

LADAKH*

J. & K. Academy of Art, Culture and Languages LEH 194101, LADAKH, J&K, (INDIA)

Ladakh is a mountainous area situated in the north of India and lying at altitudes between 10,000 and 20,000 feet above sea level. The country is surrounded by high peaks and snow-covered mountains that resemble the pillars of the sky and by ranges of multicoloured hues. These magnificent mountains are ornamented with monasteries, temples, caves, castles and stupas built by holy persons and dharmarajas in previous ages.

Most of the population of Ladakh are farmers. In winter, although it snows little, it is cold and in summer it is very hot so that various crops such as fruits and vegetables can ripen. Through the centre of Ladakh flows the great river of Singe-Khabab (Sengge Kha-'bab), the Indus. To the east is the region of Stot (Stod), to the south Zaskar, to the west Sham (gSham), to the north Nubra, and in the middle lies Leh, the capital of Ladakh.

As for the costumes of Ladakh, the men generally wear a hat called *kantrop* (*kan-trob*) and a long robe, *chuba*

(*phyu-ba*) tied with a belt *sk(y)eraks* (*ske-rags*) wound over with a large silken slash, *alti tsazar* (*ar-ti tsadar*). Undertrousers, *kangnam* (*rkang-snam*) and boots *lham* (*lham*) are also worn.

In earlier times people used to wear a hat called *kantrop* (*kan-trob* or *photip*; *pho-tib*) and earrings, necklaces and bracelets which are now no longer worn. Women continue to wear a turquoise headdress called *perak* (*pe-rag*) or else the *kantrop* hat. They wear the long woman's robe called the *gos-sulma* (*gos-bsul-ma*) and on their backs a cloak or *bok* (*gos-chen*). Around their throats they wear necklaces of coral and pearls, in the centre of which hangs a golden amulet box, if they have one. Pearl and gold earrings, conch shell bracelets and gold or silver rings are also worn in addition to undertrousers and a special kind of boot, *lham thigma* (*lham thig-ma*), or one with a high collar, *gyazo* (*rgya-bzo*).

The staple diet of Ladakh consists of meat, butter, milk, curds, roasted barley flour, wheat, tea and beer. In recent times rice has become available and is much preferred.

The domestic animals reared by the people of Ladakh are cattle, goats, sheep, horses, donkeys, yaks and hybrid yaks and chickens, all of which are of great use to farmers.

The first inhabitants of Ladakh were descended from Mongolian stock. Buddhism was introduced from Tibet, and all the Buddhist schools of Mahayana, which flourished in Tibet, including the Nyingmapa (rNying-ma-pa), the Kargyutpa, (bKa'-brgyud-pa), the Sakyapa (Sa-skyapa-pa) and the Gelugpa (dGe-lugs-pa), are to be found in Ladakh.

The people are by nature honest, humble, loving and compassionate. Although people follow various religious systems, Islam and Christianity as well as Buddhism, good relations exist between all of them. Ladakh derives its name from the fact that there are many mountain passes, *la*, in the region. Although minor differences exist between the dialects of each district, they are ultimately the same and so are mutually and easily understood. The people are all given to enjoying themselves in song and dance, but also they are of a religious disposition and of a nature that seeks to be of service to others.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LADAKH

In ancient times, before the age of recorded history, the area of Tibet and Ladakh formed a great island in a lake surrounded by snowy mountains and a beautiful forest, an area which had not yet become inhabited. Once human beings gradually



Le perak, coiffure féminine (photo Bruno Morandi)

started residing there, they built dwellings, planted the land, produced crops and raised cattle. Villages and communities were established by stages in locations where land and water were good. Guided and led by those who had the greatest power, the people were widely scattered.

In the year 127 B.C. came Nyati Tsanpo (gNya'-khri bTsan-po), the first king to gain control over the whole of Tibet. Then, at a time of the famous "Three Ancestral Dharmarajas" of Tibet, the religion of the Lord Buddha came to flourish in Ladakh as well. After King Langdarma (gLang-dar-ma), there was no longer any great king who ruled over the whole of Tibet. The Tibetan realm became fragmented and a religious as well as political decline commenced. At that time Ladakh, too, existed in a fragmented state with a few powerful so-called *co* (*jo*) acting as chiefs.

In the year 900 A.D. a descendant of the Tibetan kings by name of **Skilde Nimagon** (sKyid-lde Nyi-ma-mgon) came to Purang (sPu-rang) in the province of Stod Ngaris (Stod mNga'-ris)¹, it not being desirable for him to continue residing in Central Tibet. He was installed as the king of Ngaris Skorsum (mNga'-ris skor-gsum). He had there three sons whom he installed in different parts of Ngaris. The eldest, **Palgigon** (dPal-gyi-mgon) gained Ladakh and so in 930 he won authority over Maryul-Ladakh ((d)Mar-yul). He was the first of the kings of Ladakh and the area which he controlled stretched from Rudok in the east to Lartsa in Kashmir in the west and to Sa-kha-gog-po in the north.

His dominion prospered and increased. His two sons were: **Trogon** ('Gro-mgon) and **Chosgon** (Chos-mgon). Chosgon's son was Lhachen Gyalpo (Lha-chen rGyal-po) who ruled from 1050 to 1080 and who built the monastery of Likir. His son, Lhachen Utpala (Lha-chen Ud-pa-la), subjugated Nyungti and Mon.² His son, Lhachen Naglug (Lha-chen Nag-lug) ruled from 1110 to 1140 and built castles at Wanla and Khalsi (or Khalatse) in the district of Sham (gSham). His son was Lhachen Joldor (Lha-chen Jol-dor). His son, Lhachen Lhargyal (Lha-chen Lha-rgyal) reigned from 1230 to 1260 and had the tantras, the *Prajanaparamita* and numerous other secret texts written out in gold and also performed many religious works. His son was Lhachen Jodpa (Lha-chen Jo-dpal). His son was Lhachen Ngodrup (Lha-chen dNgos-grub). This Dharmaraja instituted the custom whereby Ladakhi monks went for their studies to the various monastic colleges in the provinces of U and Tsang in Tibet. There is a tradition that his son Prince Rinchen Gyalpo (Rin-chen rGyal-po), who was sent to Kashmir, embraced the Muslim religion. His son Lhachen Shesrab (Lha-chen Shes-rab) ruled from 1350 to 1380. He built the town of Senggyang (Sengge-sgang) at the place called Hangtsemo (Hang-rste-mo) in Sabu. His son was Thritsukge (Khri-btsug-lde). His sons were Trakspa Bumde (Grags-pa 'Bum-lde) and Tragspa Bum (Grags-pa 'Bum).

Trakspa Bumde ruled over the area of Stot (Stod), which included Ladakh, as capital Leh and so on. At

Leh he built the image of Maitreya (rGyal-ba Byams-pa mGon-po) to the height of three storeys inside the Red Temple. He also built the stupa of Tiu-Tasi-Od-Tho (rTi'u bKra-shis 'Od-phro). Spituk monastery, too, he caused to flourish. His younger brother Traspa Bum (Grags-pa 'Bum) ruled over the Sham (gSham) province and built there the castle of Timusgang (gTing-mo-sgang) and the Maitreya image. The blessed image of Avalokitesvara from Kamrup (i.e. Assam) was brought to Ladakh during his time.

Traspa Bum's son was **Lhachen Bhara** (Lha-chen Bha-ra). His son Lhachen Bhagan, (Lha-chen Bha-gan), is said to be the king who founded the Namgyal (rNam-rgyal) dynasty. His two sons received the name Namgyal, the elder one being called Lhawang Namgyal (Lha-dbang rNam-rgyal) and the younger brother Tashi Namgyal (bKra-shis rNam-rgyal). The younger, Tashi Namgyal, deceived his elder brother and after blinding him he himself acted as king. Reigning from 1500 to 1532 he built at Leh the Namgyal Tsemo (rNam-rgyal rTse-mo), the temple devoted to the guardian deities, the Maitreya image and the village of Chubi. His elder brother Lhawang Namgyal (Lha-dbang rNam-rgyal) had three sons: Tsewang Namgyal (Tshe-dbang rNam-rgyal), Gonbo (rNam-rgyal mGon-po) and **Jamyang Namgyal** ('Jam-dbyangs rNam-rgyal). Tsewang Namgyal succeeded but died before long. His younger brother Jamyang Namgyal ruled from 1560-1590. Chosje Danma (Chos-rje gDan-ma) from Drigung ('Bri-gung) was invited to Ladakh and he founded Gangsngon (sGang-sngon) monastery, thus introducing the teaching of the Drigung. His son was **Singge Namgyal** (Sengge rNam-rgyal) a king who was physically very strong and most skilled in all the martial arts including archery and fighting with the sword and spear. He ruled from 1590 to 1620 and subjugated many of the petty rulers around his kingdom. Following the Mahasiddha Staktsang Raspa (Stag-tshang Ras-pa) as his foremost guru, he built the monasteries of Hemis (Hi-mi), Chimre (ICe-bde), Hanle (Wam-le), Tashigang (bKra-shis-sgang) and others. Furthermore this dharmaraja built the castle of Palkhar (Spel-mkhar) in Leh and constructed innumerable shrines out of gold and silver. As a funerary memorial to his father he built the coppergilt Maitreya image of Basgo (Ba-sgo). His son Deldan Namgyal (bDe-ldan rNam-rgyal) ruled the state according to the tenets of religion from 1620 to 1645. He subjugated the various Tibetan communities (within Ladakh). For his father's funerary memorial he built a long *mane* (*ma-ni*) wall at Tyarerong, five hundred paces in length, with a stupa of victory at its head and a stupa of enlightenment at its end. His son, **Deleks Namgyal** (bDe-legs rNam-rgyal) ruled from 1645-1680. In 1670 the army of Mongolian Galdan Tsewang (dGa-ldan Tshe-dbang) invaded Ladakh. Later Mipham Wangpo (Mi-pham Dbang-po) of the Drukpa ('Brug-pa) school came to mediate a settlement. He drew up a treaty which provided for government traders to enter Ladakh from Tibet and for an annual Ladakhi embassy to go to Tibet.



Le palais de Leh (photo Bruno Morandi)

Deleks Namgyal's son was **Nima Namgyal** (Nyi-ma rNam-rgyal) who ruled from 1680 to 1720 and who built the long *mane* wall at Dzanang (rDza-nang) and many shrines. He administered royal law not simply on the basis of whatever came to his mind but rather in compliance with the advice of elders of good counsel. His son was Deskyong Namgyal (bDe-skyong rNam-rgyal). His son Tsetan Namgyal (Tshe-brtan rNam-rgyal) ruled for a short period from 1780 to 1790. For his father's funerary memorial he built a long mane wall at the bottom of the cliff at Kyigu (Kyi-gu). Although this king was skilled in state rule, brave against his enemies and most loving to his subjects, on account of the low fortunes of his people, he died of smallpox at the age of 28. His younger brother Tsepal Tondup Namgyal (Tshe-dpal Don-grub rNam-rgyal) renounced his monastic vows and succeeded to the throne. It was during his time that Moorcroft and Trebeck arrived in Leh by way of Nyungti (Nyung-ti) and Garja (Gar-zha, see footnote 2). This was the first time that Englishmen had come to Ladakh. In about the year 1800 this king built a new palace at Stok. He also built the "New Castle" (*skukhar soma*; *sku-mkhar soma*) and many shrines above the temple of Avalokitesvara in Leh. His son, Tsewang Rabtan (Tshe-dbang Rab-brtan) was the reincarnation of Bhilpa Dorje (Bhil-ba rDo-rje), the *trulku* (*sprul-sku*) of Hemis. He was installed king in 1830. Before long in 1834, the forces of **Zorawar Singh** invaded Ladakh and the state was lost to an external power. The king was dethroned and forced to reside in the palace of Stok. Thereafter, Zorawar installed the minister of Leh,

Ngorup Stanzin (dNgos-grub bsTan-'dzin) as regent. After six years King Tsepal Tondup Namgyal (Tshe-dpal Don-grub rNam-rgyal) father of the dethroned king, was once again appointed to the throne. His son Tsewang Rabtan (Tshe-dbang Rab-brtan) died in 1835 in Spiti. The father died later of smallpox in Baltistan, where he had gone to wage war. Once the whole of Ladakh and Baltistan had been subjugated, Jigmet Choskyong Singge Migyur Namgyal ('Jigs-med Choskyong Sengge Mi-'gyur rNam-rgyal) son of Tsewang Rabtan, was installed as king. An annual tax of 18,000 rupees was instituted. If this was not forthcoming the king of Ladakh himself had to make up the deficit. This king ruled from 1856 to 1873.

Zorawar Singh invaded Tibet and died while fighting the Tibetan troops near Toyo (To-yo) in Purang (sPurang, Bu-hrangs) on the 12th day of the 11th month in 1841. In 1860 Prince Sonam Namgyal (bSod-nams rNam rgyal) was born and in 1875 he was enthroned. Since Ladakh was no longer an independent country, he did not possess any power. His son Dadul Namgyal (Dgra-dul rNam-rgyal) was born in 1896. By that time India had come under the authority of the British, and so Ladakh too remained under the British. In 1926 Prince Kunzang Namgyal (Kun-bzang rNam-rgyal) was born. Thereafter, in 1947, India gained independence and from that time onwards Ladakh was made part of Jammu and Kashmir State and remained as such till the present. In 1974, King Kunzang Namgyal died. At present Queen Diskit Wangmo (bDe-skyid Dbang-mo)

Princesses Jigmet Wangmo ('Jigs-med Dbang-mo) and Rinchen Wangmo (Rin-chen Dban-mo) and Princes Jigmet Wangchuk Namgyal ('Jigs-med Dbang-phyug rNam-gyal) and Skarma Konchok Namgyal (sKarma dKon-mchog rNam-rgyal) are all living happily and residing at the palace of Stok.

NOTES

* The dates are the dates given by the author, based on local tradition as well as Francke (1907). Some of the dates are not generally accepted by more recent historians. Ed.

1 Mnga'-ris: « In a wide sense, the whole country round the sources and the upper course of the Indus and the Sulej, together with some more western parts (...); in a more limited sense mnga'-ris skor gsum denotes Rudok, Guge and Purang » (Jäschke, p. 132).

2 Gar-zha: « native name of the district called by the Hindoos Lâhul or Lâhûl (according to Cunningham « Lahul » is a corruption of *lho-yul* southern country, which latter appellation, however, is not in use in that district itself » (Jäschke, p. 67).

Nyung-ti: Kulu; cf. Petech, 1977, pp. 18, 32 and 73.

RESUME : Un rappel d'ensemble a paru utile, ne fût-ce que pour les lecteurs non initiés. L'auteur donne une présentation générale. Le Ladakh est ainsi restitué géographiquement et historiquement, depuis le règne du premier roi jusqu'aux actuels descendants de la famille royale. L'auteur précise aussi quelques détails sur l'habillement et la nourriture.

SUMMARY: It seemed useful to give a general introduction to Ladakh, particularly for non-specialist readers of these proceedings. Accordingly the author briefly discusses the geography of Ladakh and gives an outline of its history from the first kings to the present royal family. He also includes information on Ladakhi diet and clothing,

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Der Artikel gibt eine allgemeine Einführung in das Land Ladakh, die sich besonders an den nichtwissenschaftlichen Leser wendet. Deshalb umreißt er kurz die Geographie und Geschichte Ladakhs, angefangen von der Herrschaft der ersten Könige bis hin zur jetzigen königlichen Familie. Zudem berichtet er über die ladakhische Diät und Kleidung.