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RECENT PUBLICATIONS

The Religion of the Dards in Ladakh. By ROHIT VOHRA. *Contributions to Himalayan Studies Ladakh Series: Vol. 1* (Limited Edition) price: 950 Luxembourg Francs

The Buddhist Dards inhabit four principal villages in the north-western corner of Ladakh, also known as West Tibet, in the state of Jammu & Kashmir. All other Dard groups are Muslim and in India are settled in a few villages in Ladakh (e.g. Dras) and in the north of Kashmir in Gurais and the Tilel. The majority of the muslim Dard population inhabits Baltistan and Gilgit areas which form at present a part of the Northern Areas in Pakistan.

The Dards have preserved in their language and social customs many archaic traits which are comparable to those of the Indo-Aryan family. They have also been referred to as a branch of the Proto-Indo-Aryans who remained isolated in these inaccessible mountain valleys and thus were able to preserve language and cultural forms in such archaic purity.

In this respect the Buddhist Dards take up a very special position and the present work on their religious beliefs provides us an insight into their cosmogonical and cosmological notions. The work provides an introduction into their historical background in the context with their having inhabited the region Mard (Ladakh), west of Zan-zun in antiquity. In the history of Kashmir (Kalhana's Rajatarangini) there are numerous references during the first millennium A.D. to the Dard rulers and their relationships with the Kashmiri kings. There follows a brief examination of their social organization which reveals a 'closed community.' Household, village and ethnic identity is maintained through strict pollution taboos and at the village level one has data over three generations revealing that 80% of the marriages take place from within the village and due to demographic reasons the 20% contract marriages from within their ethnic community.

A detailed investigation is made into their migratory traditions which inform us about several waves of migrations.

The cosmogonical and cosmological myths and hymns belong to the Bonoñah traditions inherited from the Minaro which reveal several parallels with Kafir and other Dard myths and also find striking similarities with Vedic myths. Following a discussion upon the 'Tree of the World' and their 'Conception of the Worlds' there is an explanation of their beliefs of 'Purity-Impurity' as only with this as a basis can one understand their religious concepts.

The Bonoñah festival is the main occasion when a religious belief system is brought alive triennially. The Bonoñah deities have no role to play but only during the five days of this festival. One in three years relates the Buddhist Dards celebrate with their deities of the 'Bonoñah Pantheon' and this relates to their belief in the primordial days when the gods and humans lived together. This harmonious state was brought to end by the intrigue of an old woman. This also resulted in the creation of heaven and earth. The deities who had lived together with the humans in harmony departed.

The Bonoñah festival is the occasion on which the priest (*Lha-bdag*) prays in isolation for five days in order to invite their deities to come and participate in the festivities with the humans, i.e., a reactivation of the primordial times. The hymns sung during these festivities are about rituals being performed and the *Lha-pa* describing his vision of the descent of their deities. There are hymns with sexual connotations, others which concern a riddle contest between men and women. There are hymns about shepherds and hunters and these contain recitations of their archaic rituals connected with the particular activity.

This followed by a discussion of the 'Live Pantheon' which is practiced through the yearly festive cycle. These deities play a living role, they are feared and brought offerings and animal sacrifices

to appease them. No such regular offerings or sacrifices are made to the deities of the 'Bonoñah Pantheon' who only play a role for five days every three years. The deities of the 'Live Pantheon' have shrines dedicated to them and several of them are hierarchically ordered. There also follows a discussion of ancestor worship and other religious symbols.

This work is the first available information on the Buddhist Dards of Ladakh. An in depth study of an ethnic community inhabiting villages which are inaccessible and lie along the river Indus prior to its entry into Baltistan.

This book can be ordered from the address below. Order should be accompanied by a Bank check for 950 Luxembourg Francs and mailing charges. This is limited edition of 300 copies. Availability until stock is exhausted.

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Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet. Edited by JANICE WILLIS. Snow Lion Publications. Available now 166 pp. ISBN0-937938-73-4.

Six western women scholars and practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism explore the issues of "women" and of "the feminine" in Tibet. In a group of critical and provocative essays, they discuss female role models, the nun's life, and gender and role identity as these have manifested in the context of Tibet. These essays thus help to fill a gap in this important area of study; and the volume makes a valuable contribution to several disciplines, including Buddhist studies, comparative studies and womens' studies.