

IDENTITY AND POLITICS IN LADAKH: A CASE STUDY OF BALTIS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BALTIS OF LADAKH

2013, in a seminar organized by the scholars from Ladakh at Jawaharlal Nehru University on ‘Contemporary Problems Facing Ladakh’, an esteemed panellist from Leh was midway corrected by a student from Kargil as he had said, “Ladakh and Kargil.....” The student reminded everyone that Kargil was also Ladakh. Ordinarily it could have been a mistake or a genuine error. Interestingly Radhika Gupta (2013), on one of her research trips, also experiences a comparable incident, in which a tourist guide speaks of stopping in Mulbekh¹ and then heading towards Ladakh. Here too an offended Kargili enquirer corrects the guide, “You are already in Ladakh. Say you are going to Leh”. (Gupta 2013: 43) A lot may not be concurred from these instances but lesser is also not to be concurred. Ladakh a sub region, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir is the largest electoral constituency in India.² In 1979, erstwhile Ladakh was divided into two districts, Leh and Kargil, one a Buddhist majority district and the other a Muslim majority district respectively. Since then ‘Ladakh’ has been the bone of contention between the two districts. The second half of 20th century politics centres on this aspect of contestations of projecting and embodying the Ladakhi identity. Thus a parallel politics transcends this period in Ladakh here on wards: (a) Politics of identity based on religion concealed by that of (b) politics of identity between the two districts. The task is of ‘locating’ in these dynamics, a barely known distinct identity known as the ‘Balti’ of Ladakh.

In this contestation between Leh and Kargil for representing Ladakh, Leh has been flourishing. The underlying implication is the recognition of a Ladakhi identity as Buddhist. In the words of Radhika Gupta, “*it comes as a surprise to many that half the population of this region is Muslim, the majority belonging to the Twelver, Shia sect and living in Kargil district*”. (Gupta 2013: 44). It is necessary to comprehend

¹ Mulbhok is one of the villages located midway between Kargil and Leh districts.

² Ladakh is one constituency with one MP seat between the two districts. Ladakh constitutes both Kargil and Leh districts.

that the all Shia's of Ladakh are Baltis or Purigpa/ma but not vice-versa. A major portion of present Kargil was also called Purig in history. As such people from this area are often referred to as Purig-pa (male) and Purig-ma (female). In the present vocabulary of the locals especially of Leh, they are all treated or called as Baltis along with the Baltis at Leh. The differences between the Purigis³ and Baltis are miniscule and subtle, as such are clubbed as Baltis. This thesis too qualifies the stated, yet not nullifying the differences altogether.

Though 'Baltis' can be found in a number of northern states of India but Ladakh dominates in terms of population of the Baltis. However various restrictions and interests limit my studies to the 'Baltis' in modern day Ladakh. Moreover it is widely accepted that it is from this area that the exodus of the Baltis in India can be traced. Inviting interest is the fact that, it is this community which sits at the cross roads of the three estranged neighbours i.e. India, Pakistan and China. Thus this study proves stimulating in every aspect to a researcher and is also the need of the hour. Modern day nation states and their boundaries have resulted in dislocation, migration and division of communities at the peripheries. Post- Modernism and post-Marxism have already emphasized the significance of the notions of plurality, identity and heterogeneity in the political discourse of nation-states. Homogenization of cultural identities is a product of globalization. This homogenization is resisted at different levels through appeals to culture, ethnicity, history, language and similar vehicles of identity (Singh 2006: 205). The 'Baltis' located at the northern most tip of India is a classical example of such a community. Their peaceful existence in otherwise volatile area has brought them little attention. Though families have been divided, cultures propelled in different directions, existence nullified, they still dream of unison, not breaking countries, not being anti-nationals but of families being back under one roof. A little too less is known about the Baltis in general and specifically of the Baltis' of Ladakh. Historically and presently Baltis have always extended into all faiths prevalent in the northern areas. In Ladakh they extend into both the districts of Kargil and Leh. A grossly understudied and underrepresented community in all fields of being transcends into a complex yet stimulating study to undertake.

³ Erstwhile Purig are specific regions of Kargil in history. Purigis are people belonging to Purig.

‘*No entity without identity*,’ philosopher W. V. Quinine had stated (Shoemaker 2006: 42). Fundamental to virtually every community’s concern is the desire to continue in existence with a distinct identity and a distinct Culture offers distinct identity (Shoemaker 2006). Throughout history, the eulogy of *Identity* has been that of a resilient concept; with dissimilar experiences. Experiences range from break up or re-emergence of old identities or the forging of new, hybrid identities. *Identity* is a reality (though subjective) and *identity assertion*, an expression of the said. *Markers* become essential in the realization and the construct of identity. Where the ‘other’ or ‘others’ is also excluded from, for either ‘owning’ or being ‘devoid of’ such markers. Markers can include religion, language, attire, names of people, architecture etc. Culture forms an essential component of Identity and the foundation of arguments used in realization and in construct of identity. Like identity, culture too is defined using ‘markers’ and similarly is used for break up or re-emergence of old identities and the forging of new, hybrid identities.

‘Identity’ studies have been an indispensable theme in most post-colonial researches. This research contributes to substantiate such researches on this theme. Not invalidating the plethora of understandings of Identity, this research humbly exposes the experiences of ‘identity’ of the ‘Balti tribe’ in the Ladakh region. As such, arguably, it is a study of the transformative experience of identity and factors influencing this ‘identity’. Several sources of information were used in the current research, including research articles, newspaper reports, political analyses, online academic journals and websites, books relating to the theme, biographies and interviews. The researcher himself is a member of the ‘Tribe’ under study, hence capably produced is a nuanced experience of Balti Tribe or its Identity. To eject biasness in the research, comparative analysis has been an effective method used throughout, with other diverse identities existing in Ladakh. Also, it is imperative to mention here that Ladakh constitutes of diverse ethnic identities and comparatively enormous research on them is available.

1.2 LOCATING BALTIS IN LITERATURE

Literature on Ladakh as stated before largely ignores the ‘Balti identity’ existing within Ladakh, thus translating Ladakh as a homogeneous entity. Finding a proper literature on the ‘Baltis’ is an uphill task, but there are various other historical evidences in the form of notes, memoirs, oral histories, songs and heritages that do exist in abundance. Few compiled readings on the Baltis exist in Urdu with other miniscule literatures on the Baltis, thus making this research project complicated and complex, with a unique perspective.

Radhika Gupta is among the few contemporary scholars stressing on the importance of Kargil (Gupta 2013 and 2014). Her work on Kargil in general underlines the contemporary distinctions between Leh and Kargil in the process managing to throw light on the Baltis as well. In the light of the present scenario of scholarship on Kargil, her work is exceptionally important for understanding the present marked divisions in Ladakh. Her scholarship does provide an alternative to the ‘subjective’ understanding of Ladakh for future scholars. An in-depth analysis of the historical causalities in the making of present divisions in both her articles would have added the complexities that lie beneath the divisions of Leh and Kargil. B.R.Rizvi’s (1993) anthropological work on the Baltis too is extremely important because it can be considered as the pioneering work on Kargil in the modern era. The only scholarly work of then Baltis of Ladakh helps retain an understanding of the culture of the Balti people then which have changed considerably over the times. Both these scholars underline the neglect faced by the people of Kargil in general in the world of academics as well. B. R. Rizvi (1993) in the preface to his book writes that ‘*Kargil region remains almost unnoticed excepting a pioneering but less known work of Maulvi Hashmatullah’s ‘Mukhtasar Tarikh-e-jammu’ written in Urdu*’. Yet it fails to be a part of the present discourses on all fronts. The corpus of existing literature on Ladakh in miniscule proportions also offers us some ideas and proofs of the ‘Balti Identity’ existing in Ladakh.

It is a well known fact or deducible fact that for colonial explorers, expeditions and lay travellers alike, historically Ladakh was an alternative for Tibet that remained

impermeable to them. In a cold war era of chaos, aftermath of the world wars etc a romanticized peaceful Tibetan Buddhist way of life marked by monasteries, monks, landscapes, peaceful inhabitants living in harmony with virtually everything, captured the imagination of all who visited (Gupta 2013: 44). Much of Kargil which was dominated by Islam which extended from Zojila to Mulbekh rarely find mention in any write-ups. Therefore Filippi (1915) also observes that the only mention Kargil finds is, as a necessary halt to re-stock food and rest horses and men on the ways (as cited in Gupta 2013: 45). Travellers such as Moorcroft, Dainelli, Captain Knight and others have made it amply clear in their writings of their disappointments on not finding the Expected Tibetan Buddhist culture. One John Da Silva (1987) notes that:

After Kargil the roads bends south and as the sun has not yet risen over the mountains we travelled the next twenty five miles in shadow. The dwellings by the roadside had an untidy and furtive appearance and the few women we saw turned away, covering their faces. Our last glimpse was of a tiny mosque with a golden dome in the darkened fields before we emerged into sunlight at Mulbegh and saw a Buddhist monastery high on hill to our left.... it seemed we emerged metaphorically as well as actually, out of darkness into light...(as cited in Gupta 2013: 45).

Lopez (1998) terms the Travellers, explorers and academics as *prisoners of Shangri-la* (as cited in Gupta 2013: 45). A distinct Tibeto-centric tilt could be discerned in Ladakh studies by scholars such as Van Beek (2003), Aggarwal (1997) as well, remarks Radhika Gupta (2013: 45). The interpretation of its history appears to have developed a common practice to describe and analyze society, people, and culture of Ladakh to a point of being rhetorical. At the same time, such studies overlook the complex societal constructions existing in Ladakh. Documentations of Ladakh are produced which operate from a unified, unambiguous Tibetan or a Buddhist centric frame. While comparisons, if at all present, tends to refer exclusively to other supposedly Tibetan societies (Beek 1873-1941: 35). Reason in part might be because only religious institutions of Buddhism were involved or had the luxury of documenting of the events then.

The 21st century with modern and improved connectivity, has brought a flood of new researchers to this country of Ladakh. Sources ranging from rock carvings, inscriptions, numismatics, written documents, architectural sources, oral traditions

etc. have been used over the time by these scholars. But the ‘*Baltis*’ by and large are still apparently ignored in research and the region’s history, if at all; they find a mention. These reductions of Ladakhi Identity and Ladakhs pa/ma (Ladakhis) fails to do justice to its complexities. An exception however as also quoted by Radhika is the work of Nicola Grist (1995, 1998) on Kargil, “*Quite unintentionally the impression has been given that “real” Ladakhis are Buddhists and that Muslims and Muslim practices are imposters in their own land*” (Gupta 2013: 45).

Radhika Gupta further importantly notices that Buddhists in Leh generally refer to all Shia Muslims in Ladakh as Balti, which is a ‘euphemism’ for outsiders and Muslims as *Chipa* (*etymologically derived from the opposite of nangpa, denoting insiders*)(Gupta 2013: 46). Like local scholar Shakspo (2010: 123) understands ‘*Baltiyul as land of Shia Muslims: ‘Balti’ refers to ‘Shia’, and ‘yul’ or ‘-stan’ to ‘land.’* Hence the coming of Islam and its overall implications on the ‘Balti’ thus also needs to be explored in this critical debate. While at the local level, similar Islam centric representations or under the garb of ‘muslim’ or ‘Islam’, ‘*Argon*’ (trading community) dominated discourse by the local Muslim scholars is apparent. Thus an in-depth study is definitely the need of the hour.

Ladakh in the wake of 21st century arises to be the most sought after destination by both intelligentsia and the tourists alike. Its popularity increases by the day as a centre for Buddhism, partly as China closed Tibet as a centre for Tibetan Buddhism; Ladakh seems to be the ‘Next Tibet’. With foreign scholars trying to cash in on the advancing popularity of Buddhism, Buddhism seems to be the major focus. The other half of the existing literature as stated before is dominated by the followers of the ‘Sunni’ sect of Islam and their stress on the trading community dominated by the ‘*Arghon*’ community confirms to the complexities in finding an objective history/study of the region. The virtual absence of the existence and role in history of the principal minority the ‘*Baltis*’ pre-poses various possibilities and lack of objectivity. Lack of sources and various natural and manmade obstacles may have added to the woes of a researcher.

As a diverse young nation with an established policy for the political categorization of ethnic groups in the form of Scheduled Caste and Tribe status, India has indeed utilized social markers such as religion, caste, and ethnicity to

mobilize national interests. Research Scholars assume conflicting accounts of standard regional identity as stemmed from such contestations. This proves futile in the understanding of the complexities in the society within Ladakh, as complexities vary because of separate local and national interests in the region. While the anthropological conceptualization of an ethnic group has expanded the disciplinary understanding of how groups of people share common interests both within and beyond fixed geographic locales (Fewkes 2008: 2). A necessity to know the 'uniqueness' of ethnic communities also cannot be denied. Be what may for the reasons for ethnic identities and politics of identities, reality is the existence of ethnic differences. And one of the prime reasons for the upsurge of these differences is said to be homogenizing tendencies of the state. This globalized phenomenon is a paradoxical situation. It is providing for greater inter-dependence on the one hand, and is also causing for greater fragmentation on the other.

Yet it is most important to understand that discussions about identity within the public sphere of Ladakh do not simply conform to a national standard or type. *The idea here is Baltis in Ladakh do form a distinct identity specifically but are also Ladakhi's in every aspect of being a Ladakhi.* Ideas about Ladakhi-ness should essentially be articulated in relation to social contexts shaped by the legacy of the indigenous historical process in the region and factors. Contrarily *'Today, Ladakh is often simultaneously discussed as a remote, "tribal" area and a key national border of India.'* (Fewkes 2008: 2). Standard discussions of what constitutes an identity of being from Ladakh seem to employ a standardized political vocabulary, one that conforms to Indian national discourses about ethnicity, such as the debates over becoming a Scheduled Tribe. The development of census categories for Ladakh, which in turn form the basis for the contemporary classification of the 'tribes' is also seen in the dynamic between Ladakh (or Tibet) centric imaginings of the early explorer /surveyor (and many a contemporary academic), and the colonial (and nationalist) imaginings of a unified India, where the same classificatory principles were applied across the whole of the subcontinent.

The initial convergence of official and academic classifications of Ladakhis and the increasing indianization of the administrative perspective on Ladakh gradually

absolved Ladakh of its own distinct experience with history. In other words, Ladakh lost its administrative identity as a separate, unique, other, and became reconstructed as just another element in a series of imperial fragments of an imagined homogenous India. The category of tribe had appeared (Fewkes 2008: 150).

The importance of historical links with Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism needs to be acknowledged. Especially when a large part of Ladakh's inhabitants are followers of Tibetan Buddhism and in history Baltis too followed Buddhism. However, while acknowledging the importance of their historical links with Tibet, contemporary Ladakhis/Baltis are keen to emphasize their region's distinct identity. Within Ladakh almost all the inhabitants of Purig and west of present Ladakh are Balti and with the smaller Balti populations along the Indus valley (Leh district), Nubra and Zangskar—they make up nearly half the total population. Having such a part in the demographic profile of Ladakh their omission in basic narratives questions the objectivity of researchers. Ladakh has always looked east to Tibet, but also north to Eastern Turkestan (Xing Xiang), south to the plains of India and west to the regions that are now the Northern Areas of Pakistan.

Beek criticizes Cunningham on account that difference within Ladakh has been erased by him. His account gives an impression of 'Ladakhi'- *'understood as stable, homogenous and unambiguously bounded i.e. they are all 'BOT-PA', speak Tibetan and are Buddhist'* (Beek: 2001) . This equation of territory, race, language, and religion is typical of imagining's of the 'others' and devoid of understanding of the complex identities within Ladakh. Cunningham account fails to delve into the complexities within a Ladakhi Society. In Cunningham's Ladakh, there seems to be no Changpa, Arghon, etc. which were mentioned in Moorcroft's earlier accounts. Cunningham presents Ladakh as an ideal-typical nation state. But apart from being the first to give Ladakhi population statistics in tables, he does mention Dard and Balti but has little to say of them (Beek 1873-1941: 38).

How modern Politics factors in forming of the Ladakhi identity also needs to be discussed. Various studies stressing this aspect of identity formation in Ladakh has also been done. As Richard Gombrich states that, *'within a given political boundary the majority community has a minority complex because the largest minority within that boundary has the same social identity as the community, which is in the majority*

next door.' (Gombrich 2005: 28). Democracy brought the majority of Kashmiri Muslims, thus relegating all others as minority. Modern political differences and fears of democracy, such as existing in a minority position, have indeed also played a vital role in shaping and creating a Ladakhi identity. As such differences based on religion were explored. Religion provided means to both homogenise and to differentiate from the other. Thus the role of Religion here too needs to be introspected and critically analysed. How religious identities over arch other identity markers needs to be analysed. Religion governs every aspect of the Ladakhi identity in present Ladakh. 'Identity politics' and 'religion' here proves a stimulating aspect in this study.

1.3 CHAPTERISATION

This thesis has been divided into three chapters, each broadly defining the theme examined in the chapter. Being first of its kind study, analysis of the dissertation may appear subjective in manifestation. Does not claim absolute truth and simply offers an 'alternate' study or view of Ladakh and its Balti population, which has been non-existent to be precise. Humanly errors and false reiterations have been avoided to the capability of the researcher. The aim of this research is being to produce an objective study of the Baltis of Ladakh and provide the missing link in scholarship on Ladakh simultaneously. The distribution of the thesis is as follows:

CH 2: BALTIS IN LADAKH

This chapter attempts a unique analysis of the various anomalies present within the modern or present understanding of Baltis of Ladakh. The complex nature of the origins of the Baltis and such needs for more intensive research will be established. The role of religion and modern politics in the formation of the Balti Identity will also be introduced. A historical and chronological history of the Baltis of Ladakh is the underlying theme of this chapter. This chapter attempts to investigate the origins of 'Baltis in Ladakh'. This chapter also delves into the historical nuances of the Balti history and the history of present Islamic spread amongst the Baltis of

Ladakh. As such this Chapter is the much needed comprehensive historical background of the Baltis in Ladakh, and thus has been the basis of the Chapter.

CH 3: SOCIO CULTURAL STATUS OF BALTIS

Exclusivities and similarities viz a viz the Tibetan culture largely is the main theme of this chapter. The culture of Ladakh is an assimilation of both the Tibetan and Balti culture and thus exposes a distinct culture of its own. De-constructing such sociological and historical dynamics will be the theme of this chapter. The Baltis have played a vital role in the development of what we today know as culture of Ladakh. At the same time the Baltis offer a unique culture as well. The experiences of the Balti culture range from trade, religion and modern political impacts on their culture. An analysis of the complex nuances of language debates of the Baltis will be of crucial importance in understanding the Baltis and Ladakh at large.

CH 4: ROLE OF BALTIS IN POLITICS IN LADAKH

This chapter will analyse the present political scenario of Ladakh and the Role of Baltis in the process. Various nuances in the understandings of the role of the community in present day politics of Ladakh and its formation will be critically dealt with. As trade with Central Asia ended, social life in Ladakh was irrevocably altered. However, these historical events still continues to have a role in defining what it means to be a 'Balti' today. Over the course of boundary demarcation, regional trade networks were adapted to new contexts of trade relations, political systems, and global interests thus shaping the present. How politics of religion was introduced and accepted are vital aspects of the Balti identity and politics today have been dealt with.

CH 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter will sum up the dissertation seeking to direct the dissertation towards its goals. This chapter will also abridge the different chapters and stress on

the fluidity of the thesis. And other nuances which holds Balti Identity hostage will be underlined.

CHAPTER 2: BALTI IDENTITY

2.1 LOCATING BALTI IDENTITY

‘The Balti are marginal in many ways. Pakistan see them as Shiite heretics; in the eyes of mainstream Hindus, they are Buddhists outcastes; for Tibetans, they are Muslims. May be the Shiite movements in Iran and Iraq are extending a friendly hand to them. Never the less the people are also unique in so far as they constitute communities where Shiite and Buddhist coexist’ (B.R.Rizvi 2000: 2).

This anecdote can be used as the vantage point to look in the world of The Baltis of Ladakh. Present understandings, forced on the past have certainly translated into questionable results. When reifications have distorted understandings of the past, looking for answers in absolute terms, may again result in a partial understanding or vanishing of the history of the Baltis of Ladakh. Interestingly, the available scarce history and various other sources provide diverse understandings of this culture and its people known as the Baltis. It is in this plurality that I seek to understand the possibilities of comprehending the Balti.

The beginnings of the Baltis in Ladakh are equally embedded in obscurity as of the Baltis in Baltistan themselves. Every historical quest to resolve this mystery ends up opening more questions or perhaps more riddles than before. The present Baltis are differentiated by their dialect and culture perhaps more so rigidly influenced by Islam than their counterparts influenced by Tibetan Buddhism in Ladakh. But in the historical Annals where did these Baltis come from or least of all, why they are designated as Baltis in the first place proves to be a daunting task.

Balti is the most widespread name and the oldest name by which this community has been identified. The oldest reference is made by Ptolemy. The Alexandrian astronomer and geographer recorded and preserved the name as *Byaltae* which dates back to the 2nd Century BC. (as cited in B.R.Rizvi 2000 :193). Cunningham identifies *Balti* or *Baltiyul* (land of the Baltis) as *Palolo* or *Bolor* (*Balor*) of the Dards and the Arabs and *Nang-Kod* (*Nan-Gon*) of the Tibetans, Little Tibet of the Kashmir chroniclers' (Francke 1926: 193). Few plausible theories have also been put forward on the etymology of the term *Balti*, also offers clues of their identity. '*The name Balti is derived from the dialect of the Zhan Zhung, an ancient western Tibetan Kingdom. Balti means watery Ravine, 'Bal' means ravine or valley and 'ti' means water*' (Sheikh 2010: 164). Comparable claims such as '*traditionally, the Balti are believed to be the descendants of Celtic communities settled in Scandinavia. When the water level in the Baltic Sea rose and inundated their arable lands, they were forced to flee from that area. Even after the flood subsided, the land appeared to be unusable for agriculture, having been heavily saturated with mineral salts. The Baltis of Ladakh are related to many other communities in Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine*' (B.R.Rizvi 1993: Introduction), have also been there. Also views such as the Baltis came from Central Mongolia and some claim Baltis to be of Tartar origin (Dryland and Syed 2011: 46). De Cortanze describes Baltis as Caucasian or white race and Vigne refers to them as a mixed race of Mongol, Indian and Persian (as cited in Dryland and Syed 2011: 46). Other views locate Baltis as mixture of Dards and others as having Tibetan origin (Dryland and Syed 2011: 46). Cunningham importantly informs that *Balti* proper is a small district bounded by Shigar on the north, by Keris and Parkuda on the east, by Gures on the south and by Astor and Rongdo on the west (as cited in B.R.Rizvi 2000: 193).

Presently the administrative division between Kargil district predominated by Shia Muslims (*Baltis*), and Leh district, predominated by Buddhists translates into flawed historical delusions. In history, the *real* boundaries and the differences that had existed both on land and between the people of the land are very difficult to be precisely put. General historical interpretation of history of Ladakh introduces *Mons* as the first settlers in Ladakh, followed by the Dards and then the Tibetans. Nothing has been said about the *Baltis* of Ladakh. Thus discussions vary from *Baltis* being outsiders or clubbed as part of Tibetans. Contemporary analyses after the conversion

to Islam do exist. The wider classification and historical precedence of the Mons, Dards, and Baltis have largely been accepted as popular history of Ladakh. The emergence of the Mons still continues to be debated whilst a lot of historical research have been already done, which still continues to be ignored by the scholars at large.⁴ The existence of the Baltis in *La-dvags* (area ruled by Leh kings) is obvious after/with the Dards, as the areas of settlements of the Baltis west side of Ladakh, have been said to have once been marked by the Dards.

Even with the increasing number of studies on Ladakh, The Baltis of Ladakh however continue to be ignored and taken for granted. Their origin/ethnicity is still reiterated or produced to suit as needed, as the sources of their history are entombed in obscurity. The Baltis in general of Ladakh and outside, despite their distinct existence like Ladakh, too are burdened by the depiction of foreign scholars as sub sect, or subpart of the gigantic Tibetan culture. Very often they are relegated and understood to be sub sect of the Tibetans. At the local level the Baltis of Ladakh in Ladakh are understood as foreigners from neighbouring Baltistan having settled in Ladakh in many phases.

Recent researches press on the need to be intensively and extensively investigated further. Genetically and linguistically, it has been accepted that Baltis look more eastwards (Tibet), and this has been the generally accepted view of the modern scholars. However various researches locating the ethnicity of the Baltis have been done that contradicts the present understandings of Balti as a Tibetan race and culture. One such research has been conducted in Pakistan. *'The Baltis from Hunza valley are thought to have originated in Tibet, where the pre dominated haplogroups are 4 and 26. Neither of these haplogroups was present in the sample in 'Qamar at al study', providing no support for a Tibetan origin of the Y chromosomes lineages and ad mixture estimate of zero. However, This result must be interpreted with caution, because of the small sample size and an absence of any mtDNA analysis* (Mukhtar, 2002). And *mtDNA* is inherited solely from the mother in case of humans. Thus such studies further the case for need of thorough evaluation of the beginnings of the Baltis.

⁴ Works like Antiquities of Northern Tibet, Antiquities of Upper Tibet, Mirror Newspaper, other articles and books on Zhang Zhung culture and history etc.

The present day Baltis are a distinct tribal identity vis a vis the Tibetans and the rest of Ladakh in general. But to adjudicate their ethnic origin would be too early at this stage. Thus locating the emergence of the Baltis and Baltis of Ladakh in specific is a complex task. However it is essential to allocate a distinct identity to the Baltis that emphasizes the distinct identity that it is and portrays. Tibetan roots and culture though may have a larger role in the formation of the Balti culture but its distinctiveness cannot be overshadowed by a separate distinct culture that spills over on the adjacent cultures. The histories of the Balti kings can still be comparatively less testing but of that of the masses or the common Balti proves perilous. The origin of the 'Baltis' or the ethnic composition of the Baltis still needs further research and the existing plausible theories and understandings need to be un-discovered over. Who and what are the Baltis have not attracted much inquisitiveness within India, though across the LOC some research has been conducted.

2.2 MODERN CLASSIFICATIONS

In 7 October 1989, the President of India promulgated, the constitution of Jammu and Kashmir Scheduled Tribes Order 1989, declaring eight tribes of Ladakh as Scheduled Tribes. The list of communities comprises Balti, Beda, Bot/Boto, Brokpa/Drokpa/Dard/Shin, Changpa, Garra, Mon and Purigpa (Beek 1995:35). Almost all Shia Muslims in Leh district were 'identified' as Baltis and their counterparts in Kargil as Purigis and Baltis.⁵ Thus modern classification of tribes were applied and engrained in Ladakh. The Baltis of Ladakh were added another identity, that of a Scheduled Tribe. This percolates into local understanding, as being identified as different from the rest of the Ladakhi population. This further strengthens the arguments of politics of Identity that was being articulated and practised at the time in Ladakh.

⁵ Interestingly the people of 'Purig' with more similarities than differences than the Baltis in Kargil district, were put under a separate *Purigpa* category, whereas the 'Shammas' were clubbed together under the Bot/Boto tribal category, despite being identified as separate by the Ladakhi locals themselves before the research team identifying the tribes.

The course of politics pursued during the Glancy Commission and the 1989 classification of the Ladakhi populace under the categories of the Indian Tribes Schedule 6 lead to further cementing of differences in the already culturally stagnating society in terms of multiculturalism. Although in essence tribal categories were formed, but in the discourse of the local population, the division or categorization of Ladakh was under the religious terms. Tribal identity became diluted and religious identity took precedence. All history of the land henceforth seems to underline this aspect of it. This not only reified the differences but also reconstructed it on new lines. The stopping of trade and the advent of the modern state also caused the differences to embolden on religious lines. Forging of *Mod-ethno*⁶ identities in Ladakh through literature, songs, assumptions, storytelling, and religious gatherings, religious societies etc gained momentum. And these helped in pursuing various pre determined goals for the society.⁷

In academic discussions and other platforms of representing Ladakh, '*Today, Ladakh is often simultaneously discussed as a remote, "tribal" area and a key national border of India*' (Fewkes 2008: 2), which arise from standardized discourses on such areas and communities in India. Scholars acknowledge India as a diverse young nation with an established policy for the political categorization of ethnic groups in the form of Scheduled Caste and Tribe status. India employs standardized social markers such as religion, caste, and ethnicity to mobilize national interests. On the other hand, anthropological quests of examining an ethnic group has also expanded the disciplinary understanding of how groups of people share common interests both within and beyond fixed geographic locales (Fewkes 2008: 2). However exclusivities existing between various identities also need to be acknowledged. A necessity to know the 'uniqueness' of ethnic communities is pertinent to this study.

Balti Identity offers a distinct case of study under the rubric of identity and politics. Identity debates have been the focus of major researches, with the concept of

⁶ *Mod-ethno* identities refers here specifically to the identities created or formed in Ladakh in the present era and area that is roughly after the coming of religion and formation of nation states.

⁷ The study of Ladakhi politics after the coming of religion fits into the instrumentalist argument that ethnicity is a social construct with the purpose of achieving political or material gain. Ethnic groups, on this explanation, are best understood as 'interest groups for which ethnicity serves as an effective strategy. Ethnicity is a constitutive feature of the human nature and on the other hand the Primordialist's understand ethnicity as a 'permanent feature'.

identity itself being subjected to critical debates thus problematizing the concept of identity itself. While the Baltis of Ladakh predominated by Tibetan Buddhist identity search for a distinct identity that acknowledges Baltis as Baltis rather than a subjugated identity, their counter parts across the LOC who are predominated by Sunni-Wahabi identity, explore and stress their Tibetan identity. Whilst, to foray into this debate, would be to wither away from the main focus of this thesis. Never the less it seems imperative to state the importance of identity and identifications. Identity is fluid and undergoes changes, with time dissolving markers and at times creating markers of identification. My argument here is that the Baltis present a distinct identity in their existence, where distinctions may or may not lie in any positive historical facts or narratives. The ethnic identity of the Baltis should also be put to critical analysis thus parting from the preceding traditions.

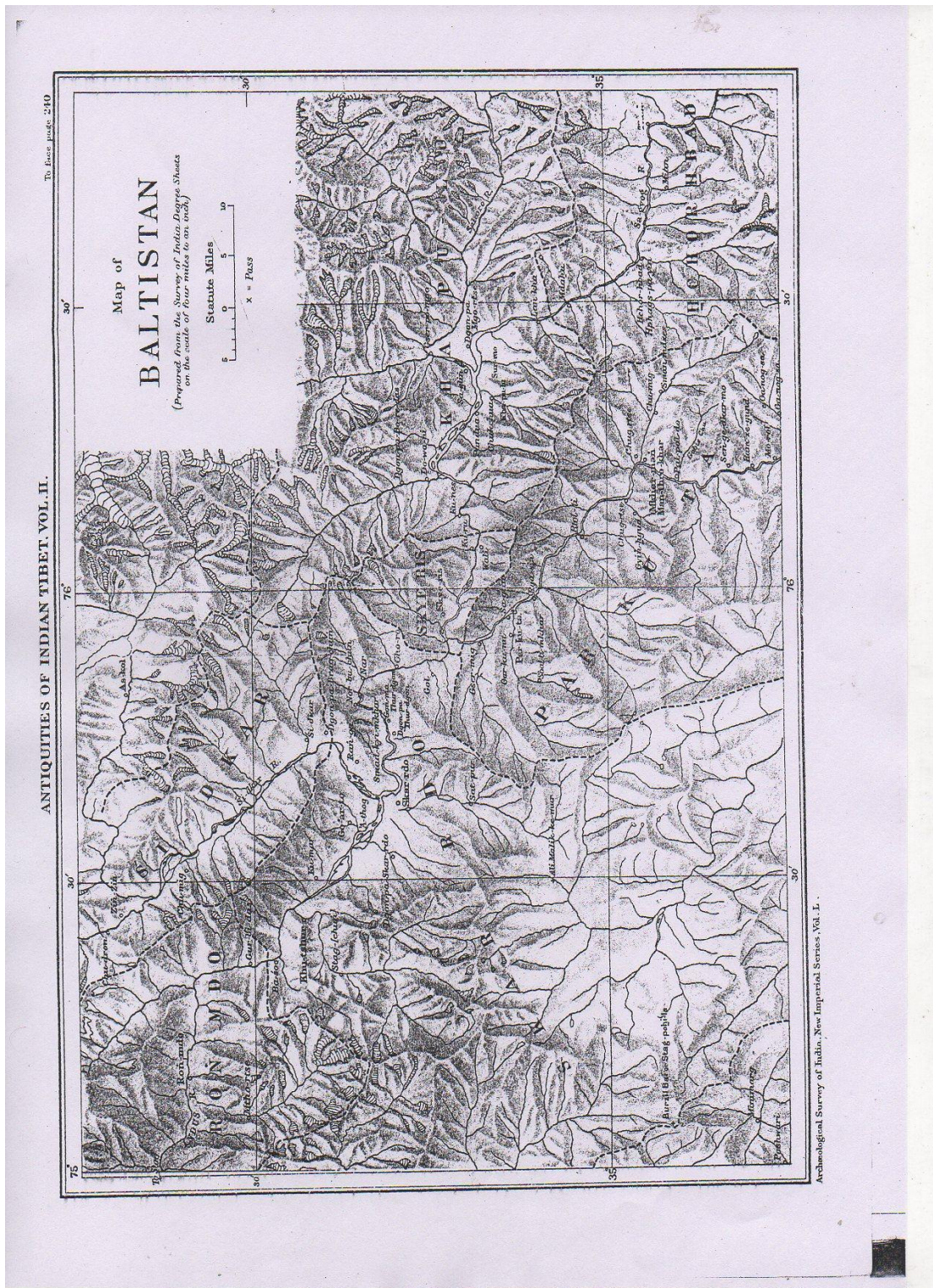
Ladakh as a society, historically had much diversity and divisions too, the most important of them being based on social hierarchy (caste), occupation followed by ethnicity and then religion. External factors played a major role in solidifying these differences within Ladakh. The termination of trade and formation of international impenetrable boundaries or limits, which were once porous, did somehow imbalance the multicultural society. This in many ways forcefully ended the historical functioning and structure of the society, and thus leading to the stagnation and development of alternate modes of transformation. One of the effects was developing or realization of differences in society based on religion. But these differences were never institutionalised differences.

It is most important to investigate the Ladakhi identity within social contexts shaped by its own unique history of the land and its people and not by standardized evaluation mechanisms. In such a scenario, Baltis in Ladakh do form a separate identity specifically, but are also Ladakhi's in every aspect of being a Ladakhi. The assimilation of historical links with Tibet, Tibetan culture and Tibetan Buddhism into the Balti culture needs to be accepted because it is proven that a large part of Balti population too were the followers of the Tibetan Buddhism. On the other hand with the coming of Islam these links with Tibet and other cultures diminished and Islamic influence apparently dominates its appearance.

Historical anomalies and the need for a *Mecca* of Buddhism, after Tibet closed down for the scholars and tourists alike have also shaped and have had considerable influence on the culture and history of Ladakh. The burden of mirroring Tibet and Buddhism has resulted in the distinct realities of Ladakh in general and the Baltis in specific to be overshadowed. Ladakh in general has culturally assimilates cultures from east to Tibet, Eastern Turkestan (Xing Xiang), south and plains of India and west to the regions that are now the Northern Areas of Pakistan and further into Central Asia as well. The reality of the existence of ethnic exclusivities is established in the debates over the origins of ethnic identities and politics of identities.

The paradoxical situation created by the ‘homogenising’ nature of modern states also caters to the resurgence of differences as well. Such homogenising factors propel towards greater inter-dependence on the one hand, and at the same time also cause greater fragmentation. Modern realities have played an essential role in the forming/shaping of identities. *Mod-ethno* identities with pre conceived goals have changed the fabric of the society. How modern Politics factors in forming of the Ladakhi identity has been evaluated in the last chapter. Modern politics of religious and fears of democracy (rule of majority) have refracted its indigenous historical way of shaping and creating a Ladakhi identity. With democracy ‘Muslims’ became the majority and as such rule of Muslims were new political concepts and challenges in Ladakhi Politics. As Richard Gombrich opines, ‘*within a given political boundary the majority community has a minority complex because the largest minority within that boundary has the same social identity as the community, which is in the majority next door.*’ (Gombrich 2005: 28) Thus the role of Religion also increased on account of new political factors of the time. The religious identities arched over other identity markers as religion primarily marked the differences viz a vis the others and provided for similarities and unity within a constructed homogenous identity. Religion governs every aspect of the Ladakhi identity in present Ladakh. *Identity politics* and role of *religion* in Balti community here thus proves a stimulating aspect in this study. The Balti identity too appears a *transformed* identity in many ways approving of the constructed nature of identities. Besides in modern Ladakh the Balti identity also seems to have transformed at many levels both for the Baltis themselves and others as well. Baltis, or specifically Baltis of Ladakh, have been a part of Ladakh through history like all other that are defined or identified as Ladakh today. Within Ladakh

almost all the inhabitants of Purig (Kargil), with the smaller populations along the Indus valley (Leh district), Nubra and Zangskar—the Baltis make up nearly half the total population. Having such a part in the demographic profile of Ladakh their omittance in basic narratives questions the subjectivity of researchers.



(Map, Francke 1926 *not to be scaled.)

2.3 GEOGRAPHY

Geographically, the Baltis spread throughout northern India, within which they exist principally in Ladakh. Within Ladakh they exist pre-dominantly in Kargil district and as a principal minority in Leh part of the region. Research on the Baltis of Ladakh has attracted very less attention by virtue of the dearth of sources, physical difficulties and lack of *impact factor* of the Baltis of Ladakh. On account of the Baltis being Muslims and exhibiting Muslim culture. Their identity positively exists in obscurity.

Ladakh, socially, politically, economically and geo-politically has undergone numerous changes over the time. Correspondingly, the political map of the region too has undergone various changes. The contemporary definitions of Ladakh, appears to confuse many readers, scholars and the locals themselves alike, of the past history of the land. Today Ladakh roughly extends from Zoji-la till the eastern boundaries which touch China and in the north extending from Nubra-Turtuk to the Himachal regions. In history these boundaries have continuously shifted. History reflects aplenty that many regions under Ladakh now, were not known or referred to as Ladakh and had their own distinct names. In fact the name *La-dvags* appears to be a much later connotation, similarly with Kargil as well. Once all of these regions came under the influence of foreign powers, their distinctiveness was ignored and marginal similarities appear to have been chosen for ease of understanding and administration etc were clubbed as one. Foreign scholars have linked or understood today's Ladakh and Baltistan region as little Tibet and greater Tibet; thus robbing them of their own originality and distinctiveness. Though cultural and political similarities with Tibet cannot be denied but what Ladakh and Baltistan were and are today is much more than just a sub part of Tibet or its culture. Historical evidences prove the existence of these cultures even before the term Tibet or Bod/Pod came into existence.

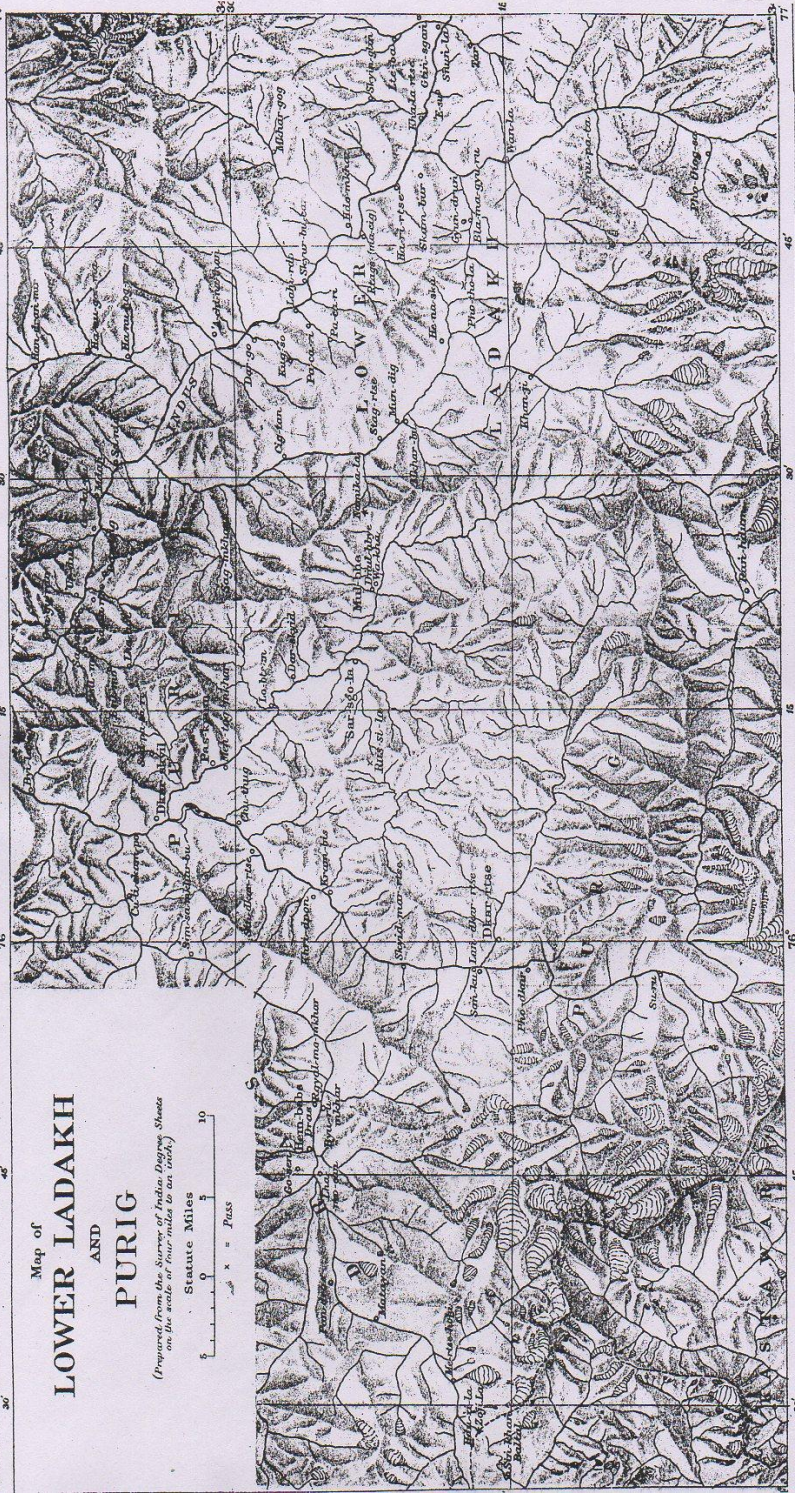
This research thus attempts to fill the gaps, for a better understanding of the past of this region. As stated earlier these regions included a number of principalities in and around Leh. Though it is not possible to give an exact/scaled historical map of these regions but a rough map is certainly possible to at least give a fair idea of the names and historicity of the regions. The eastern areas of the district of Kargil was

largely known as *Purig* for a long time but, since when is debatable. The principality of *Purig (Chigtan)* is mentioned for the first time in the context of King Jamyang Namgyal in the 16th century as stated in the *Chronicles of Ladakh* (Francke 1926: 174). This indicates that even Purig was a later creation both geographically and politically.

Purig has been lately and loosely been translated as *Pod-rigs* but it appears over simplified. It is possible to find similarities in words like the Tibetan name of the town *sPu hreng, Purang* which is claimed to be a corruption of the Zhang-Zhung words *Pu-hrang*, meaning horse head.⁸ Under King Deldan Namgyal (c1620-45 A.D.), it is mentioned in the chronicles that the first Bankhapa chief who distinguished himself was Sakya-rgya-mtsho, the field marshal who conquered Burig (Purig) and part of Baltistan. The Banka, who to his *office of master of the horse* adds the government of this district to *La-dvags* (Francke 1926: 242). Since these are oral traditions there is possibility of some error in the remembering of the chronicles. And Sakya-rGya-mtso might have worked under Jamyang Namgyal since the principality of Purig (Chigtan) is mentioned for the first time under Jamyang Namgyal in the 16th century as stated in the *Chronicles of Ladakh* under the capacity of master of the office of the horse. Hence the word Purig might have originated. So ‘Purig’ might also mean horse head indicating the early implication of the term. The geographical position of Purig was also similar to that of Purang in their respective erstwhile kingdoms. All the while the principalities in today’s Kargil never appear to have identified themselves as Purig before this.

Another possibility can be traced from villagers of the Wakha. They reportedly traced their descent from one Kunchoq Sharaftan who came and settled down at Wakha from Purang. With him came his two sons Lobzang Gyalpo and Tumber Gyalpo. Tumber became a famous reincarnate monk Kushak Narichang at Zangskar and is said to have built a monastery there. Lobzang took the reins of the region and gave many rulers to the kingdom (Kargil). Thus this may also have been the reason for the etymology of Purig/Burig (B.R.Rizvi 2000: 4).

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burang_Town



Geological Survey of India, New Imperial Series, Vol. I.

(Map, Francke 1926. * map not to be scaled)

2.4 CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THE BALTIS

Recent researches on the history of the land, has brought in many new information to the existing history. While analysing different narratives and understandings of histories can also help to unearth many more factual realities as well. Such studies adhere to the critical understanding of unbiased understanding and production of history. As such this part aims to present the contradictions in the popular history and aims at creating the possibilities for new approaches to the question of Balti identity and retracing history from the Chronicles.

Popular history according to the *Chronicles* points to the existence of a shared history of the Himalayan Kingdom's of Ladakh, Tibet and Baltistan. According to the chronicles the first of the kings to have reached as far as 'Nan-gon or Nago (Baltistan) was Gun'-sron-hdu-rje 679-705A.D. (Francke 1926: 85). However it was only with King Khri-sron-lde-bstan 755-97 A.D. that "*all the provinces on the four frontiers were subdued. China in the east, India in the south, Balti in the north were brought under his power*" (Francke 1926: 87) This event and period can also be interpreted as that of the period of dissemination of Buddhism in Baltistan and its coming under one roof. The chronicles mention that during the reign of this king, *Bon religion was suppressed and the holy religion was made to spread and flourish* in these regions (Francke 1926: 87). Thus mentioned is the existence of Bon religion in these regions. Therefore, it can be stated or argued that the Baltis too followed Bon/Shamanistic rituals. The Bon religion of the royal period (7th -9th c) is said to have come from Tazig (*Stag-zig*, Iran/Tajik) via Zhang Zhung and this is the probable source of other early components of the Tibetan civilization. A pre-Buddhist shamanistic religion was prevalent in early Tibet. (History of Zhang Zhung article: 2). However the Bon culture was not totally suppressed till the early 10th century.

Lang-dharma is well known for his destructive role of Tibetan Buddhism. Lang-Dharma was the final or last King to support *Bon* culture. He was responsible for the widespread suppression of Buddhism and destruction of symbols associated with it (Francke 1926: 87). It was during this time period after the 900s A.D. that the 'Nharis' i.e. the ordinary name of the western (now Tibetan) empire is mentioned for the first time in various documents and inscriptions of the same period (Francke 1926:

91). The next mention of Ladakh is found in the chronicles in context of King Skyid-Idde-Nima-Gon, 900-30 A.D. The chronicles mention, *Maryul he left undisturbed. At that time upper Ladakh of Maryul was ruled by the descendents of the Gesar, whilst lower Ladakh was split into small independent principalities. The boundary between upper Ladakh and lower Ladakh was marked by the plateau between Basgo and saspol* (Francke 1926: 93). Interestingly the present name of ‘*La-dvags*’ is not mentioned in the Tibetan chronicles before the reign of king Nyima Gon c.900 A.D., when it is stated that it was in the hands of king Gesar’s descendants (Francke 1926: 68). The mention of the descendants of Gesar forces us to consider the recent researches done on Gesar epic and its history. Of course it has been conveniently translated as a mythical king (demi-God) with whom all the Ladakhi Kings would trace their origins. But recent studies on Zhang-Zhung reveal a lot more. This era has also been referred as Zhang-Zhung/Mon culture and plenty of evidences have been found of this culture. Zhang-Zhung appears to be more of a cultural zone than a kingdom. The actual geographical extent of this culture has not been ascertained yet. But it certainly did include Ladakh and Baltistan as well in its cultural sphere. Some of the regions in Ladakh were ruled by the ‘Mons’ or Bonpos (followers of Bon culture). The ruins of their culture and Palaces are still to be found eastwards from Shey onwards and scattered in the rest of Ladakh. Mons are a distinct ethnic group in Ladakh, though they are now treated as ‘lower caste’ and placed amongst the lowest position in the social hierarchy.⁹ Another important magazine Mirror states that, ‘In Tibet our capital is called Lhasa. ‘Sa’ means land, land of divinity, land of deva. In the zhan zhung language *Lha* is *mar*.’¹⁰ Perhaps this points out why Ladakh was first called Maryul and then *La-dvags* around c 900A.D. Further can this be also be interpreted as transformation of *bon-Maryul* to *Buddhist -La-dvags*. The change of power might have been the cause for the downfall of the Mons and the suppression of their culture, the reason for their position in the contemporary social hierarchy.

The division of the erstwhile *Nharis* Kingdom between the three sons is well known. Lhachen-Dpal-gyi-mgon (c930-60AD), middle one was Bkra-sis—mGon and youngest was Lde-gtsug-mgon. The eldest got Maryul of mNahris (the inhabitants using black arrows.), Rhuthogs of the east and the gold mine of Hgog.

⁹ For detailed discussion on Mons and Bon culture refer to Books on Zhan Zhung Culture. Antiquities of Northern Tibet and Antiquities of Upper Tibet etc.

¹⁰ Mirror Magazine :10

The independent kingdoms of Kargil/Purig region and their accession into Ladakh throws light on the Balti history as well. It is not until the 16th century, under King Jamyang Namgyal, that the principality of *Chigtan is mentioned as Purig*¹¹ for the first time in the in the Chronicles of Ladakh. Whereas, Chigtan and the smaller principalities in and around this region had existed a long time before this, this indicates a later connotation of the term Purig. At that time around 16th century, the chief of Purig had accepted Muhammedanism and Jamyang Namgyal was involved in a war of the chief of Purig with that of Khartse. And in the 17th century the principality was again involved in a war with King Deldan Namgyal and Khri Sultan of Khartse (Francke 1926: 172). Then it is mentioned in the chronicles that the first Bankhapa chief under King Deldan Namgyal (c1620-45 A.D.), who distinguished himself was Sakya-rgya-mtsho, the field marshal who conquered Burig and part of Baltistan. The Banka, who to his *office of master of the horse* adds the government of this district (Francke 1926: 242).

Rizvi (1993:10) exploring Purig in the 1970's, translates a story based on the local traditions which recounts that the Dards¹² were in complete control of Kargil and adjacent areas including Leh till 300BC. A Mongoloid king, Neistheldon captured Zangskar and subsequently extended his rule up to Nameika-pass. He built a fort or Palace called 'Phokar' near Shargola village and extended his rule westwards up to Drass. Hence, the entire area from the west of Nameika-pass came to the east of Zoji-la which later came to be known as Purik or Purig, came under *Neistheldon*, also referred to as *Pot-riksha*.

2.5 KINGDOMS OF CHIGTAN, SOD AND KHARTSEY

The origins of these kings or chiefs are shrouded in history, though the present descendents of these Chiefs now like to trace themselves as Dards. The chronicles do

¹¹ History of Chigtan has been dealt with in later part of the chapter. Chigtan was a small principality in present Kargil district.

¹² Popular history meanwhile associates the Dards to have been a part of the Alexander's army. The areas beyond today's Ladakh, Gilgit and Baltistan were once known Bactria in history, where the Hellenistic world briefly touched and intertwined with the worlds of the Indus and the Siberian steppe. Greeks prospered here for a century or so after the death of the Alexander the great in 323BC.

give some evidences of them being Dards such as the names having Dardic suffixes and prefixes. Though this still remains debatable it may be a possibility. However, them being Balti is also equally plausible. Large sections of the Baltis of Leh do understand them as Baltis.

KHARTSEY

The principality of *Dkar-rtse* comprised the valleys of the Suru and Drass rivers (Francke 1926: 273). But the chiefs of Drass may have been independent. The capital of the principality was Dkar-rtse in the Suru valley. The towns of Suru, Dkar-kyil, Paskyum, at times even Mulbye, Wanla, Simsa-Kharbu, and Hembabs (Drass) were subject to these chiefs. The religion of the state was originally Buddhism; but in the 15th-16th Centuries they turned to Muhammedanism. Ran-hdum (*Rangdum*) in the upper Suru valley is the only place in the district which remained Buddhist.

It was during the reign of the chief Hbhag-dar-skyabs that Khartsey became a vassal to the Kashmir king and apparently in his service assisted in the conquest of the Balti, Hbrogpa district of Dah, Guge, Pu-hrans and Mnah-ris-skor-gsum. At that time began the introduction of Muhammedanism into *Purig* for names like Khatun and Ali appear in the record by the side of perfectly Tibetan names.

B.R.Rizvi (1993) in his anthropological work also explores the origins of the people of the Khartse region. He makes note of a place called Wakha.¹³ This village is situated 8 kms west of Nameika-pass. Interestingly Jonaraja also refers to this village as the place where a battle ensued between the Vakatanayas (*the people of Wakhas*) and Kalmanyas (*the Baltis of Kharmang*) (as cited in B.R.Rizvi 1993: 3, 4). The Chronicles also refer to a battle in this region. From the Ladakhi chronicles we learn that around c1550-80A.D. two Purig chiefs, the chief of Chigtan and the chief of Khartse, were also fighting with one another. The villagers of Wakha trace their descent from Kunchoq Sharaftan. He is said to have come and settled down at Wakha from Purang. With him came his two brothers Lobzang Gyalpo and Tumber Gyalpo. T.Gyalpo became the famous re-incarnate monk Kushak Narichang and migrated to

¹³ (derives its name from the river that divides it into two halves)

Zanskar and built a monastery there. Lobzang Gyalpo seems to have taken the reigns and gave many rulers to the region. His eldest son Singye Gyalpo became the king of Phokar, next son Chogyal Gyalpo became the king of Stakche; his Third son Khri Sultan became the king of Wakha and Khartse, the next son **Zirgoo Rgyacho did not have any heir**. Also interestingly, since the ruling dynasty was from Purang there is a possibility of the region and people identifying themselves and being identified as Purigis. The chronicles mention that in the 1st half of 17th Century the chief of Khartse, the Khri Sultan was taken prisoner and transported to Leh. During King Deskyong Namgyal's rule at Leh we find Bkra-sis-rNam-rGyal ruled over Purig.

Rizvi (1993) further elaborates on an oral tradition of the history henceforth. Since **Gyaldecho was without heir**, the Lamas told him that if he agrees to convert his son to Islam he will be blessed with one. Gyaldecho apparently agrees and Babar Khan was born. The Jama masjid of Wakha situated near the ruins of the Wakha fort is said to have been built by Babar Khan, the youngest son of Lobzang Rgyaldecho. It was him who invited a preacher from *Zaddibal* for preaching and leading the prayers in the village mosque. His grandson was Hashim Khan. It is during his reign that *Zorawar* Singh made incursions in Kargil areas. He was captured and exiled to Leh where he died soon after.

It is imperative here to mention that according to Aabedin (2009:34) in Suru Khartsey, *Thi Namgyal* (Khri Namgyal/Sultan) son of Raja Kunga Namgyal married a princess of Skardo Baltistan named Princess Rgyal Khatoon. Akhon Mohammed Sharif, Darwesh Imran Shah and some other dignitaries came with the princess with the motive to propagate Islam in Purig. After the marriage with the Princess, Raja Thi-Namgyal became a Muslim with the new name of '*Thi-Sultan*' (1660-1700AD). His Balti Queen came to be known as *Thi-la-Khatoon*. They convened a Kashmiri scholar Syed Hashim to educate their son Prince Thi-Muhammed Sultan. Thi Muhammed Sultan was childless so thus adopted King Nima Namgyal of the royal family of Leh as his son, in spite of the objection of his wife, who wanted to adopt a Muslim person from his own family. Thus the relation of Purig and Leh developed once more. After the death of Thi Muhammed, The Raja of Leh ruled over Suru Khartsey through his governors.

CHIGTAN

It is possible to trace the origin of this kingdom through these chronicles. The town of *Brusal* in the vicinity of Gilgit appears to be the starting or origin of the people or kingdom of Chigtan. Ltsan-mkhan-Malig according to the Chronicles made *Dargo* as his first stop and built a town there. There is a mention of the appearance of the two fairies *Ti-sug* and *Gan-ga-sug* from Gilgit region at Dargo. Modern interpretation can be seen in the context of the shifting of the people to inhabit the place and the Palace. The next stop of Ltan-Khan-mailg mentioned is a place called *Kug-so*. At Kug-so, he constructs three castles and then finally reaches *Chigtan*. There is a constant mention of building castles along the way which possibly signifies the capture of these places. It is mentioned that he brought men from Dargo and Kugso to build the castle there. The famous *Ro-zi-mkhar*¹⁴ was the last castle that *Ltsan-Khan* built. It was here that at this castle a son *Tshe-rin-Malig* was born, and then followed by Ga-bzan-phar after the 1900's.

SOD

The geographical extent of the 'Sod chieftdom' in the chronicles can be traced to the present valley of a tributary of the Wakka river coming down from the Hamoting-pass and falling into the Wakka river between Pas-kyum and Dkar-dkyil. The chiefs of this principality trace their origins from 'the great minister Khra- Khra-Khan'. However it is interesting to note that *Khra- Khra-Khan* appears to be the same person as *Ltsan-mkhan-Malig* of the Chigtan chronicles (Francke 1926: 177). Hence, pointing towards the common origin of the Chiefs of Chigtan and Sod. It can be opined that both these lines of chieftains came from Gilgit. There is also a mention of a certain Rgyal Malig in the chronicles of Sod as well.

Abedi (2009: 27) writes that around 1555-1610AD, *Ali Sher Khan Anchan* captured Kartaksha and Parkuta belonging to the Ladakhi King. It appears that he also came to know about the dispute between the two brothers, Rgyal Malig of Sod and

¹⁴ The famous father-son duo carpenters, Carpenter Tsan-hdas-pa was the one that built the castle at Chor-bad.

Tsering Malig of Chigtan. And apparently on the request of Tsering Malig, *Ali Sher Khan Anchan* invaded Sod and defeated Rgyal Malig. Consequently Tsering Malig became the ruler of entire Purig.

The statement that not only the chiefs of Chigtan but also that of Pashkyum were related to the Sod chiefs is in agreement with popular tradition. Besides when the line of Paskyum chiefs became extinct their property at Paskyum was seized by the family of Chigtan chiefs, in particular by Ga-bzan-phar of Chigtan (seems to be the last in line in Chigtan chronicles). In these chronicles the family name of the Chigtan-Sod chiefs is given as Sultan-khan and according to the La-Dvags-rgyal-rabs it is Purig Sultan.

A SHORT ANALYSIS

It is interesting to note how all of the kings/chiefs of the Baltis and around the Balti regions west of ancient Ladakh starting from Purig and then present Drass regions, Sod and Baltistan have common origin stories or fables. Though Francke has been able to translate what we now call the chronicles but in terms of accuracy and details these chronicles still leave much to be answered. In the ‘Balti Chronicles’ too, before the great king ‘Ali Sher Khan 1570-1600’ who subdued the entire region of Ladakh and Baltistan, nothing much is concretely known. The chronicles of Baltis also trace their origins from a ‘*faqir*’, whereas, in the chronicles of Chigtan this ‘*faqir*’ is actually traced. Though Francke just leaves it at pointing out the similarities it is possible to extend these guesses to actually supposing that all these kings might have common lineages. Lord Ltsan –mkhan-Malig who is also identified as Ltsan-mkhan-bkra-sis by a monastery record actually might mean *beggar* or *faqir*. The chronicles state that when he arrived at *Dar-go* he is said to have planted a dry walnut stick that he was carrying and fell asleep. And then at *Kug-so* too he planted a dry stick of Birch (Francke 1926: 173, 174). Also interesting to add here is a story of Guru Padmasambhava by noted Ladakhi historian Tashi Rabgias, accordingly Guru Padmasambhava seems to have visited Baltistan, where He planted his apricot staff onto a rock. Since then the apricot trees have flourished in Baltistan as the *nharis khambu* of the Tibetans (as cited in Shaksपो 2010: 122). These similarities further

stimulate the researcher for more indebt research on such fascinating histories of the land.

2.6 COLLECTED HISTORIES

Daniela Bredi in an article has compared the works on Baltis of Ladakh by Urdu writers. She translates valuable information compiled by the pioneer in the field of Balti studies, Hasmatullah Khan. During the reign of the Dogras, local people still referred to Kargil district by its ancient name of Purig (Bredi N.D: 7). Hasmatullah understands the term Purig as a complex of valleys inhabited mostly by Muslims, entertaining close relations with Baltistan.¹⁵

Hashmatullah explains that a Tibetan royalty, fleeing from Lhasa, Niathi Asthan arrived in Purig from Koge and established the first real government in this area, founding the kingdom of Purig with Phukar as its capital. During the reign of this dynasty a second adventurer, Thatha Khan also arrived from Gilgit and it was his progeny that gradually overtook NiaThi Asthan's kingdom (as cited in Bredie 2011: Appendix: 13). The two young princes of the defeated dynasty, Argyal Bum Ide and his brother Choz BumIde, were compelled to seek refuge in Kashmir. The Kashmir Raja took them under his protection and eventually gave his daughter 'Ganga Rani' in Marriage to Argyal Bum Ide. The Raja of Kashmir also handed over to the newlywed's lordship over the Kashmiri area bordering Purig and also provided the two brothers with an army in order to win back the lost kingdom. In This way, Argyal Bum Lde became lord of Suru, Khartse, and Mulbek from 1345-1400AD (as cited in Daniela Bredie 2011: Appendix: 14).

Bredie (2011) further translates that later in Kashmir, 'Ganga Rani' became known as the 'Muslim Begum' but Hashmatullah does not give Muslim names to the brothers because he affirms that they were referred to by their childhood names. Further translating from Hasmatullah, Bredie (ibid) describes that Argyal Bum Lde changed his capital city from Khartse to Mulbek, where he took up residence with his queen, his brother and a party of Muslims who had come with him from Kashmir. In

¹⁵ The principal valleys in Kargil are Suru, Dras, Shakar-Chigtan, Wakha and lower Indus.

Mulbek he had a mosque built and gave some impulse to the preaching of Islam. Hasmatullah states that the three tombs near the mosque are most likely those of Argyal Bumlde and his queen and perhaps Choz Bumlde (as cited in Daniela Bredie: N.D.). Further Argyal Bumlde had no sons, so Choz Bumlde 1400-1420 A.D., took his queen from a Buddhist family. From him up to Kunga Namgyal c1600 A.D., there are no indications about the kings being Muslims Daniela (Bredie 2011).

Following Konchok Sharaftan's death, Kunga Namgyal and his brothers divided their father's kingdom among themselves. As the eldest son, he got Suru-Khartse proper and wary of the intentions of the Gyalpo of Ladakh, tried to make his state safer by entering into an alliance with Kashmir and Skardo. To sanctify the alliance, he asked for the hand of a daughter of Skardo's ruler for his son and heir, Thi Namgyal 1660-1700A.D. His request was granted but he had to accept that the offspring of the couple would be a Muslim and that Suru Khartse would be open to the preaching of Islam. So the Balti princess known as Thi-La-Khatun arrived in the winter capital of Khartse Khar with an entourage which included the prominent Akhun Muhammed Sharif and other learned Muslim men who set about their task of spreading Islam among the Suru-Khartse people. Thi Namgyal and Thi La Khatun had a son Thi Muhammed Sultan who reigned from 1700- 1746. Sayyid Mir Hashim was called from Kashmir to serve as the boy's teacher, and he arrived in the company of Sajan Mir Munshi and Akhun Fazl. The last one went to stay in Wakha, invited by the local king, who wanted his son, whom he called Babur Khan, to be brought up in the Islamic religion. (Bredie 2011: 15)

Both Hashmatullah and Sikander credit Thi Muhammed Sultan (the 1st Muslim ruler of Suru and Khartse) with a victory over Kishtawar. However nothing of this is mentioned in the local history of Kishtawar (as cited by Daniela Bredie 2011). His queen was from Khapulu royal family according to some and was Ahmad Shah's of Skardo's sister according to some. They failed to produce heirs resulting in dynastic crisis. He had just a son from a concubine and taking the advice of a Buddhist Vazier he entertained the idea of nominating the Gyalpo of Ladakh as his heir. And the queen naturally wanted him to choose a Khapulu or Skardo prince as his successor. The queen was so aggrieved by the decision she took poison.

Thi Muhammed went to meet the emissary of the Gyalpo and formalized the adoption. In 1746 when he died, the king of Ladakh acquired Suru Khartse and sent his second born son, Tashi Namgyal to Khartse-Khar. After various revolts against him, Tashi Namgyal retired to a monastery and from then on Suru Khartsey was governed by Leh through Kharpons (governors), usually local nobles, sometimes Muslim and sometimes Buddhist, up to the time of the Dogras conquest in 1836.

From 1420 -1450 we find in Sod, Chigtan and Paskhyum a king by the name of Asturgpa Cho, who accepted Islam, according to Hashmatullah. His son Amrud cho 1451-1475 was definitely a Muslim because his name Murid khan is known. During the reign of first of his sons who was a weak ruler and bore the non-muslim name of Doro Cho, his dominions were reduced to Sod and Chigtan by the attacks of his neighbour, the Gyalpo of Ladakh, whose army reached Khalsi bridge under Kanji and the ruler of Astor. After him, his brother, with half Muslim name of Habib Cho 1490-1510, ruled. It was during this time that Nur Bakhsh's disciples were spreading.

It appears stated by Khan that Ahmad Malig 1510-1535, succeeded Habib Cho, Sultan Sai'id Khan, *Vali* of Yarkand, initiated a war against Ladakh and Kashmir. He states that Mirza Haidar Dughlat arrived in Sod from Ladakh via Zanskar and Suru, and confronted Ahmad Malig with his over whelming forces. From Purig Mirza Haidar had proceeded to Kashmir, leaving behind material traces of his passage. Later when Sultan Sai'id was back at Yarkand, Mirza Haidar attacked Lhasa. On his way back, he again led an army through Zangskar, stirring up anxieties in Suru and Khartse. Although after Mirza Haidar returned from war, Tsewang Namgyal established his power over Ladakh and resumed his attacks against Baltistan via Hanula (*Chorbat Pass*) (Daniela Bredie 2011:16).

Daniela quotes that according to Hashmat Khan, following Mirza Doughlat attack and Ahmad Maliks of Suru's submission, the ruler KhoKhor Baghram (1535-1550) entered into agreements with the Ladakh's Gyalpo and sent his second son, Tsering Malig, to Chigtan, as his governer. Franke mentions that according to local tradition, Tsering Malig, was the first Muslim ruler of Chigtan (1907-73-74.) Argyal Malig, the first born son, stayed with the father and on his death, succeeded him as Sultan of Sut /Sod.

Tsering Malig who built the castle of Chigtan built and took up residence there as a ruler of the country. After his father's death he entertained wishes of his independence but was unwilling to go against his elder brother openly and started attending the court of the King of Ladakh and made a pact with him. As a part of the pact, Tsering Malig accepted to give his wife to the Gyalpo and marry in exchange one of the Gyalpo's daughters. (Daniela Bredie 2011: 17). Back in Chigtan, Tsering Malig who governed Chigtan and Pashkyum from 1555 to 1600 declared his independence, provoking his brother's reaction. During this period, Ali Sher Khan the crown prince of Sultan Ghazi Mir of Skardo, was expanding his father's dominions at the expense of Ladakh. From Kartaksha, in pursuit of a Ladakhi army, he had entered Purig. Khan (1939) also informs that when Tsering Malig asked him for help to confront his brother, Ali Sher Khan marched on Sut and took it. This conformed Tsering Malig the ruler of Chigtan and with his help, the Skardo prince also conquered Budh Kharbu as well, and left a party of soldiers there when he returned to Kartaksha (as cited in Bredie 2011).

Jamyang Namgyal took advantage of the return of the Balti army and with the help of the local people, re-conquered Budh Kharbu. Tsering Malig went there to pay homage to his father in law, who did not question his independence and bestowed the name of *Sankhan* on the new born son of Tsering Malig and his daughter. From Budh Kharbu Jamyang Namgyal marched upon Wakha, whose lord did not come out to confront him and accepted his over lordship. Then he went to Mulbek, where he encountered resistance.

Ali Sher Khan of Skardo in alliance with other Muslim rulers of Baltistan replied to Jamyang Namgyal's moves against Ladakh. The Gyalpo rushed back to defend his dominions but was defeated and taken prisoner and brought to Skardo. After which the Purig kings gained considerable autonomy.

Following the division that occurred at the time of the war between Jamyang Namgyal of Ladakh and the Sultans of Baltistan, Chigtan and Paskyum were being governed by Tsering Malig and Sut was under Sultan Malig who became ruler after the death of his father Argyal Malig in 1600. Sultan Malig after whom all the names of the Sut rulers are Muslim made an attempt at re unifying the kingdom. He attacked Chigtan and killed his uncle Tsering Malig and his cousin Sankhan. He took

Sankhan's minor children, Adam Malig and Cho Sazang Malig, prisoner and confined them in the castle of Yuqma Kharbu. Sultan Malig was unable to make himself be accepted as a legitimate ruler of Chigtan, who were still Buddhists for the most part. They sent emissaries to Singgey Namgyal 1616-1642, in Leh and to Ali Sher Khan at Skardo 1595-1633, asking for their help. An instance of a physician from Chigtan living in Skardo who succeeded in restoring the queen to health is often cited. And as a reward, he asked, Ali Sher Khan to receive his fellow countrymen and listen to their request. Ali Sher Khan subsequently agreed to dispatch an envoy to the King of Sut advising him to set Sankhan Malig's children free and send them back to their country. And Sultan Malig readily followed the advice. The young princes were already back in Chigtan, when Singgey Namgyal who at first had been too busy to reply to the call of the people of Chigtan, decided to intervene. He entered Purig and took Wakha and Mulbek. He then conquered Suru Khartse, taking its King prisoner. Singgey Namgyal was on his way to Sut, when Thi Muhammed Sultan, who succeeded his father Sultan Malig in 1630 A.D., called for the help of the lord (Maqpon) of Skardo. By then Skardo position was not as strong as it had been in Ali Sher's time. After a succession struggle with his brother Adam Khan was now in power. He owed his position to the intervention of the Mughals (Ali Mardan Khan, Mughal governor of Kashmir). Ali Mardan Khan had sent an army under Hasan Beg Khan. The battle ensued at Karppo Khar. Singe Namgyal was defeated and sued for peace. Thus he had to leave Suru and Khartsey. (Hashmat quotes from Zakau'l-lah's *Tarikh e Hind*,1879).

From that time on upto the Dogra conquest (1618-1834) there is a long line of Sultans, who often married daughters of the kings of Ladakh. Hashmat explains that while he was there in those areas, descendants of the lords of Chigtan, Sut and Pashkyum were still living there, very often holding office in the government service.

2.7 ISLAMISATION OF THE BALTIS

Bredi in her analysis of the two authors Khan and Hashmatullah, concludes that Islam spread into Baltistan and Purig nearly at the same time. In a way these two

areas could be taken as configuring a Muslim ‘frontier’ on the fringe of the Buddhist Ladakh. She re-states from Hashmatullah that the first Muslim missionary in these areas was Mir Kabir Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani (1314-1385), a famous Sufi of the Kubraviya order who left an indelible mark on Kashmir. However the lack of evidence about Shah Hamadani’s arrival in Baltistan is stated by Hashmatullah. Hashmatullah claims that Islam was introduced in this area through the preaching of his disciples and followers. About Purig in particular Hashmatullah affirms that the presence of Nurbakhsia communities in this area may be taken as an indication that Islam was introduced here by Sayyid Muhammed Nur Baksh (1392/3-1464/5), who probably went from Kashmir, to Skardo passing through Purig or via Hundul. In his opinion Purig and Baltistan adopted the Shia version of Islam, due to the work of Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi at the beginning of the 16th century (Bredie 2011).

However specifically in Suru and Khartsey the Islamic religion started spreading with Argyal-bum-alde, who accepted Islam in Kashmir around 725 A.H, corresponding to 1373 CE. Some Muslim learned men came along with him from Kashmir, took up residence in Mulbek and started preaching the Islamic religion. Later on, Konga Namgyal the raja of Suru and Khartse had their son Thi Namgyal, married to a Skardo Princess, who later became known in Khartse by the name of Thi-la Sultan. Akhon Muhammed Sharif came with her from Skardo. He sent a few learned men to preach Islam from village to village and also undertook this task personally. His tireless activity gradually brought good results. Sayyid Mir Hashim, a learned man from Kashmir, was invited to educate Thi Mohd Sultan, son of Thi Namgyal and other ulema and mullahs came with him. They settled down in various villages and devoted themselves to the preaching of Islam.

Then in 840-45 AH, corresponding to 1453 CE, Sayyid Muhammed Nurbaksh laid the foundations for the Islamization of Sut, Chigtan and pashkyum. Later his disciples came and left a lasting mark upon the country. And quite a number of their followers of Nurbakhsia tradition can still be found among the local people.

Hence it can be concurred that Islam arrived in Purig from Kashmir and that the conversion began at the top, with a king or lord, whose reasons for conversions were often political, promoting its diffusion through a group of missionaries of foreign origin. As for the kind of Islam, it was Shi’ism and we can assume that the

occasional relapses into Buddhism were related to political events, such as temporary conquest by the staunch Sunni, Mirza Haidar of Kashmir (1548) and repeated threats coming from the Buddhist kings of Ladakh. Ladakh experienced first Muslim raid in 1420s after the accession of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin. Hereafter nearly for two centuries, Ladakh experienced raids from Kashmir and central Asia (Janet Rizvi 2007: 63). Among many of these raiders, Mirza Haider Daughlat needs a special mention here. He is often considered as an adventurer from Central Asia, who invaded Ladakh as far as Suru valley in 1532 (Janet Rizvi 2007:65). Interestingly, there is no description of his raids in the Ladakhi chronicles. Mirza Haider Daughlat invasion was driven by ambition to establish an empire. In this very regard he established his base at Leh and invaded Tibet and was forced to retreat within eight days march from Tibet due to harsh terrain and cold. Daughlat remained based at the strategic centre of Shey in Ladakh for another two years, with an ambition to attack Tibet again till his sudden death (Rieck 1995: 161). Hashmatullah informs that lords of Sut, Chigtan and paskyum were all Muslims beginning with the 17th century onwards, while the rulers of Suru and Khartse bore Muslim names beginning with 18th century.

According to Daniela Bred opines that Kacho's account enriches history as he relies more on local lore and folk songs. For instance, telling about the conversion of the first Muslim ruler of Suru, Khartse and Mulbek, Argyal-Bum-Ide, on the basis of Ladakhi folk song, he identifies him with Rinchen, the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir, who accepted Islam from the saint Bulbul Shah and took the name of Sadrud-din Shah.

Khan agrees on the fact that Islam started in Purig and Baltistan with Sayyid 'Ali Hamdani. Sayyid Muhammed nur Baksh followed who was welcomed as the Khalifa of Sayyid Hamadani. And finally Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi converted many kings and common people from Buddhism to Shia Islam. However Kacho's opinion is that Sayyid Mohd. Nurbaksh was a Shia Muslim, the first of the *silsila* of the Nurbakshi Sayyids, who expressed his teachings in a Sufi form. He says that it is confirmed by the Nurbakshi texts, where the sect is called a '*firqa nurbakhsiya imamiya sufiya*'. He states that when people say that in the Kargil area there are two Shiite sects, the twelve-ver and the Nurbakshi, they mean a distinction that existed once, but later was no more. The local ulema explained that the Nurbakshia was not a sect but a Sufi Tariqa and almost all the Purig Nurbakshis, with a few exceptions,

agreed to regard themselves as twelvers. (as cited in Bredie 2011: 11). Kacho also attempts a Sayyid genealogy, that of the Mausavi Sayyids of Purig. In which he tries his best to insert all the descendants of Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi.

2.8 SHIA BALTIS IN LA-DVAGS

Aabedin states (2009:17) that in the year 1430-1470 during the reign of Raja Saleem Ldey of Thursay Khar (Khapulu) when Drag-pa Bumde (1430-1470) was the king of *la-dvags* ruling from Shey, a terrible flood came in the Shayok river. The flood was the result of sudden breakage of a Natural Blockage that had formed blocking the Khumdan Lake, which is the source of Shayok river. During summer, the quantity of the water in the lake further increased, because of the melting snow and ice boulders. As a result of the sudden breakage of the passage resulted in a terrible flood in the Shayok Valley, destroying the Chaythang town of Khapulu. And a famine like situation occurred. Therefore a large part of the population migrated from here, some to Parkuta and Dogni in present Baltistan itself but also to Chuchot. So there is this wave of migration to the Indus belt in Leh part of the kingdom. However this doesn't mean that before the 15th century the Baltis did not exist in this part of Ladakh. This can be seen as one of the first large wave of Baltis that came after they had converted to Islam.

2.9 ROYAL MARRIAGES

Georgios T. Halkias (2011: 231) *In Islam and Tibet – Interactions along the Musk Routes* has worked on this important historical development. The scholar aptly asserts the impact of the exchanges of Queens on history and culture and indeed all aspects of the society. In fact this could be the mirror of the multiculturalism that Ladakh had always nurtured. Scholarly work has been attempted only after the conversion of the Balti kings to Islam. Hence much of the available information is only after the 2nd half of the 15th century.

The Baltis largely exist in all areas of Ladakh except for Sham proper and eastern most parts of Leh district. Over the period many marriage relations were built between the rulers of all these areas. There are various instances and recorded instances of queens of the Baltis having brought a large number of people along with them for her help and whom later settled down in this part of the land as well. However Halkias (2011: 243) states that much of the information on such cultural exchanges in the form of royal marriages, are garnered from Balti sources such as folk songs. The Chronicles surprisingly ignore these aspects of Culture.

Particularly interesting is the fact that Baltis in Leh District exist in ghettos. Chuchot, Phyang, Skampari in Town proper are marked by such ghettos which claim to have settled or moved with various queens. The first definite Muslim queen to have married into Ladakhi royalty was a particular Mu-su-lu Begum, who was the Kashmiri princess. She was requested as bride by king Drag Bumde to serve an ambassador of good will, given the imminent threat of the Muslim forces from Kashmir led by Rai Madari. Rai Madari has captured Baltistan during the reign of Sicander 1394-1416 (Halkias 2011:236).

Some of the queens who entered matrimonial relations with the Kings of Leh as compiled by Georgios are tabled below:

Ladakhi Kings	Regional years	Muslim queens and their origins
Kyide Nyima Gon	10 th century	Tagzig-ma (Arab)
Drag Bumde	c.1400-44	Be-Kim (Kashmir)
Jamyang Namgyal	c.1595-1616	Gyal Khatun (Skardo)
Senge Namgyal	c. 1616-23	Kelsang Khatun (Skardo)
Nyima Namgyal	c.1694-1723	Zi-zi-Khatun (Purig)
Tsewang Namgyal	c.1753-82	Bi-bi-Khatun (Karche) Bhe-kim(Purig)
Tseten Namgyal	c. 1782-1802	Zi-zi-Khatun (Purig)
Tsewang Rabten (Prince)	d.1834	Zo-ra Khatun (place unknown)

*musk route interactions (2011:252)

That whether the chiefs in Purig were Baltis or Dards will always be a question to be debated. Whilst Francke and by now the wider literati accepts on account of these chronicles as Dards. History has shown how folk tales can and does distort history. The *dards-Brogpas* are acknowledged as having pure and European origin, specifically related to Alexander and his armies, thus uplifting social status viz a viz the ruling class of Leh might have prompted to lean towards Dard lineage. Hence authentic rigorous research is needed in the matter. Possibilities also extends that since they have a common origin stories they might have been Baltis as well. Just because of the appearance of Dardic extensions in name in a few of them doesn't qualify them to be Dardic as well. Another possibility can be that the Purigis are a fine mix of the Baltis, Dards and the Ladakhi's. As such they are as much Balti as the other Baltis. However after Sher Ali Anchan around 16th century, they surely have become Baltis if ever they were Dards, on account of marriages and acceptance of culture etc. It wouldn't be wide of the mark to designate them as Baltis. The Purigis in all aspects of the markers identifying them relatively adjudicates them much closer to Baltis than of any other ethnicity. The Baltis have now largely accepted the 'Shia' (sect of Islam) faith in life. As such blunders like using the Baltis and 'Shias' as alternatives have been made. Historically and presently Baltis have extended into all faiths prevalent in the northern regions of the India. By 1758 Purig was permanently incorporated into the Ladakh kingdom, and Leh was established as the centre of power and trade in the region (Bray 2005: 175).

2.10 THE BALTIS AND THE DOGRAS

The erstwhile pre-partition state of Jammu and Kashmir consisting of the three regions was brought under one administrative unit in 1848, after the fall of the Sikh kingdom. The British under the treaty of Amritsar ceded Kashmir to Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu in lieu of Rs. 75 lakhs. The area of Ladakh was later conquered by one of his generals during the *the Dogra wars, 1834-42AD* (Verma 1987: 563). This event has been very vividly described in the chronicles. A.H.Francke has collected the accounts of the war from two authentic sources, those who were the part of the war. The first account is of *Meme Tsetan* of Khaltse collected during 1899-1904 and

second is of *Mehta Basti Ram* who was a Dogra officer and one of the early Wazirs of Ladakh from 1847 to 1861.

According to the reminiscences of Meme Tsetan, the King of La-dvags was the Father king and his territories extended from the zoji pass, chosbad pass of Baltiyul, from La-dhar in zanskar, seh-dula pass of Idumra and Pho-lon-hdra-hdra of Byanthan. He mentions how the people of Purig, Baltiyul and la-dvags did not have to pay toll. Pre-partition Kargil and Leh with Baltistan was an unrestricted thoroughfare for the locals. The Baltis travelled both ways in search of work and travels. In the 9th month of a horse year that roughly corresponds to 1833-34.AD, a call to arms was given to all the provinces on account of the news of the army of advancing *shinpas*. This first march proved victorious for the outsiders. Basti ram's account informs that in 1847 Cunningham had met him and asked to write this account of the Dogra expansion. The dogras marched from Kishtawar and entered La-dvags (*maybe the first mention of Ladakh as one.*) from the pass at the head of the Suru Valley, where they were opposed by the leader of the Boti leader Mangal. Next they advanced to Shakhar (Sag-mkhar), where there was a fort belonging to Thai Sultan (Khri-Sultan). And having reinstated the zamindars of Janguri (San-ku-ri or Saanku) and Shakar in their villages, he made a summary settlement of the district by imposing a tax of four rupees upon each village. They left 35 men and advanced to Langkarchu (Lan-mkhar-rtse) and Minji to the bridge of Paskyum where they again encountered the Boti army. The chief of Paskyum also fled the place along with the zamindars to the fort of Sod who were eventually defeated.

At Mulbek, Akabat Mehmud Khan (King of Ladakh) (*Don-grub-rnam-rgyal*) with Bankha Kalon along with four other chiefs met the Dogra Army. There is a mention of Rahim Khan of Chuchot (*Chu-Sod*). Here through various tactics they were successful in forcing the dogras to retreat. But eventually the La-dvags Gyalpo had to sue for peace. But soon there was news of chief of Sod recapturing. He then pursued them upto Suru where many were beheaded and the surrendered. And 6 years of peaceful rule followed albeit under the Dogra allegiance.

The second expedition followed when in the 7th year the Ladakhis decided to revolt against the Dogras or Shinpas (outsiders). There is a mention of a certain Sukamir of Hembabs who insisted the people of Purig to join as well in the revolt. But

on arrival of Zorawar's army, the joint army proved a damp squib. And Sukamir, Yis-mal-mir of Chigtan and several more people of Purig were caught. The exemplary punishment given to Sukamir is described; his hands and tongue was cut off. Then along with the army of the Purig and La-dvags they marched towards Baltistan. He appears in the pursuit of a certain Rahim Khan of Chigtan, who the Wazir demanded on the surrender of the Skardo chief. Rahim Khan's ears, tongue and hands were cut after which he perished in a couple of days. Another called Hu-sen of the house of Bon-pho of Pashkyum was also caught and had his right hand and tongue cut off. Then Zorawar marched on the Fateful expedition of Tibet. There is a mention of a particular Chief Ghulam Khan of Chushod who along with 4 other people from La-dvags was taken captive in Tibet and did not return (Francke 1926: 257).

After the conquest of Baltistan by Zorawar Singh which was the Third expedition, former Ladakh provinces at the time of Singgye Namgyal of Rhuthogs and Ngari were on the list. This proved to be the fateful expedition for Wazir Zorawar. He mentions again of Rahim Khan a half blood Musalman of Chuchot was placed over spiti, while Ghulam Khan his son in law was employed in the desecration of the monasteries. He was later on taken as prisoner by the Tibetans (Francke 1926: 267).

CHAPTER 3: SOCIO- CULTURAL STATUS OF BALTIS

3.1 BALTI AND RELIGION

Balti is a generic term that is routinely used especially by the Buddhist in Ladakh to refer to all Shia Muslims in the region (Gupta 2014: 5). The present understanding of the term Balti percolates into the common Ladakhi Buddhists vocabulary as all Shia Muslims, even the local Shia population in Leh use the term Balti and Shia interchangeably. The term *Balti* to an extent has been used in a derogatory sense in the late 20th century by the local Buddhists, such that the term had until recently been avoided use of even by the Baltis themselves. After political upheavals in the later part of 20th century, critically analysed in the proceeding chapter, ground realities and understandings went through drastic changes. Religion today distinctively excels as the prime marker of Identity of an individual. And all Shia Muslims in Kargil and Leh are by and large addressed as Baltis by their counterparts.

But, historically, Ladakh had always been a multicultural society in which the differences were dominated by differences other than religion. Abdul Ghani Sheikh (2010) a local scholar/ expert on Ladakh history, opines that the two regions Ladakh and Baltistan have a similar mode of living, dialect and food habits: and they share a common history. Baltistan gave the *Surna* (oboe) and *Daman* (drum) to Ladakh. B.R.Rizvi (1993) in an anthropological study of the Baltis of Kargil remarks that Kargil has acquired a strategic significance due its geographical setting. It is more or less equidistant from the capital cities of Kashmir, Baltistan and Ladakh. It has effective linkage with Punjab through Jammu and Himachal Pradesh and also with Central Asia through Leh too. Like Leh, Kargil too acquired strategic importance during the trading days and all important trading goods did pass through here. Thus Kargil also emerged as a converging point of many ethnic groups and faiths. Thus a

much needed comprehensive analysis of the transformation and formation of the present Balti culture have been attempted in the chapter.

Migrations of peoples or families from the north east of Tibet contributed greatly to the formation of the ethnic and cultural complex of what is understood as classical Tibetan culture. All analyses prove that these Tibetan traditions east of Lhasa, has certainly played a great role in Balti culture too, before the creation of the central kingdom understood as Tibet presently. A dominant east to west movement is certainly perceivable, but also movement in the opposite direction, from west to east, should not be ignored. The Balti culture exemplifies as a cradle of this cultural syncretism. It abridges different cultures of Inner Asia thus reinforcing its importance in the development of cultural relations of India with different countries of Inner Asia. The geographical location of this tribe makes it of paramount importance in contemporary India and foreign policy. Researches on culture studies emphasize the importance of culture in reinforcing identity narratives. Identity politics are deciphered on the lines of culture. Culture itself being a comprehensive notion helps accommodate various understandings of culture. Following chapter understands how Baltis understand culture and status of culture amongst the Baltis.

Scarcity of research holds hostage, an accurate history of Baltis and their culture prior to 250 BC. An edgy understanding of the existence of *Bon* culture is widely accepted before Buddhism finally made its widespread presence felt. Before this, traces of the first wave of Buddhism can be found of the early 3rd century BC, when Buddhist missionaries of Ashoka and their messages were spread in erstwhile Ladakh. We still find many rock inscriptions of the 5th and 6th century in *Brahmi* script (Kazmi 2015: 2). However practises such as animal and human sacrifices followed by shamanistic devil charming, devil dancing etc. prevailed (Rizvi 1993: 70). Present Tibetan Buddhism practised in Ladakh still holds extensive clues of this culture. *Bon* was finally suppressed or transformed to Buddhism around the 7th century. According to the chronicles King *Khri-sron-lde-bstan* (755-97AD), during this time period, subdued all the provinces on the four frontiers. China in the east, India in the south, '*sBalti*' in the north was brought under his power (Francke 1926: 87). This event or period can be seen as the dissemination of Buddhism in Baltistan and coming under one roof. During the reign of this king *Bon* religion was suppressed and the holy religion was made to spread and flourish (Francke 1926: 87).

Thus mentioned is the existence of Bon religion in these regions. Consequently after 7th century onwards *bon* culture exemplified by their establishments, were either destroyed or incorporated into the Buddhist fold. Therefore, it can also be stated or argued that the Baltis too followed Bon/Shamanistic rituals followed by Buddhism.

The credit of carrying the torch of Buddhism goes to the famous Buddhist monk Padmasambhava and Atisa. Padmasambhava known in Ladakh as Guru Rinpoche or *slob-dpon Padma Jyungnas* is supposed to be the founder of the first order of Tibetan Buddhism called as *Nyigmapa*. The first monastery ‘*Norbu Lhakhang*’ was built under his direction 749 AD on the lines of Nalanda. Padmasambhava is considered to be the reincarnation of the Dhyani Buddha Amitabha. Atisa (Dipankar) belonged to the famous Buddhist monastery of Vikramshila. He visited Ladakh in 1038AD and founded a new order on a purer Buddhist model which he called *Kah-dam* (bonded by the order). This order after words became yellow hat seat (Gelug-pa). Atisa resorted to celibacy and purged much of its devil worship rituals.

The Balti people were Buddhists till the arrival of Mir Shammsuddin Iraqi in Baltistan (Rizvi 1993: 89). B.R.Rizvi explains that after the coming of Islam a new set of beliefs and culture was brought in. The Baltis of Ladakh evolved an intricate balance between their old faith Buddhism and new faith Islam. Rather a more apt analysis would be that the Baltis evolved a distinct culture laced with the adoption of additional culture added by Buddhism and then Islam. Simultaneously, retaining and evolving a distinct Balti culture at the same time.

Various instances have been traced by scholars on the dawn of Islam in Ladakh. In absolute terms it is difficult to trace the first instances of spread of Islam in Ladakh. But the two main causes of conversion was (a) matrimonial alliances and (b) through Tabligh (*preachings*). Petech (1997: 232) informs one of the, 9th-10th century founder of the mNga-ris-skor-gsum kingdoms king *sKyid-lde Nyi-ma-mgon* had four wives; one of the four wives is recorded as *sTag-gzigs-ma*, a Persian or an Arab lady (as cited in Bray 2005:9). Traditionally large groups have followed Queens to help aid the queen in the new lands. Similarly a group large/small might have been the first Islamic people to enter these lands with the Queen. Nicola grist further mentions that most Muslims in Purig were Shia or Noorbakshi, a Sufi variant of

Shiism. The Noorbakshi order was started in the 15th century by a preacher called *Noorbaksh*, meaning gift of light. He was a follower of Sayeed Mahmud Hamadani, who is credited with bringing Islam to Baltistan and Purig. The Noorbakshs are presently limited to Nubra valley, few villages of Kargil and some in north of Leh district (Bray 2005: 177). One of the oldest monuments of Balti Islam is the *Masjid* at *Shey*, presently marked as Shah e Hamdaan masjid. According to later tradition (Sheikh 1995: 190), the muslim preacher Mir Syed Hamdani was the first to make converts even in Ladakh when passing through the region en route to Kashgar in 1394AD (as cited in Bray 2005: 9). However it is important to point out that Holzwarth (1997), Hashmatulla Khan (1992), local preacher at Thiksay, Sheikh Jawad, challenges the historicity of this tradition and the sources of this tradition (Bray 2005: 9). The patronage of the Masjid remains contentious however, it is agreed that it was built around the 15th century during the reign of King Takpa Bum-Idé. According to Balti scholar Sheikh Jawad of Thiksay, there were new Balti (Muslim) settlers in Chuchot requiring an *Imambara* where as for the minimal Muslim Balti there already existed a mosque at Shey. So it was agreed to offer prayers at Shey and Moharram at Chuchot Imambara. The tradition of offering *tabbarruk* during Muharram on behalf of Shey to Chuchot still continues to this day, which he says is evidence of the patronage of the mosque. (Sheikh Jawad 2015) Thus other two important monuments of the Baltis of Ladakh the Imambarah Chuchot Gongma and Yokma also date to the time period of Drag-pa-Bum-Idé (Aabedin 2009: 45).

Some other important events in history are, as Petech (1977: 33-37) informs, in the early 17th century (1595-1616AD) King Jamyang Namgyal was defeated in a disastrous war with Ali Mir, the ruler of Baltistan (as cited in Bray 2005: 13). The king was captured and imprisoned in Skardu, where he fell in love with Ali Mir's daughter rGyal Khatun. Sheikh (1995:190) informs that the two were eventually married and the king was reinstated, later became the mother of the most well known king of Ladakh, Sengge Namgyal. With tradition a substantial Balti population followed her to Ladakh (as cited in Bray 2005:13).

Most of the Purig region converted to Shia Islam, in a gradual process which accelerated in the 17th and 18th centuries. Nicola Grist (ibid: 175-180) shows that this was in part a result of the personal influence of Muslim preachers on the ordinary populace. Shia Islam came to Kargil via Baltistan through proselytization by

preachers who travelled overland from Khurasan in the 17th century. Legendary among them is Sheikh Ali Brolmo under whom some of the most learned of the older generation of clerics in Kargil studied (Gupta 2014: 5). Conversions also took place as a result of the local chiefs' alliance building with the chiefs of Baltistan, who had converted earlier (Bray 2005: 14). The people of Baltistan had converted to Shia Islam by early 17th century and by 1637 had come under Mughal control (Bray 2005: 11). When the British adventurers William Moorcroft and George Trebek visited the *Cho* of Pashkyum in 1821 near Kargil, which in earlier days was the main stopping place on the road to Leh, he had recently converted to Islam although his wife remained a Buddhist. But the ordinary people of Pashkyum were already Muslims (Grist 2005).

Similarly Nicholas (Grist 2005: 176) informs popular tradition and oral tradition recorded by Hasmatullah Khan (1939) relate that the conversion to Islam in Suru-Kartse, started during the rule of *Thi Namgyal*, who was the father of the last independent ruler of Suru Kartse. He is said to have married *Thi Lha Khatun*, the daughter of the Muslim chief of Skardu, the main power in Baltistan. She brought Muskim scholars to Suru, who converted the population of the valley. Their son *Thi Sultan* was a Muslim taught by a Muslim scholar Mir Hashim. His astana (tomb) still exists near the ruins of the castle of this dynasty at Karpo Khar, between Sangra and Sangkoo. Thi Sultan is said to have no legitimate heirs so he gave up his chiefdom to the ruler of Purig (Grist 2005). Whatever may have been the causes, early 17th century marked the end of the dynasty. Nicola states that though there is little information about earlier part of 20th century in Kargil however, it was during this period that there seems to have been a new influx of Shiite preachers in the Suru valley and both *Yokma* and *Goma Agha* lineages were established in TaiSuru. These were the two Shiite factions in Suru. At their core they have a lineage of *Sayyids* (people claiming descent from the family of the Prophet Mohammeds daughter Fatima and her husband Ali (Grist 2005: 179). However these differences were not short lived and many internal divisions exist today within the Balti community.

The Balti influence on the society of Ladakh and culture/history after conversion to Islam can certainly be traced but prior history needs a thorough research. Scholars have accepted the Baltis also followed the Bon Chos as other majority Ladakh counterparts, then followed Buddhism and subsequently converted to

various understandings of Islam. Today Balti is synonymously used to Shia sect of Islam. Which does explain the impact of Shi'ism on the larger part of Balti population. However present day Balti extend into Buddhism, Christianity, Sunni Islam and Sikhism. The intricacies of the later 20th century Balti politics have been dealt with in the subsequent chapter.

3.2 BALTI LANGUAGE

As Bettina states languages are vehicles of identification and hence their classification is always culturally and politically sensitive (Zeisler 2005: 41). As such to an *outsider* the historical, political, emotional ascriptions and their motivations are not always transparent. The standard language policies and taking ideologies for facts does not always justify or result in appropriate or real results or understandings. All attempts to maintain, reform, or even revive the Ladakhi and Balti languages face basic problems like the lack of clear concepts about what these languages are and where they come from. Hence this is a comprehensive attempt at historical perspective of Balti language, its present status and politics around it in the community.

Ladakhi and Balti are often said to come closest to the original Tibetan classical language (*Choskat*). The Original Tibetan language is understood to be the language of the religious books or classical Tibetan. Gani Sheikh opines that both the dialects are of *Tibetan origin and used to share a common script, although the pronunciation of Balti is considered and regarded as being closer to classical Tibetan* (Sheikh 2010: 164). Specifically, some studies reveal that Balti language is comparatively closer than Ladakhi (spoken language of people of Leh-Ladakh) to Amdo province of Tibet.

The Ladakhis, Tibetans and Baltis have shared a common written language based on classical Tibetan in history. At the same time, it is crucial to understand that there are distinct variations in the spoken form in these areas, in different villages and districts within Ladakh; and spoken Ladakhi, Balti and Lhasa Tibetan are not mutually intelligible (Bray 2005: 3). Selective narrations have ignored the fact that

Tibetan was not the only international language before the spread of Tibetan Buddhism. In erstwhile Ladakh and Baltistan, the official language of the Palolashahis¹⁶ and the clergy was *Brahmi*. Brahmi is assumed to have spread after the 4th legendary Buddhist Conference in Jalandhar under the sponsorship of Kushan Emperor Kanishka. Many rock inscriptions of the era 5th and 6th centuries are still found in Baltistan (Kazmi 2015: 2). From the 16th century onwards, Persian became one of the main languages of trade and diplomacy linking Ladakh with Kashmir and other parts of India, and Ladakhi kings employed Muslim scribes skilled in Persian to help communicate with Kashmir and India.

Discussions have been there of the inefficiency of the Persian and roman script to fully represent the Balti Language as spoken and the need to revert to the Classical Tibetan script. But present scholars of Balti language in Baltistan have added new alphabets to the existing Bhoti script and call it *Balti Script*. The addition of new alphabets to the existing ones in Bhoti by the scholars of Baltistan also points to the inefficiency of the Bhoti classical script to accommodate the Balti language as well.

Since the 19th century, Persian has been replaced first by Urdu (the state language of J&K), and now in part by Hindi (the national language) as well as English (the most widely used international language). International boundary disputes may have cut off Ladakhs historic trade routes, but it is still at international crossroads (Bray 2005: 3). Presently many languages are now to be heard in Ladakh, together with Ladakhi, Tibetan, Kashmiri, Punjabi, Nepali and the mother tongues of the many foreign visitors. Ladakhi has been historically influenced by various languages and the discourse on the ability of the classical language to accommodate these as well also needs to be further developed. Bettina Zeisler continues the discussion of the position of Ladakhi and Balti within the wider Tibetan language family. The traditional view is that the Tibetan script was introduced by *Thon-mi Sambhota*, an emissary of the Tibetan Emperor *Srong-brtsan-sgam-po*, who ruled in the 7th century. Contrary to the general views she opines that the development of the script was more complicated than this tradition suggests, and that its rules were not fixed until much later than generally accepted. Further, she challenges the view that Ladakhi is a

¹⁶ According to Syed Muhamad Abbas Kazmi in his article states that the Palolashahi rulers of Baltistan (Palolo) ruled the area of Ladakh and Gilgit from the 5th century to around 727 AD, when King Khri-Lde-gtsug-bRtan invaded Baltistan and adjoining areas.

deviation of the original Tibetan language which formed the basis of classical written Tibetan (as cited in Bray 2005: 5). She opines that Ladakhi derives from an earlier form of Old Tibetan and must therefore be considered a cousin rather than a descendant of the Old Central Tibetan form which the classical language derives (as cited in Bray 2005: 6). Philip Denwood pointing to the linguistic similarities between the dialects spoken in Ladakh and Baltistan with those in the northern and eastern Tibetan regions of Amdo and Kham, remarks that the linguistic affinities between the two regions point to the existence of historic lines of communication by this route rather than via central Tibet during the period of Yarlung dynasty and after (as cited in Bray 2005: 5).

At present Balti language has been heavily influenced by Burushaski, Turkish, Persian and Urdu apart from classical Tibetan. Syed Mohd Kazmi claims that the Balti had no script of their own till the Tibetans managed to create a script for their language (Kazmi 2015: 138). Around mid 8th century when *Khri Lde-gTsug-Brtan* commonly known *Khri-sron-lde-bstan*, conquered Baltistan, Tibetan script was formally introduced as official script through their offices, religious books, and rock inscriptions. The famous Mandala carving and rock inscriptions near Skardo, which dates back to the 8th century, are one of the best examples of such efforts. Syed claims that during this period there was no difference between the Tibetan dialects of Lhasa or central Tibet and Baltistan, therefore, the Baltis faced no problem in reciprocal communication and usage (Kazmi 2015).

However it was in the 16-17th centuries when Islam became to flourish in these areas that the script started losing its foothold. The Persian script was favoured by the religious preachers over the Tibetan script. Moreover when the Maqpon dynasty started ruling, Islam was having huge effect on the area as all the regions except east of it were Islamic rulers. And Persian was the preferable script of correspondence.

In the days of trade relations with Central Asia, many Ladakhis used to speak Turkish languages, particularly the residents of Leh, and the villagers of the Nubra valley on the Leh Yarkhand road. Some literate people also learned Persian. Some Turkish words thus have found their way into the Ladakhi language, and are still used today. Sarag-tuman is a Turkish word for carrot, and sha-pos means quilt. Similarly,

the words Qualin, Risham, Samosa, Pulao, Roghanjosh, Goshtaba and Peraq, are all originally from Central Asia (Sheikh 2010: 158).

Presently Kargil and northern parts of Leh districts still continue to employ and preserve the language albeit with various additions of new vocabulary that is assimilated necessarily in various interactions with non-Balti people. However the language of Balti in the main land of Leh appears to have submerged completely into Ladakhi. Balti sermons at the Friday prayers become notably difficult to interpret or understand for the younger generation. Thus Balti programmes and people understanding and using the language have become a rarity amongst Leh Baltis.

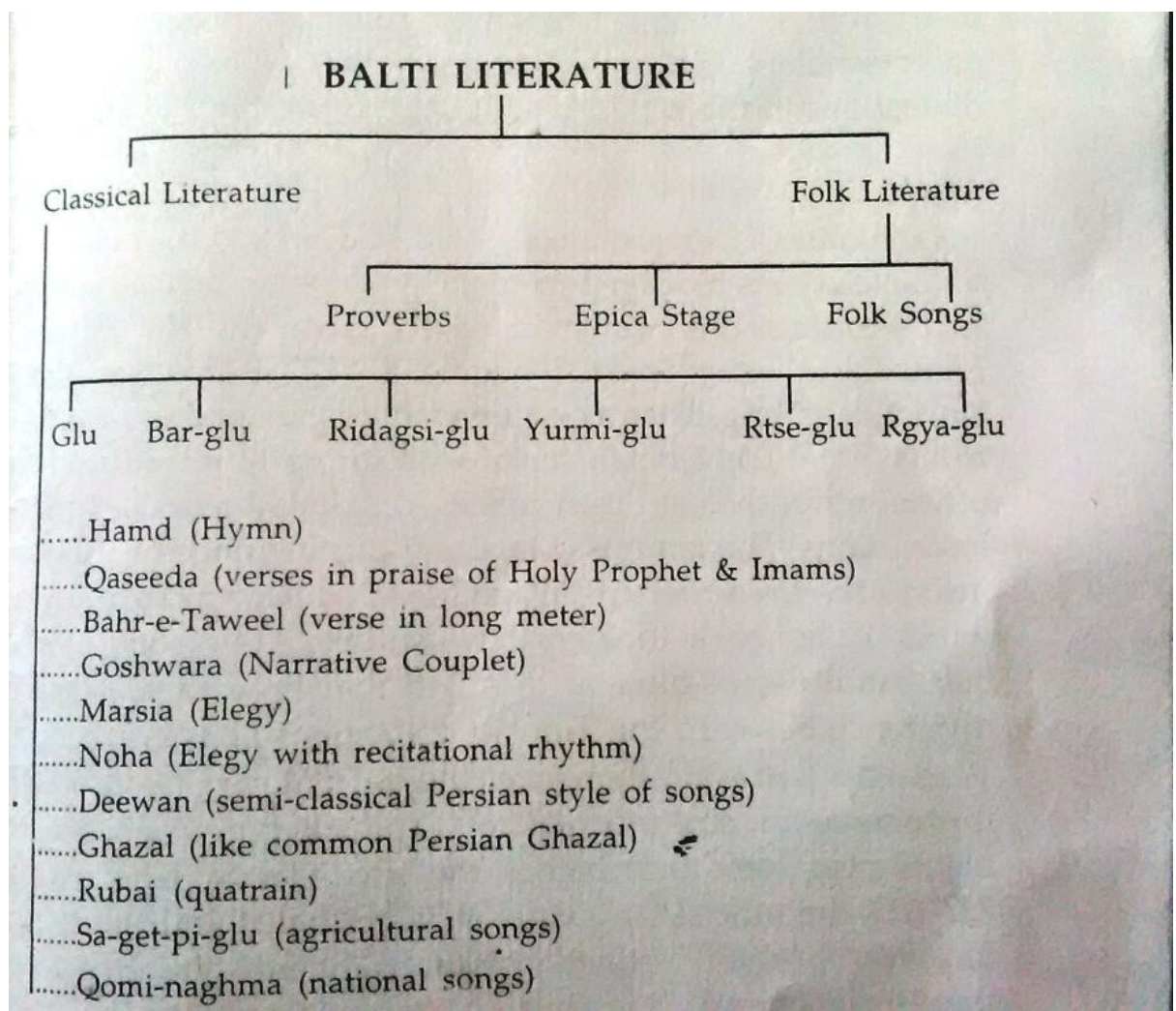
PROMINENT BALTI POETS

Syed mentions one *Al-bDe*, neither his personal details nor exact period is known (Kazmi N.D.: 143). However his poetry and the language he uses we infer that he belonged to the time when Islam through Persian language and poetry had not affected the Balti language and poetry (Kazmi N.D.: 143). His compositions can be found under *Ridagsi-glu*. After the fall of Baltistan in 1840s several poets have been recognized. *Muhib* (Prince Hussain Ali Khan) the youngest son of last independent ruler of Baltistan, Ahmad Shah Maqpon. He was deposed and deported along with his son by the Dogras and taken to Jammu. He later passed away in Tral district Pulwama Kashmir. He wrote poetry in the *Marsia* form and is considered to be the Anees of Baltistan. *Zakir* (Prince Muhammed Ali Khan) was the Grandson of King Ahmad Shah Maqpon, son of prince Lutf Ali Khan and the newpew of Muhid. He was born in Tral. He was a poet of *Qaseeda*. *Baba Johar*, born in Haldia, Khapulu he composed in the 1890s. He was a Darwesh following the Imamia Nurbakshia traditions of Shiite faith. His field of poetry was *Bahre-e-Taweel*. *Syed Abbas* of Shigar born in 1846 A.D, was an excellent poet of the *Qaseeda* and *Goshwara* etc.

Some local prominent poets from Ladakh are Bashir Wafa and Septe Kalim, who have visited Baltistan as well. Mushairas, music cds, of classical poetry set to pop music, radio programmes from radio Skardu and All India radio Kargil and

Srinagar are modes of preserving and exhibiting the Language. The famous Balti writers in Ladakh are Hasan Hasni and Ba Abbas, Mansoor and Mohaib from the older ones. Akhon Asgar Ali Basharat is another poet from Karkichu village (Gupta 2014: 9). This language faces stiff competition from the growing popularity of *nauhas* and *marsiya*s in Urdu. However the local Balti scholars maintain small personal libraries in hope of preserving this culture.

Syed has categorized Balti literature as under: (Kazmi 2015: 3)



Kazmi's description on the above classifications are: (Kazmi 2015: 3)

Rgya-glu: it can be categorized as a classical one in the folk verses for its meaning and deepness. It contains romantic songs, elegies, advice, complaints and historical events. Etc.

Rtse-glu: it a light type poetry sung while dancing. In these songs different topics and events of life families and their social cultural conditions/status and jokes etc are narrated/explained.

Yurmi-glu: these are songs sung by the women folk while working or weeding in the fields. In such songs women recollect their childhood, love and longing for her parents, pleasant or unpleasant experience or feelings about her husband or other relatives.

Ridagsi-glu: these are songs composed in praise of mountain –goats (of all sort). Some songs admire the beauty of wild life, some depict motherhood in these animals for their kids and in some the poets lament the extinctions of goats and sheeps.

Bar-glu: it can be described as the medieval stage between **rgya-glu** and modern poetry (**glu**) and it is also called *deewan*. This type of poetry also covers romantic feelings and other general events.

Glu: it can be described as the *mGul-glu*. As it has only romantics feelings and flavour.

Hamd: it is the form of verses in praise of God

Qaseeda: these are verses in praise of Prophet Mohd. and the 12 imams and their family members according to Shiite tradition.

Marsia: versed elegy commemorating the great martyrdom of holy imam hussainin Karbala and others,

Noha: versed elegies sung with rythm while Shiite mourners beat their chest.

Bahr-e-Taweel: these are general long verses of several stanzas of 9 to 14 lines. Consists generally of morality of life and other similar topics are discussed in a mystic way.

Goshwara: it is like the Persian or urdu “masnavi”. Narrative couplets. In this usually the dignity and illustrious personalities and deeds of the holy prophet and house of the prophet are narrated with fervour

Ghazal : these are the odes of love and romance exactly on the principles of Persian and urdu Ghazal and Nazm. The Balti Ghazal is popular in Ladakh and has influenced Ladakhi poetry (Sheikh2010).

Sa-get-pi-glu: these are the songs praising or encouraging the farmers and agriculturalists in modern times.

Milli-naghma : these are the urdu Milli-naghmas.

3.3 LANGUAGE AND POLITICS

In recent years the issue of *Bodhi* language has once again come to the fore. On 18th December a huge rally demanding the inclusion of *Bhoti* in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution, under the umbrella of LBA was organized in Leh. Needless to say the rally was joined by all religious organizations in Leh district. To the young youth of Leh district, this movement appears to be a contemporary issue. While in Leh LBA and LGA has been able to garner unquestioned support in favour of *Bhoti* language from all sections of the society. Arguments about Ladakhi orthography have much less resonance in Kargil because most Muslims associate the Tibetan script (*bodhi* or *bodyig*) with Buddhism and prefer to write in Urdu. At the same time scholars at Kargil were also keen to emphasize their Ladakhi identity (Bray 2005: 26). The issue of *Bhoti* is much discussed in Kargil for it is linked to that of script, or *Bod-yig*, has been appropriated, they allege, by Buddhist conservatives in Leh as a marker of Buddhist identity. Some cultural activists in Kargil argue for revival and re adoption of *Bod-yig* and lament that religious conservatism on the part of both Buddhists and Muslims has prevented this (Bray 2005:7). Similarly, Balti activists in Kargil also called for the inclusion of Balti, a dialect of classical Tibetan, in the 6th schedule of languages in the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir state.

Historical analysis reveals that the issue of *Bhoti* language is certainly not a new one. Back in early 1930s, in the days of the *Glancy Commission* a communal organization called *Kashmir-Raj Bodhi Maha Sabha* had made presentation on behalf of the *Buddhists of Ladakh*. One of the four problems that Ladakhi Buddhists were dwelling under was educational, and Urdu medium of instruction was the prime

obstacle. Of course arguments compared Buddhists of Ladakh with the rest of the general Muslim population of J&K. Anyhow with the final report by the commission in 1932, the commission acknowledged the lack of textbooks in the *Bodhi Language* and the commission referred to the preparation of such text books which was apparently taking place at the time (Bertelsen 1997: 135). Finally the formation of Ladakh Buddhist Educational Society takes place around 1932-33. It submitted a memorandum to the Maharajas Government in September 1933. The following issues were taken up (Bertelsen 1997: 138).

Five requests were laid down in the memorandum:

- 1) *Reading of urdu should be made optional in Ladakh up to Vth primary class*
- 2) *Special scholarships for Buddhist students,*
- 3) *Appointment of a Buddhist District Assistant inspector of Schools*
- 4) *Appointment of a Sanskrit teacher in Leh Middle School*
- 5) *Bodhi (Tibetan) language teachers to be brought to Ladakh, if necessary from the outside. Hence, the requests resemble the points regarding education already presented by the Kashmir –Raj Bodhi Maha Sabha to the Glancy Commission in 1931. (Bertelsen 1997: 138)*

Such developments in history helped build the politics around Ladakhi language, and isolating the discourse of this demand as a communal demand. Movements demanding the inclusion of *Bhoti* in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution have been taken or lead by the LBA. The LBA and its activities with due respect to its history, have always been viewed with a sceptical lens by the Kargilis and Vice- versa.

There was another development in the 1990s which forces the general population of Ladakh observe the Language issue through a sceptical lens is that the etymology of the term itself. There have been a lot of controversies which surged after the controversial publication of *Ladakhs Melong* in what SECMOL director Sonam Wangchuk calls Phalskat. Phalskat is the common Ladakhi language that ordinary Ladakhi citizen uses in every day life. In various programmes organised by the Ladakhi students outside Ladakh, Sonam Wangchuk has constantly argued the unintelligibility of the Classical Tibetan to the common local masses of Ladakh, therefore the need to write what we speak. The magazine *Ladakhs Melong* having a

wide secular readership was shut down forcefully by the Buddhist organizations stating the corruption of classical language. The debate centered on whether the script could be used for writing the spoken language of Ladakh? The shutting down of the magazine answered in volumes. The impact of such an action raises serious questions about the secular credentials of the Language.

There is a definite lack of clarity on the conceptuality of Boti/Bodhi or referred to as Buddhik till recently. The arguments revolve on the grammar of the language which apparently is argued only the *classical language* withholds. Other Buddhist sects and people have also claimed a grammar for spoken Ladakhi as well, but this is taken as tantamount to polluting the sacredness of the Language. This obscurity in the concept is also a reason to be sceptical about. On one hand arguments about the secular credentials are made in public and commonality throughout the Ladakh of the former use of the script, however on the other hand, issues like the *Ladakh Melong* controversy raise serious questions about the politics involved. Further the recent history of political paths adopted in Ladakh only aids to misunderstandings and scepticism of the issue. Further the demand is now also being raised on the basis of a Pan-Himalayan presence of the script which defines itself as Buddhist culture rather than Ladakhi. Thus the language or the script issue continue to be discussed in scuffled voices in Leh district amidst the understanding of what is known about the issue and what is not made to be known.

Presently a compelling LBA has managed to gather all organizations of various religions in Leh district to favour the demand for the inclusion of *Boti* as one of the official Indian Languages which implies the usage of the language for official purposes. However Kargil district continues to remain indifferent to such a demand which is half the population of Ladakh. Further there have been voices in Kargil objecting to the terminology of the language. Why not call it Ladakhi Is the question? However within Kargil too there are differences of opinion. There is also an internal dispute also between Balti and Purigi languages used in Kargil district.

3.4 BALTI AND PURIGI

The present Balti language or Balti forms of language is spoken in the whole of Baltistan and Ladakh. The Purki dialect of Purig and Suru Kartse valleys also fall into the Balti group linguistically. There is no consensus in Ladakh is on the status of Purigi as an authentic language. Purigi is the *lingua franca* of Kargil district and is understood by all ethnic groups. The Baltis sometimes understand Purigi as being a *language of the bazaar* (Gupta 2013: 6). However over the years Purigi has liberally absorbed Urdu vocabulary because of various factors such media, religion and use as a medium of education in government schools. Radhika Gupta (2013) opines that Balti language is claimed to be the original and authentic language of Kargil and Baltistan, the Balti speaking people refuse to accord Purigi any literary or classical merit. But a few of the traditional scholars or ‘wise’ among the society in Kargil, argue to the contrary. One such individual is Master Hussain from Silmo village in the Batalik area who passionately defends the status of Purigi as is the real language of the region and not Balti. He argues that the proof of the *qadim* (ancient) status of the dialect lies in the ‘repertoire of nearly five hundred Purigi folksongs that he himself knows of’ (Gupta 2013). Though such disagreements are at large within Kargil there seems to be no real consensus. But the people people supporting Purigi as a classical language wavers. And comparatively Balti is spoken over a larger area and by more number of people in the entire Balti language region. Scholars working on the language of the region do agree that Balti is the closest to written classical Tibetan. To the extent that even Ladakhi, the dialect spoken in Leh, is said to have absorbed influences from the Lhasa dialect in pronunciation and grammar (Gupta 2013:7). Radhika Gupta (2013) thus concludes that Balti and Ladakhi are the “original languages” of Ladakh.

The Baltis of Baltistan though now take pride in the fact that their dialect represents the original language as they pronounce most of the prefixed consonants of the written language, which have become mute in most of the Tibetan varieties. A similar feature is also found in some Amdo varieties (Bray 2005: 53). Because of this phonological feature, both dialect groups have been classified as archaic dialects by various western scholars.

3.5 CULTURAL ACTIVISM

Since Ladakh opened to outsiders in 1974, Leh Ladakh has been a centre for scholars subsumed by the *after Tibet* puzzle. The advancing Chinese hegemony over the world creates interest for what is seen as *an opposing Tibetan Culture* which is imagined as a challenge to this Chinese hegemony. The Baltis in the context fail to figure or generate interest despite occupying the most important geo strategic position in the puzzle of the 21st century. Thus they have been treated with neglect. Few well informed individuals in Kargil since the 1990s have been striving to project Kargil/Balti culture to the outside world, in which projecting its Ladakhi identity also holds an important place. This attempt as resurgence of identity is a result of both emotional and political causes, as well as the desire to encourage tourism in the region. This movement was initially spearheaded by a few individuals belonging to some elite and politically powerful families of Kargil town and local poets. This consciousness of *our identity and culture* is often expressed as *gnati skad* (our language) has become more widespread (Gupta 2013). While this phrase is a direct expression of linguistic identity, it has become an overarching metaphor for *regional* cultural identity of Kargil opines Radhika Gupta. Since the spread of Islam, traditional Balti culture has undoubtedly received a set back and does in linger in threat of being consumed by Islamic culture in totality. Over the years some individuals do understand the loss of their culture, but are rendered helpless when it comes in conflict with religion. The wider *sunni cultural hegemony* has proven a bane for the Baltis across the border. Baltistan appears better shielded from the Iranian Revolution which has threatened their culture through religion. Thus revival of the early Tibetan culture minus Buddhism is seen far more enthusiastically in these regions than Ladakh. The Indian Baltis on the other hand continue to absorb *Iran* spread *Islamic* culture after the revolution at the cost of Balti culture, in part to prove complete and true transition to the faith from being a converted race or community. Also it can be looked as an effect of the hegemonic Tibetan Buddhist Culture as well.

Though in Iran itself among the common population there seem to be a warm mix of culture and religion. These peripheral extensions of *Iraninan Islam culture* fail to negotiate such complexities. Early cultural activism among Baltis in Ladakh can

perhaps be traced to the work of Balti activists in Kargil for the inclusion of Balti, a dialect of classical Tibetan, in the 6th schedule of languages in the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir state. While the Baltis Cultural revival in Leh basically appears to be understood and wanted by a miniscule. The Buddhists of Leh appear more enthusiastic for a Balti Cultural revival in the light of a historical Tibetan Buddhist affiliation of the Balti culture. However after the partition the Baltis in Ladakh are Pricipal minority in Ladakh after the partition, the Baltis have actively sought to maintain a distinct cultural and ethnic identity.

Aggarwal (2004) informs that a group of Balti cultural activists came together with young men from the well known Munshi family to set up Kargil Social and Cultural Organization in 1997 (KASCO) (as cited in Gupta 2013: 5). Though mostly comprised of Balti activists the initial name of the organization was changed to include all of Kargil in response to the allegation of some that Balti culture does not subsume the culture of Kargil. The primary effort was to transform Balti poetry to pop music and produce new lyrics. Of course, the plot being, to lure the younger Balti generations swayed by contemporary music. Radhika (2013) informs that later a small troupe was established to perform on various occasions, including state functions. Organizations like KASCO were traversing through a delicate web of religious prohibitions and cultural differences. Increasing the difficulties were decisions such as clerics deeming of music and dance as being *haraam* (prohibited in Islam). Cultural activists stress the importance of preserving and reviving aspects of Kargil's/Balti cultural heritage perceived to be threatened by religious injunctions or dying a natural death with the popularity of newer forms of entertainment and lifestyles associated with modernity. Activists lament, for instance the loss of Purigi folksongs or traditional Balti poetry, or that few people now wear *goncha* (traditional woollen tunic) except on special occasions such as weddings (Gupta 2013).

3.6 CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The Baltis have retained continuity in their basic material culture where the ideology of the group has witnessed various changes from time to time. Which may understood to have caused due to various phases of transition such as from Bonism to

Buddhism, Buddhism to Islam, the Dogra rule and then being Indian citizen. A large chunk of people's territory came under the illegal occupation of Pakistan. The latest wave of changes was ushered in after Kargil was thrown open to tourists and was accorded the status of a district with two subdivisions, Kargil and Zangskar.

BR Rizvi (1993) suggests the life cycle rituals and an alteration of the annual calendars of fairs and festivities suggest an attempt to adjust after transition from the Buddhist past to the Islamic present. Nicola Grist also points to a parallel process of religious and cultural affirmation in Kargil and Suru (as cited in Bray 2005: 26). Islam brought about major changes in rules of marriage, inheritance, succession, religious tenets and rituals. Food habits, dress, and ornamentation, traditional political system, economic organization, house types, traditional fairs, and festivals have undergone through peripheral changes. Muslims in the area now no longer drink alcohol. People in Kargil say that banning of practices that were considered not to be Islamic increased enormously after all foreign Shiite clerics were thrown out of Iraq in 1974, which meant that suddenly there were more clerics in Kargil area (Bray 2005: 179). Similarly the playing of musical instruments at events such as weddings and other celebrations apparently ended some decades ago among Shiites in Kargil, as clerics said that it was un-Islamic and therefore a sin (*nyespa*). Nicola reminds the existence of musicians called *Doms* existed in Kargil and they played at weddings and other ceremonies, but they had ceased to exist by the 1970s (as cited in Bray 2005: 178). Whereas the Baltis themselves had introduced, the *Surna* (oboe) and *daman* (kettle drum), together with new styles of music. Balti Traditional sports such as archery and polo are rarely played by Baltis in Ladakh. Shakpsa (2010) opines that the traditional understanding has been that the *daman* and *surna* were first to be brought to Ladakh from Baltistan around the 16th century in the company of the marriage party of the Queen Khatoon, wife of King Jamyang Namgyal and mother of the famous King Singgey Namgyal. How and why these musicians climbed down the social hierarchy is difficult to assess. They are identified as *bedas* in the society traditionally. Though the musicians who are largely Baltis, continue to play for the traditional Ladakh cultural activities continued by the Ladakhi Buddhists they find little acceptance or use of their traditional art among the fellow Baltis. Though across the border Balti music is heard during the rare Polo Matches, the music is also accompanied by the sword

dance (Dryland and Syed 2011: 48). The Balti sword dance has become a rare cultural artefact and to call it an antique artefact wouldn't be an exaggeration.

In Ladakh in the last few years there has been an increase in effort to stop people dancing and singing, except for religious songs called *Kasidas* at weddings. Nicola states that the *Yokma Aghas* were trying to enforce this at the weddings in Suru in the 1990s, not entirely successfully (as cited in Bray 2005: 179). Besides even Polo and archery, which are traditional games, is no longer played in most of the villages. Leh Baltis seem more enthusiastic to follow the lead of the so called Islamic Culture.

When Pakistan came into being and international borders were closed. This caused a considerable change in economic activities. Trade as a major source of livelihood came to an abrupt end. Economic activities too changed considerably: the deficient agricultural supplements with the itinerant trade gave rise to labour combination in the last fifty years. Shakspe (2010) reiterates that Balti traders would trade in dried apricots, nuts, butter etc. The Apricots from Baltistan were called *nharis khambu* and became the most famous of dry fruits to the Tibetans. There is a famous story of how Guru Padmasambhava planted his staff of Apricot tree into a rock and ever since apricot trees have been flourishing in Baltistan. After these borders became impenetrable Baltis started moving out of their habitats in search of wage labour to various parts of himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and other neighbouring areas. Subsequently some of the Balti settlements emerged around Nainital and Dehra Dun. A small detail or analyses of the labour culture has been dealt with at the end of the chapter.

The economic conditions witnessed an improvement and their incomes improved relatively. Newly acquired capital gains were subsequently transferred to strengthen religious belief and ideology by way of sending young boys to the Islamic centres of learning situated in Iraq and Iran. For advanced training in Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence) this new breed of scholars returned to their respective villages fully armed with the capacity to lead the people to the path of righteousness. A greater attention was also paid to strengthen the local madrassas which produce the priests of the lower order. Earlier generations of clerics in Suru valley rarely went to Middle East, although some went to Baltistan, whereas in the current and previous generation all leading Aghas and Sheikhs study in Iraq and Iran. There has been an apparent

increase in contact between Shias in Kargil and the Shiite centres in Iran and Iraq markedly in the 1970s (Bray 2005: 179). Kacho informs us that in religious questions people of Kargil seek guidance and inspiration from the ulema and the mujtahids of Iran and Iraq, whom they prefer to those of Lucknow (India) and that their style of life is truly Islamic one (as cited in Bredie 2011: 11).

After Ladakh was declared open for the tourists an effective network of roads and communication was established. Secular education, Medicare, and successive exercises in adult franchise resulted into better interaction with the segment of Indian population. The flourishing tourist industry in Ladakh has turned many of them to alternate modes of employment and some into successful hoteliers and guides. The extent of politicization of religion remains at the lowest level in Kargil in comparison to the other parts of the state.

Polarization among the local Muslims and Buddhist populations are increasing by the day, but very few know of the similarities between the Ladakhi and Balti culture. Trewin (1990) opines that as a result of Balti influence, traditional Ladakhi music combines Tibetan vocal traditions with an Indo-Persian instrumental style. (as cited in Bray 2005: 178). Shakspe (2010) informs that many features such as crafts, weaving, woodcarving, metal working, and the water aided grain grinding technique are similar in Ladakh and Balltistan. He opines that the only difference is that of religion.

Other instances are, the Baltis of Wakha village still contribute their might in organizing the annual festival at the monastery dedicated to and built by Kushok Narichang , who is considered a common ancestor of many a villagers of Wakha- both Buddhists as well as muslim. The Muslim Baltis of Wakha not only contribute but attend the said fair in person and are looked after well by the management of the said monastery. They are supplied with the meat with (slaughtered by a Muslim) and dry rations during the festival. Radhika (2013: 6) in one of her journeys across Ladakh is a listener to a discussion on the historical extension of Purig. What is interesting though here is the mention of celebration of *Mamani*. Though in the ensuing discussion, the claim was *Mamani* was a Purig custom, which even the people of Khaltse (Buddhists) celebrated. These feasts are held to mark the peaceful passage of winter. The significance lies in the fact that this is often cited as an

example of regional culture or a remnant of Kargil's Buddhist past (Gupta 2013: 6). Shakspo (2010) informs that Ladakh and Baltistan have a common heritage in case of folklore and folk epics. He asserts that the story of Gyalbu Norzang from the Jataka Tales is equally popular among the Baltis and Buddhists of Ladakh. The *Kesar Saga* is another continuity and important part of Balti culture. This Saga is actually a story of a King called Kesar. With slight variations in different cultures this epic is narrated in Ladakh, Baltistan, Hunza, Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan and Mongolia as well.

The creation of organizations as the Ladakh Buddhist association and LMA, and other organizations with religious considerations might have helped in the process of alienation between the two communities but this divisive tendency is largely confined to the two cities i.e. Leh and Kargil. The rural population in some villages have been able to maintain the cultural pluralism for which Ladakh is well known for ages. For keeping their hearth of communal inferno silent, the people of Ladakh in general and the Balti in particular have done a commendable job. They could do so because of a higher degree of conformity to their religious tenets which teach of ahimsa, mutual love, peaceful coexistence, extolling the virtues of all religions and giving up place to coercion in religious matters. Often the friendship of Bulbul Shah and Rinchen Bhoti, who remained friends until death separated them are remembered. Almost every village in eastern Kargil has seen the existence of a Buddhist monastery (Gonmpa) and a Matamsara or a mosque side by side through the centuries. Such villages in Ladakh appear to be the strongest bastion of secularism. And it may be hoped that the coming decades will not see any changes in the situation.

Radhika (2013: 8) opines that "culture" is sought to be packaged in Kargil for pragmatic purpose such as tourism but its value goes beyond this. The activism around it are a mode of self- reflection, of being a Kargili/Balti such that their identity is not subsumed by Leh or Kashmir, by Islam or its pre-Buddhist past, but recognized on its own terms. While this emergent cultural consciousness in Kargil is instigated by a politics of recognition- of claiming a Ladakhi identity. Cultural activism of Baltis in Kargil thus goes beyond the issue of language preservation and has come to include a host of features seen to be emblematic of traditional Ladakhi or regional culture.

3.7 SHORT HISTORY OF BALTI LABOURERS

Apart from agriculture, the Baltis have also always been dependent on two main modes of earning, trade and migrant labour. Rizvi's short account gives us short but a rich account of how the present Baltis may have expanded over the northern Indian region. Migrant labour was mostly from the Suru valley and to a lesser extent from Zangskar (Bray 2005: 309). Rizvi states that, while local trade in subsistence commodities like salt, butter and barley was basic to the economy of communities along the whole line of the great Himalaya, Ladakh was unique in that a trade in a high value luxury commodity was integrated with that in subsistence commodities. This luxury item was *Pashm*. Raw material for the multi million rupee Kashmir shawl industry, came from western Tibet and reached Srinagar via Ladakh. Salt was an essential commodity, for which time immemorial Ladakh and neighbouring regions were dependent on western Tibet. Apart from the Lchemray Salt Market, trade in salt also seems to have carried over directly to Zangskar from there to Kishtawar and to Baltistan (Bray 2005: 310). Apart from the *kirayakash* there were other groups or kinds of labour which the Ladakhis performed to make their ends meet. She states the tradition of migrant labour in Ladakh and Baltis in specific has been documented since at least mid-19th century. The migrant labours were mostly from the *Suru valley*. It seems likely that the relatively large scale movement of labour from Ladakh to the neighbouring regions of the Punjab and what is now Himachal Pradesh took place during the British rule. The British were involved in large scale programme of construction, especially roads and bridges in those areas. In 1860 an expedition setting out from Shimla employed 35 Ladakhis as porters. A small village near Shimla is occupied by emigrants from Ladakh, who had been induced to leave their native wilds by the (comparatively) high prices given for coolie labour in and about Shimla (Bray 2005: 311). Rizvi furthers that by 1910 it was established that most of the coolies i.e. load carrying porters, as opposed to the rickshaw pullers in Shimla were either Kashmiris, or Shia Muslims from Kargil thus Baltis. They were also involved in house construction as well. Apart from the community of labourers from Purig more or less settled in Shimla, almost all able bodied men in the Suru valley went to the Punjab every winter to labour on the govt. Programme of road construction. This custom is said to have continued till the 1970s (Bray 2005: 312).

CHAPTER 4: ROLE OF BALTIS IN MODERN POLITICS OF LADAKH

4.1 1947 AND BEYOND

1947, was one of the most important historical events in the history of the country. This event paved way for how India defined politics, society and culture from there on. For Ladakh too, 1947 cemented modern political understandings and its transfer into Ladakh. It was the threshold of modern communal politics and identity politics. Introduced were communalism and democracy. This important event in the history of Ladakh and its people has been ignored by scholars at large. Therefore it is imperative for us to delve into this aspect of history.

When in Indian history after the partition, we talk about Pakistani tribal's raiding Kashmir; Ladakh was also a part of the regions which bore the brunt of the attacks of these tribal's and then the retaliation of the Indian side. Heavy fatalities and irreparable damage was caused by these events, not necessarily in terms of life and wealth, which to a large extent helped in solidifying the distinctions between communities. The Baltis of Ladakh, which by and large by now, were understood as Muslims generally, were introduced to a new political tool and era by the mid 20th century i.e. politics of Religious Identity. Partition, in many ways led to the transfer of Indian political instruments into Ladakh and resulting in the differences being institutionalized.

This chapter in part will attempt to draw attention to the conditions and role of the Balti community after the Independence period in Ladakh. This chapter is also crucial because it elucidates an alternate perspective to the genesis of the present political dynamics that is seen in the region. Various socio-economic-political changes happening on the international, national, state and local level aided in the transformation of Ladakh. Ladakh has always been connected by trade routes to a traveller since time immemorial, never was it separated or cut off from the rest of the world, until the formation of modern nation states around it. Examination of the historical development of culture of Ladakh proves that Ladakh was the 'brewing pot'

of different cultures around the world. In order to understand this complex catalyst of the modern politics in Ladakh, a comprehensive approach sheds better light.

It was the 1940's that closed the doors of Ladakh to its distinct indigenous growth. Present Ladakh was traditionally a trading and agricultural society that thrived on the cultural synthesis of different cultures. Ladakh was a feeder route to the famous Silk Routes. Traders from various part of the world and mostly from adjacent countries settled down in Ladakh. Political developments such as, Xing Xiang region coming under more stringent control of China, finally followed by the partition of India in 1947, resulted in permanent impenetrable boundaries. The cradle of a distinct culture was abruptly cut off from its roots. A cultural stagnation ensued in terms of cultural plurality. Whatever may have been the real causes for the partition, it is not a hidden fact that the Indian partition was a communal one based on religious differences than of history or culture. However, a lot of years had gone into making the partition happen, primarily ever since divide and rule crept up as a tool of domination. Once in vocabulary, communal politics has been a part forever. These political constructs founds its way into Ladakhi politics from the one way that remained open now. In line with politics of this period, simplified terms as Buddhist, Muslims, Shia, Sunnis etc have been used throughout the chapter. Such nomenclature realistically dissects the political discourse and implementation of the period.

After the partition happened in the 1947-48, countless histories are repeated about the Kashmiri people. Although Ladakh, especially the Balti community too has its unique experiences of partition and its effects, they continue to be ignored. The tribal raiders caused inhuman sufferings to the populations of Ladakh including killing, looting etc. From local renderings it is apparent that the Buddhists were specially meted out harsher atrocities. There are certain stories of Buddhist individuals working around Nubra saving them-selves disguising as Muslims. In retaliation there is a mention of a certain Major Pirthichand (Karja) at behest of the Indian Army in order to repel the attackers, seems to have carried out unprecedented atrocities on the local Muslim (Balti) population of Leh as well. Local rememberings range from intimidation to clear cases of mass murders in cold blood. The elderly of the Balti community and other minorities share these stories very vividly, though very few of them now remain alive. General awareness of differences based on religious aspects and animosity appears to have been a part of the society as local help

apparently in locating houses of the Muslims seems to be there. Aebedi (2009) also shows that some of the Balti people were also helping or working for the Major, which adds to the complexity of the interpretation of the event. The politics of the event is certainly tricky but on a larger scale, these events certainly motivated organised communalism in Ladakh.

The Balti community in Leh part of Ladakh appears to be a dormant community. It has contributed to nothing or so if you look at the historical existence of the community in Leh division compared to the other communities of Leh in the historical reiterations. The year of 1947 was a year of turmoil politically, socially and economically in Ladakh. We are referring to a chaotic unstable Ladakh without the divisions of Kargil and Leh and Gilgit Wazarat would still have been a part of Ladakh. A subservient Ladakh to the Dogra rule was again transferred to India. Mean while it too bore the brunt of tribal attacks from Pakistan and the Indian army alike. Ladakh and its territory bear testimony to the undermining of 'free will' under subsequent rules. In localized terms Ladakh was simply transferred from the Dogra administration to the Kashmiri Administration. The underlying thought and understanding in Ladakh being still subservient. In this aspect Ladakh and independence bear a unique aspect.

The partition caused political and social havoc in Ladakh which appears to be irreversible. The lines drawn in a room in Delhi altered the future of this small country. The consequent transfer of social constructs and its effects is apparent in this small country led to the undermining of the indigenous customs and norms. One of the significant developments was institutional communalism that had been prevalent in erstwhile undivided British India, made way into Ladakh. This is not to state that religious differences had not existed. The realization of the 'other' was existing in then Ladakh, is apparent from the participation of the locals in the dialectical process of intercommunity exchanges throughout history.¹⁷ What partition did was cementing of these differences and added fuel to the arguments in favour of these differences.

Military operations took place in Ladakh in 1948, between the Indian army and the Pakistani raiders. A particular major Prithi Chand, a Lahauli officer was

¹⁷ Activities can be labelled as communal activities ones that are necessarily disruptive and not in tune with peaceful co existence.

tasked to counter these raiding forces. Around 8th March they are said to have reached Leh. Prithi Chand no doubt did a remarkable job at flushing out the invaders infact he even befriended the locals at Leh. But none of the sources inform us of the tumulus times it created for the local Muslim population and Shia Muslims in specific. By now all Baltis in Leh district were Shia Muslims. Some of the villages were wiped of the already minimal Shia population during this exercise. Locals deduce the role of this Major representing the Indian Army in the eradication of Balti families from various villages of Ladakh. A 90+ year old woman of the community Abi Zenab reiterates this history with pain and fear still lurking in her eyes. She recounts how various helps and their families working for the Chowdhary at Thiksay were shot at point blank. Another local recounts how a family was made to wade in the river Indus and then shot. Similar countless reminiscences of populations scattered in various parts of Leh-Ladakh being burnt and killed are told. Particularly villages of Basgo, Nimoo, Shey, Changthang are still remembered of once having muslim populations. As the population ages, these histories are slowly forgotten with the younger population unaware of such histories. Mid 20th century scenes represented chaos in Ladakh. With the Pakistani raiders targeting wealth of local Buddhist shrines, Major Prithi Chand proved himself the saviour of Buddhists as well as India, maybe under the understanding that the ‘Baltis’ sympathized with the raiders. The communal tinge of the evacuation of the raiders was communal throughout the present state of Leh part of Ladakh. Finally 1st January 1949 cease fire was declared between the two sides. Relief thought was imagined, for later parts of the 18th century are filled with instances and the repercussions of partition. The partition paved way for the crystallization of ‘communal politics’ in this region.

When Ladakh had become a part of India de-facto. And rule of the majority in other term democracy was introduced to Ladakh. It dawned upon Jammu and Kashmir that Kashmir (Muslims) was the new political giant for future. And the underlying assumption was, a Muslim majority state and as such the rule of Muslims. Ladakh, despite its geographical aloofness couldn't ignore this development. A Muslim majority reduced the ruling Buddhist to a minority as well, became the underlying assumption of politics in Leh part of Ladakh. As Richard Gombrich states that, *‘within a given political boundary the majority community has a minority complex because the largest minority within that boundary has the same social*

identity as the community, which is in the majority next door.' (Gombrich 2005: 28) Modern political differences and fears of democracy (rule of majority), indeed played a vital role in shaping and creating a Ladakhi identity. The role of Religion in modern Ladakhi politics and how religious identity over arched other identity markers needs to be introspected and critically analysed. Religion governs every aspect of the Ladakhi identity in present Ladakh. 'Identity politics' and 'politics for Ladakhi Identity' prove to be a stimulating aspect in this study.

Historically by the mid 19th century Ladakh had become a part of the Dogra rule and ever since Ladakh lost its own identity as a separate country. The hardships inflicted by this tyrannical rule on the local population of Ladakh cannot be forgotten. By the late 1920s/ early 1930s, the socio-political condition of Jammu and Kashmir appeared to be deteriorating. Exorbitant taxation, forced labour (*begaar*) and increasingly troubled relations between the landowners (Kashmir Pandits) and tillers (Kashmir Muslim) had led to protests and violence. Demands for a revision of the political structure in entirety of Jammu and Kashmir were made. Hence various Muslim associations were founded in Kashmir to safeguard both religious and political interests. These were also partly in response to the existing Hindu organization called Dogra Sabha (Bertelsen 1997: 131). The Maharaja on account of increasing violence and British colonial pressure had to give in and appoint a commission to look into the grievances of all communities in the State. The commission was called the '*Glancy Commission*' after its chairman *Bertram J. Glancy*, which began its work in 1931. The representation to the commission was to include one representative per community. Hence a Hindu and a Muslim from Jammu and from Kashmir both formed the members. Ladakh though a separate administrative region, was not given any representation. The main task of the commission appears to devise a solution to Hindu-Muslim conflict thus giving a communal tone to a largely feudal problem.

Now what is intriguing is, despite the negligible position in the commission, Ladakh was represented in its deliberations! '*13th November 1931, a first oral representation of problems pertaining to 'Buddhists of Ladakh' was made before the commission*' (Bertelsen 1997: 132). This presentation was made by an organization called the *Kashmir-Raj Bodhi Maha Sabha* on behalf of all the Buddhists of Kashmir and Ladakh led by a prominent member of the Sabha, Pt. Shridhar Kaul alias '*Dullu*'.

They were recent converts to Buddhism and generally referred to as the *Neo-Buddhists*. This Sabha was formed in the 1930s. Their representation on behalf of Ladakh was not successful. Hence the January 1932 representation included Sonam Norbo a 23 year old college student from Ladakh. Though in the final report in 1932 the commission, the case was not considered fit for government action (Bertelsen 1997: 135). How the Sabha exploited the local Buddhists of Ladakh and how Buddhist communalism was funnelled into Ladakh from a national and international level by the Neo-Buddhists is available in various texts. The arguments and politics were too satiated for the local Buddhists to ignore and rise against. The modern communal politics and rhetorics of *love-jihad*, communal identity, change in demographic profile of the land etc. made its foray into Ladakh in the 1930s. Over the years, this feeling of being discriminated against has been strengthened by interventions from outsiders, from Kashmiri Pundits and Sri Lankan Buddhists to western tourists and academics (Himal 1995:4).

However ironically, when Buddhists of Ladakh were given two seats in the legislative assembly established in 1934 for the first time, this was challenged by the Neo-Buddhists and demanded elections rather than nomination. Moreover the Praja Sabha, in 1935, argued strongly against filling of the Buddhist seats by Ladakhis. Amrita Bazaar Patrika, Aug. 7, 1949 carried arguments such as, a person from Ladakh would be “*a mere dummy*,” making “*an utter mockery*” of Buddhist representation were made (as cited in Beek 1999:437). The demands of the *neo-Buddhists* were rejected. Nevertheless Buddhist Ladakh were arranged two seats for its community, while Ladakhi Muslims- who at the time formed somewhat less than 50% of the population –had no representation (Himal 1995 :2). Here inexplicably, the realization or understanding of Ladakhi Baltis as similar to other Muslim communities of the state and common interests is apparent. On the other hand comments of the so called well wishers of the Buddhist community were humiliating and degrading to a level. One such comment was from the then tehsildar of Leh, S.N.Sapru, in 1944: wrote: “*the pigtails, the chortens, the mani walls, the monasteries, the lamas, the dances, and the altitudes that are the lure of the land all conspire to produce the misery in which the people live, the misery from which it does not even occur to them that they may get out*” (Beek 1999: 437).

However, now the Neo-Buddhists after these failures, stressed their activities through and in Ladakh. Besides taking various monasteries into confidence as its well wishers, they preached realization of differences and rhetorics of communal politics in Ladakh. An important milestone in raising communal bodies in Ladakh was the formation of the *Ladakh Buddhist educational Society (LBES)* sometime around in 1932-33 (Bertelsen 1997:137). Followed by the formation of the *Young Men's Buddhist association (YMBA)* in July 1938. The leadership were identical in both the organizations (Bertelsen 1997:142). The existence of the neo Pundits in YMBA is proved by the activities and policies it pursued. There seems to be no major differences in the arguments made even now from the report that the Sabha prepared in the 1930s. The arguments and roadmap of the organization were identical to the report prepared by the Neo Buddhists to the Glancy Commission.¹⁸

However communal distinctions up till then still seem to compose of understandings and distinctions on national and state level. Then partition occurred, and then in 1948 when the Pakistani raiders occupied Skardu, the '*minority complex*' as stated earlier was actually enlivened by the Ladakhi Buddhists. Ladakh could very well be under Pakistan any day which was to be avoided at all costs. A distinction which up till now existed between the Buddhists as a whole viz a viz other communities of India and the state now zoomed in to local level. The reality of sustaining in a Muslim majority country dawned in the vocabulary of local politics. Awareness of Religious distinctiveness was not new thanks to the neo-Buddhists but what was new was its 'real realization' and 'implementation at local level'. The ambiguity of the future of Ladakh in the wake of partition alarmed the yet sleepy Ladakh. Now the understanding of 'Shia' Muslims as different from Buddhist Ladakh developed if not solidified. And vocabulary of understanding of Baltis as 'Shia' and 'Muslim' also solidified.

Ladakh as a case is particularly important in this case. As the formation of modern nation states had wide spread impact on the society. In other words it transformed the socio-economic cultural thread of the Ladakhi society. The course of this formation of impenetrable yet sensitive boundaries with holding religious majorities provided the immediate background in which the religious identity was

¹⁸ For indepth understanding on the report refer to Bertelsen (1997) and various other texts on communal Ladakh.

articulated and then was politicized. Followed by the local political leadership also using pre-existing religious affiliations to connect and mobilize masses. Here the political significance of the prevalent everyday social vocabularies of Nangpa (insider)—referring to the Buddhists as opposed to the Chipa (outsider)—referring to Muslims were explored through political slogans to create the sense of separateness. Collective representation was made on behalf of a large segment of the people of Ladakh on the basis of religion and it laid the ground for the practice of identification in Ladakh along religious lines.¹⁹ Thus to quote Kristoffer Brix Bertelsen, “*on several occasions, Ladakh is conflated with Buddhism to the extent that even though not all the people living in the districts are Buddhists, all Buddhists are considered to be quintessential Ladakhis. Thus to be a Ladakhi is to be a Buddhist, according to government perception, and neither pundit neo Buddhists, nor their counterparts in Ladakh would have had any reason to contest this assertion which fitted their diverse interests very well. Hence a host of ostensibly objective and unambiguous representations of Ladakh came to be entertained by a small but powerful number of Buddhists in Ladakh*” (Bertelsen 1997: 146).

In 1947 the YMBA submitted a memorandum to the Maharaja denouncing any administrative link with Muslim Kashmir and further stating that the Treaty of Amritsar by which Ladakh became a part of the state was no longer relevant. The Maharaja did not even bother to respond to the memorandum. Further after the first war in May 1949 YMBA President Tsewang Rigzin Kalon presented a memorandum to J.L.Nehru expressing desire to merge with India. Through various other memorandums during this period is visible an urgency of joining with India and Jammu rather than Kashmir which was understood as, in all probability would go under Pakistan. One such memorandum reads:

"The right to self-determination claimed by us cannot be claimed with equal force by the people of Baltistan including Skardu and parts of Kargil Tehsils predominantly peopled by Muslims, as they are connected by ties of religion with the majority community in Jammu & Kashmir, nor by the people of

¹⁹ For further incites into memorandums of the LBA in the 1940s read, Kristoffer Brix Bertelsen: Protestant Buddhism and Social Identification in Ladakh, *archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 42e Annee, No. 99 (Jul.-Sep., 1997).

Gilgit who came under Dogra rule through conquest after the annexation of Kashmir and whom not only identity of religion but of race as well binds to the majority community of Jammu & Kashmir." (Bertelsen 1997: 148)

By this memorandum somehow visible is a clear lack of understanding of national level politics at play by the YMBA. Since by now India was already at the UN over J&K or YMBA appears to overestimate its importance. Kashmir was a political hotbed during the 1950s-1970s. And any political action would have weakened India's stand in the UN over Kashmir. In national politics this period defined how Kashmir pursued politics for the next half a century. Kashmir became the bone of contention between India and Pakistan. The formation of the plebiscite front, and on the other hand union leadership trying to infiltrate more administrative powers in the state were the two basic strategies followed by the two fronts within the nation.

At the dawn of partition another popular Leader, Kushok Bakula had also publicly acknowledged the nostalgic longings of his people for their "spiritual home of Tibet", the underlying threat to the Indian union being, "*longing for a political union with Tibet would become, pronounced if Ladakhi identity within India was not respected*" (Puri 1982: 1). However the Sino-India war in 1962 in a way ended Tibet as a political inspiration for Ladakh.

4.2 THE COUP OF CHOGLAMSAR

Though YMBA's presentation of a uniform and single platform presentation of all Buddhists alike, there appears to be subtle divisions within the Buddhists politics of Ladakh of the era as well. The main dividing line in Ladakhi politics was between supporters and opponents of Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, 'head lama' of Ladakh and former ambassador to Mongolia. Bakula Rinpoche rose to power in 1949, when he replaced Kalon Tsewang Rigzin as District President of National Conference. Bakula was put in this position by Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah after what it sometimes referred to as the '*Coup at Choglamsar Bridge*'. A group of young, modern educated Ladakhis, including Buddhists, Muslims, and a Christian, conspired

to poison the ear of Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah to put an end to 'Kalonism (Himal 1995: 3). The Kalon, it was alleged, was too dominant and dictatorial for the new democratic era, and should be replaced by a figure with a more popular basis for support. This coup was rumoured to have been staged by few Muslims who felt neglected and intimidated by the existing setup (Himal 1995: 3). The politics of Leh Ladakh after this event is characterized by rivalry between the ruling Bakula- faction and their challengers (Himal 1995: 3). Given the respect that religious leaders enjoy in Ladakhi society, both among Buddhists and Muslims, it is very difficult to raise objections to the decisions taken in the realm of politics by such leaders. And never the less, by doing so, has resulted in social alienation for certain period of time and sometimes physical violence as well for the dissenters. The people who put up a counter candidate to Bakula in Ladakh's first real elections in early 1960s, all came from the families that are patrons of Drukpa Kargyud monasteries, led by Tsering Phuntsog Shunnu, (where as Bakula Rinpoche heads the Gelugspa school) faced social boycott which lasted for a year and incidences of violence were also there (Beek and Bertelsen 1997: 55) (Himal 1995: 3).

Bakula Rinpoche centered politics continued until the early 1980s. Its culmination was the formation of the congress party in Ladakh. This took place on the initiative of some around the 1963-64. Bakula was soon however given congress ticket. This led to the existence of two congress parties in Ladakh, which were distinguished as Congress A and B. The former was official Bakula party and latter the rebellious coalition of young Buddhists and Muslims (Beek and Bertelsen 1997: 55).

Meanwhile in the early 1950s one of two still powerful institutions religious and political, in Kargil namely 'Islamia School' was formed. Some of the early members of the institutions were Agha Syed Mehdi (Saliskot Kargil) was also an MLA from NC, Sheikh Puya, Sheikh Abur Rehman, Sheikh Mohd. Khantey etc. Within Kargil too there were subtle differences and a group led by Sheikh Aga Haider (Suru) remained separate from the organization. Munshi Habibullah also joined the Sheikh Aga Haider. Munshi Habibullah later laid the foundations of J&K National Conference in Kargil and became the first president of the party. The N.C. was merged into the J&K National Congress which he joined in 1955. After which he got nominated to the post of MLC for two terms till 1965.

Agha Syed Ibrahim Shah was twice elected MLA 1951 and 1957 unopposed from Kargil. He was the second President of the National Conference in Kargil after Agha Syed Mehdi (Saliskot).

4.3 THE 1969 AGITATION

The YMBA started to become politically active again in the late 1960s and reformed itself as the LBA. It organised the first 'agitation' in Leh in favour of regional autonomy in 1969 (Pirie 2007: 37). The role played by the Balti community in these times seems difficult to track harder still because of obscurity of any written records on the same. Around the same time 1967 Kacho Mohammed Ali Khan fought the MLA elections from Kargil constituency and won. The 1969 was the first explicitly communal agitation as stated by Beek. The agitation was triggered by an incident in the village of Sabu: apparently a long standing family dispute over distribution property had taken a communal turn since the family was of mixed Buddhist/ Muslim composition. The Buddhists branch of the family fixed prayer flags to a part of the dwellings which were possibly removed by the Muslim branch of the family (Beek and Bertelsen 1997: 50). Then there was the formation of the Ladakh Muslim Action Committee in part response to the formation of Buddhist Action Committee. The name of the association was subsequently changed to Ladakh Muslim Association on the advice of then C.M., Sadiq, who found the name of the association communal in tone and provocative (Sheikh Jawad). Though it was a comparatively dormant organization, however in times of communal upheaval like the present crisis, it played the role of a sponge. Absorbing the shocks of such events and preventing wider effects of such events. Though communalization of politics in Ladakh appears to be a well thought and planned event. The realization of its negativity in Ladakh's atmosphere still seems elusive.

All the while the urge for a distinct identity, however has never weakened. In the course of agitation, paramount importance was attached to the demonstration of 'belonging' to Ladakh and hence the authentication of rights and demands in the context of resource allocation and political representation. The identification of Buddhists with Ladakh was of considerable concern for Buddhists political leaders

(Bertelsen 1997: 130). The 1969 movement was led by a number of people including Togdan Rinpoche, Tashi Targyas Denbir and others. This movement petered out soon after Sonam Wangyal was offered a cabinet post in the Kashmir government and Bakula Rinpoche withdrew his support for the movement (Beek 1995: 30). However after the 1962 war with China the search for a distinct identity was imagined and practised within the framework of the Indian constitution which for all purposes meant a separation from the state or Kashmiri domination. A Northeast Frontier Administration (NEFA) type arrangement was demanded along the lines of that in effect in India's North East (Beek 1999: 6).

Growing Buddhist militancy and the attention it received from the centre led to a backlash from among the Muslims of Kargil, who constitute 47% of the population of the region. Ironically the same developments which have contributed to a strengthening and assertion of a Ladakhi identity have also encouraged a consciousness of a sub regional identity among them Muslims of Ladakh (Kargil specifically). The grievances though many against the Kashmiri leadership were not sufficient, to opt out of a Muslim majority state for obvious reasons (Puri 1982: 1). The National Conference was quick to sympathise with the fears of the Muslims of Kargil and lent its support for the recognition of their identity.

The state government meanwhile appointed the 'Gajendragadkar Commission' to investigate the charge of regional imbalances. Their recommendations included separate development board for Ladakh, inclusion of at least one Ladakhi in the state cabinet, establishment of a degree college, revival of single –line administration and merger of the proposed post of development Commissioner with Deputy Commissioner of Ladakh.

4.4 SPLIT OF LADAKH 1979

However in 1979 Ladakh was split into two districts Kargil and Leh with Shia Muslims and Buddhist majorities respectively. Ladakh was now officially divided on the basis of faith. The division now permanently disturbed the social equilibrium in 1978-79 by dividing Ladakh into Leh and Kargil districts on purely religious lines.

Local renderings suspect, of a motive to play Muslim-majority Kargil against Buddhist-majority Leh and weaken the autonomy movement. Local Buddhists argue that, a political schism was surreptitiously set forth, which succeeded in separating Leh and Kargil into two separate districts. In separating Kargil from Leh district, the Sheikh's government's intention seems to be to remind the Kargili's, predominantly Shia Muslims, that historical and cultural ties are insignificant factors in Islamic policy, which he was trying to impose on the state. However it cannot be denied that, with head quarters at Leh, Leh also ignored Kargil. And with constant communal politics exercised by Leh, the people of Kargil (by now Baltis) also developed a certain understanding of aloofness and distinctiveness from the Leh district.

While Leh's Buddhist minority (in the state) felt insecure in the Muslim majority valley dominating Ladakh, the Shia Muslims of Kargil believed that Buddhist majority Leh overshadowed the Kargili identity. The people of Kargil strongly resented the Leh centric conception of Ladakh region which until the 1980's had all the district headquarters and central government offices. Kargil has always been accused of close economic links and political alignments with the Valley keeping in mind the religious affinity. Kargili's traditionally have identified with the Kashmiri leadership although they did not support the secessionist movement in the valley. The centre is blamed for Kargil's backwardness, lack of an airport and discriminatory policies in recruitment to the Ladakh scouts. Compared to Leh the political equations are clearly reversed in Kargil (Behera 2000: 225). Somehow this feeling or understanding still govern Kargil's politics viz a viz Leh.

Meanwhile the internal divisions within Kargil further solidified. Following the 'Iranian Revolution' in 1979, was founded the second socio-religious/political power house of Kargil namely the, 'Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust'. It was founded by a group of young volunteers apparently disenchanted by the pre-existing 'Islamia School' and its functioning. The present MLA of Kargil, Karbalai was one of the founding members. Though both institutions swear by religious duties however actively participate and tussle in public in elections.

The wider policy of Buddhist leaders now presents a subtle shift from communal to regional (Puri 1982: 2). The demand for separation of Ladakh from state was softened. Thus in the early 1980s, the opposition parties of Leh including the

Congress (I) and the local Buddhist and Muslim leaders started an agitation for the following three demands

- 1) Divisional status for Ladakh (*with Kargil and Leh as its two districts*),
- 2) Regional autonomy and
- 3) Scheduled tribe status for the people of Ladakh.

The location of the head quarter of the Division however remained the major cause of conflict between the two districts. The 1960s and 1970s formed a politically most active era of the Balti politics of Leh and Kargil. While in Leh internal Leh politics saw the division of supporters between followers of Kushok Bakula and political opponents. The Balti community which was comparatively dormant also saw the rise of various leaders during this phase with supporters on both the sides. It is however important to understand that there was very little commonality in Political paths between the Baltis of Kargil and Baltis of Leh. Besides there were internal division within both these districts in the same community and politics they pursued. However the section of the Balti leaders supporting Kushok Bakula and Sonam Wangyal had to face social boycott within the community during this period in Leh (Aebedin 2009: 127). However this also portrays the larger Balti community or the influential were against this section and their politics.

P. Namgyal, a veteran politician from the congress party remembers it as a tumultuous time. Wide spread fissures had developed between communities within Ladakh. Religious Politics had made it harder to now place faith in the other. The underlying belief being the larger Sunni population of Ladakh placed the allegiance with Kashmir and the Shia Population played the role of the pivot on this balancing scale. The agitation was suspended when negotiations began between the Ladakhi leaders and the state government. The constitutional status of the region however remained a bone of contention between the state, Kargil and Leh.

However in 1974 a full scale movement (agitation) was again launched. The stated objective was 'Central Administration for Ladakh.' Lama Lobzang, Thupstan Tsewang and Tsering Samphel led the movement (Om 2013: 3). In 1974 the ST issue again came to the fore but Beek states that it was not until the formation of 'All Ladakh Action Committee for Declaring Ladakh as Schedule Tribe (LAC) that this

issue became the central issue or demand of the Ladakhis (Beek 1995: 31). It included representatives from both Kargil and Leh.

The Ladakh Action committee decided to revive and intensify the agitation as the state government had done nothing to implement its assurances (Puri 1982: 3). However a confusing politics seems to be at play here. Similar movements were started by Leh (LBA probably) in 1974 and 1982 under the leadership of Lama Lobzang, Thupstan Tsewang and P.Namgyal, respectively, demanding Union Territory status for Ladakh. The arguments advanced by P.Namgyal in 1982 in favour of Union Territory status were also identical to the ones made by Lama Lobzang in 1974.²⁰ Between which the two districts were created. But In 1982 however P.Namgyal demanded 'regional autonomy within the state' rather than the NEFA- type central administration (Om 2013: 3).

The agitation it called in 1980-81 was characterized by much violence. Two people were shot and killed during an attack on the DC's office. The movement led amongst others by Thupstan Tsewang achieved a certain measure of success in negotiations with the state govt. After which he left politics until 1988 (Beek 1995: 31). Talks in Jammu in January 1981 resulted in state govt. agreeing to a number of demands, including recommending Ladakh to the centre for declaration of S.T. (Beek 1995: 31).²¹ After September 1982 Farooq Abdullah took the reins of the state after Sheikh passed away.

However it was not until 1986-87 a team of social scientists visited Ladakh to determine the number of tribal members and the validity of claims. Also the prerequisite for the conduct of a special census under the authority of the Registrar General of India and a survey of the population as stated above. Thus a mini census was carried out. Ladakhi political leaders of the congress (I) under Tsering Samphel prepared a list of tribes they felt ought to be included in the S.T. list (Beek 1995: 33). A team comprising of 18 jeeps recognized 8tribes and excluded Shammass and Arghons. The Shammass were included in the Bot/Boto category where as Arghons were as a whole considered an unstable community and was excluded since any person of mixed Muslim/Buddhist descent would become arghon (Beek 1995: 33).

²⁰The Hindustan Times, Jan29, 1974; Kashmir Times, Feb7, 1997

²¹For more details refer to the Minutes of the meeting in Beek 1995:31

But what actually transpired seems that the issues or demands were not clear throughout. The Leh Politicians were using a doubled edged sword which the leaders of Kargil seem to have realised resulting in dissolving of the ALAC. However Leh was keen on disassociating from Kashmir in every possible way, thus the UT issue has been an underlying tone since the 1940s though under various names. By late 1980s the autonomous hill council model had become available after it had been used by the Rajiv Gandhi administration in attempts to settle agitations in Darjeeling and Assam (Beek 1999: 6).

In spite of the Mini-census and survey having been completed in 1987, again much time passed without any apparent action on the part of the Government. However this inaction led to rising tensions in Ladakh. Especially after Buta Singh, then home minister visited Zangskar in the summer of 1988 where by a promise was made to deliver the ST status by the next parliamentary session. Still, late 1988 Leh youth congress sent a letter to the Prime Minister with an explicit threat of an agitation in case of any further delay (Beek 1995: 34).

Then union minister P.Namgyal wrote to Rajiv Gandhi on 6th may 1989 just weeks before trouble broke out in Leh, warning him of consequences if action was not taken soon enough (Beek 1995: 34). What followed was months of communal violence along communal lines, which also led to the undeclared dissolution of the All Ladakh Action Committee. In an interview in 1989, the late Agha Hyder, one of the most powerful leaders in the suru valley expressed his distress over the issue. "We are all Ladakhis. We all suffer under the Kashmiris. We should fight them together, instead of each other. Kacho Mohammed Ali Khan, a former politician of Kargil says, "It was communalized, but really aimed at the Govt. of J&K. Here it had repercussions, but we kept it under control. The people here are angry about the communalization and the forced conversions that took place, for example at Sakti. Leh is taking most of the benefits. On the whole in our country, all the media took a high pitch as if something very specific was happening here. Communal parties from Jammu and India made it a bigger thing. It was communalized because without opium the masses can't stir." (Himal 1995: 4) The agitation of 1989, a conscious decision no matter what the goal, was taken to use religion as a tool for mobilization (Himal 1995: 4). The effect of this on the general public of leh and Kargil are difficult to summarize. As the percolation of such activities and ideologies were en-livened by

the common masses. However a parallel Kargil Action committee constituted by the National Conference and the congress raised a different slogan which was provincial status for the two districts of Leh and Kargil on the pattern of Jammu and Kashmir divisions. The state government subsequently used the KAC's stand to reject the demand for regional autonomy on the plea that all Ladakhis did not want it (Sabah Sharif 2013: 24).

Meanwhile finally on 7th Oct. 1989 the president of India promulgated the "Constitution of (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1989" declaring the eight tribes of Ladakh as Schedule Tribes.

A break down according to religion gives the following results:

	Balti	Beda	Bot/Boto	Brokpa etc.	Changpa	Garra	Mon	Purigpa
Buddhist		319	76493	2000	3511	827	873	
Muslim	10272		11265	24386				54017

Source: registrar general's report on the mini census of 1986-87.²² (Beek 1997: 35)

4.5 THE 1989 AGITATION

The LBA again launched a struggle on Oct 15, 1989 for Union Territory status for Ladakh. This movement left three persons dead and several seriously wounded. Crowds, mainly Buddhists, burnt government property and attacked police stations. The measures included social boycott of the Muslims for three years. In November 1992, the boycott was lifted after pressure from congress (I) government in Delhi and the Muslims agreed to work for a council (Himal 1995: 4). Law and order could be restored only after Oct. 29, when the representatives of the state and central government met the agitating LBA leaders at Leh and reached an agreement under which Leh district was to get an Autonomous Hill Development Council, invested with administrative and economic powers. The agreement was signed by Thupstan tsewang (LBA), P.P. Srivastava (Additional Secretary, Union Ministry of home

²² For more details on the affect of this classification have a look at Beek (1997), Importance of Being Tribal p35.

affairs) and Ashok Jaitley (Additional Chief Secretary, Jammu and Kashmir Government), in the presence of Union Home Minister Buta Singh, who assured the Ladakhis of a set up on the lines of the Gorkha Hill Council (Om 2010: 4).

Kargil Muslim leaders had staunchly opposed the creation of a united autonomous hill development council for Ladakh or grant of UT status fearing Buddhist domination, both demands were popular in Leh, which subsequently got an autonomous hill development council for the district in 1995. The rapid development that followed in Leh prompted Kargil's leaders to later demand an autonomous council for the district as well, which they got in 2003 (Greater Kashmir 17th July 2013).

Jan 10, 1990 in a meeting in Jammu differences surfaced over the implementation of the agreement of granting Autonomous council under Farooq Abdullah's government. A decision to revive the agitation was once again taken in light of the delaying tactics of the government. July 7, 1990, Thupstan Tsewang was beaten up by the police and Sonam Wangchuk, who had previously attacked a former minister, Sonam Wangyal, was arrested. These two incidents provoked LBA to storm the Leh police station, triggering police-LBA clash resulting in lathi charge, bursting of tear gas shells and imposition of curfew in Leh. June 16, Blasts occurred at the residence of Wangyal and in three government buildings in Leh (Om 2010: 5). The latest and the biggest agitation from 1989-93 eventually followed an agreement on the formation of the Leh Autonomous Hill District Council.

IMPLOING THE 1989 AGITATION

The agitation began after a series of minor clashes between Muslim and Buddhist Youths. But in the spring of 1988 there was a series of violent incidents aimed at the small Christian community in Leh. The youth wing of the LBA main cause of grievance was alleged 'abduction' of fifty Buddhist children to Srinagar for education at the Mizoram Jesuit mission school. Besides a book 'Skyabgon' written by Moravian Rev. Stephen, in which, it was alleged, the Buddhist religion was insulted and ridiculed (Beek and Bertelsen 1997: 57). However the issue seems to have been settled soon. Soon there was a huge demonstration by a large rally in the

main market on 20th May 1988. After this successful public rally, a younger generation had taken control of the LBA. Early 1989 Thupstan Tsewang had been elected as president. Rigzin Jora, Rigzin Spalbar and Tsering Dorje Lagruk all became key players of LBA (Beek and Bertelsen 1997: 58).

This young section of the LBA took to villages and far flung reaches to indoctrinate the mass. Finally it culminated into the events on 6th-7th June 1989. This wing of agitation certainly didn't follow 'ahimsa' as claimed. Crook (1994) states, techniques ranged from Intimidation, beatings and in some cases arson and Blasting were also used to create compliance with LBA policies (as cited in Beek and Bertelsen 1997: 59).

Social Boycott was imposed on Muslims and enforced through system of penalties which increased with the considered gravity of offense besides the previous mentioned methods. Sonam Wangyal the sole person who spoke against the boycott was placed under boycott himself as such no dared to speak out openly after him (Beek and Bertelsen 1997: 60). One of the most educated, influential and dynamic leader amongst the Baltis Akbar Ladakhi was the President of LMA during the peak of these Boycott and agitations. He is credited for the Breakthrough in the negotiations thus making a united effort towards achievement of Hill Council possible.

In October 1993, the central government, the state govt, and the leaders of the Buddhists and Muslims of Leh district worked out a frame work for the future council. The state govt. Agreed to the word 'Autonomous' being included in the name of the council in return for the Buddhist leaders agreeing to the council being placed within the framework of the J&K constitution. All matters except police and judiciary were to be relegated to the Council's portfolio. The final phase of the agitation in the spring of 1995 was carried on once again under the banner of the Ladakh People's movement for Autonomous Hill Council, was led by the Coordination Committee, which comprised representatives of the Muslim, Buddhist and Christian communities.

In August 1995, elections took place for the first Autonomous District Development Council, Leh (LAHDC). All key leaders of the agitation on the Buddhist side joined Congress along with Akbar Ladakhi. National Conference did

not participate in the election and so it was no surprise that congress (I) won all 26 seats, 22 having been uncontested. The formation of hill council formed another milestone in modern Ladakhi politics. The first executive council chaired by Thupstan Tsewang, included Akbar Ladakhi, Rigzin Jora, Sonam Dawa and Thiksey Rinpoche. Most other key players found a seat in the general council ((Beek and Bertelsen 1997: 61).

4.6 GREATER LADAKH

The essence of the origin of the movement lie in the Post Partition conditions of the Baltis in the northern region cutting across international Boundaries. It aspires to reclaim the regions that were once known as Ladakh or Ladakh Wazarat. Though the geographical aspirations differ from group to group but the basic area includes the erstwhile Ladakh Wazarat. The emergence of the Greater Ladakh movement can be traced to the Baltistan movement across the border. The socio-political condition being faced by the Baltis after the partition was a compelling factor for the movement. It can also be understood as a reaction to the hegemonic Pakistani institutions. The Baltistan movement started to emerge in the Balti circles in the 1980s. These movements were primarily led by various organizations to what Magnusson (2011:356) describes as Social Movement Organizations. The Baltistan Culture Foundation (BCF)²³ founded in 1998 and Society for Knowledge and Responsibilities of Culture, Health, Education and Nature (SKARCHEN) founded in 1997 based in Nubra and the Kargil Social and Cultural Organization (KASCO) founded in 1995 played a vital role in promotion of the movement. The underlying vision for the movement though appears to bring out a Specific Balti history rather than a common Ladakhi history. This movement gained momentum in the mid 1990s. And spread in Baltistan, Kargil and Nubra. The Balti population of Leh though may have been inspired but did not show any concrete support for the movement. Magnusson (2011:358) states that sympathizers of the movement often draw or imagine of a Golden past under the Tibetan influence or of the times when they were independent kingdoms with respect to the place of the movement.

²³ In 2002 the BCF was taken over by the Agha Khan Cultural Support Programme.

The stress on the revival of Balti culture and language across the border can be identified as an offshoot of this movement. Magnusson (ibid.) opines that this movement was a strategy for re assertion of a cultural, political and regional identity that is different from that of the two hegemonic nation states and transcends the border between them. Though the Baltis in Baltistan understand this as a revival of a Tibetan based culture, the Baltis of Kargil interpret this as a political tool to counter demands for Union Territory made by the Leh district. While a rational nostalgia of Greater Ladakh among the Kargilis also cannot be ruled out.

In Leh the politics of Greater Ladakh does not find much enthusiasm and the Buddhists of Ladakh abstain from giving any credibility to the movement. The paradoxical nature of the movement is, though the basis of the movement lie in the revival of a Tibetan Buddhist culture it does not find support from the Ladakhi Buddhist.

4.7 CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

As history clarifies, the Buddhists of Ladakh were the first to be mobilized along religious lines. For decades the representatives to the Lok Sabha were Buddhists, as the population of Kargil voted without consideration of religious affiliation (Beek and Bertelsen 1997: 54). 1998 Ladakh Lok Sabha were held, a fifth in less than three years. 3rd June Ladakh went to polls. The seat was won by National Conference candidate Aga Syed Hussain of Kargil (Himal 1998:2). Leh candidate P.Namgyal was defeated by a landslide margin of 30,000 votes. Again Thupstan Tsewang lost to NC candidate Hassan Khan. N.C, ministers Togdan Rinpoche and Tsetan Namgyal and MP (RS) Thiksey Rinpoche sent their congratulations to the victor (IALS 1999:8). Since elections were first held in Ladakh in 1962, the Lok Sabha seat had always gone to a Buddhist candidate from Leh. Only in 1989 at the height of the communal agitation for Union Territory status, was the seat captured by a Kargili Muslim, the independent commander Ghulam Mohd. Hassan. The M.P seat has been an enigma for the Ladakh region. Every time M.P. elections come to the fore bungling politics for votes starts. Kargil vs. Leh is the general understanding but the underlying tone of the elections have been communal for a long time. Buddhists vs.

Muslim is the sordid tale of MP elections in Ladakh. Funnily after all the hullabaloo everybody accepts the useless-ness of the position of an MP. The MPs have not been able to even fully utilize their MP funds. The successive failures of all the MPs from both the regions have been accepted by all.

The creation of the two separate districts in 1979 on communal lines created a self propelling communal machinery, which in the longer run has helped the state and the centre to balance or ward of political demands made from either district. Though Kargil's sceptical relation with Leh, Kashmir has managed to create a space of trust with Kargil which Leh doesn't seem to recover. Resulting in loss for both the districts, with an already minimal population, which apparently is a curse in democracy. In line with the comparative development swiftness after getting Autonomous council in Leh, Kargil which initially opposed any such step too demanded for the same. Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Kargil thus came into being in 2003. Azghar Karbalai is one of the most dynamic leaders that this region has produced. In 2004 he was elected the Chief Executive Councillor of LAHDC Kargil. Kacho Ahmad Ali of Sod and Qamar Ali Akhon, Asgar Karbalai are contemporary leaders of the Kargil district. In terms of political paths both the districts continue to be at logger heads, with Leh by and large demanding UT and Kargil demanding for Greater Ladakh.

Latest political developments involve a defunct LMA in Leh with wider rifts appearing within the two sects of Muslims in the district. The rift was further fuelled by the unprecedented step of granting the Executive seat in the council to Lassu Shafi a member of the Sunni/argon community in 2014. The larger Shia/Balti communities felt the larger Balti/Shia interests and stature was undermined by the ruling Congress. However the leaders of the Balti Community representing congress still continue to show adherence to the party. Younger prospective leaders from the community have joined other political parties in line with dissatisfaction with congress. The respective religious organs of the two communities seem to be thriving in divergence in the absence of a 'communal agitation', the rifts seems to be only increasing.

The rising consciousness of the counterparts of their 'Balti identity' across the border, the Baltis of Leh too appear to slowly realize this aspect of identity. Marked reference to the Balti identity and indignity in the various gatherings of the community can be seen. The socio, economic, political backwardness of the Baltis in

Leh in contrast to the argons/Sunni Muslims is one main reason for this identity surge. Besides, it can also be seen as a response to the emerging 'extremist ideology' amongst the once liberal Sunni Muslims of Leh. A conscious rendering of a Buddhist past, thus a common past with the local Buddhists is also a common affair now. Whereas their counterparts in Kargil district, politics is still discussed on the lines of the two traditional dominant power houses the IKMT and Islamia School. With their supporters divided internally into different political parties. The political scenario creates a confusing Kaleidoscope to the voter.

A subtle shift from the traditional politics of Communal representation can be observed over the last few years. On account of flourishing tourism economy social politics appear to take a back seat. The play of various different political parties on ground has also resulted in more nuances and differences in the political scenario of Ladakh. With political parties creating bases in both the districts a new era of political dynamics can be expected.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Identity is neither fixed nor is the final product, rather fluid and flexible and Cultural identity is a matter of becoming as well as of being (Dryland and Syed 2011: 51). This is not only true in case of cultural identity but other identities as well. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. Like everything that is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Identity Politics locates Identity as being eternally fixed in some essentialised past which have been distorted subject to continuous play of history, culture and power. This dissertation thus shows how Religious Identities of Baltis got strengthened from exogenous factors which in many ways diluted the Ethnic cultural identity.

The complex historical background means that Ladakh's history has to be understood at several different levels. The selective remembering or more importantly for getting of cultural practices and history, creates more and less, powerful fields of identification. 'Standardized moulds' of understanding and interpretation of history fails to do justice to the history of Ladakh. Authors have crudely divided the chronological history of Ladakh before the formation of India into a) the Pre-Tibetan, b) Independent Ladakh, c) Under the influence of the Dogra Regime, and d) British rule and some have made only two pre-independent India distinctions in history of Ladakh, that is between the monarchical age and the era of colonization, including the Dogra and British regimes. This study has exposed how such crude Standardized moulds fail to examine and justify the unique historical traditions of Ladakh. Standard Moulds have time and again marginalized Balti identity existing in Ladakh. The Balti historically and presently play a very important role in Ladakh, which cannot be ignored in a comprehensive understanding of Ladakh. An interpretation of chronological history of the Balti has been attempted. The Chronicles which till date remains one of the most important sources of History of Ladakh has been thoroughly evaluated, which has resulted in a scientific and proper evaluation of the History of Baltis of Ladakh. If not interpreting all the

nuances this study at least brings to light the nuances of the History of Baltis in Ladakh and thus in Ladakh as a whole as well.

This study reiterates the need for complication of the present perspectives on Ladakh in general and Baltis in specific. Existing ones are essential but the region and its people cannot be just taken simply as a sub-set either of India or Tibet. Thus such simplified versions or standardized chronological division need to be critically analysed. The region's increased accessibility in the last 30 years has facilitated new studies by scholars from a variety of disciplines and this study therefore includes contributions by linguists, art historians and anthropologists as well as documentary historians. The sources that they use range from rock and temple inscriptions to folk history, personal reminiscences and archival records in many different languages. Thus in future researches, further 'real research' than rhetoric can be expected.

Ladakh though profoundly impacted by Tibet and Tibetan culture still retains much of what was Ladakh, a cosmopolitan city and a cosmopolitan culture. The line which divides hegemonic influence of a majority culture and accommodation of multiple cultures needs to be thus highlighted. Any assertion of one over the other leads to the assertion of the others. Thus the Balti identity is also of experience of a paradoxical position, one where it identifies as a Ladakhi Identity and other where it strives towards a distinct identity as well. Thus an examination of the Culture of Baltis inherently projects the transforming nature of Identity. Specifically, how the Balti culture retains and overlooks various aspects of its culture. Aspects of culture like traditional dances, sports, music and others were overlooked as it did not fit with the Islamic way life and in return new aspects of Islamic culture were adopted like Eid, Ramzaa, religious hymns etc have now become a part of Balti culture. Balti culture over the years has been heavily influenced by cultures adjacent to it but continues to be over shadowed by the wider Tibetan culture.

With the coming of Islam a new dimension to the Balti identity was added. Relatively Islam impacted the Balti culture to a much wider proportion than it underwent passing through Shamanistic/Bon culture and Buddhism. Islam spread on a parallel course of accomplishment, one was through preaching to the local population and the other was a top down process, where by the rulers of the area's first embraced Islam and then it population. Matrimonial alliances among the Kings and royalties

were also a major factor in the spread of Islam. The Islamic culture continues to assimilate the Baltis and their culture. As such apparent is more an Islamic Culture than an ethnic Balti culture.

This thesis highlights this process of marginalization rather than displacing it all together. It is an attempt to address the marginalization of Balti ethnicity in social policy, literature and also highlight the complexities within the Balti Identity simultaneously. The introduction of communal politics in the latter half of 20th century was a significant factor in the Baltis submerging their ethnic identity to the religious identity. The reasons were both as a reaction and ideological spread of Islam itself. The modern political tools of intervention used by India and colonial Government alike helped in solidifying differences. Religion was an important tool of identification used both after and before partition. Religion thus became a source for commonality and exclusivity simultaneously. The association of the Baltis with that of the larger Muslim population of Kashmir propelled their Religious Identity over other identities. The 1970s marked as a period of turmoil for the Shia population in Iraq, thus most of the religious scholars had to come back to Ladakh. These scholars further encouraged the Islamic ideals amongst the local population. Further the other political developments such as politics of Identity pursued by the Leh Buddhists, discrimination by the central government and the division of Ladakh into the two districts on religious grounds further strengthened the religious identity of the Baltis. In present Ladakh religious identity governs or over arches all other identities and similarly for Baltis too religious identity over shadows all other identities.

Religion encompasses all aspects of life. And in Ladakh religion had become a tool of politics. The second half of 20th century Ladakhi politics reeks of such politics where politics is defined on the lines of religious identity. As Buddhism became a political tool so did Islam. Such a political tool had profound effect on the ethnic culture of Ladakh and of the Baltis in specific. Various cultural aspects of the Baltis stand in conflict with Islamic culture and religion. Hence the conflicting aspects were left out or forgotten from everyday life. As such, in a way, ethnic cultural identity was at least diluted if not completely changed. Religious Identities of Baltis thus got strengthened from exogenous factors diluting indigenous Ethnic cultural identity. But an in-depth critical exploration of the present Balti also proves that they withhold various strands of its ethnic culture. As such they exhibit a unique Balti culture thus

retaining and assimilating but not getting over shadowed. Hence a primary aim here is to offer a more reflexive and self-critical discussion contextualizing diversity and difference, without recourse to simplistic explanations. The production of this literature effectively represents a contradiction, to ones familiar to those working in this field.

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