Kargil district in the Ladakh region is an important part of the Jammu and Kashmir State. Historically, Kargil has occupied an important strategic and trading place. Geographically speaking it is surrounded by Srinagar and Doda in the South-West, Leh in the East, Himachal Pradesh in the South and Baltistan (now in Pakistan occupied Kashmir) in the North-West. The whole of district is mountainous with many parallel ranges of trans-Himalayas; namely the Nun-Kun, Zangskar, Drass and Ladakh. In between these ranges, the Suru, Indus and Shingo rivers flow where most of the populations live. The two elevated mountain passes Zojila and Fotulla are situated at the height of 11700 and 13750 feet above sea level which are called ‘Gateways to Kashmir and Leh’. Kargil district witnesses both arctic and desert climate therefore, often called “arctic arid region”. The seasonal fluctuation of temperature varies from minus 35° Celsius in winter and plus 30° Celsius in summer. In the Drass area of Kargil district temperature drops to minus 48° Celsius in winter, which is also the second coldest inhabited place in the world after Siberia.

Kargil district is represented by four important ethnic groups, which are Purgis, Baltis, Dardis and Zangskaris. The Purgis are Tibeto-Mongoloids they came from Tibet and settled Eastern and Central Kargil. No doubt majority of the population in Kargil district is belongs to Purgi ethnic group. The Dards (Indo-Aryan) locally known as Brogpas (highlanders) who settled in Drass tehsil and the two villages of Darchik and Garkun in Kargil district. The Baltis as the name suggests came from Baltistan (now in Pakistan occupied Kashmir). The Baltis are settled in Kargil town. The Purgis, Baltis and Dards are Muslims mostly Shia. Only a section of Purgis who are settled in Mulbekh, Bodhkarbu, Sapi, Sharole and Fokar villages are practising Tibetan Buddhism. The Zangskaris who settled in Zangskar tehsil in Kargil district are also the followers of Buddhism. The Dards of Kargil who are living in Darchik and Garkun villages on the banks of Indus River are Buddhist, however, their ritual practices are mixed with the Bon religion, the worshiper of animistic and totemistic cult, before the advent of Buddhism in the region. The languages spoken include such as Purgi, Zangskari, Balti and Shina.
In the end we could say that Kargil is the home to Shia Muslims and Buddhists because majority of the people are the followers of the above mentioned two religions.

The purpose of this study is to understand various aspects of Muslim and Buddhist society and culture of Kargil district with reference to traditional and informal components of the region. In order to examine the society and culture of Kargil Ladakh in historical perspective the study of both Muslim and Buddhist society is important. Buddhist society of Leh district of Ladakh region has been largely studied by scholars across the world. However, the socio-cultural aspect of Muslims and Buddhists of Kargil district of Ladakh region has been briefly explored by the historians and other social scientists.

Kargil has bore the brunt of numerable external attacks throughout the ages resulting in the blend of different races and cultures. Their social life in the second half of twentieth century forms a theme which is interesting. Their religion and religious elements form an essential and important aspect of social life in Kargil. Here, Muslims and Buddhists have co-existed harmoniously for ages, without conflict between their religious practices and beliefs. In everyday dealings of life, people have derived their authority more or less from religious code of conduct.

Their devotion to traditions, and deep impact of customs, habits, rites and rituals and their will to retain ‘status quo’ had been the main aspect of their life. They were maintaining continuity to their traditional institutions; people were following certain social laws, cultures and customs, which their ancestors had been observing, from centuries. Nevertheless, the society has not been static. ‘Change is the law of nature’, which is the universal truth. As similar to other societies of the world, in Kargil also the Muslims and Buddhists have maintained some aspects of their society and inevitably some changes also have been seen.

Culture has been an essential instrument which played an important role in the identity formation of the people of Kargil and their identity was the result of their culture. In Kargil the people had been practising their traditional cultural traits from centuries. In different social platforms, the Muslims and Buddhists of Kargil have always asserted the superiority of their culture. At various cultural and social occasions, they had no hesitation to exhibit the different facets of their culture. Their history, geography, climate, ethnicity, religion and economic sustenance all had been the contributing
factors of their unique culture. Earlier the cultural and trading contacts with those of Tibet, and Baltistan before 1947 had profound impact on their way of life. The culture of both Muslims and Buddhists in the area were largely customary. The different cultures of two communities had various aspects. It comprises language, beliefs, rituals, customs, food habits, dresses, ornaments, housing patterns, household materials etc. Moreover, impact of religion also can be seen in their cultural activities in a big way. The thesis has been divided into seven chapters.

The first chapter ‘Introduction: An Overview of Kargil District of Ladakh Region’ starts with the summary of Ladakh region and Kargil district. Its geography, agriculture, demography, administration and historical background have been discussed in this chapter.

The second chapter ‘Society: Family, Village and Social Stratification’ deals with the study of the society of Muslims and Buddhists of Kargil and its various aspects. The chapter has given a complete insight of Muslim joint family system, Buddhist joint family system, role of attaa (father) and role of amma (mother) within the spectrum of Muslim and Buddhist family system in Kargil. The chapter has also highlighted the law of inheritance among Muslims and Buddhists in Kargil district. Moreover, village life, seasonal activities in villages, division of labour, role of village headman, communal bonding within the village, village level medical practitioners, local oracle healer and social stratification has also been discussed thoroughly in the present chapter.

The third chapter ‘Marriage, Birth and Death Rituals’ aims to examine the marriage, birth and death rituals of Muslims and Buddhists of Kargil. The chapter has analyzed the marriage ceremonies, types of marriages, statistics of marital status, marriage customs, dowry system, divorce, polyandry and polygamy among the Muslims and the Buddhists of Kargil separately.

The fourth chapter ‘Status of the Women of Kargil’ has analyzed the social and economic life of women in Kargil. It has also highlighted the education, inheritance, welfare schemes and social changes taking place among the women in Kargil district during the period of study.

The fifth chapter ‘Culture’ reveals the culture and its various facets in Kargil. The various aspects of the local culture of Muslims and Buddhists, which includes
languages, dialects, folklores, folk songs, literature and poets have been discussed. The focus also has been given on material culture such as housing architecture, household articles, food, drinks and dresses and ornaments.

The sixth chapter ‘Religion of the People of Kargil’ examines the religion and religious life of the people of Kargil district. It focuses on the earlier history of Buddhism and Shia Muslims of the Kargil district. Moreover, their religious institutions, curriculums, beliefs and practices, role of *Lamas* (monks), *Shia ulemas* (Shia Muslim religious scholars) and their religious festivals has been discussed elaborately in this chapter.

The seventh chapter ‘Conclusion’ examines the findings of the study. It invariably is summing-up of the whole research works.

**Review of Literature**

Kargil Ladakh due to its severe cold climate and isolated geographical position in the Northern trans-Himalayan region, the area has remained neglected by historian and scholars. It was only during and after the colonial period of 19th century AD some British administrators, missionaries, travellers and adventurers had written some books on history, geography and society of Ladakh. However, it is very important to mention here that these writers had only studied and written on the Buddhist culture of Leh Ladakh and ignored the half of the population of Kargil Ladakh which consisted of Shia’ Muslim and Buddhists. Following are the review of few literature written by European as well as Indian scholars.

**J.N Ganhar & P.N Ganhar (1956), “Buddhism in Kashmir and Ladakh”** the authors try to examine the Buddhist religion in Kashmir and Ladakh. The writers have presented virtues of Buddhist and its influence on the people’s nature, which include honesty, truthfulness, and tolerance. Crime is practically nonexistence in Ladakh in early fifties as mentioned by the authors. The authors narrate the Buddhist faith and also have discussed about the *mon* (low caste). According to the authors’ *Mons* are the original inhabitants of the territory. The writers have discussed in book detailed, socio-religious life of Kashmir and Ladakh. The small gap in the book is that the writers has not discussed about the Kargil where many important monasteries and Buddha’s images exist.

Nirmala Bora (2004) “Ladakh, Society and Economy” talked about the society, economy and culture of Ladakh. The author has discussed the local very briefly.

A.H Francke (1977) “A History of Ladakh” throws light on the important social, cultural, political and religious aspects of Ladakh. He tries to examines how Greek and Roman authors researched and written about the nation of western Tibet (Ladakh). The author has produced a classic work on the history of Ladakh. In his particular book. Despite few variations, Francke’s book is one of the masterpiece on the Leh. But his focus on Kargil is very less.

Wahid Siddiq (1981) “Ladakh between Earth and Sky” gives us insight about the history of Ladakh. It is mentioned in his book that the two ethnic groups Mon and Dard, both of whom where early inhabitants of the area. The author has briefed about the community life and present scenario of Ladakh. The Kargil district, which is important part of Ladakh, has been excluded by author which needs to be explored.

Hari Om (1998) “Beyond the Kashmir Valley” the writer in his book has provided extensive discussions on the political turmoil of Jammu and Kashmir and the ethnic minorities in the state. The author has discussed only Buddhist communities of Ladakh and says Buddhist of Ladakh is patriotic, the writer did not mention the patriotism of the Muslims of Kargil in his book, whom defended their country with courage and bravery in the four wars with Pakistan on 1948, 1965, 1971 and 1999. Hari Om has excluded the people of Kargil and their sacrifices given by them for their country; thousands of civilians lost their lives as soldiers, compulsory porters and military workers.

Janet Rizvi (1983) in her book “Ladakh, Crossroads of High Asia” mentioned the overall geographical location of Ladakh. The writer has thoroughly discussed in the book about the history, society, culture and Buddhism and Islam in Leh Ladakh. In her work, the author has honestly accepted that she could not study the Muslims and Buddhists of Kargil district. No doubt the book of Janet Rizvi is very useful for present research but to a limited extent.
Inferences Drawn from Review of Literature

The review of above mentioned literature has been made. It is evident that the social and cultural life of the people of Ladakh has been studied only in fragmented basis. The work has done by scholars are mainly concentrated on Leh district of Ladakh region and left another important district of Ladakh which is Kargil. We would say very less research has been done on their geography, history, society, culture, religion and many other aspects. Without the proper study of the Kargil of the Ladakh region, we would not say that the proper research done on Ladakh. The theme intends to make a holistic study of the Kargil Ladakh, which has its extreme social, cultural and historical importance.

Research Methodology

The research methodology of the present study includes both primary and secondary sources. The historical, interdisciplinary and analytical approach has been taken into consideration while using primary and secondary sources. For the present study the archival material has been collected from National archives at Delhi, Kashmir archives at Srinagar, Jammu archives at Jammu. The Official documents and unpublished manuscripts of Jammu and Kashmir State have been consulted. A close scrutiny of the pre and post independence official writings such as administrative reports, gazetteers, census reports, linguistic surveys, assessments reports, glossaries, statistical data, village survey reports, accounts of archaeological survey, and sociological and ethnographic writings. Information has also been gathered during field trips carried out by the researcher in Kargil district. Personal interviews have been taken from local people. Religious literature was consulted to know the religious aspects of the Muslims and Buddhists of Kargil. Oral traditions like folk songs and local epics were explored. Revenue records were also consulted from revenue officials. Urdu literature has been consulted to know the social and cultural dynamics of Kargil. Both qualitative and quantitative method was used to know the aspects of their society. Interdisciplinary methods and participatory observation methods have been used to know every aspect of society and culture of the people of Kargil in a historical perspective. An attempt has been made to present the facts in an analytical manner, so that the work becomes as objective as possible.