CULTURAL HISTORY OF LADAKH
PART - I

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Ladakh, which is aptly known as western Tibet, is situated between 79°15'E to 80°30'E longitude and 32°15'N to 36°N latitude in the Trans-Himalayan region. It is strategically located at junction of four or five important regions; Afghanistan-Turkestan on the North and North-West, China-Tibet on the North, Pakistan (since 1947) on the West, and India on the South. At 12000 feet, Ladakh with its capital Leh, is one of the highest inhabited plateaus in the world. Owing to its location, it served as an overland trade centre between Central Asian regions like Yarkhand, Kashgar, Khatoon, Tibet as well as the Indian regions of Punjab and Nagar in bygone days. During the summer months ranging between July and October, caravans from all these regions arrived here after negotiating various mountain passes and the place would suddenly be turned into a veritable market for exchanging goods and commodities through the barter system. The lowest of the passes is Zozi which once comprised the boundary between Kashmir and Ladakh, and the highest ones are Nungtang (19606ft.) and Kaurikoram (18002ft.). Besides being the only routes for transporting merchandise, these passes were veritable highways for cultural exchanges, linking people representing diverse cultural groups and thus helped in furthering mutual acquaintance and assimilation of thoughts. These again were the routes through which invaders and plunderers galore made inroads into the mainland of India ever since the time of Alexander. Portuguese and Jesuit Fathers also trudged their way to Central Asia, Tibet and the adjoining regions through these routes.

Ladakh, hailed as one of the principal bastions of Tibetan Buddhism, was annexed to the State of Jammu and Kashmir in 1843 A.D. by the Dogra ruler Gulab Singh with the tacit approval of British. The aforementioned routes are less frequented now more on account of political upheavals and consequent blockades rather than any natural hazard or physical barrier. The pristine virility and vigour with respect to the practice and dissemination of Buddhism has been adversely affected though the Buddhist creed still thrives miraculously amongst the devout ones. But the fact remains that the association of Ladakh with the state of Jammu and Kashmir is not only incongruous from socio-religious stance, but equally self-defeating. The influx of tourists from all over the world and the resultant process of secularisation may very soon obliterate the culture and religion that once shaped the history of Ladakh. Despite their incessant and impassioned appeals to be granted an autonomous status, the people of Ladakh are agitated at the Union government's stonewall refusal and the more palliative means adopted. Persistent opportunities by the people to be recognised at least as a Union Territory has ultimately resulted in the formation of the Ladakh Autonomous Council which was inaugurated by a representative of the Indian government in the month of September, 1995.

BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

It has been rightly summed that the broader dissemination of Buddhism began with the second Buddhist council which was held in 237 B.C. during the reign of emperor Ashoka.
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(Some Scholars propose this to be the 4th council considering a convention held at Varshali under the reign of the king Kalachoska to be the second council). Priyadarshi Asokea sent his Buddhist emissaries, scholars, and teachers to farflung countries like China, Korea, etc. However, it was after the fourth council held during the reign of the Saka king Kansikata at Kashmir that the passes of Kasjong and Kazi bridging Nepal and Kashmir as well as the old trade routes became once again active with Buddhist Pandit and Lamas traversing through them. Fuhien, Huen-tsong and such other travelers from China came through these inaccessible routes. Kashmir remained as an important centre of Buddhism learning for ages long, receiving zealous patronage from the kings, a fact corroborated by Kalam's Rajatarami.

In the history of Tibet, the first great who introduced the Buddhist creed as the State religion was the accomplished ruler Songtsen Gampo who was a contemporary of King Harshavardhana Sridhitya of Kanauj, Prophet Muhammad of Mecca, Huen-tsong and the Chinese emperor named T'ai-jung. It was he who directed his minister Thumi-Sambhota to devise a script and grammar for the Tibetan language thereafter presiding over the gargantuan task of translating canonical and non-canonical works into Tibetan from their original Sanskrit and Pali.

Another great landmark in the annals of Tibet was during the reign of King Khri-srong-lde-btsan when at the behest of the royal preceptor Pandit Santarakshita (Shi-ba-btshe), the great Master of esotericism Guru Padmacanhabha arrived at Tibet and firmly established the Buddhist religion after taming and exercising the Bon-po priests and its votaries. In the year c. 646 A.D., RaI-Pa-Chen sat on the throne of Tibet. He was the youngest son of King Khri-srong-lde-btsan who in turn was the second son of King Khri-srong-chen-po-btsan. RaI-Pa-Chen was a paragon of human excellence, a veritable blend of administrative skill, military valour, and devotion to the Dharma. While his expansionist ventures extended the territory of his kingdom far beyond the frontiers that he had initially inherited, he also patronized the Buddha Dharma with such zeal that its reverberation could be felt throughout the breadth and breath of the kingdom. All these took sudden turn when one day, he was assassinated by his elder brother named Glang-darma who had been nurturing a deep-rooted hate for the king who had been by dint of his merit, their father's choice as the successor superseding his claims as the eldest son. The ascent of Glang-darma to the throne ushered in an age of total anarchy. At his behest, monasteries were closed, religious ceremonies banned and monks were forced to give up their views of renunciation and celibacy and instead live like the lives of ordinary laity. His well garnered hate for the popular spread of Dharma which he took to be the elementary factor behind his brother's successes turned to be his achilles' heel till at last, he was killed by a monk named Ufa-tung-dPal-Gyis dGuLo-mTsalmasquerading as a dancer attired in black, in the year 841 A.D. Thus ended a saga of ruthless religious persecution. It took decades for the wounds inflicted by this apostate king to heal and much longer for the scars to disappear. Chaotic conditions prevailed all over the country with the Bon presence again returning back with vehement resurgence. The successors of Glang-darma proved to be weaklings and could not consolidate their authority over the kingdom. They lost their hold over the mighty empire this had been built by the valiant Khri-srong-lde-btsan. dPal-Khor-btsan (6th-723 A.D.) was the last king in this line who left Lhasa and migrated to western Tibet where he is famed to have brought the
three districts-Ladakh, sParang and Gurh under his suzerain control and later let his three sons rule over them. Tseu kings and their descendants were custodians of the Buddhist faith and caused the translation of many Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Tibetan. They also sent regular emissaries to Kashmir and the adjoining lands. Among these luminaries, the name of rJe-chen Ye-shes-chod also known as 108-blama shines exclusively for being instrumental in bringing the famed master Atisha Dipankarak to Tibet. He relinquished his throne in favour of his nephew so that he could devote his time to religious matters. With the noble intention to introduce religious reformation in his country, this great prince in-titled Atisha Dipankar Srjana who hailed from the Vikramasila Tanha Tivh his death in 1054 A.D., the Acarya travelled to many places and instilled discipline and faith among the monks encouraging them to live spartan lives dwelling more on practice and rigorous study. During the course of his journey in Tibet, he also met the great translator Rin-chen-Zaampo or Ratnaprabha. The latter is believed to have been spiritually inspired by the Acharya and is famed for the establishment of 104 monasteries which was accomplished with manifest help form the royalty. Acarya Dipankar's multitudinous activities gave a fresh fillip to the dwindling spirit of the Buddhist faith in Tibet which gained universal acceptance and popularity. Based on the teachings of Asanga and Maireyana, he established a new order called Bka-‘gDam-pa which received further impetus under the able stewardship of his principal disciple named Bkom-s Tor-pa and other successive teachers and lineage holders. Atisha enjoined strict discipline among the monks and forbade the people from indulging in occult practices. Many siddhas and teachers flourished and fed the flame of Atisha's reformative tradition which never allowed the creed to be mutilated by impurities of precept and practice. Reformers and teachers parole appeared on the horizon fired by the example set by Atisha, to purge the faith and its doctrine from vulgar dilutions. Among the teachers who belong to the earlier period of transmission, the names of Marpa and Mila-respa stand out distinctively. Marpa Lo-Tawa or Marpa the translator who was a disciple of Naro-pa of Magadha ushered in a new era of doctrinal dissemination based on the direct teaching of the Buddha. This new school was known as Bka-‘gyud-pa and its doctrine was widely taught by his chief disciple Mila-respa. This school further developed into four major and eight minor school in the 11th and 12th centuries A.D. The 13th century saw the beginning of the hegemony over Tibet when the high abbot of Sakya went to China on invitation by the Chinese emperor to become the latter's preceptor and returned to Tibet to be installed as the ruler of the country. The Mongol emperor or China Kublai Khan was in fact initiated into the Buddhist faith by Phags-pa, the Sakya hierarch who was allowed to rule Tibet as a theocracy. Thus a new school of the Buddhist esoteric tradition called Sakya-pa was introduced whose doctrines were widely disseminated throughout Tibet. The rise of king Byang-chub-chetschen in the 14th century eclipsed the power of the Sakye and ushered in a new dynasty which ruled for around three centuries till it was overthrown by the king of Tsang in 1635 A.D. The latter was in turn vanquished by the Mongol king Ghoslu Khan who offered the spiritual and temporal sovereignty of Tibet to the great fifth Dalai Lama in year 1642 A. D. Meanwhile, dwelling

*The three regions of western Tibet collectively known as MNgag-Ri-sKor-Gsum consisting (1) sPa-Rang, (2) rNang-Yul & (3) Tson-Grub (Kor-1) Zhang Zhong, (Kor-2) sTod-Mad (3) sVal Mian Li, sRu-Sha, sPal-lt 11 ref - Bod gPro Thig Mezland Chan-Mu
on the fourth important Buddhist school of Tibet, the great reformer Tsong-Kha-pa who was born in 1357 A.D. was much inspired by the tradition established earlier by Asvaya Atisha Dipamkara. He reorganised the monastic order and streamlined the curriculum of the monks laying great emphasis on learning based on logic, discipline and academic education. He founded the dGe-lugs-Pa school, the third highest order named bSod-Nams rGya mtsho which later became famous as the dGe-lugs-Pa School. The third hierarchy of this order named bSod-Nams rGya mtsho who lived in the 16th century was conferred the title of Tse Trul Lama by the Mongol emperor Altan Khan which in the Mongolian language means the same as the Tibetan word rGya mtsho dSogs Ocean. The first hierarchy too was recognised in retrospect as the first Tse Trul Lamas and the subsequent successors were recognised as the Asvayas or re-incarnations of the Tse Trul Lamas, a term which came to pronounced as Dalai Lamas in the subsequent years.

The fate of Ladakh in western Tibet was more linked with Turkistan and central Asia during the early 13th century although Lhasa retained the religious pilgrimage centre and sanctuary status. In 1207 A.D. during the reign of bkra-shis dGon, the Mongol terror of Jenghis Khan overran this region during his victory march and the king was compelled to surrender. Not much is known about the genealogy of the succession of kings following bkra-shis dGon. One of the later rulers who died in the year 1353 A.D. had his capital in Leh. He established a monastery and installed there in a huge statue of maitreya bdod shing and another of Avalokiteshvara. It was in ruins though the monastery stands till this day. He seems to have been adept in warfare and annexed Baltistan, Gurge as well as some regions in the west. He is also reputed to have thwarted the invasion by Mirza Haidar in 1549 A.D. In 1675 A.D. the next king Jamyang Nam gyal was captured by the Balti ruler Ali Mur and was forced to embrace the Islamic faith. Ali Mur gave his daughter in marriage to the royal captive and eventually allowed him conditional freedom. His Tibetan wife bore him a son named Nang-rGyal who shifted the capital to Bango. He was a powerful king and a patron of learning. Many Sanskrit texts were translated during his time and some books were printed in Jetett of silver and gold. He amassed a fortune through his conquests and even made an abortive attempt to conquer Lhasa. His son Debrog too was a mighty king who quelled innumerable rebellions. The famous Sayy monastery was built by him. He died in a disaster in the year 1645 A.D. This king died as Muslim perselyte since he was forced to accept the Islamic faith after his defeat at the hands of the Mughals. He even built a mosque in Ladakh and remained the rest of his life in Kashmir. His son and successor Nyima bNams gyal established peace and once again paved the way for progress in various fields like art, literature and small industries like publication of manuscripts incaligraphy and even setting up a paper making factory. He also built memorials in the form of chaityas or choD-ten and monasteries in Zanskar, Rupsa and Nubra districts. Nyima bNams gyal who ascended the throne in the year 1705 A.D. died in 1734 A.D. bringing to a close three memorable decades of progress, peace and prosperity. Following his death, there were regular invasions by Muslims from Turkistan and Tibet. Ladakh lost huge tracts of pastureland and gold fields which scouriuously jeopardised as overland trade and commerce. Heavy war indemnities and taxes exacted by the conquerors further impoverished and destroyed the inhabitants of Ladakh. Despite all such reverses, the Ladakhis staunchly held on to their faith in the Dharma with fortitude and devotion. The downfall of the Mughal empire gave Ladakh some moments of
Despite but the sanguinary designs of the Dogra chief Zorawar Singh for the conquest of Tibet once again blew the clouds of war over its sky. The Dogra ruler had to pay dearly with his life while clashing his sword with the Tibetan army.

In the year 1843, Gelab Singh, the Dogra ruler of Kashmir annexed Ladakh with Lhalu-Spiti with the concurrence given by the British. In the wake of this, many of the monasteries of Ladakh were plundered and the king of Ladakh who was also the head of Hemis monastery was banished to Srinak. In due course of time, the British took back Lhalu and Spiti from Sardar Gulab Singh in exchange for some other areas with a view to enhance their inland trade with Tibet and Central Asia. Eric Shipton was the last political agent in Kashgar upto 1947.

After the partition in 1947, Ladakh became a part of the Indian Union along with Jammu and Kashmir. The western part of Gilgit and Baltistan came under the domain of the Republic of Pakistan in 1944 and a portion of the eastern part of Aksai Chin was annexed by China in 1962. All these developments left their impact from the geo-political stance and enhanced the strategic importance of Ladakh which had to face the brunt of Pakistan’s belligerence during the Indo-Pakistan war. Despite all such vagaries of events, the theistic fervor of the people of Ladakh remained wholly intact and firm. Ladakh still remains a stronghold of the Buddhist faith. Monks as well as the laity still throng the precincts of the monasteries during festive occasions to absorb the lilting melody of the ritual symphonies, blending with the rich baritone of the chanting monks.....which is proof of the fact that the Enlightened one still lives in the hearts of the people of Ladakh and His doctrine continues to pervade all the quarters of Ladakh.
GOMPAS OF LADAKH

Main cultural and religious centres of Ladakhi Buddhists are the Gompas (Gon-Pa) the solitary place of meditation.

There are sixteen big and excessive gompas in Ladakh of all the sects of Mahayana Buddhism. Besides, each village has its own Gonpa with many walls, chortens, mandalok and stones carved with Om Mani Padme Hum everywhere. Ladakh or Western Tibet is thus carrying the tradition of Buddhism from 10th century A.D. - when this religion suffered in the Capital Lhassa. From the Srinagar-Leh bus route which followed the former caravan route at the ancient travelers route-ancient ruins of gompas or chortens can be seen after crossing the Zo-zila (11,570') which was once the boundary of Kashmir and Tibet. After the partition- Kargil the capital of Baltistan inhabited by Muslims of Sunni and Shia sects was annexed to Ladakh thus changing the environment.

After crossing Zo-zila there is a halting place in Dras-which is the second coldest place in the world. Two ruined statues known as Avalokiteshwar and his companion can be seen with nearly obliterated rock carvings. North of this place reside Dards and Baltits-converted now to Islam. Then comes Kargil-now second city of Ladakh inhabited mainly by Muslim people of high and important position. After this comes the first Gompa-

(1) namely Sharngo-la. Particularly from here the Buddhist region begins. It is a cave temple on a high hill, mainly of black stone except the front which is painted white. It means morning star (as it faces east). On the bank of Waka river built by a Tibetan lama of Drupka sect who named it as Ma-Khang (House of the mother) now it belongs to Gelugpa order or Yellow Hat Sect.

(2) The road then leads to a flat land-Mulbek pronounced Mulhek-where a twenty feet High Maitreya (designated as a future Buddha) statue carved on rock in Indian style with ksaie length sacred thread. The dress is kingly with a crown on the top. The head, with anklets in both hands reminding one of Vishnu. In the four hands there are prayer wheel and Abhaya Mudra and beads (Rosary Wheel) and lotus on the left hand.

It was built by the famous lotsava (translator) Rin-Chek Par-Mo during the reign of King Guge Ye-Shri-God in 1054. In a cold climate it still exists after 1000 years, the face of the statue is fully wrought with contemplative aura.

Below the altar, there is a small underground gompa with a beautiful reclining figure of Avalokiteshwar with eleven hands on each side and nine heads. In a case nearby there are stone and metal statue of SakyaNumi, Padmasambhava and Tara as well as of Kukai, Bakolla, Tashi Lampa and Dalai Lama, with a small library. It belongs to the red hat Drupka sect built by an unknown lama.

After passing Naik-a-La (Flying Pillars) 12220' is Bodh Kharbu with statue of Avalokiteshwar now in ruins. This was once the capital of king Didden (1620-48) but defeated by the Muslim invaders. Then came Kullash (means snowy mountain) with some
status of different Buddhist pantheon and some rock carvings of the Darhs both is Brahmi and Kharosti scripts with figures of ibex and fighting scenes with bow and arrow. In this area mostly Darhs and Mons live-now embraced Islam.

From Kliahtse one has to cross another 13470 ft. Fazu la pass-again to descend 2000 ft. to Lamayuru the oldest of the gompas built by Naropa in 12th century. It belongs to Brigungpa sect and is now under the Tohdban Insula of Bhutan (described later) it was built on a lake dried up by the divine power of Naropa.

East of Khatse is Basgo-captial of Ladakh during the reign of Sengya Namgyal. Apart from the ruins of old palace there was a beautiful statue of mazeya Buddha-now broken. Next comes the village of Saspol where the ruins of the old monastery spread in a wide area. It was built 400 years ago. It was destroyed by the Balti invaders during the reign of Deleg Namgyal (1640-1680).

From Saspol-one has to reach the famous Atch Gompa on the other side of the Indus river. It was also built by Rinchen Zangpo 1000 years ago with a huge statue of Avadhtesvara, manuscripts with a historical chronicle of Ladakhi kings. Rinchen Zangpo appointed some of Kashmiri artists to prove by the decorations on the wooden arch (Details later).

Next comes another famous gompa Likir of the Gesapga Sect on the wayside hill on the road from Saspol to Nymo. Then comes Phyang means External forces-which is situated 25 Km from the road to Leh. It belongs to Brigungpa Sect also. There is a statue of Buddha of exquisite beauty with long ears (one of the signs of greatness in Buddhist belief). There is a good library also besides other statues (later described in detail) near the airport on a hill. It belongs to Yellow Hat Sect-founded by the great teacher Tsongkhapa-whose big statue draws the attention of visitors and worth seeing. There is a huge statue of Mahakal covered with tunkers.

REPORT ON THE MAIN GOMPAS OF LADAKH

Report on some main gompas of Ladakh are given here so that the life-style and history of Ladakhese can be learnt. The root word of Gompa is Gos (isolated place), by verbal utterance it is transformed to Gompa. Most of gompas are situated on roadside of the wide route, the merchants used to take shelter here. The Gompas in brief are named as follows;

1. Lamayuru: Of all the gompas this is the oldest in Ladakh. At present this is the monastery of the Brigungpa community. The chief of this community lives in the monastery of Bhutan-teachings and appointments are done from here. It is said and written in old books too that here was a lake in the past. According to the legend, the illustrious Siddhacarya Naropa meditated in this cave during his life. The whole valley was a lake which Naropa is said to have drained by spell of mantra before founding this monastery in 990 A.D. On one side in the low land there is a lichen of yellow earth indicating existence of lake in the past. By the side of Sangha river in China such yellowish sandy-earth lichen of this type are renowned. Sang-gang is the oldest of the temples of this place, built somewhat in a style which resembles Tabo of Spiti- this again is thought to be built imitating Ajanta. Below this old temple exists Yuk-D朗ng temple of Bon (Yungdrung/Swastika) - though the frescos are now illegible and spoilt. The sign of Swastika is well-known token of welfare among the followers of
Bon religion and Mongolians.

This gompa is situated on the top of a 12000 ft. high mountain below two thousand feet from the pass. The height of the temple is 30-31 ft.; the roof is a square and plain. On the roof exist six flags and one Trijul on which fly-whisk and horn of sheep are tied. Two big Mani-chakras and various images are there in several rooms. Statues of Padmasambhava, Kusum (guru-precceptor) Atish Dipankar. Sakyi Thupa are there, a big image of Avalokiteshvara is there, besides, image of Tara etc. goddesses with gold and silver plates. Apart all this, Thanka is there, i.e., pictures on wall or silk of Buddha on ten postures, six types of movements, the king Yamnam, the precceptor Lama, heaven and hell. On the other side wrapped in silk, Buddhist canonical works Kangyur and Tanjur are preserved. Water in small bowls and lamps of female yak butter ('Bri-Mar') are placed in front of each image. Ritual worship is held four times a day by lamas under an aged lama. On the other side, in small caves of a high mountain, lamas used to live when in 1252 A.D. Rolokias came here, they used these caves. From yore, the lamas live in a mendicant life take lessons and impart doctrinal teachings to novice.

In the eleventh century the king of Ladakh brought the famous translator Rinchen Zangpo (Ratna bhadra) to Ladakh; he then built 108 monasteries in the whole country. Amongst these, Lamayuru was the central gompa. The temples around are lettering condition hence Lama do not reside here. At that time this area was under the influence of Kadampa community initiated by Atisha Dipankara. About the end of the sixteenth century, the proctor of king Jamyang Namgyal was cured by a lama of Brigunpa community named Namu-Dhan-Mab Sang. In exchange, the king gave him this place and monastery in charity. About one and quarter kilometre of this place of at-four sides are considered as holy place. A revenue free village was endowed to meet the expenditure of this monastery. The gompas of the village below also belong to this community. Festivities with dance are held for three in March. The chief of this place is called Kusbah Tobrang. Brigunpa community have two gompas in Ladakh-Phiyang and Botthkharutbe.

2. Likhp: means Sarpamandal (Kha-dkhyil) or Akashaed in way to Nyema after Sarspur (Saspur) proceeding a little West from roads, or the north of Sindhu river near the old trade route but crossing the small river one has to climb a few steps. We followed the route for going to Khalsey from Basgo, the old route is a long round-about way. This was built at the time of La-chen Gyi-Pore (1650-80 A.D.). It is learnt from the stone inscriptions that this is a gompa of the Gelugpa community. The prayer hall has provision of sixty-seventy square seats. There are images and wall pictures around the walls of the room. Crossing three gateways and climbing steps at a height of 14000 ft. were very tried. The Lamas accorded us receptions by uttering 'Julay Julay' (welcome) and showed us the hall. On one side of the altar we found a community emblem of the community of the present lama and a big board with a signature of the lama. The walls and wooden beams are full of decorative art works. All the pictures of ....... are of gods and goddesses of Mahayana Pambone. There is statue of the first Dalai Lama Gedunrub (Gyalwa Rinpoche). The facial expression of the lama precceptor and gods and goddesses are calm and noble. At the middle are retained 'Mendocë' or memorial mummies (Shupa) with relics of dead and famous Lamas e.g. nain, hair, teeth mixed with gold and silver. Images of gods and goddesses abound all around. A side road is some-
what dark, one has to use lamp even in day time. The manuscripts wrapped in cloth are
retained in wooden shelves on one side apart from this there are big images of Sakyamuni,
Mahasiddhartha along with many small images. The facial expression of them are pleasant
and compassionate. Outside are drawn pictures of Lord Buddha and Kashi palace of Yasa
(main residential place of Yasa) I was allowed to enter a small side-room, whatever I
could, I saw from outside. I learnt earlier and it also appeared to my mind that this room
probably contained weapons previously, maybe they are existing even now. In the past, if
invasion of outside enemies occurred, these weapons were preserved for defence.

Next we were taken to roof by the lamas. Snow capped Karakoram mountain ranges
were visible. The Kailash mountain seen far was mentioned as 'Ti-Si' by the lamas. From
here the panorama all around is well visible. On the west lied the river Sindhu or Senge
Khabab. The wealthy, treasurable and invincible property and the number of this Gompa
almost equal that of Hemis. There is good demand of earthen pots and other objects
made of earth of this place. The sun is visible for long hours at the altitude of this place
is high.

3. Alchi: To reach Alchi one has to go from Saspole crossing the hanging bridge over the
river Sindhu. This was constructed about thousand years ago by the chief priest of the king
of Ladakh and famous translator Richen Zangpo. This is situated at seventy Kilometres
distance from Leh. The influence of Kashmir style is explicit in its architecture. Six temples
are here. At the time of Kashi Sen-Namgyal during 1590-1532 A.D. the temple at the mid-
dle was renovated. We saw very costly and rare shawl with various fine reedlike work and
wooden objects with artwork of decorative flowers and plants. The chief temple is small
3m x 3m. On the three sides walls of the room arc retained innumerable images-on the right
is studded of Avalokitesvara. There are three images of three storey height made of earth in
a narrow lane. The images are painted in various hues. In 1583 A.D. the king of Ladakh
brought Kashmir artisans for wall painting or frescos. This was once a centre for study
of doctrine and cultural aspects of Buddhism. Here is preserved the hand-written manuscripts
of Ladakh Chronicles' (Ladakh Gyadh) - the history of kings of Ladakh are narrated here.
But now the condition of Alchi is not good-the wall pictures are fading-they were getting
spoilt with water of melted snow percolated form roof. Their wealth is lesser and number
of lamas too is small.

4. Pe-Thun (Sputuk): The meaning is peak. This three storied Gompa is situated at five
miles distance from Leh on the southern bank of the river Sindhu near the aerodrome.
The Gompa is situated at height, so reach it one has to go on steps. Thcold one has been
removed, besides a new temple too has been constructed. The images are six hundred years old and are
wrapped in cloth the lamas uncovers them and showed to us. A large image of Mahakala
cover by cloth is retained in the old temple, the cover is removed and shown to devotees on
festive days. Images of Tshonpo, Charimona Kahi etc are there. Besides, there are few gilt
images of Tatha also. All the images are glittering - that means they are well looked after but
Sangka-pa image is the chief one. At the time of King Crag-Bhunlha (1180-1440 A.D) the
famous Singka-pa sent two ambassadors. The incarnate Lamas of Kudalak, Bakula or Gelugpa
community reside here. He is the religious head of all Gelupa monasteries and temple of
Ladakh.
5. Hemis: The meaning is thought of Wisdom (Bodhi-Chintu Chara). This Gompa is the principal and largest of all in Ladakh. The distance is forty kilometer from Leh-one has to cross the bridge on river Sindhu to reach the monastery. There is also a mountainous path but is not visible easily, after crossing the river on proceeding some distance charon or white Chaltas are viewed, then one can presume the existence of this Gompa. All around is the Hemis village. In the beginning this belonged to Nyingmapa order, at present it is possessed by Kargu-pa sect. King of Ladakh is the chief of this monastery. He went to Lhasa to acquire religious education in 1947-48 A.D., but did not come back. Later on, a child of five years among the refugees of Tibetan camp was found as his incarnation. He was consecrated as the abbot of the Gompa after being successful in various examinations - and then he was taken inside the Hemis with his parents. Now he is aged twenty years only. As a chief he is seated on the throne to witness the great festival that displayed in Hemis in June. Above the Hemis mountain, there is another mountain Gosang (gateway to Heaven). There, he will have to stay for few years, he will be under the tutelage with both internal and external teachings before he is finally enthroned as religious chief of Gompa after he succeed in final examination.

Religious ceremonies and fairs are held in Hemis in June after considering the lunar day. Hence, very many people can participate and witness this festival. Other gompas of Ladakh hold their ceremonies in winter, hence, men from outside cannot witness them. There are some ceremonies which must be observed everywhere such as New Year (Losar), worship of books and defeat of evil power. We reached there just two days prior to witness the ceremonies. We were permitted to stay inside in a room of Lama for two days, so we got an opportunity to see good portion of the arrangements inside.

A good number of Gompas were looted during the Dogra king Pratap Singh's reign. Then the chief of Hemis monastery of Ladakh arranged for shelter and provision for the Dogra soldiers, as a result the intruders left the monastery unharm. It also achieved the favour of Dogra king. Many images are enshrined there, most of them are plated with gold and silver. Large images of Sakyamimi, gods and goddesses of Mahayana pantheon are placed on the altar. There is another statue, that of Mātṛka, consort of Pārāśurāma. From the almost illegible fresco illustrations of Sisulabcharya and their miraculous powers on the opposite of the main entrance dwelling, it may be guessed that this Gompa previously belonged to Drukpa or Nyingmapa community. This Hemis gompa covers a land area is five bighas surrounded by mountains on all sides. The Gompa is five hundred years old, but the images belonged to the tenth or eleventh century. Images have been picked up from the locality of Min or Men and placed here. There are many small and big monasteries under Hemis. The biggest of the ceremonies is the famous lama Dance held in June - the dance is about defeating evil power by benevolent power. The Lamas participate in this ceremony of two days. The first day wears-emergence and spread of evil power and on the second day, driving away of that evil power by persons holding spiritual power. That is the main theme. (Detailed descriptions of this ceremony are found in many ritual books).

"These shown through display of play at dance and instrumental music besides, large and picturesque "Thanka" painted on silk or specialty prepared paper are unwrapped and shown open every eleventh year. 1990 was one such year. On this occasion, the fair held for three-four days is attended by people from far and wide-many commodities are brought and sold. The name of Hemis is Byang-Chu Sam-nachin, it means 'thought of wisdom'."
Namgyal (1599-1640), one of the Drupka community Mobsud (chief) Tag-Sangra prepared it for the Chinese. Construction of this gompa started in 1602 A.D. and completed in 1642 A.D. This community followed the Drupka community of Bhutan. But some images of tenth and eleventh centuries from the ruins of Menri or Menri gompa in Rupshu have been brought here. Hence, Menri is called "Mother of Hermit".

**GOMPAS AROUND LEH**

(1) **TIKSE** - situated on a hill 14 Km away from Leh. It has a huge statue of Buddha with 7 small temples with beautiful frescos within.

(2) **SHEY** - situated at a distance of 16 Km, form Leh, on Leh-Manali Road on hillock. A 7 m. high Buddha statue made of white copper from Zanskar with gold plating in one of the biggest statues of its kind built by Dewa Namgyal, son of Song Namgyal, in memory of his father who was imprisoned and forced to embrace Islam religion by his captors and banished in Kashgar by the Moghul rulers. A butter lamp burns throughout the year. It was built by a Nepalese sculptor with the help of three Ladakhi craftsmen. Five Kgs. of gold was required for plating.

(3) **STOK GOMPA** - was built in a village across the Indus when the king of Ladakh was banished from Leh by the Dogra ruler. He was the head of Hemis Gompa upto his death.

(4) **TSEMO-GOMPA** - is on the top of a hillock built in 1400 A.D. by the king Takpra Bumde. It's statue of Maitreya Buddha resembles that of statue at Markha (13.7 m.high)with Manjushree on left and Avalokitesvara on right. It is built by Mahayana Buddhists.

(5) **SANEAR GOMPA** - is 3 km. from Leh. It has many golden-icos built 100 years back. Stories of Panchatantra are painted on the walls around. Kosok Bakula, M.P. (present) is the head of this one.

There are gompas as Deskit and Tserag in Rupshu by Gelupa, Kartsepa and Nyingmapa Sects also have some but most of them are only 100 years old.

(6) **ZANSKAR** - This district lay south of Leh, has many ancient gompas namely: Mather, Taklat, Takram, Karsha, Rangdum, Karsha and Phatol. The last one is situated on a high hill-famous for the visit of a Hungarian and renowned scholar and Tibetologist Alexander Csoma de Koris (1784-1842) during some months from 1823-1825. He travelled through Central Asia routes and Karakoram and was stopped at Leh. The adventurous traveler D. Moorscraft requested him to stay at Yangla in Zanskar. During his stay for some months he prepared a Grammar and dictionary in Tibetan language before proceeded to Calcutta. His name is engraved in a piece of stone here. He started for Lhasa in 1842 and died on way at Darjeeling.

(7) **GILGIT** - (I). Ladakh During 1937 a mass of brick bank an a few paper manuscripts were found in Nautop near Gilgit cantonment in a circular chamber 7 ft. 91/2 ” diameter inside the dome of 1 stupa. These ascribes to 6th or 7th-century A.D. These were published later in 7 volumes. They present Sanskrit texts - many of which are only known through their Chinese and Tibetan translations, now discovered first in Indian soil. These include a number...
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of Suttas, PRAJNA/PARAMITA, SADHARMA-PUNDARIKA and the Sanskrit VINAYA PITAKA of MULA SARVASTI-VADINS. Apart from the manuscripts, the relic chamber yielded hundreds of small votive clay-stupas containing within the Buddhist creed and relieved plaques.

Concluding Remarks:

After 1959, when Tibet was occupied by the Chinese Government after the exile of Dalai Lama from Lhasa, Ladakh is considered as the main centre of Tibetan Buddhism by all the Tibetans in exile. Still some noteworthy ceremonies like Kala-Chakra have been conducted by the present Dalai Lama (1) in Leh (1986), (2) BodhGaya in 1988, (3) Sarang in 1991-92. Thousands of lamas and devotees from here and abroad attended these in large number facing great natural hazards.
List of illustration of Gompas

1. SHERGOLA
2. MAITREYA BUDDHA (20 ft.) ROCK-CARVED STATUE at MUIZNE.
3. AVALOKITESWARA with 11 hands on each side of hands at Murlhek.
4. LAMAYURU - the oldest gompa.
5. PHYANG - Statue of Buddha
6. LIKYIR - Gompa
7. SPIKUK - (Near Airport)
8-9. ALCHI - Wooden carvings of the gate and large statue of Avalokiteswara (standing) inside.
10. Way of Hemis Gompa
11. FRONT OF HEMIS
15. GOSANG cave above Hemis.
16. TRIKSHE MONASTERY - Statue of Buddha.
17. Buddha statue in Sher Gompa.
18-19. RANGDOM and KAROJA Gompa - Zanskar.

Acknowledgement

1. Photographs 1-16: Taken by Shri Sushanta Chattopadhyay of Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta.
2. -Do- 17-18: Were taken by Ms. Sunanda Banerjee.
3. 2 Decorated Covers from a newspapers.
SHER-GOLA
The 1st Buddhist Gompa of the East after Kargil.
No - 2
Towards Mulheik
Maitreya Buddha
Mulheik Rock carving

No - 3
Avalokiteswara
Lamayuru
The oldest gompa
Phyang Gompa Buddha Statue.

No - 6

LADAKH
THE TRANS-HIMALAYAN LAND

(Phyang Gompa) It was later, drained by Stampa to build the Temple.
No. 8
Al-clear Compas
Wood carving on gate.

No. 9
Acrobats working in Al-Che
No - 10
Way to Hemis

No - 11
Front of Hemis
The famous Thanka - Shown every 11th year

Freason of Heaus
No - 14
Gongzi (Door to Heaven)

No - 15
Gongzi Cave
No - 16

Tikse

No - 17

Shey Gompa
Buddha Status
No - 18
Rangdam (Zanskar)

No - 19
Karsha (Zanskar)
Decorations on covers of some Manuscripts found in Gilgit (West of Leh)

No. 21