LADAKH AND ITS NEIGHBOURS: PAST AND PRESENT

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Ladakh occupies an important geographic and strategic position, bordering on Tibet in the east, Xinjiang in the north, Baltistan (now part of Pakistan) in the north-west, Kashmir and Doda district in the west, and Himachal Pradesh and Punjab to the south. Ladakh was an important part of the Central Asian cultural and economic sphere. Traders brought information from their respective regions, and Leh bazaar was an important listening post for government officials seeking to monitor Central Asian political developments. R.L. Kennion, a British Joint Commissioner in Ladakh at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, remarked: "What Port Said is to the Suez Canal, Leh is to the Central Asian Trade road."

Ladakh's strategic importance has given it both advantages and disadvantages. Its people depended for many things on their neighbours. Whenever trade was disrupted on account of disturbances in neighbouring states, shortages occurred in Ladakh, and this led to hardship. Ladakh was frequently a victim of invasions from its powerful neighbours. At the same time, neighbouring regions—particularly Tibet—have had a paramount impact on the culture, mode of living, literature, religion and language of the region. Meanwhile, Ladakh itself served as a conduit for the diffusion of Buddhism from India into Central Asia and China. It introduced musical instruments—such as the use of the oboe and the kettle drum—to Tibet. It served as a channel to carry Buddhist art from India to Central Asia and other centres on the silk routes.

Early history

From the 7th to the 9th centuries AD, the regions neighbouring Ladakh were an arena of struggle and conflict. Ladakh's geographical position and its ancient caravan routes often served as a path first for conquest and then for the retreat of opposing armies as they alternated between

victory and defeat. Whenever there was a weak king on the throne of Ladakh, the petty chiefs of neighbouring principalities such as Kulu, Padar (Kishtiwar), Chamba and Kinnaur, launched plundering raids into Ladakhi border areas.

At the beginning of the 9th century, the power struggle ended. Central Asia fell to the Arabs and Uighurs, serving as a buffer zone between China and Tibet. Western Tibet and Ladakh broke into small principalities. Tibet fell prey to internal strife and its monarchy came to an end. Upper Ladakh was then ruled by the Gyapa Cho, while Lower Ladakh was divided into small chiefdoms, with the Dard chief Cho Broqdor Skyabs as the most prominent ruler.

At the invitation of the Gyapa Cho, Skid-de Nimagon—a prince of the royal lineage of Central Tibet—reached Ladakh with 100 horsemen. He chose Shey as his capital, and extended his kingdom from Lo Manthang (Mustang) to the border of Kashmir. Later, he divided his kingdom among his three sons: Ladakh was one of the three provinces of Ngari Korsum (*mNga'-ri-skor-gsum*).

Invasions from Kashmir and Central Asia

The descendants of Skid-de Nimagon were subject to repeated invasions from Turkestan and Kashmir. In the 15th century a Turki chief Ababakar launched a plundering raid, and this was followed by an assault by the Mongol chief Ma-yazid. During the 15th century, Ladakh also suffered from the plundering expeditions of Sultan Sikandar, Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin and Hassan Khan of Kashmir. The invasion by Sultan Sayeed and his general Mirza Haidar Dughlat, who entered the country from the north in the 16th century, is well known.

According to the Ladakh chronicle, King Tashi Namgyal inflicted a crushing defeat on a force of Turks, and the bodies of the slain invaders were buried beneath the images of the deities of Tsemo Gompa above Leh.

In 1647, during the reign of King Deldan Namgyal, a force of Turks led by Babak Beg and Sara Beg came close to Leh, and fierce fighting took place in Chushhot, resulting in heavy casualties. Stagtshang Raspa, the first head lama of Hemis monastery, intervened and the resulting negotiation led to the withdrawal of the Turks.

Ladakhi rulers never dared to invade Kashmir or Central Asia. Once King Tsewang Namgyal did plan to launch an attack on Turkestan, but dropped this idea at the request of the people of Nubra.

Ladakh and Western Tibet

The rulers of Guge (Western Tibet) had close relations with Ladakh from the 10th century onwards. In 1399, Namgyal Dey (1372-1424), the energetic ruler of Guge, quelled a revolt in Ladakh, and restored the government of Ladakhi King Chhetan Dey.

Some rulers of Ladakh nursed expansionist designs towards their neighbours. Lhachen Otpal (1080-1110) was the most powerful ruler in the Western Himalaya in his day. His kingdom included: Western Tibet, Ladakh, almost the whole of Baltistan, and Lo Manthang, which is now part of Nepal. He invaded Nyungti (Kulu), and forced the inhabitants to agree to pay tribute until the glaciers of Mount Kailash were melted and Lake Manasarowar dried up. However, his extensive kingdom did not last.

King Tashi Namgyal brought Guge into his possession. His successor Tsewang Tamgyal (1153-1175) extended his kingdom from the Mayum pass in the east to beyond Gilgit in the west. After his death, his empire disintegrated.

King Sengge Namgyal (1616-1642) embarked on an expansionist policy, and re-established Ladakh as a powerful state. Ladakh's frontiers incorporated Western Tibet and extended as far as the borders of Tsang in Western Tibet. However, he could not make any advance toward the west, where his father Jamyang Namgyal had lost Purig to the Baltis. The Mughals loomed large on the horizon of Ladakhi politics. The Mughals called Ladakh *Tibet-i-Kalan* (Great Tibet), while Baltistan was known as *Tibet-i-Khurd* or 'Little Tibet'. A daughter of the Balti ruler Ali Sher Khan was married to Jahangir, the Mughal prince**.** The Baltis were very proud of this relationship.

Sengge Namgyal did not accept the suzerainty of the Mughals but his successor Deldan Namgyal did so. Deldan sent an army to Purig, and restored it to the Ladakh dominion. The chiefs of Baltistan complained to the Mughal governor of Kashmir, but the latter gave no effective response, and Purig remained under the control of the rulers of Ladakh. Deldan Namgyal enjoyed paramountcy over Western

Tibet, Spiti, Upper Kinnaur and Lahul in addition to present-day Ladakh.

The Mughals played a balancing role between Baltistan and Ladakh. The Mughal rulers wanted an uninterrupted flow of pashmina to Kashmir where fine shawls were woven from it. Only the Emperor Aurangzeb wanted to see the propagation of Islam in the region. The Mughal Emperors sent decrees to Ladakhi rulers to be loyal, and conferred the robe of honour and title. This practice continued until the rule of Muhammad Shah in the mid-18th century, by which time the Mughal dynasty was on the verge of collapse.

In 1674 Deldan Namgyal captured Chorbat and Khapalu in Baltistan. This was an impingement on the policy of the Mughals. The Mughal governor of Kashmir intervened, and the invading force retreated. As Ladakh was a vassal of the Mughal Empire, Ladakhi rulers had taken Khapalu under their protection, perhaps without any written treaty. Ladakh intervened whenever the security of Khapalu or any other petty principality in Baltistan was threatened. Between 1723 and 1811, Ladakh sent its forces to Baltistan five times on the request of the chiefs of Khapalu and Shigar in the wake of the aggression from Skardu and other Balti chiefdoms. Militarily, Ladakh had an upper hand over Baltistan in these struggles.

The consequences of the Ladakh-Tibet-Mughal war

Ladakh had to pay a high price for the Ladakh-Tibet-Mughal war of 1681-84. The background to the war is that the Ladakhi kings were followers of the Drugpa Kagyu school, and were allies of the Bhutanese rulers who supported the same sect. On the other hand, the Gelugpa were the dominant sect in Tibet. Some differences had arisen between Lhasa and Leh during the reign of Deldan Namgyal, when both sides accused the other of discriminating against other sects. Delegs Namgyal wrote to Lhasa saying that in the event of war, Ladakh would side with Bhutan. The Lhasa government sent an army to Ladakh, and the king had to retreat to Temisgam. The Ladakhi forces made a stand at Basgo. Delegs did not seek help from the Mughals for almost three years, possibly because he was afraid that the Mughals would impose hard conditions, but ultimately did so. The Tibetan aggressors retreated, but the Mughal army did not advance

beyond what is now the traditional border. The Mughal commanders extracted a heavy indemnity from Tibet and the Raja of Bashahr who had helped Tibet in this war. Ladakh had to cede vast territories, losing what is now Western Tibet to the Lhasa government, while Kinnaur came under the possession of Bashahr. The Mughals gave upper Lahul to Raja Bidhi Singh of Kulu, who had assisted them. Ladakh received the village of Nilagrat on the Kashmir side of the Zoji-la from the Mughals.

Delegs Namgyal, who had now been given the title Aqbat Mahmud Khan by the Mughal governor of Kashmir, was drifting towards Muslim Kashmir. The 5th Dalai Lama had passed away, and the regent Sangye Gyatso was worried about this new development. He consulted Mipham Wangbo, the 6th Dugchen Rinpoche, who had great influence with the royal family of Ladakh, and requested him to proceed to Ladakh to mediate.

Dugchen Rinpoche proceeded to Ladakh in the winter of 1683-1684 and met Delegs at Temisgam. He told Delegs that Ladakh was a Buddhist country whereas Kashmir was a non-Buddhist country. The religions were different and incompatible with one another. The dispute between Ladakh and Tibet was a thing of the past: both sides should forget it. He advised the king not to invite a foreign army to Ladakh for its protection in future.

Thereafter, Ladakh became closer to Tibet. More exchanges of religious, political and commercial delegations took place. More members of the Ladakhi royal family frequented Tibet, and the Dalai Lama gave them audience at his palace. Many were ordained as monks. The Ladakhi kings turned to Lhasa to seek mediation in their disputes.

Ladakh's relations with Tibet did not have any adverse impact on its ties with Bhutan. In 1683, King Delegs Namgyal sent Nawang Paljor to serve the ruler of Bhutan, and he rose to become the governor of Paro. Later, at the request of King Nima Namgyal, the Bhutanese scholar Jamgon Ngawang Gyaltsen (1647-1732) came to Ladakh, and served as chaplain to the royal court.

Ladakh's relations with China and Central Asia

During the 18th century, the Ch'ing emperor of China cultivated friendship with Ladakh. Ladakh's geographical location meant that it was able to provide China with accurate information on the activities of the Sokpo (Dzungar Mongols) and Uighurs in Tibet and Turkestan. Ladakhi pilgrims and traders travelled to Tibet and Xinjiang without any restriction, and had access to the Chinese Ambans (residents) in Lhasa and Kashgar.

Around 1720 the Dzungar Mongols occupied Tibet, and China sought information from the Ladakhi rulers. King Nima Namgyal sent a diplomatic mission led by Nono Lobzang Nima to Mongolia (Sok-yul) to assess the situation, and this was followed by a mission to Beijing via Lhasa, which provided vital information. Similar missions were sent in 1737, 1738 and 1743 with information which was valuable for China. The Emperor sent gifts as a sign of appreciation. In 1821, the British traveller William Moorcroft saw a letter from the Emperor of China giving a list of the gifts sent to Ladakh, and these included agate, jasper, lapis lazuli and silk.

The Mongol ruler wished to bring Ladakh under his influence, but China was not prepared to allow this move since it would have given the latter a valuable base for operations against Tibet as well as Central Asia. On the other hand, Ladakhi rulers were keen to maintain friendly relations with China while maintaining uninterrupted trade with Central Asia and West Tibet.

The Chinese Emperor Sohang De in a letter addressed to King Deskyong Namgyal advised him to continue to help his representative Pali Folad just as the King's father Nima Namgyal had co-operated with his representative Kanchan. The letter refers to the conferring of a robe of honour and a certificate to the king of Ladakh for his service.

In 1759, the Chinese quelled a rebellion at Kashgar and Yarkand. The Chinese commander feared that the rebel leaders Burhan-ud-din and Khowja Jahan would flee to Ladakh and planned to send a military contingent to Leh. Later it was confirmed that the rebel leaders had fled to Badakshan and had been murdered. The king of Ladakh sent Tashi Gyatso as an envoy to the Sanju region to congratulate the Chinese government for its successful operation.

Tashi Gyatso requested the Chinese officials to continue trade traffic to Ladakh as usual.

Tsepel Tondup Namgyal, the last independent king of Ladakh, gave refuge to a fugitive prince Abdul Sattar Adijan of Kokand, who had helped Jahangir—a scion of the old Khowja family—in an abortive attempt to regain ancestral rule at Kashgar. Later, at the suggestion of a noble from Nubra, the king handed over the fugitive and his followers to the Chinese Resident in Lhasa, where he was executed along with his followers.

In the mid-19th century, the Uighurs revolted against Chinese rule in Xinjiang and Yakub Beg came to power. The Chinese Emperor sent a letter to the Dogra governor in Leh requesting him to inform the Chinese Resident in Lhasa about the movements of Yakub Beg's army. It is not known whether the letter was answered or not, but both the British government in India and Maharajah Ranbir Singh of Jammu & Kashmir were keen to strengthen political and commercial relations with Yakub Beg.

William Moorcroft's visit to Ladakh in 1820-1822 gave rise to tension in the region. The Prime Minister Tsewang Tondup told Moorcroft that he had received cautionary letters from Gartok, and an officer from Lhasa had come there to enquire what was meant by the visit of Europeans to the frontier. The Sikh governor of Kashmir also had intimated that Ranjit Singh would take offence if he gave encouragement to Moorcroft and his party. Skardo chief Ahmed Shah had written to enquire who and what these European travellers were. Bashahr also had written to the Kalon. The Prime Minister told Moorcroft that those reports had very much shaken his confidence. Then Khowja Shah Niyaz argued that Ladakh was an independent country, and that it was dependent neither upon Lhasa nor Lahore. The Khowja was a descendant of the Mughal Emperor Babur: his estates in Kashmir had been confiscated after Ranjit Singh's conquest of Kashmir, and he had taken refuge in Ladakh.

According to Ladakhi sources, Ladakhi rulers derived advantage from Ladakh's strategic position. They gave false reports of the Tibetan threat to the Mughal governor of Kashmir, and at the same time raised the bogey of the threat from Kashmir with the Tibetan government with the assurance that, while it could cope for the time

being, it would approach it to seek help if needed. Ladakhi leaders have sometimes adopted a similar strategy to press their demands in the period since 1947.

Dogra rule

In the 1830s Ladakh faced a new enemy, different from past invaders. This was the Dogra force of Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu, led by General Zorawar Singh. In the past, invaders had withdrawn with their plunder: the Dogras came to take possession of Ladakh permanently. They had cannons, a weapon never seen by Ladakhis in earlier wars. The Dogra forces were well-trained and better-equipped than the Ladakhis. Skardu ruler Ahmed Shan was the first to anticipate the threat of the Dogras and Ranjit Singh. The Ladakhi government initially was reluctant to come under the protection of the East India Company. Ladakh feared Ahmed Shah more, and requested the envoy of Ranjit Singh to extend his help in the wake of the Balti invasion.

Once the Dogras invaded Ladakh, the king desperately sought the intervention of the British. Ladakhi envoys approached British political agents in Simla and Ludhiana as well as Sir Henry Fane, the British commander-in-chief. However, the Ladakhis were not aware of the 1809 Anglo-Sikh agreement whereby Ranjit Singh had liberty to extend his territory across the east and west of the river Sutlej.

The Ladakhis also sent diplomatic missions to Nepal and Tibet to seek help. Nepal was obsessed by its own problems recovering territory lost to the British Indian government and wanted to take advantage of the situation in Ladakh. The Nepalese government informed the Chinese Resident in Lhasa about the Ladakh mission and indicated its willingness to send troops to the area provided that the Chinese government sanctioned the measure. However, the Chinese Resident stated that the Chinese government had no title or purpose to interfere with Ladakh politics, and the Nepali Durbar would do well to confine itself to its established range of authority.

When Zorawar Singh invaded Baltistan, the deposed King Tsepel Tondup Namgyal was the most worried man in Ladakh. He believed that the independence and survival of Ladakh depended on the independence and survival of Baltistan.

In 1846 under the Treaty of Amritsar, the British government annexed Spiti into the Indian empire.

From the mid-19th century to the second decade of the 20th century, a period of about 70 years, Ladakh and the neighbouring regions were once again an arena of political struggle between British India, China and Russia. This was the result of British fears of Russia's expansionist policy. The repercussions of the so-called 'Great Game' were heard in London, St Petersburg, Paris and other European capitals. Gilgit and, to a lesser extent, Ladakh were considered potential entry points for Russian advancement into the Indian sub-continent, and there were moments when Russia and British India appeared to be on the brink of war.

British policy in Ladakh was largely determined by strategic considerations. General Robert, the British commander-in-chief in India toured Kashmir and exchanged views with the Maharajah's government to help him organise his force on modern lines, and provided military advisors.

The Dogra ruler Maharaja Ranbir Singh secretly pursued a forward policy. He exchanged secret correspondence with the Russian government via the Russian governor of Tashkent to intrigue against the British government. Ladakhis were spectators of the whole episode.

Yakub Beg came to power in Turkestan in the 1860s after a successful revolt. The British government wanted to see Turkestan as a buffer state between China and India. It entered into a political and trade agreement with him. However, Yakub Beg's successor lost control of Turkestan and China re-established its authority. The British government maintained its relations with the Chinese government, and the British Consul-General in Kashgar monitored the political situation in addition to looking after the interests of trade and traders.

Independent India

In August 1947, Ladakh became part of independent India. After three years in 1950, the People's Republic of China brought Tibet and Xinjiang under its control, and the age-old trade relations between

Ladakh and Central Asia terminated. Trade with Tibet came to an end in 1960.

The British government did not see any threat to the security of India from China. History has proved it wrong. Communist China unilaterally seized a big chunk of Aksai Chin in the north-east of Ladakh and constructed a 100-mile road linking Yehching in Xinjiang with Gartok, the old summer capital of West Tibet.

The severance of relations with Tibet was a great setback, particularly to the Buddhists of Ladakh. In May 1949, the Young Men's Buddhist Association submitted a memorandum submitted to Indian Prime Minister Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru as follows:

> Tibet is a cultural daughter of India. We seek the bosom of that gracious mother to receive more nutriment for growth to our full stature in every way. She has given us what we prize above all other things—our religion and our culture—and it is the experience of having been the recipients of such precious gifts, which encourages us to ask for more.

The political situation in Ladakh was uncertain and fluid for a couple of years after independence. In 1949 Kalon Tsewang Rigzin, the President of the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA), indicated to Gopal Swami Ayyangar, the Acting Minister for External Affairs, that Ladakh was prepared to merge with Tibet if India did not keep Jammu & Kashmir.

Memories of Tibet

The Ladakhi leader Kushok Bakula also hinted that Ladakh would seek to join Tibet if J&K were alienated from India. At a later date, when the situation had become more stable, Kushok Bakula told the *Times of India* 'Whatever be the result of the Kashmir plebiscite, Ladakh would go with India rather than merge with Tibet.'

The Muslims of Ladakh also have some nostalgic feelings for Tibet. Seven Muslim families had houses at Rudok in West Tibet. One of these families led the triennial Lopchak (*lo-phyag*) mission from Ladakh to Lhasa for many years. Haji Ghulam Mohammed, a Ladakhi Muslim belonging to this family who had settled in Lhasa, led a five-member committee of Ladakhi and Kashmiri Muslims settled at Lhasa and Shigatse. This committee was given the authority to resolve differences within the Muslim community in a document of the 5th

Dalai Lama. Austin Waddell referred to this committee in his book *Lhasa and its Mysteries* (1905) when he wrote:

> An aged, gentle and good-humoured Ladakhi Muslim chaired the committee. He has got powers of an honorary magistrate to settle criminal and other cases of his co-religionists.

Ladakh no longer has direct cultural and religious links with Tibet. However, Ladakhi Buddhists continue to derive strength and enlightenment from the supreme religious heads of different orders, who are now in India and Nepal. Apart from the 14th Dalai Lama, the heads of other Buddhist schools—such as the 12th Dugpa Rinpoche, the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa, the Sakya Gongma and Zhabdung Ngawang Namgyal of the southern Drukpa Kagyu school—have all graced Ladakh with their presence and delivered sermons to devotees. In the past 1,000 years none of these leaders' predecessors visited Ladakh apart from the 6th, 7th and 8th Drukpa Rinpoches.

There is no doubt that Tibet has made material progress since 1950, and many Ladakhis say that it has changed beyond recognition. A new modern town known as Shiquanhe has sprung up in West Tibet on the banks of the river Indus, not far from the Ladakhi border. This is now the capital of the region. I heard that Tibetans call Shiquanhe 'Singge tong' or 'Indus town'. Nevertheless, all Ladakhis are immensely disillusioned by Chinese migration, which is causing demographic change in Tibet, and by human rights violations and the Chinese government's continued antipathy towards the Dalai Lama, and its rejection of his offer of talks.

Bhutan

Ladakh's close relations with Bhutan no longer exist in their old form. Bhutan represents Lo Druk, the Southern School of the Drukpa Kagyu sect. Stagna is the only main monastery affiliated to this school. On the invitation of the head lama of this gompa, Zhabdung Ngawang Namgyal, the head of the southern school of the Drukpa Kagyu sect visited Leh, Stakna and Zanskar.

In 1996 a large Ladakhi delegation comprising political leaders and teachers undertook a cultural tour to Bhutan. Mentioning age-old relations between Ladakh and Bhutan, a minister of the Bhutanese government told the delegation that in the 17th century a Bhutanese

force led by Ladakhi commander Stanzin Namgyal inflicted a crushing defeat on an invading force of central Tibet. He was the younger brother of King Singge Namgyal of Ladakh.

Baltistan

Baltistan is one of Ladakh's closest neighbours, and has been under the control of Pakistan since 1948. The two regions 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. Some historians write that polo was introduced in Ladakh by the Baltis. The Balti *ghazal* is popular in Ladakh and has influenced Ladakhi poetry.

Baltis were poorer than Ladakhis in the pre-independence period. Now their economic conditions have considerably improved. An all-weather road links Baltistan with the Karakoram Highway. Thousands of Baltis work in various cities of Pakistan and in the Gulf States, and their remittances have helped boost the local economy.

As in Ladakh, a development council known as the Northern Areas Advisory Council functions in Baltistan and the other parts of Pakistan's Northern Areas, and this has been empowered to identify and fund development schemes. However, Baltis and other inhabitants of the Northern Areas have no right to vote in Pakistan's National Assembly, and there is no Provincial Assembly in the region. There is deep resentment among the people because of the denial of these fundamental rights. In the 1990s Balti students studying in different colleges and universities of Pakistan launched a protest movement known as the Ladakh Baltistan United Front.

An influential section of literary Baltis lament the loss of their old culture. These Baltis are in search of their roots and work for the restoration of the old Tibetan script and language. In 1995 I met some of these Balti scholars at a conference in Islamabad. They asked Nawang Tsering Shakspo and myself to send a Bodhi teacher from Ladakh to teach the old script. This was not possible in the current context of India/Pakistan relations. Now, I understand that they have managed to invite two Tibetan teachers through the Chinese embassy in Islamabad. The Baltis are keen to establish contacts with the Tibetan-speaking peoples of the Himalayas, and there are many

people in Ladakh who are curious to know about people living across the Line of Control in Baltistan.

Kashmir

Before the Tibetanisation of Ladakh, the region had close religious, cultural and trade relations with Kashmir. The Zoji-la pass played a key role for conveyance of diverse ideologies to Ladakh, Tibet and Central Asia. The Brahmi, Kharoshti and Sarda scripts came to Ladakh from Kashmir. Students from Ngari Korsum or Greater Ladakh went to Buddhist Kashmir to learn Sanskrit and study religious texts.

With the advent of Islam in Kashmir, Muslim scholars and preachers came to Ladakh. The chiefs of Purig invited scholars from Kashmir to impart religious education to their children. Kashmir introduced Central Asian dishes to Ladakh, and it has given some popular commonly used words to colloquial Ladakhi.

Since the early 1990s the Kashmir Valley and some districts in the Jammu region have been in the grip of militancy. Half the population of Ladakh want separation from Kashmir and demand Union Territory Status. The other half suggest otherwise. The demand for separation of Ladakh from Kashmir is very old. In 1947, Ladakhi Buddhists through the Praja Sabha appealed to J&K ruler Maharaja Hari Singh either to rule the Ladakh region directly, or to annexe it with the Hindu majority area of Jammu and form a separate province. Alternatively, Ladakh should be allowed to join East Punjab.

Central Asia

Leh was an important centre of Central Asia for centuries. Caravans reached Leh from different parts of Russian and Chinese Central Asia and bartered their goods with Punjabi, Kashmiri and Himachali merchants. There are Turkish words in spoken Ladakhi, and these testify to the old ties between Ladakh and Turkestan. *Momo* meat dumplings, the favourite dish of Ladakh, came from Central Asia. Ladakhi art, costume and culture were partly influenced by Central Asia.

There may be more than a dozen families of Central Asian origin. Some of their relatives came to Ladakh in recent years to see their kith and kin. One of their descendants went to Xinjiang to meet

his relatives in 1999. Xinjiang has changed considerably. There is freedom of religion, and people practise the old Sufi Islam. He saw veiled women and some beggars in the streets of Kashgar and Yarkand. The problem of unemployment has not been totally solved. Tourists as well as locals are subjected to occasional passport and identity card checks. A tourist has to surrender his or her passport with the administration in Xinjiang when he moves from one place to another. There are old caravan travellers who recall their journey to Ladakh with some feeling of nostalgia. They praise Ladakhis for their honesty and simplicity.

Lahul and Spiti

Spiti and Upper Lahul were parts of the old independent Ladakh, and are now part of Himachal Pradesh. Ladakhi is spoken in both Spiti and upper Lahul. Spiti and Ladakh have an identical mountain desert landscape, climate, culture and history. Spiti has retained Ladakhi culture, whereas Lahul has partly been influenced by Hindu culture.

Spiti was opened to tourists in 1993. Since then tourists, scholars and mountaineers have travelled to the area. Many hotels, guest-houses and restaurants have sprouted up all around. Modern facilities are available, and many young people wear jeans and jackets. The economic conditions of the people have improved.

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