

Brok-pa of Ladakh: A Case of Adaptation to Habitat

Veena Bhasin

Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, Delhi 110 007, India

KEY WORDS Ecology, Habitat, Adaptation, Brok-pa, Ladakh, Culture, Economy.

ABSTRACT This paper chiefly aims at analyzing the structure and process of adaptation by the natives of a high altitude village to the cold environment. The data is based on the information collected through a fieldwork carried out in the Bema village of Leh district of Ladakh division, which is situated 3,000 meters above sea level. The natives are Dards, believed survivors of the pure Aryan race, known as Brok-pa (Highlander). The area is characterized by extremely low precipitation, intense and prolonged sun shine and cold winters. The food, people eat, their clothing, their houses and the way they interact socially is affected by the ecological conditions prevailing in the area. The economy of the people rests around agriculture and animal husbandry. The analysis of adaptation process to adverse ecological conditions has been supplemented with a brief ethnographic profile of the people.

Adaptation to the cold desert environment of Ladakh has been studied among Brok-pa of Dah-Bema in the following pages. Ladakh is an isolated high-altitude (3600 meters) desert that has a climate characterized by extremely low precipitation, intense and prolonged sunshine and cold winters. In summer, the land is parched and dry; in winter, it is frozen solid by a fierce, unrelenting cold. Ladakh's steep, mountainous terrain makes ground transportation difficult. The roads connecting the region to the rest of the India are closed because of snow for six to eight months per year. The inhabitants of Ladakh live primarily in small villages scattered over a vast region. The region is extremely poor in conventional energy sources (fossil, fuels and wood). In this barren wilderness, nothing grows wild. Few shrubs in some areas and hardly a blade of grass, and has almost no industrially exploitable resources.

Over the centuries, the Ladakhis have adapted well to these conditions, and have developed a rich culture and a traditional economy in harmony with the environment and providing an ample material existence. Channelling water down from snow-fed streams they have formed oasis in the desert. The availability of water varies

greatly with location, season and even time of day. Villages have been found where water runs down from melting snow or glaciers, or along the major rivers. Ladakhis have traditionally managed biomass resources efficiently. Biomass provides food, fodder and building material in addition to energy. The traditional Ladakhi economy is based on local self sufficiency for basic needs, and is characterised by low level of monetisation. The existing co-operative social organisation; co-operation in sharing water and agricultural work, and settling disputes, has been a way of life for centuries. Villages are governed by a headman and village council chosen by the villagers. Water use is regulated by an elected "Churpan" and villages are divided into groups of co-operating households, known as "Phaspan" that share resources for religio-cultural activities.

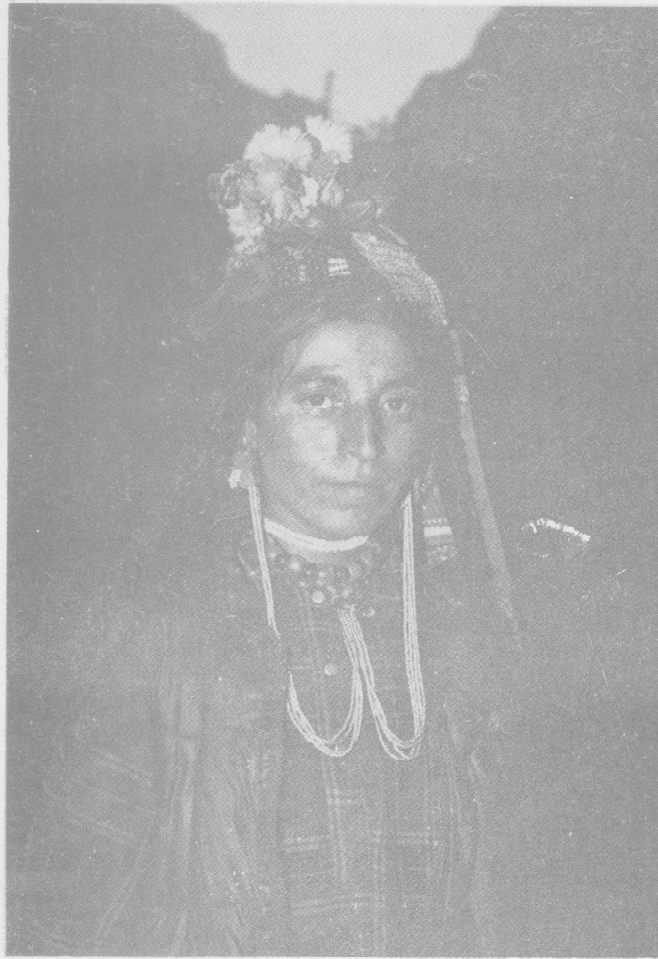
Some 130 kilometers north-east of Kargil, there are villages of Dah-Bema, Hano (Hano Goma and Hano Yogma), Darchik and Garkon, situated on the northern bank of Indus on the road to Baltistan, inhabited by Dards. It is believed these Dards are survivors of the pure Aryan race who came from the mountain of Gilgit and Astor from the north-west. The inhabitants of these vil-

lages, who are known to themselves and their neighbours as Brok-pa, are about 1920 in all (Census of India, 1981). The word Brok means to Tibetan a high pasture-land and Brok-pa must mean a 'High-lander' (Drew, 1875, pp. 433). The Brok-pa inhabiting these villages are Buddhists. All other Dard groups are Muslims and are settled in few villages in Ladakh (Dras village) and in north of Kashmir in Gurials and Tilel. The Muslim Dards from Marol in Baltistan to the Buddhist Dards in Ladakh formed a contiguous line along the Indus. They were split up during the 17th century when the border between Ladakh and Baltistan were demarcated at Gur-Gur-Do. The Buddhist Brok-pa Dard villages have once again in the last few years been subjected to an arbitrary jurisdictional division as subject of Leh District and Kargil Tehsil. Administratively Dah-Bema and Hano are in Leh District and Darchik and Garkon are in Kargil Tehsil resulting in Buddhist influence in the earlier and Muslim influence in the latter bringing changes among the growing generation. Buddhist Brok-pa speak an off-shoot of Dardic linguistic group. In Brokland today, as in other parts of India, the everyday reality is the presence of many languages. It is normal to speak different languages in different spheres of life in India. Brok-pa speak *Brok-skad* at home or with neighbours, Ladakhi with people from other villages, Urdu with army-men and outsiders, broken English with tourists, hum latest tunes from Hindi films, read Urdu and say their prayers in Bodhi and Shina.

The Brok-pa form a distinctive cultural ethnic community nestled in central Ladakh on a off-beat track. They have preserved in their language and social customs many archaic traits of their Aryan forefathers through endogamy and oral tradition. Ethnically, they have no relationship with the Mongoloid-Tibetan strain, otherwise dominant in Ladakh. Surrounded by other ethnic groups on all sides, Ladakhis, Purigpas and Baltis, they are able to preserve certain archaic traits of language, dress and culture. Though, nominally they are Buddhist, their Buddhism

does not conform with the Buddhism of rest of the Ladakh. Their acceptance of Buddhism is superficial. All Buddhism has been able to accomplish is to provide prayer ritual for birth, marriage and death ceremonies. At present there is one lama in Dah village and prior to him there was one more. Dainelli (1925) during his visit to Da in 1913-14, while sketching the Da Gompa, enquired about the faith of the local inhabitants and they did not report themselves as Buddhists. Their real worship is that of local spirits or demons. They have their own dispute solving mechanism and special religious ceremonies. Till now, they have been able to maintain their seclusion and closed system by endogamous marriages, either from within the village or from the neighbouring Buddhist Dard villages. Outsiders are not welcome in the village premises as Brok-pa are scared of pollution.

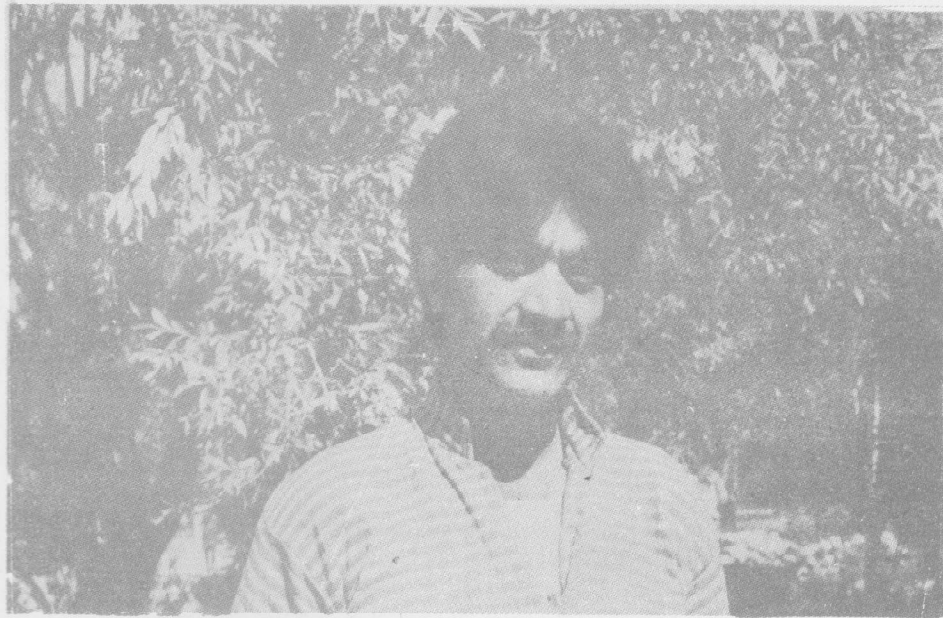
The Brok-pa have a dress which is distinctive. They have a unique head-dress and going without which is considered to be unrespectable. It consists of a woollen cap decorated with wild flowers and beads. Three types of coloured flowers are used. An all season red flower belonging to berry species is a must. They pluck them and let the berry inside the multi-dimensional cover dry in the sun and stock them. With a strong thread they tie five of them with a sixth in the middle. It gives a appearance of big, red flower. Traditional Brok-pa are not seen without this 'flower' which they wear the year round, and replaces it only after its colour fades. The cap has also stuck on to it coins and other metal pieces that they find and pins and needles which are supposed to be symbol of friendship. They wear metallic earings. Some people were found to be wearing earings made of buttons tied-together and were stretched over the ears. Traditional Brok-pa irrespective of age and sex wear pig-tails. They never comb or wash their hair. As their hair grow they are tied in pig-tails and whatever hair breaks, they are collected to be used in the pig-tails. Brok-pa wear a short tunic and narrow trouser over which they wear a long coat. Women are fond of ornaments. Almost every



Brokpa Woman



Brokpa Women in their kitchen



Brokpa Men



Brokpa Girls

women wears a pendant in the form of a copper disc around her neck.

These days the younger generation has craze for cotton clothes, jeans, jackets etc.

The reason for retaining their *Brok-skad* or Gasho (as they call it) language, distinctive dress, head-dress and cultural and racial purity is that they remained isolated in these inaccessible mountain valleys for a long time. These Brok-pa villages were avoided both by the expeditionary forces of the 18th century as well as by traders due to the harsh ecological conditions of the area. These Dards of Dah-Bema have retained their ancient religion *Bon-chos* and much of what may be assumed to be their ancient way of life. Even while adopting new customs in reference to religion, they adopted Buddhism diluted with remnants of the *Bon-Chos*.^{*} The chortens and Mani walls of Buddhists are not seen here and there are few monks in the area. There is a peculiarity of manners most strange and curious among Brok-pa. They hold the cow in abhorrence. They will not drink cow's milk, nor do they eat or make butter from it. They do not even burn cow-dung—the most commonly used fuel. They do not breed fowls, nor do they eat their eggs. Both fowls and cows are offensive to their *Lhas* (gods). They dread and almost completely avoid washing. For ceremonial purification they burn the fragrant twigs of Juniper (*Brok-skad-Chillgi*: Tibetan-*Skuk-pa*). They never wash clothes, until these are torn.

There is some change among young generation about washing and bathing. It is true that during the long cold months of winter there is little inclination to take a bath, while in summer some Brok-pa have started taking bath. Clearly, a hundred years ago cleanliness was a luxury few could afford, with improvement in standard of living and spread of education it is no longer so.

^{*}*Bon-chos* A blanket term for the religion prevailing in Tibet before Buddhism, probably embraced many cults varying from place to place. Pantheistic and shamanistic, probably included the cult of ancestors. Various elements taken over by Tibetan Buddhism (Rizvi, Janet, 1983).

living and spread of education it is no longer so.

The Brok-pa is an occupational term, associated with pasturing. There are certain other villages surrounding this area; Achinathang, Skurbuchan and along the upper reaches of Dhumkhar, the inhabitants of these villages are also called Brok-pa, but are culturally no different from other Ladakhis. The Brok-pa Dards are an endogamous group, who have avoided social interaction with outsiders. The self identity feeling is so strong among Brok-pa Dards that they never felt the need to identify themselves with any name, but they associated themselves with their village name. Brok-pa have a sense of superiority *vis-a-vis* the other Ladakhis. The constant endeavour to maintain their identity arises from their attempt to monopolize the economic resources of the area without outside interference. The environment is so harsh that even a small advantage is tenaciously held on to. This necessitates their keeping a social distance from the other Ladakhis.

In this part of the central Ladakh the bottom of the Indus valley is a narrow rock bound gorge. The river flows in it with an eddied but not uneven surface. The walls of this gorge are nearly vertical, above them rise over steep but more broken cliffs of granitic rocks. Over this rocky ground the path is so difficult that a laden horse cannot go along it. In earlier times using traditional methods it was not possible to construct a track. This difficulty of the track isolated these villages from intercourse with other areas as well as prevented the traffic between Ladakh and Baltistan from taking this route.

This is the lowest and the warmest part of Ladakh. The level of the river is about 3,000 meters but even at this height the valley in summer time is hot. The unclouded Sun heats the bare rocks. The person is subjected on one side to direct sunlight and secondly, from strong radiation from grounds. The villages are at the mouth of ravine with a few acres of flat-land for their cultivation. Because of ecological conditions, Brok-pa remained largely undisturbed and unknown to all barring few scholars and explorers till mid-1970s.

Drew (1875) has given an interesting short account of Brok-pa, describing them as casteless unlike other Dard communities. In 1907, A.H. Francke conducted the most exhaustive study among Brok-pa. He has studied all the 18 hymnals of these people which are sung during their traditional festivals describing their origin, their ancestors and cultural traits. Heber and Heber (1926) published their experiences of 12 years spent in the Ladakh, with a description of its people, culture and religion, of the rigours of the climate, its fauna and flora have described some interesting facts about Brok-pa. Dr. Michel Peissel (1984) undertook research in these areas about the origin of the Brok-pa or the 'Minaro' as he prefers to call them. Dr. Peissel work has been criticised for the selective treatment of the sources from which he got information. "Some of his observations made without quoting any authority are strutting", (cited from Book Review by Janet Rizvi and G.M. Kakpori in *India. International Centre Quarterly* 1984). E. Joldan (1985) has described the Harvest Festival of Buddhist Dards of Ladakh. Rohit Vohra (1988) in his book 'The Religion of the Dards in Ladakh' has investigated their pre-Brok-pa traditions. According to him the inhabitants claimed to have inherited the Minaro traditions. They relate that their Chiefs Gil Singe and Gapo had to kill many Minaro to restore peace in the area. They later married the Minaro women and have inherited the Minaro Traditions. The Bono-na festival is one such tradition. The present inhabitants claim that they belong to the same stock and that the Minaro had also in ancient times migrated from Gilgit as is evident from the songs.

Two factors-improvement in the means of transportation and opening up of Ladakh for tourists has contributed to the exposure of these people to outsiders. Tourists still are not freely allowed to visit these secluded areas without an innerline permit from the Deputy Commissioner of Ladakh. After the completion of the strategic military road from Khaltse bridge to Kargil via Brok-land, this isolation is breaking up. Brok-pa are visiting Leh and Kargil more often by avail-

ing easy means of transportation to sell their products such as dried apricots and purchase manufactured articles of the daily use. Bema is the last stop for the government buses which comes twice a week. The private jeeps or other vehicular traffic can go up to Dah (some three kilometers away). Change has become inevitable even in these remote areas because of implementation of sponsored programmes of planned change.

LOCALITY INVESTIGATED

The field work for the present study was conducted in June 1991 in Dah-Bema. Village of Dah-Bema is situated at the foot hills of the mountains. Bema means river sand. Indus river sand is found in abundance here. The houses are scattered, surrounded by agricultural lands. Dah-Bema is situated on the right bank of Indus, below Hano Yogma (Fig.1). Hano-Goma or Yogma, latitude 34°35', longitude 76°50' are two villages on the Hanu stream. Hano Goma is a halting place on the route from Leh to Skardu via Chorbat, 27 kilometers from Skurbuchan. Dah-Bema, latitude 34°37', longitude 76°33' is situated at elevation of about 3,000 meters. Dah-Bema with a total area of 171.59 hectares (according to village papers) is inhabited by 413 persons at a distance of 163 kilometers from Leh.

The 73 houses of village are divided into five *Mohallas*: Sanid, Bema (Phinder) Lastieance, Baldez and Dah. The five *Mohallas* of Dah are inhabited by 413 Brok-pa (189 males and 224 females) with an average family size of 5.9 individuals. The inhabitants of these hamlets possess their ancestral homes in the old Dah village. They also have houses in the higher valley pastures at Dah-Drouk where they graze their animals and cultivate their summer crops. There are five *Nallahs* (drains) and a river which serves as water source. Water is brought to homes in container and cans, etc. These *Nallahs* get water supply from melting glaciers. That is why there is seasonal variation in quantity of water. There is one middle school, two primary schools and one

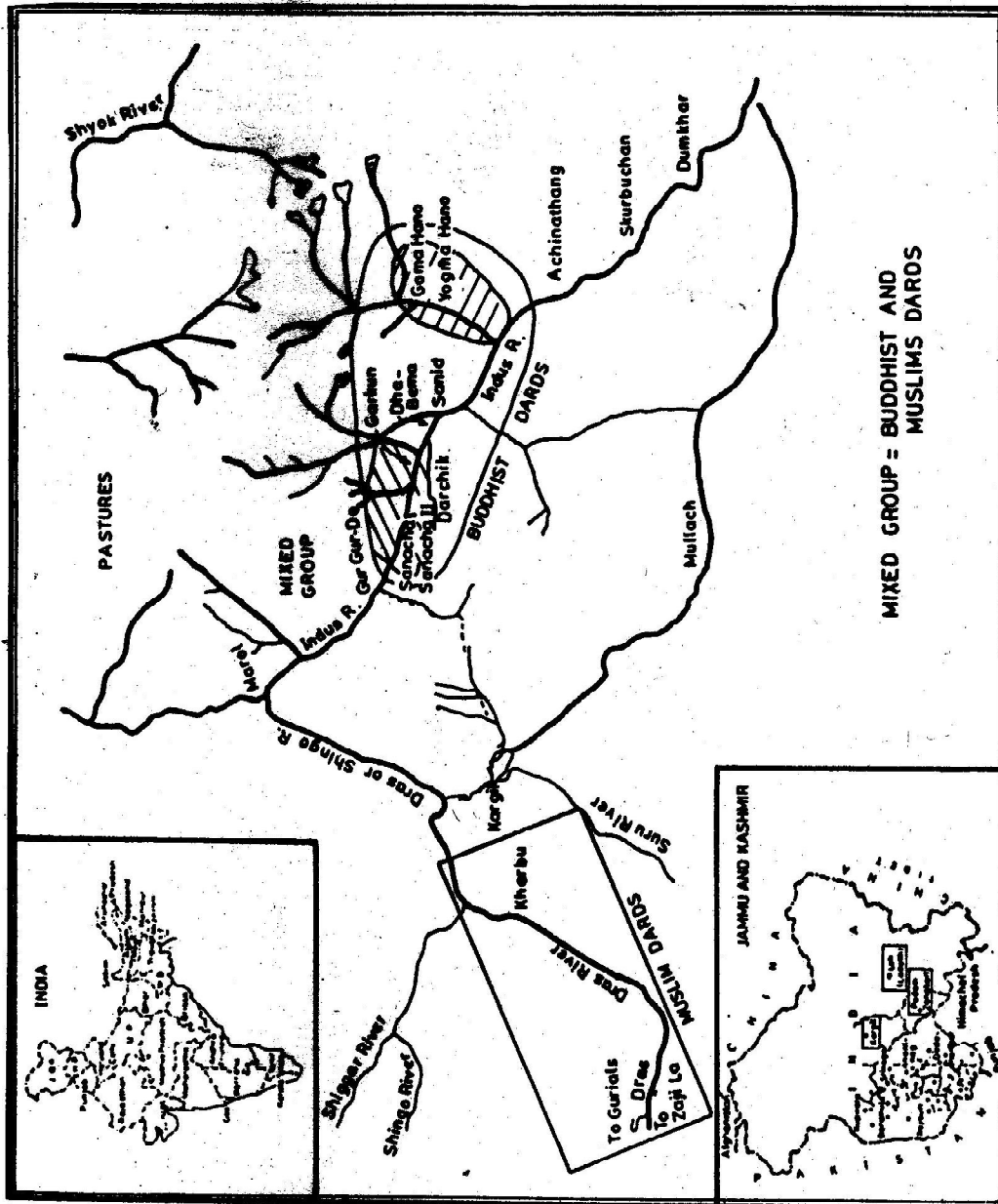


Fig.1

industrial training centre in Bema. There are 25 trainees in first batch and 25 in second. Two terms are completed in one and a half year. There is no small scale industry, except for the indigenous loom (*Thakcha*) in the homes. No financial assistance has been provided for industrial development nor any improved raw material or tools have been provided. Apart from these amenities, there is a dancing place *Cangra* shaded by two big walnut trees in the village for social gatherings. At the end of the village there is one gumpa and ruins of old fort and houses.

There is one *Lha-tho* on Sanid Lung-pa (stream) which belongs to the *Pha-spun* grouping *Takure*. Members of this *Pha-spun* worship their deity *Takure Lha-mo*. Other Brok-pa Dards *Pha-spun* have no separate *Lha-thos* for their groupings. However, Brok-pa Dards built *Lha-tho* on high rocky grounds and on roof tops for protection against diseases and ill-luck and for the fertility and prosperity of the household. Along with these *Lha-thos*, *Chillgi* (Juniper) leaves and goat horns are also kept. These are kept at high places for fear of pollution. Brok-pa Dards are not iconolater and the deity is worshipped in its existence in a mountain crevice (a cave like opening). The only articles of worship are numerous ibex horns, round and oval white stones and *chillgi* branches. Brok-pa *Lha-tho* are two to four feet high pile of stones erected in worship of the *Lha*. On all festive occasions food and prayers are offered on it.

Brok-pa do not bury their dead, but cremate them. Their cremation ground—*Roshaksha*, is at the bank of the Indus at particular spot. This place is at a lower altitude than the village premises and is considered impure.

There is no electricity in the area. Even the P.W.D. (Public Works Department) rest house has no water or electricity connection. Until recently a traditional society, the Brok-pa are gradually coming out of their shell. However, unlike most other tribes which have increasingly adopted to and adopted modern culture, technology and education, the Brok-pa still by and large zealously cling to their traditional mores. But this

does not mean that these people have not felt the thrust of the Indian administration at all. Changes are slowly coming to this area. Only a few household gadgets are used in Brok-pa houses. Even in house construction only a few changes can be seen.

The literacy rate is low in the area, but with government efforts, educational institutions are being opened. The middle school in Bema has two teachers. Twice we went to school, but on both occasions there was no teacher. We met several boys and girls who attend school. The most encouraging change in the Brok-pa way of life is the new enthusiasm for education among the young. At first when the school was opened Brok-pa vehemently resisted for fear that their children would learn only English and forget their own language and culture. Resistance to formal education has not completely died down, but a great many Brok-pa have come to realise its benefits, and have accepted it as part of their new reality. Bilingual schools, subsidised by the Indian Government with Brok-pa teachers have been established, so that they could be integrated with their own culture. They first learn their own language, then Ladakhi and later on Urdu and English. The young students stage plays on Saturdays and Sundays on social topics. We saw two plays, one on the bad effects of the *chaang* (local beer) and second on the uses of education. Mixing between sexes is permissible. They stage these plays at night, so that all the villagers can watch.

A Medical Aid Centre (MAC) is located at Bema for the whole area. It has no full time doctor, only a compounder and auxiliary male nurse. A *Amchi* (Doctor with a knowledge of Tibetan medical system) visits the area in 10-15 days. The people depend more on Lamas and local quacks, or on exorcists. Shaman (*Lhas* or *Lha-bab*) healers claim to be able to effect miraculous cures. After drinking *Chaang* they go into trance until their bodies are rattled and possessed by healing spirits. After touching the affected part of the sufferer's body the Shaman sucks the infection out and expectorates it into silver bowl filled with water.

The agricultural, horticultural and animal husbandry sectors have recorded some progress. Vegetable growing in the area has picked up. Farmers are being encouraged to plant improved varieties of grains.

Postal facilities are not available in the area. The nearest Post-office is at Skurbuchan.

Drew (1875) described Brok-pa as casteless society unlike other Dard communities. However they have three caste like division—priests, cultivators and artisans. The artisans castes include—*Garra* (blacksmiths), and *Shinkan* (carpenters). There are no classes of *Mon* (musicians) as in other Ladakhi villages. Anybody can be a musician or play musical instruments. Musicians here enjoy respect, because they do not belong to *Mon* class as in other parts of Ladakh. They do not constitute a separate class in society as *Mons* or *Bedas* in Ladakh or *Doms* in Gilgit. Brok-pa play *Dang-Dang* (Brass Drum). In Dah-Bema, out of 73 households, 5 households are of *Garras* and 5 households of *Shinkan*. Marriages are not permissible between cultivators and *Garras*. In case of intercaste marriage, lot of hue and cry is made, though there are no social sanctions to prevent it. The lower caste may take wives from the higher, but not *vice-versa* (except in case of priests). Consequently, married daughters in intercaste marriage are not allowed to re-enter the house of her parents and are not allowed to touch anything belonging to them. After three generations of marriages with the higher caste, the progeny are admitted into it.

Villages of Dah-Bema, Hano Yogma etc. were under the *Kardari* or collectorate of the Skurbuchan. There was not much wealth in the country, but whatever there was, was equally diffused, and the great body of the people were in easy and comfortable circumstances. People did not have to pay any money taxes, but were bound to suit and service, both domestic and military, and furnish contribution in kind for the support of *Raja* and the governors of the districts. Thus the inhabitants had to supply the *Raja* with fuel, milk, butter, tea, grains, servants for his persons and labourers in his fields. But Brok-pa consid-

ered it beneath to be slaves of a king. Dr. Francke (1907) reported a story of Hano Dards as to how a Ladakhi king wished to make his Dardish subjects do their share of forced labour, to which they objected. They therefore chose one of their old men to inform the king, that they would never be slaves, not even of a king. The old man himself was ordered to do the forced labour. But as he refused, they immured him. However his fellow countrymen were equally obstinate; so no forced labour could be extracted from any of them. A few miles from the Hano gorge, there is almost destroyed rock-inscription which is shown as the edict of the king who released the Dards from forced labour (Francke, 1907, p. 30).

Land use—Dah Bema

Total Area of the Village.....	171.59 hectares
Irrigated by source.....	PC. 82.96 hectares
Unirrigated.....	8.90 hectares
Culturable waste including	
Gauchar and groves.....	3.24 hectares
Area not available.....	76.49 hectares
for cultivation	

Source: Census of India, 1981

The climate of the area is generally dry, the moisture being converted into snow in the winter, and readily evaporated by the scorching sun of summer, there is consequently very little rainfall. The village agricultural lands are well supplied by water, inspite of lack of rainfall. These villages are irrigated by a network of irrigation ditches, which carry the precious water of *Nallahs* in the upper valley to the different fields. The complicated network of irrigation ditches is spread in the whole area, even along the cliffs. These small ditches (*Yer-ba*) are fed by a main channel which takes the water from a stream high up in the side valley. This in turn, carries water from the distant glaciers. These ditches are laid up with *Purcha* (Spade), goat horns and crow-bars. Usually the irrigation channels are dug out of the earth, otherwise artificial water channels are constructed with stones and clumps of earth, sealed by clay wherever necessary. On the valley bottom the main channel then branches out into a

multitude of smaller ditches so that every adjacent field can be irrigated. The fields on higher mountain slopes receive water first and subsequently the fields lower down in descending order. With wooden channel the water is led from one field to another, till all fields of a farmer are covered. The water supply is divided on a weekly basis, each getting its share on certain days. The water is allowed to stand in the fields for a while so that it had time to sink into dry-parched soil. The time duration for using irrigation facilities is proportional to the size of land holdings. In these areas water is a precious commodity and is watched jealously over its distribution. Water use is regulated by an hereditary "Churpan" or *La-bdag* (official) responsible for irrigation. Strict laws and rules have regulated the building, maintenance and use of the village's communal irrigation ditches. Just as a person is allocated time to water his fields according to the size of the land holdings, so each landowner must send one or more (according to the size of land holdings) to help with communal work on the ditch. These channels require considerable attention in case of avalanches, snow or mud. By moving some stones and lumps of turfs from the low dyke, water can be moved into different channels. These water ditches are not to be crossed, lest the water-spirits should be annoyed. If water gods (*Klu, naga*) and the earth-spirits (*sa-bdag*) get annoyed, the former would keep back the water on the mountains and the latter, at the command of the Earth-mother, would keep the earth-door closed so that the earth would withhold her procreative power. People prepare a *tu-stor*, an offering of pellets of breast-yeast, and throw it into the stream and spring in order to purify himself and placate the water spirits. Ritually unclean person *Ba-nagspa* (through contact with a mother during child birth or just by present in the house during confinement) and *Ro-nagpa* (is one who has become unclean through contact with a corpse), make the *Lha* (gods) and the *Lu* (water-gods, snake spirits) angry and the angry spirits will make water dry-up and crops will wither in the fields.

Residential Pattern

Among the Buddhist Dards, the ancient mode of residential pattern was by the division of the village into three sections. In Dah village, in traditional times, these divisions were said to exist in the communal habitations inside the fort. Three sections in the fort were: - *Dhan-Stot*, the uppermost; *Dhon-skil*, the middle level; and *Dhon-Jug*, the lowest level. These groups were organised in accordance with their pattern of living - the priests; the cultivators; and the artisans, they had prescribed rights and duties in relation to the functioning of the village. They participated in festivals by first gathering as a unit and then proceeding to the place where the celebration were held. The residential pattern in the fort at Dah consisted of rooms arranged in two three storeys, with a common passage of entry and exist as if under one roof. The entire structure was a tangle of intricate passages and connections, the remains of which can still be seen. There were three gates in the fort, first two of wood and the third of iron. The animals were kept in the fort and in case of invasion, the gates could be closed. They had an underground tunnel which ensured their water supply in case they were besieged. The fort is located at the edge of a cliff, defended on two sides by Dah-stream and the Indus river and the third side by the village and the terraced fields. The village was constructed from the defence point of view. The Buddhist gompa stands in the fort premises.

The settlement pattern of the old Dah village is similar, but a little more spacious. There are small alleys between 2 to 4 feet wide between the houses and often the roofs of a couple of houses are joined. The village is situated on a slope above the fields and is backed by a high mountain wall, in to which it is built. The alleys are used as irrigation channels.

The hamlets, which are an extension of Dah village, are more sparsely populated. At some places houses are built side by side, at other places individual houses are built in the middle of the fields. These houses have not been built

from defence point of view, but taking others ecological factors into accounts.

To sustain life three elements are necessary; sunlight, soil and water. Sunlight and soil are in abundance, but water is scarce. Therefore, proximity to water source is the essential for any habitation. The water is not only being used intelligently by these people, but it is being distributed equitably. The traditional irrigation system, the little channels and drains, is the characteristic feature of the village. The water harvesting system of the kind that these people have developed is matchless. The residential pattern is of a village surrounded by their fields, fruit trees, concentrated on the edge of stream and water canals. The proximity of the fields to villages has certain advantages. The ripening grains can be guarded day and night to protect it from birds and animals. To do this adequately the field should be within seeing and calling distance of the house. Secondly, productivity of land correlates directly with distance of the land from the owner's house, because land closest to the house receives more manure than the distant land does. It is easy to transport ploughs, other agricultural implements back and forth from field to house when family lives closeby.

Every house has a small garden in which onions, turnips, large reddishes, peas and some potatoes are grown. Potatoes do well in the Himalayas, yet its cultivation is limited. It is the belief of these people that potatoes have cooling effect on body, which give rise to rheumatism.

House Type

The houses are scattered in the village without the boundary walls on either side. The houses vary from one to two stories. The walls are in few instances wholly or in part of stone but in general they are built with large unburnt bricks. There is not enough fuel to fire the bricks in this woodless area. The roofs are flat, and are formed of small trunks of poplar trees, above which a layer of willow shoots is laid, which is covered by a coating of straw and that again by a bed of earth. The stairs are formed of rough stones. A

ladder made by the carpenter from a beam by cutting steps out of it is used for going to the roof top from the first floor. In houses of poor people, the roofs are commonly made of branches of poplar, with the leaves on. In good houses, the ceiling is of wood, arranged in squares of lozenges. The main rafters are supported by cylindrical or square pillars of wood. The doors and window frames are roughly carpented and the windows are very small, so that the rooms are as warm as possible in winter. The doors are made of planks of poplar mortised together, iron nails are rarely used as they are costly. Although there is plenty of metal, it cannot be wrought for lack of fuel, and as such iron implements and utensils used are imported from outside. The floors are of clay, firmly stamped down. Usually there is a small yard round the house which is enclosed by a high wall.

The house consists of a ground floor where agricultural implements, fodder etc. are kept. Ascending the stairs there is a spacious kitchen cum sitting room. This is the main room around which are constructed the store room and the sheds of their animals. This is the best room of the house with carpets and small painted stools (*Chogtse*) for keeping things. Often the house is built against a steep slope, so that men and animals can reach the roof of the lower floor without any steps at all. There is often a sheep and goat stall there. The kitchen is the only functional room in a traditional or modern house. It is indeed the most essential room for a family, faced with scarcity of fuel and biting cold. The whole family spends most of the time crowded together around the fire in the kitchen. In some houses kitchen is on the ground floor or in others on the first floor depending upon the space and the economic condition of the family. Wherever located, the kitchen doors and windows are tightly closed to prevent cold winds from entering, the only outlet being one or two holes made in the roof to let the smoke out. The roof and beams and inner walls are blackened with soot. The traditional hearth is made of clay or metal burning dung or brushwood. Its chimney-pipe goes out by a hole

in the ceiling. The bellows is an important fixture. The hearth serves as decoration piece in the kitchen performing its normal function of providing fire for cooking as well as heating the room. In Brok-pa houses, the house god (*Sa-bdag*) is placed in between the hearth and the wall. The hearth is the central to the life at home. It is representative of the house god and is the spirit binding the members living in the house. No outsider is allowed to touch it or come near it. In the centre of the room is the main pillar—*Thun* or *Brusika*, which is hollow from inside, and is used for keeping precious things. First few strands of the harvest are fastened on to this pillar as an offering to the house god. It is usually the prerogative of the family head to sit besides the pile of ember frequently taken out of the hearth in the low rectangular enclosure attached to it. Around the walls of the kitchen are shelves bearing an array of pots and utensils. One wall is kept free of kitchen paraphernalia for low carpet covered divans and low tables—*Chogtse*—where family and guest sit. This type of arrangement of kitchen cum sitting room does not segregate the cook from the general discussions or the rest of the life of the house. The bed-chambers and store rooms are adjacent to either room.

The status ranking is highlighted by sitting arrangements in the house kitchen, since everybody must sit in rank order. When standing at the central pillar and looking upon the hearth, the right side is for the men and the left side for the women. On the right side and close to the *Sa-bdag* will sit the household head and following him in descending order his younger brothers. Similarly on the left side sits the eldest wife and following her the other women of the house. In case, the wife is young and has recently come to her affinal home then it is usually the mother of the household head who occupies the place on the left side at the head of the women of house. When married sisters visit their natal house during cultivation season or during festivals, then they sit next to the central pillar. The children and grand parents also sit around the central pillar. The eldest brother is the most important

member, which is demonstrated in rituals, ceremonies and intertance pattern.

There is no bathroom in Brok-pa houses as they believe that if they take bath then good 'Karmas' (deed) or *Barkat* will be washed off. The Brok-pa houses like all Ladakhi houses have a separate lavatory. Brok-pa lavatory (*Chaksa*) is a little room on the first floor with a rectangular hole in the floor, complete with a pile of hearth and a shovel. In high sited houses, these rooms are built out from the main building so that everything falls several feet down, but as a rule everything goes to a ground-floor room that opens on to the outside and into which earth and straw is thrown everyday. This night soil is taken out after a long interval and is used in the fields. It is much needed fertiliser as most of the animal dung (*Dzo dung*) is not used as fertiliser because of taboo. This *Chaklut* (night soil) is mixed with *Pursh* (goat dung) and spread on the Barley and Grim fields for enriching the soil.

The material (stones, *kainu* and *Pudlu* wood and *Chakma* from Srinagar) for housebuilding is collected beforehand. Men break stones from the mountains and roll them down the steep slope to the building site. The carpenter and its helpers hack off the branches, peel off the bark and even out the roughest irregularities of the trunk but keep its round shape. In these arid mountain there is lack of strong trunks suitable for roof beams. That is why these trunks are not cut into square shape lest they become too weak to support the roof. New bricks are made out of the loam which is found close by in the glacial debris of limestone and granite.

ECONOMIC PURSUITS

The mainstay of the economy of the Brok-pa is agriculture, supplemented to a large extent by animal husbandry. Brok-pa rear mostly sheep, goats, Dzos, Bulls and horses. The Brok-pa do not rear cattle because of religious taboo. Poultry farming is also taboo. The region endures a harsh climate. In spite of scanty rainfall and arid climate, the region has maintained a stable pop-

ulation and a subsistence farming system for many centuries. As mentioned earlier, the irrigation facilities are typically based on melting snow, as the Indus river is low lying and therefore water of Indus cannot be easily used. The soil of the area is alluvial, ranging from sand to clay, and is suitable for cultivation of wheat, barley, grim, peas and *hacrene* (*Alfa-Alfa*) in irrigated areas. In the high pastures, many wild plants, grow. The palatable of these are *Ashpit* (fodder with yellow flower), *Pashu*, *Khumkhum* and *Khakhas*. Brok-pa use *Chillgi* as firewood, as these people do not use cowdung or Dzodung for fuel because of religious taboo. Three types of ornamental flowers grow in the area: *Skalzang* flowers of various colours which bloom in October are grown on the mini terraced fields; *Tung-Tung kaliman* which spreads a sweet fragrance are grown on the outskirts of some fields (Otherwise, these grow on glacial heights) and the red *Shoklo* an all weather plant of berry species to be used in head-dress.

Agriculture

As the mountain are steep, gorges are deep and the ravines or valleys in which they run, there is little space left for agriculture. The proportion of such available surface is comparatively small. The soil consists of disintegrated rocks crushed to pieces and crumbled by the successive congelation and thaw of water, and by the action of snow and torrents upon their surfaces. The land when not under cultivation, is one of extreme sterility and barrenness, in which a few willows and poplars are the only timber trees. There are three types of soil in Dah-Bema. The *Thangsa*— It is a hard soil and less productive; (2) *Bheemasa*— It is a sandy soil and good for onion* cultivation and (3) *Yeengsta*— It is black coloured soil and gives good harvest. Chemical fertilizers are not used as these are not considered good for these types of soils. Only *Chaklut* (toilet or human waste manure) and *Pursh* (goat manure) mixed in equal quantities are good for harvest.

*Onion cultivation is not popular because its smell is repulsive to Brok-pa Lhas.

Usually a family has 8-10 Kanals of land, divided into 2-3 fields (some at a distance of 1 to 2 kilometers) and a house garden *Chahas* or *Dumba*. Altitude and topography determine the choice of crop. Barley, wheat or grim and *Cha* are main crops. Two crops are grown in a short working season. Although, the bulk of the net area sown enjoys irrigational facilities, rice is not grown. Crop production varies from year to year depending upon weather condition, quantity of manure and quality of seed etc. Peas, tomato, turnip, reddish and potatoes are grown in the house garden. The fruits grown in the area are apricots, grapes, apples and mulberry. The field for wheat and Grim are called *Chros*. The dry-fields are called *Pakur*.

The place where apricots are grown is called *Palla*. In the house garden, vegetables for daily use are grown. Some Brok-pa have 'summer fields' (*dyas-btsa*) in the upper valley, separated from the main property. There is usually a small house (*Dhangra*) where one or two people (*Tanka*: temporary men) can live in the summer to cultivate and water the land. Harvesting of the crop takes place in September-October.

Cropping Pattern

First crop of Barley (*Thrumba*) and Grim or *Gano* is sown in last week of March to first week of April and harvested in from end of June to beginning of July. Barley is grown on the borders of the main crop wheat or Grim. In the same fields *Cha* (a crop with black grains) is sown and is harvested in October. Barley is consumed the most. It is roasted and ground to form the staple *Sattu* (Brok-skad: *Sattu* Tibetan: *Tsampa*) does not require further cooking and is therefore particularly for consumption in winter, when fuel is scarce. The fruit and vegetables grown in the area are dried in the Sun before being stored away for winter.

The people have developed an artificial means of melting snow in spring so that they can sow there barley in time for it to ripen before the rapid return of winter. For this purpose in autumn farmers pile up earth in their fields and even in

their houses, where this earth does not freeze. In May, when there are still a few feet of snow on the ground the farmer takes this earth and spread it over the snow covering their fields. The dark earth then concentrates the Sun's heat and melts through the snow so that these fields are free of snow long before surrounding areas. Ploughing and sowing can begin while there is still snow about. This ensures early ripening of the crop.

In spite of the adverse ecological conditions, the production of crops is by no means unproductive, without following field fallowing or rotation of crops. Perhaps one of the reasons why the soil does not become sterile is because constant irrigation (every five or seven days) brings it with additional top soil, and secondly the fields are well manured. Weeds are pulled up as soon as they appear, many eaten by the animals.

The agricultural operations consists of clearing the land and equilibrizing the surface. The larger blocks of stone are left undisturbed, but the smaller fragments are collected and arranged in longitudinal piles or walls, traversing the face of the declivity, forming a series of parallels, the space between which is made as level as possible by spreading materials from the upper to the lower edge of the slope. In this manner a succession of terraces are constructed. For irrigation purposes a network of channels communicating with some spring or natural reservoir on higher ground is constructed in the cultivable area. These prepared fields are then supplied and enriched by the manure—(night soil) mixed with *Pursh* (goat manure) According to the dryness of the soil, fields are irrigated either before or after the first ploughing. Manure is spread in the fields after the first ploughing followed by second ploughing. Seeds are sown by broadcast or by dibble in the furrows made by second ploughing. After the plant has grown to some height it is watered on alternate weeks. Weeds and grasses are taken out and used as fodder for the animals. Women and children collect weeds and grasses growing up with the main crop. The regular removal of the weeds give the barley or wheat the benefit of the whole nutritive power of the soil.

Agricultural implements used are *Hal* (plough), *Shalbow*, *Panka*, *Turkesey* (spade), *Zubra* and *Bushuns* (sickles). These are made of *Brosket*.

Horticulture

The fruits grown in the area are apricots, grapes, apples, walnuts and mulberry. The grape-vines are planted near poplar trees for winding round the tree. They do not prune grape-vines. The fruit trees are scattered and are not grown in orchard farm. These are concentrated on the edge of the stream and water canals. There are around 150 trees of apricots with yearly production of 750-800 kilogrammes. Brok-pa sell their apricots in Leh bazar. There are about 20-30 apple trees in the area, yield per tree is between three to five kilogrammes. There are about 20 walnut trees. Apples, walnuts, mulberry etc. are for domestic use. So far no steps have been taken for the horticulture development. No sapling or improved varieties of fruits and vegetables have been introduced in the area. There is rodent infestation and many diseases proliferate in the area which need urgent attention.

Though there are flowers in the area, but no system of maintaining beehives in winter exists here. No new species of *Bantse* (Honey bee) have been introduced here in last few years.

Animal Husbandry

The domesticated animals in the area are sheep, goat, horse, bull and *Dzo*. The *Dzo* are hybrid male between the yak and common cow. *Dzos* and bulls are reared for agriculture and sheep and goat for milk, meat and wool. There are 25-30 *Dzos* in the area, which are shared by the people at the time of ploughing. Though there are lots of sheep and goats in Dah-Bema, but only 12 marine and 10 Angora sheep and goats. The approximate daily yield of goat and sheep milk is 250 gm/head and 200 gm/head respectively. Estimated annual yield of wool is about half kilogram in local variety of sheep and one kilogram in improved variety. Sheep are sheared twice per year. In summer households of hamlet collec-

tively send their sheep and goat for grazing to pasture for 10-15 days. Pasture is not a proper greenland in these areas, but animals are taken near *Nallahs*, where there is some natural fodder growing. People of these villages take their animals up to *Dah-Drouk*. The livestock remain in the higher valley pastures during the summer months. In the winter months, the animals stay in the village, but are sent every morning at day break and return before sunset to the village. On the days when animals cannot venture out, they are fed on the fodder collected after the harvest for these lean winter months. Animals are fed only local fodder and no concentrates are given. Animals of the hamlet are taken to pasture under the supervision of one man from family, and each house get its turn in rotation.

Village Industries

There is no small scale industry, except for the indigenous looms (*Thakcha*) in the houses. There is one industrial training centre. No financial assistance has been given for the industrial development and no improved raw materials or tools have been provided.

The other occupations being followed by people in the area are government service and road labour etc. Government service is becoming popular day by day as it ensures solid income for the whole year. The road labourers are being engaged for repairing and widening of the road which passes near the village. During winter also they get job on the roads as these are to be kept clean for defence reasons.

FOOD HABITS

The absence of detailed health statistics such as mortality, morbidity, infant mortality rates and prevalence of different diseases hinders assessment of the health status of the Brok-pa. The benefits of modern curative and preventive medicine are not reaching these people satisfactorily. There is one Medical Aid Centre with a skeletal staff and one *Amchi* visiting the area fortnightly. The cultural-ecological condition in the area are

responsible for the prevalence of gastroenteritis and acute respiratory infections among children and infectious diseases and nutritional diseases in the adult population. The ecological conditions—desert with little vegetation, high winds particularly in spring and autumn produce dust storms, which is an added risk for chest diseases. Smoke pollution in traditional kitchens with poor ventilation to avoid heat loss is injurious to health. A weighed food intake survey on rural Ladakh showed that food intake is adequate with respect to energy, protein, fat and some water soluble vitamins. It is inadequate with regard to iron, calcium, vitamin B-12 and vitamin-A, and it contains an excess quantity of sodium (Norboo et al., 1989).

The diet of Brok-pa is like other Ladakhis though the cow's product and poultry sources are left out of menu because of religious taboos. Three meals a day are taken by Brok-pa; *Chinnana* (Breakfast); *Beh* (Lunch) and *Ganzang* (Dinner). The *Chinnana* consists of *Gur-Gur Cha* and *Sattu*. During lunch those who can afford take *Gur-Gur Cha* accompanied by wheat cakes or a paste of wheat flour, butter, sugar, served hot. Poor people instead of tea, boil two parts of barley flour with one of water or meat broth seasoned with salt and rice or *Roti* with *Chhu* (vegetable curry). The dinner of upper classes is formed of some preparation of the flesh of the sheep, goat or yak and eaten with rice, vegetables and *Khambir* or *Roti*. The poorer classes eat *Papa* or *Idir* (*Sattu* put in boiling water, stirred and put in a plate), or soup made of fresh vegetables if available or of dried turnips, reddishes and cabbages, boiled with salt and pepper in water, along with pieces of stiff dough of wheat flour.

The staple food *Sattu* or *tsampa* is made by lightly roasting barley. For roasting barley is mixed with sand to prevent the barley from catching alight in a large metal pan. The barley is then sieved to remove the sand and the roasted grain is ground in a *Ranthom* (water-mill).

Gur-Gur-Cha (salt and butter tea) is made with green tea leaves, salt and butter. The tea is ini-

tially made very strong in a *Zang-bu* (pot) with water, handful of *Zancha* (tea leaves) and *sodal* (soda from Nubra valley), and is brewed for a long time till it is pinkish-red in colour. This stock once made lasts for five-six days.

Whenever tea has to be taken, this brewed stock (*Cha-thang*) is diluted to a drinkable strength and put into butter churn (*Gur-Gur*), a wooden vessel about 15 cm in diameter and 80 cm long with brass at the top, bottom and in the middle. A spoonful of butter and salt is added, and churned vigorously with the help of *Gyals* (Churner) a wooden rod with a brass plate, till it becomes a smooth, oily and brown liquid, of the colour and consistency of chocolate, in which form it is transferred to a tea-pot of silver, or silvered copper, or brass, ornamented with flowers and foliage. Every Ladakhi, no matter how poor, has its own tea vessel, thermos and special tea cups. This tea is taken in large quantities, in place of water. Several studies in high altitude areas have shown that high altitude inhabitants tend to have lower blood pressure than those of sea level. In contrast, some reports from Ladakh and one from Lhasa in Tibet have suggested a high prevalence of hypertension in the Himalayas. It has been suggested that *Gur Gur Chai*, containing salt and butter could be a cause of high blood pressure. The relation of salt consumption to hypertension remain controversial.

Another drink, which people here are fond of taking is *Chaang*. It is a barley beer, nourishing and mildly intoxicating. No religious ceremony or festival would be complete without the serving of *Chaang*. Special holy fields called *Newne* are set apart for the growing of barley to make *Chaang* for religious festivals. *Chaang* is home brewed from barley and millet, partially seasoned by the addition of salt and pepper. Lack of nutritional education, harsh weather and difficult terrain, low income of family to procure good quality food and prevailing dietary practices are some of the reasons for malnutrition.

In a study of body morphology and lung functions in Dards of Ladakh (Bhasin and Singh, 1992), the values of height, weight ratios for Dard

Bodhs have been compared with population groups staying in the neighbourhood. They show higher height-weight-ratio (HWR) than Bodhs of Changthang, but lesser than Bodhs, Baltis and Tibetans of Ladakh, Gujjars and Dogras of Kashmir and Jammu. It is a known fact that height-weight of the body is affected by the nutrition. For body mass index (BMI) again Dard Bodhs show higher value than Bodhs of Changthang and Baltis of Ladakh but lower than other population groups of Ladakh (Bhasin and Singh, 1992).

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

The family is the effective unit of day-to-day life in the Brok-pa village, owning its own property and handling its own economic affairs. Beyond this, the wider social organisation of the village incorporated families in various ways, into relatively stable relationships with their fellow villagers. There is hardly any gender specific division of labour and the relation between the sexes is balanced. They are not sticklers over the work division and frequently a man helps his wife in any task within his competence while women likewise help the men.

Each family has a house-name (*Ghota-nu*) and is an important criteria as a person within the village, as well as in the wider context of Buddhist Dards. The Buddhist Dards are identified by their house name. Personal names are used only in the house by the family members. Every house name has a particular status in the village and among the Dards as a community. The house-name is determined by the place of residence. A person from a different village will be addressed by his house name, to which is attached his village name. Though it is primarily an agnatic kinship unit it recruits affinal members also. After marriage, the spouses discard their natal house-names and take on the name of the house to which they are married in. Succession to the head of the household status is through lineally descended eldest male heir. In case where there are only daughters, a son-in-law (Tib: *Magpa*; Brok-skad: *Baru* is

acquired, who will carry the spouse's house-name. If there are no children, adoption from within the same *Phas-spun* is taken recourse to. The persons who have married as *Baru* or have been adopted into another house, have no way of retaining agnatic kinship ties. Descent and consanguinity are of less relevance in relation to the principle of residence. A joint family having a common name is a descent group being synonymous with the residence. There are, of course, informal ties of friendship and neighbourliness. Every family is also involved in an enduring mutual-aid-group (*Rhizo-Kum-Kumi*) and *Pha-spun*, the core of which is made up of other families of the village. All these families standing in these relationships to one another are obligated to give each other gifts of foodstuffs and small sums of money, as well as personal labour, at certain established times of festivity or need. They contribute labour to one another in the agricultural and pastoral activities, and in the preparation and serving of hospitality; give money and foodstuffs as contributions to each other hospitality expenses at times of birth, marriage and death. These contribution of gifts and labour are seen as investments and are fully reciprocal over time. One gets back what one gives; one gives because one has received. This type of reciprocity operates between families and the obligation of the parents are taken over by the eldest son when parents retire. Though families hold property privately the production from this property is not entirely private. This type of production has an important collective dimension, involving the labour of mutual-aid-groups and *Pha-spun*.

Beyond this immediate exchange group, each family is involved in reciprocity relationships with a wider group "village people's or Brok-pa Buddhist Dards of other villages with whom one has obligation of token exchange. Participation in this wider network as well as in smaller groups, is basic to full membership in the Brok-pa community, but it does not ensure personal labour to one another on a reciprocity basis. If one needs labour beyond that supplied by one's smaller mutual-aid group, one has to pay wages to those

who do such work.

Mutual-aid-groups and reciprocity relationships in the wider sphere of Brok-pa operate through direct interaction between individual households on a one-to-one basis. In addition, each household contributes money and labour to the public enterprises of the village that operates for the general welfare e.g. irrigation work. Finally, each family must support the ceremonial life of the village. In the past triadic mode of village organisation was observed in the village. There were three levels in which inhabitants were divided, which was represented in their settlement pattern. Each section participated in the village life as a unit. Contribution during the celebrations of a festival were brought by each of these sections collectively. The partial remnants of this tradition are still preserved and operative during festivals. Contributions during certain festivals are brought by members of each of these section collectively, though the earlier residential pattern does not exist any more. Similarly at the threshing of new crop (*Khudas-Khal*), a feast is given each year in rotation by one of the sections as a collectivity.

Though, differing in certain religious traditions, Brok-pa have adopted specific social institutions of traditional Buddhist social structure. These social institutions have ascertained the success of Ladakhi way of life. These social institutions have helped them to adopt to this extreme and constrained environment. The foremost of these are the laws concerning land tenure and marriage practices. These laws were made to preserve intact, through the generation, a man's house and his fields. To protect landholdings, all land had to be transmitted in its entirety to the eldest son, in absence of a male heir, to the eldest daughter. The custom of primogeniture i.e. only the eldest son inherited land, prevented the division and sub-division of the fields. This is important because it was not possible to bring more land under cultivation because of shortage of water. As more land could not be brought under plough, there was need to check population growth. For regulation of population growth, cel-

ibacy of monks and custom of polyandry was adopted. The law of primogeniture left the second sons with no land. A second son can become a monk living in a monastery, or at home or in the village Gumpa performing religious duties for his living. Among Brok-pa there is no practice of second son joining the priesthood, instead they become *Baru* or *Magpa* in the families where there are only daughters. In this type of marriage, the groom is known as *Baru* and he retains this title during his married life. His status in his wife's house is not the same as that of the *Bagpo*, who brings his bride (*bag-ma*) into his father's house, as his father's heir, will eventually control the whole property. In a *Baru* marriage it is the daughter who is the heiress and mistress of the household when her father dies. She has the right to make decisions concerning the property (house, fields, animals etc.), the children of the marriage and her husband, the *Baru* himself. He can be divorced or turned out of the house/or another husband acquired. He remains an important member within the localised descent group for the purpose of procreation. After the birth of a son, he has to justify his position by showing his worth as a contributor to house labour pool. Because of the prevalence of polyandry and primogeniture, the eldest son is the heir to the property, house name, and has the right to marry. He is the actual husband who has right to divorce in case of unfaithfulness of his wife. The children belong to him and call him "big-father". The other brothers are mere members of the house performing the duties delegated to them, but having neither rights to inheritance nor to the status of "father" over the children.

As these *Baru* have not inherited anything from their parents, they have no way of retaining agnatic kinship ties, except on special occasions. Their parents on first of March (1st Buddhist month) invites them to their house for feast and give presents etc. They are invited at the time of the *Lo-sar* and *Spce-ches* (season) festival held towards the middle of January to their parental house.

In case where there are more than one sons and

second son do not become monk or *Baru*, he has to marry his brother's wife. He shares her with his brother. This custom called fraternal polyandry allows second sons to benefit from the produce of the father's household, yet does not divide it. Polyandry serves as method of natural birth control and insures the preservation of the household intact. In the course of time, because of polyandry their population started decreasing and it also deprived many women of what is now being seen as their right to marry and raise a family. The practice of polyandry is now gradually dying because it is illegal and was banned in 1941. The "Buddhist Association" was concerned at the alarming number of women converting to Islam and getting married to them. People now know of Hindu succession Act in which all children are entitled to equal share of parental property. Though the younger sons are still not getting the equal share but only small piece of land to built a house and kitchen garden. Although no special effort has been made to eradicate primogeniture in Ladakh, gradual realization of its illegality has transformed the nature of family organisation in the Buddhist sector of Ladakh since younger brothers who grudgingly remained together with their elder brother (s) began to demand a share of family patrimony. The integrity of the corporate family dissolved and family fragmentation began to prevail.

Another unusual feature of the Tibetan family system, closely related to polyandry, was a custom known as *Khang-bu* or little house. When the eldest son had reached years of discretion and had married and produced an heir, the parents retired gracefully to a small house adjoining the main property, taking one or two animals with them and retaining only as much land as they needed to support them. According to Janet Rizvi "the premium put on youth and vigour in preference to age and experience is one of the most attractive thing about Tibetan social thinking" (Rizvi, 1983, p. 120).

Four wars, the closures of borders, the considerable presence of Indian Army and the slow

commercialisation of agriculture have brought change in the socio-economic condition of the people. Family and land fragmentation has become extremely common. "Modernization in India, has, had a devastating impact on the traditional Ladakhi social structure despite the fact that no special effort was made in this direction. The transformation of the traditional social organization in Ladakh has another element that must be mentioned. Even though primogeniture could be legally circumvented in modern India, younger brothers still had to weigh the costs of fission versus polyandry in the sense that they had to determine whether they could survive economically if they split off" (Goldstein, 1981, p. 14).

Among Brok-pa, today polyandry has become rare and polygyny is the favoured form of marriage with the good reason and maximizing female fertility and preserving family bloodlines in strictly endogamous community whose small size put it at real risk of extinction. While polyandry may have been more common in earlier generation thus proving that Brok-pa shared the pragmatic view of family life and marriage with their neighbours. Various types of families—monogamous, polyandrous, polygynous families exist in the area. Marriage alliances are between household and are arranged by the head of the household and wife's brother. Child marriage is common and is solemnised by a simple ceremony at the shrine of the local deity. Marriage is usually in the form of sister exchange. This results in all different types of marriages: giving two daughters in marriage to one son (Polygyny); one daughter to two or more sons (polyandry) or one daughter to one son (Monogamy). The house which receives wives also gives daughters to the same household. In case where two brothers are married to two sisters, both the brothers have equal right of access to both wives. In all different forms of marriage practices all children belong to the eldest brother. There is no division of the household. The house continues as a unit through generations. Land ownership is traditionally associated with lineage organisation and therefore a territorial group is an agna-

tic group. Cases of female inheritance and adoption prove their logic and cover up the discrepancies between the actual descent group and geneological continuity of the house-name. However, splitting up of the lineage does not occur and the same house-name continues with the eldest son inheriting the role of the household head. Sometimes mutations occur in house-name in one generation and a new lineally descended heir takes on the role of the household head. These mutations occur usually because of shifting of residence to a new place. Sometimes, the names of the households are associated with the place of residence; any other peculiarity in the life style or any other change in the surrounding environment.

Each person in the village stands at the centre of a particular network of formal, personal relationship with certain other men. Some of these relations are established by birth (patrilateral and matrilinear kin), some by marriage—his own and those of sisters and daughters and some deliberately. A man looks to these people for friendship, sympathy, advice, affection and help.

The whole of Brok-pa society (like Ladakhi society) is divided into named patrilineal *Pha-spun*. Every person inherits a *Pha-spun* affiliation from his or her father. *Pha-spun* literally means 'father-brothers' i.e. brothers with a common father. It is a Tibetan word which means 'a closed brotherhood within the village community, who though not necessarily related by blood; worship a common god (*Pha-Lha*-father-god). The group recruitment is based on patri-filiation rather than descent (see Prince Peter, 1956). These are originally relations, though outsiders may be sworn in at a special feast, and all worship at a common altar, presided over by special deity. The altar is originally built as a platform of mud and stone and on it placed a clay pot, around which a wall is built. Small offerings of grains, coral, pearl, piece of gold are placed in it. The mouth of the vessel is closed and a wall is built up over it, then on top of this is placed another clay vessel whose offerings are renewed annually. It is their duty to support one another

on all important occasions in the life of the family and *Pha-spun* are such as birth, death, marriage and co-operation and their duties are strictly regulated by rules and rituals. The village is linked up together in the bonds of brotherhood based on religion. Upon the death of a person (except for children whose bodies are buried) one of the *Pha-spun* members after the cremation takes out a piece of cranium bone with ashes. These ashes are kept in the dead person's house for four days. Afterwards these ashes are deposited in the *Mawal* of the *Pha-spun*. At the end of the mourning period, a burning lamp is placed at *Mawal* and burning *Chillgi* sticks are inserted in the cracks in the rock. *Pha-spun* provides individual with social identity of key significance in their society. After the marriage ceremonies are over, a bride before leaving her parental home, visits the small temple of the house to say last good-bye, for after this day she may never again enter his temple, having married into another *Pha-spun*. The *Pha-spun* are not hierarchically arranged, though in the past this institution may have been created to distinguish socially between several classes. Among Brok-pa, the distinction is made between *Ruscen* and *Rusmet* lineages. *Ruscen* lineages are considered higher in status. Marital and pollution taboos are observed against the *Rusmet* lineages. The *Pha-spun* groupings of the village has *Ruscen* as well as *Rusmet* households as its members. *Ruscen* consider themselves as "pure" and do not except *Kilta* (basket) and rope from *Ruscen* household for fear of pollution. The economic reality in the area does not permit the maintenance of the kind of complex stratification found in other areas. Frequently inter-marriages between *Ruscen* and *Rusmet* are taking place. The population is not large enough to support hierarchical differences. An important factor responsible for the mildness of restrictions is the need for social interaction coupled with low population density, problems of physical mobility and the absence of social sanctions. Social interaction in *Pha-spun* relationships does occur and obligations are met accordingly. Festivals and ceremonial activities involve all the villagers. In the village of Dah and its four hamlets-Lastience,

Bema (Phinder). Baldez and Sanid there are male representatives of the nine different *Pha-spun*. The *Pha-spun* names are often the names of the apical ancestors, their particular way of dancing during the festivals; names of the places from which the ancestors originally came. In this respect, the concept of *Pha-spun* among Brok-pa, differs from the other areas of Ladakh. Among Brok-pa, the importance of names of *Pha-spun* shows its relevance in the sphere of ancestor cult and this brings them close to the area from where they came. There are five houses of *Garra* (Black-smiths) and five houses of *Shinken* (Carpenter). These are not included in any of the *Pha-spun* groupings. Commensality is confined to members of *Pha-spun* who consider themselves equal and who express their equality through the establishment of affinal relationships. This implies stratum endogamy, marriage being confined to people who have similar status or social strata. The *Garra* (Blacksmith) and *Shinkan* (Carpenters) are considered to be of a different and decidedly inferior.

A *Pha-spun* forms a kind of corporate group sharing territorial lands, it makes demands on the loyalty of its constituent members, each member being responsible to and for the whole group. The *Pha-spun* is a technique for introducing continuity and stability into a social system. It gives a greater degree of stability and permanence. Historically speaking*, all land was owned collectively by the *Pha-spun*. In each village, there were several *Pha-spun* groups. The land rights were not in the name of the individual households or families. The land in the name of *Pha-spun* was periodically re-divided among the member households. A household was given the right to only as much and as the family mem-

*The first regular settlement, assessment and collection of land revenue decided after the 'Land Settlement Act' of 1901. British colonial officers registered the fields in the names of the households, as was proper for that generation. Old system of land according to the need of the household was stopped. For taxation they followed the rules of the settlement officers, but they followed self-regulatory mechanism of land re distribution according to the need of each household. After the demise of that generation it created a lot of confusion and gave birth to many disputes

bers could personally cultivate. This type of distribution has prevented the emergence of any significant group of large land holders. Severe limitations on the land available for cultivation and a lack of market for exporting local products has prevented the emergence of either full-time specialists or landless labourers. Lacking hired labour, co-operation between families through *Pha-spun* linkage has become the compensating factor, through which households socially communicate. A *Pha-spun* constitutes a social association of household lineages who are duty bound to help each other through the critical events of life. Similar system of land ownership was observed at Phuguch (Darel) which Carl Jettmar calls as Phuguch pattern. (Carl Jettmar, 1980, p. 50). The members of each *Pha-spun* reciprocate help during birth, marriage and death ceremonies. At the birth (*stenak*) of a child, one month period of pollution is observed. During this period of pollution (*Bhambak*), the entry of the villagers is taboo in the household. However, after seven to ten days, *Pha-sun* members are allowed to pay visit, though they refrain from eating or drinking in the house where birth has occurred. During this time, the *Pha-spun* members help in carrying out the daily duties of the effected household which they themselves cannot perform because of fear of pollution.

During the marriage celebrations after the family members and the Mother's brother, it is the *Pha-spun* members who play the most prominent role. After the marriage ceremonies are over, it must be a *Pha-spun* who carries all the bride's belongings and dowry to her new home.

When death occurs in the family, the *Pha-spun* members are informed immediately. It is they who arrange for the last rites and it is only the *Pha-spun* members who carry the dead body for cremation which the family members are not to witness.

Internal relations within the *Pha-spun* are principally those between the heads of independent nuclear families. Cousins of all degrees do not have same problems of readjustment, which prove so difficult between brothers. They inherit, as it were the pattern of relations already established between their fathers in the previous generation. There is not in general, therefore, the same

sort of tension between cousins as there is between brothers. Relations commence on a basis of reciprocal rights which have already reached a level of stability.

Pha-spun association is a form of co-operation and mutual insurance, and through it a man maintains a range of significant interpersonal relations within a wider society in which he lives. This association is the core of social life through which an individual maintains himself as a full social being and not merely an isolated unit or even as the number of a small, isolated group. The residential ties and the day to day co-operation in affairs large and small that results from intimate, face to face relations among close agnates are of real and considerable importance. In ecological conditions which pertain in the area, help is needed on various occasions. Although this sort of help is reciprocal, yet members of the *Pha-spun* are always available as ready source of help. This is an adaptation to environment and *Pha-spun* as a social organisation is instrumental in insuring help in case of calamities. This support of *Pha-spun* associates is a matter of their friendliness with an individual and the allegiance they owe him. This institution of self-help, physical support, obligation to assist and in giving moral and vocal support to individuals, acts as a mutual insurance in these remote and isolated areas. The principle of reciprocity is strong; if one *Pha-spun* given daughters in marriage to another, the latter should give in return. In fact, whenever feasible, it is felt proper that two single households should reciprocate by exchanging daughters in marriage. Cross-cousin marriages are common form for the reciprocal marriages, though it is not rigidly adhered to. Parallel cousins are members of the same *Pha-spun* and therefore are forbidden to marry. The bonds in the Brok-pa community are strongest at the village level as most alliances are contracted within the village. There are quite a few marriages which have been contracted with other Buddhist Dards. These Buddhist Dard villages define the outer limits of exogamy. A significant function of the *Pha-spun* is ancestor worship. The descendants of the same patrilineage deposits the bones or ashes at the *Munal* and assemble there on festive and sorrowful occasions to pay respect

to their ancestors.

Each *Pha-spun* has a common '*Munal*' where ancestor worship is performed. Offerings and prayers are held on *Mamani* festival which is held at the end of December.

POSITION OF WOMEN

The ecological conditions in the area have resulted in the subsistence economy of the area. Agricultural production has been limited because of scarcity of water, shorter working season, severe cold and snow and absence of mechanical tools. To compensate for the agricultural deficit, people have to depend upon an array of activities. Their pastoral activities are hampered by lack of proper pastures and religious taboo for domestication of cows. Apart from religious and supernatural sentiments, the ecological conditions of the area do not allow for the breeding of cows.

In the economic sphere, there is hardly any gender-specific division of labour and relation between sexes are most balanced. Women play a role equal to that of men. At home or the hill sides, they are free to talk to whom so ever they please, male or female. As a consequence, communication among women and between men and women is as high as it is among men. They participate in all village and family social activities.

Economic activities of women include all agricultural activities (except ploughing), looking after the house, children and animals etc. The economic value and worth of woman therefore as (a) independent and necessary unit of economic activity; (b) complementary to the men's work force.

Role of women is not only of importance in economic activities, but her role in non-economic activities is equally important. Formation and continuity of family hearth and home are the domain of women. Women's role as wives, mothers, organisers and as the basic foundation of other dimensions of social life is of utmost importance. The filiative tie between a mother and her child serves as the fulcrum of ramifying kin relations with all maternal relations. Unlike relation based on *Pha-spun* matrilineal kinship

is of limited geneological depth and its span is remembered for only three-four generation past the mother-child relationship.

The socio-economic equality of sexes can be seen best in the attitudes and practices concerning marriage, divorce and household harmony. The ideal is the arranged marriage between an unrelated boy and girl, both coming from different *Pha-spun*. There is no custom which might be termed reversed dowry system entailing, some payment by the parents of the bridegroom to the parents of the bride. However, at the time of wedding the parents of bridegroom gives 12 arm lengths of *Pattu* (woollen cloth), one kilogram of goat butter, rupees two, one *Katak* (scarf), *Kapse* (Khambir bread) and one needle. Needle is very important. Needle and thread signifies the strengthening of bond between two families and between two persons. For marriage alliance, the maternal uncle of boy takes a needle and thread, gifts of goat butter, *Sattu* and *Kataka* to girl's house. *Chaang* is not presented during marriage negotiation, as in other parts of Ladakh. At the time of divorce, the needle is returned essentially, for legalization of divorce. The marriage arranged by parents (*Bak-ston*), is solemnised by a simple ceremony at the shrine of a local deity followed by usual feasts and *chaang* etc. but in cases where parents are not in position to arrange for a feast at that particular moment or for some other reason, *Skus-Ti-Kher Ches* (marriage by elopement) takes place, mostly with the consent of parents. Then at the appropriate time, when economic conditions permit the feast etc. is arranged. Succession to the head of the household status is generally and preferably through a lineally descended eldest male heir. In case in a family when there are only daughters, then a son-in-law (Tib. *Mag-pa*, Brok-skad: *Baru*) is acquired who will carry the spouse's house name. In this type of marriage it is the daughter who is heiress and mistress of the household when her father dies, she has the right to make decisions concerning the property, the children and husband.

A woman always has it in power to leave her husband if she is angry, dissatisfied or unhappy.

She has great freedom of movement as children, if any, remain with the husband. But if she wants, she can take them along, as her labour or children's labour is sufficiently in demand so that she can move not only back to her natal family but also to a sister's husband's house or more distant kinsmen house. She can stay there till such time as she returns to her husband or finds a new one.

Divorces often occur in this area, and are carried out in simplest manner. A man divorces his wife, if she proves to be infertile or unfaithful or because of incompatibility. Similarly, wife can divorce her husband if he treats her badly. The old king's law (*rgual-K' rsmā*) lays down that the guilty party responsible for breaking up marriage must pay the other compensation in the form of a "cape" full of money. Among Brok-pa of Dah-Bema, *Thoskang* (divorce) is possible if both parties agree. In earlier times only Rs. 12 were paid to the girl but now-a-days the compensation has reached up to Rs. 15,000. In case of *Gami*, where another boy wants to marry the already married woman, he pays the former husband the amount incurred by him on his marriage. The amount is fixed mutually.

SOCIAL INTERDEPENDENCE: COMMUNICATION AND SELF- SUFFICIENCY

The habitat to which people must adopt is multifaceted and includes social dimensions as well. The technological adaptations made by Brok-pa for procurement of food through agriculture and pastoralism, enable them to adjust to the challenges presented by nature. The social consequences of this are even more important. Limitation on the land available for cultivation because of scarcity of water for irrigation and a lack of market for exporting local products, has prevented the emergence of either full-time specialists or landless labourers.

As a region Brokland was isolated for much of the time. Isolation of a region, community or individual promotes economic self-sufficiency.

It is equally true that self-sufficiency can promote isolation by making it unnecessary to seek elsewhere for goods or assistance, even after facilities for communication have improved. Economic self-sufficiency is also a function of inadequate man power in the form of specialists or landless labour.

Regional isolation is today largely a matter of choice, although this attitude has probably arisen as the result of self-sufficiency that was once required. The earlier isolation of the region was primarily due to terrain, inaccessibility and lack of reason for people to travel there. Occasionally, travellers and traders passed through this area but with little influence on local population. The Indus gorge between Dah-Garkun-Batalik is so narrow that it had barely permitted a foot path used only by the Brok-pa Dards who carried on trade between Skardo and Leh. The terrain and climate has resulted in a subsistence economy with little variation in economic level from one family to another.

The Brok-pa are mostly owner-cultivators of small holdings and agriculture is a way of life rather than a commercial proposition. Earnings from agriculture are generally low and it is not economically feasible to hire labour for assistance in the agricultural operations. It is natural in a community which is not affluent and where labour force can hardly be purchased, that there should be some arrangement for co-operation when one is in want. Co-operation is a foundation of village life in this area. The inhabitants of each hamlet unite in the performance of certain communal task. Many routine tasks such as shepherding of animals, are done on rotational basis; agricultural implements and labour are often shared. Irrigation a matter of the utmost importance in these parts is a communal activity. The Brok-pa have evolved two institutions to deal with this need for interdependence and to overcome scarcity of paid labour. These institutions are co-operation between families and *Pha-spun*.

Co-operative labour groups *Rhizo-kum kumi* are formed on the basic principles of residential

propinquity and kinship ties. These co-operative labour groups are formed at hamlet level. These groups are organised for exchange of agricultural implements, cutting of grass for winter, taking animals to pasture, sowing, harvesting and shearing etc.

Beyond the hamlet, Brok-pa ties are strongest at village level. Every household has its ancestral home in the old Dah village. Marriage alliances are mostly contracted between the families within the village. The maximum limit of marriage alliances is from among the neighbouring Buddhist Dard villages, in case no suitable match is found in the village itself. Livestock grazing grounds at up the Dah stream are communally owned by the village. Encroachment by outsiders is seriously objected to and it gives rise to disputes. Celebrations of festivals connected with land cultivation, life cycle and folk traditions are shared by the village people.

Representation within the village community is through the *Pha-spun* groupings. It is also a mutual support group who help during birth, marriage and death ceremonies. *Pha-spun* membership is life time which ends at the time of death. The *Pha-spun* is not essentially an exogamous group and inter-*Pha-spun* marriages do take place.

On a broader scale, individual appointments are made to fulfil various tasks which involve the well-being of the community as a whole. There is one *Goba* or *Mokhdam* (village headman) for solving disputes, for collecting revenue, arranging festivals and registering birth and death statistics. The post of headman is for three years. He is nominated or elected depending on the prestige of the person. There is one *Domsun* (village chowkidar) to round up stray animals and restore it to the owner in order to prevent crop damage. These posts are held for a specified time, but there is considerable flexibility in the system, and the term of appointment can be extended or terminated.

Apart from these individual appointments, there are certain families in the village with the hereditary occupational status. The families of these officials (*Lha-bdags*) have an sort of reli-

gious sanction to conduct the first ritual operation on behalf of the villagers. There are three *Lha-bdags*, one responsible for the irrigation work, one for cultivation and one for servicing the village deity. The *Lha-bdag* responsible for the irrigation, offers salty grain and prayers on behalf of the villagers to the deity Gang-si-Lhamo, before the construction of a new canal and the repair works on old canals is undertaken at the beginning of season each year. Then he opens the water canal and first waters the field. After this ritual operation, the villagers begin their irrigation work. These celebrations are called *Bhair*. He supervises irrigation system, dividing the water equally among the fields. He has to keep the account of the fields and the number of the days or hours for opening of water. Similarly there is *Lha-bdag* for cultivation. He ploughs the first three furrows in the field (*Bhl*) and then sows the first grain. The entire ceremony is accompanied by an elaborate ritual and festive celebrations. There is one *Lha-bdag* in the village who is responsible for servicing the village deity during the celebrations of certain festivals. All the three *Lha-bdag* belong to different *Pha-spun*. They do not form a caste by themselves but only have an elevated status, with in the *Ruscen* lineage that too only at the time of ritual performance. From within the same *Pha-spun* there are two additional households who are assigned the role of second and the third substituting *Lha-bdag's*. The need for second and third substitute arises during the period of pollution. For instance in case of birth and death, the prohibition period is long and *Lha-bdag* cannot perform his duties, during that period second or third can take over. Similarly in Haramosh valley, there are hints, that a man of the senior line in the *tukur* had priestly functions. Even under Islam he had the right to begin seeding and harvesting" (Carl Jettmar, 1980, p. 58). There is one *Lha-bab* in *Dah-Bema* who communicates with the supernatural, and perform the role of Shaman. The *Lha-bab* is different from *Lha-bdag* who worship the village deity. The *Lha-bab* has lost much of its importance, because of introduction of modern med-

icine and he has not performed for last 20 years. Certain ethnic groups living in Gilgit, Hunza and Baltistan have partially preserved their traditional structure like *Dah-Bema*.

The social tradition in this area, works in the people's favour. The communal nature of the social structure works towards the stability of the social system as such. The ties of common residence, daily co-operation and face to face relations in the local neighbourhood tend to be permanent. A group's social organisation of social relations is an integral aspect of its adaptation to social as well as physical pressures in the habitat. Practically every household is a farming unit and the agricultural activities dominates the economic life of the village. In this type of economic scene, autonomy and self sufficiency is necessarily high, but still in some quarters of life mutual help is needed. Co-operative groups fulfil this need. Desired traditional norms and values are kept in order. These relationships are internal regulations of Brok-pa society which bind relationships. Co-operative labour is an important feature of their life and encourages the full use of human resources.

Decision Making

The Brok-pa villages had remained independent and self-sufficient until quite late in the history of the region. Till now, these show the conspicuous absence of an over arching political order regulating their village life. The political structure of the village tends to follow the adherence of certain traditions, but it does not amount to much in terms of real politics. There is one selected headman (*Go-ba*), who is selected for three years, but impeachment is possible, if the work of the *Go-ba* is not satisfactory. These traces of the republican system are remnants of the customs of original race. In case, where problematic situation arise that effects the community as a whole, a group of five or six elders may get together to discuss it. Such a group always contain some of the "big people" of the village. These 'big people' will include persons from the households with hereditary occupation, some

community-minded and/or upwardly mobile men. These ad-hoc committees have no official powers or responsibilities and no means of enforcing compliance with anything. But it should be stressed that in a way could these people singly or collectively, be said to "run" the village. Essentially, the Brok-pa depend on internalized constraints for prevention. This works, because of the small size of the village. And when inner constraints fail and some unfortunate event occurs, the Brok-pa resort to ad-hoc committees.

Inner constraints, as the Brok-pa conceive of them, include the desire to avoid shame, personal pollution, which affects one as the result of the certain types of acts, which corrupts one's mind often leading to illness whether the act is publically known or not. While some polluting acts are not social and do not have social consequences, such acts as fighting, beating and improper sexual liaisons are both social crimes and personal pollutants. The desire to avoid the pollution resulting from such acts may at least partially constraints people from committing them. And then, there is the desire to avoid sin.

Unfortunately, of course, the inner constraints do not always constrain. Disputes develop over land, divorce etc. from time-to-time. In the case of disputes, the head man might informally play the role of middleman in trying to settle them. Sometimes, disputes just more or less smouldered along, occasionally erupting into serious public arguments or fights. Relatives and friends will try to calm an argument and when it seems to verging on violence, the disputants are shepherded off in separate directions.

Among Brok-pa, there is no official governing or decision making unit. Further there is no class structure, such that landowners might have indirect (economic) power over tenants or labourers. In short, no one has the right or power to command the other members of the community. Yet Brok-pa villages can hardly be called egalitarian. There are broad differences of wealth or status, which has social as well as economic implications. High status 'big-people' have two culturally defined basis-wealth and generosity. In

addition there is always a genealogical factor, the distinction between *Ruscen* and *Rusmet* lineage, the *Ruscen* being higher than the *Rusmet*. Lastly, it is believed that with age a spiritual maturity or higher status is achieved, all other factors being equal.

A newly rich and newly charitable man will not automatically spring to the top of the status hierarchy, because he does not have the genealogical heritage, than the other who already has. However, it must be stressed that high status does not guarantee political power. It is however true that wealth gives them material comforts, greater economic freedom and security-it does not give them authority to make decisions. The influence of religious leaders is rather restricted. The whole system is highly inefficient and leaves lots of open ends.

Similar situation prevails among Shin-pseaking Dards of Gilgit Agency. Every community is headed by a council called "*Jigra*", which has to settle minor quarrels. In Duber-Kandia area, the members of *Jigra* were chosen by a kind of "Senior line autocracy". But even there strong antagonism among the castes is evident. Barth calls such societies as "acephalous" (Carl Jettmar, 1980, p. 45-46).

As for the Brok-pa way of handling serious disputes over land, water, animals etc., their general tendency is to bring the matter to the notice of the headman and village elders, who take the contenders to the Gonpa and give it to the one who take the oath. All the disputes in the village are decided by an oath. Henceforth, for a period of one year, the two men would not be allowed to attend any social or religious function together, but in turn to avoid chances of any fight. The disputing parties do not drink *Chaang* together (*Tur-chaang Har-Rushang-no chaang* amongst enemies). After a year or so, the headman and elders would meet again and make the two men exchange their cup of *Chaang* or drink from the same cup. After this, they are reconciled and help each other and share each other's joys and sorrows again. Ecological condition in the area do not permit for the prolonged fights as the village

community is small, and people need each other. From the very beginning they have tried to keep themselves aloof from their neighbours. Surrounded by other ethnic groups on all sides (Ladakhis, Purigpa and Baltis), they have to be self sufficient as far as possible for their survival as Brok-pa. Consequently they settle all their disputes among themselves instead of going to courts of Leh and Kargil.

In 1980, Buddhist Association constituted by the three to four elected or nominated members from each village was established. The members of Buddhist Association are arbitrators to settle disputes of land, water, wood and divorce etc. The members are mostly village elders or otherwise influential persons.

BROK-PA TRADITIONS

Brok-pa have some distinct traditions which separate them from other Ladakhis. In some respects they have kept the customs of the race they sprang from and in others they have adopted the customs of Buddhists. Heber and Heber (1875) while describing the Brok-pa of Dah and Hanu mentioned a strange religious arrangement, that often in a Buddhist family one member must of necessity be a Mohamadan" (1875, p. 95). At present no such arrangements exists. The Brok-pa of this area are Buddhists. The Muslims families have moved to the new settlement at Gurgur-Do. It is not only in marriages that they keep themselves apart from their neighbours. They do not eat with the Buddhist or Muslims or outsiders nor will they allow these to come near their cooking place. The caste prejudice seem to originate on the side of the Brok-pa, for their neighbours often eat in their houses; only separate dishes are given to them, which are afterwards purified by burning Juniper (Brok-skad-*Chillgi* Tibetan *Shukpa*). *Chillgi* is considered sacred by these people. On festivals and religious occasion, the *Chillgi* is burnt in a potter-shred. No Brok-pa will eat in the house or in the dishes of a Tibetan, nor will he eat fowl, eggs, cow flesh, drink cow milk, cow butter etc. Formerly, if they had

been among Tibetans, they would purify themselves with the smoke of *Chillgi* before entering the house. Similarly, during trading expeditions the Buddhist Dards took their rations of *Sattu* (roasted barley flour) with them and before their return they were to finish the rations or else give them away. They could not bring their rations back. They were only allowed into the house after they had cleaned and purified themselves with the *Chillgi* smoke. A basis for such a conduct was the principle of the pollution and *Chillgi* tree (*Lhashuk*) is considered the abode of the *Lha* (God). The reverence shown for *Chillgi* and its purifying properties link the Brok-pa Dards to the Shin of Gilgit.

Brok-pa hold cow in abhorrence. They will not drink cow's milk, nor do they eat or make butter from it. Nor do they burn cow-dung—the most common used fuel in Ladakh. These things are not allowed to enter the *Kagani Mane* (A Kagani is a kind of edifice placed at the entrance to the village, constructed of brick, plastered over and painted). These animals are specially repulsive to women. It is believed that cows and fowls are offensive to their *Lhatho* (God) *Shring Mulama*, which is supposed to be present in Dah. For ploughing also they use Bull or *Dzo* (a hybrid between cow and yak). Only for crossing yak with cow, cows are tolerated in village or near it, but they have as little as possible to do with them. If a cow dies, the people from Achinathang are invited to take the carcass. *Dzo* is indispensable for ploughing their fields, so they have to keep them in their animal shed but once sowing and ploughing seasons over (they reap two harvests in a year) they are driven to higher mountains. There are heaps of *Dzo* dung in the villages, but people would not use it for manure or for fuel. It is lying unused. Goat is considered a better substitute. Goat's milk is used in the households. For a Brok-pa, the goat is *Nor* or wealth. The status of a man is determined by the number of goats and sheep, he owns. Generally a household has at least 15-30 goats and sheep, but few households have more than 100 sheep and goats.

The intensity of their feeling with regard to the

cow and domestic fowl shows their kinship with the Shins of Gilgit, and the fact that feeling is one of aversion, and not of reverence is sufficient to show that in case of the later it has not sprung into existence since their conversion to the faith of Islam, but is an ancient tradition of the race. In the village of Duru, between Rundu and Karames, is a building containing a wooden altar, four feet high, with a tabular surface of two feet in diameter, called *Micho*. From the No-Roz or vernal equinox to a particular day, the natives do not touch milk, affirming that the Deyu would destroy their flocks, and they never drink of cow's milk, for fear of him. On a particular day they burn goat's fat and juniper-branches, upon the altar and dance, sing and drink wine and eat the meat of the wild goat. In Muru Wurdwan, after a death none of the relations will touch milk until a particular day arrives (Vigne, 1981: 305). The taboo of the Shin caste not to touch any part of a cow, not to drink its milk, and not to eat its meat, is at present observed by a few individuals only (Shamans, hunters), for a short time, when ritual purity is required.....The taboo in connection with the cow was only the counterpart of goat-worship. As this is not shared by Iranians and Burushaski speakers, it must be considered as specifically Dardic (Carl Jettmar 1981, p. 56). Goat-worship existed among the mountain tribes of Iran, may be because of similar economic condition *i.e.*, intense goat-breeding and the use of evergreen trees for winter feeding. Apart from the supernatural or religious sentiments, the ecological conditions of the area do not allow for the breeding of cows. Within the overall pattern of mixed farming and pastoral complex, the divine prohibition against cow constitutes a sound ecological strategy. The cows cannot be raised in this arid habitat and cows are threat rather than asset for agriculture. The basic reason is these unforested hills are too arid for rainfall agriculture and are irrigated by complex network of channels. Because of the steepness of slopes, narrow gorges, the unstable hill-slopes composed of friable rocks, continually shifting under the forces of erosion raise grazing problems

and feeding them in winter is a problem. This may be the reason for wise Brok-pa elders in olden-times who associated it with the hatred of gods which alone could be a effective ban. The domestic animals best adopted to these environments are sheep and goats. The sure-footed goat could easily climb these mountains for grazing. It is easy for a family to maintain 15-20 sheep without any extra expense. The sheep and goats can eat crumbs and parings of all kinds. Apricot skins, turnip peelings, pea-shells and used tea-leaves are eagerly picked up by sheep and goats. It grazes on grass, straw, chaff and leaves as well. It gives lambs within twelve months. It is shorn twice during the year and provides much needed wool. The sheep is much prized for the flavour and delicacy of its mutton. Goat is considered a symbol of fertility, as it is the only sure-footed animal that can endure in this terrain. The religious affinity between *Chillgi* and goat reflect the economic stage when the branches of this tree alone were used for winter feeding. This is only possible for goats and never for cows.

It is not right to claim that all religiously sanctioned food practices have ecological explanations. Taboos also have social functions, such as helping people to think of themselves as a distinctive community. However, now things are changing and men while on business outside. Brokland do not mind taking cows butter and tea with milk etc. Some families in Bema and Hanu have started keeping cows.

Although the Brok-pa of Dah-Bema are Buddhists, yet their real worship is that of local spirits. Brok-pa pantheon contains both male and female deities. The guardian deity of Dah-Bema is *Shiring-Lhamo* (*Lhamo* being a suffix indicating feminine gender) while that of Garkon-*Zang-mande Gyapo* (masculine suffix) and Hanu, is *Zang-Ldan-Gyapo* (masculine suffix). The origin of these local deities and why some are male and others are female is not known. A family in the village supplies the hereditary priest.

Yato-Grun Feast: Brok-pa have a unique tradition of celebrating *Yato-Gung* or feast of merit. *Yato-Grun* is particularly important for men and

women who have completed cycles of six *Loskor* (one *Loskar* = 12 years). It is believed among Brok-pa, that higher purity can be achieved through brave deeds and by giving the 'feast of merit'; later being related to economic prosperity. Though, it is not economic prosperity alone, but also a spiritual achievement through brave and selfless deeds for the community. This type of merit making leads to acquired higher status, and consequently a higher grade of purity.

Among Brok-pa, when girls complete their first *Loskor*, the occasion is celebrated by throwing a large feast to the whole village. The first cycle for the girl is of importance as they would be entering puberty. A girl's puberty signifies potentiality for childbearing. Everybody is welcome for *Chaang* and meals. The spacious family kitchen are packed with guests. The female whose *Yato-Grun* is being celebrated, sits near her hearth, with gents on her left and the ladies on her right. Guests are served *Chaang*. Then the music starts, followed by dance. At midnight, a meal consisting of *Papa* and melted goat butter is served. The young boys and girls stand near the wall quite intimately. Freedom in between sexes is permissible.

This 'feet of merit' is somewhat similar to the one that was celebrated in Harmosh valley in honour of a woman who lived a pure life without fault (adultery), observing certain taboos (such as not to step over crossroads directly) a platform '*Tali*' was erected by her parental family. A chair was put on this '*Tali*' and she had to sit down on it richly ornamental. The monument of that ordeal was called "*Sili-Tali*" (Carl Jettmar, 1980, p. 58).

Among Brok-pa, it is believed that with age a spiritual maturity is achieved. The importance attached to age signifies their belief in ancestor worship. Brok-pa cremate their dead outside the village at lower altitude, considered to be impure; but worship their ancestors within the village or at *Pha-spun Munal* at higher altitude.

socio-religious beliefs of Brok-pa have two different spheres, one concerning with the rituals of *Bononah* festival and the other with *rite-*

de-passage and the yearly festive cycle associated with agriculture and rearing of livestock. The *Bononah* festival belongs to the traditional religious complex inherited by Brok-pa from their Minaro ancestors. The *Bononah* beliefs and rituals are kept alive through oral transmission from one generation to another. The other festivals and rituals play an important part in their daily life. All these rituals are actually performed and serves as an social event, when all the villagers participate. Rituals are social events with supernatural overtone. These events take place at the beginning or upon the successful completion of their agricultural, activities connected with pastoral cycle, New year celebrations and Feast of Merit etc. The ceremonies connected with birth, marriage and death, may not bring the entire village, but these are social events for the *Pha-spun* or at hamlet level. The *Bononah* festival traditions are kept artificially alive by celebrating every three years; in the yearly festive cycle the rituals are not only learned but are life performances to the deities, who are to be pleased, periodically to avert the supernatural wrath. The rites are held to produce a harmonious relationship between man and the supernatural. They also serve as social occasions where large number of people come together for conversation, drinking and general gaiety. Rituals generate a given view of the world, and engenders commitment to existing institutional structures and modes of social relationship. Rituals restores equilibrium in an unstable or antagonistic situation or validates the *status-quo*.

Underlying the entire socio-religious complex of beliefs are the concept of pollution, impurity, purity and sacred. Brok-pa worship nature-mountains, flowers, water spirits and earth spirits, a natural out come of their ecological conditions. Ibex is considered holy animal, whose horns adorne their shrines.

The concept of 'pure-impure' plays an important role in the life of Brok-pa. During the critical events in life, like birth and death, pollution is constantly occurring, causing one to be impure. This impure state must be constantly purified. It

is never ending life time process. The state of purity/impurity is always occurring within the household, between the households, between the kins and between the villagers and outsiders. This indicates the 'closed system' of their society. The state of purity of their ethnic group is maintained by endogamy.

When a person or place is impure or polluted (*Chitu*), it is purified symbolically by cleansing oneself or place with the smoke of smouldering *Chillgi* (Juniper). There is another kind of purification, which is undertaken on particular occasions like prior to sending livestock to pasture grounds during *Gunla* festival, or before the celebrations of *Losar* festival as preventive measures. On all these occasions the house is smoked with *Chillgi* and utensils washed in water boiled with *Chillgi* branches and leaves. Through all the yearly festivals related to agriculture and pastoral activities, purificatory rites are undertaken before starting any rituals. During *Losar* (New year) celebrations, not every household perform its own purification but the entire village is cleansed. A procession of villagers carrying burning Juniper torches cleanse the atmosphere, thus chasing away the impurity of the past year.

Among Brok-pa, the purity is an attribute of the environment. All the regions above the settlement i.e. the mountains, the pasture ground, lakes, glaciers, and streams taking their origin from these regions are pure. There are certain trees, flowers and animals which inhabit higher regions are symbols of purity. The shepherds who come down from pasture grounds are seen as permeating with purity. The sweet smelling flowers from the pasture grounds are similarly associated with purity. Thus whosoever goes to mountain and glaciers acquire some of its attributes. Among human beings, this state of purity/impurity is dynamic-continually occurring and being removed by purification. Through yearly festive cycle purification ceremonies are undertaken to usher events.

Purity and impurity are inherent in sexes. Females are relatively less pure than males, until old age when they become sexually neutral. The

women are forbidden from approaching the Juniper shrine (*Chillgi Deuha*) at *Dah-Drouk* (pasture ground).

The Juniper (*Chillgi*) tree holds a special significance for Brok-pa. It is supposed to have purifying qualities. During ceremonies it is said to cleanse the atmosphere of evil spirits. Before any ritual activity, they symbolically wash themselves with the *chillgi* smoke. They do those also on coming back from any excursion outside the village. They do not use water having a belief that their *Barkat* (grace or charm) will go away with the washing. A person returning from outside the village is not allowed to enter his house or touch any household thing, till he has cleaned or purified himself with the *chillgi* smoke. The *Chillgi* leaves are eaten and its smoke is inhaled by the *Lha-bab* (shaman) before performing any ritual or exorcism or going into trance.

The importance of Juniper (*Chillgi*) in Brok-pa life can also be explained for its economic value. In the barren wilderness of Ladakh where nothing grows wild, *Chillgi* grows in abundance in the track inhabited by the Brok-pa Dards. This can be seen growing in the cracks in the rocks. In this ecological setting, at the time of difficulty this tree serves as food for their livestock and wood for their fire. Buddhist Dards make commercial use of it by selling bundles of *Chillgi* branches at Leh during *Losar* (New year), where it does not grow as such.

Brok-pa belief system incorporates fear of fairies (*Pari*) and demons (*Shaitan*). There are evil spirits and good spirits. As a protection against evil spirits, urinary bladder of goats are hung on the right side of the fire place. To avoid evil spirits a palmeter high stone (*San-doz*) is kept on roof tops, fresh blood is put over of, when an animal is sacrificed.

Ceremonial life of Brok-pa consists of individual rites involving the family members. Some ceremonies include people outside the family, the *Pha-spun* members. Other ceremonies include processions or other public spectacles and involve feasts and other entertainments that can be attended by people of all *Pha-spun*. The inter-

Pha-spun participation includes activities like joining a procession, giving a gift, accepting food, listening to a story, playing games, participating in an evening of songs and dances or simply acting as spectators. All the *Pha-spun* participate in religious ceremonies. Among Brok-pa, there are three levels at which gods enter the village life—through Household worship, *Pha-spun* worship and village and inter-village worship. The village gods are propitiated by hereditary *Lha-bdag*.

Household Worship: In all Brokpa houses, the hearth is central to the life at home. One end of the hearth faces the wall and in between the two is placed *Sa-bdag*. It consists of three upright stones, of which, one at the back of the hearth is the largest, about two feet in length. It is representative of the house god and the binding force for the family members living in the household. It was brought down from mountains by the founding father. On this stone they place an offering for the *Lhamo* (Goddess) from every dish cooked there, before eating it. Prior to every meal a prayer is offered by sprinkaling three times, with first three fingers in the direction of *Sa-bdag*. First fruits of harvest are also offered. Outsiders are not allowed to touch it or come near it. It is believed that, if any outsider will come near it or touch it, it will be polluted, thus affecting the success and fertility of the household. A girl once married is not allowed to touch the *Sa-bdag* of her natal family for fear of pollution. She is not allowed to enter the animal shed once she is married, for this may effect the fertility of the herd. The form of spirit workshop, the traces of which are preserved among Brok-pa, appears to be identical with that of the traditions of Gilgit.

Pha-spun Workshop: Each *Pha-spun* has a common '*Munal*' where ancestral worship is performed. *Munal* is a crevice in the rock where burning *Chillgi* (Juniper) leaves and special dishes are offered, on several festive occasions. *Mamani* festival held towards the end of December is one, when specially prepared dishes and burning *Chillgi* leaves are offered amidst lots of singing. Each *Pha-spun* partakes in feasting

separately. The descendants of the same *Pha-spun* deposits the bones or ashes of their members at the *Lha-tho* or *Munal*. This *Pha-spun* worship of ancestors represents the family authority and reverence extended into the supernatural realm. *Village Worship: Lha-tho* (*Brok-skad: Deuha*) are constructed for protection against diseases and ill-luck or for the fertility and prosperity of the household. These are kept on high rocky ground and on house roof tops where there is no danger of pollution. Along these *Lha-tho*'s, *Chillgi* leaves and goat horns are also kept. Village ceremonial life is taken care of by *Lha-bdag*. *Lah* has its shrine on particular high mountains located in the crevice in the rocks. The *Lha-bdag* regularly offers sacrifices to the respective deities during festivals. *Lha-tho* are two to four feet high piles of stones erected in worship of *Lha* and on all festival occasions food and prayers are offered.

Cultivation and livestock rearing are the basic economic activities of the Buddhist Dards. Agricultural and pastoral activities are interwoven with many religious ceremonies. There is a *Lha-bdag* in the village who announces the spring Equinox and the day for beginning of the agricultural activities. He plays an important role in the village agricultural activities by observing the journey of the sun across the mountains. His observations are accepted by the villagers, to open up the season for agricultural activities.

Cultivation season starts with the celebration of '*Sontas*', held approximately 20 days prior to the *Bhi* festival. First crop is sown towards the end of the February and the beginning of March. During *Sontas*, *Sattu* (Tib: *Tsampa*, roasted barley flour) marks are put on the door of the houses and on the faces of children. Following day, *Lha-bdag* for cultivation ploughs the fields symbolically. This is followed by cutting the hair on the bulls neck and then the yoke is put on the neck to which plough is attached.

A month after the sowing of crops, *Bhaiz* celebrations takes place, when the *Lha-bdag* responsible for irrigation, offers salty grains and prayers on behalf of the villagers to the deity *Gang-si-Lha-Mo* and lets the water in to the field.

After this ritual operation, the villagers begin their irrigation work. Weeding of grass starts approximately after ten days, following which routine of watering the fields and weeding continues during alternate weeks until harvesting of crops.

In June, *Gunla* festival is celebrated. *Gunla* festival is known as the festival of sheep and goats. A kid goat is sacrificed by the *Lha-bdag* to appease the deity and prayers are offered to *Zang-Mande* for the fertility of livestock. The shrine of the deity *Zang Mande* is situated between Dah and Garkon. This festival lasts for three days. The meat of the kid goat is cooked in the *Ghee* (Clarified butter), contributed by all the villagers. *Lha-bdag* takes the major share and rest is equally distributed among villagers. Livestock moves to higher valley pasture for summer months. The movement of livestock is necessitated both by the lack of edible plants at this altitude and secondly the crop is ready for harvesting. The livestock are brought in to the village after the harvest.

The harvesting begins between end of June or beginning of July. The *Noh* (Tib: *Shrubla*) festival is celebrated at this harvest, which lasts for five days. First few corns of the barley or wheat crop are tied on the main pillar of the house and on the *Sa-bdag*. Second crop of *Cha* (Buckwheat) is sown after this.

After harvesting and drying the crops, in the mid-August, the festival of *Khudaskhal* is celebrated. After which the grain is threshed with the help of 4 or 5 bulls which circulate round the *Khal* (a circular place, plastered with earth) filled up with the crop. A feast is given in rotation by few households.

In the first week of December the New year festival '*Lo-sar*' is celebrated. During the lazy winter months, it is a time of great activity for seven days. Even the *Losar* among Brok-pa is celebrated like their ancestors in Gilgit used to do. On the eve of the *Losar*, they light torches made of pieces of *Chillgi* tied round a stock and throw at a particular place in the village. There is a tragic love story behind this tradition. Brok-pa make sheep and goats of dough for this occa-

and decorate their kitchen walls with crescent and other designs. *Sattu* marks are put on the door along with a polostick made out of dough. The day for the new year celebration is decided by an old man who watches the course of the sun in the sky and pronounce the day. The burning of torches and ibex made of dough of wheat flour and tying of a branch of Juniper to the pillar in the kitchen are some of the important features of the New year celebrations. Some of these features have their origin to the ancient Dard culture. The ibexes and Juniper branch are needed to please the family god or the village God. Besides this, Brok-pa carry food and drink to the *Pha-mun Munal* and offer food to their ancestors. Oil lamps are lit in the house as well as the *Munal* sacrifices of animals if possible, and offerings of prayers and food are frequently made to *Pha-mun* ancestors to keep them from bringing bad luck.

Bononah Festival (Chupo-Shrubla)

The Brok-pa of Dah-Bema have a tradition of celebrating the *Bononah* festival. It cuts across the village boundaries and depicts the ethnic identity of Brok-pa Dards as a distinct unit. It gives them an occasion to remember their Minaro traditions. It lasts for five days. It starts four or five days before the harvest. During this time Brok-pa deities are propitiated. This religious belief system is totally different from the Buddhist religious system which is otherwise followed. The other yearly Buddhist religious beliefs and rituals practised by Brok-pa are like other Ladakies. Only on *Bononah* festival a religious belief system is brought alive triennially. Once in three years the Brok-pa celebrate their Dard festival with their deities of *Bononah* Pantheon. During these five days, they sing Dard songs which alludes to their belief in the primordial days when gods and human lived together. The Brok-pa believe that their ancestors danced with the *Lhas* (gods), who migrated with them from Gilgit to Lah-Drouk (mountain pasture). The *Lhas* were fond of dancing and because of this Brok-pa's hunting and agricultural activities suffered. This harmonious relationship between *Lhas* and Brok-pa was brought to an end by the intrigue of

an old woman. This also resulted in the creation of heaven and earth. The deities who lived together with the humans in harmony departed. During these five days the priest (*Lha-bdag*) prays in isolation in order to invite their deities to come and participate in the festivities with the humans. *Lharna* is the music for the gods and the burning of incense is done to appease the gods. No outsider is allowed in the village premises, for the fear of pollution.

It is celebrated in October in turn successively in Dah and Garkon, and the third year is left off, as it is said that in former times it was celebrated in Ganok village on the other side of the cease fire line. Traditionally the date of the festival was fixed by the *Lha-bdag* according to the course of Moon. But now-a-days, it is calculated according to some Buddhist Book.

This festival is celebrated at the harvesting of their second crop after its threshing is over. Livestock is brought down from the higher pastures. The households which cultivate their crops at higher altitude have also harvested their crops. At this time *Skalzong* flowers of various colours are in full bloom. Brok-pa love flowers. These flowers are worn on their head dress. Except for the *Shoklas* other flowers like *Skalzung* and *Tung-Tung-Kaliman* are replaced daily during festival. Flowers of various colours with strong sweet smell are bought from the glacial heights to decorate their caps. *Chillgi* wood for making torches is also brought from the higher altitude for its purity.

The festival starts by bringing the *Lha* to the dancing square down the village. A teenager boy plays the role of the *Lha*. He has to stay separately for three days. During the day he stays near the crevice in the rock and in the evening he sleeps in a separate room in the house. The whole festival is managed by *Lha-bdag* because he knows all the hymnals to be sung during the festival. According to Francke the number of hymnals is 18 but E. Joldon mentions 23 hymnals (Franke, 1907; Joldon, 1985). The text of these hymnals are different. Some of them describe the rituals being performed at the festival; others are riddle contest between men and

women; hymnals with sexual connotation, about shepherds and hunters and bravery of their ancestors. All these hymnals are sung in Shin language. These have been translated by Francke (1907). This Bononah the "Day of National Pride" is identical with the Bonion festival which is well remembered if not actually held at Gor. The ceremonial chase described by one of the songs seem to be the central act of many other Dardic religious rites. It is based on the conception that it is the hunter who brings the supernatural down to the land of men (Karl Jettmar, 1980). Two small goats are sacrificed in the morning near the *Lha-rock*, and their carcasses are brought to the square. These are cut into small lumps for distribution. The *Lha-bdag*, village head man (*Mokhdam* or *Goba*) and other elders start dancing and climb the rock to bring down the *Lha* dressed in white woollen gown and conical cap. The *Lha* dressed leading the procession carrying *Phoks* (the incense pot). The musician plays the *Lharna* while others dance. The *Phok* is kept in the square of the village and the *Lha* disappears. Then the hymnals describing the migration of their ancestors from Gilgit, under the leadership of the *Gil-Singe* (Lion of Gilgit) are sung by *Lha-bdag* and *Goba*.

The festival lasts for five days. On all the five days, festival starts in the evening and hymnals are sung. On the first day of the festival, the drinking is strictly prohibited but on other days it is allowed but not on dancing place. After supper they have a second dancing session. The final day of the festival coincides with the death anniversary of their ancestral leader *Gil-Singe*. In respect of their ancestral leader, they take off their caps and keep silence for a few minutes.

On fifth day, harvest begins. Few strands of crops are harvested and fastened to the main pillar of the house as an offering to the house-God. (*Sa-bdag*), and few are offered at the village *Lha-tho*.

Mamani Festival: In the Memory of their ancestors, Brok-pa celebrate mamani on 19th of December. This worship is organised by each *Pha-spun* at their respective *Munal*, where oil

lamps are lit and food is cooked. The cooked food is first offered to the ancestors along with prayers. Then the members of each *Pha-spun* have a feast accompanied by dancing and singing.

In the last week of December, festival of the horse-*Stastun* is celebrated for two days. The feast accompanying this festival is sponsored by few villagers, who become privileged players during the games. Two sets of objects are prepared for the two days games. For the first day a *Roti* (round flat bread), a flower and a yak made of dough is prepared. For the second day instead of a flower, a piece of snow is kept. The villagers assemble there with their horses. The hosts who arrange the feast are the only ones who are allowed to hit the yak made of dough. Then the music starts playing and the players try to hit the objects with the stick while sitting on a galloping horse. The participants who are able to strike any of the objects get the prize from the musicians. These celebrations are accompanied by drinking of *chaang*, singing and dancing.

In the middle of January, *Speeches* (season) is celebrated, marking the change of season. Prayers are held for good harvest. Food is taken before day break. Protection against rats, birds and other pests is sought in their prayers. Married daughter, *Magpa* or *Baru* are invited in their parental home for feast.

Most of the ceremonies are held during the idle months of winter, when there are no other means of socialising or entertainment.

Besides spirit worship, Brok-pa practise Buddhism. The conversion to Buddhism is recent. Lamas from Skurbuchan converted these people. There is remarkable absence of Buddhist monuments (*Chortens*, *Mani*) in Dah-Bema which form such a prominent feature along the roads in Ladakh. There is only one Gonpa in Dah. Their young men are not trained as Lamas. There is only one Lama in the Dah-Bema. They burn their dead and stow away the bones in the *Pha-spun's Munal*. Unlike Buddhist, they do not cremate their dead in sitting position, but like Hindus in a prostrate position. The Ladakhis in other areas cremate their dead in a sitting position since

less wood is used in oven like square platform where the dead are positioned and burned. Brok-pa cremates their dead in prostrate position as wood is in abundance in this area. Apricot wood is a must for Brok-pa pyre.

SUMMARY

The Buddhist Dards of Ladakh form an ethnic entity. Their traditions show a capacity to adapt themselves to new influence yet retaining their belief system. The continued existence of their beliefs can be seen in their social organisation and religious systems which have absorbed Tibetan and Buddhist ideas. The Brok-pa of Dah-Bema, though residing in an homogenous cultural area of Ladakh, surrounded by other ethnic groups on all sides Ladakhis, Purigpa and Baltis have preserved some Dardic specialities like pattern of dress, head-dress, dispute solving mechanism and some ancient religious ceremonies. Though, differing in certain traits, Brok-pa have adopted specific social institutions of traditional Buddhist structure. These social institutions have ascertained the success of Ladakhi way of life. Even while adopting new customs in reference to religion, they adopted Buddhism diluted with remnants of the *Bon-Chos*. It is strange, as to how in some respects they have kept the customs of the race they sprang from (customs regarding cows and fowls etc. to an extreme extent) and how in others have adopted the customs of the Buddhists. One reason for retaining their Shina or *Brok-skad* language distinctive dress, head-dress and cultural and racial purity is that they have remained isolated in these inaccessible mountain valley, left alone both by the expeditionary forces of 18th century as well as by traders due to harsh ecological conditions. The other reason for retaining their identity was that Brok-pa have a sense of superiority *vis-a-vis* the other Ladakhis. The constant endeavours to maintain their identity arises from their attempt to monopolize the economic resources of the area without outside interference. For Brok-pa ethnicity is the only form of defining status. The Brok-pa Dards are an endogamous group and as an inher-

ent characteristic they have avoided outside contact. This is the result of a socio-religious belief system that has its basis in the concept of pollution. In the past, strangers were debarred from entering the village. The basis of such conduct was pollution. Though, now outsiders do come and can enter the village, but the commensal and marital exchange is not allowed. The lack of commensal and marital exchange between the Brok-pa and other neighbouring communities means to represent a sort of covert or suspended competition for maintaining equality or superiority. What is implied by this statement is that while the Brok-pa do not encourage marital exchange in order to maintain superiority or ethnic identity, the other communities are motivated by a desire to match or equal the Brok-pa by being equally unwilling to enter any alliance with the Brok-pa. The situation remains largely unsolved because structural change requires long time and general consensus, all else remaining equal. Moreover, there is also the nagging fear of pollution and supernatural wrath. Brok-pa purity/pollution belief postulate that the primary effects of pollution are on the individual, although ultimately if the pollution is prevalent and widespread, the community as a whole may suffer. The effects are usually mental or emotional, rather than physical.

This paper suggests that the Buddhist Dards inhabiting this area have adopted to the constraints of the physical environment by adopting specific social institutions of traditional Buddhist social structure. The foremost of these are the laws concerning land tenure and marriage practices. These laws were made to preserve intact, through the generations, a man's house and his fields. To protect landholdings, all the land is transmitted in its entirety to the eldest son, in absence of a male heir to the eldest daughter.

The law of primogeniture (1) prevented the fragmentation of arable land; and (2) concentrated labour in the family units. For regulation of population growth, the customs of polyandry was adopted. The law of primogeniture left the other sons with no land. Either they work under

the supervision of their eldest brother or they become *Baru* or *Mag-pa* in the families where there are only daughters. The economy is based on agriculture with irrigated fields, mostly in artificial terraces, as well as herding with use of pastures and stall feeding during winter time. Families usually utilise their own labour for working on land, and villages have an intricate and extreme democratic system of sharing water from mountain channels, co-operation among families for heavy and labourious agricultural tasks, for birth, marriage and death ceremonies. There is hardly any gender specific division of labour and relations between sexes are most balanced. Much of this is being eroded slowly with the introduction of cash economy and introduction of Government sponsored development programmes.

Construction of road, improvement in the means of transportation and opening up of Ladakh for tourists has contributed to the exposure of these people to outsiders. Despite their remoteness and inaccessibility, over the past 30 or 50 years a series of different but structurally analogous, events have impacted on the life of these people and, in essence, have destroyed the traditional homeostatic adaptation. The traditional social and environmental balance is being disturbed by the provision of new economic opportunities. Four wars, the closure of border, the considerable presence of Indian Army and slow commercialisation of agriculture have played an important role in the socio-economic life of the people. This transformation has produced a situation of inability and dependence that emerges as one of the most salient characteristics of these populations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is thankful to the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, for the financial aid in the form of Research Scientist.

REFERENCES

- Bhasin, M.K. and Singh, L.P.: A study of body morphology and lung functions in Dards of Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Indi, *J. Hum. Ecol.*, 3: 71-72 (1992).
- Dainelli, G.: Le Condizioni della genti. Spedizione Italiana de Fillipi nell' Hemalaia, caracorum e Tuschestion Cinese (1925) (1913-1914), Series-II, 9. Bologna.
- Drew, Frederic: *The Jammu And Kashmir Territories: A Geographical Account* (1875). Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, Reprinted (1976).
- Fræncke, A.H.: *Ladakh the Mysterious Land: History of Western Himalayas* (1907). Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, Reprinted (1977).
- Goldstein, Melv C.: High altimide Tibetan population in the remote Himalayas: Social transformation and its demographic, economic, and ecological consequence. *Mountain Research and Development*, 1: 5-18 (1981).
- Heber, A. Reeve and Heber, Kethleen, M.: *Himalayan Tibet and Ladakh. A Description of Its Cheery Folk, Their Ways and Religion. Of the Rigours of the Climate and Beauties of the Country, Its Flora and Fauna* (1926). Ess Ess Publication, New Delhi, Reprinted (1976).
- Jammu and Kashmir: *District Census Hand Book, District Leh, 1981*. Printing and Stationery, Jammu and Kashmir, Srinagar (1986).
- Jettmar, Karl: *Bolor and Dardistan*. Islamabad. Reprinted (1980).
- Jordan, E.: *Harvest Festival of Buddhist Dards of Ladakh and Other Essays*. Kapoor Brothers, Srinagar (1985).
- Norboo, T. and Yahya, M.: Health problems in Ladakh. *Voice of The Himalaya*, 1: 5-9 (1988).
- Peissel, Michel: L'or does fourmis: La decouverte de l' Eldorado grec an Tibet' Editions Robert Laffont (1984).
- Peter, Prince of Greece and Denmark: The pha-spun of Leh Tensil in Ladakh, eastern Kashmir. *East and West, Roma.*, 7: 138-146 (1956).
- Rizvi, Janet: *Ladakh: Cross roads of High Asia*. Oxford University Press, Delhi (1983).
- Rizvi, Janet and Kakpori, G.M.: Lost Kingdoms of the Gold-Digging Ants-A Book review. *India International Centre Quarterly*: 131-147 (1984).
- Vigne, G.T.: *Travels in Kashmir: Ladak, Iskardo Sagar Publications*, New Delhi (1981).
- Vohra, Rohit: *The Religion of the Dards in Ladakh: Investigation into their Pre-Buddhists Brog-pa Tradition*. Contribution to Himalayas Studies Ladakh Series: Vol. I Skydic Brown International, S.D. Publishing Division Luxembourg (1988).