



DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION IN LADAKH: A STUDY OF SOCIAL DIMENSIONS

1. **Dr. Nazia Jabeen** 2. **Dr. Rinchen Dolma**
Assistant Professor Assistant Professor
Department of History
University of Ladakh

Abstract: This study examines the demographic composition of Ladakh, focusing on its social dimensions. Ladakh, a region in the Indian Union Territory of Ladakh, exhibits unique socio-cultural characteristics due to its geographic location and historical context. The study explores the different social groups and it also focuses on predominant languages spoken, population growth and density, reliance on external support, and income generation sources. By delving into these aspects, the study sheds light on the unique socio-cultural dynamics of Ladakh's population.

Key Words: Ladakh, Demography, Tribal groups, Culture.

The population of Ladakh consists of a diverse mix of Indo-European and Tibeto-Mongolian elements. It can be categorized into various groups, including the Baltis, Purigpas, Dards, and Drogpas, each representing a small proportion of the region's inhabitants. Additionally, there are two sub-cultural groups in Ladakh known as the Mons and the Bedas, collectively accounting for approximately 2% of the population. While the Mons predominantly follow the Buddhist faith, the Bedas encompass both Buddhists and Muslims. These groups have historically been associated with traditional music and often occupy a lower social status. It is worth noting that there are differing perspectives among scholars regarding the classification of Ladakh's population. Some Western scholars tend to associate "Ladakhiness" primarily with Buddhism, inadvertently overlooking the presence of Muslims, Hindus, and Christians within Ladakh. The authors such as Martijn van Beek¹ contend that the Ladakhis themselves do not identify 'Ladakhiness' with a particular religion. Tashi Rabgias, in his article about Buddhism and Culture suggests:

A number of casual factors go to make a culture. These include history, geography, politics and economics etc. But the main factor of a culture is a spiritual source from which it receives clear direction and constant

¹ Martijn Van Beek, 'Identity Fetishism and the Art of Representation: The long Struggle for Regional Autonomy in Ladakh', Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1996, p.144.

inspiration. In the context of Ladakhi culture, this source is the Mahayana Buddhism which means both sutra and tantra Mahayana teaching.²

Indian scholars primarily rely on early census classifications, often giving less importance to religious affiliations and instead focusing more on tribal categorizations.³ R.S. Mann,⁴ lists the following distinct groups: 1) Ladakhi or Bhoto, Boto, Bhutta, Bodh, Bodpa; 2) Mon (Masculine flute player); 3) Gara (Ironsmith); 4) Beda (Musician-drum player); 5) Muslims, including Baltis, Kashmiris and Argons; 6) Chanspa or Changpa (Pastoralists of highland); 7) Christians; 8) Hindus belonging to various caste groups; 9) Sikhs; 10) Droepas or Broepas; 11) Dards; 12) Tibetans (Lately colonised in Ladakh).

Mann has included twelve tribes, encompassing Muslims, Argons, Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs, as an integral part. However, the official recognition of tribes in the region only encompasses eight tribes, with no explicit distinction based on religious affiliation⁵ which are: 1) Balti; 2) Beda; 3) Bot, Bodo; 4) Brogpa, Droga, Dard, Shin; 5) Changpa; 6) Garra; 7) Mon; 8) Purigpa.

The Balti Tribe: The Balti Tribe predominantly resides in the Kargil district of the Ladakh region, and to some extent in Leh as well. Originally, their members were of mixed descent, with influences from both Mongoloids and Aryans. Initially, they practiced Buddhism but later embraced Islam after the influence of many saints who visited Baltistan and Ladakh. The first group of Balti settlers is believed to have sought refuge in Ladakh during the mid-fifteenth century, following a destructive flood in the Shayok valley of Baltistan, which resulted in the loss of their homes and fields.⁶ During the early sixteenth century, King Jamyang Namgyal married Gyal Khatoon, the daughter of Balti King Ali Mir. As part of her entourage, she brought numerous Balti individuals with her, who later established permanent settlements in Ladakh. The Balti community in Ladakh follows the Shia sect of Islam as their religious faith. Their primary occupations include agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry. Additionally, some Baltis also engage in government services. The Balti language is predominantly spoken among them, although they utilize Urdu for written communication.

The Boto Tribe: The Boto Tribe holds the distinction of being one of the largest tribes in Ladakh and is primarily composed of individuals from the Mongoloid race. The majority of its members migrated from central Tibet. In the Leh district, they constitute a significant portion of the population, while in the Kargil district, they form the second largest population group. The Boto Tribe adheres to Buddhism as their religious belief and converses in a language known as Bodhi, commonly referred to as Ladakhi. Agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry serve as their primary sources of livelihood. Many individuals from the tribe are also employed in government services. The burgeoning tourism industry in Ladakh has opened up

² Tashi Rabgias, 'Culture and Buddhism, *Voice of the Himalaya*, Ladakh Cultural Forum, Leh, 1989, p. 23.

³ Beek, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

⁴ R S Maan, *Ladakh Then and Now: Cultural, Ecological, and Political*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 2002, p. 118.

⁵ *Census of India, Jammu and Kashmir District Census Handbook, Ladakh District*, Jammu and Kashmir, Director of Census Operation, 2011, p.11.

⁶ Rizvi, Janet Rizvi, *Ladakh: Crossroads of High Asia*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989, p. 243.

new economic opportunities for the Boto Tribe, contributing to their prosperity. The total population of Boto tribe as per the census of 2011 is 91,495.⁷

The Mon and the Beda Tribes: The Mons and the Bedas represent two distinct sub-cultural groups within Ladakh, both belonging to the Ladakhi Buddhist community. However, they occupy a relatively lower social status in the Ladakhi societal hierarchy. These groups are known for their significant role as traditional musicians in Ladakh. The Mons are considered to be the original inhabitants of Ladakh, being of Aryan descent, who settled in the region before the arrival of the Dards. It is believed that they migrated from the Karja, Lahul, and Spiti regions of Himachal Pradesh. Some scholars argue that the term "Mon" was used by Tibetans to refer to water dwellers, indicating their substantial contribution to the development of the irrigation system in Ladakh.⁸ A.H. Franke is of the opinion that the Mons had come to Ladakh to spread Buddhism.⁹ However, according to local tradition, the role of the Mons as teachers of Buddhism is completely denied.

The word Beda is derived from the Tibetan words Be and Da. 'Be' refers to "separately" while 'da' refers to reside. So, Beda means to live separately.¹⁰ The members of the Beda tribe also belong to the lower social strata within Ladakhi society. In each village, one or two families of the Beda tribe can be found. According to historical accounts, the Bedas were originally inhabitants of Lahul and migrated to Ladakh, arriving long after the Mons. The Bedas consist of individuals who follow both Buddhism and Islam. Traditionally, they are known for their musical talents and often served as musicians in the community. In the past, it was common for them to go from door to door, playing their drums in front of houses, and the residents would offer a plate of flour or money as a form of appreciation or support. The term "Beda" is used to refer to all Muslim musicians in Ladakh. However, there are notable distinctions between the Buddhist Bedas and the Muslim Bedas. According to Shakspo, the Muslim Bedas possess land ownership and permanent homes, indicating a relatively settled lifestyle. In contrast, the Buddhist Bedas are described as wandering minstrels, relying solely on their musical talents for their livelihood. Their nomadic nature suggests that they do not have fixed homes or land ownership.¹¹

The Mons and the Bedas hold great significance within Ladakhi Buddhist society due to their role as musicians. Their presence, participation, and performances are indispensable for any kind of entertainment associated with weddings or social gatherings. They are consistently invited to a wide range of social, religious, and cultural functions. However, despite their social importance, the Bedas and the Mons face significant societal prejudice. They are often subjected to disdain and are marginalized within Ladakhi society. People tend to keep their distance from them, and inter-caste marriages between individuals from the Beda and Mon castes and those from higher castes are strictly taboo. Such marriages result in the loss of social status for the individuals involved, leading to a widespread avoidance of contact not only with the individuals themselves but also with their entire families. During social or religious gatherings, the Bedas and the Mons

⁷ *Census of India, 2011, A-11 Individual Scheduled Tribe Primary Census Abstract Data and its Appendix, Last modified July 7, 2016.*

⁸ Veena Bhasin and Shampa Nag, *Population Dynamics, Problems and Prospects of High Altitude Area: Ladakh, Anthropologist*, Kamla Raj publications, January. 2002, p. 47.

⁹ A. H. Franke, *A History of Ladakh*, Sumit Publication, New Delhi, 1981, p. 25.

¹⁰ Ali Mohamad Rather, 'Mons and Bedas of Ladakh', in Henry Osmaston & Nawang Tsering (ed.), Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1997, p. 216.

¹¹ Nawang Tsering Skakspo, *Songs from the Himalayas*. Ladakh Ecological Development Group, Leh Ladakh, 1990, p.7.

are often relegated to lower seating positions. They are required to bring their own cups and spoons, highlighting the segregation they face. Many of them have abandoned their traditional occupations due to the lack of dignity associated with their work and the harsh discrimination they experience from others. However, even by changing their occupations, they have not been able to escape the deeply entrenched social stigma and taboos that still surround them. In Ladakh, caste consciousness is highly prevalent, influencing various aspects such as marriage, social and religious rituals, and even political decisions to some extent. There exists a local tradition explaining the low social position of these groups within the society. According to this tradition, it is believed that prior to the arrival of Buddhism in Ladakh, the Mons were engaged in butchery and hunting. Even after the spread of Buddhism, they continued in these professions, leading the Buddhists to consider them as low and morally corrupt.¹²

The Ladakhi Muslim Bedas are treated better than the Buddhist Bedas. Though among Muslims they are considered low and also the inter-caste marriage is not preferred between Muslim Bedas and the non-Bedas, still inter-caste marriage is common among them. Moreover, they are treated well in a social or a religious gathering. There are around 420 Bedas and 829 Mons in Ladakh according to the Census of 2011.

The Gara: The Garas, another subgroup within the Buddhist community, hold a lower social status. Their primary occupation revolves around blacksmithing, where they craft items such as arrowheads, knives, sickles, staves, and more. In the past, their services were commonly compensated with food and grains, as households would provide these resources in exchange for the work they performed.¹³ In the village, there exists a distinct relationship between the Gara community and other ethnic groups, reminiscent of the Jajmani (Patron-client) system found in the caste society of the plains.¹⁴ They are considered one of the lower classes in the Ladakhi society but their status is higher, in social hierarchy, than the Bedas and the Mons. As per the 2011 Census, the total population of this tribe is 504.¹⁵

The Brokpa or Drokpa Tribe: The Brokpas, also known as Dards, are considered to be the descendants of the pure Aryan race. They primarily inhabit the lower Indus valley, spanning from Dah in the Leh district to Batalik in the Kargil district. It is believed that they migrated from Dardistan in search of better pastures and eventually settled in the lower Indus region, which offers relatively warmer conditions. In the Leh district, the Buddhist Dards are referred to as Brokpa, residing in Da-Hanu and Bema. On the other hand, the Dards who follow the Islamic faith and reside in Kargil are known as Drokpas, predominantly living in Darchik and Garkon. They are also known as Shins because they speak Shina language. The Brokpas or Drokpas form a distinctive cultural ethnic community in Ladakh. They have preserved their social customs, language and dress from their Aryan forefathers through endogamy. To keep up their virtue, marriage may occur from the

¹² Rather, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

¹³ Ferry Erdmann, in Detlef Kantowsky and Reinhard Sander (eds.) 'Social Stratification in Ladakh: Upper Estates & Low Castes', Weltforum Verlag, London, 1983, pp-152.

¹⁴ Veena Bhasin and Shampa Nag, *Population Dynamics, Problems and Prospects of High Altitude Area: Ladakh*, Anthropologist, Kamla Raj publications, January. 2002, p. 46.

¹⁵ *Census of India 2011*, A-11 Individual Scheduled Tribe Primary Census Abstract Data and its Appendix, Last modified July 7, 2016.

neighbouring Dard villages. The total population of Brokpa and Drokpa tribe is around 23,883 according to 2011 censuses.

The Changpa Tribe: The Changpa tribe is a pastoral transhuman tribal community and they are considered as one of the earliest inhabitants of Ladakh.¹⁶ They are regarded as the pure Tibetans and they profess Buddhism. Their main occupation is animal husbandry and they rear goat, sheep and yak. They rear pashmina goat from which the famous pashmina wool is extracted. They live in areas of Rupshu, Kharnak and Karzok. They speak Changkyet which is a Tibetan dialect.

The Purig Tribe: The Purigpas form a significant portion of the population in Kargil. Originally known as "Purig," Kargil derives its name from the Tibetan phrase "pot reeks," meaning "of Tibetan origin," indicating the ancestral connection of the Purigpas to the region. This association likely originated during the period when a Tibetan dynasty established governance over most of Purig. Another interpretation suggests that "Purig" refers to the tubular valleys that comprise the inhabited parts of the area. Presently, the Purig tribe is unevenly distributed across various villages in Kargil, particularly in Kargil town, Suru Valley, Bodh Kharbu, Sankoo Shakar Chiktan, Pashkyum, and Mulbekh blocks of Kargil district. The members of this tribe practice Islam and speak a dialect that combines elements of Ladakhi and Balti languages. Agriculture, with the cultivation of crops such as barley and wheat, serves as the primary occupation for this population.

The Argons: In 1989, the Argons were excluded by the commission of social scientists from Scheduled Tribes status on the basis of the argument that they are originally of different origins and therefore do not form a tribe. Argons were seen as outsiders, while they can trace their roots in Ladakh back to the seventeenth century or even earlier. The Ladakhi women, who originally married the Kashmiri settlers, were born in Ladakh and all their male and female successors were born in Ladakh too and it is discrimination for women as well as for their heir.¹⁷

Before 1979, Ladakh which constituted only one district as a whole was divided for administrative reasons into two districts: Leh and Kargil on the 1st of July 1979. The districts were further subdivided into *tehsils*. Kargil district thus came to consist of two *tehsils*, Kargil and Zaskar and Leh district consisted only of one *tehsil*, Leh *tehsil*. The latter was further subdivided into three subdivisions with separate headquarters in Leh, Nyoma and Diskit. These units were again subdivided into seven blocks in Kargil and five in Leh. These divisions and sub-divisions continue to exist till date.

The Census of Jammu and Kashmir (2011) reported that there were 274,289 inhabitants in Ladakh; 133,487 in Leh district and 140,802 in Kargil district. The Buddhist population in Leh is 88,635, whereas the Muslim population is 19,054. In Kargil the Muslim population is 108,239, whereas the Buddhist population is

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁷ Wien, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

20,126.¹⁸ The sex ratio of Leh is 690 whereas in Kargil sex ratio is 810.¹⁹ In 1971, the total population was 154422. There were 44,556 Buddhists and 6333 Muslims in Leh. In Kargil, the Muslim population was 42,798 and 10009 Buddhists. In 1981, the total population of Ladakh was 134,372. The Muslim population was 51407 and Buddhist population was 12862 in Kargil. In Leh there were 55514 Buddhists and 10475 Muslims.²⁰

The two districts of Ladakh has been witnessing peculiar demographic upheavals especially after it was opened for tourism. In the forty years before 2001, census analysis suggests the Buddhists have lost around 8% percent in their percentage share in the combined population of Leh and Kargil districts. Though Muslims have improved their tally by around 2% percent, the real gainers are Hindus, who witnessed an improvement of 9.5 percent, almost tripling their share since 1981. As per the last census of 2011, Muslims constituted 46.40 percent of Ladakh with Buddhists at 39.65 percent. Hindus, Sikhs and Christians represent respectively 12.11, 0.82 and 0.46 percent of the population. The census of 2011 shows very low percentage of Buddhists as compared to Muslims because the census included all the non Ladakhis as well who come to Ladakh for business purposes and labourers and the high percentage of Muslim population shown in the census is because most of the shopkeepers and labourers are Kashmiri Muslims. As far as local inhabitants are concerned, Buddhists constitute 45.87% while Muslims constitute 47.40%.²¹

According to the 2011 Census, the literacy rate in Leh is 77.20%, male literacy being 86.31% while female literacy being 63.56%. In 1981, literacy in Leh district was just 28.41% while female literacy was about 12%. In Kargil, the literacy rate was 71.34%, while male literacy rate was 83.15% while female literacy rate is 56.30%. In 1981, the literacy rate in Kargil was just 21.31% and female literacy rate was just 3%.²² Literacy rate in 1961 was 9.38% which was increased to 14.48 in 1971. Female literacy rate increased from 1.19% in 1961 to 3.42% in 1971.²³

Ladakhi is the predominant language spoken in the Leh district, while in Kargil, people use Shina or Bhatia, or a combination of Pahari-Shina-Bhatia to communicate. Despite the current faster population growth in Ladakh, the population density remains relatively low. However, the limited cultivable soil leads to high agricultural density, exerting significant pressure on environmental resources despite the sparse population. In terms of industry, Ladakh has minimal presence, and it is uncommon to find available products for sale. The rapid population growth has created an increased demand for food, manufactured goods, fuel, and energy, requiring the transportation of goods from outside into Ladakh due to insufficient local support. The purchases made and the need for development projects surpass the financial capacity of the local population, resulting in significant expenses. As a result, Ladakh heavily depends on funds and support from the Central

¹⁸ *Census of India, Jammu and Kashmir District Census Handbook, Ladakh District, Jammu and Kashmir*, Director of Census Operation, 2011.

¹⁹ The Census of 2011 has shown very low sex ration in Ladakh. It is due to the inclusion of all the army personnels who are posted in Ladakh as well as the labourers who came to work in Ladakh from all over the country.

²⁰ *Census of India 1981, Household population by religion of head of household up to Tehsil and Town level*, Series-8, Jammu and Kashmir, Paper 1 of 1985.

²¹ <https://jk.gov.in/jammukashmir/?q=demographics>

²² *Census of India, Jammu and Kashmir, District Census Handbook, Ladakh District*, 1981.

²³ *Census Atlas, 1971: Jammu and Kashmir Part IX: 303*, Director of census operations.

government in Delhi. To address the scarcity of resources, Ladakh implemented a food rationing system that aims to subsidize essential food items through the public distribution system. The region primarily relies on income generated from army expenses and tourism, which provides a cash flow to the area. Since tourism opened in Ladakh in 1974, it has created numerous job opportunities for the local population. Prior to attaining Union Territory status, the state government allocated funds in Srinagar, leading to local politicians expressing dissatisfaction as a significant portion of the funds from Delhi remained in Kashmir. These funds were either invested in local developmental projects or misappropriated by corrupt politicians and government employees. However, with the grant of Union Territory status to Ladakh on 31 October 2019, politicians and the local Buddhist population, particularly in the Leh district, are hopeful for a better future as they anticipate direct financial support from the Central government.

Social Customs

One of the notable social customs observed among Buddhists in Ladakh is polyandry, which is limited to brothers. This longstanding custom has been prevalent in Ladakh since its early history. The practice primarily stems from the benefits that brothers gain by living together and collectively managing the limited inherited property, particularly in situations of extreme poverty.²⁴ The custom of polyandry, along with the tradition of primogeniture, often results in younger brothers depending on and cohabitating with the eldest brother.²⁵ “Borrowed from Tibet, the custom owes its origin to economic necessity for if the growth of population had not been held at a dead level by this device, there would have been no food for the surplus population particularly in the absence of facilities for expansion of cultivable area and for creation and exploitation of other source of wealth”.²⁶ Polyandrous marriages in Ladakh typically involve two husbands, although three or even four husbands are not uncommon. In such marriages, the children always adopt the name of and obey the eldest brother, known as the "big father," while the younger brother is referred to as the "little father." According to this practice, the eldest son inherits all the movable and immovable property of his father and younger brothers. Although the younger brothers have conjugal rights over the common wife, they can only claim a subsistence under the same roof and lack the means to establish independent households. In addition to polyandry, polygamy was also prevalent, with two sisters being married to a man who is the sole son of his parents. Moreover, certain regions in Ladakh followed the custom of group marriage, where sisters may be married to two brothers, with both husbands having equal rights of access to both wives.²⁷

In case, one has only daughters and no son, then the eldest daughter may marry a man from whom is sought his consent to live in her house as a *magma* (matrilocal) husband from another family.²⁸ If she has a sister, she too may marry with the same man thus establishing a polygynous household. The custom was declared illegal by a statute of 1941, and anyone who practises polyandry would face imprisonment or fine or both. In the theoretical legal framework, the customary practice of polyandry has been abolished, and the Hindu

²⁴ Dewan, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

²⁵ *Census of India*, 1911, Volume XX, Part-I, Kashmir, Newul Kishore Press Lucknow, 1912, p. 41.

²⁶ Kaul and Kaul, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

²⁷ D D Sharma, ‘Brog-yul: The Land and the People’, in Dr. Prem Singh Jina: *Ladakh: Past and Present*, Gyan Publication House, Delhi, 2000, p. 34.

²⁸ John Crook and Henry Osmaston, *Himalayan Buddhist Villages*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1994, p. 477.

Succession Act has replaced the customary law of inheritance, granting equal inheritance rights to all brothers. However, due to persistent economic factors, the custom of polyandry still prevails among the poorer segments of the community.

Ceremonies

The Buddhists and Muslims of Ladakh practise various marriage customs. There are two kinds of marriages in Ladakh. In the first case, the bride goes and lives in the house of the bridegroom and in the second case, the groom goes and lives in the house of the bride and he is called *makpa*. In Buddhist community, the family generally prefers to get *makpa* for their daughters even if they have a son because of the general belief that a daughter being more concerned for the well-being of the parents would look after them better in their older age, than a son. While in Muslim community, it is very difficult to get a *makpa* for their daughters, especially, in Leh. This suggests that if a Muslim family has only daughters and the family is really keen for getting *makpa* it may find him in Kargil or Nubra. In Ladakh, the marriage proposal is always initiated by the boy's side of the family. If a girl's family wants a *makpa*, then only the family initiates the marriage proposal to the boy's family. Clandestine marriage is also practised in Ladakh. When the respective families want to avoid the expense on dinners during the marriage ceremony, this form of marriage is observed. In another case, a boy and a girl have accepted each other and want to marry, but their parents oppose their marriage, the couple generally formalises the marriage through clandestine marriage. Later the boy's relatives go to the girl's house with *khataks* on the day following the nuptial night asking for forgiveness. Usually the apology is accepted right there but sometimes the process has to be repeated a number of times until the girl's family relents. This is usually followed by an invitation for a dinner to the couple by the girl's family where they are offered *khataks* and do other marriage formalities. Generally, the Muslims may be found resorting to polygamous marriage all over the world. But in Ladakh, this practice is the rarest of the rare occasions and it is very hard to find Muslim people having kept two wives at the same period. The system of dowry is conspicuous by its absence in Ladakh which otherwise is widely prevalent in mainland India. The bride's family offers some gold ornaments and goods to the bride according to its economic status. But now-a-days this system is changing. People have started giving very expensive gifts to their daughters, because of outside influence. Since some wealthy and well-off parents have started this trend, the poor parents consider themselves bound to give expensive gifts because of social obligations, though there has been no such pressure from the groom's side. The process of obtaining divorce by either party is extremely simple. If the husband desires to divorce his wife, then he has to give her a cow or an equivalent amount of cash and he has to return to the divorced wife everything which she had brought with her at the time of marriage. If the wife seeks a divorce, she has to give the husband a horse or an equivalent amount of cash.²⁹ Of late, among Muslims, if the husband uttered the word, *talak* (divorce) in Urdu thrice, the marriage used to get naturally terminated. In mainland India, it used to be practised by quite a number of Muslims until the Triple *Talak* practice has been declared illegal on 1 August 2019. But among the Muslim male seekers of divorce in Ladakh, the divorce by verbal declaration of *talak* three times was a remote possibility. There had to be followed a proper means to seek a divorce. If someone wanted a divorce, the relatives were usually called for discussion who first tried to arrive at a resolve

²⁹ Kaul and Kaul, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

of the points of difference between the couple and made earnest efforts to convince it to rethink the decision of divorce. If at all the relatives failed in their attempt and the couple stood unconvinced and unmoved by their arguments, the proper legal procedure had to be followed to seek divorce. There has been no restriction on re-marriage of a Muslim widow.

There are many rituals and ceremonies attached with the birth of a child in a family. On third day of the birth of a child, close relatives come to the house to bless the child and family; they bring along butter and rice for the said purpose. They also give money to the mother of the child as their blessing. On seventh day, which is called *ldun*, more visitors come for showering their blessings. On the day of completion of one month, a big ceremony of celebration, called *ldagang* is held and a big feast is served on that day. Hundreds of people attend this ceremony. They bring rice, butter and money with them. It is a day of much entertainment and festivities. This ritual is generally observed for the first-born child only. There is no special preference for baby boy as the boys and the girls are treated at par in Ladakhi society. People rejoice equally on the birth of a boy and a girl.

Death rituals are performed strictly according to religious doctrine in Ladakh. At the death of a person, *phaspun*³⁰ takes care of all the funerary arrangements. The family members of the deceased are not supposed to work for a few days; *phaspun* stays home for many days and arranges everything. The last rites are done according to the rituals of the respective religion.

Food

Agriculture is very scanty in Ladakh, due to cold climate, sandy land and the absence of rains. The staple food of Ladakh is huskless barley or grim which is roasted and grinded for use as flour. A bread called Tagi Khambir (browned sour dough bread) is commonly taken in Ladakh in the morning with butter tea. Butter tea is very famous in Ladakh and any ceremony is incomplete without sipping it. Butter and green tea (*chatang*) is mixed with water and thoroughly mixed up by churning it in a wooden cylinder with a kind of pump called *gurgur* and the tea is called *gurgur cha*. In the house this butter tea is always available and whenever any guest comes, the tea is quickly served. The other popular drink is *chang* (barely beer) which is a mild intoxicant. This is made from fermented barley and wheat flour and has the most disagreeable sour smell. Chang is used by the Buddhists only and the Muslims generally do not use it because alcohol is prohibited in Islam. Another food preparation called *thukpa* is made by boiling dumplings of wheat and meat or vegetables. Paba is another most common food used in Ladakh. It is made of wheat or barley and it is eaten with ghee or vegetable. In early days, these traditional foods were eaten every day because these were considered very nutritious and healthy; at that time, rice was considered as a luxury dish which found place on the tables of rich people. Among vegetables, cabbage, radish and potatoes were cultivated all over the region. Now-a-days people hardly eat traditional food items; they now prefer eating vegetables, *daal* and rice. Most of the Ladakhis are farmers and farming is done only once a year. Nubra is famous for cultivation of apricots.

³⁰ Phaspun is a group of people belonging to closely situated household, which is formed in a village to help each other during funerals and weddings.

Presently, the following varieties of vegetables are grown in Leh and Kargil: cabbage, cauliflower, radish, turnip, onion, potato, pea, tomato etc. In Ladakh since the days are hot and nights are cold, the extremes in temperature adversely affect cultivation.

In conclusion it can be said that the Ladakhis are a mixed population with Indo-European and Tibeto-Mongolian elements. The main language spoken in the Leh district is Ladakhi and in Kargil, people speak Shina or Bhaita. The Ladakhi population is divided into many groups. Small proportions of population of the region are the Baltis, the Purigpas, the Dards and the Drogpas. The Mons and the Bedas are two sub-cultural groups in Ladakh. People of Ladakh believe in caste system. The demographic composition in Ladakh provides valuable insights into the social dimensions of the region. By examining, gender, ethnicity, and culture, the research contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the population dynamics and different social groups and their culture in Ladakh.

