

The Worldview of Buddhist Symbolism in Ladakh

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Abstract

Symbols are found in each and every religious tradition. The symbols help to create the humankind in the formation of solidarity within society. Though in most of the cases, people use the positive aspects of symbols, but sometimes it provokes havoc in the society. The emergences of these symbols came up along the philosophy of all the religions in the world. The Tibetan religious symbolism and their values in society is mostly connected with the teaching of Buddha Shakyamuni. The ancient Nalanda monastic education system has influenced the people of Tibet dates back to the 7th century. Similarly, in Ladakh the peoples have been practicing a Tibetan form of Buddhism since the 7th century. The practice of different symbols of Ladakhi people in their day to day life represents their religion, such as Prayer wheels, eight auspicious symbols and Prayer Flags which are very important and had been practicing since ancient times. There are also ritual symbols such as cake offering (Torma) which is prominently used in the day to day of the Ladakhi people. These symbols represent the living heritage of wisdom and compassionate attitudes towards all sentient beings. Buddhist values and symbols have a great hold on the lives of people living in the whole Trans-Himalayan regions in general and Ladakhi society in particular even in modern times. All aspects of their lives revolve around Buddhist values and symbols

from birth to death. In Ladakh Buddhist societies, there is not such a wide gap between spiritual and material things as there seems to exist in the western civilization of today. Symbols are signs which we used to remind ourselves of the interrelation between inward and outward, between mental activities and material appearances.

Keywords: *Religious Symbolism, Prayer Flags, Prayer Wheels, Buddhism in Ladakh, Religion, Culture*

Ladakh is one of the most important learning centers of Tibetan Buddhism, after the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1959. In Ladakh, the practice of Buddhism is unique, in which the Buddhist monastic institution has taken a significant role in spreading the message of Buddha teaching. When it comes to the following the path of Buddha in the society in Ladakh, it slightly seems different with other because in Ladakhi people mostly use various Buddhist symbols and rituals in their day to day life. The culture of Ladakh is strongly religious-oriented. Religion is a

leading power and its manifestations are noticeable in all the major aspects of Ladakhi's social structure and function. It has been pragmatic that the elements of religion provide a motivation to the people to preserve the status-quo in terms of traditional lifestyle. The religious contents and people trust in it, which offer safety under the hardest conditions.

The actual practice of Buddha is emphasizing on the philosophical teaching based on the purification of body, mind, and speech. Therefore the real practice comes from the thorough understanding of the philosophy and the way of meditation. Regarding the Buddhist practice in Ladakh, the people mostly emphasize on the rites, rituals, and Buddhism symbols. They become the primary tools for achieving the practice of philosophy and meditation. Buddhist symbols and performing of rituals are helping the people towards a positive direction, but sometimes the people only doing the ritual part and forget the philosophy and meditation. During my research paper survey work in summer 2012, while interacting with the few monks of Hemis monastery, their overwhelming opinions were that "we need to balance

rituals and philosophy, meditation to practice the Buddhism."

In Ladakh, the practice of Buddhism is known as Tibetan Buddhism or sometimes it also called Vajrayana. Most of the monasteries have a culture of performing the arts, rituals during the monastic festivals. In early Buddhist period, there was lacking to use this kind of symbols and rituals. Later it incorporated along the culture and tradition of the local areas. In reality, the use of these religious symbols into the Dharma activities further enhance the spiritual life. They have a deeper meaning and need to understand carefully, ultimately the different symbols and rituals, helping to tame our monkey mind and leads towards purity. Venerable monk Tashi Hemis monastery, 2013¹

There are hundreds of Buddhist symbols which exist in the Ladakhi society. Some of the important Religious symbols which are used by the people in life are given below:-

Oil Lamp Offering Symbol

The oil lamp offerings are the symbols of light and it provides us wisdom. Offering with the pure intention and dedication comes out from the clutches of ignorance, hence helping to purify our mind. We have a

witness to see the different sizes and kinds of oil offerings in the Buddhist monasteries and the household of the Ladakhi society. Outside of the monastery courtyard, big lamps are available, some oil lamps carry through the whole year, to continue the burning of oil, and it's called 'Loh Chod'. During the monastic festival time, the devotees bring lots of oil for the offering. In Ladakh, every household has their own small prayer room, purely dedicated for the spiritual purposes. The parents or grandparents wake up in the early morning to make offering the lamp. It has a tendency of the culture to offer the lamp in the early morning and before dark comes. On auspicious occasions such as Buddha Purnima, the His Holiness Dalia Lama and His Holiness Gyalwang Drukpa Rimpoche Birthday the offering of the lamp comes double in order to gain more merits. The thousands of butter lamps are also offered after the death of a person, in order to show the right path through the intermediate stage (Bardo in Ladakhi) by wisdom light of his consciousness. During this period people not only offers the lamps to the dead person, but offering to all the sentient beings who are or have faced extreme suffering. Along

with the offering of a lamp during the death of a person, the practice of meditation on impermanence is also conducted.

In early times the use of offering oil has been simple and traditional. In Lower Ladakh, the offering of oil is mostly made of apricot oil and in the upper part, it has a butter of cow and Demo (female version of animal Yak). But these days the offering oils are supplied from the outside Ladakh and it has different varieties of oil. The recitation of the Light Offering Prayer shows the true and right path in our life. If we recite these prayers before the lightning to the lamp, then the double positive benefit will come. This prayer was composed by famous great Indian Buddhist master Arya-Atisha. The explanations of the prayer are:

Light Offering Prayer Composed by Lama Atisha ² and translated by Ven. Pemba Tenzing Sherpa. Ancient time prayers related to the lightening lamps or candle, prayer should be recited with the burning of candles and a bright light of the lamp. And they considered the light of the lamp is equal to the great three thousand worlds and its environment. Also, they compare the bundle of lamps with the ruler of the great peaks and mountains- Mount Meru. The lamp

which uses butter as the source of fuel compares with the great ocean which infinite and too deep to measure the depth of the ocean. They are hoping for more and more lights, uncountable lamps, giving immense bright light in the presence of each and every Buddha. May the light bring more brightness and it ceases the dark part of life which can be considered as ignorant part. May this brightness bring happiness to all sentient beings from a peak of sufferings to all hell part of the life. May they get the path to pure land. May they are free from sufferings, hell and may everyone get the life which is fully blessed and free from attachment, anger, and ignorance.

The reason of lamp offering for Buddhist people believes that it signifies the disappearance of “darkness by light” literally means destroy the darkness of ignorance, hatred, and anger with rational awareness gained by practicing for hours and hours and purify the mind which is full of darkness. By offering with faith and devotion, it gives satisfaction and peace in our mind. I have learned this culture of offering from my parents and grandparents. I am always offering oil lamps with my prayers, may peace prevail in this universe

and free all the sentient being in the sufferings. Tamchos village Thiksay, 2013³

The Symbol of Water Offering

The clean water offering to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are considered, one of the most auspicious symbols and essential method in Ladakhi society. For water offering, in Ladakhi it is called ‘Yom-chaps’ and the offering bowl is ‘Ting’. The water is available everywhere, therefore every person can afford to offer without attachment to it. People from different backgrounds either rich or poor equally must contribute a Water offering to purify one’s body, mind, and speech. Like the offering of butter lamp, the culture of water offering symbol is also practiced in all the Buddhist monasteries, village households either permanent or temporary. The water offer in various bowls made of silver, copper, brass, glass and even in the wood. It is up to the individual choice, faith, and dedication.

Offering bowls must be kept clean and it is an essential part of the ritual and it is always done with a piece of cloth (Thing phis in Ladakhi). The offering bowls are mostly seven in numbers. Each bowl is kept at the distance of one size of barley and slowly the clean water is poured into the bowl by

reciting the mantras of Om Aah Hung (it represents the purification of our body, mind, and speech).

The great spiritual master Lama Gyatso of Zanskar region was one of the leading meditation practitioners from Ladakh. When he was on retreat for a longer period of time, he was offered water to the Buddhas in a single bowl with pure motivation and dedication. He was only one bowl and one pot in whole years of retreat; this made him less attachment to the material aspects. He was advised to the devotees to overcome the selfish nature of mind and do the practice of cultivating mindfulness. If we follow the footsteps of Lama Gyatso, positive merits will come and stay always inner happiness. Venerable monk Paldan village Saboo, 2013⁴

The early morning is the best suitable time to offer the water and water is changed every day with fresh and clean pure water. The water is generally removed at the end of the day before sunset, but in Ladakh, most of the people do it late evening because busy in their worldly activities. After removing the water, again cleaning of the bowls is done with a fine neat cloth and the bowl are placed inward. The offered water is

sometimes put into the river or stream to bless the creatures living in the water. “This ritual of symbols are mostly performed in Ladakh by the elderly people and the youths are less interested, because of the much emphasizing on the modern lifestyle” Uncle Tsering Bandaypa village Domkhar (2013). After going through the various opinions of the great spiritual masters, lay people, youths, and scholars about the water offering among the Buddhist in Ladakh. I have concluded with a reason that, by offering with pure intention and dedication, it overcomes our intensive selfish nature and feel peace in our mind. By doing this kind of continued practice, we will generate a compassionate attitude towards all sentient beings. Before doing any kind of ritual practice, firstly we need to cultivate a positive mind and pure dedication. This practice of water offering is passed from one generation to another and its practice is cultivated from a very tender age.

The Symbol of Rosary or Mala (rtha-Na in Ladakhi)

The rosary or garland is used in many religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. The rosary represents the symbol of peace, tranquility, equanimity

and inner joyfulness. These prayer beads are found in abundance at the religious sites of both Hinduism and Buddhism. The rosaries are made of sandalwood, Bodhi tree seeds, semi-precious stones such as Amber and Quartz. The Buddhist rosary consists of the total number of 108 beads. In Ladakh elderly Buddhist and monks usually put the Mala around their neck. Sometimes we can see, have tied the Mala even at the wrist of the hands. The rosaries are used only for the religious purposes in Ladakh. The beads are connected with the maroon color thread, and it symbolizes the unbroken lineage authentic teaching of the Buddha. The prayer rosaries are used to help the various kinds of Mantras of the Tibetan Buddhism.

The Buddhist people of Ladakh reciting the various kinds of mantras with the help of prayer beads such mantras are, the mantras of Avalokitesvara, Guru-Padmasambhava, Shakyamuni Buddha, Amitabha Buddha, Manjushree (Buddha of wisdom), and different Bodhisattvas Mantras are used. Among all the different mantras, the Avalokitesvara mantra is mostly used by the people then next the mantra of Guru-Padmasambhava. The Bodhisattva of Avalokitesvara is the mother of love and

compassion and also the most popular deity of Tibet. The mantra of Avalokitesvara is Om Mani Padme Hung (Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus) but it has also contained vast and worth meaning to benefits all sentient beings.

The prayer rosary I have given by my spiritual teacher from the Hemis monastery, since long back. This rtha-Na is made of sandalwood beads, it has a unique smell and by reciting the mantra the tremendous merit will gain. Whenever I get time, I used to recite the Mani Mantra with these prayer beads. By recitation of Mani Mantra, I can get peace and happiness in my mind and I am least taking an interest in the material aspects. I have blessed by great masters of the different lineage of Tibetan Buddhism and they also give advice to the people to recite the Mantra. In my village, I always encourage the younger generation to follow the footsteps of great Rinpoches and noble persons. Grandmother Abi Lochan. Village Domkhar Barma Walpa 2013⁵

In Ladakh, the rosaries are derived from outside, such as Bodh-Gaya, Varanasi, Nepal, and Tibet. These rosaries are easily available in the Antique shops. We encountered many European and American

tourists putting the rosary around their neck. During all the religious ceremony, most of the people take their prayer beads. *Mani Tungchur* (which contains 100 million mantras of Om Mani Padme Hum) recitation is very popular in Ladakh, in which peoples are congregating in a particular area for a few days till reach at the mark of 100 million mantras. The high spiritual master guide within this few days and everybody have to carry the rosary along with them. The main purpose of prayer rosary is to gain a spiritual merit and to purify the negative attitudes of the body speech and mind. The prayer rosary also helping to concentrate our fickle mind on a particular object and henceforth slowly train towards the positive mind. Generally, the recitation of mantras is done with the help of the left hand between the index finger and thumb. The method of rotation is in a clockwise direction. While recitation we have to speak the mantra, these will help to purify our mind. In the villages, we can find the elderly persons always along with their prayer beads.

In ancient Tibet, the people were so religious and most of the time they spend their time with the recitation of different kinds of Mantras. Thousands of the

venerable masters were staying into the solitary retreat for years. These people's behaviors and attitudes were mostly polite and humble in nature, due to which they were compassion in action. When I was childhood, many stories were heard from our senior monks that in Tibet few monks were always carried the prayer beads along with them until their death. The recitation of rosary prayer was so popular; therefore this culture of practice slowly arrived in the Ladakhi society. The rosary practices are so simple; there is no need of any great effort. If we are able to fully understand this practice of the method and by taking faith than it is the quickest way to enlightenment. I am always keeping advising to the youths of Ladakh to continue this practice to benefit them and to all the sentient beings. Sometimes I explained them, the meaning of the recitation of Mani Mantra. Meme Tsangspa (Great yogi), Village Takmachik, 2013⁶

The Buddhist Religious Symbols of Vajra and Bell

The Vajra and Bell symbols perform a significant role in Tibetan Buddhism. Vajra represents the method and Bell represents the wisdom. Both of these two symbols in



combination represent the Indivisible Emptiness and Form. Vajra (*Dorje in Ladakhi*) means an indestructible or diamond vehicle, nobody can destroy its essence. The Vajra fundamentally symbolizes the unfathomable, resolute, absolute, inseparable, and eternal state of enlightenment or Buddhahood as Vajra Mind. The Bell (*Tel-Bhu in Ladakhi*) means feminine principle which represents the perfection of wisdom (*Prajnaparamita in Sanskrit*). “The Vajra and Bell are the two most important ritual tools that symbolize the perfections of a method or skillful means (*Vajra*), and wisdom or emptiness (*Bell*).”⁷

These two religious symbols are extensively used in all the Tibetan monasteries by the monks along with the religious ceremony. During the religious performance inside the main shrine of the assembly hall, the monks usually doing their rituals in a uniform. By applying these two symbols in their daily ritual, it does not only enhance their spirituality at the highest level but also helped to keep maintain discipline in the monastic institution.

In Ladakh, these symbols are only used by the monks in the monastery. The lay people can only use it under the proper guidance of

the high spiritual monks because it needed instruction and technique. Early in the morning, the monks perform the spiritual practice with the help of Vajra and Bell, these make them in the realization of the union of method and wisdom through the proper understanding of the nature of emptiness. “When we come across the attendance in any spiritual ceremony in the early morning, the entire atmosphere becomes tranquility, peace and conducive, these kinds of activities inspired us to lead a meaningful life”. Rohan Sharma, domestic tourist Delhi, 2013. In villages, every Buddhist house has a small prayer hall for enhancement of spirituality and it has always located at the top of the houses. Inside the prayer hall of the household, the Vajra and Bell mostly used by the *Komner* (In charge monk in the village monastery) once a time in every month. But sometimes these symbols are also used during the auspicious occasion inside the village household for further development of the spirituality. Traditionally, the Vajra and Bell never be alienated from each other, either placed jointly in a position of reverence or held concurrently by the practitioner, Vajra in right (method) and

Bell in left hand (wisdom) but always remember it has together in nature.

“We always keep this Vajra and Bell inside our Chodkhang (prayer hall) with proper maintenance. Whenever it require for the performance of the Puja, we hand over to the monks and they do perform their rituals accordance with the ancient scriptures. Our whole family members are associated at the time of prayer. These provide us inner satisfaction and remind to lead a simple and peaceful life. Whenever I go into the prayer hall, I try to maintain to keep the Vajra and Bell neat and clean.” Abi Sonam Bakpa, Village Skurbuchan, 2013⁸

Since centuries ago the Vajra and Bell are being brought from the Tibet and Nepal, these are hardly made in Ladakh. With the advent of tourism in Ladakh, the opening up of hundreds of antique shops led to the availability of high volume of these symbols. The values of the religious symbols are becoming a commodity and showcase. In the ancient time, the people had faith and devotion towards this religious symbol. When scientific knowledge explored in the modern age and men seeking for the reason led to decrease in faith in symbols. Due to the lack of proper

knowledge, the majority of people in Ladakh is unable to understand the real meaning of the Vajra and Bell and their usage. If this culture and tradition must continue then, the need of the hour is to understand the depth meaning of the symbols Vajra and Bell, first and foremost along with the proper knowledge of Buddhism.

The Symbol of Incense Offering

The burning of incense is a unique tradition in both Hinduism and Buddhism. In Ladakh various types of incense are used, e.g. Juniper (mostly available at the high mountains), Spoons (Ladakhi incense stick, made of different mixtures of herbal medicinal plants from high mountains along with the sandalwood, aloes, and saffron) and nSang (a mixture of barley, butter, and juniper). Early in the morning Buddhist in Ladakh offering incenses burning to make the surrounding environment peace and harmony. In Ladakh people also offering incense burning to the deities in a different way and the Ladakhi Buddhists believe that besides the gods and goddesses existing in the sky or on the surface, there exist spirits beneath the human world or below the earth or oceans, which are known as *lhu*

(Shakspo, 2010). The *lhu* are water deities, living under the ground, in springs, lakes, and rivers. The pollution of water, the building of dams and dikes, irrigation works, and the diversion of the course of rivers are against the spirit of nature and brings about illness if they are not performed at the astrologically correct time. The lay people visited the monastery, they carry incense and oil to offer the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. They also believed that by doing the incense burning ritual, it helps in the purification of their body, mind, and speech. The incense burning always performs in the Buddhist monastery in Ladakh along with the chanting of monks. The unique carriers are used to burn the incense known as Phokskor, made of silver, brass, and iron. To create the conducive environment the Phokskor take around in all the rooms of the monastery and household houses. Whenever there is prayer flag will raise, then that time people come along with the burning of incense. The other interesting people do, when Buddhist religious important master comes to visit Ladakh, few people carry the incense burner for welcoming the spiritual master. In Ladakh traditionally, the incense burner created on

the rooftops or near the entry to the monasteries. The outdoor incense burners are made of whitewashed clay and making in the shape of stupas. For the inside of the monastery and household, a wooden incense rectangular box is used. "In early India incense was usually burned in the form of *dhup*, which was mixed with an acquiescent and waxy paste from flower and wood essences."⁹ The incense burning helps us making wake up from the clutches of ignorance and re-energize and refresh the individual's mind to carry forwards in the spiritual way of life. One of the elderly people of Ladakh narrated his practice of incense burning ritual.

I used to wake up in the early morning by keeping in the mind to perform the religious practice. The incense burning or smoke offering ritual in my house practicing by keeping faith in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. I put up pieces of dry juniper with charcoal in the incense burner and carry to smoke offering first into the prayer hall of the house and later each and every room. Along with the smoke offering, I recite few Buddhist mantras for the good wishes of all the sentient beings. By doing this ritual, I get peace and satisfaction in my mind and at the

same time, I encourage my family members to perform this important practice to lead and live a happy life. Uncle (Azang) Deldan, Chigirikpa, village Domkhar Dho, 2013¹⁰

The symbol of Stupa or Chorten

Stupas or Chorten are the most important holy objects in relation to which all the sentient beings accumulate merit. It has long been the tradition that wherever the teachings of the Buddhas have been respected and practiced, communities of followers have constructed reliquary memorial monuments known in Sanskrit as Stupas and as Chortens in Tibetan. And everywhere they have been constructed, they have been considered as sacred or holy and for like religious images and scriptures, they symbolize features of enlightenment.

The Stupa is a structure in the shape of a hemisphere or heap usually contain Buddha's relics or ashes of Buddhist highly respected monks and therefore for their memorial contribution. The Stupa represents the mind of Buddha. After Mahaparinirvana (passed away) of Buddha, his followers were erected the eight different types of Stupa to pay homage Buddha and his teaching. The Buddha in the *Mahaparinibbanasutta* advised his follower

that his body after his death must be cremated and the relics disseminated with Stupas created upon them. An explanation of the Buddha's funeral was documented by the fourteenth (14th) century Buddhist scholar and great master, Buton¹¹ in his History of Buddhism (Stein, 2013). The thousands of Stupas were erected all over the world by the great Buddhist spiritual masters and kings, to pay homage to the Buddha. During the famous King Asoka's period, the numbers of Buddhist monuments and Stupas were constructed and Asoka pillars also evidenced at the four main Buddhist pilgrimage site. There are three fundamental motives for building the Stupas. Funeral Stupas embrace relics from the funeral pyre. Commemoration Stupas symbolize the place of an occasion in the Buddha's life. The consecrated Stupas are raised to make a devotion of goodwill or to collect and gain positive merit. The final type of Stupa is an ideal channel for lay people to unite with the Buddhadharma, in the past, it was principally the laity who was concerned with building setup of Stupas.

The Stupa construction in Ladakh mostly adopted the Tibetan Buddhist tradition after the 10th Century. After the 11th century,

there was a series of efforts continued by the great Buddhist scholar of Tibet and Ladakh, to construct the different kinds of Stupa in Ladakh. "In the 11th century, one of the famous Tibetan Buddhist scholar Lotsava Rinchen Zangpo built 108 Stupas and Monasteries in the whole western Tibet."¹² The Alchi, Mangu, Thiksey, Lamayuru Lotsava Lhakhang and Sumda monasteries are living examples of Lotsava Rinchen Zangpo's contribution in Ladakh. The Ladakhi Kings were playing an important role to propagate the construction of Supas. The Namgail Dynasty kings were leading the role in the establishment of Buddhist stupas, monasteries, and castles. Today the Shey village Stupas attracts lots of visitors and, after seeing the Stupas they are compared with the heavenly stars and moon. "The King Kanishka Stupa was situated at the Sani village in Zanskar region of Ladakh and it is said to be the oldest Stupa in entire Ladakh, the Stupa was constructed in the 2nd century AD."¹³ These Stupas are not only built in the ancient times, but the construction of their legacy still continues in this modern age. The eight different types of Stupas beautifully design and magnificent architecture found in Ladakh.

1. Changchub Stupa or Chorten (The Stupa of Enlightenment). This Stupa represents Buddha's enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya.
2. Tashi Gomangs Stupa or Chorten (The Stupa of numerous Auspicious Doors). This Stupa remembers the first teachings on the four noble truths by Shakyamuni Buddha, at Sarnath Varanasi.
3. Yerndum Stupa or Chorten (The Stupa remembering the conquest over Mara) This Stupa commemorates the reconciliation of the monks who were subject to dissension caused by Buddha's cousin Devadatta arising from the jealousy he suffered towards Him.
4. Padphung Stupa or Chorten (Stupa remind the lotus heap). This Stupa remembers the birth of Sakyamuni Buddha.
5. Chosthrul Stupa or Chorten (Reminder of miracles). This Stupa remembers Lord Buddha's conquest in the debate over the six Hindu and Jain masters in Sravasvati near Bodhgaya. This is the period that Lord Buddha presented miracles.
6. Lhababs Stupa or Chorten (Remembering the descent from Tushita Heaven). As a consequence of the astonishing merit created by giving birth to a Buddha, His mother Mayadevi is reborn within seven days of a God in Tushita Heaven. The Buddha went there to teach her the universal Dharma. This Stupa remembers the Buddha's descent from Tushita Heaven.
7. Namgyal Stupa or Chorten (marking the conquest over all misadventures). This Stupa remembers Lord Buddha's overcoming a

serious illness.

8. Nyangdas Stupa or Chorten (Remembering the conciliation of existence and nirvana). This Stupa memorializes Lord Buddha's Maha-Parinirvana, the accomplishment of the absolute nirvana beyond any suffering.

The Changchub Stupa or Chorten and Namgyal Stupa or Chorten are most common Stupas in Ladakh. These Stupas are ranging from the large, medium and small size in shape. In early times for the construction of Stupas, the local earthen materials were used. After finishing the construction of the Stupas, it's decorated with white washed. The Stupa white washed is symbolizing the purity, harmony, and tranquility. Every village in Ladakh, the people take part in the ceremony of Skukar (whitewashed of Stupa) in the month of *Tangpo* (first month of the Tibetan New Year). The whole community takes part in the white washed ceremony as volunteered, by doing this kind of spiritual work people feel refreshed and reciting the Mantras for the world peace. Meme Tundup (elderly person) of village Skurbuchan said that, since youthful days, I am taking part in the Stupa whitewashed every year in my village. The peace and prosperity come in the village when people work together whenever some difficulties faced. In the auspicious days, people should take volunteering to white washed the Stupa, this keeps our village health and diseases free society. Everyone has the freedom to construct Stupa in

Ladakh without differentiating in their belief and faith. Some family has constructed a Stupa when someone died in order to commemorate the deceased consciousness. After completion of any Stupa, the people invited the high spiritual monk (Rimpoche) to inaugurate and blessed the newly constructed Stupa. The elderly people of Ladakh are so religious, that whenever they see a Stupa immediately start to do prostration. The prostration is the best method to bring calm and relax in our mind. The people do two types of prostration full and a half, to enhance spiritual growth.

In our village, there are various kinds of Stupas both ancient and modern. The ancient Stupas were built by the community members through volunteering basis. Even I have participated in many ways to build a Stupas. In early times the people used local material to construct the Stupa, therefore it remains for the longer period of time, but in modern days people use cement and other artificial, resulting lose the beauty of nature. Whenever I get a free time, I do prostrate and circumambulate the Stupa. The Stupa reminding me the presence of Buddha and his profound teaching. In order to live a happy life, the practice of spiritual is very essential. I can feel the peace of mind and inner satisfaction when I do prostrate to the Stupa. Uncle Tashi Angchuk, Phitjukpa, village Domkhar Dho, 2013¹⁴

By constructing the Stupas its benefits in many ways. Stupas are said to bring promote harmony, richness, longevity, good quality health, inner happiness and peace within the

mind. They convey blessings to the entire environment in which they are built with the right intention, to those who build them, and to persons who visit and worship them. In this way, Stupas ensure that the living quality of the Buddhist teachings and cultivating wisdom will always be available. In Ladakh people always do circumambulate the Stupas in a clockwise direction. If someone is doing circumambulating into the counterclockwise direction, then negative merits will accumulate. The Buddhist monks always advising to the outsiders, to follow the right path mentioned in the scriptures. According to the Buddhist scripture, “Avatamsaka Sutra” or the “Flower Garland Sutra” also explained, “circumambulate the holy Stupa three times in a clockwise direction”. It is necessary to circumambulate clockwise if you do it counter-clockwise, not only will you not be gaining any merit, but you will be producing negative karma by doing so. Circumambulation is the absolute method to cleanse one's obscurations and close the door to the birth into the lower realms. Circumambulating is a very influential practice and the very root of the perform is to circumambulate with strong dedication and fullest devotion and with an undiverted mind. During my field visited while I was circumambulating the Stupa, one of the respected venerable monks of Hemis monastery advised me that, circumambulations should be completed with the body, speech, and mind. There is no huge advantage if your mind is unfocused

and you are conversation while you are circumambulating.

Conclusion

Symbols are very central to religion. All religions of the world, irrespective of how ancient or modern they are, use symbols to help create a resonant ethos, which in turn, reflects the moral values, teachings, art and culture of that society. Further, adhering to this religious symbolism also helps foster solidarity among the followers, keeping them secure as a unit. As Tibetan Buddhism spread through Ladakh region, it picked up the cultures of symbols, values, and ethics to the culture of the region. In Ladakhi Buddhist societies, Buddhist symbols are part of everyday living. The collective life of the people center's around various Buddhist symbols. Thus, religious symbols are a living part of all aspects of Ladakhi culture. These religious symbols indirectly foster solidarity and community feeling among the people. Buddhist values and symbols have a great hold on the lives of people living in Ladakhi societies in modern times. All aspects of their lives revolve around Buddhist values and symbols from birth to death.

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