

A Cultural History of Ladakh

Nawang Tsering Shakspo

Edited by Kyle Gardner

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e-mail: sntsering52@gmail.com

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Cover image: Padmasambhava with *mKha-agro-Yeshes-mtso-rgyal* and *Lha-lcham-man-dha-ra-wa* at Basgo Maitreya Temple (upper).

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Table of Contents

Preface	v
Introduction: Ladakhi Culture	vii
Kuksho Village: The Legacy of a Mixed Buddhist and Muslim Tradition	xix

PART ONE: A History of Buddhism in Ladakh

A History of Buddhism in Ladakh	3
Sabu Village—a Historical Perspective	35
Alexander Csoma de Koros: the Pioneer of Tibetan Studies	41

PART TWO: Buddhism in Modern Ladakh

Buddhism in Modern Ladakh	49
Lama Tsultrim Nyima (1796-1872)	51
Geshe <i>Ye-she Don-grup</i>	63
The 19th Bakula Rinpoche	83
50 years of Tibetans in Exile	97

PART THREE: Ladakh and its Neighbours

Ladakh's Territories: Nubra, Changthang and Zangskar	105
Ladakh's Relations with Baltistan	121
A note on <i>Pod-yig</i> , the Ladakhi Script	125
<i>Lho Drugpa</i> Religious Foundations in Ladakh	131

Mongolian Connections	137
Ladakh and Sikkim	143

**PART FOUR:
Folk Religion and Traditions**

A Description of a visit to three Sumda Villages in March, 1990	159
Ladakhi Folk Songs	169
Ladakhi Folk Dance	215
Religious/Mask Dance (<i>Cham</i>)	227
Sacred Trees (<i>Lha-chang</i>)	237
Mani-Walls in Ladakh	245
Conclusion: the Future of Ladakh	251

Appendix

Appendix	261
Genealogy of the Kings of Ladakh (1000-1842 A.D.)	265
List of Illustrations	267
Bibliography	269

Preface

The total occupation of Tibet by China in 1959, the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and the opening of Ladakh for tourists in 1974 may be considered the three most significant events in the modern history of this formerly secluded Himalayan region. These moments simultaneously severed ties and opened up new routes. Regarding tourism, Ladakh has—particularly in the past 36 years—attracted Tibetologists from all over the world. The region has emerged as one of the last bastions of Tibetan Buddhism in the modern world. Unlike the rest of the Himalayan states and kingdoms, the four major Buddhist sects flourish here in living monastic institutions.

My own interest in the study of the rich heritage of Ladakh began when I joined the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages in Leh in 1976 as a research officer, and with my first attendance of an international conference on Tibetan Studies at Columbia University in New York in 1982. This forum provided me with the exposure to the worldwide community of Tibetologists which later grew with the founding of the International Association for Ladakh Studies in 1987 at Herrnhut (formerly East Germany). This international exposure also made me aware of the disparity between the amount of research conducted by foreign scholars and the work done by Ladakhis themselves. This gap compelled me to write from the Ladakhi perspective.

In the present book I have included the accumulation of three decades of research on the various facets of Ladakhi life, history, culture and religion on which I have written a number of articles, monographs and books (in Ladakhi, Hindi and English). I am compelled to write this book in English as the Ladakhi language has a limited readership, one which is growing smaller with the increase of modern education and the influences of Western culture. I know that local cultures cannot

be taught through foreign languages, but it is better to preserve what knowledge we have through an imperfect medium than it is to let this whither away with the passing of generations.

Over the years I have had scholarly support and encouragement from a number of scholars. Foremost among them is Maria Phylactou, who worked with me while I was doing fieldwork to gather materials for my writings on Ladakhi folk songs. Similarly, Rex Tom Strickland has been a constant supporter and friend who always considered my contributions in the field of language and literature as important for a changing society such as Ladakh. Kyle Gardner and John Bray have assisted me at various stages with my research projects, both large and small, and have constantly guided me. The great Ladakhi scholar, Tashi Rabgias, has been my mentor and a source of inspiration. I have taken every word of his as sage advice and wisdom from a brilliant mind. My thanks to Neil Howard for drawing the two maps included here. Thanks also to Karl-Einar Lofqvist, for photos and Julia Rampen for preparing the musical notation. Lastly, Gelong Thupstan Paldan and my family—particularly Yangchan Dolma, my wife, and Sonam Wangchuk Shakspo, my brother—have been endless sources of support and were never disturbed by my occasional absences as a result of research and travel. My four daughters, Rinchen, Stanzin, Kunzang and Sonam, now all grown up, have always been affectionate and accommodating.

Nawang Tsering Shakspo

Introduction: Ladakhi Culture

Surrounded by lofty barren mountains and beset by difficult climatic conditions, Ladakh, the northernmost region in the Indian Himalaya, has a special position in the cultural and literary history of the country. Though influenced by other parts of India and Tibet, the people of Ladakh have succeeded in developing their own distinctive culture. Ladakhis are more or less traditional in their religious practices and they largely stick to their old cultural values. The distinctive Ladakhi way of life is upheld not only in the far-flung villages of the region but also in the comparatively modernized city of Leh.

In his book, *Magic Ladakh*, Major M.L.A. Gompertz notes that “Ladakh is very much a self-supporting country, and produces everything or nearly everything it wants except tea, which is the staple drink of the country.”¹ Similarly, an interesting Kashmiri proverb says that ‘Ladakhis eat *sattu* (roasted barley flour), wear *pattu* (woolen clothing) and ride *tattu* (ponies)’. This saying indicates some of the principal themes in Ladakhi life. Buddhism penetrated Ladakh during Emperor Ashoka’s time in 204 B.C. However, the Buddhist practice in Ladakh was not the same then as it is today. The form of Buddhism which is popularly called Mahayana Buddhism came to Ladakh with the blessing of the land by the great Buddhist saint Padmasambhava in the eighth century A.D. It was Padmasambhava who, along with the great Bhikhu Santaraksita, firmly established Buddhism during the reign of the most powerful Tibetan emperor Trisong Detsen. Ever since that time, the people of Tibet have followed the religion of the Buddha. The Tibetans and others who follow what we now call Tibetan Buddhism—including many Ladakhis—regard these three great pioneers with a sense of deep gratitude and admiration. Collectively they are called ‘The Abbot, the Teacher and the Dharma raja’ (*mkham-slob-chos-gsum*). Since

Buddhist thought and ideas dominate the life and culture of the people, certain scholars have described Ladakhi culture as being a Mahayana Buddhist culture.² In Mahayana Buddhism, in addition to Gautama, the historical Buddha (who attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Gaya more than 2550 years ago), we find many other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in various forms such as compassionate, forceful, and wise manifestations. They are worshipped to bring happiness, prosperity, and peace. In contrast to Theravada Buddhism this system also includes incarnate lamas representing various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in human form, popularly known as 'trulkus' (Tib. *sprul-sku*). The trulkus are believed to have taken birth in this disturbed world to guide all suffering beings, to teach the Buddha's doctrines and to reinforce his message. They not only sit and meditate in their respective monasteries or hermitages, but pay frequent visits to the villages in order to secure the health, happiness, and prosperity of the people.

Geographically, the area of Ladakh may be divided into seven parts: Sham (Lower), Tod (Upper), Zhung (Centre), Nubra, Changthang, Purig, and Zangskar. All these seven parts of Ladakh have distinctive cultural and literary identities. For example, Zangskar, the southern part of Ladakh, has been called 'Chosyul' (*Chos-yul*), the 'Country of Religion', because it has the highest literacy rate of all Ladakh, owing to its monastic traditions.³ Similarly, the northern part is called Nubra (*lDum-ra*), the 'Garden of Flowers'. Buddhism is practiced by the people there and Nubra boasts some of the finest monasteries of Ladakh. Various types of flowers blossom there and a celebration called the 'Festival of Flowers' (*Me-tog ldad-mo*) is held in spring. On this occasion, people perform various types of dances, presenting flowers in their hands as a gesture in the form of an offering to the Buddha. As with Zangskar and Nubra there are certain peculiarities in the culture of every region of Ladakh. For instance the people of Changthang wear a distinctive dress which really suits the harsh climate (and high altitude) of the area.

Language and literature are said to be the main constituents

of indigenous culture. Ladakhis are very fortunate in having their own written language, the history of which goes back to the seventh century A.D. It was Thonmi Sambhota, the learned minister of King Songtsen Gampo of Tibet, who developed an alphabet of thirty consonants and four vowels. On this point the specialist could say that this is the history of Tibetan language and literature and not of Ladakhi. While this is technically correct, the Ladakhis would reply that they never treated or thought of Tibet as an alien country with respect to language and literature. If one studies the history of the Tibetan language its literature one finds an equal participation of both Ladakhi scholars and Tibetans. Moreover there exists a popular folk story according to which Rigpachan, the learned minister of King Songtsen Gampo, was a Shargola-born Ladakhi. In addition we find various Ladakhi 'lotsawa' (*Lo-tsa-wa-ba*)⁴, translators whose writings are equally acknowledged in the Tibetan canons. Tibetan and Ladakhi have the same grammar, but there is some difference in vocabulary and literary style and the Ladakhi form has been praised by many scholars, suggesting its close ties with classical Tibetan word formations.

It is said that skilled image-makers abounded wherever the law of the Buddha flourished,⁵ and in Ladakh the art of making images, whether it is engraving, metal casting, painting, or carpentry received great attention from early times. The dignified wall-paintings and wood carvings still existing at Alchi, the nine-storey Lion Palace at Leh, and various giant statues of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the region are among the finest examples of Ladakhi art and crafts. It was Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo from Guge who first introduced the use of an artist style which is still practiced in Ladakh. It is said that Rinchen Zangpo came with thirty artisans from Kashmir to Ngari, and built 108 temples, including three religious enclaves (*chos-'khor*). He also introduced the art of image-making, wood carving, and fresco art throughout Ladakh, Spiti and certain regions of western Tibet. According to S. S. Gergan, prior to Rinchen Zangpo's appearance on the cultural and religious scene of Ladakh and Tibet, the art of

making images did not exist in Tibet and ancient Ngari, which included Ladakh.⁶

The Mon people were the first to introduce work in iron, copper, and wood as arts and crafts in Ladakh. It is said that the Mon race who settled in Ladakh originated from the Lahul and Spiti district of modern Himachal Pradesh. These people are also credited with the introduction of the popular Ladakhi musical instruments known as *daman* and *surna*.⁷

King Delden Namgyal (r. 1620-1640) of Ladakh is said to have brought eight artisans from Nepal to build the two-storey copper statue of the Buddha at Shey and the statue of Maitreya at Basgo. After accomplishing these works they remained and settled in different villages of Ladakh, including Chemde, Leh, Gya, and Chiling. At present the descendants of these artisans pray to the god Mahadeva, reflecting their Nepali origin, and abstain from eating beef.⁸

Handicrafts also received due attention in traditional Ladakhi society. Among the popular handicrafts were spinning, weaving, wood carving and painting. According to popular Ladakhi tradition the earliest two industries of Ladakh were cloth weaving and water milling. Likewise, embroidery received due recognition. Among the well-known embroidery products of Ladakh is the world famous thangka of Padmasambhava, which was made by the great artist Sopa Palai at the request of Gyalse Rinpoche of Hemis monastery in the eighteenth century.

Ladakhis are very fond of song and dance and they have not forgotten the songs sung by their ancestors, having adopted and preserved them as part of their heritage.⁹ In Ladakh every social and cultural event begins and ends with singing. Among the popular types of song are religious, congregational, heroic, and love songs; plays on words and satires; songs for marriage, drinking, and work; and the 'trashipa' (*bkra-shis-pa*) songs which participants in any cultural event sing while performing a dance. Each song has its own distinctive tune (*dbyangs*).

As with the songs, Ladakh has a rich heritage of dances. These have been so common and popular that they have passed

as oral and practical traditions from one generation to another. Ladakhi dances are so simple in their step movements that to learn them does not require a rigorous or long training. But by careful observation, the movement of the dance, although not fast, appears to express the personality of the male or female dancer. The movements show the confidence or lack of confidence, the shyness or stage fright of the dancer. Whether they have an artistic temperament or a sense of humour is also expressed in the dance. And above all, the performance of a dance or a song provides the participants with an opportunity for meditation. Each dance opens with homage to the Triple Jewel (the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha) and each has three parts. The first is slow. With a further expression of homage the dance develops into the second stage when the music and movement become faster. The third stage is reached without homage and it develops with the music.

In the field of music, the Ladakhi musicians claim to have 360 tunes, called 'music for the gods' (*lha-rna*). This type of music would be played by the *Mon* or *Beda*, wandering minstrels who were musicians at functions attended by incarnate lamas and ministers. The *lha-rna* tunes are subdivided into two categories, popularly known as music for lamas, and music for kings or ministers or the members of noble families. Among the popular Ladakhi musical instruments are the *daman* (a pair of kettledrums) and the *surna* (or harip), a flageolet; also the *drunyen* (*sgra-snyan*), a string instrument like a banjo; the *gling-bu* (flute), and the *daff*, a large wooden-frame drum having only one side covered with leather. Of the origins of these musical instruments it is said that the *daman* or *tam-tam* came from Kashmir, while the *surna* (which resembles the shawm, a religious musical instrument popularly called *rgya-gling* and used by the monks for ceremonies) originates from India, where a similar type of instrument is known as shehnai. Lastly, the *daff* is said to have its origin in Iran, and in Farsi this instrument is also called *daff*.¹⁰

Drama (*zlos-gar*) is also a part of the Ladakhi heritage

without which the culture of Ladakh would be incomplete. Since the people of Ladakh have been practicing Buddhism from early times it is not surprising to find that the history of the past lives of the Buddha (*Jataka tales*) is the main theme or plot of Ladakhi traditional dramas. These dramas were most kindly told by the Enlightened One, the Buddha, relating stories of his numerous previous lives when he was living as a compassionate Bodhisattva, always helping living beings in his various forms. Among the many tales is the legend of the noble prince Norzang and his beloved wife Yitrok, a most beautiful and enchanting woman. It is so popular in Ladakh that in certain villages the stories are narrated continuously for several nights. This is just one instance of the pervasiveness of Buddhist culture and philosophy in every sphere of Ladakhi life and action. This is the case not only with the Buddhist houses and monasteries, but equally with the Muslim mosque. In Leh town, the most precious relics preserved in the mosque are the staff and boots of Lama Stagtsan Respa Ngawang Gyatso, the first hierarch of Hemis monastery.¹¹

A similar situation exists with traditional medicine. The type of medical system which flourishes in Ladakh is called the 'amchi' (*am-chi*) system, which was taught by the enlightened Buddha more than 2550 years ago. The word amchi refers to the medical practitioner or doctor. The amchis do not have advanced equipment like X-ray machines, yet they can diagnose a sick person by examining their pulse, urine, stool, etc. In this form of medicine the individual's faith is of equal importance and so there are prayer books devoted to *Bhaishajayaguru*, the Buddha of Medicine. According to the Ladakhi historian Tashi Rabgias, the first religious service text of the Tibetan Buddhist was the *Sman-lha bde-chog*.¹² In places where Tibetan Buddhism is practiced, such as Tibet, Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, and Ladakh, we find oracles who act as healers. The oracles obtain their power from a god and with it treat both human beings and animals. In this connection I may say that in the Buddhist medical system, the words of the Buddha, the medical practitioners, and the power of the gods all play

equal roles and each of these aspects needs careful study before an adequate understanding of this form of medicine can be attained.

The New Year celebration is an important part of the great Ladakhi culture. Unlike the Tibetans, or any other neighbouring Himalayan people, Ladakhis celebrate their New Year (*lo-gsar*) on the first day of the eleventh month of the Tibetan calendar. The popular Ladakhi account says that the Ladakhi king Jamyang Namgyal (1560-1590) wanted to lead a military expedition to neighbouring Baltistan and so he decided to celebrate the New Year on the first day of the eleventh month. In fact the New Year celebration begins on the twenty-fifth day of the tenth month, which is the birthday of Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism. On this day people illuminate their houses with butter lamps, and they light up the temples by organizing special religious ceremonies including illuminations. This day is also called the Big Day of Leh (*Gle-p'i zhag-bzang*), and from then onwards the youths of Leh assemble at a particular spot and make a procession with fire on every night until the thirtieth.

As in many other cultures, the New Year celebration has a special place in Ladakhi society. It marks a time of transition. The smiths and carpenters, mainly the Mon, stop working with their tools and instead light butter lamps beside them. The illumination, the baking or burning of seven ibex made of wheat flour and the tying of a branch of evergreen juniper to the pillar of the kitchen are some of the important features of the New Year celebration. We can certainly say that some of these features owe their origin to the ancient Dard culture. The ibexes and juniper branch are needed to please the family god or the village god.¹³ Ladakhis do believe in such gods and follow simple rules to live in harmony with them. On the occasion of New Year, traders refrain from business for three days, and presents of tea, alcohol, and bread are exchanged. In the good old days there was a tradition of the king organizing a feast in the banquet hall of Leh Palace. On this

occasion the king would invite a number of people belonging to the noble families of Leh and nearby villages. The official beer-maker (*chang-ma*) would serve alcohol to the guests and the court dancers (*drag-shos-ma*) would entertain them. On the third day of the New Year, the king himself would appear before the public wearing a crown, and riding a beautifully decorated horse for the horse-race. Similar festivals were organized by the residents of different villages to mark the occasion. Among the popular village festivals organized in conjunction with New Year are Lama-Zugi, A-bi Meme and Skinkar (*sKin-dkar*) and Skin-nak, (*sKin-nag*) (Black and White Ibexes). Besides all these, Buddhist families would carry food and drink to the family cemetery and offer food to their ancestors. According to the existing material written on these subjects, other faiths flourished in Ladakh and the western Himalaya before the introduction of Buddhism. These beliefs included Babaswami, which advocated animal sacrifice, and the Bon religion.¹⁴

In the past, the Muslim population of Ladakh, particularly the Shias, would join in the New Year celebrations. On this occasion, they too would perform dances and take an active part in the functions held in Leh and the villages. According to Mohammad Ali Khan of Turtuk, it is said that until the year 1984 there was a tradition of organizing festivals to mark the celebration of New Year. During these festivals, which were held on 21 December, the shortest day of the year, inhabitants of Turtuk would hold a fire procession through the village.

Apart from the New Year festival, one can see various other religious and cultural festivals. Among them, the *dus-mchod* (monastic ceremonies involving offerings of religious services), which are usually organized in the courtyards of the respective monasteries, are particularly noteworthy. In these festivals the monks play the role of actors and perform religious dances wearing masks representing various gods and goddesses. Every religious dance festival includes a distinctive dance (*cham*, see below) of the protective deity (*srung-ma*).¹⁵ These religious festivals are conducted every year according

to the local calendar and last for three days. Popular among them are Leh Dosmoche, Hemis, Thikse, Spituk (or Pethup), and Phyang in Central Ladakh; Likir and Lamayuru in Sham; Karsha in Zangskar; Diskit in Nubra; and Mahe and Hanle monasteries in Changthang. According to a popular saying, these religious festivals are performed for the health, happiness, and prosperity of all human beings.

Among the many social and cultural festivals of Ladakh are marriage ceremonies, birth ceremonies, village archery competitions, and harvest festivals. The historical and social backgrounds of the Ladakh religious and social festivals are so varied that it would be necessary to write separate chapters for each festival.

It is recorded in the many historical writings of European travelers that Ladakhis were honest, kind and hospitable people. Theft and cheating were unknown. Even the killing of small insects was considered sinful. Thus the people of traditional Ladakhi society were faithful in the observance of religious teachings. They would not do anything unless they first went through the appropriate religious rites. For instance before starting a business, engaging in trade, making a journey, or holding a marriage they would consult astrologers, lamas and oracles. This is also the case with agricultural tasks. Oral histories reveal that in the past certain villages had to invite a butcher belonging to another faith to slaughter animals.

In the field of trade, Ladakh had very close and cordial links with the neighbouring states of Baltistan, Tibet, and Turkistan as well as Kashmir and Punjab. Above all, trade relations with the highlands of Ngari, Guge, and Purang had a very significant role in Ladakh's economy due to geographical, cultural, and climatic similarities. Although the trade with these regions of western Tibet was limited to a very few items, such things satisfied Ladakh's immediate requirements. Among the essential goods were livestock, especially yaks and horses, and also salt and wool.

The Tibetans called the Ladakhis Rong-pa, the ravine-dwellers. Ladakhis, unlike the nomadic people of Ngari, were

a settled race engaging in agriculture and keeping domestic animals such as horses, yaks, *dzos* and *dzomos* (hybrids of yaks and cattle), mules, and chickens. Thus, the Ladakhis were able to meet the demands of the Ngari people for such items as barley, grain, fruit, spices, and cotton fabrics as these were available in Ladakh in large quantities as a result of its trade connections with Punjab and Kashmir. Thus the life of the Ladakhis in the past was very relaxed and free of the sort of strain that exists now.

As Schumacher points out, the modern world measures the standard of living by the amount of annual consumption per head of population, assuming all the time that a man who consumes more is better off than a man who consumes less.¹⁶ This way of thinking is quite contrary to Buddhist ideals, for the Buddhist objective of life is not just to earn money, become rich, and lead a luxurious life, but rather to attain liberation from this sorrowful world by performing good and exemplary tasks in one's life. Nehru's view of culture as 'restraint over oneself and consideration for others' has a very close connection with Mahayana Buddhism and its view of society.¹⁷ In Buddhist thinking the self is placed very low and work for betterment of all sentient beings, including animals and insects, is placed very high.

Ladakh today is no longer the same as witnessed several years ago by both natives and outsiders. The culture of its people and their social structure has changed a great deal. While in principle there exists no conflict between religious values and economic progress, every Ladakhi should nevertheless question the nature of change which Ladakh is currently undergoing. The recent opening of Ladakh to foreign tourists after its long closure accounts for much of the change in its people and culture. At the same time, it has opened up many new avenues for enterprising young Ladakhis. Other important influences include government development and education programmes, and the large military garrisons which owe their presence to Ladakh's role as a sensitive border district.

I think it a good thing for every Ladakhi to experience

modern progress. At the same time, I believe that the younger generation should carry forward old cultural values and adhere to the traditional inner harmony inherent to Ladakhi culture in order to make the region a perfect place to live. Bearing in mind the remarks I have made regarding the preservation and continuation of a flourishing Ladakhi culture, all Ladakhis must consider the good things of the past Ladakh. Only that awareness can save the culture of Ladakh from the threat of modern civilization.

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Kuksho Village: The Legacy of a Mixed Buddhist and Muslim Tradition

The village of Kuksho is inhabited by the descendants of the Aryan Dards known locally as *aBrog-pa*, and lies on the left bank of the “Lion River,” the Indus, about one hundred and twenty kilometers from Leh and twenty five kilometers from Skurbuchan village. Recently this small village has attracted the attention of many scholars and researchers who are interested in the centuries-old history of Buddhist and Muslim co-existence and their cultural legacy.

In September 1988, Sonam Phuntsog, my scholastic friend from Achinathang, and I paid a week-long visit to Kuksho. The route from Le-do village followed the left bank of the river Indus. It was a difficult trek as the strong river current had eroded the track in several places and we also had two difficult passes to cross before we reached the village. The journey took about four hours, but my companion helped the time to pass quickly by relating many interesting stories about his earlier visits to the village. I learnt that apart from Ledo, which lies to the east, Kuksho’s other immediate neighbours are Pachari and Dargo. While the small village of Dargo is only inhabited by Muslims, Pachari is a Buddhist village with only one Muslim family. Kuksho itself has about fifty families, half of whom are Buddhists and half Muslims. The three villages of Kuksho, Pachari, and Dargo have come under the command of a single village for administrative purposes.

Kuksho has a beautiful landscape. The stream coming from Thebchung peak just above the village flows through its centre. On the north side of the valley we could see the *aBrog-yul* peaks with juniper plant growing in abundance. Other common trees and plants in the area included birch, apple, apricot and wild roses.

On the outskirts of the village we saw a ruined castle built by *Tha-tha* Khan, the first settler in the village, in the ninth century. Then we encountered some *mcho-rten* (Skt: stupa), a Matam Sarai (a Shia mosque) and finally a new *gonpa* (monastery) and prayer wheel in the middle of the village. Among the old monuments of the village is a *gonpa* built by Lama Samphel around 1841, and a later mosque.

During our visit we saw that the people of the village observe a mixed tradition derived from both Buddhism and Islam. The Muslims of the area belong to the Shia faith while the Buddhists belong to the *Dri-gun-pa* sect of the *bKa-rgyud* tradition in the Mahayana school. Lamayuru monastery provides a lama to conduct prayers and perform rituals. Many folk traditions, particularly those connected with the various stages of the agricultural cycle, are popular with the village, as are stories connected with the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas such as the story of *Rgyal-bu-nor-bzang* (a Jataka tale) and the *Ge-sar* saga.

It has been established that Buddhism once prevailed over the entire Purig region, of which Kuksho is a part. Missionaries from Kashmir and Baltistan introduced Islam around the middle of the fifteenth century. The descendants of the missionaries—locally called *Aghas*—still have a considerable influence on the Muslim population of the area. The chief of Chigtan was a Muslim and once had great political influence on the villages which came under his authority on the left bank of the Indus, as far as Tagmachig. Dr Francke comments: “The people of Tagmachig, who were subject to these chiefs, did not like the change of religion, and, as reputedly written on a lost inscription, they went to the successor of the Ladakhi King, *Jams-dbyangs* and asked him to allow them to become his subjects. They were accepted, and remained Buddhists.”

Buddhist influence has been revived in contemporary Kuksho with the return of Lama *Smonlam Stan-zin* to his native land after nineteen years of religious study in Nepal under Lama *Padma Lung-stob Gyatso*, a Tibetan lama from Kham. I was astonished to learn that Lama *Smonlam Stan-zin*'s father

was the village's first Haji (the title given to Muslims who have completed the pilgrimage to Mecca). Haji Ghulam Ali was a convert from Buddhism and his original name was *Stan-zin Phuntsog*. His brothers were called Qasim and *Ton-drup*, one a Muslim and the other a Buddhist name. It is interesting to note that although Haji Ghulam Ali and Qasim were Muslims, they shared a polyandrous marriage with Tondrup, their Buddhist brother.

The Lama had entered the priesthood at the age of thirteen. Two years later he had left the village to go on a pilgrimage to the Buddhist holy places and then he traveled on to Nepal to pursue his religious studies. I was very keen to meet him but was disappointed to learn that he had gone to a Shia family near Kargil to perform *sangs* (purification) and *klu-gtor* (Naga/spirit) rituals. Even now a large number of Shia Muslims in the Purig region continue to show great respect and devotion to the Buddhist rituals which are connected with health and wealth. Their faith in the oracle healers, popularly known as *lha-ba* and *lha-mo*, is particularly noteworthy.

Akhon, the Muslim religious leader not only performed the usual Shia rituals, but also practices traditional Ladakhi *Am-chi* medicine. The Akhon and the Buddhist monk of the village command equal respect and confidence from the villagers.

Both communities are also very respectful to the spirits known as *lha*. I was informed that the village Muslims, as well as the Buddhists, make sacrifices and food offerings to the village *lha* on the fifteenth day of the first month, the seventh day of the fifth month and the fifteenth day of the sixth month of the traditional Tibetan calendar. However only a Muslim could kill a goat for a sacrifice as the *lha* apparently only likes halal meat.

According to village custom the eldest son of the family receives a Muslim name. Others would have mixed names such as Ali Tsering, Musa Namgyal Sonam Bibi, and Fatima Tsering. Traditionally, the *lha-bdag*, the man responsible for prayers to the village *lha*, would be a Muslim and would make sacrifices according to the Islamic custom as well as offering

Buddhist prayers. However the current *lha-bdag*, who was formerly known as Issa Mahammed, embraced Buddhism at the age of twenty seven and is now called Tsering Motup. Thus, *lha-bdag* Tsering Motup now has to invite a Muslim butcher for the *lha* offering.

The villagers believe that the village *lha*, *Stag-pa-lha-chen*, belongs to the *aBrog lha* family. The people of Kuksho therefore follow the Dard traditions, such as abstaining from eating beef and chicken or drinking cows milk for seven days after confinement (after giving birth). According to my informant, the *lha Stag-pa-lha-chen* has two brothers: *Bzang-pa-lha-chen* and *Bzang-nam* who reside in the villages of Hanu and Skurbuchen, respectively.

In Kuksho we met a *lha-mo* who, besides making predictions, possessed the power of healing and could cure sick men and animals. In response to repeated requests from Sonam Phuntsog, my companion, the *lha-mo* went into a trance and answered some of our questions. She is a middle-aged housewife who acquired the spirit power about ten years ago. When she was in the trance she announced she was possessed by a *lha* called *Kyi-gu-lha-kyong-he*, who belongs to a family of three hundred and sixty *lha*. The other *lha* who takes possession of her includes the village *lha* of Haqnis (which is now predominantly Shia Muslim), *Haqnis Chomo* and *Kangri Lhachen*.

Unlike the oracles of the Leh area, the Kuksho *lha-mo* does not need special clothes, ornaments and instruments such as a *rigs-nga* (crown), *damaru* (drum) and bell. Instead, she covers herself with a veil during the trance. Her methods were simple, requiring only a plateful of grain, barley flour, black tea, *chang*, and water in offering bowls. She also lights a butter lamp and juniper twigs for fragrance and purification.

The villagers told us that the *lha-mo* had been very effective in healing both people and animals. Her role and presence during a confinement is particularly appreciated. Like many of the oracles in Upper Ladakh, she is an illiterate housewife. When she was in trance she advised us to recite *Om vajra*

sattva hung, the famous mantra of *rDo-rje Semspa* (Skt: Vajrasattva) in order to cure a person or an animal she uses a *mda' dar* (arrow) as a healing instrument.

The *lha-mo* revealed that pungent foods such as garlic and onion are prohibited for her when she is calling up the spirit because this would delay the invocation. She had first felt the spirit within her when she was quite young but had not been fully aware of it. Eventually, when other people had felt its presence, she was taken to Leh by her relatives and the village headman. She was blessed by Bakula Rinpoche and *Rtog-ldan* Rinpoche. Both lamas gave her certain instructions and advised her to keep clean. On auspicious days such as the eighth, tenth, fifteenth, twenty fifth, and thirtieth of the month she would invoke more than one *lha*. Initially she was hesitant to perform but now she is more relaxed and even earns some money from people who have benefited through her trances.

Other fascinating aspects of the social life of Kuksho were revealed by Mohammed Hussain who is now aged seventy and had been the village headman when he was younger. He had been born into a Buddhist family and had been given the name of *Sonam Tsering*. However, when he was still young he had fallen seriously ill and he believes that someone had advised his father to change the name of his son and convert to Islam in order to save his life. During his youth he would sing and play various musical instruments, such as the *surna*, and attend both Buddhist and Muslim marriages. At some Buddhist marriages he had the privilege of acting as the *gNya-wo-pa* (the leader in the singing and dancing, at the marriage party), and had consumed *chang*. Such were the close links between the two communities.

Mohammed Hussain spoke Urdu and knew Tibetan/Ladakhi script which he had learnt from Cho Jaffer Khan, the chief of Chigtan. He linked the Tibetan script to his own culture but agreed that only a handful of Muslims in the region could read it. He had himself taught it to his son Mehdi, who is the present village headman, and to one of his nephews who is working for the Jammu and Kashmir government in Kargil. Mehdi is also a

keen *surna* player and had played for the village festivals for a long time. Some years ago the government department for tourism organized a festival at Kargil and Mehdi played a key role as a member of the Kuksho cultural group.

Mohammed Hussain knew several folk-songs and stories as well as the *Ge-sar* saga. He explained that the people of the village had been very liberal in their religious beliefs. Inter-marriages between Buddhists and Muslims were therefore common and he felt that this brought people closer to each other rather than causing conflict. Polyandry was also prevalent with brothers practicing different religions living together. However it appeared that Muslims preferred wives from Chigtan, Samra and Haqnis, and Buddhists preferred girls from Ledo, Pachari, Achinathang, Skurbachen and Tagmachig.

For many centuries both Buddhists and Muslims had lived together in Kuksho and the village was known for this to all Ladakhis in the Indus valley as well as the people in the Kargil region. Until recently it was possible to see members of both communities living under the same roof. I asked him about the common belief that in the old days families with members in both communities would reside in the same house hold and cook their food in the same pot, making the *halal* meat for the Muslims in the family. He denied any knowledge of this tradition. However, he did say that in the past when people from other parts of Ladakh had asked the fruit dealers in Skardu about the quality of the apricot kernels the trader would reply that the kernels were as good as the people of Kuksho, who were known for their sweet nature.

A Muslim called Khati, who was sixty five years old and blind, told me that of her two children the son Tashi Phuntsog was a Buddhist whereas her daughter, Rokhe, was a Muslim. She told me that now the young appeared more inclined to Buddhism. One of the reasons behind this was the fact that the villagers had easier access to the Leh area, which is predominantly a Buddhist region, rather than to their district head-quarters in the Muslim town of Kargil. A large number of the young people from Kuksho were employed as laborers

with the army units at Spituk near Leh, where they had apparently succeeded in establishing a Kuksho Colony.

Mohammed Hussain told me that traditionally the people of Kuksho had close ties with other neighbouring regions which were renowned for various trading goods. The villagers would go to Shigar in Baltistan for apricots; to Purig for wheat; to Zangskar for butter; to Nubra for soda; and to Changthang for salt. In this way they had established close cultural and religious ties with the neighbouring regions of Ladakh.

While we were talking to Mohammed Hussain in his guest room, he pointed out some old trees on the left bank of the village stream close to his house. They were birch trees which are rarely seen in Ladakh, but are abundant in this village. He believes that the god *Stagpa lha-chen* resides under one of these trees and the birch grove is the focal point of all the traditional social and cultural celebrations of the village.

The summer festival, *Sngo lha*, is celebrated on the seventh day of the sixth month. Several days before the beginning of the festival, eighteen specially selected young men who were born in the year of the Tiger go up in the mountains where they spend the night to collect various types of wild flowers. If a youth is joining the group for the first time he has to organize a feast for his friends and relatives on returning to the village. Similarly, eighteen young maidens born in the year of the Sheep also collect flowers to offer garlands to the village god to fulfill their aspirations and to pray for the peace and prosperity of the village.

All the villagers assemble at the festival site dressed in their best clothes to offer respect to the god. The *Lha-bdak* then offers libations and recites text called *lha gsol*, which praises the names of various village and local gods: *Haqnis Chom*, *Fokar Choma*, *Dragnag Choma* of Khalatse, *Yagra Choma* of Domkhar, *Lha-mo* of Dargo, *Zangnam* of Skurbuchan, *Zangldan* of Hanu and *Stag-pa Lha-chen* of Kuksho. After the *lha-gsol* ceremony they perform special folk dances and holding flowers in their hands, sing songs in honour of the village gods. They also drink a lot of *chang*.

It is interesting to note that married women are not permitted to offer flowers or even come close to the particular birch tree under which the village *lha* is said to be residing. A girl who was engaged to be married would stop at the tree on the way to her new home and offer a last prayer for happiness for her and prosperity for the village. She would also pray for the protection of the village *lha* in her new life and seek its help to overcome any difficulties. The young girl would then sing melancholy songs before the village people. Birch and juniper trees are considered holy according to the traditions of the village and no one is allowed to cut or burn these trees.

Other important festivals in the village are the harvest festival, *Losar*, and Nauroj, a Muslim festival which falls on the Spring Equinox. On the third day of the twelfth month the villagers hold *Ma-ma-ne-pa*. This was originally a *aBrog-pa* festival and it is celebrated with great enthusiasm in all the villages on the north bank of the Indus from Khalatse to Baltistan. In conjunction with this festival the villagers organize feasts for close relatives and make offerings of food to the deceased.

Looking back into the past, Mohammed Hussain commented that both the Muslims and the Buddhists used to organize *Sngo lha* and other festivals together and the whole village would take part in all the festivities. However, he continued, with a grim expression on his face, he felt that the good old days were now over and he believed that external influences were gradually eroding the old traditions. Muslims now attend the festivals as spectators only and are gradually disassociating themselves from the village customs. He himself, being a keen lover of folklore and folk songs feels strongly that the traditions which bring the village together must be kept alive for future prosperity.

Part One:

**The History of Buddhism in
Ladakh**

The History of Buddhism in Ladakh

Ladakh, known as Mar-yul¹ (the “Red Land”) in ancient times, has a special position in the Himalayas as a stronghold of the Buddhist religion. According to legend, the Buddha’s disciple Arhat Majhantika blessed this land with a visit. He first arrived at the present site of Lamayuru (*Gyung-drung*) *Gonpa* when the whole area was a lake. He blessed the valley of Nubra while at Charasa and he visited and blessed the present site of Spituk (*Dpe-thub*) *Gonpa*, prophesizing that a monastic community would be established there. There is a stupa at Sabu which is said to contain relics of Majhantika and it is believed that he also blessed the present site of the *gonpa* nearby.

Prior to that Arhat Majhantika visited Kashmir. At that time Kashmir was a lake and on arrival he sat in deep meditation. The dwellers of the lake, Nagas (water spirits), interfered with the Arhat’s meditation by evoking Indra, the god of rain. The rain, however, could not distract him. In fact the rain could not even dampen the Chivar (shawl) which the Arhat had put on. After that the Nagas became very disturbed and asked the Arhat what it was that he wanted? The Arhat replied that his wish was to have a place in the centre of the lake for meditation. Accordingly, the Nagas offered space in the heart of the lake and the Arhat landed over there and sat down to meditate, drying out the lake in the process. In this way a large stretch of land came into being. With that the Nagas were miraculously turned into human beings.

Ladakhi legend says that one of the springs which the Arhat created in Kashmir was called Veri-nag. The Arhat brought saffron seeds from Mount Malaya² and made the present Pampur as the hub of saffron. The Ladakhi called the Arhat *Dra-chom-pa-Nima-gunpa*, who attained Arhathood at noon. The Kashmiris knew the Arhat by the name of Kashyap

Muni or Rishi, and folk singers praise him in a number of popular folk songs still sung today.

It is a popular belief, although there are conflicting opinions, that Buddhism was first introduced to Ladakh during the reign of the Emperor Ashoka, the greatest ruler of the Maurya Dynasty in India. Ashoka succeeded to this great empire around 273 B.C. Even during those days Kashmir was a great learning centre and it is said that Buddhism spread rapidly in India from Kashmir to Ceylon. It penetrated into Nepal and later reached Tibet, China and Mongolia. The consequences of this included the growth of vegetarianism and abstention from alcoholic drinks. Till then both Brahmins often ate meat. But with the spread of Buddhism an end also came to animal sacrifices.

Among the higher learning centers in the northern India, Taxila attracted more students from abroad than any other. Kashmir, being situated close to Taxila, remained for a long a great Sanskrit centre of Buddhist and Brahminical learning. It also attracted students from central Asia, particularly from Khotan, now in Xinjiang. Kashmir also emerged as the center for Tantric studies, including that of Kalachakra (The Wheel of Time, reputedly originating in Kalapa, the capital of the land known as Shambhala). From here these Tantric teachings migrated to Tibet, Mongolia, and southern Siberia as illustrated in the shared mythology associated with this mythic northern land.

The first Buddhist temple in Ladakh is said to have been constructed in the Suru valley (near Kargil) during the reign of Ashoka. Ancient stupas built of stone from the time of Ashoka can still be seen in the villages of Sumda and Tiri in upper Ladakh.

The Kanika stupa at Sani in Zangskar is said to have been magically constructed by the force of Ashoka's prayers. The intention of these prayers was to see one million stupas constructed throughout the world. However, some believe that this stupa was constructed by King Kanishka, the greatest Emperor of the Kushan period; (second century A.D.) because

he had one time annexed Ladakh and Baltistan as part of his empire. Remnants of the Kushan period, such as the Avalokitesvara statue carved on a rock at Mulbek and various stone statues in Baltistan and the Suru valley, can still be seen today.

The teachings of the Buddha, wherever they reached, aroused a new consciousness in the people's minds. Nowhere is this seen more vividly than in Tibet. Just as Indian history begins to be recorded in writings from the days of the great Buddhist emperor, Ashoka, Tibetan history, too, begins to be written down from the reign of Tibet's most gifted ruler *Srong-btsan-sgam-po* (born in 617 A.D.). The emperor had selected a brilliant young talented boy from his court, Thon-mi Sambhota, along with sixteen other aspirants to go to Kashmir to study Indian epigraphy, phonetics and grammar, and after having mastered these subjects the young scholar invented an alphabetic script for the Tibetan language, and established its grammatical structure. Thonmi Sambhota fulfilled the task entrusted to him so well that besides composing eight independent treatises on Tibetan writing and grammar, he also prepared the first Tibetan translations of certain Sanskrit Buddhist works, so that he came to be recognized for all time as the father of Tibetan literature.

During the reign of the Tibetan King *Khri-strong-lde-btsan* (755-797 A.D.) in the eighth century A.D., the Indian Buddhist scholar Padmasambhava, the powerful apostle of Tantrism, blessed Ladakh with a visit. Udayana, or Swat Valley-born, Padmasambhava lived in Kashmir for five years during which he subdued many demons there. Procured several Buddhist texts from Kashmir and employed a number of monks at Samye monastery in Tibet which he himself set up. Kashmiri scholars known to have worked in Tibet at that time are known as Ananta and Shantigarbha. They were assisted by Tibetan Lotsawas in carrying out their literary activities.

While in Ladakh, Padmasambhava, to whom the Buddhist revere as a second Buddha, first visited Baltistan where he planted his staff, made of apricot wood, into a rock. Ever since

then, the apricot fruit has flourished in the Ladakh valley and in Baltistan. The Tibetans call it *mNga-ris-khambu*, the fruit of western Tibet. References can also be found in Ladakhi folk songs to Padmasambhava and the apricot.

From Baltistan, Padmasambhava went on to visit Phokar Zong and Zangskar. For several years he meditated near the Kanika stupa or Sani Kanika as it is known today, where he suppressed the demons and blessed the country. From there he came to central Ladakh. While subduing the demons at Ladakh Gonkhar, one of the highest points of the area, the demons shot arrows at him. He took refuge in a rock and there he left the imprint of his body. This imprint is still preserved in its original form and can be found near the village of Nimo. The site of present Sikh Gurudwara, Pather Sahib is believed to be the site.

Padmasambhava is sometimes known as U-rgyan³ Rinpoche and the U-rgyan rock near Sakti bears another imprint of his body. He also left imprints of his sword, his hand and footprints on rocks scattered throughout the area. The rock on which the present *Tak-thog gonpa* stands, is a brick-like shaped stone and is said to have been cast there by the U-rgyan Rinpoche from a nearby mountain. Padmasambhava's meditation cave is still preserved. *Tak-thog Gonpa* is the only *rNying-ma-pa* sect monastery in the whole of Ladakh.

Thus it was U-rgyan Padmasambhava together with the great Bhikhu Santaraksita (*Mkhanchen-zhi-wa-'tsho*) of Nalanda University who firmly established Buddhism in Tibet during the reign of the most powerful Tibetan Emperor, *Khri-srong-lde-btsan*. Ever since, the people of Tibet and Ladakh have been Buddhists and have looked with gratitude and admiration to these three great pioneering personalities. They are referred to as the *Mkham-slob-chos-gsum*: the Abbot, the Teacher and the Dharmaraja.

In 900 A.D., *Skyid-lde-nyi-ma-mgon*, a direct descendant of the first King of Tibet, *Gnya'-khri-btsan-po*, ruled over Western Tibet including the region of Ladakh. He divided the regions of Mar-yul (Ladakh), Guge and Purang, and Zangskar between his three sons. His eldest son, *Dpal-gvi-mgon* (1000-

1025 A.D.) became the first king of Ladakh. His second son *Bkra-shis-mgon* inherited Guge and Purang and the third son *lDe-gtsug-mgon* inherited Zangskar. There is a popular song about this lineage:

The race *Gnya'-khri-btsan-po*
Is like a wish fulfilling tree,
Whose branches and
leaves have spread to the vast land.

King *Dpal-gyi-mgon* had two sons, *Agro-mgon* and *Chos-mgon*. The King of Guge and Purang also had two sons, *Kho-re* and *Srong-nge* both of whom showed a profound devotion to religion and subsequently entered the priesthood. The elder, *Kho-re*, was called Lama 'Od-lde and the younger *Srong-nge*, became renowned as *Lha-bla-ma Ye-shes-od*. During the lifetime of these great Bodhisattva kings, the religion and culture of Tibet flourished. It was from this time onward that the second revival of Buddhism started in Tibet and Ladakh.

Some years earlier in 842 A.D. King *gLang-dar-ma* of Tibet had ruthlessly suppressed Buddhism. Now *Lha-bla-ma Ye-shes-od* (1025 A.D.) of Purang was determined to reinstate the banished priesthood in Central Tibet and make it more effective than ever. He first invited some Indian Panditas to Tibet and also delegated twenty brilliant young students to study Sanskrit in Kashmir. Unfortunately, the majority of them died on account of the heat. Only two, *Ratna-bhadra*, known in Tibetan as *Lo-tsa-wa Rin-chen-bZang-po* (968-1054 A.D.) and Suprajna, known as *Lo-chug-legs-pa '-shes-rab*, survived and were able to return to Tibet.

During his ten years in Kashmir, Ratnabhadra acquired mastery over Sanskrit and studied sacred texts with the masters there. On his return to his motherland he translated a number of outstanding Buddhist texts into Tibetan. For doing the job it is said that Ratnabhadra is known to have been assisted by Pandit Shradhakarvarma, Padmakargupta, Buddha Shrishanta, Buddhapala and Kamalapala. Some of these, if not all them, must have been Kashmiris.

While *Lha-bla-ma Ye-shes-od* was doing his best to revive Buddhism by appointing Lama Lotsawa *Rin-chen bZangpo* as the spiritual advisor in his country, the ruler of the nearby state of Garlok invaded Purang and *Lha-bla-ma Ye-shes-od* was captured and imprisoned. His captors set his ransom at his own weight in gold. His nephew, *Byang-chub-'od* tried his best to procure the gold and made all the necessary arrangements for sending it, but *Lha-bla-ma Ye-shes-od* sent him a message from prison saying that there was no longer any point in saving his life as death would be a perfect release from encroaching old age. Instead the gold was to be used to invite the famous Buddhist teacher, Atisha, from the University of Vikramshila. Accordingly, *Byang-chub-'od* sent *Lo-tsa-wa Rgya-brtson-'grus-seng-ge* and *Nag-tsho Lo-tsa-wa Tshul-khrims-rgyal-wa* with the goal of inviting Atisha. In the 11th century A.D. Atisha may be said to have brought the last great set of texts from India, with the result that Buddhism struck deep roots in Tibetan soil and henceforward flourished as an indigenous mode of religious and philosophical thought. It was Atisha who founded the *Bka-gdams-pa* sect after coming to Tibet.

At around this time Naropa (935-1040 A.D.), the teacher of the *Bka-brgyud-pa* school was residing in Kashmir. He paid a visit to Ladakh and blessed the present site of Lamayuru (*Gyung-drung*) *Gonpa*. In Zangskar he lived in the caves of *Rdzong-'khul Gonpa* where the print of his dagger and staff can still be seen.

Naropa had been born in Kashmir and at an early age entered the priesthood and became a Pandita, or scholar. His meditation cave exists today in Kashmir near Harvan. He received religious instruction from Tilopa and his own foremost disciples were Marpa *Lo-tsa-wa* and *Lo-tsa-wa Rinchen-bZangpo*. When Marpa Lotsawa passed through Zangskar on his way to Kashmir to see Naropa, he founded *Stong-bde Gonpa* which became known as *Stong-bde Mar-pa-gling*. From Zangskar there is a path to Kashmir over the glacier and it is known as "the hidden way of Marpa" (*Mar-pa 'i-gsang-lam*).

Lo-tsa-wa Rin-chen-bZang-po (958-1055 A.D.), born in Guge (a small province in Western Tibet), played a very important role in laying a firm foundation for Buddhism in Ladakh—indeed he may be called the true founder of Buddhism here, as well as the father of culture in Ladakh. At the age of eighteen *Rin-chen-bZang-po* visited Kashmir and other parts of India. Altogether, he visited Kashmir on three occasions. On his return from his second journey to Kashmir, *Rin-chen-bZang-po* brought back thirty two craftsmen and built one hundred and eight temples in the Ladakh, Spiti, and Guge-Purang regions. Among the main temples of Lotsawa *Rin-chen-bZang-po* are the Tholing temple of Purang, the Khatse Gokhar of Guge and the Nyarma temple of Ladakh (set in Thikse village and now in ruins). It is said that these three temples were opened on the same day. The Lotsawa also built several temples in Spiti, the important ones among them being Kanam, Drankar, Tabo and Lalung. In Ladakh, the Lotsawa temple of Chigtan unfortunately now lies in ruins.

The main temples of *Lo-tsa-wa Rin-chen-bZang-po* which have been preserved are in Alchi, Mangyu and Sumda and each contains statues of the five Dhyani Buddhas, namely Vairocana (Tib: *rNam-par-sNan-mDzad*), Akshobhaya (*Mi-skyod-pa*), Ratnasambhava (*Rinchen aByun-gNas*), Amitabha (*sNan-wa-mtha-yas*) and Amoghasiddhi (*Don-yod-grup-pa*). These temples are renowned for their architecture which includes rich wooden carvings and fine wall paintings. The richness of the murals competes with the art of the Ajanta caves in Aurangabad, near Bombay. While the Nyarma temple was standing, the main statue was *Sangs-rgyas-mar-me-mdzad*, the Buddha of Boundless Light, with its chief protector deity, *Lha Rdo-rje-Chen-mo*.

Lo-tsa-wa Rin-chen-bZang-po built other temples and stupas throughout Ladakh. The stupa at Kyungam village in Rong-Changthang is still highly revered by the inhabitants of the village. Others include the Mani Sermo of Leh and the *Gser-khri-mchod-rten-mgo-lnga* of Sakti village. Other temples are preserved at Lamayuru and Karsha in Zangskar. Ruins of

Lo-tsa-wa Rin-chen-bZang-po's temples can also be found at Basgo and Nye village. It is said that the *Lo-tsa-wa* met Atisha⁴ and, because of that meeting all his foundations became centers of the *Bka-gdams-pa* school.

Blon-po Bhag-dar-skyabs of Wanls (the administrator of the Sham region in lower Ladakh) and King *Yeshe-'od* of Guge acted as *Rin-chen-bZang-po*'s patrons and financed his activities.

Rin-chen-bZang-po is also said to have visited the present site of Spituk (*Dpe-thub*) monastery, making the prediction that a *gonpa* would flourish there. Accordingly, at the age of 30, *Od-lde*, the brother of *Ye-shes-'od*, founded the monastery of Spituk, in the early part of the eleventh century A.D.

Around this time the *Bka-gdams-pa* sect was at its height. Among the *Bka-gdams-pa* temples built in this period were the Nyilza cave of Saspola, the cave of Yuru, and the old temples of Phyang and *Brag-khung-kha-ba-che* of Spituk. Monastic communities were founded there and religion flourished. In Lamayuru *Gonpa* there stands a statue of Geshe *Cha-tang-pa* who was the teacher of the *Bka-gdams-pa* sect.

Phags-pa-shes-rab (c.1012-1097 A.D.) was born in Zangskar.⁵ He translated part of the *Bstan-gyur*⁶ and came to be called *Zangskar Lo-tsa-wa*, the translator from Zangskar. He founded the Karsha and Phugtal *Gonpas* of Zangskar. While he was in Tibet he renovated more than fifteen temples. Foremost among his disciples was Balti *Lo-tsa-wa Byang-chub-tshul-khrims* who founded the temple of *Skyo-mo-lung* near Lhasa and was recognized as the first incarnation of Ngari Rinpoche.

In the year 1100 A.D. *Lha-chen rGyal-po* came to the throne and he ruled until approximately 1125 A.D. This king founded the monastery of Likir and supported the yogins at Mount Kailash in western Tibet. Around this time Zangskar produced another famous translator, *Lo-tsa-wa Gzhon-nu-tshul-khrims*, and it is said that he brought Pandita Karma Vajara from India to Tibet.

Between the years 1225 and 1250 King *Bkra-shis-mgon*

ruled over Ladakh. He was responsible for having many of the Buddha's teachings written in gold ink and for painting the hundred acts of the Buddha on thangkas. These are still preserved in their complete form at Stok Palace.⁷ During the reign of this king, Tibet fell under the control of the Mongolian ruler, Ghengiz Khan.

It was about this time that the great mediator *Rgod-tshang-pa Mgon-po-rdo-rje* (1189-1258) visited Ladakh and resided in the upper valley Igu (near Hemis). A *gonpa* known as *Marzans* now stands over the place where he is reputed to have meditated. While residing at Igu he is said to have "flown" to Martselang where his footprint can still be seen. From Martselang he went to the upper part of Hemis, popularly known as *Rgod-tshang*. While climbing the mountain he saw many *Mkha-gro-ma* (Dakinis) bathing in the spring waters. At the *Rgod-tshang* cave one can see his cup and the prints of his hand and head. At Sakti there is a *gonpa* called *Skyid-phug* where *Rgod-tshang-pa* is said to have lived.

According to the history of Ladakh written by Tashi Rabgias, entitled *The Mirror Which illuminates All*, *Rgod-tshang-pa* once stayed in a cave close to the present Matto *Gonpa*. He went to the village for alms, but no one came forward to give any. *Rgod-tshang-pa* became sad and cursed the villagers for their lack of generosity. Many inauspicious things then happened. Later it became known that these misfortunes were due to the refusal to give alms to *Rgod-tshang-pa*. The villagers then sought forgiveness. Since that time there has been a tradition for the villagers of Matto to visit the cave of *Rgod-tshang* annually and pray.

After King *Bkra-shis-mgon's* death, his son King *Lha-rgyal* (1250-1275) came to the throne. During his reign, *U-rgyan-pa* (1230-1309) the foremost disciple of *Rgod-tshang-pa* went to the land "U-rgyan" and wrote a diary of his journey. Since he was the first important person to visit this country, he was given the title *Grup-thob U-rgyan-pa*. This great *Grup-thob* (Siddhi) is also said to have visited Ladakh and unveiled the rock statue that had been manifested by a miracle in Nubra.

The statue represented the eight manifestations of *Mgon-po* (Mahakala), one of the Dharmapalas (guardian deities). He also made the caves of Padmasambhava at Sakti a popular religious centre.⁸

During the reign of King *Dnos-grup-mgon* (1300-1325), the tradition of sending young novices to Central Tibet for instruction was introduced. This king renovated many existing *gonpas*, he had two sets of the *Bka-'gyur* canon (the words of the Buddha) written out, and he built many mandalas. His son, *Rgyal-bu-rin-chen* succeeded him. On a visit to Kashmir he embraced Islam, changing his name to Sadar-ud-din, and died there.

After *Rgyal-bu-rin-chen*, his son *Lhachen-she-srab* (1350-1375) came to the throne. He built the castle at Hangrtsema in Sabu and had one hundred and eight stupas built at the top of *Senge sGang* hill in Sabu. Many people settled there. His son *Lha-chen-khri-gtsug-lde* (1375-1400) also built one hundred stupas in Leh and a similar number in Sabu.⁹

It was during this period that a disciple of *Zur-phug-pa* called Siddhi Bharva made a visit to Zangskar and blessed the site of the present Bardhan *Gonpa*, predicting that a *gonpa* would be built there.

Lha-chen-khri-gtsug-lde had two sons, *Gragspa-'bum-lde* and *Grags-pa-'bum*. King *Grags-pa 'bum-lde* (1400-1440) was an exceptional king with many qualities. During his reign, the capital of Ladakh was at Basgo and his palace was known as *Rab-tan Lha-rtse*. At this time *Rgyal-wa Tsong-kha-pa* (1357-1419), the founder of the *dGe-lugs-pa* school, lived in Tibet. He sent a message to King *Grags-pa-bum-lde* saying that if the king would build a statue of the Buddha Maitreya (the future Buddha) on the lion-shaped rock with *Byang-chub-mchod-rten* in all four directions, all his wishes would be fulfilled. Accordingly, the king built the Maitreya statue at Timosgang and four *Byang-chub-mchod-rten*, each one for the four points of the compass on the lion shaped mountain. Then the king built the Maitreya statue on Tsemo hill, above Leh (from where a narrow path leads to the palace) and the

Maitreya of *Byams-pa-dmar-po* temple next to the palace. These images were popularly known as *Byams-ba-rnam-gsum*, the three Maitreya statues.

Close to the town of Leh is a yellow mound popularly called the Tisuru. The inhabitants of Leh believed that this mound was haunted by evil spirits so King *Grags-pa 'bum-lde* covered it by building a three tier temple over it based on a design built by *Lha-blama Ye-shes-od* in Tholing in the tenth century.

Dr A.H. Francke, the German missionary and archaeologist who carried out an excavation close to Tisuru found evidence of Dard burial places. The earliest settlers of Ladakh appear to have buried their dead rather than cremating them. Tashi Rabgias records that a burial place belonging to the Mon people was discovered near Kere. It was beautifully decorated with juniper and in the centre lay the body of the dead person thought to be that of a Mon priest.¹⁰

One of the six chief disciples of *Tsong-kha-pa* was *Shes-rab-bzang-po* who was born in Stagmo near Thikse.¹¹ He founded a *gonpa* at Stagmo village and this is assumed to be the first *dGelugs-pa gonpa* in Ladakh. Later the Stagmo Khang-tshan or hostel at the *Bkra-shis-lhun-po* monastic university in Tibet was named after this monastery. *Shes-rab-bzang-po* founded *Diskit Gonpa* in the Nubra valley and built a shrine there by installing the statues of the two chief disciples of *Tsong-kha-pa*: *Mkhas-grub-rje* and *Rgyal-tshabs-rje*. He also visited Zangskar and introduced *Tsong-kha-pa*'s *dGe-lugs-pa* order at the *Karsha Gonpa*. From then on it was known as *Dkar-sha-byams-ba-gling*. *Shes-rab-bzang-po* received royal patronage in Zangskar and lived there for many years. Finally he passed away at *Phugtal Gonpa* and his relics are preserved there. It was around this time that the *dGe-lugs-pa* preacher Lama *Rgyal-mtsan-lhun-grup* introduced the order of *Tsong-kha-pa* at *Stongde Gonpa* in Zangskar.

During this period *Sa-skya* Siddhi Lama, *Drungpa-rdo-rje* came to Ladakh and founded the *Sa-skya* monastery at Matto. The present two oracles of Matto, popularly called *Lha Rong-*

btsan, also accompanied the lama from *Rong-btsan-khawa-dkar-po* in the Kham region in Tibet and the Lama appointed them to be the guardians of religion in Matto. From that time on, the *Sa-skyapa* school was firmly established in Ladakh. At present this sect has many supporting families in Matto, Igu and Leh. There are two *Sa-skyapa* monasteries, one at Matto and the second at Skilmang village in Rang, Changthang.¹²

After the death of King *Grags-pa 'bum-lde*, his son *Blo-gros-mchog-ldan* (1440-1470) came to the throne and brought the whole of *Mnga'ris-bskor-gsum* (Western Tibet) under his control. At this time the lower part of Ladakh, popularly known as Sham, was ruled by King *Grags-pa-'bum*, the younger brother of King *Grags-pa-'bum-lde*. Rahim Khan, the chief of Sod, an area near Kargil, invaded the villages of Khalsi and Yuru thereby expanding his territory, but the people resisted. King *Blo-gros-mchog-ldan* then reciprocated by invading and annexing Sod. The whole of Sham was consequently entrusted by him to his uncle *Grags-pa 'bum* as his father had done earlier.

During the reign of this king *Pan-chen Lha-btsun-blo-bzang-bstan-pa 'i-nyi-ma* was born in Udmaru village in Nubra. He visited Tibet and after becoming a scholar, ascended to the throne of *Pan-chen Dge-'dun-grub* (1391-1475), the founder of the Tashi Lhunpo monastery. He was then called *Pan-chen Lha-btsun*. In later years he returned to Nubra and did much for the revival and propagation of the Buddhist religion in the northern part of Ladakh. He passed away under many auspicious signs. His head is preserved at Gurgon *Gonpa* at Tangyar and the lower portion of his body is kept in a stupa at Charasa in Nubra.

Around this time, *Gsang-phu-ba-lha-dbang-blo-gros* (1385-1438), a pupil of *Mkhas-grub-rje*, came to Ladakh. This pandita received patronage from the Ladakhi King *Blo-gros-mchog-ldan*. He founded a small temple on the ruins of a *Sa-skyapa gonpa* at Likir and carried out a lot of renovations and development work at Spituk *Gonpa*. *Gsang-phu-pa-lha-dbang-blo-gros* also founded Stok *Gonpa* which still has a statue of

the founder, and did much to strengthen the *dGe-lugs-pas* sect in Ladakh.

Tsong-kha-pa, the founder of the *dGe-lugs-pa* sect, once prophesized that, “on the right bank of the river Sita (Indus), my teaching will flourish.”¹³ After some time *Dpal-ldan-shes-rab-grags-pa*, a nephew of *Shes-rab-bzang-po*, founded the monastery of Thikse. The fact that he had been born into an influential family contributed to the speedy development of the *Gonpa*. Later his own nephew, *Jam-dbyangs-blo-gros*, became the abbot of the *gonpa* and the monastic community flourished.

For the first time in the history of Ladakh, a nunnery was then founded at Thikse. Some of the finest art work of the nunnery was created during this time using gold and stone colours. The names of the artists are recorded on the walls. King *Blo-gros-mchog-ldan* built another of these fine works of art, the Avalokitesvara statue with a thousand arms, in the Tsemo temple in Leh. He also erected a stupa in this temple in memory of his father, *Grags-pa-bum-lde*.

King *Blo-gros-mchog-ldan* was tricked by his own nephew, *Rin-chen-rnam-rgyal* (1470-1500), who then came to the throne. *Rin-chen-rnam-rgyal*'s bad reputation earned him the nick-name of Bhagan or Old Bull. King *Bha-gan* ruled from the *Rabtan Lha-tse* palace of Basgo. He was an expansionist ruler and seized control of Zangskar. From that time onwards Zangskar has been part of the Kingdom of Ladakh. Two auspicious mountains stand between the villages of Basgo and Nimo and according to Tashi Rabgias, this area was the home of mediators and many yogins lived there.¹⁴

King *Bha-gan* had two sons, *Lha-dbang-rnam-rgyal* and *Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal*. From this time onward each Ladakhi king has adopted the name Namgyal (*Rnam-rgyal*), which means victorious, and historians have therefore called *Bha-gan* the founder of the *Rnam-rgyal* dynasty. After King *Bha-gan*'s death, his younger son, *Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal*, seized the throne, ousting his brother *Lha-dbang-rnam-rgyal* by blinding him and imprisoning him at Lingshed. During his reign *Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal* had to fight the Hor invaders led by Mizra Haider

Dughlat from Xinjiang. During the battle many Hor soldiers were killed and it is said that their bodies were buried on Namgyal Hill (above the site of Leh palace). The king built the red temple housing the statue of the protector deity Yamantaka above the corpses of the Hor soldiers. Pictures of other protective deities were also drawn on the walls of the temple.

Bkra-shis-rnam-gyal built the palace of Tsemo hill and below it, founded the hamlet of Chubi, the first settlement of Leh which then emerged as the capital of the Ladakhi kings. In his old age the king became a great patron of religion and made many offerings to various monasteries in Tibet to atone for his misdeeds in the past. The king is said to have brought the *Bka-'gyur* canon, the original texts of the speeches of Buddha, from Central Tibet and it was probably during this time that another copy of the canon was prepared in Ladakh.

Bkra-shis-rnam-gyal carried out many religious activities which were greatly appreciated. One of these for example, was the introduction of the practice whereby every family having more than one male child had to give up one son (although not the eldest) to become a monk. However *Bkra-shis-rnam-gyal* himself had no heir and so he arranged a wife for his blind brother to insure the succession. She gave birth to three sons: *Tshe-dbang-rnam-rgyal*, *Rnam-gyal-mgon-bo* and *'Jams-dbyangs-rnam-rgyal*.

Tshe-'dbang-rnam-rgyal (1530-1560) succeeded to the throne and this king, besides being a warrior, carried out many welfare activities. He built statues of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas, and Mani walls throughout Ladakh thus paying respect to the memory of his father who had been blinded by his uncle. According to the available sources, King *Tshe-dbang-rnam-rgyal* also had no heirs and so when he died his younger brother, *'Jams-dbyangs-rnam-rgyal* (1560-1590) came to the throne.

At this time the chiefs of some of the surrounding regions were vying for more power. Baltistan was ruled by a chief called Ali Mir Sher Khan. He was responsible for agitating the

leaders of these surrounding areas, advocating separation from Ladakh, and King '*Jams-dbyang-rnam-rgyal* finally responded by invading Baltistan. The king then decided to advance the celebrations for the New Year by two months so that he could launch his campaign without being interrupted by the festival. However, he lost the war due to unfavorable weather conditions and was imprisoned in Skardu. Ali Mir's army then invaded Ladakh in retaliation, taking possession of many of the holy relics of the Buddha. His troops also looted the state treasury where all the wealth and precious jewels of the Ladakhi kings had been kept.¹⁵

In Skardu, Ali Mir had a beautiful daughter called Khatun and the imprisoned king of Ladakh fell in love with her at first sight. They married and she became pregnant. With this development Ali Mir released the king from prison. The chief then had a dream wherein he saw a lion rising from the lake of Skardu and dissolving into the image of Khatun. This symbolized that his daughter would give birth to a son. In time this happened and the baby was given the name *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal* (*Sen-ge* means lion). Ali Mir told the king that the son of Khatun should become heir to the throne of Ladakh and he agreed.

From early on in its history, Ladakh has been a great centre for Buddhism; the Body (*sku*), Speech (*gsun*) and Mind (*thugs*) of the Buddha were represented in each and every monastery in Ladakh, in the form of stupas. Queen Khatun took refuge in the Buddha and at her request the king built a special temple for her at Basgo which outwardly resembled a Muslim mosque from Baltistan. Ladakhi folk tradition says that the people regarded the Queen as the incarnation of *Sgrol-ma*, the goddess Tara, because she brought peace and harmony to the people.

King '*Jams-dbyangs-rnam-rgyal* invited the religious teacher *Chos-rje Gdan-ma-kun-dga'-grags-pa* to Ladakh and asked him to become his principal teacher but *Chos-rje* declined, indicating that someone else would come to Ladakh to fill this role.¹⁶ This was to be the Lama *Stag-tshang-ras-pa*. However, *Chos-rje* requested that the king would donate

some land so that he could build a *gonpa* and the king gave him permission to take land wherever he wished for this purpose.

One day, *Chos-rje*, arrived at the stream at Phyang and from the turquoise colored hill of Phyang he saw a lady riding on a mule, waving an arrow with scarves attached to it. He immediately understood this to be a gesture of the goddess *Aphyi Chos-sgron* and selected that site for the present Phyang *Gonpa*. From this time on the *aBri-gung-pa* sect took firm root in Ladakh. After he had completed the red temple of Phyang and the temple of *mGonbo* the Natha, *Chos-rje* went on to Yuru and founded *Lamayuru Gonpa*. The monks from the two monasteries visited *aBrigung'-yang-'bri-sgar* and the monastic centres in Tibet for higher education. Thus *Chos-rje gDan-ma-kundga- 'grags-pa* became the first leader of the *aBri-gung-pa* sect in Ladakh. A statue in his honour stands in the *Gonpa* at Phyang.

King *'Jams-dhyangs-rnam-rgyal* renovated various *gonpas* and caves in Ladakh which had been damaged by the Balti invasion. Among these were the Nyilza caves of Saspola, *Brag-khung-kha-bo-che* at Spituk, the monastery of Lingshed, the old palace at Leh and the Tisuru.

Once, on a visit to Zangskar, the king met Lama *Stag-tshang-ras-pa Ngag-dbang-rgya-mtsho* (1574-1651) who was then on his way to the land of U-rgyan. Remembering the words of *Chos-rje*, the king asked *Stag-tshang-ras-pa* to be his foremost teacher but the Lama declined because his own teacher had instructed him to visit the secret land of U-rgyan

King *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal*, the son of *Jams-dbyangs-rnam-rgyal*, ruled from 1590 to 1620 and married *Bskal-bzang-sgrol-ma*, the daughter of the Chief of Rupshu. After *Stag-tshang-ras-pa* returned from U-rgyan the king appointed him as his foremost teacher. In memory of his father, *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal* built a two-storey Maitreya statue "as big as he (Maitreya) would be in his eighth year" out of clay copper and gilt. This statue was inaugurated in Basgo on 12th. June 1623. The king also built a Mani wall at Basgo with Namgyal (symbolizing

victory) and *Byang-chub* (symbolizing enlightenment) *chorten* at either end. This Mani wall, almost half a kilometer in length, is said to be the longest in Ladakh. He also constructed the Mani wall of Lingshed and made donations to all the major *gonpas* in Tibet in memory of his mother Khatun and his foremost teacher, *Stag-tshang-ras-pa*.

Being a patron of Buddhism, King *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal* built the present nine-storey “lion palace” of Leh using traditional Buddhist architecture. The palace has a shape which symbolically represents a parasol and the front wall is intended to represent the vest garment of *Stag-tshang-ras-pa* (a symbol of respect). The palace contains many auspicious rooms, chapels and Buddhist symbols. It is said that before the start of the construction work *Stag-tshang-ras-pa* offered prayers on the site, and he blessed it on its completion. The palace was finished within three years and all the workers were rewarded with gifts from the king. Although far less imposing in its present state, it resembles the Potala, the palatial fort in Lhasa which was built later in the sixteenth century by the Fifth Dalai Lama, *Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho* (1617-1682). Until the Dogra War (1836-42), the palace was the focal point of all Ladakhi cultural activities. During the war the palace was besieged and the south-western *mchor-ten* partly destroyed.¹⁷

During the reign of *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal*, Ladakh became a producer of fine-quality paper. Many talented monks and lay people were taught to write letters with gold and silver. The king appointed *dPon Gnan-mkha-dpal-mgon* as the chief calligrapher and under his supervision the king had the *Bka-gyur* text written with gold and silver letters. Unfortunately, during the Dogra invasion a large part of this *Bka-gyur* text was destroyed, but some portions of it are still preserved at the temple in Basgo and on display in the temple of the copper-gilded Maitreya. The king also entrusted *dPon Gnam-mkha* with the supervision of the copying of the biography of Padmasambhava, and the life-history and songs of *Stag-tshang-ras-pa* for which he was duly rewarded.¹⁸

The “tiger-like” *Stag-tshang-ras-pa* and the “lion-like”

King *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal* did a great deal for the development and propagation of the Buddhist religion in the whole *Mngaris-bskor-gsum* (Western Tibet) area. They founded the world-renowned Hemis *Gonpa*, Chemre *Gonpa* and Wanla *Gonpa*. *Sen-gey-rnam-rgyal* also built *gonpas* at Meru and Tashigang (later lost to Tibet). The monastic communities flourished in all these establishments.

During the time of *Sen-gey-rnam-rgyal*, Bhutan was ruled by *Zhabs-drung-ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal* (1594-1651).¹⁹ He was the first '*Brug-pa Bka-rgyud-pa* lama ruler of Bhutan. *Sen-gey-rnam-rgyal* was on good terms with *Brug Nga-gdbang-rnam-rgyal* and presented him with several small villages in *Mngaris-bskor-gsum*. The king also sent one of his sons to Bhutan to become a monk. This son gained a lot of respect as a lama of the '*Brug-pa* sect in Bhutan. From then on Ladakh and Bhutan have enjoyed cordial relations. Lama *Chos-rje Smos'dzin* came from Bhutan to Ladakh and founded the *gonpa* at Stakna.

Towards the end of *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal*'s reign, the Mongolian leader Gushri Khan Stanzin Chosgyal invaded Tibet and seized power from the Tibetan ruler *Sde-pa-gtsan-pa*. He became the leader of the three provinces of Great Tibet. Later sovereignty over the whole country was conferred on the great Fifth Dalai Lama who then emerged as the ruler of a new and unified Tibet.²⁰

King *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal* was a great and farsighted politician and was well aware of developments in Tibet. With the support of the Mongols, the Dalai Lama was making the Tibetan government a champion of the *dGe-lugs-pa* order. Ultimately the '*Brug-pa* sect of Ladakh would come under pressure from Tibet so the king asked the foremost teacher *Stag-tshang-ras-pa* to transfer *dGe-lugs-pa* *gonpas* to the '*Brug-pa* sect. However *Stag-tshang-ras-pa* rejected the king's proposal on the grounds that the Buddhist religion should not be sectarian. Thus, the eventual mutual understanding of the foremost teacher and the king contributed significantly to the propagation of all the Buddhist schools in Ladakh without sectarian discrimination.

Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal had three sons: *Bde-ldan-rnam-rgyal*, *En-dra-bo-dhi-rnam-rgyal* and *Bde-mchog-rnam-rgyal*. Whilst *En-dra-bo-dhi-rnam-rgyal* joined the monkhood and became a disciple of *Chos-rje Smos-'dzin* and *Stag-tshang-ras-pa*, *Bde-mchog-rnam-rgyal* resided at Padum and became the ruler of Zangskar and Spiti. After King *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal*'s death, his eldest son *Bde-ldan-rnam-rgyal* came to the throne of Ladakh and ruled from 1620 to 1640.

King *Bde-ldan-rnam-rgyal* extended the border of Ladakh right up to the Zoji-la pass. He built palaces at Shey and Rudok in a similar style to the "Lion Palace" of Leh. In memory of his father, he built the temple and the three-storey statue of the Lord Buddha at Shey. The king recruited eight goldsmiths from Nepal and engaged all the craftsmen he could find in Ladakh to build the statue. When this copper statue was completed, the king also built a Chang-Chub Chorten (a stupa symbolizing the enlightenment of the Buddha) decorating the wheel, the sun and the moon on the upper portion of the stupa with copper. Inside the temple of Buddha at Shey, beautiful mural paintings were made of the Buddha, the Bodhisattvas and *Stag-tshang-ras-pa*. When construction was completed, the foremost teacher opened the temple in the presence of the kings's mother, *Bskal-bzang-sgrol-ma*. Finally, having made great efforts in strengthening the Buddhist religion, *Stag-tshang-ras-pa* passed away at the age of 76 in Hemis on 29th. January, 1651.²¹

In memory of his parents, King *Bde-ldan-rnam-rgyal* constructed the eight hundred and fifty feet long Taire-rong Mani wall in the desert below Leh. At each end he installed Chang-chub and Namgyal *chortens*, symbolising the Buddha's enlightenment and victory. The king also built the present Avalokitesvara temple in Leh and, in addition to the statue at Shey, built many other statues of the Buddha and, Bodhisattvas. Following in the great tradition of his father, the king annually appointed one hundred monks in Zangskar, Nubra and Timosgang to recite "Mani Tungchur," the chanting of a million mantras.

It was during the reign of King *Bde-ldan-rnam-rgyal* that *Grub-thob-padma-'phrin-las* came to Ladakh and settled at *Tak-thog Gonpa*. He invited a community of mediators to settle at *Tak-thog* and paved the way for the *rNying-ma-pa* tradition in Ladakh.

King *Bde-legs-rnam-rgyal* (1640-1680) then ascended the throne and during his reign Tibetan troops under the leadership of *Dga'ldan-tshe-dbang*, a Mongolian monk, invaded Ladakh and Zangskar. The purpose of the invasion was to separate the *mnga-ris-bskor-gsum* provinces from the sovereignty of the king of Ladakh and to put pressure on him to appoint a lama from the *dGelugs-pa* sect as the foremost teacher.²² Eventually the Tibetan general *Dga'ldan-tshe-dbang* entered *MNga-ris* with a powerful army of 2,500 soldiers. The Ladakhi force headed by the king's minister, *Sha-kya-rgya-mtsho*, fought the invaders at Stagla Khar in Purang but failed to stop the invaders. General *Dga'ldan-dshe-dbang* demanded the return of the *mnga-ris-bskor-gsum* region to Tibet and, when the king of Ladakh refused to allow this, sent Tibetan troops to march on Leh. For three years from 1681-1683 they pillaged the country, attacking the *Gonpas* of Ladakh and the fort at Leh.

All this time the king of Ladakh was watching the movements of the Tibetan army. On the advice of his minister *Sha-kya-rgya-mtsho*, he decided to approach the Moghul governor of Kashmir for military aid. The governor in Kashmir forwarded the king's application to the Moghul Emperor in Delhi and the Emperor Aurangzeb agreed to assist him, subject to his conversion to Islam. King *Bde-legs-rnam-rgyal* accepted this condition.

The Moghul army arrived in Ladakh led by Fida Khan, the son of the governor of Kashmir. The Tibetan invaders were defeated and forced to retreat to Tashigang, about eight miles east of Demjok, where they entrenched themselves and sued for peace. King *Bde-legs-rnam-rgyal* accepted Islam and changed his name to Aqibat Mohammed Khan. Consequently the Muslims of Ladakh were granted land in Leh on which to

build their mosque. The outcome of the war proved extremely significant in the history of Ladakh.

After the king's submission to the Moghuls, *Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtso*, the present regent of Tibet, who ruled the county after the death of the fifth Dalai Lama, became deeply concerned for the safety of the Buddhist religion in the territory of a king who had been converted to Islam. So in the autumn of 1683, leaving aside the cause of strengthening the *dG-lugs-pa* position in Ladakh, the Tibetan regent discussed the problem with the Sixth '*Brug-chen-mi-pham-dbang-po* (1614-1717), who was the head of the '*Brug-pa* sect and in his former incarnations had been the patron lama to the Ladakhi kings for generations. Promising the lama a fair reward from the booty collected in Ladakh by *Dga'-ldan-tshe-dbang*, the regent sent him from Lhasa to Tashigang to negotiate a peace treaty.²³

There was another aspect which made '*Brug-chen-mi-pham-dbang-po* a very suitable candidate to act as mediator between the king of Ladakh and the Tibetan government. When *Dga'-ldan-tshe-dbang*, the conquering Tibetan general, had stayed in the palace in Leh he had found several letters from *Brug-chen-mi-pham-dbang-po* advising the king to maintain a cordial relationship with the Central Tibetan government. When the lama arrived at the border between Ladakh and Tibet he met the general and they agreed that a peace treaty should be negotiated and that the King of Ladakh's reconversion to Buddhism should be one of the conditions.

The treaty contained many important instructions and decisions. The Ladakhis were to accept the religious supremacy of the Dalai Lama and honour his instructions, treating both the *dGe-lugs-pa* and *Brug-pa* sects equally. The original boundaries, fixed in the tenth century when King *Skid-lde-nyi-ma-mgon* divided his kingdom between his three sons would be reinstated. Only Ladakhis would be permitted to take part in the *Mnga-ris-bskor-gsum* wool trade and no one from Ladakh except the royal traders of the Ladakhi court would be permitted to enter Rudok. The King of Ladakh agreed to

return the *mnga-ris-bskor-gsum* provinces, including Guge, Purang and Rudok, to the Central Tibetan government and any income resulting from the transfer would be distributed to meet the expenses of the major *gonpas* of Tibet. However, the King of Ladakh would retain one village called Minsar in Western Tibet in order to meet the religious offering expenses of Lake Manasarowar and Mount Kailash.

The victorious Tibetan general *Dga-'ldan-tshe-dbang* slowly returned to Central Tibet. Upon his arrival in Tashi Lhunpo on 21st July 1684, he officially announced the annexation of *Mnga-ris-bskor-gsum* to the Panchen Rinpoche and on the 17th. December he was back in Lhasa where he was received with great rejoicing by the regent and by Qosot Khan, the Mongolian representative.²⁴ The mission of the Sixth '*Brug-chen-mi-pham-dbang-po* had saved the religion and culture of Ladakh from serious danger and consequently his name is recorded with respect and gratitude in many Ladakhi inscriptions.

Ladakh had not only lost all the land between Ladakh proper and the Tsang province to the Tibetan government but from that time on the country was increasingly indebted to its Muslim neighbours to the west who had come to its aid. From then on, tribute had to be paid regularly to Kashmir and the King of Ladakh had to declare himself at least a nominal Muslim. In exchange, the king was to receive annually three to five hundred bags of rice from the time of his submission in 1665.

During the reign of King *Nyi-ma-rnam-rgyal*, who had inherited the throne from his father, *Bde-legs-'rnam-rgyal*, an additional complete *Bka-'gyur* set, with its one hundred and eight volumes, was brought from Bhutan. This is now kept at the palace of Stok and is written on superior quality paper with bold lettering for easy reading. The Bum text, a shortened version of the *Bka-'gyur* canon, was also brought to Ladakh for the first time during this time.

A tradition had been established of building stupas and mani walls but these activities had suffered a set-back because the war with Tibet. However, *Nyi-ma-rnam-rgyal* revived this

tradition by building the *Za-nag-gi* Mani wall close to the village of Choglamsar. During the lifetime of this religious king, Ladakh saw considerable progress in the fields of culture and religion. The king gave his patronage to writers and poets and many Ladakhi folk-songs written during his reign are very popular even today.

After *Nyi-ma-rnam-rgyal*'s death his son, *Bde-skyong-rnam-rgyal* came to the throne and ruled from 1720-1740. He was married to *Nyi-zla-dbang-mo* of Lomanthang and they had a son *Sa-skyong-rnam-rgyal*. About this time the search for the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama was taking place. The oracles revealed that he lay in the lap of *Nyi-zla* but the search party failed to understand what this meant and many prayers were said in Central Tibet for the Panchen Lama's early re-appearance.

Meanwhile in Ladakh, relations between the King *Bde-skyong-rnam-rgyal* and *Nyi-zla-dbang-mo* had become very strained, even after the birth of a prince. Allegations passed back and forth; the rift between them deepened and finally they were divorced. *Nyi-zla-dbang-mo* left Leh but instead of living in Lomanthang, she travelled towards Central Tibet and there she gave birth to the Panchen Rinpoche *Dpal-dan-ye-shes* (1734-1780). Her elder son, Prince *Sa-skyong*, entered Hemis monastery as a novice and became popular under the name of *RGyal-sras* Rinpoche.

Chos-rje-'Jam-dbyangs-pad-dkar, an incarnate *'Brug-pa* lama from Bhutan came to Ladakh during this time and became King *Bde-skyong-rnam-rgyal*'s foremost teacher, residing at *Stakna Gonpa*. He visited Zangskar and founded the *Gonpa* of Sani which possesses many fine wall paintings and statues. He also acted as abbot of the *Bardan Gonpa*.

After King *Bde-skyong-rnam-rgyal*, the royal succession becomes complicated. The king's eldest son, Prince *Sa-skyong*, had become a monk and so the son of the king's second wife became heir apparent. However the king's third wife contrived to install her son, *Phun-tshogs-rnam-rgyal* on the throne and he ruled from 1740-1750.

At that time the Purig areas of what is now the Kargil district were ruled by *Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal*, the brother of King *Bde-skong-rnam-rgyal*. He had placed restrictions on the Kashmiri traders, virtually preventing them from trading inside Ladakh. The Kashmiri traders approached the representatives of the Moghul Emperor in Kashmir and the Ladakhi king in Leh and the threat of another war between Kashmir and Ladakh arose. The Central Tibetan government, at that time ruled by the Seventh Dalai Lama, *Skal-bzang-rgya-mtsho* (1708-1758), was very much aware of the situation and decided to send *Ka-thog Rig-azin-tshe-sbang-nor-bu* (1698-1755), an incarnate *rNying-ma-pa* lama, to study the political situation in Ladakh and help resolve the uncertainty around the throne and other potential power conflicts.²⁵ A religious convention was set up in Wanla and the rulers of upper and lower Ladakh all discussed their respective pressing problems. After listening to the grievances, *Ka-thog Rig-azin-tshe-dbang-nor-bu* made the following decisions: It was resolved that the king's eldest son would be designated heir to the throne and that any subsequent sons were to join either the Hemis or Thikse monasteries. This decision helped to ensure a smooth royal succession without any more conflict between the princes. *Bstan-srung-rnam-gyal*, the King of Zangskar, whose dominion bordered onto India, was to keep his throne. Similarly, the ruler of Hensukut, who had defected from the King of Zangskar, would also continue to rule. With these two exceptions, it was not permitted that any kingdom should have two kings. However King *Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal* of Purig would continue to rule Purig for as long as he lived. On his death the Purig region would be re-united with Ladakh in accordance with the decision of the convention. Finally it was decided that Prince *Tse-dbang-rnam-rgyal*, the son of Queen *Kun'dzoms*, should be the heir to the throne of Ladakh and he ruled from 1760-1780. The so-called "Wanla agreement" was published in the summer of 1753.²⁶

Meanwhile the great *Ka-thog Rig-azin-tshe-dbang-nor-bu* preached extensively on the words of the Buddha. During his stay at Hemis he was responsible for making a list of the assets

of Hemis *Gonpa* starting from the time of King *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal*. This was done on red brocade in black ink. He drew up rules of discipline for the monks of Hemis and this too was written and preserved on red brocade cloth.

Ka-thog Rig-azin-tshe-dbang-nor-bu is said to have built the Kakini stupa, representing peace and tranquility, at Meru village. It was he who installed the image of *Lha Rdo-rje-Chen-mo*, *Lo-tsa-wa Rin-chen-bZang-po*'s protector deity, in the temple at Shey; previously it had lain neglected in a temple at Nyarma. A ceremony was held in honour of the re-installation of the image at the same time as the Shey Subla, or harvest festival. On that day the god manifests itself, giving a lay man power to make predictions. Traditionally the royal family always consulted this deity for advice.

Under the abbotship of *rGyal-sras Rinpoche Mi-pham-jam-dpal-mthu-stobs*, Hemis *Gonpa* grew in strength. The number of monks increased and the monastic rule was enforced more strictly. Many of the silver stupas now in the *gonpa* were constructed during this period, as was the world famous thanka of Padmasambhava. This thanka is reputed to have been made by the famous artist *Bzo-pa-dpal-le* on the advice of *rGyal-sras Rinpoche*. It is an embroidery of very fine Chinese brocade in various colors and is displayed only once in twelve years. According to the Ladakhi/Tibetan calendar the years are named after twelve different animals and the year in which the than-ka is displayed is called *Spre-lo*, or the year of the Monkey (the next one occurs in 2016). It was in this year, on the tenth day of the fifth month of the Tibetan calendar that Padmasambhava was born in a lotus flower on a milky lake in Dhana-kosh in the eighth century A.D. *rGyal-sras Rinpoche* introduced the Hemis festival (*Hemis Tse-shu*) which is held in Hemis every year to commemorate Padmasambhava's birth.

As the monastery reached the height of its development, the people singled out three personages as the incarnations of the god of wealth, Jambhala. They were *rGyal-sras Rinpoche Mi-pham-'jam-dpal-mthu-stobs*, the head lama of Hemis; *Bkra-shis* the manager; and the great artist *Bzo-pa-dpal-le*.

rGyal-sras Rinpoche was also a great scholar. Unfortunately, his works have been lost but his scholarship is recorded in the writings of *Si-tu-pan-chen Chos-kyi-byung'-gnas*, whom he met in Lhasa in 1762. *rGyal-sras* Rinpoche, being the younger brother of the Panchen Rinpoche, received assistance from the Tashi Lhunpo monastery upgrading the condition of Hemis. He died on 7th of November, 1808, and his funeral ceremonies were performed in Lhasa in 1810.²⁷

During this period *Kun-dga-phun-tshogs*, one of King *Tshe-dbang-rnam-rgyal*'s ministers, renounced worldly life and entered the priesthood. Later he became a disciple of *Ka-thog-rig-azin-tshe-dbang-nor-bu* and started a monastic community at *Tak-thog*. The king donated land to *Kun-dga-phun-tshogs* and from that time on *Tak-thog Gonpa* flourished. King *Tshe-dbang-rnam-rgyal* offered *Deskit Gonpa* in Nubra to *Mkhan-po* Rinpoche of Thikse and hence all successive incarnations of *Mkhan-po* Rinpoche have acted as the abbot of *Deskit Gonpa*.

The eighth successive incarnation of *mNga'ris-sprul-sku Lo-bzangs-dge-legs-ye-shes-grags-pa* came to Ladakh during the reign of King *Tshe-dhang-rnam-rgyal*.²⁸ He was born in the Purang region of Western Tibet. The king had a very great respect for *mNga'ris-sprul-sku* and presented him with the major *Gonpas* of Zangskar, Karsha, Phugtal, Stongde, Mune and Mulbek. The king had previously presented him with the *gonpa* at Likir and provided skilled labour for its renovation. In the year 1783, *mNga'ris-sprul-sku* founded *Rangdum Gonpa* and called it *Bshad-sgrup-'zam-gling-rgyan*. At the outset only eight monks were attached to the *gonpa*. Later King *Tshe-brtan-rnam-rgyal* followed his father's example by presenting the region of Rangdum to *mNga'ris-sprul-sku*. The king also issued instructions to the leaders of Zangskar and Purig to comply strictly with all of his instructions concerning the donations of land or property to *mNga'ris-sprul-sku*.

mNga'ris-sprul-sku lived for a very long time at Rangdum and finally passed away there. His relics are preserved in a stupa at the *gonpa*.²⁹ Since he was Tibetan by birth, the people

of Rangdum started celebrating both the Ladakhi and the Tibetan New Year to show respect to the great teacher of the 'dulwa' discipline (vinaya).

Like his father, King *Tse-brtan-rnam-gyal* was devout and treated the people with respect. In memory of his father, the king built the Mani-wall of Kiudrag with Namgyal *mchorten* at both ends. After his death, his brother, *Tse-dpal-don-grup-rnam-rgyal*, who had been residing at Hemis as a Lama, came to the throne and ruled from 1790-1830. Although he was a learned man, his actions were not noteworthy and he was guided by a very able minister, *Tse-sbang-don-grup*, who also was in charge of the treasury.

It was during the reign of this king that William Moorcroft and George Trebeck, the authors of "Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan, Punjab, etc.," and Alexander Csoma de Koros, the founder of modern Tibetology, came to Ladakh. Csoma de Koros stayed to study the language and literature of Ladakh and Tibet and subsequently prepared a dictionary of the language.

The pioneering efforts of Csoma de Koros during his long stay in Zangskar served to draw the attention of Western scholars to the literature of Ladakh and Tibet. His visit to Ladakh and Zangskar is described in another chapter.

After the death of *Tse-dbang-don-grup*, the chief of Mandi took advantage of the king's lack of authority and raided Zangskar, causing a lot of destructions. The Zangskaris appealed to the King of Ladakh for assistance but he was not much help.

The state treasury was still well-endowed, however, and in 1825 the king built the palace of Stok, which housed the silver statue of *Sgrol-ma*, the white Tara, an image of Vajrapani whose head was made of gold and copper, a silver *mchor-ten* with a gold finial and other religious objects. As the king's relations with the crown prince were strained, the king had to build a second palace at Leh, close to the Avalokitesvara temple.

Meanwhile the Fifth '*Brug-pa-yongs-'dzin Ye-shes-grub-*

pa Rinpoche, recognised the only prince, *Tse-dbang-rab-brtan*, as the incarnation of *Stag-tshang-ras-pa*, the head of Hemis *Gonpa*. After entering the monastic life, the prince was called *Mchog-sprul* and he resided alternately at the *gonpas* of Hemis and Chemre. Since he was their only son and heir to the throne, his parents were very keen to arrange a marriage for him but Prince *Mchog-sprul* refused to co-operate. Later the '*Brug-pa-yongs-'dzin* consented to the crown prince's marriage and the king arranged for him to marry *Bskal-bzang-sgrol-ma*, the younger daughter of the late prime minister. In time she gave birth to a son called *Jigs-med-sen-gey-mi-gyur-kun-dga-rnam-rgyal*.

In the year 1830, Crown Prince *Tse-dbangs-rab-brtan* came to the throne. Altogether he married three times; his second wife was the daughter of the Chief of Paskyum, and his third was Zara Khatun, a Muslim girl.

Twenty members of a traders' team from Kashmir under the leadership of a man called Malik entered Ladakh at this time. Fighting broke out between the representative of the King of Ladakh and the Kashmiri traders at Tambis and five members of Malik's company were killed. Malik wanted to return to Kashmir but the Chief of Paskyum stopped him from doing so. The Chief sent a messenger to the King of Ladakh complaining about his representative's behavior at Tambis. The king sent some senior officers to Purig to investigate and they eventually returned to Leh, bringing the representative with them. The culprit told the king that the chief of Paskyum had started the fighting but since the queen herself belonged to Paskyum, all his efforts to save himself were in vain. The king found him guilty and had him punished.

However, the people of Tambis reacted against the king's judgment and, set on revenge, went to Kishtawar where they told the Dogra General, Zorawar Singh Kahluria (1786-1841) of the state of affairs in Ladakh and persuaded him to invade the country. Meanwhile King *Tse-dpal-don-grup-rnam-rgyal* and his son, Prince *Tse-dbang-rabs-brtan* had acquired reputations for corruption. Information on state affairs was

leaked to the outside world through espionage and provided a tempting opportunity for potential invaders.

The people of Tambis succeeded in their mission and in 1834, General Zorawar Singh invaded Ladakh with a strong army. On their way to Leh the Dogra army passed by Lamayuru *Gonpa* but by the time they arrived the lamas had already fled taking all the valuable statues and thankas with them. Continuing on their way to Leh, the Dogra army looted and severely damaged the palace of Basgo where they damaged the *Bka-'gyur* text that had been written in gold and silver ink during King *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal's* reign. When the Dogra soldiers reached Leh, they saw the grand palace and its small town filled with traders from Xinjiang, Tibet, Baltistan, Kashmir and the Punjab. The Dogra general was impressed to see this great trading centre and its culture. His main objective in attacking Ladakh was to collect great wealth for the Maharaja Gulab Singh and, after the king had signed an agreement in which he would make an annual payment of 5,000 rupees to the Maharaja, the invaders left Ladakh.

After some time the Ladakhis attempted a revolt under the leadership of the king's lieutenant, *Bang-ka-pa Ka-ga Bstan-'dzin*. Zorawar Singh heard of this and immediately set out for Leh. Prince *Tse-dbang-rabs-brtan* fled to Spiti and Zorawar Singh dethroned King *Tse-dpal-don-grup-rnam-rgyal* appointing *Dnos-grub-bstan-'dzin*, one of his ministers, as regent. He was given the Indian title of raja rather than the Tibetan title of gyalpo. However, the deposed king was given the village of Stok as an estate. From that time on the people of Ladakh lost their freedom. The state economy was dismantled and both culture and religion deteriorated. A fortress (*qila*, now known as Zorawar Fort) was built near Leh and a garrison of three hundred men was stationed there under the command of Magna Thanedar, the Wazir of Leh. The *Bka-'gyur* canon, written with gold and silver letters was damaged during the building of the *qila* but was eventually installed in the ceiling of the Mandir temple in the fort.

In 1839, Zorawar Singh returned to Leh and this time he

apprehended both the regent and the dethroned king and took them to fight a war in Baltistan. Unfortunately, King *Tse-dpal-dongrup-rnam-rgyal* died of smallpox on the way. After the war Zorawar Singh returned to Ladakh and installed Prince *Jigs-med-sen-gey-mi-gyu-rkun-dga-rnam-rgyal* (the son of the deceased heir apparent, *Tse-dbang-rab-brtan*) on the throne.

In 1841, after the coronation ceremony, Zorawar Singh went on to invade Tibet in order to establish a clearly defined border with Ladakh. During the war, Hemis *Gonpa* was forced to provide supplies for the Dogra forces. At Tirthapuri on the 12th of December, 1841, the Tibetan army killed General Zorawar Singh and the Dogras retreated, taking refuge in Leh palace.

In 1842, the Dogra ruler signed an agreement with the Tibetan government which recognised Ladakh as Dogra territory. Trade relations between Ladakh and Tibet continued as before, and the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir controlled Ladakh until 1947 when India gained its independence.

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- 1 For more on Maryul ('red land') see Shaksपो, *A History of Buddhism in Ladakh*, Delhi, 1990.
- 2 Malya is also a name of a beautiful park of sandal wood located at Kalapa, the capital of Shambhala mythical land. See *The Way to Shambhala*, Edwin Bernbaum, p. 8.
- 3 Scholars are not unanimous about the location of 'U-rgyan'. Most believe it to be the Swat valley in present-day Pakistan, while others believe it to be Mecca, in Saudi Arabia.
- 4 Rabgias, 1984.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 The collected commentaries on the teachings of the historical Buddha, Sakyamuni.
- 7 Rabgias, 1984.
- 8 *Ldum-rai rgyal-rabs dang chos byung* or *The History of the Nubra Valley* by Kachen Lobzang-Zodpa and Nawang Tsering Shaksपो, Leh, 1982.
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- 12 A third Saskyapa *gonpa* was built at Likir, but is now in ruins.
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Sabu Village—a Historical Perspective

Sabu is a relatively large village, some eight kilometers east of Leh. It is composed of five distinct hamlets or localities: Sabu-phu, Sabu, Meyak or Me-nag, Yok-mos and Ayu or Ayum.

Sabu is spread out over an area of about eight kilometers in length and two kilometers in width. Melted glacier water from the high mountain passes is the main source of irrigation. When there is heavy snowfall in the winter months, the villagers get sufficient water to cultivate their land the following spring. When there is less snowfall, they face a lot of difficulties.

The soil of Sabu is considered the most fertile in Ladakh, and most of the villagers live from agriculture. Farmers grow two types of barley: one is used to produce *tsampa* (roasted barley flour), the traditional staple food of Ladakh; the second variety of barley is used to make *chang*, an alcoholic drink. The vegetables produced here include cabbages, cauliflowers, radishes, turnips, spinach, kidney beans, tomato and onions. Sabu is one of the leading producers of potatoes in the whole of Ladakh. Its climate and soil also prove good for fruit trees such as apples, apricots and walnuts. The same is true of floriculture. Recently, Sabu has been identified as an ideal place to grow a sought-after flower, the gladiolus. Nowadays, local farmers grow this flower on a commercial basis.

In the nearby mountains, there are three summer grazing grounds: the first is called Stagkhar: this is around ten kilometers from Sabu-phu, and also contains a ruined fort. The other two are Tarchud and Ldings. Grassland bushes are available in abundance in the mountains, and villagers take cows and *dzomo* (yak/cow half-breeds) there in the summer months so that they can produce milk, butter and cheese. These products are processed and later stored at home for winter

consumption. Other items collected on the high mountain passes include animal dung and bushes to burn during the winter months. The villagers build mountain huts for their own use; together with special shelters to protect their livestock from wild animals such as wolves and snow-leopards.

The Ayu locality of Sabu is renowned for its medicinal springs. The springs are considered good for curing rheumatism as well as indigestion and headache.

According to local tradition, the founders of Sabu were a group of Menag people from Eastern Tibet. The name Sabu derives from *sa* meaning 'soil', and *phud* meaning 'top quality' or a 'thing presentable to gods'.

Sabu emerged as the capital of Ladakh during the reign of Lhachen Shesrab in the 14th century (r. 1350-1375). King Shesrab was the son of Lhachen Gyalbu Rinchen, who migrated from Ladakh to Kashmir. After embracing Islam, he became the ruler of Kashmir in the 14th century. When he made Sabu his capital, Lhachen Shesrab built the castle of Hangtsema on the rock overlooking Sabu, forcing his subjects to construct 108 stupas at the top of *Sen-ge-sgang* hill. The king also built several hamlets in the village.

After Lhachen Sherab, his son *Lha-chen Trisug-lde* (r. 1375-1400) inherited the throne of Ladakh. This king also ordered the construction of 108 stupas in Sabu. Apart from this, Sabu does not appear in the historical record until the mid-17th century when Sakya Gyatso became the *kalon* (minister) of King Jamyang Namgyal. Sakya Gytso was an aristocrat from Sabu, and as *kalon* played an important role in state affairs. He was succeeded by his son Agu Garmo, who served as the *kalon* of King Senge Namgyal. When he died in the year 1646, he was succeeded by his son Chosnid, who served as the *kalon* of King Deldan Namgyal (r.1642-1694).

Kalon Chosnid had a beautiful wife, Zilzom, and King *Bde-dan-rnam-rgyal* coveted her. He tried to have him killed by an attendant as he was entering the gates of Leh palace. This attempt failed but the minister was eventually murdered by his own steward on his way back to Sabu.¹ Following this intrigue

the king sent a formal message to the widow asking her to be his wife. Upon hearing the message, the widow requested the king to respect her state of mourning and to build a Mani-wall for her in the shape of her headdress in loving memory of her deceased husband. If the king would fulfill these conditions, the widow agreed to marry him. The king entrusted the construction of a massive Mani-wall below Kiu-tag in Leh. It was built in the short period of six months and a considerable amount of public money seems to have been spent in its construction. Meanwhile, the wife cut her hair and fled to Igoo, where she became a nun. It is still in good shape and the surface of the wall is still covered with mantra-slabs. At present the descendent of the *kalon's* family lives in the Ayu locality of the Sabu and is known as *Ayu Kalon*. The Kalan family now runs a guest house named after Zilzom.

Another important historical figure from Sabu was Pon Namkha Palgon, the chief scribe of King Senge Namgyal. He was born to the Pon family of Sabu in the year 1572, and was the son of Padma Palgon and Namkha Palzom.

By nature Namkha Palgon was a pious Buddhist. He always visited the family shrine to pray to the Three Jewels. He was kind and took care of poor people. No poor person who reached his door would leave empty-handed. He also learnt Tibetan reading and writing from the elders. Being a responsible head of the family, he always kept himself at the disposal of the village head. He was the father of five children. In one of his poems he mentions the names of all of his five children, and said that they were well disciplined and religious.

Namkha Palgon worked in the courts of four Ladakhi kings: Tsewang Namgyal, Jamyang Namgyal, Senge Namgyal and Deldan Namgyal. In the Pig Year 1635, King Senge Namgyal entrusted him with the supervision of the copying of several texts including the Kangyur, the *Astasāhasrika-prajñāparamitā* (Tib: *Dorje-mchotpa*), (a biography of Padmasambhava), and the life and songs of Stagtshang Raspa, the root teacher of the king. The king honored him by granting him several privileges in the village.²

Tsetan Dorje, a well-read resident of Sabu village was given the Hindi title '*Chandan Munshi*' in recognition of his learning by the Dogras in the mid-eighteenth century. *Chandan* stands for 'sandal' while *Munshi* means 'secretary'. In Lama Tsultrim Nyima's autobiography, Tsetan Dorje is mentioned as a man of letters, who was in a position to approach the Dogras ruler without hesitation.

Munshi Tsetan Dorje's son was Tsetan Paljor, a pious Buddhist and disciple of Sras Rinpoche, Lobzang Tsultrim Chosphe. It is recorded that Tsetan Paljor constructed the famed Padma Odber *chorten* of Sabu village. Beneath the *chorten* stands a Kunrig Mandala. The people of Sabu visit the *chorten* for circumambulation.

Tsetan Paljor died at the age of forty. His only son was Tsetan Phuntsog who, like his father, was a disciple of Sras Rinpoche. He studied Buddhist philosophy with Sras Rinpoche, and was equally proficient in Urdu and English. In the early 1900s, he became the first native of Sabu—and in fact the first Ladakhi—to be appointed to the posts of *Tehsildar* (revenue officer) and Information Officer of Ladakh. Although he was born the son of two devout Buddhist parents, Tsetan Phuntsog converted to Christianity.

Historical Sites

There are two large *gonpas* and several small ones in Sabu village. The largest is Tashi Gyaphel *Gonpa*, which is affiliated with Spituk. It is said that it was founded by a *Khenpo* (abbot) belonging to Upper Sabu in 1710. Close to the monastery stands a *chorten*, which is said to contain relics of Arhat Majhantika. The main deity of the *gonpa* is Gonbo (skt: *Mahakala*). This statue is said to have brought from Tibet and kept behind a curtain. Devotees can visit the statue once a year on the occasion of their annual ceremony called *sGru-mchot*. Besides *sGru-mchot*, a ceremony called 'Kunrig, ('all knowing') is also held in the monastery. To conclude the ceremony in a befitting manner, the monks create a Kunrig Mandala out of sand.

The village has a temple belonging to the Drukpa Kagyu order. The villagers call it *tsamskhang* or “meditation cell.” Some years ago, the villagers carried out massive renovation work on the temple, and all the wall paintings were remade. The temple was consecrated by Drugchen Rinpoche in 1990 and renamed Tashi Thagyan. The temple is taken care of by Hemis *Gonpa*, which sends monks to look after it on a rotational basis. Each year the caretaker monk invites colleague’s from Hemis to perform the *lha-tho* ceremony. In the temple there are statues of Padmasambhava and Gonbo.

Below the old castle lies the historic ‘cheese board’ stone brought by the king’s minister Kanja from Basgo. It is said that one day the king asked him to visit Basgo, Ladakh’s capital at the time. The next day the servant hurriedly set out from Sabu without asking the purpose of his journey. Upon his arrival in Basgo, the ministers asked the-reason why the king had asked him to come. The servant had nothing to say so, pointing to the ‘cheese board’ stone, the ministers said, “O, yes, the king wanted you to take this stone.” Kanja accordingly lifted the stone and brought it to Sabu. The stone therefore represents the consequences of acting without knowledge or seeking prior permission.

In the upper valley, there is a self-originated rock statue of Gonbo. To the north-east of the village stands a high mountain pass, known locally as Riwo Phagtas, ‘the hidden peak’. Similarly, at the end of the village lies a mountain cut off from the rest of the Sabu area. People call it *Srin-mo-gan-kyal*, the ‘sleeping demons’. In the past, these two mountains were deemed inauspicious by the local population. For protection from the two peaks, Sabu villagers constructed a number of *chorten* known as *Rigs-gsum-mgon-po*, ‘the three reverences’, The name refers to: Chenrezig, the Buddha of compassion; Jamyang, the Buddha of wisdom; and Chagdor or Vajrapani, the Buddha of strength.

Each hamlet has its own gods, associated with the most secret spots. Theses deities are known by the names Gurgon, Jurgyun-gyalpo, Jagmen-rgyalpo, Hangtsema, and *Yul-lha*

Dorje-gyudronma and Shamurma. Each Buddhist family in Sabu belongs to a group known as a *pha-spun* (brotherhood) which shares a common deity, known as a *pha-lha*. Sabu's population of around 1,500 people venerates these family gods on the occasion of the New Year or on other auspicious days. The *pha-spuns* play an important role in sharing the work load at times of celebration and mourning. If, for example, a person dies, the members of the *pha-spun* will take care of all the agricultural tasks while the family grieves. Membership to a *pha-spun* is voluntary and members are not necessarily related.

Sabu Today

Sabu was linked with Leh by a motor road almost 40 years ago. It is now also connected with the rest of the world by telephones and other electronic media. The village has three primary schools and a middle school, and the youth are doing well in the fields of modern education and science. A number of educated residents of Sabu are working as doctors, engineers, and officers in civil and military organizations. In the coming years, Sabu is going to be one of the most pleasant places to live, and one of the most sought-after villages in the vicinity of Leh. In keeping with the tradition of *lhamo* and *lhaba*, Sabu is home to three women who claim possession by various local deities. The best-known among them, the *Ayu Lhamo*, Sonam Zangmo, has preserved this tradition for almost 50 years, attracting both Buddhists and Muslims who come to her for help with various problems, both medical and psychic. The healings frequently involve the apparent removal of black material from the body, using her bare lips or a copper pipe. Lama Tsultrim Nyima consulted a *lhamo* at Sabu in the nineteenth century.

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Alexander Csoma de Koros: The Pioneer of Tibetan Studies

Alexander Csoma de Koros was born in Transylvania, Hungary (now a part of Romania) in the year 1784.¹ After twenty years of studying at the Gabor Bethlen College of Nagyenyed and at Gottingen University in Hanover, Germany, and having a command of thirteen different languages, he decided to go in search of the ancient homeland of the Hungarian race, (the Yugurs) which he believed to be Yarkand, a city in the Xinjiang province of China connected to Tibet and Ladakh by the old silk trading caravan routes.² On November 28th, 1819, Csoma de Koros set out on a very difficult journey to travel from Europe to Asia by boat, raft and on foot along the old trade route to Yarkand via Srinagar.

His first encounter with Buddhist images must have appeared by the time he reached Afghanistan. Csoma de Koros crossed into India by the infamous Khyber Pass on January 26th, 1822, and, traveling via Lahore and Amritsar, reached Jammu from where he continued on to Srinagar. Csoma followed the old caravan route through the mountains and arrived at the ancient trading centre of Leh on June 9th, 1822. He was entranced by everything he saw. It was a land of sparkling sunshine, crystal clear air, majestic silence, fast tumbling streams with rope bridges over them, trapezoid shaped houses with flat roofs and elaborate carvings over the windows, *mani*-walls, stupas, *gonpas* and finally a people speaking and writing a language which was completely different from anything he had ever experienced.

He waited in Leh for almost a month for companions for the trip to Yarkand which was about six hundred kilometers away, but this was in vain, despite Leh's central point along the caravan routes of the region. He then decided to return to

Lahore. However after two weeks of trekking he arrived at the small village of Dras, and there, on July 16th, 1822, he met William Moorcroft, a plenipotentiary of the British Government in India, who was on his way to Leh.³ Csoma de Koros explained the purpose of his mission to Leh and Moorcroft, impressed by his knowledge and adaptability, suggested that he could be of great service if Csoma de Koros could learn Tibetan and construct a dictionary and record the grammar. This scholarly task appealed to Csoma de Koros, as he believed that it was possible he would find information about the original homeland of the Hungarians amongst the Tibetan writings. Small books with English explanations of the Tibetan script were available at this time and Moorcroft offered to obtain one for him.⁴ He also gave Csoma de Koros a letter of introduction to the Ladakhi Prime Minister *bKa-blon Tse-dbang Don-grup* and recommended that he went to the monasteries of Ladakh to achieve his objectives.⁵ Moorcroft then continued on to Leh while Csoma de Koros went to Srinagar having first agreed that they would meet again in Srinagar in March, 1823.

Csoma de *Koros* returned to Leh on June 1st, 1823 and presented his introductory note to the *bKa-blon*. He was given a good reception and the scholarly Prime Minister recommended that Csoma de Koros visit Zangla to study Tibetan under the guidance of the Lama *Sangey Phuntsog*. He also gave him a passport, calling Csoma de Koros, Secander-Beg (Secander being the Ladakhi equivalent of Alexander the Great).

He traveled in a south-westerly direction for nine days along the central trail known as *gZung-lam* and upon his arrival at Zangla met the teacher recommended by the *bKa-blon*. He also received patronage from the local chief who allowed him to live in the palace at Zangla. The palace was said to have been a very interesting building, built on a rock that resembled an eagle and inside the palace were two or three holy footprints. It also housed a rich treasure of statues, *than-ka* paintings and books. During his stay there "he lived in an

apartment nine feet square where he sat on a sheepskin cloak to protect himself from the freezing cold of Zangskar.”⁶

It was then that his task really began. At the outset, Csoma de Koros had estimated that it would take one year to collect enough materials to prepare a dictionary of the Tibetan-English language. However when he started learning it in depth, Csoma de Koros found that the language and literature of the people from this part of the world was much richer than he had originally thought. He was left with no other alternative than to make a much deeper study and forget the other plans he had made.

Lama Sangey Phuntsog, the teacher of Csoma de Koros, was reputed to have been an *amchi* (a local medical doctor) and an *onpo* (astrologer) who enjoyed a good reputation among the people of Zangskar and the Skutaks, who were the upper class families of Leh. He was also a scholar, having visited Tibet and studied the canons and important works of Tibetan scholars. These facts are revealed through his own writings, currently preserved at Karsha and Steta.⁷ More importantly to Csoma de Koros, he was a writer and a scribe as well, having mastered the difficult block print script. The lama came from a *Skutak* and owned houses and property at Tangkar, Steta and Karsha, according to Kaga Sonam Wangchuk, the Karsha Lonpo.

While Csoma de Koros was staying in Zangla he visited Zongkhul *Gonpa*, the seat of many early and important meditation teachers. He seems to have spent a considerable time here learning about the Buddhist religion under the aegis of Lama *Kun-dgah-chos-legs*, the abbot of the *gonpa*. During this time the Lama *Kun-dgah* wrote a book in reply to the Hungarian's many inquiries which appeared under the title: "Answers to the questions of the European Sken-dha." The lama dealt with three subjects in this book: the formation of the world, its existence and its ultimate destruction.⁸ Lama *Kun-dgah-chos-legs* also had superb handwriting, especially when writing the *U-Chen* script.

Like his predecessors, Lama *Kun-dgah* had a wife and two

sons. Otherwise, in Ladakh, an abbot having a family is quite unusual. It is said that he became the abbot of the *gonpa* through inheritance from his grandfather, *Grup-chen Ngad-bang-tshe-ring* (1717-1790), the famous yogin of Zong-khul *Gonpa*. In a later period of his life he went on a pilgrimage to Karja Phapsa, the present Lahul and gained many disciples in Ladakh and Karja. Unfortunately, during the winter of his pilgrimage, a smallpox epidemic broke out in Zangskar killing many people including his two sons.⁹ This broke the line of succession and although the abbot was very upset there was no alternative but to pray for his sons' salvation and he built a *mchot-rten* in the area to their memory.

After staying for approximately one year in Zangla and Zongkhul, Csoma de Koros and his teacher, Lama Sangey Phuntsog, decided to shift their residence from Zangla to a more convenient place. They decided to go to Kulu because of the Lama's family ties to the Chief of Lahul, and Csoma de Koros left Zangla. However, because of problems in Zangskar, the Lama Sangey Phuntsog was unable to follow him.

With the absence of the lama the real difficulties in completing the research project began and Csoma de Koros had to think of alternatives. He visited various *gonpas* in the nearby areas searching for a suitable person who could work with him to give the final shape to the collected works. However all his efforts were in vain and he reached the conclusion that he must travel back to Zangskar and find his teacher again. After traveling for several days he arrived at Phugtal *Gonpa* in Zangskar and for some unknown reason decided to stay there. He made great efforts to contact the Lama Sangey Phuntsog and finally the lama arrived. After working for more than one year they succeeded in giving the final shape to his long and demanding tasks: the Tibetan-English Dictionary and a grammar of the Tibetan language. Csoma de Koros left a record of his stay noting that he had lived at Phugtal *Gonpa* from August 12th, 1825, until November 1826.¹⁰

After the completion of his mission in Zangskar, Csoma

de Koros moved to the village of Kanam in the Sutlej valley in present day Himachal Pradesh along with his teacher Lama Sangey Phunsog. He spent three years—from August 1827 until October 1830—revising all the material collected for the Tibetan-English Dictionary, the definitions of Buddhist terminology and other information acquired on Buddhism and Himalayan culture. He also produced his work on “The Analysis of the *bka.-gyur* and *bstan-gyur*.” Csoma de Koros moved to Calcutta to prepare his work for publication. He arrived from the mountains on May 5th, 1831, accompanied by a small library that he had acquired during his stay in Zangskar and Kanam. His scholarship was recognized and consequently he was employed by the Asiatic Society of Bengal as a librarian, where his main task was to prepare a catalogue of Tibetan literature and classical Indian languages such as Sanskrit. He worked hard and published several of his articles on Tibetan studies in the newly published Asiatic Society Journal. He was also able to publish his Tibetan-English Dictionary, a Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology and a book of Tibetan Grammar—all at the expense of the East India Company.

Although Csoma de Koros’ field of study included many subjects and languages, the Tibetan language and studies received top priority throughout his life. He was very keen to visit Lhasa, the capital of Tibet to expand on his research and left Calcutta in February 1842. Unfortunately, he only got as far as Darjeeling, the famous hill station, and died there from malaria on April 11, 1842.

A person with such a deep knowledge may die physically but his work lives on forever. This is the case with the great Hungarian, Alexander Csoma de Koros, who was born almost two hundred years ago but is remembered by Tibetologists all over the world as a great pioneer. In the year 1984, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Csoma de Koros Society, Budapest celebrated his two hundredth birth anniversary with great pomp and ceremony. Tibetologists the world over assembled in the Hungarian capital to celebrate the occasion.

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Part Two:

Buddhism in Modern Ladakh

Buddhism in Modern Ladakh

After repeated invasions by the Dogra forces, Ladakh finally lost its freedom in 1842 to the founder of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, Maharaja Gulab Singh (1792-1858).¹ The roots of Buddhism planted by the religious kings were shaken and an atmosphere of anarchy set in. The Dogra rulers undermined the authority of the aristocracy in Ladakh.² Under these circumstances hardly anyone gave political support to Buddhism and this period could be referred to as the darkest time in a thousand years of the history of Buddhism in Ladakh. The Dogras, as aliens to the religion and culture of Ladakh, did considerable damage to the Buddhist shrines, including *gonpas*, statues, stupas and Mani walls.³ Notwithstanding the political threat, the Dogras completely failed to affect the people's faith in Buddhism before or after the war.⁴

The Ladakhis were left with the huge task of reviving Buddhism in the region. This was not an easy task under a colonial regime. However, for the sake of their religion, the learned lamas of various monasteries decided to take responsibility for strengthening Buddhism and restoring its due status. Foremost among these scholarly lamas was Saspola-born *Tshul-khrims-nyi-ma*.⁵ His greatest accomplishment was to renovate the giant statue of the Lord Buddha at Shey which had been built in the seventeenth century by King *Bde-Idan-rnam-gyal* in memory of his father King *Seng-ge-rnam-gyal*.⁶ The statue had been heavily damaged by the Dogra invaders.

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Lama Tsultrim Nyima (1796–1872)

Lama Tsultrim Nyima was a 19th century Ladakhi religious, cultural and social reformer. He was born in the village of Saspol in 1796 to a humble family. At a very early age he came into contact with Geshe Mila, a highly accomplished lama from Likir *Gonpa*, who gave him teachings on Lamrim, the path of gradual ascension to enlightenment, the best known religious discourse by Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelukpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, in the 14th century.

At the age of five, he was given the name Stanzin Tsewang (*bStan 'dzin tse dbang* -'holder of religious foundation'), by Lobzang Geleg Dragspa (*bLo-bzang dge-legs ye-shes Dragspa*), the 8th successive incarnation of Ngari (*mNga' ris*) Tulku and the founder of Rangdum and Likir monasteries as well as a number of other monasteries in Zangskar and lower Ladakh. By nature Stanzin Tsewang was religious and would often visit Geshe Mila to listen attentively to his teachings, and he refrained from harming any sentient beings. The other scholar monks from whom the young Stanzin Tsewang received teachings were Lama Lobzang Tsultrim (*bLo-bzang tshul-khrims*) and Lama Lobzang Stanzin, both from Likir monastery. His religious devotion and obedience to elders endeared him to the small community of Saspol.

Since his family members were involved in trade in Western Tibet, beginning at the age of twelve, Stanzin Tsewang accompanied his relatives from Gyera and went to Western Tibet to assist them. Since he was young, he spent most of his time chasing ponies and donkeys used for the arduous journeys along the trade routes. His intelligence meant that he soon gained proficiency in his job and became an excellent trader, although he never found great satisfaction from this activity. Eventually he decided to give it up, despite having a family to support.

Once, when Stanzin Tsewang travelled to Tashigang in Western Tibet on a trade mission, he visited the Khenpo, the chief priest in the area. He listened to his teachings on morality which directed his attention towards religion and inspired him to take monastic vows. He sought a private audience with the Khenpo and expressed his inner feelings to him. Honouring his request, the Khenpo of Tashigang accepted him as a member of the monastic community and granted him a new name, Tsultrim Nyima, 'the virtuous sun'. Finding many valuable qualities in him, the Khenpo asserted that he would prove to be a jewel for the Buddha's religion and community in Ladakh.

When Tsultrim Nyima became a monk, his wife and only son also entered into religious communities. Tsultrim Nyima embarked on the life of a hermit, going as far as to construct a hermitage in the remote gorge of *Ri-khrod bsam-gtan chosling*, situated between Saspotse and Likir villages. He thus obtained spiritual and occult powers through long meditative practice, and this was to make him a powerful teacher later on. As news of his spiritual prowess spread, he eventually became known in areas as far away as Ngari, in Western Tibet. He thus became an icon of Buddhist revival in the region.

Once, during a discussion between the Ladakhi trader, *Stob-dan*, and the head of Rudok, in western Tibet on the state of spirituality and worldly affairs in Ladakh, the trader mentioned the positive spiritual impact that Lama Tsultrim Nyima had on the people around him. The head of Rudok responded that it was indeed rare to find such a person, even in Tibet.

Tsultrim Nyima soon began the construction of two monasteries, one at Rizong in lower Ladakh, and the second at Kyagar, now known as Samstanling, in Nubra. These projects were to be a life-long mission. To construct the two monasteries, Tsultrim Nyima received support from many pious people. Aristocrats and wealthy families came forward and gave generous donations. He was thus able to construct both Rizong and Samstanling monasteries in the relatively short

span of three years, and by the year 1834, both *gonpas* were in operation.

At these monasteries, unlike most of the traditional *gonpas* in Ladakh, the monks placed a great emphasis on strict observance of the *vinaya*, the set of monastic rules. Common kitchens for the monks' community were created and it became mandatory for all resident lamas to leave their families and live within the walls of the monastery. The *gonpa* management looked after their daily requirements for food and clothes. Women were also inducted as nuns at a separate residence created for them at Rizong known as Chomoling, where the nuns lived and reared cattle and obtained milk. They brought their produce to the common kitchen for consumption. With the passage of time, the number of resident monks and nuns increased and generally strengthened Buddhism in the region.

In his biography of Lama Tsultrim Nyima, the author Nastan Dorje also mentions Tsultrim Nyima's meeting with a lama named Kunga Choslegs (*Kun-dga' chos-legs*) from Zangskar, who was considered to be a great saintly scholar. This lama is thought to have been one of the tutors of the great Hungarian scholar, Csoma de Kőrös, the pioneer of Tibetan studies in the West, for whom he had prepared an enquiry into Buddhist cosmology, "The Questions of the European Iskander." Lama Kunga Choslegs resided at Dzongkhul *Gonpa* and later became the abbot there.

In 1834, a year after work on Rizong *Gonpa* began, Ladakh was invaded by the forces of Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu, led by his general, Zorawar Singh. The Ladakhi Prince Chosphul (*Chog-sprul*) fled first to Nubra, then via Tankse to Spiti. Therefore, the Dogras did not face any great resistance from the Ladakhis, and the invaders easily consolidated their positions all over Ladakh and Baltistan.

The war doomed the region, as the Dogras brought great destruction. Wherever they went, they created pandemonium, looting and destroying the monasteries. Only a few of the *gonpas* escaped the vandalism, largely due to their comparative inaccessibility. One such monastery was Hemis, the wealthiest

in Ladakh. Later, however, Hemis *Gonpa* was obliged to provide material and cash support while Zorawar waged war on Tibet. On the other hand, the worst-affected monastery in Ladakh was Lamayuru. It is recorded in Yoseb Gergan's history book (*La-dvags-rgyal-rabs-chi-med-gter*, 1976) that the invaders, in addition to taking all valuable goods from the site, also turned it into a stable, greatly offending the local Buddhist population.

However, through the activities of Lama Tsultrim Nyima, some of this damage was remedied. ~~Since the invaders were~~ rude and created anarchy in the region, most people did not dare to ~~speak~~ openly about the prevailing situation. A well-known Ladakhi proverb says that the Dogra rulers broke the backbone of the Ladakhis and from that time onwards the lion-like Ladakhis turned into foxes, with no courage to challenge the authority of the new rulers. ~~Lama Tsultrim Nyima,~~ however, showed courage by visiting the leader of the invading force, Zorawar Singh, in order to apprise him of the conditions of the ~~Ladakhi people.~~

Though the Dogras appointed Ladakhis as administrators, the locals had very little courage to attempt to remedy the people's suffering. Even Raja Morup Stanzin, the Dogra-appointed minister, as well as most of the aristocrats, asked that Lama Tsultrim Nyima hold back from meeting Zorawar Singh, as they thought the general would not respond kindly. But Lama Tsultrim went ahead with his decision and presented himself to General Zorawar Singh with two small presents consisting of a piece of brocade and a white felt. Upon the lama's presentation of the gifts, the general reciprocated and asked the lama what it was that he wanted? The lama replied that the small gifts represented the colour of the sky and the earth. "Your rule of this region is like the sky, hence, be merciful to the subjects. And like the white colour of felt, please bring peace and prosperity to the subject people." With that said, he had no more comments to make or requests to ask of him.

From that brief meeting onward, the general kept a close

watch on the activities of Lama Tsultrim Nyima. The general once said that Tsultrim Nyima looked like a secular person with a pure mind: he was like a *pir* or a saint. Similarly, another Dogra leader of the time named Magna Thanadar termed Lama Tsultrim Nyima a *fakir*, a wandering saint.

The last meeting between the two took place at Rudok from where Zorawar Singh proceeded to invade Tibet. Here his mission faced a great setback. On 14th December 1841, in the neighbourhood of Taklakot, (*Stag-la-mkhar*) the capital of Purang (*Pu-rangs*) in Western Tibet, the Dogra force was defeated by the Tibetans and Zorawar Singh himself was shot dead at a place called Tirthapuri. The situation compelled the Dogra force to make a retreat. Upon hearing the news of Zorawar Singh's death, Lama Tsultrim Nyima expressed pity for his life, and said that he had committed many sins and brought many people great misery.

Lama Tsultrim Nyima also restored several of temples, including the two Maitreya (Chamba) temples in Leh (popularly known as the Red and White temples), and the giant statute of Lord Buddha at Shey. As a charismatic figure, he was able to find donors and supporters for these noble tasks in every nook and corner of Ladakh. He toured the region to procure timber and other necessary materials.

For roofing for the Maitreya temple in Leh, he looked for a large long beam. After surveying the region, the lama was able to locate one in Sabu village. Many hurdles came in the way of locating and cutting this particular tree, as the locals suspected it to be the home of local deities. The lama, possessing spiritual and occult powers, had no problem in dealing with the local gods and spirits but the locals had greater doubts about the cutting of the tree. Thus, in order to dispel the people's doubts, the Lama consulted the local oracle of Sabu, in accordance with the wishes of the majority of the local people. The oracle said that the cutting of the tree was for a noble cause, and recommended that he go ahead.

The masons took measurements of the two ends of the building where the beam was to go and the log was taken to

Leh for installation. When the log was put up to the wall, it was found to be short by some few inches. Hence, all Tsultrim Nyima's efforts were in vain and there was no alternative except to abandon the job and look for a new beam. The lama meditated a while and then asked the masons to measure the length of the beam again. This time it was found to be more than the desired length. This incident amazed everyone and many asserted that Lama Tsultrim Nyima was a yogi. The Muslims were also impressed by the seemingly miraculous deeds of the lama and they sought out a holy object from the lama to install in a Mosque to be constructed in their style. Thus, he also found followers among the Muslim community of Ladakh. The Dogra administrator Magna Thanadar had great respect and reverence for the good works of the lama and rendered much help by allotting land to Rizong *Gonpa*.

In the biography of Lama Tsultrim Nyima, the author mentions several members of the Ladakhi aristocracy and members of the Dogra administration. First among them is Munshi Tsetan Dorje, a resident of Sabu village. ~~Munshi Tsetan Dorje~~ rendered valuable assistance to the lama in the realization of his missions as well as being an able administrator. In recognition of his good works, the Dogras conferred on him the title of 'Chandan Munshi', 'sandal-like vibrant' administrator. On the other hand, the Dogras addressed the Kalon of Leh, a member of old nobility, as 'Gobind Kalon' while they named the Basgo Kalon as 'Rupchan'. Kalon Tsering Paljor who was a resident of Wakha-Mulbek received the title of 'Heraman Munshi'. Similarly, for the convenience of the Dogra officials, the ministers were given Hindu names instead of Buddhist ones. In addition, the Dogras named villages and gardens after their rulers, such as Partapur (after Maharaja Pratap Singh), Rambirpur (after Maharaja Ranbir Singh) and two gardens by the names of Rani Bagh and Mangla Bagh. These names are still used in modern-day Ladakh.

The massive task of rejuvenating Buddhism in the region fell on the shoulders of three well-known lamas contemporary to each other: Bakula Rangdol Nyima of Lamayuru, Lama

Tashi Tamphel of Stakna and Tsultrim Nyima. These lamas were greatly respected by the Buddhists population, and faced limited resistance from the Dogra rulers. Many of the ruling officials and ministers turned out to be well-wishers and supporters of Lama Tsultrim Nyima's noble work, even extending a hand of cooperation by allotting long tracts of land in Nubra and a village in lower Ladakh to their full control. In particular, a Dogra official named Thanadar Mangal Singh turned out to be the 'god of wealth' for Lama Tsultrim Nyima, helping him realise many of his life's wishes.

Lama Tsultrim Nyima did a great deal of work for the strengthening of Buddhism in the region, and his activities ensured that Buddhism could face the challenges ahead. On the other hand, Lama Tsultrim Nyima expressed his own view of the survival of Buddhism in Ladakh by saying that the flesh of a dead lion is eaten by worms, not by any larger animals. Similarly, he did not see any great threat to Buddhism from external sources: the greatest threat to the religion was internal.

Lama Tsultrim Nyima was a major figure for Ladakhi Buddhism before and after the Dogra invasion and his chronicler, Lama Nastan Dorje (1833-1916), sheds ample light on his charismatic life and achievements.

In the same period, *Ba-ku-la dKon-mchog-rang-grol-nyi-ma*, who had been born in Skin-dyang, took responsibility for the renovation of Lamayuru *Gonpa* which the Dogra army had turned into a stable during the war and in doing so had destroyed valuable books and statues.¹

Meanwhile, the incarnate lama of Stakna *Gonpa*, Lama *Bkra-shis-bstan-phel*, noticed that the *gonpas*' financial position had deteriorated considerably because of the heavy state tax.² Therefore, he visited the Maharaja Gulab Singh and pleaded for all the *gonpas* in Ladakh to be exempt from paying taxes.³ The Maharaja gave his approval and this initiative by Lama *Bkra-shis-bstan-phel* contributed greatly to the resurgence of the monasteries.

During the reign of the Maharaja Pratap Singh (1885-1925), the second successive Ladakh-born incarnation of the

Gnas-brtan Ba-ku-la, Ba-ku-la Blo-bzag-ye-shes-stan-pa'i-rgyal-mtshan (1860-1917) became very popular with the people of Ladakh because he regulated religious, social and political activities in the region.⁴

Although Maharaja Pratap Singh was an excellent politician and a meritorious ruler—accepted by the people—both he and his subjects were extremely sad because he had no children to succeed him to the throne. However, one of the Maharaja's ministers who had just returned from Ladakh, informed him that the Kushok of Spituk *Gonpa*, Bakula *Blo-bzang-ye-shes-bstan-pa'i-rgyal-mtshan*, had special qualities both as an incarnate lama and as a great sage in the field of religion. He further suggested that it would be possible to conceive a crown prince through the power of the Kushok's prayers. Delighted with this suggestion, the Maharaja immediately sent a royal invitation to the Ba-ku-la at Spituk. The Kushok duly accepted and set off for Jammu with some senior lamas from the *gonpa*.

The Kushok received a royal reception when he reached Jammu. The Maharaja told him of the great sorrow afflicting the royal family. The Kushok prayed for seven days at the palace. It has been recorded that the Maharaja was very religious and always wore a large turban but during this period of prayer and meditation he kept it under his seat as a mark of respect.⁵ The Maharaja was very moved by the Kushok's prayers and offered to give him a donation that would satisfy the needs of both the *gonpa* at Spituk and the Bakula himself. In reply, the Bakula asked that all the *gonpas* in Ladakh and Zangskar be exempted from state tax. This had been levied on all the *Gonpas* with the exception of Hemis and Rizong during the reign of Maharaja Pratap Singh.⁶ The maharaja agreed to his request.

The Kushok continued to discuss state problems with the maharaja for the remainder of his stay and also brought them to the attention of the British Field Marshall, Lord Roberts, who was also visiting Jammu.⁷

Zangskar, the Bakula's native country, was under the

jurisdiction of the Kishtawar Tehsil at this time and the local administrators opposed the Kushok's proposals for the development of the various monasteries of the district. However, after a great deal of negotiation, the Bakula succeeded in having Zangskar transferred from Kishtawar to Ladakh for administration.

The Kushok Bakula lived for a long time in Zangskar and was responsible for a large amount of renovation work at Karsha and Stongde *Gonpas*. He built the magnificent *bla-brangs* (lamas' residence) there and later, when the Kushok received administrative and judicial powers from the maharaja, he used one big hall of the Karsha *bla-brang* as his court and office. This is still preserved along with his chair.⁸

The Kushok's activities were not confined to Zangskar. He carried out considerable renovations at Spituk *Gonpa* and rebuilt most of the old block. He also built the dignified *Gonpa* of Sankar in 1890 in the shape of the *Stong-de bla-brang*.⁹ It is said that none of the *Gonpas* of Ladakh remained untouched by his assistance during this period. Unfortunately, on August 12th, 1917, the 18th Kushok passed away at Stongde after a long illness caused by poisoning.¹⁰ His reincarnation was recognized later that year. The nineteenth Kushok Bakula Rinpoche would become the most significant figure in Ladakh's modern history.

After the Maharaja Pratap Singh died, his nephew the Maharaja Hari Singh came to the throne.¹¹ Hari Singh's reign was also very significant for the history of Buddhism in Ladakh. At that time the Buddhists of Ladakh were guided by a staunch Kashmiri Buddhist, Pandit Shridhar Koul, popularly known as Master-ji. Previously, no one at state level had shown any concern for the future of Buddhism in Ladakh, but in 1931 the maharaja's government appointed an enquiry commission, presided over by B.J. Glancy of the political department of the Government of India, to rectify this. This commission investigated the problems of the Ladakhi Buddhists which had been put forward by an organization known as the Kashmir Raj Bodh Mahasabha which had been formed under the guidance

of Pandit Shridhar Koul. It existed for “the two-fold purpose of propagating Buddhism in a land where it once nourished with full vigour and rehabilitating the Buddhists of Ladakh, socially, politically and economically.”¹² The Stag-tshang Rinpoche was nominated as its patron and the Pandit, Shridhar Bhatt, as its secretary.

At that time the Tibetan born *Stag-tshang* Rinpoche began to take an active role in the religious and cultural affairs of Ladakh. His Holiness went to Kashmir on a pilgrimage to various Buddhist shrines and called on Maharaja Hari Singh. The maharaja received him warmly and honoured him by presenting him with a full Maharaja’s dress.¹³ During his visit to Kashmir, the Stag-tshang Rinpoche discussed the future of the Ladakhi Buddhists and made a request for a piece of land for the construction of a *gonpa*. The maharaja donated 24 kannals of land at Raj Bagh in Srinagar. In the late 1960s, this was reduced to one kannal of land (One kannel = 5,440 square feet).¹⁴

As the Kashmir Raj Bodh Mahasabha had the full support and blessings of the *Stag-tshang* Rinpoche, the Buddhist leaders in Leh gave the organisation the full authority to present the grievances of the Buddhist community of Ladakh to the Glancy Commission. Accordingly, the Mahasabha’s president appeared before the Commission and on 20th of December, 1931, he submitted a detailed memorandum drawing the Commission’s attention to the economic and educational backwardness of the Buddhists of Ladakh and outlining measures for their correction. Among other things the memorandum urged legislation for the abolition of polyandry and the law of inheritance under which the eldest child was the sole heir to the ancestral property.¹⁵

The Mahasabha’s activities were not confined to Jammu and Kashmir State alone, but drew the attention of various international Buddhist organisations around the world. Soon after the appeal by the Mahasabha, Tripitakacharya Râhul Sankrityayan (1894-1963), a renowned Hindu writer, and the German monk, Anagarika Govinda, visited Ladakh to make a

firsthand study of the condition of the Ladakhi Buddhists. After their visit they submitted a report to the government about the difficulties they found regarding the state of the Buddhist monasteries and their urgent need for renovation.¹⁶

References

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- 9 *Notes on the History and Iconography of Bakula* by Sjoerd-Jan de Vries. published in *Recent Research on Ladakh* edited by Detlef Kantowsky and Reinhard Sander, Weltforum Verlag, Munich, 1983.
- 10 Gergan, 1976.
- 11 Maharaja Pratap Singh had a daughter and a son, both of whom died in infancy. One theory suggests that he was unable to have children because of a disease contracted in his youth.
- 12 Ganhar and Ganhar, 1956.
- 13 Rabgias, 1984.
- 14 I am very indebted to the late Baba Noordin Shah of Batmallu, Leh, for this information.
- 15 Ganhar and Ganhar, 1956.
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Geshe Ye-shes Don-grup

Geshe (*dge-bshes*) *Ye-shes-don-grup* (1897-1980) was one of the leading teachers of Tibetan Buddhism in his generation. Born in Ladakh, he spent more than 20 years studying in Tashi Lhunpo monastery and other centres of learning in Tibet. After returning to his homeland, he played an important part—both as a writer and as a spiritual guide helping his fellow Buddhists face up to the challenges presented by contemporary social and political change. He spent the last five years of his life as the abbot of the reconstituted Tashi Lhunpo monastery in Karnataka, southern India.

The main sources of his life are two unpublished autobiographies. The first is a 200-page document which was written in 1935 for the Dutch scholar, Johan van Manen, and covers the first 37 years of the Geshe's life. The manuscript is now in the National Museum of Ethnology at Leiden (Netherlands). The second autobiography was written in poetic style and is in the possession of the nephew of the late scholar Jigmet Dorje.

Ye-shes-don-grup was born in Stok village in 1897, the second son of *Tshe-dbang-phun-tshogs* and *Tse-ring-nor-'dzoms*. His birth was associated with many auspicious signs. According to his autobiography, *Ye-shes-don-grup* remained in his mother's womb for a year before he was born. However, his mother had a painless delivery. The family cow gave birth to a calf at the same time, ensuring a ready supply of nourishment for the young baby, sparks flew from the family stove—another auspicious sign. In his youth, he had a fine physique, a quality that he retained into old age.

The family into which *Ye-shes-don-grup* was born was called *O-ma-chig*, meaning 'Same Milk'. It acquired this name when a mother of the family breastfed a prince at Stok palace. According to the family's genealogical records, its members

had included some important people. One member of the *O-ma-chig* family was *bKra-shis*, who had obtained the blessing of the fifth '*Brug-pa Yongs-'dzin Ye-shes-grup-pa* Rinpoche, for prosperity and happiness to the family. The visit of this Tibetan Rinpoche to Ladakh coincided with the construction of the present palace of Stok by King *Tse-pal-don-grup-rnam-rgyal*, (1790-1834) the last independent ruler of Ladakh. In his youth, *Ye-shes-don-grup* was a devout Buddhist and would often visit the family temple. He would play with the musical instruments: the *damaru* (drum) and *drilbu* (bell) and he would chant mantras in a clear voice. At the age of eight he told his parents of his wish to join the monastic community at Stok *Gonpa*, and they gave their consent.

At Stok *Gonpa*, he soon acquired proficiency in reading and writing Tibetan from the tutor *Trung-ram-pa bLo-bzang-phun-tshogs*, who was his grandfather. *Ye-shes-don-grup* was later taken to Spituk *Gonpa* for the blessing of the head lama, Kushok Bakula Rinpoche. The head lama performed the ritual to mark his initiation into the religious life by cutting a piece of hair from his head, and giving him the name *Ye-shes-don-grup*. *Ye-shes-don-grup* then continued his studies, memorizing and chanting prayers at Stok *Gonpa* under the care of his tutor. Since he had a razor-sharp mind, he could memorise his lessons and the prayer texts offered by his teacher without difficulty. He was soon counted among the best novices of the *Gonpa*.

At that time it was customary for the more scholarly monks to travel to Tibet for higher education. Accordingly in 1911, at the age of 14, with the support and blessing of his tutor, parents and well-wishers, *Ye-shes-don-grup* set out for Tibet. His journey to Tibet coincided with the biennial *Lo-phyag* (Lopchak), Ladakh's salutation and trade mission to Lhasa. His parents placed him under the care of Khoja Rashid (the leader of the Lopchak) to ensure his safe passage.

According to his autobiography, the trade party took the traditional trade route via the villages of Gya-Meru to Rupshu.¹ From Rupshu the party made a diversion to Nyoma. Then *Ye-shes-don-grup* mentions his arrival at Gargunsa, the traders'

meeting point in Western Tibet, before reaching Mensar, the village nearest to Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar, which was the sixth important halting point. Under the terms of the 1684 treaty between Ladakhi King *bDe-lcgs-rnam-rgyal* (r. 1642-1694) and the Tibetans, the Ladakhi kings and the village of Mensar as retained by the Ladakhi kings so that its revenue would meet the expenses of religious offerings in monasteries and temples around Lake Manasarovar.

Ye-shes-don-grup mentions the name of several important halting points, including that of Zangzang, the nomadic village from which a member of one of the aristocratic families of Leh had brought his bride while he was on a Lopchak mission. Next, the party reached the important village of Lhartse. This was the 19th halting point of the trade party. It arrived here on the 25th day of the tenth month of iron pig year 1911. The 25th of the tenth month is known in Ladakh as *Dga' ldan lnga mchod*. This is the day on which *Tsong-kha-pa*, the founder of *Dge-lugs-pa* sect was born. Here preparations to welcome Losar (*lo gsar*), the New Year, were under way. At Lhartse, the festivities lasted for three days during which the Ladakhi participants-including *Ye-shes-don-grup* himself-performed Ladakhi dances with songs while the Tibetans performed the *shabs-bro* dance.

According to the autobiography, the party took five months to complete the journey between Leh and Shigatse, instead of the usual three months. The party entered Shigatse via the village of Phuntsogling. It was welcomed by a representative of the *dPe-thub Khams-tshan* ward of Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, where Ladakhi monks, particularly the monks of Spituk (*dPe-thub*) were given accommodation. Soon after his arrival at the monastery, *Ye-shes-don-grup* was given accommodation in Skyil-khang Datshang and Kachen (*dKachen*) *bLo-bzang-rdo-rje* became his religious and disciplinary teacher. Now the young *Ye-shes-don-grup* immersed himself in the study and memorization of mantras and prayers.

At the monastery the young novices gathered daily in the inner room behind the main assembly hall to chant mantras and

prayers, and *Ye-shes-don-grup* too would attend these prayer sessions. One day, during the prayer session, some young monks made an unruly noise. The discipline master accused *Ye-shes-don-grup* of being responsible, and beat him badly. He suffered physically as a result of this beating for a long period, during which he had to take medicine, and the injury to his back remained for the rest of his life. This incident occurred when he was 19 years old.

After this episode, on the 19th day of the first Tibetan month, *Ye-shes-don-grup* passed a minor examination over which *Chos-kyi-nyima* (1883-1937), the Sixth Panchen Lama, presided. He was then ordained as a *dGe-tshul*. Within two years of his ordination as *dGe-tshul*, he passed a major examination which paved the way for him to begin the study of *mthsan-nid*, the science of reasoning and the intellectual component of Buddhism. During the next three years he concentrated on studying various branches of philosophy. He would participate in the dialectical debating sessions, and would memorise and chant prayers in the courtyard of the monastery. For his excellent studies he received good comments from the teachers and senior officials of the monastery. He then entered the next class and, during the following two years, concentrated on the study of *Pramānavārttika* (*rNam-'grel*). In recognition of his performances in the study of *rNam-'grel*, the Panchen Lama honored him by presenting him with a waistcoat of red and yellow brocade embroidered with a dragon, a charmed silk knot for his protection, and a scarf made of silk. Similarly, from the private store of the Panchen Lama he received a tea brick annually. He was also honored by the lamas of Skilkhang, the monastery hostel, who presented him with scarves.

Each year on the 25th day of the seventh month the Panchen Lama would preside over a longevity ceremony in the courtyard of the assembly hall. His Holiness would place the 'jar of life' on the head of each individual monk. His Holiness placed the jar of life on the head of *Ye-shes-don-grup*, and gave him the 'longevity ball' made of barley flour. At that time the

Panchen Lama particularly advised him to keep studying diligently.

When *Ye-shes-don-grup* entered the next class of meditation and visualisation of the *yi-dam*, he had a *thang-ka* of the white Manjusri made in order to concentrate his mind. He would then meditate in front of the *thang-ka* to expand his knowledge. Once in a dream he was cleaning the courtyard of the monastery but, before he had finished half of his task, he woke up. This made him realise that he had progressed no more than half-way in gathering knowledge and overcoming ignorance. He spent the next six years studying the *bka'-pot-lna* the five major subjects namely *tshad-ma* (logic), *par-pyin* (*Prajnaparamita*), *dBu-ma* (*Madhyamika*), *'dul-ba* (Vinaya), *rNam-par-mdlod* (*Abhidharma kosha*) and their realisation and practices. He then started taking an active part in the religious activities of various wards of the monastery.

In 1925, at the age of 27, *Ye-shes-don-grup* obtained the Kachen (*dKachen*) degree of Tashi Lumpo monastery in the presence of 3,800 monks of whom some 200 were eminent scholars. The Kachen degree of Tashi Lunpo has the equivalent weight and prestige to the Geshe degree of Sera, Drepung and Galdan monasteries near Lhasa. Together with eight other Geshe, he then moved to Karpoche temple at Shigatse for a meditation course.

At the age of 28, he was appointed the caretaker of the Panchen Lama's private collection of books. This was an important assignment, and gave him the opportunity to learn from the valuable texts preserved in the monastery. His Holiness honored him with a silver medal. Besides this medal, Panchen *Chos-kyi-nyi-ma* provided him with considerable financial aid to help him meet the expenditure which a Geshe must incur during the feasting ceremony following the conferment of the Geshe degree. Altogether, *Ye-shes-don-grup* spent 20 years at Tashi Lhunpo studying under the guidance and supervision of more than 20 rinpoches and Geshe including Lama *bStan-'dZin-rgyal-mtsan* who later transmitted several secret teachings to the 14th Dalai Lama in India.

After completing his courses at Tashi Lhunpo, *Ye-shes-don-grup* went on a pilgrimage to Lhasa, where he was ordained *dGe-slang* by the 13th Dalai Lama, *Thup-bstan-rgya-mtsho* (1874-1933). In Lhasa he visited the temple of Cho Rinpoche and other important shrines. Next, he visited the three great monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Galdan, where he made contact with some important *dGeshe*s.

After this short pilgrimage to Lhasa, *Ye-shes-don-grup* returned to Tashi Lhunpo. In 1931 at the age of 34 he became a teacher of Buddhist philosophy at the *dPal-'khor* educational centre at Gyantse. Here he supervised the dialectics classes held in the courtyard of the monastery, and also gave lessons to the young novices.

Once, accompanied by colleagues from Gyantse, he went to the holy Lake *Lcham-sring-gya-mtso*. Upon arrival at the lake, incense was lit and food offered to the fishes. After this visit the monks narrated their findings and each of them explained his observations. *Ye-shes-don-grup*'s finding was that he saw the surroundings of the lake, including the humans, reflected upright rather than upside down in the water. Next, along with 50 other *Geshes*, he attended orthography classes conducted by one '*Be-lung Geshe Rinpoche*. Here too *Ye-shes-don-grup* showed his excellence by giving the correct reply to a question which his other colleagues could not answer. This demonstrated his ability as one of the best grammarians of the monastery. A number of monks would come to have lessons on grammar from him. In return he himself learnt astrology from a lama who was in charge of the Mani Temple.

Around this time, *dKa-chen bLo-bzang-yon-tan*, the tutor of *bLo-chen Rinpoche* passed away. *Ye-shes-don-grup* and another *dKachen* were selected as candidates to be the next tutor to the Rinpoche. In the event he was not chosen as the official tutor but, even so, *bLo-chen Rinpoche* respected him as his tutor.

While he was at Tashi Lhunpo, *Ye-shes-don-grup*'s own main teacher passed away. This meant he had to carry his teacher's body on his back to the special place in the mountains

where the flesh of the deceased was fed to the birds. At that time he realised deeply the impermanence of everything.

At the age of 37, *Ye-shes-don-grup* expressed his wishes to the senior lamas to return to his fatherland. At that time his tutor, *dKachen Byams-pa-nor-ldan*, was holding the post of Abbot at the monastery of Phuntsogling. The tutor said that he had expected him to remain at the Tashi Lhunpo for a longer time. However, he believed that his return to the fatherland would help to strengthen religion there. Before his departure, he was given a charmed silk knot for protection and other religious objects of protection. Following the old route by which he had travelled to Tibet, *Ye-shes-don-grup* set out on the return journey.

When he and his party reached Mount Kailash, he decided to circumambulate the mountain. He and a companion therefore parted from their fellow travellers and waded across a stream. The current of the water was strong, but they managed to cross it. After they had walked some distance, they met a couple who were grazing their sheep. Upon hearing that they had waded across the stream by foot, the couple was surprised and said that they were very bold and lucky people. They had never heard of anyone who had successfully waded across that stream. With that, they parted from the shepherds and went to circumambulate the holy mountain. They saw holy places such as *Grol-ma* Pass and other holy spots. Later, they rejoined their fellow travellers. They narrated the story about the crossing of the stream to their companions who were all surprised.

Ye-shes-don-grup had a safe return journey to Ladakh. There he met his relatives and fellow countrymen. However, he soon tired of his fatherland and his thoughts turned to the days he had spent at Tashi Lhunpo. While in Leh, he made contact with the literary circle of the town. However, he did not refer to any Buddhist scholar except an incarnate lama, Sera Rinpoche. However, *Ye-shes-don-grup* does speak about Joseph Gergan (*Yo-seb-dge-rgan*, 1878-1946), the Christian scholar who later wrote a history of Ladakh.² Through Gergan, *Ye-shes-don-grup* came into contact with Bishop Friedrich E. Peter (d. 1944) of

the Moravian Mission in Leh, who was popularly known as 'Peter Sahib'. Being a man of letters, Peter often enjoyed exchanging views with *Ye-shes-don-grup*. In July 1930, the Italian scholar and Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci (1894-1984) reached Leh on a scholarly expedition. Tucci wished to meet Ladakhi scholars and Peter introduced him to *Ye-shes-don-grup*. Since he had travelled from Ladakh overland to Central Tibet, Tucci asked him to write a history of Ladakh and prepare a road map for him to Tibet. The next day *Ye-shes-don-grup* presented his writings on the subjects to Tucci. Tucci was impressed by his scholarship, and persuaded him to visit Italy, promising to take care of all his needs. Since *Ye-shes-don-grup* was unfamiliar with English, he wondered how it would be possible for him to complete the necessary travel documents. Bishop Peter told him that in Calcutta he could meet a Dutch Scholar by the name of Johan van Manen (1877-1943), who knew Tibetan and would be able to help him.³

Ye-shes-don-grup then set out from Ladakh together with his brother. He arrived in *Tsho-pad-ma*, also known as Riwalsar, a town in the Mandi district of present-day Himachal Pradesh. They offered prayers at the holy lake in Riwalsar, and then proceeded on a pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya, where they visited the holy tree under which Lord Buddha had obtained enlightenment. They saw the grand Maha Bodhi temple and visited the holy rivers Niranzana and Vaishali. Here *Ye-shes-don-grup* composed a poem to dedicate his accumulated merits to Buddha. After the pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya, *Ye-shes-don-grup* visited Calcutta in search of van Manen, who could help him complete the necessary travel documents.

They found van Manen at the Asiatic Society of Bengal, where he was General Secretary. He was impressed by *Ye-shes-don-grup*'s scholarship and, when he decided not to go to Italy after all, employed him as a research scholar. Altogether, *Ye-shes-don-grup* spent a year in Calcutta and during this period he was paid a monthly salary of Rs50. He worked on religious terminology, besides writing his autobiography in Tibetan at van Manen's request.⁴

Ye-shes don grup's stay in Calcutta came to an end when *bKa blon bLo-bzang-tse-dbang* and *Sra-nga-ra No-no Ton-yot*, two important members of Ladakhi society, came to ask him to return to Ladakh for the sake of religion and culture. They offered him both their moral and financial support. At that time *Ye-shes-don-grup*'s brother, who was with him in Calcutta, went to Tibet on a pilgrimage and upon his return the two of them returned to Ladakh. On arrival in Leh, *Ye-shes-don-grup* spent a couple of months in a cave as a hermit.

Now requests for *Ye-shes-don-grup*'s teaching and guidance started pouring in. The local government first appointed him a teacher in the Government Middle School, Leh. In the school he taught *Bod-yig* (Tibetan) to the students. After he had worked for three years as a teacher, the Dharmaarth—the religious department of the Maharaja Trust of Kashmir—nominated him to teach and strengthen Buddhism in the region. Accordingly, he visited villages throughout the region and helped many people to a better understanding of their religion. As a result of *Ye-shes-don-grup*'s influence, many people stopped eating meat, and started observing fasts on important days. For the benefit of the local population, he composed a text on the visualisation of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion, and for the accumulation of merit by chanting *mane* mantras.

In 1943, at the age 46, *Ye-shes-don-grup* visited Nubra on a mission to promote religion. His father accompanied him. Upon their arrival at the village of Khardong, his father became sick from drinking bad tea. They managed to reach Diskit village where his father was treated by a local medical practitioner. Unfortunately, however, his father did not recover and died there. After the monks of Diskit monastery had performed the last rites, *Ye-shes-don-grup* offered money to the monks. His mother had died while *Ye-shes-don-grup* was still pursuing his studies at Tashi Lhunpo.

In 1946, after a gap of four years, *Ye-shes-don-grup* rejoined the education department, as a *Bod-yig* teacher, he composed a longevity text in honour of Kushok Bakula (*Ngag-*

dbang-bko-bzang-thub-bsthan-mchog-nor, 1917-2003), the Abbot of Spituk *Gonpa*, the monastery to which *Ye-shes-don-grup* would belong until his death. In addition, he composed an offering text on a chart devoted to the monks' community and the Abbot of Spituk.

One day, while he was concentrating on Yamantaka, he received a message from Tashi Lhunpo asking him to return to the monastery as a religious teacher. However, he could not accept this offer because of his obligations in his homeland.

At Stok palace *Ye-shes-don-grup* taught grammar to the princes of Ladakh. He also taught grammar and *mtsan-nid*, the science of reasoning and logic, to the prince of Matho, who was later recognised as a *Sras·sprul-sku* by the monastery of Rizong in Ladakh.

Later, accompanying Sras Rinpoche, *Ye-shes-don-grup* visited Central Tibet. On the way he taught grammar to a son of the chief of Garpon village and to the monks of Tashisgang *Gonpa*. On this journey *Ye-shes-don-grup* visited Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar for the second time and then travelled on to Trithapuri via Tashi Lhunpo. This return visit to Tashi Lhun'po to him felt like obtaining a jewel. He had the opportunity to exchange views with the senior monks of Tashi Lhunpo besides receiving teachings on Tantra from a Tantric master of Ho tho tho village. However, after spending several days at Tashi Lhunpo, he made the return journey to his homeland' via Sikkim and Kalimpong. Upon his arrival at Kalimpong, he made a visit to Babu Tharchin who published a newspaper in Tibetan entitled *Me-long* (also known in English as the *Tibet Mirror*).⁵ Babu Tharchin engaged *Ye-shes-don-grup* to work on this newspaper, and he spent a month in Kalimpong working contributing articles and poems on various subjects.

Upon finding a fellow countryman, he departed from Kalimpong en route to Ladakh. During their journey by train to Sounpur in Bihar he was tired and while he slept a pickpocket stole Rs 600 from him. This was all the money he had in his pocket. However, *Ye-shes-don-grup* arrived safely

back in Leh, and again worked with the education department as a teacher.

After some months and before the onset of winter in 1946, he went on a mission to Sikkim. Upon his arrival to Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim he visited the royal palace and met 'the queen of Sikkim and their Home Minister and then went on to Kalimpong where he met his friend Babu Tharchin and his disciple *Ang-spen-ba*. Here he also met the British Tibetologist Marco Pallis, the author of the well known book *Peaks and Lamas* (1939).

During his stay in Kalimpong, *Ye-shes-don-grup* had to work very hard. In the early morning, he would teach *Lam-rim* and related texts to Ang-spen-ba and Marco Pallis; and in the day he would visit Babu Tharchin to help edit the *Me-long* newspaper. Besides editing the general news, he contributed articles concerning the history of Ladakh and other related topics, both in poetry and prose. *Ye-shes-don-grup* worked there for five months. When the time came to say goodbye to his friends, Babu Tharchin and his pupils gave him a warm send off. He then travelled to Punjab. This was in 1947, the year of India's partition and independence. Upon his arrival at Lahore he took a train for Sialkot. While travelling in the train, he saw that Hindus and Muslims were quarrelling, and killing each other. From the window of the train he could see dead bodies scattered. He was horrified by these scenes and prayed to the Buddha from the core of his heart for an end to these brutal acts by human beings.

In Sialkot, he was walking through a narrow path in the city when someone dropped a brick on his head. He fainted and, when he recovered his senses, he found himself covered in blood but also surrounded by army officers. The officers placed him in a van and sent it to a hospital. He was treated here for a week, and then the army sent him to Jammu. Thus, although he had sustained a severe injury, his life was saved by the grace of Lord Buddha.

On his arrival in Leh, he resumed his former post and continued teaching Tibetan. However, monastic responsibilities

had also fallen on him now. At the main assembly hall of Spituk *Gonpa* he had to act as the prayer master (*dBum-mdzad*), while at Stok *Gonpa* he became the prayer narrator, the *sLob-dpon*. He also gave teachings to both monks and lay people alike.

On May 26th 1950 the relics of two of the main disciples of Lord Buddha were brought to Ladakh. On this occasion *Ye-shes-don-grup* had to give a speech about the significance of the relics to the public. In honour of the celebration of Buddha's birthday on the 15th of Vaishakhi month he composed poems related to the occasion.

Ye-shes-don-grup then became involved in a controversy over the proposed development of a new style of writing that was closer to colloquial Ladakhi than classical Tibetan (*Bod-yig*). This came from *Tshe-brtan-phun-tshogs* (1908-1973), who belonged to an aristocratic family from Sabu, and was one of the few Ladakhis educated in both modern and traditional ways of thinking.⁶ He proposed to simplify written Ladakhi, bringing it closer to the spoken language so that it would be more accessible to ordinary people. His most controversial idea was a modification of the Tibetan script when writing vernacular Ladakhi: this included the removal of one of the two letters 'a' (the *a chen*) and its replacement with the *a chung*, which is easier to write. This proposal presented a challenge to Buddhist scholars who were concerned about the integrity of the Tibetan script and the preservation of the written language which enshrined Tibetan Buddhism and its philosophy. The Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA) organised a series of conferences of Buddhist scholars to counter his challenge of. Among other allegations, they accused *Tshe-brtan-phun-tshogs* of deliberately trying to undermine the integrity of *Bod-yig* because he had embraced Christianity. Eventually, *Tse-brtan phun-tshog's* proposal was presented at an official government hearing: *Ye-shes-don-grup* made a statement which helped defeat the case.

In August 1952, Maharaja Karan Singh of Jammu visited Ladakh. The Maharaja visited Pethup *Gonpa* among others

and, to mark the visit of this dignitary, the head Lama Kushok Bakula organised a philosophical debate between *Ye-shes-don-grup* and Geshe *Brtson-dus*. Both being excellent in this subject, they put on a good debate and the Maharaja praised their performances highly.

When *Ye-shes-don-grup* attained the age of 56 in 1954, he accompanied Kushok Bakula on a flight to Srinagar. From Srinagar he went to Jammu and then on to Mandi and Riwalsar. He spent two days at *Tsho-pad-ma* (Rewalsar). After that he visited Varanasi and Kalimpong. Here he again worked for his old colleagues, and his friend Babu Tharchin. Staying at the *Me-long* for three months, he edited a Tibetan dictionary besides writing several historical articles and poems for the paper. *Ye-shes-don-grup* also gave lessons on Tibetan grammar and logic to a number of people including the monks of a *Gonpa*. He had a very pleasant stay in Kalimpong, and on his return journey to Leh, went to Varanasi on pilgrimage. From there he went to Kashmir, and arrived in Leh via Kargil.

Upon his arrival in Leh, *Ye-shes-don-grup* commissioned a local smith to make a *Ganjira*, a parasol-shaped banner to present to Spituk *Gonpa*. The *Ganjira* was installed and the ceremony took place on the 28th of the 11th month of the Tibetan calendar, the annual festival day of the monastery. As a loyal monk of Stok *Gonpa* he presented a pair of long carpets to the *Gonpa* for the assembly hall.

From the beginning of the first month of the Tibetan year he was honoured to give teachings to *Stag-tshang* Rinpoche, the young Abbot of Hemis *Gonpa*, who came to Leh specifically for this purpose and spent a couple of months with him. In return, Stagtshang Rinpoche invited *Ye-shes-don-grup* to Hemis on the occasion of the annual Hemis festival. *Ye-shes-don-grup* accepted this invitation and offered money to the monks and visited various shrines of the *gonpa*. From Hemis, he accompanied Stagtshang Rinpoche to Chemdey monastery where he spent about a month as the guest and tutor of the Head Lama. As a good friend and also as a tutor, *Ye-shes-don-grup* spent two months with Stagtshang Rinpoche at

the Hermitage of Gotsang above Hemis. In the following year he was appointed the chief monk of Spituk *Gonpa* and its three sister monasteries by Kushok Bakula, the Head Lama. This appointment meant that he was much involved in giving teachings to the monks there and also at the Jokhang Vihara in Leh.

In 1955 he accompanied Kushok Bakula on a religious mission to Lhasa. This took them by air to Srinagar, and then to Jammu, Varanasi and Kalimpong. From there via Gangtok, he once again visited Tashi Lhunpo. Here he had an audience with His Holiness the Panchen Lama, the senior monks and old colleagues. He visited various temples at Tashi Lhunpo and offered tea and money to the monks. After spending several days there, he took a Chinese bus to Lhasa. Here he again visited the three important monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Galdan, before going on to Samye and Drigung monasteries.

At the Potala palace he had the opportunity to receive teaching on *Jigs-byed*, the Vajrabhairava and *Spyan-ras-gzigs* (Avalokitesvara) from the Dalai Lama. At Drepung monastery, he presented money to the resident monks of Spituk hostel. Similarly, he offered token money of Rs. 100 to Sras Rinpoche of Rizong, who was at that time studying in Drepung. In return, Sras Rinpoche also gave him many presents. On this visit, he spent three months in Lhasa and from there he visited Tashi Lhunpo. Here he once again availed himself of the opportunity to receive longevity teachings from the Panchen Lama. He also obtained teaching on the protector deity *Cham-sring* from *Yong-'dzin dNol-chui*, the tutor of the Panchen Lama. While he was at Tashi Lhunpo, the Panchen Lama invited *Ye-shes-don-grup* to stay at the monastery. However, Kushok Bakula wanted him to return to Ladakh. Complying with Kushok Bakula's instructions, he decided to make the return journey. He reached Sikkim and via Kalimpong arrived back in Srinagar. At Srinagar he met the young head Lama of Hemis *Gonpa* and his parents, who were on their way to Tibet. From Srinagar he took an airplane to Leh.

Within a month of his return from Lhasa in 1957, the

people asked him to assume the post of President of the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA). He accepted, and the new headquarters of the association was built during his tenure. The other major religious work which he undertook during his presidency was the renovation of the red temple of Buddha Maitreya close to the nine-storey Lion Palace. This is one of the temples built during the reign of King *Grags-pa-'bum-lde* in the 14th century. *Ye-shes-don-grup* also gave teachings to the devotees on the 15th day of every month in the Jokhang Vihara.

In 1959 the Chinese suppressed the Lhasa uprising, and the Dalai Lama along with several thousand Tibetans had to flee to India. The people of Ladakh deputed *Ye-shes-don-grup* (as President of the LBA) to visit the Dalai Lama together with Stakna Rinpoche and *Don-grup-bsod-nams*, and invite him to visit Ladakh. At that time the Dalai Lama was staying temporarily in Mussoorie, and *Ye-shes-don-grup* and his party had an audience with him there. The Dalai Lama agreed to visit Ladakh, although he did not actually do so until much later. *Ye-shes-don-grup* also had an audience with the two tutors of the Dalai Lama and His Holiness's mother. After a successful visit to Mussoorie, the party returned to New Delhi where they called on Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India to give their assessment of the situation in Tibet, and to inform him of their invitation to the Dalai Lama to visit Ladakh.

On his return to Leh, *Yes-shes don-grup* involved himself very much in religious and cultural activities. In the 1960s, the Buddhists of Ladakh still consumed much meat on the occasion of Losar, the New Year and would also offer sacrifices to the village gods. *Ye-shes-don-grup* launched a campaign against excessive consumption of meat, and sacrifices to the village gods. To achieve this objective he associated himself with two cultural organisations: the Lamdon Social Welfare Society which was founded in 1969; and *Nyams-gso* Society founded in the year 1975. These societies would organise drama shows and *Ye-shes-don-grup* provided scripts drawn from the Jataka

Tales (stories from the Buddha's previous lives). At the same time, he would compose a song matching the theme of the scripts. The money raised by staging dramas was used to renovate old temples which were in bad condition.

He further promoted the celebration of Buddha's birthday with full enthusiasm and devotion. In order to promote his campaign, he visited many important villages in Central Ladakh and Nubra and received a positive response from different parts of Ladakh. Since then, the Buddha Jayanti celebration has become an annual feature at the villages of Timosgang and Chemdey. He himself also worked hard to understand the teachings of the exponents of other sects besides his own, the *dGe-lugs-pa*. As such he visited Stakna to obtain teachings from the *bKa'-rgyud-pa* order from Stakna Rinpoche.

After *Ye-shes-don-grup* had held the seat of Chief Lama of Spituk *Gonpa* for five years, he thought it best to relinquish this position in order to have more time for social and cultural activities. However, Kushok Bakula and the monk community of Spituk would not allow him to stand down, so he continued with the responsibility and taught language and grammar to the monks. During this time he also gave teachings to the elite Buddhists at the LBA headquarters in Leh at Jokhang temple, and taught *Lam-rim*, the graded stages of the path to liberation continuously for twenty days. Sras Rinpoche of Rizong was among the students there. On the final day, the Rinpoche read out a prayer he had composed for *Ye-shes-don-grup*'s long life. At that moment *Ye-shes-don-grup* felt so delighted that he said that there was no need for him to stay longer in this world. However, since it was the wish of the Rinpoche and his disciples, he was very pleased to hear the prayer composed in his honour. After this teaching, he gave a longevity initiation to a crowd of over three hundred in the Jokhang Vihara. On the occasion of the opening of the main assembly hall of Sabu *Gonpa*, he also gave teaching on longevity to the monks of Spituk *Gonpa* and the villagers of Sabu.

In 1967, *Ye-shes-don-grup* visited Gangtok on behalf of the

LBA to invite *rGyal-wa* Karmapa to Ladakh. Along with *Kere Tse-ring dPal Jor*, he visited Rumtek *Gonpa* near Gangtok, and the Karmapa agreed to visit Ladakh in 1968. Later, the Karmapa asked *Ye-shes-don-grup* to join his monastery at Rumtek to teach philosophy to the young lamas. However, due to his preoccupations in Ladakh, he could not accept this offer.

In the winter of 1968, *Ye-shes-don-grup* and *Zomdey bKra-shis-phun-tshogs* were deputed by the education department to compile school text books in *Bod-yig* up to the tenth class. For this he had to work very hard. Besides including topics on religion and the culture of the area, the department wanted them to include lessons on science. In a lesson on plants, a statement was required that plants have souls. *Ye-shes-don-grup* objected to this, saying that “According to Buddhist philosophy plants are lifeless”. This lesson became a matter of controversy and finally the case had to be referred to Kushok Bakula, who at that time was also a minister in the Kashmir government. Only after much persuasion did *Ye-shes-don-grup* agree to write in the book that plants have life.⁷

In 1970, at the age of 73, *Ye-shes-don-grup* was to retire from the post of school-teacher, but the people did not let him do so, and the local government granted five years’ extension to his service. During the extension, besides teaching at the High School in Leh, the Geshe wrote *Bod-yig* school textbooks for the 9th and 10th classes. At the same time, he started showing a keen interest in the activities of the newly established Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages in Leh, and contributed articles and poems for publication in the journals and annual book of the Academy. His articles were on subjects such as Buddhism, philosophy, language and biography. Later, in recognition of his good work, the Academy honoured him by presenting its prestigious award, the robe of honour.

In Spitik *Gonpa*, the incarnate Kushok Bakula Rinpoche created the seat of *dPe-thub mkhan po*, the Abbot.” In 1975, *Ye-shes-don-grup* became the *mkhan-po* of the newly re-established Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Mundgod (Karnataka)

at the request of the monk community there. He passed the last five years of his life in South India. In the words of Peter Richardus (1992): “*Ye-shes-don-grup* must be regarded as an outstanding example of a scholarly monk who did his utmost to preserve a civilisation caught in the most serious crisis of its history.”

References

- 1 The manuscript's reference at the museum is: Manuscript RMV 2739-194b with the title *Karehen Yeshe Don-Grup's rNam-tar* in English.
- 2 Gergan, 1976. For background on Gergan see Bray, 1994.
- 3 Van Manen was born in 1877 in Nijmegen (Netherlands) and was one of the leading Western scholars of Tibetan of his generation. As a young man became interested in Theosophy and from 1914 to 1916 worked as Assistant Librarian at the Theosophical Society's headquarters in Adyar, Southern India. From 1916 to 1918 he studied Tibetan in Ghoom, near Darjeeling, before settling in Calcutta in 1919. He served as the General Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal until his retirement in 1939 see Ricardus, 1989, 1992 and 1998.
- 4 *Ye-shes-don-grup* was one of at least five people from the Himalayan region who prepared autobiographies for van Manen. One of these was published in America soon after van Manen's death (Twan Yang, 1945). It tells the story of van Manen's houseboy, who had been born in Kalimpong of mixed Chinese and Tibetan descent and—despite his youth—had already had an adventurous life as a servant successively of Hindu, Sikh, Parsi, Muslim, British and American employers before riding his way to van Manen. Four other autobiographies remained in manuscript. These were included in van Manen's collection of books, block-prints, manuscripts and papers, which were acquired by the Dutch Government after his death, and placed in the National Museum of Ethnology and the Kern Institute in Leiden. Peter Richardus published a summary

of *Ye-shes-don-grup*'s autobiography in 1992. Richardus (1998) has also edited and published three other life-stories written for van Manen. These are of *Phun-tshogs-lung-rtoqs*, a Tibetan monk who helped teach him Tibetan, *sKar-ma Sum-dhon Paul* who had been born in Ghoom and became successively a translator for the British Government, a teacher at a mission school, and a lecturer in Tibetan at Calcutta University; and Ts'an Chih Chen, the son of a Chinese father and a Tibetan mother, who had been born in Lhasa in 1893.

- 5 Babu Tharchin was a Christian from POD, now in Himachal Pradesh, who had settled in Kalimpong. See Fader, 2002 and 2004.
- 6 On the background to his life see Bray, 1994.
- 7 For this information I am indebted to the late *bKra shis Phun tshogs Zomdey*.

The 19th Bakula Rinpoche

With the birth of the 19th Bakula Rinpoche in 1917, Ladakh once again had a leader in its highest religious position. He was born on the 19th of May in a royal family in Matho village. His father was a scholar of Buddhism, while his mother was Queen Eshey Wangmo, belonging to the Zangla (Zangskar) royal family.

At the age of 13, Rinpoche went to Lhasa for higher education and received geshe ordination from the 13th Dalai Lama. In Lhasa he pursued his studies at Drepung, the largest monastic institution in Tibet, where he was awarded the degree of *Geshe Lharampa*, the highest degree in Buddhist metaphysics, which he received after 12 years of study.

In 1934, under the guidance of the Pandit Shridar Koul, Sri Nilkanth, the Income Tax Officer, and G.L. Shah, the headmaster of Leh Middle School, founded the Young Men's Buddhist Association. This was the first such association to be established in Ladakh. *Bka'-blon Tse-sbang-rig-dzin* was elected its first president; Munshi *Bsod-nams Tse-dbang* as its secretary; and *Sra-nga-ra-don-yod* Shah as its treasurer. This association did its best to promote Buddhist education along with other social issues by raising funds in the form of donations. Among the major contributions of the association was the preparation of Bodhi/Ladakhi text books for school children. Later on, responding to repeated requests from the association, the Dharmath Trust Department of the maharaja's government sanctioned funds for religious preachers and social reformers who were able to develop public awareness, denouncing such practices as the excessive drinking of *chang* (local beer) and polyandry, and promoting literacy.¹

Also in 1934, for the first time the people of the State of Jammu and Kashmir were granted the power to nominate their own representatives, and a legislative assembly known as the

Praja Sabha was established. The Assembly had 75 members and the Buddhists of Ladakh were given two seats.

After the formation of the Assembly, the first Ladakhis to attend were King '*Jigs-med-drga-'dul, Bka'-blon Tse-dbang Rig-'dzin and Sra-nga-ra-don-yod Shah*. These Ladakhi representatives, under the guidance of Pandit Shridhar Koul, succeeded in getting a law passed dealing with the equal distribution of inherited land to all the brothers in a family. Polyandry was also outlawed at this time. In 1941, the maharaja's government promulgated the Polyandrous Marriages Prohibition Act.² Previously younger brothers were not entitled to inherit land nor were they permitted to marry independently from the eldest brother. When the younger sons did marry separately, they had difficulty in feeding their wives and children. This was one of the reasons for the large numbers of monks and nuns and helped limit the numbers of the Buddhist population.

On his return from Tibet, the Rinpoche played an active role in the socio-cultural development of Ladakh. In 1947, India became free from British rule and Pakistan was created by partition. Ladakh, together with most of the rest of Jammu and Kashmir, remained with India and the Buddhists welcomed this since, among other reasons, it was the birthplace of Sakyamuni Buddha. The joining of Ladakh to the rest of India provided an opportunity for the people of Ladakh to give their full attention to the development of their religion according to their own methods and choice. Thus, 1947 can be regarded as the date of the beginning of the Buddhist revival in modern Ladakh because from that time onwards the responsibility for the support of Buddhism fell squarely on the people themselves.

On July 4th, 1949, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, visited Ladakh together with Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, the Prime Minister of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Pandit Nehru's visit coincided with the very first democratic election in Ladakh. The Ladakhi people had elected *rGyal-sras* Bakula Rinpoche as their leader and the president of the National Conference Party. Speaking in

Leh, Pandit Nehru stressed the importance of the occasion by saying “Ladakh is no longer far away, but whether we are near to each other or far away, we are all children of India and we shall face our problems together.”³

During his stay, Pandit Nehru presented the young head Lama of Hemis *Gonpa*, *Stag-tshang-Rinpoche Nga-dbang-bstan-bzin-chos-kyi-nyi-ma* and *rGyal-sras* Kushok Bakula Rinpoche with an ivory casket, each containing photographs of the Buddha image at Sarnath, the Sanchi Stupa and Bodh Gaya temple together with two statues of the Buddha, one in bronze and the other in marble. Commenting on Buddhism, Pandit Nehru said, “Buddhism is the prevailing religion here in Ladakh so Buddhist religion and learning must be encouraged and helped. You know that Buddhism came from India; rest assured that Buddhism and Buddhist institutions here will receive every possible opportunity for development.”⁴

In the year 1950, the Kashmir government, headed by Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, passed the Large Landed Estates Abolition Act. As the bill was passed without any prior consultation with the Ladakhi Buddhist leaders they reacted against it because it directly affected the interest of Ladakhi *gonpas* and the monastic communities. At that time the monasteries of Ladakh held extensive estates comprised of some of the most fertile land in Ladakh, but they were not regarded as agents of exploitation as the Zaminders and Jagirdars were in other parts of the country. The government’s act aroused strong feelings of opposition among the Buddhists of Ladakh and they protested the decision through *rGyal-sras* Bakula. A Buddhist delegation comprising *rGyal-sras* Bakula Rinpoche, *dGer-dgan-dKon-mchog-bsod-rnamas*, Lama *dKundga* (the manager of Hemis Gopa) and *bSod-rnams-dhang-rgyal*, acting as interpreter, called on Pandit Nehru in New Delhi. The delegation formed an action committee under the name of the *Gonpa* Association to fight the case with the State Government.⁵

There was a lot of heated argument between *RGyal-sras* Bakula and Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah at the state

government level and demonstrations were held in Leh.⁶ As a result of these, the government appointed a committee of enquiry headed by justice Jankinath Wazir, the Chief Justice of Jammu and Kashmir. The Wazin Committee visited Ladakh in 1953 and investigated the case concerning the Ladakhi monasteries. In the Committee's report it records:

It was rather surprising that the tenants who were likely to gain by the operation of the Act on the lands attached to the *gonpas* have unanimously desired that these lands should remain attached to the *gonpa* and be free of the Abolition Act. It was especially enquired of them why they were in favour of the retention of the lands with the *gonpas*. Their reply was that the lands which were attached to the *Gonpas* were cultivated by the tenants and they had to pay only one fourth of the produce to the *gonpas*. The *gonpas*' share of the produce was utilized for educational, religious and charitable purposes for feeding the poor and the needy and, therefore, they would like that the *gonpas* should not be divested of these lands.⁷

The *Gonpa* Association won their case. This was a great relief to the various *gonpas* in Ladakh. The majority of land affected by the abolition bill was attached to Hemis *Gonpa* and in appreciation of the outcome the *Stag-tshang* Rinpoche presented a site in Leh to be used for the headquarters of the *Gonpa* Association. This has enabled it to pursue the causes of the *gonpas* effectively under the presidency of *rGyal-sras* Bakula Rinpoche.⁸

The date of 26th of May, 1950, is very significant in the Buddhist history of Ladakh. In fulfillment of a promise made by Pandit Nehru during his visit, the relics of the Lord Buddha and his two principal disciples, Sariputa and Mahamonglan, were brought to Ladakh. These were normally kept at Mulgandh Kuti Vihara in Sarnath, but were brought to Leh under the auspices of the Maha Bodhi Society of India for the people's darshan (vision of the divine). Commenting on this auspicious day, *rGyal-sras* Bakula said: "This is the proudest day in my life and in the life of my people. Our gratitude to Pandit Nehru is immense."⁹

These were the first holy religious objects ever to be brought to Ladakh in recent history, and the entire population was keen to perform darshan and came to pay their respects and to show reverence. The relics were kept in Ladakh for two and a half months and during this time they were taken to various monasteries and villages so that people could see them personally.

After Pandit Nehru's visit to Ladakh, the area received considerable publicity and was recognized as an important Buddhist region of India. Bakula Rinpoche attended international conferences and through his efforts Ladakh was recognized as one of the strongholds of Buddhism. As an able politician and administrator, Bakula Rinpoche served as Minister of State in the J&K State Government from 1953 to 1967. He was a member of the Fourth and Fifth Lok Sabha from 1967 to 1977. As an active Member of Parliament, he was a Member of the Consultative Committees for Defense, Education and Planning, and was also associated with several Parliamentary Committees. A widely traveled person, Bakula Rinpoche also attended the Sixteenth World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs in Tokyo.

On the 24th of May, 1956, the 2500th anniversary of the birth of Lord Buddha was celebrated in Ladakh, as in other parts of the country and world, under the chairmanship of *rGyal-sras* Bakula Rinpoche. As a gesture of goodwill, the Jammu and Kashmir government allocated Rs. 15,000 for the event. An extensive programme was implemented with this aid that included the full participation of all the leading monasteries in Ladakh. Two ministers came from Srinagar to Leh to represent the State Government. The whole town was brilliantly illuminated at night.

The Ladakhis have traditionally observed the festival of Buddha Jayanti (the Buddha's birthday) on the fifteenth day of the fourth month according to the Tibetan calendar, but in 1985 the festival was celebrated in Leh on Buddha Purnima, the day of the full moon (also known as Vaishaki Purnima) together with the rest of India, in accordance with the decision

of the World Fellowship of Buddhists at a conference held in Sri Lanka.¹⁰

The 2530th Buddha Jayanti on the 23rd of May, 1986, had a special significance in the history of Ladakh. In that year the celebration took place on the open ground close to Mani Sermo at Leh. Mani Sermo is thought to be one of the 108 stupas constructed by *Lo-tsa-wa Rin-chen-bZang-po* in the tenth century A.D. A huge procession circled round the town of Leh with a seven foot statue of the Buddha acquired by the Shanti (Peace) Pagoda construction committee from Japan and now installed at a new stupa in Leh. In the afternoon a grand public meeting was held under the chairmanship of Dgergan Dkon-mchog-bsod-nams, a former President of the Ladakh Buddhist Association, in which religious leaders of other faiths also paid respect to the Buddha. In the evening, the whole town was illuminated with fire-torches.

For some years after the founding of the Young Men's Buddhist Association/Buddhist Association, in 1934, the organization lacked a centre where Buddhist leaders could sit and discuss their problems. Their leader, Bakula Rinpoche, was keenly aware of this and in 1956, in response to his initiative, a part of Wazir Bagh was transferred to the Buddhist Association to enable them to build the Jo-khang temple of Leh. Having access to such a choice bit of land in the heart of the town, the Ladakhi Buddhists spared no efforts in the rapid construction of the temple, donating money, labour and materials and the construction was completed in 1958. Two years later the Tibetan-built statue of Jo-Rinpoche was installed there.¹¹

The construction of the Jo-Khang temple contributed to the revival of Buddhism in modern Ladakh, but this was soon overshadowed by the massive Chinese crackdown in Tibet in 1959. The Dalai Lama was forced to flee from Tibet, together with thousands of refugees, and the Chinese appeared to present both a political and a religious threat to Ladakh.

Ever since the reign of Lhachen *Dnos-grup-mgon* (1300-1325), Ladakh has looked to Tibet for spiritual guidance, and

after the tragic events of 1959 its link with Tibet was severed. This presented a serious challenge for Buddhism in Ladakh and raised a number of questions regarding the settlement of thousands of Tibetan refugees who had entered Ladakh from Changthang in the east, and the question of where to send young Ladakhi novice monks for education.

Inspired by Pandit Nehru's words regarding his affection for Buddhist education, the Ladakhi Buddhist Association and *Gonpa* Association (under the guidance of Bakula Rinpoche) decided to establish an institution that could impart instruction in Buddhist Philosophy and other related subjects. Accordingly on October 23rd, 1959, the Buddhist Philosophy School (now called the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies) was established. At first it had only ten students: one each from Hemis, Chemre, *Tak-thog*, Thikse, Stakna, Matho, Spituk, Phyang, Likir and Rizong monasteries.

In its early days the school did not receive any government assistance but later, due to the tireless efforts of the teachers and students, it was formally recognized as an autonomous state institution and from 1962 it started receiving government grants. On the 18th of April, 1985, the school celebrated its silver jubilee and Bakula Rinpoche, its founder, laid the foundation stone for a new complex which will spread over 208 kannals of land.

Also in 1959, and again thanks to the tireless efforts of Bakula Rinpoche, the Government of India sanctioned scholarships for eighteen Ladakhi novices to obtain a modern education at Sarnath, and, in 1961, sent another five young monks to Sri Lanka to study Buddhism. This initiative opened a new era in the field of education for Ladakhis. Parents became more aware of the importance of education and soon a positive response was noticed in the spheres of both religious and secular education.

The Bakula's activities in the field of Buddhism and Buddhist studies were not confined to Ladakh alone. He was very keen to see Buddhist temples and Buddhist rest houses built for Ladakhi pilgrims at all Buddhist centers in the country

including Delhi, the capital of India. The construction of a temple and a rest house in Delhi was difficult in the 1960's for both political and financial reasons, but the Bakula Rinpoche pointed out the need for such a project to Pandit Nehru. Panditji extended his personal support to the allotment of the site of the present Ladakh Buddhist Vihara on the bank of the River Yamuna and encouraged its rapid completion. The Prime Minister himself inaugurated the Vihara on the 24th February, 1963.¹²

Bakula Rinpoche's ambition was not only to build a temple in Delhi but also to establish institutions there to provide modern educational facilities for young Ladakhis. Accordingly, in 1963, the Ladakh Institute of Higher Studies was established in Delhi with students from various Himalayan regions such as Himachal Pradesh, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The government recognized the school and sanctioned scholarships for the students. Originally, the school aimed to impart Buddhist education with Tibetan and Sanskrit as compulsory subjects but due to many setbacks failed to achieve these objectives. It is still active although it now imparts only modern secular education.

In 1968 big political changes took place in Ladakh. Bakula Rinpoche, who had represented Ladakh in the Jammu and Kashmir cabinet since 1953, was elected unopposed to represent Ladakh in the national parliament in New Delhi. This was the first time that Ladakh had been given its own seat in the parliament. At that time, the Buddhist population was still dissatisfied with the Jammu and Kashmir State Government's discriminatory attitude with regard to employment and admission to the technical institutions. In addition, the conversion of Buddhist girls to non-Buddhist faiths through marriage was thought to be a serious problem.¹³ The settlement of the Tibetan refugees was also an urgent concern of local Buddhists.

At this crucial time Ladakh was without a representative in the Jammu and Kashmir cabinet and this aggravated an already tense situation. In 1969, the Buddhists launched a

period of agitation under the leadership of *Rtogs-Idan* Rinpoche. For the first time in Buddhist history an incarnate lama was arrested by the Police on charges of leading a demonstration and breaking prohibitory orders. This Buddhist agitation lasted for over two months, and it helped to unite the community.

The agitation finally ended with a peaceful settlement by the State Government. The arrested Buddhist leaders were released and the cases against them were withdrawn. The Government agreed to the demands that Ladakhi/Bodhi teachers should be appointed to all primary, middle and high schools in Ladakh and the Tibetan refugees were granted land on both sides of the Ahi canal in Choglomsar.¹⁴ The Buddhists of Ladakh felt deeply in their hearts that it was their historical duty to do everything they could for the refugees in recognition of all the moral and spiritual help that the Tibetans had given them for centuries.

On August 7, 1978, Bakula Rinpoche was appointed member of the first Commission on Minorities and constituted by the Government of India and continued on that commission until December 11, 1989. He also served with great distinction, from 1990 till 2000, as India's Ambassador to Mongolia (see page 137).

As mentioned before, conversion and polyandry were now regarded as the two major threats to Buddhists interests. An ever-increasing Muslim population threatened to out-number the Buddhists and educated people were aware of the implications of this situation in a democracy. In 1969, some Ladakhi youths decided to establish an organization called the Lamdon Social Welfare Society for the eradication of social evils such as polyandry. The society wanted to achieve its aims principally through education. In addition it published a collection of songs composed by *Dge-long Thup-bstan-dpal-Idan* and *Don-sdrup-rnam-rgyal*. In 1973, the society founded the Lamdon Model School and from 1974 it started organising *Ma-ni-dung-'phur* (the recitation of millions of mani mantras) every year. In 1976, the society was one of the sponsors of the

Kalachakra (the Wheel of Time) initiation given by H.H. the Dalai Lama. Thus, the Society received support from the local Buddhists as well as from H.H. the Dalai Lama for development.

The Buddhist youth also started a similar society called *Nyams-gso*. The main function of this society was to renovate Buddhist temples and stupas. The society also staged many dramas for the propagation of the Buddha's teachings, taking the Jataka Tales (stories from the Buddha's previous lives) as plots. Among its achievements were the cementing of the staircase of the Jokhang temple and the installation of 89 prayer wheels around the temple. These prayer wheels contain more than 150 million Mani mantras and were inaugurated by H.H. the Dalai Lama on the 6th of September, 1980.

In the last three decades, since the Chinese take-over of Tibet, Ladakh has been very fortunate to have been visited by many of the most important Tibetan religious leaders. H.H. the Dalai Lama has come on several occasions. His visit in 1976 had a special significance for the Buddhist history of Ladakh. In September, His Holiness delivered a five-day Kalachakra (the Wheel of Time) initiation at Jivetshal, the peace garden at Choglomsar, where the local administration had installed a marble statue of Lord Buddha in 1975. Almost the entire Buddhist population of Ladakh, including Nubra, Changthang, Zangskar and Central Ladakh, gathered in Choglomsar and a special temple hall, financed by devoted Buddhists was built on the banks of the Indus especially for the initiation.

In 1980, the Dalai Lama again paid a visit to Ladakh, this time to bless the people and the region of Zangskar. His Holiness entered Zangskar by the rough motor road from Kargil, crossing the 3,255 meter-high Pensi-la pass. Altogether His Holiness spent one week in the Zangskar valley. He visited various *gonpas* of the region and gave a three-day Avalokitesvara initiation at Padum. The same year the peace garden of Zangskar and a special temple hall were constructed in Padum. After leaving Zangskar, His Holiness toured the Indus valley and visited various *gonpas* there. On August 27th,

1980, His Holiness inaugurated the thirty seven foot high Maitreya statue in Thikse *Gonpa*.

The Dalai Lama returned again to Ladakh in June 1987, soon after the completion of a special residential summer palace which his devotees had built in the Jivetshal compound at Choglomsar. His Holiness spent most of his thirty five day stay in Ladakh in retreat except for the final five days during which he gave extensive teachings on the famous fourteenth century, thirty seven verse composition by *Slo-dpon Thogs-med* on the practices of the Bodisattvas.

Until the present Dalai Lama's first visit to Ladakh in 1965, none of his predecessors had ever visited the country, let alone built a permanent residential palace. The selection of Ladakh for a summer retreat will enable the local population to meet His Holiness at more frequent intervals and hear his teachings and obtain his blessings.

Ladakh was re-opened to foreign tourists in 1974 after having been closed for over 20 years. Thousands of foreign tourists began to come to Ladakh to see the cultural life of the people and to visit the *gonpas*. This sudden influx had a mixed effect on both the cultural and the economic life of the people. Ladakh seized the opportunity to become one of the richest strongholds in Mahayana Buddhism; the *gonpas* started taking donations from the tourists and these were used for the renovation and expansion of the monastery buildings. At the same time the *gonpas* now had a special responsibility to guard their precious religious objects, such as scrolls, statues and figures of Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas.

Even before the opening of the region to tourism, statues were stolen on a several occasions and the government considered handing over this serious problem to the Central Bureau of Investigation.¹⁵ After the opening of the region many antique shops dealing in Buddhist religious objects were opened in Leh. Many of the goods came from Katmandu, Delhi and Srinagar, but some had been procured from *gonpas* in Ladakh through unscrupulous people. The local police stamped many valuable *thang-kas* from various *gonpas* and the state

government opened an office in Leh for the registration of antiquities, but these government measures had little success and for a long time the antique business created a lot of problems for both the local people and for other lovers of the art, culture and religions of Ladakh.

However, on June 25th, 1984, H.H. the Stakna Rinpoche, the President of the Ladakh Buddhist Association, signed an agreement with the representative of the antique dealers stating that: "None of the shopkeepers in Ladakh, irrespective of their religion or creed, whether Tibetan Buddhist or Muslim Kashmiri, Ladakhi or non-Ladakhi shopkeepers shall transact business in Ladakh of Buddhist scrolls, statues or scriptures from October 1st, 1984."

In spite of this agreement, we still find that the practice continues. It is hoped that in the near future both the Government and the Buddhist Association will take some positive steps to curtail this very harmful trade.

In June 1984, a very significant development in the history of Buddhism occurred. H.H. *Grugs-sbangs-rtog-sprul* Rinpoche, delivered the *Bka'gyur-lung* (the recitation of the one hundred and eight volumes of the original teachings of the Buddha) in the Jo-khang for about three and a half months. There had never been such an extensive recitation of the Buddha's words before in the recorded history of Ladakh.

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50 Years of Tibetans in Exile: On the Rehabilitation of Tibetans in Ladakh

Exactly fifty years ago, in the year 1959, I was seven years old and a student in the first primary studying at the Maha Bodhi School, in Sarnath, Varanasi. I was totally ignorant of the happenings in the world around me. At the time I understood no English and little of the Hindi language.

The daily Hindi newspaper of Varanasi, called *Aaj*, published a cartoon drawing of a cage with two parrots. One could flee and land on the shoulder of Jawaharlal Nehru while the second parrot remained trapped. The caption identified the two birds as the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama. The Dalai Lama could escape and reach India, while the Panchen Lama could not.

With the broadcast of the news of the Chinese occupation of Tibet on All India Radio from Delhi, prominent Ladakhis organized a protest in Leh to condemn the takeover.

People from all walks of life gathered in the town as Murup Gyurmet Sagarak, the then President of a local unit of the National Conference, addressed the public rally on the political aspects of Tibet, based on Charles Bell's book, *History of Tibet*. Tashi Rabgias, who at the time was the Secretary of the Ladakh Buddhist Association, spoke about the religious aspects of Tibet. The news of Ladakhis organizing demonstration against the Chinese occupation of Tibet spread like wildfire and got extensive coverage in the Indian newspapers. Rallies also occurred in Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi.¹

Earlier in November 1955, Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, who at that time was a minister in the Jammu and Kashmir Government, had led a cultural mission to Tibet, sponsored by both the Government of India and the Government of Jammu and Kashmir. This visit occurred fifteen years after Kushok

Bakula Rinpoche returned to Ladakh after completing his studies in Buddhist philosophy and obtaining the degree of Geshe Lharampa with distinction at Drepung, the largest monastery of Tibet.

Kushok Bakula Rinpoche's mission to Tibet included Nirmal C. Sinha, the Cultural Attaché to the Political Officer at Gangtok, Sikkim; D.D. Khosla, the Under Secretary in the Political Department of the Government of Jammu and Kashmir; S. Stobdan, the Deputy Project Officer and longtime Secretary to Kushok Bakula; the Venerable Geshe Eshey Tudup, Bodhi Teacher, Government High School, Leh; Venerable Gelong Rigdol, Attendant; Tudup Phunchok, a Cook and two orderlies. Kushok Bakula was thus able to observe new developments taking place in Tibet, particularly in Lhasa. He witnessed the Chinese constructing roads and strengthening its military in and around Lhasa. After spending almost nine months in Lhasa he returned to New Delhi and cautiously and confidentially apprised Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru of the situation in Tibet. He summarized things as follows:

There are about [twelve thousand] Chinese troops working all over the country. They are building roads and buildings, and a few schools for teaching both Chinese and Tibetan have been opened in Lhasa and Shigatse. One hospital equipped with an x-ray machine is said to have been opened in Lhasa. The Chinese do not, at present, interfere with the administration of the monasteries. For that matter, they promised not to interfere with the religious affairs of the Tibetan for years to come.²

As a member of celebration Committee of 2500 Buddha Jayanti (under the Chairmanship of Dr. S. Radha Krishnan, Vice President of India), Kushok Bakula's visit to Tibet also allowed him to extend the Government of India's invitation to the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama to attend the celebration of 2500 years of Buddha Jayanti in Delhi and other Buddhist

holy places throughout the country. The invitation was graciously accepted by the two and they attended the grand Buddha Jayanti celebrations both at New Delhi and at Varanasi and Bodh Gaya, in 1956.

Kushok Bakula Rinpoche being a farsighted lama and a mature politician, was very much aware of the eventual catastrophe which was to come over Tibet and was correct in his estimation that in less than four years of his report to the Government of India and the Jammu and Kashmir Government, the Chinese would occupy Lhasa, and the Dalai Lama would be forced to flee Tibet for India.³

From 1959 to 1963, I could not return to my homeland of Ladakh on account of the absence of roads connecting Srinagar and Leh. I could only return to Leh after 1963, when the Sino-Indian war compelled the government to build the present Srinagar-Leh highway in great haste. Prior to that—from early times till the opening of road in the year 1963—Ladakhis would walk to the State capital, which took nearly fifteen days. While in Varanasi, I saw the arrival of Tibetan refugees. They came with little baggage and would sleep in the mango gardens of the Maha Bodhi Society. Since they often arrived without sufficient food and money, the students of the Ladakhi hostel, headed by Lama Lobzang (at that time the Superintendent of the Ladakhi Students Hostel) would distribute food to the Tibetans on behalf of the Ladakhi student community in Varanasi. The memory of this is still fresh in my mind.

In the year 1963, after the opening of the Srinagar-Leh highway, I availed myself of a seat in the army lorries and returned to Leh. After arriving in Leh, I saw Tibetan refugee camps near my family's summer residence at *Tak-ski-thang*. A good number of them were medical practitioners popularly known as amchis and some were oracles and astrologers. They had entered Ladakh via the eastern border of India. The majority of the asylum seekers in Ladakh came from the *Ngaris-Skor-sum* region and largely included the nomads of Rudok. They entered the region with their livestock and converged on the grassland of the Ladakhi shepherds of

Rupsho–Kharnak without knowledge of the local shepherds and herdsmen. This certainly inconvenienced the Ladakhi shepherds as they always had a shortage of grazing land for their own animals. But instead of protesting, they extended a helping hand to the Tibetans. Gradually the asylum seekers moved towards Leh. Only the real nomadic shepherds from western Tibet decided to stay in the Changthang plateau in eastern Ladakh. At the present time a good number of their descendents are still there.

Ever since the reign of *Lha-chen Dnos-grup-mgon* (1300-1325), Ladakh has looked to Tibet for spiritual guidance, but after the tragic events of 1959 its link with Tibet was discontinued. The Buddhists of Ladakh felt deeply that it was their historical duty to do everything they could for the refugees, in recognition of all the moral and spiritual aid the Tibetans had given them over the centuries. The occupation of Tibet by China presented a serious challenge for Buddhism in Ladakh, particularly regarding the issue of higher education for young novices. There was also a feeling of discontent among Ladakhi Buddhists against the State government dating back to 1950 concerning discrimination against the region. Only after the change of leadership within the Kashmir Government from Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah to Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed as Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir in the year 1953, did the situation improve.⁴

Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, being a staunch leader, never compromised with the government of Jammu and Kashmir regarding the rights of the Ladakhi people. He remained at the forefront for Ladakhis in the State Assembly and in other political forums. Because of that his relations with the successive Chief Ministers of the State remained strained. As far as the Tibetan cause was concerned, Kushok Bakula tried his best to settle all those entered Ladakh by providing them with land. It was also the wish of the Buddhists of Ladakh to invite His Holiness the Dalai Lama. As Ladakh was a particularly sensitive place at that time, Kushok Bakula had much official correspondence with the Central and State

government. At one time Kushok Bakula, though he was a minister in the Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq led government, had tussled with the Chief Minister, angrily discarding official files in protest. Only in 1966, after great efforts by Kushok Bakula, could His Holiness the Dalai Lama visit Ladakh for the first time after his fleeing to India in 1959. Since the army controlled both the air and road traffic to Ladakh in those days, His Holiness first landed at Leh in an Indian air force plane.

In 1968, Kushok Bakula was elected to the Indian parliament. He quickly became a morale booster for the Tibetans, as he was an incarnate lama and had a Tibetan background. Additionally, he had personal contact with the Dalai Lama, and his family, as well as the heads of different sects of Tibetan Buddhism and various high-profile Tibetans. With the exit of Kushok Bakula from state politics to represent Ladakh in the Indian Parliament, the discontented Buddhists begin to protest to the State government regarding the settlement of Tibetans in Ladakh. The agitation lasted about two months and resulted in an agreement between the Buddhist agitators and State government where the State government agreed to settle Tibetans on both sides of the Abi canal at Choglamsar.⁵ For proper rehabilitation of the Tibetans in Ladakh, the Government of India and State government jointly sanctioned a project called the Tibetan Refugee Organization (TRO). The function of the organization was to carry and implement the Tibetan welfare schemes and to arrange ration supplies. Two offices of the TRO were opened: one in Leh and the second one in Nyoma. According to the available records, the Central Government discontinued the projects in 1989, but the Jammu and Kashmir Government promulgated an ordinance to wind up the organization only in the year 2004."

In the changing geopolitical circumstances of the 20th and 21st centuries, Ladakh is emerging as a new hub of Tibetan Buddhist scholarship. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Kushok Bakula Rinpoche and the logistical support granted by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies was established in 1960. Several Tibetan Scholars were given

teaching posts in the institute as there were no Ladakhi scholars who could fill these posts. Today, however, beside the Tibetan scholars who teach there, there are also many Ladakhi teachers, a good sign for the expansion of Buddhist studies in the region.

On the other hand, a large number of young novices, both male and female from Ladakh are attached to various monastic institutions in South India, Darjeeling and Dehradun, as the heads of the different Tibetan Buddhist sects in exile opted to build their main centers outside of Ladakh. It would have certainly been good for Ladakh had the various Tibetan Buddhist schools opted to build their monasteries in one of the few historically Mahayana Buddhist regions of India, close to Tibet, both geographically and culturally. Many Ladakhi monks have stayed permanently in these monasteries, causing concern among Ladakhis, since this not only draws religious students away from the region, but the climatic conditions cause trouble for those who return. This outflow of monks and nuns may negatively impact the demographic situation of Ladakh in the long run.

It may, however, be good for Ladakhi monks and nuns to gain exposure to the outside world. It is also a pity that the majority of Tibetans now settled in the plains of India and in the West are feeling alienated from the mainstream of Tibetan culture and religion. In view of the above situation, new thought is being given towards the promotion and continuation of Tibetan culture and civilization, in which Ladakh can play vital role.

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Part Three:

Ladakh and its Neighbours

Ladakh's Territories: Nubra, Changthang, Zangskar

Nubra: The Northernmost Valley

Nubra, or *Ldum-ra*, situated in the northernmost region of Ladakh has considerable religious, political and cultural significance. Nubra is considered the most charming and beautiful valley in the whole of Ladakh.¹ Because of its comparatively low altitude, (approximately 8,000ft.) the valley is able to grow a variety of fruits and there is an abundance of trees and flowers. The literal meaning of *Ldum-ra* is garden of flowers. A festival of flowers, *Me-tog-ltad-mo*, is held every spring.² This festival provides an occasion for the Buddhists of Nubra to celebrate their religious faith. They perform various dances and present flowers as offerings to the Buddha. Some of the finest monasteries of Ladakh are situated in Nubra.

Enclosed within the Western Himalayan and Karakorum ranges, Nubra lies isolated during most of the long winter season. It is because of this isolation that Nubra is also called *Ldum-ra-lchags-kyi-sdon-bo* which means 'The Iron Trunk'.³ Nubra constitutes a sub-division of the Leh administrative district. Diskit village, which lies at the confluence of the Nubra and Shayok rivers, acts as Nubra's administrative headquarters.

Nubra used to have close political and trade links with its most immediate neighbour, Baltistan, which is now in Pakistan. Until 1947, the Ladakh district belonged to the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir and was made up of three tehsils: Leh, Kargil and Skardu.⁴ Skardu is the main town of Baltistan and before the partition Skardu was Ladakh Wazarat's winter capital while Leh remained capital during the summer.

Since Nubra lay on the main trade route from Leh to Central Asia, it readily drew the attention of various explorers and

travelers. Until recent times caravans from Yarkand (now in Xinjiang, a province of the People's Republic of China) crossed into Nubra carrying carpets, felt, shawl-wool, coarse wool, cotton, borax, salt, gold and brocades. They traded these for saffron and other goods from Kashmir and Punjab. Muslims from Yarkand also had to pass through Nubra on their way to Leh and thence to other places in India or to Mecca for pilgrimage.

There were two main caravan routes from Leh to Nubra. The first led across a high mountain pass, the Khardong-la; named after Khardong village which now has the highest motorable road in the world (it reaches 18,380 ft). This road passes through Ganglas village, the highest village in the Leh valley. The other caravan route involved crossing the Digar pass from the village of Sabu. Both caravan routes led to Khalsar, which lies on the left bank of the Shayok River, where, following the river, they then entered the Nubra valley.

Most villages in Nubra are situated on either side of the Nubra River. This river is a large tributary of the Shayok, originating from the Saser and Khomdan glaciers. Access to the various villages is made by crossing a large bridge over the Shayok at Koyak, near Tirit village. Further along the left bank of the river are several villages including Turtuk, Takshi and Thang which were liberated by the Indian Army in the war with Pakistan in 1971. The source of the river Shayok lies in the Khomdan glaciers in the Karakorum Range. The importance of the glaciers cannot be overestimated. Shayok River floods often create havoc in Nubra, destroying large parts of villages and their fields. There are many old songs in Nubra which refer to the power of the Shayok. One example is a song about the village of Lakjung where miles of fertile land were turned into an infertile sandy desert.⁵

The Shayok, like the Indus, is not normally a direct source for irrigation. It is more usual for the Ladakhis to depend on narrow gorges, *lungpa*, which hold vast reservoirs of glacial water. This brings to mind an incident that happened in 1986 during my visit to Turtuk village. One evening in July, after a hot and cloudy day, the villagers heard a murmuring sound

coming from Turtuk gorge and the noise increased as the water level started rising. The villagers quickly closed off the irrigation channels stemming from the stream, but the force of the current was so powerful that it swept away a portion of the surrounding fields, their crops, trees and grazing land together with a sixty-foot bridge.

Early History

There is very little information that exists on Nubra before the fourteenth century A.D. However, various historical works refer to the first half of the fifteenth century when *Shes-rab-bzang-po*, a proponent of the *aGe-lugs-pa* school, blessed the valley with a visit.

Shes-rab-bzang-po is said to have been born at Thikse village in the Indus valley. His first religious building project was the construction of the monastery at Stagmo village and this is thought to be the first *aGe-lugs-pa* monastery in the whole of Ladakh. In Nubra, he was responsible for the meritorious construction of a monastery at Diskit where he installed a statue of *Tsong-kha-pa*, the founder of the *aGe-lugs* tradition, and his two disciples.⁶ *Shes-rab-bzang-po* is also said to have visited Charasa village where he installed another statue of *Tsong-kha-pa* at the temple of Dwensa.

Some time later, at Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Tibet, he founded the Stagmo *Kham-tshan* or hostel, which is named after the Ladakhi village. *Shes-rab-bzang-po* also introduced the *aGe-lug* tradition to the monasteries of Karsha and Phugtal in Zangskar. He passed away in Phugtal where his holy relics are still preserved.

At this time Ladakh was being ruled by King *Grags-pa-bum-lde*, who reigned from 1400-1440. The king had a very ambitious brother named *Grogs-pa-bum* who paid an enterprising visit to Nubra in the hope of becoming ruler. In the same period we hear of a native king in Nubra named *Nyi-ma-grag-pa* and it was he who received and assisted *Shes-rab-bzang-po* during his visit to Nubra.

After the death of King *Grags-pa-bum-lde*, his son, *Blogros-mchog-ltan* came to the throne and reigned from 1440-1470. He brought the whole of *Mnga-'ris-bskor-gsum* (Western Tibet) under his dominion. During this period *Pan-chen Lhasun* was born in Udmaru village in Nubra, and he made a significant contribution to the strengthening of Buddhism in the valley. In his youth he visited Tibet to undertake higher studies and resided at the monastic university of Tashi Lhunpo. When he had completed his studies, he acted as regent for the successor of *Pan-chen Dge-dun-grub* (1391-1474), the founder of Tashi Lhunpo. He was the eighth abbot of the monastery and among his contributions to Tibet was the renovation of one thousand statues of Buddha with gold paint.⁷ In his old age he returned to his homeland in Nubra and taught the people there. His death in Charasa was marked with many auspicious signs and his body is still preserved there in a *mchod-rten*.

However, in 1960 a Bon priest calling himself a *dge-bshes* resided in the chamber where the *mchod-rten* was kept and instructed the local Buddhist devotees that they should eat a small piece of flesh from the saint's body for their protection, whenever there was a likelihood of war. The Charasa villagers, on hearing this, began to doubt as to whether the *mchod-rten* really did contain the remains of the Lama. They invited *Mkhan-po Rinpoche* of Thikse and his tutor *bKa-chen blo-bzang-bzod-pa* to the village to investigate the mystery. The lamas opened the *mchod-rten* in the presence of the devotees and found the flesh of *Pan-chen Lha-btsun* to be still fresh and without any bad odors.

Around 1500 A.D. King *Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal*, the first king of the *rNam-rgyal* Dynasty, came to the throne, and it was during his reign that the troops of the famous Central Asian adventurer Mirza Haider Dughlat entered Nubra from Xinjiang.⁸ King *Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal* resisted the Hor invaders from Chinese Turkistan both in Nubra, where there was heavy fighting with much bloodshed, and in Leh. After the battle in Leh, the king buried the dead bodies of the Hor soldiers on *rNam-rgyal* Hill and erected the temple of

Yamantaka over their graves.⁹ He also had paintings made of various other protective deities on the walls of the temple.

King *Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal's* victory over the Hor invaders has a special significance in the political history of Nubra because from then on Nubra came completely under the dominance of the King of Ladakh.¹⁰ The palace of Diskit and the *De-chen-rtse-mo* palace of Hundar, which had been previously used by the native kings of Nubra, became the residences of the kings of Ladakh. However, the aristocratic families of the Diskit and Hundar *Blon-po* continued to exercise their authority locally.

After King *Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal* died in 1530, his son *Tshe-dbang-rnam-rgyal* came to the throne. He was a brilliant and courageous king. He annexed Shigar and Skardu in Baltistan and he planned to invade the country of the Hors in Xinjiang to the north, but the people of Nubra were anxious that their trade with Yarkand would be endangered and petitioned him to abstain from the attack, thus the project was abandoned.¹¹

The king was succeeded by his younger brother, *Jams-dbyangs-rnam rgyal*, who ruled from 1560 to 1590. It is recorded that from the time of this king, the people of Nubra had to pay tribute to the kings of Ladakh on a regular basis. During this period, Muslim immigrants, mainly Shites, began to settle in Nubra and in the Indus valley.

In 1590 A.D. King *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal* came to the throne. He made Lama *Stag-tshang-ras-pa*, the founder of the monastery at Hemis, his foremost teacher and gave him much of the land of Nubra. Even today a large number of people in Nubra, especially in Yarma, Charasa and Hundar, still work on land belonging to Hemis monastery.

After the king's death, his eldest son, *Bde-ldan-rnam-rgyal* (1620-1640) came to the throne and protected his subjects in accordance with his religious principles. He appointed *Shakya-rgya-tsho* as his military commander and soon became involved in a war with Khapulu in Baltistan.¹² At that time Chief Hatam Khan resided in Gsar-gling palace in the south

of Khapulu and Bahar, the chief of Skardu, lived with his son, Yaqoob, in *Mtho-rtse* palace to the north. Chief Hatam Khan was keen to annex the area to the north and in order to accomplish this, sought the assistance of King *Bde-ldan-rnam-rgyal*. The king complied and Hatam Khan succeeded in capturing the fort and palace of *Mtho-rtse*, imprisoning the Chief of Skardu and his son.

The chief of Skardu and his Balti allies sought military aid from the Mogul Nawab of Kashmir and the Mogul Emperor of Delhi. A powerful army marched from Delhi to Ladakh. It was reported to have been made up of 20,000 men, a very large figure if the account is accurate. When it arrived at the border of Ladakh, a Ladakhi force led by the king's military commander, *Sha-kya-rgya-mtsho*, and his minister, '*Brug-rnam-rgyal*, fought bravely, killing many of the Mogul soldiers. The Ladakhi forces seized their flags and kettledrums, thus gaining a complete victory over the enemy.

Following, his father's example the king annually appointed one hundred monks at Nubra, Zangskar, Basgo and Temisgang to recite the *ma-ni tung phyur*, the chant of a million mani mantras. The king had drawn the people's attention to the Buddhist religion by building Mani walls throughout Ladakh and by carving Mani mantras on stone slabs.¹³

King *Nyi-ma-rnam-rgyal* who inherited the throne in about 1680 A.D., decided to launch a military expedition on Khapulu, but the reason for this decision is unknown. He seems to have stayed in Nubra occasionally and is thought to be responsible for the renovation and the rebuilding of the palace at Charasa. He is said to have respected and revered the famous *mchod-rten* containing the body of *Pan-chen Lha-btsun*.

After the dispute as to the succession of the throne was settled at the treaty of Wanla, during the reign of the King *Tshe-dbang-rnam-rgyal*, Balti invaders entered Nubra. On hearing this, the king appointed *Nang-gso-bkra-shis*, a member of the leading family of Charasa, as his military commander. *Nang-gso-bkra-shis* led the Nubra army into Baltistan and succeeded in capturing the Chief of Kartaksha and others of

high rank. The king rewarded his commander by presenting him with land and other valuables.¹⁴

It was King *Tshe-dbang-rnam-rgyal* who offered Diskit *Gonpa*, the biggest monastery in Nubra, to the *Mkhan-po Rinpoche* of Thikse. Since that time, the successive incarnations of the *Mkhan-po Rinpoche* have always acted as the abbots of Diskit *Gonpa*.

There are very few references to Nubra during the reign of King *Tse-brtan-rnam-rgyal*, who came to power in 1780. However it is interesting to note that this king was conversant in many languages, including Yarkandi and other languages of Xinjiang province and because of this it is possible to speculate that the king might have lived in Nubra and promoted trade.

William Moorcroft, the English explorer came to Nubra in the reign of King *Tse-dpal-don-grub-rnam-rgyal*. Moorcroft seems to have been impressed with the landscape and its beauty. As already noted, the land of Nubra is very fertile with numerous trees and plenty of flowers, including the wild roses and irises. Moorcroft decided to visit Nubra after hearing about the hot springs in Panamik which are therapeutic for many complaints and especially for rheumatism.¹⁵ His description of Nubra has been very informative and other travelers have also recorded the beauty and grandeur of its landscape.¹⁶

Dogra Rule

The Ladakhis finally lost their political freedom in 1842 after a series of invasions led by General Zorawar Singh. After the Dogra invasion, the changes in political structures seemed to pose a threat to Buddhism, but the faith and perseverance of the people was such that the Ladakhi Buddhist culture survived intact through more than a century of Dogra rule. However, there was one concrete sign of Dogra authority in the form of Pratapur, a village named after the Maharaja Pratap Singh, the ruler of the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The imposition of a colonial non-Buddhist government presented the Ladakhis with the difficult task of revitalizing the

practice of Buddhism. For the sake of their religion, learned lamas from various monasteries took on the responsibility of strengthening Buddhism and ensuring that it retained its due position of supremacy. Foremost among these scholar lamas was *Tshul-khrims-nyi-ma* (1790-1865) who was born in the village of Saspola. His greatest accomplishment was the renovation of the giant Buddha statue at Shey, which had been heavily damaged by the Dogra invaders. In addition, Lama *Tshul-khrims-nyi-ma* founded monasteries at Rizong in 1834 and Samtanling, near the village of Sumur in Nubra, in 1842. Samtanling is the second largest monastery in Nubra and has thirty five monks led by successive incarnations of *Tshul-khrims-nyi-ma*.

The monastery belongs to the *dGe-lugs-pa* order of Tibetan Buddhism and places particular emphasis on the observance of the *aDul-wa* discipline and precepts. The monks are issued with food from the governing body of the monastery which is made up of the monks themselves.

On the north bank of the Nubra River lies a small picturesque monastery called Ensa. This solitary *gonpa* has attracted the devoted attention of the people of Nubra. It was once occupied by an incarnate lama called *Ldan-ma Sprul-sku* who had been named after his native village in Kham, eastern Tibet. Accompanied by his wife *Nyi-ma-bzang—mo*, he settled in Nubra and constructed a house there. He attached himself to Diskit monastery and lived at Ensa as the caretaker of the monastery's land.

During the time of *Ldan-ma Sprul-sku* there was a tradition of organizing 'Cham masked dances on the occasion of the annual offering of prayers and masks and costumes had to be brought from Diskit *Gonpa*. Once when *Ldan-ma* was residing at Diskit Zimkhang house, his wife gave birth to a daughter. Her confinement coincided with the annual 'Cham of Diskit *Gonpa* on the twenty eighth and twenty ninth days of the twelfth month of the Tibetan calendar. According to Ladakhi custom, the parents of a new-born child are considered ritually unclean for a certain period after the birth. (The period of seclusion varies from place to place.) On this occasion the *Sprul-sku* tried to

enter the *gonpa* premises but was stopped by the village head-man (*go-ba*) claiming that he was unclean on account of his wife's confinement. *Ldan-ma Sprul-sku* pleaded with the head-man, stating that nothing would happen to his village if he entered the *gonpa*, but he was forced to return to his home.

This episode infuriated the *Sprul-sku* and he avenged himself, through his spiritual powers, by causing destruction in the village, including the washing away of the head-man's house. As a result, the people of the village had to acknowledge the superiority of *Ldan-ma Sprul-sku* as a spiritually elevated master. His religious activities included the building of the lower temple at Ensa and the installation of a statue of the Buddha.

Later, the *sprul-sku* had an affair with a woman from Nubra and as a result his wife had to leave him. This is the story behind the famous Ladakhi song of lament: *Dwen-sa-dag-pai*.

Recent Political Events

Several wars have been fought in Nubra since India declared independence in 1947. The brave soldiers of Nubra have defended their motherland from the invading forces.

In 1948, Nubra became a battlefield when the Pakistanis unlawfully occupied Skardu *Tehsil* in the district of Ladakh and came as far as Skuru village only twenty kilometers from Diskit. Among Nubra's brave soldiers was *Tshe-dbang-rin-chen* who organized a team of young fighters under the banner of the Nubra Guard. This force, which was part of the Indian Army, succeeded in forcing the Pakistani invaders back beyond Bogdang village eighty kilometers from Diskit. (Until the 1971 war Bogdang was the only Balti Shia village in Nubra). The 1948 war lasted for one month and twenty three days.¹⁷ The nation honored *Tshe-dbang-rin-chen* by awarding him the second-highest medal for bravery, the Mahvir Chakra.

In the Sino-Indian war of 1962, Nubra was again turned into a battlefield. This time, the Chinese attacked the Dolatbeg sector of Indian territory. It was only after this war that

the Indian Government recognized the strategic importance of Nubra and a massive project for the building of roads and an airport was undertaken.

In 1971, the Pakistani army once more tried to enter Nubra. *Tshe-dbang-rin-chen*, then a major, again proved his worth as a soldier. The Indian soldiers fought so bravely that they went on to liberate several Pakistani occupied Indian villages, including Turtuk, Takshi and Thang. The major was awarded a Mahavir Chakra, a second time for his distinguished services. Since then, Nubra has seen a peaceful time allowing it to foster its development and prosperity.

In 1970, His Holiness the Dalai Lama paid a visit to the valley of Nubra. He gave extensive teachings on Buddhism in the monasteries of Diskit and Samstanling. Many other eminent teachers have also given spiritual instruction to the monks and, in 1971, *Bka-chen Bzod-pa* gave a rare Kalachakra initiation.

A new chapter in the history of Buddhism in the region was written on the 3rd of January, 2005, when the 20th successive incarnation of Arhat Bakula Rinpoche was identified by His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama, as Thubstan Ngawang. His parents live in Kyagar village in Nubra. Besides the above, a three-storey statue of Maitreya is being built close to Diskit *Gonpa*, on the advice of the Dalai Lama, for the welfare of the people of Nubra and the rest of the world.

Nubra is no longer simply an isolated region of Ladakh. Improved communication links with the rest of Ladakh, both by road and air, have provided an infrastructure for modern development. The large military presence has had many economic consequences and encouraged development. In addition, from 1980-1990, Ladakh was represented in the Indian Parliament by a native of Nubra. These latest developments in the turbulent history of Nubra show that it will continue to play an important role in the future of Ladakh.

Changthang: the Easternmost Plateau

The Changthang region of Ladakh is a vast, barren land at

high altitude, ranging from 10,000 to 14,000 feet above sea-level. There are two popular lakes in the region: Tso-Moriri towards the southern corner of the plateau and Pangong Lake, towards the eastern side of the Changthang. At present, visitors can reach these two sites by motorable road, though permits are required as the region forms India's northernmost border with Tibet (China). It is sparsely populated due to its high altitude and harsh seasonal changes. It is, however, home to several picturesque monasteries. Foremost among them is Hanle *Gonpa*, which is situated at a distance of 290 kilometres from Leh; and Korzok *Gonpa*, at a distance of 200 kms. Korzok has a special place in the history of Ladakh as it is reputed to have been founded by King Senge Namgyal, the most powerful king in Ladakh's history, and his foremost teacher, Lama *Stag-tshan-ras-pa*. The king was married to the daughter of an aristocratic family from Rupsho region, also in Changthang.

After the death of King Lang-darma, who was responsible for disrupting Buddhism in Tibet, anarchy reigned across the region. This trouble reached as far as the western region of *Ngaris-skor-gsum* to the west of Tibet. Later, the King of Tibet, *lDe-dpal-akhor-btsan*, ruled the country and had two sons, the younger was known as *sKyid-lde-nyima-gon*. Due to internal fighting, he was forced to flee Tibet with one hundred horsemen to the south-western region of Ngari. From there he was well-received by the area's rulers. *sKyid-lde-nyima-gon* became the ruler of Gu-ge and Purang, within Ngari. After becoming king he built a palace of Rudok and settled some of his subjects there.

In that period, the upper region of Ladakh was ruled by an aristocrat called *Gya-pa-cho*. At around the same time, raiders from the region now known as Xinjiang (*Hor-yul*) reached Ladakh. This occurred in the winter months and *Gya-pa-cho*'s forces repelled them. The following year they attacked them and *Gya-pa-cho* was forced to seek help from *sKyid-lde-nyima-gon*. With the two combined forces the raiders from Hor fled back to their homeland. Thus, to repay the effort of *sKyid-lde-nyima-gon*, *Gya-pa-cho* offered the king large

tracks of land at Thikse and Shey. *SKyid-lde-nyima-gon* was a very learned man and was reknowned to be a medicinal master.¹⁸

The people of the Changthang are known as *Chang-pa* and *Rung-pa*. *Chang-pa* are generally those who are nomadic (or semi-nomadic), tending to their flocks of yak, sheep and goats. *Rung-pa* are pastoralists, settled in the various villages scattered all over the region.

The Indus River enters Ladakh at the village of Demchok, in Changthang. From here the river flows toward the Kuyul and onwards to the Indus valley that forms the heart of central Ladakh.

In 1962, a short and fierce war was fought between China and India. With that, the region received national attention. Prior to the occupation of Tibet in 1959, the monks of Ladakh traveled to Tibet via Changthang. This journey could take as long as three months, depending on weather conditions. Presently, the whole Changthang is linked by motorable roads and there is demand from the local population for opening the Chinese border so that pilgrims—who once traveled this route frequently—can journey to sacred Mount Kailash. Till recent times, people were alive who performed this trip. *Ye-shes-don-grup*, the great Ladakhi scholar and 20th century thinker, visited Tibet via the route through Changthang twice. His autobiography describes his journey here, as well as the varieties of people and places that he encountered along the way.

In Changthang there are two famous hot-springs (Puga and Chumathang), where people have long sought the medicinal waters to cure rheumatism. At Chumathang, near the spring, there is a small temple which contains the paintings from the period of Lotsawa *Rin-chen bZang-po*. As the region remains restricted to visitors—due to the sensitive border—little study has been undertaken to explore this site.

Zangskar: The Southernmost Valley

Zangskar, surrounded by the high mountain passes of Kishtawar district of Jammu province (west), Kulu / Manali

(south), the Zangskar Range (north) and the Changthang region (east), has remained very isolated despite the greater accessibility in other parts of Ladakh. The only road access to the region is via Kargil, situated at over 100 km from Padam, the capital of Zangskar. It has, however, attracted tourists since its opening up to foreigners in 1974.

According to Ladakhi history, the king of Western Tibet, *Nyima-gon*, had three sons. He divided the greater western Tibetan region amongst his sons. *dPal-gyi-mgon*, the eldest, became the king of Ladakh. *bTrashis-mgon*, the middle child, was given Guge and Purig. The youngest son, *lDetsog-mgon*, received Zangskar and Spiti. These three kings became known as the three kings of the “upper” (*stod*) regions of Tibet.

Not much of Zangskar's early history is known. It appears that it was onced annexed to Kashmir. Naropa, the great master of meditation, blessed the land and visited the present site of *Stongde Gonpa*. In the past, the region faced aggression from neighbouring districts, particularly Spiti and Guge. People were forced to flee with their livestock—particularly horses—which were abundant in the region.

According to Snellgrove and Skurupski, the great translator *Rin-chen bZang-po* built a number of temples throughout Zangskar in the 11th century. The region produced many scholars who became widely known for their writings. Foremost among these scholars was *'Phagspa shes-rab*. The 16th century saw two great Zangskari proponents of the Gelukpa sect: *Trungpa rTa-phug-pa* and *Grup-khang-pa dGelegs rGya-mtso*. Both lamas were born into the Zangla royal family. Both became well-known teachers of *lam-rim*, the “great path.”

The Gelukpa foothold in Zangskar emerged with the visit of *Byang-sems Shes-rab bZangpo*, a deciple of Tsongkhapa. He was the founder the first Gelukpa monastery in the Indus Valley, at Stokmo village where he was born. After studies in Tibet, he returned to Ladakh and built various Gelukpa monasteries in Zangskar. The most well-known of these was at Karsha. During this period, Zangskar was ruled by a king

named *Rin-chen dPal-lde*, the son of *Khri-gNam dPal-lde* and *aZoms-gyal*, both of whom supported *Byang-sems Shes-rab bZangpo*, to whom they gave large tracks of land and several villages.

Zangskar is blessed with several large monasteries. Foremost among them is Karsha, built on picturesque hillock and presided over by Ngari Rinpoche. The other monasteries include Tonde, Phugtal, Muni, Rangdum and all belong to the Gelukpa. The Drukpa Kagyupa monasteries include Dzongkhul, Bardan, Sani and Tagrimo, presided over by Stakna Rinpoche, who is based at Stakna *Gonpa* near Leh.

Rangdum village lies on the Kargil side of the Penzi-la Pass, the gateway to Zangskar. The monastery was founded by *Blo-bzang dgel-legs Ye-shes grags-pa*, an incarnation of Ngari Rinpoche, during the reign of the Ladakhi King Tsewang Namgyal (1753-82). It is a typical monastery built in a secluded place where the monks made to learn the *vinaya* (monastic code). Around 20 monks reside there. They are supported by the residents of the village. The whole region of Rangdum is inherited by the successive incarnations of Ngari Rinpoche. The villagers live as tenants of the Rinpoche. Therefore, until recent times, the people faced problems attaining State Subject Certificates, which are issued by the revenue authorities on the basis of their land holding and their forefathers. As a result of this, in recent times, tenants have been forced to appeal to Ngari Rinpoche to supply the necessary documentation to allow them to gain state residency status.

Among the best-known holy sites of Zangskar is the stupa of Kanika at Sani. This site supposedly dates back to the time of Ashoka (who intended to construct one millions stupas throughout his realm in the 2nd century BC) or Kanishka (who annexed the region into his Kushana Empire in the 2nd century AD). Regarding the existence of the stupa, it is mentioned in the text *bKa-thang*, the biography of Padmasambhava, "towards the north of Kashmir there is holy cemetery known as *bDe-chen brdal*. Located in the center is the Kanika (*ka-*

ni-ka) stupa.”¹⁹ Every year, here, a festival takes place called *Ka-ni-ka gnas mjal*. Monks and villagers throughout Zangskar assemble and visit the various shrines and perform prayers at each site.

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Ladakh's Relations with Baltistan

Geographically, both Baltistan and Ladakh are high altitude regions lying between 8,000 and 12,000 feet high and both are surrounded by chains of mountains. Climatically, both regions experience vast temperature ranges and winter can be particularly harsh, with temperatures dropping down to between minus 25 and minus 30 degrees Centigrade.

Both cultures intensively farm the scarce resources available to them and both are virtually self-sufficient in terms of traditional subsistence. They produce nearly everything required apart from the staple drink of the people, tea.

Ethnically, Baltis and Ladakhis are descended from the same stock, both peoples being a blend of the Aryan, Mongol, Mon and Tibetan races. Many of the features of daily life, such as the crafts of weaving, woodcarving, metal working, the grinding of grain in water mills and so on, are carried on in a similar fashion in both areas. The major difference is that of religion: the people of Baltistan are Muslim, while the majority of Ladakhis are Buddhist.

Economically, Ladakh has long had close ties with Baltistan and there were a number of trade routes between the two. The most frequently used was the Chorbat La at Hanu, used by Shadma traders from Central Ladakh to go to Khapulu and Skardu. The second route was from Kharul near Kargil which also went to Khapulu and Skardu; this was used extensively by Balti traders. Finally, the people of northern Ladakh went into Baltistan along the Shyok River. The route went from Bogdang and then onwards to Turtuk, Takshi, and then finally to Khapulu. When the Shyok froze in winter an ice bed strong enough to walk on formed at various points which considerably shortened the length of the route.

In the past, all these trade routes were extensively used as Ladakh was a great Central Asian trading centre. Baltis would

make frequent visits to Leh and Kargil to secure places on the various trade missions departing for Central Asia. Barter trade was popular: the Baltis would bring dried apricots, nuts, and butter, while the Ladakhi traders would mostly bring wool and salt and they would often also supply cotton cloth made in the Punjab. The trade was traditionally carried out in a friendly and co-operative atmosphere with food and fodder for the animals being shared amongst everyone.

The History of the Buddhist presence in Baltistan is as old as the history of the present form of Buddhism in Ladakh. It extends as far back as the great Buddhist Saint Padmasambhava, who practitioners of Mahayana Buddhism worship as the second Buddha. He is believed to have visited and blessed the land of Baltistan. There, according to the Ladakhi historian Tashi Rabgias, he planted his staff of apricot wood into a rock. Ever since then apricot trees have flourished in Baltistan, with the valley of Shighar emerging as one of the principal apricot producing areas in the world. In the olden days huge quantities of apricots were exported from Baltistan to Tibet through Ladakh and apricots became one of the most popular dried fruits eaten by Tibetans amongst whom they were known as '*ngaris khambu*' (the fruit of ngaris, one of the old names for Ladakh). Ladakhi folk songs still refer to the apricot as the national fruit of Baltistan and recount how it was brought there by Padmasambhava.

Linguistically, according to tradition, Tibetan used to be the common language amongst the Baltis, the Puriki, the Zangskaris, the Changpa and the people of Central Ladakh. However, when the Baltis converted to Islam they lost contact with the Tibetan script, a process which history tells us had occurred as early as the 10th century; they have, though, continued to use the Tibetan language in speech, although they refer to their language as Balti. It is interesting to note that amongst the Tibetan speaking peoples Baltis have preserved a dialect which is believed to be the one closest to Classical Tibetan: their pronunciation is so clear that they enunciate every particle used in the construction of syllables and words.

It is also worth noting that while the Balti dialect has been preserved in the written form in Arabic script, the latter actually lacks certain vowel sounds necessary to accurately transcribe and pronounce Balti.

Balti-yul ('Baltistan' in Ladakhi) refers to the land of Shia Muslims: 'Balti' refers to 'Shia', and "yul" or "-stan" to "land." It is assumed that the present-day Shia population of Ladakh migrated there from the Balti town of Skardu when the Ladakhi King Jamyang Namgyal married the only daughter of Chief Ali Mir of Skardu in the 16th century. This marriage took place after Jamyang Namgyal's ill-fated military venture towards Chigatan around the year 1600, which led to his heavy defeat by the forces of Ali Mir, and his capture. He was released only after he had been married to Khatoon. Later, Queen Khatoon gave birth to the important Ladakhi king, Sengye Namgyal. According to a Ladakhi tradition, the two popular Ladakhi musical instruments—the *daman* and the *surna*—were first brought to Ladakh from Baltistan in the 16th century in the company of the marriage party of Queen Khatoon. A number of folk songs relating to the life of the Baltis and their chieftains grandiose lifestyle (referring to their palaces at Kharpoche, Khapulu, and Skardu) are still sung today.

A further area of common cultural heritage is that of folklore and folk epics, most notably the Kesar saga. The story of Gyalbu Norzang, one of the Jataka Tales, is equally popular amongst Baltis and Ladakhis. The popularity of the Gyalbu Norzang story amongst Baltis persuaded Kacho Sikender Khan, a well-known Balti historian from Kargil, to translate the story into Urdu from the original Tibetan. Although the Balti style of narration of Kesar varies from the Ladakhi, the central theme of the story remains the same. Also, like the Buddhists, Baltis often refer to the pantheon of Buddhist deities, as well as ideas of house purification, including the water spirit ceremonies such as the Naga Raia prayers.

Another traditional story relates the life of the well known Balti translator of the Tibetan canon, Lotsawa Wang-chub

Tsultrim. Born in the Bolmik village Skardu, many auspicious signs were observed at his birth, and the boy soon showed a special interest and aptitude in the study of Tibetan scripts, despite having no teacher. As has already been noted, the Tibetan script was unavailable in Baltistan, and so his parents had to bring the necessary books back from Ladakh during their trading trips. Through his dedication to study, the boy managed to become versed in the Tibetan language, and his parents allowed him to travel to Ladakh, from where he went to Tibet. There he became a disciple of a Zangskari translator and entered the Kadampa school, where he showed special interest in moral discipline. Eventually, he founded the Skyomoling Gompa near Lhasa; he is presumed to be the first incarnation of Ngaris Tulku.

Thus it can be seen that both Ladakh and Baltistan have shared much in common, both culturally as well as historically; and for both, the loss of independent status finally occurred in the same fashion, when the stability of both regions was shaken by the invasion of General Zorowar Singh, at the instigation of Maharaja Gulab Singh, the founder of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. With that episode, both Ladakh and Baltistan were reduced to the status of small Tehsils of the greater Jammu and Kashmir State.

A note on *Pod-yig*, the Ladakhi Script¹

The spoken languages of Ladakh and Baltistan belong to the western branch of the Tibetan family of languages, together with Puriki and Zangskari, and have some characteristics in common with the dialects of *AmDo* in north-east Tibet.² Here, I review the common origins of the spoken language of the two regions, and discuss contemporary initiatives to promote the use of the Tibetan script (*yi-ge*) when writing Balti.

Historical background

The similarities between the spoken languages of Baltistan and Ladakh reflect their shared history. The two regions together formed part of the Yarlung dynasty's Tibetan Empire in the seventh and eighth centuries. According to Tibetan tradition, the Tibetan script (*yi-ge*) came into being during the reign of King *Srong-btsan-sgampo*, the most powerful seventh century ruler of Tibet. The king is said to have delegated the task of designing the alphabet to his minister Thonmi Sambhota, who resided many years in Kashmir and in the plains of India in order to study Sanskrit.³ Upon his return to Tibet, Thonmi Sambhota devised the structure and grammar of Tibetan writing.⁴

The *yi-ge* script was used in both Ladakh and Baltistan, and a local scholar named Balti Lotsawa made a notable contribution to Tibetan literature. He was born to a humble family in a village near Skardu in Baltistan, and became one of the four main disciples of Zangskar Lotsawa, a translator from the 10th century. He was recognised as the incarnation of the first Ngaris Tulku, whose successive incarnations ascended to the seat of the head lama of Likir, Karsha and other monasteries in Zangskar.⁵

However, the Baltis abandoned the Tibetan script when the

area turned to Islam in the early 15th century.⁶ They felt that the script was associated with Buddhism, and hence had no relevance to Islamic religion and culture. By contrast, Islamic religious writing was in Persian or Arabic. Nevertheless, even after these changes, the Muslim population of Baltistan and Purig continued to converse in Balti (also known as *Balti-skad*) or Puriki, both of which are closely related to Tibetan. Indeed, the name 'Purig' is thought to derive from *Bod-rigs*—the Tibetan race.

During the colonial period, Ladakh and Baltistan together formed part of the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir, and their way of life – as well as their spoken language - was very similar. However, the two regions were separated as a result of the partition of India in 1947. Kargil district borders on Baltistan, and many of its inhabitants regard themselves as Baltis.

Comparing the Ladakhi and Balti languages

The table below compares the pronunciation of the spoken languages of Central Tibet, Ladakh and Baltistan with written Tibetan. It is clear that Balti is close to Tibetan, and many prefixes which are 'silent' in contemporary spoken Tibetan are still pronounced in Balti.

English	Central Tibetan	Ladakhi pronunciation	Balti pronunciation	Written Tibetan
Rice	<i>Dè</i>	<i>Das</i>	<i>Abras</i>	<i>bras</i>
Sand	<i>che-ma</i>	<i>pe-ma</i>	<i>bye-a-ma</i>	<i>bye-ma</i>
Knife	<i>Di</i>	<i>Ti</i>	<i>gi-ri</i>	<i>gri</i>
Write	<i>De</i>	<i>Dis</i>	<i>Abris</i>	<i>bri</i>
Religion	<i>Chö</i>	<i>Chos</i>	<i>Chos</i>	<i>chos</i>
Salutation	<i>Chag</i>	<i>Chag</i>	<i>phyi-yag</i>	<i>phyag</i>
Hen	<i>Cha</i>	<i>Cha</i>	<i>bi-ya</i>	<i>hya</i>
Four	<i>Shi</i>	<i>Shi</i>	<i>Bshi</i>	<i>gshi</i>
Six	<i>Tug</i>	<i>Tug</i>	<i>Trug</i>	<i>drug</i>
Hundred	<i>Rgya</i>	<i>Rgya</i>	<i>bar-rgya</i>	<i>Brgya</i>

However, despite these similarities, there are few written texts in the Balti language, and those that do exist are almost all written in the Persian script.

Balti literature in contemporary Ladakh

In the 1980s I looked after the literary activities of the J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages in Kargil, and would frequently visit the town in order to convene meetings of Balti writers, as well as organising poetry symposia and seminars. I therefore developed good contacts with the local Balti writers of the time.

The Balti section of the J&K Academy in Leh started in 1986 with the appointment of Sadiq Ali Balti as a Research Assistant in Balti. As a senior member of the Academy, I guided him in his activities in the field of Balti literature. In 1987 the Academy brought out an anthology called *Ngati Adab*, an annual anthology in the Balti language written in the Persian script. In 1989, a full-fledged office of the J&K Academy started in Kargil. Besides organizing cultural shows, the Kargil branch published four issues of *Ngati Adab*, and in 1999 I myself supervised the compilation of the fifth issue of *Ngati Adab*. Since then, unfortunately, no issues of the anthology have been published.

It appears that the publications did not evoke much public interest because the Persian script does not adequately fulfil the phonetic requirements of the Balti language. Thus both reading and writing in Balti proved very difficult even for educated native speakers. To sort out this problem and in order to accommodate the actual sounds occurring in Balti, certain Balti scholars in Kargil and Baltistan introduced additional letters in the Persian script. Even so, reading and composing Balti in the Persian script remains cumbersome.

A somewhat similar situation is occurring in the case of the Ladakhi language and the Tibetan script. These days Ladakhi is not taught in the schools as a compulsory subject. Hence, very few students learn the *yi-ge* script or try to gain

proficiency in it. A movement for the simplification of the written language is gaining momentum. This new approach has little relation to traditional literary Tibetan or Ladakhi. It teaches the local spoken language but distorts the grammar of the written language.

Ladakh lies locked between the world of Hindi and Urdu speakers, and the Baltis similarly are surrounded by speakers of Urdu and other languages. In Ladakh, our centuries-old language and culture may be distorted if steps are not taken to maintain our cultural and linguistic identity.

Meetings with Balti scholars in Pakistan

In 1995, I had the opportunity to attend a conference on the “Culture of the Karakorum-Hindukush-Himalaya: Dynamics of Change” in Islamabad. It so happened that a number of Balti writers also took part in the conference. My Ladakhi colleague Abdul Ghani Sheikh and I were introduced to a number of Balti writers at this conference, namely Mohammad Yousuf Hussainabadi, Mohammad Hassan Hasrat, Imran Nadin, Fida Mohammad Naushad, Mohammad Ibrahim, Ghulam Hussan Hasni, and of course Mohammad Hassnain Singey Tsering, the young cultural activist from Skardu who now lives in New York. In this way I had an opportunity to obtain first-hand information about the state of the language spoken in modern Baltistan.

We tried to engage our Balti counterparts in conversation, assuming both groups would be able to understand each other’s speech. Unfortunately, I could not follow what they were saying. Our Balti friends, attempting to grasp our own speech, experienced the same problem. Realizing our inability to communicate, we switched from Ladakhi/Balti to Urdu and were able to converse on topics of mutual interest.

My conversation with Mohammad Hassnain on various topics of mutual interest ended with him enquiring whether I had carried any book written in Tibetan or Ladakhi to Islamabad. I had to apologize to him as I was not carrying any such book. I had a prayer book in Tibetan, but I thought this

would not serve his purpose. Realizing that at the very least I had one book written in Tibetan/Ladakhi, Mohammad Hassnain asked for it. After giving it a glance and reading some words, he sought my permission to make a photocopy, even though the book was almost 300 pages long. I said, "Well, this is a religious text and rather lengthy. If you make a photocopy of the book it will cost you lot of money." His reply was: "Money is not a problem. My concern is to obtain a book written in Tibetan," so I give him the book.

Seeing his curiosity for books written in the Tibetan script, I said to Hassnain that the Balti people in Ladakh appear to take less interest in their ancestral script. His response was that people begin to remember only once they have already lost something.

Interestingly, two cultural activists and writers from Baltistan namely Ghulam Hassan Lobsang and Mohammad Hassnain Singey Tsering have adopted Tibetan names in addition to their given names to express their affinity with Ladakhi and Tibetan culture.

On the last day of the seminar, the Balti scholars hosted a farewell party in honour of Abdul Ghani Sheikh and myself. After dinner, I recorded the messages of our Balti friends to Ladakhis pertaining to our visit to Pakistan. The questions were asked in Urdu and the replies were given in Balti, all of which I recorded with my tape recorder. My main motive was to use the recording to conduct a comparative study on the influence of neighbouring dialects in Pakistan on the Balti language.

When I returned to Leh, I played the tape and listened very carefully to the speech of the Balti writers. Upon repeated listening I found the recording to be comprehensible. The only major influence I found was that a new type of pronunciation had developed since the separation of Baltistan and Ladakh in 1947.

The Baltistan Culture Foundation

It is heartening to learn that Balti scholars have established the Baltistan Culture Foundation with a view to reviving the

Tibetan script in Baltistan.⁷ Earlier, the script was neglected or discarded by the local population on cultural and religious grounds, but the Foundation now believes that it is an appropriate medium for future literary development in the region.

Nowadays in India there are discussions at the political level about the inclusion of Ladakhi/Bhoti language in the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution, which would give it the same status as two other important J&K languages, Kashmiri and Dogri. Similar demands could arise for Balti if sufficient literature is produced in the language.

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- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Lobsang, Ghulam Hassan, 1995.
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***Lho-Drugpa* Religious Foundations in Ladakh**

Historians connect the first penetration of the Kagyu sect in Ladakh with the visit to Zangskar of Lama Marpa *chos-kyi-blo-gtus* (1012-1097), the great 11th century tantric master and translator. It is said that Marpa invented a secret path (Marpai Sanglam) along the glaciers from Kashmir, in order to reach Naropa (1016-1100), who was then in Zangskar, and to receive a blessing from him.

Lama Marpa founded Stongde *gonpa*, which was once known as Marpa-ling, in Zanksar. However, Stongde *gonpa* became a Geluk establishment following the visit to Zangskar of Stod Shesrab Zangpo, the foremost disciple of Tsong Khapa, in the 14th century. At present Stongde is a small village with a *gonpa* of around 20 resident monks presided over by successive incarnations of Ngari Rinpoche.

Kagyu teachings were later disseminated in Tibet by Marpa himself and by Jetsun Milarepa, his greatest disciple. A number of Kagyu exponents subsequently emerged, and Kunkhen Padma Karpo (1527-1592), the fourth incarnation of Drugchen Rinpoche, was one of the most celebrated. His spiritual activities were extensive, and he composed 16 volumes of Kagyu treatises and teachings. After he passed away, two lamas were born as the rival incarnations of his body, speech and mind. They were the fifth Gyalwang Drukpa Pagsam Wangpo (1593-1641) and Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651?). Both became authoritative scholars on many aspects of learning.

Ngawang Namgyal proved to be exceptional, both as a religious teacher and a political leader. He fought with the ruler of Central Tibet, Depa Tsangspa (*sde-rid gtsang-pa*) and displayed great miracles by embodying Mahakala, the Dharma

protector. However, he was forced to retreat from Central Tibet, and established a new centre of power in what is now Bhutan. Under his leadership the new Lho-drukpa ('southern' Drukpa) sect came into being. Gradually, the doctrine of Lho-drukpa spread, including in Ladakh where its main centre was at Stakna *gonpa*.

The earliest available documents of Stakna *gonpa* suggest that its founder, Chosje Moszin, visited Ladakh at the request of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal himself. King Jamyang Namgyal (r. 1595-1616) of Ladakh wished the Zhabdrung to visit Ladakh and become the foremost teacher of the kingdom. However, the Zhabdrung was reluctant to accept, as he was fully engaged with religious and political affairs in Bhutan. Instead, he instructed Chosje Moszin, a lama of high stature belonging to his own Punakha monastery, to visit Ladakh on his behalf. The lama at that time was meditating near Mount Kailash, and he travelled on to Ladakh in response to the Zhabdrung's request.

Chosje Moszin built a small temple on the 'mountain that looked like a tiger'. This *gonpa* was later called 'Stagna', meaning 'the tiger's nose'. In constructing the *gonpa*, he borrowed certain Bhutanese techniques, and number of *thangka* paintings and statues made by the lama himself are preserved there. Bhutan also sent statues and other religious objects to the new *gonpa*. In addition, the king granted the lama a large tract of land, including nearby villages, to enable him to meet the financial requirements of the *gonpa*.

The lama also travelled to Zangskar on a religious mission: the local prince and princess showed him much respect and supported him in strengthening Lho-drukpa interests in Zangskar and beyond, including in Karzha, the present-day Lahul-Spiti area of Himachal Pradesh. At present a good number of Lho-drukpa monasteries in the Lahul-Spiti area are presided over by the Stakna Rinpoche. After doing much for the strengthening of Lho-drukpa sect in Ladakh, Zangskar and Karzha, Chosje Moszin passed away at Stakna in 1624.

King Jamyang Namgyal had two sons: Norbu Namgyal and

Senge Namgyal. Norbu was the elder of the two and the initial heir to the throne, while Senge became a monk accepting Chosje Moszin, as his root teacher. Senge built a temple at Stakna and installed a self-arising statue of Arya Avalokiteshvara, which remains the most sacred statue in the *gonpa*.

Norbu Namgyal's untimely demise compelled Prince Senge to disrobe and to ascend the throne. He emerged as the strongest ruler of the time. On the political front, the Ladakhi king supported Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal's policy of resisting the Gelukpa, and sent his younger brother Standzin to give military assistance to Bhutan against Tibet. Standzin later became governor of Wangdi Phodrang in Bhutan. Additionally, Senge Namgyal granted the Zhabdrung a series of monasteries near Mount Kailash in the Ngaris Skorsum region.

King Senge Namgyal appointed Lama Stagtshang Raspa (1574-1651), the leader of a rival Drukpa school, as his root teacher. In 1630 Stagtshang Raspa founded Hemis *gonpa*, which adopted the tradition of gSang-sngas-chos-gling *gonpa* in Tibet. Hemis, Chemde, Stagna are the well-known Drukpa Kagyu *gonpas* in Central Ladakh, together with Bardan, Dzongkhul, Stagrimo and Sani in Zangskar.

Naturally, the pro-Drukpa policies of King Senge Namgyal and his successors antagonised the Dalai Lama's government in Central Tibet. They were particularly concerned that Ladakhi kings allowed the Bhutanese to enter the Ngaris Skorsum area and feared that the alliance of two Drukpa kingdoms could pose a threat to the Gelukpa in Central Tibet. In 1679 the Tibetans sent an army to Ladakh led by Galdan Tsewang, a Mongolian monk and staunch supporter of Gelukpa dominance in Tibet, to counter Drukpa influence. The goal of the invasion was to wrest the Ngaris territories from the control of the king of Ladakh and to put pressure on him to appoint a Gelukpa lama as his foremost teacher. The Tibetans invaded the country, attacking the *gonpas* and the palace. The King of Ladakh was forced to seek assistance from the Mughal governor in Kashmir, thus paving the way for a growing Muslim influence in the area, which in turn led to the

construction of the famous mosque in Leh. Under the Treaty of Tingmogang in 1684 he ceded control of what is now Western Tibet to the Lhasa government.

Despite these setbacks, Ladakh maintained close relations with Bhutan. During the reign of King Nyima Namgyal (1694-1729) a Bhutanese lama named Ngawang Gyaltzen visited Ladakh and sat on the throne of the head of the Stakna monastery. This lama also was from Punakha *gonpa* and had the rank of Khenpo. A statue of the lama is in existence at Stakna *gonpa*. Nyima Namgyal tried his best to strengthen the position of Buddhism in Ladakh. This king was responsible for building mani walls and shrines throughout Ladakh. The king also deputed his minister Kalon Sonam Namgyal of Stok to Bhutan in order to obtain a full set of Kagyur texts. The present Kagyur set of Stok place based on 108 volumes is an original Kagyur text which came from Bhutan. So far three incarnations of Lama Gyaltzen have appeared in Ladakh including Lama Tempel, who did much for the preservation and propagation of Buddhism during the early years of the Dogra regime in the mid-19th century. The present Stakna Rinpoche Donyot Dorje is the last in the series.

The last incarnate lama from Bhutan to act as the abbot of Stakna *gonpa* was *Chos-rje Jams-dbyangs-pad-dkar* (1720-1760) who visited Ladakh during the reign of King Deskyong Namgyal in the mid-18th century. The *Chos-rje* founded Sani and Bardan *gonpas* in Zangskar.

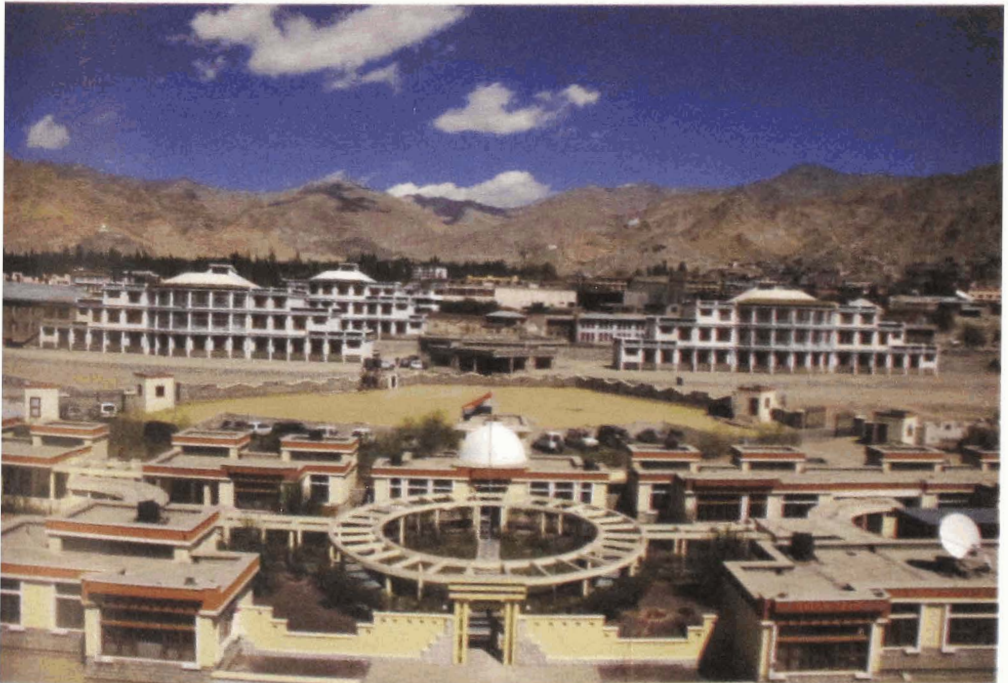
The cultural identities of both Ladakh and Bhutan are similar, as the majority of the residents of both regions are followers of Mahayana Buddhism. The natives of both regions believe that Guru Padmasambhava visited their homelands and disseminated Buddhism there. In both countries *gonpas* and stupas are constructed on a similar pattern, with some minor modifications. Bhutan's climate is different from Ladakh, hence the roof structures of the temples and houses are different from Ladakh. However, when one enters a shrine in Bhutan, the settings of the inner rooms are similar to those in Ladakh.

On the language front, the Tibetan script is prevalent in

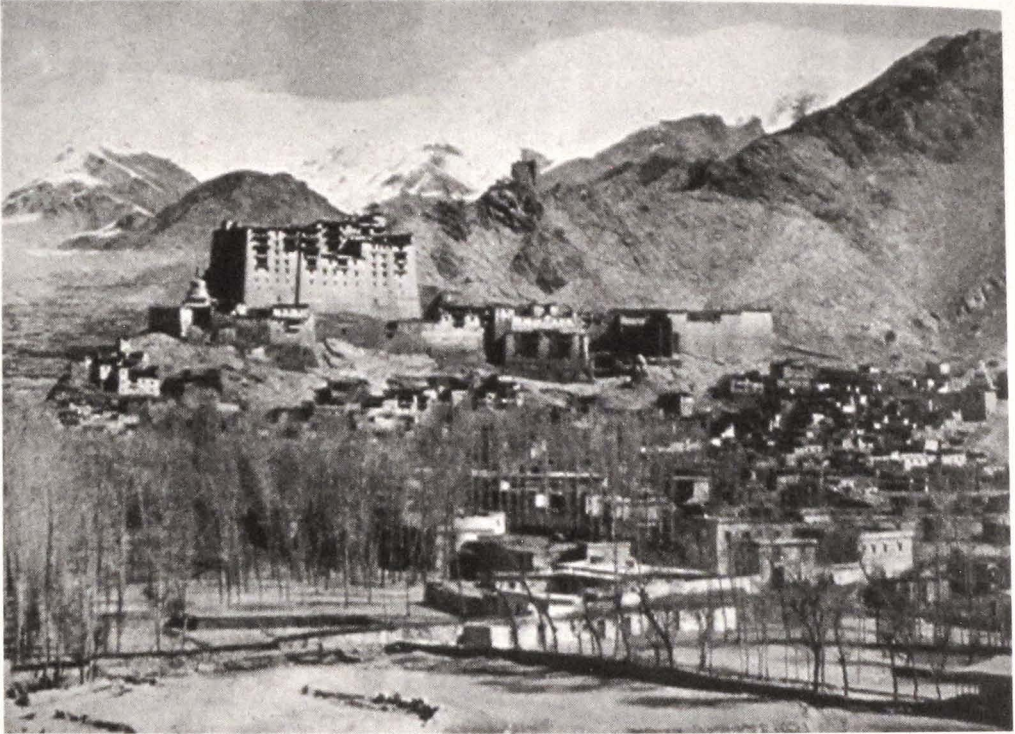
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View of Leh bazaar, 1894



View of the new Mini-Secretariat in Leh



View of Leh town, 1914



Ladakhis and Indian soldiers surrounding one of the first aircraft to arrive in Leh, 1949

A Cultural History of Ladakh



Map from P.N. Sharma's "The Ladakh Affair", showing the range of the Chinese invasion of 1962



Prime Minister Nehru in Ladakhi dress in Leh, 1949 (also from "The Ladakh Affair")



Ladakhi musicians



A Muslim wedding celebration



A Buddhist wedding celebration

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Elderly woman wearing a goat hide



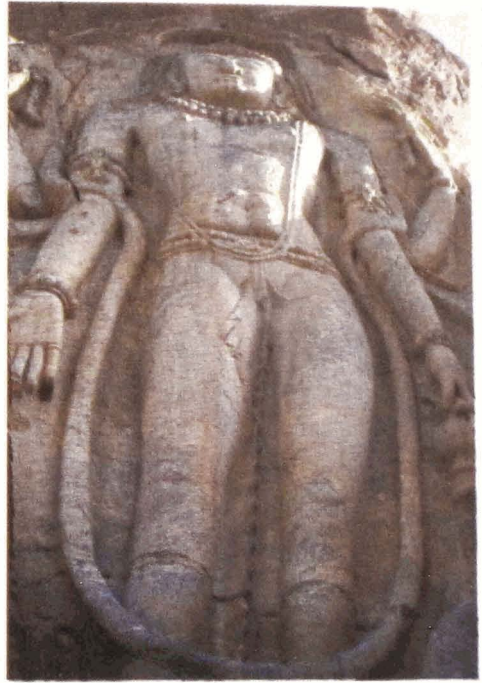
A religious gathering in Zangkar



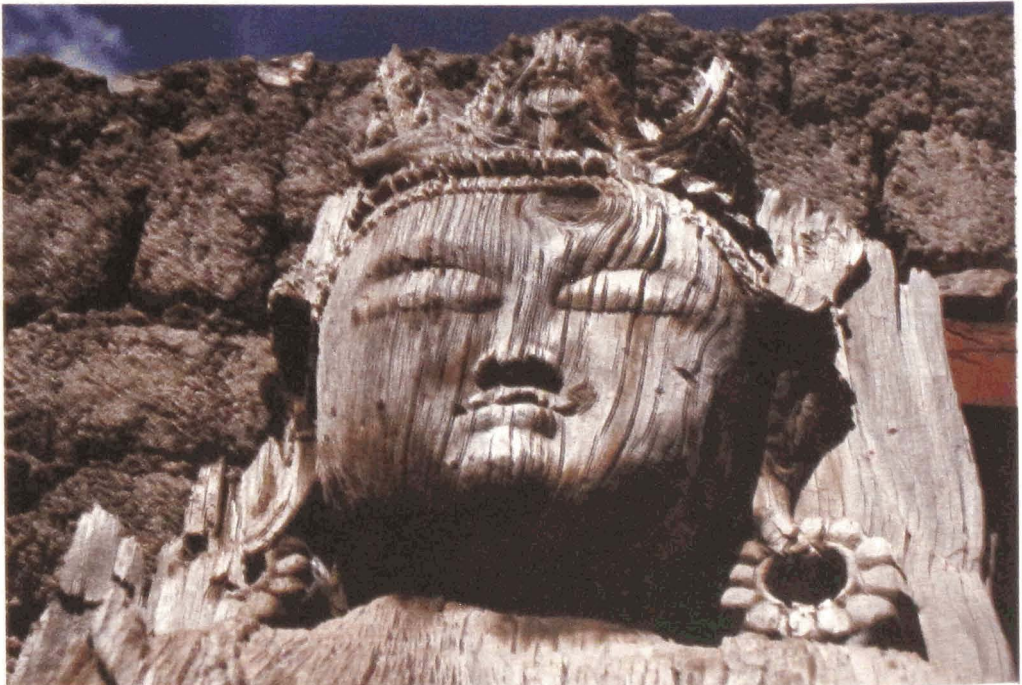
Men wearing traditional dress in Leh



*New Maitreya statue at
Likir Gonpa*

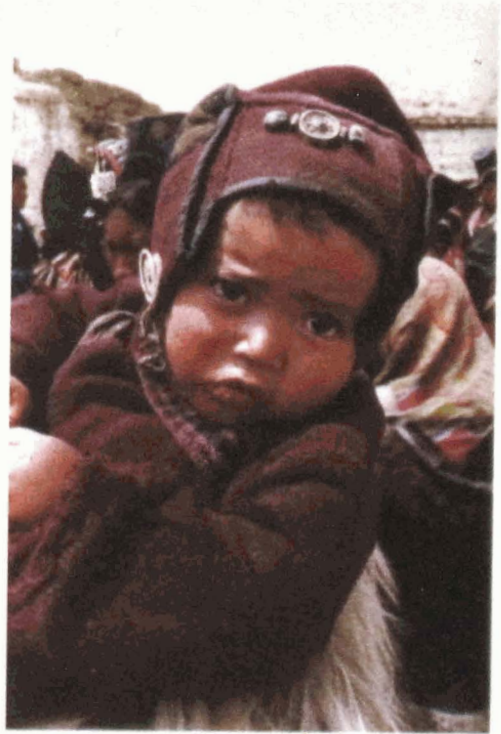
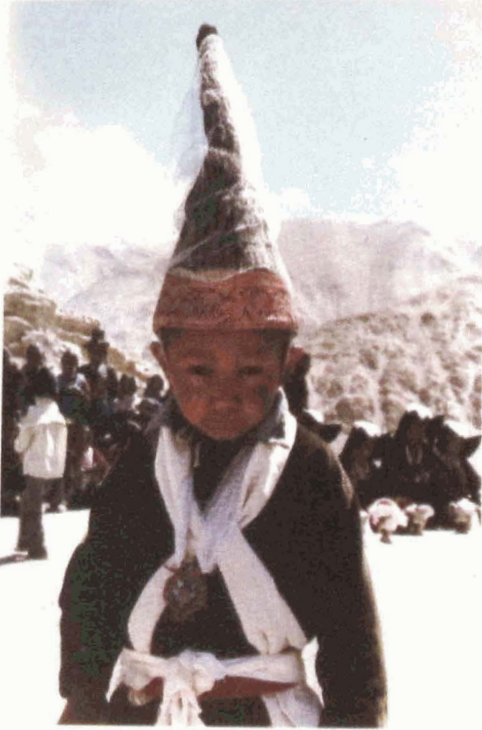


*Maitreya statue at Mulbek,
3rd century A.D.*



Wooden Maitreya at Sumda Chen-mo, 11th century

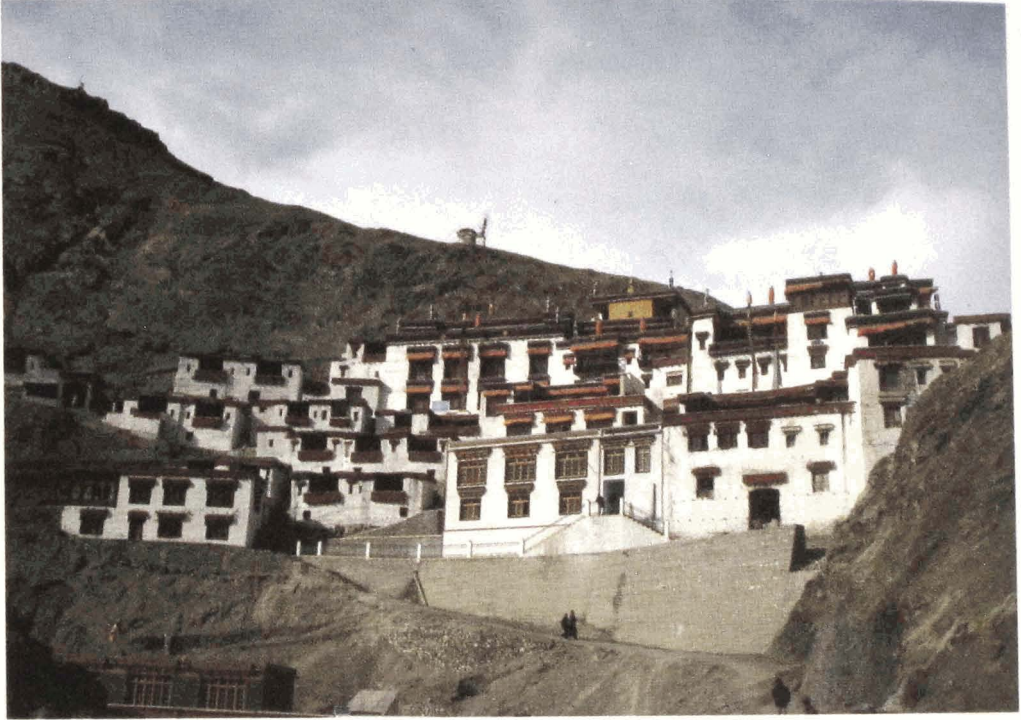
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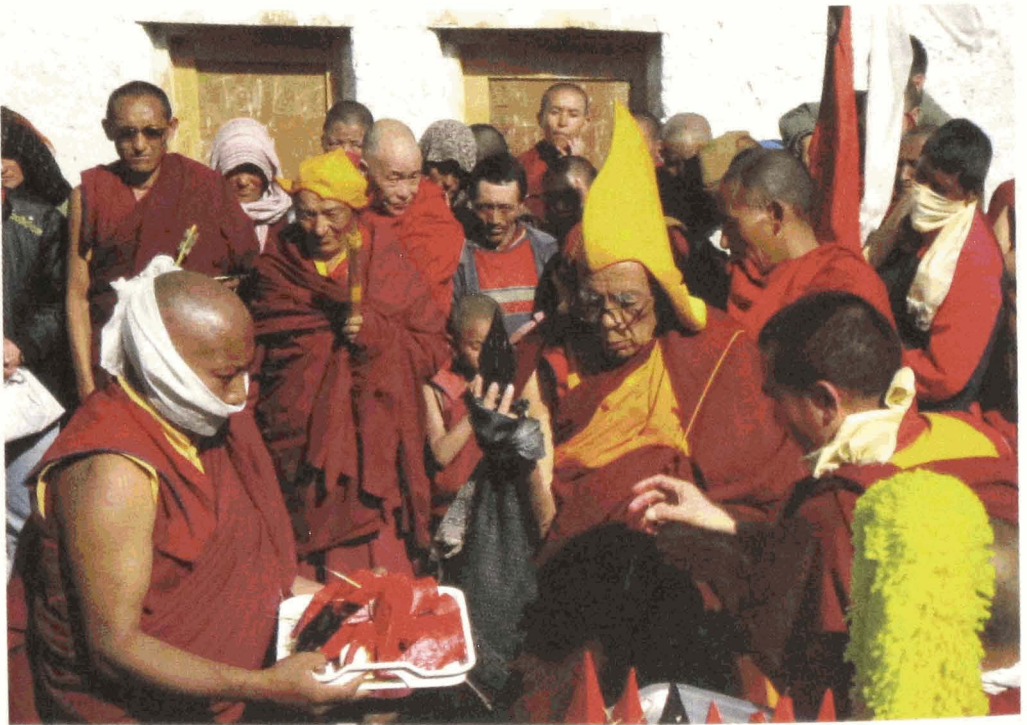
Children in traditional dress



Dancers wearing jewelry

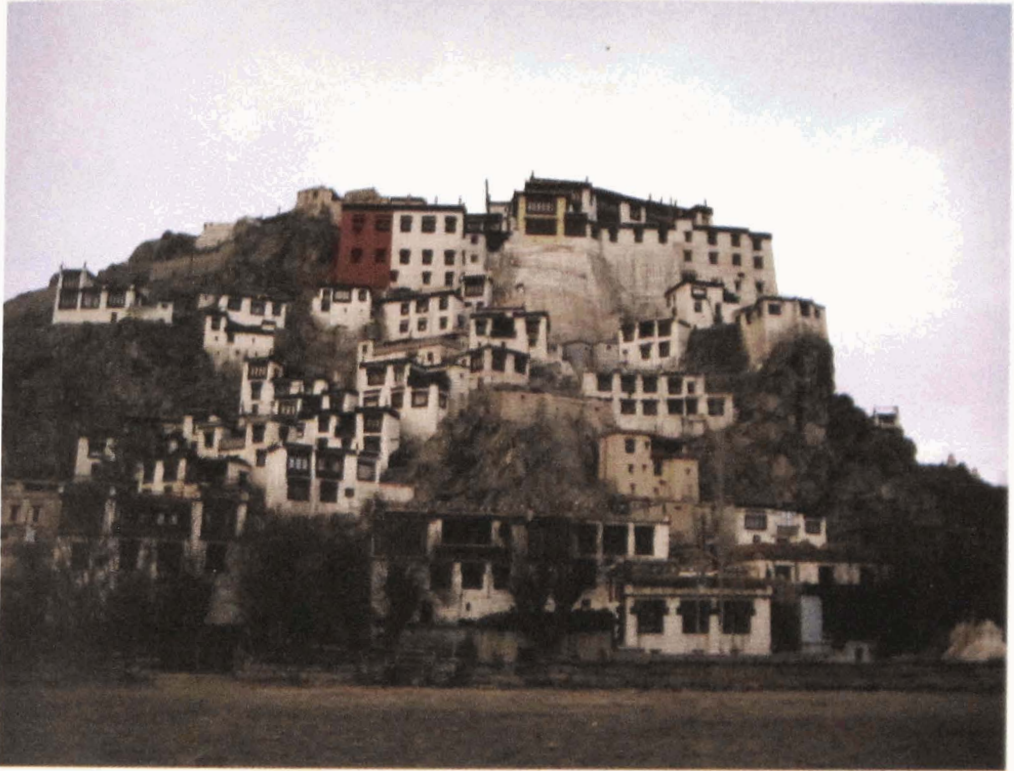


Rizong Gonpa



Sras Rinpoche, the Galden Tipa, performing a long-life ceremony at Rizong Gonpa, founded by Lama Tsultrim Nyima in 1834

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Spitik Gonpa



*Kushok Bakula Rinpoche
and Gergan Sonam in the
1950s*



*Bakula Rinpoche visiting
Karsha Gonpa in
Zangskar*



Shawa dance at Lamayuru Gonpa



Dance of Guru Shakya Sen-ge at Hemis Tsheshu

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Janak dance at Thikse Gustor



Monks on the roof of Thikse Gonpa

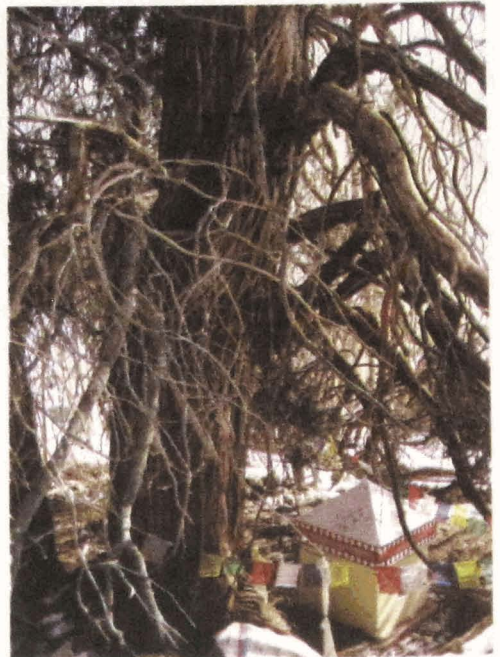
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The Mani wall at Hemis



Historical lha-tho at Basgo



*Lha-chang and klu-bang
at Likir*

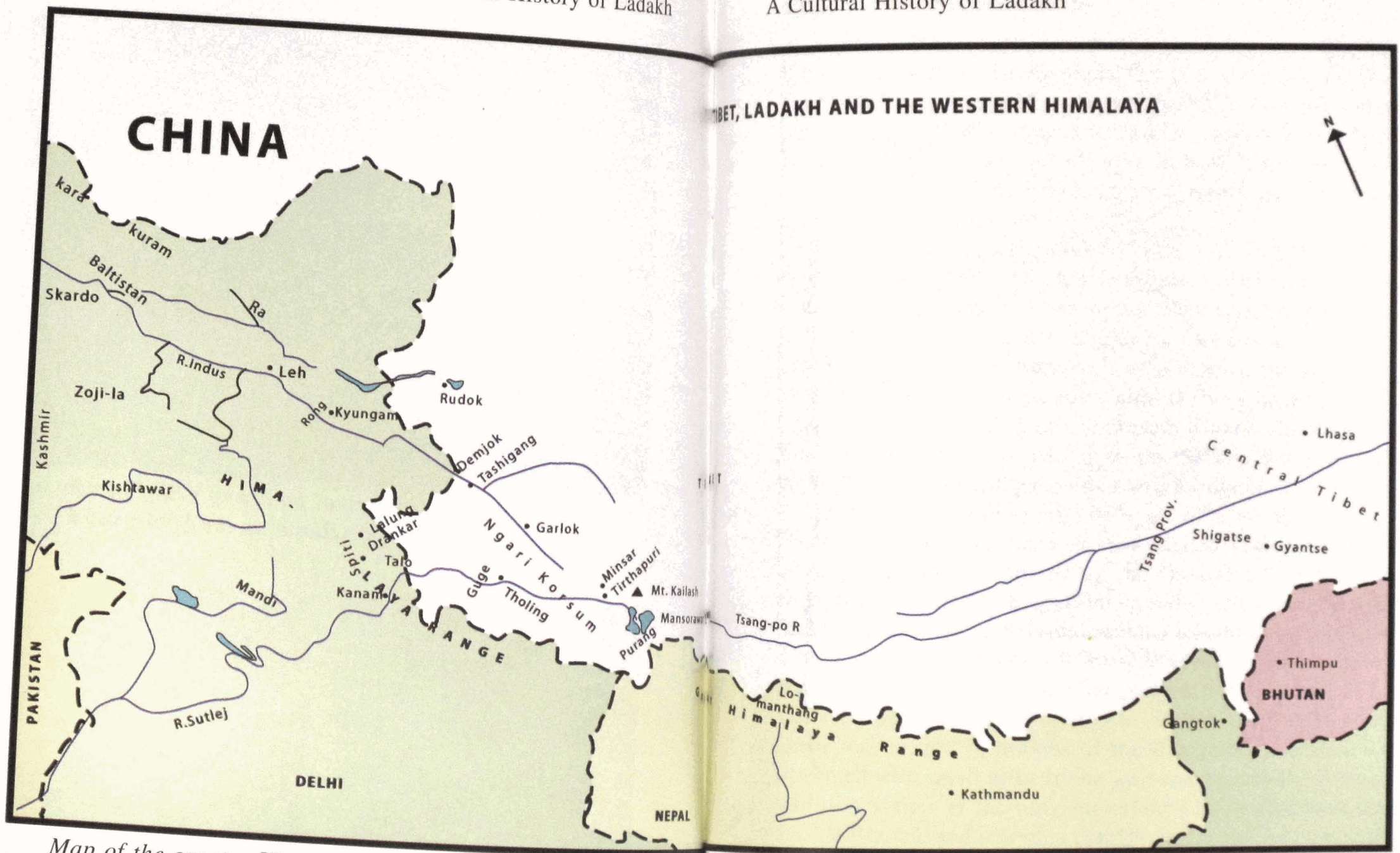
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mCho-rten with the historical palace of Chitgan, now a predominantly Muslim village, in the background



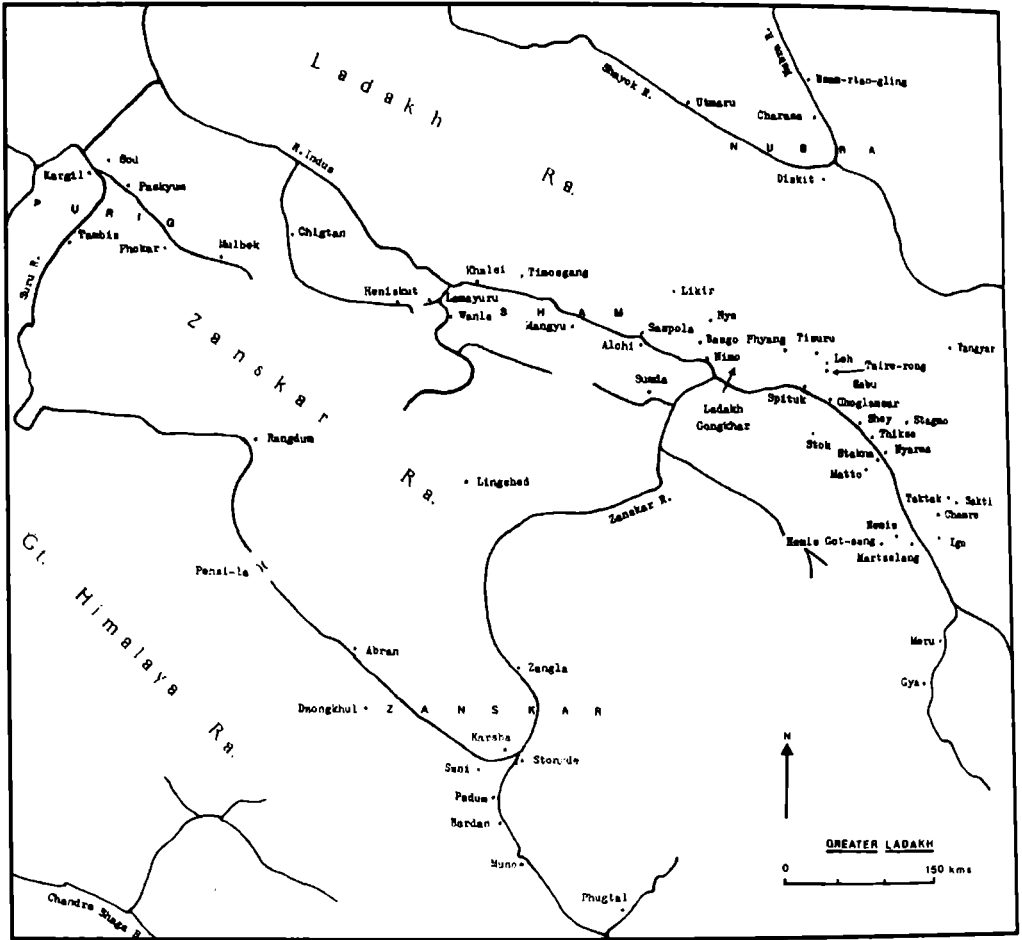
The author with Bakula Rinpoche and his manager on the Penzi-la in the 1980s



TIBET, LADAKH AND THE WESTERN HIMALAYA

Map of the greater Himalayan region

A Cultural History of Ladakh



Map of Greater Ladakh

both places for academic and religious purposes. Similarly, there is no difference between the two with regard to the learning of scriptural texts and rituals. This phenomenon also can be observed with regard to folklore and folk songs. The Kesar Saga is the best-known epic in both places. In certain cases, residents of both regions treat Kesar both as a religious as well as a secular hero.

It is heartening to see that the monks of Stakna in Ladakh consider themselves indebted to Bhutan with regard to their Lho-drukpa traditions. Even today, they look to Bhutan for both temporal and spiritual guidance. The last incarnation of Zhabsdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who resided for many years in Manali and who passed away almost five years ago, visited Ladakh at the invitation of the present Stakna Rinpoche. The Zhabsdrung kept close ties with the Stakna Rinpoche with regard to the Lho-drukpa *gonpas* in his region.

During the summer of 2005, an official delegation of Bhutan's National Museum in Paro visited Ladakh. The local government nominated me as the liaison officer, and the engagements of the delegation included their meeting with Stakna Rinpoche at his residence in Leh. I informed the Rinpoche about their arrival well in advance. Rinpoche with great pleasure organized a dinner party at his residence at Leh. The next day they were invited to Stakna *Gonpa*. Here also lunch was hosted in honour of the delegates, and they were presented with small gifts. In the welcome speech the Rinpoche said that Stakna is the only important Lho-drukpa monastery outside Bhutan, and regretted that Bhutan is paying no attention to its development. On the financial front the *gonpa* is in very poor shape. He therefore sought both spiritual and financial support from Paro. He also expressed apprehension that, if the Bhutan government and its cultural affairs department did not care of this indigenous Lho-drukpa *gonpa* in Ladakh, the Lho-drukpa tradition would soon vanish from the soil of Ladakh.

Mongolian Connections

I visited Mongolia for the first time in the year 1993, as the leader of an Indian dance troupe on behalf of the Government of India's Indian Council for Cultural Relations. My interest in Mongolia, however, arose while I was at school in Varanasi. In 1969, I had the privilege of meeting His Eminence S. Gombojav, the sagacious Abbot of Gandantekchenling Monastery and the Most Venerable Gomboyev—the Head of Buddhism in the former Soviet Union, who visited Varanasi and stayed at the guest house of the Maharaja of Benaras. I do not remember how I happened to meet the dignitaries there but I am sure that all information about their visit to Varanasi came to me from Kushok Bakula, myself being the caretaker of his religious welfare Centre there. Prior to that while in Varanasi. I was familiar with a Mongolian family, whose children were studying with me at Maha Bodhi College and later the family moved from Varanasi and later came to learn from my brother, Sonam Wangchuk, Secretary to Kushok Bakula Rinpoche that the family had moved to Ulaanbaatar. In the year 1993, when I visited Ulaanbaatar, it was a pleasant surprise to meet the eldest of the four kids, now Mrs. Silikman.

While in school, I did not have any knowledge about Mongolian affairs. I was even ignorant of the fact that until the 1970's, the Soviet supported the slaughtering of thousands of Buddhist monks and razing Buddhist monasteries and installed a communist government in the country. Later when I heard Kushok Bakula Rinpoche was paying frequent visits to Russia and Mongolia, my interest in the country grew. In the year 1969, the Russian and Mongolian Buddhists formed a religious body called the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace (ABCP) held one of their first conferences in New Delhi. Thus, I took the opportunity to see the Buddhist religious

leaders of Mongolia and Russia closely through the courtesy of Bakula Rinpoche and Secretary Sonam.

In the year 1981, I had the privilege of visiting Budapest, Hungary in connection with the celebration of the 200th birth anniversary of Csomo de Koros, the pioneer of Tibetan studies in the West. The time of the celebration at Budapest coincided with the visit of Bakula Rinpoche to Moscow. I thus managed to fly in the same aircraft to Budapest via Moscow in which Kushok Bakula and his Buddhist delegation for the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace were traveling. Before Bakula Rinpoche disembarked from the aircraft at Moscow, I asked Rinpoche and Secretary Sonam if it were possible to get an invitation to visit Moscow through the Buddhist Religious Affairs Department of Russian government. A week after the Csoma's birthday celebrations in Budapest, I visited the Soviet Embassy in Budapest and enquired if there was an invitation for my entry into the Soviet Union. The Visa Councilor said that no such letter has been received by them from their government and said that if I wanted a Soviet visa it would take a month. I was thus quite disappointed. However, just as I was leaving the embassy, the visa officer rushed out and told me that there was a letter for my visa from their foreign ministry. Without further delay, I was given an entry permit.

This gesture of the Religious Department of the Soviet Government made me very happy and the next day I landed at Moscow airport. An official from the Religious Affairs Department came to receive me at airport and took me to a government guest house. While in Moscow among the others, I wanted to visit the mausoleum of Lenin and one day I was taken to Red Square along with the Indian Buddhist delegates by our interpreter to see the mausoleum. We received special treatment from the Soviet Government because of the charismatic connection of Kushok Bakula in the religious affairs of the Soviet government.

Among the members of the Religious Affairs Department, Mr. Tom Rabdanva and I became close, and I could freely communicate with him. I once told him that the communists had

made much damage to Buddhism by destroying monasteries in Mongolia. Tom's reply was that yes, the Mongolians lost something but in return, the communist regime had provided modern amenities and infrastructure to the country. He was convinced that "to get something, one has to lose something."

In 1993, I saw multistoried buildings and wide roads built in Mongolia on the pattern of Soviet towns. The highways in particular, between Ulaanbaatar and Darkan, the 'industrial city of Mongolia', impressed me highly. At the same time these made me concerned about the Socialist government and Mongolia's capacity to maintain the infrastructure built during the communist regime, as the Soviet Union had already dissolved. I saw big cracks forming on the roads and other related infrastructure made by the Communist government in Mongolia with Soviet assistance. Both at Darkan and Ulaanbaatar, I heard from the Mongolian administrators saying that they were facing difficulties in obtaining spare parts for their aging Russian-made thermal power stations.

During my sojourn in Ulaanbaatar, I visited a number of monasteries including one in Darkan. At that time the monastery at Darkan had few lamas. While talking to a young lama, I saw a prayer book in the main prayer hall of the temple in Tibetan. With the lama's permission I read some pages from the text. The lama was impressed that I could read a religious scripture written in Tibetan. Based on that, I assumed that in Mongolia not many lay people could read the religious texts written in Tibetan, as in those days the medium of teaching in schools was Russian. Tibetan was only read and used by the lamas for chanting prayer or reading religious texts. Interestingly, at that time Kushok Bakula, the incarnate Lama of Ladakh was the Indian Ambassador to Mongolia, hence the occasion proved a big advantage for me to understand the country both politically and also in the sphere of religion. The amount of respect which the Mongolians showed to Bakula Rinpoche amazed me. I saw devotees queuing every day in front of the main entry to the Indian Embassy to get a chance to glimpse him and to get his blessing.

Today, more than a decade has passed since I last visited Mongolia. I understand that the country is passing through a very crucial period in the sphere of revival and preservation of centuries old Buddhist culture and religion which is now moving in a new direction after more than seventy years of communist rule..." The task of preservation of the centuries-old Tibetan form of Buddhism in Mongolia is a daunting task for the lama community of Mongolia, who were persecuted during the communist regime. This phenomenon was observed by Kushok Bakula, who had the privilege to travel to Russia and Mongolia under the banner of the organization Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace. Soon after Rinpoche became the Indian Ambassador, he arranged for young lamas to travel to India to study Buddhist Philosophy at Dharamsala and later created the Government of India's scholarship programs to Varanasi and the Tibetan learning centres in South India.

In Himalayan countries such as Bhutan and states in India such as Arunachal, Sikkim, Himachal and Ladakh, Tibetan occurs in colloquial usage and in some places Tibetan is taught in the school. This isn't the case, however, in Mongolia, flanked by Korea and China. There, the people who continue to practice Tibetan Buddhism have many disadvantages compared to the countries which are located in the bosom of Himalayas. Hence, to boost the zeal of these people in respect to the preservation of Tibetan Buddhism, Mongolia requires particular attention by the lover of Himalayan culture and civilization. The Tibetan form of Buddhism is being practiced by small and fragile populations throughout the vast land of Himalaya, hence the invasion of mass media from western, Chinese and Korean sources frequently comes into conflict with the traditional Mongolian lifestyle. A kind contradiction and crisis is visible in the preservation of old Tibetan culture and civilization in its traditional forms, the world over.

It is said that Buddhism relies on the monastic community and good teachers. That means that religious teachers should face the consequences of global influences, while being able to grasp the essence of our ancient culture and religion. His

Holiness the Dalai Lama time and again says that one should develop both an inward and outward-looking mind. Development of inner minds applies to the religious practices includes chanting of mantras and the performing of religious rites. On the front of external or earthly needs means proper utilization of modern amenities brought by scientific discoveries for the comfort of human beings.

In India, the government of India has been very generous for opening a number of state financed Buddhist institutions such as the Tibetan Institute of Tibetan Higher Studies, at Sarnath, the Gangtok-based Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology and the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies, in Leh. The last one is a brainchild of Kushok Bakula Rinpoche and is now heading towards obtaining the status of a Deemed University. Besides the above, a number of institutions run by Tibetan Buddhist sects are functioning to promote and strengthening religious teachings in the country. Among them are the four major Buddhist learning centers (i.e. Sera; Drepung, Galdan and Tashi Lhunpo).

The presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama among the religious leaders of the world is providing a source of moral strength not only to Buddhists but also to people of every faith around the world. With the passage of time, His Holiness is getting older and the recent political row over the selection of incarnate lamas is distressing news for the practitioners of the Tibetan form of Buddhism and the sustainability of their religion in a changing world. It is noteworthy that the system of incarnate lamas worked in Tibet when the country remained independent. Now, due to the occupation of Tibet by China, a contradictory situation is emerging regarding the selection and enthronement of incarnate lamas. There already exists unprecedented disagreements over the selection of the Gyalwa Karmapa and the Panchen Lama both in Tibet and Dharamsala, which compelled His Holiness the Dalai Lama to speak that "If the Tibetan people want to keep the Dalai Lama system, one of the possibilities I have been considering with my aides is to select the next Dalai Lama while I am alive."

The incarnation tradition in Tibetan Buddhism is complex and works so long as people have faith in the integrity of the system. In the Tibetan system, the incarnate lamas occupy very high positions. This theory relates to the Buddhist belief in rebirth, hence the incarnation is an accepted tradition in Mahayana Buddhism, and particularly in the Tibetan Buddhist system, for the continuation of monastic systems. Therefore, the deliverance of good teachings to the community by the incarnate lamas is extremely important. In this connection, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been doing great service to humanity by delivering religious discourses and his charismatic approach on the Lord Buddha's teaching has proved to be ambrosia to his followers. This is natural because His Holiness is revered as the incarnation of Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

Regarding the birth and appearance of incarnate lamas, no geographical boundaries can be ascertained or set. An incarnate Lama of Tibet can be born in Ladakh or a Ladakhi one in Tibet. A number of examples exist. Before or after the passing away of the 19th Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, a rumor spread among his followers that his incarnation would appear in Mongolia.

We know that Kushok Bakula had great love for the people of Mongolia and the country, illustrated particularly by the Rinpoche's determination to remain the Ambassador of India to Mongolia as long as he was physically fit. Similarly, the Government of India gave him full liberty to prolong his stays in Mongolia as Ambassador as long as it was in the interest of the country. His tenure as India's Ambassador lasted over a decade and brought the two nations closer. Eventually he could not prolong his stay as Indian Ambassador to Mongolia as a result of health concerns and had to relinquish the post. After that, when he was critically ill and could move only through wheel chair, on account of his sheer love for the people, he traveled to Mongolia against the wishes of his followers.

Ladakh and Sikkim

Some interesting cultural and historical ties can be found between the Ladakh and Sikkim. In both the kingdoms from the 15th century onward, the Kagyupa lamas became root teachers to both the royal family, who gave patronage to the sect.

Furthermore, the royal families of both Ladakh and Sikkim claim descent from Nyathi Tsanpo, the first king of Tibet. In Ladakh, *dPal-gyi-mgon*, a descendent of Nyathi Tsanpo, became the king of Ladakh in the 10th Century. Until the 15th century, the kings of the *mGon* Dynasty ruled over Ladakh. After that, the *rNam-rgyal* dynasty ascended to the throne. The first king in the series was *Rin-chen rNam-rgyal*, whose reign lasted over thirty years. All successive kings of Ladakh, up till the present time, were called *rNam-rgyal*.

Similarly, in the year 1657, *Phun-tsogs rNam-rgyal* had been proclaimed the first King of Sikkim. *rNam-rgyal* means "victorious" in Tibetan. After him all successive kings of Sikkim (*abras-ljons*) adopted *rNam-rgyal* as their surname.

Another resemblance between Sikkim and Ladakh is in the male dress. In Ladakh the male dress is called *Kos* or *rGya-bzo*, while in Sikkim, *Kho* or *Khos*. The same type of *Kho* is the national dress of Mongolia, still worn today. Since it was the dress of the great Mongolian ruler, Genghis Khan, it must have been originated in Mongolia and China and reached Ladakh and Sikkim at a later time.

Another similarity between the two regions is the celebration of *Lo-gsar*, the New Year on the first Day of the 11th month, in accordance with the Tibetan calendar. In Ladakh, when the harvesting is over and the grain crop has been stored for the long winter months, the day for the celebration of the New Year approaches. This celebration takes place two months prior to the Tibetan *Lo-gsar* or king's New Year (*rgyal-lo*), which is usually held in February-March.¹

Regarding Ladakhis celebration of *Lo-gsar* prior to the Tibetan celebration, it is said that once a king of Ladakh had to go on a war to a neighbouring district, hence he moved the celebration forward by two months so that his soldiers had time to celebrate the New Year with their families. However, the astrologers have a different interpretation about the celebrations of *Lo-gsar* in Ladakh and Tibet. The astrologers term Ladakh's *Lo-gsar* as a farmer's New Year (*so-nam lo-gsar*) that usually takes place at the same time as Christmas or New Year Day celebrations in other parts of the world. It may be that these early celebrations in Sikkim and Ladakh had some religious or sectarian significance, both being governed by Drug-pa kings instead of Gelukpas, as in Central Tibet in the 16th century onwards. On the other hand, it is also found recorded that farmers' New Year is observed in the villages around Shigatse and Ngari, which are the closest entry points to Tibet from both Ladakh and Sikkim.²

Similarities are also found in the food habits of the two regions, particularly in the staple drink such as chang and tea. The farmers of upper ridges of Sikkim and Ladakh grow barley and brew chang in similar style and consume a lot both at work and at leisure time. The honorific word for tea both in Sikkim and Ladakh is *solja*, while the honorific word for chang is *skyem* in both regions.

The Kingdom of Sikkim was a protectorate of the British Government from 1890 until 1947 while, in 1834, the Kingdom of Ladakh was annexed to Jammu state. Hence both kingdoms had easy access to the European explorers of the past. A number of researchers in the field of Tibetan affairs and Buddhism entered Ladakh and carried out extensive research here. And Sikkim, including the surrounding districts such as Kalimpong and Darjeeling, were climatically favorable places for those Europeans interested in Tibetan affairs to use as a base point to study trans-Himalayan affairs and Buddhism, as in those days they were not allowed to enter Tibet. Foremost among them was the great Hungarian Csoma de Koros. Csoma studied the Tibetan language in Zangskar. Here he compiled the first scientific

Tibetan-English Dictionary and Grammar of Tibetan language, finally passing away on April 11, 1842 in Darjeeling. After him A.H.Jascke, the compiler of a second Tibetan-English Dictionary, also made Ladakh the base of his studies.

Ladakh, being a kingdom in the extreme north of the subcontinent and Sikkim in its eastern side, initially had no direct trade, political or socio-cultural connections, except through the Lamas and pious Buddhists who pass through Sikkim to Lhasa on pilgrimage.³

However, regarding Sikkim's connection with Ladakh, an important document dated 8 June 1911 came to light in the Government archives in Leh. In this the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim expressed his desire to the Government of India in regard to his intention to marry a Buddhist lady of some respectable family from Ladakh.

The letters in question, spanning eleven pages in total, reveal the important status of Sikkim as a British protectorate kingdom in those days. The first letter in the series written by the Chief Minister, Jammu and Kashmir State, to S.Hashmat Ullah, Wazir Wazarat, goes as follows:

Dated Srinagar the 8th June, 1911

Dear Sir,

Maharajah Kumar of Sikkim having expressed his desire to the Government of India in regard to his intention to marry a Buddhist lady of some respectable family from Ladakh, the Govt. of India has asked the Resident to arrange through Darbar to find out some suitable match for the Maharaj Kumar.

The Maharajah Kumar is of 34 years of age and is a devoted Buddhist, and wishes to marry a grown up Buddhist lady, if possible an English speaking one.

I shall be glad if you will please make confidential inquiries about the proposed match from Ladakh, Zangskar, Purik etc. and let me know full particulars about the respectability of the parents, age, etc. of the

girl. If possible a photograph of the girl may be obtained and supplied. The inquiries should be conducted in such a manner that the parents of the girl may not come to know about the matter till it is finally settled. Please see the inquiries are made as secretly as possible, and your reply should reach me before the end of the month.

The matter may please be treated strictly confidential.

Yours Sincerely,

Dewan
Chief Minister
 J&K State

Upon receiving this letter, S. Hashmat Ullah, the Wazir Wazarat, carried out a detailed study of the family situation of the noble families of central Ladakh, Purig and Zangskar. The findings of the Wazir are recorded in confidential D.O. letter No. 427, Kargil:

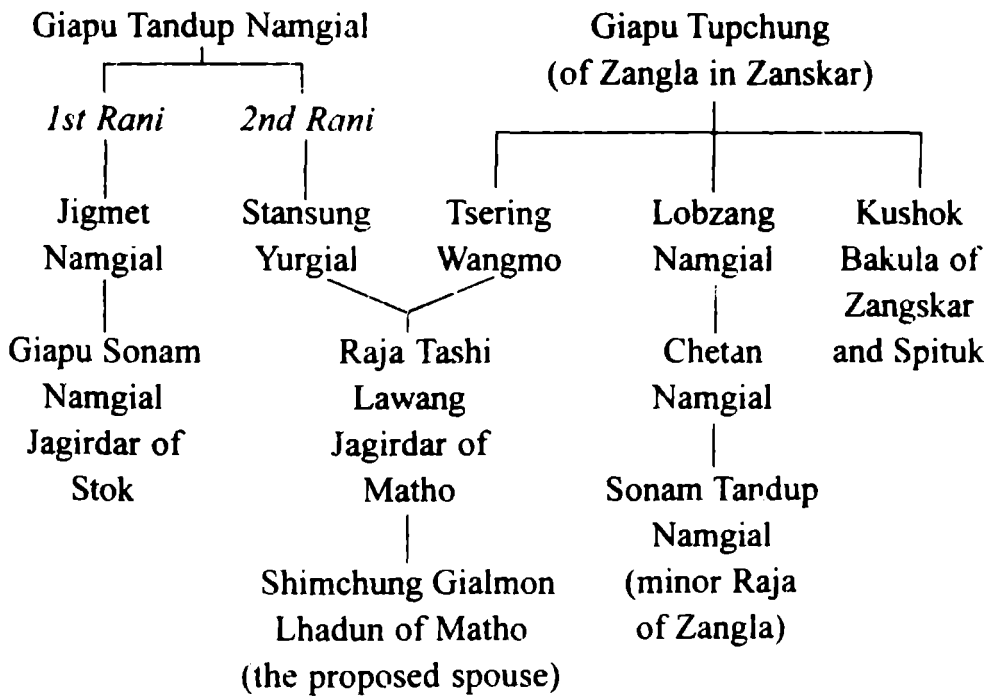
Dated: July 2nd, 1911

To: Rai Sahib Dewan
 Amar Nath Sahib Bahadur
 Chief Minister to H.H. the Maharja Sahib Bahadur
 Jammu and Kashmir State

Dear Sir,

With reference to your letter dated June 8th, 1911 regarding the desire of the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim to marry a Buddhist lady of Ladakh, I beg to state that the most respectable family of Buddhists in Ladakh, Zangskar and Purig is that of the Raja of Stok whose grandfather Giapu Tandup Namgial was the ruler of Ladakh at the time of conquest. He has no daughter of

his own. But his cousin Raja Tashi Lawang of Mathu has a grown up daughter who I should think would be a suitable spouse for the Maharaj Kumar. I therefore sent for the Raja of Stok and Kushok Bakula of Zangskar, who is closely related with the Raja of Mathu, to consult about the desired match. I have discussed the matter with them. They say that the name of the lady is Shimchung Gialmon Lhadun of Matho. The following genealogical tree will show clearly her parentage.



The Gialmon is sixteen years of age and is lady of many refined manners according to Tibetan civilization, and is also said to be good looking. The Buddhist era of her birth is called Mete (Me: fire, te: Monkey). I enclose a slip with full name of the lady and the era of her birth written on it in Buddhist characters. She is illiterate and speaks only her mother tongue the Ladakhi dialect of the Tibetan language. No one from amongst the Ladakhis knows English. Urdu knowing people are also few and far between. She is a lady of unquestionable respectability in Ladakh. But wealth she has not.

The only source of her father's income is the small Jagir of Mathu granted to him by the state where Raja Tashi Lhawang is living a peaceful life.

2. The Kushok Bakula and the Raja of Stok say that they knew absolutely nothing of the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim nor have they enough means to enter into matrimonial relations with the ruling chiefs. For this reason they don't know how to start the negotiations. In case it is desire by his highness the Maharaja Sahib Bahadur the marriage should be contracted and His Highness has full reliance on the Maharaj Kumar, the Kushok as well as the Raja of Stok will consider it there good fortune to carry out the wishes of his highness. Even in that case they will not be able to get through the marriage ceremony in a manner becoming to the dignity and position of the proposed bridegroom on their own scanty means and without help from the state. If this is arranged and His Highness the Maharaja Sahib Bahadur is inclined to think that the proposed marriage is desirable one, the Kushok Bakula and the Raja of Stok undertake to arrange for the same with Raja Tashi Lhawang of Mathu.

3. The Raja of Stok on his return to Leh will have the lady photographed and will send the photo to me which on receipt will be submitted to you. This may be expected within three weeks if a photographer is available otherwise it will take longer time.

4. The Kushok Bakula further asked that if no objection, the full name of the Maharaj Kumar, the Buddhist era of his birth, and particulars about his family and character may kindly be communicated to him.

5. As the Kushok Bakula had to be sent for from Zangskar the reply to your letter could not be sent earlier.

Yours Obediently,

Hashmat Ullah Khan

According to the genealogical tree prepared by the Wazir Wazarat, Shimchung Gialmo Lhadun was the great niece of the 18th successive incarnation of Arhat Bakula the abbot of Spituk *Gonpa* born in Zangla palace, and the aunt of the 19th incarnation of Kushok Bakula of Spituk born in the royal family of Matho. The Wazir included the Kushok Bakula, who was only her great uncle by relation, because of the Kushok's position in the Ladakhi administration and his influence in public affairs.

Now the only hurdle to the Wazir securing the Maharaj Kumar's consent was to obtain a photograph of the Shimchung through the Raja of Stok. The Raja had said that this would take three weeks, due to the difficulty in obtaining a camera, and the materials necessary for developing and printing a photograph. The Dewan upon receiving the confidential letter of the Wazir, wrote once again asking for a photo to be supplied quickly.

Confidential No. 190 C

From: The Chief Minister
Jammu and Kashmir State

To: S.Hashmatullah
Wazir Wazarat, Ladakh
Srinagar 10 October 1911

Dear Sir,

Please refer to your confidential letter No. 427 D.O. Dated the 2nd July, 1911 on the subject of the proposed desire of the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim to marry a Buddhist lady of Ladakh.

I have read with pleasure the particulars furnished by you in letter concerning Lady Shimchung Gialmo Lhadun daughter of the Raja of Matho, as also the manner in which you conducted the confidential enquiries connected with the matter.

In para 3 of your letter you said that the Raja of Stok would arrange to have the lady photographed,

I think you would supply the photo to me within three weeks.

It is expected that the Raja of Stok has already managed to have a photograph prepared of the lady. If however, he has not done so I shall be glad if you will please arrange, if it can be done without offence and without the object becoming known to the lady or to her parents, to secure a photo of the lady and supply the same to me as early as possible for transmission to the government of India as the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim is desirous of the seeing the same.

Yours sincerely,

Dewan, Chief Minister
J&K State

Ladakh, being a region cut off from the rest of the world and educationally backward, had no young ladies with proficiency in English. Nor in those days did a single school of modern science exist in Ladakh. Similarly, no photo studio or professional photographer lived in Leh to make it possible for the resident to obtain the photograph of the nominated lady, Shimchung Gialmo Lhadun of Matho, to send to the Maharaj Kumar. Therefore, it took the local administration almost six months to accomplish the task and by the time the Maharaj Kumar could get the photo, it was already very late.

A reminder to the letter also came from Captain R.H. Chenevix Trench, I.A., First Secretary to the Resident in Kashmir addressed to Rai Sahib Diwan Amar Nath, Chief Minister to H.H. the Maharaja from Srinagar Vide No. 159, Dated October 5th: 1911 on the subject:

My dear Sir

You will no doubt recollect Colonel Erskine speaking to you early last June regarding the possibility

of finding in Kashmir, Ladakh, and small Buddhist states on the latter frontier a lady who might make a suitable wife for the Maharaja Kumar of Sikkim. You promised to make secret inquiries in the matter but thought it doubtful whether a photograph of any such lady could be secured without a reference to her or to her parents, to whom it was undesirable that any direct reference should be made on the subject.

The inquiries made by you elicited the information contained in letter No. 427, dated the 2nd July 1911, from the Wazir Wazarat Ladakh to your address, which was handed by you to the resident on the 11th idem. A copy of the above letter, which is returned herewith was forwarded to the Government of India who have asked that if possible, a photograph of the lady known as the Shimchung Gialmon of Matho may be obtained, as the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim is desirous of receiving a copy.

It is possible that Maharaja of Stok (vide paragraph 3 of the Wazir Wazarat's above cited letter) has already managed to have the lady photographed. If however, he has not done so I am to request that you will kindly arrange, if it can be done without offence, and without the object becoming known to the lady or the parents, to secure a photo of the former for transmission to the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim.

Yours sincerely,

P Chevenix Trench

In spite of repeated and personal letters by both the Dewan (chief Minister) and Captain First Assistant to the Resident Captain Trench for the procurement of a photo of Shimchung Gialmon of Matho or any other lady from the region to send Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim took the Wazir Wazarat almost six months to get one. Finally, in the month of November, the photo

reached the Wazir, now in Kargil, who forwarded the photo to the Dewan, the Chief Minister, as the letter below explain.

Confidential No. 950/DO

Ladkh Wazarat
Kargil

November 15th, 1911

Sir,

Will you kindly refer to your confidential letter No. 190-C/DO dated 10 October 19th, 1911 on the subject of the desire of the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim to marry a Buddhist lady of Ladakh.

I beg to enclose herewith a photograph of Simchung Gialmon Lhadon supplied to me by the Raja of Stok. The photo I am sorry is not a good one. There are no professional photographers in Ladakh and as the matter had to be managed without giving the least opportunity to the lady or to her parents to suspect the real object no better could be arranged. I however hope that it will serve to give the Maharaj Kumar at least some idea with the Gialmon is like.

With respects

I am, yours obediently,

Hashmatullah Khan

There might have been some delay in sending the photograph of Shimchung Lhadun from the Dewan to Captain Trench, and Trench sent the Dewan the following letter:

Confidential No. 193 of 1911

From: Captain P.H. Cheevenix Trench, I.A.
First Assistant to the Resident in Kashmir

To: Rai Sahib Dewan Amar Nath
Chief Minister to His Highness the Maharaja
Jammu and Kashmir, Sialkot

Dated: Sialkot, 27th November, 1911

Sir,

I am directed to invite your attention to my letter No. 159 dated the 6th October, 1911, regarding a photograph of a Buddhist lady required for transmission to the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim, and to request the favor of an early reply.

Yours truly,

P. Chevenix Trench, Captain

First Assistant to the Resident in Kashmir.

The Dewan now obtained the photograph from the Wazir Wazarat, and posted it under confidential cover to Captain Trench. The Dewans letter reads as follows:

Confidential No. 228 C.S.

Enclosure: One photograph.

From
The Chief Minister,
Jammu and Kashmir State

To:
Captain P. Chevenix Trench,
First Assistant to the Resident in Kashmir, Sialkot.
28th November, 1911

My dear Sir,

With reference to your confidential letter No. 159, dated the 5th October last I am to forward herewith a

photograph of the lady known as Shimchung Gialmon Lhadun daughter of the Raja of Matho for transmission to the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim, a copy of the Wazir Wazarat Ladakh letter No. 950. Ditto of 15th November, 1911 with which the said photograph has been received as also enclosed for information.

Yours sincerely,

Dewan

The decision of the Maharaj Kumar not to choose the Ladakhi lady reached Captain Trench after a gap of six months, and was duly communicated to the Dewan. Trench's letter reads:

Confidential: Sialkot, the 19th March, 1912

My Dear Sir,

With reference to your letter No. 228 C.S. dated the 28th November, 1911, I am desired to inform you that the political Officer in Sikkim has reported that the Maharaj Kumar does not desire marriage with the lady Simchung Gialmon Lhadun of Matho

Yours sincerely,

P. Chevenix Trench

According to Alex McKay's paper entitled, "The Education of Maharajah Kumar Sidkeon Namgial of Sikkim," it appears that prior to the Maharajah Kumar expressing his desire to marry a Ladakhi lady belonging to a respectful family, he had sought for a Buddhist lady from Japan, Burma and Tibet.⁴ It also makes it clear that the Kumar, being a trulku, wished to have a Buddhist wife hailing from Buddhist kingdoms of the time to maintain the traditions of his ancestors, instead of marrying a wife who would not be liked by his subjects.

These letters are very valuable in helping us to understand the socio-economic conditions of Ladakh in the early 20th century and the external sentiments of Ladakh as a kingdom expressed by outsiders at the time. Ladakh, being cut off from the rest of the world till recent times, is indeed a difficult place to reach. However, its link with the rest of the country was established only in the year 1948 with the landing of an Indian Air force aircraft: the plane brought Indian soldiers to protect the land from Pakistan's aggression. Ladakh's surface link with Srinagar was established only in the year 1962, after the Sino-India war, to reinforce the presence of the Indian army in the area. On the other hand, Sikkim had easy access to the rest of the world, even in early times due to its position on the trade roads from the plains of India to Tibet. But the letters give evidence that even in the early 20th century Ladakh had a respectable place in the world of Himalayan kingdoms as a strong bastion of Mahayana Buddhist culture.

The last contact between Ladakh and Sikkim took place when the last ruler of Sikkim, *Chos-rgyal dPal-Ldan Ton-drup rNamgyal*, paid an official visit in 1972, before he was dethroned and his kingdom became the 20th State of the Indian Union. His visit was a historical one in the sense that no Himalayan ruler of such high position had ever paid a visit to Ladakh. A rousing reception was given to the Sikkimese king by the people of Ladakh at the centre of Ladakhi Buddhist in Leh popularly known as Cho-khang Vihara. Decorated thrones were set up, one for the descendant of the last Ladakhi king, *Thin-las rNamgyal*, and one for the Sikkimese King *Chos-rgyal*. The latter was offered the first throne in the row, but instead he decided to be seated next to the Ladakhi king.⁵ On further inquiry it was learnt that the Sikkimese king had given precedence to the Ladakhi king as the latter was a direct descendent of the Tibetan Emperor *Gnya-Khri-Btsan-Po*.

This episode illustrates the continuing importance of genealogy and historical lineage among the aristocracies of the Himalaya. Among the followers of the Tibetan form of Mahayana Buddhism in the region, there is a profound respect

for the Tibetan exponents of the religion, and also for the Tibetan kings. So, to establish their identity, the ruler of various Himalayan kingdoms emphasized their direct descent from the Tibetan kings. Like Ladakh, the aristocratic families of Sikkim, Mustang in Nepal, the Mons (present day Arunachal Pradesh), and other kingdoms, have claimed direct descent from these kings and it is the provenance and pedigree of these lineages which is an important factors in determining the social hierarchy amongst the aristocracies.

References

- 1 Stein, R.A., *Tibetan Civilization*, 1972.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 *Sheeraza Ladakhi*, Vol. 26, No. 3-4, a Publication of J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, Leh-Ladakh, 2004.
- 4 Alex McKay's paper, The Education of Maharajah Kumar Sidkeon Namgial Tulku of Sikkim, published in *Bulletin of Tibetology*, p. 27.
- 5 I am greatly indebted to Shri Abdul Qayum, ex-information Officer, Leh for this information.

Part Four:

Folk Religion and Traditions

A Description of a visit to three Sumda Villages in March, 1990

The three tiny villages of the Sumdas, called Sumda *mDo*, (lower), Sumda *Chu-nun* (small) and Sumda *Chen-mo* (great) are located to the west of the narrow valley where the Zangskar River descends and merges with the 'Lion River', Indus, some thirty kilometers away from Leh at Nimo.

These three villages were revealed recently as being great cultural centres, revealing some of the great monuments of *Lo-tsa-wa Rin-chen bZang-po*, dating back to the tenth century A.D. They are of great value in the history of art and culture in Ladakh, a tradition which became very strong with the establishment of many famous centres by *Lo-tsa-wa*.

In March 1990, Dr Rohit Vohrna of Luxembourg and I paid a short visit to the three Sumdas, traveling on the newly constructed Chilling road, which follows the left bank of the Zangskar until it reaches the hamlet of Tsogti, where a large iron bridge has been installed across the river.

Traditionally the track leading from Nimo to Chilling and onward to Zangskar was called the *Ched-dar-lam*, (Ice-path) and was used by the travelers from Zangskar to Leh during the winter months when the river is flanked by frozen ice. The river was found to be still partially frozen in March, during our visit.

The hamlet of Tsogti is settled by a single family and is spread over a large area to the left of the river. The land seems very fertile and apple, apricot walnut and other trees found in the Indus valley grow there. The road beyond this village has been constructed along the right bank of the river until it reaches Sumda-*mDo* and from there continues on to Chilling village.

The entire valley beginning from Nimo village is most

picturesque. The rugged barren mountains of different colors are dotted with small but very effective medicinal springs and wild flowers and grasses grow in abundance. The greenery along the banks of the Zangskar River and the vegetation on the mountains make the valley very beautiful and it attracts many interested travelers and mountain-trekkers to the Sumda valley.

Our first encounter was with the hamlet of Sumda-*mDo*, also based around a single family. From Sumda-*mDo* a narrow path leads to the two other Sumdas namely Sumda *Chu-nun* and Sumda *Chen-mo*, along the Sumda stream, a tributary descending from the *La-nag-la* (Black Mountain pass) which is situated above the narrow gorge of *La-ago*.

Seven kilometers from Sumda-*mDo* after a steep walk for about an hour, we came across Eezangs, a small hamlet of the two families of Atse-rig, situated two kilometers above the hill. Eezangs are rich in vegetation and various types of trees in great number. The resident families of Atse-rig sell the timber for use in the construction of houses and other buildings, but their main occupation is agriculture. They also produce the famous cylindrical wooden vessels called *zem*, which are used in brewing chang and are in great demand in Ladakh.

We found the people very hospitable and kind, and after some conversation they suggested that we stay for the night as it was already two o'clock and the trek to Sumda *Chu-nun* would take at least five hours because of the heavy snow and it would not be possible to reach there before sunset. In addition to the heavy winter snow fall, the path had been badly damaged by heavy rains and landslides in several places. Accepting the suggestions of the villagers, we decided to spend the chilly night in a small hut belonging to one of the herdsman, together with an elderly guest who had apparently been in Leh earlier, and had also been to my parents' house at Sankar to weave some cloth.

Before going to bed, we had a very interesting conversation with our host and his elderly guest, Meme Sonam, who lived in Sumda Chenmo, about the way of life in the area. We

learned that in order to have an administrative and executive link with the local government at Leh, the inhabitants of the three Sumdas, together with the neighbouring village of Chilling, elected a person from among themselves as the village head, popularly called the *Go-ba*.

Enclosed by high mountains passes and exposed to harsh climatic conditions, the villages are sparsely populated. During the long winter months, the sun is visible for only seven hours a day. However, the area is rich in vegetation and large numbers of wild plants and trees grow there, including the poplar and the willow which are used for building construction and as fuel to keep the houses warm.

The residents of these are skilled craftsmen, and have been working with metal for many centuries. Their metal products, such as chang vessels, kettles and spoons, are most sought after by the people of Ladakh and are widely used. Being agriculturalists and having large grazing lands, they also breed various animals such as yak, mzo, mzomo, horses, cows, sheep and goats for milk and for meat.

Alchi, the famous historical village, is situated to the north east of the three Sumdas. There is a path to Alchi from Sumda *Chu-nun* and Sumda *Chen-mo* via *Stag-pa-la* (the upper pass) situated above the two villages. These villages had close links with Alchi in the old days in the observance of village traditions such as birth, marriage and death ceremonies. The smiths and the *Mon* musicians of Alchi would come whenever they were required. Now, with the changing of social customs and traditions, the Alchi musicians rarely bother to work on the barter basis. Therefore, only the residents of the three Sumda villages and Chilling now join in the happiness or sorrow of whatever befalls. The residents of these villages belong to the *Brug-pa bKa-rGyud* sect of Tibetan Buddhism and rituals are conducted by the resident monks appointed by Hemis *Gonpa*.

Some changes are now taking place in the lifestyle of the inhabitants of these villages, including in their diet. In common with the other parts of Ladakh, barley and wheat had been the

staple food for these people. Now, however, because of an easier access to Leh, they have started consuming a considerable quantity of rice and sugar. The recent construction of the Nimo-Chilling road has contributed to the socio-economic uplift of these people. However, the connection of Sumda *Chu-nun* and Sumda-*Chen-mo* by a miserable road is a very distant prospect. The immediate need is to improve the steep track built through the mountains. Special attention should also be given to improving health care, education and animal husbandry.

The next morning we awoke before dawn and without waiting for a cup of tea, started walking towards our destination, the historical village of Sumda *Chu-nun*. We followed the right bank of the Sumda stream and after an hour we saw a young boy coming towards us. We greeted each other and the boy enquired as to whether his grandfather, who was traveling from Leh, had stopped for the night in Eezangs. We confirmed that an old man named Meme Sonam did spend the night with us in the shepherd's hut and should be following us after taking some tea

The boy belonged to Sumda *Chen-mo* and was presently staying at a place called *La-nag-mDo* in order to take care of his livestock. He was on his way to Eezangs to assist his grandfather who was to bring food such as rice, sugar and tea for his family. Before we parted company, the boy told us to follow the right bank of the stream, and at the beginning of the valley of Sumda *Chu-nun* we would see a *lha-tho* (A small four cornered room after built on a mountain or the roof of a house as a residence for minor or household gods) and a hand engraved on a stone, opening the way to the famous temple of *rNam-par-snan-mzed*, the Buddha Vairocana.

When we entered the valley we found it covered by trees, such as white willow and poplar, wild roses and other bushes and plants. The stream and the path were completely covered by ice. The journey from Eezangs to the village of Sumda Chunun had taken four hours and we gratefully took breakfast at the house of the resident monk in the village who had come

from Hemis. After a short rest we then proceeded to the temple, located on a mountain.

The monk very kindly opened the temple and the entrance immediately reminded me of the great Vairocana temple of Alchi village. It also made us wonder how such a grand temple came to be built in the village. The iconography and the whole layout of the assembly hall are practically identical to the one in Alchi. Tradition has it that the Sumda temples were built at the time of the upsurge of religious and artistic activities that were inspired by *Rin-chen bZang-po*. Indeed the grand mandalas in the main assembly hall and the miniature Buddha paintings suggest that they are contemporary with the rest of *Rin-chen bZang-po*'s works in Ladakh.

The Vairocana temple of Sumda *Chu-nun*, like other temples of *Rin-chen bZang-po*, is a treasure house of stucco images and mural paintings.¹ The stucco images of the five Dhyani Buddhas, namely Vairocana (*rNam-par-s nang-mzed*), Vajradhara (*rdo-rje-sems-pa*), Ratna Sambhava (*Rinchen abyun-g-nes*), Amitabha (*snan-va-mthayas*), and Amoghsiddha (*Don-yot Drupa*) are decorated in the Gandhara style of art, flanked with flowers, and the giant bird Garuda with Makaras issuing from his mouth surmounts the central image. Mandalas and drawings of the protector deities are in very good condition on the walls. Seven wooden statues of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas varying in length from forty to eighty centimeters are kept on the left of the shrine together with the *Lha-tho* and the votive cairns of the *Lha, rDor-ji Chen-mo*, who was the protector' deity of *Rin-chen bZang-po*.

The monastery of Sumda *Chen-mo* is attributed to *Rin-chen bZang-po* who was responsible for constructing three *rNam-par-s nang-mzed* temples in Ladakh at Alchi, Mang'yu and Sumda. These three temples were all built in remote villages with very difficult access to the town of Leh.

The second stage of our pilgrimage was to Sumda *Chen-mo* (greater Sumda). As the trek was very tiring and wet under foot, we had thought it better to enter the village via the mountains if possible. However, we were advised by the

villagers to descend to the narrow gorge where the track and the main stream of the Sumda would meet.

We climbed to *La-nag-mDo*, (the Black Mountain pass,) where we found yak, mzo and mzo-mo grazing on twigs from the willow trees after a long, lonely walk lasting three hours. To the extreme corner of *La-nag-la*, on our right-hand side, we saw a small hut partly under snow and outside was an old man lying in the sun. Before we reached there a young boy joined him and he turned out to be the nephew of our friend *Meme Sonam*, whom we had met earlier that morning on our way from Eezangs to Sumda *Chu-nun*. *Meme Sonam* had found it difficult to walk, but had been able to cover the distance at a steady pace and was now having tea, which he invited us to share.

Upon finding us exhausted he consoled us by saying that we were now fairly close to our destination. The distance from his hut to the village was only a maximum of two hours walking. However there was a strong possibility that we might not have been able to reach the village before dusk fell over the valley. To ensure that we reached the village in time, we asked *Meme Sonam* to lead our trek and in exchange we offered to share his load. He agreed to this. We found the track leading to the village under snow, which caused us to frequently fan out into the ditches. After we had walked for one hour we reached the narrow gorge called *La-ago*.

La-ago gorge was very picturesque; having passes which appear to bring a lot of water during the summer months. *Chilling* is situated at a distance of approximately twenty kilometers from *La-ago* and the inhabitants are said to probably be of Newari origin. (Newaris are a race of people from Nepal who are famous for their metal work). We enjoyed a brief halt at *La-ago* and then proceeded with the final leg of our journey.

After walking for some minutes, we saw glimpses of Sumda *Chen-mo* village with a beautiful *chot-rten* of the *rNam-rgyal* (victorious) style, located on a sloping hill in front of the village. Dusk was now falling and we had very little time left to see the valley or survey the village that evening. *Meme*

Sonam took us to his house for our night's stay, and on our arrival the *bokhari* (stove) was lit to warm the kitchen and to dry our shoes.

Before we went to bed we had an interesting discussion on the customs and traditions of the villagers. They claim to be the inhabitants of one of the most isolated and backward regions of Ladakh. We could find very little change in their lifestyle. Their staple food is barley and the main occupation of the villagers, about forty five in number, is farming. Some, however, do skilled work such as carpentry and metalwork. They have a caste-free society, unlike the majority of the villages of Ladakh, and they meet all their requirements themselves. They observe the festival of the New Year and also honour the village's protective deity, Sumda *rGyal-mo*.

Early in the morning we saw that the entire valley was flanked by snow and that the sky was covered in clouds. It was still snowing and Meme Sonam suggested that we should try to reach the other side of the *La-nag-mDo* before noon so that we could avoid being trapped at *La-nag-mDo* because of avalanches in the valley. He proposed that we complete our visit to the village's main temple and the *Byams-pa Gogpo*, a ruined Maitraya temple, popularly called *Srit-pai-bDag-po* after the God of Transmigration. We went first to the main temple dedicated to *Spyan-ras-gzigs*, the Buddha of compassion.

The temple had some interesting statues of the Buddha Shakyamuni, Avalokitesvara and Guru Padmasambhava, as well as large mural paintings. On the wall of the courtyard it was found documented that the temple was built on the instruction of *Kathog Rig-aZin Tse-dbang Norbu* (1698-1755), a famous *rNying-ma-pa* teacher who had come to Ladakh from Tibet on a political mission. The villagers assemble in this temple on auspicious occasions such as the birthday of the Buddha, and the fifteenth day of the first month of the Tibetan calendar when the entire community observes a fast.

After walking some distance through the fields, we arrived at the site of *Byams-pa Gogpo*, the ruined temple of the Buddha Maitreya. Behind the temple were scattered stupas

which had been built in the time of *Rin-chen bZang-po*. Everything was covered in snow and we cleaned it away from the faces from the seven wooden statues including the Maitreya. The statue of the Maitreya is carved from Juniper wood and stands six feet tall. The other six smaller statues are two to three feet in height and they all looked very impressive.

A closer inspection of the ruined temple revealed that it could be a contemporary of the ones at Alchi and Sumda *Chu-nun*. We found a small gate hanging within the ruined wall. We found similarities in the lay-out and design with other temples attributed to *Rinchen bZang-po* such as the *rNam-par-snang-mzed* temples of Alchi and Sumda *Chu-nun*. Lying beneath the ruins we found two long beams which could have been the original beams of the temple.

The *Byams-pa Gogpo* is an open, ruined temple which has neither a roof nor side walls to protect this tenth century monument from the scorching heat of summer, the rain of autumn, the snows of winter or the dust storms of the spring. We were told that the reason for *Byams-pa Gogpo* lying unprotected and being left uncared for is the villagers' firm belief that any efforts made for its restoration, or for any alteration to the present sitting posture of the Maitreya would bring bad luck and would eventually lead them to disaster. Apparently on two occasions an attempt has been made to restore the temple, once by *Kathog Rig-azin Tse-dbang Norbu* and once by the fifth successive incarnation of the Lama *Stag-tsan-Raspa* of Hemis *Gonpa*. However they were unable to persuade the villagers that any attempt made to change the sitting position of *Byams-pa* would not be in their interest and they eventually had to abandon their renovation programme.

In the Ladakh Colloquium of 1989 held in Bristol, England, a British participant, Tim Malyon, presented a report on the deplorable state of *Byams-pa* in the context of the sentimental feelings of the dwellers, and their reservations about its sanctity. He had concluded that perhaps a roof could be erected to protect the statue and that he would willingly bear these expenses himself.

Shortly after the Colloquium, Tim Malyon returned to Ladakh to seek support from religious leaders in his efforts to raise a structure to protect the *Byams-pa* from any further ravages of nature. Meetings were held under the auspices of the Ladakh Buddhist Association and several incarnate lamas attended. Representatives from the villages were also invited to give their views. The meetings failed to reach any conclusion due to the resistance of the Sumdas' representative, who claimed that changing the outlook of *Byams-pa* would still bring disaster. I happened to be in the village again in 2007 and the statues were found to be in the same state.

Sumda *Chen-mo* unlike Sumda *Chu-nun*, had little to offer in the way of historical buildings. The weather was proving menacing so we decided to leave the village and to go to *La-nag-mDo* as quickly as possible. Our friend, Meme Sonam accompanied us to guide us up to the place where his nephew was residing with the family's animals. The walk proved very interesting, although it was hard work walking on snow. When we arrived at *La-nag-mo*, his nephew offered his services to dig a path to enable us to cross a wooden bridge nearby and from where we had an easy walk to *Sumda-mDo* which now has a road, usable all the year round, which connects it to Leh.

References

- 1 Snellgrove and Skorupski, 1980.

Ladakhi Folk Songs

The geographical situation of the Indian Himalaya may have been an important factor in the development of its distinct cultural tradition. Simultaneously isolated and remote, but also a great trading centre, the unique features of its position were combined into a cultural tradition that can be thought of as specifically Ladakhi. An especially prominent part of this cultural tradition is its rich heritage of myths, proverbs and songs.

Popular Ladakhi folk songs have not been studied in the past. Most of the songs have neither been published nor researched. Francke's work in this field provides a notable exception. More interest has been shown recently and in 1968, the Jammu and Kashmir, Academy of Art, Culture and Languages persuaded Tashi Rabgias to undertake the work of compiling a volume of Ladakhi folk songs.¹

The songs are an integral part of everyday life; both at work and at all events of social and cultural importance such as births, marriages and festivals. The tradition is an oral one and the songs, which are simple, easy to understand and memorize, are handed down from generation to generation. Regional variations can be found in the different parts of Ladakh such as Sham, Stod, Nubra and Zangskar.

As is usually the case with any folk tradition, the authors of the Ladakhi folk songs are unknown and the songs not written down (though obviously this is rapidly changing). Even the ancient epic stories of King *Ge-sar* remained part of the oral tradition for centuries. With the introduction and propagation of Buddhism which began in a purposeful manner in the 7th century, the Tibetan language was given a script and a standardized grammar. Subsequently Tibetans, and the Tibetan speaking people such as the Ladakhis, undertook the monumental task of translating hundreds of volumes from other languages into their own tongue.

Educated elites then emerged in Tibet and the fields of religious writing, philosophy, logic and literature flourished. The introduction of writing could have had a revolutionary social impact, and the folk tradition degenerated as a result. However, since the majority of people did not have the opportunity to become educated, they still clung to their heritage of folk songs which remained a major source of popular entertainment. Thus the folk tradition persisted in spite of the various setbacks it suffered in the course of its historical development.²

It seems that the Tibetan educated elite did not give much importance to this tradition, but neither did they actively discourage it.³ The Ladakhi kings on the other hand gave their whole-hearted support to its development. The number of songs dedicated to them is evidence of their patronage in this sphere. Until recently, professional singers and the traditional *Mon* musicians were invited to play at the royal ceremonies held at the palace in Leh. The most notable of these occasions was perhaps the king's annual prayer ceremony or *Dos-mo-chey* festival. The musicians were also present at royal processions and conferences presided over by the king.

Therefore, on this point one would have to disagree with Francke when he says: "The old regimes of Ladakh did not allow the national literature to develop fully."⁴ The country's religious and folk heritage seems to have been used as a means of controlling the people, rather than being itself suppressed. Nevertheless, the Ladakhi cultural heritage does seem to have a less literary bias than the Tibetan. As a frontier state, defense was foremost in the popular consciousness and consequently the traditional folk songs tended to be more about bravery and chivalry than morality and religion; praising the virtues of cultural heroes, leaders and kings, rather than intellectuals and scholars.⁵

Little is known about the precise origins and the chronology of the folk songs. Obviously they have been composed in different periods, and as such shed considerable light on prevailing cultural styles, attitudes and personalities of the time in this small western Himalayan kingdom. Folk songs were composed in honor of rulers, head lamas and leaders. In these

songs the composers frequently referred to their contemporary kings and queens by the names of the well known culture heroes and heroines of their famous epics, especially *Ge-sar* and *Druguma*. Important lamas and ministers were similarly addressed. Occasionally however, they used the real names of their native rulers, both Buddhist and Muslim, (the latter being the traditional chiefs or *cho*) such as *De-ldan rNam-rgyal* (c. 1620-1640) *Nyi-ma-rnam-rgyal* (c.1680-1720), and Hussain Khan. In such cases it would be possible to give the songs an approximate date.

Leh is renowned for its former reputation as one of the great trading centres of Central Asia. People from far and near used to gather there with their merchandise and, especially in summer, the town became a focus for cultural exchange. Interestingly, this is reflected in many of the folk songs. Close and distant neighbours are frequently referred to, and there are numerous beautiful descriptions of Tibet, Baltistan, Kashmir, Lahul and Spiti. Such songs prove very useful in understanding the ties of the old Ladakhi kingdom with its neighbouring states.

In the old trading days the journeys were both long and arduous. Long distance traders had to face many risks because of the hazards of the climate and the terrain. Descriptions of this can be found in many of the traveling songs.⁶

ལ་དགལ་གྱི་ཡུལ་གྱི།

《ཕྱེས་གྱུ།》

ནི་མ་ཤར་ནས་ཤར་བ། །

ཤར་གྱི་ངོ་ཅན་ནི་མ། །།

ཤར་གསུམ་ཤར་ནས་ཤར་བ། །

ཤར་གྱི་ངོ་ཅན་ནི་མ། །

The sun rose from the east,

The warm sun of the east.

ནི་མ་འི་འོད་ཟེར་ལེགས་མོ། །

སྐྱེས་པའི་ཕ་ཡུལ་ལ་ཕོག། །

སྐྱེ་བའི་རྒྱུང་ཟེར་ལེགས་མོ། །

རྒྱ་མོ་དྲུག་གཞུང་ལ་ཚོག། །

May the warm rays of the sun
Give warmth to the fatherland,
May the beautiful light of the moon
Give light to the centre of Chuchot.

ཞག་བཟང་སྐར་བཟང་ལ་བལྟས་ཏེ། །

བྱ་ཚང་བྱེས་ལ་འབིང་ངེད། །

ཞག་བཟང་སྐར་བཟང་ལ་བལྟས་ཏེ། །

ཨ་ལི་ང་བྱེས་ལ་འབིང་ངེད། །

བྱེས་ཀྱི་བྱེས་སྒྲོ་ཚོད་ཅིག། །

ཡར་ན་ཁོད་བདག་པོ། །

On this auspicious day,
I, the boy, left home on tour.
By looking to the stars,
I, Ali, left home on tour.
May I succeed in reaching my goal,
This I prayed to god.

མཁར་རྫོང་ལའི་ཁར་འབིང་བ། །

སྐྱེས་པའི་པ་ཡུལ་མཐོང་ངེད། །

མཁར་རྫོང་ལའི་ཁར་འབིང་བ། །

རྒྱ་མོ་དྲུག་གློང་བྱ་གཞུང་མཐོང་ངེད། །

When I reached the top of the Khardong Pass,
I was able to see the fatherland.
From the top of the Khardong Pass,
I could see the thousand households of Chuchot.

མཐོང་སྟེ་བསམ་སྟེ་ཅི་བྱ་ཡིན།

བྱ་ཚང་སྟེ་བསམ་སྟེ་ཅི་འདུག།

མཐོང་སྟེ་བསམ་སྟེ་ཅི་བྱ་ཡིན།

ཨ་ལི་ང་སྟེ་བསམ་སྟེ་ཅི་འདུག།

What can I do by seeing and wondering,

Since I, the boy, can not get there.
 What can I do by looking and wondering,
 Since I, Ali, can not get there!

ས་སེར་ལའི་ཁ་འབྱིང་པ། །

ཐུ་རུས་སེལ་སྐྱ་གཏོང་འདུག །

ས་སེར་ལའི་ཁ་འབྱིང་པ། །

ཐུང་ཐུང་གིས་སེལ་སྐྱ་གཏོང་འདུག །

When I reached the top of the Sasser pass
 The horse began to neigh.

བདེན་ད་ཐུ་རུ་བདེན་ནོ། །

ཕ་ཡུལ་གྱི་མུ་ཐུ་བསམ་ས། །

བདེན་ད་ཐུང་ཐུང་བདེན་ནོ། །

ཐུ་ཤོད་གྱི་མུ་ཐུ་བསམ་ས། །

And I understood the horse's feelings,
 For it recalled the good grass of Chuchot.

The opening lines, "The sun rose from the east, The warm sun of the east" are typical of so many Ladakhi songs. The folk composers have always described natural phenomena, and the sun in particular, no doubt because of the importance on the sun and the weather in both agriculture and long distance trade. On the other hand, Tashi Rabgias has speculated that the words "*sharri sharra*" might actually serve as a mnemonic for recalling the tune of the song.

Below contains a brief outline of the eleven main types of song which are popular in Ladakh. Other scholars, namely Tashi Rabgias⁷ and Phuntsog Tsering⁸ have also identified a similar number. The first attempt at such a classification was made by Thinlas Dorje who found eight major types of songs, each with eight sub-types, bringing the total to sixty-four.⁹ Here, less emphasis is laid on the typology. Thus the songs will be described in relation to the occasions on which they are sung. It is believed this approach should provide a basic starting point for an understanding and critical analysis of the

songs themselves, a task which would have to be undertaken at some later date. Examples of each of the major song types are given in the enclosure.

At the moment it would be appropriate to say a few words only in passing about singers and musicians, for they are described in greater detail later in relation to each type of song, and also in the concluding comments on current changes in the tradition of folk singing. For some songs, specialists are required. Usually these are no more than ordinary villagers who have a good voice and who have memorized well all the popular and important popular songs such as those sung at marriages, birth ceremonies, the New Year festival, and so forth.

On some occasions one such villager is employed as the leading singer of the festival: the *gner-pon* or *glur-pon*, song expert. He is usually a respected, older person such as the village headman or *go-ba*. These ceremonies are marked by formalized dancing as well as singing performed by a number of *gNya-wopa*, led by the *gner-pon*. The *natitpa* or *tashispa* sings only the auspicious lines which bring any such ceremony to a close.¹⁰ This individual should possess various qualities of an auspicious nature: he must be from a good family, with both parents alive and in good health, his birth signs should be acceptable, etc. in order to bode well for the ceremony itself.

It must be remembered however, that these are special occasions and that every Ladakhi possesses a large repertoire of songs which he will sing given the slightest opportunity, whether formal or informal, alone or in company, or with or without musical accompaniment. The best illustrations of this can be found in the Ladakhi work songs. Most of the agricultural tasks, e.g. ploughing, weeding, harvesting and threshing, as well as other occupations such as building and brick-making, are carried out to the rhythm of the appropriate song. In these cases usually no more than a few words or lines are given a tune and repeated over and over again, the rhythm setting the pace for the particular task to be done.

Each song has its own distinctive tune. Some songs however can be grouped together in "families", *glu-tsangs*, by virtue of

sharing the same rhythm or drum beat. Thus for the purposes of the dance especially, the musicians might play a sequence of different songs belonging to the same *glu-tsangs*, during which the drum beat remains the same throughout, whilst the melody on the flageolet or *surna* changes according to the song. When the drum beat also changes, it is a sign that this particular *glu-tsangs* is over. Not all songs belong to a *glu-tsangs*.¹¹

On some occasions the singing is done by the low caste musicians, or *Mon*, of the villages.¹² Their main function however is to provide the musical accompaniment for the singing and dancing at all the village ceremonies. Their traditional instruments are the *daman* and *surna*, a pair of kettledrums and a flageolet. Some *Mon* also play the *damnyan*, a stringed instrument somewhat resembling a banjo. This is never played at ceremonial occasions, only at informal gatherings. The *limbu* or flute is generally played by the village shepherds in the mountains. Although the *Mon* are considered low caste by profession, they do in fact own a minimal amount of land in the villages. At every ceremony they attend they receive food and *chang* from the hosting household. They also collect grain from the whole village at various important points of the agricultural calendar. This is known as *gso-nyoms*, life sharing.

On the other hand, the sole livelihood of the *Beda*, the wandering minstrels, is the music itself. These people also play the drums, and at various times of the year (usually on dates of religious or ritual importance) they do the rounds of the houses in their own locality, and often in the neighbouring villages as well. After beating the drums, they will be given a plate of barley flour and possibly some money by each household. Unlike the *Mon*, the *Beda* traditionally were not attached to any one village in particular, had absolutely no possessions and they depended entirely on what they could manage to collect from the houses for their survival. The *Beda* women, or *Bemo*, also went round the villages from house to house playing the daff, a large drum like instrument with a wooden frame, and only one side covered with leather. After singing they too would collect contributions of money and

flour. This lifestyle has earned the *Beda* the reputation of beggars, and a status far lower than that of the *Mon* musicians. It is of interest however that this apparently rigid system is also currently undergoing a process of change and the division of labour in the field of music is becoming more diffuse.

Francke's assertion that, "Those (Aryans) who are Buddhist in religion are still called *Mons*, whilst those who are converted into Mohammedanism are called *Bedas*,"¹³ would be very difficult to prove nowadays in Ladakh since both Buddhist and Muslim communities possess their own *Mon* and *Bedas*. Musicians of both religious persuasions may be found playing together at any one festival. Not so long ago in Leh there used to be ten official palace musicians, *kharmon*, of whom five were Buddhist and five Balti.¹⁴

Finally, a point about the other important field of music in Ladakh i.e. religious music. Obviously this belongs to an altogether separate classical tradition, surrounded by its own philosophy and literature, associated with a rigorous religious training,¹⁵ yet in some respects the lay music of the *Mon* complements the religious traditions. At most important religious occasions, the *Mon* will be required to go to the *gonpa*, where the ritual performance is focused on the household where both *lamas* and *Mon* will usually be present. Clearly the inter-relationships between these two apparently antithetical branches of the musical tradition, must be quite complex and strong. An example of an occasion where both monks and *Mon* will be performing music is *mDosmochey-chamra*.

The main types of songs found in Ladakh will now be touched upon. First the more formal kinds of song (i.e. religious, congregational and heroic), all of which are sung on public or ceremonial occasions, will be dealt with. Then various other songs, both public and private will be taken up which form an important part of everyday life in Ladakh, and which mark all the social and cultural events of any importance in the villages. These are love songs, sarcastic songs, marriage songs, *tashispa* songs, and *chang* songs. Finally, the traditional *Shabs-bro*, *shon-glu* and *bal-glu* songs, all of which come under a rather different

category will be described. These songs can all be thought of as products of influences outside Ladakh proper. As such they reflect Ladakh's close links with the neighbouring states and cultures, especially Baltistan and Tibet. They also demonstrate the degree of cultural interchange characteristic of the area.

Chos-glu: Religious songs

The religious songs of the folk tradition should be distinguished from those belonging to the category called *mGurma*, which are taken from religious texts such as the songs of Milarepa and are used exclusively by the religious community. The *chos-glu* are generally composed on a religious theme in honour of a great *lama* or famous *gonpa* by the lay-people. The songs are also sung by lay-people when they are celebrating important religious occasions.

With religion taking up such a large part of daily life in Ladakh, one would expect there to be an old established folk tradition of religious songs. In fact this is not the case. The introduction of public celebrations on religious occasions dates back only some thirty years, prior to which the celebrations were purely monastic. Currently, the villagers will participate in the festivities held at their local *gonpa*, and it is on such occasions that the *chos-glu* will be sung. There are however a number of times when, even in the past, a religious ceremony affected the village as a whole such as the *chosil* (the annual reading of the religious texts) or the *gyetsa* (the initiation ceremony for the novices in the *gonpa*) when the *chos-glu* will be traditionally sung. Some of the *chos-glu* songs about the *gonpas* of Ladakh are very old. A notable example is the song of Hemis, the biggest monastery in the area, and its incarnate *Lama Stag Tshang Raspa* who lived in the sixteenth century.¹⁶

ཚོས་གླུ། Religious Songs

《དེ་མེས་དགོན་པ། 》

ལྷང་ར་སྐྱུག་རྒྱུང་གི་དྲུག་ལ་ན། །

དགོན་པ་གསེར་གྱི་བྱང་ཚང་། །

ལྷང་ར་སྐྱུག་ཚུང་གི་དགྱིལ་ན། །

དེ་མིས་གསེར་གྱི་བྱང་ཚང་། །

In the midst of the brown trees,

Stands a *gonpa* like an ornament of gold.

In the midst of the brown trees,

Stands Hemis *gonpa* like an ornament of gold.

གསེར་གྱི་མེར་པོའི་སྟེང་ན། །

བཟང་གསུམ་སྤྲ་མ་བཞུགས་ཡོད། །

གསེར་གྱི་མེར་པོའི་སྟེང་ན། །

སྐྱབས་མགོན་སྐྱག་ཚང་རས་པ། །

On the golden throne of the *gonpa*

The precious one is seated.

On the golden throne of the *gonpa*,

Ven. *Stag-tshan-ras-pa* is seated.

ཚ་བའི་སྤྲ་མའི་བྱིན་བཏབས། །

ཡུལ་ཕྱོགས་གཞན་ལ་མ་སྐྱེལ། །

སྐྱག་ཚང་རས་པའི་བྱིན་བཏབས། །

ཡུལ་ཕྱོགས་གཞན་ལ་མ་སྐྱེལ། །

The precious Lama's blessings,

Not bestowed in other parts,

Stag-tshan-ras-pa's blessings,

Not bestowed elsewhere in the land.

ཚ་བའི་སྤྲ་མའི་བྱིན་བཏབས། །

རང་གི་ཡུལ་ལ་སྐྱེལ་ཅིག །

སྐྱག་ཚང་རས་པའི་བྱིན་བཏབས། །

ལ་དགས་ཕྱོགས་ལ་སྐྱེལ་ཅིག །

May the precious lama's blessings

Be given to the native people.

May *Stag-tshan-ras-pa*'s blessings

Be given to the people of Ladakh.

དགོན་ལྗེ་ཕན་ཚུན་གྱི་སྐྱེ་མཉམ། །
 སེར་སྤྱེང་བརྒྱ་དང་བརྒྱ་མ། །
 ཉེ་མིས་སྤྱེ་བ་དེའི་དགོ་འདུན། །
 སེར་སྤྱེང་བརྒྱ་དང་བརྒྱ་མ། །

The lamas of the related *gonpas*
 Are the hundred beads of the golden rosary.
 The lamas of Hemis and Chemdey
 Are the hundred beads of the golden rosary.

སེར་སྤྱེང་ལེགས་མེདི་མདུད་འཛིན། །
 བཟང་གསུམ་ཚ་བའི་སྐྱེ་མ། །
 སེར་སྤྱེང་ལེགས་མེདི་མདུད་འཛིན། །
 རྒྱུ་བས་མགོན་སྐྱེ་ཚང་རས་ལ། །

The centre binding of the rosary
 Is the Precious Head Lama;
 The centre connection of the rosary,
 The Ven. *Stag-tshan-ras-pa*.

CHANG RA SMUG, CHUNG GI SKYIL NA GOM PA SER GI
 BUM TSANG CHANG RA SMUG, CHUNG GI SKYIL NA HE MIS
 SER GI BUM TSANG

Another example is the song of Thikse which was sung in the large assembly hall with eighty pillars where, it is said, one thousand monks used to gather at a time. More recently a number of religious songs have been composed by different scholars,

amongst whom the name of *Sras-Rinpoche blo-bzan tshul-khrims chos-phel* is worthy of mention. This religious song is a sample of the work of this scholar who died early in this century.¹⁷

ལྷ་རྒྱལ་ལྷ་ལྷོ་བཟང་རྒྱལ་ཁྱིམ་ཚོས་འཕེལ་ནས་བརྩམས་པའི་ཚོས་སྲུང་དཔེ་གཅིག

ལྷ་རྒྱལ་ལྷ་ལྷོ་འཁོར་བསྐྱེད་པ། །

ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་བྱུག་ན་མངོས་པའི། །

ཕི་མང་རྒྱུད་སྟོང་ལྷན་པ། །

ངའ་ལ་གཡར་རོགས་གནང་དང། །

O, King Drita-rastra (Deva King of the East)

Lend me thy violin with one thousand strings in thy hands.

དེ་རིང་བཟ་ཤིས་ཉི་མ། །

དམ་ཚོས་བཟ་ཤིས་དབྱེད་སྟོན། །

ཕི་མང་སྐྱེད་ལྷན་ནས། །

ཉམས་པའི་སྲུ་རུ་སྐྱེད་ངོ། །

Today is an auspicious day,

And I would like to sing a melodious religious song

To the music of the violin,

please help me.

བདེ་ཆེན་ཚངས་པའི་སྲས་མོ། །

བདག་གི་མགྲིན་པར་བཞུགས་ལ། །

དྲུག་ལྷན་བཟ་ཤིས་སྲུ་དབྱེད་ས། །

ལེན་པའི་སྟོང་ཀློགས་མངོད་ཅིག །

O blissful Brahma's daughter Saraswati,

Please bless my throat,

Enable me to sing six melodious songs.

LHA RGYAL YUL KHOR SAUNG NA KHAD KI UNYAG NA ZES PAI PI

HANG RGYUD STANG DAN PA . NGA LA YAR ROGS NANG TANG

Strictly speaking such songs are not part of the oral folk tradition at all since they are scholarly written compositions. On the other hand, *blo-bzan tshul-khrims* himself took a great deal from the folk tradition. In his extensive travels around the area he acquainted himself with many folk songs and tunes, which he borrowed for his own written compositions. These consisted of religious teachings and his own religious experiences which he wrote according to the Sanskrit poetic tradition. Some of these poems were subsequently popularised and sung by ordinary Ladakhis, thus entering the folk tradition.

The current process of development in Ladakh has led to an increasing popularisation of this category of songs and poems. With a more widespread introduction of education, *chos-glu* are now sung by children in school prayers. Since the establishment of the All India Radio Station in Leh, they have also been broadcast in devotional song programmes.

***Gjung-glu*: Congregational songs**

The congregational songs go back to the time of the Ladakhi royal dynasty. They were composed in honour of the kings, famous lamas and other distinguished people. They were also sung in praise of *gonpas* and places of social or religious significance. "The stupa of white glass at Tise (Mount Kailash)" is an example of this.¹⁸

《གཞུང་གླུ། |》 Jung glu

ཏི་སེ་ཤེལ་དཀར་མཚོད་རྟེན། །
 འཇམ་བུ་རྒྱིང་གི་རྩེ་བ། །
 རང་དེ་ན་རང་རྟེན་བཞུགས་ཡོད། །
 མ་རིག་མུན་པ་ཀྱན་སེལ། །

The stupa of white glass at Ti-se,
 Is the centre of Jambuduipa.
 Inside reside holy objects,
 Which eliminate the darkness of ignorance.

ཚེས་སྐྱ་སྤྱང་བ་མཐའ་ཡས་བཞུགས། །

མ་རིག་མུན་པ་ཀུན་སེལ། །

དེ་སེའི་གཡུ་མཚོ་སྤྱན་མོ། །

སྤྱ་རྒྱལ་འཛོག་པོའི་ཕོ་བྲང། །

The Dharmakaya-Amitaba,
Removes all darkness of ignorance.
The turquoise blue lake at *Ti-rtse*,
Is the abode of the Naga king,

གཅིག་དུ་རྒྱལ་ཁམས་ཡོངས་ཀྱི། །

འབྲུ་སྤྱའི་བང་མཛོད་འབྱིལ། །

སྤྱ་རངས་ལ་ལུང་མཚོད་མོའི། །

སེར་མོ་ནས་ཀྱི་བང་མཛོད་འབྱིལ། །

The whole kingdom
Is filled with the storehouse of grain.
All the valleys of the Purang kingdom
Are bestowed with piles of barley.

སྤྱ་རངས་ལ་ལུང་མཚོད་མོའི། །

སེར་མོ་ནས་ཀྱི་བང་མཛོད་འབྱིལ། །

ཁ་བ་ཅན་གྱི་ཞིང་ཁམས་དེ་ནི། །

བདེ་སྦྱིད་ལྷ་དང་མཉམ་འབྲུང། །

The snowy land of Purang,
Bestowed with piles of barley.
In the land of snow,
Happiness and prosperity prevails.



The Stupa of white Glass at Tise (*Ti-rtse* or Mount Kailash), is an example of such a song. Although in general such songs would not be composed nowadays, they are still very popular and are sung at marriages, Losar, and at a number of other village festivals. During the reign of the Ladakhi kings the *gJung-glu* formed a traditional part of the *mDos-mo-che* festival, the annual prayer ceremony of the kings.

Unlike the Tibetans, the Ladakhi Buddhists celebrate the New Year on the first day of the eleventh month of the Tibetan calendar, which usually falls in the month of December. In former times a royal feast used to mark this occasion.¹⁹ Celebrations commenced on the last day of the tenth month. On New Year's Day all the participants, including the local gentry, ministers, and all their relatives, would come to the palace in Leh bearing *kha-btags*, (white silk scarves) as a mark of respect for the king. Later in the day they would all proceed to the *thek-chen* (the ceremonial dancing ground). Here, a balcony was provided for the king and all his important guests. The rest of the audience would be seated around the dancing ground in a hierarchy that depended on social status. Then the *mkharmon*, the palace musicians, would begin playing their music. Both the musicians and the dancers would sing the *gJung-glu*. On this occasion the dances would be performed by a number of specially selected women dancers called *takshosma*. They came from families who were traditionally obliged by royal decree to provide a dancer for such occasions. This seems to have been as much a right as a duty since other people required their consent if they wanted to participate in the dancing. These dances lasted for hours since every stanza of the song was followed by long periods of instrumental music.

Ever since the Ladakhi king vacated the nine-storey palace in Leh, transferring his residence to the palace in Stok, this tradition has been discontinued. The Leh *mDos-mo-che* is now a purely religious ceremony sponsored by the four sections of the Leh settlement.²⁰ Over the years the *mkharmon*, who traditionally sang the *gJung-glu* on these occasions, were given their own land and they settled down in the villages, another

reason for the decline in this particular tradition. Thus, now when parties are held in many Ladakhi households around the time of the New Year, the old traditional songs are still sung, but by the ordinary people instead.

***Gying-glu*: heroic songs**

A large number of popular songs recount the life and brave deeds of famous culture heroes and heroines. In olden times senior members of the family used to sing these songs to their children in order to encourage them to be brave and fearless. A great number of these songs are actually taken from the *Ge-sar* epics which tell “the story of *Ge-sar*, how he succeeded in founding and expanding the kingdom of *Lin-sgar*, defeating many enemies, and regaining his beloved wife from the dreaded *Hor*.”

The *Ge-sar* story is only narrated in wintertime, and there is a taboo on telling it after the fields have become green. This, of course, coincides with the resumption of agricultural work after the winter break. The heroic songs taken from the *Ge-sar* epic are also only sung in winter.²¹ This is one of them:

《འགྱིང་གླུ།》 *Ging-glu*

དེ་རིང་མཚན་གྱི་མི་ལམ་པོ། །
 མི་ལམ་བཟང་པོ་ཞིག་མཐོང། །
 ཞག་བཟང་མཚན་གྱི་མི་ལམ་པོ། །
 མི་ལམ་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཅན་མཐོང། །
 The dream of the night
 Was a wonderful dream,
 The dream of the auspicious day,
 A dream of hopes fulfilled.

སྲིང་སྲིང་མཁར་རྩེ་དགུ་ལ། །
 ཉི་མ་གསུམ་ཤར་བ་མཐོང། །
 སྲིང་སྲིང་མཁར་རྩེ་དགུ་ལ། །
 ལྷ་བཀག་སུམ་ཤར་བ་མཐོང། །

At the nine-storey *gLin-sgar* palace,
I saw rising three suns.

At the nine-storey *gLin-sgar* palace,
I saw rising three moons.

སྲིང་སེང་ཆེན་རྒྱལ་པོ་ཀུན། །

གསེར་ཁྲི་ཁར་བཞེངས་པ་མཐོང། །

སྲིང་རྒྱལ་མ་ཆེན་པོ་ཀུན། །

གསེར་ཁྲི་ཁར་བཞེངས་པ་མཐོང། །

The great Lion King of *gLing*,
I saw assuming the golden throne,
The warrior *gLing* Kesar,
I saw assuming the golden throne.

སྲིང་ཤེལ་ལྷམ་འབྲུག་གུ་མོ། །

གཡུ་ཁྲི་ཁར་བཞེངས་པ་མཐོང། །

བས་སྲུན་སག་བདར་བཙོ་བརྒྱད། །

གཡས་གཡལ་ལ་བཞུགས་པ་མཐོང། །

The great Queen of *gLing* Druguma
Assumes the turquoise throne.
The eighteen relatives of the father
I saw seated on the right row.

མས་སྲུན་བཞི་བརྒྱའི་ལ། །

གཡོན་གཡལ་ལ་བཞུགས་པ་མཐོང། །

ཡབ་སྟོན་པ་ཨ་བ་གཡལ་གྱི་གཡལ་འགོ་ལ་བཞུགས། །

ཡུམ་སྟོན་མོ་ཨ་མ་གཡལ་གྱི་གཡལ་འགོ་ལ་བཞུགས། །

The forty five relatives of the mother
I saw seated on the left row.
The great father and mother
Assume the first seat of each row.

བ་ལུ་དྲུང་དྲུང་བཞེངས་ཏེ་ནང། །

གཡལ་ཆེན་ཞིག་སྲིག་པ་མཐོང། །

བལ་མོ་སྐྱེལ་འཛོམས་བཞེངས་དེ་ནང་། །

གསུམ་ཚང་རིག་སྟེར་བ་མཐོང་། །

དེ་བས་ཀྱང་དགའ་བ་ཞིག །

སྟེང་སྟོགས་ལྟ་ཡུལ་ལའང་མེད། །

དེ་བས་ཀྱང་དགའ་བ་ཞིག །

དགའ་ལྡན་ལྟ་ཡུལ་ནའང་མེད། །

A dwarf stands up,

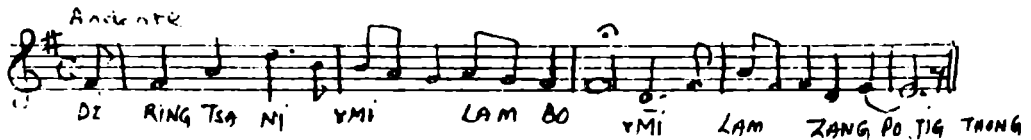
And prepares rows of seats.

Similarly, Balmo Tholzoms stands up,

Pours *chang* in the cup.

Such happiness is not possible to find in the world of gods,

Such happiness is not possible to find in the land of the (under world) Nagas.



Other *gying-glu* songs are sung in praise of the Ladakhi kings and queens of the past, their strength and bravery, and countless good deeds. These songs bear a strong resemblance to the *gJung-glu*. In present times they are occasionally composed in honour of the leaders of the community. In these songs the person who is being praised frequently assumes the identity of *Ge-sar*.

The *gying-glu* in general were only popular during the winter period, when they were sung in conjunction with the New Year festival, upper class marriage ceremonies (weddings are customarily held only during the winter season), or on such occasions when the kings or the local rulers performed the dances themselves. In the latter cases the dance performance was initiated by a special kind of dance called *kha-thog—Chen-mo*. Although extremely popular in Ladakh, the ordinary people were not allowed to participate in the dance unless it was led by a member of an upper class family (*sku-drag*). On these occasions the heroic songs would normally be sung by the musician drummers in honour of their respected dancers.

Again the music of the drums would continue for hours after the completion of the song itself.

Togs-glu: Love Songs

Despite the popularity of love songs in Ladakh, they are never sung on public or formal occasions, and this makes them somewhat different from the songs already described. To sing these rather private songs at a public gathering would cause immense amusement, but might also be considered in bad taste. The *togs-glu* therefore are sung mainly by individuals at work in the fields, or on the mountainside when the animals are taken out to graze. People believe that the beauty of the melody is actually beneficial to the lover of whom one is singing.

Some of the heroic songs come under the category of love songs, for example when the story of *Ge-sar* and Druguma is described. Others may be historical, referring to kings and queens of the past like the one reproduced here.²²

《ལྷོགས་གླུ།》 Love Songs

སེ་གྱིམ་པ་སྐྱ་ཅན་ནི་ཚེ་ཅན་ནི་ནང་། །

བསོད་ནམས་པ་སྐྱ་བའི་མེ་དོག་ཡས་ཡོད། །

བསོད་ནམས་པ་སྐྱ་བའི་མེ་དོག་མེན་རྒྱུག། །

ང་འི་འབྲུམ་ལེགས་མོའི་ས་ལམ་ཁ་དུན། །

In a colorful silky garden,

A lucky lotus flower blossomed.

It was not a lucky lotus flower,

But was the beautiful Salam Khatoon.

སྐར་མདོ་ག་དར་འི་རྒྱལ་སའི་ནང་ན། །

རྒྱ་མིག་བརྒྱ་དང་བརྒྱ་ཅ་རྒྱུག་གི་དེ། །

རྒྱ་མིག་བརྒྱ་དང་བརྒྱ་ཅ་རྒྱུག་ན། །

བདག་གི་དཔོན་པོ་ལ་འདམ་རྒྱ་ཚོར་རེད་ཇོ། །

In the capital town of Skardu,

A hundred and one streams flow.

Though such streams flow,
Yet our beloved chief feels it as muddy water.

བདག་གི་དཔོན་པོ་ལ་འདམ་ཚུ་ཚོར་ན། །
བུ་མོ་ཕྱེ་མེད་མོ་གཡའ་ཚུ་ལྷན་ཤིག་ངོ། །
དངོས་གྲུབ་བསྟན་འཛིན་ལ་འདམ་ཚུ་ཚོར་ན། །
ས་ལམ་ཁ་དུན་ང་གཡའ་ཚུ་ལྷན་ཤིག་ངོ། །

If our beloved feels the water as muddy,
May Salam Khatoon become a mountain stream.
If *dNos-grup bstan-hdsin* feels the water as muddy,
May I become a mountain stream.

བྱེ་ནང་གང་གང་བའི་བྱེ་མའི་ནང་ན། །
བདག་གི་དཔོན་པོ་ལ་འབས་ཚུང་ཚིག་གེད་ངོ། །
བྱེ་ནང་གང་གང་བའི་བྱེ་མའི་ནང་ན། །
དངོས་གྲུབ་བསྟན་འཛིན་ལ་དབུ་ཐོད་ཚིག་གེད་ངོ། །
བདག་གི་དཔོན་པོ་ལ་དབུ་ཐོད་ཚིག་ན། །
བུ་མོ་ཕྱེ་མེད་མོ་ཉེ་སྒྲིབ་ལྷན་ཤིག་ངོ། །
དངོས་གྲུབ་བསྟན་འཛིན་ལ་དབུ་ཐོད་ཚིག་ན། །
ས་ལམ་ཁ་དུན་ང་ཉེ་སྒྲིབ་ལྷན་ཤིག་ངོ། །

On the sands of the sandy plain,
The feet of *dNos-grup bstan-hdsin* are burning.
On the sands of the sandy plain,
The head of *dNos-grup bstan-hdsin* is burning.
If the head of my Chief is burning,
May I become a parasol,
May Salam Khatoon become a parasol for his burning head,
If the head of *dNos-grup bstan-hdsin* is burning,
may Salam Khatoon become a parasol.

དྭ་ཡི་དྭ་ཡི་འབུམ་ལེགས་མོ་ཡ་རི་སྒྲིའི་ཤ་དའི། །
ཤར་ལ་གཟེགས་པ་རི་རབ་གསལ་བའི་ནང་ན། །

The Chief relaxes
In the balcony of the Eastern Palace.

SIK KIM SIK KIM MA MA CHAN NE
 KIM TSE
 CHAN NE SO NAM PAD MA SO NAM VAY MA MEN TOK YA SET
 YOT HI HI BUM LKS MO YA RI GO SHA HEY
 SHAR LA ZIX PA BAY RAB SAL BE NANG

This song is an example where the love between *dNos-grup bstan-hdsin*, originally a minister of the Ladakhi king but later installed as king by the Dogra rulers, and Salam Khatoon is described. Perhaps the most intriguing and popular of the love songs however are those which take a question and answer form.²³

《ལྷོགས་ལྷོ་ ༡》 Sarcastic Songs

ཇི་བཤ། ང་ཅའི་ཡ་ཏོ་མ་མཐོང་སྟེ།
 ཡ་ཏོ་ཆེ་རིང་སྐྱེད་མ་མཐོང་སྟེ།
 ཇི་ལན། ལྷོད་ཅའི་ཡ་ཏོ་ངས་མི་ཤེས།
 ཡ་ཏོ་ཆེ་རིང་སྐྱེད་ངས་མི་ཤེས།
 ལྷོ་ལོ་གཡུ་མོའི་རྒྱལ་ལྷང་ཞིག།
 ད་ལྷ་དེ་ནས་སོང་སྟེ་ཡོད།

Have you seen my companion,
 The companion Tsering Skit?
 I know not your companion,
 The companion Tsering Skit.
 A woman of long braids has just passed by this way.

ཇི་བཤ། ང་ཅའི་ཡ་ཏོ་མ་མཐོང་སྟེ།
 ཡ་ཏོ་ཆེ་རིང་སྐྱེད་མ་མཐོང་སྟེ།

ཇི་ལ་ན། བྱེད་ཅའི་ཡ་ཏོང་ས་མི་ཤེས། །
 ཡ་ཏོང་ཚེ་རིང་སྐྱེད་ངས་མི་ཤེས། །
 དཔུལ་པ་བཙེན་ལཱི་ཟླ་བ་ཞིག །
 ད་ལྟ་དེ་ནས་སོང་སྟེ་ཡོད། །

Have you seen my companion,
 The companion Tsering Skit?
 I know not your companion,
 The companion Tsering Skit.

A woman of forehead like a full moon has just passed by this way.

ཇི་བ། ང་ཅའི་ཡ་ཏོང་མ་མཐོང་ས། །
 ཡ་ཏོང་ཚེ་རིང་སྐྱེད་མ་མཐོང་ས། །
 ཇི་ལ་ན། བྱེད་ཅའི་ཡ་ཏོང་ས་མི་ཤེས། །
 ཡ་ཏོང་ཚེ་རིང་སྐྱེད་ངས་མི་ཤེས། །
 མིག་སྒྲ་ཀ་ཁའི་ན་རོ་ཞིག་ནི། །
 ད་ལྟ་དེ་ནས་སོང་སྟེ་ཡོད། །

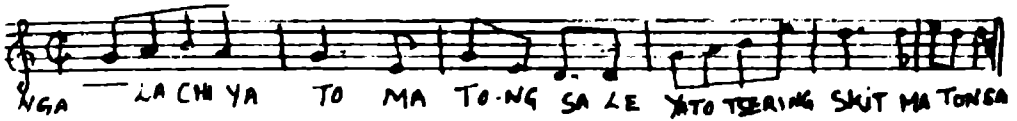
Have you seen my companion,
 The companion Tsering Skit?
 I know not your companion,
 The companion Tsering Skit.

A woman of an vowel shaped eyebrow,
Just passed this way.

ཇི་བ། ང་ཅའི་ཡ་ཏོང་མ་མཐོང་ས། །
 ཡ་ཏོང་ཚེ་རིང་སྐྱེད་མ་མཐོང་ས། །
 ཇི་ལ་ན། བྱེད་ཅའི་ཡ་ཏོང་ས་མི་ཤེས། །
 ཡ་ཏོང་ཚེ་རིང་སྐྱེད་ངས་མི་ཤེས། །
 ལྷ་ཁུང་ཟངས་ཀྱི་ཕུ་རི་ཞིག །
 ད་ལྟ་དེ་ནས་སོང་སྟེ་ཡོད། །

Have you seen my companion,
 The companion Tsering Skit?
 I know not your companion,
 The companion Tsering Skit.

Who has a nose like a copper pipe,
Has just passed this way.



***Tshig-glu*: plays on words or sarcastic songs**

The sarcastic songs, like the love songs, should also not be sung at formal public occasions. Their meaning is often obscured by complex metaphors. In general they tend to play on a person's weakness—be it mental or physical—which is described in a highly satirical fashion. It is for this reason that people are so apprehensive of singing them in public, especially when important guests of honour are present. Bad feelings could easily be aroused in someone who for a variety of reasons might feel he was under attack, and who might therefore start a quarrel.²⁴ To sing such a song at this kind of gathering is an indication of an underlying dispute which would necessitate the separation of the parties concerned if a fight is to be avoided. However at more informal occasions the *tshig-glu* are thoroughly enjoyed by friends indulging in mock battles of verbal attack and counter attack. This is often a battle between the sexes as shown in the following composition.²⁵

《ཚིག་གླུ།》 Tshig-glu

བག་ནི་བག་ལ་ཤིས་སོང་། །

དོན་ནི་དོན་ལ་གྲུབ་སོང་། །

བག་ཤིས་དོན་གྲུབ་གཉིས་ལ། །

འགྱུར་བ་ཡོང་དགོས་མི་འདུག །

May fortune and good luck prevail,

All good hopes are fulfilled.

Good fortune and hopes

Never go apart.

ཟྱེད་ནི་རྒྱ་གར་མ་བུ། །
 ང་ནི་ཁ་ལྷུལ་གུར་ཀུམ། །
 རྩེས་ས་རྩེ་ཡུལ་མི་གཅིག །
 འཛོམས་ས་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་བུམ་པ། །

You are the peacock of India,
 And I, the saffron of Kashmir.
 Though we hail from different fatherlands
 We get together in the vase Namgyal Pumpa.

ཡམ་འབྲས་ཕྱི་ལོག་ཞིམ་པོ། །
 ལྷ་ར་ག་ནང་ལོག་ཞིམ་པོ། །
 ལ་སྟོང་བྱེ་མ་ཀར། །
 ཕྱི་ནང་གཉིས་ཀ་ཞིམ་པོ། །

The Mango is sweet outerly,
 The walnut is sweet within
 And the sugarcane is sweet
 Inside and out.

ར་མོང་མཐིང་པ་རིང་ཡང། །
 བར་ཀའི་རྩ་ལ་མི་རྣོབས། །
 རི་བོང་སུག་གུ་བྱང་ཡང། །
 ལ་མོ་འབྲ་འབྲ་རྒྱབ་སོང། །

Though the camel's neck is long,
 It cannot reach the grass of the far bank.
 But the hare whose legs are short,
 Can easily cross the mountain pass.

ལྷང་མ་ལྷང་སྟོང་གཅིག་ལ། །
 ཕྱི་རྒྱུང་ཚངས་ཀ་ཤིག་ཤིག །
 ང་ནི་ཚངས་ཀ་མི་རྒྱབ། །
 ལྷང་རྩེ་ཤར་ལ་ལོག་འགྲོ། །

The trunk of a single willow tree
 Is thronged with hosts of birds.
 I myself won't crowd it more,

Will return to the top of a tree in the east.

དཔོན་པོ་གསེར་གྱི་རི་ལ། །
 འབས་ཕྱི་ཐང་དཀར་ཚོད་པོ། །
 ཐང་དཀར་ཚོད་པོའི་ཚོལ་གཏད། །
 གསེར་གྱི་རི་ལ་བཙོལ་ཡོད། །

To the high golden mountain,
 White-tailed eagle is the companion.
 The white-tailed eagle has placed all its faith
 Entirely in the golden mountain.

དམག་དུ་བ་གཡང་འཛིན། །
 ཞིམ་པོའི་ཟས་ཤིག་མ་ཡིན། །
 མི་ཡུལ་བྱང་ཐང་སྒྲིམ་དུས། །
 ཡབ་ཡུམ་གཉིས་ལས་ལྷག་བྱུང། །

The pleasure of tobacco smoke,
 Is not a food of good taste.
 Yet, when traveling in the desert land Changthang,
 Its preciousness surpasses that of mother and father.

TA NI TA LA SHI SONG TON NI TON LA DUP SONG
 TA SHERS TON DOP NRES LA GYER HA
 YONGSA MI DUG

Bagston-gi-glu: marriage songs

In Ladakh marriage feasts are conducted with great enthusiasm and, when it can be afforded, on a grand scale. The feast usually lasts at least a couple of days and during this time the traditional marriage songs actually form an important part of the lengthy proceedings. Some parts of the whole sequence will be described here in brief.

Before the marriage ceremony the relatives of the bridegroom, namely the father and the maternal uncle, have to go through a number of formalities. The boy's relatives must make an initial informal inquiry to the girl's house through friends and relatives. If a positive hint is received from them, a number of friends and relatives will then visit the bride's house with a pot of *chang*, ceremonial white scarves, and a present of a gold or silver ring or some other ornament. This is called *dri-chang*. On the completion of a number of further formal inquiries, the date of the wedding is then fixed by the local astrologer, *dwon-po*.

On the occasion of the marriage a singer called the *gner-pon* is traditionally engaged to lead the ceremony. He is selected from among the best folk singers in the village. He must have a wide knowledge of all the different marriage songs, a good voice and also be highly respected in the village since he is responsible for, and leads all the *gNya-wo-pa* (witnesses) in the singing and dancing.²⁶

As the wedding party sets off from the house of the groom, the *gner-pon* begins to chant the marriage songs. Custom has it that the wedding party must be received at various points along the route by villagers standing in a line bearing pots of *chang*, barley flour and incense. When the leader reaches these points he has to reciprocate the greeting with his songs. The maternal uncle, who should always accompany the party, must then give money to the villagers who have come to receive them.

In the offering songs the *gner-pon* will chant the names of the gods at the end of every stanza. These are the protective deities of the house and village, and the lords of the soil. This forms a very important part of every ceremony in Ladakh. It is considered very auspicious since it is the gods who will help the people achieve their desired objectives. When the song is over, food is offered to the gods and pasted on the ceremonial arrow or *mda-dar*. Most of the marriage songs express the community's good wishes for the future happiness and prosperity of the young couple in their new life.²⁷

《བག་སྒྲོན་གྱི་སྒྲུ།》 *Bagston-gi-glu: Marriage Songs*

ཨོ་བག་ཤིས་པར་གྱུར་ཅིག།

བག་ཤིས་བདེ་ལེགས་དང་ལྷན་པར་གྱུར་ཅིག། །

Om, may all have good fortune,

All have good fortune and become prosperous.

དུས་བབ་དེ་རིང་། །

གནམ་ལ་སྐར་མ་ཤར། །

དུས་བབ་དེ་རིང་། །

ས་ལ་ཉི་མ་ཤར། །

On this auspicious day,

Stars appear in the sky.

On this auspicious day,

The sun shines on the earth.

དུས་བབ་དེ་རིང་། །

རྒྱལ་པོའི་དབུ་ཚོག་མཐོ། །

དུས་བབ་དེ་རིང་། །

སྐྱ་མའི་ཚོས་གཙུག་མཐོ། །

On this auspicious day,

The king looks great.

On this auspicious day

The lama's teaching prevails.

དུས་བབ་དེ་རིང་། །

སྒྲོན་པོའི་དཔའ་རྩལ་མཐོ། །

དུས་བབ་དེ་རིང་། །

མི་སྡེ་ཁམས་གསུམ་མཐོ། །

On this auspicious day,

The minister is in full vigour.

On this auspicious day,

The people are in good health.

regional variations can also be found, especially in Sham and Stod. In these places the marriage songs tend to be far more elaborate. Furthermore there are many more of the question and answer songs which are seldom heard in the area around Leh.

Tashispai Songs

At the end of every social and cultural event of any importance in the Ladakhi villages, the *tashispai* song is sung. This is traditionally sung with a chorus, and all the participants take part in the dancing as well. The performers wear the golden cap, *serthod*, and the ancient Ladakhi cap made of woolen *pattu* called *photip*, brocade robes, and the traditional waist band.

As opposed to the *gner-pon*, the *Tashispa* is usually a younger man who must possess various qualities of an auspicious nature. This is of particular importance as the *tashispa* brings the marriage ceremony to a conclusion on a happy note. In the song the expression '*tashis-shok*', 'May There Be Peace', is repeated often; Peace not only for the sons and daughters who are to embark on a new life, but also for the elders who remain behind. The desire for peace is a deep one and is aptly expressed in the song and dance of the *tashispa* which aims to achieve lasting; happiness for all.²⁸

《བཀྲ་ཤིས་པའི་མུ།》 *Tashispai* songs

དེ་ལ་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ཤོག །

བཀྲ་ཤིས་ཤོག །

དགུང་གནམ་སྒྲིན་མོ་ཀུན་མ་འགྱུར་བ་བཞུགས་ན། །

དགའ་བའི་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ཤོག །

May happiness prevail.

If the blue sky remains unchanged,

May happiness prevail.

ཤར་གྱི་ཕྱོགས་ན་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ཤོག །

བཀྲ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྱེལ་མ། །

ཨ་མའི་རྩོམ་མོ་རྩོམ་མོ་ལ་བཞེངས། །
 བཏུ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །
 བསྐལ་བཟང་སློལ་མ་རྩོམ་མོ་ལ་བཞེངས། །
 བཏུ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །

May the peace come from the East,
 O peace of full prosperity.
 May the mother's daughter lead the Shon dance.
 May Skalzang Dolma lead the Shon dance.

ལྷོ་ཡི་ཕྱོགས་ན་བཏུ་ཤིས་ཤོག །
 བཏུ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །
 ཨ་མའི་རྩོམ་མོ་རྩོམ་མོ་ལ་བཞེངས། །
 བཏུ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །
 བསྐལ་བཟང་སློལ་མ་རྩོམ་མོ་ལ་བཞེངས། །
 བཏུ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །

May peace come from the South,
 O peace of full prosperity.
 May the mother's daughter lead the Shon dance.
 May Skalzang Dolma lead the Shon dance.

རུབ་ཀྱི་ཕྱོགས་ན་བཏུ་ཤིས་ཤོག །
 བཏུ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །
 ཨ་མའི་རྩོམ་མོ་རྩོམ་མོ་ལ་བཞེངས། །
 བཏུ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །
 བསྐལ་བཟང་སློལ་མ་རྩོམ་མོ་ལ་བཞེངས། །
 བཏུ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །

May peace come from the West,
 O peace of full prosperity.
 May the mother's daughter lead the Shon dance.
 May Skalzang Dolma lead the Shon dance.

བྱང་གི་ཕྱོགས་ན་བཏུ་ཤིས་ཤོག །
 བཏུ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །

དགུང་སྒྲོན་མཐོན་པོ་ལ། །༡

བྱ་རྒྱལ་གྱི་ཚང་ཤིག་འདུག །

དེ་ལ་སེར་པོ་གསེར་གྱི། །

ལྷ་གུ་ཞིག་འདུག །

In the lofty sky is the nest of the vulture.

The nest is built of twigs of golden colour.

ལྷ་གུ་མ་འགྱུར་མ་འགྱུར། །

བརྟན་པོ་རུ་བཞུགས། །

ལྷ་གུ་འགྱུར་མེད་འགྱུར་མེད། །

བརྟན་པོ་རུ་བཞུགས། །

May the nest of twigs remain stable,

May the nest of twigs remain unchanged.

བྲག་སྒོད་མཐོ་ལ། །༡

ཁྲ་སྐྱུའི་ཚང་ས་ཤིག་འདུག །

བྲག་སྒོད་མཐོ་ལ། །

དཀར་པོའི་ཚང་ས་ཤིག་འདུག །༡

On the lofty mountain,

Is the nest of the hawk.

On the lofty rock,

Is the nest of a white hawk.

དེ་ལ་དཀར་པོ་དངུལ་གྱི། །

བྱིའུ་ཞིག་བསྐྱོར། །

བྱིའུ་མ་འགྱུར་མ་འགྱུར། །

བརྟན་པོ་རུ་བཞུགས། །

The nest is attended

By a bird of silver white.

May you, the bird,

Remain unchanged.

གད་པ་པའི་སྤོང་ཤེད་ན། །

ཕུག་རོན་གྱི་ཚང་ས་ཤིག་འདུག །

གད་པ་བའི་སྤྲོང་ཤེད་ན། །
 གཡུ་མའི་ཚང་ས་ཤིག་འདུག །
 Upon the high crevasse,
 Is a pigeon's nest.
 Upon the high crevasse,
 Is turquoise pigeon's nest.

བྱིའུ་མ་འགྱུར་མ་འགྱུར། །
 བརྟན་པོ་རུ་བཞུགས། །
 བྱིའུ་འགྱུར་མེད་འགྱུར་མེད། །
 བརྟན་པོ་རུ་བཞུགས། །
 May you, the bird,
 Remain unchanged.
 The unchanged bird,
 May you remain unchanged.



However, the general category of marriage songs may be subdivided into a number of different types, which mark the different stages of the ceremony. The most important of these are: the departure song, the song of the arrow, the dowry song, the song of the pillar, the milk song, the friends' song and the various question and answer songs. The singing begins before the wedding party departs from the house of the groom and continues until the bride enters the groom's house before the appearance of the morning star the following day.

During the ceremony many kinds of dances are also performed by the *gNya-wo-pas* to the music of the *Mon*, who must be provided by the groom's side. Traditionally there should be two *Mon* playing the *surna*, and three playing the *daman*. Most weddings are conducted along broadly similar lines but

regional variations can also be found, especially in Sham and Stod. In these places the marriage songs tend to be far more elaborate. Furthermore there are many more of the question and answer songs which are seldom heard in the area around Leh.

Tashispai Songs

At the end of every social and cultural event of any importance in the Ladakhi villages, the *tashispai* song is sung. This is traditionally sung with a chorus, and all the participants take part in the dancing as well. The performers wear the golden cap, *serthod*, and the ancient Ladakhi cap made of woolen *pattu* called *photip*, brocade robes, and the traditional waist band.

As opposed to the *gner-pon*, the *Tashispa* is usually a younger man who must possess various qualities of an auspicious nature. This is of particular importance as the *tashispa* brings the marriage ceremony to a conclusion on a happy note. In the song the expression '*tashis-shok*', 'May There Be Peace', is repeated often; Peace not only for the sons and daughters who are to embark on a new life, but also for the elders who remain behind. The desire for peace is a deep one and is aptly expressed in the song and dance of the *tashispa* which aims to achieve lasting; happiness for all.²⁸

《བག་ཤིས་བའི་མུ།》 *Tashispai* songs

དེ་ལ་བག་ཤིས་ཤོག །

བག་ཤིས་ཤོག །

དགུང་གནམ་སྔོན་མོ་ཀུན་མ་འགྱུར་བ་བཞུགས་ན། །

དགུང་བའི་བག་ཤིས་ཤོག །

May happiness prevail.

If the blue sky remains unchanged,

May happiness prevail.

ཤར་གྱི་ཕྱོགས་ན་བག་ཤིས་ཤོག །

བག་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྱིལ་མ། །

ཨ་མའི་རྩོམ་ཤོན་འགོ་ལ་བཞེངས། །

བཀྲ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །

བསྐྱལ་བཟང་སྒྲོལ་མ་ཤོན་འགོ་ལ་བཞེངས། །

བཀྲ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །

May the peace come from the East,

O peace of full prosperity.

May the mother's daughter lead the Shon dance.

May Skalzang Dolma lead the Shon dance.

སྤྱི་ལྷོགས་ན་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ཤོག །

བཀྲ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །

ཨ་མའི་རྩོམ་ཤོན་འགོ་ལ་བཞེངས། །

བཀྲ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །

བསྐྱལ་བཟང་སྒྲོལ་མ་ཤོན་འགོ་ལ་བཞེངས། །

བཀྲ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །

May peace come from the South,

O peace of full prosperity.

May the mother's daughter lead the Shon dance.

May Skalzang Dolma lead the Shon dance.

རུབ་ཀྱི་ཕྱོགས་ན་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ཤོག །

བཀྲ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །

ཨ་མའི་རུམ་ཤོན་འགོ་ལ་བཞེངས། །

བཀྲ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །

བསྐྱལ་བཟང་སྒྲོལ་མ་ཤོན་འགོ་ལ་བཞེངས། །

བཀྲ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །

May peace come from the West,

O peace of full prosperity.

May the mother's daughter lead the Shon dance.

May Skalzang Dolma lead the Shon dance.

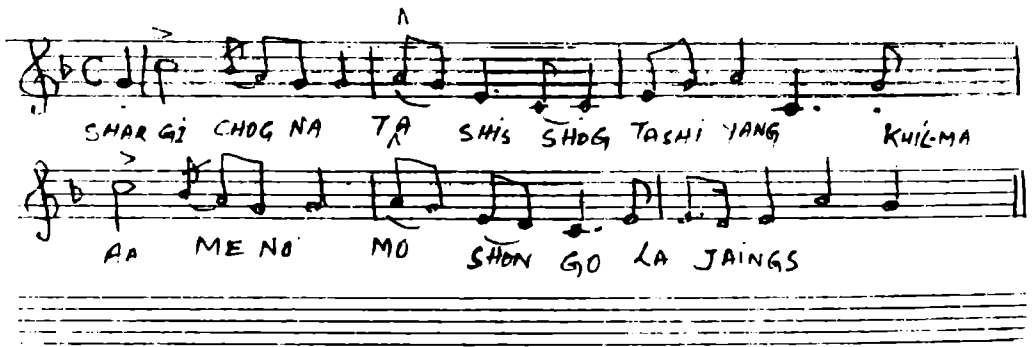
བྱང་གི་ཕྱོགས་ན་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ཤོག །

བཀྲ་ཤིས་གཡང་འབྲིལ་མ། །

ཨ་མའི་རུ་མོ་ཤོན་འགོ་ལ་བཞེངས། །
 བག་ཤེས་གཡང་འབྱིལ་མ། །
 བསྐལ་བཟང་སྒྲོལ་མ་ཤོན་འགོ་ལ་བཞེངས། །
 བག་ཤེས་གཡང་འབྱིལ་མ། །

May peace come from the North,
 O peace and full prosperity.
 May the mother's daughter lead the Shon dance.
 May Skalzang Dolma lead the Shon dance.

དགའ་བའི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་འབྲིག། །
 སྒྱིད་པའི་ཉི་མ་ཤར། །
 May favorable causes and factors assemble.
 May the sun of happiness shine.



Chang-glu: drinking songs

Ladakh is well known for its *chang* drinkers. As the villages are situated at an altitude of between 8,000 and 15,000 feet, people drink huge quantities in order to keep warm in winter, and allegedly, to raise their capacity for work in the summer. Every house must have a large store of beer for its own consumption and to serve to guests. No social or cultural occasion is considered complete without *chang*. Even when someone dies, large quantities of the beverage have to be consumed.

Given this state of affairs, it is obvious that the villagers, mostly the men, often get drunk and frequently quarrels over petty issues ensue. It is especially at these times that the *chang* songs are sung, and in this way many a fight is avoided, or so it is said. Many of the songs describe the way in which the

drink is made. The words are sung in praise of the *chang* which is called the food of the gods, *bdud-rtsi*.

Cunningham, an archaeologist and author of *Ladak* (1854), has described these songs in the following way: "Every event is made the pretext of a feast which usually ends in great uproar, and frequently in general drunkenness. Huge bowls of *chang* provide the chief attraction of the entertainment, and singing and laughter abound until the liquor is finished. On such occasions people will always prefer to hear merry drinking songs. The singer is often accompanied by a fiddler, and sometimes by drums. Sometimes the women perform various dances, but the performers are more remarkable for their costume than for their graceful movements. The principal occasions on which these entertainments are held are births, marriages and deaths."²⁹

The following three categories of song are typical of the central part of Ladakh and are being included in order to demonstrate the degree of cultural exchange traditionally typical of this area of the Himalayas.

Shabs-bro

Changthang is the highest region in Ladakh. The local population is largely nomadic with livestock providing the main source of livelihood, breeding yak, sheep and goats. The butter made from the milk of the female yak, *dimo*, is considered in Ladakh to be the best in taste, colour and nutritious value. The sheep yield wool, and from the goats the soft fibre called *pashmina* is obtained. This is used extensively in the manufacture of the world famous Kashmiri shawls.

Jabro is the name of a dance which is very popular in Rong and Changthang. In origin it is Tibetan, but it has now become popular in other parts of Ladakh. It is performed at all kinds of festive occasions. Both men and women participate in the dance, rhythmically moving hands and feet. They link hands in two separate rows, and facing each other they dance to the music of the *sgra-snan* (an instrument similar to the *rihab*). The number of dancers is usually six, nine or eighteen.

The words of the *shabs-bro* songs which the dancers sing are very interesting and eloquent. They frequently contain religious instructions and texts. The word *shabs-bro* is cried throughout. One song follows another for hours and gradually the festive mood reaches an exciting climax.³⁰

《འབས་བྲོ།》 Jabro

ཨ་ལེ་མོ་རི་འཕྱང་གའི་ཡུལ་ལ། །

འཕྱང་གའི་ཚེ་མོ་ལ་བྱིན། །

ཨ་ལེ་མོ་རི་ཚེ་མོ་འདི་རུ། །

སྐྱགས་དང་དར་ལྗོག་གིས་བརྒྱན། །

We shall go to the top of the Alemori Mountain,

This is decorated with flags and umbrellas.

ཨ་ལེ་མོ་རི་སྐྱགས་དང་དར་ལྗོག། །

ནི་རྒྱ་དགུང་དེ་དང་མཉམ། །

ཨ་ལེ་མོ་རི་འཕྱང་གའི་ཡུལ་ལ། །

འཕྱང་གའི་སྐྱད་པ་ལ་བྱིན། །

The flags are flying and touching the sky.

We shall go to the high pass of Alemori.

ཨ་ལེ་མོ་རི་སྐྱད་པ་དེ་ལ། །

རྩོ་རྩེ་བྲག་རི་ཡིས་མཛེས། །

ཨ་ལེ་མོ་རི་རྩོ་རྩེ་བྲག་རི། །

བྱ་རྒྱལ་ཁོང་གིས་བརྒྱན། །

The thunderbolt mountain adds beauty to Alemori,

On which great eagles are perched.

ཨ་ལེ་མོ་རི་འཕྱང་གའི་ཡུལ་ལ། །

འཕྱང་གའི་ཚ་བ་ལ་བྱིན། །

ཨ་ལེ་མོ་རི་ཚ་བ་དེ་ལ། །

གཡུ་མཚོ་སྤོ་མོ་ཡིས་བསྐྱོར། །

We shall go to the bottom of the Alemori,

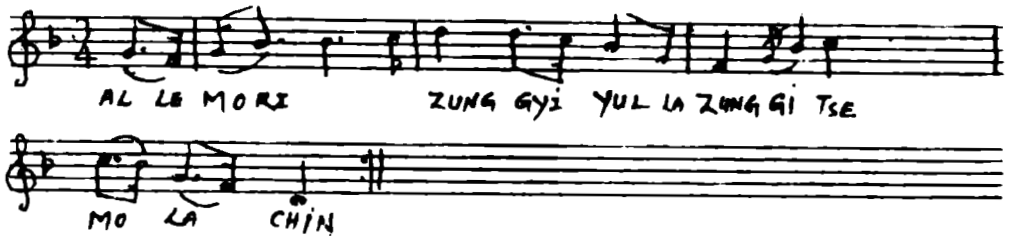
The bottom is covered by blue lake.

ཞེ་ལེ་མོ་རི་གཡུ་མཚོ་སྤྲོ་མོ།

ཉ་རྒྱུང་ཁོང་གིས་རྒྱུ།

O, Friend! The bottom is surrounded by a blue lake.

The fishes are the ornaments of the lake.



Shon-glu

The light-hearted *shon-glu* are sung in conjunction with the performance of the dance called *shon-rches*. The dance is said to originate from the region of Gilgit, from where the *Dard* population in Ladakh is also said to have come.³¹

Shon-rches is performed by both men and women who dance in a circle holding hands. As they dance they all sing very loudly. A particular example of this may be seen on the occasion of *srubla*, the harvest festival held annually in the village of Shey on the tenth day of the seventh month of the Tibetan calendar. The dance is performed by the villagers in honour of the *Lha Dorje Chen-mo*, who is said to be the protective deity of the great translator *Lotsawa Rinchen bZangpo* of the tenth century. The building of one hundred and eight monasteries throughout *Mnga-ris-bskor-gsum* is attributed to him. Three of these architectural works are said to have been inaugurated personally by *Rin-chen bZang-po* on the same day. This only happened with the help of the protective deity *Dorje Chen-mo* whose *lha-tho* is found in Shey village. On the occasion of *sru-bla* the people of Shey sing the following song.³²

《གཤོན་གླུ།》 Shon-glu

གཤོན་རྒྱུང་མཚོ་དར་གྲུན་བསྐྱམས་ཏེ་འབྲུལ་ཡང་།

ཨ་མ་དོ་རྗེ་ཆེན་མོའི་བྱུག་ལ། །

དོ་མོ་དོ་རྗེ་ཆེན་མོའི་བྱུག་ལ། །

By wearing the golden head-dress, O mother,
We come to salute Mother Dorje Chenmo.

ཤེལ་པའི་ལྷ་ཤོན་ཁྱེད་དེད་ཨ་མ། །

ལྷ་ཤོན་གྱོ་མོ་ཁྱེད་དེད་ཨ་མ། །

བལ་འདུམ་ཅ་ཟར་བསྐྱམས་ཏེ་འབུལ་ཨང་། །

ཨ་མ་དོ་རྗེ་ཆེན་མོའི་བྱུག་ལ། །

དོ་མོ་དོ་རྗེ་ཆེན་མོའི་བྱུག་ལ། །

We the villagers of Shey dance shon, O Mother,
We dance the happy Shon dance, O Mother,
By holding the woolen scarves, O Mother.
We come to salute Mother Dorje Chenmo,
We come to salute Goddess Dorje Chenmo.

ཤེལ་པའི་ལྷ་ཤོན་ཁྱེད་དེད་ཨ་མ། །

ལྷ་ཤོན་གྱོ་མོ་ཁྱེད་དེད་ཨ་མ། །

ར་བལ་གོས་ཆེན་ཀུན་བསྐྱམས་ཏེ་འབུལ་ཨང་། །

ཨ་མ་དོ་རྗེ་ཆེན་མོའི་བྱུག་ལ། །

We the villagers of Shey dance shon, O Mother,
We dance the happy shon dance, O Mother.
Wearing brocade of soft fabric,
We come to salute Mother Dorje Chenmo.

ཤེལ་པའི་ལྷ་ཤོན་ཁྱེད་དེད་ཨ་མ། །

ལྷ་ཤོན་གྱོ་མོ་ཁྱེད་དེད་ཨ་མ། །

པར་ཁའི་སྐྱེ་རགས་བསྐྱམས་ཏེ་འབུལ་ཨང་། །

ཨ་མ་དོ་རྗེ་ཆེན་མོའི་བྱུག་ལ། །

དོ་མོ་དོ་རྗེ་ཆེན་མོའི་བྱུག་ལ། །

We the villagers of Shey dance shon, O Mother,
We dance the happy shon dance, O Mother,
Wearing belt made of silk,
We come to salute Goddess Dorje Chenmo.

ཤེལ་པའི་ལྷ་ཤོན་ཚུང་ངེད་ཨ་མ། །
 ལྷ་ཤོན་གྱི་མོ་ཆེ་ཚུང་ངེད་ཨ་མ། །
 ཀོ་ས་མ་སི་ཀུན་བསྐྱམས་ཏེ་འབྲུལ་ཨང་། །
 ཨ་མ་རྩོ་རྩོ་ཆེན་མོའི་བྱུག་ན། །
 རྩོ་མོ་རྩོ་རྩོ་ཆེན་མོའི་བྱུག་ན། །

We the villagers of Shey dance shon, O Mother,
 We dance the happy shon dance, O Mother.
 By wearing kosamassi,¹ O Mother.
 We come to salute Mother Dorje Chenmo,
 We come to salute Goddess Dorje Chenmo.

ཤེལ་པའི་ལྷ་ཤོན་ཚུང་ངེད་ཨ་མ། །
 ལྷ་ཤོན་གྱི་མོ་ཆེ་ཚུང་ངེད་ཨ་མ། །

We the villagers of Shey dance shon, O Mother,
 We dance the happy shon dance, O Mother.

SER RAYANG TAO DAR KUN SHAMS TE BUL ANG AMA
 DOR JAI CHEN MOI CHAKLA JOMO DOR JAY CHAG LA

In certain parts of Ladakh such as Nubra and Dah Hanu, which are situated at a lower altitude than most of the Ladakhi villages, many kinds of wild flowers can be found in abundance. In these places there is a tradition of flower festivals when everyone makes garlands of flowers to be used to decorate the homes, and to be offered in the *gonpas*. The songs and dances performed during these festivals, *me-tog ltad-mo*, are themselves a form of *shon-glu*. The people join hands and dance in a circle, singing the traditional songs. These dances are particularly slow and last for hours.

Bal-glu

In Ladakhi, the term Balti currently refers to the population of Shia Muslims who are mostly concentrated around the area of Kargil. Strictly speaking this region should be called Purig; the real Baltis being the inhabitants of Baltistan, once a tributary chiefdom of Ladakh. Nevertheless, the term Balti is now used by the Ladakhi Muslim population in the Kargil region perhaps in order to give themselves a stronger cultural identity.

The Baltis have their own traditions and customs, but in general their way of life may be considered a part of the greater Ladakhi culture. Most of the songs which are now popular among the Baltis are similar to those found in other parts of Ladakh. *Bal-glu* refers to a kind of song which these people sing in a mixture of Ladakhi and Urdu dialects, mainly on the occasions of marriage and birth.

Since olden times many of the Balti songs were composed in honour of the native rulers or chiefs, *cho*. A particularly famous example of this is the song praising the Balti *cho* of Chigtan. Nowadays Chigtan is a predominantly Muslim area although it was once Buddhist. Evidence of this is provided by the remains of the Buddhist monasteries, shrines and *chortens* which can still be found there.

Narrating Buddhist epics such as the *Ge-sar* saga and the story of *rGyal-bu Nor-bzan*, (one of the Jataka stories which recount the Buddha's previous lives,) is also very popular among the Baltis.³⁴ Although the style of narration varies slightly from that in other parts of Ladakh, all the beliefs and terms central to Buddhism that can be found in the cosmologies, pantheon of deities, concepts of purification and so on that are retained in these versions.³⁵

◀ཐལ་གླུ▶ **Bal-glu**

དང་པོ་མི་ཡུལ་ཆགས་ས། །

ཕུག་རོན་གྱི་མགོ་བོ་གསུམ་ཁར་ཆགས། །

The world was formed in the beginning
On the heads of three pigeons.

ཕུག་རོན་གྱི་མགོ་གཅིག་པོ་ཕྱིར་ཏེ་ནང་ལེ། །
སྤོང་ཕྱོགས་ལྷ་ཡུལ་གྱི་ལྷ་མོ་ཀུན་ལྷན། །
ཕུག་རོན་གྱི་མགོ་གཅིག་པོ་ཕྱིར་ཏེ་ནང་ལེ། །
ལྷ་ཡུལ་གྱི་ཡིད་འཕྲོག་ལྷ་མོ་ཀུན་ལྷན། །

From the head of the first pigeon,
The heavenly damsel came into being.
From the head of a pigeon,
The goddess adthrok Lhamo emerged.

ཕུག་རོན་གྱི་མགོ་གཅིག་པོ་ཕྱིར་ཏེ་ནང་ལེ། །
འོག་ཕྱོགས་སྤུ་ཡུལ་གྱི་སྤུ་མོ་ཀུན་ཨང་ལྷན། །
ཕུག་རོན་གྱི་མགོ་གཅིག་པོ་ཕྱིར་ཏེ་ནང་ལེ། །
སྤུ་ཡུལ་གྱི་མ་རྩོད་གཟེ་ལྷ་མ་ཀུན་ཨང་ལྷན། །

From the second head of a pigeon,
The Naga damsel of the under world emerged.
From the head of a pigeon,
The Nagin Matos Zichan emerged.

ཕུག་རོན་གྱི་མགོ་གཅིག་པོ་ཕྱིར་ཏེ་ནང་ལེ། །
བར་ཕྱོགས་བཅོན་ཡུལ་གྱི་རྒྱལ་བུ་ཀུན་ཨང་ལྷན། །
ཕུག་རོན་གྱི་མགོ་གཅིག་པོ་ཕྱིར་ཏེ་ནང་ལེ། །
བཅོན་ཡུལ་གྱི་རྒྱལ་བུ་ཚོར་བཟང་ཀུན་ཨང་ལྷན། །

From the third head of a pigeon,
The prince of the spirit world emerged.
From the third head of the pigeon,
The Prince Norzang of the spirit world emerged.

སྤོང་ཕྱོགས་ལྷ་ཡུལ་ལ་བསྐྱོད་ཅན་ལེ། །
རྒྱལ་བུ་དང་རྒྱལ་མོའི་ཞལ་ཆད་གཅིག་ཡིད། །
སྤོང་ཕྱོགས་ལྷ་ཡུལ་ལ་བསྐྱོད་ཅན་ལེ། །
ཚོར་བཟང་དང་ཡིད་འཕྲོག་གི་ཞལ་ཆད་གཅིག་ཡིད། །

When the Prince went to heaven,
 A pledge was made between Prince and Goddess.
 While going to the heavenly abode,
 A pledge was made between Norzang and adthok.

མུ་ཏིག་གི་ཚུན་པོ་ཀུན་ཚུང་ཡིན་མོལ་པ་ཡིན། །
 ཞལ་རྩུན་ཅན་གྱི་རྒྱལ་བུ་ཚོར་བཟང་། །
 མུ་ཏིག་གི་ཚུན་པོ་ཀུན་ཚུང་ཡིན་མོལ་པ་ཡིན། །
 ཏ་ཤན་ཅན་གྱི་རྒྱལ་བུ་ཚོར་བཟང་། །
 He promised to bring a bunch of pearls.
 But Prince Norzang was a liar,
 Who promised to bring a bunch of pearls.

འོག་ཕྱོགས་སུ་ཡུལ་ལ་བསྐྱོད་ཅན་ལའི། །
 རྒྱལ་བུ་དང་སྐྱ་མོའི་ཞལ་ཆད་གཅིག་ཡོད། །
 འོག་ཕྱོགས་སུ་ཡུལ་ལ་བསྐྱོད་ཅན་ལའི། །
 ཚོར་བཟང་དང་གཟེ་ལྷ་མ་གྱི་ཞལ་ཆད་གཅིག་ཡོད། །
 When the Prince went to the land of the Nagas,
 A pledge was made between the prince and the damsel.
 When they went to the land of the Nagas,
 A pledge was made between Norzang and Zilcham.

ཡུ་ཡི་ཚོག་གུ་ཀུན་ཚུང་ཡིན་མོལ་པ་ཡིན། །
 ཏ་ཤན་ཅན་གྱི་རྒྱལ་བུ་ཚོར་བཟང་། །
 But Prince Norzang is a liar,
 Who promised to bring a slab of turquoise.

བར་ཕྱོགས་བཅན་ཡུལ་ལ་བསྐྱོད་དེ་ནང་ལའི། །
 རྒྱལ་བུ་དང་སྐྱ་མོའི་ཞལ་ཆད་གཅིག་གང་ཡོད། །
 བར་ཕྱོགས་བཅན་ཡུལ་ལ་བསྐྱོད་དེ་ནང་ལའི། །
 ལྷ་མོ་དང་རྒྱལ་བུའི་ཞལ་ཆད་གཅིག་ཡོད། །
 When the Prince went to the spirit world,
 A pledge was made between prince and goddess.
 When the Prince went to the spirit world,
 A pledge was made between them.

བྱ་རུའི་ལག་པ་གང་ཁྱོད་ཡིན་མོལ་པ་ཡིན། །

ཞལ་རྩལ་ཅན་གྱི་རྒྱལ་བུ་ལོ་རྒྱུ་བཟང་། །

བྱ་རུའི་ལག་པ་གང་ཁྱོད་ཡིན་མོལ་པ་ཡིན། །

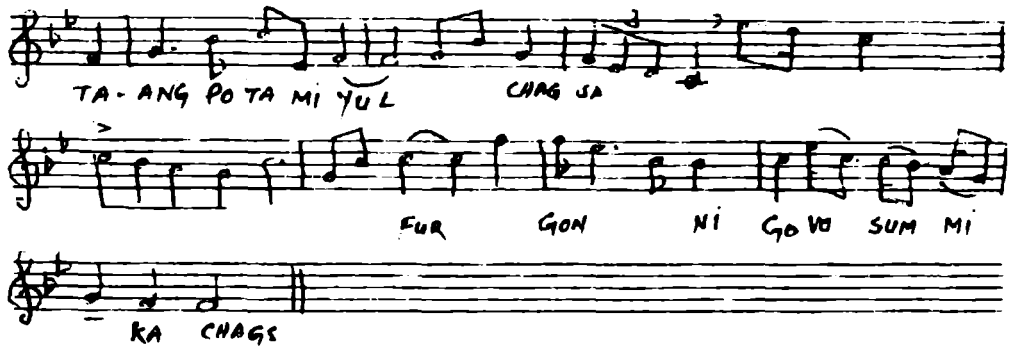
ད་ཤན་གྱི་རྒྱལ་བུ་ལོ་རྒྱུ་བཟང་། །

He promised to bring a handful of coral.

But Prince Norzang was a liar

Who promised to bring a handful of coral,

Gyalbu Norzang, you are a liar.



Over the last 40 years or so Ladakh has been undergoing a rapid process of social and economic development. It has also been opened up to foreign tourism and this coupled with the closure of Tibet has encouraged a great number of western scholars to study the areas as one of the only accessible centres of traditional Tibetan Buddhism.

Cultural interest in this part of the Himalaya predates these socio-economic developments. Of the foreigners who passed through or stayed in Ladakh, the Moravians, in particular the Rev. A.H. Francke and Dr. Karl Marx were the most scholarly, and they were the first Europeans to recognise the richness of the folk heritage. As I mentioned earlier on, besides his historical and archaeological work, Francke actually collected and translated a number of Ladakhi songs. Most of his work was focused on the area in and around Khalatse in Sham, and represents only a small part of the tradition as a whole. The scope for more work in this field therefore remains large.

The importance of the folk tradition has only been recently recognized within Ladakh itself. Now the huge task of collecting

and translating the songs of Ladakh is well under way. In 1968, Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages delegated the job of compiling a volume of these songs to Tashi Rabgias. In 1971 this publication was finally released. In 1972 another important landmark was established with the introduction of the All India Radio Station in Leh. The transmission of Ladakhi songs on the radio created a strong demand for local singers and musicians, which itself revitalized the folk tradition considerably. In 1977 the J&K Cultural Academy compiled another volume of 208 songs, and since then another 10 volumes have been released. The most recent one, published in 2003, contains 97 songs from the region near Kargil, an area with a predominantly Muslim influence.

But during this time the folk songs themselves have not remained static. Changes are now apparent in the folk tradition which affects the songs and their content as well as their performance; new written compositions are being broadcast on the radio, other old songs are being popularized through this process, regional variations hereby becoming less marked. I would like to elaborate with a brief discussion of such changes.

First, the dying parts of the tradition. I have described in passing a number of ceremonial occasions central to the former Ladakhi royal dynasty, the *mDos-mo-che* in particular, on which *Ging-glu* and *Jung-glu* were traditionally sung. Obviously this kind of celebration no longer exists, or has been significantly transformed, and nowadays there are no analogous occasions for which to sing these songs, let alone compose them. Similarly the professional musicians and singers/dancers traditionally engaged by the palace for such occasions, no longer have any role to play. The *khar-mon* have long since been settled in various villages around Ladakh, Phyang in particular.³⁶ It is said that a number of these musicians were actually given land grants by the king in return for their services.

This leads to more recent developments among the *Mon* musicians. I have already said that each village will usually have one or two *Mon* households, each owning a minimal

amount of land and on whom the village depends for the performance of traditional music at all ceremonial occasions. Although these individuals are still considered to be of low status and continue to practice caste endogamy, they have taken certain steps to ensure that the economic wellbeing of their children is improved. This occurs mainly through education, as a result many men have been able to secure regular salaried employment, thereby abandoning their traditional profession.

This creates the problem of who is to continue the musical tradition. In Leh, where this process is occurring before and at a faster rate than in any of the surrounding areas, *Beda* (the wandering beggar bards) have officially taken over from the *Mon* the duties of providing music for all the relevant occasions.

In Leh there are five or six *Mon* families, and of these one traditionally had the prerogative to play the *dinjang* (a small barrel shaped drum with two heads) at Losar as a form of *lharna* to the gods, before which the *Mon* had to be ritually purified. The particular *Mon* household who was entrusted with this job in the past, still continues to provide a musician for this purpose and he is still the head man. However, at most festive occasions that can be seen nowadays in Leh, the musicians tend to be *Beda*. In fact, if one were to ask a local inhabitant about the occupation of *Mon* the answer would almost invariably be that they are carpenters. This seems to have been a former additional attribute of the musician caste, which is perhaps reemerging now as a more secure means of earning an income. In this scheme it is the *Beda* who are classified as musicians. In a few of the villages this transition has also taken place because of the same problem: the old *Mon* families are engaged in some form of outside employment, the villagers having to bring in a *Beda* from the Leh area to perform the traditional musician's job as a result. In the majority of the outlying villages though, the *Mon* still perform their customary duties and the *Beda*, if present at all, are merely classified as beggars. Here the association between *Mon* and carpentry is not generally made.

Whilst I am on this point, it is worth mentioning that in Zangskar there are no *Mon*. In this part of Ladakh the traditional instruments are played by ordinary villagers. This tallies with the greater degree of egalitarianism in the region, reflected for example in ordinary seating arrangements. Whereas in the Indus valley seating follows a more or less rigid hierarchy dependent on social status whereby people sit in a line (*tal*) with a beginning and an end *gral-ga gral-mjug*. Typically the Zangskaris will sit in a circle, Elsewhere it is the *mon* followed by *Beda* who sit at the *gral-mjug*.

Following the establishment of the Radio Station in Leh and the recent proliferation of many new kinds of song which owe much to cultural influences outside Ladakh, another category of musicians has merged employing non-traditional instruments such as the harmonium, tabla, dolak, as well as guitar and banjo. These instruments are played by ordinary Ladakhis and the music carries none of the occupational stigma associated with the traditional *daman* and *harip* of the *Mon*.

Many of the recent songs are outside the established Ladakhi tradition. Although the language is Ladakhi or a combination of Ladakhi and Urdu, the themes are usually of love, the rhythm completely alien from the customary beating of the *daman* and the tunes based on Indian movie songs or Urdu Kawali. A few of these songs actually tell of the modernization Ladakh is undergoing and thus reflect the social and political conditions of the times.

Besides this some of the song types peripheral to Ladakh proper, especially those associated with a Tibetan influence such as the *shabs-bro*, have found themselves in the mainstream of Ladakhi culture. But even in the *shabs-bro* nowadays the *tabla* is used instead of the traditional *sgra-snan*. As I have mentioned in the text, the chanting of *chos-glu* is also increasing.

The fact that old songs are now being collected, and new ones composed, written and broadcast, implies that a process of standardization is probably occurring whereby regional variations are becoming less pronounced. The writing of the songs must itself be having considerable effect on the nature

of what was previously a purely oral tradition. It is obvious that the face of the folk tradition is changing quite rapidly in some respects and will probably continue to do so in the future. However, this is only possible because the tradition of song in Ladakh is so strong that such changes are both necessary and accommodated in its already rich cultural heritage.

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Ladakhi Folk Dance

Ladakh has a rich heritage of dances. These have been so common and popular they have passed as oral and practical traditions from one generation to another. These dances are simple in thought, language and movement of steps. It does not require a rigorous long training; nor, on the other hand, can its simplicity be taken for granted. From a careful observation, the movement of the dance, although not fast, appears as a thorough expression of the personality of the male or female dancer. The movement shows the confidence or lack of confidence, shyness or stage fright of the dancer. Whether he or she has got an artistic temperament or sense of humor is also exposed in the dance.

Above all, the slow pace of a traditional dance of this nature provides an opportunity for meditation to the participants or dancers. The joy of this meditation is felt by the dancers and shared by the spectators in the same measure. Even though the dances are simple, a Ladakhi audience can watch them for hours. As we sit and sip Ladakhi *chang* and watch an evening of dance, our joy constantly grows as the dancing progresses. This is what we love about Ladakhi dance.

The dances of Ladakh are a sort of cooperative venture in which the dancer, the musicians and the audience participate with a pleasant feeling of joy influencing each other to lead the whole to a harmony of music and movement which lifts the mind to a higher state of consciousness. Each dance starts with homage to the triple Gem, that is, the Buddha, Dharma and Singh. The dance has three stages. The first starts slowly with a salutation to the august gathering and after making a round of the dance ground, enters the second stage in which the music and movement of the dance step become faster. In the third and final stage, which is entered without salutation, the dance reaches its climax with the beat of the drum, a kettledrum, and the playing of the *surna*.

Interestingly, the dancers at the socio-cultural events in Ladakh can not be treated as 'professional,' as within traditional Ladakhi society it is assumed that every person will have some proficiency in folk dancing.

On certain occasions the dancers, along with the musicians, first sing songs drawn from the song categorized *Ging-glu* (heroic songs) or *Jung-glu* (congregational songs). Only after singing these songs does the drum beat start and the slow step movement begins to the rhythm of two musical instruments, the *daman* and the *surna*. While initiating a dance, the person who leads the dance calls out "Ya-sha O, Ya-sha" to stimulate the dancers' body and step movements.

In order to perform the dance, the dancers queue in order of social status. If a member of an aristocratic family is to lead the dance, he or she will stand first in the line. Next will be an elderly person or a person with a high social status in the village or in society. He will be followed by the dancers belonging to the *mang-rigs* (or commoners) and only at the last of the line will the dancers belonging to *Gara* (smith), and *Mon* (carpenter) families queue.

Traditionally, Ladakhi society was divided into the following social layers, namely Gyalrigs or royalty, Skutaks or nobility, Mangrigs the commoner and Rigsnan or outcasts. Now in the democracy, a new social hierarchy has developed. In the local government, the Chief Executive Councillor or the Deputy Commissioner occupies the highest position amongst the line of administrators in the district. He or she thus gets a suitable seat within the line of aristocrats, and may be seated next to a village nobleman. If the person is male, he will be seated first at the row beginning from the right hand side, while women are provided the first seat from the left hand side.

As stated above, the *daman* and the *surna* are the two most popular traditional musical instruments and are widely used. The *daman* is an instrument made of copper and looks like a big bowl, with the upper side covered with the leather of a cow. The diameter of the instrument is a minimum of one foot and can be as big as two feet in diameter. Made as a pair of

different sizes, one produces the male sound while the other a female sound and are beaten with two sticks. The other indispensable musical instrument, the *surna*, is made of willow and looks very similar to a shanai. At the top of the *surna* pipe one finds seven holes on the front, with two at the back, duly decorated by laying coral and turquoise stone into it.

Other popular instruments which are used are a double piped flute made of walnut, locally known as a *Lingbu-gNis-rags* and a single piped flute made of bamboo. The Piwang, a string instrument made from willow or apricot wood is very popular among the nomadic people who live with their herds in the high Changthang plateau and has some similarities with the violin. The Piwang is played widely in Changthang to accompany their popular dance called *shabs-bro*.

The other popular musical instruments are the *daff* and the *dinjang*. The shape of the daff is a thin drum covered only on one side with leather. It is made of willow and in order to play, the musician holds it in one hand, while beating the skin with fingers of both hands. The Dingjang is an instrument mainly used by the Dard people to perform their dances and very seldom used by the musicians in the rest of Ladakh. This instrument has a shape of a barrel, is covered both sides with leather and is played with two sticks. Again this instrument is made of willow or walnut wood.

Different kinds of dances are performed in Ladakh. The most widely performed dances are the male dance, the female dance, the three step dance, Khatok Chenmo or the dance of nobility, originally performed in the palace's courtyard), Lhashon dance (the dance of gods/goddesses), Chabskyan or Jar dance, Metok Stanmo (flower) dance, Koshen (brocade) dance, Tashon dance, Shondol, Chartse (bird) dance, Nyawopa (marriage) dance, *shabs-bro* dance, Drogpa dance, sword dance, and Tashispa. However, some of these dances are performed only on special occasions such as Losar, the New Year celebrations and the Srubla festival of Shey village. In the past special dances were also perfumed on the festival day of Dosmochey, the annual festival at Leh palace. To give an

idea of the dances, short notes are written on each of the popular folk dances below.

The male dance

This is the most common dance performed throughout Ladakh. Although it is called the male dance or *Pu-tse-tses*, women also perform or participate in the dance with their male counterparts with keen interest. While performing the dance the dancers carry a scarf on their shoulders. In the dance there are three stages. The first stage begins with a salutation of the dancers to the audience and making a round of the dance ground. The second stage also begins with a salutation to the spectators and, with a change of drum beat and rhythm, the step movements become faster. In the third stage both the drum beat and step movements become very fast and reaches a particular climax, whereupon, after making one or two rounds of the dance ground, the dance come to an end after making a final salutation to the audience.

The dancers or the performer's abilities can be judged by looking at the step movements and hand gestures. If one keeps the body straight and erect while dancing, he or she can be assumed a good dancer. Similarly, finding calmness in appearance instead of too much movement of the body parts is also considered the quality of a skillful dancer. Regarding Ladakhi dances there is a popular proverb which says that the male dance should be fast, while the female dance slower in movement.

The female dance

Unlike the male dance, participants in the female dance should only be female. In the past, at every social and cultural gathering, *chang*, the alcoholic drink, is served in abundance. Hence certain drunk people or those getting excited on the tune of the music, do not mind to mingle with female counterparts, to dance with them and give them company. This kind of

participation by male dancers is not considered an act of vulgarity.

Unlike the male dance, the ladies do not carry scarves on their shoulders while dancing. Instead the women wear a woolen shawl called Bok or Logor, which has the shape of an apron. The Bok is usually made of fine brocade covered with fur and wool called Logor.

Although the female dance initially starts at a slow pace, with the increase in the rhythm the step movements of the dancers get faster. While performing the dance, the dancers cover their body within the Logor by holding it with the right hand while the left is hidden inside it. After making a round of the dance ground, and salutation to the spectators by the striking their conch shell bangles, the step movement becomes faster. In the second stage they raise their right hand and make a gesture as if they were plucking flowers and offering these to divinities such as Buddha, the Bodhisattvas and Dharmapalas. With that, the rhythm of the drum beat and the step movements of the dance become faster. The dancers' proficiency of performance can be judged by looking at the body and step movements of the dancer - if they do not jolt while moving faster during the dance, it is considered good.

Kompa gSumtsegs or Three-steps dance

This is the most common and popular dance among all of the Ladakhi dances. In performing this dance, not much distinction is made whether the dance is led by a man or women. It is also an easier dance to perform than the male or female dances. Interestingly, this dance is performed more in Leh, while in the remote and far flung villages this dance is not so common.

As said earlier, it is considered to be a male dance but females can also participate in this dance. In this dance the dancers take three steps of the same foot in time with the rhythm of music. The same steps with a faster movement are continued in the second stage. In the final stage, the movement

changes to the usual two step dance. This dance is also considered a faster dance as compared to some of the other popular dances. Hence today even non-local people like to perform it.

Khathok Chenmo or dance of the nobility

This dance is the dance of the nobility. During the long historic period when the dynasty of the Gyalpo or kings ruled Ladakh, a circle of aristocracy was formed around the highly exalted family of the king who was always accepted as a Dharmaraja or Chosgyal. In Ladakh, a religious king shaped the policy of the state in accordance with the precepts of universal love, compassion, tolerance and deep wisdom mercifully given by the great enlightened one, the Buddha.

Naturally, the Khatok Chenmo dance carried much prestige with it. The musicians would not play this music unless they knew that the dance was going to be led by a person of high nobility. But now with the new movement of secular democracy there is no restriction or objection from any quarter for performing this dance if one knows how to perform it properly.

In the past, the royal family of Ladakh had dancers called Takshosma. These dancers drawn from a few selected families of Leh town and exclusively performed dances in the courtyard of the nine storey lion palace of Leh on special occasions such as the New Year celebration or the annual religious festival of the royal family called Dosmochey. On this occasion, the members of the noble families of different villages locally known as Kalon, Lonpo, and Zildar, would assemble in the courtyard of the palace, occupying their seats in accordance with their social status. The changma, the wine maker of the palace, would serve the alcoholic drink chang freely. Interestingly, the guests were not offered cups from the palace; instead they came carrying their own cup and spoon in their pockets to avoid any kind of inconvenience to the host.

Lhashon of Shey village

This dance is also known as the dance of the harvest festival of Shey. This festival is locally called Shey Srubla, and takes place every year before the harvest. On this festival day Dorje Chenmo, a goddess, projects herself through a human medium and appears as an oracle. Commencing from the 10th century A.D., the people of Ladakh and the successive kings of Ladakh have shown great respect to this goddess. A dance is performed in honour of the goddess on the day of the harvest festival and dancers will put on gowns made of brocade. While performing the dance, the dancers hold each other's hands to make a circle and move forward and backward, singing a song in honour of the goddess Dorje Chenmo.

Chabskyan the Chang-pot dance

The dancers perform this dance, whilst carrying the chang-pot or Chabsskyan on their head. To perform the dance requires some practice as there is every apprehension that while dancing, the jar can fall down and create an awkward situation. Therefore, the dancer must have confidence and experience in balancing the jar on the head. This requires concentration and at the end of the dance *chang* is then offered to the important guests. This is a comparatively fast dance and people observe the movement of the dancers with keen interest!

Mentok Stanmo or Show of the Flowers

This is a dance which is popular in the valley of Nubra, Shakar-Chigtan and Mulbek areas of Purig. Traditionally, on the occasion of any festival the youth of these villages would go to the mountains before dawn and collect the wild flowers that blossomed in abundance there. They would bring back bunches of these flowers and the people, especially the maidens of the village, would welcome the group of youths upon their arrival. Bunches of the flowers are then offered in the temples of the

respective villages, with the singing and dancing taking place nearby. Unfortunately, the performance of this dance at the festivals in the Purig area has largely ceased with the population embracing Islam, although the performance of this dance in the Buddhist populated areas continue to flourish.

Koshen Tses, the Dance of Brocade

This dance is performed on special occasions. Basically this is a court dance performed by people who are attached to the royal family or court attendants. In Ladakh brocade is known as Koshen. And so naturally the dance is connected with the dress made of brocade. In the past, the wearing of a brocade gown was considered to be something very special. It was mainly worn on the occasion of marriages or other very auspicious occasions, such as the consecration of a temple or statue, with the lover of the dance performing it with grandeur. The musicians play a special tune for the dance which is not so common except in the town of Leh or Stok village, where the present royal family is residing, and also at Shey, the village which is the old capital of Ladakh and which holds certain festivals connected with harvest and the appeasement of the goddess Dorje Chenmo.

Takshon dance

In Ladakhi, the word Takshon is used for a member of an aristocratic family. This is a special dance performed on the occasion of Losar, the New Year celebration. In the past, the Lhardak—the priest of the palace—and his colleagues performed this dance in the palace courtyard. This dance is now-a-days performed for certain festivities only.

Shondol dance

In old times, this dance was performed on the concluding day of the nine day Losar festival at Leh Palace. It was

exclusively performed at this New Year celebration by a skilled dancer on the wide roof of the nine storey palace - the ceremonial dancing ground of the lion palace of Leh called Khatok-chenmo.

Even today, one can see the dance ground, which is located on the third floor of the palace. Here, the king and all important guests would sit in the balcony, with the rest of the spectators occupying seat as per their hierarchy or seniority wise on the floor. When the palace musician began their music, the court dancers called Takshosma would perform the dance. They, the Takshosma, would come from the families who by order of the king were traditionally obliged to dance on such occasions. The Shondol dance is performed by ladies.

Shondol means the breaking of the line, and is the only dance in which the dancers take backward steps, with the rhythm of music. They move right and left and each time, make a salutation to the very important guests of the function. Even today this dance is performed by ladies with full vigour and an occasion to perform the dance is a joyful one.

Char-tses—The Bird Dance

In Ladakh numerous types of birds are found. Among the important birds are the crane and the pigeon. In Ladakh, the peacock dance is performed, with songs in praise of the national bird of the country by the female dancers because of the religious significance of the bird, with its plumes used for ritual purposes in the monasteries. The musical instruments used in performing this dance are the surna and the daman.

Nyawopa or Marriage Dance

Ladakh in the trans-Himalaya remained isolated for centuries. Hence, the people developed some unique features of their culture. One of them is the marriage ceremony. First of all, informal enquiries are made from the boy's side to the girl's house through friends or relatives. If positive hints are received

a party consisting of few relatives or friends visits the bride's house with a pot of *chang*, a scarf, and a present which may be a gold or silver ring or an ornament of any other kind.

In the marriage ceremony, a singer is traditionally engaged to lead the ceremony and on the actual feast of the marriage seven to thirteen people in peculiar ancient dress have to play their part in the marriage celebrations. They are called Nyawopa and are the witnesses to the marriage, giving it legal confirmation. Their function is to sing songs and to perform various folk dances. The Nyawopa dances are comparatively faster than other folk dances and the music they play is quite thrilling.

***Shabs-bro* dance**

Basically, the *shabs-bro* Dance is a Tibetan dance. Since Ladakh had a long cultural and trade relation with Tibet, naturally the very culture and tradition of Tibet—particularly of what we now know as western Tibet—has had a big impact on Ladakh. There are many similarities existing in the life style and food habits of the region, and like wise, the dances and the dresses of the area also has a lot of resemblance with that of Ladakh.

The *shabs-bro* dance is a dance in which one can see a lot of movement of feet and hands. The dancers hold a Damnyan, a string instrument like a violin or ribab in the hands and, wearing a typical cap called Tsering Kil-khor, they perform the dance with the playing of the instrument. Jabro songs are very catchy hence it thrills the dancers to make their hand gestures at a fast pace. Interestingly, while performing the dance both men and women mingle and a different atmosphere is created altogether.

Droga Dance

The race of the present Ladakhi population is said to be the blend of three distinct tribes: the Mongol or Tibetan, the Mon

and the Dards. The inhabitants of Dha-Hanu regions of Ladakh are considered to be Aryan (the Droghpa race in Ladakhi) and have succeeded in maintaining some of their traditional dances which they usually perform to the rhythm of a barrel shaped drum called a Dingjang with great enthusiasm. In their hand gestures and step movements, one can see some similarities with the prevailing dances of central Ladakh.

Spawo/ Sword Dance

Gyalam Kesar is the best known epic through out Himalayan regions including Ladakh. In the past, the story of Kesar was narrated in every household to while away the long winter night. In between the storytelling, the narrator would sing the songs depicting the brave deeds of Kesar and his eighteen brave heroes, with the listeners becoming very excited and even participating in singing and dancing. These kinds of songs are found in Ladakh folklore categorized as *Ging-glu* or heroic songs.

Today, some of these songs drawn from the epic have occupied a place in the popular literature of Ladakh and people sing and dance to the tune of these song accompanied by music.

In certain cases, the dancers take a sword in their hands and perform the dance waving their hands holding the swords high in the air. A skillful dancer can take the dance to a certain climax. The sword dance is also popular in the Muslim dominated areas of Kargil and Turtuk in Nubra. This is a dance of bravery and hence it has now taken the shape of popular folk dances, which are generally performed by enthusiastic dancers on the occasion of an archery festival. The sword is an ancient weapon which is used here in the performance of a dance. The quick movement of the hands with the sword produces a feeling of thrill amongst the audience.

Tashis-pa

Tashis-pa dance is performed at the end of every social or cultural gathering. The idea of this dance is to conclude the

celebration on a happy note! *Tashis-shok* or 'may there be peace' are the oft repeated words in this song and dance. The people want peace for their elders as well as for their sons and daughters. They want peace so that they may be able to work in their fields and to celebrate the marriage of the young ones. So it is sung with the deep desire of the singer and dancer for peace and happiness of society.

This is a short description about the popular dances performed in Leh and in nearby villages. According to a tradition, it is said that there exist 360 variants of dances. This number also applies to the musical tunes of Ladakh which the musicians play during Losar celebrations and on the occasion of Matto festival, when the two oracles appear possessed by two lamas in the courtyard of the *gonpa*. Interestingly, a Ladakhi writer writes in his article that on the occasion of Losar celebration at Alchi village the dancers perform 360 variants of dances. Hence more research and study is required on the dance forms of Ladakh, as very little has been written to date on this important topic by scholars.

The change in the lifestyle of Ladakh is very much visible these days. Almost thirty five years back, every Ladakhi man and woman would put on a traditional dress to pay a visit to the Leh market. Particularly for women: whether a Muslim or a Buddhist, she was never to be found wandering around without a head dress, as this was considered taboo. But now, with the passage of time, people have not only abandoned wearing the traditional dress Kos or Chuba and the turquoises headdress; they have also abandoned participating in performances of special occasions - particularly true for young Ladakhi people. In addition, it used to be that Moslems participated in these dances, even performing at the annual Argun Dartses festival in Leh Town. Nowadays, the Muslim community has stopped organizing the Argon festival considering these dances to be Buddhist and no longer includes them in their festivals, marriages or celebrations of any kind.

Religious/Mask Dance (*Cham*)

The mask dance, popularly known as Cham, is a highly choreographed secret Buddhist dance performed by lamas to the accompaniment of mystic music played on the monastic orchestra. The mask dances are essentially religious in nature as the lamas reserve themselves the right to act in the mystic play with its manifestation of *lha* (gods) by awe-inspiring masks, illustrating the former births of Buddha and the protectors of the religion.

The original motive of the dance is to symbolize the destruction of evil spirits and dramatize the illusoriness of life, and to perform ritual offerings to tuterly deities (*Yi-Dam*) of the monasteries and guardians of the faith. While performing the dance the dancers wear various kinds of masks, some fearful; others benign and pleasing. These represent various divinities from the Buddhist pantheon. Most are found in form in the Gonkhang, the room dedicated to the guardian divinities in major monasteries. The more fearsome ones represent various forms of the protectors of the religion (Dharmapalas), actually Buddha and Bodhisattvas in their wrathful tantric form.

Mask dances are performed by wearing dresses made of brocade, silk costumes from China and Varanasi and an apron made entirely of human bones which is placed on the breasts. The musical instruments used during the dance are trumpet, cymbal, drum, bell, shell and flageolet and the lamas wear numerous oxen-headed, three-eyed stag or deer masks of Dharmapalas, symbolizing the victory of truth over evil. The dances culminate in the destruction of the devil, which is personified by an effigy made of barley dough.

Origin of Mask Dance

It is said that performing of the dance came into being during

the lifetime of the Shakya Muni, the historical Buddha. The Buddha personifying himself the tantric form promoted and propagated the dance popularly called Cham. In the eight century A.D. the King of Tibet, Trisong Detsen, Padmasambhava (Tib. *Pema Jungne*), and Shantaraksita (Tib. Khenpo Bodhisattva) gave impetus to these tantric dances. In 9th century King Lang-darma of Tibet ruthlessly suppressed Buddhism. The monks were compelled to disrobe and the monasteries were dismantled by the cruel king. At that time a very powerful monk named *Lha-lung-dpal-gyi-rdor-rje* appeared wearing large wide-brimmed black hats, high boots, and silk brocade costumes, exercised to the demonic forces from the dancing arena and shot the king in the forehead with an arrow while he was reading the pillar scripture in front of Jo-khang temple in Lhasa.

In the fourteenth century A.D. the disciples of Tsong-kha-pa the founder of the Gelugs-pa school also promoted the tantric dance and with the passage of time every school of Mahayana Buddhism in Tibet and Ladakh accepted and promoted the tantric dances as an integral part of the religion. Religious dances are important events throughout Mahayana Buddhism commemorating the deeds of the Buddha or those of the great masters of the past associated with one tradition or another.

The masks are made out of clay mixed with cotton, are painted with natural colours and polished with gold and silver. Similarly the dresses are made from brocades of different colours such as white, yellow, red, blue and green. The dancers hold mystic signs such as dagger, spear, bell, vajra, skull and *damaru* in their hands. The masks are personification of various protector deities: they are treated as secret, and are visible by the devotees only during the secret dance festivals organized by various monasteries.

The masks are identified by viewers by watching and observing its fearful face structure and colour of the masks. The most popular deities that appear for the dances are Gonpo, who is painted black, Paldan Lhamo or Shrivi in light black, *rNam-sras*, Vaishramana, the god of wealth in yellow and *lCham-sring* in red.

Tibetan Buddhist sects

There are four main sects in Tibetan Buddhism, the form of Buddhism practiced in Ladakh. They are Sakyapa, Gelukpa, Kagyupa and Nyigmapa. There are eight schools within the Kagyupa.

In the monasteries of the four sects besides the religious and cultural ceremonies take place, among them the *dus mchod*, the religious service offering ceremonies of the *gonpas*. These festivals are conducted every year according to the lunar Tibetan calendar and last for three days. The Ladakhis believe that they are performed for the health, prosperity and happiness of all human beings.

Religious festivals

These are important events throughout the Tibetan Buddhist world—commemorating the deeds of the Buddha, or those of the great masters of the past associated with one tradition or another. In Ladakh the most renowned of these, in addition to the standard festivals associated with the Buddha's life, are the Hemis Tsechu (10th day) festivals commemorating the deeds of Padmasambhava, the eighth century master who is credited with the introduction of the most profound Buddhist teachings into Tibet and Ladakh. Each 10th day of the lunar calendar is said to commemorate a special event in the life of Padmasambhava and some of these are dramatized in the context of a religious festival, which may last from two to three days.

Mask Dance in Ladakhi Monasteries

Ladakh is dotted with large and small monasteries belonging to various sects and founded by various lamas. In a number of monasteries, mask dances are organized during the year to commemorate the birth of the founder as well as of the exponents of the sect. The festival of Hemis is the most

well known one. Here, the most impressive dance performed is the eight manifestations of the Guru Padmasambhava. Likewise, the mask dance festival of Pethup *Gonpa* is held on the 28th and 29th of the eleventh month of the Tibetan Calendar, which usually takes place in the month of January. Pethup Monastery belongs to the Gelukpa, popularly known as the Yellow Hat Sect. Here, the best known dance is of the protective deity of the monastery called Chamsing. A similar type of festival also takes place on the 28th and 29th of the twelfth month of the Tibetan Calendar which usually falls in the month of February at Likir *Gonpa* in lower Ladakh, Diskit Monastery in Nubra Valley and Karsha in Zangskar, all belonging to Gelukpa Sect; besides the well known festival of Leh Town called Dosmochey. The Stok *Gonpa* and Matho *Gonpa* also hold dances: Stok on the 9th and 10th day of the first month (Tibetan Calendar), and Matho on the 14th and 15th. Similarly, Lamayuru Monastery, Stongde and Padum in Zangskar, Shachukhul, Korzok and Mahey *Gonpa* in Changthang, Pheyang in Leh, Tak-thog, Thikse, Chemde in upper Ladakh and some more monasteries including new ones also organize their annual mask dance festival called Duschet.

Religious Dances (*Cham*)

The dances (*Cham*) are performed by the monks on the rhythm of long horn (*Dungchen*), oboes (*gyaling*), drums (*nga*), cymbals (*silnyen/bubjal*), shinbone trumpets (*kangling*), conch shells (*dung*), skull-drums (*damaru*), and bells (*drilbu* and *Dorje*). The performance of the monastic dances begins with the appearance of the mask of Hashang and Hatuk.

Hashang and Hatuk

The Hashang is a Chinese monk, generally known as the smiling Buddha. Ever smiling, the Hashang exhibits the inner peace of mind. That is why he is shown in the fair along with Hatuks, the disciples. It shows the happy culmination of the

programme. First the Hashang comes out along with the five Hatuks. His disciples prepare a seat for him. They bring the drum and cymbal. The Hashang distributes sweets among the Hatuks in order to prepare them for study.

Clown Dance

Clown dances are performed during the annual mask festival of Phyang *Gonpa* and Lamayuru. Both the *gonpas* belong to the Drigung Kagyupa order. In between the masked dances, the clowns appear and entertain the spectators by performing masked dance as well as folk dances. To entertain the audience, they also make jokes and sing sarcastic songs. They keep control of the crowd of the dance ground, assist the mask dancers with their costume adjustments and collect money offerings for the monastery.

Eight manifestation of Padmasambhava

Padmasambhava is called the second Buddha by Tibetan Buddhists. Padmasambhava was responsible for bringing the present form of Buddhism to Tibet. In the 7th Century AD he constructed Samyas Monastery which is said to be the site from where tantric Buddhism came into being. On the occasion of the world famous Hemis Festival, which every year is held on the tenth day of the fifth month of the Tibetan Calendar. The day is the birthday of the famous teacher and on the particular day the monks perform the dances of eight manifestations of Padmasambhava. This dance besides Hemis, one can see at the Drukpa monasteries such as *Tak-thog*, *Chemde* etc. The eight manifestations are:

Tsokye Dorje Chang

Pema Gyalpo

Shakya Singe

Loden Chokse

Padmasambhava

Nyima Ozer
Singe Dradok
Dorje Drolu

Drum Dance

Drum dance is performed by the lamas wearing simple dresses and hats in a dignified manner. The step movements and hand gestures move with the rhythm of the drum. By its appearance, the Drum dance can be termed a “peaceful” dance. The leader wears a round yellow hat with a flag and at the back of the head bone ornaments. Two small black dots decorate his cheeks and in his hands are small cymbals. The other dancers hold a golden drum in the left hand and a beater in the right. Their movements consist of twenty different dance steps.

Four heads Dance

The four heads represent the owl, the tiger, the pig and a wolf. Each animal has a meaning. The owl signifies the ‘hook of loving kindness’. The tiger is the ‘lasso of compassion’, the pig is the ‘iron chain of happiness’ and the wolf is the ‘bell of equanimity’. These four animals drive out the evil image, represented by a small effigy of Rudra on a wooden plank. First they must conquer the protectors of that image, and dispel it. The negative image is then removed from the dance ground.

Deer, Buffalo and Dzam Dance

The purpose of the dance is to drive out the evil spirit and negative forces gathered. The monks perform the dance by wearing the masks of deer and buffalos. The dances are fast in movement and action. The appearance of these dancers makes the audience excited, therefore it is a very demanding dance, requiring skill and stamina, especially of the younger performers. In the deer dance for instance, the performers jump, twirl and stamp; turning and twisting their bodies. Only

an extremely supple dancer is able to perform the difficult feat of touching the ground with his horns while bending over backward.

Heruka Drubcham

The dance of the Heruka Mandala deities is the main part of Rudra's (evil spirits) defeat. The objects to be dispelled are the five poisons afflicting the inhabitants of the six realms of Samsaric existence who are naturally overcome by the 10 activities of:

1. Enemies of the Dharma
2. Those who harm sentient beings
3. Adversaries of the Triple Gem
4. Slanderers of the Dharma
5. Dividers of the Sangha
6. Destroyers of shrines
7. Disbelievers in Karma
8. Samaya breakers
9. Those who abandon the Dharma
10. Vow breakers.

The manner in which the evil image is dispelled is through loving kindness and compassion, thus delivering all from the realms of hell.

Black Hat Dance or Zorchan

The dance is performed by the monks wearing large wide-brimmed black hats, high boots and silk brocade costumes. The Shanag is one of the most interesting and powerful dances, and is normally performed by the most skilful dancers, those performing the ritual sacrifice being generally lamas with high degree of realization. The main dancer cuts the negative image and reveals it as non-existent. It symbolizes the killing of the ego and aims at freeing the soul from illusion.

Mahakala (Gonpo Dance)

Mahakala is in its essence an emanation of Chakrasambhava. The dance depicts his deeds throughout the ages. A solo dance is followed by dances of figures of the entourage of Mahakala. At the times of the first Buddha (Dipankara, *Mar-me-ze*), he converted the four sons and daughters of Evil and they, after having taken Bodhisattva vows from the Buddha, became protectors. Mahakala is venerated in the Phagmodrugpa and Drigung and generally in all Kagyupa lineages, mainly in its four-armed form.

Achi, the Dance of Achi

Achi is the chief protector deity of *Drigungpa* sect and is thought to have been the grandmother of Kyoba, the founder of the sect. In the dance Achi expresses a feeling of joy. According to a sutra, Achi is, in her essence, an emanation of Tara sometime addressed as *Re-ma-tsi* (a protector) or also Paldan Lhamo Kali Devi. According to Lord Jigten Sumgon. Achi is the protectors of the 1000 Buddhas.

Dance of the king and the ministers

Gyalpo Pehar, King Pehar, was initially a demon. After his conversion at the time of Padmasambhava in the 8th Century A.D. he was chosen by the masters from Udyana as the protector of his monastery of Sam-ye. Within the Drigung lineage, the already quoted Kyabgon and Terton Gyalwang Rinchen Phuntsog had a vision of him, in which he promised to watch over the Drigungpas. He is since considered one of the protectors of the order and has identical place of Nechung Choskyong, the protectors of the government of Tibet.

Dance of the four protectors

The four protectors are Eka Za-ti (with only one eye and

one tusk-like big tooth, an emanation of Samantabhadra, *Kundu Zang-mo*) Rahula (*Cha-trag Go-tseg*), an emanation of Heruka Dam-chan, an emanation of Vajrapani Hara, product of the conjunction between a planet and Evil.

Buddha Mar-med-ze, Vajrapani and Padmasambhava declared Hara as one of the protectors. The four dancers dance with completely different movements, but to the same rhythm of the cymbals.

Dance of *Nam-tho-se* (Vaishramana)

Nam-tho-se is a form of the Dhyani-buddha Amonghasiddhi (*Don-yo-Dub-pa*), come into this world as a protector. *Nam-tho-se* had three sons: *Phag-Key-po*, *Chen-misang* (said to have seen “The land of the Buddhas” Paradise, and called thereafter) and *Yul-khor-sung* (“protector of country”, i.e. protector of the six realms of gods).

Vajrapani (Chagna Dorje) installed *Nam-tho-se* and his sons as the four Lokapalas, the protectors of the four directions. Their image is seen at the entry of every Tibetan temple up to the present day.

Nam-tho-se has a darkish yellow colour and holds as attributes the Gyaltzen (the typical round banner symbolizing the triumph of Buddhism), and a mongoose spitting jewels (*Nu-le*).

Sacred Trees (*Lha-chang*)

At certain junctions in particular villages in Ladakh, one finds old trees called *lha-chang*. “*Lha*” means god, “*lchang*” means tree. These trees are often hundreds of years old and usually poplars or willows. Such a tree stands in Leh at the place called *Chute-rantak* and is known as *gTsug-tor Lha-lchang*. This tree must be no less than four hundred years old. According to a tradition the tree was planted during the reign of King Senge Namgyal, the most powerful king of Ladakh in the 16th Century AD. Presently, the tree is cared for by the Sikh community of Leh, who have named it *Datan Sahib*—the “tooth brush” of Guru Nanak—the founder of the Sikh faith. It is said that Guru Nanak halted underneath a stone at a place called *Ladakh-kong-ka*, near Nimo village on his second missionary tour (this time to Tibet in the year 1515-1518 AD) leaving a print of his body on the stone. In the year 1978, the Sikhs built a *Guru Dwara*, (temple) to cover the stone, naming it *Pathar Sahib*, or “venerated stone.” Until this time, the Buddhists had venerated the same stone for centuries, believing that it displayed the body-print of Guru Padmasambhava, who visited Ladakh on his way to Tibet in the 7th Century AD. It is said that while making a halt here Padmasambhava was attacked by demons that were abundant in the region. In order to protect himself from them, he took shelter underneath the stone, leaving his body print on it. This story has a connection with the construction of the famous Samye temple in Tibet in the seventh century by Shantarakshita, Guru Padmasambhava and Trisong-detsan, popularly known as (*Khan-slob-chos-gsum*). While these three were in the process of constructing the Samye *Gonpa*, the first temple in Tibet, they had to confront spirits who worked against their efforts. Guru Padmasambhava managed to subdue the evil spirits.

Historically, the tree is also known by the name of *Tsugdor Lha-chang*. The Tsugtor is also the name of a *Lha-mtho*, or divine deity, of the area. *Lha-tho* are made from heaps of stone or are made as four cornered rooms erected on a mountain or at a family house.

In the past, Leh had two communities: *Skya-nos* and *Gog-sum*. Skyanos is the area on the left side of Leh palace while Gogsum lies to the right of the palace. During the reigns of the kings of Ladakh, the town had three entry gates and the houses of the entire Leh community were accommodated within the boundary wall surrounding the town. The gates were called Ta-go, the tiger gates. At the entry which leads to the *Gog-sum* area stand two curved stone statues of *Chan-re-zig*, the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, in front of a *mcho-rten* built on a roofed gate. (Above the hill there stands an impressive temple of Padmasambhava known as *Gog-sum* Guru). The ruined gate area of *Skya-nos* is still in existence but the gate itself which was falling in the centre was somewhere near the present Balkhang area. There is a popular proverb in Ladakhi about the benefits of having a house beneath the palace and land below a pond:

Mkhar-gi-yog-ga kham-pa tang

Zing-yog ga-na-ma

A house below a fortress.

And marriage to a family below ponds.

In the vicinity of Leh town there exist two more *lha-chang*, one at Changspa and the second one at Yurtung. Both are revered by the local populations. Such trees may be found in every village, small or large, in Ladakh. The local populations venerate these trees by lighting butter lamps and burning juniper incense every morning and evening. Every month on the 10th or 15th day, a lama from the nearest *gonpa* will come and perform *sangs*, the purification ceremony. Hence, the cutting of the branches of the tree or the burning of fallen leaves from the tree is a taboo. Locals often believe that within the

tree reside gods or spirits, and if a person cuts or harms the *lha-chang* in any way it could disturb the atmosphere and he or she could encounter severe illness or skin diseases. Buddhists believe that in mountain passes, nooks, houses, fields, rocks, springs and lakes there lurks a spirit.

The Buddhists of Ladakh believe in gods and goddesses, beside spirits. It is said that even the petty gods or spirits can bring good luck and happiness to a person or family.

There are three types of gods. The first and foremost are the deities falling under the categories of *yidam*, *mkhan-do* and *Chosk-yong*. They are Buddhist tantric deities and each sect has its own tutelary deity, called *yidam*. *Dorje Jig-ched* (Vajrabhairava), for instance, is a well-known *yidam* of the Gelukpa sect, *rTa-mgrin* (Hayagriva) is a prominent *yidam* for the Nyingmapa, and *aKhor-lo-ldom-pa* (Chakrasambhava) for the Kagyupa. They are, in general terms, equivalent in status to a Buddha. Among the higher gods are *mkhah-agro-ma*, the gods or goddesses of wisdom such as *Tshe-ring mched-Ing*, the five long lived sisters and *Bstan-ma bchu-gnyis*, the twelve nymph sisters who undertook to guard Buddhism. Among the *Chos-skyong* are *lha-mo*, *rnam-thos-sras*, *mGonpo* and *lcham-sring* and the female deity Apchi of Drigung Kagyud. Statues or paintings of these gods and goddesses are found in special temples in every *gonpa* or family temple. At the *gonpas*, the shrines where the wrathful forms of protector deities are installed are called *Gon-mkhang*.

Within the Choskyong category falls *Lha-rDo-rje Chenmo*, the protector deity of Rinchen Zangpo of 10th Century A.D. who was responsible for the building of numerous temples and religious enclaves at Nyerma, Alchi and in the Sumda region of Ladakh. *Lha Rongtsan Karpo* was said to have accompanied Lama Tungpa Dorje while visiting Ladakh on a religious mission, and who built Matto *Gonpa* in 1500 A.D.

In the second category of gods fall the village gods or *Yul-lha*, *Pha-lha* and *rTse-lha*. Since time immemorial, the people of Ladakh have been worshiping these village gods as their protectors. These gods are worshipped because they bring

prosperity, good luck and happiness to the village or community. Hence, on the occasion of new year celebrations or on auspicious days such as on the 15th day of the fourth month of the Tibetan calendar—the birth day of Buddha—these gods are worshipped by the population who make small offerings. This process generally involves lighting butter lamps and incense and redecorating their respective *lha-thos* by replacing the old barley grain and butter kept inside with fresh ones and by placing prayer flags above the *lha-thos*, and finally, by placing a *khatak* around the structure. These jobs are done by lay people and only after they are completed will a lama from the nearest monastery come to perform the purification ceremony.

On the roof of Buddhist families' houses, one can find constructed a small four cornered room, decorated with juniper twigs and flags of five colors representing the five elements (blue: sky, white: clouds, red: fire, green: surface and yellow: the earth). These *lha-tho* or the "house for the spirits," are also decorated once a year on an auspicious date, usually on the night of the 30th day of the 11th month, prior to the celebration of the Ladakhi New Year.

In the third category are the *khim-lha*, the family gods. These can possess a male or female and are popularly called oracles. In Ladakh, those possessed by spirits are called *lha-ba* or *lha-mo*. Lhaba are male and Lhamo female. Here, oracles are often consulted by the local population.

Ladakhi Buddhists believe that beside the gods and goddesses residing in the sky or on the surface, there exist spirits underneath the human world or below the earth or oceans. They are called *kLu* and it is popularly believed that the *lha-chang* grants shelter to these spirits of the underworld. In the earth, they reside below the tree or within the small house constructed for them known as *kLu-bang*. In villages, one can usually find constructed a small four cornered room called a *kLu-bang*, near the village pond or main family fields where harvested wheat or barley is kept and where threshing is performed. It is said that in the *kLu-bang* reside spirits of

the underworld that frequently take the form of fish, snakes and lizards. Fish are very well protected in the Buddhist belt of Ladakh. Hardly any Ladakhi Buddhists will fish. Similarly, snakes and lizards also have popular religious sanctity and no one disturbs the places where lizards live or are seen. Snakes are not found in Ladakh, however, they are considered spirits of the underworld and widely seen in Buddhist paintings.

On the sanctity granted to these trees, one can assume that in the past Ladakh was barren. Due to the harsh climatic conditions and little vegetation, the trees planted during summer were eaten up by sheep, goats and other domestic animals during the long winter months. Hence, very few plants survive perennially. Those trees that survived and kept growing became the pride of individuals and communities. Hence, any such tree which survived in common lands was often dedicated to a god.

There are many interesting stories about these holy trees. One such story found in the writings of Lama Tsultrim Nyima¹, the founder of Rizong monastery, who carried great renovation work at the Maitreya temple in Leh. Being a spiritually elevated lama, he arranged to cut a *Lha-chang* at Ayu-Sabu for the roofing of the Maitreya temple. Prior to that, he had obtained the necessary measurements for the temple. When the wood was taken to the temple, the masons found the log was short by some inches, which made the lama unhappy. He then performed a prayer and miraculously the log's length increased and thus could be used as a beam for the roofing of the temple. Similarly, regarding the tree of Alchi, it is said that that the same is an offshoot of Lotsawa *Rin-chen bZang-po*'s walking stick, left when he visited the region in the 10th century to build his monastic enclaves. The tree is a birch type and very few of these species are available in Ladakh.

Juniper is also found at the high cliffs of mountains of lower Ladakh, particularly in Dha-hanu area. It is called *Lha-shing* or "god's tree." One such tree is standing close to Likir monastery and is said to have been planted by Lhachen Gyalpo.² It is a popular belief that the gods or spirits like the

fragrance of juniper and like residing at clean places. Hence, if a person pollutes the land where a local deity resides, the spirit becomes angry and harms the polluter. These are eco-friendly gods and due in part to these traditions, Ladakh is still environmentally clean. Even these days the Ladakhi Buddhists invite lamas from the *gonpas* to perform *sangs*, involving the ceremonial cleaning of the marshy lands or spring sites. While doing so the devotees first burn juniper and make fire to burn the dry leaves of juniper so that the fragrance reaches every nook and corner of the area or temple. At the same time, people do not cut or destroy juniper, considering it holy, only using the logs in the construction of temples or preparation of the backbone of a holy object. Several large juniper logs which were earlier used as the pillars of main assembly halls are still standing, as the juniper logs are considered solid and strong and can stand for centuries without any damage by insects or the harsh climate.

It is also interesting to note that there is a tradition that requires that prior to carrying out any kind of ritual in front of *lha-lchang*, *lha-tho* or *klu-bang*, the person who is responsible for performing the ceremony or redecoration of the site must first take a cold bath. This has long been a precondition for performing rituals before a *lha-tho*. If someone does the ritual without washing himself, the spirits get angry.

The next step is to burn juniper incense. In Ladakh, juniper trees have great religious and cultural significance. Hence there exist a number of folk songs, which speak to the greatness of the juniper incense and how much the gods or spirits like the incense produced from it.

From very early times, Ladakhis had great consideration for the protection of the environment and plants. Even the uprooting of a wild plant is considered unethical. Plants, like wild roses also had religious or environmental significance. In the vicinity of *gonpas* or at places of special significance, one often finds wild roses standing. The population neither cuts nor damages these sites, thus the wild plants also get protection by the local population.

In the past people were not allowed to wash their bodies or clothes in streams, nor allowed to urinate or throw any kind of dirt on green land, assuming that underneath that land spirits reside. It is also popularly said that if someone contracts a certain skin disease, it is the result of harming a spirit, and lamas will often perform special prayers called *Sa-bdag-don-dol*. “*Sa-bdag*” means the spirit of the earth and “*Don-dol*” means feast to the spirit. The lama offers a feast to the spirit so that they will again become happy and become benevolent to the people or person affected.

In the Buddhist cultures of the Himalayas, trees have great significance. More than 2550 years ago, Lord Buddha gained enlightenment under a Pipal tree in Bodh Gaya. A descendant of the tree under which Lord Buddha obtained enlightenment stands in grandeur in Bodh Gaya near modern Gaya. Buddhists from the world over come there to pay homage to the sacred tree. The Buddha encouraged his followers to plant a tree every few years and look after it until it is safely established.³ The preservation and growing of trees is a part of human existence and the protection of our ecosystems. Emperor Ashoka, the great Buddhist ruler of ancient India, also promoted the planting of trees in order to obtain shade from the scorching heat, believing it is for the well-being and happiness of all.

References

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Mani-Walls in Ladakh

Among the many landmarks of the Buddhist heritage of Ladakh, is the *Mani-Man-thang*, the literal meaning of which is 'jewel plains'. Unlike the *mchot-rten*, which may be interpreted as 'support for worship', and its Sanskrit equivalent the stupa or chaitya, we do not find any kind of accepted formal art or design in the construction of Mani-walls

The history of the *mchot-rten* in Ladakh dates back to the reign of the Emperor Ashoka in 200 B.C. We can find *mchot-rten* which traditionally date back to that time and were said to have been built by the force of the Emperor's prayers.¹ Other *mchot-rten* said to have been constructed by the Kushan kings, such as King Kanishka, date from the early second century A.D. They are believed to contain relics of the Buddha, the Bodhisattvas and other revered religious figures.

The history of the construction of Mani-walls is not very old and records show that the oldest wall dates from the fifteenth century A.D.² Prior to this, Ladakh had the tradition of building one hundred and eight *mchot-rten* in a row; examples of which can be seen at Sabu, Alchi, Stok and Hunder, in the Nubra Valley.

Mani-walls do not reveal any evidence of having contained religious relics. It is believed that the construction of Mani-walls was started to provide a kind of stage on which to keep the widely chanted six syllable Mantra of Avalokitesvara (*Spyan-ras-gzigs*), that is *Om-Mani-Pad-me-Hung*, which had been beautifully carved on stone slabs by the thousands, and other mantras such as that of Padmasambhava, i.e. *Om-Ah-Hung-Vajra-Guru-Padma-Siddhi-Hun*. There are also a large number of ornate stone carvings of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. These were placed above the Mani-wall as an invocation for protection against evil spirits or to recognize a successful outcome. The Buddhists walk round these walls in

a clockwise direction chanting mantras as they do so, and this action earns merit.

Mani-walls are constructed by placing rocks and boulders by the wayside at important cross-roads, where the atmosphere is peaceful and where the maximum number of people gets the opportunity to do a circumambulation, as well as where animals may pass along the wall.³ The peaceful and undisturbed site also allows supernatural beings, who are struggling for liberation in this world, to earn merit by circling the wall.⁴ The Mani-walls also serve as resting places for travelers on the arduous journeys through the sand and heat of the summer in Ladakh, in the absence of trees and other vegetation.

The Ladakhi Buddhists believe that the construction of a *mchot-rten* or a Mani-wall, the circumambulation of any religious construction, and the chanting of mantras to be a meritorious act and will be rewarded with good luck and merit in this life and the next.⁵

The walls range in length from ten feet to half a kilometer and most of the popular ones terminate in *mchot-rtens* at both ends. They also vary in width from one to twenty feet with the top sloping down from the centre on either side to create a platform for the Mani slabs.

The traditional explanation for the construction of the Mani-walls is that they were built in commemoration of deceased kings. However there are many religious, geographic and economic factors contributing to their construction. It is believed that the pious kings of Ladakh, instead of following the conventional way of punishing criminals by hanging or imprisonment, preferred to sentence the offender to building Mani-walls.

Geographically, unlike most of the Tibetan Buddhist dominated regions, in Ladakh there is plenty of barren land and lots of stone for building work. Economically, it is recorded that from the reign of King *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal* (1590-1620) until the Dogra invasion of 1834, the State treasury was full, and had the potential to pay for labour for religious works such as *gonpas* and Mani-walls.⁶ Historically, the patron of the

construction of the first Mani-wall was King *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal* who had it built in commemoration of the funeral of his father, King *Jams-dbyangs-rnam-rgyal* (1560-1590). He received the idea from the great teacher Lama *Stag-tsan-Raspa*: the founder of various monasteries, including the famous *Hemis Gonpa*. Dr. A.H. Francke referred to this lama as the inventor of the Mani-wall.⁷

There are no records about the details of the building of the smaller walls and popular legends have to be relied upon to give the circumstances. The carvings on the stones can not be dated either, as it is a process that is frequently ongoing. However, many inscriptions have been found on the slabs and together with small clay images known as *tsa-tsa*, containing the bone powder of the deceased and votive tablets have all revealed important information for researchers. Dr. A.H. Francke made Mani-walls his special field of research before going on to study the history of Ladakh.⁸ Dr Francke reports finding a "two-storied" mani-wall at Khalatse which had a narrower upper part, and therefore somewhat resembled a damaged row of one hundred and eight *mchot-rtens*. He estimated its construction to have occurred at the time of *Rin-chen bZang-po*. Fifty years before Dr Francke, General Sir Alexander Cunningham, the author of the famous book 'Ladak', measured the length of most of the massive Mani-walls.⁹

The first Mani-wall was constructed by the greatest King of Ladakh, *Sen-gey-rnam-rgyal*, in the village of Basgo about forty kilometers west of Leh. The plain on which the Mani-wall is built is called *Bya-rjes-thang* (the plain of the print of a bird). Alexander Cunningham records the length of this impressive Mani-wall as being eight hundred and twenty three paces, or nearly half a mile.¹⁰ The surface, which is covered with inscribed stone slabs, is fifteen feet in width. The wall is roughly six to seven feet in height with *mchot-rten* at both ends; one *mchot-rten* being in the shape of *Rnam-rgyal*, having round steps and the other, *Byan-chub*, having square steps. Since Mani-walls seem to have been built under the

supervision of the king's foremost teacher, on completion he would have blessed it and inaugurated it for public circumambulation and prayers.

After King *Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal*, his son *Bde-ldan-rnam-rgyal* (1620-1640) ascended the throne and was responsible for the construction of the longest Mani-wall in Ladakh, situated below Leh upon the sandy plain popularly called *Melong thang*, or "The Mirror Plain." Cunningham recorded this wall as being eight hundred and eighty paces or two thousand, two hundred feet in length. It also has a *mchot-rten* at each end similar to the Mani-wall at Basgo. It was built for the spiritual welfare of his mother.

Mani-wall construction then suffered a setback during the time of political instability in the region and the invasion of Ladakh by the Tibetan troops led by *Dga-ldan-tshe-dbang*. However, King *Nyi-ma-rnam-rgyal* revived this tradition by building the *Za-nag-gi* Mani-wall near the village of Choglamsar. He also built one at Timosgang and one at Le-do village, situated thirty kilometers from Khalatse, on the Khalatse-Gurgurdo road. Apart from a wall which was constructed—according to Sonam Phuntsog of Achinathang—by King *Tse-dpal-don-grup-rnam-rgyal* (1790-1830) in the village of Skurbuchan, the wall at Ledo is the last one to be found in lower Ladakh. No further walls have been built between there and the border with Pakistan.

The most recent and the longest Mani-wall of Leh is the one constructed by King *Tshe-rtan-rnam-rgyal* (1780-1790) in funeral memory of his father King *Tshe-dbang-rnam-rgyal*. It is seven hundred paces and has a *mchot-rten* at each end.¹¹ In the regions of Nubra, Changthang and Zangskar we also find Mani-walls built by the Ladakhi kings, but they are much shorter than those found in Central Ladakh.

Impressive Mani-walls can be found close to most of the *gonpas* in Ladakh and they have probably been built gradually by monastic communities over the years. Other Mani-walls lie close to the houses of individual families and were probably constructed by families donating their labour to earn merit.

Two of the best-known Mani-walls built by village communities stand above the famous *Rnam-rgyal mchot-rten* close to the bus stand at Leh. It is believed that these two walls were built by the *Skyanos* and *Gogsum* communities which now form part of the town of Leh.¹²

There are two small Mani-walls at Chubi, the first hamlet in Leh, which bear inscriptions written on stone slabs, Mani-mantras and a drawing of *Byams-pa*. In Zangskar too, there are Mani-walls at crossroads and along the roadsides.

Khalatse is a small but important village on the Leh-Srinagar road and has, from ancient times, been the traditional meeting point of traders from Baltistan, Kashmir and the rest of Ladakh. Near the village is a massive Mani-wall standing alone in the desert. It is almost one kilometer in length. Every year the villagers donate their labour to extend and renovate it for ten days prior to the celebration of the birth of the Buddha, i.e. on the fifteenth day of the fourth month of the Tibetan calendar. During these ten days, the skilled laborers would renovate and extend the wall, while the artists would inscribe mantras on the slabs or -white wash the structure. The workers would be fortified with *chang*, the local beer made from barley served by the women of the village.¹³ The example of Khalatse probably represents the way in which Ladakhis in the past constructed the Mani-walls which are prominent features of every village in Ladakh.

References

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- 2 Rabgias, 1984.
- 3 Tsering, Dr. Nawang, *Buddhism in Ladakh*.
- 4 I am grateful to Shri Tashi Rabgias for this information.
- 5 Ribbach, *Culture and Society in Ladakh*.
- 6 Zodpa and Shakspo, 1979.
- 7 Francke, 1977.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Cunningham, 1854.
- 10 Ibid.

11 Shakspo, 1990.

12 I am grateful to Ama Tashi Tsomo Munshi for this information.

13 I am grateful to Shri Morup Namgial for this information.

Conclusion: the Future of Ladakh

Along with the rest of the developing world, Ladakh is entering a new stage of modernization. In the 60 years of my life I have witnessed marvelous and profound changes to the social, economic and political landscape of my mountainous homeland.

The Kashmiri proverb—‘Ladakhis eat *sattu* (roasted barley flour), wear *pattu* (woolen clothing) and ride *tattu* (ponies)’—is no longer relevant for describing the lifestyle of Ladakhis today. It was, however, quite accurate 50 years ago. Today, rice, green vegetables, Indian cuisine and Western-style foods have been added to our diet. Indian and Western styles of clothing are now ubiquitous, not only on the streets of Leh, but in remote villages as well. 50 years ago women were not allowed to walk outside without a headcover. Today, this is certainly not the case! And ponies have been replaced by cars, trucks, motorcycles and airplanes. The streets of Leh are more likely to be congested with cars than they were 30 years ago when motorized vehicles were exceedingly rare. Rather, the streets were filled with women selling *chang*, animal fodder or spinning, while on special occasions polo played on ponies would fill the streets.

On the religious front, acts such as shining light on statues of deities at night—once considered a sign of disrespect—are now considered superstitious. Even small activities of development, including altering the direction of windows and doors once required the permission of an astrologer (*on-po*) or a high lama.

On August 15, 1947, India gained its independence. With that, most of Ladakh became a part of Jammu and Kashmir State. However, Baltistan, historically part of Ladakh, was annexed to Pakistan during Partition. One year later, raiders from Pakistan entered lower Ladakh and succeeding in reaching

within 15 kilometres of Leh. The Indian Army soon reached Ladakh via Kashmir and Manali and routed the raiding forces. From that time onward there has been a continuous—and sizeable—Indian Army presence in Ladakh. In 1962, the Sino-Indian War took place. The battles were fought throughout the Changthang region and resulted in the annexation of a large part of Aksai Chin, which had long been considered a part of Ladakh. Besides that particular conflict no other significant disputes have arisen with China regarding that area. However, Pakistan has proved to be much more problematic for Ladakh's security. As recently as 1999, when a group of Pakistan-based militants entered the Brogyul area, full-scale war has broken out. Significantly, more than 25 Ladakhi soldiers died in the Kargil War and belonged to the Buddhist community. On account of their bravery, the unit known as the Ladakh Scouts was upgraded to full regiment status. It is worth mentioning that relations between Ladakhis and the substantial Indian military population have remained good, with no reports of incidents occurring between the two groups.

In 1962, Ladakh was linked to Srinagar by road. This road was hastily constructed thanks to the Chinese aggression in Aksai Chin and along the current border. Democracy had taken root in Ladakh. Kushok Bakula Rinpoche became Deputy Minister in the cabinet of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, then the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir State. Interestingly, it was Sheikh Mohammed (Bakshi Mohammed's predecessor) and Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru who brought Bakula Rinpoche into politics in 1949, the year in which the two leaders visited Ladakh. However, the Sheikh tried to undermine Bakula Rinpoche's potential—by not giving Ladakhis any posts in the state government—which later compelled Bakula to speak openly against the government of which he was a member.

Ladakhis realized the importance of modern education thanks to Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, who always spoke in favor of modern education, an example of which is found in the immediate aftermath of the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959, which brought Bakula Rinpoche closer to Nehru. Bakula

Rinpoche made Nehru realize that for the Buddhist Ladakhis there was no option for education in Tibet and it was necessary to explore Buddhist related higher education within India. Soon after that the Government of India sanctioned scholarships for 18 Ladakhis to go to Varanasi and received modern educations.¹

For religious education, the Buddhist Philosophy School was established exclusively for monks, with two Tibetan Geshes as the sole teachers. Initially located at Spituk, after receiving Nehru's blessing and a charter by the Ministry of Culture, the renamed Central Institute for Buddhist Studies relocated to Choglamsar and became open to all. With that, the Buddhist population of Ladakh received the benefits of modern education much earlier than their Muslim counterparts.

Largely as a result of their increased access to education, feelings of resentment amongst Buddhist Ladakhis grew as they were ignored by the state government at Srinagar and in Jammu. The first example of this resentment was Kushok Bakula Rinpoche's speech delivered on the floor of the State Assembly in his capacity as a member of the Legislative Assembly during the budget discussion on December 12, 1952. Parts of the speech are excerpted below (a longer excerpt follows in the Appendix):

Sir,

The Budget Estimates presented by the Finance Minister evoked reactions amongst the members of this House. My own reaction, I must say clearly, is such as can hardly be called pleasant. The Budget Estimates, if I am to describe them lucidly are extremely disappointing for us unfortunate people of Ladakh, who are professedly the most highly backward and awfully poor people in the whole state. If the Estimate is read from end to the other end, no mention of Ladakh is found anywhere in it. There is no mention of the economic or other requirements of Ladakh, which being so considerably urgent and necessary, merit prompt attention for their fulfillment.

There are two post offices and two telegraph offices in our area, and one TD Post office at Khalse. In Zangskar, the people of its central place, Padam, have to go to Kargil to find post and telegraph facilities. But can you estimate how far away Padam is from Kargil? It is a hilly one hundred and fifty mile journey in which several mountaintops higher than 12,000 feet high have to be crossed. Now under such circumstances you can yourself imagine how impatient we are that adequate provision be earmarked for the development of transportation and communication in our area. Any such scheme that is formulated should be accomplished in a few years. But I am concerned, Honorable Finance Minister, that not even half a word about Ladakh has come up in even half a place, From the Budget, it seems that in the brains of the Budget makers there is no place called Ladakh, nor has this area been considered to be a part of the state.

Perhaps some people might argue that from *Illaq*a (Urdu: area) the government gets a meager income of rupees two lakhs (200,000), and the government has to bear the burden of expenditure of about rupees nine lakhs (900,000). But I cannot help but submit that this heavy amount of nine lakhs is not spent on the development of our area. This is spent solely on the salaries of government employees and other such type of expenditures. In this connection, our area cannot be grateful to the government. Perhaps the very burden of the expenditures of the salaries of the government employees is the reason that no steps are being taken for the development of our area. And this very fact does not seem to substantially take into account that for very long our area has been left backward and that nothing has been done to lift it out of poverty and squalor.²

Kushok Bakula Rinpoche stayed as Minister in the successive state governments from 1953 to 1964. Later, he decided to quit the state politics as he found himself trapped in the bureaucracy and local politics. He realized that Ladakhis should have a say in national politics as well, which didn't happen until the year 1967, on account of Ladakhi ignorance of national voting and representation. Till 1967, Ladakh was treated as part of Gandharbal constituency of Kashmir division, another discriminatory measure whereby no Ladakhi could reach the Indian Parliament. In that year, however, Ladakh was granted a seat in the Parliament and Kushok Bakula Rinpoche was elected and remained in that position, representing Ladakh, until 1977 (during the fourth and fifth Lok Sabha—terms in the lower house). By exiting state politics, the Kashmir government gained the upper hand in deciding how to choose ministers and bureaucrats. Sonam Wangyal, who was elected to the state assembly, was denied a ministry position by virtue of his strong support for Kushok Bakula Rinpoche and, in 1969, a Buddhist agitation against the state government was launched. Among the results of this agitation was the allowing of the Ladakhi language to be taught in schools up to 10th class and creating 33 posts for Ladakhi teachers known as *Bodhi* teachers (*Bodhi* is the distorted name of *Pod-yig*).³

The demand for Union Territory status for Ladakh began in the 1980s. Continued unrest with the state government in Jammu and Kashmir and the national government in Delhi pushed many to ask for autonomy. The compromise with the national government resulted in the formation of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council which has attempted to shape Ladakh as it moves into the 21st century. The Hill Council raised expectations among Ladakhis that they would be in a stronger position to affect their own destiny. However, only after its formation was the question of its actual functional powers raised. Its limited powers have frustrated many who continue to push for genuine autonomy in the form of Union Territory status. On this point, one can observe how the executives have settled on seats without power.

Kushok Bakula Rinpoche played a role in the emergence of Ladakh in the 20th century akin to that of His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama. Both incarnate lamas emerged out of crisis to lead their distressed followers and act as focal points for faith and strength, as well as political and social empowerment. Bakula Rinpoche, like the Dalai Lama, realized the importance of reaching out to neighbours and governments to build cultural ties and shared identities. In the rapidly changing circumstances of the late 20th century, new ways of thinking were needed to address and strengthen the existing social, cultural, and religious institutions for which the whole world has looked upon with great interest.

With the benefits of modern education, technologies, improved communication and mass media also comes challenges to the traditional fabric of Ladakhi society. As religion has declined in the West, there is the possibility that Buddhism in Ladakh may face similar problems. Unless it succeeds in adapting to the needs of the youth it will increasingly be relegated to the older generations. The complexity of Tibetan Buddhism and its pantheon and practices makes its continued dynamic existence uncertain. There is a risk that Ladakh will become a museum, unless the institutions (*gonpas*, schools and colleges) that support the study and practice of its vast religious tradition can grow along with Ladakh's future. The curriculum of the Jammu and Kashmir State educational system does not support the cultivation of culture, art and music in the schools, making it more difficult for places like Ladakh which have vast traditions, but lack the outlets to pass these on to younger generations.

Handicraft production has also seen dramatic changes in the recent past. Prior to the advent of motorable roads, connections with the rest of the country were sparse and infrequent. As a result, Ladakhis produced almost everything they required: from food to clothing, jewelry and home furnishings. These crafts required a range of skilled workers. For example, each village would have a carpenter family, belonging to the *Mon* families⁴ (who are frequently also

musicians). For gold, silver and iron, the *Sergar* and *Gara* families were engaged. Every village had weavers, millers, and oil-extractors. Above all, farming was the main source of livelihood for Ladakhis. Now, however, these craftsmen and women have taken new jobs and the skills they once possessed are disappearing. The government, thus far, has failed to stem the flow of villagers into the towns and provide incentives to continue this work by establishing sustainable cottage industries. Similarly, farms that once relied on their own animals to provide all labour, food and manure are now diminishing and those that remain are using chemical fertilizers and importing tools and food supplies to supplement the crops they continue to produce. Unless steps are taken to revive these cottage industries and local traditions, the next generations will be totally dependent on external sources of goods and employment that takes them away from the villages or else leaves them unemployed.

If tourism flourishes in Ladakh, it is not because Ladakh is rapidly modernizing. Rather, Ladakh has become, since opening up to foreigners in 1974, a destination for those who are fascinated by its cultural and religious traditions, its unique landscape and its status as one of the last bastions of Tibetan Buddhism. Since the 1980s, the Jammu and Kashmir State Tourism Department has been organizing the annual Ladakh Festival every summer. A similar festival was organized shortly thereafter—called the Indus Festival—that targeted Hindus who wished to explore the origins of the mighty river and bathe in its waters. The number of cultural performances has steadily increased with foreign demand. Thikse, Phyang, Lamayuru and Karsha (Zangskar) *Gonpas*—as well as other smaller monasteries—have all changed their annual festivals to take place in the summer months in order to attract foreign visitors. There has also been a rise in the number of culturally-focused organizations that seek to promote Ladakhi culture as well as profit from it. The growing number of tourists has posed challenges to the infrastructure of the region. Ladakh's future undoubtedly lies with cultural tourism and it is crucial that the

infrastructure adapts to meet this demand, as well as the everyday needs of its indigenous population.

Statistical reports issued by various government agencies—including the Tourism Department—have found that tourism is (or will soon be) the single largest grossing sector of the local economy (agriculture employs the most). While change is constant and cannot be stopped, there is always a risk of losing traditions in the process of adopting modern ways. Tourism brings Ladakh into contact with the whole world and requires new ways of adapting to cultural diversity that it has never needed before.

Architecturally, Ladakh has undergone a rapid transformation. Its palaces, forts and *gonpas* illustrate a strong and creative tradition. The nine-storey Leh Palace is a superb example of Himalayan architecture. It was built over 400 years ago using mud and locally-grown timbers and is still standing today with few problems. The Archeological Survey of India made an attempt to restore a section in need of a new wall and has, for over a decade now, been unable to mimic the form used by Senge Namgyal's builders. Later, Ladakh's Dogra rulers, who designed the main market of Leh, provided the town with a majestic central thoroughfare. Similarly, in the past every Ladakhi village used local materials—mud, timber, and stone—in the construction of its houses. Today, however, owing in part to the influence of modern building techniques, buildings in villages and in towns are more commonly made of concrete, a material less suitable for the harsh Ladakhi climate. This trend in building—coupled with a growing urban population—also contributes to health problems by allowing structures to be built in places that don't allow for proper drainage and heating (i.e. hillsides and in city alleys). This unplanned and haphazard technique has reduced farmlands and the beauty of hillsides, as well as creating urban sprawl. The Hill Council needs to address this growing problem or else face the kind of structural decay and overcrowding that occurs elsewhere in the country. This also threatens the growing tourism industry as it risks harming the rich architectural heritage of our towns and villages.

Finally, and perhaps the greatest threat to the region, climate change poses new and immensely challenging problems for Ladakhis, as well as the rest of the world. It is estimated that the glaciers of the Himalayas may disappear in as little as 50 years. This threatens to create critical problems for natural resources, signs of which have already appeared. In Sabu village, for instance, the lower part of the village has faced water shortages for the past few years owing not only to the expansion of farming in the village's upper region, but also because of the reduction in annual snow melt from the Digar-la range. This affects the crops and livestock that farmers rely on for food. In Leh, where urban growth has caused overcrowding, water must be brought into the city by tanker trucks which operate at a high cost to the government as well as polluting the city's air.

The 20th Bakula Rinpoche, Thubstan Ngawang, born in 2005, will see a very different Ladakh than that which his predecessor helped to shape during his long life. It is, perhaps, comforting to see the continuation of this tradition in the face of such great change.

References

- 1 I was fortunate enough to be among those young students.
- 2 Shakspo and Vyner, *Kushok Bakula Rinpoche: Saint and Statesman*, 2006, p. 121-8.
- 3 In the past, the Kashmiris addressed Ladakhis as *Bhoto* and since they cannot correctly pronounce *Pod-yig*, the language of Ladakh was enlisted by the State Board of Education as *Bodhi* language. In the constitution of Jammu and Kashmir, the language of Ladakh is listed as Ladakhi, which is a proper name as it refers to the region.
- 4 The Buddhist religion condemns caste systems. In Ladakh, however, a caste system has evolved which places the *Gara*, *Mon*, and *Beda* (traditionally wandering beggars and musicians) families at the low end of the social spectrum. See the above chapter on folk songs. For more information on this, please refer to Ferry Erdmann's work on 'Social Stratification in Ladakh' (1981).

Appendix

Excerpt from the speech of Bakula Rinpoche,
December 12, 1952¹

Sir,

The Budget Estimates presented by the Finance Minister evoked reactions amongst the members of this House. My own reaction, I must say clearly, is such as can hardly be called pleasant. The Budget Estimates, if I am to describe them lucidly are extremely disappointing for us unfortunate people of Ladakh, who are professedly the most highly backward and awfully poor people in the whole state. If the Estimate is read from end to the other end, no mention of Ladakh is found anywhere in it. There is no mention of the economic or other requirements of Ladakh, which being so considerably urgent and necessary, merit prompt attention for their fulfillment.

In this estimate, even if very meticulous efforts are made to find, in page after page, any special provision made for the educational progress of the area, all of them will be of no use. Similar is the case with the expansion of the elementary education of the area, which depicts the beckoning, crying picture of the district. The frontier scholarships granted to students of the elementary, secondary, and the college level in the district by the erstwhile government, were revoked with the stroke of a pen by the present government. The same is the case with the restoration of these scholarships. The old government had sanctioned grants-in-aid to the three primary schools of the Shia, Sunni and Buddhist communities, which the present government withdrew. The position of their restoration, too, didn't fare better than the ones mentioned above.

[...]

There are two post offices and two telegraph offices in our area, and one TD Post office at Khalse. In Zangskar, the people of its central place, Padam, have to go to Kargil to find post and telegraph facilities. But can you estimate how far away Padam is from Kargil? It is a hilly one hundred and fifty mile journey in which several mountaintops higher than 12,000 feet high have to be crossed. Now under such circumstances you can yourself imagine how impatient we are that adequate provision be earmarked for the development of transportation and communication in our area. Any such scheme that is formulated should be accomplished in a few years. But I am concerned, Honorable Finance Minister, that not even half a word about Ladakh has come up in even half a place, From the Budget, it seems that in the brains of the Budget makers there is no place called Ladakh, nor has this area been considered to be a part of the state.

Perhaps some people might argue that from *Illaq* (Urdu: area) the government gets a meager income of rupees two lakhs (200,000), and the government has to bear the burden of expenditure of about rupees nine lakhs (900,000). But I cannot help but submit that this heavy amount of nine lakhs is not spent on the development of our area. This is spent solely on the salaries of government employees and other such type of expenditures. In this connection, our area cannot be grateful to the government. Perhaps the very burden of the expenditures of the salaries of the government employees is the reason that no steps are being taken for the development of our area. And this very fact does not seem to substantially take into account that for very long over area has been left backward and that nothing has been done to lift it out of poverty and squalor.

[...]

From Srinagar, a stock of kerosene oil is dispatched for us. But it is not known where the stock is spent. We don't know whether this oil goes to the black market or how is it used. But there is one fact that does oppress us. Even at this time we are required to pay ten rupees for every bottle of kerosene

we buy. Do you think that in these circumstances, when we understand what price we have to pay for an article that we would need to take lessons from outsiders?

[...]

Responsible officers loot our people. For the first time in history, police called from the outside are posted in our area. We could not have imagined that things such as this would ever happen in these present times. From all of these things we have suffered damage. We have succumbed to humiliation. We have been insulted. Are these things that cause indignity, insult or damage done by others that they may involve us in their net? Besides this, we have borne other hardships with patience, and we have been crying under those hardships. Are our cries and lamentations; is our sufferance and embarrassment, the voice of others?

References

- 1 For the full text, please see Shakspe and Vyner, 2006. An extended excerpt is included in the Appendix. The speech was delivered to the Jammu and Kashmir State Legislative Assembly during its Budget hearings.

Genealogy of the Kings of Ladakh from 1000–1842 A.D.

dPal-gyi-mgon (1000-1025)

'Gro-mgon (1025-1050)

Lha-chen Grags-pa-lde (1050-1075)

Lha-chen Byan-chub-sems-dpa (1075-1100)

Lha-chen rGyal-po (1100-1125)

Lha-chen Ut-pa-la (1125-1150)

Lha-chen Nag-lug (1150-1175)

Lha-chen dGe-bhe (1175-1200)

Lha-chen dGe-abun (1175-1200)

Lha-chen Jo-ldor (1220-1225)

bKra-shis-mgon (1225-1250)

Lha-chen Lha-rgyal (1250-1275)

Lha-chen Jo-dpal (1275-1300)

Lha-chen Dnos-grup-mgon (1300-1325)

Lha-chen Rgyal-bu-rin-chen (1325-1350)

Lha-chen Shes-rab (1350-1375)

Lha-chen Khri-gtsug-lde (1375-1400)

Lha-chen Grags-.pa-bum-lde (1400-1440)

Blo-gros-mchog-ldan (1440-1470)

Rin-chen-rnam-rgyal (1470-1500)

Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal (1500-1530) (1555-1575)*

Tshe-dbang-rnam-rgyal (1530-1560) (1575-1595)*

Jams-dbyangs-rnam-rgyal (1560-1590) (1595-1616)*

Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal (1590-1620) (1616-1623)*

Bde-ldan-rnam-rgyal (1620-1640) (1642-1694)*

Bde-legs-rnam-rgyal (1640-1680) (1680-1691)*

Nyi-ma-rnam-rgyal (1680-1720) (1694-1723)*

Bde-skyong-rnam-rgyal (1720-1740) (1729-1739)*

Bu-khrid-dbang-mo (1740-1750)

Phun-tshogs-rnam-rgyal (1750-1760) (1739-1753)*

Tse-dbang-rnam-rgyal (1760-1780) (1753-1782)*

Tse-brtan-rnam-rgyal (1780-1790) (1782-1802)*

Tse-dpal-don-grup-rnam-rgyal (1790-1830) (1802-1837)*

Tse-dbang-rab-brtan (Prince *Mchog-sprul*) (d. 1839)

Jigs-med-sen-gey-mig yur-kun-dga-rnam-rgyal (1840-1842)

References

- * These dates are estimates based on the works of Tashi Rabgias (1984). Luciano Petech (1977) offers differing dates following the reign of *Rin-chen-rnam-rgyal*. We have chosen to give both sets of dates to illustrate the discrepancies in documenting these periods accurately. Petech's (*) follow those of Rabgias.

List of Illustrations

Cover image: Padmasambhava with *mKha-agro-Yeshes-mtso-rgyal* and *Lha-lcham-man-dha-ra-wa* at Basgo Maitreya temple (upper). (Kyle Gardner)

View of Leh bazaar, 1894 (Author's collection).

View of the new Mini-Secretariat in Leh (photo by Dorje Kaya).

View of Leh town, 1914 (Author's collection).

Ladakhis and soldiers surrounding one of the first aircraft to arrive in Leh, 1949 (Author's collection).

Map taken from P.N. Sharma's "The Ladakh Affair," showing the range of the Chinese invasion of 1962 (Author's collection).

Prime Minister Nehru in Ladakhi dress in Leh, 1949 (Author's collection).

Ladakhi Musicians (Author's collection).

A Muslim wedding (photo by Karl-Einar Lofqvist).

A Buddhist marriage celebration (photo by Karl-Einar Lofqvist).

Elderly woman wearing a goat hide (Author's collection).

A religious gathering in Zangskar (photo by Karl-Einar Lofqvist)

Men wearing traditional dress in Leh (Author's collection).

Newly built statue of Maitreya at Likir *Gonpa* (photo by Kyle Gardner).

Maitreya statue at Mulbek (photo by Rinchen Angmo).

Wooden Maitreya statue at Sumda village (photo by Dorje Kaya).

Young Ladakhis in traditional dress (Author's collection).

Ladakhi Dancers (Author's collection).

Rizong *Gonpa*, founded by Lama Tsultrim Nyima in 1834 (photo by Rinchen Angmo).

Sras Rinpoche, the first Ladakhi to assume the position of Ganden *Khri-pa* (Tsong-kha-pa throne-holder), performing a puja at Rizong *Gonpa* (photo by Rinchen Angmo).

Spituk *Gonpa* (photo by Kyle Gardner).

Kushok Bakula Rinpoche and Gergan Sonam in the 1950s (Author's collection).

Bakula Rinpoche visiting Karsha *Gonpa* in Zangskar (Author's collection).

Shawa dance at Lamayuru *Gonpa* (photo by Karl-Einar Lofqvist).

Dance of Guru Shakya Sen-gey at Hemis Tsheshu (Author's collection).

Janak dance at Thikse Gustor (photo by Karl-Einar Lofqvist).

Monks on the roof of Thikse *Gonpa* (photo by Karl-Einar Lofqvist).

Mani wall at Hemis *Gonpa* (photo by Dorje Kaya).

Historical *lha-tho* at Basgo (photo by Kyle Gardner).

Lha-chang and *klu-bang* at Likir *Gonpa* (photo by Kyle Gardner).

Chorten with the historical palace of Chitgan in the background (Author's collection).

The author with Bakula Rinpoche on the Penzi-la. (Author's collection)

Map of the greater Himalayan region (Neil Howard).

Map of Greater Ladakh (Neil Howard).

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A Cultural History of Ladakh is a comprehensive account of the history and culture of this remote Himalayan region—once known as Western Tibet—from the earliest times up to the present. The author discusses the arrival of Buddhism to the region, the growth of the Ladakhi kingdom, its relations with neighboring Buddhist states and its eventual incorporation into Jammu and Kashmir State. Throughout the book Nawang Tsering Shakspo draws on local histories and biographies to illustrate the larger historical trends. The second half of the book is devoted to Ladakh's rich cultural heritage: its songs, dances and folk customs. It concludes with a discussion of the future of Ladakh, which is undergoing a tremendous transformation. This is a unique book written by one of Ladakh's foremost scholars.

