The Nambardars of Kargil, Ladakh

Current relevance of a traditional governance system

November 2026



Kargil Town, Photograph by Ashish Kothari

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1. Introduction

1.1 Context of the report

This report is a follow-up to the study titled 'The Goba of Ladakh: Current Relevance of a Traditional Governance System' published in 2022. That study highlighted the relevance and key aspects of the Goba system that continues to exist in Ladakh along with the contemporary governance systems. The original study focused only on Leh district and a need was felt to conduct a follow-up study of Kargil district to see the similarities and differences between these two regions. This is important to study and understand whether the shared and distinct geographies, cultures, customs, and ways of living have influenced the governance of each region. We visited a few regions of Kargil district and met with several village heads - Nambardars (as they are called in Kargil) to understand how their system works. We noticed many similarities but also key differences in how governance works across these regions.

1.2 Kargil: A brief profile

Ladakh was granted a Union Territory (UT) Status in 2019, after several decades of struggle. Since its formation as a UT, Ladakh is under overall governance of appointees from New Delhi, as part of the Administration headed by a Lt. Governor. The UT administration is divided into two districts, Leh and Kargil. Each district is governed by its own Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) which is responsible for local matters such as development, health, and education.

Kargil (where this study is located) became a separate district in 1979. It is located in western Ladakh, named after the city of Kargil. The district has 4 Sub-Divisions, 7-Tehsils, 15 Blocks, 98 Panchayats and 130 villages.[1] The district is bounded by the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir to the west, the Pakistani-administered territory of Gilgit–Baltistan to the north, Ladakh's Leh district to the east, and the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh to the south. The main sub-divisions of the district are Drass, Kargil, Shakar-Chiktan, Sankoo and Zanskar.[2]



Drass, Kargil. Photograph by Ashish Kothari

As a border district, it is a sensitive geopolitical region. Because of its close

[1] See: https://ladakh.gov.in/about-department/administrative-setup/

[2] This report is being finalized around the time when The Ministry of Home Affairs has announced the creation of five new districts — Sham, Nubra, Changthang, Zanskar and Drass — by 2028

proximity to the line of control, Kargil has often been the site of border conflicts between India and Pakistan, such as the Indo-Pakistan wars in 1947, 1965, and 1971. The largest and deadliest of these clashes was the Kargil War (May-July 1999), which had significant political, economic, and social implications. The Kargil War also resulted in the loss of hundreds of combatants on both sides.

According to the 2011 census, the people of Kargil mainly follow Islam (76%) and Buddhism (14%), and a small percentage are Hindus and Sikhs. The most common language spoken is the Purgi dialect of the Tibetan language, followed by Shina, Ladakhi and Urdu. The culture is influenced by earlier contacts with Tibetan culture and later influence of Persian culture due to the spread of Islam in the region.

The landscape of Kargil is mountainous and rugged. With a minimum elevation of 8,000 feet (2,440 meters), the climate is cold, dry, and arid throughout the year with scant precipitation (mainly as snow) in the winter. One of the sub-districts, Drass, is reputed to be one of the world's coldest permanently inhabited places, with winter temperatures falling to as low as −40 °C or colder.

Kargil is also home to diverse wildlife including the Snow Leopard, Himalayan Brown Bear, Tibetan Wolf, Asiatic Ibex and Musk Deer, and birds such as Eurasian Magpie, Eastern Chiffchaff and Common Sandpiper. The vegetation of the region mainly comprises grasses and shrubs, confined to the lower elevations in the river valleys. At higher elevations, the landscape is mostly rocky and barren.



Map of Kargil. Source: https://kargil.nic.in/map-of-district/



A family of Himalayan brown bears. Photograph by Ashish Kothari

1.3 Objectives & Methodology

The objectives of this study were:

1) To understand and document the functioning of the traditional governance system of Kargil district;
2) To examine the differences, if any, between the Goba system of Leh and the Nambardari system in Kargil;
3) To understand the relevance of the Nambardari system in the current socio-economic and cultural context;
4) To understand the interface of the traditional system with contemporary systems of Panchayat, Hill Council and Union Territory.

Some key research questions we asked were:

1) How is the Nambardar (head of the village) appointed?
2) How does the system work, how decision-making happens and who all are involved in the decision-making processes?
3) What are the key functions of the Nambardar?
4) How do the Nambardars interact with the Panchayat, the Hill Council and the Union Territory administration?
5) What is the role of women in the governance system?

Our research methodology primarily involved interviews with the Nambardars, women and youth from the villages while visiting the villages in person, in May 2025. The interviews mostly took place in the villages, sometimes in common spaces and sometimes in their homes.[3] We spoke to multiple people from a village to arrive at a better understanding of the system. We were supported by a translator wherever needed although most interviewees understood Hindi as well. In December 2025, we organised an online meeting with the Mambardars of Kargil to present the analysis and results from our study. Their feedback, comments, and suggestions have been integrated in the report. In July 2026, we presented the revised draft of the study to the Nambardars, at an in-person meeting in Kargil, and incorporated their suggestions in this final report.

1.4. Limitations of the study

Despite our best efforts, the study has two main limitations:

i) The amount of time we could spend in Kargil was constrained due to poor weather conditions as well as an escalating border conflict in May 2025. This meant that we were able to travel to and study only a few villages in Kargil.

ii) While we tried to interact with a wider demographic of the village population, we could not interact with marginalised castes and women to the extent we would have preferred, largely due to time constraints.

iii) Meetings to present our study results were attended by a limited number of Nambardars, due to logistic and financial constraints.

[3] See Annexure for a full list of respondents.

2. What is the Nambardari System in Kargil?

2.1 Introduction and Structure

In the Kargil region, the head of the village is called a 'Nambardar'. The Nambardari system was recognised formally under the Jammu and Kashmir Lambardari Act, in 1972. Nambardars play an important role in the governance system of the region just like their counterparts who are called 'Goba' in Leh district. Most also have a committee formed of representatives from different parts of the village to assist the Nambardar. They are called by different names in different villages such as 'membars', 'sargoros' or just 'committee members'. Unlike Leh, many villages did not have a *kutwal* (messenger). Two villages we visited, Mulbek and Waka had a kutwal. Some villages have 'chowkidars' who act as messengers. In Soud village, they used to have one Sarbara who played the role of a messenger but that role is no longer active. The villages of Soud and Darket had *churpons,* who supported the Nambardar with water/irrigation related matters.

We visited several villages in Kargil to understand the Nambardari system. One of them was the village of Mulbek, where we met a 93-year old woman Nambardar who was part of a royal family. The village has 250 *chullahs* (households) out of which 200 households practice Buddhism and the rest follow Islam. We met the Nambardar of Kargil Town, which is the biggest town in the district, and had a committee that had 25 members called 'Sargoros' and along with a secretary. In the village of Barso, which had 450 households, we met a Nambardar who had been serving for the last 45 years. In the village of Kharcheykhar we visited the centuries old Buddha statue carved out of a hill. A population of 144 households, mostly Muslims, have been taking care of the Buddha's statue for centuries in a spirit of interfaith harmony.

2.2 Selection of the Nambardar

There is no uniform way in which a Nambardar is elected across the region. We found that there were three major ways they were elected/selected:

a) Selection by the village: In this, the village meets and selects the Nambardar based on who they feel would best serve the village (e.g. Soud & Barsoo)
b) Hereditary: In this, the Nambardar is usually appointed from the same family, in some cases royal families of the past. (e.g, Waqha, Mulbek, Karcheykar)
c) Rotation: In this system, the Nambardar is changed every few years to ensure a qualified person gets a chance and that the responsibilities are divided. In some villages such as Shargole and Barsoo, the rotation system also ensures that there is representation of both Buddhists and Muslims.

2.2 Decision Making Process

We found the decision-making processes to be different across the Kargil region. In some villages the *Yulpa* i.e the village assembly, met to decide on key decisions about the village but in many cases the decisions were made by the Nambardar in consultation with elders and a few committee members known as "membars" or "sargoros". We also found that in villages where both Muslims and Buddhists lived, the committee had representatives from both communities. In Shargole village, there was a rotation between a Muslim and Buddhist Nambardar every two years. The decisions of the Nambardars were usually accepted and trusted by the village.



Mohd. Yousuf, Nambardar of Darket. Photograph by Ashish Kothari

3. Functions and Responsibilities of a Nambardar

3.1 Functions across villages

The following functions are common to most villages:

a) Liaisoning with the Revenue Department for tax collection
b) Liaisoning with the Army and Police for security and labour needs, or for handling investigations into crimes.
c) Acting as the representative of the village in relation to government agencies and personnel, religious institutions, and many kinds of visitors.
d) Signing various documents and certificates (eg: birth certificate, passports, character certificates, etc).
e) Conflict resolution between villagers over land and personal matters.
f) Managing and maintaining common lands.
g) Executing Panchayat functions (in the absence of a Panchayat).
h) Liaisoning with the Union Territory administration and LAHDC, Kargil to voice any needs of the villages.
i) Enabling the full process of property acquisition, e.g. if a road is taking a part of someone's land or house, making sure the process including compensation is undertaken.
j) Ensuring local customs were followed.

3.2 Functions unique to particular villages

Some functions are also unique to some regions and vary from village to village. For instance, in some villages we found that the Nambardars also have a role to play in the following:

a) Managing the timing of harvesting, sowing, irrigation and grazing activities

b) Playing some role in certain rituals (such as funerals) and religious functions (such as Eid, Ramzan, Muhharam, Mammari) and religious ceremonies (such as Losar)
c) Supporting disaster relief activities
d) Managing water allocation for irrigation
e) Maintaining religious shrines and monuments (e.g. Karchey)



Fields of Karchey village (Kargil). Photograph by Ashish Kothari

3.3 Relevance of the Nambardari system

In our conversations with present and past Nambardars, the then Additional District Commissioner (ADC), Naib Tehsildar, and with members from villagers, it became evident that the Nambardars continue to play a significant role in local governance even in the presence of newer institutions such as the Panchayat and UT Administration. The Nambardar serves as the primary village-level point of contact for the Revenue Department. While the Panchayat plays a role in development matters of the village, the Nambardar focuses more on the community matters and is the main point of contact for villagers to report and resolve land and water disputes, amongst others. On the rare occasion that a dispute is not resolved by the Nambardars or the committee members, the matter is then taken to the Police.

The ADC emphasized that the Nambardars have different connotations in different villages & districts, they are the "eyes, ears, and mouth" of the village. Two women we interviewed in Darket, Maryam Zaheeda, and Sohra Batoor, also emphasized that while the Panchayat and Council play an important role, the village would not work in the absence of a Nambardar.

The Police and Army consult the Nambardars on all important matters. A distinction we observed between Leh and Kargil districts was the much more frequent relationship and interaction between the Army and the Nambardars in the latter. The Army can call for impromptu meetings with the Nambardars on matters related to security of the region.[4] In fact, as we were doing our case study, a conflict had broken out between the state of India and Pakistan. Kargil, being on the border, became a sensitive zone. We saw the Nambardars being called to meet with the Army officials for preparatory work.

[4] Kargil district is closer to the India-Pakistan border, hence the widespread presence of the Army.



Meeting between Kalpavriksh team and Nambardars in Kargil

The relevance of the Nambardari system also lies in the fact that it is place-based, and maintains the cultural, spiritual and ecological practices in each village. As elaborated in the functions and responsibilities section, the Nambardar also plays a role in certain rituals and religious functions, and manages the timing of harvesting, sowing, irrigation and grazing activities. They also ensure that the customary rules are followed and maintained in each village.

4. Analysis

This section expands on some of the points discussed in the previous section on the relevance, functions, and importance of the Nambardari system. In particular, the section elaborates the relationship of the Nambardari system with the Panchayat and other local bodies of governance, the relevance and role of Nambardars in contemporary governance, and inter-faith relations, among other threads.

i. Relationship with Panchayats, Council and UT Administration

Panchayat

The Jammu & Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act 1989[5] and the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act 1997[6] do not mention Nambardar (or Goba) in any clause or guideline. This is despite the Nambardars playing a significant role in community matters and local issues. Importantly, the introduction of the *Panchayati Raj* system and other Constitutional bodies of governance in this region has not been accompanied by a clear demarcation of responsibilities and roles of the Nambardar, Sarpanch and the Councillor. There is a lack of clarity on the relationship between the Nambardars and local bodies of governance, especially on matters around joint decision-making. This finding has also been highlighted in our study on the Goba of Ladakh.[7]

There are contradictory reports on the relationship between the Sarpanch and the Nambardars. For instance, the Nambardars of Darket, Wakha, and Drass noted that the Sarpanch consults them on matters pertaining to land disputes, development work and expenditure. One of the Nambardars from Drass also mentioned that the Sarpanch consults the Nambardars regarding the distribution of development funds across the six villages in Drass. While

[5] See: https://prsindia.org/files/bills_acts/acts_states/jammu-and-kashmir/1989/1989J&K9.pdf
[6] See: https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/IND227527.pdf
[7] See: https://in.boell.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/Goba-case-study-post-Goba-gathering-dec-2022-for-digital-use.pdf

most of the Nambardars we interviewed in Kargil reported that they have maintained a harmonious relationship with the Panchayat, a few have had a different experience. For instance, the Nambardar of Toumel in Soud shared that the Sarpanch did not approach the Nambardars for their input on decisions pertaining to their villages, including spending of budgets.

The diversity of experiences also raises the question if these relationships between Nambardars and Panchayats could possibly be due to several factors, including urban-rural differences, political affiliations (though in theory *Nambardars* are apolitical, some could be affiliated or have leanings towards one party while the Sarpanch is of the other), and individual personalities (some individualistic, some collegial). We suggest that further analysis should be conducted with a larger sample of villages to understand these relationships on the basis of rural/urban areas and other aforementioned factors.

During the time we had conducted this case study (April-May 2025), the new Panchayat had not been elected yet.[8] The Nambardars we interviewed recognised the role and need of the Panchayat; at the same time, they also argued for the recognition of their own role and function. They unanimously agreed that their workload had substantially increased in the absence of the Panchayat during this interim period. Possibly because the distinction between the responsibilities of the Sarpanch and Nambardars has not been clearly outlined, the Nambardars said that most of the work handled by the Panchayat had now fallen on their shoulders. This additional work came without any recognition or increase in their financial compensation.

Hill Council and UT Administration

The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act does not contain any legal mandate for the LAHDC to consult the Goba and/or the Sarpanch. Our findings suggest an inconsistent relationship between Nambardars and the council members in Kargil district.

The ADC of Kargil, Imtiaz Kacho, acknowledged that while the role of Nambardars varies across villages, they play a vital role as the “eyes, ears, and mouth” of the village. They serve as the primary point of contact with the Council. Mehdi Ali Khan, the Nambardar of Wakha, expressed that Nambardars reach out to governmental officials for various purposes; e.g., to notify the repairs needed in houses after snow damage, and to document damages to send to the development department.

However, Asghar Ali, Nambardar of Kargil, noted that apart from land issues, the Kargil Municipality does not consult them at all. Neither the UT administration nor the LAHDC reaches out to them for consultations on matters besides land disputes. One interviewee reported that even in cases where the councillors take up responsibility, the majority of the work still falls on the Nambardar.

[8] The Panchayats had completed their five-year term in January 2024. The next elections — the first since Ladakh has been granted UT status — will take place in August 2025 (tentative).

Since 2019, post the abrogation of Article 370, Ladakh has been declared a Union Territory (UT). We asked several people how this major shift in governance has impacted their everyday decision-making. For the UT administration, the Nambardar is the primary village-level contact for the Revenue Department. The Tehsildar contacts the Nambardars for the allocation and use of common land. When asked if the introduction of the UT Administration in 2019 led to any difference in their responsibilities or the functioning of their village, some Nambardars noted that the UT administration brought increased funding for education, healthcare and other social institutions, while others remarked that the UT administration has made no substantial difference.

ii. Financial incentives and support from the village

Salary

The consensus among the Nambardars was that given the amount of work involved in daily activities, the current salary of Rs. 1500 per month was insufficient to meet their needs or cover their expenses. They also do not receive any reimbursements for travel and support for essential office supplies, or for work done in relation to Army and Police needs. As one Nambardar put it: "the labour that is contracted by the Army gets paid, but we get nothing". Another Nambardar who used to work in the government said: "I have to use my pension to do all the work required of me as a Nambardar!". And on this remark, other Nambardars said: "at least he has a pension, we don't even have that!" Even the ADC and the Tehsildar of Shargole acknowledged that the salary of the Nambardars should be increased.

Support from the village

Nambardars received little support or assistance from their villages. Possibly in the past, the Nambardars would require little financial support as they were usually from royal or landed families and had greater resources as well as fewer responsibilities. However, given the workload and the meagre salary (Rs. 1500 per month) offered to them, support from the village – whether that's through a collective resource pooling, or material help of other kinds – would also be beneficial for them to carry out their tasks without financial worries.[9]

iii. Gender

Besides the Nambardar of Mulbek, Tashi Diskit Wangmo, we did not meet or hear of other women Nambardars currently serving in Kargil district at the time of our study. At ninety-two years old, Tashi Diskit Wangmo has been the Nambardar of Mulbek for 44 years, since 1981. Four generations of her family have been Nambardars and the *yulpa* of her village selected her to continue in this role. Apart from this, we also heard from Mohammad Yusuf, the Nambardar of Darket, that his village had appointed a woman Nambardar from 1963-73.

[9] In one of the villages we visited (Kharcheykhar), the *Nambardars* were offered grains by the villagers as a form of support.



Tashi Dikshit Wangmo, Nambardar of Mulbek. Photograph by Ashish Kothari

While most current Nambardars we interviewed shared that there were no restrictions on women being appointed to the role, some of them mentioned that villagers would be less likely to listen to women. In the context of Nambardars' role in Kargil, Sadiq Ali, the Nambardar of Drass, highlighted that the interactions with the Army – often at odd hours in the night – would make the role less suitable for women. Because of safety concerns, this could be one of the reasons why women hesitate to be appointed as Nambardars.

"Women have several responsibilities", two women we interviewed in Shargole, Maryam Zaheeda and Zohra Batoor, responded to why women sometimes choose not to be appointed to the role: "In addition to household chores and childcare, women work in the fields, engaged in harvesting, sowing, and other agricultural activities." The responsibilities that come with the role of the Nambardars would constitute an additional burden on their day-to-day work.[10]

Upon enquiring if there were any special bodies or associations that dealt with issues specifically raised by women (such as domestic violence or family disputes), there were differing responses. In most of the villages in Kargil, there were no women's associations that dealt with women-specific issues, with the exception of Shargole. Women usually report any disputes to the Nambardar, and in rare cases, to the Councillor.

Shargole was an exception.[11] The women have set up *ama tsogspa*, a community-level association for women to assemble and discuss relevant matters, holding meetings 2-3 times each year. The *ama tsogspa* is selected on rotation and changes annually. Notably, since Shargole has an even number of Buddhist and Muslim residents, women from both religious communities gather together. One of the interviewees noted, however, that while women from both communities would discuss matters together, they would eat separately. If male representatives were unable to attend the *yulpa* meetings, then women would join on their behalf. Women also played a role in observing that the local customs are adhered to by the villagers and outsiders.

In some villages, National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have been recently introduced by the government to support women's livelihoods. For instance, women in Darket have set up SHGs (six members in each group), and meet once every month. In these

[10] This finding was also reported in Leh district. See: the Goba of Ladakh case study.

[11] Possibly due to a higher Buddhist population when compared to other villages in Kargil district.

groups, they develop skills for various activities such as netting, tailoring, sewing, and agriculture — to earn a livelihood that would enable them to be self-sufficient.

iv. Caste

One of the critiques of the Nambardari system, as highlighted in the Goba study report, was the persistence of internal inequalities, especially towards marginalised castes. During our study in Leh district, we reported that the *garba* (blacksmiths) and *mon* (musicians) castes could not be a *Goba.* One of the Nambardars we interviewed in Kargil mentioned that the mon and garba are not appointed to the role of Nambardars here as well. However, one of the limitations of our study is that we did not interact with any members from the marginalised castes to understand and learn about their perspectives.

v. Interfaith relations

While most residents in Kargil are Muslim (in contrast to Leh district which is primarily Buddhist), there were a few villages with an even mix of Buddhist and Muslim families, and a small percentage of Christians. Wakha and Shargole were two such villages that offered a glimpse into inter-faith relations. In both villages, there are processes that ensure representation in decision-making and spaces for communities to come together to discuss issues. For instance, Wakha follows a rotation system while selecting the *membars*, ensuring that there are two Buddhist and two Muslims serving as *membars* in each term.

In Shargole, where there is an equal split in Buddhist and Muslim households, the communities get together to resolve issues. The development work in the village is also distributed equally between the Buddhist and Muslim *mohallas*. The Nambardar of Darket mentioned that communities from both religions attend and invite him to weddings, rituals, and other events.

Thus, the relations between the two religious communities were largely amicable, with no recent reports of tensions or conflicts on religious/faith grounds. We found many examples of religious harmony, e.g., Mohammad Hasan, Nambardar of Karchey village, shared how his ancestors gave his (Muslim) community the responsibility of protecting a 1600 year-old Buddha statue, which they continue to preserve until today. Later, we also spoke to the Nambardar of Darket, who mentioned how they live in harmony with different faiths. People of different faiths regularly attend important events such as weddings. Here is a recorded interview with him where he explains this in more detail.[12]

vi. Non-party politics

An important part of the role of the Nambardar is to remain non-party political, as the role is assumed to be devoid of any party-political interests. While selecting a Goba in villages (where it is not hereditary), the village focuses on the qualities of the Nambardar, i.e., their knowledge of local issues, customs and traditions, how proactive they were in the village activities, and if they were able to read and write. While there were no reported instances of

[12] A video interview with Mohammad Hasan is available here- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8Ik1SwcSGg

conflict or tensions between the Nambardar and the Panchayat owing to party political issues, a few Nambardars reported that they were wary of potential rifts emerging if the Sarpanch found out about their party affiliations.

vii. Formal Recognition

Under the Jammu & Kashmir Lambardari Act, 1972, Nambardars are recognised for their functions in relation to the Revenue Department. However, as highlighted in this report, their roles and responsibilities extend beyond collecting and managing revenue; these responsibilities have not been formally recognised in the Act. While the formal recognition of the responsibilities of the Nambardars is missing, their work is socially recognised by the village as important and necessary.

viii. Local Customs

There are customary rules which are orally passed down generation to generation. They are unique to each village and are collectively decided based on the ecology and bioregion. During this case study, we found that in the Leh region these local customs are referred to as *thims*, whereas in Kargil they don't have any special name. These customs include keeping local water sources clean, not littering, disposing of solid waste in appropriate ways, amongst others. The Nambardar's role is to ensure that these customs are followed by villagers and outsiders alike. However, unlike Leh, where fines can be imposed on those who do not adhere to the local customs, we didn't find such measures being taken by Nambardars in Kargil. Shargole was unique from other villages as the *ama tsogspa* played an important role in ensuring that the local customs were followed.

ix. Differences between Leh and Kargil districts

While there are many commonalities between the role and responsibilities of *Gobas/Nambardars* in Leh and Kargil, there were a few differences between the two districts.

The Jammu & Kashmir Lambardari Act, 1972 stipulates a maximum age limit of 60 years for Nambardars and a maximum term of five years; while these guidelines have been partially implemented in Leh[13], they are hardly followed in Kargil. Many of the Nambardars we interviewed had served in their position for several years, and a few of them also exceeded the age limit. Furthermore, the hereditary system is more prevalent in Kargil district as compared to Leh district.

In Leh district, the Gobas of most villages were usually supported by *membars* and a *kutwal* (messenger). However, in Kargil this was less consistent, and the terminology also varied. While the Nambardars of villages had people to support their work, they were usually termed as "*committee members*" or "*sargoros*" in a few villages. Except for Mulbek and Wakha, the *kutwal* was not a role that existed in most of the villages.

In some villages in Leh district, the Gobas were invited to and had a role to play in

[13] One of the recommendations in our Goba study report was to change the age limit to 70. The Gobas of Leh have stated that there is no justifiable reason for the current age limit.

marriage ceremonies, while in Kargil district the Nambardars did not usually have a function to play in marriages. For instance, in Leh district, the Gobas have a special seat assigned to them in marriage proceedings, while in Kargil we found the Nambardars had no such special recognition.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Nambardari system in Kargil is of relevance and importance in local governance and in maintaining the cultural and traditional practices and livelihoods in the region. However, it faces challenges which include lack of clarity in relation to other institutions of governance, the lack of formal recognition and financial incentives for Nambardars to stay in the role. The recommendations below are oriented towards strengthening the Nambardar's role in local governance especially in a changing landscape.

1. Increasing or removing the age limit

In both Leh and Kargil districts, the maximum age limit stipulated by The Jammu & Kashmir Lambardari Act, 1972 is 60 years, with a maximum term of five years. The age limit of 60 should be immediately withdrawn, and either kept open or replaced by a higher age limit of 70.

2. Salary increase and reimbursements

There was consensus among the Nambardars that the salary stipulated under the current Jammu & Kashmir Lambardari Act, 1972, i.e., Rs 1500 per month, was inadequate, given the workload and responsibilities borne by them. We recommend that the salary should be increased. Importantly, this increase in salary should not be accompanied by the assumption that the Nambardars are government employees. Furthermore, their out-of-pocket expenses —including travel and office expenses— should be reimbursed through a system of TA/DA; some Nambardars also pointed out that they could be issued free travel passes for public transport.

3. Balance between difference selection processes

In villages where the Nambardars are chosen through a hereditary system, there is a risk of power concentration especially in the hands of a few from a specific family. On the other hand, frequent rotation does not allow sufficient time for Nambardars to handle their tasks. There is a need for a selection process that disallows power concentration whilst enabling Nambardars to gain sufficient time and experience in the role to handle tasks well.

4. Clarity of roles and greater recognition

Currently, there is a lack of formal recognition of Gobas. Moreover, this recognition should also come with the clarity that Nambardars are their village representatives — as such, their people's representatives (as are Hill Councillors and MLAs) — not government employees. There is a need for greater recognition of the Nambardar's role through financial, legal and social recognition.

5. Formation of a Kargil-wide Nambardar Association

The Nambardars in Kargil are discussing the formation of an Association to organise their needs and demands.[14] Reportedly there are already block-level Associations in Zanskar, Sankhu, Shargol, and Chiktan, but not in Kargil and Drass. Nambardars said they will hasten the formation for the latter two, and also for the district-level body. The Association will be a space to learn from each other and address some of the common issues facing them, for instance, their insufficient salary, excessive workload, etc. These issues can be more effectively addressed through the joint unified voice of an Association. Importantly, once an Association has been formed, it should be formally recognised by the UT administration and the Hill Council, as has happened in Leh district.[15] Leh and Kargil level Associations can also then form an all-Ladakh Association.

6. Strengthening local customs

The customary rules have some measures around not littering, keeping the water in rivers clean, etc. However, these are not enough in the face of massive changes in recent times. They have not been adapted to more contemporary problems around waste management, heavy tourism and climate change impacts. In the village of Shargole, the *ama tsogspa* play a role in monitoring that local customs are adhered to; there should be similar such discussions around local customs initiated by the Nambardars, the *yulpa*, and other relevant youth, women and religious bodies.

7. Tackling internal inequalities

There is a need to transform the Nambardari system's internal limitations and inequalities. There should be appropriate social incentives to address the lack of representation of women and members from marginalised castes and an ongoing discussion on how to open up this position to all in the community.

8. Periodic community exchanges between Gobas of Kargil and Leh

More interaction and engagement between the Gobas from Kargil and Leh districts could help strengthen the association.

9. Community Support

Given the workload and the meagre salary offered to Nambardars, support from the village – whether that's through a collective resource pooling – would also be beneficial for them to carry out their tasks without financial worries**.** In one of the villages we visited (Kharcheykar), the Nambardars were offered grains by the villagers as a form of support in the past.

[14] This suggestion was made by Tsewang Stobdan, Goba of Alchi village (Leh district) who had accompanied the research team to Kargil, at meetings that the team had organized in April 2025 and July 2026; it was enthusiastically welcomed by the Nambardars present. As of the time of publication of this report, an Association had not been formed.

[15] In October 2022, a group of 35 *Gobas* from Leh District gathered to form and officially register the Ladakh Yoms Ki Goba Tsogspa (All Ladakh Goba Association (Leh District). This Association takes up various issues relating to *Gobas*, to help strengthen their role for the benefit of Ladakhi society as a whole.

Annexure

List of respondents to the study

We interacted with the following Nambardars during the course of the study who provide valuable inputs for this report

1. Mehdi Ali Khan. Nambardar, Wakha
2. Naveed Ahmed. Tehsildar, Shargol
3. Tsiring Smanla. Nambardar, Shargol
4. Tashi Diskit Wangmo. Nambardar, Mulbek
5. Asghar Ali. Nambardar, Kargil
6. Imtiaz Kacho. ADC, Kargil
7. Saqiq Ali. Nambardar, Drass
8. Mohammad Yousuf. Nambardar, Darket
9. Rinchen Zangmo, Shargole
10. Ameena Bano, Shargole
11. Sonam Bhutti, Shargole
12. Maryam Zaheeda, Darket
13. Sohra Batoor, Darket

Other than the above respondents, we held an online meeting on 30th Dec 2025 and an in-person meeting on 28th July 2026 to get inputs of Nambardars on the initial draft of the study. Their names are listed below:

Online meeting attendees in Dec 2025

1. Ali Kingy, Tingdoo
2. Mohd. Akbar, Phokar
3. Ali Jaffar, Lochum
4. Mohd. Yousuf, Darket

In-person meeting attendees in July 2026

1. Nasir Hussain, Sangrah
2. Mohd. Yousuf, Darket
3. Talib Ali, Yokma Kharboo
4. Mohd. Husaain, Yourbaltak
5. Qualbi Ali, Lamsoo Sandow
6. Mohd. Ismail, Trespone
7. Gulam Mamad, Tumail Kargil