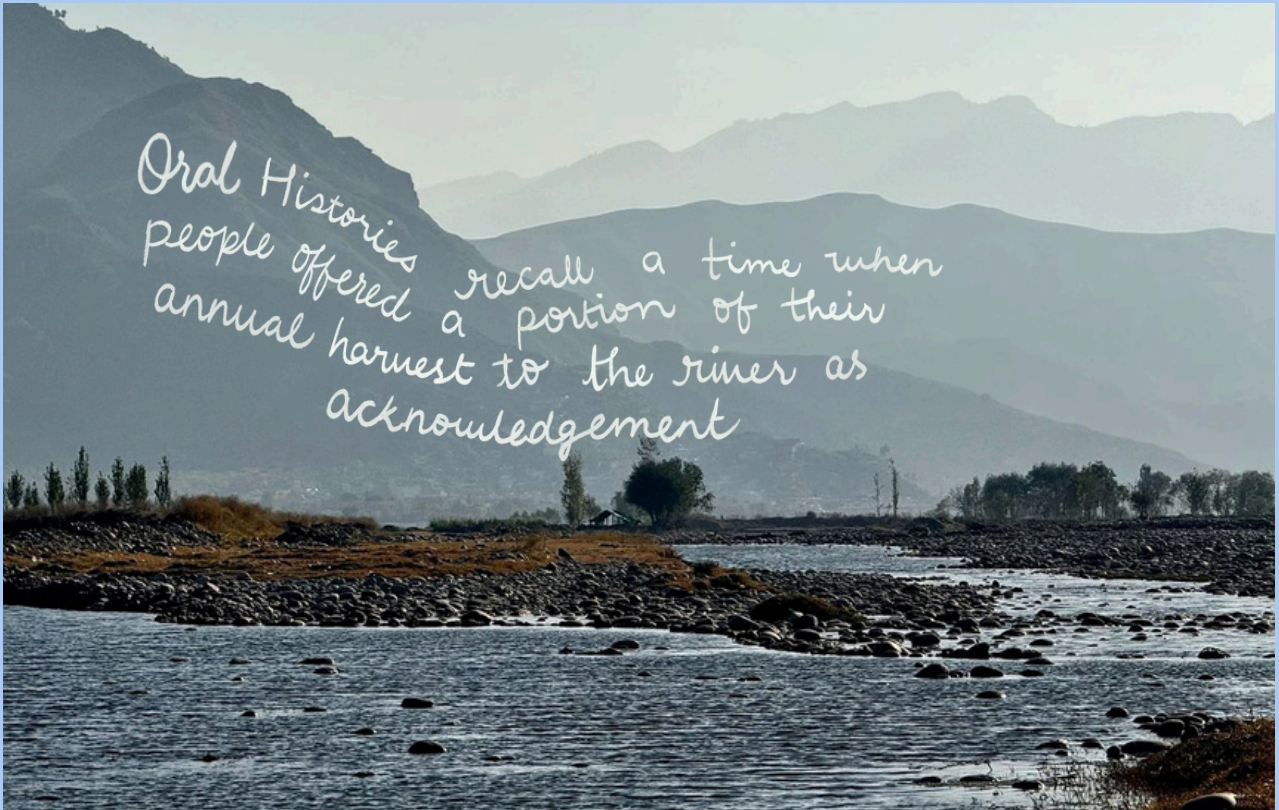
being for one another

SACRIFICE

In early texts, the river now known as Swat was called

SUVASTU

Instead of a resource, it is considered a living entity, capable of nourishment, emotion, and destruction.



MIRACLE

Such gestures recognised the river's agency and the limits of human control.



The story of the Nāga Apalāla recounts a moment of encounter: the Buddha descending from contemplation to address the serpent king, not to conquer him, but to temper his force. Here, the river is framed as a being with temperament.

One whose power must be met with restraint, attention, and care.

These narratives articulate an ecological ethic grounded in collaboration between human and non-human life.

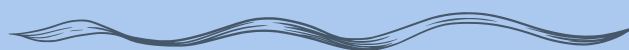
SACRIFICE

# Song to the Rock Demoness

River, ripples, and waves, these three,  
When emerging, arise from the ocean itself.  
When disappearing, they disappear into the ocean itself.



MIRACLE



SACRIFICE



MIRACLE

Habitual thinking, love, and possessiveness, these three,  
When arising, arise from the alaya  
(higher) consciousness itself.  
When disappearing, they disappear into  
the alaya consciousness itself.



Milarepa, 11th Century Buddhist Mystic

SACRIFICE

What is negotiated with the river continues on land.

Seasonal rhythms, groundwater paths, and fertile soil shape how people grow, gather, and prepare food as a response.



Much of Swat's everyday sustenance depends on groundwater streams that surface and disappear across the valley.

Foraging along these paths requires familiarity: knowing where water gathers, which plants return, and how much can be taken without depletion.

Foraging here is not framed as scarcity or emergency.

It reflects proximity and trust, practices shaped by repeated connection with the land.

RIVER





Food in the Swat Valley follows agricultural rhythms shaped by season, land and household labour.

Wheat-based meals such as jowaro rotai and naan form the basis of daily sustenance, supporting bodies shaped by fieldwork and harvest.

Agriculture extends into domestic spaces, where women's largely invisible labour sustains families through repetition and care.

RIVER



This continuity extends into healing: certain foods are valued for medicinal properties, while practices such as fermentation and postpartum nourishment reinforce connections between diet, recovery, and balance.

SACRIFICE



RIVER

Knowledge here develops through attention to timing - when fruit ripens, when herbs are gathered, when land must be left to rest.

The Swat Valley / Uddiyāna / Orgyan  
is shaped by fertile alluvial soil, abundant groundwater,  
and a climate that has long supported subsistence farming  
alongside local markets.

*This abundance is not accidental.*

Glaciers, seasonal melt, and long sunlight have allowed  
double-crop agriculture for centuries, making Swat  
one of the region's most productive agrarian zones.

Oral histories recall practices of offering that emerged from this surplus -  
acts of reciprocity toward land and water that embedded agriculture  
within care rather than extraction.

It was this surplus, sustained by land and water, that anchored  
Swat's wider cosmopolitan significance. Situated along  
transregional routes connecting South Asia, Central Asia,  
and the broader Buddhist world, the valley became a site of  
circulation: of grain, people, ideas, and devotion, shaping Swat  
as a generative centre within older networks of  
trade, ritual, and knowledge.



RIVER

Even today, abundance in this land is understood not as possession, but as something to be given.

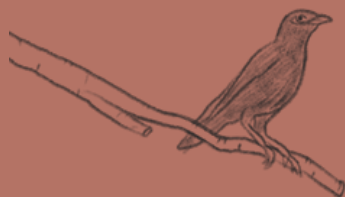


To chase the season,  
in the here and now,  
to forage,  
to feel the earth tilt—

The warm autumn sun on skin,  
the change of winds,  
the slower flow of water.

What grows in the dirt,  
nourishes the soul.

RIVER



The hand of a cook  
is the creator of alchemy-  
elixirs of life for  
nourishment and healing.

Recipes are guides—  
like spores ready to inoculate the mind  
when the cook is ready.

ASAD MONGA





RIVER



Melmastia, the Pashtun code of hospitality, begins with the generous act of making the guest feel like a part of the family. The host carries the responsibility of care: to offer food, to honour presence, to give the best they can without measuring.

RIVER

Women, especially, pay attention to the smallest things like making sure that each cup of tea is equally poured. In Swat, this ethic has long extended beyond the household. Historically a cosmopolitan valley, it fed travellers, students, traders, and monks moving through the region, and this gesture of nourishment continues today in everyday life.

Food is shared communally – walnuts cracked and passed hand to hand, shna chai poured and refilled in hujras, during jirgas, and at weddings alongside sweets or dry fruits. These practices are practical ways of holding people together.

As contexts change, so does language. If one were to describe the richness of Swat's soil today, its capacity to sustain, feed, and host, one might simply say: you need to be Swat-maxxing.

❄️ YOU NEED TO BE ❄️  
SWAT-MAXXING





بند گھوٹی او مٹی پلواری  
بند گھوٹی او مٹی پلواری  
بند گھوٹی او مٹی پلواری

# BAND GOBI AUR

# MAKAI KAY PAKORAY

## Ingredients:

1 band gobi/cabbage (roughly 650g piece)  
 5-6 bhuttas/makai/fresh corn (kernels taken out)  
 salt as per taste  
 1 teaspoon red chili flakes (take out the heat if you wish)  
 1 teaspoon coriander seeds (put more of this if you want better digestion)  
 1 teaspoon dambara, pricklyash  
 a handful of fresh coriander  
 500g basin/chickpea flour  
 250g cornflour  
 250g maida  
 1 litre cooking oil of choice



## Method:

Julienne the band gobi, which means to just slice it thinly against the grain. It's a very satisfying process. You can Youtube for further instructions. After this is done, take a bowl and add your cabbage, along with kernels of corn. Now add a big pinch of salt, followed by the coriander seeds and chilli. Now massage the cabbage and corn. Once well mixed, let this mixture stay.

*The salt will draw out moisture from the vegetables and also season them deeply*



Now prepare your dry mix: basin, cornflour and maida- at this point, feel free to add whatever other dry spice you want. I added some **dambara**, which is pricklyash from Swat, similar to a Sichuan peppercorn- but milder. Now revisit your vegetables. Hopefully by now their cell walls will have wilted. Add your dry mix and go at it with your hands. Goondofy (knead) the dough and feel it. Is the mixture too dry? Add a few splashes of water. Too wet? Add some additional besan to get that right viscous pakora consistency.

*Now prepare your dry-mix:  
 Besan + Cornflour + maida*

Heat up your oil of choice. Desis know how to fry things, don't make me spell it out for you. Just be ready with your fry station: a wok with hot oil on medium high heat, a spider (that tool to pull out stuff from the fryer), a steel bowl or plate, absorbent paper, chat masala. Check the oil. Nice and hot.

*The Pakora-drop technique*

Use your hand. Dip your fingers in the vessel which is holding the pakora batter and scoop out a big pinch to drop in the hot oil. This method will give you thin and crispy shards of cabbage on the pakora. Be confident and get close to the oil before releasing the pakora. Go clockwise with the droppage until the wok can't hold any more pakoras. Cook for about 4-5 mins or until golden brown. Take out the pakoras from the wok with the spider onto the absorbent lined bowl or plate and sprinkle chat masala or more dambara as you please. Enjoy by itself or have it with a killer tamater ki chutney. Keep reading for the recipe.

# تماتر چتني تماتر چتني تماتر چتني

## TAMATAR CHUTNEY



### Ingredients:

- 4-5 juicy, ripe, blushy red tomatoes
- 2 green chillis
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 1 small onion
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice or vinegar
- a big pinch of salt
- 1 fist full of walnuts
- a handful of chopped coriander and mint



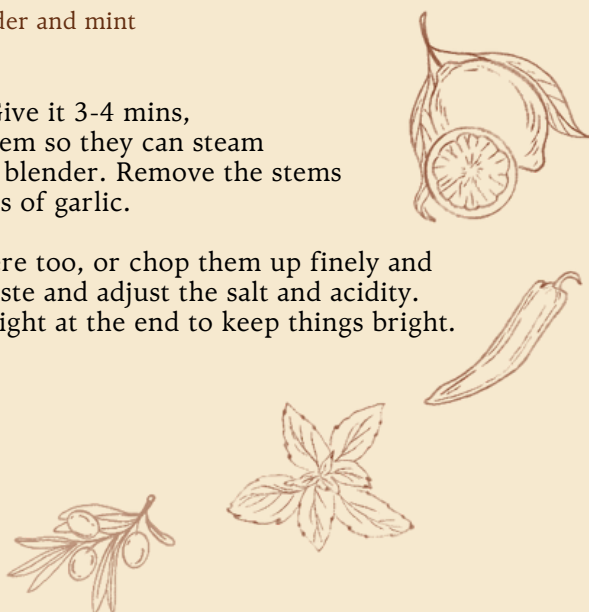
### Method:

Fire roast the tamater, chillis and onion on an open flame. Give it 3-4 mins, once they char from the outside, take them off and cover them so they can steam and soften. Peel the onion and tomato skin and add it to the blender. Remove the stems of the chili and add it too, along with: salt and the two cloves of garlic.

Now you have two choices: either you add the walnuts in here too, or chop them up finely and THEN add it to the chutney post blending. Once blended, taste and adjust the salt and acidity. Once it feels right, add in the chopped mint and coriander right at the end to keep things bright.

*A touch of olive oil at this point can really elevate this chutney and give it a shine too.*

*(Maybe even some honey to play the sweet notes.)*





پختگی



Warjalay: one of the most beloved traditional foods of Swat Valley. Its core ingredient is Begumai rice, locally known as Boti Wriji. The rice itself has a story behind its name. Begumai rice is named after the lady that introduced it to the culture. Her name was Begum Princess Bilqees Jan Afandi and she was an Afghan married into the royal family of the Swat Valley. She introduced the crop to the land in 1949, although it mutated with a shortened length.

*This rice is the soul of Warjalay*

This is paired with spinach and garlic leaves called Ogakai. In its earliest form, the greens were first boiled and then added to rice. Later, as cooking evolved, a base paste of garlic, tomato, and onion was lightly cooked in oil before the chopped greens were mixed in. Once the greens softened, rice and water were added, and the whole dish simmered together with salt until the rice absorbed the flavor.

*† A touch of oil or desi ghee finishes it †*

In older days, women would finely chop the greens with a lor, a small hand-held scythe used for farming and kitchen work. Today, many use blenders or juicers for convenience, though elders still insist that the lor gives distinct texture.

# WARJALAY

Warjalay is a complete meal on its own, but it pairs beautifully with yogurt, desi ghee, soft butter, or a light curry. It reflects a harmonious blend of simplicity, nourishment, and the valley's agrarian roots, a dish that carries both the scent of the fields & the earth.

## Ingredients:

1kg begumai rice  
 2kg beef with bone (preferably a part from the leg)  
 1 whole head of garlic  
 1 bunch of green garlic  
 1kg greens (like spinach, mustard leaves, bitter dock, rocket)  
 5 tablespoons ghee  
 salt, pepper, coriander seed, zeera, star anise, clove  
 whole red chilli

## Method:

So, you start by stewing the meat as it will take the longest time; in addition you will also require the broth to cook the rice. In a large pateela or pressure cooker: add your meat with bone, add one head of garlic, star anise, cloves, whole red chili, coriander seed and zeera. Add a big pinch of salt and top the pot up with water and let it come to a boil. Once it comes up to boil, lower the heat to a simmer, cover the pot and let this go for at least 4-5 hours.

### *In the meantime*

Clean and wash your greens. Chop the remaining head of garlic, chop up the green garlic, wash and clean your rice to get the station ready.

### *Hopefully the meat has been stewed by now*

Strain the liquid (yakhni) and reserve. Use your hands to separate the meat from the bones and set it aside. Keep any bone marrow and tendons which have come out of the process.

In another pot: add your ghee, fry up the garlic and green garlic until fragrant, now add your washed begumai rice. Mix them around so the ghee is coated well onto every grain of rice. Now add your yakhni to the pot. Make sure your water level is at point 2 of your finger. Adjust the salt, bring this up to a boil, then close the lid and let it simmer for 25 minutes on low heat. The rice will steam and cook.

### *You will have some یخنی leftover*

Reduce that liquid to enhance the flavour, we'll use this as a sauce later when serving. You can also thicken this liquid with roux or corn starch.

Time to cook the mixed greens: in a pan, add some ghee and garlic, once it gets fragrant add your greens. This happens very quickly - high heat - just sauté enough so that they wilt and retain their bright green colour and flavour. Season this as well with salt and pepper.

Now it's time to plate up:

Add a healthy scoop of the begumai rice onto a plate or bowl.

### *On go the wilted greens, followed by the pulled beef*

Just to finish, use that reduced yakhni sauce on top to give it richness and to make this a hearty meal fit for the region.



# WALNUTS & HONEY

## Ingredients:

25-30 uncracked walnuts

(depending on the number  
of guests you have)

2 spoonfuls of honey



## Method:

The act of cracking walnuts together in a gathering feels like community work. A sense of closeness and lowered guards. Also, freshly cracked walnuts are the top most quality. Dip that walnut liberally and in honey ~ eat and marvel at the simple things in life which can give such pleasure.

The honey we had the pleasure of eating was from the wild forests of upper Swat. The taste was of apricot and peach flowers with a thick, viscous, golden texture.



جایانی میبوه، سنتره او د انبلا کیک

# PERSIMMON, CITRUS & VANILLA CAKE

## *For the Vanilla sponge*

2 cups flour  
2.5 teaspoons baking powder  
0.25 teaspoon salt  
4 eggs  
1.5 cups castor sugar  
115g/0.5 cup butter  
1 cup milk  
3 teaspoon vanilla extract/or 5 drops of vanilla essence  
3 teaspoons vegetable oil

## Ingredients



## *For the Persimmon Puree*

10 pieces of ripe persimmons  
4 oranges (juiced)  
50g sugar  
3 lemons (juiced)  
4-5 cloves  
1 stick cinnamon

+ 300g whipped cream

## Method:

Prepare your vanilla sponge beforehand. Combine all dry ingredients together: flour, baking powder and salt in a large bowl. Beat eggs until frothy. You can do this by hand but it really helps if you have a hand beater or stand mixer. Now add your sugar slowly and beat until the mixture triples in volume. Now add butter which you have melted into the mixture. Next, add the milk and whisk. Now it is time to add the dry ingredients to the mix gradually.

Make sure it is well combined and your batter is ready. Now pour the batter into pans and bake. Make sure to layer the pan with parchment paper to avoid sticky mishaps. Cook for 30 mins, use a toothpick to test doneness.



For the compote, combine all the ingredients and cook on a medium flame. Add your cinnamon and cloves in too. Once all the fruit has softened, remove the cinnamon stick, add the juice of the lemons and blend it up into a fine puree, and set aside to cool.

You can use any store bought whipped cream for the process.

To assemble the cake, take your vanilla sponge and cut it in half. Now start with the bottom half of the cake and pipe whipped cream on the edges. The centre gets a healthy quantity of the persimmon puree. Safely place the other layer of the cake and repeat the process. You can let the inner artist sing in this moment and decide your cake aesthetics. I added fresh sliced persimmons and citrus fruits on top to give it a fresh and vibrant look.



Bring a pot of water up to a rolling boil and reduce the heat. Add your Maro and wild roses to the pot with the green tea. We used the open green tea which was available in the market. Once all the ingredients are added, switch off the flame, cover the pot and let it steep for 15 mins. This also doubles as an excellent meditation exercise while you wait for your elixir to brew.

Making tea in the valley of Swat helps me to imagine tea ceremonies which must have taken place around the Stupas. Wild herbs foraged from the land and brewed for communal gatherings. After the time has elapsed, strain out into cups and garnish with a few wild rose petals.

Take a deep breath in, sip and enjoy.

## NOTES FROM ORCHARDS



In orchards and homes, citrus and blood orange are cultivated through long waiting. Fruit comes late, reminding growers that care often precedes reward by years. These are small, fragrant signs of trust between people and soil.

صبر کا پھل  
میرٹھا ہوتا ہے



Clay and mud beekeeping is practiced widely across the Himalayan–Hindu Kush region and its valleys. In Swat, hives made from local earth are fixed to the outer walls of homes, allowing bees to nest close to domestic life. Bees act as major pollinators for orchards and crops, supporting fruiting cycles across fields and gardens. Honey is collected carefully and seasonally, within a mountain landscape of orchards and sunlit slopes that often feels unexpectedly Mediterranean in character.

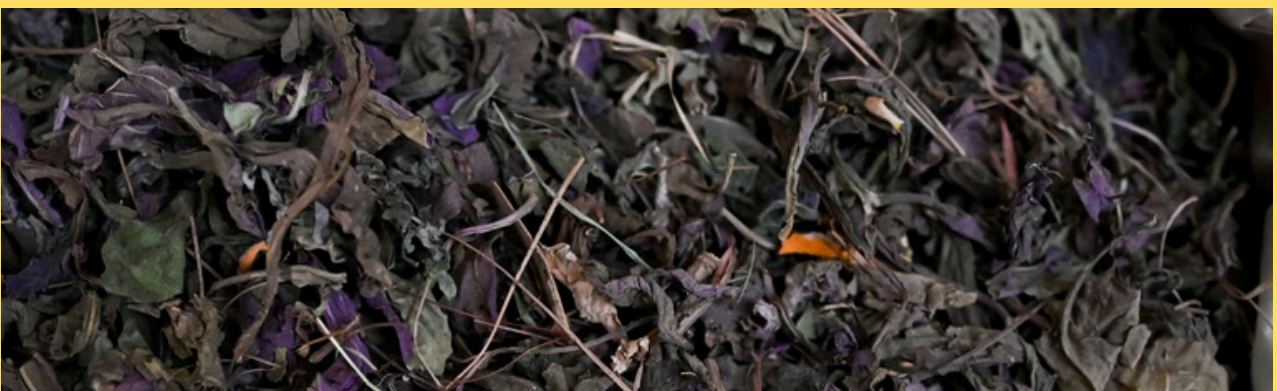
## NOTES FROM THE BAZAAR



Chestnut seeds (*Aesculus indica*) appear in ethnobotanical records of the Swat and neighbouring Himalayan valleys as a mountain sustenance food, used particularly during periods of scarcity and famine. Bitter and toxic when raw, the seeds were traditionally leached in water over several days to remove toxins, then dried and ground into flour. Today, this practice is rarely used but remembered as subsistence systems and access to staple grains have changed.



Amaltas phalli (*Cassia fistula*) is sold in local markets as dried pods. The pulp inside the pods is traditionally soaked or boiled and used in small amounts as a mild laxative, particularly for relieving constipation. Its use reflects a preference for gentle, plant-based regulation rather than strong purgatives in everyday care.



Dried rose petals are widely available in Swat's markets. Their use is documented across Himalayan regions, where roses have long been incorporated into food and gentle domestic preparations. In Swat, dried rose continues to circulate within everyday culinary and care practices.

MIRACLE



RIVER

In Swat, food does not end at nourishment,  
it continues into care.



SACRIFICE

Healing in Swat is practiced as attention to the body, the season, and the land.

Remedies are chosen by smell, texture, heat, and timing, passed down through maternal knowledge and daily cooking practice.



Wenalaray  
{Wild Mint}

Kaga Wenalaray  
{Fennel}

Malkhuwaray  
{Fenugreek}

Kashmalai  
{Basil}

Haldi  
{Turmeric}

Khuwaga Zela  
{Licorice}

Adrak  
{Ginger}

Karnal Panhara

Kuaray  
{Indian Barberry}

{Aloe-  
vera}

## KASHMALAI



(Basil)

Fresh leaves are chewed and the juice held in the mouth to soothe throat soreness and inflammation. May also be boiled, cooled, and used as a gargle. Crushed basil is also added in small amounts to sharp condiments such as jagay to mellow taste.

## KHWAGA ZELA



(Licorice Root)

Root pieces are boiled to prepare a mild decoction taken for sore throat or chest irritation.



## TEA WITH EGG YOLK



(Traditional Tonic)

A single egg yolk is whisked into strong black tea once it has cooled slightly and consumed warm for short-term relief of persistent cough.

## KWARAY

(Indian Barberry)

A traditional preparation made by boiling the root bark in water often reducing 16 parts water to 1 part liquid, to create a concentrated, bitter tonic for liver, gallbladder, and digestive issues.



## HALDI



(Turmeric)

Fresh or powdered turmeric mixed with warm water is applied to bruises and minor swelling. In some households, haldi is heated in desi ghee and dabbed onto wounds or bruises using cloth or cotton.





## WELANAY (Mentha Longifolia)

Dried leaves are stored and powdered. A small pinch is taken with water for mild diarrhoea or digestive discomfort. Leaves are also added to dishes such as Gungrhi and Warjalay for flavour and digestive support.



## KAGA WELANAY (Fennel Seeds)

Soaked overnight in water and the strained water consumed in the morning to support digestion, reduce bloating, and ease colic.



## MALKHWAZI (Fenugreek)

Roasted seeds or small quantities are chewed for stomach pain and given after childbirth as a supportive food.



## ADRAK CHAI (Fresh Ginger Tea)

Sliced and boiled in water and consumed hot. Commonly used to ease cough and settle the stomach.



## KAMAL PANRHA (Aloe Vera)

After draining the yellow sap, the clear gel is mixed with water and lemon and consumed once daily. Some individuals report improved appetite and more stable blood sugar levels.

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## POWDERED DIGESTIVE MIX

A ground mixture (phakki) of fenugreek seeds, fennel, and green cardamom is taken with water as an appetite stimulant and digestive aid, particularly where access to medicine is limited.

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Postpartum healing here is structured around *Letai*, a nourishing halwa prepared communally over forty days (*Salwekhti*) to support recovery after childbirth. Cooked slowly in desi ghee and shared daily, *Letai* functions as both food and care, restoring strength, warmth, and balance through a practice sustained by women's collective labour and inherited knowledge.

One Hakeem interviewed in the valley described a practice shaped by multiple lineages. He studied natural medicine with a monk in China while continuing local traditions of herbal and homeopathic healing.

Alongside his medical practice, he trades in minerals and prepares his own medicines using locally sourced plants. He emphasised that healing is not just about ingredients, but about knowing how to prepare, combine, and time them correctly.

He is now investing in his children's formal medical education, hoping to pass this knowledge forward.



RIVER

What is endangered is not the landscape alone,  
but the knowledge required to read it.



Local ecology, Buddhist medical traditions, Central and East Asian knowledge systems, and later Unani and homeopathic practices overlap here adapting to the same land.

Across these practices, healing is framed as balance. It relies on restraint, attention, and relationship between body and land, knowledge and practice, inheritance and adaptation.

But plants that once held medicinal significance are overlooked, misused, or undervalued as their potential gets erased by gaps in transmission.

SACRIFICE

The same attentiveness that restores balance to the body also shapes how materials are handled: how stone is carved, how thread is woven, how memory is held.



From healing, the work of making continues.



It extends outward into how materials are handled, how time is spent, how memory is carried forward.

RIVER

Practices of care in Swat move fluidly between tending land, tending bodies, and tending material.



SACRIFICE



In this landscape, memory is carried through repeated gestures — walking, carving, shaping, selling, returning.

Ramzan Kaka's work with stone draws from the same sites that mark Swat's Buddhist heritage. His practice aligns with an ethic of patience and attention embedded in the land itself.

RIVER



The site photographed here is the Amuluk-dara Stupa, among the earliest Buddhist structures in the Swat Valley. Architecturally, the stupa operates as a container, an egg or womb-like form that gathers land, ritual and memory rather than presenting them outwardly. Ramzan Kaka's stone carving practice unfolds within this same spatial logic. Working with local material, he engages continuity through forms of making that hold, contain, and endure.

SACRIFICE

Craftsmanship is the physical expression of devotion.

Philosopher

JOEL VILI

on craftsmanship in one's vocation





A popular local saying holds that “no one is jobless in Islampur,” where the industry supports both men and women, and remains rooted in family practice and interdependence. The village of Islampur has long been a hub for wool weaving. Its handloom industry stretches back through generations and the craft continues to be central to everyday life. Here, weaving warm shawls is the livelihood for much of the community.



As of recent years, roughly 70% of Islampur’s residents depend on weaving for their livelihood.

The craft’s endurance reflects both economic and social continuity: individuals from within and beyond the valley come to work here, and the skills of weaving are recognised as valuable and sustaining, not obsolete.

MIRACLE

Shawls, blankets, and other woolen goods produced here meet local needs and beyond; historically, even rulers and patrons from distant regions prized these textiles.

Today, digital networks and e-commerce have expanded demand further, connecting local makers to buyers across Pakistan and, increasingly, abroad.



RIVER

People in Islampur speak of weaving with both affection and solemnity as craft, lineage, and shared identity passed across generations.

In families with long histories of loom work, younger members often choose to stay and learn the craft, not because there is no other option, but because weaving holds economic agency, community dependence, and personal meaning.

MIRACLE



Women participate equally in this labour.

For many, weaving brings financial independence and recognition within the household and the wider valley community.

The village sustains more than 20,000 seasonal workers, yet demand fluctuates. As industrial production accelerates, the specialised knowledge embedded in these shawls, such as Gandhāran motifs, risk disappearing. What remains is a way of seeing - born of plural worlds, peace-oriented, and shaped through quiet gestures held in fabric.

Like healing remedies and foraging paths, weaving survives through deep attention rather than instruction. Food, healing, stone carving, and handloom do not exist as separate domains. They respond to the same conditions: water availability, seasonal cycles, material proximity, and inherited knowledge.

Across the valley, what is endangered  
is not practice alone, but transmission.



MIRACLE

Miracle, in this landscape is continuity.

Sacrifice is not loss alone but restraint:  
knowing what must be returned, left untouched, or shared.

RIVER



What this zine gathers are practices shaped by land, water, memory, and attention,  
still unfolding.

They remind us that abundance is relational. That care is practical.  
That knowledge survives where it is used.



MIRACLE

And this is what Swat teaches. This valley of cedar/citrus/olive trees. Of pine cones and begumai rice. Of handloom weavers and players of the rubab. Of Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic cosmologies swirling and settling into the present that is the past and that which has always been. Of Siddharta's unwavering gaze and the lotus flower that appears everywhere travelling seamlessly across stone/wood/cloth. Of birthing ideas that bloom into projects that reveal their own paths and find their own people.

A return to cyclicity with the River Swat - ancient Suvāstu - born of glacial waters, and so very alive. An honouring of lineages forward and back.  
A longing to never, ever leave.

Much more of what appears in these pages will be shared in time.  
For now, there's just wonder and awe.

FATIMA MULLICK

Senior Arts Manager, British Council Pakistan







This publication offers a timely and sensitive documentation of Swat's living cultural landscape by bringing together ecology, food traditions, women's knowledge, folklore and Buddhist heritage into a single, coherent narrative. The work demonstrates how heritage is not limited to monuments and collections, but is deeply embedded in everyday practices, seasonal rhythms, and the intimate relationship between communities and their environment. By linking culinary knowledge, creative practice and anthropological research with archaeological context, this study expands our understanding of Swat as both a historic centre of the ancient Buddhist world and a vibrant contemporary cultural region whose intangible heritage deserves equal recognition, protection and investment.

DR. ABDUL SAMAD

Director General, Archaeology & Museums, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



These pages carry the cadence of a place shaped by care.

Through what is gathered here, herbs, grains, gestures, and stories, Swat reveals itself not as an idea, but as a practice of attention. Knowledge moves slowly across these pages, held in hands that know when to gather and when to wait, when to offer and when to leave the land undisturbed. What is shared is not abundance as excess, but as balance. To appreciate this project was to accompany a process grounded in listening, to land, to labour, and to forms of knowing sustained through repetition and trust. The work honours what is passed quietly between people, across seasons and generations.

I am grateful to all who shaped this residency with care and generosity. This zine asks us to slow down, to read with tenderness, and to recognise that what endures is not only what is made, but the way it is held.

MONA HABEB

Cultural Protection Fund, British Council

Ramzan Kaka  
Stone, labour, memory.  
Scan to watch his story.



The Wild Grains and Sacred Herbs Residency is an initiative of Heritage of the Swat Valley - a collaborative project led by Essanoor Associates in partnership with the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan (ISMEO / Ca' Foscari University of Venice), The Heritage Management Organisation, and the Directorate General of Archaeology & Museums, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



HERITAGE  
THE HERITAGE MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION



Special Thanks to  
Serena Hotels, Swat



## ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE

Asad Monga — Chef

Shaped food-based research and recipes, contributing culinary knowledge grounded in seasonal ingredients and local practice.

Areesha Khuwaja (Pakkhee) — Visual Artist

Developed the residency's visual identity and visual ethnography, compiling and designing the zine through research-driven visual storytelling.

Iman Habib — Anthropologist

Conducted ethnographic research and produced contextual writing on food, healing, and everyday knowledge systems in Swat.

Noorulain Ali — Photographer

Produced photographic narratives of food, landscapes, and on-site processes, supporting the visual language of the zine.



## CONTRIBUTORS & COLLABORATORS

Dr. Luca M. Olivieri — Scientific Director

Ar. Kashif Essa — Project Director

Mona Habeb — Cultural Protection Fund, British Council

Fatima Mullick — Senior Arts Manager, British Council Pakistan (Advisor)

Salman Khan — Filmmaker & Heritage Documentation Expert

Uzair Ahmed — Project Coordinator

Maria Rahim — Research Associate

Wali Shams — Administration

Alessandra Buizza — Representative, Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan

Marco Pinelli — Representative, Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan



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Serena Hotels, Swat





WILD HERBS

&

سوات تم پخیر راغله

SACRED GRAINS