Chapter-2

Society: Family, Village and Social Stratification

The object of this chapter is an attempt to understand various aspects of Muslim and Buddhist societies of Kargil district especially traditional and informal components of the society. Before taking up the topic, it is important to know the proper definition and the meaning of society. As the term is generally defined in sociology, a society has three fundamental characteristics (1) it is bounded by readily territorial border (2) it is structurally and culturally distinctive; and (3) it possesses an objective existence that is independent of the will or actions of individuals. Society has been defined as is a system of usage and procedure of authority and mutual aid, of many grouping and division, of control of human behaviour and liberties.¹

Sociologists define society as the people who interact in such a way to share a common culture. The cultural bond may be ethnic or racial based. The term society can also have a geographic meaning and refer to people who share a common culture in a particular location. According to Trevelyan: the society has various components like demography, social structure, religion, social groups, culture, customs, rites and rituals, institutions, gender and social changes.

The mix of Muslim and Buddhist society of Kargil district were deeply fascinating. The region has bore numerable external attacks throughout ages resulting in the blend of different races and cultures. Their social life of the Kargili people in the second half of twentieth century forms a theme, which is captivating and interesting. Religious elements form an essential and important aspect of social life in Kargil. Here, Muslims and Buddhists have co-existed harmoniously for ages, without conflict between their religious practices and beliefs. In everyday affairs of life, people derive their authority more or less from religious code of conduct.

Their devotion to traditions, and deep impact of customs, habits and rituals and will to retain ‘status quo’ had been the main aspect of their life. They were maintaining continuity to their respected traditional institutions; people were following certain traditions and customs which their ancestors had been observing from centuries. And yet, the society has not been static. ‘Change is the law of nature’, which is the

universal truth. As similar to other societies of the world, in Kargil also, the blended society of Kargil district was maintained some aspects of their society and inevitably, some changes also have been seen. Different facets of their society such as family, marriage, social division, village life and the condition of women has been discussed thoroughly in the following pages.

**Family**

Family’ as a reproductive or biological unit, usually consisting of a man and a woman having socially approved sexual relationship and the offspring (natural or adopted) they might have. As a social unit, a family is referred to as “a group of persons of both sexes, bound by marriage, blood or adoption, performing roles based on age, sex and relationship, and socially distinguished as making up a single household or sub-household”.

Generally ‘family’ authorizes various facets of society and changes in it resonate through the rest of society. A ‘family’ can be defined as a group of people bound by complex set of relationships known as kinship: for some it is a group characterized by common household, reproduction and economic cooperation. It is the basic unit within the society which ensures continued existence of society—procreation of new generations. It is within the family we find the practices of child bearing; maintenance, support and socialization of the young ones. It is within the family, members learn their set of ethics, morality; concepts, values, knowledge, hereditary lineages and basic human qualities.

In order to study the family structure of the people of Kargil, the surveyed households from nine blocks of district are divided into three categories, namely nuclear, intermediate, and joint families. A nuclear family consists of a husband, wife and children. It may also include a widower or a widow. An intermediate family, which includes father, mother, married sons and un-married daughters and are classified as intermediate. Joint family is one in which some of the married children, brothers and or sisters or the head of the household may also be living and taking meals from the same kitchen.

---


Table 2.1: Types of Family in Kargil

Categorization of 600 Households or Families from the nine Blocks of District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Numbers of Households</th>
<th>Nuclear-Family</th>
<th>Intermediate-Family</th>
<th>Joint-Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>71 (17.75%)</td>
<td>118 (29.5%)</td>
<td>211 (52.75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhists</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>14 (7%)</td>
<td>39 (19.5%)</td>
<td>147 (73.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>85 (14.17%)</td>
<td>157 (26.17%)</td>
<td>358 (59.66%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnographic and quantitative method was used for data collection. Research was carried out in nine blocks of district with a stratified random sample based on community households and family types. A total number of 600 households were surveyed personally. Kargil block 82, Sanku block 80, Drass block 74, Shakar Chiktan block 76, Shargole block 72, G.M Pore block 68, Tai Suru block 67, Zanskar block 58, Lungnak block 23.

The Muslim Joint-Family System

Before discussing some distinct features of a Muslim joint family system it would be better to know a definition of joint family system defined by various scholars. Irawati Karve has given five characteristic of joint family: common house, common kitchen, common land, common family worship, and some relationship. On the same basis he defines joint family as “a group of people, who generally live under one roof, eat food cooked at one hearth, hold property in common, participate in common family customs, and are related to each other as some particular type of kinship”.

In Kargil the size and the longevity of the Muslim family was a matter of pride and prestige of a family. They were preferred joint families as Islam teaches them unity, “God and Prophet Muhammad wished unity among them”. The common people were depended on agriculture, which was common to many other communities. It is evident from the (Table 2.1), that total 59.66 percent of the families in the selected villages of nine blocks in Kargil district were joint families. The Muslim joint families in the surveyed villages were 52.75 percent. The majority of the Muslim and Buddhist of the area still maintain the culture of joint family system. For them a family, on the whole,

---

was an organization mainly for broadening common property. The important objective was to provide maintenance for a number of families connected with each other with some kind of relationship. A joint family system in Muslims in Kargil was brought up together under the roof of a common patriarchal-family, a number of people were some sort of kinship. The family was looked as the unit of social system; the bonds of family were such that relationships within the group were often lost sight of, for instance Muslim man could marry four wives and his son might commonly refer to all his father’s wives as his mothers. It would not be improper to say, that close link maintained between brothers, cousins and nephews, who often lived under one roof; and who owned the property of the line in common.

The logical reason of the prevalent of joint family system in Kargil was that the region is less productive and barren. The agricultural work was very hard and would not be possible to cultivate by two or three members. All family members were collectively worked and sweat in the summer season of four months and are able to produce some food stock. Another reason for Muslim joint family system was that the district consists of hundreds of villages and isolated into small numbers of valleys in far-flung mountainous region. The mindsets of the people remained static due to backwardness, ignorance; and were disconnected with modern society. Even today Kargil remains disconnected with the rest of the world for six month of winter. People still believe and respected the conventional, conservative and religious customs with utmost devotion. There was no limit to the number of family members of Muslim joint family in Kargil. In many households large numbers of family members have been living together.

One of the respondents a seventy year old man, in a personal interview with the researcher, he recalled: people in Kargil were living jointly; it was because of poverty, unemployment, hardships to procure agricultural land, short summer season, zero road connectivity with the outside world. Moreover, joint family system was the measure of social security to its members. In a traumatic situation a man could rely on his family members. Agriculture was the only major subsistence of people, where everyone had to labour hard on their respective fields in summer, there were no tractors and threshers, all family members worked entire summer, so that the severe

---

5 Mohd Hussain, Personal interview with the researcher, 04-07-2015.
winter can be passed comfortably. He further gave a detailed outline of his own family, which consisted of twenty one members; his father; five brothers, two sisters, an uncle, cousins, nephews and grandfather. All of them were living in one small house and almost all family members had to sleep in one or two rooms without differentiating between male or female.6

Discontentment if any among the Kargili Muslim joint family members used to arise it did not shatter the joint-family system. It was only when the sons passing to adulthood and had a large household members of their own and the aged father was not able to handle the affairs resulted in a break-up of a joint family system. To confirm segregation they would begin by using separate kitchens. The parents would join with elder son or join the son most beloved to them. As long as the father was able, to hold joint family together he would assign various duties to his sons and regulate his views and commands over them. Even after separation, the sons would continue to live in the separate room in the same house till the construction of the new house. With the advantage of joint-family system in the orthodox Muslim society in Kargil there were some drawbacks too. In the last decade of 21thcentury AD with the spread of modern education and technology, new employment opportunities, social changes and some degradation of customary traditions is evident in their society. Questioning and resisting the traditional authority, asserting individual opinion sometime could create clashes against the head of the family. However, with growing modernization there is a threat to the integrity of Joint families in Kargil. As it is the same for the modern Indian society.

**Law of Inheritance among Muslims in Kargil**

The law of inheritance among the Muslims of Kargil was strictly according to *Shariat* (Islamic law). Individual in the family had the right to inherit and maintain a joint household. When a family member passed away their inherited property would come to an end. Thus the younger ones and new borne were given the right to inherit the property of their deceased kin. The rights of each member were started as part of the family and not by taking the place of any particular individual.7In all the villages in Kargil people wanted to retain their ancestral way of life so that land is still kept intact in family.

---

6 Haji Abass, Personal interview with the researcher, 04-07-2015.
7 S.Dua, *Society and culture of northern India, 1850-1900*, Indian Bibliography Bureau, Co-publisher, Balaji Enterprises Delhi, 1985, p. 92.
According to Islamic law of inheritance the ancestral or acquired property of patriarchal families other than agricultural land was inherited after and not before the death of father by his children. The Muslims of Kargil has been followed the Shia Islamic code of conduct in its true spirit and content. This has been a big reason they still continue their traditional system of family pattern. For instance, inheritance of property was given both male and female issues according to the Sharia (Islamic law).

There were three categorizes of persons who inherited from a deceased, based on relationship: The first category consists of the deceased’s father and mother and sons and daughters. In the absence of son or daughter, the grand children, among them whoever was close to the deceased inherits his property. The second category involved paternal grandfather, paternal grandmother, and sisters, brothers, and in the absence of sisters and brothers their progenies’ whoever from among them was close to the deceased, inherited from his property. The third category involved of paternal uncles and paternal aunts and maternal uncles and maternal aunts, and their lineages.

The male kin of the deceased among the Kargili Muslims used to get inheritance of two third portion of the land; whereas female kin was granted one third of property. On death of the wife of the head of the household the property owned by her was shared by husband and the children, the former being entitled one fourth and the latter remaining property, in the proportion of two shares per male and one share per female child. The children of a person who died during the life time of his father was not entitled to any share from the property owned by their grandfather, unless he executed a special will or made gift of a property in their favour.

In Kargil a joint-family would increase until it become un-manageable; usually the family was fractioned after the death of father or grandfather. The property was divided among sons and daughters. However, sometimes the daughter voluntarily used to refuse to share the property with brothers due to her marriage expenses which were already spent on her by the family. In their society if daughter claimed the land or other estate; it was considered as violation of family ties with her siblings. She was

---

supposed to be satisfied with love, care and affection of natal family. In this case the family always extended their support to her at the time of distress. However, if she insisted for her share; then she used to give her share in the family property.

Role of Attaa or Bawaa (Father)

The head of the joint-family is known as *attaa or bawaa* (father) as a customary tradition of Kargil, or *appoo* (grandfather) if he is still alive, or in absence, any elder male member of the family was honoured with the title. Father was authorized and was accepted by members to manage the joint property of the family. He had the privilege and legality according to custom to represent the household in all transaction without the consent of other family members. In Kargil the other family members as long as in a joint family had the right to maintenance and habitation. Members of the family were not prohibited to inquire about the account nor did they claim any precise share of income.

*Attaa or bawaa* (father) had the responsibility to manage and maintain the household affairs with best of his ability and dignity. *Attaa* had retained the absolute right over the ancestral property. If the head of the family had few brothers; then opinion of the brothers were sought before taking any major decision.\(^{12}\) However, the final decision rested on the *attaa* himself.

In all temporal affairs such as marriage of family members, economic transactions, social obligations and village affairs were handled by the *attna or bawaa*. In matters relating to health and education of family members and debt, customary donation and maintenance of discipline in the family were the primary task of the *attaa or bawaa*. Any achievement of family members was the achievement of the head. In the society, he had to uphold the integrity and dignity of the members of his household. At home, the wife of *attaa’* (father) used to call her husband by the name *jou* (usually used for ‘asking’ and ‘calling’ word’ for respected persons, like *ji* in Hindi). The head of the family i.e. *attna* used to encourage *amma’* (mother) and tried to fulfil her wishes and ambitions.

---

\(^{12}\) Kacho Sikandar, *op.cit.* p. 699.
Amongst the Kargili Muslims, if some of the elderly men and women have desired to go to a pilgrimage at Mecca Medina in Saudi Arabia; and to visit the shrines of Imam Hussain, Hazrat Ali and his progenies in Iran, Iraq and Syria, atleast once in their life time. The father of the household used to save an amount to go on such pilgrimages with utmost care and devotion.

In Muslim families in Kargil a ceremony called fateha the rite commemorate the memory of deceased ancestors at which recitation of Holy Quran by clerics and some Quran known people. Sons, grandsons and relatives of the deceased used to joining together in fateha. After the end of the fateha, local vegetarian and non-vegetarian cuisines were served to all guests and relatives. This kind of rites and rituals are still prevalent.

In case of any dispute within the family as a head, the father was to initiate stringent action against peace breakers. Even in extreme situation sometimes the peace breaker were expelled from the household for damaging the family reputation and spoiling the peaceful and normal household tradition. On the event of certain Islamic occasions like Eid (Islamic joys occasion) Ramazan (Islamic holy month of fasting and prayers), Mauharram (month of mourning in the memory of the Imam Hussain and his family members) all these religious ceremonies were handled efficiently by the attaa or bawaa.

As per Shia Muslim law, every household must pay customary and obligatory Islamic religious taxes and donations to institutions, clerics, descendants of Prophet and beggars per annum. These taxes are zakat (obligatory tax on goods and commodities) khumus (Islamic tax once in a year). All these were the primary duties of the attaa of the family to pay and to maintain the accounts of the household finance properly.

Amma (Mother)

Amma (mother) was the next authority in a family after father, amma (mother) or grandmother, if she is still alive, in mater-families. Among the Kargili joint family mother was not only responsible to procreate and raise the children but had always

13 It is small ceremony in which the verses from the Holy Quran recited in the memory of deceased descendants and non-vegetarian would serve to relatives and phasphun (local clan).
14 Master Hussain, Personal interview with the researcher, 14-09-2014.
been an influence over the affairs of family and had control over the finance. She would sell milk, butter, wool and some other agricultural products from her household. Amma used to purchase ornaments and new clothes for her daughters. She had the power to purchase some kitchen implements such as utensils, cups and plates etc. To raise money amma had the responsibility to keep the family well nourished and nurtured even when the temperature dropped down below minus 30° Celsius in the winter season.

In summer season women of the family used to spend their time in fields or on the desolate heights of mountains gleaning for animals droppings and collecting juniper bushes. In early eighties winter season was the real test of their fortitude; when the male members of the family usually remained away to Shimla, Dehradun, Punjab and other main land places of country in search of employment for about five to six months of a winter at a stretch.16

In Kargil conservative and traditional families, mothers were honoured with love and reverence. She was looked upon as the source of all wisdom and experience. The domestic affairs of the family were always managed by her such as spinning mills, weaving, making garments, making special winter dresses of woollen and pashmina, like ilsakpa (upper gown for ladies), saanmbo (woollen loom) paapau (leather shoe) tipi (woollen cap) gooncha (traditional local gown for both male and female), baalai-kaanche (woollen socks) baalai-baadain (woollen sweater) etc., for the family members.17

In the house, the mother always cook and managed food procurement, and used to keep watched over the needs of all members. She was responsible for maintaining discipline within the family especially among younger daughters and daughters-in-law. She had the duty to maintain unity and harmony in family, and used to handle tough situations competently.

In the house amma provided hospitality to the guests, poor, helpless, and destitute ones. If a guest visited the house; then, chaa (local salt and butter tea) was served to the guest and the gratifying environment was maintained at house until the departure.

17 Zenab Banoo, Personal interview with the researcher, 16-09-2014.
of the guest. It was considered as the sign of humbleness and dignified of a woman of a household in their society. An able mother had always maintained good relations with all her neighbours, villagers, relatives, and had to maintain mutual cooperation and support to each other in their respective agriculture and domestic labour.

Geographically, due to high altitude in the Kargil district, the harvesting season is very short; hence people have to remain active in agricultural activities continuously for about five months of summer. Women never lagged behind in fulfilling their family duties and obligations. It was difficult to comprehend a male farm worker without active participation of female members of the household. Usually the peasant ammas’ were workers; they were not only doing their work at home and bring up children but also worked in the fields like picking fodder for cattle, watering the fields, feeding livestock, collecting twigs, weaving shawl and carpet and collecting cow dung for fuel. In the peak season, they had to winnow, thresh, husk, clean grain and churn milk. They were to fetch grass from hills and would rear, cows, yaks, horses, cattle, zoa (offspring of yak and common cow) and mules of their respective households.

**Other Members in Joint Family System**

In Kargil responsibility of the family was not only vested on the mother and father, but all the members of family had to contribute somehow to sustain livelihood. On the death of parents, the elder son of the family was expected to take charge and care of all family, social, religious and economic responsibilities of the house. Since, agriculture was the main source of livelihood of the family in the region; so, it was the main responsibility of the sons and nama to finish the seasonal agriculture tasks on time. The capability and skill of the daughter-in-law was assessed depending upon her timely completion of seasonal agricultural and other works.

The daughter in a patriarchal system had a momentary role in her family till her marriage and thus become member of another family. Daughters enjoyed respect and freedom in their natal home than daughters-in-law. The children of the family shared a united bond with each other in domestic circle. They used to grow up in the environment of collective harmony. All of the children were given equal attention, love and care from grandparents, uncles and aunts.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{18}\) Haji Baqir, Personal Interview with the researcher, 10-08-2015.
In Kargili society the gain and loss of any household was often linked with the daughter-in-law of the house. She had to maintain and uphold her dignity until her mother-in-law was quite mature to be called appi (grandmother), after that it would be her turn to take up the responsibility of mother, mistress and custodian of the house. Female members of the family were responsible of preparing food and chaa (local salt and butter tea) which was served to all family members. The other members of the family also used to make their contribution in other activities which helped them secure their daily bread. Other activities of the female member of the house were cleaning utensils, cooking, making bread, rearing cattle and churning milk. In the winter season when there was no agricultural activities; the female family members used to contribute in the other activities such as spinning, shoe and rope making and the weaving of shawls, socks and woollen sweater. They also exchanged milk and butter with phaspun (clan) on rotation basis called orais, in the neighbouring locality. Women were going to hills for the collection of bush which is called burtse (eurotia) which was used as fuel during winter. The young ones, who were not able to help their parents, were given the duty of collecting twigs for fuel from nearby vicinity.

Both male and female used to take ploughing, sowing, loading and transporting of manure in fields, cutting timber for fuel in autumn and transporting grass from fields to store. They also helped each other for; constructing stone walls, digging and cleaning the silt of water channels, cutting of grass and fetching drinking water from nearby rivers and springs.

The modes of transportation in hilly areas were mostly consisted of yaks, donkeys, mules, and horses for transporting goods from one place to the other. These were usually the duties of the young ones in the family. In Kargil, certain villages located near the line of control (LoC) on the Pakistani border used to take their mules for transportation of arms, ammunitions and other freights on higher altitude posts and of Indian military. They earned some cash for this hard labour and have been contributed in family earnings. These tasks were performed by the younger male member of the family since independence.

20 Frederic Drew, op.cit., p. 248.
21 Amina Banoo, Personal interview with the researcher, 10-10-2015.
With the changing trends in the society, the male members of the family started to go out of their villages to earn and supplement income for the family. In early 1960s to late 1980s thousands of people from Kargil had migrated to Shimla, Punjab, Dehradun, Chandigarh, Jammu and Srinagar in search of employment during winters.\textsuperscript{22}

In case of the construction of the new house, only the skilled mason was hired from outside rest of the labour work was always done by the family members. For the same purpose, the children, brothers, cousins, sisters, daughters-in-law, mothers and even fathers all worked hard till the completion of the house. Children were supposed to fetch water from nearby water channels while females transport timber, mud, sand, and bricks from one place to another. The younger sons were worked with the direction and guidance of the professional masons.\textsuperscript{23} The father had to supervise all activities on the construction site advising, encouraging and sharing his experience with the family members and other workers.

**Buddhist Joint-Family System**

The joint family system of the Buddhists in Kargil was linked with the custom of polyandry. (Table 2.1) indicates that in the selected villages of nine blocks of district Kargil. The joint-families among the Buddhists were 73.5 percent. The numbers of intermediate families were 19.5 percent and nuclear families were 7 percent among Buddhists in this district. It clearly indicates that the custom of joint family system was dominant among them and is still prevalent in their society.

Like other Himalayan regions, Buddhists in Kargil too were observed polyandry till recent past. They had been following the traditional joint family system. Custom of Polyandry and primogeniture forced the younger brothers to be dependent upon and live jointly with the eldest brother.\textsuperscript{24} The main reason of polyandrous families and primogeniture in the region was the barrenness and unproductiveness of the region. In earlier times, it was extremely difficult to survive without agricultural production, which too was very scanty. A person had to maintain a small portion of their land very meticulously; so that the longevity and the fertility of fields could continue. To

\textsuperscript{22} Hashmatullah Khan, *op.cit.*, p-600.
\textsuperscript{23} Haji Hamid Tanveer, Personal interview with the researcher, 10-10-2015.
\textsuperscript{24} *Census of India*, 1911, Volume XX, Part-I, Kashmir, Newul Kishore Press Lucknow, 1912, p. 41.
keep the land intact within one's family and to prevent from division, polyandry was maintained and practised as a custom.

The Buddhists, like other communities of Kargil, used the term ‘naang, which means household as well as a family. There were usually two types of households; khang-chen (big house or ancestral house) and khang-chun or khang-bau (little house). They had practised a peculiar custom of the father retiring from the business of the family as soon as his elder son was married and had a child. The parents used to shift to khang-chun or khang-bau (little house) and pass the authority to the next generation.25

The separation of parents used to create a distance between their sons which lowered the possibilities of disputes among the parents and their married sons. The parents used to leave the house when they were convinced about the reliability of their sons or daughters to shoulder independent responsibilities of the household. No doubt, the parents would continue to provide their guidance and advice even after leaving the house. In common practice parents did not want to be a burden on their children. The custom of Buddhists was conducive to the maintenance of joint-family existence to a great extent.

They used to withdraw themselves from all the connections with household affairs. Some of the retiring parents were given livestock and small farm known as ltho-zhing (food fields) for their livelihood and survival. They had little or no say in the household decision after they leave the khang-chen and shift to a small new house called khang-bau, the elder son would take his place. Their estates would be included under the khang-chen, after the death of parents. In Buddhist society there was no formal ceremony to mark the succession of the household head from the one generation to next. Separation of parent was not compelled rather it was voluntary. After this traditional practice, parents were no claim on the property of son, who was considered as a legal owner of the family property. The same custom is still maintained in many Buddhist dominated areas of Kargil district especially Zangskar tehsil and Bodhkharbu village respectively.26

Law of Inheritance among the Buddhist

Among the Buddhist the law of inheritance is exceedingly old and based in the principle laws of the land tenure given by the then Tibetan King Srong-Tsan-Gam-po in 7th century AD. It was formed especially to preserve the land and house as intact unit from generation to generation because of the lack of fertile cultivable land in the region. The law of inheritance, which still functions in Buddhist, dominated area of Zangskar in Kargil district. These rules are summarized as follows:

A land is inherited after marriage by form of primogeniture. The eldest son with two or more brothers may share the same wife, by the custom of polyandry. The eldest son takes over the khang-chen from the father. At the same time he would be the head of the household and was responsible for management of property. The younger brothers were left with narrow choices either to share the wife of elder brother or become Lama (monk) and live the life of celibacy. Sometimes the last option for younger brother was to give-up his inheritance rights and solemnised magpa (matrilocal) marriage with a brother less woman. Where he used to inherit his wife’s property. The estate was thus passed from generation to generation.

The parents as already mentioned moved into a small house. The management of this land was usually given the eldest brother or inheriting generation and upon the death of the oldest family member khang-chun (little house) would remain vacant building until the next inter-generational changes.

In case of brother less daughters, the eldest daughter used to marry a man who was suppose to live in her house as a magpa (matrilocal) husband from another family. If she had a sister she too may marry the same man thus establishing a polygynous household. The magpa had little influence in the family but the estate would eventually pass to the sons born out of this marriage. Thus, whether by polyandrous marriage of brothers’ or the marriage of daughters, the estate remains intact within the

27 John Crook and Henry Osmaston, Himalayan Buddhist Villages, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1994, p. 703.
28 Kacho Sikandar Khan, Qadim Ladakh, (Urdu), Kacho Publisher, Leh Ladakh, 1987, pp. 35-36.
30 John Crook and Henry Osmaston, op.cit., p. 477.
31 Kacho Sikandar Khan, op.cit., p.470.
same family. If an unlawful kid was raised along other blood related brothers or sisters, they get same inheritance along with other progenies. An espoused male would have the possibility of combing with brothers in a polyandrous marriage and adopted daughter would be married with dowry.

Since polyandry was declared illegal through the Ladakhi Buddhist Polyandrous Marriages Prohibition Act, 1941. It is no longer a legal form of marriage and on the death of owner of the land his sons and daughters were the right to claim a share of the property. However, the decrease of polyandry among Buddhists of Kargil was not linked to the Polyandry Prohibition Act. In fact very few people seem to be aware about the 1941, Act, especially in far flung areas of Buddhist dominated villages like Lungnak, Zangla, Stongde, Pipcha, Kumik, Abran, Rangdom and many other extreme remote areas of Zangskar tehsil in Kargil district.

**Abba (Father)**

The Buddhists of Kargil also followed the codes of a typical patriarchal society. The *abba* (father) was the head of the household and was the central authority of property, land and household affairs much like their counterparts of Muslim families. In all family affairs such as marriage of daughters or sons, social customs and economic transactions, were carried out by the father. In matters relating to education, charity and maintenance of discipline within household were also his primary tasks. In unfortunate circumstances father was the strong sole saviour and protector of his family in the society. All religious affairs, rituals, festivals, *yajnas*, family rituals and other social and village level obligations were performed with the consent and guidance of *abba*. During festivals any other social occasions, everyone was to follow the direction of the father in the household. Buddhist festivals such as *losar* (Ladakhi New-year), Buddha Purnima, and various other local festivals were arranged and celebrated in the family. The head of the family was responsible for attending village meetings also.

---

32 John Crook and Henry Osmaston, *op.cit.*, pp. 477-78.
35 Namgayal, Personal interview with the researcher, 07-08-2015.
**Amma (Mother)**

*Amma* in Buddhist families were responsible to run daily household affairs with wisdom. The chores of *amma* in Buddhist families were similar to as above-mentioned Muslim women of Kargil. They had been in the same role of looking after the domestic affairs and agricultural activities. Women also used to meet freely and made conversation with men at festivals and other important Buddhist ceremonies. They would not tolerate the ill treatment by their husband. In Buddhist community relations between mother and father was generally cordial and harmonious. They used to manage all the religious and social obligations related to women in their respective families. It was *amma*’s duty to carry out all the customs and traditions which women of their society had been practising from centuries.

**Intermediate and Nuclear Families in Kargil**

As indicated in the (Table 2.1) in the selected villages 26.17 percent were intermediate families and 14.7 percent nuclear families. Some factors responsible for the intermediate and nuclear families were almost same among both Muslims and Buddhists family system in the district. It was because of the increase of literacy rate and per-capita income of individuals and the possibility of employment opportunities among people especially in government sector. The growth of various small enterprises due to increasing number of Indian army and tourism were the main factors of the emergence of intermediate and nuclear families during the last decade of 20th century. Another reason was a family disputes among brothers for ancestral property and disputes among women especially among daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law. Presently the social change is in the process of taking place in this district.

**Pattern of Village Life**

Administratively a ‘village’ is a source of revenue. It is revenue or cadastral survey unit which has separate entity and a distinct number assigned to it in the revenue records of the state. It may consist of a single village with a cluster of houses or a number of hamlets within the boundaries of the village. It may be inhabited or uninhabited.

---

In the census of 1901, a village has not been properly defined, it appears that areas where houses were clustered together was only taken as village and the sparsely populated places, which were separated from other similar areas by natural barriers such as hillock, a rivulet, a *khul* were not treated as a village. In census of 1931, the definition of the village’ varied according to the local conditions. Broadly speaking, a well-organized unit with definite boundaries which was surveyed in the recent past was treated as village. According to the census of 1961, a village was defined as an area with well-defined boundaries for revenue arrangement having residential houses densely or sparsely populated irrespective of the number of hamlets of which it might be constituted. The motive was mainly for revenue village or *mauza* wherever it existed. Thus, a *mauza* which is for the sake of convenience was taken as a village in census parlance is merely that tract of land, inhabited or not, which has been demarcated as a unit for revenue purposes.37

A study of ‘village’ has undoubtedly been single most important preoccupation with the sociologists and anthropologists working in India. The scholars, who carried-out the ‘village survey’ during 1960s and 1970s, saw the soul of India being located in the village. Mahatma Gandhi declared in the beginning of 20th century “the soul of India lives in its villages”. A village had been a primary unit of Indian civilization. Since, ancient period village was looked upon as a symbol of traditional social milieu and social organization. In a village one can see the native life and facets of their customary society, relationship among people, rules and regulations and the way local people organize social gathering and their belief system.

According to Betelie “village is not merely a place where people live; it had a design which reflected the basic values of Indian civilization”.38

As stated earlier Kargil is spread across the nine administrative blocks; and the blocks are divided into 95 Panchayati-halqas. According to District Statistics 2011, there were 129 villages in whole district, out of which 127 were inhabited and 2 were uninhabited. According to revenue records in 2011, the district was spread in 19437 hectors, with 11454 hectors were under cultivation and 7983 hectors were cultivable waste land.39

In local Purgi (ancient name of Kargil) language village is called ‘yul’ their village or yul is an imagined community and social reality, an abstract reality, an abstract category and a contextual reference point for various locales. In its narrow, territorial sense, yul indicates a place where one’s house is located. It can be the land of one’s birthplace (skyes-yul), the land of one’s fathers (pha-yul), or simply a place where one dwells.\(^{40}\) The main environmental constraint for the founding of a village has been that there must be water in the form of snow-fed stream; since, Kargil is a cold place. The denizens of a particular village had a land which they or their ancestors had been harvesting, and it had been his/her main source of sustenance. Those inhabitants did not owe land and migrated from some other places in the particular village would not be considered for the primary membership of concerned village in Kargil. The smallest customary unit of political power in the particular territory was the village. In every village, within the limits of agricultural space and ecological period the village households organized themselves into fairly a group for various tasks. The residents of a village were the locus of consumption and production revolved around the fields made available by the joint efforts of villagers.

Kargil is surrounded by high snowy peaks are some small villages with only one or two households, and a very finely tuned adaptation to tough environment. This adaptation means that from area to area, from village to village there are significant differences, even in the architecture, and the distribution of houses.\(^{41}\) The vital features of any villages in Muslim dominated areas of Kargil were masjid (mosque), matatam-sara (edifice for praying and mourning of Shias’) qabrastan (grave yard), Aghas\(^{42}\) (descendants of prophet), Sheikhs\(^{43}\) (local Shia Muslim cleric), Akhuns (Shia Muslim clerics educated locally), yuli-mala (incumbent rites performers in village). In Buddhist dominated villages were Lamas (monks), Zimskhang (upper class house), Gonpa (monastery), Chorten (Stupa), Manni (long wall), amchi (local medical practitioner), Rong-khang (Buddhist cremation centre), Garba (smiths) and Mon (Musicians) and sometime noble families.

\(^{42}\) Aghas are the descendants of Prophet Muhammad, came in Kargil in 16th Century from Persia for the preaching of Islam.
\(^{43}\) Sheikhs are the local Kargili Shia religious clerics; completed their Islamic theology from the institutions of Iran and Iraq.
Seasonal Activities in Villages

Like any other normal rural pattern, the rural people of the Kargil were mostly dependent on agro-pastoral life. The activities of village people have been oriented by the cycle of seasons. Due to variant temperature plus 35°C in summer and minus 25°C in winter, these limitations are certainly limited, and the advantage of summer must be taken to hoard the stocks of food, fuel and fodder for the sustenance of human and animals in winter. They had to manage and maintain the hoarded commodities at least till the next sowing to harvesting period.\(^{44}\)

After harsh winter, spring is the main season of rejuvenation, which follows soon after the Shia’s *Nau-roz* (Muslim New Year) in 21 March. Within few days of *Nau-roz* the beginning of farming and cultivation season starts in majority of the parts of Kargil district. The sowing season in the most parts were usually done in the first week of April, excluding few extremely cold high altitude regions such as Zangskar, Drass, Sapi, Rangdum, Bodhkharbu and few villages of Suru valley. In these places the sowing season starts in the last week of May. Before the cultivation, the winter snow usually two to three feet deep must be melted by sun. To remove the snow from fields, people usually spread the soil on the upper layer of the snow to speed up the process of cultivation. Both male and female members of family have to do all the work concerning agriculture and livestock, with few exceptions which were meant for male. The mixture of soil and human excreta (*chaak-lud*) was taken from the *chak-ra* (local toilet) and cattle shelter, filled in baskets carried to the field and dumped like mounds. This was usually done a mutual task between several households. The *chaak-lud* together with the compost, animal dung which was left on the fields in previous autumn, was to disperse out by men and women, using a *kham* (spade). The fields were to be sown with barley, wheat was composted in Zangskar tehsil, and however, all other areas wheat fields too are composted regularly.\(^{45}\) In the end of all above mentioned process; the first cultivation was done with some religious rituals and distribution of ritual foods to people by the owner of farm. Buddhists had been performing their own rituals before the cultivation.

\(^{44}\) Hashmatullah Khan, *op.cit.*, pp.655-56

The ploughing was always done with a pair of oxen, often zoa, and yak, but never with horses; except in the rare situations such as spring of 1956, when large number of animals died and ploughing was done using horses and even men. The plough is of a simple wooden design with a single drought flat timber passing between the yaks, mortised through a strong upright wooden beam hooked forward at its foot and connected with iron. The task of ploughing was tough job and it was always done by men. Usually three or four men would take their turn during the day. In the same way the sowing of seed has been normally been male’s task. Fields were usually ploughed twice before wheat and once before barley, pea and other yields.

The water channels were repaired to irrigate seasonal crops within the village. The distribution and times of receiving water for the fields were being fixed according to their old village traditions, rule of respective villages and its needs. In summer, the village folk had to perform different kinds of agricultural works. The important work was gathering, carrying and threshing of the ripen crops. One member of each family had to live at the ri-yaa (high pasture land) in Zangskar valley it is called dogs-pa for cattle and cow herding. Other children herd the cattle at the village and collect dung and other fuels. The cumbersome task of weeding the fields was vested on women. It would take many days to weed the large fields.

In Kargil every village women collected fresh fodder for domestic cows from fields, which was usually their daily task. Ropochey (stubble) making was the gregarious task with members of families joining in groups. Though the crops are not heavy but it a tiring job, as the Lucerne has lean shoots and the zorba (ripper) is small and often blunt to cut a handful of straw. The rsoa (grass straw) dried quickly in the sun and dried grass was usually gathered into khoor (rolls). These rolls were used to tie with woollen ropes and carried on the mule or yaks sometimes even men and women would carry on their backs to deliver at various stores for animals till the next harvesting season

The local threshing (khu-yu) technique was very traditional and byzantine; that had been plasticising form centuries by their ancestors. In Kargil, every household had

---

46 Kacho Sikandar khan, op.cit.p. 700.
47 John Crook and Henry Osmaston, Himalayan Buddhist Villages, Henry Osmaston, Janet Frazer and Stamati Crook, Human Adaptation To Environment In Zangskar, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1994, pp. 104-05.
A Peasant Ploughing his Field in Zangskar Valley, Kargil

A Father and Son Ploughing their Field in Zangskar Valley, Kargil
their personal threshing floor, and is known as (yul-thak). The design of threshing floor was circular in shaped, which was meticulously designed and made, to crush all the barley and wheat hay in a proper way. In all village animals were used for threshing.\textsuperscript{48} After two hours of threshing, the straws are broken and grains are collected separately. Immediately, after the starting of threshing process, different types of local foods used to distribute by household member among the children and adults of nearby the threshing ground, and an elderly men prayed, for safe storage of their hard earned harvest on time. So that the next six months of winter would be passed with ease for both humans and animals.

After the end of threshing the cows or zoas were taken for feeding, and resting. The household members winnow the hay into air, so that the grain fall back while the phukma (straw) blows away to the other side. The aowngs-fayarba (winnowing process) was very cumbersome; it takes many days to complete the process. Finally, grains were collect and measured with a traditional boo (wooden container). In every household father of respective families would make the standard of weight and the unit of it was called sair. If a family cannot harvest the needed amount of grain then the incumbent household would take the grain on loan from farmers, till the next year cultivation. The household would give it back next year.\textsuperscript{49}

\textit{Chuli} (apricots) and \textit{ku-shu} (apples) was the staple fruit of the Kargil district. People in some low laying places in Kargil, it was cultivated in central part of the district. In the month of July important works of people who were residing on low laying places plucks the well ripened apricot and apple from trees and collect it meticulously without wasting a piece. Fruits such as apple and grapes were packed in boxes and was sent to market for selling. The ripened apricots laid on the roof of their respective house for dry-up and after dried; farmers packed it to sell in retail. It has been the significant part of the local economy of the people of the low laying villages in Kargil district.\textsuperscript{50}

In winter all the livestock were housed in a village. On the ground floor of the house, the sheep and goats were kept together in \textit{ba-ra} or \textit{dang-ra} (animal shed) and the female cattle in another. Horses are tied at its own feeding shed. In winter, the bridle

\textsuperscript{48} Haji Attahullah, Personal interview with the researcher, 18-07-2015.
\textsuperscript{49} Kacho Sikandar khan, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 700.
\textsuperscript{50} Master Nabi, Personal interview with the researcher, 14-07-204.
was replaced by a *ra-naati* (wooden nose ring) and *baali-thaqpa* (woollen rope). To avoid from severe cold every household has been used their own traditional heating system. The main heat of the living room is radiated by fire which burns all day in a hearth in the floor. In hearth, the dry dung of cattle was used. The survival of people was tough from centuries in the tough climatic and weather conditions. However, the ordinary villagers had their conventional and cultural way to survive harsh climate. In Buddhist dominated Zangskar tehsil, winter was the season when Zangskaris relax and enjoy the company of people, visiting neighbours, talking and drinking *chang* (local liquor). In some place in Zangskar the traditional festivals of monasteries were held in winter.\(^{51}\)

**Livestock**

Livestock rearing has been the vital occupation of the rural population in general in the district. They were mainly depended on livestock for their livelihood. According to the livestock census of Kargil district 1992, the district had a total livestock of 36,2500 while it stood at 36,5480 as per 1997 district livestock census. In places such as Suru, Drass, Shargole, Sankoo, Lounchay and almost whole of Zangskar tehsil the subsistence of common people were hugely depended on livestock. The domesticated animals had been an important part of the economy of native people.\(^{52}\)

The cattle used to take pastures for grazing by a villager usually called *rarais*; a date was fixed and allotted to every household by *goba* (village headman). For the purpose of grazing, the cattle were usually grouped into: sheep, goat and *zoa*, (offspring of male yak and common cow). It has been the responsibility of the households who have been herding, to bring back animals safely in the evening. Few sheep and goats were kept at home for milking, and young calf would keep in villages. One of the villager *lorapa* (watchmen of fields) had the task of grazing animals but without letting animals graze on growing crops during summer, and he was remunerated by each peasant during the harvesting period in both cash and kind.\(^{53}\)

\(^{51}\) Crook & Osmaston, _op.cit._, p. 109.
\(^{52}\) *Statistical Hand Book*, District Kargil, Director of Economics and Statistics, Planning and Development Department, 1998-99, p. 29.
\(^{53}\) Haji Attahullah, _op.cit._, 18-07-2015.
A Woman Shepherd with her Cattle in Zangskar Valley, Kargil

Division of Labour

In the villages in Kargil district both male and female were always worked jointly on their respective fields. In almost all the villages in the district, women had been playing a vital role in cultivation, and other agricultural activities throughout the summer. They used to irrigate their fields on rotation basis and help each other to collect fodder, weeding and depositing the cattle manure on the fields for next sowing season before winter. The women also had to take their wheat or barley for grinding on raan-thak (water-mill grinder) located near the river or khul (water-channel) in their respective villages. They had been doing the work of ‘yous-rgochaa (grain generally roasted in big pan), grinding barley (tsampa or sattu) and accumulated it for winter. Daily tasks, such as watering the fields, cutting wood, taking care of animals, fencing the fields, planting and transplanting vegetables were done by both males and females, with certain basic tools, which were usually owned by every household. These tools were khaam (spade), lag-staa-ry (pick-axe), tok-che (hoe), thaap (heater or stove), the tsepoo (backpack), the arra (chopper) and the holler and so on, all these were required during human labour.

In case of death in the village, whether Muslim or Buddhist it was the duty of Sheikh (Muslim cleric) or Lama (monk) to perform the death rituals according to their respective religion. Phaspuin (clan) had been engaging in mutual assistance and collective rituals at the time of birth, death and weddings. Almost all the elder members in the families in villages used to visit the deceased family and expressed their condolences to the bereaved family.54

Goba or Muqaddam (Village Headman)

According to Geoffrey Samuel, “the representative of village’s political unity is the village headman, the goba, and the village committee”. In several villages, the position of village headman was hereditary. In early 19th century AD in Buddhist, villages’ families of the aristocrats and the Zimskhang (upper class house) also had de-jure political powers in addition of big proprietors in Ladakh (Kargil and Leh). This was largely based on tradition, aristocrats and petty chiefs had a great deal of autonomy sending taxes to the king and sometimes keeping a small contingent of

---

soldiers for the king. The aristocrats and the Zimskhang (upper class house) owned large tracts of lands in the villages as well as monastery, with a number of lease holders being a source of great power. While relation within the villagers may have been repressive, among king and the local landlord, chiefs, ministers and monasteries, power seems to have been divided among all the stake holders’ even clergy and nobility had the power. In 1901, the gobas were chosen and replaced every year by villagers themselves. They had been responsible for the collection of land revenue, the management of beggars and supply of provisions to visitors.

In 1901, the gobas were chosen and replaced every year by villagers themselves. They had been responsible for the collection of land revenue, the management of beggars and supply of provisions to visitors.

In Kargil, every village the goba or mauqaddam had been playing an essential role within the boundary of the village, where people nominated him or her. Goba or Muqaddam was to perform various political and social powers which were: mediation between government representatives and the village committee during major events concerning their village; resolving various social disputes within the village; supervising and managing the proper distribution of water for irrigational purposes; and he also had to be present during important religious ceremonies such as Eid, Moharram and Losar. Every year before cultivation, the village goba and the village elders holds meeting of village committee to decide the proper day and month for plough. Same kind of meetings were also held for cleaning water channels, preparing the ma-yur (main canal) for irrigation, de-silt the small water channels, watering the farms and herding the livestock on particular locations etc.

In the region harvesting, cutting fodder, and feeding the cattle after the completion of all agricultural activities were decided by goba and elders of village. The goba had been conducted the village meetings any time as according to need. Those who were violating the decision and regulation of the village committee; a fine was imposed on them by goba according to village norms. If the defaulter household head continuously disobeys the norms of village; then the particular household would suspend from the primary membership of the village, until, he/she accepted the conditions and rules of village committee headed by goba.

55 Osmaston & NawangTsering, op.cit., p. 276.
57 Asgar Ali, Goba, Personal interview with the researcher, 15-07-2014.
The common people in the area had to maintain the proper traditions of their respective villages, as their ancestors had been maintaining according to their customs and the law of the land. It was the prerogative of the goba and village folks to boycott the households; if they occupy the khalisa (community land) without dividing it among the village households. For instance in a Baroo village in Kargil, six households had been boycotted from all village obligations in early nineties. One of the respondents a ninety year old native of same village, he recalled: “In late nineties, we were dividing the traditional gair-abad (uncultivated barren land) land among the Baroo-pa (people of Baroo village) native people of our village”. He further adds “However, eight households had made illegal occupation of the village land without informing the goba. During the division of land people traced those households and warned them and told them to release the land immediately.” “However, after this initial warning two households gave-up their ownership on land but the other six households did not. We summoned the village committee meeting under the guidance of village goba and some village clerics. After the meeting, they passed the resolution, imposed fine on the illegal occupants, and dismissed them from the membership of village. Later after few years all the defaulted households had accepted their mistakes and paid the fine and handed over the land to village committee”. He further added, “during those days village gobas were strong in Kargil and hardworking person for the cause of village.\(^\text{58}\)

The village goba, in both the Muslims and Buddhists, with their respective committees, had always tried to solve the disputes within the village boundary. The types of disputes related with: marriage, stealing, divorce, cattle, public land, orchards, and pastures, land encroachments, debts, water disputes, village property and last but not least the modesty of women. In Muslim majority villages, goba, with some Shia’ clerics had been mediating and consulting with the respective complainants’ so that the disputes could be solved peacefully. However, in case of no mediation, their disputes were referred to highest Shia clerics of Islamia School Kargil (ISK) or Imam Khomeini’ Memorial Trust Kargil (IKMT). If the clerics too fail to resolve the issues then, the complainants may refer to, Chief Judicial Magistrate Kargil (CJM), for further legal mediation.

---

\(^{58}\) Akhun Hussain, Personal Interview with the researcher, 10-09-2015.
Communal Bonding Within the Village

The sense of communal bonding among various communities was the significant feature of the people of Kargil. In many villages, Muslims and Buddhists live together from centuries with cordial relationship. One of them is Mulbekh village; where both the communities were shared pleasant relations and always shared their happiness and grief together. Master Namgayal one of the famous local historian, he recalled: Mulbekh village is a symbol of communal brotherhood. Many politicians have tried to vitiate the communal bonding among villagers. But native people were always resisted and did their best to maintain social harmony. The village has been an example of brotherhood. He further said: In 1947-48 India Pakistan war, Pakistani armies occupied Ladakh (Kargil &Leh) for about six months; and hundreds of Pakistani army’ raided Mulbekh a Buddhist dominated village.59 The local Muslims saved their villagers Buddhist brothers from Pakistani raiders by sheltering them in their houses. Buddhists showed same reciprocity; when garja-pa, a military regiment of Indian army raided and tortured large number of Muslims in Kargil. They help each other in time of crisis. Such stories are the sign of mutual respect and brotherhood among the native villagers of Mulbekh in Kargil.60

Kuksho village is about 100 kilometre away from district headquarter. The village has a history of Muslim/Buddhist living together from centuries. In the particular village, there are matam-sarai (edifice of praying and mourning of the Shia Muslims), masjid and gonpa (monastery). In Kuksho village, Kargil a typical communal relationship between both the Muslims and Buddhists and both used to give the mixed name of Muslim and Buddhist to their new born. In 1988 Buddhist influence had been revived in contemporary Kuksho with the return of Buddhist Lama Stanzin to his native land after nineteen years of religious study in Nepal under Lama Padma Gyatso. Lama Stanzin’s father was the village’s first Haji (the title has been given who performed pilgrimage to Mecca) Haji Ghulam Ali. He was converted from Buddhism and his original name was Stanzin Puntsog. His brother was named Qasim and Tundup, one was Muslim and another was a Buddhist name, according to village customs, the eldest son of the family had a Muslim name and rest of others had mixed names such

60 Master Namgayal, Personal Interview with the researcher, 02-09-2015.
as Jaffar Tsering, Ali Namgayal, Angmobibi and Fatima Tsering. Kuksho village has been a rare example of brotherhood, communal harmony, social assimilation and the spirit of togetherness’ in the entire Kargil district.\(^\text{61}\)

In 1961 the border village of Kharboo in Kargil had both Shia and Sunni communities living in harmony. There were two mosques in the village both the sects prayed together in the two mosques simultaneously in their respective forms. The administration and the management of these mosques had not been vested to any committee. Whenever there was need of any repairs or construction, contributions were made from the inhabitants. Then some respectable person was requested to supervise the execution of the work. All religious affairs were observed amicably without any grudge among the two sects. The village was the example of honesty, brotherhood, sincerity and the feeling of togetherness\(^\text{61}\). \(^\text{62}\)

**Village level Medical Practitioners**

In Muslim dominated villages the local medical practitioners are (local Muslim health practitioner). In almost all Muslim majority villages in Kargil, the akhuns were performing various social and religious roles. They had been enjoying good social status within the society. They also treated patients suffering with different psychological and biological illnesses. It was a hereditary profession; usually after the death of father, his son would take the charge of the noble and respectable profession. Akhuns would recite Quranic verses and prayers in Arabic which include surah-yaseen\(^\text{63}\), dua-jawshan-kabir\(^\text{64}\), Surah-anbia\(^\text{65}\). He used to give taviz (amulet), to patients which was written prayers in Arabic and Persian. He was also prescribed the patients to read some specific verses of Holy Quran some patients were used to give white flowers and bunch of papers written with specific Arabic prayers, which could

---


\(^\text{63}\) Surah Yaseen is: 36th chapter of Quran. *Surah Yaseen* explains three main topics of Islam in Quran those are: *Tawheed* (Allah), *Risalah* (Prophet hood), *Aakhirat* (After the world), *Surah Yaseen* also explains these three topics beautifully; *Surah Yaseen* is also called the heart of Quran.

\(^\text{64}\) *Dua-Jawshani-Kabir*, is an large Islamic prayer. It has enclosed about the thousand names and qualities of ‘Allah’. Jawshan means ‘steel plate’ and the name of prayer refers to Prophet Muhammad’s sturdy armor in battle. According to Islam, Allah” introduced the prayer as a safeguard from attacks in war.

\(^\text{65}\) *Surah Anbia* is: the 21st chapter of the Quran with 112 verses.
be mixed with *Aab-zum-zum*\textsuperscript{66} as a medicine. The other method of treating the patients by *Akhuns* was to write Arabic prayers on the bark of a walnut tree which would be burned with coal and the patient was to inhale its smoke for few minutes. Some local herbal medicines were also used to treat the patients if someone in village felt sick; then *Akhuns* were called immediately. During personal interview with the researcher *Akhun* Ibrahim, he recalled: “since, 1988, I have been performing multiple tasks in my village and outside village, my first priority is always have been my village, I have been teaching Islamic elementary education to the children of my village, but my top priority is to treat the patients who have been suffering in different ailments, such as headache, stomach-ache, constipation, vomiting, pregnancy and psychiatric illness”. He further adds, treating the patients by reading proper Islamic monographs, which include Quranic verses and various other prayer books”.

In Buddhist villages in Kargil, they had their traditional Buddhist *amchi* (Tibetan Buddhist medical practitioner) they too had been enjoying good social status among the village people. It evolved based on native bio-herbal-resources, minerals and beliefs. *Amchis* being the medical specialist of ethno-medical system had been practicing their skill in the respective village and valleys from generations. There was no discrimination among Buddhists and Muslims as a patient, large number of Muslims too have been treating and cured by the traditional medical system of *amchis*. They usually treat diseases such as indigestion, chronic cold, fetid smell, burning sensation in body, chronic headache, paralysis, arthritis and inflammation of joint etc.,\textsuperscript{67} Muslims in Kargil too show a great respect and trust to the various health oriented rituals of Buddhist *amchis*. However, now the noble occupation of *amchis* are declining due to modern medical science and lacking interest of new generation, it needs to be revived by the efforts of respective village community and concerned government, so that the option of medical facilities could be continued for the people.

**Local Oracle-Healers**

Oracle-healer has been the conventional and cultural part of the identity of the people of Ladakh (Leh & Kargil). In some villages the oracle-healers, popularly known as *lha-ba* (male-oracle healer) and *lha-mo* (female oracle healer) both means “divine

\textsuperscript{66} The sacred well, *Zam-Zam*, is situated at the perimeter of the sacred complex of Mecca.

person” who exemplify holy spirits or deities during incantation practice. The oracle healer can be found in both Muslims and Buddhists villages.

**Buddhist Oracles**

In Buddhist community there were usually two types of oracle healers, one was monastic oracle healer and another was the village oracle healer. The monastic oracle healers would serve whole Buddhist community and village oracle healers practice for individuals. In contemporary period female oracle healers are more than men oracle healer in Ladakh (Kargil & Leh). The oracle healer performed rituals and some religious functions of curing and divination for sentient beings. They used to diagnose illness by measuring pulse.\(^68\)

They usually heal by imbibing virus or disease out from various portions of patient’s body and they do it through her/his mouth. Some of the oracle healers show all dirt which he/she brings out from patient’s body.\(^{69}\) Domestic animals, mainly cow, cattle, zoa, yak, were cured in the similar way as humans, with importance given on lapping out khaab (needle) and other disorder-causing objects from the animal’s stomachs.\(^70\)

Oracle healers used to go into trance by invoking Buddhist deities.\(^71\) They offer barley, water and chang (local barley liquor) to the divinities during the practice of invocation and trance, which they prompt and sustain by beating drums. Some time they also used incense, shug-pa (juniper) and oil seed during oracle practice. It is important to mention here that the trances of Buddhist oracles were not drug-incited. Certain oracles drink chang (local barley liquor) while the lha attain them, nonetheless, this was not considered the normal procedure, and its use was mainly not a requirement for achieving the invocation. They used to wear a special dress, which consisted of a five-pointed crown.\(^72\) Scarf around the head and the mouth, and katak (white ceremonial scarf) that are placed in the crown. They evoke deities near an altar, which was generally placed in the kitchen of their household. Some oracle healers

---


\(^{69}\) Ibid, pp. 198-200.

\(^{70}\) Ibid, p. 228.


\(^{72}\) Schenk Amelie, *op.cit.*, p. 225.
were displayed their skill by holding a hot iron knife and licking it with tongue without being hurt. Almost all oracle healers had stated no recollection of event concerning practises that was performed during the trance state after the lha have left them.\textsuperscript{73}

**Muslim Oracles**

Like Buddhist oracle healers there have been many Muslim oracle practitioner also in Kargil. Muslim oracle healers have very different method and technique to treat patients then Buddhists. One of the villages in Kargil named Lounchay has a Muslim lha-mo (female oracle healer) named Chocho Fatima. In comparison to the Buddhists the Muslim lha-mo are traditionally rare. She has been practicing the said profession from last eighteen years. From almost all parts of the district both male and female patients’ visit her house to treat various illnesses. Lha-mo can make predictions, besides that she has healing powers and can cure sick people and even animals. An enquiry has been made about her method and skill of treatment. She is respected in her village because of her expertise in oracle field. Explaining her unique position in village with researcher, Chocho Fatima said, “Fifteen years earlier in 1998 I had suffered certain health complications. Her family members consulted akhuns (local Muslim practitioner) and doctors, and they told her, that she had an acute psychiatric depression”. She further says “I usually fainted and lost consciousness. One day I fainted again and lost my consciousness. In the trance state a spirit emerged and asked me to chant elegies of Imam Hussain (grandson of Prophet Muhammad), Hazrat Zainab (Zainab was the daughter of Ali-bn Abu-talib and his wife Muhammad’s daughter Fatimah), Hazrati Fatima (Prophet Muhammad’s daughter). She adds, “I tried all those unconsciously; and later when I got out from trance state of mind; I found some inner-power entered my soul which is still with me. Khuda (God) has given me this inner power to help the sentient beings. Before that, I was illiterate; I did not know Urdu and Arabic, now I can read Holy Quran, recite prayers in Persian and Arabic and treat various diseases, especially psychiatric”.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{73} Frank Kressing, *op.cit.*, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{74} Chocho Fatima, Personal interview with the researcher, 10-08-2013.
Chocho Fatima’s appointment dates were usually Thursday and Friday. However, in emergency, she treats patients immediately. I observed, her process of treating patients, first she recited nimaz (Muslim prayer five times a day), and read Holy Quran, counted beads, used chest band written the name of Hazrat Zenab, and started lamenting in the memory of the family members of Imam Hussain, (Prophet’s grandson) whose family members were killed in the Battle of Karbala. She continuously recites all the martyrs’ names of Karbala, for about an hour as the patient remains in-front of her, sometime certain patients gets unconscious. After all these rituals, some family member of her brings grains, white lotus flower, barley, clean water and incense for fragrance. Like Buddhist oracle healers, she too had displayed her skills by holding hot iron dragger and touching it with tongue without being hurt. She treats various patients and also prescribes taviz (amulets with written Islamic prayers), and advises to perform various Islamic rituals to patients at home till the specific period of time. At home her family members used to take extreme care of her and they told me that she is not an ordinary woman. Family members have to keep all her relics and articles clean and pure. In her village too she was respected and performed her duty with dedication and honesty. In her village, few elders and when asked about Chocho Fatima, they praised her and she was revered in their society. An elderly man has told the researcher that she is special and all villagers have been respecting her unique God gifted skill.

In Kargil, usually every village is either Muslim or Buddhist; some households have been classified according to their customary duties and occupations. We can also see some specialization in specific skill, such as akhuns (Shia Muslim clerics educated locally), yul-i-mala (Muslim incumbent ritual observers, especially during birth and death), onpo (astrologer), amchi (Tibetan medical practitioner, usually Buddhists) tsong-pa (merchant), shain-khan (carpenter), garba (blacksmith), mon (musician), beda (wanderers musician), larje (physician), lorapa (watchman of fields) noar-lain-pa (butcher only Muslim villages), rarzi-pa (cattle herder), ranthaq-pa (local grinders), thaqs-khan (weaver) and lam-khan (cobbler).

75 Battle of Karbala was a military combat that happened on the Islamic calendar of 10 Muharram, 680 AD in Karbala in Iraq. The war was fought between the Prophets of Islam, led by Muhammad’s grandson Imam Hussain and the forces of Yazid I, the second Umayyad Khalifa. The battle is denoted as the episode which divided Sunnis and Shias in Islam.
Social Stratification among the Shia Muslims of Kargil

Social stratification has been a field of study among the social scientists of multiple subjects. It has an important research work in different disciplines such as Sociology, anthropology, history, economics, geography, human rights, political science and psychology etc., The term ‘social stratification’ has been borrowed from sociology which refers to a division of society into various tiers. However, sociological allegory has it specific ways and means. It cannot be used to generalize all others aspects of study.

According to Andre Beitelle “the arrangement of a persons in a society is enormously more complex than the arrangements of layers of the earth; and social strata are not visible, to the naked eyes in the way that geological strata are”. In generality social stratification is assume as inequality and social hierarchy existing within the larger framework of society among the individuals. In larger perspective social stratification is a division of particular society into number of strata and even hierarchical clusters too. All these clusters have been assumed large number of historical and cultural disparities, of which castes, classes and estates are common. Since, sixties attention has been paid on the gender and ethnic stratification too.76

In Islam caste system is non-existent. It has given every human being equal importance and no distinction can be made on the basis of birth, race, creed and colour etc. From the 15th century AD onwards, the people of Kargil and its neighbour Baltistan (now in Pakistan occupied Kashmir) started converting into Islam from their erstwhile religion of Buddhism. Some travellers reached Kargil via Baltistan travelling overland, many preachers from Iran spread Shia Islam’ peacefully. Earlier large people first became Nurbakshi under the influence of Syed Mohammad Nurbakshi. However, the majority of the population was converted into Shia by Syed Mir Shams-ud-din Iraqi from 16th century AD onwards. The same religion is still practised by the majority of the people of Kargil.77

In Kargili Muslim society Aghas\textsuperscript{78} had been honoured and respected because they are the descendants of Prophet Mohammad. They wear a black turban and usually black tunic touching their feet. Sheikhs are local Shia clerics who completed their religious education from Iraq or Iran wear white turbans. Aghas had a good esteem in the society because they were well versed in theology like Quran and Islamic laws. Their society was an orthodox Muslim society. The common people had always showed respect to those who were morally and socially connected with religion. Shia Muslim population of Kargil can be put in the following hierarchical order: Aghas (Saayid clergy, descendants of Prophet Mohammad, usually Studied in Iraq or Iran), Sheikhs (non- Saayed local clerics usually studied in Iraq or Iran), Kachos (descendants of medieval royal families), Akhuns (they have educated locally under the guidance of Aghas and Sheikhs), Hajjis (pilgrims who performed Islamic rituals in Mecca, Saudi-Arabia), Saaget (peasant).

\textit{Aghas (Sayyids)}

The Aghas or Sayyids were less as compared to its total population. They are usually found in both Shia and Sunni sect of Islam. Aghas hold the supreme position and respect in the Muslim society in Kargil district. They are the descendants of Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatimah-al-Zahra and were scattered in many parts of the world due to their missionary activities during the early days of Islam. In India, lots of them came with the Muslim invaders during medieval period. In Kargil, the population of Aghas were scattered in various villages. However, in Suru valley their numbers were more than any other parts of Kargil.

In Suru valley of Kargil, Aghas have been revered by respective villagers with utmost respect. In social, religious, cultural and even in political field the Aghas had been playing an important role. In every village, the gobha, (village headman) with proper consultation with Aghas, usually issued their decisions concerning the seasonal activities related with respective villages. The village headman used to take Aghas, into confidence all the time in Kargil. Without the consent of Aghas social and religious dictates were not possible and would not accepted by villagers. Sridhar Kaul, in his book, ‘\textit{Ladakh through the Ages towards New Identity}’ writes about the Aghas:

\textsuperscript{78}Aghas (Saayids) is a male descendant of Hashim, the great grandfather of Prophet Mohammad.
The people of Suru are passionately devoted to their religion; they regard their religious leaders, the agas, all of whom is the law for a Shia. The cult of ceremonial cleanliness, an essential part of their faith, as observed by them is unique. The touch of non-Muslim used to defile all fluids and even solids with a wet surface, oil, water, butter, milk and such other things passing through the hands of a Buddhists or a Hindu, even though their substances might have been contained in air tight receptacles, were an anathema to the devout Shia’ and this applied even to a chunk of meat exhibited in butcher shop or a cut melon and, inadvertently touched by an unwary non-Muslim customer, who would witness the edibles thus polluted by him. There was a time no Shia would use liquid medicines dispensed by hospitals. Agas all of whom are the Sayyids, with reverence which had no limit and, perhaps, no parallel in any part of the world.\textsuperscript{79}

According to general Islamic perception all the progeny of Prophet Mohammad through his daughter Jinab-Fatima will receive respect for forever. This intimacy of Sayyids with Prophet Muhammad gives them a higher status in the social hierarchy of Muslims in Kargil. In Kargil majority of the Aghas traced their genealogical descent with Mir Shams-ud-din Iraqi who had relation with Imam-Moosa-Kazim in twenty six descending generation.\textsuperscript{80} Hence, they were known as Moosavi Sayyids.\textsuperscript{81} Aghas who had completed a long stint of theistic learning in the Islamic madrasas in Iran and Iraq used to lead the masses on the direction of rectitude on their return. Their entitlement of the descendants of Prophet and religious knowledge; they had usually enjoyed high religious and social status in their society. Aghas were eligible to get a Maale-Saadat, portion of the khums, (one–fifth tax in Islam) which every Shia household had to be paid at the rate of 1/5th of the total income at specific period in once each year.\textsuperscript{82} The khums levy was divided into two parts first is Maale-Saadat and second is Maale-Imam. Maale-Saadat is again divided into two parts, from it one part goes to Aghas and other part is donated for Islamic madrasas. In the same way Maale-Imam was also divided into two parts one goes to widows, orphans, destitute, poor and other economically weak ones and second half goes to mujtahids.\textsuperscript{83}

In Kargil Aghas had been performing a diverse role in their respective villages and even in district level. In important religious and private ceremonies their presence was important, such as Mohhram, Eid, birth ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, funeral ceremonies, reciting prayers during foundation of new houses, setting


\textsuperscript{80} Kacho Sikandar Khan, \textit{op.cit.}, p-571.

\textsuperscript{81} B.R Rizvi, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 26.


\textsuperscript{83} The representative of the Imam-Mehdi, the contemporary living 12th Imam-al-Mehdi.
foundation of mosques, child circumcision, distribution of *khums*, interpretation of *Sharia’* (Islamic law), distribution of public land, performance of Islamic rituals in Mecca and shrines of Imams etc., The historical and highly revered *Aghas* of Kargil were: Saayid Hussain Lounchay, Saayid Ibrahim Shah, Saayid Mehdi Gongma, Saayid Hussain Saliskote, Sayyid Mohmmad Tambis, Sayyid Abass Tambis, Sayyid Haadi Mangalpor, Sayyid Baqir Suru, Sayyid Raza Suru and Sayyid Jaffar Shah Lounchay were prominent. These prominent Aghas had been playing important role in the propagation, preaching, and spread of Shia philosophy in Kargil. They played important role in the establishment of Islamia School Kargil in 1956. In Kargil, the death anniversaries of above mentioned *Aghas* have been commemorating every year.\(^{84}\)

**Sheikhs**

In Kargil *Skeikhs* were enjoyed the status of second number in the social hierarchy after *Aghas*. The title of *Sheikh* was achieved, as he may belong to any section of society in Shia community in Kargil. He could become respected *Ulema* (Muslim cleric) by the virtue of his hard work, commitment and the understanding and inclination towards Islamic thoughts. The first step to become a *Sheikh* was to study in *maktabs* (Islamic elementary school) and then *madrasas* (Islamic higher education centres). For higher education most of the aspirants used to go Iran and Iraq in various institutions such as Al-Mustafa International University, Tehran which has given the award degree certificates.\(^{85}\) Presently there are about 500 *Sheikhs* in Kargil.

The important Muslim organization working in Kargil, since 1950 is Islamia School Kargil (ISK). In 1989, another Muslim organization was founded Imam Khomeini Memorial trust, Kargil (IKMT).\(^{86}\) Both the organizations offer religious education among the selected candidates and train students for higher learning in Iran and Iraq. After the completion of higher studies *Sheikhs* have to come back to Kargil and guide the common people on religious matters. The organizations had complete jurisdiction on these *Sheikhs*. It had been deputing all *Sheikhs* to different parts of Kargil, where they guide people in religious matters, run *madrasas* and also work as prayer

---

monitors. While remembering his return from Iraq, Sheikh Hassan, has recalled: “In 1960, I had started my journey from Kargil to Iraq, we travelled by horse from Kargil to Srinagar, and in Srinagar we completed all the formalities of passport and visas. After that we left for Bombay and from Bombay we boarded a ship to Basra port of Iraq. After twelve days and twelve nights journey we reached Basra port. The travel fare for round trip was Rs. 390. We got admission in Islamic Institution Najaf. However, in 1975, due to Saddam Hussain the then President of Iraq, had followed the persecution policy against the Shias’ all scholars were forcefully thrown out of the Iraq. Thousands of Sheikhs came back to Bombay and then back to Kargil. After that I was not able to go again for higher studies. In some villages in Kargil on the expense of their respective villagers, usually sent talented poor family boys to Middle-East for the learning of Islamic theology. So that it could be guaranteed that they learn to conduct life cycle rituals in their village.

In every Shia dominated village, the Sheikh’s role is vital, in almost all religious and social ceremonies. The important Islamic rites and rituals used to perform by Sheikh according to his knowledge and intellectual ability. He could mediate and solve social and property disputes too. In the absence of Aghas all village social obligations such as distribution of khums (Islamic specific tax) were done by the Sheikhs in Kargil.

Moreover, Sheikhs had to deliver sermon in the month of mohhram (Islamic month of mourning in the memory of Imam Hussain) and ramzan (Islamic holy month of fasting). The proper distribution of khums was the responsibility of few chosen Sheikhs called, Hakim-I-Sharah, he had to be chosen by mujtahid (a person who has attained the level of authority in Islamic law). He used to take utmost care to distribute khums to all the deserving people, which include poor, destitute, schools, bridges and roads etc. Besides imparting doctrinal philosophy and performing ritual services, since 1980s they have also been an instrument for social change in Kargil. This has been highlighted by ideological positions and dialogues circulating within a transnational Shia realm.

The poor Sheikhs were get some parts of khums. There were some highly respected Sheikhs of Kargil, they had been playing huge role in the dissemination and

88 Ibid. p. 10.
establishment of religious ideas in every corner of the Kargil. In late fifties, they established a seminary named Islamia School Kargil, its students contributing in their society immensely. The institution functions in all spheres like religious, social, educational and economic they were Sheikh Mohammad Mufeed, Sheikh Rahmatullah, Sheikh Nassir-ud-din, Sheikh Abdul-Rehman, Sheikh Ghulam Hussain, Sheikh Ali Naqi and Sheikh Mohmmad Ali. All these had been played important role to the transformation of Shias in Kargil.

Kachos

The progenies of medieval Muslim ruling families are known as Kachos in Kargil. During medieval period Kargil had been divided into small principalities till 17th century. Luciano Petech in his book ‘The Kingdom of Ladakh’ mentioned about the four Muslim chiefs of Purig (ancient name of Kargil) Pashkym, Sod, Suru and Drass. However, after the conquest of Dogra army in 1842 AD the families were assigned the duties of zildari (land holders) and remained till the title was abolished in 1950 by Jammu and Kashmir government. Nevertheless, these families lost their political power and prestige, which they had possessed earlier. But despite that their descendants are respected in villages. Of course, they are highly qualified and economically well off.

Akhuns

In Kargili Muslim society Akhuns were hereditary priests. Their religious duty was usually limited to their respective village. However, the Akhuns’ specializes in giving charms, amulets and trinkets to prevent and treating various symptoms, his service could be taken all over. Unlike Sheikhs and Aghas, Akhuns’ would not need to wear any formal religious dress. Akhuns were usually educated locally in madrasas imparted by Sheikhs. They used to learn Persian and Arabic and used to perform small religious rituals in their respective village. In the absence of Sheikhs, Akhuns used to take command of all social and religious obligations. All life cycle rites within the village had to be performed by Akhuns, such as circumcision, Eid prayers, teaching in maktabs (Muslim elementary schools), and send-off and receive the Hajj pilgrims by

---

90 BR Rizvi, *op.cit.*, p.43.
chanting some Quranic verses. These were and still the major tasks of Akhuns, for these practices he had to be paid by respective households. In every village, almost one or two Akhuns reside to fulfil their duties.

**Hajis**

Hajis mean those who visited ‘House of Allah’ the ‘Kabah’ in Mecca in Saudi Arabia and performing the prescribed rituals there. It is wajib (obligatory) are those people who are economically well off. The Hajj practice is one of the five duties prescribed in Islam. Hajis are respected in their society because of the performance of obligatory rituals. To perform Hajj pilgrimage the obligations and conditions are: balig (being of the age of legal responsibility), being sane and free person, on the account of going Hajj, one must not be compelled to commit an unlawful act which is more important to avoid then performing Hajj, he must have enough time to perform rituals of Hajj and he must be able to meet the living expenses of those whose maintenance is obligatory on him, such as his spouse and children. These are the basic criteria before setting off for Hajj. In Kargil The word, ‘Hajji’ is prefixed with the name of the individual, due to his successful pilgrimage of Mecca.\(^91\) If any Muslim has fulfilled all socio-religious and economic conditions, then it is wajib (obligatory) on them to perform hajj rituals. Whatever, his or her occupation whether farmer, contractor, cobblers, artisan, carpenter, labourers etc.\(^92\)

In Kargil generally Hajj were done by economically well off in the society as to perform pilgrimage to Mecca. The economically weaker section of society such as farmers, labourer, carpenters, masons, smiths and cobbler saves throughout their life with the aim of pilgrimage atleast once in life time to the revered ‘Kabah’ (house of Allah) and the shrines of Prophet Muhammad and Imams. In the last step of hierarchy in the Muslims society of Kargil were various types of artisans.\(^93\) These were Garba (iron smith) Lamkhun (cobbler) Champo-pa (tailors) Thaqskan (weaver) Rantaq-pa (millers) Shinkhan (carpenter) Shipkun (mason), Chunpa-pa (time bound cultivator) Mon (drummers) and Beda (wanderers)\(^94\)

---


\(^93\) BR Rizvi, *op.cit.*, p.44.


73
In Kargil, the occupational specialization was not based on the criteria of ethnicity, as any person can go to Hajj and practice any specialization as Hajji may also specialize in *garba* (smith) as in case of Hajji Fida Hussain. He has been in the profession of smith from last thirty years and had performed his Hajj pilgrimage in 2004. There was no differentiation among the various strata of the society. The only basis of strata, thus appear to be the direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad. This has been the reason why various professionals find a place on different rungs on the hierarchical ladder.

The Muslim clerics of Kargil have been preaching equality of all human being irrespective of his or her social and economic background. However, in many places the psychology of the people is still orthodox, such as the remote village of Hardas in Kargil: in 1996 a native of Nepal named Akash Bahadur, embraced Islam by the name of Zakir Hussain in Hardas village. He formally performed all rituals by the guidance of cleric. Later, he was married with Nargis from same village, their *nikah* (Muslim marriage contract prayers) were ritualized by Sheikh Abdul Karim. The Islamia School Kargil had given him some financial assistance. However, after fifteen years of conversion to Islam, he has some complaint against the villagers. While talking with the researcher, He says, “I did not get that respect which I deserve, now no one is supporting me and I am facing social segregation sometimes I facing the challenge of identity crisis, socially I am personally wanted to indulge in all activities of the village” ⁹⁵. In every village, the remuneration to the artisans who provided service to the respective villagers would be given in both cash and kind. In respective village after the proposed work were finished, the artisan informed the concerned households about the completion of specific work. The artisans received barley, grim, wheat, wool, coal, and cow dung for fuel, fodder and even some time cattle.

**Social Stratification among the Buddhist in Kargil**

Buddhism does not recognize caste system; all human beings are equal in the eyes of *Kunjuk* (God). In Kargil Buddhist, society had been categorized into three main classes. The upper class ‘*Rig-zang*’(upper class) includes *Gyalpo* (king), *Kalon* (prime

⁹⁵ Zakir Hussain, personal interview with the researcher, 5-08-2014.
minister) and Lonpo (governor). ‘Mang-rig’ (middle class) includes Lamas (monks) Thon-po (ploughman, farmer), Onpos (astrologers), Larje (physician) and common man. The lower class or ‘Rigs-nan’ includes Beda (musicians), Mon (musicians), and Gara (blacksmiths). The word ‘rigs’ means class or rank.\(^{96}\)

**Rig-Zang (Upper Class)**

In 16th century AD, during the period of Namgayal dynasty Ladakh (Kargil & Leh) had been demarcated into various small districts each district was headed by petty ruler called Gyalpo (petty ruler of small territories). The structure of society was thoroughly feudalistic in nature with the different strata of the social line clearly marked. On the top was Gyalpo the lineal descendent of the local monarch who was once the ruler of the land. However, when the dynasty came to an end there were some petty chiefs left all theoretically entitled Gyalpo. These were the Gyalpo of Zangla and Gyalpo of Padum situated in Zangskar tehsil of Kargil district. There were other Gyalpos of Henas-ku and Mulbekh.

In 1842 AD the Dogra ruler of Jammu Gulab Sing (1792-1857) occupied the entire Ladakh (Kargil & Leh) region.\(^{97}\) The property of the Gyalpos was reduced to a jagir (estate) and all their political powers were seized. The situation remained unaltered, under indirect British rule, and remained same even after independence. In Buddhist society, the progenies of Gyalpos had been respected just according to their tradition and custom. Gyalpos were considered the member of the upper strata of their society.

Kalon’s office was almost hereditary; it was limited to a member of the same family. The selection of Kalon was decided by royal favour or greater popularity and exceptional talent. Kalon was in actual charge of districts, could assemble and act as a sort of advisory council to the government.\(^{98}\) They had their own area where they collected revenue, administered justice and had military duties. Kalon was entitled, by custom to receive the offerings of the first crop harvested and of the first local beer brewed in their native places. The progeny of Kalons were noticed in many villages of Kargil, especially in Buddhist dominated villages. They had been receiving some respect permitting the law of the land.

---


\(^{97}\) Ibid, p.2.

\(^{98}\) Luciano Petech, *op. cit.*, p.156.
Lon-po had been entrusted with certain tasks; some of them were governors of petty kingdoms, they were given the post of manager in the royal court. The position of Lon-po was hereditary. In social functions Lon-po was given proper respect and they were always counted among higher layer of Buddhist society. Few descendants of Lon-po could be found in Zangskar, Chiktan, Bodhkharbu, Mulbekh, Shargol and Fokar villages in Kargil. In contemporary Buddhist society, the progeny of Gyal-po, Kal-on and Lon-po have been venerated in their respective villages. It is because of their customary positions and titles.

**Mang-rigs (Middle Class)**

Mang-rig or the middle class includes Lamas (monks) Thon-po (ploughman, farmer), Onpos (astrologers), Amchi (physician) and common person. Lamas (monks) are the most important element of Buddhist society. Lamas could be drawn from any social group. Almost every village monastery bigger or smaller subjected to the importance and reputation of its residential Lamas. The larger monastic institutions possessed a significant number of Lamas each with number of branches. The small sized village temples in almost all Buddhist villages of Ladakh (Kargil & Leh) accordingly possess only a few Lamas. The Lamas were graciously honoured by the ordinary people as they were the important components of their society. The duties of Lamas were not only limited to practising meditation and observing rituals in monasteries. Their presence was obligatory at the rituals of births, deaths, marriages and other social, religious and traditional customs. Their main profession was monkhood but they also work as teachers and physicians. Most of the Lamas worn maroon clothes with sleeves and long gown, secured by a red girdle. They generally have their heads shaved. The senior Lamas wear semi circular maroon or yellow caps. Presently there are hundreds of Lamas in Kargil district performing their obligatory religious duties in different monasteries in Zangskar, Mulbekh, Bodhkharbu and Shargole.

In Buddhist society On-pos (astrologers) had an important status in their respective places. They had been practicing their said profession from many generations. On-pos used to give insight and predicted about the life such as health, prosperity, family, friends, spouse, children, career, education, marital relations and birth to death. The

---

setting and arrangement of the planets and constellations during the exact time of birth was carefully studied using ancient Tibetan system of arithmetic. The remedial measures were given in the form of personal prayers and amulets. In Buddhist dominated villages in Kargil, he could be consulted in all important occasions.

The conventional herbal practitioner Amchi (Tibetan herbal medical practitioner) was counted in middle the rank of Buddhist society. In every Buddhist village in Kargil, the traditional practitioner Amchi had been enjoying good social status. Being the medical specialist of ethno-medical system which had been passed down by their respective ancestors from generations, the Amchi had to perform his duties as local doctor. In villages, the patients could knock his door any time day or night. In emergency cases, he treats the patients at his home. There was no discrimination among Buddhists and Muslims as patient, along with Buddhists large number of Muslims were treated and cured by the traditional medical system of Amchis. They usually treat diseases such as indigestion, chronic cold, fetid smell, burning sensation in body, headache, paralysis, arthritis, inflammation of joint.

In villages, the patients could knock his door any time day or night. In emergency cases, he treats the patients at his home. There was no discrimination among Buddhists and Muslims as patient, along with Buddhists large number of Muslims were treated and cured by the traditional medical system of Amchis. They usually treat diseases such as indigestion, chronic cold, fetid smell, burning sensation in body, headache, paralysis, arthritis, inflammation of joint.

The ordinary farmer and ploughman were also the part of Mang-rigs (middle class). They had their own ancestral land and other properties and were self-sufficient in agricultural productions. The ordinary farmers had been cultivating barley, wheat, millet and different varieties of vegetables and fruits. They used to participate in all important social and religious ceremonies of village. The significant contributions of farmers were annual contribution of agricultural products to monasteries in their respective villages and region.

**Rigs-nan (Low Caste)**

Rigs-nanis the last edge of the social hierarchy in Buddhist society in Kargil. In reality they were separated from the rest of the people. In social function, they used to sit aside in the row or on the ground near the door. Moreover, food and drinks were served to them separately in their own glass and plates. This sternness was due to their ideas of impurity based on physical contact with rigs-nan and was avoided by common Buddhists. No one would take a food or drinks prepared by them or in their utensils. The rigidness was un-thinkable; nobody would wear their clothes, sleep in their bedding or have any sexual relations with them. Breaching the anathema would

---

deem to downfall into their class. Inside the low caste layer, the three pyramid units were further differentiated these three. They were endogamous, ‘caste like’ groups were, from high to low: the gar-ba, the mon, and the be-da.

**Gar-ba (Smith)**

In the social strata of Buddhist community in Kargil, gar-ba was considered impure. Gar-ba belongs to a village, i.e. they own land, houses and cattle as like other common villagers, and with them they had good relations involving rights and obligations. The gar-ba make arrow heads, iron chopper, dicer, knives, sickles, stoves, grass cutter, silver polishing the utensils, repair all agricultural tools, all kinds of pans and pots. When a baby would born in the house of gar-ba, the baby was given a small arrow and bow, and iron armlet if it is girl. In all these services gar-ba was not paid in cash. He was used to pay in kind such as some foodstuff, and at the harvest period, he usually collected some grains from respective households.

**Mon (Musician or Carpenter)**

According to common perception of the Buddhist of Kargil, they consider Mons as the original inhabitants of Ladakh. Hasmatullah Khan had stated: “They are Aryans and settled there before the arrival of the Tibetan and the Dard ethnic groups in Ladakh. They are believed to have come from Karja in Himachal and resided in Ladakh. S.S Gergan says they are of Astro-Asiatic origin”. Mons specialise in carpentry and music as well. In Zangskar tehsil of Kargil district where mons were absent, commoners play the drums with liveliness and joy. The main job of Mons was playing music in different social ceremonies. Like their counterpart gar-ba, mons own dwellings, land, and livestock in their respective villages. Their payments were often made in kind. They would do carpentry work within the jurisdiction of village. They were treated as inferior caste as the gar-ba. A mon cannot become Lama. In some Muslim dominated villages in Kargil, we could find some Muslim mons. These families are holding good position in their villages, unlike Buddhist mons.

---

107 Ferry Erdmann, *op.cit.*, p. 152.
Be-da (Wanderers)

There is a different interpretation of the beda of Kargil. The literal meaning of beda, is derived from the Tibetan word be’ and da’. Be’ refers to separately and da’ means reside. Thus, beda means to reside separately. In local belief, it is considered that bedas were the inhabitants of Lahul and Spiti and had moved to Ladakh, long time before Mons.\textsuperscript{110} In some villages, Muslim bedas are also found. However, there were some degree of variations between Muslim and Buddhist bedas. Muslim bedas have permanent houses whereas Buddhist bedas were wandering minstrels. The bedas roam from village to village and beat their traditional drum infront of the house and procure flour and money in return.\textsuperscript{111} In their society, they were treated as menials and outcastes.

\\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., p. 216.