CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Geographical Background

Ladakh is the northernmost part of Jammu and Kashmir State, linked with the Kashmir valley by the Zogila pass (3529 meters) and forms a part of the trans-Himalayas. It is one of the most elevated regions of the earth, the altitudes ranging from 3000 meters to 7000 meters. It lies roughly between 32 to 36 North latitudes and 76 to 79 East longitudes.

The chief mountain ranges in Ladakh are the Karakoram, Zanskar and Ladakh. The highest mountain in Ladakh is the Karakoram, situated on the north-east of the Shayok and Nubra valleys. The Ladakh range has no major peak; its average height is a little less than 6,000 meters, and a few of its passes are less than 5,000 meters. The Indus valley is bounded to the south by the Zanskar range.

Ladakh has been referred by many names, the most common being Ladakh, or in Tibetan La-dvags, the land of many passes. Formerly, it was also called “dMar-yul” or lowland or Red-land. Ladakh consists of various regions known as Zanskar, Suru valley, Rupshu, Nubra valley and Central Ladakh situated along the different rivers.

---

2 Ibid., p. 12.
3 Ibid., p. 12.
Nubra Valley

Nubra valley or the northwestern part of Ladakh is situated along the Shayok and the Nubra rivers.\(^6\) It is separated from Central Ladakh by the Kardongla pass, about 18380 feet high. The road to Nubra valley that was constructed across Kardongla is the highest motorable road in the world. The famous caravan route from Leh to Yarkand passes through Nubra valley. The average altitude of the valley is 10000 feet. The lower villages of this valley are as warm as the lower portion of Central Ladakh, while the upper villages enjoy a moderate climate.

Central Ladakh

This region is composed of upper, central and lower Ladakh, situated along the Indus river. It stretches along the Indus from South-east to North-west of Ladakh, covering a total area of about 4,000 square miles, and an average altitude of the inhabited portions is about 11,500 feet.\(^7\) It is also called the Indus valley, and is the most populous area of Ladakh. Besides Nubra valley, Central Ladakh forms another fertile track in Ladakh. Historically and culturally it has formed the heartland of Ladakh.

Zanskar

Zanskar lies to the southwest of Leh. It has an area of some 3000 square miles and an average elevation of 13000 feet, and comprises the country lying along the two main tributaries of the Zanskar River.\(^8\) The first one, the Doda, called in Tibetan \textit{dPon-rtse-chu}, has its source at the base of the glacier which descends towards Zanskar near the mountain-pass.

\(^{6}\) Ibid. p. 21.
known as Penzila (dPon-rtse-la), and it then flows along the main valley leading towards Padum, the capital of Zanskar.\(^9\)

The second tributary is formed by two sub-tributaries known as Kurgiakh-chu with its source near the Shingo-La and Tsarap-chu with its source near the Baralacha-La. These two rivers unite below the village of Purne to form the Lingti (Tibetan Lung-nak).\(^{10}\) The Lung-nak-chu then flows northwestwards along a narrow and precipitous gorge towards the Padum Valley where it unites with the Doda river to form the Zanskar river. The Zanskar river then takes a northeastern course until it joins the Indus river opposite the village of Nimu in Leh.

Zanskar is bounded in the north by Ladakh. To the west and northwest are Kasthawar and Purig. To the south it borders with Lahul and to the east is Rupshu.

Communication with the neighbouring Himalayan areas is maintained across mountain passes or along the Zanskar river when it is frozen. The easiest approach leads from Kargil through the Suru Valley and over the Pensi La. It is along this track that in 1979 the first and only road in Zanskar was built to connect Padum with the main road from Srinagar into Ladakh. The remoteness of this region also explains why only a few western travellers have visited this area until recent times, the Tibetologist Alexander Csoma de Koros in 1823 being probably one of the first.\(^{11}\)

Culturally and religiously it has retained close contacts with Ladakh, Guge and Tibet. Its political status depended upon the strengths and weaknesses of her neighbours, especially

---

9. Ibid. p. 3.
10. Ibid. p. 3.
Ladakh, and in the 17th century it was annexed to Ladakh by king Sen-ge rNamgyal (1616-42) A. D. 12

Rupshu

Rupshu is an area at the south-east end of Ladakh, lying between the watershed range and the Indus. 13 It the most elevated area in Ladakh. 14 The lowest ground is as much as 13,500 feet above the sea, and the long flat valley is at 15,000 feet, while the mountains that surround it have a height of 20,000 to 21,000 feet. 15 It high altitude and extreme climate render the region unsuitable for agriculture. Pastoralism, practiced in various forms, is the only form of livelihood there. Various animals including yaks and pashmina goat are found in the area. This high altitude and extreme climate make this region a natural habitat of the pashmina goat whose soft wool is known throughout the world. 16 The presence of a salt lake called the Tso-kar or White Lake, and the Tso-Moriri lake are unique features of the area.

Rupshu is bounded on the north by Central Ladakh, on the east by the Tibetan district of Chumusti, and on the south by Lahul Spiti. 17 Historically the region has connected the trade of Ladakh with different countries including Tibet and India.

Suru, Dras and Purik

These are three areas to the west of Zanskar, on the high road between Kashmir and Leh. 18 Dras is the most westerly among them. According to A. Cunningham "its Tibetan

12 David L. Snellgrove and Tadeusz Skorupski, op. cit. 8, p. 11.
14 A. Cunningham, op. cit. 5, p. 22.
15 Frederic Drew, op. cit. 13, p. 296.
16 Foreign Department, Political. A. Branch, Nos. 21-24, Consultation September 1875.
17 A. Cunningham, op. cit. 5, p. 21.
18 Ibid. p. 22.
name of hem-babs (snowfed or snow descended) is descriptive of its most striking peculiarity, as the most snowing districts of Ladakh.”

Spiti and Lahul

The two form the southern districts of Ladakh. “Spiti comprises the whole valley of the Spiti river, from its source to the junction of the para,” comprising about 1,900 square miles. Lahul comprises the valleys of the Chandra and Bhaga rivers, as well as that of the Chandra and Bhaga (united stream) following upto Treloknath, where the Chenab river enters Chamba. It is about sixty-eight miles in length and thirty-four miles in breadth, which gives an area of 2,312 square miles.

In 1846, when Gulab Singh became the Maharaja of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, the British India government detached Spiti and Lahul from Ladakh and added it to the Kulu subdivision of Kangra district of Punjab under their control. Thus, these areas are the natural divisions of Ladakh and formed administrative units under the native rulers.

Today, Ladakh comprises of two districts, namely Leh and Kargil. For its administrative bifurcation in 1979, Kargil was carved out comprising two tehsils, namely Kargil and Zanskar having 129 villages and a geographical area of about 14,000 square kilometers. At the time of the 1971 census there were 238 villages in the entire district of
Ladakh having a geographical area of 95,876 square kilometers including the areas of Ladakh occupied by China and Pakistan).  

**Sources**

This study is based on various sources. The unpublished records are available with the National Archives of India, New Delhi, State Archives, Jammu and District Archives, Leh. These records deal mostly with the trade of Ladakh from 1867 onwards. Oral sources are the interviews with the monks, from Lamayuru, Rigzong, Likir, Spituk (dPe-t’up), Thiksay and Disket monasteries in Ladakh. There are ninety-six monks in these monasteries who had been to Tibet for their monastic education. It was fortunate that when we visited these monasteries in the summer 2004, monks were assembled for the Mandala prayers in most of the monasteries. Besides, the La-dvags rgyal-rabs, the Chronicle of Ladakh, the Tibetan texts published in A. H. Francke (1926), and few other Tibetan Texts are also used. For the names and translations of the Tibetan texts into the Roman alphabets, we tried to use those forms adopted in the modern books in western language. Written Tibetan has a number of unpronounced prefixes, and thus the radical consonant of any syllable may be the second or even third litter, e.g. dPe-t’up is pronounced as Pe-t’up. Also the travelogues and books in western language on the religion, culture and history of Ladakh and Tibet are consulted.

The present day population of Ladakh is a mixed race, the chief of which are the Tibetan (Mongoloid) and the Dardic (Indo-Iranian). Ladakh is known not only for its strategic location but also for its culture. Ladakh, along with Sikkim, Bhutan and Mustang are

---

27 Ibid. p. 8
28 Details informations have been given Chapter Two.
some of the places in the cis-Himalayan states where Tibetan Buddhism continues to be practiced as a living religion, as it has been for a thousand years. These cis-Himalayan states have had a long and consistent cultural relation with Buddhist Tibet. This study takes Ladakh as a case study to demonstrate that general thesis. It is an attempt at examining Ladakh's deep traditional relations with Buddhist Tibet.

Methodology

The approach of the research subject has been basically two pronged-descriptive and analytical. Under the former, the historical aspect has been covered, and within the analytical approach, the conclusion has been derived from the first-hand information gathered from the monks who have been to Tibet for monastic education and some interviews with local traders have also been included.

Historical Background

The term 'cultural relation' can be interpreted to include a number of aspects like paintings, sculpture, dance, music, films, theatre, literature, and so on. But here I am emphasizing the religious and spiritual ties, not the political, either implicit or deduced.

The Tibetan polity and its culture have been decisively shaped by Buddhism, which having originated in India assumed particular characteristics in the Tibetan setting, both in its doctrine and its practice. Gautama Buddha founded Buddhism around 2500 years ago. The changes and developments within Indian Buddhism in its long history were enormous. It was during this long period that it gradually became the religion of most of Asia. Buddhism disappeared from India at the end of the 12th century at the time of the Islamic arrival. By that time Buddhism was already well established in Tibet.
Tibet becomes Mahayana Buddhist centre

Buddhism was first introduced to Tibet in the 5th century, but for the first two hundred years its impact was not so strong. In the 7th century, King Songtsen Gampo gave firmer footing to Buddhism. He married two princesses, one who was from Nepal and the other who was from China. The two princesses played a major role in influencing the king to take an interest in Buddhism and he in turn used his influence to spread Buddhism in Tibet.

Another famous king, Tisong Detsen ruled over Tibet during the latter half of the 8th century. It was during his reign that Santrakshita and Guru Padmasambhava, masters of Buddhism, were invited to Tibet from India. Padmasambhava, better known in Tibet, as Guru Rinpoche. He built the first Buddhist Monastery around 766-767 A.D. in Tibet. The great debate on whether the Tibetan king should choose the Indian form of Buddhism or the Chinese form took place during King Tisong Detsen's time. The Indian Buddhist master won the debate and the king decided for the Indian version of Buddhism.

The translation of Buddhist Sanskrit texts into Tibetan began under King Ralpachen (814-836 A.D). The king invited many Indian masters to Tibet who engaged in the translation of Buddhist texts along with Tibetan collaborations. The above three kings, Songtsen Gampo, Tisong Detsen and Ralpachen, were the outstanding figures, both in war and peace, among the kings of Tibet. They are known to Tibetans as, 'The three religious kings, and men of power'.

Then came the 9th century and King Lang Dharma who was anti Buddhist. He persecuted the Buddhist Sanga and destroyed many temples. After Lang Dharma, Tibet disintegrated into a number of principalities and the central power of Tibet also disappeared. Central Tibet was hardest hit by the following Dark Age. But in Western Tibet, particularly in
Guge and Purang, the political fragmentation and the decline of Buddhism were not so long lived. It was in Western Tibet that Buddhism was rekindled and less than two centuries after the anti Buddhist persecution by Lang Dharma, Buddhism was revived in Tibet. The moving spirit behind this Buddhist renaissance, which started in western Tibet, was to be found in two holy men, Rinchen Zangpo, the translator (958-1055 A. D)\textsuperscript{30}, and the great Indian Buddhist saint Atisa (982-1052 A. D). These two were the initiators of what Buddhist historians call the second spread of Buddhism in Tibet.

All the formation of the four major sects of Tibetan Buddhism, the rNin-ma-pa sect, the bKa-gyud-pa sect, the Sa-skya-pa sect and the Ge-lug-pa sect took place in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century in terms of doctrine, practice and the monastic organizations. Soon Tibet became a centre of Mahayana Buddhism. Buddhism brought tremendous changes in the Tibetan society. As Prof. Norbu said, "it changed from warrior nation to a peaceful community, from warrior kings to Lama rulers, from Bonpo magic to Buddhist rationality and from violence to compassion."	extsuperscript{31} Vajrayana Buddhism spread from Tibet to the Himalayan States of Ladakh, Mustang, Sikkim and Bhutan.

**Cultural Relations between Ladakh and Buddhist Tibet**

Buddhism in Ladakh first came from Kashmir and some of its remains can still be seen in Ladakh but the real influence came from Tibetan Buddhism. Ladakh appears to have come into contact with Tibet in the 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} centuries, when the latter not only conquered western Tibet but also dictated terms to China.


With the establishment of the Ladakhi kingdom in the 10th century, Ladakh shared with Tibet the development of some Lamaic institutions. Tibetan cultural influence has been simply uniform. From the point of view of language, it has provided Ladakh with the western Tibetan dialect which is still generally spoken to this day by Ladakhi Muslims as much as Buddhists. As far as literature is concerned, the regular style of literary Tibetan has remained current in Ladakh from 10th century onwards. Tibetan influence can also be seen on the Ladakhi dress, customs, food and drink. The Ladakhi dress ‘goncha’ is an adaptation of the Tibetan ‘chuba’. Both Ladakh and Tibet have the same staple food, ‘tsampa’ or barley flour and ‘chang’, a mildly alcoholic drink made of fermented barley. As regards religion, the major sects and the several sub-sects like the Bri-gung-pa and Brug-pa of Tibetan Buddhism were developed in Ladakh. Besides, Tibetan influence can also be seen on the Ladakhi architecture, astrology and paintings. Ladakh’s religious and spiritual ties with Buddhist Tibet were very close for centuries. In terms of historical developments and evolution, Ladakh earned the present-day reputation as a peaceful Buddhist community.

There were three most important tools through which Mahayana Buddhism from Tibet spread to Ladakh. They were the lama missionaries, monastic education of the Ladakhi monks in Tibet and pilgrimage and trade.

**Lama missionaries**

Sending missionaries is not a new concept in Buddhism. In fact, it goes back to the time of King Ashoka, who sent missionaries to different countries. In the case of Ladakh and the Buddhist Tibet relationship also, lama missionaries played a major role in terms of monastic education, construction of monasteries and the spread of Mahayana Buddhism in
Ladakh as a whole. Following are some of the important lamas who visited Ladakh mostly from Tibet and played a vital role in the teaching and spread of Mahayana Buddhism there.

Guru Padmasambhava was the first to come to Ladakh and he is believed to have visited Ladakh in the 8th century A.D. Caves where he is believed to have meditated are still found in Ladakh. Then came the famous Lotswa Rin-chen Zangpo, and the spread of Mahayana Buddhism in Ladakh is closely connected with him. He founded many monasteries in Ladakh, Lahul Spiti and Guge. Several monasteries of his time have been preserved in Ladakh, the most important among them being Nyarma, Alchi, Mangyu and Sumdo in Zanskar.

In the 15th century, another famous lama Chos-rje Gdan-ma was invited by the king of Ladakh, probably from Tibet. He built the present Phyang monastery. Phyang along with Lamayuru monastery are the important monasteries of Bri-gung-pa, a sub-sect of the bKa-gyud-pa sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The 15th century saw the growth of influence of the Ge-lug-pa or the Yellow sect in Ladakh. The king of Ladakh, Grags-bam Ide had received an envoy from the reformer Tsong Kha-pa, and in order to commemorate the event he is said to have built the dPe-t’up monastery for the new sect. According to Luciano Petech the monastery had been actually founded in the 11th century and the king must have assisted in a thorough restoration and to the transference to the Yellow sect.32 The Ge-lug-pa sect in Ladakh developed rapidly and many monasteries were built, like Thiksey, Likir and Disket in Nubra, and Bardan in Zanskar. Stag-tsan-Ras-pa was another great lama who was invited from Tibet and was responsible for the development of the Brug-pa, a sub-sect of the bKa-gyud-pa sect in Ladakh. The great lama founded many monasteries of the Brug-pa sub-sect in

32 Luciano Petech, op. cit. 29, p. 22.
Ladakh, including the famous Hemis monastery. Brug-pa sub-sect ascendance in Ladakh was fully established by Stag-tsan-Ras-pa.

Thus, the development of many sects, sub-sects and their monasteries in Ladakh was with the help of close contacts and encouragement from the main centre of the sects in Tibet. Though all the four major sects and several sub-sects of Tibetan Buddhism had developed in Ladakh, only three Lamaist sects played a major role in Ladakhi history. They were in chronological order, the Bri-gung-pa, sub-sect of the bKa-gyud-pa sect, the Ge-lug-pa sect and the Brug-pa, another sub-sect of the bKa-gyud-pa sect. The other remaining sects were the rNin-ma-pa and Sa-skya-pa, neither of which ever played a major influence in Ladakhi history. The existence of the lay monarchy, an overall authority independent of the Church did not allow a complete ascendance by one sect. However, the head Lamas had considerable influence on the royal house and the social and daily life of the people.

Monastic Education

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. There were no records of how many lamas went to Tibet for education except those sent by the royal house, who were mentioned and recorded. After getting educated in different monastic centres in Tibet, many lamas returned to their native places and played a major role in spreading Mahayana Buddhism in Ladakh. Many royal princes became monks and went for higher studies to Tibet. After coming back from Tibet, they became heads of important monasteries and played an important role in the spread of monastic education in
Ladakh. For example, King Del-dan rNamgyal’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 Thiksey monastery, which heads seven monasteries in Ladakh. The supremacy of Thiksey abbots over the other Ge-lug-pa monasteries in Ladakh did not last long; at an unknown date a royal prince became abbot of dPe-t’up and made that monastery independent of Thiksey.

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 important reasons why the cis-Himalayan people looked upon Tibet as the centre of Mahayana Buddhism. First of all, 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.

Pilgrimage and Trade

The Capital of Ladakh, Leh, due to its strategic location had developed into an active and important centre for commercial intercourse with Tibet, Persia, Yarkand and China. Though the majority of the Ladakhi lived by subsistence agriculture, yet trade played a vital role in the development of its economy and culture.

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

---

33 Ibid. p. 85.
34 Ibid. p. 85.
have contact with the sedentary Mon and Dard, exchanging grains for the animal products. Then come the two missions ‘Lapchak’ and the ‘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 lama entrepreneurs.

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. It 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. Besides economic benefits, reopening of this old route will promote pilgrimage to the Kailash Mansarovar Lake and other holy places in Tibet. The Kailash Mansarovar Lake can be reached in a relatively shorter time than the present hazardous fifteen-day trek from further South. One of the important advantages of the route through Ladakh is that there is a motorable road on both sides of the border; one can drive all the way up to Kailash. This is ideal for older people and women. 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.

Chapterisation

This study is organized in the following manner. Chapter Two of my thesis is about monastic organization and education. There are many monasteries that have been founded in Ladakh. The foundations of these monasteries are associated with the effort of active lama missionaries and encouragement, guidance and support from Buddhist Tibet. Chapter Three and Four trace Ladakh’s deep historical relations with Buddhist Tibet. Chapter three covers the Ladakhi history and its cultural relations with Buddhist Tibet from 10th century, when the first kingdom in Ladakh was established, to the beginning of the rNamgyal dynasty. In the 10th and 11th centuries, the cultural influences on Ladakh came from both Kashmir and Guge and Puran, provinces in western Tibet. Alchi monastery and its paintings are the best example of both Kashmiri and Tibetan influences during the period. In these two provinces of western Tibet, the Buddhist renaissance took place after central Tibet disintegrated. And from western
Tibet Buddhism was not only spread to cis-Himalayan states but most importantly reintroduced in Tibet. From the 12th century onwards the cultural influence in Ladakh was mainly from Tibet. This is shown by the fact that several important monks from Tibet visited Ladakh and built monasteries during the period. Chapter Four covers the Ladakhi history and its cultural ties with Buddhist Tibet during the 16th to 19th centuries. The cultural influences from Tibet during this period were consistent and close. Most of the present monasteries in Ladakh were built during this period. Chapter Five deals with trade and pilgrimage. Trade and pilgrimage is played also an important role in the development of close relationship between Ladakh and Tibet. The Sixth chapter is the concluding part where the analytical conclusions reached in each of the chapters are elaborated.

Many people have written on the history and culture of Ladakh but nobody has worked on cultural relations with Buddhist Tibet. There has been a consistence cultural relationship between Buddhist Tibet and Ladakh. 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’. Tibetan Buddhist ideas and values, which came into contact with the indigenous culture, ecology and psyche of the Himalayan people added to the Himalayan Character. The dynamic and living principles of Mahayana Buddhism gradually transformed the history and religion of the Himalayan States. In the past there have been tendencies to state that the cultural ties between Buddhist Tibet and the Himalayan States have political significance in that the cis-Himalayan States were somewhat subordinate to Tibet. I, however, beg to differ. This is in keeping with the contemporary views of Ladakhi people. The fact is that there have been considerable developments in the Lamaist culture
areas in the cis-Himalayas since the early traditional relation between the Himalayan states and Tibet. First of all there is a steady growth of local identities in the Lamaist culture areas in the Himalayas. This is a new social fact, which we have to recognize and take into consideration when studying the relations between Buddhist Tibet and the Himalayan states. Secondly, there have been unprecedented modern historical developments, which have transformed South Asia into an engine of change. Economic growth, education, science and technology have influenced indirectly and invisibly but very effectively the Lamaist culture areas in the cis-Himalayan region, which looked upon Buddhist Tibet as the 'epicenter' of their faith towards South Asia.