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III. RESEARCH REPORTS AND PAPER ABSTRACTS

*Ethnographic Monograph of the Buddhist Dards in Ladakh

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The narrow ravines and valleys south of the Hindukush-Karakoram ranges have preserved scattered groups of Dardic ethnic stock. The Daradas are known to us from writings of Greek authors of antiquity, numerous Sanskrit sources, and epigraphic evidence, all of which show a changing ethnic situation in the region from the first millennium B.C. to the first millennium A.D.1 Most of the Dard groups today inhabit the northern regions of Pakistan. Despite the numerous works on this region it was not until the post II World War period that scientific anthropological work was undertaken.2 Sometime during the late first millennium A.D., a segment of this Dardic ethnic population migrated from the Gilgit-Brukshal area to settle down in what today forms the extreme north-western part of Ladakh. A total of 10 villages lie along the Indu river and up the rivulet-like streams which descend into it from the glaciers of Ladakh range.

Field research was for the first time conducted in January 1979, when the area is covered in snow and mobility made extremely difficult. A subsequent trip was undertaken during the spring-summer of 1980. One of the more important issues was to discern the preservation of ancient beliefs in their social, religious, and oral traditions. Another task complementary to the above was the sifting of Ladakhi cultural and Tibetan Buddhist influences which have been incorporated during the past century. This however has not prevented them from practicing their ancient socio-religious belief system. The cultural ideas from Ladakh have filled in the lacunae, like the Tibetan Buddhist prayer ritual during the rites de passage or the adoption of the institution of Bha-spun. The research task was to make a survey of the area occupied by the Buddhist Dards (the main villages being: Hanu, mDa, Garkun, and Darchicks) and a detailed ethnographic study of their cultural center, the village mDa.

There appear to have been several waves of Dardic migration: this research documents such a flow occurring until the early 20th century. There are other groups of Dards in Ladakh, and, as well, along the Kishanganga river (north Kashmir), which have been converted to Islam during the course of the past centuries. It is however only among the Buddhist Brog-pa Dards that their archaic traditions have been preserved, due mainly to the geophysical nature of the terrain. The narrow Indus gorge and the mountainous terrain are inhospitable and communication difficult. Combined with their beliefs in pollution from outside influences, this has enabled them to secure their identity. Today they are known by their Ladakhi neighbors as 'Brog-pa, an appellation derived from their occupational attribute of spending time in summer valley pasture grounds (TilhDog) with their livestock. The locals had no need to identify themselves; when they did make outside contact on trading expeditions, they were called 'Brog-pa, a term they have accepted when dealing with outsiders. Similarly their language is called Brog-skad. Ancient sources, like the Mahavastu and the Lalitavistara, mention Darada lipi. Csoma de Kéros mentions in his geographical description of Tibet that here lived the Minaro tribe. This information is also attested to by A.H. Francke and even today, when one asks, they claim descent from the Minaro. They have inherited Minaro traditions and many of the new settlers in the villages married Minaro women at time when their ancestors Gil Singe and Gapo fled from Gilgit and settled here.

The Daradas through history controlled great portions of the regions from Gilgit to Ladakh3 and certainly exercised considerable influence in certain parts of Ladakh (e.g., Purig) until quite recently though the stability and control of their chiefs must have begun to decline with the Ladakhi ruler, Lha-c'en Utpala, taking control of a considerable portion of Ladakh and making raids into Balistan. The village inhabitants even today


The village mDa consists of 35 independent and self-sufficient households. The households are organized into seven Pha-spun groupings which serve to regulate a part of their social activities, i.e., during the rites de passage. The focal point of their interest lies in the ancestral worship at the Munal. It is however the household which is a whole by itself and relations within the village are maintained at the level of the household which constitutes an extended family. During each generation the eldest son takes on the role of the household head and regulates the activities of the household members. A person within the village, and in the Buddhist Dard community as a whole, is identified by his house-name. Marriages are alliances between household heads and are mostly contracted when the children are still young. The marriage of the eldest son holds the greatest significance as in each generation only he has the status of father. The other brothers may participate in the elder brother’s marriage (polyandry) or two sisters may be married to two brothers (group marriage) both having equal rights of access to the wives. A most appreciated form of marriage is to marry two sisters together into a house with only one son (polygyny); they not only provide for harmony but supply the needed labor resources. Within the developmental cycle of the household during each generation the situation develops differently and the taking of additional official recruits alters the form of marriage as it would be classified in ethnographic literature. Almost 80% of the marriages are contracted from within the village, based upon data from marriage alliances over three generations. The outer limits of exogamy extend to the other Buddhist Dard villages. Data on case histories of the 35 households in village mDa, often extending over seven to eight generations, make an interesting study of the permutations a household goes through during its developmental cycle. The household (=house-name: in ’Bro skad, Ghota-nu) is a descent group and is synonymous with the residential group. The affinal recruits discard their natal house-name and Pha-spun membership to join that of their husbands. In the case of a Baru (Tib. Mag-pa) marriage the husband goes to live uxorilocally whereby joining the Pha-spun of his wife and taking on the house-name of his residence. In such an instance the Baru has no way of identifying himself with his agnatic kin and with the change of residence he has become a member of his wife’s descent group.

A triadic mode of village organization is known to exist in village Garkun while in mDa it is said to have existed at their communal habitation in mDa fort (Tib. mKhar) and even today this organizing principle becomes operative on certain festive occasions. Deities particular to each of the three sections exist and are worshipped at their shrine on a hill which is known to be their seat of residence. Their chief deity Sring sLha-mo is worshipped universally among all the Buddhist Dard villages. Her shrine is adorned by huge Ibex horns and decorated with juniper (’Brod-skad, Chilgi) leaves and branches. In fear of arousing her wrath no cows are kept in the village nor any of their products consumed. Only the bull is used for cultivation purposes but is not kept as a domesticated animal and is allowed to roam freely. Beyond this, there exists a whole pantheon of deities. There are deities with significance to particular villages or to a certain group of villages whose region of settlement they are supposed to protect. The deities Bāsha and Roshe are two particular ones who had remained behind in the heavens when the supreme god assigned each deity its task and sea of residence. Still others, like Masho Nakrn (also called Hari Lé) tells the future events but has no fixed place of residence. The deity tZāng-Mandē sLha-mo is worshipped during Gùn-la festival celebrated prior to the sending of livestock to the higher valley pasture grounds. The deity resembles and is perhaps the same as the Yaksha Mandara, specially worshipped by the Daradas, as is mentioned in the Buddhist Mahamayuri text of the Gilgit Mss.

Their beliefs about the origin of the world state the existence of water which turned to frozen ice upon which settled dust. Later grew grass and then the creation of three mountains of different colors upon which grew three sandalwood trees of the same color (white, red and blue). Their songs relate about how in the beginning the gods and the men lived together in harmony. Later due to the desire of the man for the women of the gods led separation, with the men remaining in Mi-yul while the gods in Lha-yul. The most fundamental concept and the one which confronts them daily is the ‘Sa-bdag. The Sa-bdag is located behind the hearth and when facing the hearth the women sit on the left while the men on the right side. The Sa-bdag in the house is worshipped for the fertility of the residential unit, their livestock and in general for the prosperity of the household and the crops. It is to be prevented from polluting influences coming from outside as well as during the periods of pollution observed upon the birth of a child or when a death occurs in the residential unit.

When the men return from trading expeditions, where they have had contact with outsiders, they must first purify themselves with juniper smoke and only then enter the house. As purifying medium juniper is used universally, the smoke of which is used for washing hands and face and not infrequently for bathing. On all
religious and ritual occasions the smoke of juniper ('Brog-skad: Chilgi) is used, which represents not only a
purifying factor but its smell is pleasing to their deities.

Their belief system incorporates a fear of fairies (pari) and demons (shaitan). There are evil spirits which prey
upon malignant persons and have the capacity of taking possession of their mind, arising into action at certain
moments, when the afflicted person is unconscious of his environment. As a protection against evil spirits
Munthoto are hung from the roof of the room. These are the urinary bladder of goats and are hung on the right
side where the men are seated around the hearth. There are positive spirits like the Il-i-phru which roams with
the wind. It has the form of a dwarf, possessing three hands, one arising from the trunk and one each from the
limbs. Occasionally a lucky man may find the shoe or the hat of Il-i-phru which is supposed to bring
prosperity.

With the opening of Ladakh to tourism and the development of a road network the speed of communication has
taken leaps. A weekly truck service to the Buddhist Dard villages from Leh has brought them into contact
with influences not only from the Indian sub-continent but also opened them to ideas from the rest of the
world. Their traditional economy based upon self-sustaining endogamous village units is under pressure from
the new developments taking place in the region. Tourism brings about its own type of strains which increases
pressure upon the areas strategic sensitivity4.

A recording of their ancient traditions and language is urgently needed under these circumstances. Their
language belongs to the Indo-Aryan group and has fundamental relations with Sanskrit and even Prakrit
dialects. As it is many of the words in their traditional songs are not understood by the local people
themselves and some of the aged men who can explain their traditions in perspective may not live long.

*Addenda to Papers Presented at the 81st American Anthropological Association Meetings, Washington, D.C.,
December 3 - 7, 1982

*AZIZ, Barbara N. (Columbia) PILGRIMAGE IN THE HIMALAYAS In Hindu and Buddhist cosmology, Mt.
Meru is the center of the Universe and the goal for pilgrims from all over Central and Southern Asia. the
theories of Turner and Eliade are assessed as they apply to Himalayan pilgrimages and contrasted with an
explanation based on pilgrimage as personal quest and on the role of individualism in Asian cultures. Material
discussed in the paper included the writings of pilgrims, poets, classicists, geographers, historians, as well as a
collection of slides based on indigenous pilgrimage maps.

*GOLDSTEIN, Melvyn C. (Case Western Reserve) HIMALAYAN SYSTEMS OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY This
paper provides the basis for an Andean-Himalayan comparison in the realm of kinship systems which
emphasizes production and reproduction, and based on a comparison of three basic ethnic types (Tibetan
speakers, Tibeto-Burman speakers, and Hindus) the paper compares and contrasts Himalayan systems of
marriage and family, using recently collected unpublished materials as well as published data.

*HOLMBERG, David (Cornell) CHTHONIC CULTS AMONG THE TAMANG OF HIGHLAND NEPAL
Comparison of symbolic and sociopolitical forms in the Andes and Himalayas can appropriately move from
consideration of conceptions of the earth expressed in cults of autochthonous deities found among both these
peoples. This paper, in direct dialogue with a paper on the Andes by Isbell and Allen, discusses these cults
among the Tamang, the most numerous of Tibeto-Burman groups in Nepal and concentrates on (1) the
symbology of chthonic deities; (2) cosmological and ecological notions embedded therein; and (3) the relation
of these cults to territorial legitimacy and their articulation with Hindu and Buddhist forms in the genesis of
encompassing sociopolitical units in Nepal.

No. 458, New Delhi, 1979.