Dard Aryans of Ladakh

Why in news?

A delegation of the Dard Aryans recently submitted their charter of demands to Minister of State for Tribal Affairs.

Who are the Dard Aryans?

- The word 'Dard' is derived from a Sanskrit word, 'Daradas', which means people who live on hillsides".
- They inhabit Dha, Hanu, Beema, Darchik and Garkone villages in Leh and Kargil districts and are together called the Aryan valley.
- The people of this region have unique physical features, social life, ethnic culture and language.
- Researchers believe that the 'Aryans of Ladakh' or the 'Brokpas' are descendants of Alexander's army and had come to the region over 2,000 years ago.
- They do not document their history.
- They participate in a six-day festival, 'Arya Utsav', wherein the tribe follows liberal customs and kissing in the public is considered normal.

What are their customs?

- They are mainly dependent on agriculture and the apricots grown here are considered among the best in the world.
- There are 12 varieties of grapes in the region and Grape-wine is very popular in the "Aryan valley".
- They rear goat and sheep for milk and meat.
- Their festivals are based on the solar calendar.
- They worship trees, rivers and mountains.

What are their concerns?

- The tribe is considered threatened due to their depleting numbers, which, at present, is around 4,000.
- They are "educationally and economically backward".
- The perceive threat to the heritage of the community owing to modernisation, migration and religious conversion.
- Over the last few decades, many of them have embraced Islam or Buddhism.

- The community prohibits marriage with outsiders to keep the gene pool intact.
- Of late, the Dard men have been migrating to other parts of the region (in search of livelihood) and marrying outside the tribe.
- Thus, the tribe is struggling to find a balance between modernity and traditional values.
- Also, after the Kargil War, development work in this region has been restricted, since it borders Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

What are their demands before the government?

- They have demanded that the government set up a tribal hostel and declare the "Aryan valley" a heritage village to boost tourism.
- Besides, they have also asked for–

1. A Dardi post be filled at J K Art, Culture and Language Academy in Kargil
2. A regional Study Centre for Dardi Tradition
3. A Cluster Model Village at Garkon to boost the cultural heritage of the Dard Aryans.

- The tribe is already part of the Scheduled Tribes list and hence has been protected adequately under the constitution.
- But the only way to sustain them is by giving them special status and helping make them self-sufficient so that they don't have to migrate.

Source: The Indian Express

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering