

CULTURE AND CULTURAL RELEVANCE OF CHANGPA NOMADS

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ABSTRACT

The investigation was aimed at studying the culture and cultural relevance of changpa nomads. The study was conducted in Changthang region of Nyoma block of Leh district of J&K state. 100% of the changpa nomad's respondents celebrate losar festival and Guston. The losar festival marks the beginning of New Year in Ladakh and is considered to be the most important festival of the region. Respondents from all the villages celebrate Losar (New Year), Dalia Lama's birthday with feast and prayer in gompas (monasteries) people enjoyed a good stage fight between the good and the evil. Every year the date and the location of the festival, losar change. The result also revealed that 13.3 % of respondents believed in polyandry form of marriage because they believe that property will not be divided and will remain in the same family. Polyandry was prevalent only in the age of 35 - 50 years of respondents which clearly indicate that earlier generation believed in polyandry whereas the present generations do not believe in polyandry system. Regarding number of husbands 13.3% of respondents had two husbands and all husbands were brothers in relation.

KEYWORDS: Changthang, Changpa, Nomads, Polyandry

INTRODUCTION

Ladakh is the repository of ancient cultural heritage. It is the only place in the world, where Tantrayans Buddhism is practiced as a way of life. People of Changthang region are deeply drenched in music, dance and drama which embody religious fervor. The culture of Changthangi people is an interesting mix of Tibetan and other customs. The Changpa are Buddhists and share cultural and linguistic affinities with Tibet (Rizvi, 1996). The main occupation of the Changpa tribal community is animal husbandry. Changpa nomads weave cloth from wool acquired from Yak and goats which has been a traditional occupation. Raising livestock seems to have been main occupations providing clothing, shelter, and food. Having cheerfully adapted to the harsh weather and austere living conditions (www.indianetzone.com). Tribes of Jammu and Kashmir). The changpa society practiced fraternal polyandry where brothers usually married one woman as a way to restrict the number of individual households and avoid the division of limited property (livestock) and resources (Goodall 2003).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Stanzin Namgail (2015) conducted a study on "Marriage and Changing Pattern, among the Changpa Tribe of Ladakh. 50 sample has been drawn from four village i.e, sato, chepra, parma and kherapulu. Random sampling method was used. The finding of the study attempt to understand the social relationships, involved in the marriage of changpa tribe of Ladakh with a specific focus on rules, norms and patterns that govern the construction of social relationship, in the marriage system.

Sandy Shea (2015) investigated that the Changpa nomads is having an influence on retention of traditional song knowledge, and specifically on the transmission of this knowledge to younger generations. The praise or offering songs included in this study are a primary way that these Buddhist-animist peoples have traditionally conceived of themselves within their natural and human environment. Using an ecopsychological approach (focusing on the nexus between ecology, psychology, and spirituality), this study seeks to document the existence and nature of song loss, and to better understand how loss or hybridization of these songs may influence the evolving self-concept of the Changpa people, and how they interact with their natural environment. In many ways the traditional Changpa culture, with its emphasis on intimate relation to the land, to each other, and to the spirit world, embodies the ideals of ecopsychology.

Bhasin (2012) Studied that, in Changthang, and other parts of Ladakh, every male, female, adult and child, if he she is physically fit and old enough to work, participates in economic activities. Men and women both contribute towards household economy participating in herding, processing the animal products (milking, combing of pashmina and wool, spinning and weaving); household work (cooking, washing, cleaning, bringing water and fuel etc.); trading; child-care and socialization of children; social obligations and village duties.

Namgail, T.et al (2010) studied that, most of the villages in Changthang have monasteries, especially in their winter settlements. The monks perform rituals on special occasions, and based on the Tibetan astrological predictions they recommend auspicious days for herd movements to different pastures. Changpas live in yak-hair tents, known as Rebos, except in their winter settlements where they have one-room structures made of stone and mud. They sometimes indulge in cultural festivals especially during Losar (the New Year) where a special dance called Zhabro is performed.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Locale of the Study

Changthang is a unique part of Ladakh which has harsh climatic dryness (with very low rainfall) whose temperature varies from hot to extreme cold. The area is known as a Cold Himalayan Desert and has very low thermal and hydric indexes. July and August are the hottest and January is the coldest month of the region. The minimum and maximum temperature fluctuates between – 40°C to 40°C and rainfall is meager. The average relative humidity varies between 13–90% with the highest humidity corresponding to the lowest temperature. The snowfall in the area is very scant and when it does occur it is dry and powdery.

Sample

The surveys were carried out between June–September 2015, both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data was collected through participant observation and through self structured interview schedule. The secondary data was collected from the published reports, magazines and from various official sources. Data was analyzed in accordance with the data collection; data was coded, tabulated and analyzed. The sample for the study was drawn from Nyoma block of Changthang region. Nyoma block consists of 18 villages from which 7 villages were selected for the study, namely, Hanley, Koyul, Korzok, Samad, Kharnak, Angkung and Sumdo. From Hanley, Karzok and Samad 40 households were selected and 15 households were selected from Karnak, Ankung and Sumdo. From Koyul 25 households were selected for the study totalling to 190 families (household) in the study area. From each household only woman were selected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Important Traditional Festivals & Other Religious Ceremonies

Traditional festival	Koyul		Korzok		Sumdo		Kharnak		Angkung		Samad		Hanlay		Overall Total	
	n=61	%	n=116	%	n=37	%	n=48	%	n=39	%	n=105	%	n=96	%	N=502	%
Losar (New Year) and Guston	61	100	116	100	37	100	48	100	39	100	105	100	96	100	502(100)	
Buddha jayanti	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Dalai Lama birthday	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	61	100	116	100	37	100	48	100	39	100	105	100	96	100	502(100)	
Celebrate important festivals like Losar (New Year), Dalai Lama's birthday																
502(100)																
Feast and prayer	61	100	116	100	37	100	48	100	39	100	105	100	96	100	502(100)	
Mask dance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	61	100	116	100	37	100	48	100	39	100	105	100	96	100	502(100)	
How often do you offer prayers?																
Daily			22	18.96	11	29.72	20	41.66	3	7.69	52	49.52	35	36.45	143(28.48)	
Weekly	-	-	44	37.93	6	16.21	7	14.58	13	33.33	8	7.61	9	9.37	87(17.33)	
Occasionally	61	100	50	43.10	20	54.05	21	43.75	23	58.97	45	42.85	52	54.16	272 (54.18)	
Only on festivals	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Never	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	61	100	116	100	37	100	48	100	39	100	105	100	96	100	502(100)	

Data from the above table observes that 100% of the respondents celebrate Losar festival and Guston. The Losar festival marks the beginning of New Year in Ladakh and is considered to be the most important festival of the region. All the respondents from all the seven villages celebrate Losar (New Year), Dalai Lama's birthday with feast and prayer in gompas (monasteries) people also enjoy a good stage fight between the good and the evil. Every year the date and location of Losar change. Regarding prayers, majority i.e. 54.18 % of respondents said that they pray occasionally, 28.48% said that they pray daily and 17.33% of the respondents said that they pray weekly because livestock activities and household chores keeps them busy whole day.

Table 2: Participation in Local Monasteries and Religious Festivals

Responses	Koyul		Korzok		Sumdo		Kharnak		Angkung		Samad		Hanlay		Overall Total	
	n=61	%	n=116	%	n=37	%	n=48	%	n=39	%	n=105	%	n=96	%	N=502	%
Yes	61	100	78	67.24	37	100	48	100	39	100	85	80.95	96	100	444(88.44)	
No	-	-	38	32.75	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	19.04	-	-	58(11.55)	
Total	61	100	116	100	37	100	48	100	39	100	105	100	96	100	502(100)	
Type of attire																
Feast and prayer	61	100	116	100	37	100	48	100	39	100	105	100	96	100	502(100)	
Mask dance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	61	100	116	100	37	100	48	100	39	100	105	100	96	100	502(100)	
How often do you offer prayers?																
Ladakhi	61	100	116	100	37	100	48	100	39	100	105	100	96	100	502(100)	
Tibetan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	61	100	116	100	37	100	48	100	39	100	105	100	96	100	502(100)	

Analysis of the table reflects that majority i.e. 88.44% of the respondents said that they participate in local monasteries and religious festivals where as only 11.55% of the respondents said that they do not participate in local monasteries and religious festivals. Regarding wearing Ladakhi dress 100% of the respondents from all the seven villages said that they wear Ladakhi dress. The 'gonchas' which are worn by poor people is made from coarse homespun woolen cloth

Which is in a dark shade of maroon?

Table 3: Marriage type

Type of marriage	Koyul		Korzok		Sumdo		Kharnak		Angkung		Samad		Hanlay		Overall Total
	n=31	%	n=58	%	n=19	%	n=29	%	n=23	%	n=62	%	n=56	%	n=278
Monogamy	25	90.32	50	86.2	14	73.68	24	82.75	17	78.26	58	93.54	53	94.64	241(86.69)
Polygamy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Polyandry	6	9.67	8	13.7	5	26.31	5	17.24	6	21.7	4	6.45	3	5.35	37(13.3)
Total	31	100	58	100	19	100	29	100	23	100	62	100	56	100	278(100)
No. of husbands in case of polyandry															
2	6	19.35	8	13.79	5	26.31	5	17.24	6	26.08	4	6.45	3	5.35	37(13.3)
3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	6	19.35	8	13.79	5	26.31	5	17.24	6	26.08	4	6.45	3	5.35	37(13.3)
Relationship of husbands with each other															
Husband's brother	6	19.35	8	13.79	5	26.31	5	17.24	6	26.08	4	6.45	3	5.35	37(13.3)
Cousin	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	6	19.35	8	13.79	5	26.31	5	17.24	6	26.08	4	6.45	3	5.35	37(13.3)

It is evident from the above table that 13.3 % of respondents believe in polyandry form of marriage because through that way the property is not divided and it remains in the same family. Polyandry was prevalent only in the age group of 35 - 50 years which clearly indicates that earlier generation believed in polyandry whereas the present generation do not believe in polyandry system of marriage. Regarding number of husbands 13.3% of respondents had two husbands and all husbands were brothers in relation.

CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that, all the changpa nomads celebrate losar festival and Guston. The losar festival marks the beginning of New Year in Ladakh and is considered to be the most important festival of the region. People of Changthang celebrate with feast and prayer in gompas (monasteries), they enjoy a good stage fight between the good and the evil. Date and the location of the festival, losar change every year. Some Changpas believed in polyandry form of marriage, because they believe that property will not be divided and will remain in the same family. Polyandry was prevalent only in the age of 35 - 50 years of respondents, which clearly indicate that, earlier generation believed in polyandry, whereas the present generations do not believe in polyandry system. Regarding number of husbands, respondents had two husbands and all husbands were brothers, in relation.

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