



**On the border between Leh and Kargil, there are a few villages where pure Aryans, called Brok-Pa, live. They do not rear cows or hens or consume milk or any milk products. Very few outsiders have visited the Brok-Pa. ■ by Murli Menon**

Land- ing at Leh airport and walking down to Moonland Tourist Bungalow — my home in Leh for 3 weeks — a kilometre away, was similar to what the first astronauts to the moon may have experienced. Large tracts of barren land, craggy rocks and mountains stretch from one end of the horizon to the other.

In the chilly September mornings, endless cups of hot, black tea, prepared by Mohammed Rasool, caretaker of the tourist bungalow run by JKTDC (Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation) were like nectar, throughout my stay in Ladakh. Being a strict vegan (no animal products, including wool, leather, meat, milk, milk products or eggs), I planned to face the biting cold with sambhalpuri kurtas, khadi jackets and cotton earplugs.

My objective in Leh was to address co-coordinators and teachers of the 'Sarva Siksha Abhiyan' on "Learning can be fun in ZeNLP" and "High altitude stress management through ZeNLP". I also planned some high-altitude solo treks, armed with apricots, walnuts and assorted dry-fruits. Only biodegradable stuff would accompany me on my eco-tourism treks. My ZeNLP trance meditation audio-cassettes, tribal music cassettes, walkman and camera were



These women are Brokpa, pure Aryans from the valley of Dha-Hanu.

neatly packed into my rucksack.

At the tourist bungalow, I kept insisting that I did not consume milk or any milk products, in addition to being vegetarian and not consuming or using any products of animal origin. The Ladakhis' immediate question to me was, "Are you an Aryan?"

When I replied I was from Kerala, Rasool told me that, on the border between Leh and Kargil, there were a few villages where pure Aryans, called Brok-Pa, lived. They did not rear cows or hens or consume milk or any milk products. Neither did they eat eggs, fish or meat. As these villages were at heights of over 15,000 feet and surrounded by barren hills, very few outsiders had visited the Brok-Pa.

I decided to spend a week studying the secret lives of these Aryans. I maintained a detailed diary of my experiences with one of the most fascinating tribes of India. My destinations were

the villages of Dah and Beema in Leh district and the villages of Garkun and Darchik in Kargil district. I planned to trek and visit the most inaccessible pockets of these villages and spend quality time with this historic tribe.

We rose early and started our jeep safari at 7:00 am. The journey was as pleasurable as the destination. The 130-km-long drive took us through the villages of Khalatse or Khalsi, Dumkhar, Skurbuchan, Achinathang and Hanuthang. We crossed several high peaks before reaching Beema, located at 14,350 feet. Every photograph we clicked en route resembled a picture-postcard. We played soothing ZeNLP music for relaxation throughout this 7-hour drive over rugged terrain.

### Divine experience

The first glimpse of the Indus, from miles away, was a divine and spiritual experience. It appeared as a speck of light blue amidst sand dunes, rocks and stone; a stream nestling in the palm of Nature's hand. The closer we got to the river, the more beautiful it looked.

We finally arrived at Beema. The ice-cold bath in the turbulent waters of the river calmed my body, mind and soul. The tranquillity experienced while meditating on a bed of round pebbles, near the banks of the

Indus, cannot be described in words.

A group of women checked my bags as I got down from the jeep. There is a self-imposed prohibition in these Brok-Pa (Ladakhi word for Aryan or white skin) villages. The Sarpanch had authorised the women to ensure that no alcohol was brought from Leh by locals, tourists or outsiders.

The 3 women, resembling Greek goddesses, frisked my bag thoroughly before letting me enter the People's Work Department (PWD) guest-house. Here, I met my first Aryan, Sonam Thondup — the chowkidar. He knew a smattering of Hindi. Through sign language, body language, eye movements and facial expressions, I tried to create a rapport with this hostile Aryan, who told me in no uncertain terms, that my visit to Dah was not welcome.

I was the only occupant of the PWD guest-house. I handed over my inner-line permit and letter from the Collector to Thondup. He reluctantly gave me the keys. The PWD guest-house at Beema is located on the banks of the Indus and the view from my room was picturesque. The gurgling sound of the river was soothing music to my ears.

The next morning, I was summoned to the Sarpanch's house for a purification ritual. I had to trek 10 km over mountain, stream, rock and stone, to reach his house. Thondup sent 2 tough-looking escorts. It took us almost 2 hours to reach Laisthang — the Sarpanch's village. The landscape began to change and a canopy of green could be seen. Walnut and apricot trees stretched across the horizon and the fields were full of grain, ready to be harvested.

I found out later that the staple food of these Aryans was barley, grown on terraced fields and irrigated by the mountain streams. The ascent was steep and the altitude nearly 17,000 feet. I drank lots of natural mineral water from the countless

**This minuscule community bars both their men and women from marrying non-Aryans (to maintain their racial purity) and polygamy and polyandry is common. Couples who do not conceive are free to choose other partners.**

streams that criss-crossed our way.

The Sarpanch's hut was situated atop a hill. Women peeled apricots in his garden. Some of them were breaking apricot seeds to remove almonds. Hundreds of fresh walnuts lay on the floor. I resisted the impulse to pick up some.

A couple of old women came out of the hut with burning roots in their hands (I later learnt the roots were of a juniper tree). I recited the Gayatri mantra silently. I was about to experience the cleansing ritual of the Aryans. This was mandatory for all outsiders, who entered their village. The old women started chanting in unison (sounded like German) and the elder one brought the juniper smoke close to my face and symbolically waved it across my body.

Thereafter, I met the Sarpanch, Angmo. As I was trained in Neuro

Linguistic Programming (NLP) or the art of creating rapport through non-verbal communication, I started mirroring Angmo's body language, facial expressions and eye movements; he knew only broken Urdu and Hindi. After an hour, Angmo asked his wife to serve me tea.

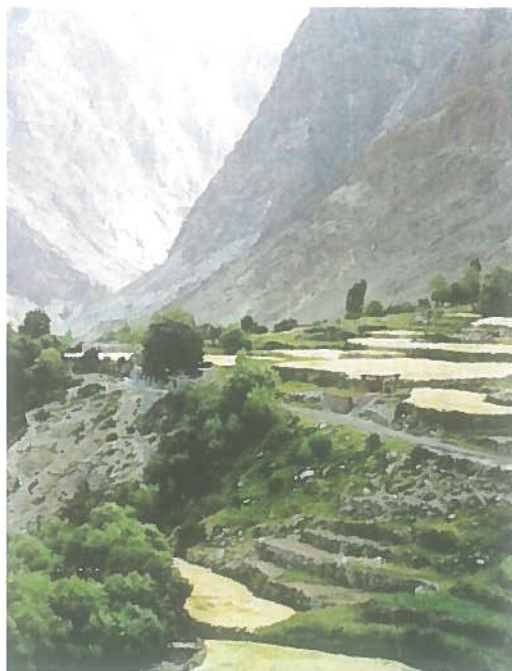
His wife poured me a cup of black tea, which I relished. As we began sipping our tea, Angmo put some barley flour into my tea. I told them about my being a strict vegan and that I had come to stay with them to know more about their food habits, music, dances and culture.

## Traditional practices

The NLP had begun to work. The Sarpanch issued instructions to my escort to take me to all the neighbouring villages and introduce me to the orthodox Aryans, who still followed their ancient traditions. I saw 2 books in English/German with the Sarpanch and borrowed the English book. The Aryan Dards by Rohit Vohra, for reading prior to my field trips. The trek back was uneventful.

As there is no electricity at Beema, I read Rohit Vohra's book, cover to cover, in candle-light. This book traces the ancestry of the present-day Aryans to the pure Aryans, who lived on the banks of the Indus, 5,000 years ago. Presently, there are about 1,000 descendants of these pure Aryans, who live scattered around Gilgit, Hunza, Kargil and Leh. They are Nature-worshippers and believe in Brok-Pa traditions and celebrate the Bononah (Nature) festival. These pure Aryans observe taboos against cows and hens and eat neither their flesh nor eggs; do not drink milk or consume any milk products.

This minuscule community bars both their men and women from marrying non-Aryans (to maintain their racial purity) and



The valley with thousand year old traditions.



**Sitting on round pebbles at confluence of Indus and Zaskar river, 30 km from Leh provides transcendental experience.**

polygamy and polyandry is common. Couples who do not conceive are free to choose other partners to give them a better chance of producing an offspring. While 80% Aryans marry in their own villages, 20% marry from neighbouring villages.

### Ageing population

These pure Aryans worship the Juniper tree (Cilgi Deuha). The village of Dah is known for a pair of 500-year-old Juniper trees. Dah is the venue of the Bononah festival, held on a full-moon night during October, once every 3 years. The Aryans symbolically draw energy from these ancient Juniper trees by hugging them after a ceremonial dance. They also respect the Swastika symbol (clockwise) and the Om (symbolising energy).

I started my 3-hour trek to Dah in the wee hours of the morning, to visit the sacred Junipers. My escort was Tsewang Nurbu. It was a dangerous trek, as we crossed several craggy peaks, hanging on to tiny crevices for support. We could hear sounds of gunfire across the Indo-PoK (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) border. My inner-line permit was checked at the army post. One wrong step on this arduous trek, could prove fatal, but I chanted continuously throughout this hair-raising experience.

We reached the ancient juniper trees by noon. I hugged these trees to soak in their energy. Their energy aura was phenomenal. I could feel a new vigour in each and every cell of my body!

After spending several hours at this picturesque place, I visited a few of the elderly Aryans and shared a meal with these humble villagers. The women cooked in an open hearth, burning fallen twigs, collected from the trees in their courtyard. As they worship trees, they observe a strict taboo against tree-felling.

The meal consisted of jo (barley) rotis baked in an earthen oven, lettuce leaves, roasted potatoes, spring onions, boiled cauliflower and wild mint. The simple meal was fresh and extremely tasty. It is no meaningful coincidence that we serve a similar, raw diet at our ZeNLP-based corporate stress-management workshops.

They spoke in Aryan language, which was distinct from Ladakhi. The basic numerals sounded closer to Greco-German: 1 is a, 2 is du, 3 is tra, 4 is chor, 5 is ponch, 6 is sha, 7 is sat, 8 is onsh, 9 is nue and 10 is dis.

The next week, I trekked to the other Aryan villages, Baldes, Samit, Garkun, Darchik and Hanu. The population of these Brok-pa Aryans does not number more than a few thousands but, surprisingly, they have

maintained their racial purity over 5,000 years. They continue to practise Nature-worship in one of the most hostile terrains at altitudes above 15,000 feet, subsisting on a vegan diet.

Music and dance are a way of life for these Aryans. Both men and women wear colourful traditional costumes, decorate their hair with flowers and are full of joie de vivre. They live in harmony with nature, are cheerful and stress-free in spite of living in small rock-shelters. Both men and women trek long distances. Almonds, apricots and walnuts are part of their diet, along with endless cups of black tea fortified with barley flour. The weather in September is pleasantly cold, though temperatures in January can plummet to -20 degrees.

There is an unusually large number of Brok-Pa population above the age of 70. Many elderly Aryans were active even at 90. The most striking feature of these people is their looks. Their round-shaped, blue eyes, aristocratic noses, fair complexion and flawless skin, make them ethnically distinct from the Ladakhis and Kashmiris.

### Strict rules

These Aryans observe a strict taboo against marrying outsiders and have ensured a code of conduct to maintain their racial purity over centuries. They restrict their contact with the outside world and are happy in their isolated existence. Married women braid their hair, which makes them resemble the Greeks.

Some of the families I stayed with include Misken Soman, Shirin Konshkit, Tsering Dolma, Sonam Dolma, Sonam Lamo, Tashi Panma, Tsering Chospel, Chewen Dolma, Tsering Nurbu and Tsering Jorphel. One of the ladies I photographed at Dah, could be mistaken for a German tourist. She was blonde, had blonde eyebrows, high cheek-bones, rotund face and unmistakable German features.

One of the most fascinating

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aspects of the lives of the Brok-Pa is a belief in prophecies and recording of dreams. Most elderly members meet in the morning at the Juniper grove and discuss their dreams as if nature was communicating to them through the language of dreams.

The fresh mountain-air, the crystal-clear water of the mountain streams, the nutritious vegan diet, trance music, chanting, dream ceremonies, tree-worship, dances and a way of life in harmony with nature, could be responsible for the survival of this miniscule community. Living in an Himalayan Shangri-La, they continue to practise their ancient religion over centuries of isolation.

### **Tale of origin**

One of the Aryan folk songs (about creation myths) sung at the Bononah festival is translated as follows:

In the beginning there was water all over the earth and some of it froze. Dust settled on this patch of ice. Later, a small patch of grass appeared on the frozen patch and soon, a juniper tree sprouted from the earth. The whole universe was created by Chag (Fire), Ser (Water) and Yun (Earth).

These Aryans worship the Sun, Water (Indus) and Earth (Juniper tree). They eat before sunset and sleep at dusk. They wake up at dawn, bathe in the ice-cold water of the Indus (even in September), trek over long distances by foot, work in their fields, celebrate festivals, pray religiously, avoid intoxicants, stick to a vegan diet, chant, sing, dance and socialise. In ZeNLP terms, they programme the body through exercise, the mind through music and the soul through prayer.

The return journey took 8 hours but a visit to the Aryan villages of Jammu & Kashmir is a once-in-a-lifetime experience and the investment in the journey was worthwhile. Every moment spent in Leh was meditation in the truest sense. Ladakh is an ideal venue for our next residential stress-management workshop. ■

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