CULTURAL HISTORY OF LADAKH

PART - I

-Mrs. Kunzom Makkerjee

Ladak, which is aptly known as western Tibet, is situated between 74°15'E to 75°5'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-Turkistan 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, Ladak 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 Yarkand, Kashgar, Khuran, Tibet as well as the Indian regions of Punjab and Naggar in the 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 barrier system. The lowest of the passes is Zoji in which once comprised the boundary between Kashmir and Ladak, and the highest ones are Nogbag (19600 ft.) and Karcharom (18002 ft.). 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 acculturation 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 traded their way to Central Asia, Tibet and the adjoining regions through these routes.

Ladak, hailing 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 intrigues 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 Ladak 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 acculturisation may very soon obliterate the culture and religion that once shaped the history of Ladak. Despite their incessant and impassioned appeals to be granted an autonomous status, the people of Ladakh are agitated at the Union government's stoic refusal and the more palliative means adopted. Persistent inadequacies 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 surmised 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.
Bulletin of Tibetology

(Some Scholars attribute this to be the first council considering a convention held at Varanasi under the reigns of the king Kalashajja to the second council). Priyadarshini Ashoka 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 Kannikaa at Kashmir that the princes of Kalinga and Kuttapragada Nepal and Kashmir, as well as the old trade routes became once again active with Buddhist Pandit and Lamas traversing through them. Fa Hien, Huen Tsang and such other travelers from China came through these inaccessable routes. Kashmir remained as an important centre of Buddhist learning for ages long receiving zealous patronage from the kings, a fact corroborated by Kalhana’s Rajatarangini.

In the history of Tibet, the first great who introduced the Buddhist creed as the State religion was the accomplished ruler Srong-Btsan Sgam-po who was a contemporary of King Harshavarman I of Isanapura. Dharma-Prabha of Kumaon, Prophet Muhammad of Mecca, Huen Tsang and the Chinese emperor named Taizhang. It was he who directed his minister Thumi Sambhota to devise a script and grammar for the Tibetan language thereafter presiding over the pan-Asian 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 Khrisrong-De-de-btsan when at the behest of the royal preceptor Pandit Sambhota (Shi-ba-bSho), the great Master of esotericism Guru Padmacanabha arrived at Tibet and firmly established the Buddhist religion after taming and exercising the Bon-po priests and its votaries. In the year c. 716 A.D., Ra-Pa-Chen sat on the throne of Tibet. He was the younger son of king Khrisrong-De-de-btsan. Ra-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 patronised the Buddha Dharma with such zeal that its reverberation could be felt throughout the length and breadth 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 but 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 death, 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 guarded state for the popular spread of Dharma which he took to be the elementary factor behind his brother’s successes turned to be his achille’s heel till at last, he was killed by a monk named Lha-lang-dPal-Gyi tDo-Rje masquerading 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 condition prevailed all over the country with the Bon priesthood 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 that this had been built by the valiant Khrisrong-De-de-btsan. dPal-Khar-btsan (696-923 A.D.) was the last king in this line who left Lhassa and migrated to western Tibet where he is famed to have brought the
three districts—Ladakh, sParang and Guge—under his suzerain control and later let his three sons rule over them. These 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 Jnanagavi, Ye-shes-hod also known as Lha-blo-gama shines exclusively for being instrumental in bringing the famed master Atisha Dipankarar 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-sted Atisha Dipankarar Sirjana who hailed from the Vikrama district of Har. Till his death in 1054 A.D., the Acharya traveled to many places and instilled discipline and faith among the monks encouraging them to live a Spartan-like lifestyle dwelling more on practice and rigorous study. During the course of his journey in Tibet, he also met the great translator Rin-chen-Zapo 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 munificent help form the royalty. Acharya Dipankarar'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 Atsanga and Maitreyar, he established a new order called Bka'-gDam-pa which received further impetus under the able stewardship of his principal disciple named Bsm-gsTor-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 maltreated by impurities of precept and practice. Reformers and teachers galore 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 Nar--po 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'-gyul-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 Sakya hegemony over Tibet when the high abbots 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-rgyal-chen 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 Gushi 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 Mngun-Ri-sKor-GShen consisted of (1) sPa-Rang, sMar-Yul & Zhong-Khor (2) Zhang-Zhung, Khri-'gro sTo-dPal-sMed (3) Yabam Mten 'Li, Brun-Sha, sPal-Til Href : Bod rGya Thig Merged Cham-Mo
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 Atsara 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 achievement. He founded the dGe-lugs-pa School of Buddhism which later on 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 Tae Dal Lama by the Mongol emperor Altan Khan which in the Mongolian language meant the same as the Tibetan word rGya-mtsho or Ocean. The first hierarchy too was recognised in retrospect as the first Tae Dal Lama and the subsequent successors were recognised as the Avatars or re-incarnations of the Tae Lamas, a term which came to pronounced as Dalai Lama in the subsequent years.

The fate of Ladakh or western Tibet was more linked with Turkestan and central Asia during the early 13th century although Lhasa retained the religious, pilgrimage, trade, and sanctuary and drama of the region. In 1207 A.D. during the reign of bKra-shis dGe, the Mongol terror, Tenghis 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 dGe, one of the later rulers who ruled in the year 1233 A.D. had his capital in Lha. He established a monastery and installed there in a huge statue of Maitreya Buddha and another of Avalokiteshvara. His palace is in ruins though the monastery stands till this day. He seems to have been adept in warfare and annexed Baltistan, Gure and 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 Jampa Namgyal was captured by the Bali 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 Sange Namgyal 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 letters of silver and gold. He amassed a fortune through his conquests and even made an abortive attempt to conquer Lhasa. His son Deqen too was a mighty king who quelled innumerable rebellions. The famous Svet monastery was built by him. He died in a disaster in the year 1645 A.D. This king died as Muslim proselyte 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 as the rest of his life in Kashmir. His son and successor Nyima Namgyal established peace and once again paved the way for progress in various fields like art, literature and small industries like publication of manuscripts in calligraphy and even setting up a paper making factory. He also built memorials in the form of chaityas or mchod-Ten and monasteries in Zanskar, Rupin and Nubra districts. Nyima Namgyal who ascended the throne in the year 1705 A.D., died in 1744 A.D. bringing to a close three memorable decades of progress, peace and prosperity. Following his death, there were regular invasions by Muslims from Turkestan and Tibet. Ladakh lost huge tracts of pastures and gold fields which scientifically jeopardised as overland trade and commerce. Heavy war indemnities and taxes exacted by the conquerors further impoverished and desolated the inhabitants of Ladakh. Despite all such reverses, the Ladakhis dauntlessly held on to their faith both Dharma with fortitude and devotion. The downfall of the Mughal empire gave Ladakh some moments of
respite but the sangamary designs of the Dogra chief Zorawar Singh for the conquest of Tibet 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 Leh-yul-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 Srin. In due course of time, the British took back Leh-yul and Spiti from Sirdar Gutha 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 Assai 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 Buddhist faith of the people of Ladakh remained wholly intact and firm. Ladakh still remains a stronghold of the Buddhist faith. Monks as well as the faithful 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 extensive gompas in Ladakh of all the sects of Mahayana Buddhism. Besides, each village has its own Gompa with many walls, chortens, mandoks 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 Lhasa. From the Srinagar-Leh bus route which followed the former caravan route at the ancient travellers route-ancient ruins of gompas or chortens can been seen after crossing the Zoji-la (11,570) which was once the boundary of Kashmir and Tibet. After the partitions Kargil the capital of Baltistan inhabited by Muslims of Sunni and Shia sects was annexed to Ladakh thus changing the environment.

After crossing Zoji-la there is a hutting place in Dras which is the second coldest place in the world. Two ruined statues known as Avalokiteshvara and his companion can be seen with nearby oblitereted 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 Shangspa 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 Wanka river built by a Tibetan lama of Drakpa sect who named it as Ma-Khang (House of the mothers) now it belongs to Gelugpa order or Yellow Hat Sect.

(2) The road then leads to a flat land Mulbek pronounced Mulbes where twenty feet High Maitreya (designated as a future Buddha) statue carved on rock in Indian style with nose length sacred thread. The dress is kingly with a crown on 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-Chen b'zang-Po during the reign of Saint King Gyuge Ye Shrim-God in 1054. In a cold climate, it still exists after 1000 years, the face of the statue is fully wrought with contemplative air.

Below the alter, there is a small underground gompa with a beautiful reclining figure of Avalokiteshvara with eleven hands on each side and nine heads. In a cave nearby there is stone and metal statue of Sakyamuni, Padmasambhava and Tara as well as of Kunig, Bakmla, Tashi Lama and Dalai Lama, with a small library. It belongs to the red hat Drakpa sect built by an unknown lama.

After passing Naika-La (flying Pillars) 12220' is Bodhi Kharbu with statue of Avalokiteshvara now in ruins. This was the capital of ring Doden (1620-48) but defeated by the Muslim invaders. Then came Khatse (means snowy mountain) with some
status of different Buddhist pantheon and some rock carvings of the Darus both is Brahmi and Khrosi scripts with figures of ibex and fighting scenes with bow and arrow. In this area mostly Darus and Mons live-now embraced Islam. 

From Khaltse one has to cross another 13470 Fachu la pass-again to descend 2000 ft. to Lamanupur-the oldest of the gompas built by Naropa in 12th century. It belongs to Brjagopa sect and is now under the Tohdban inukula of Bhutan (detailed later) it was built on a lake dried up by the divine power of Naropa. 

East of Khalte is Basgo-capital of Ladakh during the reign of Sengy Namgyal. Apart from the ruins of old palace there was a beautiful statue of mazerya 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 Achi Gompa on the other side of the Indus river. It was also built by Rinchen Zangpo-1000 years ago with a huge statue of Avalokitesvara, manuscripts with a historical chronicle of Ladakhi kings. Rinchen Zangpo appointed some of Kashmiri artists as proved by the decorations on the wooden arch (Details later). 

Next comes another famous gompa Likir of the Geltupa Sect on the way side hill on the road from Saspol to Nymo. Then comes Phyang means External forces-which is situated 25 Kms from the road to Leh. It belongs to Brjagpa 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 Mahakala covered with tukars.

REPORT ON THE MAIN GOMBAS 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 Gon-pa (closed 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. Lamanupur: Of all the gompas this is the oldest in Ladakh. At present this is the monastery of the Brjagpa community. The chief of this community lives in the monastery of Bhutan-teachings and appointments are done from there. 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 loess of yellow earth indicating existence of lake in the past. By the side of Hong-he river in China such yellowish sandy-hearth loess of two 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 Yung-Drung 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
Bulldedn of Tibetology

Ikon 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 Trishul 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, Kusha (guru-preceptor) Atish Dipankar. Sakyi Thupa are there, a big image of Avalokitesvara 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 Yama, the preceptor Lama, heaven and hell. On the other side wrapped in silk, Buddhist canonical works Kanjur and Tanjur are preserved. Water in small bowls and lamps of female yak butter ('Bri-Ma') 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 1952 A.D. Roerich 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 bharda) to Ladakh-he then built 108 monasteries in the whole country. Amongst these, Lamayuru was the central gompa. The temples around areiotting 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, lepsoy of king Jamyang Namgyal was cured by a lama of Brigungra community named Namu-Dhan-Madang. In exchange, the king gave him this place and monastery in charity. About one and a quarter kilometre of this place of all 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 Kushab Toblung. Brigungra community have two gompas in Ladakhi-Phiyang and Botshharbutey.

2. Likhey: means Sarpamandal (Kha-dkyi) or Akashhed on way to Nyema after Saspol (Saspol) 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 step. 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 Gki-Pore (1050-80 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-seven square seats. There are images and wall pictures around the walls of the room. Crossing three gateways and climbing steps at a height of 1400 ft. we were very tired. The Lamas accorded us receptions by uttering 'Jale Juley' (welcome) and showed us the hall. On one side of the alter 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 Pantheon. There is statue of the first Dalai Lama Gedun grub (Gyalwa Rinpoche). The facial expressions of the lama preceptor and gods and goddesses are calm and noble. At the middle are retained 'Mendöe' or memorial mummies (Snupa) with relics of dead and famous Lama e.g. nail, 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 two wooden shelves on one side apart from this there are big images of Sakyapa thubpa, Majusri along with many small images. The facial expression of them are pleasant and compassionate. Outside are drawn pictures of Lord Buddha and Bodhishattva of Buddhist palace of Dushal (main residential place of Dushal). 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, may be 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 seat far was mentioned as 'Ti-Si' by the lamas. From here the panorama of around is well visible. On the west lied the river Sindhu or Senge Khabab. The valuable, irreplaceable and immovable property and the member 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. Alich: To reach Alich one has to go from Snapele 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 Rinchen 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 Kirin-Sen-Namgyal during 1590-132 A.D. the temple at the middle was renovated. We saw very costly and rare shawl with various fine说得-work and wooden objects with artwork of decorative flowers and plants. The chief temple is small 3m x 3m. On the three side walls of the room are retained innumerable images on the right is stucco 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 1983 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 manuscript Ladakh Chronicles' (Ladakhi Gyalchab) - the history of kings of Ladakh are narrated here. But now the condition of Alich is not good the wall pictures are fading they were getting spoiled with water of molten snow percolated form roof. Their wealth is lesser and number of lamas too is small.

4. Pe-Thund (Spituk): 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, it reach on its has to get on steps. Thchod one has been renovated, besides a new temple too has been constructed. The images are six hundred years old and are wrapped in cloth but the lamas uncrossed 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 Tshurku, Chaginaka etc are there. Besides, there are few gilt images of Tara 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 Chag-Bumtala (1310-1440) A.D. the famous Songka-pa see two ambassadors. The incarnate Lham of Kunchek Bakula or Gelugpa community reside here. He is the religious head of all Gelugpa monasteries and temple of Ladak.
5. Hemis: The meaning is thought of Wisdom (Bodhi-Chintu Chhara). This Gompa is the principal and largest of all in Ladakh. The distance is forty kilometres 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 on the white Chaltas are viewed, then one can presume the existence of this Gompa. All around is the village of Hemis. In the beginning this belonged to Nyingmapa order, at present it is possessed by Karsj-pa sect. King od 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 elsewhere 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 unharmed. 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 Sakyamuni, gods and goddesses of Mahayana pantheon are placed on the altar. There is another statue, that of Maitreya, consort of Padmasambhava. From the almost illegible fresco illustrations of Sisabcharya and their miraculous powers on the opposite of the main entrance dwelling, it may be guessed that this Gompa previously belonged to Druk-pa 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 Maha or Meny 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 covers-emergence and spread of evil power and on the second day, driving away of that evil power by person 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 specially 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-ran-chin, it means 'thought of wisdom'. Sege
BULLETIN OF TIBETOLOGY

Nangyul (1596-1648), one of the Drukpa community Mohanta (chief) tag-sangra prepared it for the Chinese. Construction of this gompa started in 1002 A.D. and completed in 1642 A.D. This community followed the Drok pa community of Bhutan. But some images of tenth and eleventh centuries from the ruins of Meni or Meni gompa in PYPUHK have been brought here. Hence, Meni is called "Mother of Hemis".

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 frescoes within.

(2) SHEY - situated at a distance of 16 Kms. from Leh, on Leh Manali Road on hillock. A 7.5 m. high Buddha statue made of white copper from Zanskar with gold plating in the biggest statue of its kind built by Dhul Jangyal, son of Song Nangyal, in memory of his father who was imprisoned and forced to embrace Islam religion by his captors and banished in Kashi 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 Kg. 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 up to his death.

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

(5) SANEKAR GOMPA - is 3 km from Leh. It has many golden icons built 100 years back. Stories of Panchatantara are painted on the walls around. Kasok Bahula, M.P. (present) is the head of this one.

There are gompas at Deskit and Targat in Pypuk by Celupha, Karjupa 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 Cosma de Körös (1784-1842) during some months in 1823-1825. He traveled through Central Asia routes and Karakoram and was stopped at Leh. The adventurous traveler D. Moorthi 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 London in 1842 and died on way at Darjeeling.

(7) GILGIT - (4) Ladakh) During 1931 a mass of brick-bark on a few paper manuscripts were found in Naupura near Gilgit cantonment in a circular chamber 7 ft. 91/2" diameter inside the dome of 1 step. 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
Bulletin of Tibetology

of Suttas, PRAJNA-PARAMITA, SADDHARMA-PUNDARIKA and the Sanskrit VINAYA PITA KA 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) Bodh Gaya in 1988, (3) Sarahan 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 MUZAFFARABAD
3. AVALOKITESWARA with 11 hands on each side of hands at Mukhlo.
4. LAMAYURU - the oldest gompa.
5. PHYANG - Statue of Buddha
6. LUKYIR - Gompa
7. SPITUK - (Near Airport)
8-9. ALCHII - Wooden carvings of the gate and large statue of Avalokiteswaran (standing) inside.
10. Way of Hemis Gompa
11. FRONT OF HEMIS
15. GOSANG cave above Hemis.
16. TIKSHE MONASTERY - Statue of Buddha.
17. Buddha statue in Sher Gompa.
18-19. RANGDÖMON and KAROJIA 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.
Towards Mulheik
Maitreya Buddha (3rd)
Mulheik Rock carving

No - 3

Avalokiteswara
Lamayuru
The oldest gompa
(Lhayr Gompa) It was later drained by Sersapa to build the temple.
No. 8
Atcho Compa
Wood carving on gate.

No. 9
 Scalokiteswara in Af-Chu
Way to Hemis

Front of Hemis
No. 12
The famous Thanka - Shown every 11th year

No. 13
Fresco of Beasts
No - 16

Tikse

No - 17

Shey Gompa
Buddha Status
Decorations on cover of some Manuscripts found in Gilgit (West of Leh)

No - 20

No - 21