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**Topic of Research** : ***Local Cosmologies, Diverse Universes: An Ethnographic Study of The Purigs in Kargil***

### **Finding**

The ethnographic study of the Purig community, which forms one of the major popular tribes in Kargil, is distinctive yet unexplored. No substantial evidence is documented about the people of Purig and whatever is known about the region's populace, settlement and cultural history is via the medium of folklores, folksongs, epics and proverbs. And only a small amount of information is recorded about historical, cultural and religious significance of the region. The partial documentation of the community therefore, does not do justice to the many more fold of cultural and social components that culminate into making the greater and significant picture of its historical as well as contemporary aesthetical worth.

In the larger context, Kargil and specifically Purig culture have been overlooked and reduced to a sub-culture to the greater Tibeto-Ladakhi culture. It is very much apparent in the lack of researches done on it in the general analytical studies done on Ladakh. Few present-day scholars, like Radhika Gupta, have tried to place Kargil in the academic map of Ladakh. A variety of reasons seem to be behind this exclusion. The prevalence and overwhelming influence of Islamic/Persian/Arabic and Kashmiri domination seem to have overshadowed the traditional ethnic culture of the place.

This seems to be the preoccupation of the then scribes as well where more emphasis was given to the religious literature, which further had and still persist to have a hegemonic influence on the ethnic tradition of the Purig community. This is further evident in the lingual and scriptural polarity visible amongst the people of Ladakh as a whole, where Muslims of Kargil have adopted Persian/Arabi/Urdu scripts to write the Purig language, whereas the Buddhists of Leh and other Buddhist populated areas within Ladakh have been using the Tibetan script to express other Ladakhi dialects.

Ladakh has its own cultural, religious and political history that substantiate the contemporary existence of the society. The territorial significance of the Ladakh region further attributes to its processes of immigration that took place from across all its bordering nation such as Baltistan, Tibet and Indian provinces. The subsequent interaction and communion between various racial groups within the Ladakhi milieu have resulted into numerous ethnic tribes such as the Purigs, Baltis, Broqpas, Gara, Mon, Bodh and Changpa. Each of them speaking different dialects, wearing different attires, playing different music and still co-

existing.

In this multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural local setup, the languages spoken are Purigi, Balti, Broqskat, Shina and Ladakhi amongst others and the script which is used is Urdu and Persian as well as the Tibetan script called Bhoti. In such a culturally rich community, mediums through which the local customs and traditions are preserved and promoted are through folklores, songs, performing arts, radio and the only museum in the region called the Munshi Aziz Bhat Museum of Central Asian Art and Artefact, situated in Kargil.

The specific geographical location with its seeming isolation and remoteness, was once an important centre for trading, forming a link in the Silk Route and Central Asia, that may have been an important factor in the development of some distinct cultural tradition in the area today, that can be seen particularly as Purigi. The barter tradition that became part of the culture in Purig during the trade, the region served as a meeting place of the people of different nationalities, sharing different cultures, ethos, religious beliefs, music, art, clothes, ornaments, cosmetics, utensils and food.

From the historical amalgamation of the three indigenous tribes in the making of the identity of the Purig community forming its aboriginal cosmology, to the cosmopolitan experience during the trade culture, this ethnic group embraced diverse conventional universes within its socio-cultural sphere.

It could, therefore be postulated that Purig could be seen as a space of multiculturalism and pluralistic imagination, sometimes resulting into a cross cultural existence. A sort of decolonial narrative could also be appended in this discussion where the Purig community created their own identity through series of mobility across borders, thus forming a local cosmological history of its own, where intersection of multiple and diverse universal histories and cultures that took place within the Purigi ethnic domain.

The traditional festivals like the *Mamani festival* and customary folksongs such as *Gul-Lhus* or *Songs of Praise* from the non-material cultural component of Purig, further exhibit and explain in magnitude the cultural and aesthetic nuances of the tribe. It is noteworthy to comment that Purig is a melting pot of diverse non-material entities of a culture. From festivals to folksongs, the cultural ethos of this community is well preserved and promoted by the elders and the youngsters alike. Furthermore, this shared culture, values, ideas and attitude have given rise to the collective consciousness of the Purig people.

Therefore, it could be stated that the synthesis of multiple realities and the unity in diversity that the terrain of Purig has witnessed, reaped cultural fruits in the form of local traditions, customs, rituals, values, artefacts, costumes, faith, collective consciousness, thought process and learned behaviours. Finally, with the intervention of modernity and technology, the contemporary Purig populace is witnessing a cultural dynamism.

The intervention and implementation of new modes of techniques and knowledge toward existence within a traditional community such as Purig, a modern culture is resulted out of it which further give rise to the notion of cultural economy. Furthermore, culture upon interaction with the modern world and technology has a tendency to a rapid change and swift shift. Janet Rizvi acknowledges the changes experienced by the Ladakhi society and states that, these alterations within the region have occurred due to the new associations established between Ladakh and the other parts of the world. The use of modern technology and economic techniques by the local populace that were introduced by numerous Government agencies and multiple other organizations on a voluntary basis by the mid-1980s, brought about a wave of development and progress in the local social setup.

Popular culture has emerged in Ladakh, with the arrival of technology and the influence of modernity. Norberg-Hodge mentions about the contemporary Ladakh society that along with touristic development the community is highly influenced by the Western as well as Indian films, that almost every household has a set of television that serves as a medium of entertainment, which provide overpowering images of luxury and indulgence.

Nonetheless, the first Kargil Film Festival or the *Awam Ka Cinema* was organized on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2012. The festival over the period of time, has showcased persistent improvement and some outstanding and significant films were screened in the event. The festival served as a platform for both the locals and people from other states of the sub-continent to interact with one another and share movies, documentaries, and short films and contribute collectively in the new formed popular community.