

Buddhism in Ladakh and its Culture and Tradition- A General survey

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Introduction: Ladakh is very much influenced with Tradition and Culture of Tibet. Infact, Ladakh is known as the western Tibet. Lying politically in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, bordering Pakistan and China, Ladakh is an important snow desert region of India. The people of Ladakh have been cherished by the virtue of generosity, kindness, love, tolerance and compassion from the ancient time. It is very renowned place all over the world. Thus during the summer season regardless of the harsh geographical conditions, the place is crowded with people from different part of the World just to have a sign of the long survived Tibetan Buddhist culture and their impact upon their lifestyle. The majority of the people of the Ladakh are the follower of the Buddha Dhamma and Islam with a few Christian populations.

As we know the culture is the characteristics of groups of people defined by everything such as Language, religion lifestyle, etc. different people in different society have different culture but also have some similarities. The culture varies in

different things such as clothes, food, marriage ceremony etc.

Different author define culture in different way for example culture: learned and shared have patterns or model for living; day to day living patterns, these patterns and model, pervade all aspect of human social interaction.

Culture is the Mankind's primary adaptive device. Another author says that, "culture is the collective programme of mind which distinguishes the member of one catagories of people from other.

If we look at the history of Ladakh then we will find that the history of Ladakh until 900, CE, Ladakh was directly under the control of the Tibetan Kings. Thus, King Skyid-Ide- nyi-ma-mgon, a direct descendant of the first king of Tibet, Gnya' -khri btsan-pa ruled over Western Tibet, which consisted of the region of the Ladakh, Guge, Purang, and Zangskar. The regions were divided into three of his sons. Thus eldest of his son Dpal -gyi-mgon (1000-1205) ruled over Ladakh. His second sons Bkra- shis-mgon inherited Guge and Purang and the youngest one

ruled over Zangskar. Ladakh has been a part of the Tibetan empire ever since its history is known up to the period of its annexation by the dogra general Zorawar Singh in the years 1834. Thereafter it resulted in the inclusion of the territory of Ladakh into the Indian state. Thus the major historical event related to the region of Ladakh is associated with the Tibet.

It is well known fact that, Buddhism is a world Religion, which arouse in and around the ancient kingdom of Magadha now which is situated in Bihar, India and is based on teaching of Siddhartha Gautama, who was deemed as “Buddha”. Buddhism spread across the country during the lifetime of Buddha.

Before describing the term religion as Buddhism it is very important to understand and clear the meaning of term religion. About 2600 years ago at the initial time of Lord Buddha there were already 62 religious sects in India alone. Since all the existing religions during his time could not provide answer to his question he decided not to use the ingredient or concepts of the existing religions.

In India, the basic religious thinking at that time was and still, “God created everybody; God is responsible for

everything; God will reward; God can forgive all sins; and God is responsible for our lives after Death; God will send us to heaven or he will send us to hell.

These are the basic beliefs for all religions even today.

Different scholars have different views and opinion about the nature and meaning of the term Religion.

According to Aldous Huxley, religion is among other things, a system of education; by means of which human beings may trains themselves, first to make desirable changes in their personality and society and second, to enlighten consciousness and established more relations between themselves and the universe of which they are the parts.

Modern Indian philosopher like Dr.S. Radhakrishana has said the religion is not a set of doctrine but that is experience; and religious experience is based on the realisation of the presence of the divine in man.

The Buddha message as a religion, it is a way of life; “keeping away from all evil deeds, cultivation of life by doing good deeds and purification of mind from mental impurities”.

Religious Belief and terminology of the lord Buddha: while introducing his doctrine, Lord Buddha used the existing religious terms and beliefs thinking that his followers and listeners would group on the familiar ground.

Some of the terms like Dharma Karma, Moksha, Nirvana, Niraya, Samsara, Atam were common to all religious groups of his times. The teaching of the Buddha gave a very rational and unique meaning and interpretation to those existing religious terms.

Buddha Dharma: According to ancient interpretation, the word Dharma is law given by God. There is an ancient belief that God promised to appear from time to time to protect this dharma by taking different incarnations. Buddha contradicted that God has not given any doctrine and religious laws.

According to Buddha, 'Dharma' is not an extraordinary law created by anyone. Our body itself is dharma. Our mind itself is Dharma; the whole universe is Dharma.

In Buddha's opinion, "by understanding the nature of physical body and nature of

mind and worldly condition we realize the dharma". The Buddha was not interested in the development of "Faith" or religion in an absolute sense. He insisted that one must not accept even his own teachings on the basis of faith alone. He used to say in his teachings that, one must gain knowledge and then develop understanding through study, discussion, meditation and finally contemplation. Knowledge is one thing and understanding is another. If there is understanding one can adjust one's life according to changing circumstances based on the knowledge one has.

Origin of Buddhism in Ladakh: the religion of Ladakh is a modified form of Indian Buddhism, to the Tibetan system of Buddhism. This faith was introduced in Ladakh during the reign of Asoka. In 241 B.C. numerous missionaries' teachers were dispatched to all the surrounding countries to spread the peaceful doctrine of the Sakya- Muni. Then Majjhantiko (in Sanskrit- Sthavira- Mahavanso) was deputed to Kashmir and Gandhara, and the surrounding countries of China and Tibet.

The spread of Buddhism in Ladakh was followed by its introduction to China; the people on the Indus attributed to the

spread of the Buddhism “beyond the rivers” to some sramanas (ascetics) who came with sacred books, 300 years after the nirvana of the Buddha or in 243 B.C. previous to the occupation of the Tibet by khiri- Tsampo, in 250 BC, there is nothing known about the history, that the people were of Bon or the pon – religion, which like Indian Tirthakaras was an aphorism. According to Mogul Author Sanay Stezen, Khiri-Tsampo was an Indian Prince of the Litsobyi (or Lichhavi) race who being conquered in war had sought refuge in Tibet, and afterwards he was proclaimed king by the people. Who were called the Bebehin Banbo of heaven, Yang-Banbo of the earth.

They denoted only different sects; the one effecting heavenly aspiration and the other leaning to the earthly objects.

Debachin is most probably Tibetan the “blissful” which is an equivalent of the Sanskrit “Sugata” the well gone or blessed or the epithet of the formers Buddhas.

But the followers of the young – Drung – pa, or Mystic-Cross were still powerful, and in A.D. 899 Buddhism was formerly abolished by Lang Tarma and was not again introduced for more than seventy years, until A.D. 971. It was finally

restored and has since continued as the dominant religion.

In Ladakh the great Monastery of Lama Yurru, is still called “Yung-drung-Gompa” or the Monastery of the “Mystic- cross”. The establishment of this monastery attributed to “Naropa” a Lama from Brigung near Lhasa (Tibet). But the name of Lama Yurru was derived from the Lama, because he has suppressed the faith of Mystic- cross (Yung- drung) and had established the Lamaic- doctrine of the Buddhism.

But Buddhism was prevailing religion of Ladakh from the conversion of the people by Asoka’s Missionaries down to A.D.400 when Fa-Hien visited India. At that time Buddhism was flourishing in little part of the Ladakh and in other small state in the North, i.e. Kotan, Tsung- ling (Karakoram).

The king of Kie-Chha (kha-chan or snow land) Ladakh celebrated the great assembly, i.e. in the Gyalpa’s time; the Lamas assembled annually at Leh in the month of Tan-po (march) and were parted with presents. Now they assemble at hemis in June or July, every year. The Buddhism in Ladakh was the Indian Buddhism. The number of sramanas was about 10,000 all of whom were satisfied with the study of

the lesser advancement” but later on it got its advancement from the Tibetan system of Buddhism. In the Indian version there were three great doctrines of Buddhism” the Vinaya, Sutra and the Abhidhamma but in Tibetan version these were divided into seven different doctrines.

The first King of Tibet of Buddhism:

The recorded history of Tibetan Kings and Tibet itself is available only from the 3rd century B.C.E, and it is stated that the region was practising the Bon religion. The first recorded King of Tibet was Nya-khri-po. There are a number of assumptions about this king, according to the Mughal author Sanasang Stezen, the King Nya-khri-tsanpa was an Indian Prince of the Licchavi race, who, being conquered in war, had sought refuge in Tibet, where he was hospitably received, and afterwards proclaimed king by the people. Csoma de Koros repeats a similar story, with the addition that Nya-Khri-Tsan-po “being defeated in battle”, fled to Tibet, where he acknowledged as a king by the Bön.

The reason behind the entering of the Licchavi prince into Tibet and becoming King of Tibet is being described differently by different scholars. In this regard, Csoma de Koros says that the prince was a

contemporary of the great Buddhist King Asoka dating c. 250 B.C.E and is assumed that he must have been expelled from India by Asoka as the Licchavi family were great oppositionists of Buddhism.

The history of Tibet is tightly joined with Buddhism. In fact, all the Tibetan chronicles were compiled after the well establishment of Tibetan Buddhism in the region. Some of the Chinese scholars have written in this regard as follows, “After its struggle with the indigenous Bon Religion, the Buddhist or rather the Lamaists hierarchy took the seat of the ruler of Tibet displacing the feudal Lords and chieftains. In order to gain prestige, it became a fashion to trace everything to Sakya Muni, the Buddha, or the land of Buddha”.

Different names of Ladakh: In ancient times Ladakh is known by different names. Ladakh in Tibetan La-tages, is most common name of the country; but it is also called Mor-yul, or low land or red land, Kha-chan-pa, or snow land, both of which names are used by the old Chinese’s travellers; by Fa-Hian, A.D. 640, who calls it Ma-lo-pho. The name of Kha-chan-pa or snow land, is also applied to the Lhasa Kingdom of Great Tibet. The two central districts of Great Tibet are Dbus, G Tsang.

Ladakh is inhabited by peculiar races of people who call them self Bot-pa, who speaks peculiar Language called Tibetan and who profess the religion of the Buddha, under a peculiar hierarchy of Monk called Lamas. The name of the Tibet is entirely unknown to the people as well as the Indians, who call them Bhotiyas and their country Bhutan. The use of name of bot and Bhutan is probably not older than the tenth or twelfth century when the Buddhist having been expelled from Indian the hill country of Which they settled naturally acquired the name of the Buddha – than and Bod-tan or Bot .

Bots of Tibetan Origin: Among the earlier settler in Ladakh are, Dokpas and Changspa. Generally they were the nomads. The Tribes belong to the pure Aryan Blood, Supposed to have been migrated from Gilgit and had Settled near Dress and around but afterwards they pushed back to the remote areas of Khaltsi and Kargil regions by the sides of the Indus.

The Culture of Ladakh: before describing the culture of Ladakh I would like to define culture, which reflects the deep value based, everlasting traditions customs, Rituals and various aspects of the

advancement in a society there are three main aspects of a rich culture.

1. Preservation of the ancient values based aspects of the good culture.
2. Elimination of the obsolete aspects of the good culture. For example some such custom or tradition which are not suitable for the society, must be discarded and eliminated from preserved culture.
3. Inculcation of new values based traditions and cultural aspect in society.

The culture of Ladakh has generally two main striking features, i.e. the Mongolian culture and the Indo- Aryan Culture. The Mongolian culture is dominant since the ancient times because of the widespread of the Buddhism in whole of then Ladakh and Tibet and the Buddhist Emperor for most of the historical periods.

The culture of Ladakh is divided into various fields:

1. **Monasteries:** Buddhist monasteries were constructed with the help of Buddhist emperors, throughout the Ladakh. The rich Buddhist culture is preserved in the Monastery of Ladakh. Besides these Monasteries have played

a vital role in the cultural and social integration of the rural Ladakh. the poor class or the peasant attendant the monastery lands and cultivated them and provided foods grains and other product of the daily use like butter, edible oils, fuel and all the day ti day needs of the Lamas, were fulfilled by the head of the monasteries for performing rituals in the village on the ceremonial occasions i.e. marriage ceremonies or sometime the religious performance on the death of the inhabitant families. This traditional system still exists all over the Ladakh.

Buddhist Deities and their statues in Different Monasteries of Ladakh: since long time ago, Nepal had been a site for renowned Buddhist or Spiritual master to practice meditation and dharma teachings for its calm and Naturalistic geographic setting of Mountain, Himalayas and Valleys. Perhaps for that reason, the art of statue making might have flourished in this reason since as early as fifth century 5th i.e. Lichhavi period (300-700 AD) .Guru Padamsambhava, the “Second Buddha,”who travelled from Northwest India through Lahaul Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Arunchal Pradesh and firmly established Buddhism in

these land had taken Nepali artisan to Tibet to work at Samye Monastery. In this we can see different Deities statues are available in different Monastery of Ladakh which attract the tourist all over the world and left the deep impression in the mind of the numerous visitors

2. **Types of races in Ladakh:** Ladakh was inhabited by four races of men, namely Champa, Ladakhi, Balti and Dards, the first three races belong to Tibetan races.

The first if the three subdivisions of Tibetans – the Champas- were those who led a nomadic life on the upland valleys, places with which, being too elevated for cultivation to bring a living, were fit only for pastoral uses. The, second the Ladakhi , were those Tibetan who had settled in the valley, and in the side Valleys, of the Indus, who had formed villages and had occupied nearly all the ground fit for cultivation; and who still retained the Buddhist faith which was held by the Tibetan to the south-east to East. Thirdly the Baltis were that branches of the Tibetan races, who at one time identical with the Ladakhi, spread the

farther down the Indus valley and then became converted to the Mohammedan Faith.

3. **Sacrificing or sparing:** a child there was a tradition in the Buddhist families of Ladakh that each of the families will send at least one of the offspring, i.e. a son, or a daughter to their respective monasteries for conversion into a Monk (Lama) or the nun (chunno). They used to learn Dharma by staying in the Monasteries, and are sent to some other monasteries for the advance religious knowledge. This practice is still prevalent in Ladakh.

4. **Druk-pa's (the Purest Aryan) is another significance of Ladakh culture:** In some village of Ladakh, on the bank of Indus river down towards Khaltse, like Dha, Hanu Garkun, Batalik etc., they are survivors of the purest Aryan Race, known as Drukpas. They are still for their unique Aryan culture. They wear colourful clothing's. Both male and female, wear Necklace, bracelet and ear rings, they wear cap with the variety of flowers. The robes and caps are switched with coins. Both male and females keeps

long hair and even male are seen with long- parandhas of different colour.

They do not use cow 's milk, fowl and hens eggs even they refrain from the use of cow dung unlike the different sects of Buddhist , with yellow dresses called Geluk- pa sect and one with red hat sect is broadly known as Druk –pa.

5. **Position of women in Ladakh:** A women had sole authority in household matters. She did all the work in household matters. She did all the work in the house and when it was finished helped in the fields in some district she also fetched fuel from jungle **Polyandry is very common in Ladakh:** the most remarkable social institution of the poorer family is of Ladakh was the system of polyandry; which is still prevails in the far flung areas. But this system is strictly confined to real brothers. Each family of the brother in ancient time had one wife in common. The most usual number of husbands is two but even tree are four were not uncommon. This system was more confined to the poorer classes the rich in the eastern part of Ladakh and Tibet generally had

two or three wives according to the circumstances. According to Alexander Cunningham "polyandry is the principal check to the increase in population and however revolution it may be to our feelings. It was most politic measure for a poor country which cannot produce sufficient food for its inhabitant.

6. Use of Chung (a local barley- beer):

another important feature of Ladakhi culture is simplicity, innocent and social habit of the people. The huge bowl of chang are the chief Attraction of entertainment in most if he village of Ladakh; the feast are generally attached with the songs and dances. A drinking song is appropriately called "Chan-glu liquor song. The singer is generally accompanied by a fiddler or sometime by a dream called 'damn in local language.

7. Dance in Ladakh: exhibition of the female dance in the traditionally Ladakhi dress; especially in the occasion of welcome of the VIP's or the chief guest; and on different occasion of birthday fest called Tsas-Ton'.

8. The Ladakhi Marriage System:

Marriage is much more a female business but of some peculiarities when betrothed bridegroom proceeds to the bride's house with a bowl of "Chang" and flowers and relatives discuss the wedding days and the spirit together. After the bridal day has been fixed; the bridge groom obliged to send a portion of food and Chang daily to his elect.

The Marriage party and entertainment starts with Gur-Gur -Tea (butter Tea) and the special variety of "Chang" the marriage feast namely "Ming—Ton" "served to all participants in the Marriage. There is no evil of Dowry in the marriage which is the richest feature of Ladakhi culture.

9. Different races: there are Indo Aryan groups which include the man, in Dards, and the Baltis. The Dards of areas and baltis are mostly Muslim. The mons, Chngspa and Dards of dha-Hanu, Darchiks Garkans are the Buddhist. Mongolian annexed with Tibetans lives in Chang- Thang and is known as Changspa, Chang -Thang is the name given collectively to the

plains which extend up to Chushul or south east into Tibet.

10. Phas- phuns and Chos- puns: -

besides all the above tradition of Ladakh; phasphun is traditional types of relation among the people of Ladakh; who visit to each other's house during Festivals like Losar Marriage, or cremation ceremonies, phas-phuns comes to work without any notice and work for all related formulation without any personal interest, this relation continues through generation. Similar in the case with Chos – pun; this relationship is made by the monks through the religious ceremonial lottery system at the end of the festivals in the every monastery.

11. Monastery festivals: another feature of Ladakh culture is the Annual festivals of almost all the monasteries in Ladakh. The festival of hey, hemis, Lama Yurru Alchi, Basgo-phiyang, Spituk, Thikse and Hanle- monasteries are of the much significance. Some of the festivals are organised by certain monasteries after twelve years gap. Like Hemis monastery, where the festivals of 1992 was just like that of a Kumbhela of Haridwara; is the festival on 9th ad 10th of July 1992 –

4390 foreigners united in addition to countless local visitors.

12. Five Ladakhi food items that is most favourite in Ladakhi tradition.

Every country or state has its own culture and tradition and we observe many differences on the basis of food, clothes etc. Leh and Ladakh are greatly influenced from Tibetan Culture which makes it distinct from the rest of the nation nations. similarly in Ladakh we find its own traditional food which is famous by the tourist of different parts of the countries. The local traditional food of the Ladakh is mentions are as under.

Thukpa: This lip-smacking delicacy mainly contains pieces of our or noodles, in a soup which mostly contains vegetables, but may sometime also have pieces of chicken added to it. This piping hot soup is eaten by our Ladakhi folks mainly to cut out the extremely cold temperatures experienced in Leh and Ladakh.

Chang: This indigenous brew of Ladakh is prepared by fermenting miller with yeast in a cylindrical porcelain pot. The preparation is topped with warm water, till

the miller loses its strength. The liquid thus obtained is called Chang.

Butter Tea: This signature tea of Ladakh is mainly prepared by adding and stirring butter and salt to boiling milk

Skyu: A traditional dish of Ladakh, this food preparation is made of kneaded thumb sized wheat our dough. Cooked mainly with water, it is served with meat or vegetables.

Khambir: The traditional bread of Ladakh is known as Khambir. Shaped like a pan, this bread is served mostly with the traditional butter tea.

13. Mural Painting and Scrolls: old mural Paintings and old scrolls in the monastery called “Thangkas” are other important features of Ladakh Culture. Mural painting and Thangkas are the richly presented token of Ladakh Culture, some of Murals and Thangkas are rarely found in the world, and are presented once in years on the occasion of monastery festivals or some important festivals which take place once in 12 years.

14. Ancient wood crafts and fascinating architecture work in the monasteries and palaces of Ladakh add to the richness of Ladakh Culture.

15. **Display:** performance of Lamas in the Monasteries – annual festivals which take place in winter take the shape of dance and dharma in the Gompa court yards. Lamas wear colourful garment and starting frightful mask. They perform of mines various spirits. Performs various aspects of religious progress i.e. the progress of the individual’s soul and its purification or the victory of good over evils.

16. **Oracles and Astrologers:** the people of Ladakh believe in the influence of God and spirit on the material world. The Lamas are most mediators between the human and the spirit world. The most famous Mark- oracles are of ‘Matho Gompa. This is chosen by a traditional procedure.

Conclusion:

The culture of Ladakh left great impression on the mind of people from all over the world. Economy and society has been shaped by many factors - the fact that Ladakh neighbours Tibet in the east, in the north by the Xiniang province of China, in the northwest by Pakistan, in the west by Kashmir and in the south by the Lahaul and Spiti valleys of Himachal Pradesh, also Central Asia further field. Along the long established trade routes through Tibet, Central Asia, Kashmir and the plains of northern India, came not only with goods but also ideas. Despite its harsh terrain and remoteness from urban centres, Ladakh has long been a location where people, commerce and cultures intermixed and its art forms therefore reflect influences from many other places. Many people from different countries come to visit in this place and feel very happy to visit here and enjoy the unique beauty of this area. In this way I have an attempt to touch the basic cultural values of this place and present a picture of Ladakh in a brief survey.

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