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Legends from Dha-Hanu: Oral Histories of the Buddhist Dards in Ladakh¹

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According to the elders in Dha, their Dardic ancestors originally came from Europe and settled in the Pur valley, east of Gilgit. Then Duthamelo Sanaleph, the grandson of Angutheno, moved to Gilgit, and had three sons there: Galo, Melo, and Dulo. As they grew up, one brother became a good hunter, one a good trader, and one a good shepherd, and by joining their skills they became rich. They had a good friend who was a musician. Unlike today in Ladakh, at that time musicians in Gilgit were of equal social status like the rest of the population. The hunter-brother used to provide him with meat, the trader-brother used to give him money, and the shepherd-brother provided him with butter and curd.

Galo, Melo and Dulo frequently went hunting together. Once, as they were hunting and exploring the mountains near today's village of Dha, they came to a place that is now known as *Nirdah*. As it was already late in the day, they decided to spend a night there, and when they took off their shoes to sleep, some grains from the barley used for insulation fell on the ground.

As the years passed, people in Gilgit became jealous of this family's success and made a plot to kill them at a party. The brothers' musician friend who was playing on that party, however, knew of the plot and warned his friends with a special tune or rhythm. The brothers understood: one of them gestured while dancing, "Oh, today we will die," another signalled, "Today our life is finished," and the third said, "We escape." Thus, during a dance called *nimaskor brasal* they made space around them by dancing wildly, and escaped. They fled Gilgit and passed through some villages before they came to Ganoks valley, where they stayed for some time. There each brother had one son: Galo's son was Gapomaro, Melo's was Thapomaro, and Dulo's was Gil Singhe.

They went hunting again and came to Nirdah a second time, where they found barley growing as a result of the few grains that had fallen out of their shoes years earlier. The place where they found the barley growing in Nirdah is called *Malmalkutu*. When they saw the barley, they liked the place.

They also went to the nearby Hanu valley for hunting, where two of the brothers had a competition. One said, "I can kill an ibex by using another live ibex for supporting my bow." The other brother said, "I can eat 18 feet of *shibris*.² After that, in one night I will plough a field 18 feet square all alone." The third brother did not participate in the competition. On the same day, the first brother killed the ibex just as he had announced, and out of its meat they made the *shibris*. Then, the second brother ate 18 feet of it. Night came, and while the other two slept, he ploughed the field. He had brought some barley grains from Nirdah, and when he had finished, he planted these seeds in the field, because they also liked this place. The next morning they left again for Ganoks.

When their sons were older, Galo, Melo and Dulo took them on their hunting trips, and came again to Nirdah and Hanu where they now found a lot of barley growing.

¹ This article is a modified version of a section of the book *Tibetan Medicine among the Buddhist Dards of Ladakh* (Kloos 2004: 36-45). The author is grateful for the publisher's permission to reprint this section.

² *Shibris* is a kind of sausage: meat stuffed into guts.

There was also a clear spring at Malmalkutu in Nirdah. They named the field in the Hanu valley "*Hangdangsmín*," which remains the uppermost hamlet in the Hanu valley and today is also the site of a large army camp. As they grew increasingly fond of these places, one brother said half jokingly, "I will settle in Hangdangsmín." Another brother said, "I will settle in Nirdah," and the third one said, "I will stay in Ganoks." Then they laughed and all three of them agreed that they would stay together. Thus, they and their families divided time between Ganoks, Nirdah, and Hangdangsmín in Hanu.

It was not long, however, before Galo settled permanently in Hangdangsmín, which was his favourite place. Melo settled in Nirdah, and Dulo stayed in Ganoks where he liked it best. Their sons had different tastes, though, and thus Melo's son Thapomaro stayed with Dulo in Ganoks, and Dulo's son Gil Singhe with Melo in Nirdah. Then they decided to have a yearly festival rotating between Ganoks, Nirdah, and Hangdangsmín. In each place they had a *dūhiya* (a place for *lha*; Ladakhi: deity, spirit) where they killed an ibex or goats for the festival. This was the origin of the Bononah festival, which is still celebrated every three years in Dha at the full moon of October.

Years passed. When Gil Singhe was 40 or 50-years-old, he decided that he wanted an orchard, and since he was a lucky man who always got what he wanted, he said, "I will shoot my arrow (*dah*), and wherever my arrow lands, this will be my orchard and I will call this place *Dah*." He shot and went to check where the arrow went, and at that place (*Dhaphangsa*) he dug an irrigation channel and planted apricot trees. Today, there is still a hole at this place, which is forbidden for women and covered in special grasses and juniper by the men of Dha.

The Dha-Hanu region

Beginning with the core of Buddhist Dard oral history that deals with the Dards' migration to the Dha-Hanu area, this article constitutes the first attempt to assemble a local history of Hanu valley. It is believed that the Dards constitute some of the earliest permanent inhabitants of what we know today as Ladakh (Francke 1999: 19ff; Petech 1977; Vohra 1989a&b; Kaul 1992: 38; Phuntsog 1999: 379), but during Tibetan influx from the east, they intermarried, were assimilated or pushed back to less accessible regions. Today, they form only a small ethnic, linguistic and cultural minority in Ladakh, comprised of between 1500 and 2000 Buddhist Dards in the villages of Dha, Hanu, Byema, Garkun and Darchik along the Indus valley.³ Hanu, lying on the eastern fringe of the Buddhist Dard region, is comprised of three villages—Hanu Thang, Hanu Yogma, and Hanu Gongma—in a side valley to the north of the Indus river. Together, these villages have an approximate population of 900, most of whom are ethnic Dards.⁴ Apart from a few references (Phuntsog 1999, 2000; Vohra 1989a&b; Bhasin and Nag 2002), the history of the Buddhist Dards in Ladakh has so far not been studied in any rigorous manner. There are several reasons for this. One is an almost total absence

³ Besides Vohra's work, see Prem Singh Jina (2002) for a basic introduction to the Dards in Ladakh. The 2001 census of India does not distinguish between language and ethnic groups in Ladakh. The 1991 census puts the number of Buddhist Dards in Ladakh at 1,920 (cf. Bhasin and Nag 2002; Bhasin 2004, 2005), while Zeisler (2004: 606) puts their number at 1,419. The larger part of the Dardic population of Ladakh—over 7,000 people living in the area of Drass—have converted to Islam, as have Dardic communities in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

⁴ Only a handful of families in Hanu Gongma and Hanu Yogma are of non-Dardic origin (see Kloos 2004).

of written sources by the Dards themselves. Another is the tendency of Ladakhi historians past and present to deal with outlying regions such as the Dha-Hanu area only when they gain temporary importance through, say, a war. War and Hanu's close location to the India-Pakistan Line of Control have furthermore limited outsiders' access to this valley severely, especially since 1999. Finally, due to a loss of the original language, a dialect of Shina today called "Brog-skad," local oral histories are less well preserved than in neighboring Dha or Garkun, where that language and its oral traditions are still alive. Life in the villages of Hanu must have been rather uneventful for most of the time, so that what is remembered today by the locals are only the most outstanding and unusual events that have shaped the life of the Hanu-pa until today.

The present attempt at assembling a local history of Hanu makes use of three sources. The first source consists in the oral history concerning the Dardic migration to Dha and Hanu as remembered by the elders of Dha. In addition, I also combine whatever written sources exist on the Buddhist Dards with local oral histories of Hanu. Most of the data was collected during five months of ethnographic fieldwork in 2001, and in discussions with local historian Sonam Phuntsog (see also Phuntsog 2000). No doubt, the account offered here is both superficial and incomplete, both due to reasons of space and available material. Still, it may be of use for further work in and on the Hanu region, especially given its on-going inaccessibility.

Early Migrations and the Settlement of Ladakh

It is generally agreed today that the first settled inhabitants of Ladakh were Indo-Aryan peoples, and that the Dards, moving in from Gilgit, soon gained the upper hand over other groups coming from Kashmir (Francke 1999: 19). From about 200 BCE onward, they settled Ladakh, which was until occupied primarily by nomads from the Tibetan plateau (Francke 1999: 19ff; Petech 1977; Vohra 1989a&b; Kaul 1992: 38; Phuntsog 1999: 379). Old rock inscriptions and ruins of Dard castles dating from pre-Tibetan-influence times can still be seen today in various places of Ladakh. Rohit Vohra (1989a: 6ff) deals in some detail with classical Greek and Sanskrit sources such as Herodotus, the Puranas or the Mahabharata, where the "Daradas" were already mentioned as a warlike people inhabiting the areas of Baltistan and Ladakh (cf. Mock 2012). Some mentions have also been made by the early Chinese traveller Hsueh-ch'ao and in various later Islamic sources.

Vohra (1989a: 18, 22) emphasizes that this early migration was only the first of many over the centuries, and Mock (2012) cautions that the Dards did not actually constitute a single ethnic group. According to Vohra, the last migratory wave took place as late as the 15th or 16th century. The Dards living now in Dha-Hanu have probably migrated 1,000 to 800 years ago, and legends like the one about Galo, Melo, and Dulo relate to that time. At that time the people called Minaro already lived (Vohra 1989b: 14) in the Dha-Hanu area, who were probably Dards from an earlier migration. While at first there seemed to have occurred some fighting between the two groups, later they intermarried (Vohra 1989a: 32).

Over most of the first millennium CE, Dard settlements spread in Ladakh and organized themselves in small chieftainships relatively untouched by influences from Tibet. This changed, however, sometime between 935 and 945 CE (Petech 1997: 232), when the Tibetan king Nyima-gon conquered Ladakh. After that, the Dards were gradually assimilated to Tibetan culture through intermarriage or pushed back westwards (see also Francke 1999: 50ff). The area of Dha-Hanu, however, appeared not to be directly affected by this.

While it is not sure when exactly Dha-Hanu became part of the Ladakhi kingdom,⁵ at the latest by the time of the Ladakhi king Tsewang Namgyal (1532-1555) the area belonged to Ladakh. This king conquered Shigar and Kharko in Baltistan, and had a road built up the Hanu valley over the Chorbat La to Baltistan (Francke 1999: 86; Kaul 1992: 48). This is the first time specific reference is made to Hanu due to its strategic location on the main route from Ladakh to Baltistan.

The Settlement of Hanu

There exists an alternative account in Hanu about the migration and settlement of the Dha-Hanu area to the one recounted above. The two accounts overlap to a considerable degree, so that here I will focus only on the differences.

The Hanu-pa trace their ancestors to the royal lineage of Gilgit. According to this legend the king of Gilgit had seven sons, three of whom—their names are unclear—came to Hanu on a hunting trip. They called the first place they came to in Hanu “Hangdangmin,” which means “empty of crops” (*hangdang*: nothing; *smin*: crops). Much in the same way as brothers in the Dha-pa’s story, they left barley grains there, which later sprouted. A few years later, the brothers came back and eventually settled there because they liked the place. At first, they lived in cave shelters rather than houses, and there is still a place—now called “Rigu-chos-pe-phongs” (*rigu*: baby goat, *chos*: to do/make, *phongs*: rock)—where they conducted sacrifices and prayers. In the beginning, the brothers took ibex there, offered the blood to their gods and afterwards ate the meat on the same spot. Even now, some Hanu-pa sacrifice baby goats at that spot before plowing and sowing.

One day, one brother went down the valley to hunt for ibex. He came upon people living in what is today Hanu Yogma, and who were originally from a place called “Kharmang” near Shigar, a valley along the Indus in what is today Pakistan. Although they were Balti, they appeared similar to the newcomers. The brother married one of their women and brought her up to Hangdangmin. After some time the other two brothers also took wives from these people and slowly all of them moved down the valley. It is due to this intermarriage that the Hanu-pa today trace their male ancestors to the royal lineage of Gilgit, and their female ancestors to Shigar. The Dardic Gilgit lineage was considered superior not only because of their royal origins, but also because they did not eat beef, chicken, eggs, or milk products from cows. The Hanu-pa speculate that there may have been a violent conflict at some point, because today no descendant of the original inhabitants of Hanu are left. As the Dardic population grew, they spread through the entire Hanu valley, and later also to Dha and Garkun.

Other informants in Hanu were of the opinion that the three brothers Galo, Melo, and Dulo each settled somewhere else: Galo in Hanu, and Melo and Dulo in Dha and Ganoks. There is still a *phaspun* in Hanu Gongma called Galo-pa. All Hanu-pa insisted, though, that Hanu was the first of all Dardic villages in Ladakh, and that the first settlement in Hanu was Hangdangmin. As a sign of Hanu’s superiority over the other villages, the Hanu-pa are also fond of telling about how Galo and his descendants (i.e. the Hanu-pa) would always get the best part of the meat during

⁵ The local Dards seemed to retain their independence for some time by siding either with Baltistan or Ladakh, whichever was opportune (Vohra 1989a: 34).

festivals or gatherings. According to the Hanu-pa, this was because Galo was the eldest brother, the best hunter, and because Hanu was the best place.

The Story of Gangrinchen

Besides the above account of Hanu's settlement, the oldest story in Hanu—dating to some time before the 16th century⁶—concerns a field called “Gangrinchen” still owned by the Gangludup-pa family (see more on this family below). There was a Gangludup-pa man called Rinchen who at that time lived alone in a place called “Satkhar” (*sat*: to kill; *khar*: fortress, place), on a steep slope high above the valley floor. Today, one can still discern the ruined foundation of a building there. One day, Rinchen saw an army coming up the valley, and shot a stone at them with his sling. Miraculously—considering the distance—he hit the leader of the army on the head, killing him instantly. As the other soldiers did not know what happened, they thought this was a punishment of god and a bad omen. They turned around on the spot and headed back instead of passing through Hanu and looting its villagers, as the locals had feared. Thus, Rinchen Gangludup-pa became a hero and was given the land where the army headman had died. This is the “Gangrinchen” field, and another piece of land where they celebrated this turn of events is called “Isunkhar” (*isun*: party; *khar*: place).

The story of Tho Shali

Once a Ladakhi king—most likely Tsewang Namgyal (1532-1555)—demanded forced labour (Ladakhi: *thal*) from the Hanu-pa.⁷ However, there was one man, Apo Tho Shali, who refused this demand in the name of all Hanu-pa. He proclaimed that “*Like a dog does not wear a saddle, a Dard does not do forced labour*” (Ladakhi: *Khi'a rgal met, Brog-pa thal met*), which to this day remains a well-known proverb in the Dha-Hanu area. The king, of course, was not amused by such insubordination. He arrested Tho Shali and had him immured in the foundation of a bridge over the Indus, the ruins of which can still be seen a little upstream from the confluence of the Indus and the Hanu river. As he was being immured, Tho Shali was asked repeatedly if he would give labour, and again and again he refused until only a finger was sticking out of the walls, which still waved “No!”.

On a rock near the old bridge's foundations there remains an inscription saying: “*Tho-shali was killed because of his resistance.*” (Phuntsog 1999: 380) Because of the martyrdom of Tho Shali, the Hanu-pa were exempted from all taxes and forced labour until 1842, when Ladakh lost its independence. Even today, the Hanu-pa celebrate a yearly festival to express their combined joy and sorrow over the exemption from taxes and the death of this local hero.

Language change in Hanu

⁶ The Hanu-pa connect the following story to Zorawar Singh's passage through Hanu. However, this does not make sense for several reasons. Firstly, we know that Zorawar's army passed through Hanu and did not turn back as this story suggests. Secondly, after the Tho Shali incident (see below), no Ladakhi or Dogra army was likely to risk losing the Hanu-pa's loyalty by raiding their villages. The story must therefore refer to a time before Hanu came under control of the Ladakhi kings.

⁷ Both Francke (1999: 86f) and Kaul (1992: 48) note that Tsewang Namgyal demanded forced labour and tributes, and Vohra (1989a: 2) notes that the story of Tho Shali must have happened in the 16th or 17th century, which overlaps the time when Tsewang Namgyal ruled (1532-1555). This also led Sonam Phuntsog to assume that the king in question was Tsewang Namgyal.

About two years after the Tho Shali incident (Sonam Phuntsog, pers. comm. 2001), King Tsewang Namgyal issued a rule that forbade the Hanu-pa from speaking their own language and forced them to speak Ladakhi instead.⁸ In return, they were granted the distinction of being officially “Ladakhi” rather than “Brog-pa” of inferior status. According to Sonam Phuntsog, the king was worried that after the Tho Shali incident, the Hanu-pa might support Baltistan out of grudge. This concern was coupled with the more general idea to ensure the support of a population known to be on good terms with the enemy (cf. Francke, 1999: 86)⁹ and living strategically along the main route between the two kingdoms. The fact that the Hanu-pa spoke a language the Ladakhis could not understand made such considerations all the more urgent. Thus, in addition to freeing them from tax duties, right after Tho Shali’s death, the language change “agreement” was aimed at removing language barriers and securing the Hanu-pa’s loyalty by giving them full and equal status as Ladakhi subjects.

Not surprisingly, this had far reaching consequences for the Hanu-pa, and constitutes the single most important event in the history of Hanu. As a consequence, the Hanu-pa not only lost many Dardic oral traditions, but over time developed an identity located uncomfortably between the Shina-speaking “Brog-pa” of Dha and the Buddhist Ladakhis. Today, they speak Ladakhi as their mother tongue and deem it an insult to be called “Brog-pa.” Another consequence was the influx of *amchi* medicine in the Hanu valley during the 19th century that resulted in several local *amchi* lineages (Kloos, 2004)—a unique phenomenon for an Indo-Aryan community.

The Ganglondup-pa family

There is a cluster of oral histories in Hanu Gongma concerning one of the biggest land-owning families in the village, the Ganglondup-pa. They refer to the time shortly after Tho Shali and the language change (i.e. the mid-16th century), and are exemplary for the way status and wealth are legitimized by history and the reference to old royal decrees.

According to the family legend, one day the Leh *rGyalpo* (Ladakhi: king, ruler) came to Hanu with 18 men.¹⁰ At that time the Ganglondup-pa were the richest family of Hanu Gongma, and volunteered to provide the king and his men with food for one whole day. The second day all other families together served him food. As a reward for the Ganglondup-pa’s generosity, the king gave the family all the land of a ravine above the hamlet of Khaskhas (a part of Hanu Gongma) called Khaskhas *lungpa* (Ladakhi: valley), which is still owned by them. At that time, the land of the Ganglondup-pa was even bigger than all of nearby Sanjak village today. Because they were so rich, they received special respect from the villagers, which manifested in the tradition of the *Ihangargu*. This involved a special rhythm that was played in their house at the Ladakhi new year before the musicians would move on to the other

⁸ Francke (1999: 30) suggests that this incident happened much later, under “the last Tibetan kings,” and that it was not an agreement (as Sonam Phuntsog calls it) but a rule forced upon the Hanu-pa. While the second point makes sense for several reasons, his time reference is unlikely. It is clear that the language change happened after Tho Shali, because Tho Shali still referred to the Hanu-pa as “Brog-pa” in his famous saying, but from all local accounts it is equally clear that this happened more than seven generations ago (i.e. before the “last Tibetan kings”).

⁹ Francke (1999: 86) remarked that Tsewang Namgyal “*wished to keep the goodwill of the people.*”

¹⁰ It is interesting to note here that Pascale Dollfus (1996: 10) mentions that reference is made to 18 archers in connection with special status also in Hemis-Shukpachen, and it is likely that both references have the same source.

houses. In return, the Gangludup-pa provided food and *chang* (Ladakhi: local barley beer) to all the musicians who played for them.

Not long after, the king again visited Hanu with seven men, and this time they went straight to the Gangludup-pa house. The seven men cooked nine goats' heads in a pot, but while cooking, they broke the *skea* (Ladakhi: wooden stick used for cooking). When the king saw this, he ordered them to throw all the food down the toilet. However, one of the seven men held a bowl under the toilet and caught the food, which they secretly ate somewhere else. The king told the Gangludup-pa not to eat this meat, for they, too, were *rus-chen* (Ladakhi: of noble lineage). His order meant that any time a wooden stick used in making or eating food broke, all the food in that pot or bowl had to be thrown away. From that time on, the Gangludup-pa were called *Geshingpa* (Ladakhi: *gal tches*: to break, *shing* = wood), i.e. "the broken wood people," and had the status of *rus-chen*, of noble lineage. At that time, also the Sakyipa *phaspun* (Ladakhi: group of families, believed to have common ancestors) was *rus-chen*. In time, the Gangludup-pa family grew and split, so that today the resulting *phaspun* is called Geshingpa, and also the two other families of Gangludup-pa origin, the Malikpa and Nagdapa, are considered of noble lineage and have the rule of the broken wood. This rule is still followed today, even though one suspects that there are not many occasions to actually apply it. The family still possesses documents written by that king in a sealed tea-making tube. As for the king, he had a small fortress built above Hanu Gongma where he stayed whenever he came to Hanu. The ruins of this fortress still exist, and are called "Khargok" (*khar*: fort, place; *gok*: old, broken)

The introduction of Tibetan Buddhism to Hanu

At the time of the first Dardic migrations during the Indian Gupta period, Buddhism had already spread to the north-western regions including Kashmir and Gilgit. This means that already the earliest Dards must have been exposed to Buddhist ideas. However, whatever Buddhist influences there may have existed among the old Dards, they disappeared over the centuries. Therefore, when Tibetan Buddhism made its way to Hanu and its animistic beliefs and practices, it was an entirely new religion for the Hanu-pa. It should be noted that even today animistic beliefs play a large role in Hanu society, where despite the presence of Buddhism, animal sacrifices were still carried out in 2001 to appease the *yul-lha* (village deity). Sonam Phuntsog (1999: 381) describes the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism to Hanu in some detail, mostly based on oral history. In short, three monks from Spiti came to Hanu in 1779 and converted a few Hanu-pa. The majority of Hanu's population, however, only converted to Buddhism (outwardly, at least) after the visit of Konchok Wangpo from Skymbuchan. This hermit built a monastery in Hanu in 1825. Except for a short interruption of seven years, early in the 20th century, the Hanu-pa have been associated with the Digungpa monasteries at Phyang and Lamayuru until today.

The Passage of Zorawar Singh

After the completion of the road by Tsewang Namgyal and the language change, we can assume that Hanu was continuously subjected to outside influence, as it lay on the most important route to Baltistan. At the same time, the more enterprising Ladakhi kings seemed interested in the loyalty of the Dards (including the non-"Brog-pa" in Hanu). Thus, Singhe Namgyal on one occasion helped the Dha-pa rebuild their fortress (Vohra 1989a: 32).

The next time we hear of Hanu in the literature is at the occasion of Wazir Zorawar Singh's military expedition to Baltistan in February 1839 (Kaul, 1992: 75) or 1841 (Francke 1999: 154).¹¹ On his way to Baltistan, Zorawar Singh divided his troops, sending the Ladakhis half up the Hanu valley over Chorbat La, while he and his Dogra troops took the route along the Indus where the Garkunpa helped them secure a victory over the Balti forces by building a bridge for them. The passage of Zorawar Singh's Ladakhi soldiers is still remembered by the Hanu-pa today, who recount that a Garba-pa man called Phele shouted "gyenpa-gyal!" (*gyenpa*: upper world; *gyal*: to win) as they passed. After they won their battle, Zorawar's soldiers returned through Hanu and gave the Garbapa family the land of today's village of Kanyungtse in the Indus valley as a reward.

Dogra rule until independence: socio-economic developments

While there are many historical accounts about Ladakh from 1841 until today, I did not have access to written sources concerning Hanu after Zorawar Singh's conquest of Baltistan. According to Sonam Phuntsog (pers. comm. 2001), there exist some written reports by a Dogra official responsible for Hanu, who apparently complained about the bad character of the Hanu-pa.

However, we know that the tax exemption of the Hanu-pa (the result of Tho Shali's martyrdom) lasted until Ladakh lost its independence and became part of the Dogra Empire following Zorawar Singh's conquests. Later, shortly after India won independence, taxes were again abolished—this time for all Ladakhis—due to the efforts of Bakula Rinpoche (Kaul 1992: 207ff). In the little more than 100 years in between, the Hanu-pa had to pay tax both in form of barley and labour. Oral histories in Hanu concerning this time provide a glimpse of the socio-economic situation then.

Thus, under Dogra rule, 21 families of Hanu Gongma as well as 42 families of Hanu Yogma had to go to Lamayuru each year after Losar to pay taxes in barley and provide labor for 30 days. It seems that there was a representative of the Maharaja called *Khazar* who collected the taxes and oversaw the work. There is still a valley near Lamayuru called Hanu-pa *lungpa* where they used to keep their animals. Work was divided between the families from Hanu Gongma and Hanu Yogma in the following way: batches of seven families from Hanu Gongma and 14 families from Hanu Yogma worked for ten days, then the second batch would come, and after another ten days the third batch took over. In that way the Hanu-pa ensured that the villages were never completely empty.

At that time, the wealth of a family depended on the land they owned: the more land, the better. Those who had too little land to supply them with enough food for winter were forced to borrow at high interest rates (25% p.a.) from the rich families who had a surplus of barley. If a family was unable to pay back the grain the next year, they had to give labour instead, and if the debt became too high, the lending family threatened to take part of the borrowing family's land. This system created a static situation of dependency, and there was little chance for a poor family to become rich. There also existed a few "middle class" families who had enough land to sustain themselves, without borrowing but did not have enough to lend. The rich families were the IDanpa, Ganglunruppa, Garbapa, Gangchungpa, and Kulikapa. The poor families, among them the Manupa, Pheyapa, and Doangpa, however, were the majority.

¹¹ Zorawar Singh was the military commander of the Maharaja of Jammu and responsible for the Dogra empire's expansion to Ladakh. A full account of Zorawar Singh's conquest of Ladakh and Baltistan can be found in Kaul (1992: 64-88).

Since under the Dogra rule the animosities between Ladakh and Baltistan ceased, a lively trade between the two regions developed, most of which went through Hanu. The Hanu-pa took advantage of this situation and actively participated in this trade. Thus, it was popular practice to exchange their surplus barley in Sakti for salt from the nomads of Changthang and Rupshu. Then they took the salt to Baltistan to exchange it for dried apricots, which in turn they brought to Leh to sell for money or goods. Generally, at that time the Hanu-pa had closer relations with Baltistan than with Leh, and Ladakh proper. While Baltistan was only one day's journey away, it took six days to travel from Hanu to Leh. Thus, the old Hanu-pa had many friends in Baltistan and the Balti often came to work on the fields in Hanu, for which they were paid in barley. It was around this time that the English first explored this area. Old people still remember the English survey expeditions that came three times a year and required locals to work as porters.

The Kargil conflict

While Hanu was affected by the two wars between India and Pakistan in 1965 and 1971, the most recent "Kargil conflict" from April to July 1999 engendered the biggest changes. The direct impact of this brief war that also took place in the Hanu valley was minimal: the Hanu-pa had to camp a few days in a side valley to avoid Pakistani shelling, but ultimately no civilian died or was hurt, nor was any building damaged during the conflict. One local soldier, Angchuk Dorje Manupa was killed in battle, and the big prayer wheel at the side of the road as one enters Hanu Gongma was erected in his memory.

Of much greater consequence was the Indian Army's completion of the road from the Indus valley to Hanu Gongma and Chopodok or Hangdangmin in 2000. There had been ongoing road-construction by the government for over ten years that showed little progress. With Hanu's strategic location back in the spotlight, however, the Indian Army completed the job in less than one year, winning considerable applause from the local villagers. With the road, transport of people as well as goods has become easy, making life much easier for the Hanu-pa. Gas cylinders, kerosene, threshing machines, food rations, and building materials now easily find their way up to Hanu Gongma, and Leh with its business opportunities, educational and medical facilities can be reached within a day.

While it is not readily visible in Hanu itself, also the bank accounts of the Hanu-pa have been in good shape since the war. Following a similar strategy like King Tsewang Namgyal in the 16th century, the Indian Army tried to secure the loyalty of locals in strategic border areas by offering them extremely high wages, heavily subsidized consumer goods, and free apples and chocolates for the children. Thus, at the time of the war when local porters and cooperation were needed most, the Hanu-pa received higher salaries than even army officers could dream of. After the conflict, the demand as well as the wages have gone down but still remain sufficiently high to provide lucrative income for the Hanu-pa.

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