

FOKAR IN THE KINGDOM OF PURIG

Skarma Junglay

Fokar is situated in the west of Purig, 30-35km from Kargil and 200km west of Leh. A narrow unmetalled road links it to the main national highway at Shargol. The name 'Fokar' is derived from *Phu-Kar*, which means 'top white'. It is said that in ancient times the upper portions of the valley were mostly covered by glacier, and even today they are often covered with snow, like a scarf.

An alternative explanation is that the name is derived from *Fo* and *Kar* which mean 'man of white garments'. It is said that it was named by a Tibetan saint who once visited the famous Urgyan Dzong. He met a man wearing white garments and riding on a white horse. The saint asked the man about his village and its name. The man could not give any response to his question. Looking at his dress, the saint named him *Fo-kar*, and since then that has been the name of the village.

The history of this area started with Naytri, the second son of the eighth ruler of the Tibet, King Drigung Stanpo, between the middle of the first century A.D. The King faced a revolt from the supporters of the Bon religion who threw him out of power. His two sons—Shatri and Nyatri—were exiled from Tibet. During his exile Nyatri approached this area via Kishtiwari, Zaskar and then the Suru valley. Eventually, he established his kingdom at Fokar, and became the first ruler of this area.

In this way, the Puryal dynasty started in this area, which was started first in Tibet by Nyatri Stanpo in 127 B.C in the Yalung area and it continued up to the eight rulers. Perhaps it is by his arrival that the name of this area fall as Purig which means *Pot-rigs* or it named as Purig after the Tibetan King Tashi Tsespal and Skilde Nima Gon, who fled from Tibet to Ladakh from the south west of Leh in 900 A.D due to political confusion, after the assassination of Tibetan king Lang Darma in 842 A.D. It is said that the two Tibetan princes fled to

SKARMA JUNGLAY

Ladakh. On their way to Ladakh they married the daughter of the Chief of Purang, who was the ruler of western and southern Tibet including Ladakh in the west, Rudok in the north, Purang in the east and Tholing in the south.

It is said that Nimagon assigned the territories from Rudok to Zojila to his eldest son Spalgigon. It shows that this area named as Pod-rig or Purang-rigs, because their Raja who had came from Purang side. Overall it makes clear that Purig derived its name from Pod-rigs or Purang-rigs. The ancient history makes it clear that the entire Purig region was once dominated by Buddhism with some influence from Bon.

With the arrival of Nyatri and the establishment of his kingdom in Fokar, many changes took place in the faith of Buddhism due to his influence. One interesting point to note is that there is a ruined fort at Fokar, and this is locally known as the *Khar* of “Bong-kang-chan Gyalpo”. It is said that the Gyalpo used to have a donkey leg. However, there are no written records about this king: there is only the oral tradition of the local people and the present ruined fort.

It is said that after Nyatri the control of this area felt into the hand of the few distinguished people of the area. But the villagers were not satisfied with them. So, a group of people from Fokar and Mulbek set out for Tibet to seek guidance and to find a new ruler for the area. They came back from Tibet with Rgyal-bum-lde and Chosbum-lde, two brothers from the Tibetan royal family. On their way, they married Ganga Rani and Sita Rani of Kishtiwari. Rgyal-bum-lde became the Raja of Fokar, and Chosbum-lde the Raja of Mulbek, between 1345-1420 A.D.

After them the power fell in the hand of Nak-ldey, Thong-ldey, Tung-ba-Rgyalpo, Lobzang Rgyalpo and then Konchok Shesrap (1560-1600). He was very popular among the people of Wakha Mulbek and Fokar. He had five sons: Kunga Namgyal, Kunga Chosrgyal, Konchok Rinchen, Gyaloo Singe and Rgyal-lde. Keeping his boldness and talent in view, people composed many songs in his praise, which are still sung during various occasions of public gathering and marriage ceremonies in the area.

FOKAR IN THE KINGDOM OF PURIG

One of the stanzas of the song runs as follows:

In the fort of Fokar, Konchok Sherap Stan celebrated
The drum of silver beating, wherever his excellence is leaving.

His son Kunga Namgyal and Konchok Chhosgyal became the Rgyalpo of Kartse Khar and Konchok Richen, Rgyalu Singay and Rgyaldey became the Rgyalpo of Mulbek, Fokar and Wakha village respectively. Kunga Namgyal extended his influence towards Zanskar in the south-east and Baltistan in the north-west. It is said that he married Thri-Khaton, the daughter of Skardo's king on the understanding that their children would adopt Islam. Their son was named as Thri Namgyal, and he became the Gyalpo of Kartse in the Suru Valley in the 17th century AD.

Thri Namgyal's son, Thri Sultan—also known as the 'Purig Sultan'—played a key role in spreading Islam throughout his kingdom. At present the whole of the area is Muslim-dominated, but one can still find a few rock-carved statues and *manes*, and some documents written in Tibetan script are still available in some of the houses.

The entire Kanji valley, the present Shakar Chiktan block, the Wakha valley of Shargol block, Suru valley, Zanskar region and Sod area are known as part of the Purig. Purig itself produced a number of ruler such as Konchok Shesrap Stan, Tri Namgyal, Tri Sultan, Tsering Malik of Chiktan, Adam Khan, Adam Malik, Mohd Sultan Raja of Sod etc etc were some of the known persons in the history of Purig.

Some of the famous castles of the Purig region are as follows:

1. Razi Khar of Chiktan
2. Stakche Khar
3. Sunbrang Khar of Wakha
4. Muldok Khar of Mulbek
 - a. Chhokshang Khar of Fokar
5. Chuli Khar of Pashkyum
6. Karpo and Kartse Yangtse Khar of Suru

SKARMA JUNGLAY

7. Kangi Khar Kartse
8. Chang gi Khar of Langkartse.

Most of these castles are constructed on the steep cliff hillocks or rocks. At present we can find only ruined and remains of the buildings.

Dress

The common dress of this area is long woolen white *Goncha* prepared locally. People tie a woollen scarf-like kummerbund, locally known as *skeraks*. They carry many minor tools hanging on the *keraks* such as *Khapshups* meant to carry different sizes of needles put in the case made up of wool and skin, finger protector called *zugten*, local lighter called *cha-mak*, spoon, knife, whip, flute, sling stone (*yukdo*), keys and (Samta) wooden 'diary'. The word *Samta* consists of two words *Sam* and *Ta*: *Sam* means to think, and *ta* means remember. *Samta* is made up of two wooden curved long boxes facing each other and tied one of its corner in such a way that can easily turn, oil and dust are put inside the *samta* so as to write easily by any pin pointing materials. People often use it to remember important messages and prayers. They also used woollen trouser and leather white shoes known as (Tat-pa), which consists of two parts, the upper part is known as (Lambol) and the lower part is known as (Rdokspa) leather. However, old man used to tie (Finba) on their leg just between the knee and the ankle. They keep (Gonda) as well as (Kantop) on their head according to their mood they change the style.

The women folk wear a small size head gear studs with turquoise (donyu) the front sided turquoise, on its top they put a black round shaped cap called (ta-kee), pile on the top. It is silk hemmed. It is common for both the Muslim and Buddhist women. However, the Muslim women keep it just over or under their scarf, which is known as (daa-woon). There was restriction to put silk hemmed around the cap in the past. No can allowed except the royal families women. As the man's kamarband, it also acts as mini tools to keep needles, threads, and money etc. Both the donyu and the ta-kee are unique dress of Purig culture. The other dresses are woolen gonchas of black

FOKAR IN THE KINGDOM OF PURIG

and red colour. The women folk also wear a goat skin called (Tsakpa). They wear leather shoes of black and green (lambol).

Lha: the territorial god

Like other parts of Ladakh, Fokar has its own *lha*. The territorial god of Fokar is Fokar Chomo. It is said that she was asked to act as its protector by the Tibetan Vajrayana founder Urgyan Guru Padma Sambhava in 8th century A.D. who visited this area to defeat and control the black spirit in the cave of the Urgyan Dzong.

The votive cairn of the *lha* is constructed on the far side of the village surrounded by tall juniper trees, and can still be seen. The present person who carries the power to transform the spirit of the Fokar Chomo is living at Mulbek. People invite the *lha* on various occasions, personally as well as for other predictions. Interestingly, the *lha* invite easily on any day in the entire area of Fokar village, but *Lha* can not be invited after crossing the Wakha river. He can be invited only on special days such as 8th, 10th, 15th, 25th, and 30th, of the month as per Tibetan calendar. All the people of the entire Purig and Ladakh region firmly believe in Fokar Chomo.

Still Fokar is famous for its folk songs and other important festivals like Snola, Losar, and Fokar Dzong Tseschu. On the day of Snola the unmarried boys and girls used to offer all kinds of flowers to their territorial god. The boys decorate the flower into the stick, which already cut into four parts on the top of the stick., so that the flower can easily put on the stick, locally known as chasing. The girls hung the garlands of followers over the stick, which is known as patta. It is carried in a group of three to five girls. Later it is offered to the various gonpas and to the votive cairn.

Fokar Urgyan Dzong Tseschu

Fokar is famous for its isolated hidden valley of Urgyan Dzong. The hermitage place of the Tibetan Vajrayana founder Urgyan Guru Padma Sambhava, who visited this area in the 8th century AD. On the day of Tseschu pilgrims from various parts of Ladakh visit the various caves in large numbers. Urgyan Dzong Tseschu held every year on the same day of Hemis Tsechu. The whole area is covered with auspicious signs, symbols, marks and mantras on the smooth rocks. Having such

SKARMA JUNGLAY

an important amazing pilgrimage site many of the Tibetan saints as well as the 14th Dalai Lama visited and halted overnight in 1980.

At present thousands of locals and non-locals as well as foreigners visits Urgyan Dzong to practice meditation in the various caves and also to experience natural peace and harmony with the nature.

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