

Tāghdumbāsh Pāmīr enters the long and narrow gorge in which the river has cut its way through the axial range of the Hindukush. The tracks that lead through it present, for six trying marches, all the difficulties of true Alpine climbs, including passages over large glaciers. During a considerable portion of the year they are altogether impassable except for men on foot. The transport of loads over these mountain tracks becomes possible only by the employment of the hardy hillmen, who manage to subsist on the few patches of cultivable ground to be found amidst the barren masses of rock and ice which bound the course of the main stream and the still more confined gorges of its affluents. The extreme sterility of these mountains restricts the population of 'Little Guhyāl', as this region is now called on account of its Wakhī settlers from Wakhān or Guhyāl, to a few hundred families⁸. It seriously taxes the resources of these scattered settlements to supply even porters for the occasional European traveller who is permitted to pass through the Hunza Valley. In the face of such natural obstacles, it is impossible to conceive how the latter could ever have served as a route for trade and general traffic.

After leaving behind Misgar, the northernmost hamlet of Hunza, the natural difficulties of the route decrease. The valley widens as we approach the watershed which separates the headwaters of the Hunza river from those of the Oxus on the one side and from the Tāghdumbāsh Pāmīr on the other. Lord Curzon, in his exhaustive Memoir on the Pāmīrs, has duly emphasized the important geographical fact that the water-parting in this part of the Hindukush lies considerably to the north of the axial range and is also far lower⁹. This helps to account for the relative ease with which the Kilik and Mintaka passes, giving final access to the Tāghdumbāsh Pāmīr, can be crossed, even with laden animals, during the greater part of the year.

⁸ For photographs of Wakhīs and Kanjūtīs settled in 'Little Guhyāl', see Figs. 5, 6.

⁹ See Curzon, *The Pamirs and the Source of the Oxus*, p. 40.