

## **Balti Proverbs - Compiled by G. H. Hasni**

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Baltistan (locally known as Baltiyul) is the western part of the Ladakh province of the State of Jammu & Kashmir. Partition of J&K and wars between India and Pakistan left Baltistan in Pakistani control. The population of Baltistan is a mixture of Mongoloid Tibetan, Mons and Dards. Centuries old Shaman, Tibetan and Islamic influences have shaped the Balti culture into its modern form. Many elements of the ancient supernatural belief systems, especially traditions connected with agricultural practices, are still followed with subdued reverence.

Majority of the people speak Balti, a sub-dialect of Ladakhi and an archaic form of Tibetan. Baltis are proud of their ancient past and of possessing a script of their own, which is similar to Ladakhi script. Five decades passed and the Baltis, including two generations born after the partition of Baltistan and Ladakh, still identify strongly with the people of Ladakh. The rich folklore and literary heritage of the Baltis; poetry, folk songs, proverbs, sagas, folk dances, wedding rituals, festivals like Losar and Mephang, sports like polo and daphang (archery), architecture and handicrafts are evidence of a shared Ladakhi identity and heritage.

Baltis desire to preserve their culture and language which is essential to promote local identity. Unfortunately, absence of government patronage, closure of the border and the lack of interaction with ethnic brethren across the border has obstructed the development of Balti culture and language. Under these circumstances, preservation of folk songs, sagas, proverbs, sayings and expressions is of paramount importance to counter the identity theft. Famous Balti author Mr. Hassan Hasrat expresses importance of proverbs in the following manner: ‘a language without proverbs is like food without salt and spices.’ Professor Nicholas Tournadre from University of Paris, who is also compiling a Balti dictionary, says, “Proverbs tell us about the ways of life and experiences of people evolved over hundreds of years.” He says that Balti proverbs record an older stage of the development of Tibetan language and contain archaic form of pronunciation. These proverbs are a reflection of a common Ladakhi/Balti lifestyle and traditions. Some proverbs reflect Islamic thoughts, while others are absolutely identical to Tibetan literary counterparts. Understanding the danger, the Balti language is facing today, Mr. Hasni traveled all over Baltistan and collected more than 900 proverbs and sayings. The book, ‘Balti Tamlo’, compiled by Mr. Hasni, is a step forward in the right direction. All proverbs and sayings come with English and Urdu translation, however, historical context and other details are published in Urdu.

Mr. Hasni is an established writer, poet, columnist, and radio commentator and play-writer. His published books are Sambai Melong (Mirror of thoughts) and Balti Tamlo (Proverbs) Volume I. His books under publication are Balti Tamlo Volume II; Balti Bar-glu (Balti classical songs) and Jadeed Balti Ghazal (Contemporary Balti Ghazals). His service to Balti nation and culture is commendable. My presentation is a way of thanking him and promoting his mission. I will present my paper by using an overhead projector, which will help the audience read and compare Balti dialect with literary Tibetan. I have used standard Romanized Tibetan as Balti script for simplification purposes. The presentation also includes a brief introduction of Balti language and comparison with modern spoken Tibetan. In the end, I will recite proverbs selected from Mr. Hasni’s book with the translation and analysis, which will help the audience comprehend the accent and pronunciation differences of Balti, and other Ladakhi and Tibetan dialects. The audience is requested to engage during the Q&A session at the end of the presentation.