



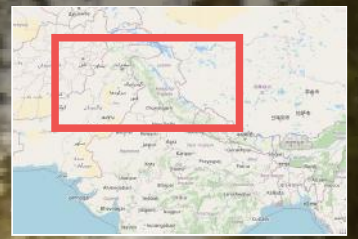
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The European Brokpa Tribe from the Indian Himalayas

NUBRA GUEST
HOUSE ←

by Murli Menon



The experience of landing at Moonland Tourist Bungalow – my home at Leh for three weeks, sums up the landscape. The experience of landing at Leh airport and walking down to this traditional Ladakhi guesthouse, a kilometre away, was like what the first visitors to the moon may experience. Large tracts of barren land, craggy rocks, and mountains stretch from one end of the horizon to the other. The chilly September morning greeted us and the endless warm cups of herbal infusion, prepared by Mohammed Rasool, the caretaker of the tourist bungalow, where I stayed, was the nectar I needed throughout my stay in Ladakh.

My objectives at Leh were to address coordinators and teachers of the Education Department on “Learning through Stories can be fun.” Being a strict vegan (no animal products including wool, leather, meat, milk, milk products, or eggs), I planned to face the biting cold with canvas shoes, cotton jackets and cotton earplugs. I also planned some high-altitude solo treks, armed with apricots, walnuts, and assorted dry fruits. I also carried herbal infusion for improving immunity. Only biodegradable stuff would accompany me on this eco-tourism trek. My meditation tapes, mobile and digital camera were neatly packed into my rucksack.

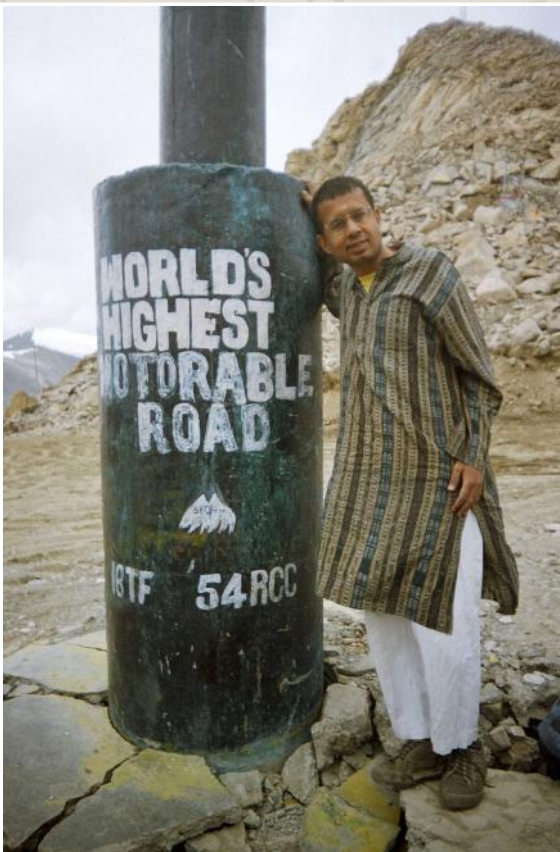
At the Tourist Bungalow, I kept insisting that I was a vegan and not consuming or using any products of animal origin. The caretaker's immediate question to me was, “Are you an Aryan?” When I replied I was from Kerala, the caretaker explained to me that in Leh, there were a handful of villages where pure European Brokpa Aryans lived. These European Brokpa Aryans did not rear cows or hens and did not consume milk or any milk products, besides not eating eggs, fish, or meat. As these villages were in inaccessible areas, surrounded by barren hills and at heights of over 15,000 feet, very few outsiders had visited or stayed at length with these European Brokpa Aryans.





As I had planned to trek around Leh for twelve weeks, I spent six weeks studying the secret lives of these pure European Brokpa Aryans. I maintained a detailed diary of my visit and would like to share my experience with one of the most fascinating tribes in India. My destinations were the villages of Dah and Beama in the Leh district and the villages of Garkon 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 a.m. The journey was as pleasurable as the destination. The 130 km. the drive took us through the villages of Khalatse (pronounced Khalsi), Dumkhar, Skurbuchan, Achinathang, and Hanuthang. We crossed several tall peaks before reaching Beama (14,350 feet). Every photograph we clicked en route resembled a picture postcard. The first glimpse of the Indus, from miles away, was a very spiritual experience. A peck of light blue amidst sand dunes, rocks, and stone. It resembled 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 Beama, after a seven-hour drive along the Indus. The ice-cold bath on the turbulent waters of this river steeped in history calmed my body, mind, and soul. The tranquillity experienced while meditating on its banks, on a bed of round pebbles resembling marbles, cannot be described in words.



Flocks of women checked my bags as I got out of my vehicle. There is a self-imposed prohibition in these Brok-Pa (Ladakhi word for European Brokpa Aryan or white skin) villages. The sarpanch had empowered the womenfolk to ensure that no alcohol was brought from Leh by locals, tourists, or outsiders. After a thorough frisking of my bag by three women resembling Greek Goddesses, they let me enter the PWD (People's Work Department) Guest House.

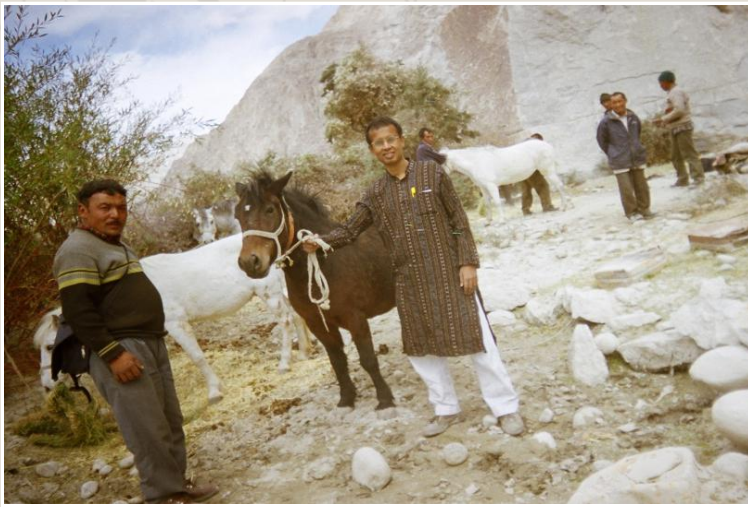


Here I met my first European Brokpa Aryan, the (watchman, who went by the name of Sonam Thondup. He knew a smattering of English and the communication was also through a combination of sign language, body language, eye movements, and facial expressions,

I tried to create a rapport with this hostile European Brokpa Aryan, who told me in no uncertain terms that my visit to Dah in September was not welcome. I was the only occupant of the local guest house. He reluctantly gave me the keys and, after settling in my room, explored the immediate vicinity, but found a few shops. The PWD Guest House at Beama is 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 day morning, I was summoned to the chief's house for a purification ritual. I had to trek 10 km over mountain streams, rock, and stone to reach the chief's house. Thondup had sent two tough-looking escorts who accompanied me to the top. It took us almost two hours to reach Lavishing – the sarpanch's village. The landscape changed 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 European Brokpa Aryans was barley grown in these terraced fields and irrigated by the mountain streams that rush to meet the Indus flowing below. The ascent was rather steep, and the altitude was nearly 17000 feet. I kept replenishing my body fluids by drinking lots of natural mineral water from the countless streams that crossed on our way.



After an endless trek, we reached the hut of the sarpanch, which crowned the peak of a hill. A group of 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 walnuts. As soon as I reached, my escorts spoke to the assembled women in European Brokpa Aryan, and they began laughing spontaneously. Soon, two old women came out of the hut with the burning roots of an unidentified tree in their hands (I later learned that it was a Juniper tree). I chanted the gayatri mantra (Hindu chant) silently in my mind. I was about to experience the cleansing ritual of the European Brokpa Aryans. This was mandatory for all outsiders who entered their village. The old women started chanting in unison (sounded like German) and the eldest one brought the juniper smoke close to my face and symbolically waved it across my body.

Later, I met the sarpanch, Mr. Angmo. As I was trained in NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) or the art of creating rapport through non-verbal communication, I started mirroring the body language, facial expressions, and eye movements of Mr. Angmo, who knew only broken Urdu and Hindi. After an hour of developing a nonverbal rapport, Mr. Angmo's wife poured me a cup of herbal tea, which I relish. We began sipping our tea when Mr. Angmo put some white powder into my tea (which I later learned was barley flour). He asked me about my visit to Beama and I told them about my being a strict vegan and that I stayed with them to know more about their food habits, music, dances, and culture. The sarpanch issued instructions to my escort to take me to all the neighbouring villages and introduce me to the orthodox European Brokpa Aryans, who still followed their ancient traditions. I saw two books in English/German with the sarpanch. I borrowed the English book "The European Brokpa Aryan Dards" by Rohit Vohra for reading prior to my field trips.



The trek back was uneventful. As there is no electricity at Beama, I read Rohit's book, cover to cover, in candlelight, in order to discover the hidden world of the European Brokpa Aryans. German anthropologists had evinced an interest in this pure European Brokpa Aryan race and a few had even visited and stayed with them. This book traces the ancestry of the present day Aryans to the pure European Brokpa Aryans from Alexander's army who got lost in the Himalayas and lived on the banks of the Indus thousands of years ago. Presently, there are about 1000 descendants of these pure European Brokpa 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 and are strict vegans.

These pure European Brokpa Aryans observe taboos against cows and hens and eat neither their flesh nor eggs or drink milk or consume any milk products. Hens and cows are not kept. This minuscule community bars both their men and women from marrying outsiders (to maintain their racial purity) and 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. 80% European Brokpa Aryans marry in their own villages, while 20% marry from neighbouring villages.



These pure European Brokpa Aryans are nature worshippers and worship the Juniper tree (Cilgi Deuha). Two, ancient Juniper trees crown the village of Dah, which is the venue of the triannual Bononah festival (to be held on a full-moon night during October) The European Brokpa Aryans, symbolically draw energy from these ancient Juniper trees by hugging them after a ceremonial dance. They also respect the swastika symbol (clockwise) and Om (symbolising energy).

I started my trek in the wee hours of the morning to trek to Dah, to visit the sacred Juniper groves. My escort shyly introduced himself. He was Tsewang Nurbu. The trek to Dah from Beama took us three hours. It was a dangerous trek, as we crossed several craggy peaks, holding on to tiny crevices to haul ourselves up. We could hear sounds of gunfire across the 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. The energy aura of these trees was phenomenal. I could feel a new vigour in every cell of my body when I stepped into the sacred grove of the European Brokpa Aryans at Dah. After spending several hours in this picturesque place, I visited a few of the elderly European Brokpa Aryans. They still observed their taboos of intoxicating substances: milk, eggs, and meat. I shared a meal with these humble villagers.

The meal consisted of jo (barley) rotis baked in an earthen oven, lettuce leaves, roasted potatoes, spring onions, boiled cauliflower and wild mint. Women cooked in an open hearth, burning fallen twigs, collected from the trees in their courtyard. They worshipped trees and hence observed a strict taboo against tree felling. The simple meal was fresh and extremely tasty.

They spoke in an European Brokpa Aryan language which was distinct from Ladakhi. Their numerical were:



One=A

Two=DU

Three=TRA

Four=CHOR

Five=PONCH

Six=SHA

Seven=SAT

Eight=ONSH

Nine=NUE

Ten=DIS





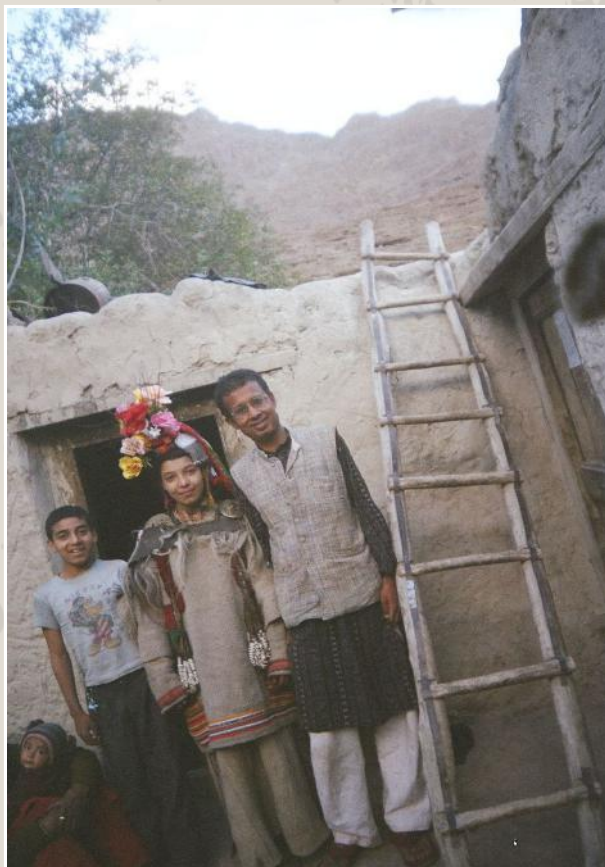
The next week, I trekked to the other European Brokpa Aryan villages, including Baldes, Samit, Garkon, Darchik and Hanu. The population of these Brok-Pa European Brokpa Aryans could not number more than a few thousands. But the surprising fact is that they have maintained their racial purity over 5000 years and continue to practise nature worship in one of the most hostile terrains at altitudes above 15000 feet, subsisting on a vegan diet. Music and dance are a way of life for these European Brokpa 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 herbal infusion fortified with barley flour. The weather in September is pleasantly cold, though temperatures in January can plummet to minus 20 degrees.

There are an unusually large number of European Brokpa Aryans above the age of 70. Many of the elderly were active even at 90. The most striking feature of these European Brokpa Aryans is their looks. Their blue eyes, aristocratic noses, round eyes, fair complexion, and flawless skin, made them ethnically distinct from Ladakhis or Kashmiris.

European Brokpa 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 Greeks.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the lives of these European Brokpa Aryans is a belief in prophecies and the recording of dreams. Most elderly European Brokpa Aryans meet in the morning at the Juniper grove and discuss their dreams as if nature was communicating to them through the language of dreams.



These European Brokpa 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 long distances on 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 program their body through exercise, mind through music, and soul through prayer.

The return journey took eight hours, but a visit to the European Brokpa Aryan villages of Leh, is a once in a lifetime experience and the investment in the journey was worthwhile, considering that every moment spent was meditation in the truest sense.

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 a Himalayan Shangri-La and continuing to practise their ancient religion over centuries of isolation.

One of the European Brokpa Aryan folk songs (creation myths) sung at the Bononah festival is translated:

"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 entire universe was created by Chag (Fire), Ser (Water) and Yun (Earth)."



Murli Menon
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