
RELIGIOUS ETHOS IN LADAKH WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SURU VALLEY

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INTRODUCTION:

Ladakh is known by various names *Mar-yul* (*The Red Land*), *Lag-tags*, Land of Lamas and the Moon city etc. In fact Ladakh has been named by many people on the basis of their first glimpse of the land. The multinomial nature of Ladakh depicts its versatility in the geo-ethnic milieu of the world itself. Speaking in terms of geography, Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir state can be divided into seven parts, lower (Sham), Upper (tod), Central (Zhang), Nubra, Chang-thang, Purig and Zanskar. But in typical geographical terms the whole region can be divided into three major sub geographical regions. These are Upper Ladakh, Central and Lower Ladakh (Sham). In addition to their physical distinction, these sub regions have a religious peculiarity as well in the present era. The Upper and Central Ladakh has a majority of Buddhists whereas the Lower Ladakh is inhabited by Muslims. By Muslims both Shia and Sunni sects of Islam are meant here.

The *Suru Valley* is a valley in the Kargil District in the Union Territory of Ladakh, India. It is drained by the Suru River, a tributary of the Indus River. The valley's most significant town is Sankoo.



The villages of Ladakh's Suru valley come alive during the summer months. Streams gurgle through lush green fields, where wildflowers grow with abandon and snow-capped mountains surround. The day sky is a beautiful blue, and you can spot the Milky Way in the night sky. Horses, yaks and other animals can be found in the valley. In winter Suru Valley experiences heavy snowfall and avalanches. Almost the entire population of Suru valley are adherents of Shia Islam. A small fraction of the population also follows the Sunni branch of Islam, mostly concentrated in the villages of Panikhar and Prantee. The Purgi language is the predominant language in the Suru Valley, spoken by about 95 percent of the people in the Sankoo Tehsil. The majority of Suru Valley people is Shia Islam. Shia Muslims in Suru valley regard Tai Suru, which is 70 kilometres south of Kargil town, as an important religious centre.

(Muharram in Suru Valley Ladakh)

The Muharram marks the first month of the Islamic calendar. Muharram also known as "*Azadari*" Although it marks the first Islamic month, the tenth day of Muharram is also known for being a period of mourning where the Shia Muslim community commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (R.A), the son of Hazrat Ali (R.A) and the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.), (*peace be upon him.*). Imam Hussain (R.A), achieved martyrdom (*Shaheed*) along with 72 of his companions in the Battle of Karbala (in modern-day Iraq) on October 10, 680 CE.

The History of Muharram:

Some fourteen centuries ago on the day of Ashura, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) (*peace be upon him.*), Imam Hussain R.A) and his little son, were mercilessly martyred (*Shaheed*) by a cruel and oppressive ruler in the Battle of Karbala. Although Imam Hussain (R.A) was martyred in the battle, his message of kindness, justice and equality lives on among people who love him, and hence, that is his real victory.

The real event behind the mourning of Muharram is a very tragic one. On the 10th day of Muharram, also called Ashura, in the 61st year of the Islamic calendar, the fierce Battle of Karbala took place. The battle was fought between a small group of supporters and relatives of Prophet Muhammad's (S.A.W) (*peace be upon him*) grandson Imam Hussain (R.A), and a much larger military of Yazid I, the Umayyad caliph. It is a real life event that has happened at Karbala. Muslims honour the sacrifice of the innocent lives by observing a mourning period in the month of Muharram. They respect their sacrifice and pray in abundance as well as refrain from all joyous events.

The mourning period starts on the 1st day of Muharram and lasts for 10 days until the martyr day of Imam Hussein (R.A). They mourn by putting on black clothes, observing abstinence, fasting and then they break their fast on the day of Ashura, the 10th day. The day of "*Ashura*" is especially important to Shia Muslims, as the battle- and *Imam Hussain's (R.A) Martyrdom (Shahadat)* has deep religious significance to the sect. In the month of Muharram, Shias around the world hold large processions of mourners beating their chests while reciting elegies and chanting slogans to make the martyrdom of *Imam Hussain (R.A)*.

Both men and women take part in the rituals commemorating the event during Muharram. Processions, called *juloos* or *dasta*, are taken out on several days. The largest of these happens on Ashura – the tenth day of Muharram – when Imam Hussain (R.A) and his entourage were martyred in Karbala.

Everyone gathers for *majlis* (religious gathering), held twice a day in the Imambara during Muharram, to remember the resistance and sacrifice of Imam Hussain (R.A) and the others. They listen to the *agha* (religious head) narrate episodes from the Karbala battle and related events.





- ❖ “Muharram is the month in which Justice rose against Injustice and Truth stood up against Falsehood and proved that, in the course of history, Truth has always triumphed over Falsehood.”
(Imam Khomeini)
- ❖ “Imam Hussain (R.A) you taught us how to live after death.”
- ❖ “Imam Hussain (R.A) is from me and I am from Imam Hussain. Allah loves who loves Imam Hussain.”
Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) PBUH.”
- ❖ (“LABBAIK YA HUSSAIN”), (“Salam Ya Hussain R.A”).