CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

To conclude, Ladakh’s cultural ties with Buddhist Tibet were close and consistent for centuries. Even during the conflict between Ladakh and Tibet in the 1680s, the cultural relations between the two countries continued. This is illustrated by the fact that the peace treaty of the conflict was signed in 1684 by the effort of the 6th ‘Brug-c’en’ Mi-p’am-dban-po (1641-1717 A. D.), the head lama of the Brug-pa sub-sect in Tibet, who came to Ladakh in 1683-84. The cultural aspects played a significant role in developing close relations between Ladakh and Buddhist Tibet.

This thesis has placed importance mainly on the religious and spiritual factors, besides trade. I briefly summarize here the main points that have been analyzed.

It is certain that before the Tibetan influence, the cultural influence on Ladakh was from Kashmir. But very little remains as evidence except some rock-carvings. The first important and widespread cultural influence from Tibet came with the establishment of the first Ladakhi dynasty rule in the tenth century. The origin of the first Ladakhi dynasty is connected with the decline of and fall of the Tibetan monarchy.

There were several important mediums through which the Tibetan influences came to Ladakh; there were the lama missionaries, trade and pilgrimage,
the Ladakhi lamas' monastic education in Tibet, and the royal patronage to Mahayana Buddhism.

Lama missionaries played an important role in the spread and development of Mahayana Buddhism in Ladakh. Many important lamas from Tibet and other areas visited Ladakh. Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo, Chos-rje Gdan-ma, and Stag-tsan-Ras-pa, etc., were some of the important lamas who visited Ladakh and played a vital role in development of religious and spiritual ties between Ladakh and Buddhist Tibet. The more lama missionaries were active, the more diffusion of Mahayana Buddhism in the area.

Monastic education of Ladakhi monks in Tibet was another important medium through which Mahayana Buddhism from Tibet came to Ladakh. Tibet became an important center for monastic education and many Lamas from Ladakh went to the different monasteries in Tibet for studies. After coming back from Tibet, they played an important role in spreading Mahayana Buddhism in their native places. Many royal princes also became monks and went for higher studies to Tibet. After returning to Ladakh, they became heads of important monasteries and played an important role in the spread of monastic education in Ladakh. For example, King Deldan Namgyal's second son named Lobsang Nawang Puntsog studied at the university of Brans-spun, and after nine years study he obtained the high degree of dge-bses-rab-byams-pa. After coming back from Tibet, he was appointed the abbot of Thikse monastery.

There are still today more than one hundred monks in various monasteries in Ladakh, who have been to Tibet for monastic education. They are still active in
religious activities of the monasteries and teaching the younger monks. The hallmark of Ladakhi lamas was their perusing a comprehensive study in various branches of Buddhist studies in some renowned monastic institution in Tibet, and for the lamas, a visit to Lhasa, their spiritual home, was a cherished dream. There are two reasons why the lamas went to Tibet. First of all, the Mahayana Buddhism came directly from Tibet to the Himalayan areas, and secondly, Tibet in due course of time became a centre of Mahayana Buddhism and the residence of leading Lamas who taught Mahayana Buddhism.

Both lama missionaries and the monastic education of Ladakhi monks in Tibet contributed towards the construction of various monasteries, stupas and other religious structures in Ladakh. Monastic organization and monastic education was a sustaining factor in the relationship between Ladakh and Buddhist Tibet.

Trade and pilgrimage was another important medium through which the Tibetan influences impacted Ladakh. The trade relation between Ladakh and Buddhist Tibet is an old one. It is quite possible that the inhabitants of Ladakh felt the Tibetan influence as early as mid-seventh century, for the nomadic Tibetans of Changthang (Western Tibet) would have good reasons to have contact with the sedentary Mon and Dard, exchanging grains for the animal products. Then came the two trade missions called ‘Lapchak’ and ‘Cha-pa’ between Ladakh and Buddhist Tibet, which were setup as the result of the Tinmosgang Treaty. This treaty brought to an end the three-corner conflict between Ladakh, Tibet and the Moghul Empire, and established the border between Ladakh and Tibet, and some trade regulation especially about wool and pashm. The Lapchak mission went from Leh to Lhasa.
once in every three years. The king of Ladakh was to send offerings to Buddhist Tibet for the Smon-lam festival and for the blessing of the Dalai Lama. In return, the Tibetan government sent an annual trade caravan from Lhasa to Leh, popularly known as the Cha-pa mission or ‘tea man’, as the mission used to come with loads of tea. This mission gave rise to a number of lesser missions. The major monasteries sent half-religious and half-commercial missions to Tibet. The participants ranged from the big merchants to ordinary peasants, from bigger monasteries to a Lama entrepreneur. The two missions were the most important manifestation of the close relationship existing between Ladakh and Buddhist Tibet.

The Tibet influence continued for centuries and was felt in every village of Ladakh. Tibetan influences can be seen on Ladakhi language, literature, dress, customs, food and drinks. As regards religion, the four major sects and several subsects of Mahayana Buddhism were developed in Ladakh. Besides, Tibetan influence can also be seen on the Ladakhi architecture, astrology and paintings.

The advent of Mahayana Buddhism in the Himalayan states where the people were having faith in primitive religions did not create any serious conflict, as they were peaceful diffusions. Mahayana Buddhist ideas and values, which came into contact with the indigenous culture, ecology and psyche of the Himalayan people added into the Himalayan character.

The survey of the early and the medieval Ladakhi history, characterized by the establishment of the first Ladakhi kingdom of Tibetan origin and then the emergence of the rNamgyal dynasty, and their patronage of Tibetan Buddhism propagated and sustained Ladakh's spiritual ties with Buddhist Tibet. The emphasis
shifted to primarily Buddhist preoccupations such as the patronage and support of the construction of monasteries and stupas in Ladakh, and moved away from violence as a policy and way of life of the entire population. In terms of long historical development and evolution, Ladakh earned the present day reputation as a peaceful Buddhist community.

**Problems and Prospects**

The tradition of going to Tibet for education, which continued for hundreds of years, was suddenly stopped when the Chinese occupied Tibet. Most of the monks from Ladakh had to come back. This abrupt end would have had a major impact on the standard of monastic educational levels in Ladakh. But luckily three important developments have worked in Ladakh’s favour. First of all, the monks who came back to Ladakh after the Chinese occupation of Tibet played a major role in teaching the young monks in Ladakh, and soon a Buddhist institute named the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies was established in 1959 at Leh, where initially novices from different monasteries in Ladakh came for their education. Secondly, the major monasteries in Ladakh set up their own schools in their monasteries. Lastly, with the establishment of the Tibetan government-in-exile in India and the establishment of some Tibetan monastic institutions in India, many monks from Ladakh go to these institutions for higher education. Some of these institutions are in Karnataka and few other places in India, where many well-known teachers from Tibet are teaching.
At present all the major monasteries in Ladakh have their own schools. In these schools, besides the monastic education, they teach subjects like mathematics, social sciences and Hindi and English languages. Many novices are studying in these schools and after the completion of their courses they go for higher studies to the Tibetan institutions in southern India and few other places.

Relevance of the reopening of the border

The effect of the traditional relationships, which continued for hundreds of years between Ladakh and Buddhist Tibet were felt in nearly every village in Ladakh. The links of the relationship disappeared after the Chinese occupation of Tibet, when the borders were closed. Of late, India and China have made progress in boosting economic ties, prompting both sides to look at opening up new routes to encourage cross-border trade. In June 2003, India and China agreed to open the border trade along the eastern stretch of the rugged Himalayan border between Sikkim and Tibet. In this changed environment, the people of Ladakh are optimistic about the opening of the old trade route through Demchok on the Ladakhi side and Tashigang on the Tibetan side. Trade and subsistence agriculture have been the Ladakhis' only livelihood through the ages. At the moment there is no border trade, but there is smuggling and goods-selling in the streets of Leh. There is no reason why this old trade route should not be reopened. Reopening of the route will benefit both the local economy as well as the government trade. Since age-old routes and relationships already exist, they only need the government approval to start functioning again, leading to economic
benefits for both India and China. As India & China work towards greater cooperation in the economic sphere, Ladakh as an economic area of activity should be focused upon.

The hope for Ladakhis is the restoration of normal border trading and cultural relations between them and Tibet. The opening of the old trade routes will not only help trade in the region but also promote pilgrimages and tourism.