

THE HANDBOOK OF THE
DARD-ARYANS
of LADAKH

THE HANDBOOK OF THE
DARD-ARYANS
of LADAKH

Dr. Suheel Rasool Mir



NEW DELHI PUBLISHERS

New Delhi, Kolkata

This First Edition Published in 2025

© 2025 New Delhi Publishers, India

Title: The Handbook of the Dard - Aryans of Ladakh

Author: Dr. Suheel Rasool Mir

Description: First edition | New Delhi Publishers 2025 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: ISBN 9789349897878 (Print) | 00000000000000 (eBook)

Cover Design: New Delhi Publishers

All rights reserved. No part of this publication or the information contained herein may be reproduced, adapted, abridged, translated, stored in a retrieval system, computer system, photographic or other systems or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, by photocopying, recording or otherwise, without written prior permission from the publisher.

Disclaimer: Whereas every effort has been made to avoid errors and omissions, this publication is being sold on the understanding that neither the editors (or authors) nor the publishers nor the printers would be liable in any manner to any person either for an error or for an omission in this publication, or for any action to be taken on the basis of this work. Any inadvertent discrepancy noted may be brought to the attention of the publisher, for rectifying it in future editions, if published.

Trademark Notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.



NEW DELHI PUBLISHERS

Head Office: 90, Sainik Vihar, Mohan Garden, New Delhi, India

Corporate Office: 7/28, Room No. 208-209, Vardaan House, Mahavir Lane, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi, India

Branch Office: 216, Flat-GC, Green Park, Narendrapur, Kolkata, India

Tel: 011-23256188, 011-45130562, 9971676330, 9582248909

Email: ndpublishers@gmail.com

Website: www.ndpublisher.in

PRESERVING THE LEGACY OF DARDS



Protect-Preserve and Promote

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRESERVING THE LEGACY OF DARDS	v
FOREWRD	xi
PREFACE	xiii
DARCHIK CULTURAL CENTRE, KARGIL	xv

CHAPTER 1

THE IDEA OF DARDESHA	1
A Historical and Textual Reconstruction of the Dardic Homeland	1

CHAPTER 2

WHO ARE THE DARD-ARYANS?.....	5
SHILOKS, TEXT MENTION & TRANSLATION.....	12
TOPOGRAPHY OF ARYAN VALLEY, LADAKH	13
KEY TOPOGRAPHICAL FEATURES INCLUDE:.....	13

CHAPTER 3

MYTHS LEGENDS AND TALES	15
-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER 4

FROM LALUNG TO KHALTSE: INTRODUCING THE DARDS OF LOWER LADAKH.....	20
--	----

CHAPTER 5

ETHNOGENESIS AND MIGRATORY PAST	32
Historical Origins and Migration.....	33

CHAPTER 6

SOCIO-LINGUISTIC HERITAGE OF DARDS OF LADAKH	39
Contesting Dard, Shina and Brokpa	39

CHAPTER 7

RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM AND INDIGENOUS BELIEF SYSTEMS	42
Lha-bdak; Caretaker of the Gods	51

Traditional Faith Practices among Brokpas of Ladakh	54
Cultural and Religious and Spiritual Significance of Juniper	55

CHAPTER 8

CULTURAL PRACTICES AND DAILY LIFE	58
Rituals, Social Practices and Ceremonial Life	60
Traditions Followed in Everyday Life	62
Major Festivals of Dards in the Batalik, Darchik, Garkone and Dha-Hanu Valley	66
Traditional Dresses & Festivals of Dard Aryans	69

CHAPTER 9

THE SOCIAL ETHOS OF THE DARDS	77
Cultural and Social Practices	77
Type of Family	79
Type of Marriages	79
Wedding Rituals	81
a. Weddings (Bag-ston)	83
Death Rituals	83
Family, Marriage & Kinship among the Brokpa tribe	84

CHAPTER 10

FOOD TRADITIONS AND CULTURAL BELONGING	91
Traditional Food Consumption Pattern of Dard Aryans	92
Changing food habit and patterns	93
Influence of consumerism & Changing Tastes	93

CHAPTER 11

NEGOTIATING ROLES: THE POSITIONALITY OF WOMEN IN DARDIC SOCIAL HIERARCHIES	95
---	----

CHAPTER 12

LIVING WITH THE SEASONS CULTURAL ADAPTATIONS AND SOCIAL RHYTHMS	99
Winter (December to February): Uno	99
Spring (March to May): Bazun	100
Summer (June to August): Ulo	100
Autumn (September to November): Shahru	101
Negotiating the winters	101

CHAPTER 13

ECONOMY, LIVELIHOOD AND AGRICULTURE	103
Local produce.....	103
Major crops.....	104
Traditional & Modern Agricultural Artefacts	105
Agricultural and Pastoral Festivals	107

CHAPTER: 14

HANU FORT AND THE ETHNO-HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE DARDS.....	109
An elaborate Overview of the Fort	110
List of Artefacts in the Barn	110
List of Artefacts in the Kitchen	112
List of Artefacts in the Granary and Wine Cellar	114
Highlighting the Differences among the Dard Aryan Villages.....	116

CHAPTER 15

VILLAGE PROFILE	118
-----------------------	-----

CHAPTER 16

BRIDGING IDENTITIES: COMMUNAL HARMONY IN ARYAN VALLEY	126
---	-----

CHAPTER 17

CONCLUSIONS	129
-------------------	-----

CHAPTER 18

ETHNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVES FROM THE ARYAN VALLEY.....	137
WAY FORWARD: DARDS IN THE 21ST CENTURY	152
END NOTES	153
BIBLIOGRAPHY	154
APPENDICES	164
BROKSKAD MORPHOPHONEMICS	167
TRANSCRIBED TABLE OF SOCIO-LINGUISTIC VARIATION	167
TRANSCRIPTION AND PHONETIC SYMBOLS	168
DARD ARYAN ARTEFACTS.....	169
INDEX.....	175



Foreword

It gives me immense pleasure to pen a foreword to Dr. Suheel Rasool Mir's latest scholarly contribution titled *The Handbook of Dard Aryans of Ladakh*, a compelling volume dedicated to the history, culture, and identity of the Dard Aryan community of Indian Himalayan region of Ladakh.

The Handbook of Dard Aryans of Ladakh is a comprehensive work that delves deep into the rich heritage, traditions, and folklore of the Dardi tribe, offering a profound exploration of their cultural heritage. It takes the reader on an immersive journey through the rich legacy of the Dard Aryans as one discovers the vibrant history, traditions and folklore of this enigmatic tribe. From ancient rituals to modern adaptations, this comprehensive book offers a captivating exploration of Dard culture, shedding light on its resilience.

Dr Suheel Rasool Mir under the patronage of Darchik Cultural Centre, Kargil, offers a fascinating glimpse into the world of the Dardi tribe, a community steeped in tradition and heritage. This enlightening piece of research navigates the cultural landscape of the Dard people, chronicling their myths, rituals and everyday life. The book masterfully explores the remote landscapes and an intricate cultural nuance of the Dardi tribe. This meticulously researched volume unveils the captivating customs, language and social structures of the Dard people.

Authored by Dr. Suheel Rasool Mir, this Handbook also provides invaluable insights into the history and evolution of the Dardi tribe in the lower Indus region of Ladakh. I believe this edition is very much needed and may be a significant step towards understanding and appreciating the cultural heritage of the Dardi tribe.

Engaging and informative this definitive guide invites readers to uncover the hidden treasures of Dard culture and embark on an unforgettable expedition of discovery. I commend Dr.Suheel Rasool Mir for his scholarly integrity and deep commitment to cultural preservation. I am also confident that this work will be of immense value to researchers, policymakers, and anyone interested in the pluralistic heritage of our region.

I extend my warmest congratulations to Dr. Mir and wish him continued success in his scholarly pursuits.

Prof. (Dr.) Saket Kushwaha
Vice Chancellor
University of Ladakh

PREFACE

In the sun-shadowed valleys of Ladakh nestled along the contours of the lower Indus and its tributaries, settled a community whose identity has withstood the test of time, isolation but intact. Brokpa or Minaro referred to variously as *The Dard Aryans* inhabit a liminal cultural space where the boundaries of language, ethnicity and belief have congregated and reconfigured across centuries. This handbook is a culmination of an immersive journey scholarly, personal and ethical into that living archive of the human experience.

What began as an academic inquiry soon evolved into a voyage of ethnographic engagement. From the zojila heights of Drass-Kargil to the remote hamlets of Dha-Hanu, I encountered not only communities but stories etched in the rhythm of Brokskat songs, wisdom whispered in the fragrance of juniper, rituals performed before the sacred mountains and languages shaped by millennia of geographical and spiritual negotiation.

This book is not merely an ethnographic mapping of a Dard Aryan tribal community; it is an attempt to listen, to record and to honour the diversity of Dardic voices before they are drowned in the overwhelming tide of globalization and homogenization. I have walked with the cultural stalwarts through Darchik and Garkon's apricot orchids, shared butter tea (Gur Gur cha) with elders in Darchik, attended the Bononah and religious festival in Dha where humans still dance with gods and stood in silent awe before the weather-worn shrines where juniper burns to purify the spirit and ward off misfortune. Each of these moments brought me closer to the inner intricacies of a cultural nuances often portrayed in tourist brochures as exotic yet rarely understood in its full depth and dignity.

The ethnographic fieldwork underlying this volume spanned several years of field work. It was undertaken not only in the terrain of mountains and valleys but also in the emotional, intellectual and cultural landscapes of the communities themselves. I lived in Dard Aryan homes, participated recorded oral narratives and mapped the cultural and traditional heritage, transitions and continuities. My engagement was informed by transdisciplinary methods blending anthropology, sociology, history, folklore and linguistics. But it was grounded most deeply in community participation, respectful and patient interactions with people whose lives continue to carry the residual rhythms of ancient Indo-Aryan memory.

What emerged was interplay of complexity. The Dards of Gurez, Drass and some pockets of Kargil (Budgam), Batalik, Chulican, Sarchey, Gurgurdo and Lalung are Muslim and speak a pure dialect of Shina unlike last five villages. While as the Dard Aryans of Darchik, Garkon and Dha-Hanu is Buddhist guarding pre-Vedic traditions while adapting to modernity. In Batalik, Sarchay and Chulichan they are mostly pastoralists and warriors shaped by the confluence of Islam and ancestral worship. These distinctions matter but they also resist any single narrative. The Dards are neither relics of a bygone past nor the frozen figures of a tourist gaze. They are dynamic negotiating identities across the borders, ecological upheavals and spiritual resilience.

This handbook is an effort to bring together the cultural, linguistic, historical and ritual wealth of these communities in one comprehensive volume. It does so not in the spirit of finality but in the hope those future generations of scholars, policymakers and Dards themselves may find in it both a mirror and a map. A mirror to see themselves reflected in dignity and detail and a map to navigate a future that values their presence not as an tourist curiosity but as vital custodians of Himalayan civilizational continuity.

I must Thank Darchik Culture Centre (DCC), Kargil for providing an immense amount of support while trusting me enough to allow me the space to work independently. I still can't imagine navigating this process without the institutional support of DCC. Indeed it was a privilege to work under the auspices of DCC.

My profound thanks go out to the Aryan Valley local scholars, students and civil society members who provided guidance, opinions and support throughout my fieldwork. I would especially like to thank my friends Prof. Gailtson, Mr Arif Hussain Ladakhi, Mr Nawang, and Mr Lundup and his family, Mukhtar Hussain (Chulichan), teachers of government high school chulichan, local artists of khaltsi, local musicinans of Darchik and Garkon for helping me get through unfamiliar historical, cultural, linguistic and geographical terrain. The work would have been impossible without the openness of the Dard Aryans themselves particularly the village head darchiks (Mr Tashi Dawa sahab). I owe this book to their generosity, their stories, and their trust. May their ethnic vibrancy continue to flourish amidst the flow of Indus River.

My special thanks to my team Mr Prashant (Art director and designer), Ramanandsarkar (filmmaker), Aamir Rasool (Phd Scholar), Arslaan (cinemetographer), Tajamul (economist), and Sahil Khan (Artist)

Dr. Suheel Rasool Mir

DARCHIK CULTURAL CENTRE, KARGIL



Protect-Preserve-Promote

Darchik Cultural centre is a vintage space where stories of the past are celebrated by ensuring that future generations remain connected to their roots by minimizing the generational gaps. This Museum-Cultural centre reflects a shared commitment in safeguarding traditions, art and histories that shape the unique vibrant ethnicity of Dards of lower Indus belt of Ladakh, meant to preserve the rich cultural heritage of Dard Aryans of Darchik, Garkon, Dha-Hanu and other adjacent areas like Batalik, Beima, Chulichan etc.

The aim of the centre is to *protect, preserve and promote* Dard legacy and heritage by documenting oral traditions, preserving artefacts and showcasing material and non-material culture, tradition, art, craft and the Dard-Aryan way of life.

The centre serves as a beacon of cultural pride, fostering unity and mutual respect by not only strengthening the community bonds but a strong commitment to cultural and heritage preservation of indigenous communities.

Darchik Cultural Centre stands as a testament to the power of collective action in honouring the past while inspiring a culturally vibrant future for all.

DARCHIK CULTURAL CENTRE (DCC)