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## A SURVEY OF SOURCE MATERIAL FOR THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF LADAKH

The aim of my paper is to make a survey of the source material for the historical geography of Ladakh.

Ladakh's geographical location kept it isolated from the adjacent territories. Access for outsiders was limited to a few passes in the west, and the north-east. As a land-bridge between India and Tibet. Ladakh received much of India's philosophy, religion and culture. During the six hundred years from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. through the influence of diverse, complex forces, Ladakh was able to work up by slow degrees a social and political system, which by its nature was to shape the character and pattern of its future civilization. The 9<sup>th</sup> century was a turning point in the development of Ladakh's history, when King Nimagon (Nyi-ma-mgon), who established a western Tibetan dynasty, spread his kingdom up to the Zoji-la pass. Thus, from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards Ladakh received much of Indian and Tibetan culture.

There is abundant source material available, which is of sufficient geographic quality to write the historical geography of Ladakh. The sources are of two kinds: some are foreign, and some are local. The local sources are of the greatest interest for any attempt to study the historical geography of past Ladakh. These materials generally are of a twofold character: records on stones as well as on paper. As far as information on stones is concerned, comparatively little has become known up to the present, the reason being that systematic and thorough research in this field has not yet been made. Regarding records on paper, the most important sources seems to be the records, which have been kept by the kings of Ladakh and the documents maintained by the monasteries or *gonpa* (*dgon-pa*) of Ladakh. A second category of works consists of the contributions of historians and archaeologists who have studied the late medieval texts, surveys made by British colonial authorities, travel accounts and maps. Besides these records, families all over Ladakh possess shorter documents on paper, and to collect and edit them will be a necessary preliminary to a scientific study of historical Ladakh. It is very probable that there are many more historical materials, either in the region or outside it, which will be discovered in the course of time.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The study of archaeological finds and of architecture does much to supplement the written records, especially in the investigation of the geography of the early period. Some effort was made by a few researchers to reassess the evidence during the various archaeological excavations in different parts of Ladakh in order to develop an understanding of the remote phases of human history in the region. Dr. A.H. Francke, carried out an archaeological survey of Ladakh, with the recommendation of Dr J.H. Marshall, C.I.E., Director General of

Archaeology in India. His work was edited under the authority of Archaeological Survey of India, New Imperial Series Vol. XXXVIII, under the heading *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*. Francke made a notable contribution towards the understanding of the pattern of early human settlement in Ladakh through an analysis of the ceramic evidence collected from the different sites of Dard colonies and of the cult of the pre-Buddhist religion. Most of the findings from Dard graves are clay pots, skulls, bronze objects and stone objects. His contribution makes it possible to understand or to trace the sequence of cultures which penetrated the region. Beside the graves similar hand-pottery with dark red ornaments has been found.

The distribution of ruined *gonpa* (*dgon-pa*) and *chorten* (*mchod-rten*) are also good source material in understanding the changing geography of the villages and the evolution of the settlements pattern. Many of these *chorten* are built to prevent natural calamities such as drought, floods and epidemics and they therefore provide information on the prevalence of weather phenomena and disease patterns in Ladakhi villages. *Punpa* (*pun-pa* or *phun-pa* sometimes *bum-pa*)<sup>1</sup> are other valuable materials, which are lying, buried and kept in *chorten*. Study of them would reveal valuable source material.

### CHRONICLES AND RELIGIOUS TEXTS

Probably the most important documents on which Ladakhi history is based are the chronicles of Ladakh or *La-dwags rgyal-rabs*. It was not until the early 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Namgyal (rNam-rgyal) dynasty came to power that Ladakh chronicles became of some historical value. These *gyalraps* (*rgyal-rabs*) enable geographers to understand contemporary geographical patterns. They are like the *Janapada* and *Mahajarapada* of the northern Indian rulers containing the territorial extent of the country, place names, statistical and quasi-statistical materials which are of a sufficient geographical quality. Giving them a geographical treatment would yield interesting and valuable results. *Gyalraps* (*rgyal-rabs*) are written in Ladakhi and therefore to trace the historical material of Ladakh one has to acquire a deep understanding of the Ladakhi language. A number of chronicles of Ladakh (original manuscripts) were edited, translated and annotated by A.H. Francke in the *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, part II: *The chronicles of Ladakh and minor chronicles*, Archaeological survey of India, New Imperial Series, Vol. 50 (Calcutta, 1926). These manuscripts were also described by Dr. Karl Marx in the *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. 60 (1891), Vol. 63 (1894) and vol. 71 (1902). A systematic search for such material documents was made by S.S. Gergan and his father Joseph Gergan.

### TRAVEL ACCOUNTS.

Ladakh has fascinated many travellers from far-off lands since ancient times. The travel accounts of the great Chinese travellers Fa-hsien and Hsüang-tsang<sup>2</sup> are noted for their historical and geographical acumen. Fa-hsien, who visited Ladakh in 400 A.D. mentions Ladakh in his diary as Kie-Cha. Analysis of the duration and direction of roads, flora and fauna, hazards of passes, mountains and deserts, etc. would be of the highest value for the study of the ancient geography of Ladakh. Numerous Tibetan scholars who studied in Indian universities, such as Rinchen Zangpo (Rin-chen bZang-po), contributed much in changing the cultural history of Ladakh. Rinchen Zangpo (Rin-chen bZang-po) built 108 monasteries and 108 *chorten* with the help of 32 Kashmiri artists. The detailed study of these monasteries and their locations has yet to be taken up. Mirza Hyder Tughlak, who invaded Ladakh in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in his accounts *Tarikhi Rashidi* has given vivid description of Ladakh's topography, ancient trade routes, spaces relations and settlement patterns. The most important scholars, who explored the whole region in later centuries are Desideri, Moorcroft and Drew. Alexander Cunningham of the British East India Company visited Ladakh in 1846. A standard book, *Ladak*, by him was published in 1854. He was one of the first Europeans to have conducted a geographical survey of Ladakh. His book is of great importance, furnishing a great deal of systematic information concerning the geography, topography, meteorology and economy of the whole region. Drew (1875) and Johnson are other geographers to have given intensive accounts of their geographical surveys and their statistical information seems to be quite reliable. The *Gazetteer of Ladakh* published by the Imperial Gazetteer of India and the census published by the British India government as well as the atlas brought out by them would be useful source material for the geographers to analyze the contemporary spatial phenomena. The Maharaja of Kashmir during his rule over Ladakh maintained revenue records, trade agreements and boundary treaties which are highly valuable for geographers.

### VILLAGE RECORDS

The local administration or government of villages is in the hands of village headmen known as *goba* ('go-pa) or *mispon* (mi-dpon) or *tronspoon* (grons-dpon). The *goba*'s prime function is to collect revenue or *baps* ('babs) from villagers. Information relating to land and household is maintained by the village. The *goba* also performs judicial functions and information concerning crime, land disputes, family disputes, settlements with regard to water sharing are kept by the *goba* of a village. Such agreements are found in written form with the *goba* and are known as *kamgya* (bka'-gya) meaning "agreement", and *chatdon* (mchad-mdon) meaning "terms of agreement". There are other records available with the *goba* for various incidents which might have occurred in a specific village. The analysis of these written documents in a scientific manner with the help of geographical tools would give interesting results.

Another important component of the Ladakhi village is the monastery or *gonpa* (dgon-pa). These *gonpa* are based on a hierarchical system, and have their lower level of units in all the villages of Ladakh. The village *gonpa* functions at the

lower level and is linked with that central institution. The *gonpa* serves not only as a religious institution but also as a centre of economic, political, social and cultural activities. Each family or *trongpa* (*grong-pa*) is affiliated to a *gonpa* (known as *cindak*; *sbyin-bdag*) either with the *gonpa* of the same village or another *gonpa* outside the village, depending on what sect the family belongs to. Generally a monastery has its *cindak* in the nearby villages. For example, in the case of Spituk *gonpa* most of its *cindak* are in Spituk, Leh, Stok, Sabu, Phyang, Rumbak, etc. which are not far away from the *gonpa*; but in the case of Hemis *gonpa*, its *cindak* are spread all over Ladakh. Beside the records kept for religious matters, they maintain records of the offerings made to them by their *cindak*. Such offerings are generally lands, ornaments, grains and other valuable material. These records are written on cloth and mention the location of land, its size and shape. Written documents for rent collected from the tenants of the monasteries are also maintained. These monasteries in Ladakh have kept all such information about the villages, which come under their sway, and it would be an interesting and valuable task to give them a geographical analysis.

Most of the biggest monasteries in Ladakh have maintained eulogies for the laying of foundations or the consecration of *gonpa* and *chorten*. These eulogies are inscribed on the stucco surface of the walls of the assembly halls. Much more information regarding the *gonpa* is contained on inscriptions on the walls of the *gonpa*.

All Ladakhi families maintain records known as *reltho* ('breltho) which contains detailed information of gifts given by the villagers on various occasions like the birth of a child, a wedding, the death of a person and other religious and cultural functions. The family *reltho* provides information such as:

- the total number of families attending a particular function;
- the names of the families attending a function;
- the names of the village each family comes from;
- the nature and amount of gift given on each particular occasion.

These gifts are generally given in cash, clothes, bread, grain, alcohol or *chang* (*chang*). Collection of these *reltho* ('breltho) would provide useful source material for the historical geographer to analyze the socio-economic conditions of historical Ladakh. *Reltho* are still maintained by each family in Ladakh, including non-Buddhist families. So far no attempt has been made to work through this material, which would provide abundant information for geographers, anthropologists and sociologists.

### FOLKLORE AND FOLK SONGS.

Folklore and folk songs are important elements pertaining to the social and cultural activities of the Ladakhi population. Different songs give details of past geography. These folk songs and historical songs are generally related to particular occasions and activities. For example *garu* (*mgar-glu*) is a song by *beda* in the sowing season. *Garu* songs describe the general topography, geographical features, vegetation type, soil conditions, etc. Folk songs also describe the material culture prevailing in the past. The non-mongoloid tribes, the Dards, who settled in Ladakh before the Mongoloid race, sing

the songs of their colonization of Ladakh. These songs are sung at the time of their festival known as *bonana* (*bo-na-na*). Francke translated a number of Ladakhi historical songs including the 18 songs of the *bonana* festival of the Dards in the periodical *Indian Antiquary*. Recently Tashi Rabgyas (bKra-shis Rab-rgyas) also edited a song book, which contains 128 Ladakhi folk songs. Much interesting information can be found in these songs.

### LOCAL FAMILY NAMES

Another source material from which early Ladakhi social characteristics could be indirectly understood are local family names. These names are mostly based on the nature of the occupation of a particular family. A family's social position and status was related to the kind of occupation it performed. Ladakhi society had three broad social stratification's:

**rigzang** (*rigs-bzang*) higher; **2. rigman** (*rigs-dman*) general; **3. Rigngan** (*rigs-ngan*) lower.

Within this division of society there are further sub-divisions depending upon the nature of the work they had to perform at the time when local kings ruled Ladakh. For example *rigzang* include the family names: *kalthon* (*bka'-blon*); *lhonpo* (*blon-po*); *nangso* (*nang-bsd*); *kharpon* (*mkhar-dpon*); *tronspon* (*grong-dpon*); *shakspen* (*shags-dpon*); *togoche* (*to-goché*); *caksi* (*byag-shi*); *rigman* also known as *trongpa* (*grong-pa*) has further two subdivision: *trongchen* (*grong-chen*) bigger household and *trongchung* (*grong-chung*) general/ordinary household.

There are some families whose names are based on occupation such as:

*tshaskan* (*tshas-mkhan*) gardener; *thaskan* (*thags-mkan*) weaver; *lharje* (*lha-rje*) physician; *onpo* (*dbon-po*) astrologer; *khirji* (*khyi-brdzi*) cowherd; *starje* (*rta-brdzi*) horseman.

*Rigngan* constitute the families whose prime occupations were musicians and blacksmith such as:

*Gara* (*mgar-ba*) blacksmith; *mon* (*mon*) musician; *beda* (*bhe-da*) also written *bhe-da*) dwellers.

There are also local names for the families who had been outsiders and later settled in a village: they are generally called *chaktsukpa* (*chags-tshus-pa*). Thus, in writing the historical geography of Ladakh, the local names would also serve as source material.

The theories put forth about Ladakh so far have been based on limited observations: ethnographic, linguistic, etc. but there is abundant scope for historians, anthropologists, sociologists, archaeologists and geographers to explore sources which are lying untapped or partially tapped. In conclusion I would say that there is enough source material at the disposal of researchers for a rational assessment or reconstruction of the past geography of Ladakh.

### NOTES

1 *Pungpa* sometimes pronounced *pumpa*, written *pun-pa*, *phun-pa* sometimes *bum-pa*: small pot. *Pungpa* are found in the *lhatho* (altars for *lha*) and *lhubang* (*klu-khang* or *lhu-bang* houses for *lhu*; *klu*).

2 Petech's orthography. Both Francke and Petech say they didn't visit Ladakh and that Kie-Cha is Kashgar (information John Bray).

**RESUME** : Cet article n'expose pas le résultat d'une recherche. Il s'agit au contraire de dresser un programme de recherche. L'auteur a voulu avant tout établir la liste des matériaux utilisables par l'historien ou par le géographe qui se place dans une perspective historique. Certains de ces matériaux sont connus et déjà exploités, comme les récits de voyageurs; d'autres sont connus mais pas ou peu exploités; d'autres enfin sont inconnus; plus exactement, leur existence est connue, mais ils n'ont pas été systématiquement relevés. Tel est le cas des listes de présents faits à l'occasion des mariages, des naissances et des décès, tel est aussi le cas des accords signés sous la férule des chefs de village. De tels documents devraient être systématiquement relevés avant d'être soigneusement étudiés. Pour le moment ils croupissent au fond de coffres dans les maisons.

**ABSTRACT**: This paper is not the result of research already carried out but rather a programme for future research. The author gives a detailed list of sources which could be used by historians and historical geographers. Some of these sources, such as travel accounts, are well-known and have already been exploited. Others are scarcely known at all, or rather their existence is known but they have never been systematically analysed. Such is the case with the lists of gifts presented on the occasion of birth ceremonies, marriages and funerals. The same applies to agreements signed under the authority of village headmen. All these papers are still rotting at the bottom of trunks in people's houses, waiting for scholars to analyse them.

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**: Dieser Artikel basiert nicht auf originären Forschungsdaten, sondern will künftige Projekte anregen. Der Autor listet detailliert verschiedene Quellen auf, die sowohl von Historikern als auch von historisch interessierten Geographen bearbeitet werden können. Einige dieser Materialien wurden bereits untersucht, wie zum Beispiel die Reiseberichte. Andere wiederum bleiben auch heute noch weitgehend unbeachtet, und eine dritte Gruppe wird völlig ignoriert. Wir wissen zwar von ihrer Existenz, aber sie wurde noch nicht aufbereitet. Es handelt sich um Listen, in die anlässlich einer Geburt, einer Hochzeit oder eines Todesfalles die überbrachten Geschenke eingetragen wurden, oder um Verträge, die unter Aufsicht des Dorfoberhauptes abgeschlossen wurden.