

#### 4. LOCAL CULTURES AND TRADITION

##### *Editorial introduction*

One of the most striking features of Ladakh—which becomes more apparent the closer one looks—is its historical and cultural diversity. This section offers four local perspectives on Ladakh and neighbouring regions.

*Nawang Tsering Shakspo* opens the discussion with a historical review of Saboo, his home village. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century Saboo briefly became the capital of Ladakh. In the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century it was the home of Kalon Chosnid, a famous minister whose beautiful wife Zilzom attracted the envy of King Deldan Namgyal. The king had his minister murdered, but Zilzom escaped to become a nun. Later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Saboo was the home of Tsetan Dorje, who was renowned for his learning in the Dogra period. Saboo's many historical monuments testify to its interesting history.

*Sonam Phuntsog* discusses the distinctive history, language and culture of the Dards of Da Hanu. He begins with a review of their stories of origin, noting that they are believed to have migrated from the Gilgit region in the distant past. He then describes their festivals and cultural celebrations, before concluding with a hunting song in Minaro dialect.

*Skarma Junglay* reviews the history of Fokar in western Purig, 30-35km from Kargil, as well as its distinctive dress. Like other parts of Ladakh, Fokar has its own Lha or deity. It is also famous for its isolated 'hidden valley' of Urgyan Dzong which is believed to have been a hermitage of the Tibetan saint Padmasambhava in the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Finally, *Raja Iftikhar Hussain Ali Khan*, who is himself a descendant of the rulers of Skardu in Baltistan, points out that Tibetans, Ladakhis and Baltis share a common linguistic heritage, and discusses Balti influence in Kashmir. In 1840 the Dogras exiled the Makpon Rajas of Baltistan first to Kishtiwari and then to other parts of

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J&K. They and their family continued the Balti tradition of playing polo, which is one of the reasons for the sport's popularity in the region.

*Editors*