

**LOCAL POLITICS IN THE SURU VALLEY  
OF NORTHERN INDIA**

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## Abstract

This thesis addresses the politics of the *yokma-pa*, a Shi'ite faction in the Suru valley in the Ladakh district of Jammu and Kashmir state, in Northern India. I use the term factions as this is one of two Shi'ite religious groups in the area that between them contain the majority of the population, and are normally opposed to each other. Recently, the *yokma-pa* have apparently undergone a major political shift from the 1960s, when they had a millenarian ideology and were primarily concerned with their own local religious agenda. In the 1990s, they have taken on the role of an interest group in the context of electoral politics and the local administration. Education is a major contemporary issue in the area, and through opening their own English medium private school in Suru, they are addressing the stereotype held by the administration and in popular discourse in the area that Shi'ahs in Suru are backward and irrational. The thesis demonstrates the continuity between these two phases. It also shows that the *yokma-pa* constitutes a legitimate political organisation, at the same time as being a religious organisation and a faction.

This thesis makes an important contribution to the anthropology of Ladakh, since there is now a large amount of detailed ethnography on Buddhists, but very little on Muslims, who also remain relatively neglected in the ethnography of India more generally. It may also contribute to academic debates on political forms in India in the context of the current political crisis, especially the rise of Hindu communalism, since there is a dearth of contemporary studies of local politics.

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Map 1 - India showing Jammu and Kashmir



Map 2 - Jammu and Kashmir State Showing Ladakh and Neighbouring Areas



KEY	
	International borders
	State borders
	Ceasefire Line
	Towns

# Chapter 1

## Background to the Research

### (i) The Research Problem

In the upper Suru valley, where I conducted the majority of my fieldwork, there are three factions: the *yokma-pa*, *goma-pa* - both Shi'ite factions; and the Sunnis. This thesis is primarily concerned with the politics of the *yokma-pa*. It had a strongly millenarian phase in the 1960s and 1970s, when its members were relatively uninterested in secular education. But, by the 1990s, its leadership had opened a secular English-medium school where I worked during my stay in Suru. In addition, the *yokma-pa* had been involved in a political dispute with the *goma-pa* since the 1960s, particularly over the issue of the millenarian preaching which the *goma-pa* leader opposed. However, in the 1990s, a new conflict emerged, this time with the Sunnis over the issue of access to and control over government resources. In my analysis, I shall show substantial continuity in the organisation and ethos of the *yokma* faction itself over the last thirty years.

Although the *yokma-pa* might normally be regarded as a religious organisation, I shall show that it is also a kinship group, like the other two factions. The relations between these three groups are defined by marriage strategies. I shall show, therefore, that kinship is central to both religion and politics in this area. Moreover, I shall demonstrate that this is not simply true of rural society in Suru Block because, in Kargil itself, the emerging administrative elite is forming a kinship group.

Kinship was also extremely important in differential responses to modernisation processes, particularly the introduction of government schooling and employment. I shall demonstrate that marginal differences between Shi'ah and Sunni kinship practices and hence their relationship to the land and locality have had an important impact on their readiness to enter into the government economy. The fact that in the past few decades many Sunnis had gained secular educational qualifications and white-collar government jobs, while Shi'ahs had not, was a major source of tension between the *yokma-pa* and Sunnis in the 1990s.

In addition to local practices, the politics of the wider region and the Indian nation state have a profound effect on politics in Suru. In particular, discourses concerning Muslims and Shi'ahs in the colonial and post-colonial state in India and more specifically in Ladakh itself, and the 'developmental project' that is inherent to the state in India (Kohli 1990:289, Chatterjee 1993:200-219), have a profound effect on the interaction between Suru people and the government institutions and economy.

Suru is a particularly good place to look at the impact of the state on local politics in India. The governmental economy is the main supplier of capital, jobs and infrastructure, in Kargil *tehsil*,<sup>1</sup> as there are few other business opportunities or large capitalist enterprises. Secondly, although Suru itself is peaceful, the location of Muslims (and largely Shi'ahs), in Jammu and Kashmir state during the current conflict means that they are caught up at the heart of India's current political crisis. My examination of politics in Suru, may also reveal important insights about the relationship between government policies and communalism in India.

## **(ii) A Brief History of Suru and Ladakh<sup>2</sup>**

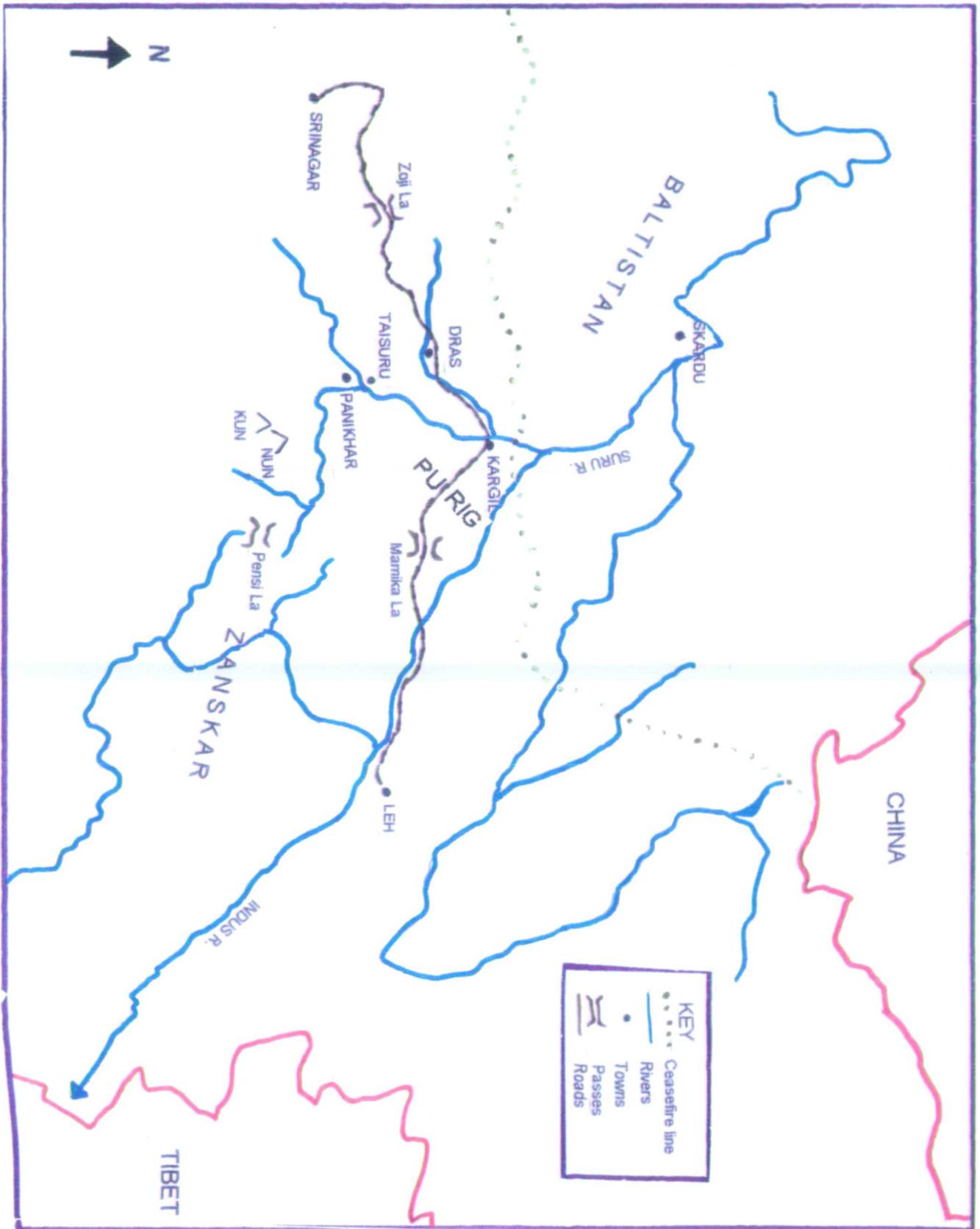
The history of the Suru valley from the 18th to the 20th century is one of successive incorporation into larger polities. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the area was apparently made up of small chiefships, the most prominent of which was Kartse, with

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<sup>1</sup> A *tehsil* is an administrative division which has its own local administration. The two *tehsils* in Ladakh are Leh and Kargil.

<sup>2</sup> The main sources used for the history of Ladakh are: Petech 1977, Francke 1904, 1914 & 1926, and Rizvi 1983. The main documentary sources for these works are the chronicles of the Ladakh kingdom and various smaller chiefships of the region, most of which were written in Tibetan but are available in translation in Francke 1914 and 1926. These works occasionally refer to Purig and Suru-Kartse; however, there are no extant documents from the area, prior to the current century. In fact, the only sources are Hashmatullah Khan's Urdu history of Jammu and Kashmir (Khan 1939), which is largely based on oral accounts that he gathered while he was the Dogra administrator (*wazir-i-wazara*) of Baltistan and Ladakh just after the turn of the century, and Kacho Sikander Khan's Urdu history of Ladakh, which is partly based on Hashmatullah Khan (Khan 1987). The main sources used for the history of Kashmir are Bamzai 1962 & 1987, Lamb 1991 and Singh 1996.

Map 3 - Ladakh



forts at Karpokhar and Kartsekhar near Sankhoo.<sup>3</sup> However, by the mid-16th century, larger political entities were beginning to form in the Himalayan region and, in the early 18th century, the chiefship of Kartse was incorporated into that of Purig, covering most of western Ladakh and ruled by the younger brother of the king of Ladakh. The Ladakh kingdom was becoming more powerful at this time and consolidating its territory in that area. It was both a centre for trade in *pashmina* wool from Western Tibet, used in the manufacture of Kashmir and other fine shawls; and an *entrepôt* on the long-distant trade routes between Tibet, Central Asia and India (Petech 1977:24, Rizvi 1983, Grist 1985). Ladakh and Purig frequently fought to control the Kashmir trade in the 17th and 18th centuries and, in these conflicts, the chiefdoms of Purig often allied themselves with the chiefships of Baltistan, who shared their Muslim faith (Petech 1977:102ff). Nevertheless, by 1758, Purig was permanently incorporated into the Ladakh kingdom and Leh was established as the centre of power and trade in the kingdom (Petech 1977:105 & 110). The rulers of Ladakh (*rgyal-pos*<sup>4</sup>) normally professed Buddhism, and supported the expansion of various sects of Tibetan Buddhism in the area (Petech 1977).

From the 15th century onwards, the people of Baltistan, Ladakh's north-western neighbour, had converted from Buddhism to Islam, as had a large proportion of the

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<sup>3</sup>Mirza Haidar Dughlat who invaded Ladakh in 1532 said that he sent a party against the *cho* (a name for a local noble or chief) of the upper Suru valley. This is mentioned by Petech 1977:26, quoting Dughlat 1895:408 & 460, and frequent mentions are made of the chiefs of Kartse.

<sup>4</sup>The Suru language is a dialect of related languages called Ladakhi in Leh *təhsil* and Balti in Baltistan. It is now officially called Purigi, so I will use that term; however, it is not normally used by people in the area, who simply refer to 'our language' (*ngati skat*). The language is closely related to Tibetan but people in this area do not use Tibetan script, although they apparently did in the past. Nowadays, when it is written, mainly in books from Baltistan, the Urdu script is used. As a result, there is no standard spelling for words, as the Balti written language is relatively unformalised. Therefore, I have transliterated words as they are pronounced in Suru, rather than as they are officially spelt. I have done the same with Farsi and Urdu words and used the simplest spelling that accords best with how the word is said in Suru, but the conventional transliteration of these words can be found in the glossary. I will also indicate when a term is Arabic, Farsi, Urdu or, occasionally, Ladakhi. All other words can be assumed to be from the local dialect.

population of western Ladakh, and a minority around Leh (Rovillé 1990:117). The conversions in Purig were as a result both of proselytising by religious figures from Kashmir and Baltistan, and of some chiefs converting to Islam while forming alliances with Baltistan. A link between political and religious affiliation was common in this area. Ladakh was often, although by no means always, in alliance with Tibetan principalities, on the basis of their common religion. There had also been some Muslim immigration from neighbouring areas such as Baltistan and Kashmir (Rovillé 1990, Dollfus 1995). The incorporation of Purig into the Ladakh kingdom left it relatively disadvantaged economically and politically and without any major involvement in trade, except as the supplier of carriers for the caravans. Hence, Muslims in Ladakh were left relatively peripheral both economically and politically. During this period, the Suru valley was administered by *kharpons* (regional administrators), most of whom were Buddhists appointed from Leh (Khan 1939:700).

Ladakh remained an independent kingdom, prior to the 1830s, when it was conquered by the Dogras from Jammu who, by 1857, came to rule over large parts of the surrounding area, including Kashmir and Baltistan (Rizvi 1983:67, Lamb 1991:8).<sup>5</sup> The Dogras themselves came under British influence very soon after their conquest of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir was a princely state in the British Raj. During the Dogra period, trade continued but the regime was relatively harsh and its people were subjected to heavy taxes, such as having to provide *corvée* labour for the major routes (Bamzai 1987:150ff, Grist 1994, Sonam Wangyal:1997:486). Cunningham reported that many Muslims fled to Baltistan following the Dogra conquests (Cunningham 1854:288). The Dogras appear to have been particularly harsh to Muslims, including the nobles of Purig who rebelled several times. They apparently ceased to have any importance after this time, unlike those of central Ladakh (Francke 1926:178). Thus, Kargil *tehsil*,<sup>6</sup> as it was later known, became even more peripheral in the Dogra period and its people were economically disadvantaged. By the middle of this century, many men from Purig were migrating to labour in other parts of India, as had those of

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<sup>5</sup> The Dogras invaded Ladakh from Kishtwar, via the valley that leads to Panikhar and fought several battles with the Ladakhis in the Suru valley (Rizvi 1983:62ff).

<sup>6</sup> Kargil itself only became important as a bazaar town after the Dogra conquests. Moorcroft and Trebeck reported that in 1822, the nearby village of Pashkyum was the main place on the road between Leh and Srinagar (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1837 Vol 2:23).

Baltistan and Kashmir since the previous century (Bamzai 1987:153). In Suru, nearly all the men used to go and labour in the Punjab and Himachal Pradesh in the winter until the 1980s.<sup>7</sup>

At the time of Independence in 1947 Jammu and Kashmir was effectively left out of the Partition agreement with the consequence that India and Pakistan fought a war over the region. In 1948, western Ladakh was occupied by Pakistani forces, who nearly reached Leh, but were eventually driven out of most of Ladakh. It is very unclear what happened in the weeks following the defeat of the Pakistani forces, but the Muslim population of Ladakh seems to have reduced. For example, there are villages in Leh *tehsil* where the Muslim population prior to 1947 had disappeared by the next census as the Muslims either fled to Pakistan or other parts of India, converted to Buddhism, or were killed.<sup>8</sup> In Suru, I heard of several men who went to Pakistan in 1948 and did not return. Baltistan and some other parts of Jammu and Kashmir became part of Pakistan, but most remained in India.

There is now a cease-fire line dividing the two countries on the north-west side of Ladakh, which is still a matter of dispute and heavily militarised on both sides.<sup>9</sup> Trade with China and Tibet had dropped considerably after the Chinese Revolution in 1949 and the invasion of Tibet in 1959, and ended completely with the cancellation of the Indo-China Trade agreement in 1961. In 1962 India and China fought a war, in which the eastern border of Ladakh was one of the main fronts (Lamb 1991:204). In the wake of this war, a motorable road was built connecting Ladakh with the Kashmir valley to the west, and government spending in the area greatly increased. Since the 1960s, there has been a massive army presence in Ladakh. Subsequent wars and skirmishes with Pakistan have meant that Ladakh has continued to be of crucial strategic importance to the Indian government; and the people of Ladakh live with a constant threat of hostilities, as indicated by the shelling of Kargil in 1997.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Only men went from Suru, but from neighbouring Zaskar women also went.

<sup>8</sup> The Ladakh region was 86.7% Muslim and 12.89% Buddhist in 1941 (Srinivas 1995:72).

<sup>9</sup> Fighting took place near Kargil in the Indo-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971 and the line of actual control is currently about twelve kilometres from Kargil town (Rizvi 1983:70-71).

<sup>10</sup> Kargil was shelled twice by Pakistan in 1997. The first time three people were killed and several injured, but the second about twenty were killed and many injured in Kargil town, and several important buildings such as the hospital were damaged.

Government and army activity, as well as the building of the road and the opening of Ladakh to (mainly foreign) tourists from 1975 have combined to bring enormous economic changes to the area. One of the most significant changes has been the growth of government and army employment, mainly around Leh, which was the administrative headquarters of Ladakh for the first three decades of Independence. In 1979, Kargil was made into a *tehsil* in its own right with its headquarters at Kargil town, and there was more government activity and employment in Kargil *tehsil* and Suru. However, this increase in government services has slowed down in the last decade, with the effect being felt first in Leh *tehsil*, and more recently in Kargil. The numbers of people who have state-recognised educational qualifications, combined with a lack of other economic opportunities and the relative lack of development in farming, has led to serious unemployment in the district as a whole. The resulting severe competition for government jobs was one of the catalysts for the anti-Muslim feeling among many Buddhists over the last decade (Brix Bertelson & van Beek 1995).

Since the late 1980s, the conflict in Kashmir has caused huge disruption in the state, and many deaths. Although the dispute is largely confined to the Kashmir valley and its environs, Kargil *tehsil* has been adversely affected as an immediate neighbour. In 1990, the government in Delhi decided to suspend the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly, and put the state under Governor's Rule, which prevailed until 1996, when elections were held. In Kargil *tehsil*, tourism has severely declined as most foreigners are unwilling to travel through the Kashmir valley; hence, many of the hotels that were built in Kargil town in the 1980s are now empty.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, business opportunities have been severely curtailed, leaving the government as the main source of non-agricultural employment in the area.

The population of the western parts of Kargil *tehsil* is almost entirely Muslim, but Zanskar in the south is predominantly Buddhist. In the east there are many villages where both religions are found, even within the same family (Shakspo 1995). The majority of Muslims in Kargil *tehsil* are Shi'ahs, but there is a sizeable minority of Sunnis, and a small number of adherents of the Noorbakhsh sect in a few villages

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<sup>11</sup> Tourism in Leh *tehsil* has not been so badly affected, as it has an airport with flights from the plains, and can also be reached by the Manali road in summer.

near Kargil (Zutshi 1961). Shi'ah Muslims, particularly those in remoter areas such as Suru, suffer relative poverty as compared to the majority of other Ladakhis. Evidence can be seen in their relatively high mortality and prevalence of diseases such as tuberculosis and leprosy.<sup>12</sup>

### **(iii) The Suru valley and the *Yokma-pa***

My research centres on Suru Block, one of the eight administrative sub-divisions of Kargil *tehsil*. The Suru valley contains three Blocks<sup>13</sup>: Tambis, Sankhoo and Suru and runs between Kargil and the Pensi La (pass) dividing it from the sub-division of Zaskar to the South.<sup>14</sup> Suru Block is found about fifty kilometres to the south of Kargil, to which it has been connected by a motorable road since 1978. Due to heavy winter snowfall that the valley experiences, the Block can only be reached on foot from Sankhoo or by helicopter for several months in the winter and early spring. The area is still predominantly agricultural, and nearly all the permanent households in Suru have at least a small plot of irrigated land which they farm using mainly manual labour. In Suru block, the staple crops are barley, wheat, peas and a few vegetables; and the extensive pastures support various bovines, sheep, goats and horses.

The majority of the population of the Suru valley are Shi'ahs, and the rest are Sunnis, who form about half the population of the neighbouring villages of Panikhar (the headquarters) and Prantee in Suru Block. There are also two Sunni families in Sankhoo, the headquarters of Sankhoo Block. The Sunnis do not currently have any

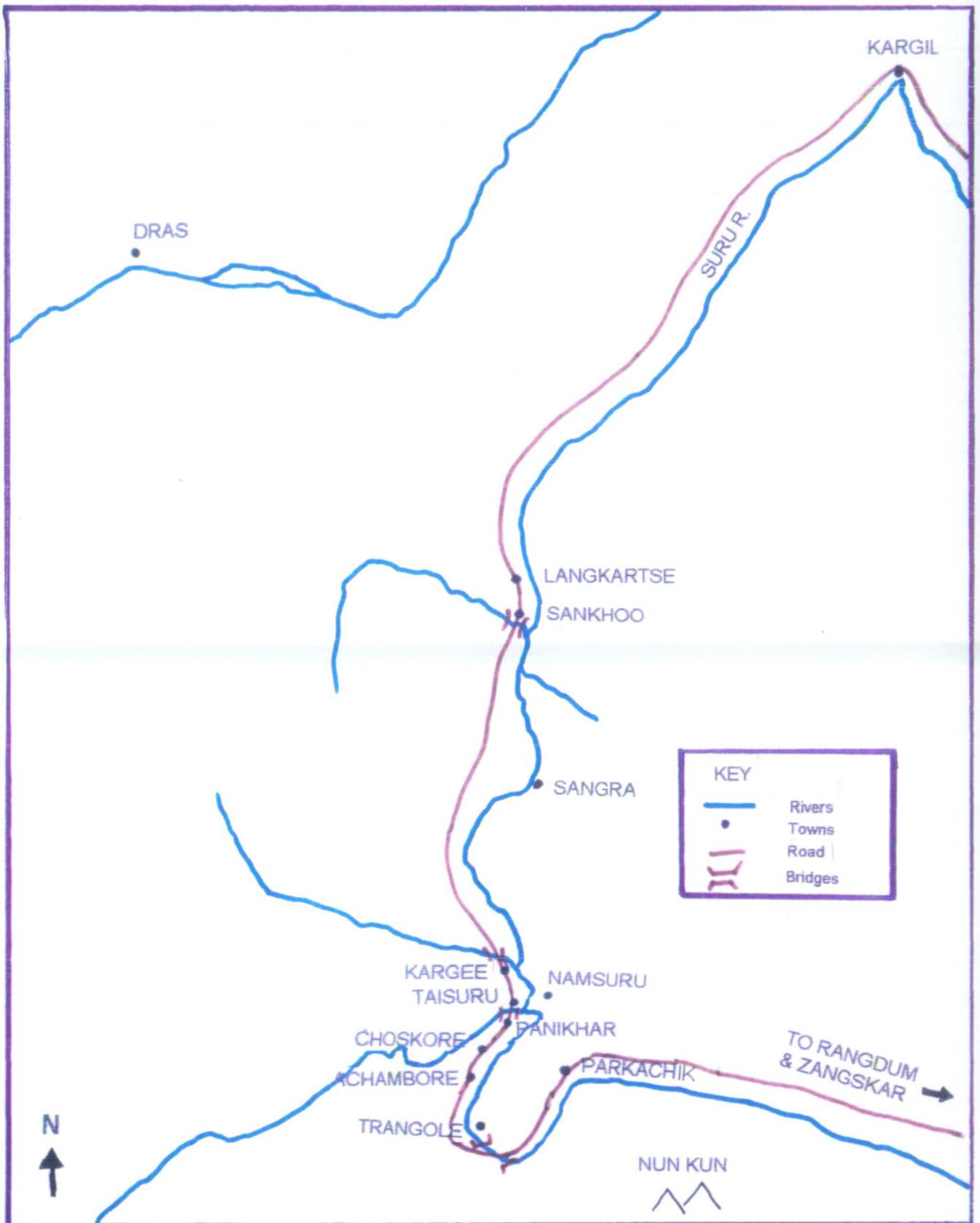
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<sup>12</sup> According to the records of the government medical department, the upper Suru valley has more than half the total tuberculosis and leprosy cases for Kargil *tehsil*, although it only contains about an eighth of the population.

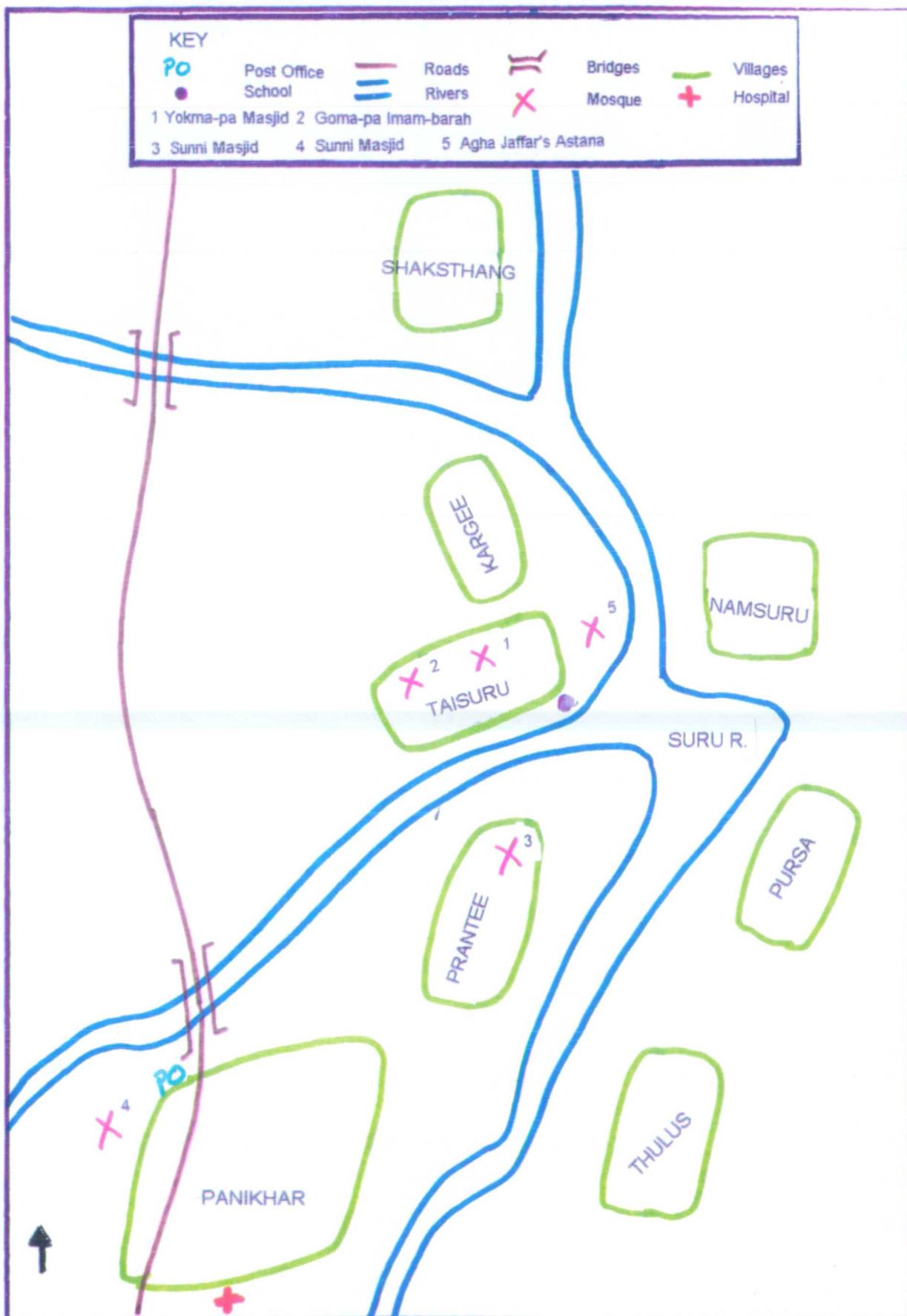
<sup>13</sup> Blocks are administrative sub-divisions of *tehsils*. In Suru block, the headquarters are in Panikhar, which is on the main road at the point where the non-motorable road from Kashmir enters the valley.

<sup>14</sup> Sankhoo and Suru Blocks between them contain about a quarter of the population of Kargil *tehsil*. There are no official census results for 1991, but in 1993 the Tehsildar's Office in Kargil recorded the population of the *tehsil* as being about 86,000. From the 1981 figures it can be calculated that, in 1993, the population of Suru block was about 6,800 and that of Sankhoo Block about 13,000. The two Blocks between them account for about a quarter of the population of the *tehsil*.

Map 4 - The Suru Valley



Map 5 - The area around Taisuru and Panikhar in Suru Block





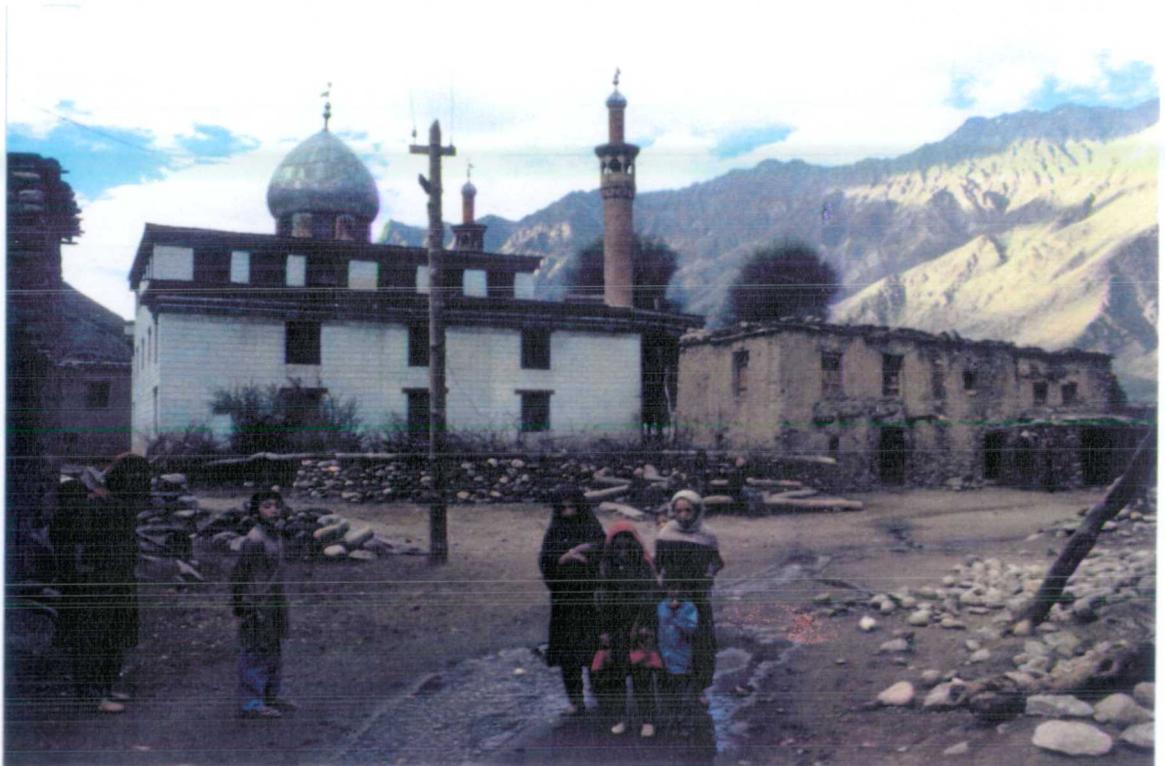
*Picture 1.1 - Panikhar and Taisuru*



*Picture 1.2 - Taisuru in the winter*



*Picture 1.3 - The Yokma-pa Masjid in Taisuru*



*Picture 1.4 - The Goma-pa Imam-barah in Taisuru*

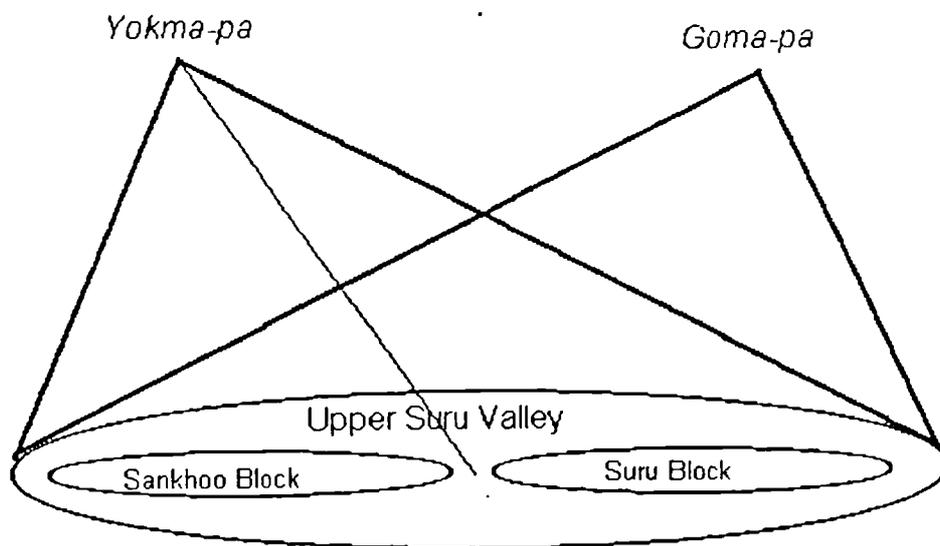


*Picture 1.5 - Agha Miggi Ort with a letter from an ayatollah in Iran (in picture)*



*Picture 1.6 - Agha Baqir with one of his sons*

religious leaders in this area, but they have recently built new Sunni mosques (Arabic: *masjid*) in Prantee and Panikhar. The Shi'ahs in Sankhoo and Suru Blocks nearly all belong to the two factions, called the *yokma-pa* and *goma-pa* respectively, which mean the "lower" and "upper" group of people. These terms have no connotation of hierarchy. The majority of Shi'ahs in Sankhoo Block are *yokma-pa*, but in Suru Block the two factions are roughly equal in numbers.<sup>15</sup> When I started my fieldwork in 1993, they had been in dispute with each other for the last thirty years, since a strongly millenarian phase of the *yokma-pa* in the early 1960s. The *yokma-pa* and *goma-pa* form clearly demarcated kinship and social groups (see Chapter 2).



**Figure 1.1 - The Yokma and Goma-pas and their Relationship to the Blocks**

Both factions have at their core a lineage of *sayyids* who claim descent from the family of the Prophet Mohammed's daughter Fatima and her husband Ali, the Prophet's cousin (Glassé 1991:26).<sup>16</sup> In Kargil tehsil, male *sayyids* have the title *agha* and

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<sup>15</sup> Estimates by *yokma-pa* members were that they had about 16,000 supporters in the two Blocks in 1988, but that the numbers had slightly declined by 1993. In 1993, they had about 3,400 supporters out of a total population of 6,800 in Suru Block and about 10,000 in Sankhoo Block out of a total of 13,000.

<sup>16</sup> They are called *sharif* - meaning 'noble' - in some other parts of the Muslim world including other parts of India. In Suru this term is used for a good upstanding person, and its equivalent in the local language is *norbu*.

women are called *archo*.<sup>17</sup> In each faction there is a leading *agha* who is the local guide, called *rehbar*<sup>18</sup> (Farsi) or *lamstan* (literally 'one who shows the way'). The *agha* is the head of the faction and the rest of the members are his followers, called *murid* (Farsi) or "*agha khriile yodkhan migun*" (literally 'those who follow the *agha*'). In Suru, all Shi'ah households are affiliated to one of the factions. They attend its major religious ceremonies, pay certain taxes to the leading *aghas*, and go to them for rulings on matters of inheritance and dispute settlement. The leading *aghas* have studied for many years in the Shi'ite centres of Iraq and Iran, and are literate in Farsi and Arabic, the languages of their religious books. As *sayyids*, the *aghas* trace descent in the male line from different Imams and have lineage names such as Rizvi, Husaini and Musavi. In Suru, there are a number of *sayyid* lineages, but only a few of the *aghas* are important leaders. Nevertheless, all *sayyids* are respected and they and *archos* are considered to be different from ordinary people (*am-pa*).

In addition to the core *aghas*' lineages, there are other religious practitioners, such as lesser *aghas*, shaikhs, non-*sayyid* men who have undertaken religious studies usually in the Middle East, and *akhuns*, village-level clerics who often act as teachers and healers. The factions have a representative in each village, usually an *akhun* or *hajji* (someone who has visited the Shi'ite pilgrimage centres in the Middle East or Mecca), who is responsible for collecting the member's taxes, for *ad hoc* collections and organising work parties.

The main centres for the *yokma-pa* are Taisuru village in Suru Block and Sankhoo village in Sankhoo Block. In Taisuru the two leading *aghas* have houses next to the *yokma-pa masjid* (mosque), which is the centre for their main religious gatherings in Suru Block.<sup>19</sup> The current leader of the faction is Agha Sayyid Mohammed, who is

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<sup>17</sup> This term was a title of honour or military distinction among the Turks (Glassé 1991:26), and in Iran it is a title of respect both for an ordinary man and for someone of true authority (Fischer and Abedi 1990:505). *Archo* seems to be a local term, as *cho* is a title of respect in this area.

<sup>18</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini is called the *rehbar* of the Revolution (Momen 1985:316).

<sup>19</sup> *Masjid* means mosque, which is a place for ordinary daily and Friday prayers. *Imam-barah* is an Urdu term for *matam-i-sarai*, which means "place of *matam*". It is a special building for Shi'ite mourning ceremonies - particularly at the time of Muharram. *Matam* are accounts from of the *hadiths* - books of interpretation of the Koran and accounts of the lives of the Prophet

commonly known by the name Agha Miggi Ort, which means "with eyes like a lamp".<sup>20</sup> He studied in a Shi'ite college (*madrasah*) in Iraq for several years and is considered to have considerable insight on matters of religion. He is normally mild-mannered and retains a certain air of detachment in many discussions, which is a sign of his authority. He lives in a large household shared by his principal wife, their children and older son's wives and children, one or two of the young *aghas* from his relatives in Langkartse, who study with him and several servants (*duksmi*).

His neighbour in Taisuru is Agha Baqir, the son of Agha Hyder, the last leader of the *yokma-pa* until his death in 1988, who started the millenarian movement in the 1960s. Agha Baqir has not studied in the Middle East but is nevertheless highly respected for his religious knowledge and healing powers. During my fieldwork he appeared to be trying to build his own power-base in the faction and is generally more argumentative than Agha Miggi Ort. He lives with two of his wives, eight of his children and a number of servants.

Near the *yokma-pa aghas'* houses, on the edge of the village settlement, there is a graveyard (Urdu: *qabristan*) of previous *aghas* and their families. It contains a number of graves of revered people (*astanas*), the most impressive of which is that of Agha Jaffar, Agha Miggi Ort's father. Agha Hyder's two other sons live in Sankhoo. Near their house there is now an impressive *astana* for their father. There is also a lesser branch of *yokma-pa aghas* at Langkartse, below Sankhoo.

Agha Najibul, the current leader of the *goma-pa*, also lives in Taisuru, where the *goma-pa* have their *imam-barah*. He is the most retiring of all the *aghas* but his brother is a well-known and much consulted healer. Agha Najibul's predecessor, Agha Raza, who was the bitter opponent of Agha Hyder, lived at Shaksthang near Taisuru, where his descendants remain.

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Mohammed and his family (Glassé 1991:141 & 2 62). The *yokma-pa masjid* is also used as an *imam-barah*.

<sup>20</sup> This epithet was also used for his father, Agha Jaffar, who was the *rehbar* before his death in 1957.

Shi'ahs revere twelve Imams, who are believed to be the direct descendants from the Prophet's daughter, Hazrat Fatima, and his cousin, Imam Ali, who was the first Imam. Their descendants are known as *Ahl al-Bayt* (the Family of the Prophet) and there were Twelve Imams or leaders in this line. Shi'ahs believe that the succession of the spiritual authority of the Prophet Mohammed should have passed through the Twelve Imams rather than the Umayyad Caliphs, who managed to gain authority in the Muslim world. This line was defeated and almost completely annihilated in the 7th century AD, at the Battle of Karbala in which Husain, the son of Fatima and Ali and the rightful Imam from the Shi'ite point of view, was killed along with most of his male relatives (Fischer 1980:13-21). Those events and their commemoration are at the heart of the major Shi'ite religious observances, the climax of which is the month of Muharram, when Shi'ahs mourn and atone for the martyrdoms at Karbala. In Suru Block, both factions have large processions at Taisuru on the 10th of Muharram, the day of the battle of Karbala. In the past, this has often been the occasion for fighting between the *yokma* and *goma-pas* when their processions met.

During Muharram and on many other occasions throughout the year, each faction holds mourning ceremonies, called *matam* (Farsi) or *orche* (Purigi). An *agha* or another cleric gives an account of one of the members of the Prophet's family, and sometimes of their suffering, and urges the congregation to weep. The tears that people weep are considered to be of atonement, since they were not able to fight on Husain's behalf at Karbala. Shedding tears gains Husain's intercession for the Day of Judgement (Hegland 1983:221).

The Twelfth Imam or Imam Mahdi, was forced into hiding in the 9th century AD, due to the persecution of Shi'ahs.<sup>21</sup> Hence religious leaders have the role of guiding Shi'ahs on earth for him and acting as intermediaries between man and God in his absence (Glassé 1991:186). Every Shi'ite is enjoined to follow an Ayatollah as their main guide, to whom they will also pay religious taxes (*khums*) (Richard 1995:85). These main leaders are all in the Shi'ite centres in the Middle East, but people also normally follow a local guide (*rehbar*), such as the *goma* and *yokma-pa* leaders.

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<sup>21</sup> This is often referred to as the 'occultation'.

Shi'ahs believe that the Imam Mahdi will reappear on earth and rule before the Day of Judgement (Glassé 1991:155-6). In the 1960s, Agha Hyder, the leader of the *yokma-pa* at the time, started telling his followers that the coming of the Imam Mahdi (Twelfth or Hidden Imam) and the end of the world were imminent. During this period, his following increased, and the majority of people in Suru and Sankhoo Blocks followed his millenarian teaching. However, he was opposed by Agha Raza, the leader of the *goma-pa*, who actively campaigned against the idea that the Imam Mahdi was about to appear. Nevertheless, the *yokma-pa* continued to hold these beliefs and still do, albeit in a muted form.

Until the mid 1980s, the major focus of the *yokma-pa* was the millenarian movement and merit-making both to attain salvation and social standing in the community. They were not very interested in secular state education or the government economy which was rapidly expanding from the late 1970s. However, by the 1990s, the leadership was concerned about their relative disadvantage in respect of secular education and government jobs, particularly as compared to the Sunnis in the Block, who had enthusiastically entered into these areas *en masse* in the 1970s and 1980s. So in 1993, the *yokma-pa* opened the Noon Public School, on the pattern of similar private English-medium schools in other parts of Ladakh. Its main aims were to provide English-medium education in a school located in Suru, so that children could gain educational qualifications while retaining their existing culture; and to address their relative disadvantage as compared to Sunnis in the field of education and government employment.

The school is situated in Taisuru, the home of Agha Miggi Ort, the *yokma-pa* leader and main organiser of the school, and was opened a month before I arrived to do my fieldwork. I became closely involved in the school, both as a volunteer teacher, and finally as a member of the management committee. It rapidly became clear that the school was a major source of controversy in the area, particularly for Sunnis. So the conflicts around the school became an important focus for my research. This thesis asks whether the school will provide a means for the *yokma-pa* to build power and resources in the rural area that will allow them to have some control over the development process, or whether it will merely hasten the existing processes of elite formation and urbanisation that are currently taking place in Suru.

#### **(iv) Politics and Factions as a Topic of Anthropological Enquiry**

India is undergoing a political crisis and a growing level of political violence associated with the rise of Hindu nationalism, anti-Muslim sentiments and regional conflicts in the Punjab and Kashmir. Largely historical accounts of the politics of the nation state in India, and South Asia in general, are complemented by a growing literature on the issue of more extreme incidents of communalism (religious bigotry) (Pandey 1993, Das 1990, Hansen 1996). However, there is a dearth of information on local-level politics in India that might examine some of the important issues that these other works raise, particularly the effect of Hindu communalism on Muslims, the main 'target'. Moreover, Muslims, in general continue to be neglected as a topic of study in India.

Local level politics has been rather unfashionable in anthropology since the 1970s. One reason for anthropologists' neglect of the topic may stem from the theoretical sterility of past approaches. Transactionalism, the theoretical approach found in such works as Barth's *"Political Organisation of the Swat Pathans"* and Bailey's various ethnographies of Orissa and his theoretical work *"Stratagems and Spoils"* (Barth 1959, Bailey 1963 & 1970), was rejected by later generations for its lack of historical perspective and use of imported western economic concepts to describe people's motivations.

Ahmed addressed both of these issues in a critique of Barth's work on the Swat Pathans (Ahmed 1976). He claims that Barth describes the Pakhtuns (Pathans) as if they were the colonial stereotype of the pre-literate wild men who are locked into a constant state of anarchy and war, caught in a timeless present, and without a history of their own (Ahmed 1976:6). In order to counter these images, Ahmed tries to restore Pakhtun history, particularly by showing that they built a state in their recent past, rather than being the state of anarchy that Barth had described.<sup>22</sup> He also criticises Barth for ascribing motives to Pakhtuns based on western economic concepts of maximisation rather than their own values.

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<sup>22</sup> Ahmed himself has been criticised for seeing Swat society too much from the point of view of the leader, called the Wali (Street 1990:251).

For Bailey and Barth, political disputes represented a form of competition (or game) between relatively equal and structurally similar groups based on motives such as maximisation. In respect of Barth's work, Ahmed demonstrated that the ideas of entrepreneurial maximisation that he brings to his Swat analysis, come directly from western economic theory and have little obvious connection with the way that Pathans see the world, and their possible motivation for what they do (Ahmed 1976:7). Hence Ahmed tries to give an accurate depiction of Pakhtun society and motivation in terms of what he sees as their own concepts. Furthermore, he shows that these altered in the face of changing political and economic conditions.

In an earlier critique, Asad had argued that Barth overprivileged vertical ties in the form of the segmentary lineage, and ignored the importance of classes in Pakhtun society (Asad 1972). Asad claims that Barth emphasised choice and ignored the issue of power in the political affiliation of tenants to landlords, who are also political leaders. As he points out, in Swat, saints can also be landlords and political leaders, and the degree to which they can exert power over their followers is crucial (Asad 1972:85ff). He also shows in his critique, that such politics were not only developed through dispute and conflict but also through consent (Asad 1972:94). However, Asad associates power purely with control of economic resources, and ignores what Bourdieu calls symbolic power (Jenkins 1992:85). This has the result that he draws a sharp distinction between authority and power, using the examples of saints who are followed because they are believed to be saintly and those who are landlords (Asad 1972:86). As Bourdieu has shown in his classic analysis of marriage patterns among Béarnaise farmers, ties of kinship that are regarded as affectionate by the participants can also be relations of exploitation (Bourdieu 1990:147-161). This is true of leading *aghas* in Suru, since they have more land than most people, but are not landlords, nevertheless, they have considerable power over their followers who are bound to them through ties of kinship and belief in their religious powers.

In asserting that class rather than lineage/faction was central to the understanding of Swat society and decentralising conflict in an analysis of politics, Asad raised an important feature of western academic approaches to the Orient that was to be elaborated by Said in his book "Orientalism". Said said that one form of the stereotyped views of Eastern peoples that frequently appears in western academia, is

that they are intrinsically factional and fight among themselves in an irrational manner (Said 1978:293-305).

This point was taken up by Hardiman, in the opening volume of *Subaltern Studies* (Hardiman 1982). He analyses the use of the "*Great Indian Faction*" as a defining explanatory concept of Indian politics, at all levels from the village to the national political party (Hardiman 1982). He makes a number of detailed criticisms of the work of Bailey and several other anthropologists and historians who defined factions as vertical organisations that comprise people from different castes or classes within a single political bloc, and suggest that they were a major factor in Indian politics from the village-level up to national parties. Hardiman disputes their analysis and says that factional ties do sometimes come into play, but usually only in certain particular contexts, such as elections. In addition, he says that factions are rarely politically relevant at the supra-village level as they are usually not even advertised to outsiders, to whom villages normally show a unified face (Hardiman 1982:212).

Hardiman shows convincingly that we should be cautious in using 'faction' as an explanatory concept for Indian politics in general. However, he also suggests that political blocs in India are much more likely to combine on common class interests (Hardiman 1982:230). This assertion does not fit in with the evidence of instances of factional alliances that he himself has offered, some of which apparently last for generations (Hardiman 1982:230, Bailey 1970:92). Neither does it take into account the importance of other vertical organisations such as regional political parties in Indian politics.

A possible source of Hardiman's problem with the village-level data on factions, is that he does not define the historical epoch to which he is referring. Most of the anthropological studies to which he refers were conducted in the first few decades after Independence and concern a particular type of faction led by dominant (land owning) caste members. These were a common feature of Indian villages in parts of the country in the post-Independence decades (Lewis 1958, Carter 1974). However, low-caste and class organisations also became increasingly important during this period. For example, in Bailey's own material on Bisipara in Orissa, he says that factions led by landowners of the Warrior caste with followings of other castes, had been a feature of the politics of the village in the 1950s, but that in the 1960s,

increasingly Warriors faced a revolution by their Untouchables (sic) (Bailey 1970:46ff). Similarly, Robinson says that in the village in Andhra Pradesh that she studied in the 1980s, processes of democratisation were transforming the position of lower castes (M Robinson 1988:263).

Therefore certain types of faction do seem to be in decline in parts of India and horizontal forms of organisation may have become more widespread. However, vertical forms of organisation are still important in India (Chatterjee 1993:215) and co-exist with horizontal forms such as caste organisations and classes (Jalal 1995:202). Hardiman praises Carter's work on South India as he shows that, despite the existence of factions, there is also a political elite that, to some extent, cross-cuts the factions (Carter 1974:7ff, Hardiman 1982:219ff). However, Hardiman seems to take Carter's material as evidence of the lack of importance of factions, whereas I would suggest that it shows that factions and vertical forms of organisation are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Moreover, Hardiman dismisses the idea that kinship could have anything to do with political organisation. For example, he says of Lewis' work: *"there is little suggestion of the Great Indian Faction. He has merely observed, with considerable insight, the operation of Jat kinship networks within one village and has labelled this phenomenon 'faction'."* (Hardiman 1982:212); and later: *"Nicholas's description of the Congress and Communist 'factions' merely demonstrates the well-known fact that Indian villages tend to be dominated by powerful families. As the power of these families continues over the generations, it would be surprising if there was not some continuity of conflict between them."* (Hardiman 1982:212). Even if Nicholas's evidence - of kinship-based factions at the village level that support different factions - does not prove that *"the Communist Party of India was merely a faction in a red cap"*, it does show that there is some connection between village-level kinship-based factions and the Communist Party (Hardiman 1982:215). However, Hardiman seems to pass over those links, as he seems to regard kinship organisation as intrinsically irrational and he cannot accept that kinship groups could be associated with ideological or party politics which he seems to regard as rational. Such an assumption was partly based on the false belief

that kinship no longer plays a major part in western society, a view that has been criticised most notably by Strathern (Strathern 1992).<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, for Hardiman, class politics are 'rational' and factional politics are not. Accordingly, to associate factions with India becomes an example of the orientalism Said discusses. If, however, factions are as 'rational' as classes, then his argument does not hold. I present factions in this thesis as a form of political organisation that is just as rational, valid and varied as any other. I shall also show that kinship is part of modern politics and is not incompatible with the politics of the nation-state.

I use the term faction in the limited sense that can be applied to politics anywhere, as a form of vertical organisation, often within recognised collectivities such as co-religionists, political parties, or a village. By vertical, I mean that a faction may contain people of different 'status', 'class' or property holding. I hope to avoid associating them with any derogatory connotations which, as Hardiman has shown, has applied historically to the study of factions in India.

In Suru, '*pa*', might be the more appropriate term to use for faction, since, in the local language of Suru, it is used to denote a collectivity or identification with a collectivity, which can range from the extremely temporary to the more long-lasting. For example, it is used in the name *yokma-pa*, which is the *yokma* faction as a whole; for a village, such as "*Taisuru-pa*"; or for house names which are the name of the head of the household plus *pa*, such as "*Husain-pa*". It is also used for the most fleeting collectivity, such as "*I can see Nicky-pa coming down the road.*", which just means me and whoever I happen to be walking with at that moment. However, it does not imply a collection of individuals in the western Liberal sense, but rather the collectivity as an entity. Concepts like ownership are also almost always associated with a "*pa*" rather

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<sup>23</sup> Barth and Bailey make a similar mistake as they regard relations of kinship as being fundamentally different from those they term transactions. For example, Bailey draws on Barth's Swat material to make a distinction between the core of the factions, which are the families of the khans, who are the landholders, and the only people to have full citizen rights in the villages and the followers, who are landless tenants, who he says swap sides frequently and base their decisions on what he calls sensible and rational calculation of which leader can best protect them (Bailey 1970:39ff). However, he also throws in the information that the khan may have affinal relations with his followers (Bailey 1970:39).

than an individual, for example you would always say “*Husain-pe balang*”, meaning the cow of the Husain house, rather than Husain’s cow (*Husaini balang*).

The *yokma-pa* is just one of the collectivities to which people belong in Suru, albeit an extremely important one. It is both a religious, kinship and political group with various external connections. Nowadays, one of its roles is that it acts as an interest group in the electoral and administrative politics of the area, which is an important theme in my thesis. The nature of those interactions are heavily influenced by aspects of the Indian nation state and attitudes to Muslims and Shi’ahs in India and Ladakh, as I shall discuss in the next three sections.

#### **(v) The Political Economy of the Indian Nation State**

There have been several recent contributions to the history of the Indian nation state as opposed to the local state I describe in Ladakh. Chatterjee suggests that the role of planning and development lie at the core of the ideological conception of the post-colonial Indian state, and hence they are located in the field of administration which is *de jure*, but not *de facto*, politically neutral. Thus, Indian electoral politics are not by and large contests between left and right because every party has to promise to spend money in order to develop the areas they represent (Chatterjee 1993:206).

Jalal has taken a similar view, in a comparison of the politics of post-Partition India with those of Pakistan and Bangladesh, where she examines the role of the government bureaucracy in some detail (Jalal 1995). She argues that the post-colonial state in India inherited and continued the colonial administrative system almost intact. This had been both authoritarian and provided the only contact between the populace and government. After Independence, the Congress party was organisationally weak in many areas, despite being the main political party of the nationalist movement. Therefore, it was often forced to work with bureaucrats who had links with voters that the Congress party lacked, leading to a progressive politicisation of the administration. Jalal suggests that the country came to be ruled by a relatively authoritarian administration that was close to, rather than controlled by, politicians and, amongst both politicians and bureaucrats, a tendency to bend the rules to achieve their objectives became common. She argues that this inherent authoritarianism was also compounded by the fact that the Indian Constitution does not contain many civil rights for the individual. In brief, it is argued that the state

delivers its policies through an administration in which power is centralised and has become increasingly so in recent decades, but is not highly democratised.

The politics of nationalism and India's eventual Partition created a post-colonial state which appears to be secular, but implicitly is founded upon notions of Hindu nationalism. Muslims are therefore classified as a minority, and regarded as potentially disloyal to India (Pandey 1993:3, Jalal 1995:208). Both Jalal and Chatterjee maintain that various tendencies in the post-colonial state have been exacerbated by the politics of the centre and particularly the Congress Party over the last two decades. Jalal suggests that the failure of democratisation and development in most parts of India have led to dwindling support for the Congress Party, and that both Indira and Rajiv Gandhi mobilised religious and regional groups to counter political challenges to their declining authority (Jalal 1995:94ff, Pandey 1993:4ff). This in its turn has led to an escalation in demands on the state and a corresponding sharpening of communal tensions.<sup>24</sup>

One of the states where this is particularly evident is in Kashmir. Jalal shows that Shaikh Abdullah and his predominantly Kashmiri National Conference Party were treated as if they were dissidents during the early post-Independence decades, despite the fact that they had actively fought for the inclusion of Kashmir as part of India in 1947/8. In the past decade, the Congress Party used Kashmir to woo the Hindu right by promoting the idea that Kashmiri Muslims were suspect Indians, and then progressively undermining democracy in the state, resulting in the present crisis (Jalal 1995:175-179).<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in her extremely illuminating book on the generation of the current Kashmir crisis, Singh shows that the current situation was not caused by any pre-existing rebelliousness among Kashmiris, but largely by the politics of central government (Singh 1996). As I shall show, these policies have had a profound effect on Suru in the last decade.

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<sup>24</sup>In the Punjab, for example, Indira Gandhi originally encouraged Bhindranwale (the leader of the Sikh separatist movement who died in the storming of the Golden Temple), in order to try and undermine the ruling Akali Dal party.

<sup>25</sup> The Congress and National Conference parties made a pact before the 1987 elections in Kashmir and then proceeded to use vote-rigging to stop a loose coalition of Muslim parties winning the election. It was because of this event that people subsequently began to take up arms in the state (Singh 1996:101ff).

One consequence of the political economy of the state in India and the politics of the centre has been that interest groups have become extremely important in the contemporary politics of India and are now increasingly competing for the resources of the state. One aspect of this is that both 'low' and 'high' caste organisations have been transformed in the last few decades into interest groups that make political demands couched in the rhetoric of egalitarianism (Chatterjee 1993:215-6).

Another aspect of contemporary politics in India, is the existence of an elite class that is closely associated with the state and the administration. A number of writers on the politics of the state in India, and other South Asian countries, have noted that there is a major social divide between the urban, well-educated middle class and the mass of people. This is generally regarded as being a legacy of the colonial administration that has been largely perpetuated since Independence (Donnan and Werbner 1991:23, Chatterjee 1993:134). From the mid-19th century, it was an explicit policy of the colonial administration to produce a stratum of Indian administrators between the British rulers and the mass of the Indian populace. The intention was that they would be: *"Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinions, in morals and in intellect."* (extract from Macaulay's famous Minute on Education, quoted by Ahmed 1986:149). Hence the British encouraged English-medium education for a small minority of Indians, while at the same time showing little interest in education for the mass of people, who remained largely illiterate (Drury 1993:24). This administrative elite provided the majority of the leadership of the nationalist movement in India, resulting in a social divide between the administrators and leading politicians and the mass of the electorate post-Independence (Jalal 1995:156).

As I shall show in my analysis of Suru, the emergence of an elite with some of these characteristics, is one facet of the politics of Kargil *tehsil* at the moment. As I shall demonstrate, this elite partly construct themselves as 'modern' in contradistinction to groups like the *yokma-pa*. One reason for this is that attitudes to Shi'ahs in the region tend to be derogatory. These attitudes are a result of Shi'ahs' particular role in the legitimating discourses of British rule in India and other colonial possessions that continue to influence contemporary attitudes to them in India; combined with more local discourses on Muslims and Shi'ahs in Ladakh, as I shall discuss in the next two sections.

### **(vi) Problems in the Interpretation of Shi'ism**

In discourses both on and in India, Shi'ahs have been regarded as intrinsically riotous and rebellious since colonial times. In his fascinating work on Shi'ahs in Hyderabad, Pinault says that: *"From early on the British government in India seems to have viewed public Shi'ite Muharram observances primarily as a security risk harboring a great potential for violence."* (Pinault 1992:63). In his analysis of a children's book written by a British writer called Mason in the 1930s, Pinault shows how an extremely stereotypical view of Shi'ahs is contributed: *"The fact that it is a children's story is suggestive of how widely shared were certain British assumptions concerning the nature of Islam in general and Muharram in particular, insofar as the author may be imagined to have drawn on readily recognisable conventions requiring little explanation in creating his tale."* (Pinault 1992:74). Mason apparently drew heavily on Durand's book "The Making of a Frontier", which is about the Gilgit and Hunza areas where many people are Shi'ahs (Durand 1899). Pinault identifies the frontier area as the main location for the constitution of an image of Shi'ahs as wild and anti-British/government: *"Mason couples Muharram with anti-English treachery among the natives and makes the holy day part of a threat to the very borders of the Empire."* (Pinault 1992:76). It is also highly significant that Mason was also the author of "The Three Feathers", which is another adventure story that takes place during the Mahdi revolt in the Sudan, an incidence of Shi'ite millenarism that came to have an explicit anti-colonial aspect to it (Ahmed 1976:89-93).

Pinault's discussion dwells on the British administration's "obsession" with Muslim-Hindu (and sometimes Sunni-Shi'ah) fights during Muharram processions, which seems to have been a common occurrence since the last century. As he shows, the British administration went to enormous lengths to try to de-fuse and police these occasions and they became an important locus for the pathologising of Hindu-Muslim (or inter-religious) relations. This process enabled the corresponding creation of a role for themselves as impartial administrators keeping the peace. For instance, he quotes from an onlooker's description of a Muharram procession in 1907: *"Immediately behind the horse came the police squad, forming a cordon about the animal and its attendants....Behind the force of constables, all of them on foot, rode the embodiment, for the nonce, of the British Raj, a solitary Englishman with a resolute but bored expression on his face - the Assistant Superintendent of Police."* (Pinault 1992:74).

Such representations of Shi'ism witnessed a resurgence since the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Rushdie affair (Asad 1993:239-268); despite convincing challenges in recent years through an extensive anthropological and historical literature, on Iran in particular. There are two major themes in this stereotyping of Shi'ahs, the first is the old chestnut that they are intrinsically rebellious; and the second is that they are anti-modernisation. In recent decades, the rationale for the former view appears to have come from the Karbala Paradigm (see above), which offers a potential theodicy of protest against illegitimate governments. But, as Gilsenan has demonstrated, with contrasting examples from Iran and Lebanon, the same core of symbols can be interpreted in many different ways in different social contexts (Gilsenan 1982:29). In Iran the doctrine of the Hidden Imam could be used as a reason for the Shi'ite clergy not to oppose the government, since they argued that Shi'ites should wait for the Imam Mahdi to transform the world; but equally, at other times, the anti-government theme could be stressed, as it was in the Iranian Revolution (Gilsenan 1982:57-61). Similarly, Hegland shows that in Iran the figure of Husain can be used in one context as an intercessor for people to appeal to within the existing *status quo*; whereas in another he is used as an example of a political revolutionary (Hegland 1983).

Since the Iranian Revolution, Shi'ites have been considered 'traditional' or anti-modernisation. In fact, their radicalism in Iran seems to have been a reaction to disruptive modernisation that was undermining the institutions and power of the Shi'ite clergy and the neo-colonialism of the Shah's regime, rather than opposed to modernisation *per se* (Cole & Keddie 1986:22). Also, other writers have shown the use of Islamic symbols, which are seen as being anti-modern by others, can just as easily be associated with modernity by the actors themselves. For example, in an article on the introduction of the use of the head scarf and full-length clothing by urban lower middle-class working women in Egypt, MacLeod shows that, at least initially, this was voluntarily adopted partly as a means of creating a symbol for their new role as both Islamic and modern. However, it is also rapidly being transformed by men in to the essential garb of a 'good' working wife (MacLeod 1992). By the late 1980s, the Egyptian authorities saw this practice as an act of defiance by Islamic fundamentalists, and banned its use in universities (Eickelman & Piscatori 1996:4).

In the West Islam is commonly regarded as traditionalist and fundamentalist. The issue of what "the modern" constitutes is not just a topic of academic debate, it has

become a central issue in the politics in and around Islam globally (Ahmed 1992). As Baykan says in an article on the politics of modernity in Turkey: *"At any given time, in any society, there are various conflicts between alternative power structures. Today, given these conflicts and resulting forces for social change, one side of the conflict identifies itself as the one that advocates historical continuity. It stands to represent the "traditional" society and opposed a 'modern' one which may be regarded as either corrupt, alienating, imperialist, Western, or as any other symbol for the 'other'."* (Baykan1990:138ff).

These discourses concerning Islam and Shi'ism and their relation to modernity in India have a major impact on Suru, particularly with the current situation in Kashmir, affecting the position of Muslims and Shi'ahs in Ladakh. So in the next section, I shall outline some of the general features of their treatment in the academic and popular literature on the area, and show the connection between these and indigenous discourses in Ladakh itself.

#### **(vii) Muslims and Shi'ahs in Ladakh**

Appadurai suggested that there is a strong regionalising tendency in anthropology, which assigns certain questions and epistemologies to regions of the world, and then proceeds with the assumption that the inhabitants of those areas are subject to them (Appadurai 1986a, 1986b & 1992). As he says: *"The central fact here is that what anthropologists find, in this or that place, far from being independent data for the construction and verification of theory, is in fact a very complicated compound of local realities and the contingencies of metropolitan theory."* (Appadurai 1986a:360).

In a series of articles, Appadurai used the example of caste/hierarchy in India/South Asia to make his point. He said that the approach to South As an anthropology - as epitomised by Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (Dumont 1970) - is in the orientalist tradition, *"in that in placing hierarchy, as a concept, at the heart of a "sociology for India", Dumont also composed an elegy and a deeply western trope for a whole way of thinking about India, in which it represents the extremes of the human capability to fetishize inequality."* (Appadurai 1986b:745). He says that such epistemologies are based on the *"idea of the Geist (spirit) of an age or a people"* (Appadurai 1992:39), which leads to totalising concepts such as hierarchy in respect of India.

A further point, which Appadurai does not make, is that such a view assumes that Hinduism is central to Indian society, thus implicitly rendering Islam somehow alien to India. Evidence for this assumption can be found in the debate about whether Islam in India is syncretic or purist (Minault 1984, Bayly 1986, Robinson 1986). This debate has raised some interesting points, nevertheless, it arose because of the widespread assumption that Hinduism is the intrinsic religion of India.

In his contribution to a volume devoted to the identification of regional epistemologies in anthropology, Burghart notes that the anthropological view of caste is not merely a figment of the imagination, but in fact is often the “Brahmin’s-eye view”, that reflects the ideology of powerful (usually) male informants who have a vested interest in presenting a view that both justifies and attests to their privileged position (Burghart 1990). Therefore anthropologists are regurgitating hegemonic discourses in the society that they are observing - which of course do not have to be true, simply authoritative. I find his suggestions particularly helpful, firstly because they accord with an intertwining of academic and indigenous discourses in Ladakh, that has existed since colonial times (see below); and secondly, because it implies a predominantly Hindu view, which in part explains the widespread silence about Muslims in the regional epistemology of India.

In Ladakh, Buddhists are much more studied and written about by scholars of all disciplines than Muslims. This situation seems to have arisen partly because Ladakh is seen as a Buddhist kingdom in the popular and academic imagination, although it is in fact an administrative subdivision of Jammu and Kashmir, with a population that is virtually half Buddhist and half Muslim.<sup>26</sup> Ladakh also divides the two major academic regions in the Himalayas, each of which has its own distinct anthropology. In the eastern Himalayas/Tibetan plateau, Buddhism, polyandry and the household have been major concerns; and the western Himalayas/Karakorums which has been characterised by a concern with ethnicity, conflict, segmentary lineage systems and

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<sup>26</sup> There are several books on Ladakh and (predominantly Buddhist) Zaskar, with titles such as *“Hermit Kingdom Ladakh”* and *“Zaskar the Hidden Kingdom”* (Ahluwalia 1980, Peissel 1979).

Muslim saints and sects.<sup>27</sup> These two anthropologies correspond to the two interdisciplinary groupings of Tibetan Studies and those of the Karakorum/Hindu Kush area.<sup>28</sup> There has been a considerable amount of critical debate about the anthropological literature on the latter area, such as the debates on Swat society which I discussed earlier; however very little work has been done on synthesising the anthropology of the two regions.

The most serious theoretical attempt to bridge the gap between the anthropologies of these two regions, has been a paper by Samuel: *"Tibet as a stateless society and some Islamic parallels"*, in which, he argues that most "Tibetan" society is of the relatively uncentralised Sherpa type, rather than being like Lhasa and its environs (Samuel 1982:216); and that it has marked resemblances to Islamic societies in the anthropological literature, such as the Moroccan Berbers and the Swat Pathans (Samuel 1982:222). One of the main foci for his comparison is the nature of religious/political leadership in these relatively politically uncentralised areas, which he characterises as embodied in a single person who is both spiritual teacher and able to direct spiritual power (Samuel 1982:221-222).

In a more recent article Samuel argues that Tibetan society is seen to be somehow unique because of the Buddhist base, as with Hinduism in India, and that social organisation in Himalayan Buddhist societies cannot be assumed to be organised according to Buddhist precepts (Samuel 1992:698). He goes on to suggest that there are obviously continuities between the Himalayan area and neighbouring regions. His remarks are particularly relevant for studies of Ladakh, with its religiously mixed population and its position spanning various ethnographic regions.

Unfortunately his article created a furore in Tibetan academic circles, ostensibly because his argument could be taken to undermine Tibetan claims of autonomy from

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<sup>27</sup>This area also falls into the broader ethnographic region of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, which Street characterises as being rather weak on central concerns, but having a marked focus on the study of tribal and pastoral nomadic peoples who account for a very small proportion of the population (Street 1990:245-6).

<sup>28</sup>For the former there is the International Association of Tibetan Studies and the Tibet Journal, and for the latter various small groupings and an umbrella often of Pakistan or Islamic studies associations.

China. However, parallels between Tibetan Buddhist and Islamic societies are unthinkable for many scholars of Tibetan studies. I have argued elsewhere that this attitude relates to the demonising of Islam and lionising of Tibetan Buddhism in western orientalist discourses (Grist 1995).

Similar attitudes can be seen in the popular and, occasionally academic, literature on Ladakh. One common theme contends that Islam is taking over Ladakh and is a corrupting influence. For example, William Moorcroft, who worked for the East India Company and was - with his companion Trebeck - the first British person to visit and write about Ladakh, commented on the effect of conversion to Islam in Western Ladakh:

*"One good effect is its promotion of temperance by the prohibition of chang and fermented drinks, but on the other hand it has introduced much more dissoluteness, dishonesty, and disregard for truth, than prevails in those places where lamaism still predominates."* (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1837 Vol I:345).

In the 1850s, after Ladakh's conquest by the Dogras, another British writer, the explorer Cunningham, commented that longevity is rare in Baltistan and offered this explanation:

*"The differences between this and the average of the Ladakhis can only be accounted for by the general dissoluteness of all Mussalmans, and the consequent spread of loathsome and fatal diseases."* (Cunningham 1854:301).

In a recent book on Zanskar, the writer comments:

*"Under the British, both Ladakh and Kashmir were lightly administered, the system of Government introduced by the Dogras remaining in force and depending on head offices in Srinagar rather than Leh. Yet, under the Pax Britannica, the Buddhist culture was able to survive amid the now decaying splendours of previous ages; for both Hindu and British rule meant that Muslim influence, the only serious threat to the culture, was well contained."* (Crook 1994a:461).

Later in the same book, it is claimed that, for the majority of Ladakhis: *"a prime fear remains that of domination by Islam."* (Crook 1994c:820).

In both popular and academic works about Ladakh and other parts of the Himalayas, extensive attention is paid to the practice of polyandry, referring to joint marriage between two or more men (usually brothers) and one woman. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the practice has been explained by a purported need to limit

population increase because of a shortage of cultivable land. For instance, Drew says of Ladakh:

*"There can be no doubt that the practice of polyandry in Ladakh originated from the smallness of the extent of land that could be tilled and the general inelasticity of the country's resources, while the isolation from the rest of the world - isolation of manners, language, and religion, as well as geographical isolation - hindered emigration."* (Drew:1875:250).

An additional comparison is made between the apparently conservative behaviour of polyandrous Buddhists and the profligacy of monogamous or polygamous Muslims.

Thus, later in the same book, Drew says of Baltistan:

*"In adopting Muhamadism the Baltis dropped the custom of polyandry, and have since to some extent followed polygamy. And this although the same economic reasons for polyandry hold in Baltistan as in Ladakh. The area of cultivation is closely limited; there are not means of support within the country for an expanding population. Still with the new religion the customs prevalent among Muhamedans in other parts of the world were adopted and the old prudential arrangements set aside. ... The result is that Baltistan is crowded. The population is overflowing..."* (Drew 1875:357-8).

This theme of attributing the relative poverty of Muslims to their marriage practice has probably been derived from indigenous Ladakhi discourses of religious difference.

Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark reports that he received the idea from Lobsang Tok-Tok, an elderly Buddhist man in Leh, who said to him:

*"He had noticed , he said, that those Ladakhis who were converts to Mohammedanism did the same as we did; they ceased overnight to be polyandrous, and divided up the property immediately they got married, the result was that there was not enough to go round for all of them. The eldest brother remained on the best part of the land, and the others had to move away. They had to look for work, often as landless labourers, which was most depressing. He had noticed, too, that some of them went further afield and travelled all the way to Burma to work in the ruby mines there. Obviously, he concluded, they did so just as Europeans had to do, because they were monogamous,"* (Prince Peter 1963:362).

Prince Peter reports that these ideas came as a surprise to him, as he remarks that he was "wondering who was doing the field-work, he or I." He also accepts that this economic argument is a valid explanation of polyandry (Prince Peter 1960:362).

In recent decades, there has been a rise of Buddhist militancy that has been largely in opposition to the Sunni-dominated administration of Jammu and Kashmir State but, at

times, actively hostile to Ladakhi Muslims, who are deemed to be associated with Kashmir and/or hostile to Buddhism (Brix Bertelsen and van Beek 1995:8). During this period, Buddhist organisations have increasingly enforced a prohibition on the practice of polyandry because it was regarded as contributing to a decline of Buddhists relative to Muslims.<sup>29</sup> Since the 1980s, particular attention has been focused on marriages between Buddhist women and Muslim men, which along with other types of religious intermarriage had been common in the past (Grist 1991:137). In the 1970s and early 1980s this opposition took the form of active attempts to bring back Buddhist women who were running away with Muslim men but, from the late 1980s, the Ladakh Buddhist Association has banned Buddhists from inter-religious marriages altogether and tries to impose a penalty of exile from Ladakh on couples who break the rule. Latterly the Leh-based Ladakh Muslim Association has imposed a similar ban. In Leh *tehsil* Buddhist-Muslim marriages have largely ceased to take place, but in Kargil *tehsil* they continue to be relatively common.

Leh, from where most scholars get much of their informed opinions, is the centre of Ladakhi Buddhist political discourse. For instance, Crook says that:

*"the low reproductive rate of Buddhists in Ladakh and the marriage of Buddhist women into Muslim families, means that the demographic balance between Muslims and Buddhists is changing in favour of Islam, especially in towns such as Leh or Padum where cultural change is most pronounced. These demographic trends may eventually produce more non-Buddhist than Buddhist voters with an inevitable increase in political resentment among Ladakhis in their homeland."* (Crook 1994c:820).

These discourses concerning the relationship between Buddhists and Muslims in Ladakh have been questioned by a number of scholars since the anti-Muslim agitation in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Wahid 1989, Grist 1995, Aggarwal 1997). One result has been that there has been a shift to studies that acknowledge the Muslim presence in Ladakh, such as Aggarwal and Srinivas's work on religiously mixed villages in Leh *tehsil* (Aggarwal 1994, Srinivas 1994 & 1995). Van Beek and Brix Bertelsen have also worked extensively on the communal politics in Ladakh, particularly in Leh area since the 1930s (van Beek 1996, Brix Bertelsen 1996). However, there is still a lack of work either on Muslims or on Kargil *tehsil*. The only

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<sup>29</sup> Polyandry was actually banned in the state in 1947 but it was still extremely common in the late 1970s (Cambridge Undergraduate Ladakh Expedition 1979, Sander 1983).

exceptions are Rizvi, who did fieldwork in *tehsil* Kargil in the early 1970s (Rizvi 1981, 1987b, 1993), and Khan, who has written an Urdu history of the area (Khan 1987).

In contemporary Ladakh, Shi'ahs are regarded as the poor 'other' and sometimes treated with a degree of contempt and fear. In Leh *tehsil*, the name *balti* is used both for Shi'ahs and for Muslim Kargilis in general. This term both has derogatory connotations and also implies that they are outsiders, as the name refers to neighbouring Baltistan. The term is more accurate when applied to the Shi'ahs of Chushot, since they do apparently claim descent from Baltistan; however, in Kargil *tehsil* only a small minority of families claim such descent - such as some of the families in the Balti Bazaar in Kargil town.

In Leh, *balti* men are commonly regarded as having a string of characteristics, such as being powerful and sexually potent in respect of non-*balti* women. For instance, in 1977, I was told that there was an *agha* in Kargil *tehsil* who killed and ate Buddhist nuns. Several people told me that Kargili men have magic potions that they put in tea and chewing gum that force people to fall in love with them. They are said to be extremely sexually promiscuous and have a propensity for divorce. For instance someone in Leh told me:

*"Just the other day there was a woman who was married to a man from Dras. They had three children and he threw her out. The children weren't even wearing any shoes when they left. That is what Kargili men are like, they just divorce women and take another one."*

Kargilis/Shi'ahs are also thought to be uncouth and dirty. Several people in Leh objected to my use of the Suru dialect. I gather that people from Kargil - as opposed to Leh *tehsil* Shi'ahs - receive direct derogatory remarks when they are in Leh. More generally Kargil is seen as inferior to Leh, an opinion that is found in some books on Ladakh. For example:

*"What the Aghas and the Sheikhs do to the religion-ridden Shia population of Baltistan territory under the occupation of Pakistan, is practised on the Muslim population of Kargil tehsil on almost the same lines. In other words, the Aghas and Sheikhs of Kargil sector profit by the people's blissful ignorance. Some of these "demi-gods" are materially prosperous while quite a few of them take advantage of "mutta" without any restriction. The old Muslim practice of "mutta" (temporary marriage) is common in the region." (Kak 1978:18).*

As I shall show in this thesis, the attitude that Shi'ahs are backward, irrational and responsible for their own poverty, have important consequences for their continuing poverty in the present.

### **(viii) Methodology**

One of my main concerns in this thesis is to understand the *yokma-pa* as a historical phenomenon, following the example of Ahmed and Asad in their criticisms of Barth's account of Swat Pathans (see above). I tried to construct a history of the area from the available sources. However, in common with other politically peripheral places, there are very few published documents on the area, or even references in the standard histories of Ladakh (Francke 1904, Petech 1977, Rizvi 1983).

The only 'historical' sources that deal with Suru in any detail, are Hashmatullah Khan's Urdu history of the area, which is a fascinating rendition of oral histories collected at the turn of the century, but is understandably short on verifiable fact; and the more recent history by Kacho Sikander Khan (Khan 1939, Khan 1987); the land records and settlement reports in the Tehsildar's Office in Kargil, which go back to the beginning of the century; and the two factions' own written records (*daftar*), which the respective leaders were kind enough to translate for me. In addition, there is Moorcroft and Trebeck's account of their visit to the lower Suru valley in the 1820s, and Rizvi's book "*The Balti*" and his various articles based on research in the early 1970s (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1837, Rizvi 1981, 1987b, 1993).

I had already stayed in Suru in the early 1980s and, therefore, had some overview of the changes that were taking place. In 1981/2 I had briefly visited the valley as a village surveyor for a joint Save the Children Fund/United Nations Children's Fund project, to find out about maternal and infant mortality and its causes. Another researcher and myself carried out individual interviews rather than conducting systematic surveys in Suru. However, we obtained sufficient data to ascertain that the levels of mortality were dramatically higher than those found in Leh *tehsil*, where we had undertaken more rigorous surveys. During that visit, we were told of the millenarian movement and we had the opportunity to discuss these beliefs with various people in the area.

The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted during three visits to Suru totalling 16 months in 1993/4, and was mainly funded by a grant from the ESRC. In 1996, further funding from the University of London's Central Research Fund allowed me to make a month's visit to Suru. This visit proved to be invaluable to my research since (again by chance) the campaigns for the first local elections that had been held in Ladakh for seven years were taking place. The political shifts at that time revealed important aspects of the situation in Suru, of which I had not been aware in 1994 (see Chapter 5), thereby illustrating the value of having a slightly longer-term perspective on the fieldwork site.

The majority of my research was conducted during 1993/4, and consisted primarily of participatory observation, backed by some detailed household surveys and interviews. I stayed for several months first in a Sunni household in Panikhar and later in a *yokma-pa* one in the same village. Most days I also attended the school for several hours and I also frequently visited the two *yokma-pa aghas'* houses in Taisuru. Most of the rest of my time was spent in Panikhar or Taisuru villages, where I had a wide acquaintance and I also visited the houses of most of the pupils from the school. As far as possible, I also attended the *yokma-pa matam* ceremonies and Muharram observances as well as the major Sunni festivals. I have several *goma-pa* friends and talked extensively with Agha Sakawat the brother of their current leader but I did not attend any of their ceremonies in the *imam-barah*.

The language in which most of my interviews took place is the local language of Suru, which is a dialect of Tibetan and very similar to both Ladakhi and Balti. There is a brief grammar of the language by Bailey and a Balti grammar, which is sufficiently similar to the Suru language to be useful (Bailey 1915, Read 1934). I refer to the language as Purigi, but the Suru people call it *ngati skat* (meaning 'our language'), and often describe it as 'a mixture' of languages. In fact, pure Suru does not contain many loan words, but nowadays many Urdu and some English words are in everyday use. In the Shi'ite religious context, Farsi terms are widely used, some of which are used with a different meaning in Suru (and India in general) than they are in Iran (Momen 1985:242).

English is spoken by a handful of men in Suru Block, particularly in Panikhar and Prantee. Urdu is also used in interactions with non-Ladakhi teachers and other

visitors to Suru, in many government offices in Kargil and in schools. Most people have not attended government school so they neither understand nor speak Urdu, nevertheless it is the main language of literacy in Suru nowadays. In addition, clerics have studied some Farsi<sup>30</sup> and Arabic and those who have studied in the Middle East know them very well. Some ordinary people, particularly men, can read some Arabic as they are taught to read the Koran.

I could converse in Purigi when I arrived in Suru in 1993, but I was far from fluent as I was used to the Leh dialect. I had spent more than two years in and around Leh in the early 1980s but I had only visited Ladakh once in the intervening decade. Nevertheless, I was able to conduct my fieldwork in the local language and my understanding and conversation improved, although I never achieved total fluency. For example, although I recorded some *matam* speeches, I was not able to translate them from the tapes, but I could understand my own taped interviews. In addition I can understand a fair amount of Urdu, particularly the simplified form that is spoken as a *lingua franca* in northern India. I can also read it, very slowly, but this familiarity often came in useful. I do not know any Farsi or Arabic, and I relied on people translating unfamiliar terms into the local language or English for me.

There is very little statistical/census data available on the population of the Suru valley in recent years. The 1991 Census of Jammu and Kashmir was performed but has not been published, apparently due to unrest in the state. However, I was able to obtain information from individual government departments such as the Education Office and Tehsildar's Office in Kargil and the Zonal Education Office in Panikhar. There were no detailed household surveys of the area when I arrived in Suru. However, in the winter of 1993/4, the Medical Department in Kargil decided to implement a decision to start keeping records on all the households in the Block. I was able to assist in the conduct of these surveys, in four villages. These were Taisuru and Prantee (see above) and Thulus and Pursa, which are on the opposite side of the Suru River from Prantee and Taisuru, and are relatively cut off (see Map 5, Page 21).

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<sup>30</sup> In the earlier Dogra period Farsi was one of the main languages of the administration in Jammu and Kashmir but was later replaced by English and Urdu (Bamzai 1987:278 & 367).

Prantee contains households from all three factions in Suru, that is *yokma-pa*, *goma-pa* and Sunnis. Its inhabitants are relatively prosperous as the majority of households, both Sunnis and Shi'ahs, have at least one person with a government job. Taisuru, also has more government jobs or income generating alternatives, such as shop-keeping, than other villages in Suru, although there are fewer with government jobs than in either Panikhar and Prantee. All the people in Taisuru are Shi'ahs, and the households are roughly equally divided between the *yokma* and *goma* factions. Thulus is the most remote of the four villages as it is on a virtually disused branch road, and is almost cut off by snow and the risk of avalanches in the winter. All the households in Thulus are *yokma-pa*; whereas in Pursa, there are equal numbers of each Shi'ite faction. In 1993, there was only one young man in Thulus who had studied up to 10th class (the equivalent of GCSE's in the UK), and no-one with a government job, or another major source of non-agricultural income. In Pursa there are more men with government jobs and a few with other income generating occupations, such as contracting.

I personally surveyed a total of 66 households, the results are summarised in Figure 1.2.

Village	Households	Females	Males	Total	Household Size
Thulus	16	41	51	92	5.7
Pursa	20	56	81	137	6.8
Taisuru	12	57	77	134	11.1
Prantee Shi'ahs	3	12	12	24	8.0
<b>Total Shi'ahs</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>7.6</b>
Prantee Sunni	15	43	49	92	6.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>7.3</b>

**Figure 1.2 - Basic Population Statistics for Household Surveys<sup>31</sup>**

The fact that there are significantly less women than men in these households, reflects the very high levels of maternal mortality at the time of childbirth and the relatively early death of many women. For example, the age to gender statistics for Thulus and Pursa show that there are half as many women over forty as men.

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<sup>31</sup> In addition to these formal household surveys, I also informally interviewed another thirty households, particularly those involved in the Noon Public School.

Age Range	Males	Females	Total
0-10	47	48	95
10-20	32	30	62
20-30	25	25	50
30-40	12	12	24
40-50	14	4	18
50-60	14	10	24
60+	4	2	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>279</b>

**Figure 1.3 - Age/Sex Distribution of Thulus and Pursa<sup>32</sup>**

Out of the 46 children under 5 in these two villages, 22 of them were underweight, under the criteria used by UNICEF, many severely so. Although I do not have accurate statistics for infant and child mortality, I found that women under 40 in all the villages had already lost a third of their children on average, and those over 40 have only just over half their children surviving. These levels of maternal and child mortality are very high, and do not appear to have improved since 1981/2, when we found a level of 40% child mortality among the offspring of women of child-bearing age. Moreover, the figures are also extremely high compared to other parts of Ladakh. In 1981/2, detailed surveys of villages in Leh *tehsil* that we conducted revealed only a 20% child mortality.

These surveys suggested that the people of Suru Block are relatively disadvantaged compared to those in other parts of Ladakh, and that this disadvantage has not significantly decreased in the last two decades, despite the processes of modernisation that have occurred in the area, such as the introduction of schooling and a government medical service.

I also spent some time in Kargil town, as services such as a telephone are only available there. In Kargil I have a number of friends and acquaintances, whose homes I visited and where I sometimes stayed. I also visited several government offices, both as part of my own research and on school business.

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<sup>32</sup> A demographic survey of an equivalent village in neighbouring Zaskar in the early 1980s, found that there were a total of 85 women and 75 men, and there were 21 men over 40, as opposed to 26 women of that age (Elford 1994:333).

The final aspect of my fieldwork that I wish to stress is that I was not a neutral observer, since I both worked in the Noon Public School, and I became a member of the Management Committee and an enthusiastic supporter. So I was also located at the centre of the politics of the school, and I was known not to be neutral by those who were opposed to it - many of whom are also my friends. This meant I simply had to participate and watch events unfold. Obviously I did also ask questions, and go and visit people specifically to find things out, but that was a small part of what I did. One of the main reasons why I offered to teach in the school in the first place was because I felt that it was inappropriate just to 'be there' and that I needed to play a useful role in order to explain why I was there. I feel that it also had the consequence of allowing me to have a much greater insight into the *yokma-pa* than if I had just gone and asked people questions.

## Chapter 2

### The *Yokma-pa* and other Social Groups in Suru

#### (i) Introduction

The Upper Suru valley is reached by the rather rough road from Kargil, that passes over an area of uninhabited high land, that separates Sankhoo and Suru Block from the lower valley. In the south, the valley is dominated by the twin Himalayan peaks of Nun and Kun and the road proceeds to Zanskar, via a pass called the Pensi La. Suru and Sankhoo Blocks correspond to the much older sub-divisions of Suru and Kartse. These are the colloquial names for the area, which is sometimes referred to as Suru-Kartse.

All the *yokma* faction members are in Sankhoo and Suru Blocks and they form an endogamous kinship group, as do the *goma-pa* and Sunnis. In Suru Block, the two Shi'ite factions are roughly equal in number but, in Sankhoo Block, the majority of Shi'ahs are *yokma-pa*. In this chapter, I will examine Shi'ah kinship and the organisation of the *yokma-pa*.

The *yokma-pa* is only one of the social groups to which people in the faction belong, but it acts as the overarching kinship group for its members. The *pa* is a named patrilineal clan that appears to have declined in importance during the current century. I shall suggest that this is partly due to the emergence of the two Shi'ite factions which form alternative kinship groups. The *p'ha-spun* is a much smaller, unnamed subgroup of the *pa* consisting of households that have divided a single piece of land, usually in the generation of the grandfather of the current household heads. The fairly strict patrilineal transmission of land and the frequent movement of women through divorce or the death of their spouse and their consequent remarriage, creates a situation in which women are not as firmly located as men in the official kinship associated with landed property and the *p'ha-spun*.

The *yokma-pa* too can be understood as a kinship group that is formed around the core of the lineages of the leading *aghas*. A crucial element in this structure are the

kinship relations between the leading *aghas* and their female followers. Thus women are located in the faction much more permanently than they are in the *p'ha-spun*. One of the ways that kinship relations are constituted in Suru is through mourning and weeping, especially, but not exclusively, by and between women. Within the faction one of the main occasions for this are the *matam* or mourning ceremonies, which are central to *yokma-pa* ritual and beliefs. These ceremonies are also a means of gaining merit, leading to the obtaining of salvation and social prestige in the present.

Finally, in a discussion of stratification within the faction, I shall show that these same ideas of merit and the performance of good works are important in the organisation and internal stratification in the faction.

## **(ii) Muslims of Kargil and Suru**

The Muslims of Kargil and Suru define themselves in contradistinction to other people in the area, particularly Buddhists. Suru people frequently refer to the fact that they were Buddhists in the past, with the exception of the clerics and Sunnis who trace their descent outside the area. A sharp distinction is drawn between the distant past, Buddhist times, and the recent past, or Muslim times. For example, at the top of the village of Namsuru, on the opposite bank of the river from Taisuru, are the ruins of a fort or castle. I visited the family of one of the children in the school, and we tried to find out more about the ruins. My companion, who is in his thirties and from Namsuru, only knew that it was said to be from "Buddhist times". An old man said that it had been the residence of the "Black Lama", *lama* (Tibetan: *bla-ma*) being a term for a Buddhist priest. He also told us a story about the founding of the village, by a man called Nag-Ide, who is mentioned in Hashmatullah Khan's history of the area (Khan 1939:685). *Nag-po* means 'black' in the Suru language, so that is presumably the origin of the notion of the Black Lama. Generally in Suru, only older people remember fragments of local histories and origin stories. These are no longer recounted and younger people usually do not know them.

In other parts of Ladakh, similar types of local history and origin myths are widely related (Kaplanian 1991). For example, in this whole region the most important mythological figure is Kesar, about whom there is a cycle of stories which is found from Tibet to Hunza (Tsering Mutup 1983, Francke 1906, Lorrimer 1987:56-95, Yang En hong 1993). In Ladakh, Kesar is believed to have been the founder of the dynasty

of Ladakhi kings (*rgyal-pos*), and in Zaskar he is also said to have given the area government and laws (Kaplanian 1981:45, Crook 1994a:435). When I asked about the Kesar story in Suru, it turned out that it had been told there until quite recently and some old people can still recite it.<sup>1</sup> However, Suru people now consider it to be a story for Buddhists, and some people even regard telling it as a sin (*nyespa*). One old man said that Kesar is full of untruths, such as a bird turning into a stone. However, people thought it very funny that in parts of Baltistan Kesar is considered to be the *dajjal* or Anti-Christ (Sagaster 1987).

This forgetting of histories that people associate with their Buddhist past is in marked contrast to the importance of historical narrative in the context of Shi'ism in the area, which I will discuss in a later section and the next chapter. One woman said to me that, in the past, the Buddhists were the *rus-pa* and the Muslims were the *sha*. This comparison is very evocative, since, in Ladakh, *rus-pa* literally means 'bone', and implies an official line of descent; whereas *sha* means 'flesh' and usually refers to descent through the line that does not carry property and power, which is often via the mother. She seems to be saying that in the recent past, Buddhists formed the government as they did for long periods in Suru's history. Buddhists in Ladakh make a similar distinction as they refer to themselves as *nang-pa* ('insiders') and Muslims as *chi-pa* ('outsiders').

A similarly sharp distinction to that which is drawn with the past and Buddhist times is found in a prohibition called *sherpa* ('wet') or *sithu*, which is observed by the majority of Muslims in Kargil *tehsil*. They believe that they will be polluted by touching anything wet that has been touched by a non-Muslim, or consuming any wet food or drink from the hand of a non-Muslim. Such a contact renders them unable to pray until they have performed ritual ablutions to purify themselves.

Nowadays, this prohibition is still observed by nearly all older people and many of the younger generation in Suru, as it is in other parts of the *tehsil*. Nevertheless, it does not restrict social interaction with non-Muslims to any great degree. For example, both my children, myself (we are Christians) and the Kashmiri Pandit (Hindu) teacher from the school could freely visit people's houses, as long as they purified vessels that we

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<sup>1</sup> This is also the case with the sagas of Apitso, another mythological character, whose saga is found all over this region, especially in the west.

had used by washing them while saying a short prayer (usually “*Bismillah*” the all purpose blessing); and when my family gave a children’s party in Panikhar, we arranged for the food to be prepared by someone else. The fact that a person is polluting in this way does not mean that they will be treated with any lack of respect. For example, one day I met Cho-cho Razi, one of Agha Baqir’s wives in the fields near Taisuru. She came up to me to shake hands which is a sign of mutual respect; however, her hand was wet, so she bent down and rubbed it in the soil to dry it before taking my hand, so that she would not be polluted by my touch.

The main group of non-Muslims that Suru people come into contact with are the Zanskari Buddhists, who visit in large numbers during the summer and some Suru families have Zanskari Buddhist relatives who visit occasionally. They are regarded as being different from Suru people, and polluting, but not as social inferiors.<sup>2</sup> Marriages with Buddhists, particularly between Muslim men and Buddhist women (who are now often disowned by their natal family), are still quite common in Suru. These spouses have to convert to Islam, but are treated with special respect. Shi’ahs give them the title *Shaikh* in recognition of their special status. Some of these Buddhist spouses are also from families that are considered to be low-caste in other parts of Ladakh but, in Suru, no such distinctions are made. Thus there is no implication of social inequality in the *sherpa* distinction.

When I first visited Suru in 1981/2, we were told by a number of people in Leh that Suru people would not let us into their homes and that we would have difficulty even getting a glass of water. This was untrue and typical of derogatory things that were said about Kargili Shi’ahs in Leh (see Chapter 1). It is common for the *sherpa* prohibition to be ridiculed by people from other parts of the region. In a long passage that both caricatures and criticises several aspects of Kargili society, Kaul says:

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<sup>2</sup> The most moving example of this that I witnessed was in the winter of 1993, when a truck overturned in Parkachik killing six Buddhist Zanskaris and a Suru man. Subsequently the bodies of the Buddhists were brought to Panikhar, and some of the Zanskari’s relatives decided to cremate them in Suru. So the headman of Panikhar village arranged a collection of wood from the villagers for the funeral pyres. I was told that this was *bes-pa*, meaning that they would do the same for us.

*“The cult of ceremonial cleanliness, an essential part of their faith, as observed by them is unique. The touch of a non-Muslim used to defile all fluids and even all solids with a wet surface. Oil, water, butter, milk and such other things passing through the hands of a Buddhist or a Hindu, even through their substances might have been contained in air tight receptacles, were an anathema to the devout Shia and this applied even to a chunk of meat exhibited in a butchers shop or a cut melon, inadvertently touched by an unwary non-Muslim customer, who would witness the edibles thus polluted by him being consigned to the gutter and, who in consequence had to make good the loss by a cash payment equivalent to the value of the things so contaminated.” (Kaul 1992:23-4).*

As in this example, the *sherpa* rule is usually discussed as if it is very unusual, although it is similar to pollution and commensality rules found all over the region. For example, Madan reports that in the 1950's a similar rule was observed by both Muslims and Hindus in respect of each other in the neighbouring Anantnag district of Kashmir (Madan 1972). Kashmiri teachers from that area say that Muslims do not have such a prohibition any more, although older Pandits usually still observe such restrictions.

Less than thirty years ago the *sherpa* prohibition was apparently strictly followed by everyone in Suru and the prohibition on wet contact was also observed with Muslims from other areas, such as Leh, who were thought to be impure because they mixed freely with Hindus and Buddhists. Nowadays, attitudes are more relaxed and its observance is declining, particularly among those in the younger generation who have secular education; however it is still an important way in which most Kargili Muslims distinguish themselves from outsiders.

As in the Anantnag example that I mentioned earlier, the existence of the *sherpa* rule, does not imply a relationship of hierarchy with those excluded. Nevertheless, the custom has the effect of creating an enclave in which Kargili Muslims can obtain merit that will enable them to gain salvation, despite their relatively poor social standing in the present. The avoidance of sin is crucial to maintaining merit and eventual salvation (see below). Merit-making is also central to the organisation of the *yokma-pa* and its relations with the *goma-pa*, where each faction defines itself as being the true upholders of Shi'ism and therefore as having access to merit denied to the other.

The relationship between the two Shi'ite factions has elements of a type of egalitarian rivalry that is found between other structurally equivalent groups in Suru, such as between villages, which are important social groups in Suru.

### (iii) The Village in Suru

When I was in Kargil during my fieldwork, I was frequently referred to as *Panikhar-pe Nicky*, that is Nicky who belongs to the Panikhar people (*pe* being the pronunciation of *pa-i* meaning 'of the people'). This is the polite way of identifying ordinary people from a neighbouring area, and illustrates the importance of the village as a social unit. In one's home village or nearby, people are identified by both their house and *muhallah* or village neighbourhood. Most houses in Suru are called after their oldest male (who is also the household head), and have names such as *Husain-pa*, *Master Mehdi-pa*, *Hajji Iqbal-pa*. Other members of the household are referred to using the house title, for example *Husain-pe Fati*. The houses of *sayyids* are referred to as *Agha-pa*. Some, but by no means all houses in larger villages are described by using the name of the *muhallah* or *chor* (*muhallah* is the Urdu name and *chor* the local one) in which they are located. Most villages have several named *chors*, for instance there are four in Panikhar. In the village of Kaws, near Namsuru, the members of each *chor* were said to be descended from a common ancestor. This is often the case, as new houses tend to be constructed close to relatives, so a *chor* may consist of houses from one or two *pa*. For instance, in Taisuru, one of the *chors* is called Ralam and the people from there are usually described by that name, such as "*nga Ralam-pa in*" (I am a person from Ralam), but all the houses are also descended from a descent group called *Jali pa*, so they are also a descent group.

In Suru all households of permanent villagers have some land, with the exception of some elderly childless widows, who are supported by relatives. Each land holding household has full citizen rights in the village, by which I mean that they are social equals to other households and have the right to participate in village-level decision-making. There are no lower castes or households that are excluded from full jural status, such as are found in other parts of Ladakh and the Himalayan region (Barth 1960:127, Levine 1989:63, Grist 1991). In Suru, as in the rest of Ladakh, the village is an important co-operative unit, as cultivation mainly relies on water from irrigation canals and villages are usually built around a water source, such as a mountain torrent or a major river. Hence the villagers are all reliant on the same, relatively scarce

supply of irrigation water and are forced to co-operate to maintain and share the use of irrigation canals. For example, in Panikhar there is an irrigation canal that brings water to the village from further up the Chelong Nala. As with other major canals, this has been reinforced with concrete in parts by the government, which builds and repairs some canals; but the villagers are responsible for most repairs and upkeep. When work is needed on the canal (*yurba pingcha*), the *moqdam* (village headman) sends a message to all the houses with land to send someone to work on this task, for as many days as are necessary. This work is all free, as it is for the participants' own benefit.

Another form of co-operative labour is used for taking animals to the mountains during the day in the summer, between ploughing and harvest. A rota, called *bares* for the bovines (*ba* means 'bovines', and *res* means 'turn') and *rares* (*ra* means 'ovines') is organised. During the summer, each day, houses take it in turn to be responsible for one rota and send two people, often school age children, to do the work. They take out all the animals from the village in the early morning, lead them to their village's pastures in the neighbouring mountains and return them at dusk. The *moqdam* is a government appointee, but usually holds the post by heredity in Suru, and is ultimately responsible for organising these co-operative village-level tasks. But, on the whole, they are organised collectively by the villagers, particularly the male household heads. There are no official meetings or gatherings for this. Interested parties may gather informally, anywhere from the bazaar, to someone's house, to discuss any matter that comes up. As with other Suru politics, some people participate much more than others, but underlying there is a real sense of equality between all the landholders in a village. For example, in Taisuru the *aghas'* families participate in the *rares* and *bares* and take their turn just like other households and the younger *aghas* go to the mountain, when it is their turn.

The village is also celebrated as a social group in many rituals, particularly weddings (*bag-ston*), and events such as inter-village archery contests (*da pang*s). During the celebration of a wedding, it is customary to invite someone from every house in the village for a dinner (see Chapter 6). In the early spring, men also combine to organise archery contests with neighbouring villages. These competitions are apparently very competitive and are typical of the rivalry that exists between neighbouring villages. For instance, people in Panikhar refer to Taisuru people as *Basara-pa*, that is people from Basara in Iraq, who have a bad reputation. This kind of rivalry is particularly

marked between groups that are close to each other, including the *yokma* and *goma-pa*.

Within the village, despite differences of wealth and power, households are regarded as equivalent and equal units, as are the villages themselves. This is also true of the *p'ha-spun* which is another important kinship group in Suru.

#### **(iv) Kinship Groups - the *Pa* and the *P'ha-spun***

It is likely that in the early part of this century, inheritance was managed by a named, mainly patrilineal clan, called a *pa*.<sup>3</sup> In the past, the custom in the Dah area of Kargil *tehsil* was that a named patriclan held land in common and fields were allocated among the member households according to their need and the availability of labour (Vohra 1989:19). Shaw reports that the fields in Dah were under the names of seven apical ancestors (Shaw 1878:9). However, Vohra says that the effect of the revenue settlement that was undertaken just after the turn of this century, was to change the inheritance system by institutionalising these temporary divisions of land so that from henceforth land was inherited individually (Vohra 1989:22 & 72).<sup>4</sup>

Rizvi gives an account of the *p'has-spuns* of the purely Shi'ah village of Hardas in Kargil *tehsil* in the mid-1970s (Rizvi 1993). The *p'ha-spuns* were named lineages that in the past had shared the same piece of land, but by the 1970s they followed Muslim inheritance practice and divided the land. However, they continued to practice joint decision-making among the male elders and co-operate for funerals and other life-cycle events (Rizvi 1993:27 & 47-8). The larger ones contained as many as nine households, although nearly a third only consisted of one household. The irrigation water in the village was allocated according to *p'ha-spun*, each one being allotted a number of hours for all its constituent households (Rizvi 1993:27). In the past they had been endogamous and marriage was still preferably within the *p'ha-spun* (Rizvi 1993:47-8).

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<sup>3</sup> For clarity I use the term *pa* which is the Suru name for this, but in fact people sometimes used terms such as *zat*, a Kashmiri term and is always used by Sunnis or *qum-bo*, the Urdu word for 'tribe'.

<sup>4</sup> This settlement was undertaken around the turn of the century. Its preliminary report is available in the Tehsildar's Office in Kargil, and was published as Clarke 1901.

In Suru, the named patrilineal clan also exists in the form of the *pa*, whose members trace descent from an apical ancestor. However, nowadays it is of little significance among Shi'ahs in Suru Block. In the winter of 1981/2, when I first visited the area, most adults knew the name of their *pa* and its status as a descent group, but they did not know how they were related to other houses of the same *pa*, particularly those in other villages. For instance, one of the commonest *pas* in Suru is Brukshel, which means people from Gilgit, a common house and clan name in Ladakh.<sup>5</sup> There are more than thirty houses of Brukshel in villages such as Trangole, Prantee and Choskore (near Panikhar) and it is found in other villages as well. Even in the early 1980s relationships with the *pa* in other villages were not traced, unless they involved men who had recently married uxorilocally.

In the Tehsildar's office in Kargil, there is a list of the *pa* that dates from 1911 when the settlement of the area was conducted. There were eighteen *pas* with land holdings ranging from 4 to 171 *kanals*, the average being about 38 *kanals*.<sup>6</sup> Land ownership is still listed by *pa* in the *patwari's* records. In 1993 there were twenty-two recorded in the *patwari's* records, fifteen had the same name as before and three were listed under a new name. Several of the *pas* had been divided into two or more sections, but many of the land holdings remained the same size.

Despite their continued official existence in the land records, nowadays, among the majority of Shi'ahs, the *pa* is no longer a corporate group with any social interaction and many adults do not know the name of their *pa*. It was quite common for people to respond to my questions about their *pa* by saying things like "you can find out from the *Patwari's* records", or "what did my relatives' house say, because they are the same as us". One of the commonest *pa* names in Suru is Helbi, which is the name of one of the mythical founders of Ladakh who came from Gilgit, and is used as a clan name all over Ladakh (Khan 1939:684, Vohra 1989:23, Rizvi 1994:27). But in Suru, people of that *pa* did not know the story of Helbi, nor were they interested. The only Shi'ahs

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<sup>5</sup> Francke reports that in Kha atse (in Leh *tehsil* between Leh and Kargil) at the turn of the century, one of the *p'ha-spuns* was called Brushalpa (Francke 1904:364-5); and Vohra records its use in Dah (Vohra 1989:23).

<sup>6</sup> A *kanal* is a measurement of land and 8 *kanals* are equivalent to about an acre.

who referred to their *pa* spontaneously were in Panikhar. Lampa is the most numerous *pa* in the village and is that of the headman Moqdam Mehdi, who is the third generation in his family to hold the post. They still refer to themselves as being a *pa*, and refer to the Lampa-*pa* graveyard (*qabristan*) and water-mill (*rantak*). I suspect that the reason why the *pa* is more significant in Panikhar (and possibly Prantee) than in other Suru villages, is because those villages contain both Sunnis and Shi'ahs; and the former actively use and refer to their equivalent to *pa*, called *zat*.

The *pa* has clearly ceased to be of any great importance as a kinship group, during this century, and probably most rapidly in the last few decades. There may be a number of reasons for this, such as the changes in land registration and a move towards Muslim inheritance practice that stipulates the division of property between heirs. However, I think that the main reason that it has become socially irrelevant among Shi'ahs in Suru, is that its role as a kinship group and in the construction of histories has been superseded by the Shi'ite factions.

Nowadays, only the *p'ha-spun* which is a sub-group of the *pa* is important for Shi'ahs. This term is used for a kinship group in Ladakh and Baltistan, and other parts of the Himalayas, but the nature of this group varies considerably between different areas, even in Ladakh itself.<sup>7</sup> The literal meaning of the term is 'father's relatives' (*p'ha* is a term for father, and *spun* means relative) but this name does not necessarily reflect practice. For instance, among Buddhists in the Leh area, for whom the house is an important kinship unit, the *p'ha-spun* is a group of unrelated houses that form a 'fictitious' exogamous kinship group that is not based on any notion of patrilineal descent (Brauen 1980, Kaplanian 1981:167ff). Brauen says that in some other villages in the *tehsil*, the kin links do exist, but are purely symbolic and involve the evocation of a mythical ancestor figure (Brauen 1980:24).

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<sup>7</sup> There is an extensive literature on the *p'ha-spun* among Buddhists in Ladakh, starting from Prince Peter's extensive and valuable data on the *p'ha-spuns* of Leh town, and including detailed descriptions of the *p'ha-spun* of various villages in Leh *tehsil* by CULE, Kaplanian, Dollfus, Phylactou and Brauen, Vohra's detailed information on the Buddhist Dards of Dah in central Ladakh, and data on Zanskar from Crook (Prince Peter 1956 & 1963, CULE 1977 & 1979, Brauen 1980a & 1980b, Kaplanian 1989, Day 1989, Dollfus 1989, Phylactou 1989, Vohra 1989, Crook 1994b:501ff).

In Suru, the *p'ha-spun* is an unnamed sub-division of the *pa*, that consists of a small group of households descended from a common ancestor, each holding shares of what was once a single land holding. It is an important mutual aid group for all life-cycle events and its members also act as a decision-making group in respect of such issues as land division and marriage partners. For example, a woman in Suru was divorced by her husband because she was unwell and so was unable to do much farm work. She said that her husband had been happy to keep her but that his *p'ha-spun* had decided to get rid of her. Such decisions are usually made by all the older adults (male and female) rather than just the household heads. The *p'ha-spun* is also the kinship group that manages the inheritance of land.

The apical ancestor for a *p'ha-spun* is usually the grandfather of the current household heads. For instance, the Lampa *pa* in Panikhar, now has seven households in that village, but there are two *p'ha-spuns*, one containing six houses who are all descended from a common grandfather and the other only a single household.

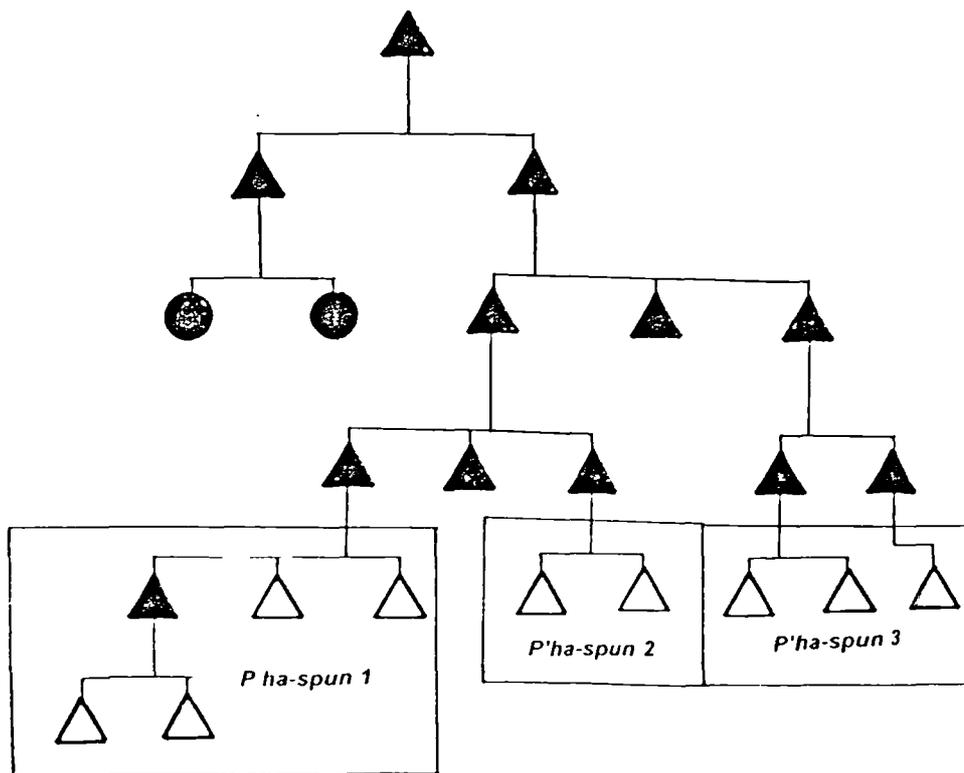


Figure 2.1 - The *p'ha-spuns* in a *pa*

The *p'ha-spun* normally only contains households that are connected in living memory, and ordinary (that is non-*sayyid*) Shi'ahs do not show any great interest in their ancestors beyond the grandparents generation, although the local language does contain kinship terms for both male and female ancestors up to four generations past. Similarly, they do not distinguish the graves of anyone beyond the recently dead. The *p'ha-spun* is also an active group and therefore members must be in contact with each other. For example, the only potential *p'ha-spun* of one of the houses in Panikhar is the father's brother of the household head. However, he went to Pakistan in 1947, and remained there, so he is considered to be their *zargyud*, which is a term for someone from the same descent group, but his is not their *p'ha-spun*, as there is no contact between them.

There is a strong association between a *p'ha-spun* and their land, that can override the importance of patrilineal descent. People often referred to the *p'ha-spun* as *sagyat chik-pa* (that is the people from the same land, *sagyat* means 'land, and *chik* is one). Unrelated people such as faithful servants can join a *p'ha-spun* by being given a share in its land. This is the case of the *p'ha-spun* of Munshi Habibullah Bhat, an ex-Minister in Kargil, which contains the descendants of a servant who was given land by Munshi Habibullah's father. The connection between the *p'ha-spun* and land is also very strong in death, since ideally members will be buried on their own land. People also said to me that *p'ha-spun* members are *sha-rus-pa chik-chik* or *mirab chik chik cha*, which in Suru means they are of the same descent.

Nowadays land is inherited according to Muslim inheritance law; however, as in many other places, women do not usually receive the share to which they are entitled. Thus, division of a household's land only takes place if there is more than one son. It rarely takes place before all the sons are married and it is common for people to wait until their parents, particularly their father, is dead. At the time of division, each of the sons takes equal shares of the land and property; or, if there are several brothers, some of them may decide to remain together longer and not divide their joint shares. This was the case of one of the families in Taisuru who have a son in the Noon Public School. Their grandfather was a Buddhist *garba* (blacksmith<sup>8</sup>) from Zanskar, who

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<sup>8</sup> Blacksmiths are considered to be low-caste in Zanskar, but not in Suru.

married a Shi'ite heiress and settled as her *mag-pa* (uxorilocal husband) and became a Muslim. Their daughter had no brothers, so she also married a *mag-pa* from Prantee, hence they have land in both Taisuru and Prantee. Now there are four brothers, one is a *mag-pa* in Pursa and the other three are in Taisuru. The eldest brother has recently divided from the rest of the family but his younger brothers and their wives and children remain with their elderly parents in the original house.<sup>9</sup>

Daughters do not normally inherit land and are not given a share at the initial division between brothers. However, if there are no sons in the family, one of the daughters may bring a *mag-pa* and her children will then inherit all the land. Heiresses may also marry virilocally but still inherit land from her natal family, in which case children inherit both their mother's and their father's land. Alternatively parents may choose to give the land to an *agha*. For instance, in 1994, I attended a wedding in Namsuru of a young woman who was the only daughter of her widowed father. He had donated his land and house to Agha Baqir from the *yokma-pa* and she was being married to a young man in Namsuru. This practice is quite common and is an indicator that the *yokma-pa* is now the main descent group for its members (see below).

Even women who have brothers, retain some rights in their natal land. If one of their brothers dies without any heirs after the land has been divided then his sisters have rights in his share. Virilocally married women have no inheritance rights in their husbands' houses and older childless widows must usually rely on the good will of their husband's family to support them after his death. However, the system of inheritance is flexible insofar as the *p'ha-spun* can make alternative decisions. While I was in Panikhar, when the husband of a childless couple died, the *p'ha-spun* decided to give his wife half of his 10 *kanals* of land and the other half to his sister, who is married in Panikhar. His widow objected and asked for all the land and the matter was still in dispute a year later.

Men who marry uxorilocally remain as part of their natal *p'ha-spun* and it is common for them to say things like: "*I have two p'ha-spun in this village and one in Taisuru, that's my father's brother.*" When a woman has married virilocally and inherited land,

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<sup>9</sup> When partition occurs, new houses may be constructed, but often people initially just make separate hearths and, therefore, households, within the same house.

her children are also considered to belong to her *p'ha-spun*, but it is not important as a corporate group in the same way as the father's *p'ha-spun*. The terms *mo-p'ha-spun* and *pho-p'ha-spun* can be used in such a case, for mother's and father's *p'ha-spun* (*mo* means 'female' and *pho* 'male'); but the mother's *p'ha-spun* is not normally referred to as such if there is no connection with it through the land.

During a large part of their lives women's *p'ha-spun* membership is more tentative than that of men. A woman starts life in the *p'ha-spun* of her natal home and in rare cases of uxorilocal marriage, she will remain there. However, when she marries, she joins the *p'ha-spun* of her husband and moves to his house. Afterwards it is unusual for her to resettle in her natal home, instead she will remarry in the event of his death or divorce. While she is of child-bearing age her attachment to her husband's household only remains as long as her husband is alive. In the event of his premature death she usually remarries fairly rapidly. Her children will remain in their natal home, with the exception of very young children who may temporarily accompany her. Still children will eventually return and have full inheritance rights in their father's house, but their mother does not retain any such rights.

For example, Sajjida, the mother of one of the younger children in the school, has been widowed twice. She had several children with her first husband, who then died, and she remarried in the same village of Achambore. She then had two more children before her new husband died as well. It is unlikely that she will remarry now, as she is in her forties and there are no other adults in her second household to bring up the children. However, as a single woman with children it was considered impossible for her to live alone and so she and the two younger children have moved back into the house of her first husband, which they share with her older daughter and son and his wife and children. Similarly, Api Cho-cho, the most popular and influential widow of Agha Hyder, the last leader of the *yokma-pa*, was originally married to the father of Hajji Ghulam Mohammed who is one of the main organisers of the Noon Public School. He then died, after they had had several children. She subsequently married Agha Hyder and left the children at their father's home in Trangole. Both these women retained close ties with children from their first marriage; but after divorce, which is often acrimonious, it is quite common for the husband's *p'ha-spun* to refuse to let a woman see her children. Divorced women rarely return to their natal home. For example, Roqia, one of Agha Baqir's wives, was married to a man in Choskore, but

she was unhappy there, so she left and became a servant (*duksmi*) in Agha Baqir's house and subsequently they married. Commonly, women divorce and remarry a number of times. For instance, the stepmother of one of the other children in the school, is now married to her third husband, since she was divorced by the previous two for not producing any children.

It is only when women pass child-bearing age that their position in their marital home becomes permanent and they seem to be fully accepted as part of the *p'ha-spin*. This change in status is illustrated by adoption practices. When a couple are childless, they may adopt a *tsozbu*, who is a boy or man who will inherit their land. The preference is to adopt someone from the father's descent group; however, failing that, they will often adopt a boy from the woman's side. For example, one of the parents in the school had inherited his father's sister's land in Pursa, and was settled there. In another case I heard of, a woman from Choskore had been married in Sankhoo Block, but when her husband died she married a man in Choskore, where she also had land, leaving her two sons there.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, her husband's brothers threw out her sons and they came to live with her and her husband in Choskore. They had no children, so her husband adopted one of her sons, who inherited his adoptive father's land; the other son inherited his mother's land. In another instance of adoption, in Panikhar, a woman was married consecutively to two Lampa brothers, both of whom divorced her. She had a son by the first, and subsequently married another Lampa man, with whom she did not have any sons. So they adopted her son as the heir, which was seen as being particularly appropriate, as he was also from the same *pa*. These are the only cases of adoption that I know about in the last forty years, and they are relatively rare. However, the high levels of mortality, and the migration in 1947, has meant that many households have experienced a shortage of male heirs, which is significant to the history of the *aghas* of both the Shi'ite factions and Sunnis, who trace their origins to men who came and married heiresses in Suru.

As I have demonstrated, women's location within kinship groups in Suru is often changeable and insecure. They are also considered to be supremely susceptible to attract *mi-kha* (literally 'gossip' but it means the evil eye) particularly during their child-

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<sup>10</sup> Her new husband had gone to Pakistan in 1947, but had returned to Choskore in middle age.

bearing years, as are their children, especially babies. This is partly related to the extremely high levels of mortality that both women and babies experience. Women tend not to reveal the fact that they are pregnant for fear of *mi-kha*. For instance, a Panikhar woman I visited alone while we were doing the household surveying told me that she was pregnant, but asked me not to tell any other women about it. I passed another woman teacher whose parents' house I was staying in at the time on the road to school one day, and suddenly noticed that she was pregnant, although no-one had told me. She gave birth a week later, and when I mentioned this after a few days to the Medical Assistant at the Hospital he had not heard, although her house is a few yards from the hospital and they are otherwise enthusiastic users of the medical service.

Women often said that they had lost teeth when their children were babies, and they suggested that this was due to *mi-kha*. When my own teeth were looking particularly yellow, one of the *aghas* commented that it must be *mi-kha* and that he could do *poo ba* for me to make it better. This method of healing involves the person saying some prayers and then blowing on the affected person. It is used most by clerics such as *aghas* and *akhuns*, but other men also do it. In addition *aghas* in particular, give people *tawiz* (amulets with lines from the Koran in them) to ward off *mi-kha* and its effects. Thus women's relative vulnerability and the *aghas'* ability to heal and protect them is an important way in which women are bound to the *aghas*. For instance, most of the visitors to Agha Sakawat of the *goma-pa*, who is a famous healer trained in the Islamic Yunani tradition, are women.

In contrast to women's precarious position in terms of the official kinship of inheritance and the *p'ha-spun*, they retain strong affective ties with their natal family and rarely marry far from home. Affinal ties are also extremely important. As in the whole of this region, people usually have a close relationship with the family of their mother's brother, who is known as *azhang*. These relationships are relaxed and affectionate, partially as they do not involve any potential conflicts over inheritance. Affinal ties are publicly acknowledged in the wedding ceremony, at which the companions of the bride and groom are their *azhang* and *nene* (father's sister). Similarly, the term *snyen* (relatives), refers to both cognatic and affinal relatives. In Suru, as in other parts of Ladakh, many kinship terms, such as *apo* and *api* for grandfather and mother, do not distinguish between cognatic and affinal relatives. However, in Suru aunts and uncles

have particular terms according to whether they are cognatic or affinal relatives and their birth position or age relative to *ego's* parents. In the Leh area, where descent is more likely to be bilateral, a mother's brother is called the same as the father's sister's husband.

In Suru, Shi'ah women nearly always marry in their own or a close village (see Chapter 6). Hence they are able to visit their natal homes regularly. On the occasion of Id Ghadir, which commemorates the day when the Prophet Mohammed chose Imam Ali as his successor, Shi'ahs visit their relatives, particularly their affines. This is an important occasion for women to renew their kinship ties with their natal home, which they will try to visit. If either of their parents are dead, they visit their graves and hand out sweets to anyone who is about. Such ritual distribution of foodstuffs occurs on a myriad of different occasions in Suru, and often involves people's acceptance into a group. For example, on a child's first day at school they will bring sweets to be distributed to the other children and teachers.

Thus women's links with land and kinship groups are often created through their connection to graves, often through rituals of mourning. Women only definitively join their marital *p'ha-spun* in death, as they are buried on their husband's *p'ha-spun's* land, or at least near to his other *p'ha-spun* members in the graveyard (*qabristan*). Their graves then become a focus for their daughters' links with their natal home.

Thus women's location within the *p'ha-spun* is very weak compared to that of men. In contrast they have a more central and enduring location within the *yokma-pa*, which is also a kinship group. However, before I discuss the organisation of the *yokma-pa* I shall outline some aspects of gender in Suru.

#### **(v) Gender and Authority in Suru**

As I have suggested in my discussion of the *p'ha-spun* there is a clear gender division in Suru. One expression of this is in the division of labour, as there are tasks such as ploughing that women never perform. Prohibitions on other types of agricultural work vary between different parts of the Suru valley. However, the main unit of agricultural production is the household, and in most families, both men and women work at the majority of agricultural tasks. Older people of both sexes withdraw from heavy work if and when there is sufficient alternative labour within the household. Children start

helping with various tasks fairly young. Girls start fetching water and washing up from the age of about five, and boys will be sent to tend animals from eight or nine.

The oldest man in a household is considered to be the head, and the family unit is named after him; however, authority structures within the household are relatively weak. As I have described, divorce is extremely frequent partly because women cannot be forced to stay in a marriage that they do not like, either by their natal or marital relatives. Similarly men told me that when they were younger they had been sent to school, but that the teachers were so horrible to them that they just left. Others, said that they had run away to labour in the Punjab in the winter without their parents' permission when they were teenagers.

Women, particularly the older wives, are usually involved in decision-making, both within the individual household and the *p'ha-spun*. In the household where I stayed in Panikhar, the adults were a couple in their 30's who acted as equal partners in the management of their household and their relationships with relatives and neighbours. Until the 1980s, the majority of men were absent from Suru for most of the winter, so women must have enjoyed even more authority within the household than they do today.

I talked to a number of men about their participation in this annual winter migration to labour in the lower hills, particularly the Punjab.<sup>11</sup> They used to depart after the end of harvest and the marriage season in the autumn, and return in the spring before ploughing, which starts at the end of April. They would walk to Wardwan and Kishtwar via the Chelong Nala route and often encountered thick snow on the return journey. Many men told me of their hardships on these journeys. However, some said that they could return with as much as Rs. 50 when, in those days, a sheep cost Rs. 5. An important feature of the migration was that they always travelled in a group, living and cooking together to avoid pollution from outsiders. When they returned to Suru they were referred to as the '*punjab-pa*' (Punjabis). Similarly, prior to the opening of the road, the men who went on trading expeditions to Kashmir via the Chelong Nala route, were known as '*kachul-pa*' (Kashmiris) on their return. Their reincorporation into Suru society involved the preparation of a dinner of rice, which was one of the main

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<sup>11</sup> In those days Himachal Pradesh was part of Punjab state.

commodities that they brought back for their relatives and neighbours; and the *punjab-pa* distributed small gifts of tea that they had brought back.

In contrast, women rarely travelled out of Suru in the past and still do not. The majority of peasant women only go to Kargil two or three times in their entire life. Older women made a definite virtue of their reluctance to leave Suru, and would say that they did not like going to Kargil as it is dirty and noisy and the water is not clean. This restriction on women's movement is usually regarded by outsiders as being part of the Islamic conservatism of the people in Suru and Kargili Shi'ites in general. For instance, it is often said that the poor health of women in this area is partly because their male relatives do not allow them to visit the hospital in Kargil. This restriction appears to be more a feature of Shi'ism in this area rather than being Islamic, since in neighbouring Zanskar the young Sunni Muslim women from Padum used to go labouring in the plains until recently, as did the Buddhists. Similarly, as I shall discuss later, Sunni women commonly marry in other parts of Ladakh and Kashmir.

Moreover, Shi'ah women's movement out of the area is not restricted because they are seen to be weak in a physical sense. In fact quite the opposite is the case, and they work extremely hard at farming and on all kinds of heavy work. Within Suru itself women and girls go alone far into the mountains to collect dung. My feeling is that the restriction on their leaving the area is connected with women's lack of location, in terms of land and kinship group that I described in the previous section. This makes it more dangerous for them to travel out of the area than it is for men, as they are regarded as being much more vulnerable to being harmed by *sherpa* and *mi-kha*. It is also likely that as the conduits of tears that fertilise the land, women must themselves particularly avoid pollution by *sherpa*, lest their tears pollute the land.

Given that Shi'ah women are not encouraged to leave Suru, I was initially surprised to be told by Archo Nargis, Agha Miggi Ort's wife, that she had been on *ziarat* (pilgrimage to the Shi'ite centres in the Middle East) with her father in the late 1960s, before she was married.<sup>12</sup> Normally, she is reluctant to leave Suru, and has told me how little she likes Kargil. In 1994 they were trying to obtain a passport for her teenage daughter

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<sup>12</sup> In those days it was a difficult journey, partly by boat from Bombay, whereas now people fly from Delhi to Iran.

Mansura Begum to go to Iran with her father before she was married. In fact, *ziarat* is the only major journey that women make out of the area and even then few Suru women ever go.<sup>13</sup> The reason why I think it is possible for *sayyid* women to go with their fathers is that *aghas* are considered to have the greatest power to counter *mi-kha* and other forms of harm and create a ritual space around them which is less dangerous than normal. *Archos* themselves are also considered to have greater powers than ordinary people and therefore may be better protected.

When Shi'ah women travel out of Suru, it is considered desirable for them to travel with a close male relative, who is *moharam* ('not forbidden') to them. This concept is based on Muslim restrictions on interaction between men and women who are not closely related.<sup>14</sup> For women in Suru, it is taken to mean the relationship with the husband and males with whom it is forbidden to marry but with whom they are permitted to shake hands, and show their hair (*gus-po*) and legs. To do these things with other men is considered to be a sin (*nyespa*). For Shi'ahs the group that are *moharam* includes men from a woman's natal family, including her uncles, her husband and sons. When a woman goes away with unrelated men, she must go through a ritual, usually in front of an *agha*, which makes them *moharam* to each other. For example, Agha Miggi Ort's sister Archo Tohira, is *moharam* to a man from Trangole who took her on *ziarat* some years ago.

Women's relative lack of power within the *p'ha-spun* and the restrictions on their mobility, are in contrast with the important role that they play in the *yokma-pa*, which can be regarded as being the most important and enduring kinship group for women. However, as I shall show in the next two sections, the official organisation of the *yokma-pa* is largely a male affair, but its organisation as a kinship group relies heavily on women's links with the leading *aghas*.

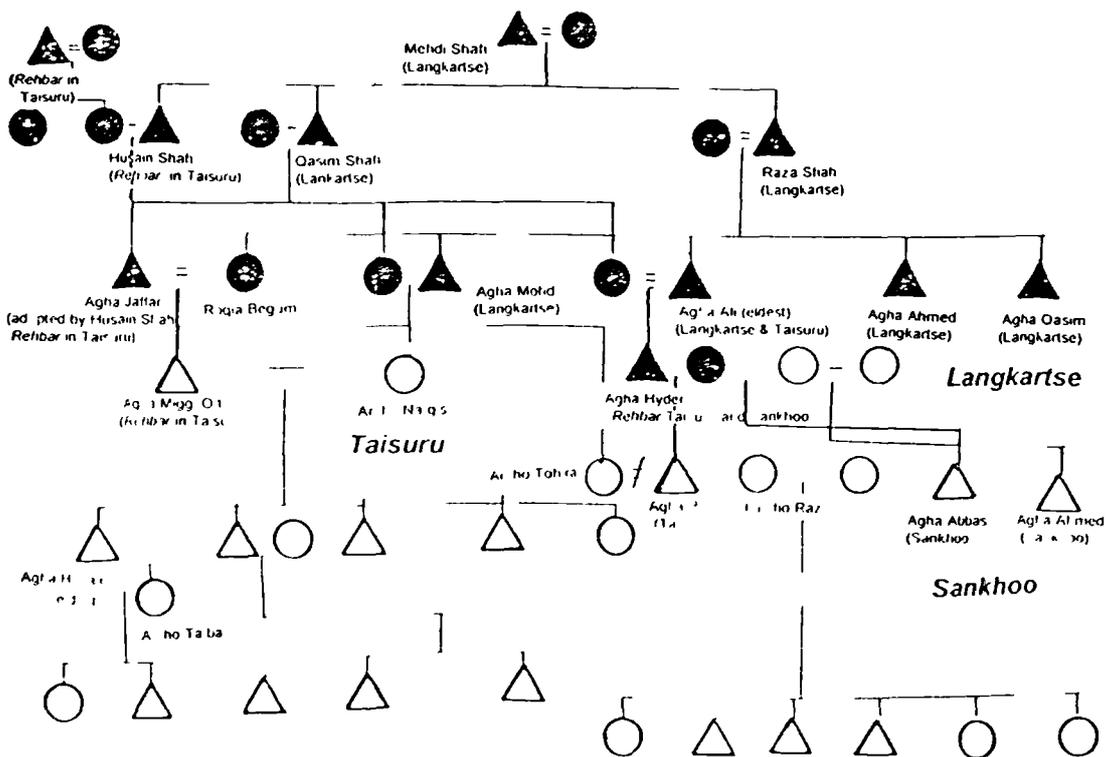
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<sup>13</sup> For instance in our survey of Thulus and Pursa there were a number of male *hajjis* but only one female one.

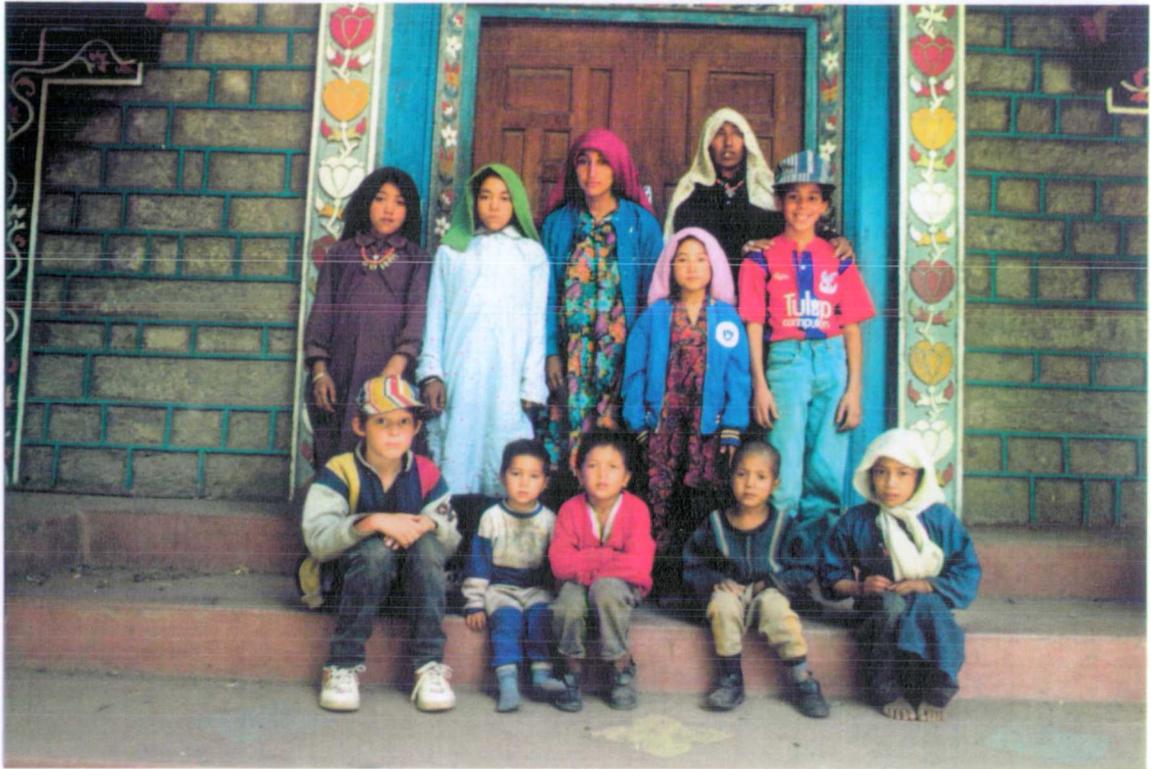
<sup>14</sup> Fischer and Abedi explain this term as; "*spouse and close kin with whom one cannot marry and before whom a woman need not veil: spouse, mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, brother, sister, aunt, uncle.*" (Fischer and Abedi 1990:515).

**(vi) The Organisation of the *Yokma-pa***

The *yokma-pa* has a single leader, Agha Miggi Ort, who is the *rehbar* or guide for all his followers. They are called *murid* (which is the Sufi term for followers), or more colloquially: “*agha khriile yodkhan migun*”, which literally means ‘the people who follow the *agha*’ in the local language. The faction is localised to Suru and Sankhoo Blocks, in the upper Suru valley. In Sankhoo Block most people are *yokma-pa*, and they have their main centres in Sankhoo and Langkartse, where the important *yokma-pa aghas* live. There are also a few *goma-pa* in the Block, but they do not have a centre there. A minority of people follow other lesser leaders, such as a *shaikh* in the Ichu valley near Sankhoo, who apparently preaches against the influence of all *aghas*, whether *yokma* or *goma-pa*. In Suru Block all the Shi’ahs are *yokma* or *goma-pa*, which are roughly equal in number. In Panikhar and Thulus all the Shi’ahs are *yokma-pa*, but all the other villages contain members of both factions. For example, Taisuru had twenty-two *yokma-pa* houses and twenty-seven *goma-pa* in 1993. Both factions have their centres in Taisuru, which is where their leading *aghas* live and they have their main religious buildings.



**Figure 2.2 - The *Yokma-pa* lineage**



*Picture 2.1 - Archo Nargis, some of the aghas' families and the author's children*



*Picture 2.2 - Agha Baqir's family*



*Picture 2.3 - The Langkartse Aghas in 1991*



*Picture 2.4 - Agha Jaffar's astana while under construction in 1988*



*Picture 2.5 - Agha Jaffar's Tomb in 1988*



*Picture 2.6 - The older astanas in the qabristan in Taisuru*



*Picture 2.7 - Women at matam in the yokma-pa masjid*



*Picture 2.8 - Women and girls going to the Id Ghadir celebrations in Taisuru*

At the core of the *yokma-pa* are two patrilineages, which are branches of a lineage which originated in Langkartse. In Taisuru, these two sub-lineages are represented by the two *yokma-pa aghas'* houses. The first lineage is that of Agha Miggi Ort, who has been the leader of the whole faction in the Suru valley since 1988. His father, Agha Jaffar, was the leader of the faction until his death in 1957. Both of these men had no brothers, so there is only one house of their branch of the lineage. The other house belongs to Agha Baqir, the son of Agha Hyder, who led the *yokma-pa* from 1957 until his death in 1988. His branch of the lineage has houses in Langkartse, Sankhoo and Taisuru. Agha Hyder had three main wives, each of whom had a son. Agha Baqir, the eldest, lives in Taisuru. He is highly respected and reasonably powerful within the faction, but he has not studied in Iran or Iraq. Neither has Agha Abbas, the elder of his two brothers based in Sankhoo. But the youngest brother, Agha Ahmed, is studying with Agha Husain, Agha Miggi Ort's eldest son, in Qum in Iran. It is likely that they will both be important *aghas* in the future, but the succession of the leadership of the faction has not yet been decided, as far as I know, as Agha Miggi Ort is still only in his 40's. In addition there are several other *aghas* families in the faction, including their relatives in Langkartse, and a number of other clerics that I shall discuss later.

Agha Baqir and Agha Miggi Ort live in neighbouring houses in Taisuru, near to the large and imposing *yokma-pa masjid*, which was built in 1975 and is the focus of their collective rituals in the Block. Not far from their houses is a *qabristan* (graveyard) that contains the *astanas* (Urdu: saints' tombs) of some of their ancestors. The largest *astana* is that of Agha Jaffar which was built in 1987. In Sankhoo, there is a *masjid* and now the *astana* of Agha Hyder is found near his sons' house.

The *yokma-pa* as an organisation has a structure called a *daftar*<sup>15</sup>, which is a set of records and agreements, that are the basis of the faction. Agha Miggi Ort's *daftar* dates from 1916, which was his grandparents' generation. It covers both Blocks, but at the moment he administers the *yokma-pa* in Suru Block, and Agha Hyder's other two sons do the same in Sankhoo Block. The *daftar* contains a list of men who organise the faction in each village. They are responsible for collecting taxes and other *ad hoc* donations from the members in their village, and for organising work

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<sup>15</sup> This is a Farsi word. In Iran it is used for the register of students kept by teachers in *madrasas* (Akhavi 1980:18). In India it is normally used for office (as in the place of work). In Swat it is used for land which has feudal rights and obligations tied to it (Barth 1960:127).

parties to help with the *aghas'* agricultural work. In the seventeen villages of the *yokma* faction in Suru Block (excluding Taisuru, where the *agha* himself is present), ten of these representatives are *akhuns*, two are *aghas*, one is a *shaikh*, two are *hajjis*<sup>16</sup> and the remaining two are ordinary men.

The *yokma-pa* from the whole of Suru Block perform services for Agha Miggi Ort's family, such as working on their land at various points in the agricultural cycle, and bringing certain goods to the *aghas'* households. These obligations are written in Miggi Ort's *daftar* as part of the agreement that was made between their family and the local people in 1916, when his lineage were established in Taisuru (see Chapter 3). In this agreement, each household among the followers in Suru Block promise to bring one kilo of butter and a load of wood to the *agha's* household every year, as well as a sheep on New Year's Day (*nauroz* - the 21st of March); and to do free labour in their fields (this kind of corvée labour is called *milaks*). It also says that the *agha's* family will not be fined for allowing their horses and cows to stray into other people's fields in the summer.<sup>17</sup>

*Milaks* is a form of free non-reciprocal labour used by powerful households in the area. Work teams are organised when the *agha's* family sends a message, or visits each village to request the labour, and then the organiser for that village will send workers on a particular day, one village per day for the larger villages and two for the smaller ones. *Milaks* come to Taisuru from the villages from Trangole down to Damsna (towards Sankhoo), as it is too far to come from places like Parkachik. The *milaks* do a full day's work, and the *agha's* household will feed them, often with the customary meal of *paba* (a dough made of parched barley dough) and melted butter - this is a particularly luxurious and auspicious dish, which is used in ceremonial contexts. On appointed days, women from faction members' households in each village will bring basket-loads of dung for the *agha's* winter heating and cooking, and other goods. They also give the *agha* other donations, such as the butter that comes from the first milk of each cow or *dzo-mo* (cow-yak cross breed) that calves. Followers from each

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<sup>16</sup> In Suru this usually means someone who has been to the Shi'ite centres in Iraq, Iran and Syria, rather than on *hajj* to Mecca, as I shall discuss later in this chapter.

<sup>17</sup> Other people would be fined by the *lorapa* whose job it is to keep an eye on stray animals.

village also take it in turns to provide the *tobarok* (ritual food) handed out at the end of various religious ceremonies in Taisuru.

Lesser *aghas*, *shaikhs* and *akhuns*, including Agha Baqir's house in Taisuru, have similar arrangements, but on a more local scale. For example an *akhun* family from Sangra, who came to the area from Karmang in Baltistan several generations ago, were given land by the local people in order to settle there, and have a document that outlines the services that local people will perform for them.

Agha Miggi Ort is responsible for the collection of Islamic taxes in the area through his representatives. They do not collect the general Islamic *zakat* tax, as they say that no-one in the area is rich enough to pay. Instead they collect the *khums* tax, which is a tax that is only found among Shi'ites, and is collected on behalf of the Hidden Imam (Glassé 1991:226). It is a one fifth tax on the surplus that a household has at the end of a year, whereas *zakat* is a tax on total income. This surplus can be in the form of cash, or kind, such as grain, and is paid to the *agha*. Agha Miggi Ort said that the average given by each household in his following was about Rs. 200 a year, which is the cost of about thirty-five kilos of rice. I interviewed a number of households about *khums* payments in 1994, some of whom had given nothing at all, while others had given up to Rs. 1000.

Half of the *khums* is called *mal-e-imam* and is for the upkeep of the *mujtahids* (high ranking Shi'ite clerics) at the Shi'ite centres, and half is *mal-e-sadat* which is meant for the support of *sayyids*, charity and good works locally. However, as far as I could ascertain, the money is kept as a single amount. Some is used for the upkeep of the *agha's* household and for charitable works; and the remainder is sent to the *mujtahid* who is currently regarded as their main guide in Iran.<sup>18</sup> In 1994 Agha Miggi Ort told me that he sends between Rs. 10-50,000 to Iran annually; but the *goma-pa aghas* said that all their *khums* income was spent in Suru. They do not receive any money from Iran, but students who study in the Shi'ite *madrasas* in the Middle East receive a small stipend.<sup>19</sup> Followers can also be called upon to give money for religious

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<sup>18</sup> The *mujtahid* to whom it was being sent up to his death at the end of 1994 was Ayatollah Araki, who was also the person to whom any legal disputes that could not be resolved locally were referred.

<sup>19</sup> A Shi'ite doctor from Kargil commented to me that if the Ayatollahs in Iran had any idea how poor the Suru people are, they would send all the money back.

building, specific causes or ceremonies. The two *imam-barahs* in Taisuru, and the *astana* of Agha Jaffar, were both built using money of this kind. I gather that every house in the following will give money on these occasions. For example, in 1997, Dr. Jaffar told me that Rs. 100,000 had been collected for Agha Miggi Ort and Agha Baqir to visit Iran.

It is also fairly common for people to donate their land to an *agha's* family, if they have no male heirs (see above). In the *patwari's* records Agha Miggi Ort's lineage are recorded as having about 80 *kanals* (about 10 acres), and Agha Baqir's branch have land in a number of villages. The *goma-pa aghas'* lineage have about 300 *kanals* in 9 villages in Suru Block.

People regard pious donation as being a religious service, that brings merit (Farsi: *savab*) to the donor. The word *sawab*, which is a Farsi term, is used for this kind of good work (Rizvi 1994:115, Fischer and Abedi 1990:521). It is used as the opposite of *nyespa*, which means 'sin' in the local dialect. In fact, *nyespa* is used all over this area by both Muslims and Buddhists. In Suru it is used both for disobeying general Islamic precepts, such as women showing their hair to unrelated men, and for things that are considered to be a sin locally, but not in Islamic rules. One day, several of the children were eating parched barley (*yos*) during a lesson in school. After asking them to desist a number of times, I told one of the boys to throw the *yos* away, but he said to me that he could not, as it is a *nyespa* to do so. This is because the *yos* is a product of their land and household, which it is a sin to waste, not just in Suru, but all over Ladakh.

Individuals are considered to have an account of both sins and good works that will affect their chances of entering Paradise. The following is an extract from a speech given by Agha Hyder in Taisuru, in 1974, on the death day of Hazrat Zahra (who is also known as Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Mohammed and wife of Ali the first Imam), when the money was being collected for building the *yokma-pa masjid*:

*"By constructing the masjid here, I am going to make a place for you in the other world. If you give one stone or one paise for the masjid it will remain as long as the mosque remains or until Doomsday. If you go for hajj or pilgrimage you will get the rewards for good works just for that time. Or if you say your*

*nimaz,<sup>20</sup> it is just for that time of the day. But if you build the masjid, the good work and its reward will last as long as the masjid. It is actually not the masjid itself you are making, but something like a vehicle which can take you and all your relatives to heaven."*

The faction's main contacts in India outside the Suru valley are with an organisation called the Ayatollah Khomeini Memorial Trust in Kargil, and with the National Conference Party. Surprisingly, the faction seems to have little contact, official or otherwise, with other Shi'ite centres in India, even in Kashmir. This seems to be due the fact that Baltistan was the centre for Shi'ism in this area prior to partition. In the 1960s and 1970s, the main outside links were with Iraq but, in 1974, the Iraqi Government expelled all foreign clerics and, since then, people from Kargil *tehsil* have only gone to Iran and Syria to study. Nowadays, the *yokma-pa*'s most important links are with Iran, particularly the Shi'ite centre of Qum, where Agha Miggi Ort's eldest son Agha Husain and Agha Baqir's brother are both studying.

Shi'ahs usually take their spiritual leadership from a local guide (*rehbar* in Farsi, and *lamstan* in the local language), who may be an *agha* or a *shaikh*. He in turn takes most of his guidance from a *mujtahid* (Farsi: 'leading cleric') in the Middle East, to whom he may send a share of the *khums* tax that he has collected from his followers. The local guide is the primary authority for issues such as inheritance and general correct religious practice, and he is considered to be guiding his followers to salvation. However, there is no obligation to solely follow a single guide, and followers can accept judgements from different guides.

As Agha Miggi Ort is the *rehbar* in Suru, he is the main local guide for all his followers, but Agha Baqir and other *aghas* are also important in the faction. Under Indian Law, he can also act as the main authority in respect of Muslim family law for the *yokma-pa*. Hence disputes over inheritance and land are taken to him for resolution, although people often also consult with Agha Baqir as well. Disputes nearly all occur in the Spring at the time of ploughing, as that is when issues of land ownership and boundaries become clear. At that time, the *yokma-pa aghas* are constantly busy settling conflicts among their followers. Some days, several groups of petitioners will

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<sup>20</sup> *Nimaz* are Muslim daily prayers, which are called *phyak* in Suru. Shi'ahs say them three times a day, whereas other Muslims say them five times.

come to their houses. The *agha* will listen to their cases and come to a decision. Where this involves the permanent inheritance of land, rather than the setting of a field boundary or such like, it may be written down in the *agha's daftar*, which has official legal authority.<sup>21</sup> When rulings by the local guide are disputed, they can be referred to the higher authority (nowadays usually in Iran). For instance, in 1993, Agha Miggi Ort usually took religious guidance from Ayatollah Araki, who was one of the leading Ayatollahs in Iran before his death in 1994.<sup>22</sup> Agha Miggi Ort would write to him, outlining the matter in dispute, and the Ayatollah then replied giving his decision. Although inheritance disputes can also be taken to the court in Kargil, this rarely occurs.

In the next chapter, I shall discuss these connections to the Shi'ite world and other external links of the *yokma-pa*. Despite their existence and importance, internally the faction itself is extremely localised, and consists of a real community as it is a kinship group that is based on personal relationships between the *aghas* and their followers, as I shall show in the next section.

#### **(vii) Kinship of the *Yokma-pa***

Among Shi'ahs in Suru, the main social distinction is between people of *sayyid* descent and ordinary people (*am-pa*, *am* being the Urdu for 'ordinary'). The former are thought to have special powers and are given respect, due to their descent from the family of the Prophet Mohammed. *Sayyid* status is passed in the male line, so the children of an *agha* are automatically *sayyids*, but the children of an *archo*, are only *sayyids* if their father is a *sayyid*. In Suru, the kinship practice of *sayyids*, particularly the families of leading *aghas*, differs markedly from that of ordinary people. Ordinary Shi'ahs nearly always marry monogamously with a person from the same faction and their own or a neighbouring village, who is usually a non-relative.<sup>23</sup> *Sayyids* also

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<sup>21</sup> His decision is not final however, since it can be referred to a *mujtahid*, and also to the court in Kargil.

<sup>22</sup> Ayatollah Araki was made the leading Ayatollah after the death of Ayatollahs Khoi and Gulpaygani (Richard 1995:84).

<sup>23</sup> In the houses that I surveyed a third of the marriages were with a relative of which two thirds were with a *patrilateral relative*.

marry within their faction but they have a strong preference for marrying into their own or a related *sayyid* patrilineage, and leaders usually practice polygyny.

The two *yokma* lineages in Taisuru, are descended from the same ancestor in Langkartse, but they now consider themselves to form two separate lineages, which intermarry whenever possible. In the current grandparents' generation there were two sets of patrilateral parallel cousins. The first was Agha Jaffar and his three sisters who lived in Taisuru, and the second consisted of four brothers and four sisters from the *yokma* lineage in Langkartse. Agha Jaffar married one of the sisters from Langkartse, and two of his sisters married two of her brothers. The latter two couples were the parents of Agha Hyder and Agha Miggi Ort's wife, Archo Nargis, respectively. Agha Hyder's son, Agha Baqir and one of Agha Miggi Ort's sisters were also married, but are now divorced. In the current generation, Agha Baqir's eldest daughter, Archo Taiba, is married to Agha Miggi Ort's eldest son (and intended successor), Agha Husain (see Figure 2.2, p.73).

These two lineages also consider themselves to be affinally related, as Agha Jaffar was Agha Hyder's mother's brother (*azhang*), and Agha Hyder was Agha Miggi Ort's classificatory *azhang*. Intermarriage between these two lineages maintains the solidarity and power in the leadership of the faction. Both parallel and cross cousin marriage is common among prestigious families in the area, and is used to form solidary groups of kin. For example, at the core of the *goma-pa* there is a single patrilineage of the leading *aghas*, who have houses in Taisuru and the hamlet of Shaksthang in Suru Block. Agha Raza, the previous leader, was married to his father's sister's daughter, and his sister is married to Agha Najibul the current *goma-pa* leader, who lives in Taisuru. Agha Raza had no sons, so his brother's son has come as a *mag-pa* for his daughter.

In 1994 I attended a wedding that involved various members of the family of Munshi Habibullah Bhat, who is one of the richest and most influential people in Kargil and was previously a Minister in the Jammu and Kashmir Government. His family form the core of the administrative elite in Kargil (see Chapter 6). His eldest son, who is the Tehsildar (officer in charge of the land records and revenue) in Kargil, is already married to his brother's daughter. In this wedding, his middle son married Munshi Habibullah's sister's daughter, whose father is the Assistant Development

Commissioner in Kargil and his youngest son married the daughter of a member of their *p'ha-spun*.

*Archos*, like *aghas*, are considered to have special qualities and so to give one of them out seems to result in a loss to the lineage. Therefore it is desirable to retain them within it. The desire to retain a family's property or assets, is I believe an important aspect of parallel cousin marriage in Suru. It also reflects the ideal of the large and solidary household which is a sign of high status in the whole Ladakh region. When *archos* do marry outside the lineage, they are virtually always married to another unrelated *agha*, which is the preference as then her children will also be *sayyids*, or at least to a *shaikh* or *akhun*.

Important *aghas* are the only group of men who widely practise polygyny in Kargil *tehsil*, and polygyny is rare among Muslims in Ladakh. In 1994, a Kargili *archo* commented that only *aghas* could afford to have more than one wife, as they are the capitalists of Kargil. Ordinary men in Suru only take a second wife when their first has not had children. The second wife is often brought in with the agreement of the first, in the hope that she will produce children. More often than not, the first wife will be divorced before the second is brought in. Agha Hyder had several wives and his three sons are all from different mothers. Agha Baqir has four wives, two of whom live in his house at Taisuru. They are both non-*sayyids* and are given the respectful title *cho-cho*. Agha Miggi Ort has two wives, but only Archo Nargis lives with him at Taisuru. His second wife, by whom he has two small children, was a widow and lives at her parents' house in Maita, near Taisuru. Agha Raza, the previous leader of the *goma-pa*, had three wives, one of whom was an Iraqi *archo* who he had married when he was studying there. But, in the current generation, the *goma-pa aghas* each have only a single wife.

Polygyny allows leading *aghas* to have a larger kinship following than other people. There also various other ways by which *aghas* expand their households and extend kinship links throughout their faction membership. The most controversial is through the practice of *mut'a* or temporary marriage with single women of the faction. *Mut'a* marriage is permitted under Shi'ite law as an insurance that children born in temporary liaisons will be supported by their fathers (Fischer and Abedi 1990:275). It involves an agreement that states how long the marriage will last (often just a few days) and a

*mahr* (marriage payment) of a few hundred rupees that is given to the woman. In the past in both Kargil *tehsil* and Baltistan, this kind of agreement was apparently used for most marriages, which could be contracted for short periods, but were often for up to a hundred years (Rizvi 1993:55). Sagaster says that in Baltistan it was usual for young couples to initially have an agreement of a few years, and then if their marriage was a success, they would make another contract for a hundred years (Sagaster 1997:414). She says that this kind of marriage is now rare (Sagaster 1997:415). It has also ceased to be the normal practice among ordinary people in Suru and Karg'l, who now use the *nikah* form of agreement, which is 'permanent' but allows for divorce. Rizvi says that in the 1970s clerics came back from Iran and Iraq and started to preach against *mut'a* marriage (Rizvi 1993:57).<sup>24</sup> In Suru, *sigheh* (which is the Farsi term for this kind of contract (Fischer and Abedi 1990: 522 & 518)) is still used by Shi'ahs as the word for the contract but I understand that a permanent marriage contract is normally used nowadays.

The *mut'a* marriages that *aghas* seem to conduct are genuinely temporary marriages of extremely short duration. An *agha* from Kargil told me that they usually are made for a month. *Aghas* are able to make such marriages relatively discreetly, as they can authorise the contract themselves. I could not ask the *yokma-pa aghas* about *mut'a* marriage directly as it is a sensitive subject, and something for which they are often ridiculed. However, they seem still to contract *mut'a* marriages, although this is done much more secretly than in the past. In the early 1980s, when the subject was still openly discussed, these liaisons were normally said to take place when an *agha* went for a *dawat* (dinner) at one of his follower's houses.

The few instances of *mut'a* marriage that I know of involve women who either come from one of the more influential families among the *aghas'* following, or who are without heirs and are donating some land to one of the leading *aghas*. For instance, in Sangra in 1981 I heard that one of Agha Hyder's sons had come for a *dawat* at the house of a widow who had no heirs, and was donating some land to the *agha's* family. Someone quipped at the time: "She is no longer a widow". It was said that a woman who slept with an *agha* had more chance than others of entering heaven.

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<sup>24</sup> I understand that it is now generally considered to be permissible in Iran again.

The *yokma-pa aghas* also often create *moharam* links with their female followers.<sup>25</sup> Two unrelated members of the opposite sex can become *moharam* in respect of each other by the performance of a simple ceremony. Subsequently when the woman visits the *agha's* house, she can go and greet him and shake hands as they are *moharam* to each other and this relationship will last for the rest of their lives.

In these ways the *aghas* make links, particularly through women, to the more important families among their followers. The formation of these links also provides a means by which women can themselves create a relationship that gives them personal access to the *aghas'* patronage and power. It was very noticeable for instance, that it was nearly always women who petitioned *aghas* for some favour or help. They also make most of the visits to the *agha's* house as *milaks* and to deliver gifts, so they have a good deal of contact with the *aghas* and their families

The *yokma-pa aghas'* kinship groups are enlarged further by having a number of houses in different villages. For instance, Agha Baqir has two wives at the house in Taisuru and another wife, who lives at her parents' house, visits to help at times of heavy agricultural work. He also has a small house and land at Namsuru. Important *aghas* usually have several servants in their house known as *duksmi* (household servants), who help with the household and agricultural work.

The *duksmi* in the *aghas'* households are all from houses of factions members. Some of the girls are orphans or particularly poor while others are from relatively well-off families that have close links to the *aghas* and enough children to spare one to work in the *agha's* house. All the girls said that they would stay with the *agha's* family until married. The majority of the men have disabilities, some have learning difficulties and one is deaf. These men do not necessarily come from poor families, but they will not marry and settle on their own land as it is impossible to find marriage partners.

Sadiak, a young man from neighbouring Kargee village, is a *duksmi* in Agha Miggi Ort's house. His mother died when he and his sister were still children and his father

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<sup>25</sup> Fischer and Abedi say that *mut'a* marriage can be used in Iran as a fictitious marriage that allows unrelated men and women to have contact with each other (Fischer and Abedi 1990:276).

was no longer able to manage their farm single-handed. So they rented out their land in Kargee and went to live in the *agha's* house. His sister has since married and his father has died. In 1996 Sadiak was 20 and was studying in 11th class. When he has finished studying, it is hoped that he will obtain a government job or other occupation and be able to return to his own house and land. Three years ago he married a woman from quite a prosperous family in Taisuru, in a joint wedding with Agha Miggi Ort's second son, Ali Agha. Like the other *duksmi* and the *aghas* from Langkartse, he is expected to work hard but he is treated like a member of the family. His wife and two year old son now usually stay at the *agha's* house as well and she also works hard at both house and agricultural work.

Api Cho-cho, one of Agha Hyder's widows, said people could now get paid employment and were less willing to work for the *aghas*. Nevertheless, *aghas'* households are significantly larger than those of ordinary people, which only contain about five or six people on average. Agha Miggi Ort's household is usually about twenty strong and that of Agha Baqir has thirteen members.

Another notable difference between the kinship practice of *sayyids* and *am-pa* is in respect of ancestry and descent. *Sayyids* take a keen interest in their patrilineal ancestry (*mirabs*), that traces their descent to the family of the Prophet and they usually possess a written record of this. For example, Agha Miggi Ort has a book in which his father wrote their line of descent through twenty-four generations from the Eighth Imam.

Their line of descent is also preserved through the *astanas* of their ancestors. In Taisuru in the graveyard near the *yokma-pa aghas'* houses and *masjid*, there are a number of small stone *astanas* of their forefathers and mothers. In 1987, a much larger concrete *astana* was constructed for Agha Jaffar. It also contains the tombs of his wife Roqia Begum and Agha Baqir's mother. People remember who these graves belong to, and visit the *astanas* of the previous leaders, who are still thought to have some power to intercede for ordinary people. The anniversary of Agha Jaffar's death is observed, as are those of the close Family of the Prophet. On his death day (*gyur-jak*) there is a *matam* and followers visit the *astana* to obtain his blessing. These *astanas* are now more important for ordinary *yokma-pa* than the graves of their own (except immediate) ancestors, who are now forgotten. I would suggest that the *yokma*

lineage and their ancestors now effectively act as the lineage and ancestors for their followers as well.

The *aghas* also form a living link with the family of the Prophet and through them, all the faction members become connected to that line of descent. Through the *aghas* the stories of the family of the Prophet, which are the *aghas'* family history, become the history of everyone in the faction. These stories are known to everyone, and are by far the most popular narratives in the area. Ordinary people's involvement in this history is made very immediate by being regularly recounted and relived in emotion-charged religious ceremonies.

### **(viii) *Yokma-pa* Ceremonies**

The main collective rituals of the *yokma-pa* are the *orche* or *matam* (*orche* is the local name for these, and *matam* is Farsi<sup>26</sup>) ceremonies. These take place on important days in the Shi'ite calendar, both those that are mournful, such as death days of the Imams, and on Id days of celebration, of which there are more than a dozen during the year. There are also a large number of these ceremonies during the month of Muharram, when Shi'ites commemorate the martyrdom of the Family of the Prophet at Karbala. In Suru Block the *yokma-pa* hold their main *matam* rituals at their *masjid* in Taisuru. This building is both a *masjid*, that is the building used for Friday and other prayers, and an *imam-barah* or *matam-i-sarai*, that is a place for mourning ceremonies during the month of Muharram.

These rituals are attended by crowds of faction members, who converge on the *imam-barah* in Taisuru at mid-morning. Followers come from all villages in the Block, although people from Parkachik and the more distant villages attend less. The *agha* - usually Agha Miggi Ort - sits on the large stepped seat or *minbar* at one side of the *masjid*, with the men on the floor in front of him and the women, girls and small children concealed by screens in various galleries. The main rite consists of the *agha* making a *matam* speech in the local dialect. This usually consists of part of the story of the martyrdom of the Prophet's Family, or a story about the particular member of the Prophet's family whose birth or death day it is, interspersed with admonitions to

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<sup>26</sup> The correct word for this is *matn*, which means the body of the *Hadith* (commentaries on the Koran and stories of the life of the Prophet Mohammed) in Farsi (Glassé 1991:262).

weep. For instance, a passage from a *yokma-pa akhun's* speech delivered at a halt during the procession on the 13th Muharram 1994 reads:

*"Oh great lady [rgyal-mo - literally 'queen'] Hazrat<sup>27</sup> Zahra [this is another name for Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Mohammed and wife of Imam Ali the first Imam], you are our sponsor for the road to Heaven, because it is only the tears that we weep for you and your relatives which provide provisions for the journey."*

*Matam* ceremonies explicitly link the participants into the wider Shi'ite congregation. This *akhun* also said:

*"You shouldn't think that you are alone in grieving here. All the Imams, including the Imam Mehdi and the whole Universe are mourning today."*

In Suru, these speeches are very emotional and compelling and are always accompanied by loud weeping and lamentation from the *agha* and his followers. A *yokma* woman once remarked to me: *"Kargil is good for fruit and vegetables, but Suru is good for matam, because it really gets the tears flowing."* The *agha* recounts a small part of the story, or exhorts the congregation to weep, and then he usually stops and weeps himself, while his followers weep and some cry: *"Husain"* and the names of other martyrs. These are tears of repentance and remorse, and are considered to provide merit for the Day of Judgement, as well as being instrumental in gaining Husain's intercession for his followers to enter Paradise (Hegland 1983:221). For instance Agha Hyder said in a speech delivered in the open air in Taisuru in 1974, when he was collecting money for the building of the *yokma-pa masjid*:

*"We can't help Imam Husain now, because we weren't at Karbala on that day. Had we been there we do not know whether we would have passed the test and helped him. But now we can help him by crying and repeating the story of his martyrdom."*

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<sup>27</sup> *Hazrat* is a term of respect used for members of the Prophet Muhammed's immediate family and prophets such as Jesus, who is know as Hazrat Issa.

A later passage in the *akhun's* speech was:

*"On Doomsday when God asks Imam Husain to enter Paradise, he will say, "Oh God, I will not go alone unless you allow all those people who have mourned for me to enter too"."*

In these ceremonies, Agha Miggi Ort usually weeps more copiously than the other men who are gathered in the congregation. His tears are considered to provide a special blessing and it is not unusual for him to weep in other contexts. For example, when he visited a *yokma-pa* woman who was gravely ill in Kargil Hospital, he wept over her, although the rest of the assembled relatives and friends remained dry-eyed.

These *matam* ceremonies sometimes provide an occasion for the Agha to give his followers advice about good conduct, and when the *agha* speaks from the *minbar* he is considered to have the most authority. Agha Miggi Ort told me that he tells people not to steal and to do good works. Women said that they are sometimes told to work hard and avoid sin like Hazrat Zahra. He also sometimes passes on an important pronouncement (Farsi: *fatwa*) from an Ayatollah in Iran or Iraq. For instance, in 1994 at the end of a *matam*, he said that a *mujtahid* had ruled that women should cover their arms right to their wrists and only allow their hands to show.

In the *yokma* faction, usually Agha Miggi Ort, and sometimes Agha Baqir make the *matam* speeches in the *masjid*. This adds an additional element of immediacy, since they are the local embodiment of the Prophet's Family. People said that they preferred one of the *aghas* to give the speech in the *masjid*, although a number of people give them in other locations in the month of Muharram (see Chapter 3). Agha Miggi Ort also sometimes goes to Sankhoo to lead a ceremony there, in which case Agha Baqir deputises for him at Taisuru. Both Agha Hyder and Agha Raza also used to deliver these speeches in their day. Interestingly, it is not very usual within Shi'ism in general for important spiritual guides to lead *matam* ceremonies or their ilk. Apparently, they are usually conducted by lesser clergy, such as the equivalent of *akhuns* (Momen 1985:203, Fischer 1980:137).

These speeches reach a particular emotional intensity during the month of Muharram, which is the main focus of the Shi'ite calendar. As I shall show in the next chapter, it is also the main time for conflict between the *yokma* and *goma-pa*.

### **(ix) Stratification within the *Yokma-pa***

Suru-pa are ranked according to their spiritual power or merit. The main division is between *sayyids* and ordinary people (*am-pa*). All *sayyids* are respected with the titles *agha* or *archo*, and are thought to have greater healing power and sexual potency than ordinary people. An *agha* in Kargil said that *archos* could have children at a much greater age than ordinary women and, as I have shown, important *aghas* often have several wives. They usually perform a number of types of healing, such as giving *tawiz* (protective amulets) and *poo ba*, a form of healing which is performed by reciting some lines from the Koran then blowing on the affected person.

All *aghas* are respected, but the leaders have also studied *chos* (religion) for many years in Iran and Iraq and are given special respect. For example, when Agha Miggi Ort enters or leaves a room, it is common for other people to stand up as a mark of respect, and he will be given the best place to sit in any gathering. Leading clerics - both *aghas* and *shaikhs* - wear special dress when they are doing their religious work, which is reserved for clerics who have undergone extensive religious studies.<sup>28</sup> But only *sayyids* may wear black turbans and other clerics wear white ones.

As the leader of the faction, Agha Miggi Ort is regarded as a source of blessing for his followers. Anything that is given out by him is called *tobarok*, which comes from the term *baraka*, meaning spiritual power, blessing or grace, which Shi'ites consider to be a property of the descendants of Fatima (Algar 1980:350). The term *tobarok* is used for the food and sweets that are distributed at the end of *matam* ceremonies and some Friday Prayers. It is also used for anything that has been given by the *agha*. For instance, a *yokma-pa* woman told me to take special care of the shawl that I was given when I left the school in 1994, as she said that it had come from Agha Miggi Ort and so it was *tobarok*. Food that the *agha* has half eaten is called *sangma* and is also considered to be blessed. During an ordinary meal in his kitchen at home, Agha Miggi Ort often hands his half-eaten plate of food to a companion or a family member to eat in a manner that is not normal practice for other people, even if they are closely related.

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<sup>28</sup> Their dress consists of long robes covered by an *aba* which is a sleeveless gown and a turban.

Learned *aghas* are considered to have access to esoteric knowledge that is hidden from ordinary people. This is linked to their possession of *baraka* as well as their superior religious learning. This belief is in accordance with the Shi'ite concepts of *zahir* and *batin*, that mean 'revealed' and 'hidden' knowledge respectively (Hollister 1953:29). Once while a friend who is fluent in English was translating a tape of one of Agha Hyder's *matam* speeches for me, a man came in, and asked what we were doing. When I said that I wanted a translation he laughed at me and said: "*How could you possibly understand that? Even X (who was translating, and is from an akhun family), cannot understand it. We don't understand much of what Agha Hyder or Agha Miggi Ort says.*" Agha Baqir, made similar comments when he heard what we had been doing. When I played the same tape to the woman of the house where I was staying, she said: "*How do you expect me to understand this, when even men can't understand it?*" What they meant was that the meaning of his words are so esoteric that their full meaning is hidden to ordinary people. Agha Miggi Ort's epithet, which means 'with eyes like a lamp' also refers to his ability to see the unseen.

Agha Miggi Ort's presence is most desired at the funeral of one of his older followers. If he was not available, Agha Baqir or one of his sons would be requested to attend. People emphasised, that they needed to have a *chogo* (big) *agha* from one of the leading lineages. My understanding is that this is for two reasons. Firstly, the leading *aghas* are regarded as being the direct representatives of the Family of the Prophet, and therefore have the greatest power to intercede on behalf of the dead person, so that they go to Heaven rather than Hell. Secondly, the presence of members of the leading *aghas'* families at a funeral is a public expression of their kinship with their followers. I attended a memorial feast in Panikhar for a *yokma-pa* man who had died and his wife made a great point of posing for photographs with photos of her husband, Agha Jaffar and Agha Hyder, so he was located within their kinship group.

A powerful *agha* has an enormous amount of authority within his following. In the mid-1990s, religious leaders in Kargil and Suru said that it was a sin to sing non-religious songs and dance during the main parts of weddings, according to previous custom in the area. I was at a *yokma-pa* wedding in the winter of 1994, at which the two *azhangs* from each side were *hajjis*, both of whom are prominent in the faction. During the evening of the wedding day at the groom's house, we all sat around, and the *nyo-pa* sang *marsiya*s (religious songs) in the next room. One of the *hajjis*

remarked that this was boring and we should be dancing, but the *agha* would be angry. It was also said that the *agha* would beat his followers if they did something he had spoken against. Once, I was waiting to travel to Leh but heavy snow had blocked the road, someone in Kargil said that, if Agha Miggi Ort told them to, his followers would dig me a path all the way to Leh.

*Shaikhs*, who are non-*sayyid* men with a large amount of religious education, are also treated with a great deal of respect in Kargil *tehsil*. But in the *yokma-pa* the importance of the *aghas* seems to have eclipsed that of other religious practitioners, and there are no very important *shaikhs*. However, in the *goma-pa*, Shaikh Anwar, a young man from Namsuru, is an important leader. He is currently still studying in Iran, but he usually leads *matam* at the *goma-pa imam-barah* when he is in Suru. In Kargil some of the most influential religious leaders are *shaikhs* and there is less emphasis on the role of *aghas*.

*Akhuns* are men with some religious training, some are hereditary, and they are also generally treated with some respect. They are usually active just within one or two villages whereas important *aghas* and *shaikhs* do religious work over a wider area. They provide a variety of religious services, particularly teaching Arabic and Farsi, but they may also officiate at life-cycle ceremonies and some of them are renowned *matam* speakers. In the *goma-pa matam* is normally conducted by an *akhun* in their *imam-barah*, as the *aghas* rarely conduct these ceremonies. *Akhuns* are often healers and Rizvi says that they are similar to Buddhist *amchis*<sup>29</sup> (practitioners of Tibetan medicine) (Rizvi 1981: 222-3, Rizvi 1993:43).

It is the aim of all Shi'ahs to go on the pilgrimage called *ziarat* (it is also called *hajj* in Suru) to the tombs of the Imams in Iran and Iraq (Arjomand 1981:29, Richard 1995:7). Undertaking *ziarat* is considered to be a good work that enhances a person's piety. Both men and women who go on *ziarat* are called *hajji* when they return, as are people who were in Iran as children. *Hajjis* are treated with more respect than ordinary people, and are considered qualified to speak in discussions, as they have a greater store of spiritual power. At a training session for female village-level workers in 1993, there was a woman who had been in Iran as a child. Everyone called her

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<sup>29</sup> There are also people who practise these techniques in Suru, who are called *aba*.

*hajji* and she assumed the role of spokesperson for the group. Most of the people who go on *ziarat* from Suru are men. In Thulus village, there were four men who were *hajjis* in 1994 but only one woman. *Hajjis* prefer to go as a companion of one of the leading *aghas*. Thus, the father of the man who is the main sponsor of the Noon Public School has been twice, both times as a companion for Agha M'ggi Ort.

*Ziarat* differs from *hajj* to Mecca in that Islamic custom stipulates that you must not borrow to go on *hajj*, whereas the performance of *ziarat* does not have such restrictions. Few can afford to go on *ziarat*, as the cost of the journey is tens of thousands of rupees. For those that do go, it usually involves a great deal of work and sacrifice, but at the same time they gain both religious merit and higher standing when they return. Rizvi reports that in the 1970s, men in Kargil *tehsil* would labour in order to send their son's to study religion and so raise their status (Rizvi 1993:50). In general, both the acquisition of religious merit and the performance of good works is central to rituals and prestige in the faction, and played a key role in the founding of the Noon Public School, as I shall show in Chapter 5.

### **(x) Conclusions**

Shi'ahs in Suru are involved in multiple types of relationship, such as those of the *p'ha-spun*, gender and the village. All of these contain idioms of kinship that centre on relationships to the land, both through the official male kinship of land inheritance and through the largely female area of the creation of ties to the land and hence kinship relationships through graves and weeping. The relationship between mourning, land and fertility is well attested in many agrarian societies (Bloch 1982). In Suru men hold land and women ensure its fertility by weeping.

The village in this area is also a form of kinship group as, like the *p'ha-spun* and the *pa*, as it is a set of households that share the same piece of land. My understanding is that for the most part the village contained the *pa* since, although there are often several *pas* of the same name in different villages of Suru, practically people only recognised kinship with the *pa* in the same village.

Clearly the faction is just one of the groups to which people in Suru belong and uses the same idioms for creating kinship relations. However, on analysis, the faction both contrasts with the others and incorporates them. This is clearly the case in respect of

gender, as within the faction women have a more permanent and enduring kinship connection than they do within the *p'ha-spun* and these kinship connections are created directly with a leading *agha*. The *agha's* own role also approaches closer to that of women, in this respect, as he weeps many tears as women do, in contrast to the behaviour of other men, particularly younger ones. This is most marked at the time of Muharram (see Chapter 3), when the younger men beat themselves and chant loudly but the *agha* weeps.

Agha Miggi Ort is clearly also at the centre of the faction's official structures and stratification, which are largely male and patriarchal. Hence he also mediates between men's official, and women's unofficial kinship. In the official structure of the faction, merit is crucial and can be gained (or preserved) in several ways. For women it is mainly gained by weeping and avoiding sin and, on occasion, donation. However, the major merit making enterprises such as engaging in religious studies and performing *ziarat*, remain relatively closed to women and are largely a male affair.

The faction has almost superseded the *pa now* and taken on all its role of being the holder of tradition and continuity for its members, particularly through the line of *aghas* and the Prophet's family and their *astanas*. The *p'ha-spun* still remains important, but is virtually entirely subsumed to the faction. Moreover, the now common practice of allowing descent lines to die out and donating land to the *aghas* is evidence of the importance of the faction for its members in respect of notions of inheritance and continuity.

In this chapter, I have examined the internal relations within the faction, and shown that it is in some respects almost hyper-local in its internal kinship links and connection to the land in Suru. Kinship is also central to the relationship between the *yokma* and *goma-pa* as I shall describe in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3

### The Two Shi'ite Factions in Suru

#### (i) Introduction

These two Shi'ite factions have roughly equal numbers of followers in Suru Block, and there is no perceptible socio-economic difference between the profile of their respective memberships. Internally, the organisation of the *goma-pa* is similar to that of the *yokma-pa*. Externally, they have formed opposing factions in Suru for at least the last thirty years.

The people of Suru have been Muslim for several centuries, but the two Shi'ite factions came into existence in this century, when their leaders were encouraged to settle in Suru. They apparently formed two separate factions by the 1950s, but their current hostility derives from the period of the *yokma-pa*'s millenarian movement in the 1960s and 1970s, which occurred partly in response to the disruption of partition and the increased poverty faced in those days.

The *yokma-goma* dispute is neither pathological nor unusual. However, like the *yokma-pa*'s millenarian beliefs, it has been used by others in the region to stereotype Suru people and Shi'ahs as being irrational, unruly and factional, in a derogatory sense. Such attitudes in the administration have contributed to the continuation of poverty in Suru in recent decades, as Suru people have been thought incapable of participating in modernisation processes.

#### (ii) The History of Islam in Suru

There are few written sources on the history of Suru, but it would appear that the spread of Islam into Purig (*Kargil tehsil*) was gradual and the result both of Muslim preachers converting the ordinary populace and of chiefs adopting Islam as part of the process of alliance building with the Mughals and the chiefs of Baltistan, who had become Muslim earlier. An example of the former, is that of the *Cho* (chief) of Pashkyum near Kargil, which was the main stopping place on the road in those days. When the British adventurers Moorcroft and Trebeck visited him in 1821 he had recently converted to Islam, although his wife remained a Buddhist; but the

ordinary people of Pashkyum were already Muslims, (Moorcroft & Trebeck 1837 Vol II:22). However, the chiefships of Chigtan and Kartse are both said to have converted as a result of political alliances with the chiefs of Skardu (Rizvi 1983:48).

Popular tradition in Suru, and the oral history recorded by Hashmatullah Khan, relate that the conversion to Islam started during the rule of Thi Namgyal, who was the father of the last independent ruler of Suru-Kartse. He is said to have married Thi Lha Khatun, the daughter of the Muslim chief of Skardu, the main power in Baltistan. She brought Muslim scholars and preachers to Suru, who converted the population of the valley (Khan 1939:698).<sup>1</sup> Their son, Thi Sultan was a Muslim, taught by a scholar called Mir Hashm. His *astana* (tomb), still exists near the ruins of the castle of this dynasty at Karpo Khar, between Sangra and Sankhoo, and is an important pilgrimage place. Thi Namgyal is said to have had no legitimate heirs, so he bequeathed his chiefdom to the ruler of Purig (Khan 1939:698-702).

This story is partly mythological, since it is likely that the title Thi (from *khrid* meaning 'throne' in Ladakhi) was a dynastic rather than an individual title. However, there are references to Thi Sultan of Kartse and the Sultan of Chigtan feuding in the mid-16th century (Cunningham 1854:24, Matoo 1988:24). Another Thi Sultan of Kartse is mentioned in the Ladakhi Chronicles as having controlled much of Purig until the early 17th century when he was defeated and captured by the Ladakhi ruler (Francke 1926:98, Francke 1914:181-2 & 274). It is likely that this was the real end of the dynasty as it is not mentioned again in any documents.

By the turn of this century, Francke reported that Baltistan was largely Shi'ite and the majority of people in the Purig area were Muslim and Islam was still spreading rapidly eastwards in Ladakh (Francke 1929). At that time, most Muslims in Purig were Shi'ahs or Noorbakhshi, a Sufi variant of Shi'ism, rather than a completely different sect (Matoo 1988:133 & 162). The Noorbakhshi Order was started in the 15th century by the preacher called Noorbakhsh 'gift of light'. He was a Sufi follower of the teachings of Sayyid Mahmud Hamadani (who is accredited with bringing Islam to Baltistan and Purig). Noorbakhsh declared himself to be the Imam Mehdi (Twelfth or "Hidden" Imam) and tried unsuccessfully to overthrow the Caliphate in Persia. His

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<sup>1</sup> She is also said to have built a *masjid* at Kartse Khar, the site of their other castle, which was burnt by the Dogras during their invasion in the 1830s (Khan 1939:697),

followers became Shi'ahs in Safawid times and his disciple Shams Ud-din Iraqi propagated his teachings in Kashmir (Glassé 1991:304, Rovillé 1990:117ff). The Noorbakhshi Order was banned by the Dogras who deported some of its members from Baltistan to Kishtwar after their conquest of Ladakh in the 1830s (Rovillé 1990:118). Many people in Purig, including Suru-Kartse, were Noorbakhshi until recently (Francke 1914 Vol I:185). Now there are only adherents in a few villages in Kargil *tehsil* (Zutshi 1961) and some in the Nubra valley north of Leh (Srinivas 1995), but there are still many in parts of Baltistan (Sagaster 1997:414).

During the centuries when the people of Purig apparently converted, Islam was associated with power in the region. For example, from the 16th to the 18th century, the Mughals were in power in India and Kashmir and at times had a loose control over Baltistan and Ladakh. During that time the Shi'ite Safawids ruled Iran and were closely linked with the Silk Route on which both Baltistan and Ladakh were sub-routes (Momen 1985:309, Yurur 1993:vii). The 18th and 19th centuries saw the Shi'ite Qajjar dynasty in Iran, and the kingdom of Oudh in Northern India, which had its capital at Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh (Momen 1985:309, Cole 1988). However, by the 19th century, Muslim power was waning in India, and Suru had been politically unimportant for two centuries.

The Suru-Kartse area had apparently come under Purig, when a Thi Sultan was defeated by the Ladakhi king in the 17th century (see above). At that time Purig was under the control of the King of Ladakh's younger brother. However in 1758, Purig was permanently incorporated into the Ladakh kingdom, and henceforth, the Suru valley was administered by *kharpons* (regional administrators) who were all Buddhists from the Leh area (Khan 1939:700). In the 1820s Moorcroft and Trebeck reported that the valley was under a Buddhist governor who had a house at Tambis in the lower Suru valley (Moorcroft & Trebeck 1837 Vol II:27-9).<sup>2</sup> At the time of the Dogra conquests in the 1830s, Suru-Kartse was still administered by a Buddhist *kharpon* from the Leh area (Francke 1914:274).<sup>3</sup> When the Workmans came to climb Nun Kun just after the beginning of this century, the *chag-dzot* (bursar) of

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<sup>2</sup> They report that he was the brother of the *chag-dzot* (bursar) of Hemis *gonpa* near Leh.

<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of this century there was still one Buddhist household at Tambis (Clarke 1901).

Rangdum Monastery (between Suru and Zanskar) was the Zeldar (Block Administrator) of Suru (Workman & Workman 1909:29).

The last Zeldar of Suru was a Muslim man from Namsuru, whom I met in 1981. Some Muslims seem to have had administrative jobs in Suru prior to Independence, but most of them came from outside Ladakh (see Chapter 5). Despite the lack of power of local Muslims during this period, Islam itself was clearly flourishing in the area, as Moorcroft and Trebeck's account of the Suru valley from their visit in 1821 suggests:

*"In each of these (villages) was an akhund, or village school-master, and one or two individuals who could speak Persian or Hindustani. Every village had its mosque, and not a single Lama's house, or sculptured pile made its appearance. Islamism is evidently making rapid strides, and there is every reason to expect that before long Ladakh will be entirely a Mohammedan state."* (Moorcroft & Trebeck 1837 Vol II:27-8).<sup>4</sup>

There seems to have been a new influx of Shi'ite preachers in the Suru valley in the earlier part of the 20th century, when both the *yokma* and *goma aghas'* lineages were established in Taisuru. However, there is little information about this period in Kargil *tehsil* in general.

In recent decades there has been an increasing emphasis on more 'orthodox' practice among Shi'ite clerics. For example, the playing of musical instruments at events such as weddings and other celebrations apparently ended some decades ago among Shi'ites in Kargil *tehsil*, as clerics said that it was un-Islamic and therefore a sin (*nyespa*). Rizvi says that musicians called Doms existed in Kargil until recently, and they played at weddings and other ceremonies, but that they had ceased to exist by the 1970s (Rizvi 1981:228). Also polo, which is a traditional game in this area, is no longer played in many villages and most Muslims in the *tehsil* no longer drink alcohol. People in Kargil said that the banning of practices that were considered not to be Islamic increased enormously after all foreign Shi'ite clerics were thrown out of Iraq in 1974, which meant that suddenly there were more clerics in Kargil area.<sup>5</sup> In the last few years there has been an effort to stop people dancing and singing (except for religious songs called *khasidas*) at weddings. The *yokma*

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<sup>4</sup> The *Akhunds* that he refers to are what are now called *akhuns*.

<sup>5</sup> Agha Miggi Ort, who was thrown out at th's time, says that there were about two hundred Kargil's studying there.

*aghas* were trying to enforce this at weddings in Suru in the 1990s, not entirely successfully.

There has also apparently been an increase in contact between Shi'ahs in Kargil and the Shi'ite centres in Iran and Iraq, particularly in the numbers of men who go and study in Shi'ite *madrastas* (colleges) in the Middle East. Rizvi observed this phenomenon in the late 1970s, attributing it to increased money-earning opportunities that had arisen since 1947 (Rizvi 1981:227-8, Rizvi 1993:93). Earlier generations of clerics in Suru rarely went to study in the Middle East, although some went to Baltistan, whereas in the current and previous generation, all the leading *aghas* and a number of *shaikhs*, studied in Iraq or Iran.

In the last twenty-five years, there has also been a flourishing of religious architecture in Kargil *tehsil*. In Suru this seems to have started with the building of the *yokma-pa masjid* in Taisuru in 1975, followed by the *goma-pa imam-barah*. There are now a number of large religious buildings and *astanas* in the Suru valley, as well as Kargil itself and other parts of the *tehsil*. They are built in a style that has emerged in the last twenty years, and are much larger and more impressive than those that existed in the past; they are also stylistically similar to the 'modern' style concrete houses that are found in Panikhar. Prior to this phase of building, there were small *masjids* in every village. There is now a general more self-conscious display of the presence of Islam in Kargil *tehsil*, that is also evident in other areas of daily life.

### **(iii) The History of the *Yokma* Faction**

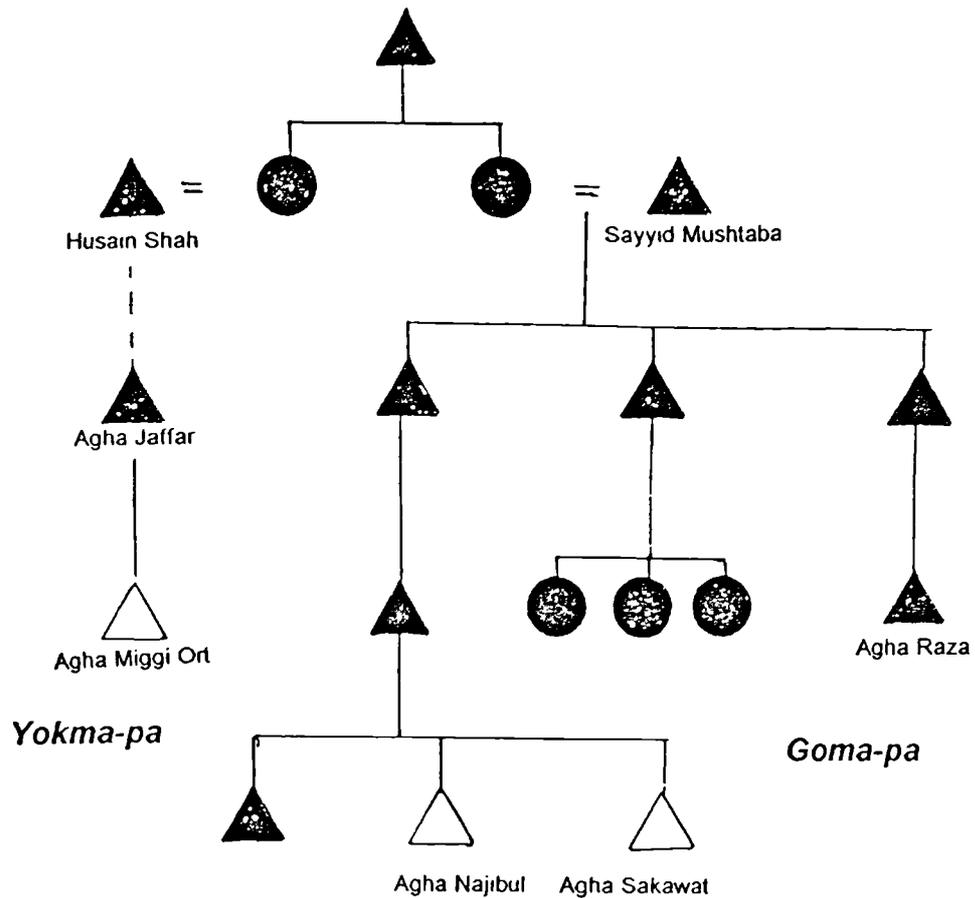
There were *sayyid* lineages in the Suru valley before the current century. However, some of the ancestors of the leading *aghas'* lineages and other clerics seem to have arrived in this century from Baltistan and Kashmir. Certainly the leading lineages of both the *yokma* and *goma-pas* both settled in Taisuru in the early part of this century.

The *yokma aghas* have the name Rizvi and claim descent from Imam Rizvi Hazrat the 8th Imam whose *astana* is in Mashed in Iran.<sup>6</sup> Agha Miggi Ort's father, Agha

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<sup>6</sup> That of his sister Fatima is an important pilgrimage site in Qum in Iran.

Jaffar, recorded that they had come to the area from Iran nine generations (*khul-po*) ago. However, they initially settled in Langkartse and only came to Taisuru in 1916.



**Figure 3.1 - The relationship between the yokma and goma agha's lineages in Taisuru**

According to the records (*daftar*) of the *goma* faction, both their and Agha Miggi Ort's lineages are descended from two sisters of a lineage of *sayyids* who were religious leaders in Taisuru in the past. The two sisters had no brothers, so one was married to Sayyid Mushtaba who was the great-grandfather of the present leader of the *goma-pa*. Her sister married Husain Shah, the son of Sayyid Mehdi Rizvi who was from the *aghas'* lineage in Langkartse, who then became the *rehbar* in Taisuru. However, he had no sons, so he adopted Agha Jaffar who was apparently the son of his youngest brother, Qasim Shah.<sup>7</sup> Their middle brother stayed in Langkartse, and

<sup>7</sup> Both of their *astanas* are in the *qabristan* in Taisuru.

his descendants include Agha Hyder and Archo Nargis, Agha Miggi Ort's wife. The accounts I received about this line of descent were rather confused, as the lack of a direct line in the *yokma-pa rehbar* was a matter of some embarrassment to the current leadership; nevertheless, the same line of inheritance is recorded in the *patwari's* land records in the Tehsildar's office in Kargil.

Agha Miggi Ort's *daftar* contains the agreement made in Taisuru in Hejira 1335, which is 1916 AD, between his family and the local people, in which the latter agree to perform certain duties for the former in perpetuity. They also have at least 80 *kanals* of land in Taisuru that dates from that time.<sup>8</sup>

Agha Baqir's branch of the lineage came to Taisuru from Langkartse more recently. Agha Hyder's father Agha Sayyid Ali was encouraged to settle in Taisuru by Agha Jaffar who was his brother-in-law as well as being his paternal cousin. Agha Miggi Ort said that his father gave Agha Sayyid Ali land in the village. He retained a house in Langkartse, as well as one in Taisuru. After his father's death Agha Hyder was invited to settle in Sankhoo, which eventually became his main residence.

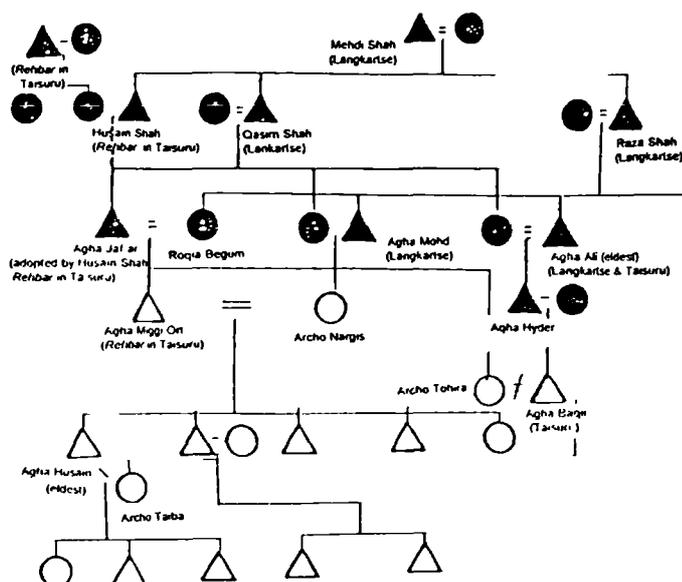
In his day, Agha Jaffar was the *rehbar* for the *yokma-pa*, and Agha Hyder, who was his sister's son, spent much of his youth studying with him. Subsequently Agha Hyder went to a Shi'ite *madrassa* in Iraq for twelve years, and Agha Jaffar died in 1957 while he was still in Iraq. Agha Jaffar had chosen Agha Hyder as his successor, as Agha Miggi Ort was still a child. So, Agha Hyder became the *rehbar* of the *yokma* faction until his death in 1988. Agha Miggi Ort was always intended to be the *rehbar* after Agha Hyder and studied with him in his youth.

Agha Hyder was his *azhang* (he is his mother's brother's son) and Agha Jaffar was Agha Hyder's *azhang* as well. Several people mentioned this relationship therefore, in religious succession, mother's brother/sister's son relationships appear to be important, but do not override the primary importance of direct patrilineal descent. Agha Miggi Ort went to study in Najaf in Iraq for seven years until he was thrown out by the Iraqi government in 1974. From Agha Jaffar's death in 1957, Agha Hyder had made Taisuru his main base, but after 1974 he settled permanently at Sankhoo. On his death in 1988, Agha Miggi Ort, his designated successor, became the

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<sup>8</sup> Agha Miggi Ort's family currently have 80 *kanals* in Taisuru according to the land records.

*rehbar*. Several people said that Agha Miggi Ort was the real successor of his father, and that Agha Hyder had only inherited the leadership because Agha Miggi Ort was so young when his father died.



**Figure 3.2 - The Yokma-pa lineage showing the rehbars and relationship between them**

Ordinary *yokma-pa* members in Panikhar said that both of these lines of *aghas* had been “*nyuse kyongs*” which means ‘bought’ by the land and privileges. Some people said that religious practitioners had been invited to settle there because the people had been Buddhists before and wanted to learn Islam, although in fact they may have been Muslims for several centuries at that time.

The internal organisation of the *yokma-pa* seems to have remained relatively unchanged in the last few decades. However, the faction apparently had become much larger and more united during Agha Hyder’s time. I was told that Agha Miggi Ort inherited a following that was about sixteen thousand strong in both Blocks. One factor in the increase in the *yokma-pa* in Agha Hyder’s day was his leadership of the millenarian movement.

#### **(iv) Millenarism and the Yokma-pa**

I originally heard about the millenarian movement in 1981/2, when I first visited Suru, as it was still very active at that time. When I returned there in 1993 it was not spontaneously discussed in Suru. However, various people in Leh and Kargil,

mentioned Agha Hyder and his millenarian beliefs to me, often in order to make a joke about him and to ridicule the Suru people and Shi'ahs more generally. I also suspect that this is one of the reasons why people like the *yokma-pa* leaders do not refer to the millenarian beliefs so openly now. Consequently I initially felt reticent about writing about the millenarian period in any detail, since I felt that I would be exposing people to further ridicule. However, I came to realise that the whole episode and the reaction to it, especially among people involved in the administration, is critical to an understanding of the current politics of the *yokma-pa*.

Apparently Agha Hyder started his millenarian preaching in 1962, shortly after his return from studying in Iraq. He said that the Imam Mahdi, the Twelfth or "Hidden" Imam was going to re-appear soon, an event which presages the Day of Judgement and the end of the world. His followers used to gather, particularly after Friday prayers, weep and repeatedly exhort the Imam Mahdi to come. I never attended one of these ceremonies, but apparently they used a *tazbi* which is like a rosary of beads made from earth from the battlefield of Karbala in Iraq. In 1981, I was told that they counted through the beads, repeatedly chanting: "*May the Imam Mahdi come.*"

At one point, Agha Hyder set an actual date for the Imam Mahdi's coming and some of his supporters reputedly stopped tilling their fields. The authorities then intervened, and police were sent to quell the movement. I was told that a policeman from Leh said to the *yokma-pa* that one of the signs of the coming of the Imam Mahdi, was that if you fired a gun nothing would happen. He says that he fired his gun and people heard the sound and knew that the Imam Mahdi was not coming. This story is most interesting, firstly because it casts the people of Suru as being completely irrational in comparison to the rational man from the government administration (and Leh); secondly, despite being told as a joke, the reference to a gun indicates the power of the administration and the threat of force. In fact, force was used as Agha Hyder himself was apparently arrested and some of his supporters were beaten.

I do not know exactly when this incident occurred as most of the accounts that I received of this period were in the form of stories that are told about it by people from outside the area. However, I believe that it was in the 1960s. I have also been told that people believed that Hajj Abdullah Far, the leader of the Sunnis in the Suru

valley, was connected with the coming of the Imam Mahdi. He was from one of the leading Sunni families in Panikhar, but he had gone as a *mag-pa* to a Sunni family in Sankhoo that had large amounts of land. I have heard that in those days, people used to touch his clothes to obtain a blessing. On one occasion a cap that fell near him was believed to have fallen from the head of the Imam Mahdi. Again this last story was told as a joke.

Agha Hyder continued his millenarian preaching through the 1970s, and he was still saying that the Imam Mahdi would come soon. The following is an extract from his *matam* speech in 1974, that I quoted in the previous chapter:

*“Oh poor ones, oh people who are waiting for the Imam. The best prayer is to wait for the Imam whether it is day or night. So wait for him. Who knows whether he will come out of hiding in the day or night, morning or evening. Everyone who is the well-wisher and follower of the Imam is waiting for him to come out of hiding.”<sup>9</sup>*

In the early 1980s, when I visited Suru for a few weeks with another English woman, we were invited to both Agha Hyder's house in Sankhoo and Agha Baqir's in Taisuru. We were struck by their great interest in Christian mythology, especially in details of what happened to Jesus Christ when he was crucified. Subsequently, Hajji Abdullah Far's grandson, Dr. Nazir, told about the millenarian movement. He explained to us that part of the millenarian belief in Suru was that Jesus Christ was also about to appear.

In Shi'ite mythology Jesus Christ did not die on the cross, but was taken by the Angel Jibril (Gabriel) to Heaven, where he sits in the fourth level, whereas the Imam Mahdi is in the seventh. In Kashmir there is a widely held belief that Jesus Christ ended his days and is buried there (Kashmiri 1973:1, Robinson 1988:13).<sup>10</sup> After the coming of the Imam Mahdi and his period of rule on earth, Jesus Christ will descend to earth and will fight and kill the *dajjal* (Anti-Christ). These events will presage the Day of Judgement and the end of the world (Glassé 1991:246-7). We were also told that it was commonly believed that foreign climbers who had been coming to Nun Kun - the twin peaks at the head of the Suru valley - were looking for

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<sup>9</sup> This is from the *matam* speech delivered on the death day of Hazrat Zahra (Fatima the daughter of the Prophet Mohammed and wife of Ali), in Taisuru in 1974.

<sup>10</sup> Bray has reported that there is a belief that Jesus Christ visited Hemis monastery near Leh (John Bray - personal communication).

Jesus Christ who was said to be at the top of one of the mountains. Those who died on the mountains, a not uncommon occurrence, were thought to have reached him because they were pure in heart.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, single foreign women like ourselves, who were far too old to be unmarried by local standards, were thought to be saving ourselves to be brides of Christ when he descended.

This information made sense of the fact that we had been repeatedly asked about Nun Kun by people in Suru and there seemed to be a general belief that this was one reason why we had visited. For example, one winter's day, we were walking along the road to Parkachik, in a light blizzard, when an old man we met on the road exhorted us not to go up Nun Kun. Beliefs in this area about mountain spirits and fairies provide a fuller background. For example, Munshi Khaled, the brother of Hajji Abdullah Far, vanished without trace one night more than thirty years ago, and some people believe that he was taken by mountain fairies (*pari*). Therefore there were pre-existing beliefs about deities in the mountains. When the Workmans came to the Suru valley to climb Nun Kun, just after the turn of this century, their porters prayed to the mountain spirits (*sic*) when they got near to one of the peaks. People in the villages below said they had seen lights on Nun Kun when they were on the mountains (Workman & Workman 1909:68). Even now people often told me that you can sometimes see lights on the top of Nun Kun and I was often asked why foreigners climbed them.

We were frequently told about two unmarried foreign women who had visited previously and this is often mentioned to this day. As far as I can ascertain, they came as missionaries to the area in the early 1960s and stayed in Sankhoo, where Agha Baqir says they knew his father well. My understanding is that Agha Hyder himself did hint at connections between many of these different elements rather than explicitly saying what they were. This ability to hint at hidden (*batin*) truths is seen as part of the *aghas'* power (see Chapter 2). For example, in one of his *matam* speeches Agha Hyder refers to the belief of the coming of the Imam Mahdi in the following way:

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<sup>11</sup> A few years ago a foreign climber who had been to the top of one of the mountains told me that there is a Christian cross on the summit.

*“Remember, you should not forget what is in your hearts. [i.e. do not forget the Imam Mahdi and that he will come soon] Do not forget what you have seen and what your have in your hearts.”<sup>12</sup>*

By the time that I returned to the Suru valley to do the fieldwork for this thesis in 1993, the millenarism was muted. However, people still believe that the Imam Mahdi will come soon, as do most Shi'ahs in Kargil *tehsil* now. In one of the *matam* speeches that was made on the 13th Muharram in 1994, the speaker, an elderly *akhun* refers to the millenarian beliefs and quotes Agha Hyder, saying that people should follow his example and pray for the Imam Mahdi to come. However, *yokma-pa* people did not mention the millenarian beliefs or the events of the past spontaneously, probably because they have been ridiculed over them.

The millenarian preaching may well be connected with Noorbakhshi beliefs which seem to have been widespread in the area until very recently. There are a number of reports of a previous Mahdist episode in Purig in 1884 (Francke 1926:145, Shaw 1894:17). Certainly there appears to be some connection between Agha Miggi Ort's epithet containing the word 'lamp' and the fact that Noor means the same. However, no-one in Suru made that link to me.

However, the main elements in the millenarian preaching are found in mainstream Shi'ite *Hadiths* (books of the interpretation of Islam), from which the *aghas* prepare *matam* speeches (Glassé 1991:26). As Richard says, millenarian beliefs are part of Shi'ite philosophy: *“The millenarist anticipation of the Imam's reappearance makes Shi'ism a doctrine turned, far more than Sunnism, towards meta-history, towards an idealistic anticipation of the End of Time.”* (Richard 1995:48). Cole describes a Shi'ite millenarian episode in Oudh (the Shi'ite kingdom in Northern India) in 1844, in which Jesus Christ figured prominently. He says that this was in response to a feeling that Christianity was taking over, as the British were conquering India at the time (Cole 1988:100-101).

The millenarian movement arose in a very difficult period for Suru and the rest of the region. Partition had been extremely traumatic in this area and left Shi'ahs in Kargil *tehsil* cut off from Baltistan which had been the local centre for Shi'ism. In the last two decades the economy of Ladakh had been badly affected by the closing of the

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<sup>12</sup> This s from the *matam* speech delivered on the death day of Hazrat Zahra (Fatima the daughter of the Prophet Mohammed and wife of Ali), in Ta'suru in 1972.

borders and the end of trade. In addition, Suru and other neighbouring areas, such as Zanskar, had experienced a serious famine in 1957, when snow fell in June and destroyed the entire year's crops. Older people frequently referred to this and said that no one had actually died, but they had only survived by eating all their livestock, and even the soles of their shoes. The lack of government help was a particular source of bitterness. Someone also said that at that time, the *yokma-pa aghas* used to lead prayers to try and change the weather.

I do not know what the motivation was for the millenarian episode. However, the people of Suru had clearly experienced quite extreme disjuncture in the last two decades, and had been left cut off from their main outside connections. The millenarian doctrine may have provided a means of creating an intense form of identity and thus making sense of, and taking control over, a world which was clearly out of their control. In the 1980s, the rise to power of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran was seen by some people as being a possible sign that the end of the world might be near. People in Suru also said that it was possible that the Shah had been the *dajjal* (Anti-Christ). The *yokma-pa* became enthusiastic followers of Ayatollah Khomeini, as did many Shi'ahs in Kargil *tehsil*, and to this day most *yokma-pa* have a picture of him in their houses.

At the height of the millenarian movement, a strong rivalry emerged between Agha Hyder and Agha Raza, who was the leader of the *goma-pa* at that time. This may have exacerbated a pre-existing competition between the two factions and resulted in a major rift between them.

#### **(v) The *Goma-pa* and the Dispute with the *Yokma-pa***

I found it very difficult to find out when the *yokma-goma* split had started. Agha Miggi Ort said that the height of the fighting between them had been forty years ago, in his father's time; but other people said that there had not been any antagonism before Agha Hyder and Agha Raza's time. However, it would appear that some kind of divide seems to have existed between them for decades since they have not intermarried. The first *goma-pa astanas* are in what is now the *yokma-pa* graveyard, but they have had a separate graveyard for at least fifty years.

Nevertheless, at least part of the current antagonism between the *yokma* and *goma* factions dates from the 1960s, when Agha Raza, was the leader of the *goma-pa*.

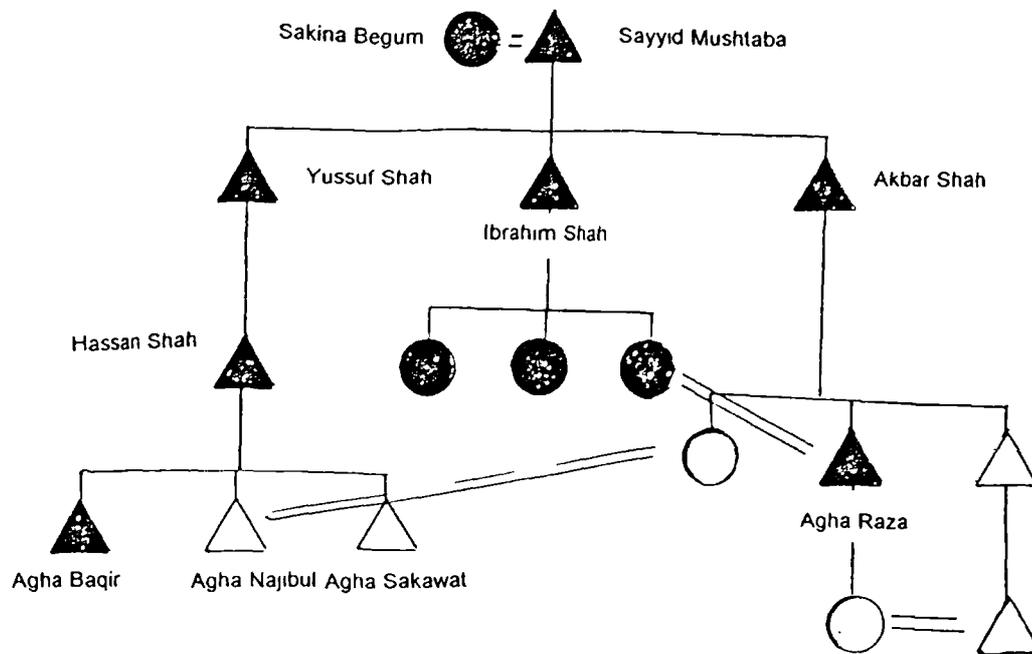
He strongly opposed Agha Hyder's millenarian preaching and, with some clerics from Kargil, he wrote to a *mujtahid* in Iraq asking him to say that it was not doctrinally correct. They also apparently asked the authorities to intervene to stop the movement, which occurred with some force, as I have mentioned. Hence there was animosity between the two factions, sometimes leading to fighting, and they would not even enter each other's houses. Although this mutual antagonism has greatly lessened recently, it was still an issue in 1993 in Suru.

The *goma* faction also has its main base in Taisuru. That is the site of their *imam-barah*, as well as being the home of Agha Najibul the current leader of the faction, and his younger brother Agha Sakawat. They are from the core lineage of *sayyids* which consists of the descendants in the male line from an ancestor three generations ago. According to the *goma-pa daftar*, their great grandfather, Sayyid Mushtaba, came from Pakistan (where he is buried) and married the *sayyid* woman from Taisuru, whose sister married Agha Miggi Ort's male ancestor. His descendants inherited his wife's land and settled in Taisuru. He is said to have been the descendant of an Iranian monarch, who had Safwi as his family name, which indicates that he was a Safawid - who were the first Shi'ite dynasty in Iran (Momen 1985:105).

There are now three households in this lineage, one in Taisuru and two in the nearby hamlet of Shaksthang, about two miles from Taisuru, where Agha Raza lived. He had no sons, so Agha Najibul, his great nephew in the male line and brother-in-law became the *rehbar* on his death.<sup>13</sup> Agha Najibul had been prepared to be the next important *agha*, as he studied in Iraq for eighteen years. His younger brother, Agha Sakawat, practises as a *hakim* or medical practitioner, mainly, but not exclusively, following the Yunnani tradition. He is the most popular non-allopathic practitioner in the area, and receives several patients every day. He learned this skill from one of his uncles, and it has been passed down in the family for several generations.

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<sup>13</sup> Agha Najibul is married to Agha Raza's sister.



**Figure 3.3 - The patrilineage of the goma-pa aghas**

The structure of the *goma* faction is similar to that of the *yokma* since they have a *daftar* with a list of their representatives in each village where they have followers. They claim to have followers all over the Kargil area, but this is because they are affiliated to the Islamiya School Shi'ite faction in Kargil and so have allies/supporters rather than their *daftar* in those villages. Their effective *daftar* is in the villages from Parkachik down to Sangra, from which they receive *khums* and *milaks* from their supporters. Agha Najibul's branch of the lineage have land in Taisuru, Kargee and Parkachik; whereas Agha Raza's branch have most of theirs in Shaksthang and Namsuru.

The rift that occurred over the millenarian episode was also the time when Agha Hyder's following was growing, presumably at the expense of Agha Raza's.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the two factions established separate places of congregation in Taisuru, and stopped all unnecessary social interaction with each other. In particular, they stopped marrying each other and I only know of one marriage between the two factions in the recent past. In the 1960s, they did not even enter each other's

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<sup>14</sup> They apparently made up the majority of the population of 16,000 odd in Suru and Sankhoo Blocks combined, although only half of the 6,000 in Suru Block.

houses as a general rule. In Agha Hyder's *matam* speech that I have already quoted, he seems to suggest such an action, when he says:

*"Do not put your foot wherever you like. And do not greet everybody. You should not go to a place where there are enemies of God, or the Imam. Do not go to the door of an enemy of God or the Imam."*

Nevertheless, this antagonism does not seem to have extended to every aspect of people's lives, especially their farming activities. I was told that villagers still co-operated for collective work such as the *bares* and *rars* and that between neighbours and relatives (called *laktsiks*). Also, the more hostile politics between the factions are only really present on a day to day basis in the upper part of the Suru valley and particularly in Suru Block.

Dr. Jaffar tells me that in the early 1970s, his father, an important *yokma-pa akhun* encouraged mutual visiting again. By the early 1990s ordinary members of the two factions were interacting, but those from the leading lineages in Taisuru still did not usually speak to each other. There is a good deal of antagonism between the factions over the allocation of government resources. For example, there are a number of schemes that involve the distribution of grants to villagers, which often lead to disputes. It was also quite common for people to make derogatory remarks about the members of the other faction, particularly about their piety.

This hostility is linked to Shi'ite history and beliefs concerning the enemies of the Imam. The Umayyad Caliphs, who gained the leadership of the Muslim people shortly after the death of the Prophet Mohammed and killed Imam Husain at the battle of Karbala, were Sunnis. So Sunnis are usually regarded by Shi'ahs as being the enemy in this respect rather than other Shi'ahs (Pinault 1992:157). In Suru, there does not appear to have been any hostility between Shi'ahs and Sunnis in the past. On the contrary, the *yokma* faction and Sunnis were close during the millenarian period and many Sunnis seem to have believed in Agha Hyder's preaching. I understand that there were also good relations between the *goma-pa* and the Sunnis, as there are today.

The factions seem to have directed this hostility at each other. They sometimes speak of each other as being enemies of the true faith. For instance, in one of Agha Hyder's *matam* speeches, he obliquely suggested that the *goma-pa* would be excluded from salvation on the day of judgement, because they opposed the supporters of Imam Husain. God will say to them:

*“I know you were not present on the battlefield when Imam Husain was murdered, but you have harmed his followers.” [Then God orders these people to be taken to Hell, and addresses the others.] “Oh well-wishers of Imam Husain, do not do such works that will hurt the followers of Imam Husain. Anybody who has done any harm to a well-wisher of Imam Husain, has done direct harm to the Imam himself.”*

As well as mutually avoiding each other, there have also been incidents of fighting between faction members, particularly during the processions (*juloos*) on the 10th and 13th days of Muharram. The 10th Muharram, known as Ashura, commemorates the actual day of the Battle of Karbala and is the climax of the Muharram observances for all Shi'ahs. The 13th commemorates the day when Imam Husain was finally buried. These two days are the main focus of the ritual year for Shi'ahs in Suru. Despite being extremely upsetting, they are also eagerly anticipated. For example, young boys used to play games of Muharram *juloos* for weeks before and after. Their games usually started with them all beating their breasts, then one of them would fall to the ground as if overcome and the others would come and pick them up and rush them to an imaginary medical aid post.

In 1993, I witnessed the processions in Kargil, as we had just arrived on the 9th Muharram. I had avoided processions in Leh previously thinking that they would be frightening with all the blood. I was immediately disabused of that view and found the chanting beautiful and moving, despite the fairly violent beating and bloodletting that took place that year. In 1994, Ayatollah Khamenei, the appointed successor of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, issued an instruction (*fatwa*), saying that there should no longer be any bloodletting, because of the risk of infection. This was followed in both Kargil and Taisuru, but apparently not in Sankhoo, where people chose to continue as before, since they are not obliged to obey one particular guide.

In 1994 I attended the Muharram observances in Suru Block. During the earlier part of the month, there are a number of *matams* in the *masjid* at Taisuru and *majlis* (Farsi: gatherings) in individual villages, at which people recite *marsiyas* (Farsi: mourning dirges), and chant *nohas*. These are repeated refrains, usually in Urdu, that lament the deaths at Karbala and the sufferings of other members of the family such as Zenab, Imam Husain's wife. On the night of 9th Ashura, the *yokma-pa* of Taisuru, Panikhar and Prantee, held such a gathering at Moqdam Mehdi's house in Panikhar in the late evening. This was attended by about a hundred people from the three villages, particularly young women and men. Agha Miggi Ort and Archo Nargis were not there but all the younger members of their household were. We were in

their large guest room, with the men sitting in the middle with a microphone and speakers, and the women crouched around the edges. The young *aghas* led the recitations and chanting, at which they are extremely skilled.

The atmosphere was subdued and there was little display of emotion, but some men gently beat their breasts. At the end of the ceremony, the women left the house, and we were given bread and meat as *tobarok*, while the men stayed inside and had tea. When they emerged, they unfurled banners, which have village names or curses against Yazd - the leader of the Ummayyads at Karbala, and other enemies of Imam Husain written on them and, sometimes, drawings of Imam Husain's horse Zuljena.<sup>15</sup> Some of them have the hand called *Panja* (Farsi: *panj tan*) at the top, which represents the five pure souls of Islam, the Prophet Mohammed, his daughter Fatima (Zahra), and Imams Ali, Husain and Hassan (Fischer and Abedi 1990:519).

The whole group formed a procession (Farsi: *dasteh*, Urdu: *juloos*<sup>16</sup>) that started to move down the road towards Taisuru. Each village formed its own section, with a banner and burning torches, as well as a microphone and loudspeaker, and chanted a different *noha* as they walked. The men and older boys formed the centre of the procession, and women and girls came mainly at the end. The men beat their breasts (*branga dungcha*) in time to the rhythmic *nohas* as they walked, and some women pat their chests, and occasionally cry out the name of Imam Husain. Every so often the procession halts for a period of more intensive chanting and beating. The men of each village usually form a circle and beat their chests much harder, reaching a crescendo, before they stop and start processing again. As we got nearer Taisuru, some of the men were overcome with emotion (*behosh*) and had to be restrained and looked after by their companions. When the procession reached Taisuru, many people had come out to watch, both *yokma-pa* and *goma-pa*, and the men were gently beating their chests in sympathy. The *goma-pa* accompanied the procession up to the *yokma-pa masjid*, which was already full of old men who were sitting on the floor with their heads in their hands, in gestures of despair. The *minbar* was covered in a black cloth and Agha Miggi Ort was present but not

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<sup>15</sup> In Kargil I have also seen curses against Salman Rushdie, and people chanting anti-American slogans.

<sup>16</sup> Momen says that the terms used for the elements in Muharram are different in India than in Iran (Momen 1985:242-3).

wearing his clerical garb or taking any particular part in the proceedings. Then there was a very short speech by an *akhun*, who stood at the bottom of the *minbar*, before everyone went home. Some people would stay up all night and women in particular often eat nothing until after the observances on Ashura day.

The benign way in which some *goma-pa* had greeted us in Taisuru, was apparently unusual and a sign of a short-lived truce which had started the previous year, when they had fought as usual on Ashura day. However, that day there was a bomb during a Muharram procession in Iran, which left many people dead and was extremely shocking to all Shi'ahs. Unusually, on 13th Ashura the *yokma-pa* had a procession. Agha Miggi Ort related that when the processions met, he said to everyone, "Look, we should not be divided in the light of this terrible tragedy that affects us all." So the two parties processed together to Taisuru. In 1994, the two factions had become even closer, after some events that I will describe in Chapter 5.

Ashura is the day that the battle of Karbala took place and the Imam Husain and most of his male relatives were killed. In Suru, in both factions, every village has its own section, banners and loudspeaker in the procession. Clerics do not seem to take part in the *juloos* itself,<sup>17</sup> nor do many elderly men; but all the younger men who are prominent in the faction played an important role in their village section. The three younger sons of Agha Miggi Ort formed the core of the Taisuru group. Most men go bareheaded and some of them were wearing a black headband and women wear black or dark coloured clothes as they do for the whole month. Women of all ages walk both behind and alongside the men.

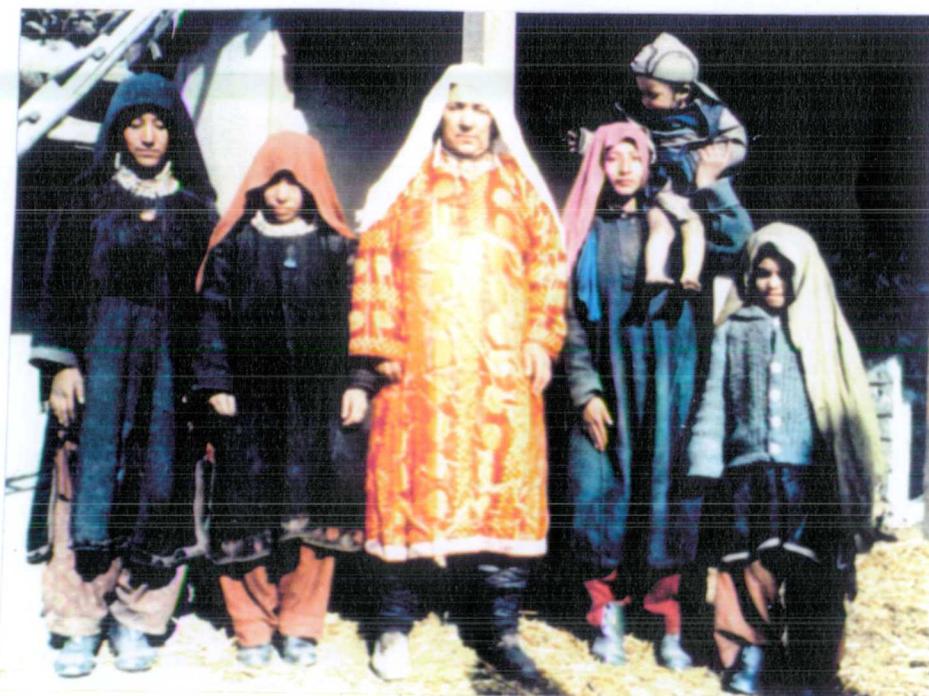
All the workers from the Medical Department were on duty, including the doctor, who had the Hospital jeep; and there were field hospitals at the roadside in Taisuru, as well as in the village itself. Two bus-loads of police had come from Kargil, as well as the five or six men from the Taisuru Police Post (*chowki*). The main part of the *yokma-pa* procession started in Panikhar bazaar; whereas the *goma-pa*'s came from below Taisuru. The procession halted on the way for a *matam* speech, which was given by a non-clerical young man, who gives a particularly vivid account of the battle of Karbala.

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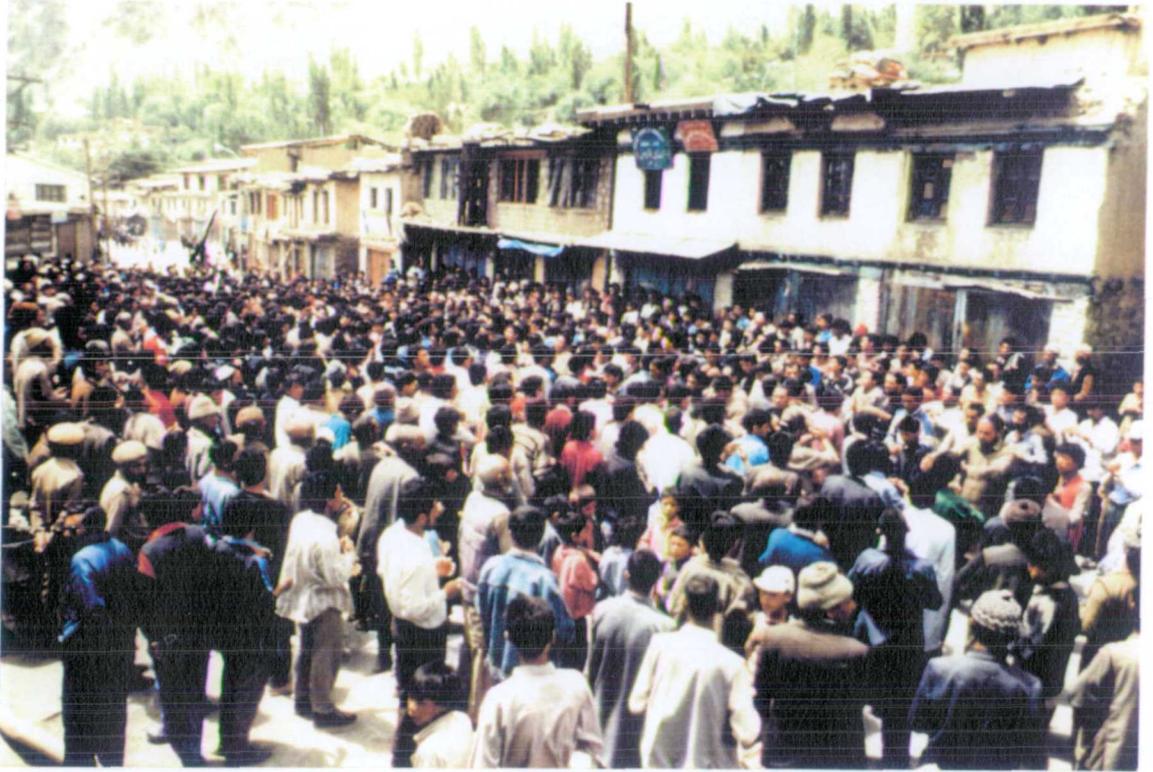
<sup>17</sup> In Iran it is unusual for clerics to join in the processions, as they are said to disapprove of them (Richard 1995:101).



*Picture 3.1 - Agha Hyder and Agha Ahmed, his youngest son, in 1981*



*Picture 3.2 - Api Cho-Cho, one of Agha Hyder's wives and other household members in 1981*



*Picture 3.3 - Procession in Kargil on the 10th of Muharram 1993*



*Picture 3.4 - The Yokma-pa dasteh in Panikhar on the 10th of Muharram 1994*



*Picture 3.5 - The tazia being carried in the procession Muharram procession*



*Picture 3.6 - Men chanting nohas at the Qatl Gah*



*Picture 3.7 - The Goma-pa procession going to Taisuru*



*Picture 3.8 - Mourners arrive at the yokma-pa masjid*

The two processions met on the road near Taisuru at the *Qatl Gah* (*qatl* means 'slaughter', *gah* means 'place'), and represents the battlefield at Karbala where the Shi'ite martyrs died. Emotions were running very high at this point, and there was a good deal of tension, when the two processions surged together, but nothing happened. At this point, a *yokma-pa* woman, Sakina, described how they fight. She said that the women would gather up rocks and hide them under their *dahons* (head scarves), to conceal them from the police. She made it sound exciting and enjoyable, and my understanding was that she was half looking forward to a good rumpus!

At the *Qatl Gah*, both processions stopped for some time, and sat in separate groups, that formed around the *tazias*, which are representations of the tomb of Imam Husain at Karbala (Momen 1985:242). Each of the groups had a horse with red dye on it that represented Zuljena, Imam Husain's horse at Karbala. The son of Agha Najibul, the *goma-pa* leader, who was visiting from his studies in Iran, made a speech but it was not the occasion for an outpouring of grief. When the two groups rose to continue into Taisuru, Agha Miggi Ort, who was dressed in his ordinary, rather than full clerical garb, managed - with the agreement of the *goma-pa aghas* - to get the two processions to combine for the last part of the walk into Panikhar. The *nohas* and beating became more frenzied and a number of men were completely overcome and had to be taken to one of the field hospitals. At Taisuru, the two processions divided again and went towards their respective places of worship. When they reached the *masjid* each group paused for a final session of intense breast beating before. At one point, a group of young women formed a circle in front of the *masjid* and chanted *nohas* and beat their breasts very hard. In the *yokma-pa masjid*, the *minbar* was covered with a black cloth, but Agha Miggi Ort sat at the top of it. The horse was brought into the *masjid*, and tethered at the bottom of the *minbar*. On the walls there were a number of hangings with pictures of Imam Husain on them. There were a few brief prayers and then the crowd dispersed.

The 13th of Muharram is the day when the burials of Imam Husain and the other martyrs are commemorated. For the second year, the *yokma-pa* broke tradition and had a procession; the *goma-pa* always organise one on this day. Again the *yokma-pa* procession set off from Panikhar, but there was a halt on the way in the meadows next to the river between the two villages. There an *akhun* from Kanoor village in

Sankhoo Block gave a *matam* speech that was particularly touching. He described what happened to Hazrat Zenab, Imam Husain's sister, after the battle of Karbala:

*“After the martyrdom of Imam Husain, his sister, Hazrat Zenab went to look for his body. She picked up lots of bits of earth but she could not smell Imam Husain on them, but on her way back she saw some earth and she smelt it and recognised his smell, then she saw his body. [She was in the Qatl Gah between the tents where the dead bodies were.] When Hazrat Zenab saw the body of Imam Husain she wept there and stayed for some time. Then she said goodbye to his body and returned to the campsite where she saw the enemies had tied up all the womenfolk in a single rope, and were ready to take them as prisoners of war. [All the men had been killed.]*

*Then Umr Sadr, the leader of the Yazdi forces, ordered all the prisoners to be taken. The womenfolk were riding camels, and he told his men to take the prisoners through the Qatl Gah just to show them what they had done and to harass them. [After killing the martyrs they had beheaded all the dead bodies] He wanted them to see with their own eyes the result of not obeying Yazdi's orders. All the prisoners had their hands tied behind their backs so they could not come down from the camels. Hazrat Zenab said to Imam Husain, “I cannot come down and embrace your body, so I am saying goodbye to you from far away.”*

*[Then the speaker addresses Hazrat Zenab.] I am sorry you cannot dismount, as you are tied to the camel and your hands and legs are bound.*

*[Then the speaker addresses the Last Imam.] When will you come to take revenge on the enemies of Imam Husain, who have martyred your grandfather? [Imam Husain was the grandfather of the 12th Imam.] Hazrat Zenab has been parted from her beloved brother and she is plucking her hair out.” [This is customary when your closest relatives have died.]*

This fragment is very typical of *matam* speeches, insofar as it allows us to view the tragedies of the Prophet's family through the sufferings of one of the women. Hazrat Zahra, the Prophet's daughter and the wife of Imam Ali, and Hazrat Zenab, her daughter are both extremely important in the rituals of the *yokma-pa*, and other Shi'ahs in this area.<sup>18</sup>

When we reached the *Qatl Gah*, the *goma-pa* had a blood-spattered bier, which bore the shrouded body of Imam Husain. Women in particular went up to it weeping and touched it, and some of them put earth on their heads, a sign of mourning. When the *yokma-pa* procession reached the *masjid*, Agha Miggi Ort was sitting on the *minbar* which was no longer covered by the black cloth. The men from the

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<sup>18</sup> People said that the other two important women for them are Hazrat Maryam (Mary mother of Jesus), and Hazrat Hawwa (Eve).

procession entered the floor of the *masjid*, village by village, and for some time they continued to loudly chant *nohas* and beat their breasts very intensely. Agha Miggi Ort started to recite some prayers, but for quite a while the crowd of men stayed on their feet and refused to stop chanting *nohas*; eventually they quietened down and he gave a brief *matam* before everyone dispersed.

The observances on the 10th and 13th of Muharram often involves some kind of re-enactment of the events at Karbala. Among many Shi'ites, this takes the form of an actual drama, which in Iran is called a *tazia* (Thaiss 1972, Momen 1985:242). There is no explicit drama in Suru, but I think that there is a dramatic element to the whole occasion. For example, an important part of the observances is that people in the procession are meant to experience thirst, in order to recreate the conditions that Imam Husain and his followers suffered. The attendants who provide cold drinks which they press on the processors, are also able to gain religious merit by being able to help. In 1994, Muharram fell in June, but when it falls in the winter it is apparently the custom in Ladakh to commemorate the events at Karbala a second time in the summer when it is suitably hot (David Pinault - personal communication).

The fighting was like a ritual battle, albeit one that was started spontaneously. As far as I could gather, it was not very violent and never caused any serious injury or death. It seems that it was an opportunity for the members of both factions to act as if they were the true supporters of Imam Husain and his family at Karbala. As their enemies, the other faction were the enemies of Imam Husain. So, both factions felt that they had performed a righteous act by fighting with his enemies.

The processions were watched closely by the police, both the four or five men from the Police Post (*chowki*) at Taisuru, and the reinforcements from Kargil. As far as I know, the fighting in Taisuru is unusual in Kargil *tehsil* and the level of Police presence is correspondingly high. Their presence adds to the drama of the processions, as does that of the Medical Department. However, Suru people's religious expression is being pathologised, in a way that has been common practice in India since colonial times (see Chapter 1). In Kargil, the Shi'ahs of Suru are regarded as being both riotous and a bit of a joke, both because of the millenarism and the *yokma-goma* dispute. These attitudes are particularly prevalent among people in the administration, both in Kargil and in the state as a whole. For example,

one story is told about Agha Hyder visiting the Governor and not being able to drink tea because of the *sherpa* prohibition

The *yokma-goma* split is regarded as if it was unique and used as the stereotype for negative images of Shi'ahs. On one level, the fact that there are factions in Suru is just normal politics both in Ladakh and anywhere else. For example, underlying the overtly communal politics of the Ladakh Buddhist Association in Leh *tehsil* in recent years, there is a major divide between two factions in Buddhism (van Beek and Brix Bertelson 1995). Similarly in Kargil there are two major Shi'ite political factions and this is a feature of Shi'ism in the Middle East at the moment as well (see below).

The *yokma-goma* split also has resonances of the type of rivalry that is found all over the region between structurally equivalent groups. For example, relations between brothers who have divided their land, are often quite fraught because they form part of the same *p'ha-spun*, whose members must co-operate and support each other, but at the same time they are to some extent in competition. A large proportion of serious disputes are between closely related people over land and inheritance, and nearly all come to a head at the time of ploughing when land ownership becomes *de facto*. A Suru man once remarked to me that he could not understand why another was jealous of him, since he had neither stolen his beloved, nor was he his relative who had become richer than him. People also particularly feared the evil eye (*mi-kha*) from the houses of their immediate *p'ha-spun*, especially those from whom they have recently divided the house and land.

Therefore, the rivalry between the factions is typical of that found between groups of equal status in the area, a slightly more playful form of which is the inter-village rivalry enacted at weddings (see Chapter 6) and in archery contests. External connections of the two factions reveal a similar form of competition between equals and reflect ideological splits that are found in Shi'ism in Kargil and the Middle East, and in party political divisions in Ladakh.

#### **(vi) Outside Connections of the two Shi'ite factions Suru**

The Shi'ite congregation has its most important spiritual centres in Iran and Iraq (and to a lesser extent Syria), but there is no single central organisation or leader for all Shi'ites. This is partly a result of the doctrine of the line of Imams and the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, which means that most Shi'ahs believe that in the

absence of the Hidden Imam there is no absolute religious authority present on earth.<sup>19</sup> Hence, at any given time, there are several religious authorities in Shi'ism who are considered to be *mujtahids*, that is, people who are sufficiently learned to pronounce on matters of jurisprudence. A handful of the most respected of whom are known by the title *Ayatollah* (Glassé 1991:259). They are spiritual guides, who ordinary believers are enjoined to follow (Zubaida 1987:43).

Currently, all the leading *mujtahids* are normally resident in the Middle East, mainly in Iraq, Iran and Syria. Each *mujtahid* may pronounce judgements (Farsi: *ijtihad*) on matters of religious practice, and Shi'ahs are free to follow the guidance of whoever they want. When this was discussed in Suru, people said: "If we don't like one *Ayatollah's* advice, then we can just choose another one." This was what had happened in 1994 in respect of the blood-letting at Muharram. *Ayatollah* Khamenei, who is the successor of *Ayatollah* Khomeini in Iran, had issued a ruling (*fatwa*) that there was to be no bloodshed during the memorial processions in Muharram. Nevertheless, the people of Sankhoo were under no obligation to follow this advice, and chose not to; whereas those of Suru Block and Kargil did.

Some *mujtahids* also run religious colleges, called *madrasas*, in the important Shi'ite towns, such as Qum in Iran, Najaf (near Karbala) in Iraq and Damascus in Syria. These *madrasas* are funded mainly from the *khums* tax, and, to a lesser extent, through income from land ownership (Fischer 1980:42).<sup>20</sup> The students are from all over the Shi'ite world, and may receive a small stipend from the *madrasa* towards the cost of their upkeep.<sup>21</sup> The main religious leaders in Suru have all spent some years studying in Iraq before the expulsion of foreign clerics in 1974 (Richard 1995:114), and more recently in Iran. At the moment, a number of men from Suru are studying in Iran, including three of the scions of the *yokma* faction's lineage, and

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<sup>19</sup> *Ayatollah* Khomeini challenged this in his political philosophy, and did claim temporal authority (Zubaida 1993:16).

<sup>20</sup> Fischer says that since the land reforms under the Pahlavis, the *ulama* in Iran no longer own much land (Fischer 1980:95)

<sup>21</sup> For example in the *madrasa* where Agha Husain was studying in Qum, most students received a stipend of about 1,000 Rials a month, about Rs.300, which is very little in Iran; but, in 1994, Agha Husain had come first in the examinations so he would receive 7,000 Rials a month for the following year, but even that was not enough to live on. The rest of the cost of his upkeep was covered by the *khums* money and other *ad hoc* donations from the *yokma-pa*.

an important *shaikh* from the *goma* faction.<sup>22</sup> Until 1947, some of the local religious leaders used to study at *madradas* in Skardu in Baltistan; but I have not heard of anyone studying at Shi'ite *madradas* in other parts of India, not even in Kashmir. Local leaders may have a certain doctrinal loyalty to the preaching of the guides associated with their *madrasa*; however, they can choose subsequently to take the guidance of one or more other *mujtahids*. Hence, as Zubaida points out, despite Shi'ism having a large institutional base, it does not have a centralised organisation or single authority (Zubaida 1987:42).

The absence of a single indivisible sovereignty or territory was a feature of the politics of religion and the state in the Himalayan region for centuries, as Burghart has shown in respect of Nepal (Burghart 1984). Miller describes the overall structure of Tibetan Buddhist monasticism as a "web", since it consisted of different sects, which overlap geographically, and are not completely exclusive, or often antagonistic to each other. Similarly, within each sect, the sub-monasteries and *rinpoches* (lines of religious leaders) are often relatively autonomous, and not subject to any centralised spiritual authority (Miller 1961, Cassinelli & Ekvall 1969).

A similar factional split to that found between the *yokma* and *goma-pa* exists in Kargil, where the two important Shi'ite factions in the last few years have centred around the Islamiya School and the Ayatollah Khomeini Memorial Trust (AKMT). The former, has been in existence since the 1950s as a school of religious instruction for younger men, most of whom subsequently study at one of the Shi'ite centres in the Middle East. Nowadays it has an imposing building in Kargil's main bazaar. The latter was started after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini as a social welfare organisation, and runs a chain of schools in and around Kargil town. The *yokma* and *goma-pa* are linked to the AKMT and Islamiya School factions respectively. The AKMT does not seem to have any presence in Suru itself; but a few years ago, the *goma-pa aghas* opened a branch of the Islamiya School in Taisuru. However, it is relatively inactive and Agha Sakawat said that it only had two pupils in 1994.

This division among the Shi'ites of Kargil *tehsil* reflects one in the Middle East between Ayatollah Khomeini and the Ayatollah Khoi, who were two of the leading

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<sup>22</sup>In 1994, there were said to be about 100 students from Kargil *tehsil* in Iran, and a few had their families with them.

*mujtahids* in Shi'ism, until their deaths in 1989 and 1992 respectively (Richard 1995:84). Broadly speaking, the *yokma-pa* faction has taken its leadership for the last few decades from a politically more radical section in the Shi'ite leadership, whose main exponent was the Ayatollah Khomeini, and hence it is seen in Kargil as the Iranian faction. The *goma-pa* favoured the Ayatollah Khoi who lived and taught in Najaf in Iraq and died at a great age in 1992, not long after he was briefly imprisoned by Saddam Husain during the Gulf War. He was considered by many Shi'ites to be the most important *mujtahid* prior to the rise to popularity of Ayatollah Khomeini. He remained extremely popular, and was followed by the majority of Shi'ites in India, Pakistan and East Africa as well as many in the Middle East (Momen 1985:315).<sup>23</sup> He preached a quietist doctrine and he: "*considered politics a pitfall to be avoided by men of goodwill.*" (Taheri 1985:136). His view was in keeping with the widespread interpretation of the doctrine of the Hidden Imam, which can be used as a justification for accepting existing regimes (Hegland 1983). Hence, the fierce opposition between the two factions on matters of doctrine is congruent with wider Shi'ite divisions.

The factions are also split along party lines in the democratic politics of the area. It has been customary for the *yokma-pa* to support the National Conference and for the *goma-pa* to follow the Congress Party, as do the AKMT and the Islamiya School factions respectively. The National Conference party is only found in Jammu and Kashmir state, and has been the party of several recent administrations. The Congress Party is national and has been in power at the centre most of the time since Independence. From the 1950s to the 1980s, these two parties were politically opposed to each other, except for a brief period in the late 1980s when they had a disastrous accord (Singh 1996:90ff). In broad ideological terms, there is a definite homology between the *yokma-goma* split, that between the more radical doctrine of Ayatollah Khomeini and the more quiescent of Ayatollah Khoi in Shi'ism and the National Conference and Congress parties. The former being more politically proactive and the latter more connected with the *status quo*. Thus, there is an ideological coherence within each of the factions and in their relationships to politics beyond the local level.

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<sup>23</sup>Richard says that, by 1988, he had become the most popular Ayatollah in Iran, presumably as people became disenchanted with Ayatollah Khomeini, who the majority had followed since the Revolution (Richard 1995:85).

Nevertheless, the politics of the *yokma-pa*, particularly the millenarian doctrine, cannot be regarded either as simply oppositional to the Indian state or its rule in the area, or as a response to a threat to Islam, as Ahmed suggests (Ahmed 1976:106). In fact, the opposite seems to have been the case, since in the early 1960s Agha Hyder personally encouraged his followers to go and work on the building of the Leh-Srinagar road, which was strategically crucial to India.<sup>24</sup> Equally, although the faction's main focus was undoubtedly on the Shi'ite world which to a large extent provided a meta-state, at the same time the *yokma-pa* has been actively involved in state and national democratic politics for several decades.

Initially, the *yokma-pa*'s involvement in electoral politics seems to have arisen largely because Agha Hyder's following was the largest block of votes in Kargil, constituting about a quarter of the population of the *tehsil* and this vote was more or less determined by the *agha*'s directions. He and other *yokma-pa* leaders were accordingly wooed by the main political parties and apparently always supported the National Conference candidate. However, their enthusiastic support of the democratic process did not result in them receiving reasonable treatment from the administration. For example, in 1981, a non-Ladakhi DC ridiculed Agha Hyder's request for a female doctor in the area, claiming that the *agha* wanted her: "*like an elephant to tie in his yard*". These kinds of attitudes to Suru people, persist in the administration and affect Shi'ahs in general in Ladakh. In the early 1990s, the budget for Kargil *tehsil* was about half that of Leh (Kristoffer Brix Bertelson, personal communication). Moreover, Kargilis' demands for resources that are available in other areas, are often turned down with ridicule, both locally and by government officials.

By the time I started to do my fieldwork, the *yokma-pa* were more proactively engaged in electoral politics and for some years had had their own political candidate, Qamer Ali, who is from the Sangra *akhun* family that I have mentioned previously. He had briefly been the Member for Kargil of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly before the suspension of democratic politics in the state in

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<sup>24</sup> On the wall of Agha Hyder's family's guest room in Sankhoo, there is a letter of thanks from Sonam Norbu who was the Ladakhi engineer supervising the building of the Leh-Srinagar road in the early 1960s. This letter commends him for insisting that his followers went and worked as labourers on the most difficult and dangerous part of the road near Lamayuru. It says that Agha Hyder told his followers not to return until the road was finished.

1989 and stood as a candidate for MP in 1996 (see Chapter 5). Thus their relationship to democratic politics had changed significantly in the past decade. Moreover, in Suru itself, by 1992, a split had emerged in Suru between the *yokma-pa* and the Sunnis, who had previously had a cordial relationship and at the same time relations between the *yokma* and *goma* factions became less strained, as I shall describe in the next chapter.

### **(vii) Conclusions**

As I have shown in this chapter, the *yokma* faction is not a 'traditional' organisation that is now adapting to 'modern' conditions. Rather it is an organisation that has emerged in the relatively recent past out of forms that have a long tradition in this area and it has been changing throughout the last forty years. Therefore, following Zubaida (1993) I would suggest that drawing a distinction between traditional and modern forms of organisation is not helpful. Moreover, such categories are themselves socially constructed in any particular context. In this respect, in the next chapter I will show that in recent years they Sunnis have constructed a history for themselves in which they are more 'modern' than Shi'ahs.

Nevertheless, until the late 1970s, Suru was relatively cut off both from government and the effects of modernisation. During this period, the most significant politics for the *yokma-pa* were the millenarian movement and their split with the *goma-pa*, both of which are viewed from outside as a sign of their intrinsic irrationality and disorderly nature. The transformation of the local political economy over the last few decades, particularly since the opening of the road in the late 1970s, has caused a period of unusually rapid change, which is having an impact on the *yokma* faction. Whereas in the past they had largely avoided secular education and too close an involvement with the institutions of the state, at the moment they are increasingly forming an interest group in competition for the resources of the state. However, the structure and organisation of the faction remains relatively unchanged and has adapted to these new aims.

This new kind of politics is evident in the relationship between the *yokma* and *goma* factions. By 1994, these were fairly cordial at Muharram, when they had traditionally fought, but their antagonism flared up over competition for government resources. Nevertheless, the hostility between the two Shi'ite factions over such issues was minor during my fieldwork, as compared to that which had emerged between the

Sunnis in Panikhar and Prantee and the *yokma* faction. Relations had been very cordial previously and Sunnis had often taken part in *matam* and Muharram observances. However, by 1993, they were starting to openly compete, particularly in the field of secular state education, in which Sunnis had been remarkably successful in the last few decades. One reason for this was that they had been less locally focused and marginally more oriented towards the government historically than Shi'ahs, as I shall demonstrate in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

# Sunnis, Education and the Government Economy

### (i) Introduction

As I demonstrated in the last chapter, for the last few decades, the factional conflict between the *yokma-pa* and *goma-pa* has been the main political issue in Suru. However, during my fieldwork there was an emerging conflict between the *yokma-pa* and the Sunnis. The Sunnis are a minority in the Block, having about 50 households in Panikhar and Prantee. I start by describing some aspects of Sunnis' social organisation and collective history and rituals. I then show that the Sunnis in Suru Block were the first to take advantage of the opportunities offered by government education and employment and hence have been much more successful in obtaining government jobs than Shi'ahs. I will demonstrate that differences between Sunnis and Shi'ahs, in terms of their history and kinship, have been significant in this process.

I shall also make a distinction between the peasant farming economy of Suru, which remains the main source of livelihood in the area and the government economy, which is largely a feature of the last three decades in Suru. As I shall show, such a distinction does exist and is relevant to the current politics of Suru but I am not suggesting that they are totally separate economic spheres. Initially, Shi'ahs were not very interested either in secular education or government employment, but the undermining of the peasant economy in the last two decades has meant that they are now forced to look for alternative sources of income, particularly government employment, for which they now need secular educational qualifications.

The changing conditions in the *tehsil* and state as a whole, had also caused great increase in competition for government resources, particularly jobs, in the last few years. At the same time, Sunnis had been attempting to establish themselves as an administrative elite in the Block by refusing to marry with Shi'ahs among other

things. They justified this move by claims to being more educated and modern than Shi'ahs, who came to feel increasingly bitter about their deteriorating position in respect to Sunnis, particularly in the field of education. As I shall show, this is the context in which the *yokma-pa* leadership opened the Noon Public School, in order both to address their disadvantageous position in respect of secular education and government employment and, to some extent, as a challenge to Sunnis' dominance of secular education in the Block.

## **(ii) Sunnis in Suru**

Just like the two Shi'ite factions, the Sunnis now form a kinship group in Suru that is apparently of relatively recent origin and is rapidly transforming itself in the changing economic and political context in the area. All the Sunnis in Suru Block are now in the villages of Panikhar, the administrative centre, and its contiguous neighbour Prantee. They make up about half the population of each of these villages and in 1993/4 there were about forty Sunni households altogether in the two villages.<sup>1</sup> The only other Sunnis in the Suru valley are in Sankhoo, where there are two families, both of whom are wealthy. There is also a small settlement of Sunnis from Panikhar in Wardwan, in Kashmir, which is a two day walk on foot from Suru via the Chelong Nala route from Panikhar.<sup>2</sup> The Wardwan families moved there during the famine of 1957 and their settlement is called '*chota Kargil*' (little Kargil) in Wardwan.

In Suru, as elsewhere in Ladakh, the word for Sunnis is *kache*, which seems to refer to their Kashmiri origins, but is not the same as the word for Kashmiri, which is *kachul-pa*. The Sunnis in Panikhar and Prantee consider themselves to form a community, which is also a single kinship group. They say that they are all related to each other and, due to their tendency to marry within this small group, many of them are closely related. However, this idea of relatedness exists even between people who do not remember any actual kinship connection. Sunni men and women in Suru treat each other as close relatives in respect of the Islamic rule of *moharam*; whereas, for Shi'ahs, it only applies to relatives in the immediate family. Nevertheless, like Shi'ahs, they also share a common spiritual ancestry in the form

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<sup>1</sup> I do not have exact figures for this as I did not survey the whole of these two villages.

<sup>2</sup> Before the opening of the road, this was the quickest way to get to Kashmir from Suru.

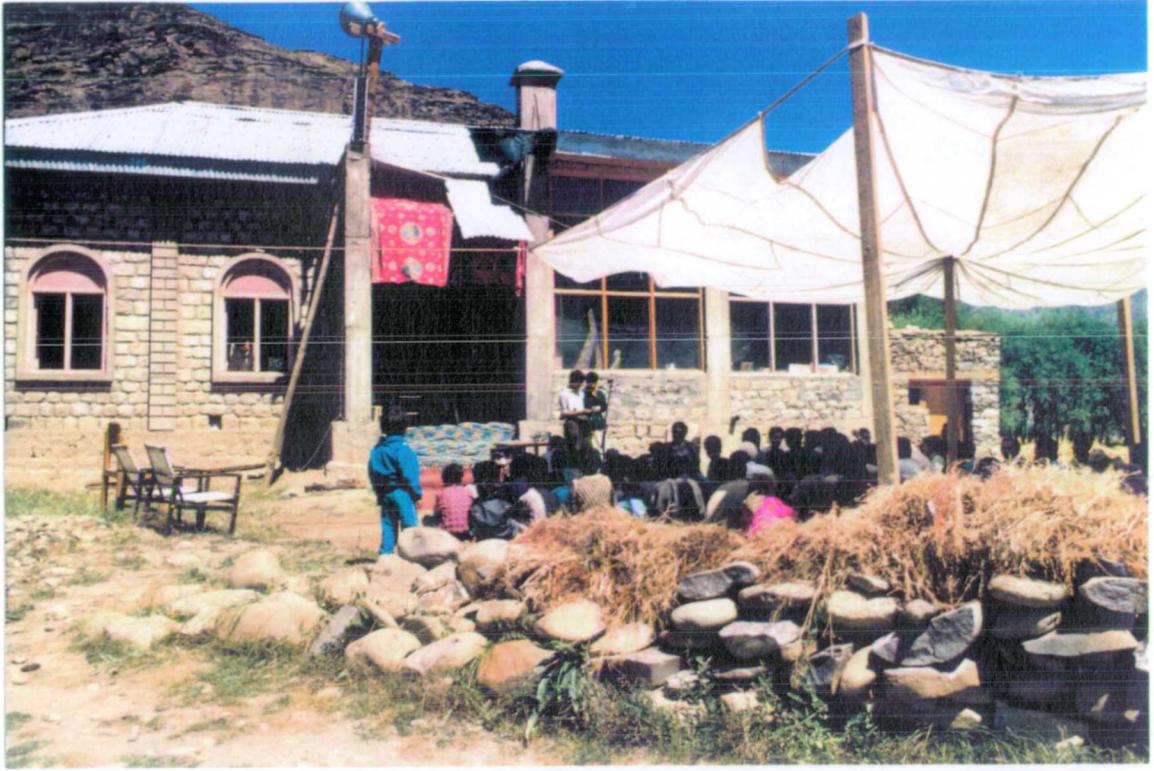
of a preacher called Hazrat Zanchas or Hazrat Pir. He is a semi-mythological religious leader, who is said to have come from Kashmir and settled in Suru. The story of his settlement follows a common paradigm for foundation myths in this area, containing similar elements to the story of the founding of Namsuru (see Chapter 2), and the origin myth of the leadership in Chigtan as being founded by a wandering *fakir* (Francke 1926:173-4).<sup>3</sup> Part of this myth, recounts that when Hazrat Zanchas came to Panikhar, he planted his stick in the ground and it grew into a willow tree.

His *astana* is in the fields above Panikhar where this is said to have occurred, and people said that until recently the tree had been growing there. Hazrat Zanchas is regarded as being the founding ancestor of the Sunnis, although nobody literally traces descent from him. His *astana* is a major focus for Sunni rituals, such as Mentok Tangba (literally 'the giving of flowers'). This takes place in the late spring, when wild tulips called *kapi mentok* are flowering on the mountainsides. The day before the festival, many of the girls and young women from Panikhar and Prantee go up the mountains to gather the delicate yellow flowers. On the morning of Mentok Tangba, the men and boys pray and put flowers on the *astana* of Hazrat Zanchas. Then most of the Sunnis visit all the Sunni graves in the two villages, sprinkling them with flowers and water. The men say prayers for the dead (*fatiha*) over some of the graves (*qabr*), particularly those of the more influential men. In the middle of the day everyone gathers in Prantee near the grave of a man who had been considered as a saint.<sup>4</sup> Men and women sit separately and a collective (vegetarian) meal is served, to which every house has made a contribution. On the morning of Mentok Tangba in 1994, I was told by my Sunni companions that they could go and eat in anyone's house, as it seems to be a day which particularly emphasises that all Sunnis are related, so the normal discomfort about going uninvited to eat food in non-relatives' houses does not apply.

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<sup>3</sup> Chigtan is a village between Kargil and Leh, which for several centuries was the base of the chiefs of Purig (Francke 26:173-4).

<sup>4</sup> He was called Sadur Shah and is said to have had great spiritual power. In 1981, his grandson, who is now dead, was an important Sunni leader.



*Picture 4.1 - Id celebration at the Sunni masjid in Prantee*



*Picture 4.2 - Women sitting near the masjid at the Id celebration*

It is also customary for a Sunni groom's wedding party (*nyo-pa*) to take him to pray at the *astana* of Hazrat Zanchas in Panikhar, before they leave to go and fetch his bride. Both men and women also pray at their deceased parents' graves before they leave their house on their wedding day.

Although the Sunni emphasis on a common spiritual ancestor has some resonance with the structure of the Shi'ite factions, as a religious group they are far more egalitarian internally, as they do not have any leaders who collect taxes or take *milaks* from the others. Their collective ceremonies also emphasise equality between all men - of whatever age - although gender differentiation is marked in their enactment and organisation. In Suru, as in Kashmir itself, Sunnis revere preachers called *pirs*, and spiritual guides called *qutubs*. There was a man from Prantee three generations ago, who was considered to be a saint. *Pirs* occasionally visit from Kashmir, and in 1993 there were two serving as government teachers in Suru.

The Sunnis' collective religious ceremonies are organised by a man chosen by all the households in Panikhar and Prantee, but there is a strong sense of equality between all the Sunni families both in the organisation and the enactment of the rituals. This was clear in the celebration of Id Qurban, which is one of the most important festivals for Sunnis. This Id commemorates Hazrat Ibrahim's (Abraham) sacrifice of a goat, which God had substituted for his son Isaac.<sup>5</sup> In 1993 the day started with all the Sunni men going to pray in the Id Gah, which is a field near the Tourist Bungalow. Then a man in each Sunni household slaughtered a goat. This was then cut into pieces, one for each Sunni house in the two villages and some special bits for close relatives and for the household itself. Then children from every house went round all the others to give them a piece of meat - which is called *tobarok* - and to say '*Id Mubarak*' (Id greetings), the traditional greeting for Id days. Later in the morning people dressed in new clothes and then went for a *majlis* (congregation) at the Sunni *masjid* in Prantee. That had been built the previous year with a contribution equivalent to two and a half months' Government salary (about Rs.5,000) from every Sunni house in the two villages. A platform with loud speakers and seating had been erected in front of the *masjid*. The men and boys

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<sup>5</sup> Qurban means 'Sacrifice', and it is also called Bakri (goat) Id.

participated in the ceremony and sat in front of the *masjid*, while the women and older girls sat by a line of trees about fifty yards away. The ceremony lasted about an hour, and consisted of some prayers in Arabic and a number of speeches on religious subjects by various men and some recitals by teenage boys. One of the men gave his speech in a very emotional style, but most of the deliveries were very low key. At the end, a large cauldron of *halva* (a delicious and auspicious sweet) was brought round, and we were each given a piece to take away. I was told that I must take it as it was the *tobarok* from the ceremony.

Id Qurban, and the days following are a particularly important time for visiting relatives, on both sides of the family. Each house prepares meat curry and rice, and gives snacks like cakes and biscuits to their guests, who must always eat and drink something when they visit. All the Sunnis who are living or staying in Kargil try to return to Suru, as do the women who have married outside the area. There are a number of such women, as it is common for Sunnis to contract marriages with families in other parts of the region. In this and other respects Sunni marriage practice differs quite markedly from that of Shi'ahs.

The expressed preference among Sunnis, particularly older people, is for marriage with relatives, particularly affinal ones. Two thirds of the marriages of the Sunni families that I surveyed in Prantee had been with a relative and nearly half of them were with a close affinal relative. The majority were between people in Panikhar and Prantee, but nearly a third were between people in different parts of Ladakh and Kashmir. When these marriages occur they are frequently with an affinal relative, and the marriage ties seem to be continued over several generations.

For example, Jamila who is a trained midwife working in the Primary Health Centre in Panikhar, is married to her mother's sister's son from Chushot village near Leh. In 1994 I attended the wedding of Latifa and Bashir, a brother and sister from Panikhar. They married a brother and sister from Zanskar who are their maternal cousins.<sup>6</sup> Kazim Sahib, the Sunni leader from Sankhoo, was married to a woman from Dras; and now one of his daughters is married to a man from that family.

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<sup>6</sup> These joint weddings, are very common among both Sunnis and Shi'ahs, as I shall discuss in Chapter 6.

Although I do not have statistics for the whole Sunni population of Suru Block, I know of many people who have made similar marriages, most of them being with people from the small Sunni community in the neighbouring region of Zanskar. The effect of this is that most families have relatives in another part of the region, as well as in Suru itself. Hence their kinship practice differs markedly from that of Shi'ahs, whose kinship connections are almost entirely local.

The Sunni kinship pattern seems to have similarities with that of the Muslim (predominantly Sunni) traders, of the Himalayan/Central Asian region. These trading families, usually had (and some still have) branches of the family in different trade centres, such as Lhasa, Shigatse, Leh and Kashmir (Petech 1977:105, Gaborieau 1972 & 1973, Radhu 1981, Shaikh 1991, Siddiqi 1991). Such an inter-regional kinship structure, was advantageous to their long-distance trading activities. In fact Suru was important for local trade in the past as, prior to the building of the road, the Chelong Nala route from Panikhar to Kashmir was apparently the main route for bringing rice and other such commodities into Kargil *tehsil*. People from the area also traded with Baltistan and Zanskar. Some of the Zanskari Sunnis were successful traders at the turn of the century (Khan 1939:791). As I shall discuss in a later section, a considerable amount of small-scale trade still occurs in the area.<sup>7</sup>

In Kargil itself most of the traders and people who were involved in the administration in the past also trace their descent from outside the area, and several were Hindus in the past, but are now Shi'ahs. Most notable among these is the family of Munshi Habibullah Bhat, one of the most influential men in Kargil *tehsil*. His family came to Kargil from Kishtwar (on the Anantnag side) a couple of generations ago, at which time they were Hindus, called Kashmiri Pandits (Pandits are Brahmins). They first became Sunnis, then, in Munshi Habibullah's father's time, they adopted Shi'ism. There are several other families in Kargil with similar origins, who have now become Shi'ahs and there is only one *zat* of Sunnis remaining who are from Kargil itself. The one Sunni family in Taisuru, who were Dogra administrators prior to Independence, became Shi'ahs in the 1960s.

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<sup>7</sup> The 1911 settlement report in the Tehsildar's office in Kargil says that there were a number of traders at Panikhar and Taisuru.

The Sunnis in Suru do not claim to have been traders in the past. However, they do claim outside descent in the male line, since most of them say that they are the descendants of men who came to the area and married local women in Suru. Only two families in Suru Block say that they are descended from Dogra administrators, but some of the Sunnis of Padum say that they are (Crook 1994a:461). The majority of the Panikhar and Prantee Sunnis claim to have been Muslims from the Anantnag district of Kashmir and have Kashmiri names such as Wani (Wain) and Kakpuri (Bamzai 1987:313). They also call their equivalent of the *pa*, called *zat*, which is a Kashmiri term for this kind of kinship group. The members of several Sunni *zats* say that their male ancestors were Hindus. For instance a family in Prantee that have the *zat* name Shaikh - which is a title that is sometimes given out of respect to people who convert to Islam - claim descent from a Hindu grandfather, who married a Shi'ah woman and converted to Islam.<sup>8</sup> As far as I can ascertain, the majority of the Sunnis who came were poor and this remained true until the 1980s.

It is likely that a major reason why people came to Suru from Kashmir, was that it was relatively undisturbed by rapacious government administrators compared to Kashmir proper. Bamzai says that until the later Dogra period, land tenure in Kashmir had been extremely precarious, as the majority of farmers were only given land for a year at a time, in what seems to have been a corruption of a pre-existing system of periodic re-allocation similar to that of the *pa* in Suru. Taxes both in kind and in *corvée* labour (*begar*) were also very harsh, so people frequently left their tenancies and went and settled elsewhere, leaving much land uncultivated (Bamzai 1987:119-120 & 128). As I suggested in the previous chapter, in the past many households in Suru apparently experienced a shortage of labour rather than land, and outsiders seem to have been encouraged to settle there.

This lack of a strong link to the land and custom of moving from area to area does seem to be connected both to the engagement of Kashmiris in trade and the inter-regional marriage patterns of Sunnis in Suru. It is also significant that Chota Kargil,

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<sup>8</sup> Shaikh is used generally in India and Kashmir for Muslims who are said to have converted from Hinduism (Imperial Gazetteer 1909:36).

the settlement of Suru Sunnis in Wardwan dates from 1957, when a number of Sunni families moved there in the face of the famine in Suru. However, I was told that no Shi'ahs moved out of the area at that time.

As I shall show later, these Sunni origin stories are constantly being reformulated, and cannot be taken simply as fact. Nevertheless, most of the Sunnis do seem to be of outside origin on the paternal side and most of the Sunni *zats* have less land than Shi'ahs in Panikhar and Prantee. For instance, in the 1911 settlement records in the Tehsildar's office in Kargil, 5 Sunni *zats* have land in Panikhar and they are still the only Sunni *zats* in the village. They each had between 10 and 56 *kanals* of land, whereas the Shi'ah Lampa *pa* had 116. Nowadays, most Suru people say that Sunnis tend to have less land and the majority of them were poor until recently, as I shall discuss in a later section. In the whole of Ladakh, until recently, a minority of Sunnis were prosperous traders or administrators, but the majority were socially and economically marginal.<sup>9</sup> For example, Korkhurru is a Sunni *zat* name in Panikhar and Prantee and this apparently refers to the *khur khuru-pa* (literally 'load carriers'), who used to act as poney men on the Leh Srinagar and other routes. They were wage labourers, with no political or economic power in the region (Ramsay 1890:18 & 47, Imperial Gazetteer 1909:66, Joldan 1985:65, Grist 1994:268).

Hence, as in other parts of Ladakh, the origins of the Sunnis are quite diverse, but they have made themselves into a cohesive social group. In Suru, like the Shi'ite factions, they now form a localised kinship group, that is linked to the landscape of Suru through monuments to ancestors. As recently as the early 1980s, my observation was that in most respects Sunnis were neither very different, nor did they greatly differentiate themselves from Shi'ahs. For instance, all the Sunni households had land and were primarily farmers. They were also virtually indistinguishable from Shi'ahs in terms of dress, language, and day to day activities. Until a few years ago, they were not politically divided from Shi'ahs and they intermarried freely with them. They also used to attend Shi'ah religious

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<sup>9</sup> According to Joldan, by the 1940's, there were only two aristocratic families of Ladakhi Muslims in Leh; as well as a few - apparently Shi'ah - Muslim families from Central Asia who were engaged in the long-distance trade (Joldan 1985:61).

observances such as the Muharram procession and *matam* and, as I showed, Hajji Abdullah Far, a leading Sunni was very close to Agha Hyder and the millenarian movement.

Similarly, Suru people often said to me that in the past they were all equally poor, in order to emphasise the fact that there are now noticeable economic differences between Sunnis and Shi'ahs. As I have mentioned, that is not strictly true as there were some Sunnis and Shi'ahs who were better off than the mass of people. Nevertheless, the majority of Sunnis were poor in the recent past, as most Sunni men who are now of middle-age and older used to go labouring in the plains in the winter, until the 1970s. However, this situation has changed dramatically in the last few years, so that by 1981, there was only one Sunni man in the whole of Panikhar and Prantee who still went labouring in the winter. This has been largely to do with the introduction of government infrastructure and jobs into the area in the last twenty years. During this time, Sunnis have taken up educational and employment opportunities much faster than Shi'ahs. As I shall show in a later section, their relative success in and enthusiasm for the government economy has partly been a result of minor differences between them and Shi'ahs, that I outlined in this chapter, particularly their more regional focus. However, first I shall outline some of the major economic changes that have taken place in the last few decades.

### **(iii) The Changing Economy of Suru**

With the exception of landless widows, all Suru families have some land and practice both agriculture and animal husbandry. They practice a mixed agriculture, which involves growing one crop of barley and, to a lesser extent, wheat and peas, per year, in irrigated fields; and keeping various bovines, sheep, goats and horses, from which they get milk, meat and wool. In the past landholdings were much larger than they are now, as the amount of cultivable land has not increased very much in the current century, but the population clearly has. The 1911 settlement report in the Tehsildar's Office in Kargil says that average size of landholdings in this area was 2 to 3 acres, which is 16 to 24 *kanals*<sup>10</sup>; whereas the Tehsildar said that now it is about 7 *kanals*, a figure that I confirmed from my own surveys. People in Suru, told me that an average size household needs about 20 *kanals*, so

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<sup>10</sup> A *kanal* is an eighth of an acre.

many households have less than they need. This pressure on land is common throughout the State. The 1981 census reports that the increase in population in Kargil *tehsil* was the lowest in Jammu and Kashmir state. However, since 1971 the population of the whole of Ladakh had apparently increased more rapidly than in the past (Census 1981a:101 & 103).<sup>11</sup> The slower rate of population increase in Kargil *tehsil* is also certainly attributable to the extremely poor state of health found in the area, as I shall discuss later.

The village of Thulus, which is on the opposite bank of the Suru river from Prantee, provides a good example of the peasant economy. In 1993, there was only one young man from this village who had studied and passed his 10th class examinations and no-one with a government job. Thulus and Pursa villages, which are recorded jointly in the census reports, had 15 houses and 14 landholdings in 1911, but in 1993 there were 36 households.<sup>12</sup> Clearly, we do not know what the household size was in those days, but it still indicates a significant population increase. Thulus-Pursa is recorded as having 296 *kanals* of land in the 1981 census, which is an average of 8 *kanals* per household, a figure that I confirmed from my own household surveys. I also found that the smallest landholding was 4 *kanals* and the largest was 20. The number of animals that each household has varies from village to village depending on the availability of pasture; and between households, largely depending on their wealth. Most households have at least one cow or *dzo-mo* (cow-yak cross-breed) that gives milk, although not necessarily all the year, and several sheep and goats, as well as either a horse or *dzo* (male cow-yak cross-breed) for ploughing and other such tasks. In Thulus, each house had on average 2.5 bovines, 5 sheep and goats and 0.5 horses, but one had only two goats.

In Thulus, most men still do labouring for part of the year, but this is now done in the non-winter months of the year in Ladakh itself, as there are now many such

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<sup>11</sup> This increase seems to be for a range of reasons, from a general move towards universal marriage to the availability of subsidised food from the government.

<sup>12</sup> Similarly the number of households in Panikhar has gone from 17 to 31 in the same period, but the cultivable land has slightly decreased, because some of it was used for government buildings.

jobs in government projects. This kind of work is only undertaken by people from poorer households, and is now considered to be rather demeaning. For example, a man from Namsuru village told me that there are only 10 households out of more than 100 from which the men now take labouring jobs and he took this as an indication that these are the poorest households. Labouring is both extremely arduous, as people work for many hours each day, and poorly paid, as in 1994 the wages were about Rs. 60 a day, giving about Rs. 1,500 a month. This compares with government salaries that start at about Rs. 1000 a month, are paid all year and often do not involve much actual work. Usually men only go labouring for about two months of the year, as the rest of the time they need to be doing their own agricultural work.

Until the 1980s however, most men from Suru went labouring in the winter in the plains. It is impossible to know when this practice started, but the 1911 settlement report says that some men from Kargil *tehsil* went labouring to the Punjab. However, it also reports that many villagers got their cash income from *res* or *begar*. This was a practice under the Dogra administration, that required villagers to be available to carry loads, on their backs or on animals, for traders and government administrators. It was levied in all areas that were on or near one of the major routes and was extremely onerous since it required large numbers of people and ponies to regularly attend at stages on the routes during the busy agricultural and trading seasons (Joldan 1985:65, Sonam Wangyal 1977:486, Grist 1994).

According to the 1911 settlement report, the people in the upper Suru valley were not required to supply people for a fixed period to be present at a stage (*parao*) on the road; but the people from the lower part of the valley had to attend at Dras. Nevertheless, even the Suru-pa were apparently constantly made to supply workers for *ad hoc* demands. For instance, the Workmans say that just after the turn of the century their mountaineering expedition to Nun Kun took 243 coolies from Wardwan on the way to Suru and 60 in Kargil. They said that in the Suru valley itself all available coolies were absent on government service (Workman & Workman 1909:6-13). The *moqdam* of Achambore, who is an old man, told me that he had to organise frequent levies for this purpose. Older people in Suru and elsewhere in Ladakh told me that they had often been beaten by government officials while

working as carriers. Generally, all over Ladakh, the Dogra period is remembered as a time of hardship and harassment by their officials (Imperial Gazetteer 1909:103, Kaul 1992:183-4, Sonam Wangyal 1997:485-487).

Prior to Independence there was also work as commercial carriers on the major trade routes (see above). However, this does not seem to have been a practice in Suru Block. As I have mentioned, some Suru people were involved in trading, and the 1911 settlement report says that the people from this area took butter, horses, and sheep to Kashmir and returned with rice and maize. They also apparently traded in Ladakhi salt, and also sometimes went to Baltistan to get apricots and stone vessels that were used for cooking. This trade was all undertaken by exchange in kind. The 1911 settlement report said that many of the people in the upper Suru valley did not have enough cash to pay the land revenue, half of which was in cash and the rest in kind.

The need for cash to pay the land revenue, must have been one of the reasons why during the Dogra/British period, large numbers of men and boys also started to migrate to the hills and plains each winter to work as wage labourers.<sup>13</sup> This practice apparently increased enormously after Partition, as the amount of carrying work in Ladakh reduced as a result of the closure of the borders and trade routes, dramatically affecting the economy of Ladakh. Rizvi says that many people permanently left the area and settled in places such as Nainital and Dehra Dun in Himachal Pradesh, where there are now said to be sizeable Kargili populations (Rizvi 1993:102). However, no one in Suru refers to having relatives in that area. In Suru Block men and boys were already going to labour in the plains and the majority of them still did until the early 1980s. As this work was undertaken in the winter, it had the advantage that the men were available for agricultural work for the rest of the year. Although the wages they received were poor, they would apparently return with money to the value of about 10 sheep or goats, which was a useful addition to their household's income.

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<sup>13</sup>Sometimes men were also forcibly taken to work on projects, such as for the building of the Gilgit road in the latter part of the 19th century (Imperial Gazetteer 1909:101).

This practice was in existence from the 1920s, which is the earliest living memory in Suru. In those days, the only salaried government employees in Suru were the *patwari* and a policeman. There was also a *zeldar* who was in charge of *res* and the collection of taxes for the whole Block. The last *zeldar* was a man from Namsuru, who was alive in 1981 and had a large landholding that had been partly granted by the government. The village headmen, were given a small share of revenue collections, and both they and the *zeldar* could obtain tips (*baksheesh*) from travellers for whom they arranged coolies.

Prior to the 1930s, there were only a few literate people in the Block, most of them clerics. Important *aghas* and *shaikhs* would study Arabic and Farsi in one of the Shi'ite centres in the Middle East and some *akhuns* and other *aghas* also studied in Baltistan. Some ordinary people also studied Koran reading with a cleric, but they were not fully literate in that language. There were also a small number of non-clerical men, who were literate in Farsi, Arabic and Urdu, such as Hajji Abdullah Far, from the Kakpuri *zat* in Panikhar.

He was one of the first teachers in the Panikhar Primary School, when it was opened in the 1930s. It was the first primary school in the Block and at that time there were only a handful of primary schools in Kargil *tehsil* and middle schools at Kargil and Skardu (Chohan 1994:110-111).<sup>14</sup> Hajji Nabi, one of Hajji Abdullah Far's cousins, who is a retired Sunni teacher from the Kakpuri *zat* in Panikhar, was one of the first students of the Panikhar primary school. He is now considered to have the greatest knowledge of Urdu in the Block. Hajji Nabi was the only student from Suru to complete middle schooling in Kargil at that time.<sup>15</sup> A Shi'ah from Choskore and a Sunni from Panikhar went to study with him but they dropped out. After completing his studies, he went to the Punjab to labour in the winter for a couple of years, as

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<sup>14</sup> Chohan says that the government first opened a primary school in Kargil at the turn of the century, and it was upgraded to a middle school in the 1930s.

<sup>15</sup> In Jammu and Kashmir, primary school is 1st to 5th class, middle school is 6th to 8th, secondary is 9th and 10th, and Higher secondary is up to 12th class, after which people go to college or university. As the Indian education system is closely modelled on the British, the 10th class exams correspond to GCSE's and 12th to "A" levels.

there were no government jobs.<sup>16</sup> Then, in 1942, he became a teacher and was posted to Karsha in Zanskar. Further studies were only available in Srinagar at that time, as the schools in Leh and Kargil were only extended up to 10th class after independence (Kaul 1992:189).<sup>17</sup> It was not until 1957 that three other Sunni men from Panikhar also qualified as teachers, which in those days required a Middle (8th class) pass.

Since that time there has been a great increase in education in the Block and the *tehsil* as a whole. In 1973, a Boys' High School was opened in Panikhar and by then all the villages had primary schools. By 1994, there were twenty-eight primary schools in Suru Block, three middle schools, one lower high school (up till 9th class) and girls' and boys' high schools in Panikhar and Prantee respectively. The girls' high school in Panikhar is the only one of its kind in the *tehsil*. In other areas older girls have to attend boys' schools, except in Kargil where there are both boys' and girls' higher secondary schools, but only a hostel for boys. In 1996, the Sankhoo high school was extended to be a higher secondary school. For university studies students usually go to Srinagar, although a degree college was recently opened in Leh. When the Governor visited in 1994, he promised to open one in Kargil, but this has not been started yet.

Despite the increasing availability of government education since the 1930s, other changes in the economy came much later. Firstly, the road from Kargil to Suru was opened in 1978, and eventually extended as far as Padum in Zanskar, which caused a great increase in small-scale commerce in the area. For instance, Moqdam Mehdi, the headman of Panikhar, opened the first shop in Panikhar in 1978, and by the time I visited Suru in 1981/2 there were several shops in the small bazaar that was growing up along the road. By 1993 there were about thirty shops in Panikhar itself, and about twenty in Taisuru, and one or two in other villages. In Panikhar, there is also a small hotel and cafe and there had been several more that

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<sup>16</sup> Chohan reports that in 1932 there were only a total of 76 Ladakhis in government service in the whole area, of whom more than half (44) were teachers (Chohan 1994:150).

<sup>17</sup> Chohan says that there were grants for a few Ladakhi students to study in Srinagar, and they could then be employed as Naib (deputy) Tehsildars or sub-Inspectors of Police, and were paid much less than non-local employees (Chohan 1994:113).

catered mainly for foreigners, before the trouble in Kashmir caused a decline in tourism to the area.

There has also been a great increase in government employment and activities funded by government money during this period, due to the establishment of Kargil as a separate *tehsil* with its own headquarters in 1978, after a campaign by Kargili politicians. Prior to that Ladakh District had been administered as a single unit with its headquarters at Leh, which had resulted in the majority of government offices and jobs being in Leh *tehsil*. Politicians in Kargil had campaigned to have it made a *tehsil* in order for it to attract more government jobs and money.

The *tehsil's* administration, consists of a District (Development) Commissioner, who is both in charge of the administration, and responsible for development. He has two deputies, the Assistant Commissioner (AC), who is his deputy for the basic administration, and an Assistant Development Commissioner (ADC), whose responsibility is solely for development. Under them they have a number of departments, such as education, and the public works department. Each of these has a head of department, such as the Chief Education Officer (CEO). Each department has most of its white-collar staff in Kargil, although there are offices in the Blocks, such as the Zonal Education office. However, the senior administrators, who are called Officers, have their offices in Kargil, and most of the administrative officers are in Kargil. The posts of DC and Superintendent of Police (SP) are frequently filled by people from outside the state, as the incumbents are from the higher echelons of the national civil service. However, all other government jobs in Jammu and Kashmir, must be filled by state subjects, due to Jammu and Kashmir's special status in the Indian union.

There are no government statistics on the origins of their workers, but my observation is that the majority of those working in offices in Kargil are local, although there are a significant number of people from other parts of Kashmir, and a few from Leh *tehsil*. For example, in 1993/4, the DC was a Sunni from Leh, and both his deputies were Shi'ahs from Kargil *tehsil*. In the medical department, the head was a Kashmiri Pandit, and his wife worked as a doctor in the hospital; but all the rest of the doctors were Ladakhi, one being from Leh and one from Zanskar

*tehsil*.<sup>18</sup> There is still a shortage of sufficiently qualified local people to fill the more senior government posts. For example, in Suru Block, several of the senior teachers in the boys' and girls' high schools are from other parts of Kashmir, as there are no local teachers who are sufficiently qualified to teach some of the more advanced levels. However, where possible jobs are filled by locals and below a certain level all employees are from the *tehsil*. For white collar jobs candidates are required to have minimum educational qualifications, such as a 10th class pass (called the Matric) in order to be a teacher. There are also many unskilled government jobs, such as *chaprassies* (janitors) in schools and offices, and manual labourers in the animal husbandry and other such departments.

In addition to permanent government jobs, many other opportunities have been created in areas like construction. For example there are a number of Suru men, who now call themselves contractor (*tikadar*). This can mean anything from supplying furniture for a school to building a major construction such as a hydro-electric project. Anyone can become a contractor, as it requires no educational qualifications. In addition, many of these projects require casual labourers, so now there is a great deal of that kind of work available in Ladakh.

These new opportunities have enabled some Suru people to substantially increase their prosperity in the last two decades, particularly those living in and around Panikhar and Prantee. For example, Hajji Razak is an elderly Sunni man from Prantee, who used to go regularly to the Punjab to labour, and is considered to have been poor in the past. Now, one of his sons is the Headmaster of the boys' high school in Prantee and one of the most respected people in the Sunni community. Another son is a Medical Assistant and has a shop in Panikhar bazaar and two of his daughters and another son are teachers. The family of Ghulam Hyder, who is one of the chief sponsors of the Noon Public school, have also become much more prosperous. Their father also used to go for labouring, but eventually he got a job as a *chaprassie* in Panikhar. Ghulam Hyder his eldest son, is now a successful contractor and his younger son is a bus driver.

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<sup>18</sup> Zanskar was recently made into a separate *tehsil* as well.

Other families, such as that of Moqdam Mehdi, have managed to build on their existing advantages. As I have mentioned, he is the hereditary *moqdam* and so his father and grandfather held this post as well. They were not poor in the past, and so never went labouring, but seem to have always been involved in small-scale trading. He is now one of the biggest traders in the area. Among other things, he buys wool from the nomadic Bakarwal, who come to this area from Jammu in the summer. He then sends it by lorry to a weaving plant in another part of the state. Both he and his brother also have shops in Panikhar bazaar, above which they used to have a hotel and he is one of the wealthier people in the area.

These histories also illustrate an important difference between Sunnis and Shi'ahs. Namely that Sunnis have mainly obtained secular education, and taken government jobs; whereas Shi'ahs have tended to eschew government education and are not well represented in most areas of government employment. Similarly, all Sunnis have adopted such an approach, so, as a community, they are now well established in government employment, but only a minority of Shi'ahs have benefited from the economic changes of the last two decades and many of them are extremely poor.

The division of landholdings has left many households without sufficient land for their household's needs, and there has been very little effective development of agriculture. The value of local barley and wheat have also fallen relative to other prices and the increasing monetization of the economy has made cash a necessity for everything from bus fares to (government subsidised) 'ration' rice. In addition there are very few non-government or government associated jobs in this area. This is partly because of Ladakh's remote geographical location, especially the cost of transport in and out of the area, which has made many types of business unfeasible. Since the late 1980s, Kargil has also been badly affected by the Kashmir conflict which has severely curtailed business activities in the State, and unlike Leh *tehsil* it does not have a large tourist industry. It is also very difficult for people from this area to obtain jobs in other parts of the State or India, as there is an unemployment problem in most parts of the country, including many unemployed graduates.

The consequence of this is that most households in Suru are poor, evidence of which can be seen in their relatively high rates of mortality and disease as

compared even to other parts of Ladakh. When I first visited Suru, we were conducting a survey for SCF/UNICEF, and hence asking people about issues such as child mortality. We were shocked to find that it was dramatically higher than in areas of Leh *tehsil* where we had been working. While we were in Suru, a severe virus was killing so many children that outside some villages there were half a dozen or more freshly dug graves. I was equally surprised to find that the situation had not significantly changed by the time that I returned in 1993. I do not have accurate figures for such indices as child mortality, since this is not yet recorded at the Block level (see Chapter 1). However, among the families that we surveyed for the medical department, I calculated that women in the under-40 age group had already on average lost a third of their children. Maternal mortality is also extremely high, as is the prevalence of diseases such as tuberculosis. The degree of premature mortality is particularly bad in villages such as Thulus, which are further from the hospital and other medical services, but it is still very bad in villages such as Taisuru which are not.

Part of the reason for this is absolute poverty, causing many people to not have enough to eat. No-one in Suru is destitute, as the social system accommodates people who cannot fend for themselves, but many ordinary families are struggling to survive. For example, several children in the Noon Public School have been given free places because they are orphans (this means without a father), or their families are extremely poor. One day, I talked to one of the latter girls about washing her uniform, but she told me that she could not, as they do not have any money to buy soap. When we were interviewing women about their own health, most of them said that they usually only eat bread and drink tea and our observation was neither they nor their children ate enough to be healthy. It was noticeable (although not statistically significant) that mortality was slightly lower than average in the leading *aghas'* families, and the wealthier Sunnis, who nowadays eat much better food than most other people on a daily basis.

Nevertheless, the whole Block is deprived in terms of their access to resources, such as medical services and transport and hence there is not such a great difference in mortality between rich and poor families in Suru. For instance, Sunnis' mortality rates are not much better than those of Shi'ahs, despite the fact that they are nearly all fairly comfortable economically, live close to the Primary Health

Centre, and compared to Shi'ahs, are much more likely to use contraception to space their pregnancies, vaccinate their children and visit a doctor when they are ill.

Nevertheless, there are important differences between Sunnis and Shi'ahs in respect of their history of involvement with the government economy and how they both view that history. So in the next section I shall look at why the Sunnis have been so ready to take up government education and employment. I will also show that during the same period they have reformulated both their sense of what it is to be a Sunni, and their relationship to Shi'ahs, by constructing a history in which they are the more educated and modern people in the Block.

#### **(iv) Sunnis, Secular Education and Government Employment**

There are several reasons why Sunnis have entered enthusiastically into the government economy. The first, and one of the most important, is that they were less ideologically tied to the land than Shi'ahs. As I have shown in my analyses of Shi'ah and Sunni kinship practices, despite the *aghas'* own outside origins, the whole reference of Shi'ahs' practical kinship is local. Women are discouraged from travelling far from their own land, and hence the preferred partner is someone physically close. For ordinary people, however, there is no particular preference for relatives and in fact marriage with them is thought to risk future rifts in the event of divorce. For Sunnis the opposite is the case, as one of the preferred partners is a person in another region, but they prefer that person to be a relative. As I showed, this kinship pattern is partially a result of laws in Kashmir preventing people from being permanently tied to land, until the end of the 19th century. Its consequence is that for Sunnis the kinship group is more enduring and important than the location, and therefore being a Sunni is not ultimately tied to being connected to a particular piece of land.

Both they and Shi'ahs say that Sunnis entered government employment because they had less land than Shi'ahs. There is some truth in this, since there are a number of Sunni *zats* that do not have very much land. However, until recently there was usually a large amount of land in Suru that was available for leasing, which is commonplace when a household does not have sufficient labour to farm its

own land.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Shi'ahs, who also did not have much land, have not done the same, and the two families in Suru Block that were leaders in government education both had larger than average landholdings. One of these families is the *yokma-pa akhun* family in Sangra (see Chapter 3). The other are the Kakpuris of Panikhar, who have been the leaders and role models for the other Sunnis in the Suru Valley.

The Kakpuris are one of the few exceptions among Sunnis in Suru, as they do not have a history of being relatively poor. They have considerably more land than other Sunnis in Panikhar which is their original base in Suru. In the previous generation, Hajji Abdullah Far, who I have mentioned several times, went as a *mag-pa* (uxorilocal husband), to a Sunni heiress in Sankhoo. Her family, who were descended from Dogra administrators, had large amounts of land in both Sankhoo and two villages near Leh.<sup>20</sup> Before he married in Sankhoo, he taught in the newly opened primary school in Panikhar in the 1930s.<sup>21</sup> He was able to do that as the men in his family were apparently all highly literate in Farsi, Urdu and Arabic, although he was apparently the first to have a government job. After he went to Sankhoo he became the leader of the Sunnis in the Suru Valley.

In the present century, the Kakpuris have played an important part in providing both the leadership and bridgehead for other Sunnis to enter into state education and government employment. Older people told me that in the past Hajji Abdullah Far, and his elder brother's son, Munshi Khaled, had been the people in the area who were most literate in Urdu, and who used to help everyone else by writing letters and dealing with the administration.<sup>22</sup> Nowadays, the Kakpuri *zat* in Panikhar has the most senior government officer from Kargil *tehsil*, a Doctor, several engineers and many teachers in its number. Hajji Abdullah Far has been dead for about ten

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<sup>19</sup> For example in 1911, there were several tenants in both Taisuru and Panikhar, and in Choskore, half the households were said to be tenants. The tenancy arrangement is called *shazma*, and the tenants are expected to give half the crop to the owners.

<sup>20</sup> They gave much of this up in the 1950s when the government of Jammu and Kashmir made a land ceiling of just under 200 *kanals*.

<sup>21</sup> Chohan reports that the first primary school had been opened in Kargil in 1899, and that it was converted to a middle school in 1930 (Chohan 1994:110-111).

<sup>22</sup> Munshi Khaled disappeared mysteriously about forty years ago (see Chapter 3).

years and now his son Kazim Sahib has the unofficial role as leader of all the Sunnis in Kargil *tehsil*. Until his retirement, he was a senior administrator in the Education Department in Kargil, one of his sons was one of the first two people from the Suru valley to qualify as a doctor - the other being from the other Sunni family in Sankhoo, his other son is an engineer, and his two daughters are both teachers.

The Kakpuris were apparently in a good position to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the government as they already had a sound base, having a knowledge of Urdu, the administrative language, and good contacts with the government and an understanding of the government system. Most Sunnis certainly did not have these advantages, but they still started to engage in the Government economy from the 1960s and 1970s. For instance a man in his fifties from the Sunni Shaikh family in Prantee, told me that he only studied up to 3rd class and then went to the Punjab and Himachal Pradesh for labouring with his brothers when he was about twelve. Much later he got a job as a *chaprassie* (unskilled janitor). Now all his older children are educated and have jobs and the younger ones are studying. His family's success in education and employment is typical of most of the Sunni families in Panikhar and Prantee, whatever their previous economic profile.

In this respect they are also markedly different from most Shi'ahs in the Block, as the statistics in Figure 4.1 illustrate. Sunnis particularly predominate in the education department, since teaching requires educational qualifications. In 1996, of twenty-five women teachers in the block, all of whom are local, only two are Shi'ahs and there were about fifty local men, most of them Sunnis. There are also around twenty-five male teachers from Kashmir and Jammu areas, all of whom are well-qualified and are usually posted to Suru for two years.

Village	Thulus		Pursa		Taisuru		Prantee		Total		Prantee	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
No. of HH's	16		10		12		3		41		15	
Children Studying	22	14	11	11	31	19	6	5	70	49	16	16
Uneducated children	1	6	0	1	0	7	1	2	2	16	0	0
Educated Adults <sup>23</sup>	0	0	5	1	4	1	2	0	11	1	10	8
Employed Adults <sup>24</sup>	0	0	6	0	13	1	3	1	22	2	18	5
Adult Farmers	17	15	12	18	20	26	1	3	50	62	4	18

**Figure 4.1 - Education and employment statistics for surveyed households in Thulus, Pursa, Prantee and Taisuru villages in 1993**

One of the major reasons why Sunnis seem to have moved into education and government employment is because the Kakpuris had already created a foothold in that sphere in the 1930s and 1940s, so were able to help other Sunnis. Certainly Kazim Sahib, in particular, still plays a very important role in representing people in Government Departments, where it is extremely difficult for an ordinary person to get anything done - even to obtain something to which they are fully entitled - without an influential sponsor. The predominance of Sunnis within the education department in Suru, also gives Sunni students an advantage, since their teachers seem to favour Sunni students.<sup>25</sup> The fact that Sunnis see themselves as all being related, means that nepotism to some extent applies to the whole group.

<sup>23</sup> I counted adults as educated if they have a 10th class pass or more in the government education system, or if they are highly educated in the religious system.

<sup>24</sup> I have included those who have a major non-government source of income, such as contractors, shopkeepers and builders.

<sup>25</sup> For example, there is a Central Government funded school in Kargil called the Vidhyalaya school, which offers a very high standard of English medium education and is free. The headmistress told me that in 1995 eighty percent of the children who passed their examination from Suru were Sunnis. After they had been admitted, she received representations from Shi'ahs in Suru who told her that as those supervising the examinations

Although this was not true in the past, in the last two decades, bribery and cheating has become a feature of the education system in Kargil *tehsil*. Seeing the advantages that could be obtained from the possession of educational qualifications, Sunnis apparently took to the practice earlier. They also had the cash incomes to afford bribes, as the following account of a young Suru man illustrates:

*"When I first took my Matric exam (in the early 1980s) the examiners were asking for two hundred rupees as a bribe for copying (cheating). My father was very poor so he didn't have enough money to pay this so I failed. At the same time Ustanis (female teachers) X, Y and Z were taking the exam. Their parents paid the money and they passed, and subsequently got jobs as teachers. I then went and got work and saved up the money myself and went to take the exams in Kargil. That time the bribe had gone up to six hundred rupees, which I paid; but then someone reported me for cheating and I had my papers cancelled."*

During this period of their changing fortunes, Sunnis seem to have also reformulated their collective history to one in which they have always been the educated people in the area. A number of older Sunni men told me that their ancestors had come to the area because the local people were illiterate and needed people to act as their *munshis* for letter-writing, particularly between Suru and the men in the Punjab. One man said that people from as far away as Karpokhar would send a horse and bring one of these educated men for a dinner (*dawat*) at their house - both of which are signs of great respect. As I have suggested, this may have been true of one or two Sunnis in the past, but certainly not most of them. So these stories must be understood as a justification of a claim to higher status in the present.

For their part, Shi'ahs contest the Sunnis' reading of their history and origins. For instance people said that the Sunnis had been wandering people who had settled in Suru and that, except for the Kakpuris and one family in Prantee, all the Sunnis had been poor in the past. While both the *aghas* and some other Shi'ahs had been relatively well off and had been able to get *milaks* from most of the other houses.

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had all been Sunnis, they had put the Sunni children in a separate room and helped them with their papers.

Apparently as recently as twenty years ago in Panikhar some of the other families would work for a Shi'ah family that had plenty of land in return for the promise of loans of grain in times of shortage and other such benefits.<sup>26</sup> It was also relatively common in the past for a poorer house to send a child as a *duksmi* to a richer one that had a labour shortage. A male child sometimes remained and inherited property and became part of the new family's *p'ha-spun*, (see Chapter 2).<sup>27</sup> Hence what started as an unequal relationship of patronage was frequently transformed into one of equality.

Nowadays, it is rare to find new relationships of this type being formed by non-clerical Shi'ah households; however, they are increasingly common among Sunni households, albeit with a different emphasis. Many of them are now able to use their advantageous position in the Government economy and education to obtain labour from Shi'ahs. For example, several Sunni teachers in Panikhar and Prantee called a dozen or so children from their school to come and work as *milaks* for them for a day during harvest in 1994. Since the wage for labouring in this way is at least Rs. 50 a day and there is a shortage of labour at this time this was obviously very economically advantageous for them, as well as being a public illustration of their superior social standing.<sup>28</sup> Some Shi'ahs families also had a patron-client relationship with a Sunni neighbour for whom they would do *milaks* and help them out when needed.

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<sup>26</sup> In colonial times there was no limit on landholdings, and these larger landholders usually had a number of client houses who were heavily in debt to them. However, the Jammu and Kashmir government successfully enacted land reform, and outlawed these kinds of debt relationships soon after Independence, which however did not then immediately disappear.

<sup>27</sup> For instance the family of Hajji Mirza, one of the richest Shi'ahs in Panikhar and a political opponent of the *yokma* faction, have a young man Mehdi living with them who came to their house from Parkachik when he was a baby. He has no educational qualifications and does farm work; whereas Hajji Mirza's own son studied and is now an engineer. Mehdi is now married with several children and has his own separate household in Hajji Mirza's house.

<sup>28</sup> Teachers can also ask other things of their pupils. For instance, teachers in the Noon Public School could ask one of the pupils to bring milk, yoghurt and vegetables from home and they would feel obliged to do so.

In 1993 there were also a number of Sunni houses in Panikhar and Prantee which had young Shi'ah men as *duksmi*. These men were almost all studying in 9th or 10th class and worked for a Sunni family for low or no wages in the expectation that they would use their influence with government departments to find them a job. Some, but not all, of these relationships differed quite markedly from similar ones in the *aghas'* households and what I understand to have been their nature in the past. Since it was increasingly becoming the case that they were being treated as social inferiors rather than as a relatively equal member of the family. For example, they were often spoken to in a rude manner and given orders; whereas the *duksmi* in the *aghas'* households were not treated markedly different from the family members. Sadiak, the young man from Kargee who is a *dukmi* in Agha Miggi Ort's house, is expected to do more farm and heavy work than the young *aghas*, and is not encouraged to study to the extent that they are. Nevertheless, he had a joint wedding with Ali Agha, Agha Miggi Ort's second son and, like the other *duksmis*, he is treated as a social equal and valued member of the household.

Thus these relationships are being used by some Sunnis to create a social inequality between them and Shi'ahs. In all the patron client relations involving Sunnis, Sunnis were the patrons and Shi'ahs were the clients. All free labour arrangements between Sunni households are of a reciprocal kind known as *laktsig* (which Shi'ahs also use). This is used for particular agricultural tasks, for instance the job of taking the fertilizer soil from the earth latrines and barns to the fields in the spring. So again Sunnis seem to emphasise social equality among themselves, although economically this is far from the case.

Another factor in their success has been the Sunnis' location in and around Panikhar, which has been the administrative centre since Dogra times and hence is where the first schools and jobs were created. Shi'ahs from the four most central villages of Panikhar, Prantee, Choskore and Taisuru have also been far more successful than those from remoter villages, both in obtaining Government jobs and in other areas of the new economy, such as shop-keeping and contracting. However, as my statistics showed, even in the central part of the Block, there is still a marked discrepancy between the level of educational qualifications of Shi'ahs and Sunnis, and hence the kind of jobs that they obtain.

As the previous account has shown Sunnis have managed to substantially improve their economic position, by taking advantage of the opportunities that the state offered and using their new position to form patronage relations with some Shi'ahs. One of the reasons why they have been so successful in this is that in the past the Shi'ite majority did not compete with them for government benefits and resources. In the next section I will look at some of the reasons why this has been the case and offer some suggestions as to why the situation has changed in the last few years.

#### (v) Shi'ahs, Secular Education and Government Employment

In Kargil *tehsil*, the numbers attending school have increased enormously in the last decade, as the following statistics demonstrate, although some allowance must be made for the fact that there is a high drop-out rate (Kaneez Fatima forthcoming, Kargil Youth Voluntary Forum 1993).

Class	Girls	Boys	Total
1st - 5th Primary	5327	6176	11503
6th - 8th Middle	1037	2453	3490
9th - 10th	283	897	1180
11th - 12th	95	445	640
<b>All classes</b>	<b>6742</b>	<b>9971</b>	<b>16 813</b>

**Figure 4.2 - Numbers of Children Attending School in Kargil Tehsil<sup>29</sup>**

In the villages that we surveyed in Suru, nearly all children of primary school age are now attending school, as I showed in Figure 4.1. Sunnis were already sending all their children to school in the early 1980s, so the great increase in school attendance has been because Shi'ahs have also started sending their children *en masse*. This high rate of school attendance, particularly in a relatively remote rural area, is unusual in India as a whole, in which only a quarter of children complete primary school (Drury 1993: vii, Census 1991). One of the reasons for it, is undoubtedly that the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in the Indian Union and the strategic importance of Ladakh, means that the State Government (with Central

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<sup>29</sup> The population of Kargil *tehsil* was 86,000 at this time.

Government funding) provides free education and medical services on a scale that is not available in most parts of India. Recently there has also been a small subsidy and free uniform for older girls who attend school. Now in some primary schools there are also free school meals and this scheme is apparently being extended throughout the *tehsil*.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, there are also other factors involved in the increase in school attendance among Shi'ahs.

As recently as ten years ago, Shi'ahs in Suru were not very interested in secular education for a number of reasons. One was their historical lack of involvement with the government - of whatever period, and their experience of state power as an external and coercive force. Hence they did not regard schools as being benign providers of education, but as just another example of an arbitrary and cruel imposition of an external authority. Several men associated with the school said that they had been treated very badly by the teachers when they were at school and some of them said that they had abandoned their studies as a result.

This reluctance to engage with the Government institutions also had resonances with some of the anti-secularist ideas coming from the Shi'ite centres in the 1960s and 1970s, which were a result of the erosion of influence of the clergy due to a rapid and divisive process of state-led modernisation (Cole & Keddie 1986:22). By the 1970s some of the Shi'ite leaders in Kargil *tehsil* were apparently discouraging their followers from being involved both in secular education and the use of Urdu and English the main languages of government.<sup>31</sup> This suspicion continued until very recently in some quarters. For instance in Kargil town, the first private school was the Islamiya school that was opened in the 1950s as a *madrassa* for the religious training of young men who will later go to study in the Middle East.<sup>32</sup> The Suru Valley Public School, the first non-religious private school, was not opened until 1982. It was started by a predominantly Sunni management committee. Mr. Chisti, a Tibetan Muslim, who was the principal of the school from 1985-1990, said

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<sup>30</sup> In 1994 the grants were Rs200 twice a year for girls in 6th - 8th class, and Rs.300 twice a year for girls in 9th and 10th class.

<sup>31</sup> There was apparently a time in the 1960s and 1970s when some preached against the wearing of modern dress and men cutting their hair, which were seen as un-Islamic.

<sup>32</sup> By 1996 they had also opened some English medium private schools.

that when he first arrived in Kargil most Shi'ahs were not interested in sending their children to the school, because they objected to the secular nature of the syllabus and to the wearing of uniform - particularly the dresses for girls. Partly in opposition to this school, the more religion-oriented Mutahan School was opened in Kargil by some Shi'ites. However, after many months of persuasion, the principal managed to persuade more Shi'ahs to send their children to the school. In 1985, there were 20 students in the Suru Valley Public School and 40 or 50 in the Mutahari School; but, by 1986, there were 100 in SVPS and only about 15 in the Mutahari School.<sup>33</sup>

There was certainly also a discouragement of parents sending girls to study, as the current levels of female literacy among Shi'ah women in Suru illustrate (see Figure 4.1). Agha Hyder told his followers that girls should be married at about nine years old, as soon as they had reached their religious maturity (*baliaq thongse*), although women said they had been married at about twelve. He also discouraged parents from sending older girls to study. When we visited Sankhoo in 1981 there were 300 boys in the high school, but no girls; whereas in Panikhar there were many Sunni and a few Shi'ah girls.<sup>34</sup> In Sankhoo Block, the sons from the *Sangra yokma-pa akhun* family were the exception, in that they all studied to university level; but some of their sisters have never attended school. In Suru Block, the first Shi'ah graduated in 1993; whereas, by then, there were a number of Sunni graduates in the 40 households in Panikhar and Prantee. However, there was no particular difference in the levels of male or female education between the two Shi'ite factions.

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<sup>33</sup> The Mutahari School now offers the full secular curriculum, and has several branches in villages around Kargil. The Islamiya School organisers also apparently opened a branch for secular education in 1996.

<sup>34</sup> The atmosphere was the same in Kargil at the time. Munshi Khadim, who is the nephew of Munshi Habibullah in Kargil, and the main organiser of the school, said that his mother's family came to Kargil from Skardu before 1947. He educated all his daughters despite being severely discouraged by the Shi'ah clerics who said that it was against their religion, and one of his granddaughters became the first woman from Kargil to graduate. She then became the Headmistress of the Girls' High School in Kargil in the mid-1970s, at which time there were only 10 girls studying there, but soon she had raised the number to 350.

One reason why Shi'ahs did not send the children to school in the past, was because their main focus was on the land, both symbolically and economically, and therefore they did not want to spare their children from work on the land. It is significant in this respect that those who entered secular education earlier, such as the Sangra *akhun* family, could get *milaks* for their agricultural labour. Another major difference between Sunnis and Shi'ahs can be found in the different focus of their leadership and role models. Sunni leaders, possessed secular education and had pre-existing links with the governmental economy. Hence secular education and government employment were seen as both attainable and desirable in themselves. Whereas, Shi'ite leaders stressed the attainment of merit through religious education and donation. Higher status could be obtained through going on *hajj*, or sending a son to study in a Shi'ite *madrassa* in the Middle East. However, the latter was always out of the reach of most ordinary Shi'ahs and the aim of Shi'ah household heads was to go on *hajj* or *ziarat*.

Nowadays Sunnis are critical of Shi'ahs' practice of going on *ziarat*, particularly the fact that men frequently go when they still have younger children. They say that you should only go when you have brought up and educated all your children. Only a few Sunnis go on *hajj* (to Mecca) and it is nearly always when they are fairly elderly. For instance, Kazim Sahib went after his retirement. Some Sunnis also say that the fact that they go on *hajj* shows that Shi'ahs are not really poor at all. In fact, only a minority of Shi'ahs ever get to go on *hajj*. Out of 41 Shi'ah households from various villages that I surveyed in detail, eight of them had a male household head who was a *hajji* and there was only one female *hajji*.

The differential initial entry of Sunnis and Shi'ahs into secular education, is analogous to what Rizvi observed in a village in Spiti, a close neighbour of Ladakh, that was part of the pre-Dogra Ladakh kingdom. He says that the breakdown of polyandry in this area, had the result that there are two major types of household: the *khangchen*, which are those of older brothers and have both more land and a higher status in the village and the *hinjung*, which are the houses of younger brothers, who have much less land due to the customary rule of primogeniture which is still largely observed. Rizvi says that the *hinjung* were ready to send their children to school and try out agricultural innovations; whereas the *khangchen* were very unwilling to change. The *hinjung* started to look for other opportunities,

and refused to work on the land of the *khangchen* as they had in the past (Rizvi 1987a:424-425). As in Suru, it seems that the *khangchen* had an attachment to the land as a symbolic manifestation of their status as full citizens of the village, and therefore were unwilling to change this position. Thus differences in their position in the kinship system from that of the *hinjung* had a marked effect on their attitude to change. Similarly Hastrup has shown that in Iceland a collective representation of the society being primarily agricultural, caused those with larger landholdings to both discourage and avoid fishing as a source of livelihood, leading to a failure to produce sufficient food (Hastrup 1992b:111). I am not trying to suggest that Shi'ahs were wrong to avoid secular education, merely that differences in focus had an important effect on their attitudes to it.

I would suggest that in the 1970s and 1980s, Shi'ahs entered the government economy in a largely instrumental way, to get money to finance their religious activity, particularly to go on *hajj*. Initially, Shi'ahs did not send their children to school, as they saw no merit in secular education *per se* and at that time there were government jobs that could be obtained without educational qualifications, for those that wanted them. Nevertheless, most Shi'ahs do not seem to even have had the expectation of obtaining a government job at that time.

However by the late 1980s the situation was changing rapidly. Firstly because the division of land, and undermining of the agricultural economy and increasing monetization of the economy meant that many households were forced to look for alternative sources of income. An additional factor in the last decade has also been the escalation in brideprice (*rintho*), in order for young men to marry, as I shall discuss in Chapter 6. Secondly, the rapid increase in government employment in the late 1970s and 1980s had almost completely stopped. For instance, in 1994, there had been a freeze for the last three years on any new appointments in the education department. The government's response to this situation was to increase the educational qualifications required for government jobs, so that by 1993 it was necessary to have a 10th class pass even for unskilled jobs. At the same time the number of students obtaining qualifications is increasing very rapidly, both because of the larger numbers now attending school and because of a great escalation in the scale of bribery in the last few years. The result is that there is now a growing unemployment problem in Kargil *tehsil*, where people talk of 7,000 or more

unemployed (Urdu: *bekar*). This situation is apparently similar to that found in most parts of India, where there is a serious unemployment problem among those with educational qualifications (Drury 1993:vii).

Men in Suru and elsewhere in the *tehsil* no longer want to go labouring, as they know that it is both much harder work and worse paid than a government job. Only men from the poorest families now go labouring, and it is generally regarded as being rather demeaning. As I have suggested, in practice, the majority of government jobs are rather undemanding on the incumbent, both in terms of workload and their actual attendance at work. So to some extent Shi'ahs have been forced to obtain educational qualifications in order to get government employment, not because they particularly value the education itself, rather they see it as a means to an end. As a Suru woman once remarked to me: *"Urdu and English are good for getting a job, but Arabic is the language which is close to our hearts."*

However, just as Shi'ahs entered secular education in large numbers, the idea that educational qualifications, particularly pre-University ones, give access to a government job is becoming increasingly unrealistic. Nevertheless people's expectations of such an outcome are rising rapidly at the moment. An important reason for this is that in the last twenty or so years people in Kargil *tehsil* have witnessed the state in an unusually generous mood and as the main source of waged jobs and other cash opportunities in the area. This seems to have given people the impression that the state can and will provide. Secondly, all political parties and most politicians, make promises to provide more government facilities and jobs, even though this may be extremely unrealistic. For instance, it is noticeable that the visit of a politician from outside, or a disaster that befalls the area (such as the shellings of Kargil in 1997), is nearly always the occasion for a State or Central Government statement saying that money will be spent or jobs will be created in Kargil *tehsil*. As Jalal and others show, this is now standard practice, for politicians in India, particularly in areas that are seen as being dissident or strategic (Jalal 1995:94ff), and is clearly linked to Chatterjee's notion of the developmental state (see Chapter 1).

The effect in Kargil is a rapidly escalating expectation that people are entitled to a government job that could be provided. By 1994, this situation was exacerbated by the disruption in the state in the last five years, which had caused a decrease in

business opportunities and an increase in bribery, which was already rife, as I have suggested. One consequence is that greater numbers of students were passing the Matriculation examination than in previous years, thereby increasing the numbers of people who see themselves as being unemployed. In the mid-1990s, this resulted in demonstrations in Kargil by students' organisations, demanding to be given jobs.

This situation has strong resonance with an article by Degregori on highland Peru, an area that has similarities with Suru (and Ladakh) in terms of its history of external domination and current peripherality to the centres of power. He says that there education is regarded as a "black box" the contents of which are not very important, but which must be obtained to get access to the resources of the state, therefore he says it is similar to a cargo in a cargo cult (Degregori 1991:241).

In this context of increasing demands for government resources, a conflict has emerged between Sunnis and the *yokma-pa* in Suru, particularly over access to and control of education. This is the context in which the *yokma-pa* leadership decided to open the Noon Public School, as I shall discuss in the next section.

#### **(vi) The Causes of the Sunni *Yokma-pa* Conflict**

As I have shown, by the 1990s about half the adult Sunnis in Panikhar and Prantee had a government job or occupation that brings in a reasonable income, such as shop-keeping, compared to just over a sixth of Shi'ahs. Of the Shi'ahs that I surveyed, the majority had non-government jobs, such as being a contractor, shop-keeper or skilled craftsman. Nearly all the Sunnis had government jobs, most of which were white-collar. In Suru Block itself, they dominated employment in the Education Department, where all but 2 of the 18 female teachers were Sunni, as were the majority of the local male teachers, and they had most of the posts in the Medical Department which required educational qualifications.

By 1993, the advantageous position that Sunnis had attained in respect of education and government service meant that many Sunni households had managed to move into the position of being patrons for poorer Shi'ah families and were able to draw on their free labour both for farm work and household servants. Thus indirectly challenging some of the *aghas'* power over their followers. At the same time, the leading *aghas* were finding it difficult to operate as patrons for their

followers in the government economy. For instance, Agha Miggi Ort is highly educated; however, he is literate in Farsi and Arabic, but not in Urdu and English, the main languages of the government administration. He is also an expert in the Shi'ite system of administration, but not in that of the government in Jammu and Kashmir and the departments in Suru and Kargil. For example, one day Agha Miggi Ort asked me to help him fill in a school application form, which was in English and Hindi. On another occasion, I suggested to a young man from a family that are his devoted followers, that he should ask Agha Miggi Ort to help him in his representations to a government department in Kargil. He laughed sarcastically and said "*Why? What should he do, say some prayers?*"

That young man's family had a patronage relationship with a Sunni family in Panikhar by which he was a *duksmi* in their house, and his family provided *milaks* for the other household. This kind of arrangement between Sunnis and Shi'ahs was on the increase at a time when the *aghas* were finding it more difficult to get free labour from their followers, and non-clerical Shi'ah houses no longer used *milaks*.<sup>35</sup> There was also a growing feeling among Shi'ahs that Sunnis were not honouring these patronage relationships. One Shi'ah man remarked to me in 1993: "*We have been very helpful to them, but they do not help us*". To some extent this was true, since several of the young Shi'ah men who had been servants (*duksmi*) for Sunnis in Panikhar and Prantee, had not been found Government work by their employers, which had been the understanding on which they had taken the work in the first place.

Nevertheless, education was not a matter of dispute between the *yokma* faction and Sunnis as recently as 1988, when they co-operated to open the short-lived English-medium Crystal school in Prantee. The main organiser of the school was Headmaster Gulzar, a Sunni from Prantee, who was the Principal of the Boys' High School there; but Agha Miggi Ort was also enthusiastically involved in the school and sent one of his sons there. The Crystal school did not last for more than two years, partly because of the tragic death of Headmaster Gulzar, after which no-one else was interested in taking over the organisation.

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<sup>35</sup> Api Cho-cho, one of Agha Hyder's widows, told me that in the past they had a much larger household, because of all the *duksmi*.

The growing antagonism between the *yokma-pa* and the Sunnis apparently came to a head in 1991, when there was an ugly incident in Prantee in which a *yokma-pa* woman was allegedly raped by some young Sunni men and the ensuing furore seems to have left both sides feeling very disgruntled.<sup>36</sup> After that there was a growing openness in the hostility between the two. For example, in 1993, Sunnis told me that two years before they had been made to feel unwelcome when they attended *matam* at the *yokma-pa masjid* in Taisuru, and so they no longer went.

This emergent competition was to some extent exacerbated in 1992 by the granting of Tribal Status to Ladakhis. This status gives advantages in terms of reservation of government jobs and access to higher education in particular. Due to an extraordinary decision by the caretaker government of Jammu and Kashmir, the initial implication of this status was that Sunnis were excluded, since they claim origin outside Ladakh. However, in Kargil *tehsil*, most of them have now obtained it under the *Purigi-pa* status that is used for the majority of people in the *tehsil*. In 1993, some Suru Sunnis who were given prestigious Government jobs still did not have their Tribal Status certificates and *yokma* faction members were apparently challenging their appointments in the courts. Thus there was a growing feeling among the *yokma* faction that Sunnis were taking things to which they themselves were rightfully entitled, which was similar to the anti-Sunni discourse among Buddhists that was prominent in the politics of the Tribal Status demands in Leh *tehsil*. The *goma-pa*, do not seem to have taken the same position in respect of Sunnis, which is in keeping with their generally less proactive politics.

By the early 1990s, Sunnis had also entirely stopped intermarrying with Shi'ahs in the Block. Marriages between them had been relatively infrequent in the decades before, but had been common in the past. This change had occurred because Sunnis had recently started to claim a degree of social superiority over Shi'ahs. However, whether it had this effect is a moot point, since correspondingly, they felt that they could no longer ask for Shi'ah women, as they were bound to be refused, since Shi'ahs were starting to resist the attempts by some Sunnis to turn them into

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<sup>36</sup> I know very little about what happened, but I have heard that some of the young men were arrested and beaten by the police.

inferiors. At the same time, Sunnis were increasingly differentiating themselves from Shi'ahs in other ways, particularly in claiming to be more educated and modern.

However, this was by no means a *fait accompli* in the eyes of the Shi'ah majority, who were becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the situation. Another factor was that the *yokma* faction had fragmented a bit since the death of Agha Hyder in 1988, and apparently could no longer count on all of its previous following. So its leadership were also having to look for new ways to retain their power among their followers. This is the context in which the leaders of the *yokma* faction decided to start their own private English-medium school in Suru, as I shall describe in the next chapter.

### **(vii) Conclusions**

In this chapter I started by describing how the Sunnis in Suru, have moved from being relatively poor and undifferentiated from Shi'ahs as recently as twenty years ago, to being an emergent administrative elite in the 1990s. I identified two main reasons why this occurred: firstly Sunnis had different kinship practice from Shi'ahs and consequently were not as closely linked to the land ideologically; secondly, the leading Sunni family in the area already possessed both secular education and a connection with the administration, and acted as role models and patrons for other Sunnis entering this part of the economy.

At the same time, Shi'ahs were not interested in secular education when it was first introduced as they were more interested in their own Shi'ite world and system of merit and status, than that of the government. However, some of them did take unskilled government jobs but, by and large, they seem to have mainly engaged in agriculture supplemented mainly by labouring, trading and shop-keeping.

I then showed that in the last decade changing economic conditions have meant that many more Shi'ahs are now seeking government jobs. Since these can only be gained by possessing secular education, this has caused a corresponding rush for education at any cost. I then discussed how this tendency has been exacerbated in Suru and Kargil tehsil, by the rapid introduction of the government economy, the constant raising of expectations by all political parties and the local

factors which means that the government is virtually the only employer. By using the example of the bribing with which most people pass exams, I demonstrated that most people's desire is not for education *per se*, but for the qualifications that they think will entitle them to a job.

One of the consequences of Sunnis' early and successful move into government education and jobs, particularly in education itself, is that they have increasingly been able to obtain services such as free labour from Shi'ahs and are starting to make claims of social superiority over them. To some extent, they are also threatening the position of the *yokma aghas* as patrons of their followers. This has led to a rift emerging between the Sunnis and the *yokma-pa* in the early 1990s, when they previously had been amicable. The *yokma-pa* leadership made the decision to open the school partly as an attempt to challenge the Sunni dominance in secular education.

As I have emphasised the opening of the school by the *yokma* faction was partially a political act, and was interpreted as such by a predominantly Sunni faction, who almost immediately became actively opposed to its existence, as I shall describe in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5

# The *Yokma-pa*, the School and the anti-School Faction

### (i) Introduction

The Noon Public School was opened by the *yokma-pa* in order to address their disadvantage in respect of education and government jobs and to challenge the Sunnis' dominance in these areas. In my examination of the management committee of the school and its internal politics, I shall show that the committee and the pupils of the school are mainly drawn from a tiny elite in the *yokma* faction and that the majority of its members support the school as part of their religious duty to the leading *aghas* rather than from any apparent interest in the aims of the school itself. In a description of the committee's discussions concerning the location of the school, I shall show that the faction is not monolithic, and that other issues of locality and village are also extremely important in its politics.

During the two years when I was conducting my fieldwork in Suru, there was a truce between the *yokma* and *goma-pa*, and a conflict had emerged between the Sunnis and the *yokma-pa*. This dispute was particularly public around the issue of the Noon Public School, which the Sunnis boycotted almost from the start. However, it became increasingly apparent that they were not in a position to challenge the *yokma-pa*, and that many Sunnis were ambivalent about the politics of the anti-school faction. It was also clear that most of the overt disputes around the school were between the elites of the various factions involved, including members of the administrative elite in Kargil.

When I returned to Suru during the local elections of 1996, I was extremely interested to find that there had been a number of changes in alliances in the area, and that the return to democracy had also seen a revival of the split between the *yokma* and *goma* factions. At the same time, the differences between Sunnis and Shi'ahs appeared to be less in evidence. Generally it was my observation that religious organisation continued to be important, but religious affiliation as a basis for faction formation was less so. These political changes that I saw in 1996 led me to revise my initial analysis of the situation made in 1993/4.

## **(ii) The Management Committee and Supporters of the School**

By the time that the decision was made to open the school in the spring of 1993, several members of the Kargil administrative elite had suggested such a move to members of the *yokma* faction without any success. However, in 1993, a pre-emptive move by Sunnis to set up a rival school was feared, which might thwart the leading Shi'ahs wish to have a local school that was under their political control. The *yokma-pa* elite also wanted their children to become qualified for jobs in the higher echelons of the government administration, but did not want to have to send their children away from Suru, so that they would lose their existing culture and traditions. There is a strong historical association in India between English-medium private education and the senior administrative jobs (Drury 1993:24). As I have suggested, possession of such jobs gives access to membership of the administrative elite in Kargil *tehsil*. However, it is important to stress that this was only the ambition of a tiny minority in the *yokma-pa*, and I do not even think of the whole of the management committee.

A further incentive came from outside the area. In the winter of 1992/3, when Agha Miggi Ort was in Delhi, he had met with Zaidi, an Iranian Shi'ah, who is a travel agent in Delhi. He had developed a plan to build a large school in the Suru area of Kargil *tehsil*, and was keen to put his idea into practice. It appeared at the time that he would be able to raise large amounts of money for the project. He was asking for money from western development organisations, such as Oxfam, although nothing came of this. His interest and enthusiasm encouraged Agha Miggi Ort to go back and form a committee to open the school, as he gave people in the *yokma* faction a sense that they were being supported by the wider Shi'ite world which is an important frame of reference for them.

Consequently, a management committee was set up, chaired by Munshi Khadim, the Block Development Officer (BDO) for Suru Block. Agha Miggi Ort, Agha Baqir, and Mahi-ud-din, the Headmaster of the Boys' High School in Prantee (a Sunni from Prantee) were leading members, supported by two more Sunnis, 11 members of the *yokma* faction, and one *goma-pa*.<sup>1</sup> At the initial meeting, where various pledges of money were made, it was decided to open the school in early June in an abandoned

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<sup>1</sup> The District Commissioner and Chief Education Officer were made the honorary chair and vice chair of the committee.



first man from Suru Block to qualify as a doctor. From 1994 to 1996 he was posted at the Primary Health Centre at Panikhar, and became the Secretary of the Noon Public School during this period. He is married to one of Munshi Habibullah's nieces, and their sister Latifa is married to a member of Munshi Habibullah's *p'ha-spun*. They were the only *yokma-pa* family to have marriage links with the Kargil administrative elite. Dr. Jaffar is also a founder member of the Kargil Youth Voluntary Forum (KYVF), which is a social welfare and cultural organisation set up by a group of young Shi'ah men from the Kargil administrative elite.

The number of people from the *yokma* faction who are actively involved is very small as compared with the thousands of *yokma* faction members in the block. The main supporters, management committee members and parents for the school were less than thirty in number in 1993, and several of these families are certainly not very well off. The actual roll of the school is also tiny compared with the several hundred young *yokma* children who could attend as they live in walking distance of Taisuru.<sup>2</sup> Even by 1996 the numbers in the school had only increased to sixty, of whom seven were orphans with free places. Obviously a significant proportion of *yokma-pa* supporters could not afford to send a child to the school, but for many it was simply not a priority.

In the first year it had eighteen pupils, of whom only one was a girl. In 1994 there were thirty-five, of whom five were girls, three of whom and four boys had free places; by 1996 there were sixty, with only seven girls, two *goma-pa* and two Sunni children (a brother and sister from Prantee). These statistics raise the question of what meaning the school has for ordinary members of the *yokma* faction, and also why some of the parents did send their children to the school.

When the school was opened the *yokma aghas* used their influence with the faction members to get them to give children to the school and to donate money. The notion of giving to the school was clearly seen by most people as being in the same category as religious donations that they periodically make at the *aghas'* request for special expenses such as for religious ceremonies and buildings (see Chapter 2). The *yokma-pa aghas* can raise sums as high as Rs. 100,000 from their followers, as every

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<sup>2</sup> There are in excess of 3,000 *yokma-pa* in the Block, of whom over a thousand are in villages that are within realistic walking distance from the school, hence there must be at least two hundred children in this age group.

household in their following will donate a small sum at their request. However, in the case of the school, they asked for individual voluntary donations. Most of the initial funds came from a few members of the management committee, and the parents of the first set of children also each gave Rs. 5,000, which is meant to be returned at some point in the future.<sup>3</sup> Wealthier *yokma-pa* households with no child to give to the school were also persuaded to make donations of several hundred rupees.

Of the original eighteen families putting children in the school, most had above average incomes for Shi'ahs and could easily afford the donation and the one hundred rupees monthly fees. However, there were three families who were not at all well off. One was that of Husain from Panikhar. Due to a division of the *pha-spun's* land and animals a few years ago they did not have sufficient land and animals to support the household that consists of Husain, his wife Sakina, their daughter and three sons. He also had a job as an unskilled assistant in the Animal Husbandry Department, and their eldest son was a 9th class pass and worked as a *duksmi* for the neighbouring Sunni house (see Chapter 4). Both Sakina and their daughter aged sixteen have never been to school and spend their time doing farm and housework. Another son was studying in 8th class at the Boys' High School in Prantee, and the second youngest was placed in the school.

Although they were clearly not in a position to easily afford the fees at the school, their enthusiasm for it was partly because they are from Panikhar, where most families have at least one person with a government job and place an above average emphasis on educational qualifications, and partly because they are particularly close socially to the *aghhas* in Taisuru and their families, and enthusiastically follow their leadership. However, Husain did not take any part in the management of the school, or discussions about it, as he is not in the inner circle of the more influential *yokma-pa* members.

A number of the parents who have children at the school took a good deal of persuading before they agreed to give a child. It is clear that in the end what persuaded them was the wish to please the *agha*, which was construed as a pious act.

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<sup>3</sup> An initial entry fee is payable at all the private schools in the area, and is usually about Rs. 1,000. In this case it was higher and returnable (theoretically) as it was seen as being the start-up capital for the school.

One of the parents from Yuljuk - which is about an hour's walk from the school - said that the fees were difficult for him to pay as he is only a *coolie* (day labourer) and that he had had doubts about the distance that his son had to walk to school. He said that he is close to Agha Miggi Ort, who sometimes visits their house, and who kept trying to persuade him to give his son to the school, so that eventually he agreed. He was clearly not sure about his decision, but he was the only parent who expressed such a doubt. The *goma-pa* did not boycott the school, but only two *goma-pa* children had been sent by 1994. These are both from prominent *akhun* and *shaikh* families, one of whom is the cousin of Qamer Ali and Dr. Jaffar. The main reason why hardly any *goma-pa* sent children, was that without the encouragement of their *aghas*, there was not sufficient incentive, as for them it could not be construed as a religious donation. Sunnis, who did see a point in English-medium education, effectively boycotted the school (see below).

Nevertheless, many *yokma-pa* members could not afford to send their children to the school, even in the second year when the initial donation was reduced from Rs. 5,000 to Rs 3,000. But many others could not see any point in sending their children to an English-medium private school when they did not see themselves as having the means or contacts to help their children into white collar jobs. In stark contrast, when a branch of the school opened in Sankhoo in 1996, it immediately attracted around sixty fee-paying pupils.<sup>4</sup> This difference is to do with the fact that Sankhoo is the main administrative centre for the whole Suru valley, and therefore there are many government employees, either from there or with lodgings in Sankhoo, and there is a larger population within walking distance of Sankhoo, and a better bus service in that area. Therefore, there is a much larger pool of families with a steady cash income from government employment and a greater interest in getting their children higher level educational qualifications.

### **(iii) Management Committee Meetings and the *Yokma-pa* Leadership**

In this section I shall look at some of the discussions within the management committee about the location of the school, in order to show how politics are conducted among the leadership of the faction. The school had originally been located in Taisuru both because it was the most satisfactory location for the *yokma-pa*

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<sup>4</sup> In 1996, this school was temporarily housed in Agha Hyder's *astana* in Sankhoo, but a permanent site was already under construction.

*aghas* and ensured that the school was very much an extension of the faction, and also because there was an empty government school available. However, the building was very small and basic and only temporarily available. It was therefore planned to build a permanent school after one or two years.

Initially three possible locations were suggested. The first was to use a school building and adjacent land in Prantee near the Boys' High School. Most Sunnis and Shi'ahs in Panikhar and Prantee supported this, but it was unpopular with some of the *yokma-pa* leaders who saw Prantee and Panikhar as being predominantly Sunni. The second proposal was to use an uncultivated piece of land called Choskore Thang, on the roadside about a mile above Panikhar. This was the most convenient and cheapest of the sites available and that favoured by the BDO. The third option was to build on some land near the school's current location in Taisuru, a solution favoured by the two leading *aghas* and many parents in the locality. In fact, for several years the *yokma-pa* leaders had been campaigning to have the Block headquarters moved from Panikhar to Taisuru, but the DC had recently refused such an idea.

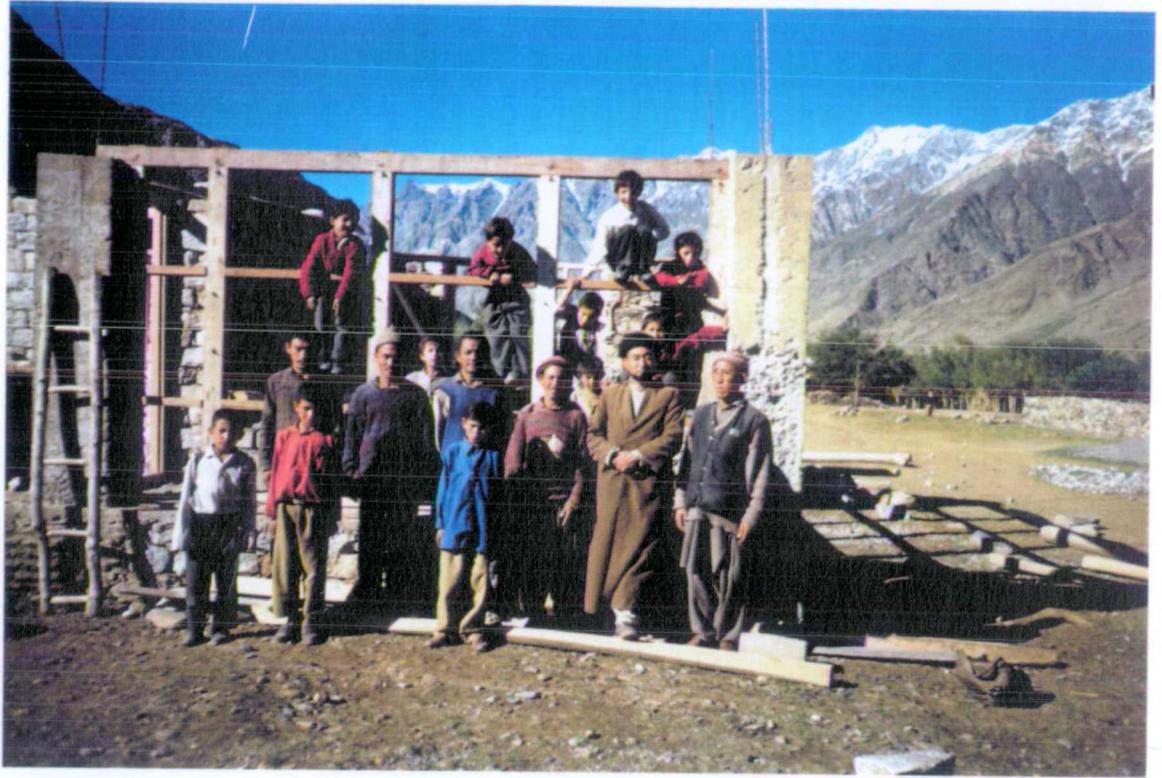
When the location was discussed in committee in the spring of 1994, the first option had been completely ruled out by the *aghas*, and was not even mentioned. The meeting took place in a large guest room in Agha Baqir's house. The floor of the room was carpeted, and the two *aghas*, and the BDO sat at one side of the room, forming the main focus of the group, and myself and the other teacher who was a Kashmiri Pandit, sat to their right and were flanked by three of the most important *hajjis*. In all there were about twenty people present. During the discussion, the main protagonists were Agha Baqir - for Taisuru, and Hajji Ghulam Mohammed - for Choskore Thang.



*Picture 5.1 - The Noon Public School at Taisuru*



*Picture 5.2 - The Management Committee meeting at the Dak Bungalow*



*Picture 5.3 - Agha Miggi Ort and others at the new school in Choskore Thang*



*Picture 5.4 - The visit of the KYVF to the school in 1994*



*Picture 5.5 - The children eating dinner during the KYVF visit to the school*



*Picture 5.6 - The Middle School in Kargee in 1993*

They did most of the talking, arguing very heatedly and sometimes shouting at each other, with occasional interjections from other people. Hajji Ghulam Mohammed, could argue this strongly with Agha Baqir as he is from the inner circle of their family, but other *yokma-pa* members never did so at any of the meetings. A few days before, an ordinary woman had argued heatedly with Agha Miggi Ort while he was trying to settle a land dispute, and everyone was commenting on how shameful it was to argue so openly with the *agha*, not that she was a woman and did so. Both Agha Miggi Ort and the BDO said little, except when the latter intervened to calm people down. Most other people did not contribute to the discussion, and in general only a few of the members said much at the meetings.

Finally, it was agreed to build the school at Taisuru, on land that was mainly to be donated by the *aghas*. At the end of the discussion, people turned to Agha Miggi Ort and asked him for his agreement which was given. A document was then drawn up and signed by both *aghas* and some witnesses, saying that they each intended to donate land for the construction. Two other members, one from Taisuru and one from Namsuru, offered to donate money for additional land as they also wanted the school to be in Taisuru, because they had small children for whom Choskore Thang would be a long walk.

By the early autumn, Agha Baqir had withdrawn his offer of land, and seemed to be losing interest in the school, so that no action had been taken to start building. Later, in the summer, at an open day for parents, to which each of the families with children in the school had sent a male representative, Hajji Ghulam Mohammed raised again the question of building at Choskore Thang. We all sat in a circle on the ground outside the Dak Bungalow for the discussion. He reiterated his support for the Choskore Thang site, and although Agha Baqir did oppose it, he was not nearly so vehement this time. The two parents who had offered additional land in Taisuru objected more strongly to Choskore Thang, but they were in a minority. It was finally conclusively agreed to start building the school there the next spring. In fact the construction started in the summer of 1996, and it was due to be completed in 1997.

At this meeting several of the parents, who are not on the management committee prepared food for everyone, which they served after the discussion. They were all present while the subject of the site was being debated, but none of them contributed. It was normal in any such discussion, that only a few prominent people would presume

to venture an opinion. Agha Miggi Ort often says little at these discussions both because part of his authority lies in his ability to stand back and act with a degree of *gravitas*. Also, people already know what he thinks and ultimately he has the final word on such things. As with any organisation, much of the discussion does not take place within the management committee itself, but occurs on an *ad hoc* basis, in other contexts. If I discussed a school matter with another management committee member, and we agreed that something needed to be done, they would often say something like: “Go and speak to Agha Sahib (Agha Miggi Ort) about it, and if he agrees to it then we can do it”, or simply “The Agha must decide.” In which case, I would then informally speak to him about something when I was visiting their house.

At the same time, Agha Miggi Ort’s leadership is built on the voluntary support of his followers, and therefore he does have to listen to their opinions, particularly those of the more powerful supporters such as Hajji Ghulam Mohammed. In the case of the location of the school, he won the argument, because Agha Miggi Ort had come to see that the Taisuru site was impractical, particularly without Agha Baqir’s land and that the school could be built at Choskore Thang.

This example shows that the *yokma* faction itself is by no means monolithic. The members have a number of other cross-cutting ties, as well as a sense of community within the *yokma-pa* and allegiance to the leading *aghas*. For example, the disputes within the management committee and between them and the Sunnis, over the issue of the location of the school, were in part fuelled by the normal inter-village rivalry that exists in Suru.

Another interesting aspect that this example highlights is the difference in vision of the school between two main groups in the management committee of the *agha-pa* and those who were usually referred to in meetings as the *hajji-pa* - particularly Hajji Ghulam Mohammed and Ghulam Hyder. In general terms the former saw the school as being merely an instrument for gaining secular education, but the latter saw the school as to some extent transforming their children into modern people. This came out in the two locations of the school, since the Taisuru site was seen as creating a school that was an extension of the faction, and located close to the *aghas* themselves; whereas the Choskore Thang site was a completely new place, that was unconnected with the pre-existing centre of the faction. I shall return to this topic in Chapter 7 when I examine further aspects of the organisation of the school.

#### **(iv) The Truce Between the *Yokma* and *Goma* Factions**

By the early 1990s the relations between the *yokma-pa* and *goma-pa* were not nearly as hostile as they had been in the past, but intermarriage between them hardly ever occurred, and they remained politically divided (see Chapter 3). However, the occasion for a more significant truce between them came in the winter of 1993/4 over the issue of the treatment of Suru Block by the administration in Kargil.

In common with other Blocks in the *tehsil*, Suru Block has a single Primary Health Centre (PHC - locally known as the Hospital), with a single doctor who is called the Block Medical Officer (BMO). They have under them a number of Medical Assistants and other paramedics, some of whom work at the Hospital and others at Medical Aid Centres which are located in a number of villages in the Block. In the autumn of 1993, the doctor at Panikhar was transferred to Kargil at the end of his two year posting and was not replaced, although there were doctors available at Kargil. Panikhar is a very unpopular posting, due to its relative remoteness and the fact that the road is cut off for several months of the winter. In addition there are fewer opportunities for supplementary private practice than in Kargil. When the Suru post became vacant, all the newly qualified doctors in Kargil managed to use family influence with the administration to avoid being posted there, with the result that Suru was left for the winter without a doctor. Luckily, the weather was relatively mild that year and so the road remained open until late January. However by February, snow had closed the road, necessitating a five-hour walk to Sankhoo and then a bus ride to reach Kargil. In emergencies a helicopter could be sent from Srinagar to fly patients to a hospital at Srinagar or Kargil itself.

In February two Shi'ahs in Suru became seriously ill at the same time. One was a woman from Pursa who needed a caesarean operation, and the other was Ali the manager of the hotel in Panikhar who was suffering from appendicitis. The Medical Assistants called for a helicopter to take them both to Kargil, but it took two days to arrive, by which time the woman had died. A large group of Shi'ahs rioted, smashing windows in most of the government buildings in Panikhar and Taisuru - including those of the Noon Public School. During the riot, they clashed with the two policemen at the police post at Taisuru, one of whom was beaten up. The government reacted quickly, extra police were sent in and four men were arrested, one each from Pursa and Namsuru, and two from Taisuru. By coincidence, since the demonstrators had been

from both factions, all of them were *goma-pa*. They faced charges which could lead to imprisonment, and two who were government employees faced dismissal if convicted. In order to avert this, the leaders of the two factions met together, and agreed to campaign jointly to defend the arrested men.

After the riot, the government sent Dr. Jaffar to Suru Block to investigate the complaints about the medical service. At that time, he was the Block Medical Officer in Sankhoo. He wrote a report saying that the Block urgently needed a doctor, but he found that in addition some of the medical staff were not carrying out their duties properly. This latter part was to lead to further trouble later in the year, since the medical workers he particularly criticised were Sunnis. For a few weeks a senior doctor from Kargil was sent to Suru, but he shortly returned to Kargil.<sup>5</sup> Later one of the newly qualified doctors stayed in Suru for a few weeks. After that Dr. Jaffar was temporarily given both Blocks to deal with, but was persuaded by the *yokma-pa aghas* to agree to a posting to Suru Block for two years. The *yokma-pa aghas* and Qamer Ali were heavily involved in negotiations with the administration, and in April, Agha Baqir returned from Kargil with a copy of an order posting Dr. Jaffar to Suru Block.

When the old doctor had been transferred the previous autumn, the medical authorities had kept the Panikhar Hospital jeep in Kargil, and had refused to send it back until a new doctor was posted in Panikhar. That had left the whole Block without any transport except for the Kargil bus, which only runs once a day in the autumn and early winter. Some of the Sunni Medical Assistants were very frustrated by this, as they have no illusions about the lack of services for everyone in the Block. Nevertheless, most Sunnis would not publicly take common cause with the Shi'ahs over this issue. In fact, some of the Sunni leaders criticised the Shi'ahs for having rioted, and used it as further evidence that they were lawless and needed keeping under control. The administration seemed to take the same attitude, since the police presence at Taisuru was increased by the addition of an officer in the spring of 1994. The desire of many Sunnis to distance themselves from the Shi'ahs' actions, despite the fact that they too suffered from the lack of a doctor and a hospital jeep, shows their keenness to establish themselves as a separate group, and perhaps to show that

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<sup>5</sup> He is a Sunni from Leh, and he was sent because he does not have much influence in Kargil and so could not avoid the posting.

they were intrinsically more responsible and co-operative with the administration than Shi'ahs.

So, in 1993/4 as relations between the two Shi'ite factions improved they were deteriorating between the *yokma-pa* and the Sunnis, particularly over the issue of the Noon Public School.

#### **(v) The Sunnis and the Anti-School Faction**

Despite the fact that the Sunnis in Suru are largely a community of equal households, they do have some laymen who are considered as leaders. In Kargil *tehsil* as a whole the leader is Kazim Sahib, who is now retired and divides his time between Sankhoo and Kargil. He occasionally visits Panikhar, when many Sunni men will come and visit him to discuss politics. In Panikhar/Prantee, there are two local leaders. The first is Ghulam Rassool, from Panikhar, who is a relatively wealthy contractor, with a brother who is a Senior Engineer with a house in Kargil. Another works in the Tourist Department and is the highest ranked Ladakhi officer in the Jammu and Kashmir administration. The other leader is Hajji Mirza, also from Panikhar, who was a *yokma-pa* until recently, but is now extremely opposed to their leadership and is an active Congress supporter. However, Fatima, his wife who tragically died in the winter of 1993, continued to be an active and highly respected *yokma-pa*, and regularly attended their *matams* in Taisuru. Although he is still a Shi'ah, Sunnis refer to Hajji Mirza as being one of their leaders.

In 1993/4 these two men led a faction that was explicitly against the Noon Public School. Some Sunnis saw the setting up of the school as being a challenge to their traditional authority in respect of secular education. Apparently at an initial planning meeting for the school, the Sunnis who attended felt that their opinions were not respected, but they co-operated with the school until the day of the opening ceremony. This was a large affair, held at the Dak Bungalow in June 1993, and attended by the DC, some army top brass from Kargil, and all the *yokma-pa aghas* from both Blocks. Apparently the day started badly because Hajji Mirza from the anti-school faction took the opportunity to complain publicly to the DC about the actions of the BDO in the Block. This was clearly designed to cause maximum embarrassment for the management of the school, since Munshi Khadim is on the committee. Later in the day one of the other Sunni leaders took offence at something and returned to

Panikhar before the end of the ceremony. After that all of the Sunnis stopped taking part in the management committee and did not enrol any children in the school. I had not yet arrived in Suru at this time, and I received different accounts of what happened from each side, but the events of that day seem to have been an open expression of the rift between a predominantly Sunni faction and the *yokma* faction which had been brought out into the open by the founding of the school.

The anti-school faction remained fiercely opposed to the school, and appeared to be telling people not to send their children there. They told me that the organisers of the school had never really wanted to have Sunnis involved and had insulted them on the opening day. They also claimed that the Shi'ah leadership were mainly uneducated in the government system, and would never be able to run the school successfully, whereas Sunnis understood about secular education.

However, I joined the school in August 1993, and during my time in Suru, a number of Sunni women teachers told me that they would like to send their children to the school. In fact, the mother from the Kakpuri house in Panikhar where we were staying in 1993 used to send her young daughter with us regularly, although she was never registered in the school, and her mother stopped sending her in 1994. These women did not seem to be particularly interested in the anti-school politics, which were always a predominantly male phenomenon. However, it seemed that no one wanted to be the first to break ranks and send a child to the school, and the women could not make such a move without the permission of their male relatives. Also, despite the fact that a number of older Sunnis, including Mahi-ud-din's father, had given donations to the school, by 1996 only one Sunni family from Prantee had enrolled their children. My understanding was that many of the Sunnis were not actually against the school, but were under pressure from their leadership not to send their children there.

In the winter of 1993/4 the school's application for registration went to the State administration in Jammu, and Qamer Ali, went personally to the education office there to make sure that the application was accepted. He was told that someone from Panikhar had already visited the office to try and persuade them not to register the school. Nevertheless registration was granted, and the school added first year primary for the new year, starting in March 1994. There were an additional seventeen children, seven of whom had free places, which were paid for by the BDO, Dr. Jaffar, the Kargil Youth Voluntary Forum and the Save the Children Fund Project in Kargil

(the Kargil Development Project). One more *goma-pa* family also sent a child to the school, but there were still no Sunni children. Several representations had been made to the DC asking him to second a government teacher to the school, which was by then common practice among private schools in the *tehsil*. An order had been raised the previous autumn to this effect, but various workers in the education department in Panikhar had said that there were no spare teachers. Finally, after lobbying by supporters of the school in Kargil, a *yokma-pa* teacher from Achambore, was seconded in the spring of 1994. He was already the school's treasurer, and had been asked personally by Agha Miggi Ort to come and work there.

Apparently, the most contentious issue for most Sunnis in respect of the Noon Public School was its location in Taisuru rather than Panikhar/Prantee, the administrative headquarters for Suru since Dogra times. Over the last few years the *yokma* faction had tried to establish Taisuru as the administrative headquarters instead of Panikhar, although the DC had declined to do this in 1993. However, as a result of their lobbying, some new government departments such as the Bank and the BDO's office have been placed in Taisuru, as opposed to Panikhar. Both of the buildings are new-built, one is owned by Agha Miggi Ort and the other by Agha Baqir, and they receive rent for them. Understandably, most people in Panikhar and Prantee did not want the headquarters moved, whether they were Sunnis or Shi'ahs; but for Sunnis the proposition held a particular threat, since it was partially directed against their power base in the administration.

Even those Sunnis who otherwise seemed well disposed towards the school would explain that the location was the main reason for not sending their children. However, they did not raise the Block headquarters issue, rather they would usually say that it was too far away, and near dangerous water, so therefore it was not safe to send their children there, rather than politicise the issue. Once there was even an entirely groundless rumour in Panikhar that one of the school's children had been swept away in the river. Since the school is only ten or fifteen minutes walk from Panikhar along the main road, and therefore the walk there is not really dangerous, it was clear that moving the centre of power to Taisuru was the real issue.

Despite the decision to locate the new buildings in Choskore Thang, the anti-school leadership did not change their opinion; on the contrary, their attitudes hardened. So in the spring of 1994, they decided to set up their own social welfare organisation and

start a rival school. This was called the Suru Valley Education and Environment Trust (SVEETS). None of the *yokma-pa* leaders were invited to join; but most of the Suru Sunnis, Hajji Mirza's son, and Master Bakhshi, Ghulam Rassool's cousin from Taisuru, whose family were previously Sunnis but are now *goma-pa* took part in the organisation. When important SVEETS meetings were held, some of the Suru Sunnis who are now usually resident in Kargil also attended. The organisers set up an office by the road in the Panikhar bazaar. The first scheme implemented was to organise rubbish bins in the bazaar, since previously rubbish has been thrown into the street. This scheme was not very effective since the SVEETS members lacked the authority to persuade people to do what they wanted; moreover many of them were away from Panikhar most of the time.

By this time the Kargil Youth Voluntary Forum (KYVF), were sponsoring two 'orphaned' (which in Suru means without a father) children at the Noon Public School. This organisation's members mainly consists of young Shi'ah men from the administrative elite in Kargil. In response to the emergence of SVEETS, they were invited to pay a visit to the Noon Public School and to open a branch of their organisation in Suru. A large function was held at the Dak Bungalow in Taisuru to welcome the KYVF, and commemorate the school's first year. It was an elaborate affair that consisted of a number of speeches and displays by the children from the school. As well as a dozen Kargil Youth Voluntary Forum members, Sunni representatives from Panikhar and Prantee also attended and the son of Agha Najibul the *goma-pa* leader who was on a visit home from his studies in Iran, made a speech supporting the school.

The next day, there was a meeting in the Kargil Youth Voluntary Forum office in Panikhar to inaugurate the Suru branch of the organisation. It was attended by some of the leading Sunnis as well as mainly *yokma* Shi'ah. An office was found for them across the road from the SVEETS office in Panikhar bazaar, rather than in Taisuru, so the signs of the two organisations faced each other across the road. Thus the point had been made that the school was supported by the Kargil Shi'ah administrative elite.

The rivalry between the school and SVEETS considerably worsened in August when the latter had its opening ceremony. This was a large event, and was held at the Tourist Bungalow at Panikhar. The location is significant since the Tourist Bungalow is historically very much a Sunni location, as it was built under the auspices of Mr.

Kakpuri, the half brother of Ghulam Rassool, who is now a senior officer in the State tourism department. For several days before, a teacher from the Higher Secondary School in Kargil drilled some of the older boys in songs and skits to be presented at the ceremony. Invitations were sent well in advance to all the senior government officers in the *tehsil* and many of the other members of the Kargil administrative elite were expected to attend. However, the invitations to the local Shi'ahs such as the *aghas* and Dr. Jaffar were only given on the morning of the event. Although this is in accordance with normal custom for invitations to local people, it was disrespectful in the light of the prior distribution to people in Kargil.

On the morning of the ceremony, the *yokma-pa aghas* informed the organisers that there should be no un-Islamic singing and dancing at the event, thereby forcing the organisers to cut down on the entertainment in order to avoid trouble. Such a ban fitted in very well with the view of many Kargil clerics, who have discouraged the singing of secular songs and dancing at weddings and other events in Kargil itself.<sup>6</sup> However, I had used English songs, often accompanied by dances, in the everyday curriculum of the school, and this continued to be actively encouraged by the management committee as being enjoyable and beneficial to the children.

Apparently the District Development Commissioner (DC) and the Superintendent of Police (SP) had said that they were coming, but the day before they were warned off by people in Kargil - presumably *yokma-pa* members. I met someone connected with the school in Kargil the day before, who obviously knew that something was going to happen as he suggested that I should go to Panikhar later in the day to avoid the event. On the day, the Assistant Commissioner, who is a Shi'ah from Chigtan, came to represent the administration. Although a reasonable number of people from Kargil did come there was nothing like the attendance that had been expected, and it was known that many others had been discouraged from coming. The AC came in a jeep from Kargil which was stopped on the way by a *yokma-pa* deputation, including Agha Baqir. The deputation debated with the AC for two hours and tried to stop him from attending the event; however, eventually he went on.

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<sup>6</sup>I was present in Kargil in 1982 when the showing of a film in the Government cinema hall in Kargil resulted in a riot and the removal of the DC who had sanctioned it.

There were two very different accounts of what was said. According to *yokma-pa* sources, it was put to the AC that his attendance at what would be a social event would be contrasted with his lack of interest in their sufferings the previous winter without a doctor. Further, that SVEETS was a purely Sunni organisation for whose benefit teachers were taking time off work. These points are valid, but nearly all teachers in the Block shirk their duty, whether they are Sunnis or Shi'ahs. Similarly, the problems in the medical service the previous winter had affected everyone, not just Shi'ahs. However, the *yokma-pa* deputation were trying to claim that Shi'ahs were the only ones who suffered from the local difficulties. Ironically their position, was indirectly supported by the attitude of the more status-conscious Sunni leaders who tried to avoid casting themselves as being equally disadvantaged, because it contradicted their claim of elite status and social difference from Shi'ahs.

The complaints of the *yokma-pa*, had reportedly been delivered in inflammatory language which caused severe offence to the organisers of the event. They said that the *yokma-pa* delegation had called them 'little Militants' (i.e. supporters of the independence movement in Kashmir), and claimed that they should be thrown out of the Block. This may be a slight exaggeration, just as the *yokma-pa* account makes their input sound more moderate than it actually was; nevertheless in the current climate to even hint that someone might be a militant is very inflammatory, since Sunnis are in much greater danger of being falsely connected with militancy because of their claim to Kashmiri descent.

Some Sunnis were very angry and upset about what had happened and several said that now it would be impossible for them to relent in their attitude to the Noon Public School. They maintained that they were the educated people of the Block and merely wanted to work for the common good, therefore they were very aggrieved at having their efforts rejected in such a dramatic way. The SVEETS organisers had experienced considerable loss of face by the disruption of the event, which had also made public what had previously been a fairly local dispute.

However, I think that many people from both sides thought that things had now gone too far and nothing would be gained by continuing the dispute. Agha Miggi Ort was not actively involved in the boycott, and almost certainly felt ambivalent about such a strong display of opposition to the event; however, he arranged to go to Parkachik on the day and did not attend the ceremony. I gathered from other people that he was

not happy with Agha Baqir's confrontational stance towards the Sunnis. I suspect that Agha Baqir was also attempting to build his own power base within the *yokma* faction. I also heard that there was meant to be a boycott of the event by Shi'ahs from Panikhar and Prantee, but many Shi'ahs - including parents of children in the Noon Public School - enjoyed the spectacle, without receiving a rebuke from any of the *yokma-pa* leaders.

Despite the fact that Sunnis were boycotting the Noon Public School and they supported the setting-up of SVEETS, many of them were not interested in having a quarrel with the *yokma-pa* faction and wanted to maintain the good relations that they had had in the past. Prominent among these was Shaikh Nabi, a schoolmaster from Prantee. He comes from a Shaikh family who place a greater than average emphasis on religion and religious studies and are the equivalent of lay preachers. He is the only Sunni who continues to attend the Muharram processions as an active participant.<sup>7</sup>

In the autumn of 1993, he decided to organise a Koran reading contest in Panikhar at the Tourist Bungalow. He approached Agha Miggi Ort, Agha Najibul and a Kashmiri Sunni Pir who was posted as a teacher in Panikhar to act as advisors. His desire to co-operate with Agha Miggi Ort was unusual at that time, since the majority of Sunnis no longer even visited his house as they had done until the early 1990s. None of the local Sunnis would help in the preparations, because it was organised with the *yokma-pa*. But Agha Miggi Ort, and the Tourist Officers from Kargil together with the headmaster of the Girls' High School, all of whom are Sunnis from other parts of the *tehsil*, were all very helpful. On the day about twenty people came to read the Koran in the competition, including several relatives of Shaikh Nabi.<sup>8</sup> The winner was a man from Pharona (a village in Sankhoo Block). Ali Agha, Agha Miggi Ort's middle son was second, and a Sunni from Wardwan was third. Shaikh Nabi told me that, on the day, quite a large number of Panikhar and Prantee Sunnis turned up to watch, although only his relatives participated in the contest itself.

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<sup>7</sup>Others do attend as part of their duty for the medical department.

<sup>8</sup>Master Nabi told me that there are only about ten good Koran readers in Suru Block, but many more know the basics.

By and large, Sunnis did not support the overtly hostile stand taken by the anti-school faction, as the reaction of many of the Panikhar Sunnis to the refurbishment of their *masjid* in 1994 suggested. In 1992 the Sunnis had built a large new *masjid* in Prantee. This coincided with the period when the split between the Sunnis and the *yokma-pa* became more public, and Sunnis were made rather unwelcome at Shi'ah religious ceremonies. Therefore it partly represented the Sunnis' move to stress their identity as a different and equally legitimate religious group; whereas, in the 1970s, when the two factions had built their *masjids/imam-barahs* in Taisuru, they had obviously not felt the need to have such a prominent monument. The Prantee *masjid* was built with donations from every Sunni household in Panikhar and Prantee. Apparently, each one of them had given the equivalent of two and a half months' wages to the project (about Rs. 5,000). The fact that the amount given was defined as wages for government jobs is extremely significant, expressing as it does the extent to which Sunnis associated being Sunni with government employment by that time.

The project of rebuilding the Sunni *masjid* in Panikhar started in 1993 and was instigated by the Panikhar Sunnis involved in the anti-school faction. The *masjid* was to have its own hot water system for ablutions prior to prayers (*nimaz*), and a septic tank. These amenities were particularly emphasised by several people, I believe because they were seen as being symbols of modernity expressed through the *masjid*. Although the rebuilding went ahead in 1994, about half of the Panikhar Sunnis refused to donate to it, mainly the poorer and less politically active households who apparently thought that the project was unnecessary and very expensive. Although no one voiced this opinion, I suspect that they were rejecting the anti-*yokma-pa* politics.

A little earlier in the summer, I had been told by a number of Panikhar people that Ghulam Rassool's brother, who is a senior government engineer living in Kargil, had been advising people to send their children to the Noon Public School. Apparently he also took his brother-in-law Mahi-ud-din to task and said that there had been no reason for him to resign from the management committee of the school. He suggested that it would have been better for them to stay with the school and to work to improve it. It is not surprising that he should advocate a more moderate approach to the issue of the school, since as a result of conversion to Shi'ism by a number of elite families, there is now only a small number of Sunnis in Kargil and they are a minority in the administrative elite there, to which most of them belong. So it is not in their interests to become severely alienated from the Shi'ahs.

Later in 1994 there was another occurrence that revealed the tenuous nature of the authority of the Sunnis in Suru itself. The occasion was a demonstration by students from the Middle School in Kargee, near Taisuru. I was told by Agha Miggi Ort's son, Agha Abbas, an 8th class student in the school at the time, that the students often had to organise morning prayers as none of the teachers had arrived. The women teachers in particular always arrived after prayers in the morning (which are at about 10 a.m. when the school day begins). Women teachers often left at midday and the men, who were mostly from Kashmir, were frequently absent on permitted home leave.

On the day in question, all the non-local teachers were visiting their homes, and the women teachers (all of whom were Sunnis from Panikhar and Prantee) arrived very late. This was the last straw for the students, so they marched to the police post in Taisuru to complain. Meanwhile, the women teachers all fled home. The officer in charge of the police post returned with the students to the school, and having checked that what they said was true, he used the radio to inform the DC and Chief Education Officer (CEO) in Kargil about what was going on. The Zonal Education Officer, who is in charge of government education in the Block, was on one of his periodic visits from Kargil. So the next day, he went to teach at the school himself. Within a short while all the women teachers had been posted to other schools in Panikhar and Prantee, and were replaced by male Shi'ah teachers.

In this case again, the criticism of the teachers was made into a Sunni-Shi'ah issue, when in fact it was not so straightforward. At that time all of the women teachers in the Block were local and all but two of them were Sunnis. It was common practice for them only to attend school in the morning and to take lots of time off, because many of them have small children and virtually all of them have farming and household work to do at home. Nevertheless, the fact that female Sunni teachers were replaced by male Shi'ahs made it seem that the issue was Sunni women neglecting their Shi'ah pupils. In fact, the majority of teachers in the Block are very lax about their attendance at school, including the male Shi'ahs. Women teachers were probably the target of this protest, merely because they exert less authority over students than male teachers and the students would not have demonstrated if the male teachers had been present.

These examples show that a significant proportion of Sunnis did not support all the activities of the anti-school faction but were interested in retaining or restoring the good relations that they had had in the past with the *yokma* faction and their leadership. The Sunni leadership did not have the authority to persuade all the other Sunnis to follow their point of view, so although most Sunnis boycotted the school, partly because of its position in Taisuru, many of them were not interested in engaging in an open dispute with the *yokma-pa*. At the same time, the Sunni claim to higher status had been relatively successful in the 1980s when Shi'ahs had not competed with them over the government economy, but had by the early 1990s become somewhat flimsy and easily challengeable by the Shi'ah majority. Moreover, the unrest in Kashmir had led central government to falsely associate Ladakhi Sunnis with militancy.

When I left Suru in the winter of 1994/5, the most prominent politics in the area had shifted from a conflict between the *yokma* and *goma* factions to one between the predominantly *yokma-pa* pro-school faction and the predominantly Sunni anti-school one. Thus factions seemed to be forming around the issue of common religious affiliation. However, as Qamer Ali pointed out in 1994, the issue was not primarily religious but resulted from the suspension of democratic politics. Thus, an abnormal situation encouraged people to retreat into religious division. This had also occurred in Leh *tehsil*, where during the period of suspension of politics in the state, the major political divide had continued to be between Buddhists and Muslims, although the anti-Muslim boycott by Buddhists had ended in 1989. The truth of what he said was borne out in the elections of 1996 in which he played a major part.

#### **(vi) The 1996 Elections**

Democratic politics in Jammu and Kashmir had been suspended in 1990 and the last elections had been in 1989. In 1996, in an attempt to end the unrest, the central government decided to end Governor's rule of Jammu and Kashmir and to hold elections there again. The parliamentary elections were held first in the spring and were boycotted by the National Conference and all the specifically Kashmiri parties,

with the result that Congress(I) won five of the six seats.<sup>9</sup> In Ladakh, Qamer Ali, the ex-MLA from the *yokma* faction and brother of Dr. Jaffar, stood as an independent, although his normal party is National Conference. The other main candidate was P. Namgyal a Leh Buddhist who stood for Congress(I). This pattern of a Buddhist Congress(I) candidate standing from Leh side, and a National Conference Muslim from Kargil side has been standard for parliamentary elections for several decades in Ladakh, the only exception being the 1989 election when most Muslims backed Commander Hassan who was the anti-boycott candidate.

In 1996, as usual, the Congress(I) candidate won by a few thousand votes. It seems that both in Kargil and Leh *tehsils* voting patterns in the parliamentary elections returned much to what they had been before the suspension of democratic politics in the State, which is that the majority of Buddhists vote for the Congress(I) candidate who is always a Buddhist and the majority of Muslims vote for the National Conference candidate who is a Muslim, but at the same time, a sizeable minority of Muslims in Kargil *tehsil* vote for the Congress(I) candidate. However, one important shift in the politics of Kargil *tehsil* was that Munshi Habibullah and his family supported the Congress(I) candidate, whereas previously they had been political allies of Qamer Ali. In Suru itself the *goma-pa* allegedly voted *en masse* for Congress(I), and thus returned to their usual political opposition to the *yokma-pa*. One of Qamer Ali's campaign supporters from Kargil told me that they were surprised by this, as they thought that the *yokma-goma-pa* rift had ended; apparently most Muslims in the *tehsil* had promised to vote for Qamer Ali.

I was lucky enough to visit Ladakh in August 1996, during the campaigning for the elections to the Legislative Assembly (MLA), two of whom are elected for each *tehsil* in Ladakh. By then the National Conference had decided to fight the election. In Kargil ward, which includes some of the villages in Suru Block, the two candidates were Qamer Ali standing for National Conference and ex-Superintendent of Police (SP) Khan standing for Congress(I). He had previously been a National Conference supporter, but changed his allegiance to Congress(I). In the Suru/Zanskar ward the National Conference candidate was ex-SP Abbas from Kargil, who himself had previously been Congress(I). Their two sons were both members of the Kargil Youth

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<sup>9</sup>The National Conference is the party which is local to Jammu and Kashmir State and has controlled the state government for most of the last few decades.

Voluntary Forum and had been married on the same day to two sisters who are nieces of Munshi Habibullah.

The Congress(I) candidate in Suru/Zanskar was Kacho Mali Khan from Pashkyum who had previously been a minister in the Jammu and Kashmir government and stood for Congress.<sup>10</sup> The BJP also put up three candidates in the *tehsil*, but they are a minority party in this area. In Kargil some of the most enthusiastic supporters of Qamer Ali's National Conference candidature were leading Sunnis who are loyal supporters of National Conference. In Suru the majority of Sunnis had reputedly supported the Congress(I) candidate for MP, but would always support the National Conference at the state level. However, Ghulam Rassool and some of the leaders of the anti-school faction had changed allegiance and were supporting the Congress(I) candidate, hence there was a split among the Suru Sunnis. The *yokma* and *goma-pa* returned to their normal split of National Conference for the former and Congress(I) for the latter. In the event National Conference won both of the seats in Kargil *tehsil* and each party got a seat in Leh *tehsil*. In the state as a whole, National Conference dominated the election, although many people in Kashmir observed the request from the more radical Kashmiri parties not to vote at all. Qamer Ali, who was re-elected as the MLA for Kargil, was later appointed as the Minister for Public works in the new National Conference administration, which is a significant and powerful post.

The candidature and voting patterns in these elections highlight several important issues, as far as my analysis is concerned. The nature of the changes in political allegiances that took place once democracy was restored, show that the cancelling of democratic politics had noticeably increased the emphasis on common religious affiliation being a basis for faction formation in the area. One example concerns the Kargil Youth Voluntary Forum, which for the last few years had been supporting Qamer Ali who they saw as the Shi'ah candidate. However, in 1996 the members were split in their support of the two parties, which was the cause of a good deal of acrimony. Similarly, both the Sunnis and Shi'ahs in Suru had been split by religious differences for the last few years, but now each were internally split into supporters of the two main political parties and the *yokma-pa* and the majority of Sunnis supported the same candidate in the MLA elections.

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<sup>10</sup> His grandfather was a Dogra administrator from Kashmir.

A similar change was seen in Leh that year, where anti-Muslim sentiment among Buddhists had abated and differential support for the two main parties often followed factional splits within one religious group, so that party support was not on a religious basis. For instance a Buddhist National Conference candidate was elected with large numbers of Buddhist votes.

What these elections showed was that the policies of central government do have an important effect on politics in Ladakh, albeit not the intended one. It also showed the benefits of having a slightly longer term perspective on Suru, since the effects of the withdrawal of democracy which was in effect during the main part of my fieldwork only became clear in 1996. Another important change was that the appointment of Qamer Ali as a Minister in the Jammu and Kashmir government after the elections in 1996 left the *yokma* faction looking less peripheral than they had in 1994.

### **(vii) Conclusions**

In this chapter I first looked at the composition of the management committee and its internal politics. I showed that only a small minority of *yokma-pa* are actively involved in the school and that the majority of them are from the very small number of Shi'ahs who have successfully entered the new economy. They now have ambitions of their children obtaining elite administrative jobs, whereas the majority of the *yokma-pa* support the school as part of their religious duty and merit-making, but do not send their children there as they do not expect their children to attain those levels. In my examination of the discussions over the location of the school, I showed that the faction is not monolithic in its internal politics and that issues of village and location remain important to faction members, who are subject to several different cross-cutting ties.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, there was an emerging divide between a predominantly Sunni administrative elite and a predominantly Shi'ah peasantry. It seems that Sunnis wanted to form such an elite in Suru, based on their possession of secular education and white-collar government jobs. However once Shi'ahs started competing for these resources and challenging Sunnis' claims to superior social status, it became clear that the Sunni minority could not easily sustain a claim to superior status. In addition, many Sunnis did not want to enter into an open dispute with the *yokma-pa*. Similarly, although the *yokma* and *goma-pas* did find common cause in their protests against

neglect by the authorities in Kargil, they did not seem to be interested in forming a permanent alliance over these issues, and have returned to their usual rivalry.

Another important point revealed by this description of the disputes between different factions in Suru, was the degree to which much of the hostility was between elites, both in Suru and Kargil. However, in the next chapter, I shall look at marriage strategies among the emerging Kargil administrative elite and show that in fact many of their marriages cross cut the different factions that I have identified.

## Chapter 6

### Marriage and Weddings

#### (i) Introduction

In the previous chapter I demonstrated that in 1994, neither the conditions nor the will existed for the Sunnis to form a distinct administrative elite in Suru. In this chapter, I shall show that marriage strategies and the enactment of weddings play a key role in the formation of the urban administrative elite which is forming primarily in Kargil town and has an urban non-agricultural focus. To illustrate my point, I shall describe aspects of four of the weddings that I attended in Suru and Kargil in the autumn of 1994, all of which involved people who are connected with the politics of the Noon Public School and of education generally, that I described in the last chapter. I shall demonstrate the role of marriage strategies and the form of weddings in the emergence of a social division between the administrative elite in Kargil and the predominantly peasant majority in Suru.

Marriage strategies are very varied and complex in Suru and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the subject fully. However, as elsewhere in the region, one aspect is that they have the effect of creating social distinctions in Suru. I have already outlined some of the important features of marriage strategies among *sayyids* and Sunnis. In this chapter, I shall focus on the marriage strategies of non-sayyid Shi'ahs. Whereas Bourdieu, who has produced two of the most illuminating analyses of marriage practice concentrates on the role of marriage strategies in the reproduction of social prestige (Bourdieu 1990:147-199), I am going to look at the role of marriage in the production of new social relations and distinctions.

I shall first look at the issue of choice of marriage partners in Suru and its significance for the formation of social ties. I shall show that families from the upper echelons of the administration intermarry and therefore the Kargil-centred administrative elite is also a kinship group. Furthermore, membership of the administration seems to make such a move possible by offering opportunities for people to form relations of patronage with other villagers, rather than through

marriage. At present aspirant Suru people are shifting their social focus towards Kargil and are starting to marry into the administrative elite, in the process cutting across political factions, which peasants rarely do. My concentration on Shi'ah marriages shows that the new social divisions that are emerging in the area as a whole are not exclusive to the Sunni-Shi'ah divide and there is a process of elite formation occurring in the area as a whole that runs counter to affiliations in the overt politics of the area.

Weddings, which are the major social events of the year, provide an opportunity for both the expression and creation of prestige. I shall describe parts of the ritual and style of enactment of a number of weddings that I attended in 1994, in order to show that there is a significant difference of emphasis between those of ordinary peasants in Suru and those of people who are in, or aspiring to, the administrative elite. The weddings of peasants in Suru are more 'local' in style and social reference, whereas those of the administrative elite have a greater emphasis on the regional elite and its social style. I conclude that although the administrative elite that is emerging is primarily urban-centred, it is not necessarily urban in origin, showing that the processes of elite formation are in large measure generated locally, rather than being merely imposed from outside.

## **(ii) Marriage Practice and Stratification in Suru**

In the last few decades in Suru, people seem to spent more of their lives married than before and there is also a corresponding escalation in the value of brideprice (*rintho*). These changes seem to be linked to the increasing monetization of the economy over the same period. The increase in brideprice and desire to obtain a wife has acted as an additional incentive for young men to seek waged and therefore cash-generating government jobs in order to finance their marriages. In 1981/2, I did not conduct systematic household surveys, but a significant number of men reported that they had either never, or only briefly, been married. We observed that a number of households contained two or more middle-aged brothers, some of whom were not married (Grist 1993). Further evidence of this can be seen in the village of Thulus, where the number of households has increased from ten to sixteen due to division by the current generation of household heads. Suru people said that in the past the divorce rates were much higher than they are today and it seems that many marriages were fixed-length *mut'a*

contracts, rather than necessarily being permanent. Suru people also linked the increased permanence of marriage to the fact that brideprice had become so much higher. Therefore marrying was much more expensive than before and there was correspondingly greater familial pressure on both partners to remain together.

The legal part of a Shi'ah wedding in Suru is normally enacted months before the actual wedding by an *agha* or suitably qualified cleric and is known as *sigheh zercha*, which means to read the wedding contract. This contract includes the setting of a brideprice that will already have been agreed by the *p'ha-spuns* of the couple during the marriage negotiations. The current generation of older people (that is those over fifty) said that when they had got married the *rintho* had consisted of goods in kind, such as rolls of *snambu* (woollen cloth), butter and barley and had been very modest in the actual value. However, about twenty years ago, people started giving cash as the main part of the *rintho*, which apparently started at a value of about Rs. 1,000, but has now escalated up to a range of about 10,000 to 30,000. The largest payments are reputedly offered by men in Parkachik who have difficulty attracting brides due to the relative remoteness of the village and its local reputation for being particularly backward in its customs. Suru people said that they really do make these payments, although others in Kargil said they were only paper amounts and all the money is never actually handed over. The payments are also not so burdensome for most families as a common strategy is to marry a daughter and then use the *rintho* received for her, to bring a wife for a son. The agreement also involves the specification of *mahr*, which is the payment to be made to the woman's family in the case of her husband divorcing her under Muslim law, which at the moment is usually around ten thousand rupees.

Most marriages of non-*sayyid* Shi'ahs are with unrelated partners from a nearby or the same village. Two thirds of marriages were with non-relatives; of those with relatives, the majority were with those on the father's side.

Same Village	Nearby Village <sup>1</sup>	Further Afield <sup>2</sup>
20	48	9

**Figure 6.1 - Origin of non-Sayyid Marriage Partners among Suru Shi'ahs Surveyed in 1993**

No Relation	Father's Relative	Mother's Relative
57	18	9

**Figure 6.2 - Relationships between Marriage Partners among Suru Shi'ahs Surveyed in 1993**

Shi'ah families want a bride who will do farm work and a local woman is used to the conditions and farming practice in the area. For instance, after a wedding between a Suru man and a woman from Kargil, one of the grandparents from the school told me that he thought she was a bad choice as she would not be any use (*panche man*) in Suru. He meant that women from Kargil are neither used to farming nor the conditions in Suru. Another example of this attitude to wives is illustrated by the history of a woman from Prantee who was married to a man in Thangbu, who I discussed in Chapter 2. She became epileptic after several years of marriage, when she had already borne two children. Her husband's *p'ha-spun* persuaded him to divorce her since they saw her as a liability who had to be looked after by another adult some of the time.<sup>3</sup> The other requirement is that a woman bears children, and those who do not are often divorced. These women do not usually remain unmarried as the high mortality and divorce rates in the area mean that there is a constantly unmet demand for wives.

Among ordinary (*am-pa*) Shi'ahs, marriages are usually between people from families of roughly equal social and economic status. Most of them are made on the basis of the suitability of the individual partner, rather than for alliance

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<sup>1</sup> This is either a neighbouring village, or one within an hour's walk.

<sup>2</sup> All but one of these partners came from Suru or Sankhoo Block, the remaining woman was a Buddhist from Leh *tehsil*.

<sup>3</sup> This also meant that she lost her two young sons, as she remarried and her husband's family kept them with them, as they often do.

formation. Hence partners are sometimes chosen on the basis of mutual attraction. Nowadays universal marriage is the ideal, and no differentiation is made between the children, who usually get married in age order. A person's first wedding is attended with a major celebration, usually lasting several days, but subsequent ones may be enacted very quietly. For example, if a man who is divorced brings a new wife, even if she is previously unmarried, they will usually have a very small wedding.

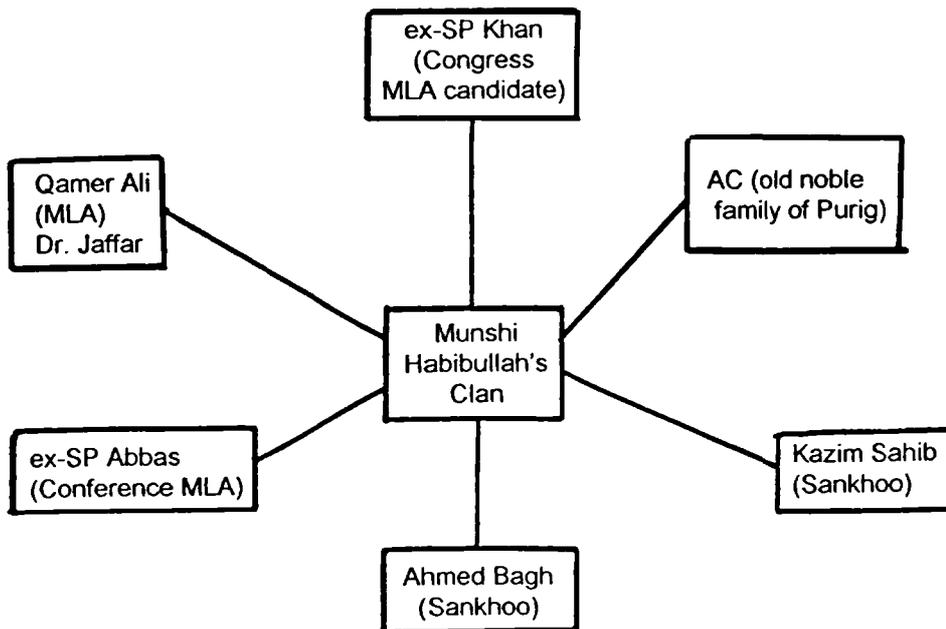
The first wedding in Suru is the rite of passage into adulthood and what I would call full citizenship. By this I mean that on a certain level there is no stratification in Suru, as every household participates as full and equal citizens in the village. This is expressed in the wedding by the fact that the bride and groom are like a queen and king for the period of their wedding. From the first day of the wedding, and for several months afterwards, they are referred to by the titles *bag-mo* (bride) and *bag-pho* (groom), rather than their own names. They are also treated with a great deal of respect and considered to be auspicious during this period. For instance, for several weeks after the wedding itself, they will wear new clothes and visit all their relatives in turn for a dinner. This process is called *skyilba* (to be stopped on the way), and they are always given meat and good food.

Similarly, the wedding itself is also the opportunity for a household to show that it has full citizen status in the village. It is also extremely common for more than one wedding to be celebrated at the same time. Three out of five of the weddings that I attended in 1994 were of this type, and people aim to have joint weddings if possible. The Sunni wedding that I attended in 1994, was of a brother and sister from Panikhar, who married a sister and brother from Zanskar, who are their maternal cousins. The preference for joint weddings seems to be because it provides an opportunity to express the prosperity and solidarity of the kinship group. I suspect that this has become even more important now that division is more common.

As I showed in Chapter 3, the endogamy practised by the lineages of *aghas* produces a large and united core for the two factions, and their numerous and intensive kinship connections within the faction are almost hyper-local. The marriage alliances of the faction leaders' families are primarily used to consolidate

the internal structure and solidarity of the faction, rather than in making external political alliances. Hence their focus in marriage is localised to Suru and the faction, just as it is for their followers.

Their strong preference for marrying within both the faction and Suru is in marked contrast to an emerging trend for aspirants to the administrative elite from Suru to marry into a small group of families in Kargil that centre on the wider clan of Munshi Habibullah, the ex-Minister and paternal uncle of the BDO. For example in 1994 I attended a large joint wedding that involved two of Munshi Habibullah's sons, his sister's daughter, and the son and daughter of one of his *p'ha-spun* members among others. This series of marriages (three in all) made up the most elaborate and prestigious of the weddings that I attended that year, which was not surprising since the Munshi Habibullah family have been the most politically important family in Kargil in the last few decades and form the centre of the administrative elite of the area.



**Figure 6.3 - Some of the Kinship Connections of the Munshi Habibullah Family**

At the core of their family there are the households of Munshi Habibullah, his brother Munshi Sadiq, and Munshi Khadim (the BDO in Suru) who is his dead brother's son. Until relatively recently, this family were Sunnis and in the previous generation they intermarried with both Sunnis and Shi'ahs in Kargil and other parts of the *tehsil*. So they have affinal links with many of the important families in the area, which are also used to consolidate their social group. For example, of Munshi Habibullah's three sisters one is married to Ahmed Bagh from Sankhoo who is the second Sunni leader behind Kazim Sahib, and their daughter is married to Kazim Sahib's second son. Her cousin, who is the daughter of another of Munshi Habibullah's sisters, who married into a Shi'ah family in Kargil, is married to Dr. Jaffar the doctor in Panikhar. A third sister is married to the Assistant Development Commissioner from Batalik, who is from one of the few remaining noble families in Kargil tehsil. Their daughter married Gulzar, Munshi Habibullah's son, at the wedding in 1994 that I have just mentioned.

They also have many other kinship connections in the area, such as with most of the members of the Kargil Youth Voluntary Forum, and have relatives in Zanskar. The creation of these kinds of affinal relations between different areas has long been a feature both of the elites of the area and of Sunnis (see Chapter 4); however, what seems to have changed now is that these connections are increasingly within the administrative elite and focused on Kargil and it is important for aspirants to the administrative elite to marry into this group. For example one of the weddings that I shall describe was between Haddi, Hajji Mirza's son from Panikhar, who is a Junior Engineer, and Nargis, who is the daughter of ex-Superintendent of Police Abbas, who was elected as National Conference MLA for Suru and Zanskar in the 1996 elections. After their marriage, a member of the anti-school faction in Panikhar remarked with satisfaction, "*Now we are beginning to get some good brides.*". He meant by this that they were marrying into the Kargil administrative elite. Later that year, the same person also expressed dissatisfaction that his relative had married someone from Zanskar rather than making a more prestigious match with a family that is prominent in the administrative elite.

As I have pointed out, this emerging tendency of endogamy within the administrative elite differs from the practices of the *sayyids* in Suru, including leaders, who do practise endogamy, but also appear to use marriage and other types of kinship link to build and maintain their following of ordinary people. These relationships are based on patronage rather than equality, but the *agha* must constantly create and maintain them, in order to be a leader. Members of the administrative elite do not feel the need to do the same thing, as white-collar jobs in the administration give their incumbents an automatic relationship with their constituency in the general public. In Chapter 4, I showed that teachers have such a relationship with their pupils, which they can use to get the children to act as *milaks* for them. A similar relationship also exists between senior and junior staff. For instance, one of the teachers in the Noon Public School used to send the *peon* (general *factotum*) to do his shopping in Panikhar.

As I have described, the social circle of the administrative elite is becoming a *tehsil*-wide but Kargil centred phenomenon, particularly since most of the families involved have a house in Kargil, even if their primary home is elsewhere in the *tehsil*. Another significant fact is that both in Suru and Kargil there is a sharp divide between the new administrative elite and the religious elite. There seems to be virtually no intermarriage between the families of the Shi'ite administrative elite and those of religious leaders. In Kargil town, I have often heard people refer to Goma Kargil, which is the village of Kargil above the town, and describe the people there as being very religious and strict. For example, during the wedding season, remarks were made about attending weddings in Goma Kargil which were regarded as being very boring, as no one was allowed to dance or sing anything except *khasidas* (hymns of celebration). However, in the marriages of the administrative elite in Kargil there was plenty of secular dancing, although not everyone approved.

In general, there seems to be a growing social and cultural gap between weddings of the administrative elite, and those of the majority of peasants in the area. This is certainly the case in Suru, where there are now two distinct style of weddings.

### (iii) Weddings in Suru

In Kargil and Suru, weddings usually take place in October and November when the main agricultural work has finished for the year and travelling is still easy, as there is usually little or no snowfall at this time. People look forward to this season as there are a number of such celebrations in every village, lots of parties and special food to eat. In 1993/4, I attended a total of eight weddings, two in Kargil and six in Suru, four of which involved more than one couple.<sup>4</sup> In addition to those I attended I was aware of numerous other weddings taking place on a daily basis during the season. In Kargil in November it was not unusual to see several bridegrooms' parties in the bazaar in a single day and in the villages around the centre of Suru Block, there was a wedding every few days.

Weddings normally involve thousands of rupees of expense for the two families, both of which host various celebrations and dinners. The main part of the wedding takes place over several days. On the first day the bride and groom are taken for a dinner, called the *bag-gron* (*bag* means 'wedding', and *gron* means 'dinner'). This is mainly organised and attended by their friends of the same age and sex. It is paid for by a collection among those who will attend, some of whom prepare the food. The party takes place somewhere other than the bride or groom's own home, or that of their relatives. The participants, most of whom are young and unmarried, eat a meal (usually of meat and rice) and then sing and dance all evening, during this the bride or groom sits very quietly looking morose. This party goes on all night, and the next day, the young people process back to the home of the bride or groom. That night there is a celebration called *sinmo-tse* (literally 'the colour of happiness') in the local language, or *mehendi raat* (which means 'the henna night' in Urdu). This consists of a dinner, usually followed by singing and dancing, and then late at night women bring henna and put it on the hands of the bride and groom, and possibly the bride's feet as well.

The next morning, is when the dressing of the bride or groom occurs, which is called the *bag-ches*. Among Shi'ahs in Suru, the bride is taken to another place, which can be a relative's house, or in one wedding, it was the *imam-barah* in

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly this was in stark contrast to my time in Leh, when in two years the only wedding I attended was in the house where I was living.

Namsuru. This place is called the *bomoi kangsa*, which I understand to mean the girl's place. This is the last time that she will be referred to as a girl (*bomo*), women who are or have been married are called *ane*. Both the bride and groom are bathed and dressed in their wedding clothes by their close relatives and friends of the same sex.<sup>5</sup> When they are ready, they will be given gifts and money by their relatives and friends. The groom will then usually depart with his *azhang* as the leader of his *nyo-pa* (groom's party) to fetch his bride. When the *nyo-pa* arrive at the bride's house they are greeted by her relatives and given a large and varied meal. Meanwhile she says goodbye to most of her relatives and friends at the *bomoi kangsa*, during which she is weeping and lamenting. Finally she is taken (often carried) to her own home, where she says goodbye to her parents. If one of them is dead, she is also taken to their grave, where she will weep uncontrollably over the grave until dragged away.<sup>6</sup>

She is then taken by her *azhang* and *nene*, with her groom's *nyo-pa* to his house. On the way, they will usually be stopped several times by villagers, who ask for money to let them pass, and then give them tea or snacks such as nuts to eat. When they reach the groom's house, the bride is greeted at the door by women carrying barley flour (*pe*), butter (*mar*), and a sheep, apparently as symbols of the prosperity of the household which she is entering. She is then taken into the house, where her feet are washed by one of her husband's sisters. They then lock the front door of the house before the groom has entered. He then comes to the door with his *azhang*, who knocks on the door and asks to be let in. After some negotiation, the women open the door, and he must give them some money. That night there is a small dinner for the bride and groom's parties, and the marriage is consummated.

The next morning, the bride is taken into the kitchen of her new home, and she makes some bread at their stove. This is a crucial part of the wedding ceremony, and symbolises that the woman is married. I was told that in the past, when

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<sup>5</sup> Older people said that in the past the bride would be dressed in pleated woollen trousers, and other garments that were only worn by married women.

<sup>6</sup> Aggarwal (1994:200ff) gives an illuminating account of similar leave taking in Achinatang, a village between Leh and Kargil.

Muslims used to marry Buddhist brides in Zanskar, they would simply bring them to their house and get them to cook food at the stove, after which they were considered to be married. Straight after that, the bride and groom start a round of visiting called *lakpa kruches* (literally 'to wash hands'), when they go to the houses of the groom's *p'ha-spun* and any other close relatives in the vicinity. These visits usually last at least two days, and they are given luxurious food such as meat and butter at every house and treated with a great deal of care and respect. During this and the following weeks, they will also be invited for dinner at the homes of more distant relatives. This process is called *skyilba*, which means to stop someone on the way. Both the bride and groom are treated as being very auspicious at this time and they both distribute sweets and such like to everyone they meet. This is called *skyes*, which means a gift that does not need to be reciprocated and the *bag-mo's skyes* is considered to be particularly auspicious.

After that they both go to the bride's house for a few days, when they go to visit all her relatives. This visit is called *sulum*. Finally the groom returns home and the bride follows with her young female friends and there is usually a lively and informal party, which is mainly attended by young people, and marks the end of the wedding ceremonies and her incorporation into the new household.

I am going to leave most of my analysis of the wedding rituals until after I have described some of the weddings that I attended in 1993/4, as I am going to show that there are some important differences of nuance. However, my description of the outline of a wedding highlights one element that is common to all of them, namely that it is a rite of passage from girl or boyhood into adulthood.

In fact, wedding ritual differs slightly in each part of Suru and there are some major differences between Kargil and Suru, as I shall show in my account. However, the main distinction that I wish to draw out is between the weddings of people who are still primarily involved in the peasant economy of Suru, and those who are members of, or aspirants to, the Kargil administrative elite.

#### **(iv) Peasant Weddings in Suru**

The wedding that was most closely connected to the Noon Public School was that of Fatima from Achambore, the sister's daughter of Hajji Ghulam Mohammed from

the school's management committee, who is the elder sister of one of the pupils of the Noon Public School. She married a young man, who was the only person in Thulus village to be a 10th class pass at that time. Although they were unrelated, their families are both *yokma-pa*, and are part of a small group that are close to the *yokma-pa* leadership. Most of these families have some involvement with the Noon Public School and they are already connected by a number of previous marriages. I joined the wedding on the second day, when the *nyo-pa* (*bag-pho's* party) were due to arrive to take the *bag-mo* away. The hand-written Urdu invitation to the *bag-mo's* house in Achambore had been brought to me earlier that morning by her teenage brother. When I arrived, the *bag-mo's* house was decorated with bunting and *khasidas* (religious songs of rejoicing) were being sung by men inside the house and relayed over a loudspeaker on the exterior wall. Near her house there was a large decorated ceremonial arch set up with tables and chairs for the *nyo-pa*. Outside the house, makeshift shelters had been constructed as temporary kitchens, and some men were preparing tea and food for everyone.<sup>7</sup> Inside, a large room had been prepared for guests, but there were only a handful at that time. Everyone was saying that they had been up very late the night before because there had been a really good party with lots of singing and dancing.

If they live in different villages his *nyo-pa* usually go on horseback and all his male relatives, friends and neighbours who have, or can borrow, a horse join the party. Every house likes to have a horse for such occasions, since they offer an opportunity, especially for the younger men, to show off both their horse and their own prowess at riding. On this occasion, the *nyo-pa* arrived on horseback from Thulus in the late morning. They came without the groom, because it is the custom in Thulus and its neighbours, for him to stay at home while his bride is fetched. As is customary, the *nyo-pa* were led by the *bag-pho's* *azhang* (mother's brother), who in this case was an elderly *hajji* from Pursa whose son is a contractor, and whose grandson attends the Noon Public School. In addition there were about fifteen men from Thulus and its neighbour Pursa. The *nyo-pa* tethered their horses, and there followed a small ceremony in which the *azhang* cut a ribbon stretched across the

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<sup>7</sup>Most of the cooking at weddings is done by men, in temporary kitchens outside the house. Relatives and neighbours who are known to be good cooks are invited to come to prepare the food.

ceremonial arch. The *nyo-pa* were then seated on chairs in the open air and given tea and a variety of different delicacies, such as fried meat, cakes and pastries. After some time, they were taken into the main house for another meal.

Meanwhile the bride had been taken to the nearby house of one of her family's *p'ha-spun*, which was her *bomoi kangsa*, where she was to be dressed. Fatima was in a small room, which was packed with women and girls who were singing and crowding around her. Men and older boys kept out, but many were peeking through the windows. She had already been bathed by a few of her female friends and relatives, and was seated on a decorated platform which is called a 'stage'. She was being dressed by two other women, one was her *p'ha-spun* member Sakina, who is unmarried and the elder sister of another of the children in the Noon Public School.

First of all the women did her hair, which was woven into small plaits and then adorned with various clips and ornaments, some of which were brought by women as gifts while she was being dressed. Then she was dressed in her wedding clothes, which consisted of several layers of entirely new clothes, topped by a black velvet *phirin* (the Kashmiri-style womens smock) and trousers, which had been brought by her husband's relatives when the marriage was arranged. She also had a *phruk* (thick local wool) smock but, after trying it out, the helpers rejected it. Finally she had a small local hat, to which were attached various silver ornaments, a *tawiz* (holy charm) and the *balthot* which is the piece of wool to be exchanged with her new husband the next day. Over all of this, she had two good-quality *dahons* (head shawls), which we kept swapping one for the other for good effect. She had lots of rings and bracelets, some of which were given or lent by other women, and some necklaces and gold butterfly pendants (*pemar labste*) encrusted with turquoises, that her father had bought for her.

The *bag-mo* had been crying and moaning quietly all this time, and, while she was being dressed, some of her mother's relatives - such as her mother's sister, and Hajji Ghulam Mohammed's wife and daughter - came in and they all wept copiously in remembrance of her own mother (*holto yongse*) who had been dead for many years. Grieving and remembrance form an important part of the ritual of departure of both the bride and the groom in weddings in Suru, but for the bride it is

particularly heart-rending as she is leaving her relatives. When she was dressed her male relatives came in and gave her presents, and then other friends and neighbours did the same. After this, they threw *chola* (sweets) over her, and photographs were taken. *Paba* (a hot barley dough) was also distributed to the participants at one point. Then she and her female helpers went into the kitchen of the house and we all had tea, bread, *paba* and butter. At this point she was quite cheerful and was chatting with us all, while the rest of the public were kept out of the room. After lunch, she went to do her prayers (*phyak* or *nimaz*) before her departure.

Meanwhile, I was taken back to her house, where the *nyo-pa* were being given lunch. We were given rice and meat with various other curries, as well as specially cooked ceremonial bread and tea. After some time, the *bag-pho's* *azhang* came to the house where the *bag-mo* was again sitting on her stage, and insisted that they should be allowed to take her away. She was then brought to the door of the house, weeping copiously, and put on the back of another woman who carried her from the house, so that her feet do not touch the ground. She took her to her mother's grave. There, she fell on the ground and lay weeping and calling out for her mother for some time. Finally she was dragged off the grave and carried to her own house, where she was taken in to say goodbye to her family. The door was shut and everyone else waited outside as they said their farewells.

Finally, she came out again, and was carried to her *azhang's* horse and placed behind him with her head swathed in her outer shawl so that her face was invisible. All the *nyo-pa* mounted, and her two female relatives - one of whom is customarily her father's sister (*nene*) - and I, who were to accompany her, were accommodated on the backs of some of the *nyo-pa's* horses. Someone suggested that the groom's *azhang* from Pursa should carry me on the back of his horse, but he declined, saying that I was far too heavy! The *nyo-pa* then threw *chola* to the people gathered around, and we set off at a very slow pace, as the *bag-mo* was frightened on the back of the horse.

The year before, I had attended the wedding of a young man from one of the leading families in Taisuru to a woman from Pursa. The *nyo-pa* - including the *bag-pho* - were all on horseback and had raced along the main road between the

Namsuru bridge and Panikhar. This was very exhilarating but also alarming if you were sitting on the back of someone's saddle hanging on to them for dear life without stirrups or bridle.

A whole crowd of women and children accompanied us as far as the bridge, where our path was blocked by a ribbon across the road. This had been put up by the villagers of Kochik, on the opposite bank, who demanded some money from the bride's *azhang* to let us pass. He paid them fifty rupees and was given some apricots and nuts, after which we went on our way. This custom is called *cha pingcha* (to bring out tea), and the wedding party may be stopped in this way a number of times on its journey.

When we got to the *bag-pho's* house it was getting dark and there was a crowd of people outside. The *bag-pho's* relatives greeted the *bag-mo* with various customary offerings, such as a sheep and plates of bread and butter. She also dipped her right hand into a proffered plate of *pe* (barley flour) which is auspicious on entering and leaving a house. Again her feet were not allowed to touch the ground, so she was carried into the house on the back of another woman. Before she was put down, her feet were washed by the *bag-pho's* elder sister, who is married to a man in Choskore and has a son at the Noon Public School. My understanding is that she has been carried and her feet washed, so that she does not bring the earth from her old home, or any other place into her new home.

We were then all taken into a large room, in which the *bag-pho* was sitting, flanked by his *azhang* and some male companions. He was dressed in the traditional *bag-pho's* white turban and a white *goncha* (or male local wool coat), which is commonly worn as everyday wear by older, but not by young men. The *bag-mo* was seated next to him but at some distance, with her *nene* (father's sister) and Sakina and myself on the far side. First of all the *nene* of the *bag-mo* was offered some bread and butter by the elder sister of the *bag-pho*, which she refused very curtly. I was shocked, as I thought that she was being rude, but it turned out that this is part of the ritual of a wedding, in which the bride's family act as if they were giving her up unwillingly. She was then offered money, and eventually, after further refusals, she took the money and ate some of the bread. Then we all had bread, butter and tea, followed by *marzan* which are large plates of *paba* (or *zan* - lumps of

cooked barley and pea flour) with a pool of butter in the middle, and *oma* (yoghurt). This combination of *paba* and butter is traditionally used in a number of ceremonies in Suru and all over Ladakh as an auspicious food to be distributed to participants.

After everyone had eaten, most people had a cigarette or smoked the *hookah* (hubble-bubble). All the women in our party, except for the *bag-mo*, smoked cigarettes, which is not normally done by ordinary women in Suru, and we also took pictures of ourselves smoking. Then the *bag-mo* needed to pray, but she was embarrassed, so she, her female companions and the two *azhangs* withdrew to a more private room next door. We sat around chatting in our two groups of men and women for the rest of the evening. Later we were served dinner of rice, meat and various curried vegetables and pulses. The others were all served their food on the large plates used for ceremonial meals that allow four people to share within sex segregated groups.

Meanwhile, the *nyo-pa* and *bag-pho* were being entertained in the larger room. We could hear the sound of muted singing of *khasidas*, but there was no singing of popular songs or dancing as far as we could gather. At one point, one of the *azhangs* said to the other, "*We should really be singing and dancing, but the agha will tell us off if we do.*" Apparently, earlier that year Agha Miggi Ort had said from the *minbar* that popular singing and dancing should not be mixed with religion, under which category the main part of weddings were apparently classified. However, this was the first time that such a ban had been imposed, and people were still rather unclear about what was allowed and what was not. In the morning, we found out that there had been a women's party for most of the night in the neighbouring house of a *p'ha-spun* member with plenty of singing and dancing.

During the evening, the *azhang* from Pursa roundly criticised the cooks for serving cold tea, and lamented that they had not got better people to do the cooking. He and the other *azhang* also discussed the economics of feeding people at weddings, and agreed that nowadays it is probably better to serve meat, because it gets eaten, whereas if you serve *marzan*, most of the butter gets wasted. This had happened earlier, as only a tiny bit of the large *marzans* had been eaten by us. When I returned to Panikhar the next day and was telling Sunni friends about the

wedding, some of them said, "How could you eat marzan, isn't it disgusting. I can't eat it at all." However, it is still served as a treat, in most houses in Suru.

We all slept in the room together, and in the night the *bag-mo* was taken off presumably to consummate the marriage, but she was back by morning. The first thing that she does that day is to go into the kitchen and prepare a symbolic piece of bread (*tagi*) in her new house. Next the *bag-mo* and *bag-pho* started on a long round of visiting that continued for the next few weeks.

The first visit they usually make is to a member of the *bag-pho's p'ha-spun*. In this case, they went with the rest of the companions to the neighbouring house of their *p'ha-spun* members where the women's party had taken place the night before. The *bag-mo* was greeted by all the adults of that house and the women all shook her hand which is a respectful form of greeting. We were seated in a guest room and were given tea, bread, yoghurt butter and other delicacies, which were hardly touched, except to drink a cup of tea. Most of us left very quickly with only the *bag-mo* remaining to talk with her new female relatives in the kitchen. I then left the wedding to go to school in Taisuru, so I did not observe any more of the ceremonies.

Another more local wedding that I attended was that of Jaffar, the brother of Ali from the Hotel in Panikhar, who married Sakina from Thangbu - a village between Panikhar and Sangra. Both of them come from families that are about average economically and who already knew and liked each other. Sakina had been staying with her widowed and childless paternal aunt (*nene*) in Panikhar the year before and she helped to arrange the marriage. Sakina was brought from Thangbu by *nyo-pa* led by Hajji Mirza, who is Jaffar's *azhang*. The marriage had been arranged some time before, but the wedding itself was organised in a hurry, because Sakina's younger sister was getting married on that day, and her father had asked for the two to be held together as he could not afford the expense of two weddings. Ali, Jaffar's brother, told me that he wanted to make the wedding a fairly small affair so they could save money for building up the business. He also said that he does not believe in the socially competitive nature of some weddings. The house where I was staying at the time was one of the Lampa-pa houses, who are Ali's *p'ha-spun*,

so the whole family were helping with the cooking and organisation and their eldest son went as one of the *nyo-pa*.

In the morning, Jaffar was dressed in his own house. This was supervised by Hajji Mirza and his relative Akhun Jaffar, both of whom are from Jaffar's mother's family. The main part of this ceremony consists of the creation of the turban (*tof*), that the *bag-pho* wears on his wedding. This task is usually performed by a cleric, preferably an *agha*, but any man can do it. This is the only part of the wedding ceremony in which an *agha* would take any role, besides coming as a guest. A piece of wool from his house called the *balthot* (*bal* means wool) is placed in the *bag-pho*'s turban, and this will be exchanged with the one in the *bag-mo*'s hat in the final ceremony of the wedding.

The *nyo-pa* travelled to Thangbu in a mini-bus that Ali had hired from Kargil, and a loudspeaker and ghetto-blaster were installed. The party consisted of the *bag-pho* and a dozen of his male relatives, including several members of his *p'ha-spun* and some male neighbours, Api (meaning grandmother) Hani, the father's sister (*nene*) of the *bag-mo*, who is a widow in Panikhar, and myself. When we reached Thangbu, the *nyo-pa* and I were taken into a room in the house of a relative of the *bag-mo*. We were given several courses of food, such as bread and butter, apricots and finally meat, various curries and rice. It was a very jolly party, and there was a good deal of joking and giggling, including during the prayers at the end which were led by Hajji Mirza. The two *bag-mos* were already dressed when I first saw them in their *bomoi kangsa*, which was in a small house near their own, where they were seated on the floor, surrounded by a crowd of women and girls who were singing and clapping in time to the music.

When the two parties finally left, Sakina's sister and her groom's *nyo-pa*, who had been entertained separately, went on foot, as the groom's hamlet was very close. A big crowd had gathered to see both parties off. The *bag-mos* were both walking, and the *nyo-pa* were throwing lots of sweets to the crowd.<sup>8</sup> When our party had all got into the minibus, Api Hani, her father's sister, and official female companion had

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<sup>8</sup> In this instance the sweets are called *skelda*, maybe because *da* means arrow and is associated with masculinity.

a kind of tussle with the *bag-mo* who was weeping, and eventually pulled her onto the bus.

When the *bag-mo* arrived at the house in Panikhar, there was a crowd of women and children waiting, and the boys from the house where I was staying let off lots of firecrackers. The *bag-mo* had her feet washed by the *bag-pho's* older sister, and then she, her *nene*, *azhang* and companion, were seated on a good carpet in one of the two guest rooms, which soon filled up with women and girls of the village. Latifa, a Sunni woman, whose wedding had taken place a few weeks before, was there dressed in some of her new clothes, and everyone referred to her as *bag-mo* still. Soon after, Mahi-ud-din's wife who is the sister of Ghulam Rassool, came up, greeted the *bag-mo*, shook her hand and lifted the shawl that was covering her face as a *burqa*. She did not seem to be happy with this and pulled it back down to cover herself again.

We were given bread, butter and tea, and the *bag-mo* and her *nene* also ate some. Afterwards, the *bag-pho's* older sister brought in two plates of *marzan* and offered some to the *nene*, and they performed the pantomime of offering money and the *nene* refusing, until finally both the *nene* and the *bag-mo* ate some. At this point she still had her face covered, but one of the young Sunni women came up and told her that she should uncover her face, and then teased her and kept trying to pull her shawl back. Most people were laughing, but I found it embarrassing, and later one of the girls said to me that it had been unnecessary and disrespectful for her to do that to the *bag-mo*.

That evening, they had invited guests from all the houses in Panikhar (*grong mi kyongcha* - that is to bring the villagers), and at least one person from each house should attend. They served everybody with rice, meat and curries, which had been prepared by some of their male relatives. As this was a small wedding they did not invite anyone but their relatives and fellow villagers for the celebrations. The evening ended fairly early, and I was told by some of Jaffar's relatives not to give my torch to any of the young girls who were hanging around. I was told that the reason was that villagers would do anything to observe a couple in bed on their wedding night. So Jaffar and Sakina sneaked off to his family's old house in the centre of the village to avoid detection. The next day, Fati the teenage daughter

from the house I was staying in told me that some bridal couples in the village had had tape-recorders and even people concealed in their room on their wedding night.

The next morning, was the ceremony for exchanging the *balthot*, when the tuft of wool from the hat and turban of the *bag-mo* and *bag-pho* were swapped by Api Hani her *nene*. Again money was offered to the *bag-mo*'s relatives, this time in order to persuade them to break and eat some bread - usually with some sweet *halva* as condiment, which is then distributed to everyone present. The *bag-mo* and *bag-pho* were sitting between their relatives, but with her *nene* in between them. The ceremony of eating the bread and *halva* and exchanging the wool was accomplished relatively easily, but then Hajji Mirza said that I should take a photograph of the couple together. Api Hani said that the *bag-mo* was shy and did not want to, and there ensued a long and hilarious argument between her and Hajji Mirza. She continued to refuse for about ten minutes, and he kept saying things like, "Well, you've taken the money and eaten the bread, so why can't we take a photograph?" She said, "It's not the custom to do this". Finally she agreed and moved from where she had been sitting between the couple, and a muffled cheer went up from everyone else in the room. That day all the Prantee people were called for a dinner.

About ten days later, after they had been to Sakina's house in Thangbu, she returned on the bus with the customary group of her young female friends and relatives. They were carrying baskets of bread and fried pastries which they distributed to people as they went and later took to all Jaffar's relatives in Panikhar. In order to make more of an occasion, they got down from the bus at the Police checkpoint on the road by Taisuru and walked the rest of the way. Just as it was getting dark, they arrived in the village where they were met by a crowd of women and children who asked to be given the bread and pastries. There was plenty of noise and excitement, and some of the boys and young men let off bangers to add to the atmosphere.

They visited a couple of houses on the way, but soon arrived at Sakina's new home where they and lots of mainly younger village people went into the guest room. Sakina and her friends sat in a circle with their backs to the rest of us, and sang

some local songs. Lots of banter was exchanged between them and the young women from Panikhar. This evening Sakina was much more lively and not at all shy. She knew all the Panikhar people as a year before she had been staying in Panikhar with Api Hani to help her as she lives alone. The dancing and singing got into full swing after we had all been fed. Most of us formed into two circles - one for the *bag-mo* and her friends, and the other for the Panikhar people most of whom were Jaffar's relatives by now. For the rest of the evening these two groups of villagers acted out a friendly rivalry. First of all the Thangbu women were urged to sing by the Panikhar crowd and roundly sneered at if they stumbled or forgot lines. Myself and others were dragged up to do an individual "turn" in the middle of the singing group, although there was a general reluctance to dance, but soon things got more lively.

The Panikhar group started to sing in competition with the girls from Thangbu, and two jerry cans were brought in to be beaten in time to the songs. The singing got louder and more raucous and there was lots of good-natured pushing and shoving, particularly of the *bag-mo* by the Panikhar people. At one point, a teenage Panikhar boy got up and did a hilarious wild pantomimic dance in the middle of the Thangbu circle - which made most of us cry with laughter. I left at about 1 am, but apparently the party carried on for several hours, becoming more hilarious and wild. I was slightly shocked the next day to hear from the ever demure Fati (the teenage daughter from the house that I was living in at the time) that even she and her friend had got up and danced. The next day everyone was saying what a brilliant party it had been.

These two marriages included a number of elements that are typical of peasants in Suru, whose marriages are local in focus. The same people also enact their actual weddings in a manner which I describe as being in the Suru rather than regional style, albeit with local variations in customs between areas and villages. For example, among peasants there is a preference for the *nyo-pa* to go on horseback to fetch the *bag-mo*, as this is considered to be the most prestigious and exciting way to do so. The year before, when Moqsin, a bus driver from Taisuru, had married Zenab the sister of a contractor from Pursa, he and his *nyo-pa* had gone on horseback, although he had also laid on a mini-bus for the female members of the

party. Similarly the clothes worn by the *bag-mo* and *bag-pho* are in a local Suru style, albeit with enhancements for the wedding.

In both of the weddings that I have described, the people involved were almost exclusively close relatives of the two families, or from the same village. It is normal practice for people from every house in a village to attend parts of a wedding, except when there were the boycotts between the *yokma* and *goma-pa*. My understanding is that families prefer to bring a *bag-mo* from a different village, as the element of rivalry between villages (see Chapter 3), adds to the triumph with which she is brought. This enjoyable competitiveness was very clear in the party at the end of Sakina and Jaffar's wedding, when it was the difference between the two villages and groups of people and the solidarity of each as separate units which was emphasised. Similarly, on the main day of the wedding when the *bag-mo's* *nene* negotiates with the *bag-pho's* sister over the eating of the bread after they arrive at his house, she acts as if she is dealing with someone hostile, and is unwilling to hand over the *bag-mo*. This seems to be connected with the theme of capture, which is common in marriage all over this region.<sup>9</sup>

The passage of the *bag-mo* between her own and her husband's home during the wedding, also emphasises the relocation of the woman from one place to another. Near the beginning of the wedding, she is removed from her own house to the *bomoi kangsa* for her *bag-ches*. After that she only returns home briefly to say goodbye to her family when her husband's *nyo-pa* have come to collect her. Hence her separation from her own home is emphasised before she even leaves to go to her husband's house. This process of separation between the old and the new land is particularly striking in the villages such as Achambore and Namsuru where the *bag-mo's* feet are not allowed to touch the ground between her *bomoi kangsa* and her new house. For example, at a wedding in Namsuru, where the *bag-mo* was going to another house in the village, she was still carried on another woman's back from her *bomoi kangsa* to her father's house and then to that of her husband. The woman who carries her is called the *bag-ista* (literally 'wedding horse'). Even in

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<sup>9</sup> Marriage by capture is found all over the Himalayas, and usually it is a mock capture, as it is frequently in Ladakh, but in some areas, such as parts of Nepal, it is apparently often done without the woman's consent (Schuler 1987:141).

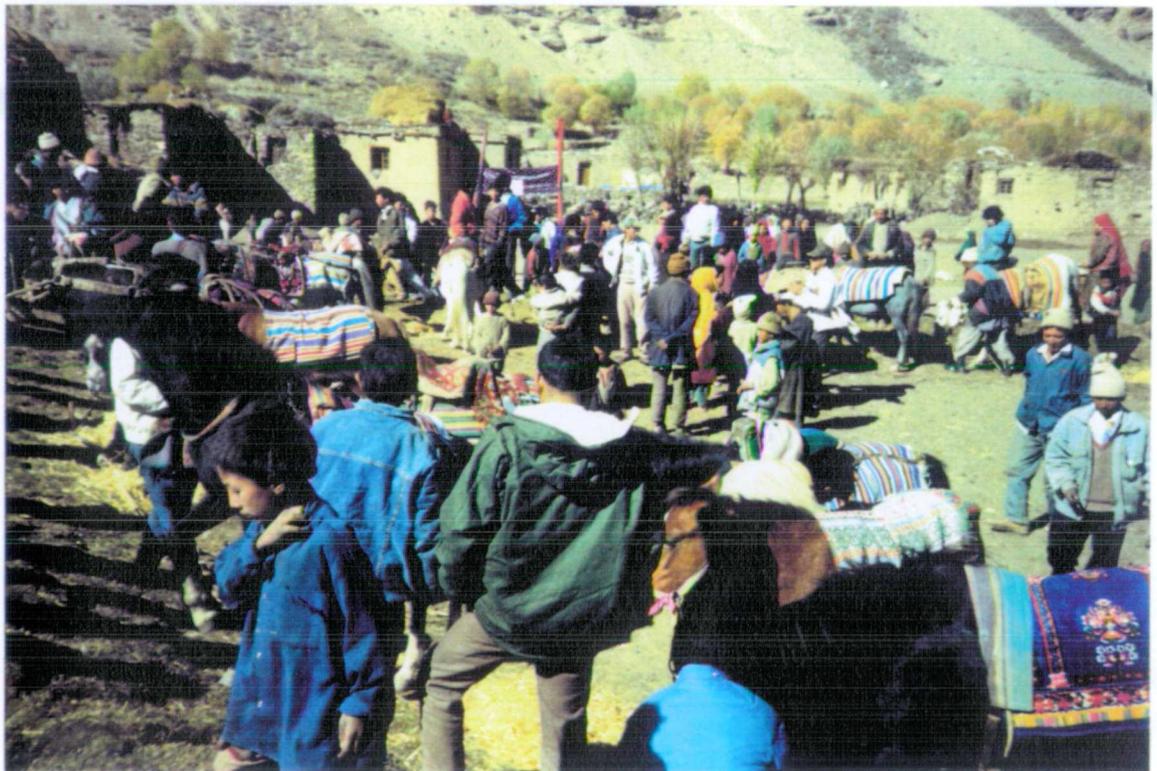
villages such as Thangbu and Panikhar where she is allowed to walk, her feet must be washed as she enters the new house, which seems to be a ritual of washing off the land where she came from.

Another striking feature of these weddings, is the degree to which mourning forms a part of the wedding. The fact that the bride weeps is normal in both Ladakh and other parts of India, but in Suru, the theme of mourning runs through the whole wedding. It might appear to outsiders that it is coincidental that so many of the brides or grooms in the weddings that I attended had lost their father or mother, but that is not the case, it is simply a function of the high levels of mortality in the area. Out of the eight weddings that I attended in 1993/4, four of the brides or grooms had lost their mother or father. However, that would not necessarily mean that mourning was stressed at weddings, and the fact that it is indicates that it is closely connected to ideas of kinship, particularly for women. I have suggested that the mother's grave is a most important site for women, once they have married out of their natal home, as she forms the anchor point for their kinship (see Chapter 2). This seems to come out clearly in Fatima's wedding, since she wept longest and most uncontrollably over her mother's grave. Even if a woman's mother is still alive their parting is the most poignant and demonstrative. When the woman leaves her home, most of her female friends and relatives also weep. In other parts of Ladakh, a much more ritualised lamenting is performed (Aggarwal 1994:200ff). In Chigtan, women practice a poignant lament which they recite when they are leaving their parents and family. In Suru, however, the weeping is mainly uncontrolled and similar to the tears wept when someone dies, or at *matam* ceremonies.

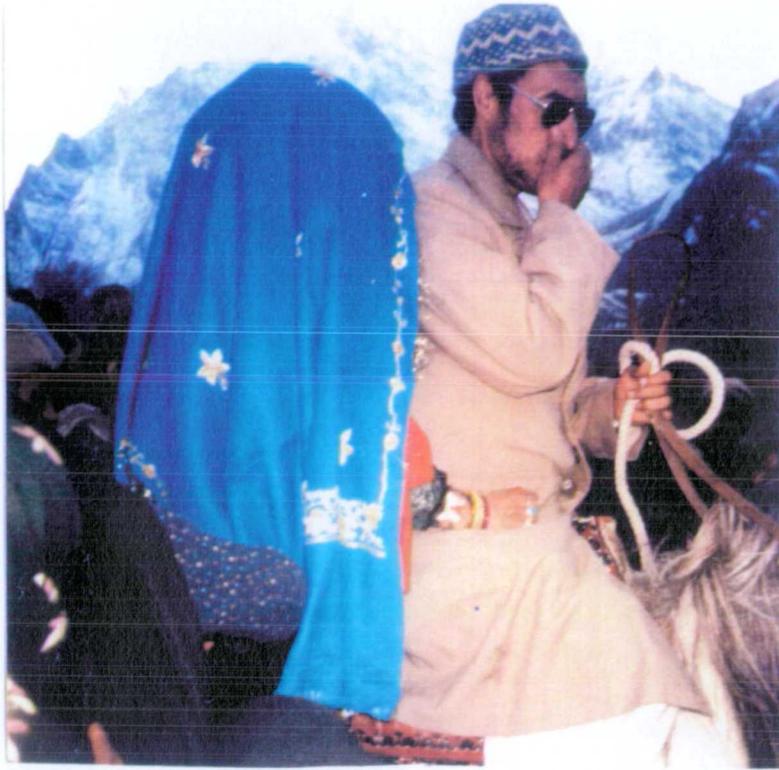
The *aghas* also used this more local Suru style in their weddings. For instance, Ali Agha, Agha Miggi Ort's second son, said that he had had about fifty *nyo-pa* on horseback for his wedding a few years before. When I discussed these kinds of weddings with the people who had been involved in them, they often commented that they were much more enjoyable than the more formal ones enacted by the administrative elite that I shall describe in the next section. Of course the way that they were celebrating weddings was not the exactly the same as it was in the past; however, the style that was being used was seen by these people as being more local and traditional than that of those of the administrative elite.



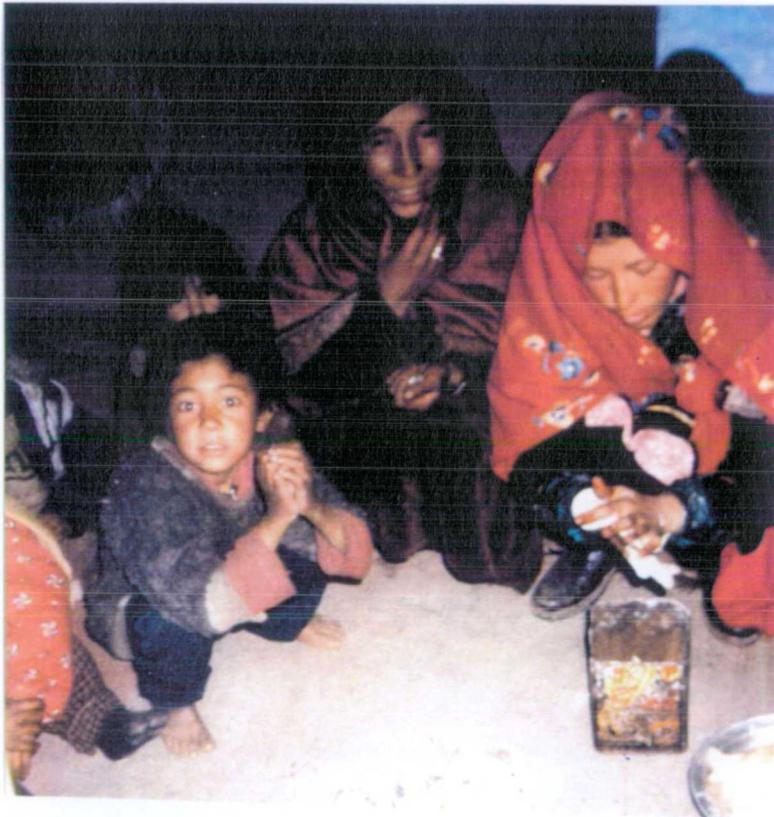
*Picture 6.1 - Fatima on her stage wearing the balthot*



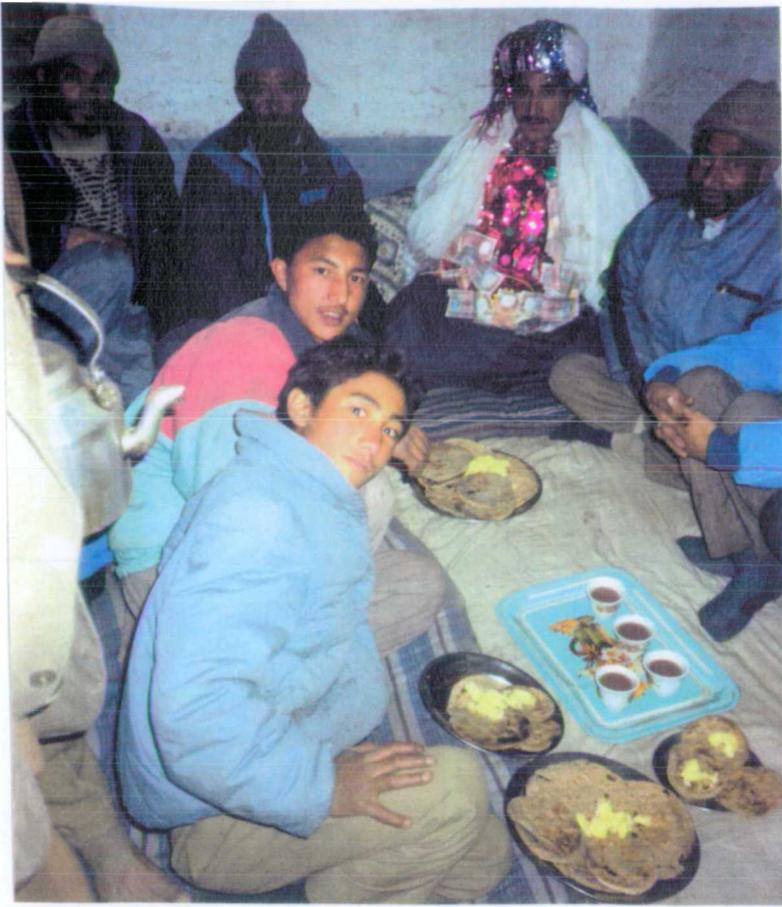
*Picture 6.2 - The nyo-pa and horses in Achambore*



*Picture 6.3 - Fatima on Hajji Ghulam Muhammed's horse*



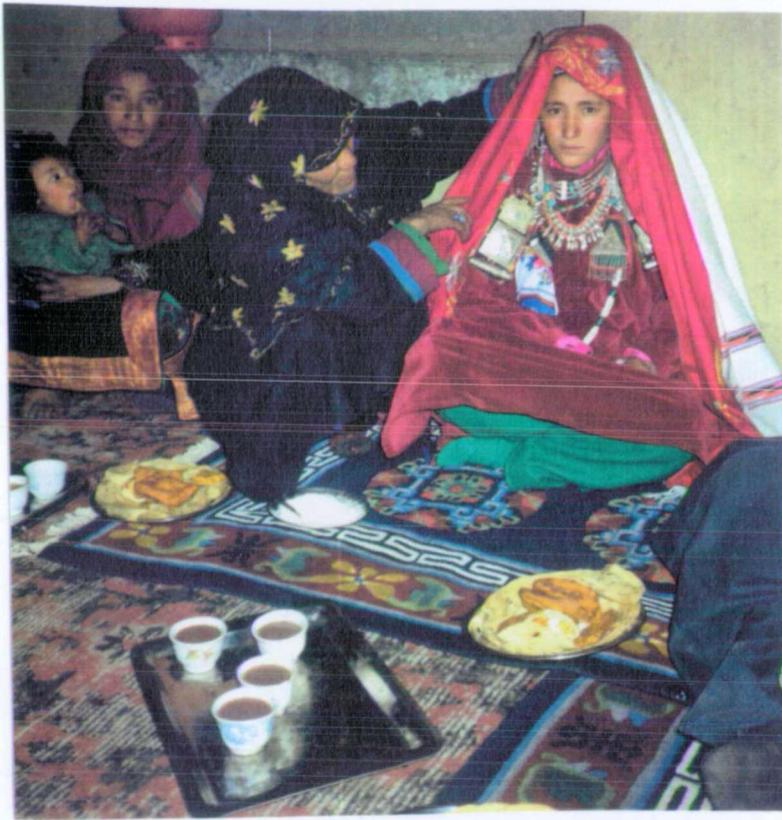
*Picture 6.4 - Fatima prepares bread at her new house*



*Picture 6.5 - Jaffar's Nyo-pa in Thangbu*



*Picture 6.6 - Sakina and her sister in their bomoi kangsa*



*Picture 6.7 - Sakina and Api Hani at Jaffar's house*



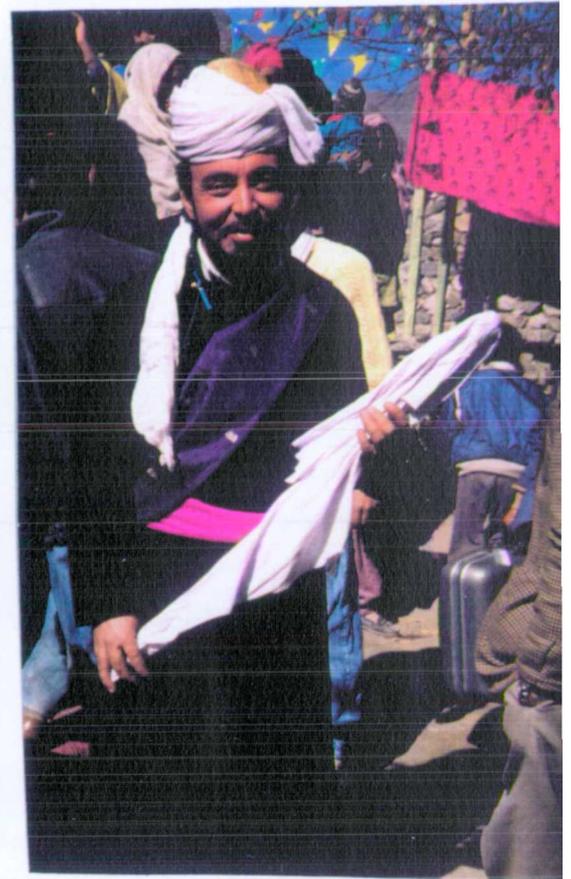
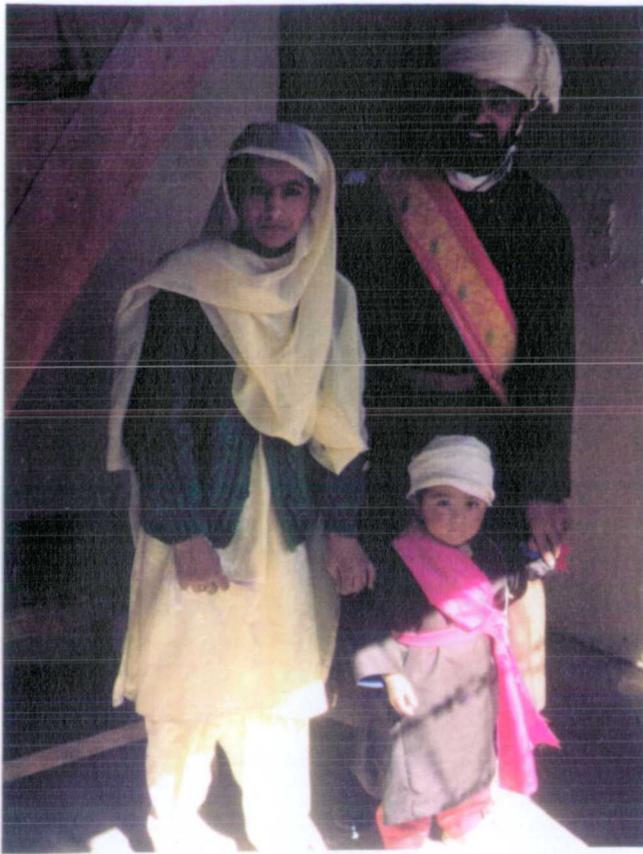
*Picture 6.8 - The ceremony of the balthot at Jaffar and Sakina's wedding*



*Picture 6.9 - Nargis on the stage at Haddi's house*



*Picture 6.10 - Roqia's sinmotse being brought*



*Picture 6.11 - Dr. Jaffar and son and the BDO as Aijas's nyo-pa*



*Picture 6.12 - Roqia on the stage*

### **(v) A Suru Administrative Elite Wedding**

A few weeks before Jaffar's wedding, his cousin Haddi, Hajji Mirza's son who is a Junior Engineer, had also married but, in his case, into the administrative elite. The *bag-mo* was Nargis who is a graduate with a government white-collar office job in Kargil. She is the daughter of ex-Superintendent of Police (SP) Abbas, who was elected as the National Conference MLA candidate for the Suru valley in the elections in 1996. Her brother is married to one of Munshi Sadiq's daughters, and is a leading member of the Kargil Youth Voluntary Forum.

The invitations for the wedding were given on expensively printed cards, and delivered well in advance to guests both in Kargil and Suru-Kartse. As with other, administrative elite weddings, the different parts of the wedding were referred to by Urdu and Arabic names, for instance, the groom's party was called the *barati*. The wedding started in Panikhar with the *bag-gron* for the *bag-pho*, which was held at the Tourist Bungalow, the most imposing modern building in Panikhar. This was arranged by group of young men who were to make up the *barati*, who were predominantly Sunni. At the beginning of the evening, the *bag-pho* was sitting in the main room of their house, wrapped in a blanket and surrounded by his male relatives and other men who were singing *khasidas*, while his sisters and female neighbours and friends were in the kitchen. Tea and bread was served to everyone in the respective rooms, and a number of people were weeping as they remembered his mother Fatima who had died in the winter of 1993. She had been an auxiliary nurse (ANM) and an exceptionally popular woman, who had continued to attend *yokma matams* with her daughters in 1993, despite the rift between her husband and the *yokma aghas* (see Chapter 5).

After some time, the *bag-pho* was taken in procession to the Tourist Bungalow, by a crowd of men, women and children carrying torches and a ghetto-blaster. The girls and young women, including his sisters, sang songs as we walked towards the Bungalow and boys set off fireworks and bangers. Only the men and older boys attended the party, which went on until the following afternoon.

By the following evening, the large marquee (*shamiana*), ceremonial arch, outside kitchen, and stages for the *bag-mo* and *bag-pho* had all been set up. Another procession brought the *bag-pho* back to the house, and he and the men occupied

the main guest room. After dark, a car arrived from Kargil containing the *snyen-go* and *halpa*, who are the representatives of the *bag-mo's* family and the person who arranged the match - it is a Kargil custom for them to come. They were greeted at the ceremonial arch and given tea and biscuits, then brought into the house. That evening Kazim Sahib, the Sunni leader from Sankhoo from the Kakpuri family, also arrived with Agha Jemal from Tambis Block near Kargil, who is a leading figure in the local Congress Party. He was there to fill the ceremonial role that one of the *yokma aghas* would have been asked to take, had relations been better between them and Hajji Mirza.

The women were all in the kitchen, where the special wedding bread, pastries and sweet tea were being served. Those who were helping were mainly Shi'ah relatives and neighbours, and the guests were either women from the more prestigious Sunni families of Panikhar and Prantee. There were also several Shi'ah women who had come from other villages for the wedding. Later on, everyone was given an elaborate meal of rice and various dishes, including some special Kashmiri meat preparations - such as *yakhni* - which are served at weddings. Hajji Mirza had apparently brought two cooks from Kargil to help with the preparation of these specialities. After dinner, the younger women and girls went to a room in a neighbouring house for singing and dancing. Meanwhile the men had a party in the house, with a powerful public address system broadcasting their singing to the whole village. This carried on until the middle of the night, when the *bag-pho's* sisters and her friends went back to the house to take the *sinmo-tse* (*mehendi* or henna) in to the *bag-pho*.<sup>10</sup> They entered the *bag-pho's* room, singing much more demurely than before, and the ceremony of putting henna on the *bag-pho's* hand was performed. This ceremony is performed for both the *bag-pho* and *bag-mo* on the eve of the wedding and ranges from simply smearing henna on the right hand to the drawing of delicate patterns on both the hands and feet.

The next day, the *bag-pho* and *nyo-pa* set off to Kargil with a minibus, thirteen taxis and cars and a motorbike (Dr. Jaffar's). The number of vehicles is an important sign of prestige for this kind of wedding, and people counted the vehicles and

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<sup>10</sup> *Sinmo-tse* is the local term for henna, which literally means 'colour of joy', as it is used as an auspicious colouring for happy events such as weddings and Id days.

commented that there had been a very good turnout. Dr. Jaffar told me that he had had the largest number of vehicles at his wedding that had ever been seen at that time, since his had been a 'political' match, as he had married a niece of Munshi Habibullah. Thus it constituted an alliance between the families of Munshi Habibullah and Qamer Ali, the two most important politicians in Kargil *tehsil*. With the exception of Dr. Jaffar's motorbike, no-one in Panikhar or Prantee had a vehicle at that time, so all of the taxis were brought from Kargil by Haddi's friends and relatives. The *nyo-pa* were nearly all dressed smartly in Ladakhi *gonchas* (long garments), and had matching sashes and rosettes. The *bag-pho's azhang*, and one or two of the other *nyo-pa* were also wearing white turbans. The *bag-pho*, who travelled in a decorated taxi with his *azhang* and others, had on a very smart suit, Kashmiri shawl and the wedding turban. Before he left, his eldest sister and other people put *khatags* (ceremonial scarves) round his neck, and his eldest sister threw rose-petal confetti and *chola* over him.

The men who went with him as his *nyo-pa* were a mixture of Shi'ahs and Sunnis, mainly from Panikhar itself, although the majority were Sunnis. Some of the Shi'ahs who attended and helped at the wedding are keen supporters of the Noon Public School and the *yokma-pa aghas*, and there is obviously no contradiction between that and their closeness to Hajji Mirza's family. For example, Sakina, from the Lampa house where I was staying who has a son at the Noon Public School, had been the *chos-pun* of Fatima, Haddi's mother, which means that the *agha* had performed a ceremony to make them fictive siblings.<sup>11</sup> She and all her family worked tirelessly at the wedding, and at certain points she took the part of Haddi's mother, but she told me that she would not have worked for them, had she and Fatima not been related in that way. Similarly, Dr. Jaffar, who had been a classmate of Haddi in Srinagar and is a great friend of Nargis's family took an important role in the ceremonies and went as one of his main *nyo-pa*.

I did not go to Kargil with the *nyo-pa*, but I saw the video that the *bag-mo's* family had made of the whole wedding. They had had a party the night before at which there was lots of singing and dancing. Most of the participants seemed to be young men and women from the Kargil administrative elite families. I was surprised to see

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<sup>11</sup> This is not the same as *moharam*, as it is between people of the same sex.

that the party was mixed, and some of the braver participants did individual disco-style dances. The next day, the *bag-mo* was dressed in a family room, with just a few female relatives. She wore an outfit of fine turquoise and gold diaphanous material, and gold jewellery, and dainty gold sandals. This style is completely 'non-local' and is that of a Punjabi-type wedding, which is the fashion for better off people in northern India, and it made her look like a heroine in a Hindi film.

A supporter of the Ayatollah Khomeini Memorial trust and ally of the *yokma-pa* in Kargil said to me that when the *nyo-pa* arrived there they were all amazed because so many of them were Sunnis. He commented that Hajji Mirza had been split off from 'his own', and that it was a shame for him. In Panikhar the *nyo-pa* reported on their return that the *bag-mo* had left her parents without even shedding a tear, which was seen as being very unusual, as a *bag-mo* normally weeps hysterically when she leaves her family. When the party arrived in Panikhar, there were several stops for tea and snacks. At one, the *bag-mo's azhang* had to pay money for a pair of scissors to cut a ribbon across the road, and, as is customary, everyone commented on the meanness of his payments for these services. The *bag-mo* eventually got out of the taxi near the door of the house, with her head bent and covered by a large shawl. She was greeted by women holding a sheep and burning incense and then, with the rest of the women in her party, she was led inside on foot, and the men were served tea and snacks by the ceremonial arch.

Meanwhile the door to the house had been shut and the *bag-pho's azhang* had to go through a pantomime of asking to be let in. Eventually he paid the *bag-pho's* sisters Rs. 200 for them to open the door. The *bag-mo* had been taken into another room and seated on the stage with her relatives and the *halpa* next to her. The *bag-pho* went and sat on the stage in the main room. His main companions at this point were a Kashmiri colleague, and Dr. Jaffar. In the *bag-mo's* room there was a deadly hush. She was sitting on the stage, with her *nene* (father's sister), *azhang*, friends and relatives, and headmaster Mahi-ud-din to her right. In front of her were three women from the more prominent local Sunni families, including Farida, a woman from a highly prestigious family, who are the only Sunnis to originate in Kargil and she is married to one of the Kakpuri engineers, Ghulam Rassool's wife Zubaida, and Haqima, his sister who is married to Headmaster Mahi-ud-din. The other people in the room were a group of mainly small girls and

myself. Then Haqima, who had done the same to Sakina at Jaffar's wedding, offered the *bag-mo* some tea and biscuits and very politely persuaded her to lift her *dahon* to reveal her face and drink some tea. After that, the photographers - her *azhang* who had a video camera and I - took photographs. The *bag-mo* and her elder women companions did their prayers (*phyak*) for a long time. After that the *bag-pho's* sisters all came in and gave her wrapped presents and greeted her. There was some desultory talking by the men and her *nene*, but for the most part an awed silence was maintained.

During this period, Archo Mansura and Archo Sajjida, the daughter and granddaughter of Agha Miggi Ort, arrived and were brought into the room. The *halpa*, realising they were *archos*, tried to persuade them to come and sit on the ceremonial carpets with the other non-Panikhar guests, but they refused and sat with the group on the floor. The *yokma-pa aghas'* families had both been sent invitations, but neither of the *aghas* attended personally. Agha Baqir did not send a representative to any part of the wedding, as he is generally more open in his opposition to the Sunnis. The next day Agha Miggi Ort asked me all about the wedding, and seemed quite relaxed about it as he laughed uproariously when I said that the *bag-mo* was very attractive.

Later on that evening, everyone was served an elaborate meal, consisting of rice and a range of speciality Kashmiri wedding dishes, and the evening ended quite early. First thing the next morning, Nargis performed the ceremony of making bread, supervised by Sakina, Haddi's mother's *chos-spun*. The new couple had spent the night alone in a well-furnished bedroom and in the morning there was a good deal of speculation among the women about how the night had gone. The next day there was a big lunch in the marquee to which many people came, including a number of guests who came in taxis from Kargil, and the next day Haddi and Nargis went to her house in Kargil for a few days. They returned to Panikhar in her brother Dr. Raza's jeep accompanied by Najima her elder sister. During their stay they all visited the Noon Public School one day. On their return to Kargil, Haddi and Nargis stayed at his family's lodgings which are hired rooms in the centre of Kargil, but they also spent a good deal of time at her family's house.

### **(vi) A Kargil Administrative Elite Wedding**

The final wedding that I am going to describe was the social event of the wedding season that year in Kargil, as it involved a number of members of the Munshi Habibullah family and their relatives. This wedding consisted of three marriages, one of Munshi Habibullah's second son Gulzar and his maternal cousin, whose father is one of the two Assistant Commissioners (AC) in Kargil; that of his younger brother Aijas to Roqia, who is from the family of Hajji Shafi who owns the Argali Hotel in Kargil bazaar, and who are their *p'ha-spun* by virtue of their grandfather having been given land by their family; and that of her brother Fida who married a woman from a village north-east of Kargil.

On the first main day of this wedding two sets of *barati* left to get Gulzar's *bag-mo* from his uncle's house in Batalik, and Fida's from her village. They both went off with a number of jeeps and there was lots of noise and fireworks at their departure, so that you could hear it all over Kargil. That evening it was Roqia's *mehendi raat* at Hajji Shafi's house which is behind the hotel in the centre of Kargil. They had set up two large marquees (*shamiana*) in the garden of the neighbouring house of Commander Hassan, who stood, and was elected, as MP in 1989 to break the Buddhist boycott. Roqia was dressed in her ordinary clothes and was looking very downcast as Latifa had done. She was sitting at one side of the extremely large women's tent surrounded by her friends. There were about two hundred female guests, including lots of her *nene's* family from Sanjak near Chigtan where she is married. Roqia's mother died some years ago and her father is now married to Latifa, one of Dr. Jaffar and Qamer Ali's sisters. So several of their female relatives from Sangra were there too. In addition there were women from most of the important families in Kargil, although there were very few Sunnis there. I do know that the only people they invited from Suru Block were the *yokma-pa aghas'* families, and a Sheikh from Damsna, who has a son at the Noon Public School from Suru Block.

The evening started with a dinner, which consisted of rice and a number of the Kashmiri meat wedding dishes. All the Muslim guests ate in groups of four women and children around a single plate, and the wife of the Headmaster of the Noon Public School who is a Hindu by birth, although married to a Muslim and I ate off our own personal plates. Many of the guests were dressed in beautiful clothes,

most of them wore *salwar kamiz*, but some of them had on *koshen gonchas* (brocade dresses), such as are the fashion in Leh *tehsil*. After the meal, some of the women started to sing, but apparently the male guests were still in the next tent at this time and so we were asked not to do so. This was presumably because there were *aghas* and *shaikhs* in the next room who would have disapproved of singing and dancing at a wedding. However, later on the dancing got into full swing. One of Roqia's young female relatives acted as the master of ceremonies as she took on the task of persuading women to dance. Some get up fairly willingly to do a short solo turn in the middle of the seated company, but others had to be dragged and pushed up and this causes a good deal of hilarity. The star of the evening was the young daughter of Dr. Ghulam, who is from Leh and the Physician in Kargil Hospital, who did a disco-style dance that brought the house down.

Gradually most of the guests left, leaving the relatives and Roqia's close friends. They then performed the ceremony of *sinmo-tse*, and after that most people went to bed. The next day, the *bag-mo* had her *bag-ches* in a room in the house, with just a few female relatives and friends. She was dressed in diaphanous, gold-decorated clothes in the Punjabi wedding style, just as Nargis had been, and she changed into another similar outfit during the day. She then went down to the stage in the women's *shamiana* where there was a very large group of well-dressed young women and girls. Many women also wandered in off the street to see what was going on, including many of the young women from Panikhar and Prantee who study in Kargil. There was lots of singing of local songs and dancing, although Hajji Shafi came in several times to request everyone to sing *khasidas* (religious songs).

Later in the day, the *bag-pho's nyo-pa* arrived. Their leader (called the *krashis-pa*) was Munshi Khadim the BDO in Suru Block from the management committee of the Noon Public School, and his uncle Munshi Sadiq was also with them. His daughters are married to the son of ex-SP Abbas, who in 1996 was elected as the National Conference MLA for Suru and Zanskar, and the son of the Congress candidate who opposed Qamer Ali for the MLA for Kargil in 1996. Dr. Jaffar was also one of the *nyo-pa*, and Qamer Ali and Commander Hassan were also there and took tea with the *bag-pho* and *nyo-pa* when they arrived. The *bag-pho* was dressed very smartly in a suit and had a white turban and was wearing a veil of gold tinsel that concealed his face.

Once the *nyo-pa* had arrived the *bag-mo's* father and her younger brothers and other male relatives brought her presents, and then many of the women did too. At this point the *bag-mo* started to weep, and was comforted by her *nene* who sat next to her on the stage. When it was finally time for her to go she set up a more concerted keening and her girlfriends refused to let her go until her father had paid them Rs. 500. Later on that day Fida arrived back with his *bag-mo*. She was immediately taken to a stage in the upper room of their house, where Aijas' *nyo-pa* had been entertained earlier in the day. She was wearing a brocade Ladakhi *goncha* and was quite relaxed and spoke to me and her *nene* and friends. Latifa, Hajji Shafi and his elder brother Abdul Rashid among others came and put *khatags* on her head and congratulated her.

I then went to the dinner at Munshi Habibullah's house. The two *bag-mos* were sitting with their entourages on a stage at the end of a very large *shamiana*. Gradually a large number of female guests arrived from most of the important houses in Kargil, although there were not many Sunnis. Before the dinner was served, I was taken to another room inside the house which was for the non-Muslim female guests, who were a number of Buddhists and Hindus and myself. During the course of the evening we were visited by several of the family members and Munshi Habibullah himself. The meal was extremely elaborate, and Munshi Habibullah said that he had brought in cooks from Kashmir to prepare it. There were at least ten delicious Kashmiri meat dishes which were served to us by the young men of several of the administrative elite families of Kargil, some of whom are son-in-laws of Munshi Habibullah's family.

Later on, we were joined by the *bag-pho's*, some of the women guests and more family members, and there was a bit of singing and dancing, but we went to bed quite early. There were two women guests from Leh, but Munshi Habibullah said that he was disappointed because very few of those invited from Leh, Srinagar or Jammu had come.

The next morning the ceremony of exchanging the *balthots* took place in two separate rooms. The *bag-mos* with their *nenes* and all the female relatives were in the kitchen, where they had earlier made the ceremonial *chapati*. The women who

were preparing bread and tea at the stove brought two plates, one with *halva* and *chapati* on it and the other with thick breads and butter. Everyone was offered some of the bread and butter, and then the two *nenes* were given one hundred rupee notes. Then the *bag-mos* each put their *balthot* on one of the plates, and these were taken to the *bag-phos* in the next room. Someone then came in with the *bag-phos'* turbans, and they took the *balthots* off those and attached them to clothes of the respective *bag-mos*. Then a piece of *halva* was put on a plate and all the bridal party were given a bit to eat, and afterwards it was offered to the rest of us.

### (vii) Conclusions

There were clearly some significant differences between the administrative elite weddings, and those I described as being enacted in a peasant style in Suru.

Feature	Peasant Weddings	Administrative Elite Weddings
Mode of Transport	Horses	Multiple vehicles
Dress	'Suru' style	'Modern' style
Food	Marzan and 'ordinary' curries	Elaborate Kashmiri dishes
General demeanour	Relaxed and informal	Formal and polite
Guests	Relatives and village	Relatives and village plus other members of the elite

Another important difference is that *rintho* is not paid in Kargil among these families now and instead a dowry is given according to the custom in Kashmir.

In various respects the administrative elite weddings used a regional style, which is seen as being more civilised and modern. In Panikhar, in particular, where Sunnis now also usually follow this regional style of wedding, several people commented on how much better they were, and made derogatory comments about the weddings that I had attended in the other villages. I was asked several times whether I had been served beef at any of the weddings and considerable disgust was expressed at the idea that I might have been. Beef is eaten by all Muslims in Suru, and is not *haram* (forbidden) for them or seen as being in any way a problem;

however, in a wider Indian context many people regard beef-eating as stigmatising, and hill people in general are often derided for being beef-eaters.

There was also a major difference in the terms of who attended the wedding and the social interaction between them. In the administrative elite weddings the people tried to get as many members of that group as they could to attend the main dinners, and that was the most important reference group besides relatives. Secondly most of the events of the wedding are much more formal, and everyone is treated with respect, so the egalitarian rivalry of the other weddings is not normally present. I think that this is because these kinds of weddings are being used to create a status distinction between those that are involved in them and other people. Therefore these marriages are part of the process by which an administrative elite is being constructed as a group of superior status to the mass of people in the area. It also cross-cuts the factional divisions that I described in the previous chapter. For instance, both Dr. Jaffar's marriage into the Munshi Habibullah family, and Haddi's to Nargis represented alliances between families that had previously been in opposed political factions.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that there are similarities between the marriage patterns in the administrative elite, and those of the *aghas* in Suru, in that in both cases the leaders practise a large amount of endogamy within their lineages, thereby enhancing its solidarity. However, the difference is that whereas the leaders among the administrative elite, do not appear to form kinship ties with ordinary people, this is a major part of the *aghas'* kinship, since their leadership is dependent on them constantly recreating their kinship ties with their followers in the locality. As I have suggested, the administrative elite have a constituency simply by virtue of holding a particular post, and hence they have no need of creating kinship ties with their public through marriage. Hence they are free to separate themselves socially from the mass of peasants in the area.

Similarly, the loss of association with the land is linked to processes of urbanisation and regionalisation in the area. As well as having less reference to the land, the weddings of the administrative elite, are also very urban and modern in style. I would suggest that this is connected to a desire to join the administrative elite in the

region, which is largely urban and self-consciously constitutes itself as being more 'modern' than the majority of ordinary people.

One interesting factor is that this difference is self-consciously referred to by people in Suru. At the moment, the elite of the *yokma* faction in Suru Block appear to be intent on retaining their local focus, and remaining a cohesive group within the Suru valley, rather than moving away and joining the administrative elite in Kargil. Nevertheless, the processes of regionalisation and urbanisation in which they are involved and often play an important part, ultimately do seem to be transforming the social geography of the area, as I shall discuss in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7

### Agriculture and the Urban Bureaucracy

#### (i) Introduction

I have identified one of the main aims of the school as being to bring education under the political control of the faction and to provide a high standard of secular education locally. I have shown that this was not merely an activity of elites, since the impetus for creating the faction and its leadership has come as much from the followers as from the leaders themselves. For its members, the school is a continuation of the faction. Although the faction is internally stratified, it nevertheless remains a largely cohesive social group, the members of which are all involved in agriculture in Suru. Moreover, the faction is mainly a local organisation, despite the fact that it has important outside connections.

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that there is an emerging administrative elite in Kargil *tehsil*, largely urban in outlook and residence, although it includes a minority from rural areas like Suru. More and more there is now a clear social divide between them and the mass of ordinary people who are still primarily involved in the agricultural economy. In this chapter, I shall further explore a growing divide between town and country. In particular, attitudes to agricultural work are changing as the possession of secular education and government employment are increasingly associated with higher status. Such changes are symptomatic of a more general shift of focus that is resulting in a restructuring of the social geography of Suru.

Corresponding changes are taking place in kinship and the organisation of the household. One is that masculinity and male authority within the family group are being redefined in some families at the moment. There is also a noticeable change in patterns of speech and address between people outside the household and an increased use of honorific terminology, especially for those who have government jobs.

Hence, there is an emerging social divide within Suru, that corresponds to various divisions between the peasant agricultural economy and that of the government and administration, rural and urban areas and a gender divide. This affects the access to resources of women and peasants, particularly in that it leaves them effectively disenfranchised in the conduct of development policies. It also has important consequences for the ability of the *yokma-pa* leaders to represent the interests of their members in Kargil and to turn their undoubted authority in Suru into effective action when dealing with the administration.

I have suggested that the Noon Public School was set up to counter some of these processes. So, finally, I look at the school to see how and whether some of these issues are addressed in its organisation and policies. In doing so, I shall show that there is an important difference of opinion within the management committee. The *aghas* see the school as being merely instrumental in gaining educational qualifications; whereas some of the men who are more involved in the government economy want the school to transform their children into modern people.

This difference in conception is not at all surprising and highlights a potential contradiction between the desire to bolster the power of the faction in the local area and the potentiality for the attendance of their children at the school to hasten the pace at which the elite of the faction move away from Suru and the peasant economy. This contradiction also comes out in the educational aims of the school and most of the parents, which is that their children will obtain jobs in the administrative elite. As I showed in Chapter 6, one possible outcome of the education that the school offers is that the elite of the faction will join the administrative elite and abandon Suru for an urban centre.

## **(ii) Agriculture, Locality and Urbanisation**

Farming still remains the main economic activity in Suru Block and all the families that live permanently in Suru have agricultural land and some animals. It also provides the main source of livelihood for most households, particularly in the villages away from the Panikhar area where there are far more people with government jobs. All land owning households in Suru still farm, even those that have a considerable income from other sources; however, attitudes to agriculture are changing at the moment. In order to illustrate this, I shall describe the work patterns in two families in Panikhar,

one being an economically average *yokma-pa* family who have a son in the school and the other, a richer Sunni family which has a solid base in government employment.

The first family is that of Safia and Mehdi, who have five children of ages varying from three to nineteen, one of whom is a pupil at the Noon Public School. They had divided their land with Mehdi's two brothers more than ten years previously and hence they had under twenty *kanals* of land, which was less than they really needed. In addition they had three bovines, from which they received a regular milk supply, a horse and a few sheep and goats. Their income was supplemented by Mehdi's rather undemanding manual job with the agricultural department which brought in around Rs 1,500 a month and, in 1995, they opened a small and as yet not very profitable shop in Panikhar bazaar. Their eldest son had attended school until 9th class and was unsuccessfully taking his 10th class exam in 1994. Their daughter was seventeen and had never been to school. Their income was above average, as they had about the average amount of land for Suru Block as a whole with additional income from a government job and, latterly, the shop as well; however, they were one of the poorest of the fee-paying families of children in the Noon Public School and were poorer than the majority of households in Panikhar.

Safia and Mehdi's eldest son was working as a servant (*duksmi*) for a neighbouring house for part of the time, in which he was involved in both household and agricultural work. At times of intensive agricultural work, such as ploughing and harvesting, his mother and sister also performed some *milaks* (free labour) for this household. For their own work, they occasionally received mutual aid (*laktsiks*) from relatives in Panikhar. Both parents and the two oldest children, who were not attending school, spent the majority of their time on agricultural tasks during the summer months. Mehdi did, of course, have to attend to his duty but, in common with many government jobs in Suru, this was not very arduous and he was always able to take leave when his labour was urgently needed at home.

The two boys who were attending school would help with the animals in the morning and evening and the older one might take a day off school when it was their turn to provide labour to take the animals to the mountains for the *ba-res* and *ra-res*. Safia, Roqia her daughter and sometimes Mehdi also went regularly to the mountains to

collect dung and furze (*burtse*) for cooking when they were not engaged in other agricultural tasks. For instance, for a long period after harvest, Roqia got up before light every day and returned a few hours later with a large basket of dung.

Their neighbours are a Sunni family, who have a larger than average plot of land. They are said to have two shares (*po*) of land, as Nazir, the household head's paternal uncle went as a *mag-pa* to another house and subsequently sold his half of the land to Nazir's family. Despite having a shortage of labour at the moment, they farm all the land themselves rather than letting out a part to tenants. It is common for households in this situation to give their land as *shazma* (leased land), to another household who will farm it and give them a share of the grain crop. However, Nazir, the household head, wanted to farm all the land. In 1994, their household consisted of himself, his younger son and his wife and three children, his cousin and his daughter and his eldest son's son from his first wife. He himself has a part-time administrative job, which involves him in a small amount of work every day. Both his sons are teachers, one works in the Kargil area and spends nearly all his time there; the younger one is posted in Sankhoo, where he stays in a relative's house and occasionally visits Panikhar. His wife Sara, who is also a teacher, was posted in Suru Block and stays there, as does his cousin, who is a janitor at the Girls' High School in Panikhar. They also had a young man from Panikhar who came every day and worked as a servant (*dukmi*) doing both house and agricultural work.

Sara, Nazir, his cousin and the *dukmi* did most of the agricultural work in this family, with the assistance of his eldest grandson, who was about fourteen and the occasional help of one of Nazir's daughters who is married in Panikhar. His sons never engaged in heavy agricultural work, in common with many other Suru men who have government jobs. Hence their family had a shortage of labour, particularly at harvest when labour demands are heavy. The previous year they had been able to hire four labourers from Doda who came up via the Chelong Nala route, but in 1994 the deteriorating security situation meant that no one came. They were unable to get hired labourers in Suru, although Sara managed to get some of the girls from her school to come as *milaks* one day and the family of their *dukmi* also helped out.

Like other women in Suru with government jobs, Sara had to go to school six days a week and work on the harvest for the rest of the day as well as preparing all the food

for the family and performing numerous other tasks such as milking. Nazir toiled in the fields from morning until night during this period, despite his age, at which most people in Suru have given up agricultural work. In both 1993 and 1994 they also used a tractor for part of their work. For example, in 1994 Nazir's younger son brought a tractor from Sankhoo for both ploughing and threshing. There are only a few tractors available in the valley, which can be hired by the day. They were used quite extensively for ploughing in Panikhar and Prantee, but I did not see them being used at that time in any other village in the Block. Agricultural work is seen as being demeaning by some men, but using or driving a tractor is regarded as modern and exciting. Most of the families that used a tractor for ploughing were those in which the men have white-collar government jobs and do not engage in agricultural work. So the tractors were used both to allow men to withdraw from agricultural labour and because they provided a symbol of being modern.

The withdrawal from agriculture labour is already seen as a sign of status in Kargil and the trend is increasing in Suru. In Kargil itself, a significant proportion of the families of the administrative elite do not have land in that area, either because they come from other villages, or because they were never an agricultural family. It is now rare for either women or men from this group to engage in agricultural work, besides tending small vegetable and flower gardens next to the house, although most women still engage in domestic work such as cooking and the washing of clothes. As one young Suru woman remarked: *"Of course women in Kargil have fair skins, because they just sit at home smearing cream on their faces twenty-four hours a day."* They usually do not expect their children to help with the household work as women would in the village. For example, one day a woman in Panikhar asked me why I used to fetch water and do the washing-up instead of getting my children to do it, which is the normal practice in Suru. She phrased this by saying: *"Are you doing like the Officers in Kargil ?"*, by which she was suggesting that I might be putting on airs.

Thus the use of tractors for ploughing seems to have been an attractive option for status-conscious men with aspirations to the administrative elite, as it allowed them to avoid manual labour in this exclusively male task and seem modern at the same time. The use of a tractor-powered threshing machine was much less widespread and seems to have only been resorted to by households that have large amounts of land, a more practical reason for its use. The time of threshing and winnowing s a

particularly critical part of the agricultural cycle in Suru, since adverse weather conditions can considerably delay the whole process and ultimately risk the crop. In Suru the grain (which is mainly barley) is all cut by hand using small scythes. At that point if it has rained, the cut crop is left to lie in the fields until the sun dries it out and then it is gathered into haystacks, which can be covered in the case of rain. Then a round flat area is prepared called a *yultak* and a number of animals are tied to a central post and made to walk round and round to trample the grain and remove it from the straw. This task takes several days for the average household in Suru.

Then the winnowing process takes place, which consists of throwing the grain and stalks into the air, so that the chaff is blown off by the wind. This is dependent on there being little rain and a reasonable amount of breeze. In Suru, the weather can break at any time and there is a considerable amount of precipitation in the summer. For instance, the famine of 1957 was caused by a heavy snowfall in June which destroyed the entire grain crop and, in 1996, there was a snowfall in August when the crop was at its most vulnerable having been cut and not yet collected from the fields in some villages. Thus the period between the harvest and the final extraction of the grain is a tense and often frustrating one, which can take many days for those with larger amounts of land; and the use of machinery can reduce this process to a single day's work.

In comparison ploughing is a much less risky activity. It takes less than two days to plough the average land holding in Suru.<sup>1</sup> Ploughing is done by two draught animals, usually horses or *dzos* (male yak-cow cross-breeds), which pull a wooden plough tipped with metal. They are driven by a single man and there is a taboo against women performing this task. Then both women and men use various types of wooden rakes to smooth the ploughed soil and build the pattern of banks for the irrigation water in the field. Households usually combine with a neighbour or relative for this job in a reciprocal exchange of assistance, so that each one need only have a single draught animal.

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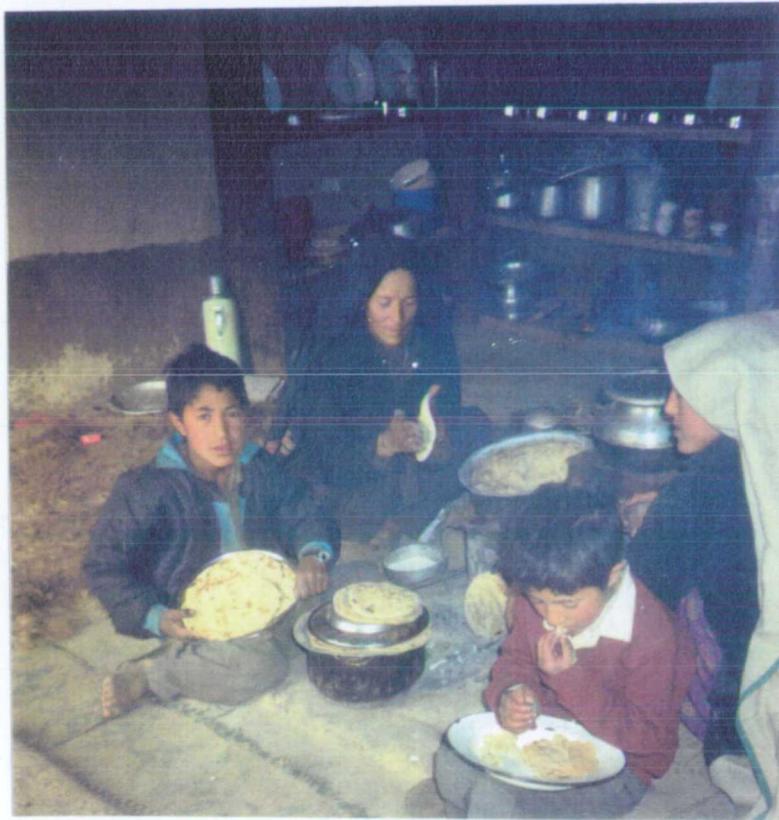
<sup>1</sup> Osmaston *et al* have calculated that it takes about six days to plough the average land holding of 30 to 40 *kanals* in neighbouring Zanskar (Osmaston, Frazer & Crook 1994:100).



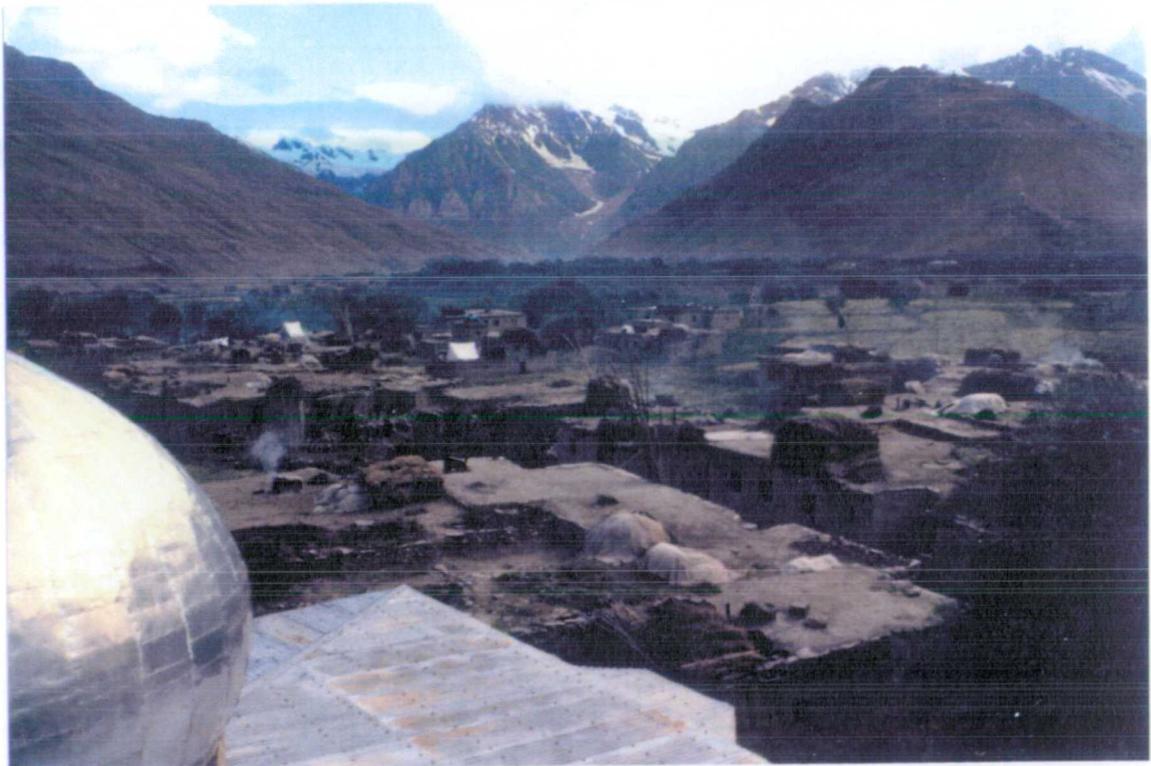
*Picture 7.1 - Sadiak ploughing Agha Miggi Ort's fields in Taisuru*



*Picture 7.2 - Threshing with a tractor and machine in Panikhar*



*Picture 7.3 - One of the Noon Public School boys at home in Panikhar*



*Picture 7.4 - Houses in Taisuru*

The *yokma-pa aghas* received help from their followers in the form of *milaks*, as for other agricultural tasks. In 1994 I visited the team that was ploughing one of Agha Miggi Ort's fields in Taisuru. It was the day that the *milaks* were to come from Taisuru itself and, rather to my surprise, the people who were helping were mainly young men from the richer and more prestigious *yokma-pa* households in the village and all the younger members of the *agha's* household were engaged in the work. There were two teams of animals and about a dozen people and the work was accompanied by lots of joking and laughter. There was quite a contrast between the working team at this time and at harvest, when the *milaks* that came were predominantly women from among the 'ordinary' followers and only the women and male *duksmi* from the *agha's* house were engaged in the work. This is because there is an important difference in the prestige implications of the various agricultural tasks. Agha Miggi Ort's younger sons do not do a great deal of agricultural work; however, both they and he help with the animals in the morning and evening, although I have never seen Agha Miggi Ort himself do any heavy physical work.

Although Agha Miggi Ort and other important religious leaders do not engage in much manual labour, there is no implication in his family's general attitude that suggests that it is demeaning. However, the withdrawal from agricultural work among certain men in Suru is now becoming much more widespread, as it is associated with being modern and of higher status, particularly for men. In Panikhar there are now a number of families in which the men and teenage boys no longer do farm work, whereas their female relatives do. Ali's Hotel which is the only tea-shop/restaurant in Panikhar, is a major focus for such men, particularly the younger ones. For most of the long summer afternoons, there is usually a small gathering from Panikhar and the surrounding villages, particularly young men with government jobs who come after work. Meanwhile the women in their households do not visit the hotel and will often be engaged in agricultural tasks until dusk. The older men tend to sit by shops and along the bazaar, often minding their grandchildren as they are accustomed to do.

A few households who are more engaged in the non-agricultural economy, are starting to withdraw from agriculture altogether. For example, neither Hajji Mirza nor his son Haddi engage in agricultural work and the main part of their farming is done by Mehdi, a man who they adopted from Parkachik when he was a child and his wife, who live in the lower part of the house. Nargis, Haddi's new wife from Kargil, will not be required

to do agricultural work, as is the case of the other wives from the Kargil administrative elite in Panikhar. In fact, all of the couples in such marriages effectively live in Kargil rather than Panikhar. For instance, Haddi's family have lodgings in Kargil and he and Nargis either stay there or at her family's house in the town. Engineer Nazir, Ghulam Rassool's brother and his wife live in Kargil and occasionally visit Panikhar. The other engineer who is married to a woman from the Kargil elite also lives in Kargil most of the time and they occasionally visit Panikhar. By 1994 a number of other Sunnis from Suru were thinking of building houses in Kargil. Kazim Sahib, the Sunni leader from Sankhoo, was said to be in the process of selling most of his land as his family would no longer farm there. Several Sunni Panikhar families had either moved or were thinking of moving to the Kashmir valley, as opposed to Wardwan. In 1994, it was noticeable that the majority of people who were moving out were Sunnis, largely because more Sunnis had government jobs and were in a position to aspire to the administrative elite. However, as I have shown, Shi'ahs such as Dr. Jaffar and Hajji Mirza's family were also making closer ties with Kargil and moving more in that direction.

The drift to Kargil has partly occurred because of a social preference on the part of aspirants to the administrative elite but, the organisation of the administration itself also plays an important part in this mobility. The majority of the administration of the *tehsil* is situated in Kargil and government employees in the higher grades will spend most of their career in Kargil or its environs (see Chapter 4). In addition, increasingly, people from Suru are having to spend more time in Kargil and even further afield in Srinagar in particular, for work, education and business. So a significant number of people from Suru now have a (usually single roomed) lodging (*dera*) in Kargil, where one or more family members stay a good deal of the time because they have to work or study there.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the vast majority of households do not have such lodgings in the town.

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<sup>2</sup> People who have white-collar government jobs are usually allocated a lodging in government quarters, most of which are in Baroo, the administrative area near Kargil town. These are quite salubrious and have amenities such as their own kitchen/bathroom and access to a toilet. Some richer families also have better quality lodgings, but most people have very small rooms without adequate facilities.

The rural people from all parts of the *tehsil*, who are spending more of their time in Kargil are predominantly male. There are however, a growing number of young women, both Sunnis and Shi'ahs, from Suru who have gone to study in 11th and 12th class in the Girls' Higher Secondary School;<sup>3</sup> but the older people in their families usually insist that they spend a good deal of their time back in the village, both during periods of intense agricultural activity and in the winter. Educated young men and women are almost universally uninterested in agriculture as a possible occupation, which almost inevitably will lead to the further marginalisation of the agricultural economy. Thus they join the swelling ranks of the urban students and unemployed who are becoming more disgruntled at their position, as was illustrated by their demonstrations during the election of 1996, but for whom it is difficult to see a role in the foreseeable future.

This progressive relocation of the administrative elite to Kargil and the shift of focus away from agriculture among the majority of educated people are having serious consequences in terms of both the development of agriculture in the rural areas, as is officially supported and encouraged by government development efforts, but practically neglected; and in the phenomenon of the rapidly increasing numbers of the urban-oriented unemployed. Unfortunately, both of these problems seem to be partly the result of government policies which are intended to develop the area. In the next two sections I want to discuss other changes that are taking place in social behaviour in Suru and, in later section, I shall examine some of the political consequences of urbanisation for Suru.

### **(iii) Changes in the Household and Gender Roles**

The change of emphasis away from agriculture and towards a more self-consciously modern style is also reflected in changes in the architecture and organisation of houses particularly in Panikhar. When I first visited there in 1981/2 the houses in the village were small and single storey and built in a cluster in the centre of the village. Internally most houses only had a small and simple kitchen with a rudimentary central hearth; although some had an additional room for receiving guests called a *bokhari* and occasionally one or two other small rooms. These living quarters were usually

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<sup>3</sup> There are also several dozen younger Suru children, who are mainly from Panikhar and Prantee who are attending the government-sponsored Vidyalaya boarding school in Baroo..

raised off the ground and reached by some stone steps, the lower part of the house consisting of stables for the animals.

Since the mid-1980's many houses have been built in the new style. The majority of these are in Panikhar and Prantee, but there are now several of this type in other villages. These are initially made with a single storey and then a further floor is added later. They are normally constructed of stone and concrete, as opposed to the stone and mud-brick of the older houses and they usually have large windows and several rooms, often including a glass room that catches the winter sun and a bathroom. In most houses the bathroom consists of a concrete or tile-lined area with a drainage hole and water is brought in jugs. As far as I know, only Ghulam Hyder's house in Choskore and Ghulam Rassool's in Panikhar have bathrooms with their own water supply.

In Panikhar and Prantee in particular, a number of these new houses do not include animal shelters, since people now often keep the old house to use as an animal shelter and barn. This physical separation of people from animals and the other paraphernalia of the agricultural economy is significant and is also reflected in a growing fashion towards orderliness and cleanliness within the house itself. For example, in the last few years in Panikhar there has been a fashion, particularly among women with government jobs, for constructing a new style of kitchen. These usually contain a set of elaborate shelving (*tsangs*) with a display of gleaming pots and other kitchen utensils that is almost universally found in kitchens in Leh and is common in Kargil; and the kitchen itself is kept as clean and tidy as possible. These are in marked contrast to the majority of kitchens in the area, which are much more disorderly and do not contain any special features of display. The leading *aghas'* families in Taisuru have larger than average houses with many rooms and concrete bathrooms, which are still rare in Suru; but, in other respects their houses are much like those of the majority of peasant households.

Among those who espouse the new tidier style there is a tendency to compare it favourably with that of the average Suru house, as the following quote illustrates. The speaker is a woman from the village of Chushot near Leh who was married to a man in Panikhar in about 1970, describing what Suru seemed like to her when she first came there:

*"You would not believe how dirty it was. You know that when you go into a house in Leh that everything is clean. The pots are all washed and set out nicely on the shelves. Well, here everything was filthy, the animals lived in the kitchen with the humans and nothing was ever washed. They used to cook the food in the same pan that they had used before without washing it - ever. The whole village was filthy and, as you know, most of it still is. Even when you look at houses like X (a Sunni household which is now relatively wealthy and have a large smart house), they were exactly the same then too."*

This emphasis on orderliness and cleanliness in the newer houses is frequently commented on by the women that live in them, particularly Sunni women from Panikhar. Several of them said that neighbouring villages were dirty and they would question my willingness to visit houses in them, saying that everything was so filthy in contrast to Panikhar and their houses. They also sometimes made derogatory comments about the state of other women's houses and housekeeping in Panikhar and Prantee. I also felt under considerable pressure to keep my own room clean and tidy, so as not to seem slovenly.

In such households, there is also a noticeable increase in authority, order and differentiation between people, that to some extent corresponds with the increasing order in the house itself. Aspirants to the administrative elite are much more likely to treat their servants as social inferiors; whereas, even in the *aghas'* households they are treated as social equals. This is just one indication that within the household, differentiation and authority were relatively weak in the past and in most continue to be so (see Chapter 2). Although in theory, authority is mainly vested in the household head, people nearly always referred to their parents rather than just their father when decision-making was discussed. Most peasant households work as a team, with both adults and children working with little prompting, although obviously children are more likely to be told what to do and scolded, as they are learning their roles. A striking degree of co-operation also marks the mother-in-law - daughter-in-law relationship, which is often quite cordial and close.

However, this lack of differentiation and strong notions of authority within the household is now changing. One aspect of this is a particularly marked shift in the

way that masculinity is constructed. A number of Suru men stressed to me that in Islam it is one of the most important duties of the father - as opposed to the mother - to feed and educate his children. This view represents a change in focus, since their major priority in the past was to fulfil religious duties and to go on *ziarat*. Some men are also quite noticeably attempting to exert authority over their wives and children and create a new role for themselves as patriarch - not always completely successfully. I think that one reason for this is the recent trend for universal marriage and the division of households in each generation. Nowadays, there is much greater emphasis on the household as a unit and many contain a single adult male and, as a result, authority and masculinity within the household had to be renegotiated.

This is particularly marked among men who aspire to the administrative elite. What is striking about this is that formal behaviour - that would normally be reserved for certain public gatherings is now often found in the intimacy of the immediate family and home. In several households of my acquaintance, all the women and girls whisper, when the male authority figures are present. Similarly, men may insist on sitting in a guest room, or special place and being served food and tea in a more ceremonial and respectful way than other household members. When a guest arrives at the house, it is not unusual to hear a man bossing his wife about preparing tea in order to exert his authority.

Such men are likely to subscribe strongly to the ideal of the Islamic male, who has authority and provides for his family. They also commonly comment on this, describing themselves as being more moral as compared to the more profligate ordinary people in Suru, who, they say, do not bother about these things. It is striking that this kind of behaviour is much more common among men who have government jobs and who are absent from the household because their work or posting is elsewhere. These attitudes were most common among Sunni men. However, these are also the views of some of the parents and management committee of the Noon Public School. For example, in the family of one of the Noon Public School pupils, the father insisted that his children said their prayers before and after dinner and sat very quietly when they were in the kitchen. He also frequently gave frequent orders to his wife, as she prepared the meal.

In these families the notion of 'the *agha* will tell me off' ("*aghas kha tseat*") is being replaced by 'my father/brother will tell me off'. Thus there seems to be a shift of authority away from the *agha* into the household.

There are also some significant changes of attitude taking place among women who have government education. The manner in which these women enter into employment is very different from that of men. Nearly all employed women work in relatively junior positions either as teachers, or in the medical service. Although they enjoy a degree of respect and enhanced status in Suru, they are still restricted in their movements and normally expected to do a large amount of agricultural work as well. The government policy is to place women in jobs near to their home as much as possible; however, in Suru, even most of the local men with similar jobs are normally posted within the area. Nevertheless it is difficult for a woman to aspire to higher levels of education and employment, as this would require them spending time in other parts of the *tehsil* or even the State and their male relatives will usually not agree to this. For instance, a young woman from Panikhar wants to train as a nurse (which is a well-paid and respected occupation) but her father refused to let her, as the training college is in Srinagar.

As a result, educated and employed women in Suru have to limit their field of activity mainly to the house and the village. One of the places where their relative wealth and status can be expressed is in the house itself and this can be seen in their kitchens some of which have elaborate shelving and many utensils, much in the style of a Leh kitchen (see above). Similarly, these women dress quite smartly and wear brightly coloured clothes made of synthetic materials, whereas peasant women usually wear darkly coloured clothes some of which are made of local wool.

Thus, at a time when Suru men's field of activity is expanding and most importantly finding a focus in the town and outside of Suru, most women remain relatively restricted to the rural area, as they were in the past. However, women with government jobs do gain a degree of independence unknown to peasant women since they have their own income through employment which they can use for their own purposes. For instance, one of the younger teachers in Panikhar went on a trip to Leh in 1994 without telling her husband; and other employed women use their salaries to make similar trips to Kargil. Nevertheless, women are not usually encouraged to

continue their studies beyond the point that they will be eligible for a job, which means 10th, or increasingly, 12th class; and they nearly all work in jobs such as teaching and medical auxiliaries, which are considered both respectable for women and do not usually involve working outside Suru Block.

In Kargil itself, there is now a sizeable older generation of women in the administrative elite who have nearly all been teachers for several decades and there are many younger women with government jobs. The older women in particular have a good deal of freedom in how they run their lives. For instance, one of the BDO's relatives who's widowed effectively runs her large household and is quite capable of taking on any man in a political debate. On one occasion a prominent *agha* was extolling the virtues of Shi'ism to me and she kept countering his points. For instance, when he said that Shi'ahs were peaceable, she said: "*So what about the Iran-Iraq war?*" When he said that the Islamiya school was providing education, she said: "*But not for girls.*"<sup>4</sup> A number of Kargili women in their twenties and thirties now have degrees or are studying for degrees. Nevertheless, there is a noticeable difference in the access of women to the most public and political spaces. For example, there are no women activists at all in the political or religious parties locally and local women do not visit cafes or restaurants in Kargil, or wander too much in the bazaar. The only Kargili woman who has a prominent government post is the BDO's sister. She was the first female graduate from Kargil and is currently the headmistress of the Central Government funded Vidhyalaya School in Baroo.

I am not suggesting that this gendering is a standard or inevitable process, since for example, in Leh, gender relations are very different from those in Suru and Kargil, so the role of educated women is not the same. Of course, men in Suru went outside the area to labour, study and trade in the past, whereas women stayed in the village, so the gendered ordering of space was there before. However, at that time, men's primary focus was on the village and local area, whereas now, for some of them at least, it has shifted towards the town and the wider urban context.

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<sup>4</sup> A man in Kargil, complaining of the forceful nature of some of the elite women's personalities, famously remarked: "*Why is it that we in Kargil have to live in Iraq?*", which is a reference to some of the wives being like Saddam Husain, who is an arch enemy of Shi'ism.

At the same time, the emergence of the elite woman, who has a salary and a relative amount of control over her life, is a common phenomenon in India and elsewhere. Similar processes have been described by a number of writers, such as Connell, Sangari and Vaid and Chatterjee, who have recognised the importance of gender in processes of modernisation, urbanisation and the creation of a national elite (Connell 1987:119, Sangari & Vaid 1989, Chatterjee 1993:127). But, as I shall show, despite the relative autonomy of a minority of women in the administrative elite, the majority of peasant women, do not have the same opportunities and to some extent their situation is worsening.

Another aspect of these emerging roles, is that there are some significant changes taking place in the ways that people interact, particularly in patterns of address, as I shall show in the next section.

#### **(iv) Changing Modes of Speech in Public Interactions**

When I first visited Suru in 1981, it was very noticeable that the Suru dialect of Ladakhi (Purigi) - like that of neighbouring Zanskar - was markedly less differentiating than that of the Leh area to which I was accustomed. In Leh, variations in vocabulary and terms of address are used extensively to express status difference. There is an elaborate honorific vocabulary to be used with or between people who are of high status, or whom the speaker wishes to respect but, nowadays, are widely used in public contacts so that it seems impolite to address acquaintances and strangers using the non-formal terminology.<sup>5</sup> There are also a limited number of terms which are reserved for talking to or about highly respected people, especially *rinpoches* (re-incarnate *lamas*). In Suru, you normally use the same forms of words irrespective of whom you are speaking to or about. A very limited honorific vocabulary is used for *aghas* and their families alone, such as *agha* and *archo* (*agha's* daughter), *sangma* (food touched by the *agha*), *zizi* (mother), *no-no* (boy or younger man) and *cho-cho* (non-*sayyid* wife of an *agha*). However, with the exception of the terms *archo* and *agha*, they are used much more for the families of *aghas* who are also important religious leaders.

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<sup>5</sup> I am referring here to the use of terms such as *skyod* - for come and go.

People in Suru have started to use a very limited number of honorific loan-words from the Leh dialect (such as *skyod* for both "come" and "go"), particularly when speaking to male members of important *agha* families. However, this usage is of recent adoption by all accounts and the terms are used patchily and often incorrectly. The most enthusiastic use of these words was by some of the *archos* when speaking to the *aghas* in their own families. A limited use of the term "skyod" is also becoming common among men of the bureaucratic elite, although most people still use the more egalitarian style of speaking and some people now subtly emphasise that they do, as a sign of resisting these changes.

Normal speech is also extremely direct in its content as well as its form. A typical chance encounter with an acquaintance or stranger may go something like this:

Other person: "*Where are you going?*" (Non-honorific language)

Self: "*Up the valley.*" (This is a standard answer)

Other person: "*Why?*"

Self: "*I'm going to see Fatima.*"

Other person: "*Why are you going to go and see her?*"

In this exchange, the interlocutor could have been a small girl or an old man, as the way that I was addressed would have been perfectly appropriate for either, since age is not a basis for ranking in ordinary interchanges. Gender considerations would however come into play, if those concerned were unrelated people of opposite sexes - and most particularly if they were unmarried - in which case some avoidance or circumspection is necessary. Nevertheless, despite the fact that both gender and age are undoubtedly important organising principles in some aspects of social life, these distinctions do not imply differences of status.

Only leading *aghas* are treated with any particular respect. For others, any honour with which they are treated is based on the individual having gained a particular status such as *hajji* or government servant. Thus to a large extent status is not ascribed by birth, but is to do with a particular level of learning or employment status. This is reflected in words used as respectful terms of address, such as: *hajji* (used for both men and women, *doctor* (sometimes used for other medical personnel as well), *munshi* (used for learned people and miscellaneous government servants), *tikadar*

(contractor), *ustani* and *master* (female and male teacher respectively) as well as a plethora of government job titles.

The use of most of these occupational terms is very recent (as are the jobs themselves) and so they are often used rather inaccurately. For instance, one of my best friends always called me *ustad* which is the Urdu for male teacher. At the moment there is a great deal of ambiguity and room for manoeuvre. I might be addressed by others as "*angrez Nicky*" (English Nicky), which is the most disrespectful, or "*ustani*" (respectful term for a female teacher), "*madam*" (which was the name used by many of the school parents and management committee for me and is used for female teachers of non-local origin), or even "*Nicky sahib*". At the moment there is an increase in the use of the terms for the higher status new occupations, but they are not used for people with low-status government jobs - such as *chaprassi* (a general *factotum* in schools and offices). Thus to be addressed with a title is an important marker of being of above average status in Suru.

There has been a similar shift in the use of Urdu words in everyday speech, particularly among the educated members of Sunni families in Panikhar and Prantee. In these families, the normal kinship terminology used in Suru is being replaced by the use of Urdu terminology, which is seen by them as sounding more sophisticated and respectful. They are also much more likely to use Urdu words for other things, even those for which there is a Suru dialect term.

Originally, I wondered whether these families had always used a greater admixture of Urdu, because of their putative origins in Kashmir. However, most older and uneducated people - especially women - still normally only use the Suru dialect words. One striking feature of Suru life at the moment, is that many uneducated women do not understand Urdu at all, even if they have access to it on the radio or the television. For instance, one of Dr. Jaffar and Qamer Ali's sisters, Latifa, who is now married to a member of the Munshi Habibullah *p'ha-spun* in Kargil, told me that she does not understand the Urdu/Hindi television programmes that all her family watch.

In Kargil town, the use of honorific titles and more formal modes of address has become much more widespread than in Suru. For example, the term "*kacho*", is a term which in the past was only used for men from the handful of hereditary noble

families of Kargil *tehsil* but is now used as a respectful title for Shi'ah men from the bureaucratic elite, for whom there is not an obvious occupational title. The term "*sahib*" is usually used for Sunnis of a similar status. The Zonal Education Officer to the upper Suru valley was referred to simply as "*the ZEO*" or as Tanveer Sahib - Tanveer being the name he uses for Urdu poetry. Thus it would seem, that as in Suru, the Sunni bureaucratic elite tend to use Urdu terms as being indicative of higher status.

As with the other changes I have described, these are more marked among the men and those involved in the administration. One place where this is particularly evident is on the bus journey to Kargil, which acts as a rite of passage from the rural to the urban area.

#### **(v) Going to Town - the Bus Journey to Kargil and the Changing Political Geography of Suru**

A high degree of mobility is not new to Suru people. Nevertheless, I would argue that the trends away from agriculture as an occupation and towards the town represent a significant shift in the political geography of Suru in the last two decades. One of the most striking illustrations of these changes can be seen in the personal experience of one of the leaders of the anti-school faction. He told me that when he was a child he had had the opportunity of going as a government-sponsored student to a boarding school in Jammu, but his parents had refused to let him go because he would inevitably be unable to keep to the strict '*sherpa*' prohibition on touching anything wet that had been touched by a non-Muslim and consequently come to harm. But by the 1990s his brother lived permanently in Kargil and he himself spent most winters in Delhi with his wife and children and his sons were attending a religiously mixed boarding school in the plains; his parents, however, preferred to stay in Suru. Another example is that of a young Sunni engineer from Prantee who had a very good job working for a company in Calcutta, but he had returned to the area at his parents' request and was working as a government Junior Engineer. Hence ideas of social space and boundaries appear to have changed quite dramatically over one generation.

As notions of social space have changed with increasing urbanisation, so too has power shifted to the male urban-focused administrative elite. One place where this

distinction is constructed is on the bus to and from Kargil, where men with government jobs create a mutually enhancing camaraderie, that excludes both peasants and women.

This bus journey to Kargil is a social event in itself, since any traveller from Suru can expect to travel with a number of acquaintances. The bus runs twice a day in the summer and once in the spring and autumn and takes about five hours to cover the fifty-eight kilometres to Kargil. The main stop for the bus in Suru is Panikhar, where the evening bus remains over night, although in the summer, it goes on to Parkachik - at the top of the valley - once or twice a week. The morning bus is usually quite empty when it leaves Panikhar, but the midday one is already full. The bus fills up considerably as it travels towards Kargil and on the return journey it is already full when it leaves Kargil, hence many passengers cannot get a seat for the long uncomfortable ride.

There can be a range of travellers on the bus, including foreign tourists in the summer; but the majority are people travelling to or from Kargil for work, business or study. There are usually few peasant women, as they rarely visit Kargil and are often discouraged from boarding the bus if they want to take a short ride with their baskets within the valley, because they bring in dirty baskets and loads. When they do manage to board, they are rarely able or try to get a seat, even if they are rather old and infirm, but small children will usually be accommodated on someone's lap. The time when peasant women take local trips is during the autumn marriage season, when they attend weddings in other villages.

Educated young women, such as teachers and younger women who are studying in the Girls' High School in Kargil and older women who have sons working in Kargil, are treated with more respect and, if all the seats are taken, they may be offered a seat by a relative. However, since most of these women came from Panikhar and Prantee, a relative would save them seats on the outward journey and for the return journey seats could be reserved in advance in Kargil. There is no general obligation for men to give seats to women. I was particularly aware of this myself since, on many occasions, I boarded the bus without a seat and had to stand for a long time. This is embarrassing for women, as the bus is a very male and public space, so the ideal is to be able to sit down and not appear conspicuous. On one occasion, when I boarded a

packed bus at Sankhoo, Agha Mehdi, one of Agha Miggi Ort's sons, got up and gave me his seat and there was an audible muttering of disapproval among some of the passengers, who were saying things like: "*Fancy an agha standing up for her.*"

There is a marked contrast between the way that women are treated and the way that many men treat each other on the bus. As the bus approaches Kargil, what seems to happen is that a marked male camaraderie and ranking emerges, particularly among the men from, or with aspirations towards the administrative elite. The seats near the front of the bus being the most prestigious, since the road is extremely rough and people sitting at the rear of the bus are constantly thrown about. If an important officer - maybe a 'non-local' - gets on the bus, then lesser government employees in the front seats will normally leap to their feet and offer him the seat and may in turn be offered another seat by someone else. Often during the course of the journey the seating will be rearranged several times in this way as people get on and off.

At the same time, these men usually greet each other effusively and shake hands. The conversation is in Urdu if a non-local officer is present, but otherwise it is in the local language. However, some honorific language is normally used. An officer can expect to receive this kind of respect from other male government employees and men working in the new economy, but not from other people. Thus their status is enhanced and displayed, not by acts of deference from peasants, but by the behaviour among themselves. This is in contrast with the treatment of an important *agha* who will always get a seat and will be offered a front seat by anyone from Suru. His family members will also get a place, although not necessarily a front one.

By the time that the bus reaches Kargil from Suru, the camaraderie that is created on board, shows that not only educated women are excluded from the society of government workers, but so too are ordinary peasants, possibly to a greater extent. This has real consequences for people's access to resources in Kargil. For women, the differentiation between public and private space is particularly marked in the town. I myself found it very difficult to spend too much time on school business in Kargil, as the constant visiting of government offices and walking in the bazaar that it involves entails one in effectively parading in predominantly male spaces, which is difficult, although educated women are treated courteously in the offices themselves.

Male peasants can move around Kargil without notice, but they are ignored when they make requests in many offices and so find it very difficult to obtain things to which they are fully entitled. I witnessed a particularly poignant example of this in the summer of 1996. Husain, Sakina's husband from Panikhar, who was in his early forties, had died a few weeks previously, leaving Sakina and children whose ages ranged from nineteen down to three. He had had a job in the Agricultural Department. Government rules specify that his widow is entitled to a small pension and that his job (which is unskilled) should be given to his eldest son, who was nineteen at the time. However, both of these concessions needed to be authorised by an officer in the department in Kargil issuing an order to that effect.

During the three or four weeks that we were there, the eldest son made the five hour bus journey to Kargil several times and was forced to stay there one or two nights each time, to try and obtain the necessary orders. After having no success for a couple of weeks, he went to Qamer Ali, who tried to help. When we left several weeks later, he still had not got the orders he needed and it was suggested that the officers in the department were expecting him to bribe them. I frequently heard similar stories about other departments - even Kargil-based teachers with relatively good contacts have to pay bribes to get their pay rises enacted. It was also said that people have to pay bribes of thousands of rupees in Srinagar and Jammu for sought after places at university to study medicine and other prestigious subjects.

The *aghas* and other members of the management committee encounter similar difficulties in performing management committee business. Agha Miggi Ort rarely dealt with school business when he visited Kargil, despite showing much more day-to-day interest in the school than anyone else. This is because he does not have any particular authority in the urban administrative environment. He and his family stay in the more rural *muhallah* of Goma Kargil, above Kargil town, rather than the town itself, or Baroo, where most of the administrative elite live. They mainly move in circles outside those of the administrative elite, as they do not have kinship connections with any of those families and their main contacts are other Shi'ite clerics. Agha Miggi Ort is also unfamiliar with the structures and the major languages of the administration. For example, on one occasion he asked me to help him to fill in a primary school registration form in English and Hindi for one of the young *aghas* from Langkartse who stays at his house. He always had to ask someone else to write school reports

and records in English or Urdu. Thus the structures in Kargil make it very difficult for him to translate his powerful position in Suru and his control of a significant proportion of the *tehsil's* electorate into a modicum of power there. However, Qamer Ali is able to be much more effective in dealing with the administration as he has secular education and his family are now married into the administrative elite and hence he can expect a degree of help from relatives in the administration.

The social reverse of the bus journey to Kargil is when officers from Kargil visit the villages. Most of them come by jeep and stay for very short periods in the rural area. A particularly farcical example of this was a visit by some agricultural officers to Taisuru, who had come to talk to farmers about ways to kill pests on vegetables, which are now grown by some families in Suru. They held a meeting in one of the richer houses in Taisuru, which I attended, as I was called out of school by a villager insisting that I came as my presence had been requested by the officers. When I got there it turned out that they had heard about me and just wanted to meet me and the Taisuru people had obliged, as they felt they had to please them. The meeting consisted of the officers, who were 'non-local', their Kargili assistant and a number of the male householders from Taisuru. The officers described how to prevent slugs in Urdu, while the assistant urged the Taisuru people in Purigi to ask them to give them some free sprays. In fact no one responded to this and there was very little dialogue between the farmers and the officers.

Many of the officers in Kargil, dismiss the Suru people as being backward and religious fanatics and use these stereotypes as an excuse not to implement policies or engage in community development initiatives in the area. The people in Suru are also frequently blamed for their own poverty. For example, it is government policy in Ladakh to try and promote family planning and many Sunni women in Suru do use contraception, as do a few Shi'ahs. But it is often said that it is impossible to promote its use among Shi'ahs since the religious leaders refuse to allow any kind of contraception. Certainly in Suru in recent years, very little effort had been made to give women information on contraception.<sup>6</sup> However, in the winter of 1993, Dr. Asghar from Kargil visited Suru to initiate the household surveys by the medical

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<sup>6</sup> Contraception has been effectively banned in Kashmir by militant groups, but this has nothing to do with Kargil.

department in which I took part. He was very keen to promote family planning in the area, particularly in order to increase spacing between pregnancies, since a major cause of the very high levels of maternal and infant mortality is the physical weakness of mothers caused by short birth intervals. He also stressed that the use of contraception for spacing of births is not un-Islamic, as some people claim, as it is being used for the preservation of health and life.

Dr. Asghar went to see Agha Baqir, who agreed for the surveyors to promote the idea of contraception among women in the area and the next day Agha Miggi Ort also agreed. We then talked about the benefits of increasing the birth interval and ways of improving mother and child nutrition to all the younger Shi'ah women that we met. We found that the vast majority of them were very interested in the idea of contraception and in the next few months many women spontaneously asked me about it.

To summarise, on the bus to Kargil there is an increase in various divisions which are certainly not absent, but are relatively muted, most of the time in the village but come to the fore in the urban context. In particular, I have illustrated the social divide between the urban administration and the countryside. In the next section I shall look at how some of these issues pertain to the Noon Public School and how they are negotiated by the management committee.

#### **(vi) The *Yokma* Faction and the School - Resetting the Balance?**

In 1993/4 the Noon Public School was a very modest affair, as it was housed in a typically small primary school building and did not have much equipment beyond some floor mats, blackboards and a few chairs for the teachers. However, it was clearly regarded by many of the children's parents as being a separate social space that was primarily for those with secular education and inside which they felt uncomfortable entering. These were primarily the mothers and older uneducated female relatives and older men who do not have any secular education. They would normally hang around near the school but would very rarely even come up on to the veranda or speak to the teachers. Whereas people who had secular education were usually much more confident and would come straight up to the veranda and might sit down with the teachers. The obvious exception to this general rule was Agha Miggi Ort. He was the most regular visitor to the school, but Agha Baqir virtually never came there.

Avoidance of the school by women who do not have secular education reflected the more general lack of involvement of any *yokma-pa* women in the school, in marked contrast to their importance in the faction itself. I was the only woman on the management committee and the only female teacher. There was a degree of commitment to have at least one female teacher after I left, but mainly in order to have someone who would be kind to the younger children. Initially there was only one girl in the school and, even by 1996, there were only six as compared to fifty five boys. Three of these had free places.

The lack of girls among the pupils is not because they do not attend school at all, rather the parents usually send daughters to the government school as they are not expected to continue to the highest levels of education. I never heard anyone express disapproval of girls attending the school, on the contrary, the management committee were pleased that sponsorship was obtained from the Save the Children Fund project in Kargil for three girls in 1994. Within the school itself two of the girls were very quiet and unconfident and being there seemed to have an automatically infantilising effect on them. The youngest of these two was a girl from Taisuru, who was almost incapable of even putting a mark on the paper of her copybook after she had been in the school for several months and had not settled down in school at all. However, one day I saw her by the stream in Taisuru with a big pan of dirty dishes that she was competently washing. Clearly the small number of girls in the school ties in with the more general attitudes to male and female occupations, which the school may be reinforcing.

One of the initial management committee meetings adopted a school uniform identical to that worn by the children at the Suru Valley Public School in Kargil, which itself is modelled on that of the Moravian Mission School, one of the largest and most successful private schools in Leh. However, that of the Noon Public School has a more Islamic style of dress for girls. The uniform consists of a shirt, jumper, tie and trousers for boys; and a *salwar-kamiz* head-scarf, jumper and optional school smock for girls. This uniform, would have been politically contentious for many Shi'ah clerics only a decade before, but in 1993 apparently it was adopted without any particular argument. But by the early 1990s, even the Mutahari School, which is run by the Ayatollah Khomeini Memorial Trust and has several branches in and around Kargil, has a standard school uniform, albeit with an Islamic green shirt and no tie, since their use is apparently frowned upon in post-revolutionary Iran. The religious objections to

the wearing of uniform seem much less important than in the past and western-style dress is now standard for most young men with secular education in Suru.

Nevertheless, there are contradictory opinions in the management committee itself about the general purpose and effect of the school, which are neatly illustrated by the attitudes to this uniform among the members. Despite the similarity in the form of the uniform to that of the schools in Kargil and Leh, there is a great difference in the way it is worn by the pupils of the Noon Public School. In the towns, children turn out each morning in a full set of uniform, which is normally very well-kept, clean and ironed. They themselves are also freshly scrubbed and have their hair neatly combed. Urban schools strictly enforce cleanliness and the wearing of full uniform for the students and children in the town - particularly those from the administrative elite - are always cleaned up when they go out.

However, in Suru, only a few families dress their children in clean clothes for everyday wear. Most wear local style clothes outside school and these are usually dirty, as are those of their parents, since they are involved in agricultural and other heavy work much of the time. In the Noon Public School, all the children possessed a uniform, which they were meant to wear every day during the summer months. Each morning one of the teachers usually made a cursory inspection of the children's uniform at prayers and he would tell them off if they did not have the correct uniform, or if it was not washed. However, they would often come to the school in other clothes and both those and their uniform were frequently not in very good shape.

The two boys from the *aghas'* families rarely came to school in the correct or clean uniform. Their families thought it was unimportant and they had some misgivings about the dress-code. For instance, Archo Taiba, Agha Baqir's daughter and Agha Miggi Ort's daughter-in-law, who has a child at the school, was very incensed one day, because a temporary teacher from Kargil had criticised the school's children for being dirty and unkempt. As she pointed out, parents such as herself in the villages had far too much work to do to be washing their children's clothes all the time, as women with jobs and no land in Kargil could do. Similarly, as soon as the weather got cold in the autumn, Agha Miggi Ort made a point of asking the teachers to tell the children that they should wear some decent warm local clothes to school. The *aghas'* attitude was commented on by two members of the management committee, both of whom had

firm footholds in Kargil in terms of government employment and commercial occupations. They criticised the way that certain parents sent their children to school without taking any care over their appearance and their studies. One of them likened this to the way that people sent their animals to wander freely in the hills during the day. As far as I could gather, they regarded a transformation in their children being a necessary part of the educative process; whereas the *aghas* saw secular education as being an addition to the existing person, who remained basically unchanged.

This difference of opinion is at the heart of the dilemma that the *yokma-pa* faces, which is whether they could simply take on secular education and government jobs and remain much as they were before, or whether the elite of the faction would join the administrative elite in Kargil and, to some extent, leave Suru behind. This was illustrated quite neatly by the events at my own leaving ceremony, which was one of a number of large and impressive social events that the management committee organised, such as the opening ceremony and founding day, that were clearly designed to increase its profile and prestige. This event took place at the Dak Bungalow at Taisuru on a Sunday at the end of the school year in December 1994. It was organised by the management committee, all of whom attended, in addition to all the children and some of the fathers. The ceremony consisted of a presentation to myself of a *pashmina* shawl by Dr. Jaffar, on behalf of the management committee, which was wrapped over the *dahon* (head scarf) that I was already wearing. I was then given a *katag* (ceremonial scarf) by each child from the school in turn. This was an entirely invented ceremony, but several people commented jokingly that I was like a *bag-mo* festooned with the two *dahons* and the *katags*.

Only a month before I had been present at the departure of Master Salaam, a Kashmiri teacher from the Girls' High School in Panikhar, who had been one of the most popular teachers in the Block. He had been posted back to his home area of Anantnag, but before he left he assured everyone that he would try and return to work in Suru in the future. He also tried to arrange for his son to come and work at the Noon Public School. When he left on the bus for Kargil he was seen off by a large group of women teachers and older girls from the school, some of whom had wept every time his departure was mentioned for several days before. Everyone was crying and some of the older girls were quite grief stricken. Master Salaam himself wept much of the way to Kargil. By the end of my own leaving ceremony I was getting a bit tearful but no one else was. I would like to think that this was because I was the only

woman there, as the only other females were the young girls from the school, who are not yet of an age to weep in that way.

After the main part of my leaving ceremony, most of the adults went into the glass room in the Dak Bungalow for a meal of meat and rice that was being prepared by some of the non-management committee parents. Inside the room, the two *aghas* and another from Langkartse, Dr. Jaffar and I were all seated on chairs in the places of honour at one side of the room. A few others were sitting on chairs at the side, with some of the younger men standing at one side. As people came and went in the room, there was a huge amount of polite offering of chairs going on and, eventually, all the *hajjis* were also seated. We then had a debate about the curriculum. At the end of a brief discussion, involving about six of us, the *hajji-pa's* suggestion that we should continue to follow the pattern of the Suru Valley Public School in Kargil was adopted.

When the meeting started to break up, the topic of the hospital jeep came up, as it was currently in Kargil when it should have been in Suru. The driver had apparently taken it to Kargil without Dr. Jaffar's authorisation and had then complained that Dr. Jaffar had attacked him. The officer in charge of the medical service, who is a 'difficult' person, was ill-disposed to Dr. Jaffar. So, rather than sending the jeep back, he had kept it in Kargil. The *yokma-pa* leadership decided to use the opportunity to send a signal to Kargil from the police post demanding that the jeep be returned. This incident illustrated two things, firstly that the *yokma* faction was using its influence to get resources for the area that would benefit everyone, as they had in the case of Dr. Jaffar's own appointment; and, secondly, that it is always an uphill struggle for Suru to get what it is entitled to from the administrative centre in Kargil, as the politics of Kargil are very removed from their interests.

By the time I returned to Suru in 1996, the situation was about to change dramatically in some respects, since Qamer Ali (Dr. Jaffar's brother) was elected as the MLA for Kargil and was subsequently appointed to the important position of the Minister of Public Works in the Jammu and Kashmir government. Thus the *yokma* faction seemed to have become more central than it had been in 1994, aided by the fact that Qamer Ali's family had obtained secular education and entered urban politics and the administration, but had remained loyal to the *yokma-pa* leaders and the interests of people in Suru. However, it is pertinent to the theme of this chapter, that the political

geography of administrative power means that Qamer Ali shall have to spend most of his time in Jammu and Srinagar, so he will be physically removed from the area he is representing.

### **(vii) Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have described two types of changes that are taking place in Suru at the moment. The first are explicit changes in the aspirations and style of behaviour among people who are engaged in the government economy, who increasingly distance themselves the agricultural economy and the rural area. Nevertheless, as I have described in other chapters, the attainment of a job let alone membership of the administrative elite may be an unrealisable dream, for most men, evidence of which can be seen at the moment in the considerable student and young unemployed unrest in Kargil.

As in the last chapter, I have also tried to emphasise that the changes in attitude that I am describing are not confined to any particular religious group, although they are more marked among the Sunnis in Suru, largely - I believe - because they currently have a greater involvement with the government economy and because, in the past, their kinship practices involved a weaker link to the land and locality than those of Shi'ahs. The reference point for the emerging administrative elite is now increasingly urban and non-agricultural; and it seems likely that the social gap will continue to widen between them and ordinary peasants. Particularly since they are creating new marriage ties with people in Kargil (see Chapter 6). At the same time, agriculture is increasingly regarded as a female occupation, whereas public politics are virtually entirely male. Thus a shift of power is taking place away from the local area to the urban centres of the government economy, which in the case of Suru are Kargil, Srinagar and Jammu. This is having a profound effect on the allocation of resources and development efforts towards farming and the rural areas.

In the last section I looked at the possibility of the *yokma* faction being able to reverse some of this process through the school. By creating their own people with secular education, who will remain part of the faction and continue to keep their primary loyalty to Suru and the *yokma-pa* leadership. However, as I have suggested this is going to be difficult given the political economy of the administration. Also, the school seems to almost totally exclude the adult women, particularly those who have not attended

school, in marked contrast to the other rituals and activities of the faction, in which women play an important role. This *de facto* exclusion may have important consequences in the future. Moreover, the school itself may represent the start of a process of the *yokma-pa* elite joining the administrative elite rather than bringing advantages to the wider faction membership, which it does not seem to do as yet.

# Chapter 8

## Conclusions

### (i) Introduction

The main objective of this thesis was to examine the role of the *yokma-pa* as a political organisation. It also sought to challenge the idea that the *yokma-pa* could not be both a kinship group and act as an interest group in the 'modern' politics of the Indian nation state.

In examining this question I have shown that internally the *yokma-pa* has witnessed a great deal of continuity from the 1960s to the 1990s, during which time it has experienced two major political phases, which, of course, have also overlapped. The first was characterised by the millenarian movement and the dispute with the *goma-pa* and the second by its increasing role in electoral politics and acting as an interest group for its own members and Suru people in general. This second phase resulted in the opening of the Noon Public School which was a focus for my research.

Despite the remoteness of the Suru valley, the politics of the *yokma-pa* cannot be understood in isolation, as their relatively peripheral position in larger polities over the last three centuries has also had consequences for the present. When I started this research my focus was mainly on their position as Shi'ahs, Muslims and Kargilis in the context of Ladakh. However, the horrendous situation in Kashmir and the fear of violence that I encountered during fieldwork in Suru, forced me to look at more general political issues in India to understand what was happening there.

I came to realise that some of the processes occurring in Suru, ranging from the expansion of private schooling to the increase in communal tension are common all over India at present. While Suru and the *yokma-pa* may seem extremely peripheral, events there lie at the heart of the current political crisis in India. So too do the dilemmas that they face, particularly the contradictions that are encountered in the Noon Public School.

## (ii) The *yokma-pa* as a Kinship Group

Land and location are the key elements in official kinship in Suru as membership of several types of kinship group is assigned to people who share the same piece of land. There are several levels to this official kinship: all Kargili Muslims, the Block or subdivision, the village, the *pa* and the *p'ha-spun*. At the highest level, Kargili Muslims see themselves as forming a community that is separate even from Muslims from other areas, with whom, until recently, they still observed the *sherpa* taboo against commensality and other 'wet' contact. Thus being located in the area seems to be central to being a Muslim in Kargil. Similarly, someone is a Suru-*pa* by virtue of living in one of the households that have land in Suru. Villages can also be understood as kinship groups as each village is seen as a distinct entity and its constituent households are regarded as sharing a single piece of land. Moreover, citizenship in a village is assigned by the possession of land which carries with it rights to take part in decision-making in the village but also the obligation to contribute labour for village activities.

The importance of land for official kinship can be observed in the *p'ha-spun*, membership of which exists by virtue of sharing a piece of land. Hence, new members can join a *p'ha-spun* by sharing its land irrespective of physical descent (*rgyud*); and those who move right away and no longer share the land are regarded as being of the same physical descent but are not members of the *p'ha-spun*. This form of descent is almost exclusively male. Although land is sometimes passed through women, these links are soon erased and it is rapidly absorbed into the male structures of official kinship.

Another important aspect to the relationship with the land is that people should be buried on their *p'ha-spun's* land. Even women, who in life are only loosely linked to the land and the *p'ha-spun*, are buried on the land of their husband's *p'ha-spun* and therefore become part of the official descent group. The graves of parents also become the site for renewing kinship links with the natal home, particularly for women at the time and after marriage. The central importance of burial to Suru notions of kinship can be seen in the fact that I was frequently asked by new acquaintances: "Do you burn or bury your dead?", as this is how Suru-*pa* distinguish themselves from Buddhists who burn their dead.

Earlier this century the *pa* seems to have been the most important kinship group in Suru. The effective *pa* was a village-level kinship group and each one had a graveyard (*qabristan*) on its own land. At that time, there seem to have been origin stories for *pas* in which they had a founding ancestor who was attributed with settling in the village, fragments of which are still sometimes remembered and correspondingly kinship terms existed for five generations of ancestry. However, the sense of history which was previously invested in the line of ancestry and myths of the *pa* is now found in the faction itself.

The *p'ha-spun* is a subdivision of the *pa* but, unlike the *pa*, it is regularly re-constituted as the land that it is based on is divided. Hence, the ancestors that are remembered are only those within living memory (both male and female) and the *p'ha-spun* relationship is not traced beyond the grandparents' generation. Parents' graves are still marked in the *qabristan* and feature in rituals at the time of marriage in particular (see Chapter 6) but people do not distinguish even their grandparents' graves and previous generations are completely forgotten.

The faction is the main kinship group for its members now and it also acts as their lineage and history. Through their links with the *aghas* members share their descent from the line of Imams. This can be seen most clearly in practices concerning the graves (*astanas*) of the *aghas'* lineage members. These are revered and visited by faction members and the names of the dead are remembered in a way that is no longer done for ordinary ancestors. For example, Agha Jaffar's death day is observed by a *matam* ceremony in Taisuru and the *yokma-pa* also visit his *astana* on that day. Similarly, the history of the line of Imams and their sufferings has become the history of faction members and of Suru to some extent.

So a sense of history seems to have been relocated from the *pa* to the faction and consequently the *pa* has ceased to be of any importance. In fact the faction now encompasses the various local level official kinship groups. As it subsumes both the *p'ha-spun* and the village into its organisation. The leading *agha* is now the main (although not ultimate) authority for faction members in respect of landholding

and inheritance, dispute settlement and household life-cycle events, particularly marriage and funerals.

Notions of citizenship that are connected to the land have also been subsumed into the faction to some extent. Possession of land gives rights for male household heads to take part in decision-making within the *p'ha-spun* and the village.

However, as I have shown, the degree of authority that they exercise is relatively weak and shared between groups of men and women as well, in marked contrast to that of the leading *agha* who has a considerable amount of personal authority over his following.

Within the faction, there is a well-defined hierarchy at the head of which is the *rehbar*, Agha Miggi Ort. However, his power is partially based on the belief in his spiritual powers, so his authority is tempered by the need for him to appear impartial and detached. His authority can only really be challenged by his agnates, the other *aghas* from the core lineage. As I showed, Agha Baqir, did appear to be trying to enhance his own power base in Suru Block in 1993/4. However, his propensity for open dispute was a disadvantage in that respect and seemed to undermine his standing within the core of the faction.

Around the leading *aghas* there is an inner circle which consists of their close relatives - both agnatic and affinal, other learned clerics and men from the richer families in the faction - many of whom are *hajjis*. These men take some part in the decision-making of the faction such as in the management committee meetings of the school. In these gatherings clerics are considered to have the right to speak because they have above average merit and understanding through their possession of religious knowledge; and the *hajji-pa* have gained merit mainly through donation. This is achieved both by giving money to the *aghas* beyond the normal donations made by ordinary followers and through going on *ziarat*, which involves considerable financial sacrifice and is considered to accrue large amounts of merit. Thus status in the faction is understood to come from the possession of religious merit and power.

Ordinary male faction members do not participate in decision-making and even if they are present, they will normally remain silent. When they want to approach the

*agha* for a favour they may ask some of the men at the core of the faction to intercede for them. Women, however, more frequently take on the role of putting requests to the *agha*. Although they are largely excluded from the official politics of the faction and notions of citizenship and status, in practice they and their relations to the leading *aghas* are crucial to the organisation of the faction. Equally, for women, the faction is the most enduring kinship group.

One of the reasons for this is that their location in the official kinship groups is very tenuous as they have few rights in the land of their natal home and often change their marital household (and village) several times in their lives, due to divorce or the death of a spouse. Women's ties of kinship are partially created through weeping, particularly, but not exclusively, over graves in which case their tears can be understood as watering the land which is the substance of male kinship. Weeping also occurs in many other contexts and creates relationships where no official ones exist through the medium of land. For instance, when a young woman leaves her natal home at the time of marriage she weeps over her living parents and if they are dead over their graves.

Within the faction women's tears are shed to gain merit and the intercession of Husain. Significantly, women tend to weep more copiously and extravagantly than men, with the exception of the *agha* who also sheds many tears in his seat on the *minbar*. Women from the faction, particularly those from the richer families often have kinship links with the *agha* created through permanent and temporary marriages and relationships of *moharam*. These links enable women to approach the *agha* in order to make requests and present disputes and petitions and therefore gives them a role in the politics of the *p'ha-spun* and land that is denied them by the official kinship.

Hence the faction is a kinship group with the *aghas'* lineage at its core. As I have shown it acts as the main political organisation for its members, as well as being a religious and kinship group. In fact these three fields cannot be understood as separate as aspects of all three of them are present in most relationships within the faction and they share some of the same idioms.

### **(iii) The *Yokma-pa* as a Faction**

By the 1990s the *yokma-pa* had taken on the role of acting as an interest group for its members in the electoral and administrative politics of the area. Although their engagement with secular education, in particular, did represent a major shift from their previous stance, this had not required any great change in the organisation of, or relationships within, the faction. The Noon Public School is regarded by most members as an extension of the faction and therefore their donations (both of money and children) are partly understood as good works that gain merit for the donors. Similarly, one reason why *yokma-pa* members will vote according to the *aghas'* wishes is because to follow his guidance is considered a meretricious act. Equally, to disobey the *agha* is to run the risk of being a sinner. However, at the same time, people do not do things just because the *agha* tells them to, as witnessed by the difficulty of recruiting many *yokma-pa* children for the Noon Public School.

Nevertheless, the faction has been able to adjust to the changing context and there is no necessary contradiction between its constitution as a religious and kinship group and its engagement in 'modern' electoral politics. So it clearly calls into question the distinction between vertical kinship-based organisations and 'rational' politics that some authors have made (see Chapter 1). Similarly, there are continuities in the ideological differences between the *yokma* and *goma* factions and their outside links both in the Shi'ite world and in party politics. Within Suru Block, the three factions form distinct kinship groups between which there is now virtually no intermarriage or changing of sides. Nevertheless, the apparent solidarity and endurance of the factions does not preclude other cross-cutting ties. In particular those of village and locality that I demonstrated in Chapter 5.

In addition, the fact that it is a vertical organisation does not prevent the *yokma-pa* from acting as an interest group for its members and to some extent as a regional organisation that represents the people of Suru and Sankhoo Blocks in the wider politics of the area. In this respect it is similar to other interest groups based on ties of religion, region, class, caste or gender that are currently found all over the world and have a particular importance in the political economy of the nation state in India (Jalal 1995:336, Mitra 1994:68, Kohli 1990:385).

Membership of the factions in Suru Block seems to have remained very steady in the last two decades at least. This is not surprising as their boundaries are now very sharp and defined by endogamy, so leaving a faction requires joining another one or looking for marriage partners elsewhere. As I have shown, the only person in Suru Block who seems to have ceased to be a *yokma-pa* in recent years is Hajji Mirza, who has formed alliances with the Sunnis and the administrative elite in Kargil. His move is still unique in Suru but may be an indicator of wider changes some of which I described in Chapters 6 and 7, of which, possibly the most significant is the emergence of an administrative elite which is largely Kargil-based but also involves people from Suru.

#### **(iv) The Emergence of an Administrative Elite**

The fact that the major political groups in the area are vertical organisations, does not preclude the existence of horizontal organisations. Moreover, the administrative elite is partly emerging through alliances between people from different factions. Carter observed a similar phenomenon in South India, where he says that despite the existence of vertical factions, power was most often brokered in alliances between faction leaders and hence there was an elite that cross-cut the factions (Carter 1974:7ff).

The emergence of this elite in Kargil *tehsil* seems to be largely linked to the large scale introduction of the government economy in the last three decades. As I demonstrated, in Suru, the Sunnis entered into secular education and government employment much earlier than the Shi'ahs, for a number of reasons. In the 1970s and 1980s, their possession of white-collar government jobs provided a platform for them to greatly increase their status in Suru and to carve out a position for themselves as the educated and 'modern' people in the Block. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether in Suru itself the conditions or political will exist for them to create a separate class, particularly since the Suru Sunnis are all still engaged in agriculture and are a small minority in Suru. Hence in 1993/4, the *yokma-pa* appeared to be able to successfully challenge a notion of Sunni dominance in the field of education. Nevertheless, processes of class formation do seem to be occurring in the wider *tehsil* in which both Sunnis and Shi'ahs are participating.

This emerging elite, just like the factions is constituted as a kinship organisation. However, it appears to be a horizontal or a vertical organisation. At the core are the Munshi Habibullah clan and a few other powerful Kargil families, surrounded by a network of marriage ties that link them to other families with jobs in the administration. These families only marry within the group, or with other people who are also involved in the administration and they do not intermarry with the Shi'ite religious elite, although they are predominantly Shi'ah themselves. I have suggested that the administrative jobs themselves that facilitate the creation of a class as these provide bureaucrats with an automatic constituency in the form of their public so, in effect, they have a following without having to create it through kinship strategies as the *aghas* do.

This administrative class partly constitutes itself as being more 'modern' and educated than ordinary Shi'ahs in the area. It is also largely urban and its members are increasingly withdrawing from agriculture. The effect in Suru is that aspirants to the administrative elite are moving to Kargil and even Srinagar and abandoning agriculture. Therefore, there seems to be a growing economic and social divide developing between the urban administrative elite and the majority of (mainly Shi'ite) peasants in the area. One problem this creates is that a largely urban administration is charged with 'developing' the rural areas, often without reference to the opinion of the peasants themselves. This particularly affects peasant women most of whom lack secular education and are largely confined to the rural areas.

Even in the *yokma-pa* itself, which to some extent represents the rural area, politics is increasingly conducted in spaces to which women do not have access. This was true of the Noon Public School as I was the only woman present in all the management committee meetings and ceremonies during my fieldwork. A feature of the school which contrasts with women's importance to other political debates and rituals within the faction.

Another consequence of the changes taking place is that some men who are aspirants to the administrative elite or who are more involved in the governmental economy, seem to be redefining their masculinity. One aspect of this is the attempt to increase their authority within the household through greater control over women, children and servants. Another related one is the privatising of religion through

increasing emphasis on household-based prayers. These tendencies may ultimately lead to an undermining of some of the authority of the *aghas* because of the increasing authority of male household heads and the relocating of religious observance into the household. However, at the moment, most of their more successful followers continue to support the *agha* and the power of the faction is being enhanced by their increased ability to donate money. At the moment the faction seems to be holding together in the face of these processes and it remains to be seen whether its own elite will increasingly be drawn into the administrative elite partially through the long-term effects of the Noon Public School.

For educated and employed women, such as the women teachers, the situation is also ambivalent as they are both gaining some degree of independence through their salaries while at the same time under increasing surveillance by male relatives as the control of women has become an important issue in inter-faction politics. This phenomenon seems to be connected to the increasing communalisation of politics that has taken place both in Ladakh and Kashmir in the last few decades.

#### **(v) Communalism and Kinship**

In recent decades in Ladakh, religious difference has become less flexible and inter-religious marriage and conversion are now both rare and less publicly acceptable. For example, one of the main measures of the Buddhist boycott of Muslims in 1989-1992, was a ban on intermarriage which still continues. That particular period was also marked by some incidences of communal violence, such as the burning of Muslims' homes and forced conversions to Buddhism that occurred in at least one village near Leh. Partially as a consequence of this, in Kargil town, the small Buddhist monastery (*gonpa*) is under 24 hour police guard to prevent it being destroyed by some Muslims.

The *yokma-pa* and *goma-pa* also refuse to intermarry and are in a state of conflict. However, I have been at pains to show that they have been pathologised by derogatory discourse on Shi'ism in the area. In his book *"The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India"* (1990), Pandey suggests that the British exaggerated reports of inter-religious violence at Muharram and used these invented episodes in the construction of discourses that both pathologised Indian religion and legitimated the British as rational and impartial rulers. As I have shown

in the example of the *yokma goma* dispute, they do fight over merit which is an ordinary part of Shi'ah kinship therefore, the violence itself can be understood as an aspect of kinship relations.

This is also true of the more violent outbreaks that have occurred in Ladakh in the last decade. For example, one of the key ways in which difference was constructed between the religious groups in both Leh and Suru was by the refusal to give women to the other group. In Leh, it was common in the past for Buddhist women to marry Muslim men, often in what in Leh are called 'marriage by capture' (*skuste*). This form of marriage covered a multitude of circumstances from outright abduction (albeit one that was often then regularised), to elopement and a convenient fiction for an arranged inter-religious marriage. However, from the late 1970s, when these marriages took place between Muslim men and Buddhist women, they were increasingly treated as being an assault on Buddhist manhood and by the early 1980s onwards, they were often forcibly prevented. Thus the control of women became key elements in the construction of a more aggressive and clearly defined Buddhist identity.

In Suru the control of women has also been an important element in the Sunni-*yokma-pa* split. Relations between the two groups had become more hostile after Sunnis had refused to give brides to Shi'ahs. However, they came to a head when a *yokma-pa* woman was allegedly raped by Sunni young men after which Sunnis were apparently discouraged from attending Shi'ah ceremonies. Similarly, in the summer of 1994. Gender was also an issue in the Kargee school students demonstration, a protest which was partly directed against Sunni women teachers (see Chapter 5).

Hence in both Leh and Suru the control of and, sometimes, attacks on, women do seem to be a common theme in the hardening of religious identities. Incidents of violence in both Suru and Leh are relatively rare. However, in Kashmir, there are many reports of incidences of rape of Kashmiri women by the army. Gender and rape are key themes in more violent incidents of dominance generally in the region and elsewhere (Jayawardena & de Alwis 1996).

As I showed in my analysis of the politics of Suru in Chapter 5, during the period when democratic politics were withdrawn in Jammu and Kashmir, there was a tendency for disputes to be framed along religious divisions Sunnis and Shi'ahs. At that time Kashmir was under Governor's Rule and anti-Sunni discourses in the whole area made them an easy butt for Shi'ah claims of unfair treatment. Van Beek and Brix Bertelson make the same claim concerning the politics of Leh *tehsil*, suggesting that the Buddhists voiced their demands for regional autonomy in anti-Muslim terms, as religious difference is intrinsic to the ideology and structures of the Indian state and hence demands using communal idioms would be better acknowledged (van Beek and Brix Bertelson 1995). The period of Governor's Rule also meant that there were no democratic politics in the state and the virtual absence of political parties seems to have left a vacuum for more communalised forms of identification. However, in Suru, as noted, the sense of local community was also strong, and frequently worked to mediate these disputes. Similarly, with the restoration of democratic politics in 1996, the previously existing factional politics returned and religion ceased to be so central to their positions.

The communalism that occurred in Ladakh in the 1980s and 1990s was partly caused by central government interference in the 1980s, which had raised tensions in the state (Jalal 1995:179, Singh 1996). Therefore Jalal's conclusion that a greater degree of federalisation and regional autonomy would allow people to find compromises in their own area seems correct, in Suru at least (Jalal 1995:257). Some writers are optimistic that factions or interest groups will also provide a solution to the political crisis (Mitra 1994, Khilnani 1998); however, they seem to ignore some of the more major structural problems in India which are to some extent implicated in the existence of those very political groups.

#### **(vi) The *Yokma-pa*, the Noon Public School**

My long-term engagement with Ladakh has given me a perspective on what might be termed the private school movement there, as I taught in one of the first private schools in Leh in the early 1980s. Since then, there has been such an expansion of private schooling in the Leh town area that there are only a handful of children - nearly all non-Ladakhi labourers - who attend government primary schools. Many villages also have a private primary school today. A number, including the one where I taught, are run by the Buddhist Lamdon Society and other such religious

social-welfare organisations. In Kargil *tehsil*, a similar expansion of private schools started in the 1980s, so there are now a dozen or so throughout the *tehsil* of which several are in Kargil town and Baroo. Apparently a similar rapid expansion in private schooling is occurring all over India and it is so common for caste and religious groups to set up primary schools that Drury has talked about an explosion of private education in the country in the last decade (1993:vii).

The opening of the Noon Public School, despite its remote position, therefore, reflects political currents in India more generally. Clearly I do not know what the motivation is behind the expansion of private schooling in other parts of India. But, in Suru, and Ladakh generally, the main impetus for parents comes from the desire to have some political and cultural control over schools and for their children to obtain white-collar employment, through the possession of educational qualifications. However, as I suggested in the last chapter, there are inherent contradictions in such an approach. Firstly, the pre-existing structures and attitudes in education make it very difficult to enter the system without to some extent being changed by it. Therefore, the *yokma-pa aghas* who allow their children to attend the Noon Public School merely to gain educational qualifications in a purely instrumental way may be ultimately less realistic than the *hajji-pa's* view that their children will be changed by the school.

The rapid growth in private schools is also partially a product of interest group politics, another side of which is the expectation of obtaining jobs which the state clearly can never provide. In Kargil, the situation has been exacerbated by the political treatment of Kashmir by the centre, which has used a disastrous mixture of the carrot in terms of promises (usually unfulfilled) of government funding and the stick, in the form of authoritarian rule. This has created a situation in which rising demands for education and jobs are countered by violent responses by the authorities.

During the election campaign of 1996, I witnessed such an occasion in Kargil town, when young men from students' organisations were demonstrating about the lack of government jobs. While marching, they were met by baton (*lathi*) wielding police firing, I heard, the occasional bullet. Two days later, I witnessed a demonstration in Leh, by mainly female school students, protesting against the abduction and rape of

a young Buddhist woman by a soldier. That demonstration was allowed to pass peaceably and representatives met with a senior officer who took swift action and arrested the man allegedly responsible for the attack.

Most important for my theme about the marginality of the *yokma-pa* in Ladakh and the region, the election of 1996 also saw Qamer Ali being given the important position of Minister of Public Works in the Jammu and Kashmir state government. At the same time, the National Front government raised a brief glimmer of hope that they would try to solve the Kashmir problem. So it looked as if the *yokma-pa*'s and Suru's fortunes had changed. However, by 1998, the creation of the Hindu nationalist BJP government, the failure to create any settlement of the Kashmir problem in India and the shelling of Kargil by Pakistan in the autumn of 1997, make the prospects for Suru seem worse than they did in 1996.

This thesis has demonstrated that possibilities for the *yokma-pa* are framed by their structural position within Ladakh and India. Nevertheless, they are not mere objects of exogenous forces, which they can either accommodate or resist. Despite their apparently peripheral position in India, they are playing a part in creating 'modern' India and an examination of their politics has revealed valuable insights into more general political processes in India.

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## Glossary

Term in text	Arabic, Farsi or Urdu transliteration	Meaning
alam	'alam	banner for Muharram processions (Farsi)
am-pa	ām-pa	ordinary people - as opposed to sayyids (am is Urdu for ordinary)
agha	āghā	male sayyid
akhun	ākhūn	village-level cleric
api		grandmother
apo		grandfather
archo		female sayyid
astana	āstāna	tomb of a saint (Urdu)
azhang		mother's brother
bag-mo		bride
bag-pho		groom
bag-ston		wedding
baraka	barāka	blessing bestowed by an agha or other religious leader
batin	bāṭin	that which is hidden, in reference to knowledge
behosh	behūsh	unconscious (Urdu)
bekar	bēkar	unemployed (Urdu)
bomo		girl
cho-cho		honorific title given to am-pa wives of aghas
daftar	daftar	the aghas area of administration and records
dahon		women's head shawl
dasteh	dasteh	procession (Farsi)
dawat	dāwat	dinner (Urdu)
duksmi		household servant
fatiha	fātiha	verses from the Koran read for the dead

goma		upper
gron		dinner
hajji	hājji	person who has been to Mecca or to Shi'ite holy places
holto		grief or remembrance
ijtihad	ijtihad	judgement (Farsi)
imam-barah	imām-bārāh	an Urdu name for a matam-i-sarai
juloos	julūs	procession (Urdu)
khasidas	khasida	hymns of rejoicing
khums	khums	Shi'ite taxes
laktsiks		reciprocal free labour
lamstan		'shower of the way' - used for the rehbar
madrasa	madrasa	religious school
Mahdi	al-Mahdī	the Twelfth or "Hidden" Imam
mahr	mahr	payment made to a woman on divorce
majlis	majlis	religious gathering (Farsi)
marsiya	marsiyyeh	mourning dirge (Farsi)
masjid	masjid	mosque
matam	matn	speech of stories from the Hadiths and advice
matam-i-sarai	ma'tam-i-sarai	building for above
milaks		free labourers
minbar	minbar	the agha's stepped seat in the masjid or matam-i-sarai
mirabs		ancestors
moharam	mohram	members of the opposite sex with whom you may shake hands etc.
Muharram	Muḥarram	the first month in the Islamic calendar
mujtahid	mujtahid	important Shi'ite guide
murid	murid	followers
mut'a	mut'a	temporary marriage
nauroz	nauroz	New Year
nene		father's sister
nikah	nikāḥ	ordinary marriage contract
nimaz	namāz	prayers (Farsi)

noha	nauha	mourning chants for Muharram (Farsi)
nyespa		sin
nyo-pa		bride groom's companions
orche		a local term for matam
pa		patrilineal clan that shared the land
p'ha-spun		sub-clan that shares the land and life-cycle ceremonies
phyak		prayers
pir	pīr	Sunni preacher
poo ba		healing given by saying prayers and blowing on affected person
qabr	qabr	grave
qabristan	qabristan	graveyard
qatl	qatl	killing - as in Qatl Gah - killing ground
rehbar	rehbar	guide (Farsi)
rgyud		descent
rintho		brideprice
rus		bone - meaning descent
sagyat		land
sangma		food touched by the agha, which is then blessed
savab	savāb	merit (Farsi)
sawab	ṣawāb	good works - leading to merit (Farsi)
sayyid		descendent of the Prophet Mohammed's family
shaikh	shāykh	highly educated religious officiant
sherpa		'wet' - also refers to the Kargili Muslim prohibition
sigheh	sigheh	another name for muta'a (Farsi)
sithu		another name for sherpa
snyen		relatives
tawiz	tawīz	protective charm given by clerics
tazia	ta'ziyah	model of tomb carried during Muharram processions

tobarok	tabārak	food or other goods which are given by an agha or after a religious ceremony and confer blessing
yokma		upper
zahir	zāhir	revealed knowledge
zat	zāt	the Sunni name for a clan
ziarat	ziyārat	pilgrimage to Shi'ite holy sites in the middle east (Farsi)
zizi		honorific word for mother mainly used for archos