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Combining Slaughter and Social Values

During my research about the tribal areas along the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan I experienced the warm hospitality of the Pashtun tribe and their traditional Eid Festival. I stayed a whole day with my friend’s family and discovered a unique and interesting part of their life which far away from a bloody killing of animals and clearly connected to religious, social and cultural values.

Pashtun people love to invite friends and are very open minded to new people. My friend Khausar invited me to join his family for the Eid Festival which is celebrated in mostly every Islamic country after Ramadan. In this festival you usually gather with your family and sacrifice a domestic animal (goat, cow, etc.). Khausars family lives outside of Peshawar which is located about 10kms to the Afghan border. His parents were very happy to see me and welcomed me to their home in a very friendly way. They didn’t have much interior but they offered me the best and convenient place in their house. They also served me little snacks and drinks while asking me every possible question about my life and my home country only limited by their English skills. I was very surprised that they shown so much curiosity and interest in a person they have never met before. They told me a lot about the religious Eid festival and I felt like being part of their family at that day.

The preparation of the festival is recognizable all over the country. A few days before the festival I saw animal tradeshows nearly everywhere. Pashtun people also like to decorate their animals with colorful plastic flowers, small jewelry and paint before slaughtering them. At this time everyone was preparing for the festival by buying goats or cows, decoration and food in huge quantities.

The sacrifice itself was an unbelievable experience. I have seen documentaries and pictures in magazines about slaughtering and the way the meat is processed but it is a completely different feeling if you see it right in front of you. Khausar’s family bought two goats and a cow for the Eid festival. In the garden his father and two neighbors hold on to the goat while Khausar carefully cut the throat of the goat with a sharp knife. The blood was squiring out and it was even more intensely red than I had imagined. I was very upset and felt a little sick but on the other hand it was also very interesting. I took a lot of pictures which will remind me on that special day. When they slaughtered the cow it was amazing how much fear and anxiety you could see in the eyes of the cow. It was struggling to survive but there was no chance. It took those guys who slaughtered it very precise work, because if you cut at the wrong place and open part of the cows stomach the whole meat is not eatable anymore because of the different acids inside a cows stomach. Khausar told me that every little part of the animals are used. On third goes to the family, one third to neighbors or friends and the last third is given as a gift to the poor. I really liked that idea and was surprised about this social idea behind the sacrifice.

It takes a lot of work to get the final meal. After the slaughtering which was done by men, the meat parts were bought to the kitchen where all the women prepared it to be cooked. It has to be cut in very small pieces and a lot of meat has to cook very long before it can be eaten. They also made delicious side meals with rice, potatoes and vegetables which was great for me because I don’t eat much meat. During the dinner we shared a lot of stories and laughter.

Values are most important at this day in the year. The Eid festival is more than just slaughtering and eating. Khausar told me exactly what I experienced that day. It is very important for muslim families to spend time together, share stories and engage in charity.   
I had a great day with Khausars family and gained a lot of experience about the Eid festival, its values and part of a traditional Pashtun life.