

فولکلونستان

PAKISTAN'S LEGENDSCAPE



A

Ashqar Deozaad

In the Hamzanama, when Ameer Hamza returns from Koh-e-Kaaf to the mortal realm, Ashqar Deozaad accompanies him. This jet-black equine then gallops alongside the Ameer up until he conquers the Tilism-e-Hoshruba.

Ashqar was also the name of the steed of the great Khalid bin Walid, one of the most accomplished generals in history.

Al Ana

In Balochi folklore, Al Ana is believed to be the daughter of Iblis (Satan). She attacks women who are expecting or in labour, new mothers, and infants. Newborn babies are not left unattended, and sharp, iron objects are often placed near them to guard against her.

Legend has it that a hunter came across a woman in the wilderness, holding a liver in her hand. It was Al. He fought her and forced her to return the liver to the victim and kept Al prisoner and in his service for 7 years, during which women were safe during childbirth. In another story, she chewed on the legs of her brother's horse, for she could not find babies, or women.

Asuras

The Asuras often works with the Rakshasas, to drink up the blood of their prey, fresh corpses of humans and animals. The chief of these monstrous beings is Ravana, and his sister, Surpankha. The demon exists in Hinduism as well Buddhism, we do not know if lived on in collective memory from Pakistan's Buddhist era during the Gandhara civilisation or were adopted from Hinduism.

Azdaha

A cross between a snake and a dragon, it often has scaly skin and wings. Folklore describes their favourite activities to be guarding treasure, attacking cities, and preventing people from accessing lakes. Legend has it that the only way to destroy Azdaha is to pierce the insides of its mouth.

B

Baital

Punjabi folklore describes it as a sinister entity with the eerie power to possess the lifeless. Those who die unnatural deaths, particularly at a young age, and do not receive their last rites are most at risk of turning into a Baital.

An Indian film features the demon, in which the storyline revolves around a construction company forcing open an ancient tunnel closed down by villagers. Hell breaks loose as an East India Company officer and his regiment of Redcoats killed in that very tunnel find themselves free (and Baital-fied), and go on an assault spree in the village. It is perhaps why funerals are always serious business, may it be West Punjab or East Punjab.

Balaa

She roams in the forests, and other desolate roads after nightfall. In Punjabi, Hindko and Pashto folklore, it often appears as a young maiden, or an old woman, in distress, asking for help. Brahui folklore suggests that she asks travellers to look for lice in her head. If they refuse, she instantly kills them.

Banbudda

In Kashmiri folklore, the Banbudda is a harmless shape-shifter which enjoys playing tricks. However, giving away Sadqah (charity) is advised, should one encounter it.

Banshee

The only Banshee to be found in Pakistani folklore lives in the valley of Shoghort in Chitral. An ancient fortress is believed to be her home. In literature covering more than a century, it has been noted by the inhabitants of the fort that she wails every time a king is about to die. It is also believed that she might be the fairy daughter of one of the first Kings of the Katoor Dynasty known as Mohtaram Shah Katur, who died nearly three centuries ago, who comes down to the old fort to wail and weep on the account of her people and her father's kingdom.

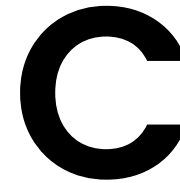
Barzangi

In Khowar folklore, the Barzangi is associated to extreme rainfall, hailstorms and blizzards. It is believed that its name comes from Persian words 'barez', high or distinctive, and 'zangi', meaning dark, giving it a literal title of the "Dark Giant".

It is quick on its feet and lives in desolate, remote areas. Lore suggests that it can devour a man before a drop of blood has a chance to stain the ground. It can only be beaten if it is decapitated – however, it can grow a new head seven times. R. R. Rakhimov explains that the Tajiks believe that its presence is signalled by earthquakes.

Bhau

The Bhau is said to be a tall, slender man who is used as a personality to scare children. He carries a big bag with him and is said to take away children who are awake beyond their bedtime. He lives alongside the Jinns and Churails.



Chumur Deki

The steed is believed to have iron hooves. It can cover a mile's distance in a single jump. Some legends also suggest that it breathes fire. It was the equine companion of choice for Shri Badat, the Cannibal King of Gilgit, who was eventually overthrown by his daughter, and the Fairy Prince, Azur Jamshed.

D

Deo

Pashto, and languages East of the Indus refer to them as "Deo" (or Deozaat in plural), whilst languages West have retained their original name in Persian – Div (in Pashto, it varies with dialect). They are entrenched in an eternal war against the peris, and resent humankind. They inhabit all that is desolate: forests, mountains, deserts, or even ruins. Known for their perpetual rage, they do not take kindly to those who dare cross their path.

Deo Safed

The King of the Deozaat, he is featured in several legends, sometimes as the hero, sometimes as the villain. In the Shahnameh, he destroys the forces of Kay Kavus, by conjuring a storm using magic. In another tale, he helps Prince Behram win back his fairy-bride, who has been imprisoned by her father for marrying a mortal. In some iterations of Saif al Malook, he imprisons the Queen of Fairies, Badri Jamala. Later, he floods Naran and Kaghan to prevent her from escaping with Prince Saif. When he does not succeed, he cried so much that a lake in the shape of a teardrop was formed (Aansoo Jheel).

Dhat

In Balochi lore, it frequents desolate roads, meeting travellers as a child or a lamb. Legend has it that if people try to take the lamb along, two of its hooves stay in place, and its body begins to stretch. Lore also suggests that when people engage with the child, its feet turn into hooves, and its voice turns demonic. Tales about it also exist in Pashto lore.

F

Farishta

The belief in the Angels is both cultural and religious for Muslim tradition mandates belief in the Angels. Over time, they have been woven into local folklore. In Balochistan, oral tradition suggests that Hazrat Khizar (A) and Hazrat Ilyas appear as angels to guide lost travellers at sea and in the deserts respectively, guarding them until they find their way home.

G

Gwat

A shapeless demon of the winds of Makran coast, it is infamous for possessing the hearts and minds of its victims. The possessed are often driven to insanity or suicide. At times, it can be expelled, through a ceremonial ritual called *leb*, a trance tradition. The ritual is led by the *Gwat-e-Mat*, a group of women who have the *Gwati-Ilm* (Knowledge of the Gwat). The *Ilm* is passed on from one family matriarch to the next generation of women via oral tradition.

Gowanko

It is the Balochi counterpart of the *Khapasa*, also known as the *Bhoota*. It burdens the chest, suffocating the sleeper, causing nightmares and sleep paralysis. Lore suggests that sleeping sideways is better – for it doesn't leave the chest open for the night hag.

Gorgakh

It is a demonic spirit from Pashto folklore infamous for unearthing graves and feasting upon the flesh of the dead. Graves across the province are often lined with stones to guard against it.

Ghouls

Arab folklore regards *Banu Ghilan* as a tribe of the *Jinns*. Folklore from the Persianate world however, (including Pakistan), describes them as a distinct demon. Sometimes, they prey on the dead. Sometimes, they hide in abandoned wells, or haunt barren wastelands, preying on the living.

Some tales also suggest that initially, they are harmless, but their lack of intelligence makes them easy to fool, and gets them into trouble with humans. This makes them vengeful, hence, wicked and dangerous.

H

Halmasti

A hell-hound as large as a horse, the *Halmasti* has a coat of dark red fur, and spews fire out of its mouth. It is a nocturnal creature which descends when someone dies, or when a baby is born. Newborns are to be accompanied at all times – if they are left alone, an iron weapon is to be tucked underneath the cot to keep the *Halmasti* from coming close and harming the baby.

It also frequents new graves, or where a corpse is being prepared for burial with a bath, *ghusal*. People try to keep such places occupied and recite the *Quran* to keep it away.

I & J

Ifrit Jinn

The Ifrit is mentioned in the Quran as well as the Hadith – it is a tribe of the Jinn. It was an Ifrit who brought the throne of the Queen of Sheba, Bilquis, to the Prophet Suleman (Solomon), in the blink of an eye. During Isra wal Miraj, an Ifrit was following the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) with fire in its mouth. The angel Jilbail (Gabriel) then taught the Prophet (PBUH) a supplication which protected him.

Folklore suggests that the Ifrit are generally ruthless and wicked, though not necessarily always evil. They have eyes for mortal women, inhabit ruins and desolate temples, and can only be harmed, killed or enslaved with magic.

Jinns

Beings of smokeless fire, they are believed to be good and bad, just like humans. Belief in the Jinns was also a part of pre-Islamic Arab mythology, but has now been woven into cultures across the Muslim world, including Pakistan.

They haunt desolate roads, forests, ruins, abandoned buildings and graveyards. They can also possess humans, causing the victim to fall sick, or even to die.

Jinn Princess

The Jinn Princess is the heir to the throne of Koh-e-Kaaf – the homeland of the Fairies and the Jinns. She is often caught up in turmoil, to save her father's throne, or to protect humankind from evil Jinns in her kingdom. She also features in romance legends.

Jalpari

The Jalpari, is our counterpart of the mermaid. She may attract sailors, sometimes to tease them, and sometimes to kill them. The Jalpari's live in the rivers. They love flowers, so an offering will appease them, allowing one safe passage through rivers in Punjab. In Sindh, Bhullan, the Blind Dolphin of the Indus, is believed to be a mermaid by the Mohannas, a tribe of boat people. Ajaib al Makhlooqat mentions mentions the Mahi Mantooq, half-woman and half-fish, with wings, who lives on the Island of Ra'ih, a mythical island believed to be on the Indus River. Djullanar is a mermaid from the epic Hazaar raatein (1001 Nights). Her son, Badr Basim, goes on to rule Persia.

Jashtan

A dwarf-heighted, human-like creature from the Hindukush, it has pointed ears and a hat. During summer, they care for the homes of farmers working the fields. They migrate to warmer temperatures after fall, and the lights of their torches are seen in a straight line before disappearing. People often left baked goods by the roadside for the Jashtans during the season, which is followed by the autumn festival, the Jashtan Dekeik.

Jaatu

In Brahui folklore, the women who do evil and perform black magic in their lifetime is said to be turned into witches known as Jaatu. They are disguised as humans. Like the Al Ana, it also feasts on liver, but it also added hearts to the menu. Her primary victims are children rather than women and newborns.

K

Khapasa

Khapasa in Pashto, and Khapisi in Khowar, it causes sleep paralysis, and has only four fingers, and no thumb, for if it did, it would choke its victims.

Kazhabol

In Pashto lore from Balochistan, the half-human, half-beast, it appears after of joyous days. It is usually someone from the extended family, who will transform into the monster. A tale speaks of a woman, who was widowed twice on her wedding night, with both the husbands brutally mauled. When she said she had no knowledge of the incidents, people hid to observe her. They witnessed her transforming into a Kazhabol. After that, she was caged at night for several years, until she eventually learnt to control herself.

M

Mumm

An urban legend from Quetta, it has the upper body of a woman, and the lower body of a mighty lion. It is said to haunt the hills which line the city, primarily dwelling in dark caves of the Hanna Valley and the Koh-e-Murdar mountains. Tales of ghosts, cattle, and even people vanishing without a trace, or travellers being attacked, were commonplace, and parents warned children to stay indoors after dark, to be safe from the Mumm.

P & Q

Pisacha

In South Punjab and Sindh, the it is the spirit of those who know no peace in this life, and are destined to find none in the next - liars, drunkards, murderers, and adulterers. It often takes on the voices of the living. Boys stepping into adolescence and young women of marriageable age are particularly vulnerable to fall victim to it.

Prita

A spirit from Sindhi folklore, it is neither inherently malevolent nor benign but simply exists. It is believed to be the wandering spirit of a prematurely-born baby, or an adult who lived with deformities and disabilities.

In a way, it lives on the fringes of the supernatural world, perhaps, a like the people it represents: unborn children, whose stories end before they can even start; or the differently-abled, often pushed into oblivion by society.

Peri's

Overarchingly, they are described in Pakistani folklore as beautiful, feminine, winged creatures who are friendly to humankind. However, exceptions exist, and on occasion, they do show their wrath by cursing those who anger them, or by bringing calamity.

The race is dominated by the womenfolk - legends occasionally mention a fairy prince every now and then. Sindoni is a special kind of fairy who can be summoned using magic - she is then bound to the commands of her summoner. Feru-Tis is the hearth fairy in Khowar folklore, known for occasional harmless mischief.

Quqnoz

Influenced by the Simurgh, it is a gigantic mythical bird that burns itself every 500 years and rises from its ashes after the first rain of spring. Khowar lore suggests that four huntsmen once heard the Song of Fire. Each of them heard a different combination of notes, which now form the basis of all Chitrali music.

R

Rantas

In Kashmiri folklore, she is believed to be a type of a witch. Her feet are reversed, and she has the ability to shapeshift into a young maiden. In her true form, she has long hair which reaches out all the way to her toes, a hunchback, and sharp, pointed nails and teeth. She treks about in the snow, seducing and kidnapping young men she becomes infatuated with, only to murder them a few months into the marriage.

Rakshasas

The Rakshasas often works with the Asuras, to drink up the blood of their prey, fresh corpses of humans and animals. The chief of these monstrous beings is Ravana, and his sister, Surpankha. The demon exists in Hinduism as well Buddhism, we do not know if lived on in collective memory from Pakistan's Buddhist era during the Gandhara civilisation or were adopted from Hinduism.

S

Saledah

A shapeshifter from Punjabi lore, it is mischievous rather than malicious, it likes to give people a scare every now and then. Lore suggests not to interact with it at all. Its idea of fun is to create unpleasant situations and shapeshift in order to escape responsibility.

“Saleday ki tarah khisak jana” is an Urdu simile, which means “to give someone the slip, or escape, like the Saledah” – in all likelihood, it has been absorbed from Punjabi.

Sea Jinn

Sea Jinns are famous for never forget favours. A Sindhi folktale speaks of a fisherman, who saw a big fish in immense pain. Seeing that the spear had not killed it, he removed the spear and let the fish back into the water.

A few days later, he befriended a stranger, who whisked him away in the air to treat him to halwa. The stranger warned the fisherman not to ask how they had travelled, and to keep his eyes closed during the journey. However, the he asked anyway, and learned that the “fish” was actually a Jinn of the Sea. It frightened the fisherman so much, that he passed away a few days later.

Sheeshaka

Originating from Pashtun folklore, Sheeshaka is a tall, mostly formless creature who is said to haunt graveyards in the dead of the night. In Mohmand, it is believed that women who remain unclean for four months or more, and men who do not pray five times a day can morph into a Sheeshaka.

Shirrar

Found in Mansehra and Haripur, Shirrar is a shape-shifting creature usually with the head of a rooster and body of a snake. It is often spotted near watermills during grinding season. It isn't necessarily associated with any evil properties, however, witnessing them can be difficult and horrifying.

Sharmakh

It is a creature of the sea in Pashto lore, believed to hold the power to conjure storms and causing treacherous shipwrecks.

Shaperai

In Pashto folklore from Balochistan, the Shaperai is a woman living two different lives. By day, she blends into the mundane, but as the sun sets, she takes off on nocturnal journeys to distant lands.

Lore speaks of a beautiful maiden being spotted in villages on days when the weather is pleasant. Upon being asked why she was there, she always answers, “Where I roam, good weather follows.”