

Political History of Ladakh (Pre 9th to 12th CE)

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Abstract

Ladakh is the Northern most division of Indian Union which falls in Jammu and Kashmir state. Generally the recorded history of Ladakh begins with the coming of Tibetans to Ladakh in the late 9th CE. This paper is an attempt to string together the Pre 9th political history and the post 9th political history of Ladakh till 12th CE. For this purpose folk lore and oral traditions have been employed as well in order to logically fill the lacunae in the pre 9th CE history of Ladakh. This paper also provides a geographical glimpse of Ladakh.

Keywords: Ladakh, Geographical, Political, Chronicle, Tibet, Ladakhi Kingdom.

Introduction

Ladakh is known by various names like Mar-yul¹ (The Red land), La-tags², Land of Lamas and the Moon city³ etc. In fact Ladakh has been named by many people on the basis of their first glimpse of the land. The multinomial nature of Ladakh depicts its versatility in the geo-ethnic milieu of the world itself. Speaking in terms of geography, Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir state can be divided into seven parts, lower (*Sham*), Upper (*tod*), Central (*Zhang*), Nubra, Chang-thang, Purig and Zaskar. But in typical geographical terms the whole region can be divided into three major sub geographical regions. These are Upper Ladakh, Central and Lower Ladakh (*Sham*). In addition to their physical distinction, these sub regions have a religious peculiarity as well in the present era. The Upper and Central Ladakh has a majority of Buddhists whereas the Lower Ladakh is inhabited by Muslims. By Muslims both Shiite and Sunni sects of Islam are meant here. A detailed description of the major geographical divisions is as under:

1. The Upper Ladakh:

Upper Ladakh is comprised of northernmost part of the Ladakh region that shares its border with China and is a sensitive zone prone to Chinese interference as seen in recent past.⁴ This region mainly contains the vast stretches of wasteland. Green oases can also be spotted due to presence of two rivers Shyok and Indus in this belt. This region of Ladakh has further three main geographical zones which are Nubra Valley, bounded on North by Karokoram, the gigantic range spanning the borders between present day Pakistan, India and China. On the east it is bound by Kailash (the crystal)⁵ range, an important place in the Hindu Pantheon as it abodes the Lord Shiva, the destroyer of ignorance and illusion. This valley is mainly irrigated by the waters of Shyok. Similar in elevation to the Tibetan Plateau with an elevation of around 3000 meters⁶. Due to fertility and availability of irrigating agents, Shyok and its tributaries near the river beds, a variety of crops like wheat, barley, peas, mustard and a variety of fruits and nuts are grown. The climate of Nubra Valley is salubrious and bracing with least precipitation. This region is inhabited by a people of Mongolian ethnic stock.

The Rupshu is the other sub geographical division of upper Ladakh. It is one of the highest inhabited tracts in the world. Its elevation is around 4500 meters with an extremely dry and cold climate, hence thinly populated. The Nomads of Ladakh called Chang-pas, a Mongolian ethnic stock inhabits this climatically severe region.

The third sub geographical division of upper Ladakh is the Indus valley, one of the most important regions of the Ladakh. With an elevation of around 3400 meters, it covers a major portion of Leh district of Ladakh. This region was first inhabited during the reign of *Lhachen Tashi Namgyal* (C.E 1500-1532)⁷. This region stands strategically important and still abodes the important administrative places of Ladakh. It is the capital of Ladakh division of Jammu and Kashmir state.

2. Central Ladakh

Central Ladakh is bounded on North-east by Upper Ladakh and on North-West by the lower Suru valley of Lower Ladakh. Kishtiwari district of Kashmir division marks its boundary on the south-west and the Chamba, Lahul and Spiti districts of Himachal Pradesh on south-west. The core of the Central Ladakh is Zaskar valley,

¹Nawang Tsering Shakspo, *A Cultural History of Ladakh*, Centre for Research on Ladakh, Sabu, Leh. P.3

²Prem Singh Jina, *Buddhism Beyond Zojila*, Vijay Goel English Hindi Publisher, Delhi. Introduction

³The Nation, *Land of Many names*, Thailand July 18-2004

⁴The Hindu, April 23-2013

⁵Monier- Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, Oxford Clarendon Press, P. 311

⁶, O.C.Handa *Buddhist Western Himalaya, Part-1, A Politico-Religious History*, Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, p. 60

⁷Ibid p.62

the lone valley it has. It lies to south-west of Leh with an elevation of 4000 meters. It is named on the river Zaskar that flows through it forming a horse-shoe bent near Kursha. Being at higher elevation, the climate is mostly cold and dry. This region is inhabited by Mons¹, the earlier settlers of this region as per the various historical records available till date. Padum, a historical settlement is presently the administrative headquarter of Zaskar.

3. Lower Ladakh

Lower Ladakh known as *Sham* inhabits most of the Muslim population of Ladakh. It forms the north-western limit of Ladakh. It is called lower Ladakh strictly in geographical terms because of its lower altitude as compared to the other two parts which have considerably higher altitudes. Being at lower altitudes in contrast to the other two parts of Ladakh, the climate is fairly mild and not so much dry and cool with Drass as the only exception that records a fall of -45°C. Suru and Drass valley constitute the lower Ladakh. The former is located on the west of Zaskar valley where as the latter is located on the north-east of Drass river. It also forms the extreme western boundary of Ladakh as well as the Indian union. The inhabitants of this region are known by the name of Drokpas.²

Physical or geographical aspect of Ladakh makes it unique as it is nestled in between parallel mountain ranges from South-east to North-west. This unique physical character determines natural boundaries and the course of rivers of Ladakh. According to pioneer researchers of this region of Indian union, the position of this region was not hospitable because of barren land and harsh climate and was hence inhabited by a scarce population³ but the modern facilities like transportation and electrification has transformed the demographic set up of Ladakh considerably. Further being an extremely important strategic region of Indian union, a huge contingent of armed forces is stationed there which brought the development with it in terms of reconstruction of Ladakh and provided avenues of trade along with employment to the locals.⁴ The region is crawling with rendezvous and hostile neighbors like Pakistan and China. The Kargil War of 1999 is a fresh example in this regard.

Another important physical aspect of Ladakh is its elevation. In fact Ladakh is one of the most high elevated regions of the world. This elevation is responsible for the making of a unique climate of this region. While days are burning, the nights are bone chilling with an atmosphere devoid of moisture like the desert, hence the name Cold desert is often used to describe Ladakh. Such a climate may negate the blooming of human life but at the same instant it is favorable for animal life. Perhaps this is the reason behind a dense fauna including a hefty number of wild asses, horses and domestic animals. This blooming fauna could have attracted the early adventures to this region as Ladakh could have been a paradise for hunters due to abundance of game.

Political Profile

Moravian missionaries Dr. Karl Marx and A.H. Francke along with Alexander Cunningham and German Researchers Emil and Hermann von Schlagintweit were the first researchers who made an attempt to reconstruct the earliest history of Ladakh. Their familiarity with the land and a constant contact with the people of Ladakh makes their work to be called authentic. They mainly used the old inscriptions and the literary sources collectively called the Chronicles of Ladakh as the source material for their works namely *The Antiquities of Indian Tibet* in two volumes, *History of Western Tibet and Ladakh Physical, Statistical and Historical*. These scholars can be called the pioneers in the historical research of Ladakh. According to Janet Rizvi there was only one shortcoming in the research of these especially the Francke and that was the extensive use of Ladakhi sources alone for their research purpose.⁵ It was in 1977 CE that we get the more detailed description of this historically obscure region of the world when Luciano Petech published his work *The Kingdom of Ladakh*. One of the most important features of this work is that Petech not only used the Ladakhi sources but also consulted the Tibetan sources by the virtue of which he was able to fix a more acceptable chronology and consistency in the chain of events that makes up the past of Ladakh. Since then various scholars have contributed to unveil the Ladakh history and its various aspects like cultural, Political and religious. Among these O.C.Handa (*Buddhist Western Himalaya*), H.N Kaul (*Ladakh through Ages*), Janet Rizvi (*Ladakh Cross Roads of High Asia*), Tsepon W.D Shakabpa (*Tibet, A Political History*), and many papers by John Bray.

What has been commonly accepted by almost all the researchers of Ladakh is that the history of Ladakh till the dawn of 10th CE remains blurred with mystery. Though archaeologists have unearthed the existence of human in this region but their history remains blurred. It can be said rather that the history of Ladakh till the 9th century CE is a sort of protohistory. According to some scholars the region of Ladakh was geographically as

¹Ibid p. 66

²Op.cit, O.C.Handa, p. 68

³Alexander Cunningham *Ladakh Physical, Statistical And Historical*, Allen & Co.7 Leadenhall Street, London, p. 16

⁴David Snellgrove, *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh*, Aris and Phillips, Warminster London.Introduction.

⁵Janet Rizvi, *Ladakh, Crossroads of High Asia*, Oxford University Press. p.60

well as politically a separate entity and was inhabited by an Aryan race called Mons and Dards.¹The region was not habitable and hence remained barren and devoid of human settlements for such a long period of time until its major portion was inhabited by Tibetans. At the same instant there are references that the region if not completely but still its major portion was under an oligarchy of a bit republican nature.²But Ladakh came to forefront or was recorded in the pages of history only after the break down of Tibetan Empire shortly after the death of Buddhist persecutor Lang-darma. In fact if the Chronicles of Ladakh are to be believed, the disintegration of Tibetan empire proved a boon in disguise for the Ladakh as it paved the way for settling down of many Tibetans in this region.³

Assassination of Lang darma led to the disintegration of the Great Tibet as an empire. He was succeeded by Yumtsen (*yum-brtan*), a nephew or a foster son from the elder queen and occupied the throne of Central Tibet ignoring the claim of the legitimate son of the Lang darma Osung (*od-srungs*) from the junior queen. This period saw an immense revival of the Buddhism because of the rejuvenated zeal of the Buddhist monks. On reaching maturity, it is believed that Yumtsen handed over the throne to Osung and went himself to Yarlung and reigned there from 842 to 870 CE. It is believed that this period witnessed a parallel growth of both Buddhism and Bon chos. It is further believed that Yumtsen was a staunch follower of Buddhism while Osung had no taste for Buddhist values. In such a situation both the eminent religions of Tibet found patronage of these kings. The conflict became inevitable between the two ideologies and Tibet went into abject anarchy.⁴

Lucciano Petech considers the accession of Yumtsen as merely legendary as there is no mention of this king in the Tibetan traditions. But Osung seems to be a historical figure as we confront two sets of dates regarding him which makes him a historical figure. The earlier tradition *Sa-skyapa* fixes his date from 843-905CE. The later tradition by the great historian *dPa-bo-gTsug-lag* assigns him the date 847-885 CE.⁵ According to traditional historical records of Tibet, Osung was succeeded by his son Depel Khorsten (*lde-dpal-bkhor-bstan*). He is generally assigned two sets of dates, 893-923 and 865-895 CE.⁶He is believed to have built 8 temples and also make the copies of religious scriptures like Hbum (*Prajna Paramita*)⁷. In order to rejuvenate the Buddhism which got an immense set back during the reign of Lang Darma and a following conflict with Bon Chos, he took an oath as well to reestablish Buddhism in Tibet.⁸ Luciano Petech on the authority of *Sa-skyapa* states that Depel Khorsten had two sons, *bKra-sis-brtsegs-brtsan* and *K'ri-kyi-Idin*.Ladakh chronicle *la-Dvags-Rgyal-Rabs* names *K'ri-kyi-Idin as sKyid-lde Ni-ma-mgon*.⁹ O.C Handa differs from the statement of Petech regarding the name of first son of Depel Khorsten. He names him Tashi Segspel (*Khri-bkra-shis-rtsegs-dpal*).¹⁰ The name given by Handa is attested by A.H.Francke as well in his translation of the chronicle of Ladakh.¹¹ According to *Sa-skyapa*, there was a rebellion in Tibet which compelled both these brothers to move towards the peripheries of the kingdom. It took place in 929 CE. The same statement regarding the rebellion in Tibet is attested by the Chronicle of Ladakh as well with a date slightly different from the former, placing it around 900-930 CE.¹² The younger one Tashi Segspel stayed back in a province of Central Tibet, Gtsang while the elder son Nima-gon escaped to the western Tibet in the beginning of the 10th CE.

Nima-gon along with his loyal soldiers is said to have attacked the Purang, which seems to be a principality ruled by a lord namely Geshe Tashitsen (*dGeshes-bkra-sis-btsan*). It is believed that without going for confrontation, the lord tied the knot of relation with Nima-gon by marrying his lone daughter to him. In this manner, Nima-gon established his footing in the western Tibet and started to strengthen himself. He gradually enlarged his kingdom by annexing petty kingdoms of western Tibet like Guge, Ladakh, Spiti, Lahul and Kinnaur. Petech do not includes Ladakh in the kingdom of Nima-gon as he believes that Ladakh was under the command of Ge-sar decedents whereas lower Ladakh was still divided in small chief-ships.¹³ Later on Nima-gon subdued other chieftains as well and founded the Kingdom of Ngaris (*Mnah-ris*) or Ngarí. In this manner Nima-gon can be said to be the true founder of Ladakh and the political history of Ladakh as separate dominion begins from here. It was around 900-930.¹⁴ It is believed on the authority of the Chronicle of Ladakh that They was selected

¹ H.N.Kaul *Ladakh Through the Ages, Towards a New Identity*, Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi., p.38

² Op.cit, H.N. Kaul, p. 39

³ Op.cit, Janet Rizvi, p. 63

⁴ Op.cit, O.C Handa, p.125

⁵ Luciano Petech, *The Kingdom of Ladakh*, Istituto Italiano Per Il Medio Ed Estremo Oriente, Roma, p.14.

⁶ Ibid, pp.13-14

⁷ Op.cit, O.C Handa, , pp.125-126

⁸ A.H.Franke, *Antiquities of Indian Tibet, Part-I*, S. Chand & Co, Ram Nagar New Delhi55, p.92

⁹ Op.cit, LucianoPetech, Chapter III, p.15.

¹⁰ Op.cit, O.C Handa,p.126

¹¹ Op.cit, A.H.Franke, p.93

¹² Op.cit, Luciano Petech, p.15-16

¹³ Ibid. p.17

¹⁴ Op.cit,A.H.Franke, p.93, Notes, I.

as the headquarter of the newly found kingdom. She still has a magnificent palace which includes the fine citadel made by Nima-gon.¹ She holds an important strategic position. It is located in one of the widest stretches of Indus at a distance of 12 Km from Leh. Nima-gon is also credited with habitating his people in the highlands of Sino-Tibetan part of Ladakh. He is also credited with the principal sculptures at Shey which are nowadays known as *Sman la*. This rock carving shows standing Ratnasambhava, Ashokbhya, Vairocana, Amitabha and Amoghasiddhi. They are distinguished by their respective vehicles (*Vahana*) a horse, an elephant, a lion, a peacock and a garuda. It is located just below the Shey monastery on the curve of the road leading to Leh from Khaltsi. Another sculptor is located about 1 Km below. It shows a standing Maitreya.

Nima-gon passed away in 930 CE as per the Chronicle of Ladakh. He had three sons, who parceled out the whole kingdom between them.² The eldest son Pelgyi-gon (*Dpal-lde-rig-pa-mgon*) got upper Ladakh or *Maryul* stretching from Ruthog or Rodakh in the east to the Zoji-la. The second son Tashi-gon (*bKra-shis-lde-mgon*) got *Guge* and *Purang*. The third son *Detsu-gon* (*lDe-btsun-mgon*) got Zanskar (Sham) and Spiti. In this manner the western Tibetan kingdom founded by Nima-gon was divided into three separate kingdoms in 930 CE. These three kingdoms were Ladakh (*Stot-Maryul*), Guge, Purang (*Chang Chong*) and Zanskar, Spiti (*Sham*). Hence it was in 930 CE, that a true Ladakhi Kingdom was established out of the great Kingdom of Ngari. It is generally believed that Nima-gon was the founder of historically political Ladakh, but the true founder of a separate Ladakh was the eldest son of Nima-gon, Pelgyi-Gon (*Dpal-lde-rig-pa-mgon*). About this king the sources only provide the time period of his reign 930-960 CE and a list of names that probably succeeded him till Lhachen Rgyelpo who finds a bit detailed mention in the sources especially the Chronicle of Ladakh.

We find the name of Hgro-gon (*Hgmro-mgon*) (960-90 CE) and Chos-gon (Chos-mgon) as the two sons of Pelgyi-gon. Hgro-gon's son was Lhachen Trakpapel De (*Lha-chen Grags-pa-lde*) 990-1020 CE. A.H. Francke believes him to be a lama.³ Trakpapel had a son namely Lhachen Byangchup Sempa (*Lha-chen Byang-chub-Sems-dpa*) 1020-50 CE. Though from the Chronicle we are not able to find anything extra except the names of these kings. Dr. Karl Marx and A.H. Francke call him lama on the basis of Tabo inscription which mentions his name along with Lotsawa *Rin-Chin-bzang-Po*, Atisa and king Byan-chub-hud of Guge. He is believed to have erected Tabo and Alchi monasteries. If Francke is believed, his portrait can be found in the Alchi fresco paintings with an inscription of him.⁴ Lhachen Rgyelpo (*Lha-chen Rgyal-po*) is the next king with to some extent detailed information in the chronicles of the kings of Ladakh. He is believed to have reigned from 1050-1080 CE.⁵ A.H. Francke states that he reigned from 1100-1125 CE.⁶ He is credited with the foundation of Likir monastery in the north east of Alchi monastery near Saspol some 5 Km from the Highway leading to Leh. Francke believes that the fine pencil cedar close to monastery was planted by him.⁷ This monastery looks after the Alchi monastery till date. He is believed to have caused a brotherhood of lamas to settle down at Likir. In that time Likir was located on the great trade route. The route during that time going to Leh passed through Tingmogang, Hemis and Likir. He is also known to have extended facilities of food and general maintenance for the lamas who lived around Mansarovar and Kailash. It is believed that during his reign Santokh Pal, the ruler of Kullu invaded Ladakh.⁸ According to the folk lore of Ladakh, Lhachen Rgyelpo is eternalized as one of the best rulers and Likir monastery has been described the most ancient monastery though historically it is not proven as those monasteries erected by Kashmiri monks are certainly older. Still it provides an insight into the Buddhist zeal of Rgyelpo and depicts the respect and reverence he holds in the masses of Ladakh.

It is believed that the successors of Pelgyi-gon lacked political vision and hence were not able to consolidate the kingdom. It is often argued that after the death of Pelgyi-gon, there was a shift in the suzerainty and it passed into the hands of Tashi-gon who ruled Guge and Purang. Nevertheless, the kings of Ladakh continued to enjoy the status of senior brother even when they were not the suzerain lord of the kingdoms in the Western Tibet. Lhachen Rgyelpo was succeeded by Lhachen Utpala (*Lha-chen Utpala*) 1080-1110⁹ CE. We find another date ascribed to Utpala by A.H. Francke in his *A History of Western Tibet* which exceeds by 15 years. He ascribes him the date from 1125-1150 CE.¹⁰ He is described as an enthusiastic king by the contemporary

¹Op.cit, O.C Handa, p.127

² The distribution of kingdom is also witnessed in the medieval India when Humayun distributes his empire among his brothers as per the advice of his deceased father, Zahir uDin Mohammad Babar.

³Op.cit, A.H. Franke, p.95, Note, I.

⁴Op.cit, A.H. Franke, p.95, Notes.

⁵ O.C Handa has assigned this date to him in his *Buddhist Western Himalaya, Part-I, A Politico-Religious History*, O.C Handa, p.129.

⁶A.H. Francke, *A History of western Tibet*, Motilal Banarsidar Publishers Pvt .Ltd. Delhi, p. 49.

⁷Ibid p.129

⁸J. Hutchison & J. Philip Vogel, *History of Punjab Hill States, Vol-II*, Asian Educational Services, Hauz Khas Delhi, 1933, p.438

⁹ This date is mentioned in the *La-dvags-Rgyal-rabs* (Royal Chronicle of Ladakh) Tr. A.H. Francke p.96.

¹⁰Op.cit, A.H. Francke, p.128.

sources especially the Royal Chronicle of Ladakh. His Indian name may be indicative of the anterior close socio-cultural contacts of Ladakh with northwestern India especially Kashmir where his namesake reigned in the 9th CE. Luciano Petech believes that the Sanskrit name of Utpala points towards the foundation of new dynasties by the Aryan speaking clans who broke into Western Tibet during this period. This argument was first proposed by Tucci whom Petech quotes in his “the Kingdom of Ladakh”.¹ He is believed to have invaded Ñun-ti (*Kulu*) at the head of the united forces of Upper and Lower Ladakh and to have extorted from its king a treaty by which Kulu was bound to pay tribute forever. The conquest of Kullu is attested by the Rajtarangini of Jonaraja indirectly whereas Francke has confirmed it on the authority of Minor Chronicles of Ladakh.² He subjugated the country from Blo-bo and Pu-hrans downwards in the south the country of Bre-sparn to C’u-la-me-bar, in the west from Ra-gan-gren-zin and sTag-Ku-tsur upwards, in the north from Ka-sus (*Ka-brus*) upwards. They paid an annual tribute and attended the court. Some of these names can be identified with the present day territories as well like Blo-bo as Mustang in present day Nepal. Stag and Ku-tsur are two villages in Baltistan in a side valley west of Skardo. Baltistan often failed to resist the external invaders because of disunity among the various chieftains. It is believed that when Ladakhis invaded Baltistan, the chiefs not only deserted the attacked one but also supported the invaders. This is perhaps the reason that each and every invader succeeded in subjugating Baltis. It is true about Ladakhis, Sikhs and finally Dogras.³ The tribute was mostly paid in the form of *dzos* (a hybrid from Yak and Cow) and iron.⁴ This geographical horizon reveals a temporary paramount over most of Western Tibet and almost the whole Baltistan. If the sources are to be believed, Ladakh was though for a short time the greatest power in the Western Himalays.⁵

Lhachen Nagloka (*Lha-chennagloka or Naglug*) 1110-1140 CE⁶ succeeded Lhachen Utpala. Francke assigns him the date 1150-75 CE. He is credited with the construction of citadel palaces at Wanala and Khalatse. In the history of Ladakh, Lhachen Nagloka is the first king whose reign holds a secure chronological cross check.⁷ Wanala is situated a few Kilometers from the National Highway 6 near Khalatse and Lamayuru. Khalatse is situated near the bridge crossing over the Indus about 52 miles prior to Leh on National Highway 6 connecting Ladakh with Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. The citadels founded by Nagloka are today just ruins and deserted in the respective names of the old towns ,Wanila and Khalaste. The citadel at Khalaste is known as Brag-nag. Francke gives an interesting story behind the making of Khalaste citadel and the bridge across the Indus. He points out that it was an economically motivated step to divert the lucrative trade.⁸ Lhachen Nagloka was succeeded by his sons Lhachen Dge-bhe 1140-1170 CE and Dge-hbum. Lhachen Dge-bhe was succeeded by Lhachen Joldor 1170-1200 CE. Nothing beyond the names of these kings of the ending 13th CE is known from the chronicles. But we do find an important political event that changed the religio-cultural stratum of the Ladakh. It was the conquering of Tibet by great Mongol king, Genghiz Khan. It is believed to had happen in the reign of Lhachen Tashi-gon 1200-1230 CE which falls beyond the time period of the present study. It is also believed that within a few years, the western Tibet could have undergone the Mongol suzerainty. O.C Handa has also stated that Kublai Khan, the successor of Genghiz Khan held a census in Tibet including the area under study, Ladakh or western Tibet. Later Kublai Khan became a Buddhist which strengthened the Tibet and China not only politically but at religio-cultural levels as well. The still continuing strong religio-cultural relation of Ladakh with Tibet perhaps is an evidence of this historically important transformation.

Like the Rajtarangini which provides the names of a series of kings, the Royal chronicle of Ladakh provides the series of names without any further information that can make us to know the contemporary socio-economic and religio-cultural life. The dates that have been assigned to the Kings is also based on a probability than the historical way of dating. But, we do find the required information about some kings with details. Thanks to the folklore and oral traditions that help us to overcome the hurdles coming in way of Ladakh history from 9th CE onwards. Like Kashmir, Ladakh has also a blurred pre historical period. All the sources available on Ladakh are silent about this remote past which makes a considerable part of the Ladkh history as well as the present study. In case of Ladakh, till 1st CE, we are to some extent on historical tract due to the discovery of an inscription belonging to Kushan king Wima Kadphises. Tracing the history of Ladakh from earliest to 1st CE still remains a big task before the historians, anthropologists and archaeologists. So, we have a recorded history from 9th CE onwards and a reference belonging to 1st CE. The period between 1st CE to 9th CE remains historically blurred. Likewise, the period prior to 1st CE to the earliest is also historically blurred.

¹Op.cit, Luciano Petech, p.19.

²Op.cit, A.H.Franke, p.96. Notes

³Parvez Dewan *A History of Ladakh, Gilgit, Baltistan*, Manas Publications, p.76.

⁴Op.cit, A.H.Franke, p.96.

⁵Op.cit, H.N. Kaul, p. 40

⁶ 1110-1140 CE is the date assigned by the Royal Chronicle of ladakh whereas Francke in his AHWT assigns him the date 1150-1175CE, AHWT p.50.

⁷Op.cit, Luciano Petech, p.19

⁸Op.cit, A.H.Francke, p.130.

Earliest History (Pre 9th CE):

The pre 10th CE history of Ladakh is mainly based on folk lore of the local population of Ladakh. These cannot at the present state of our knowledge be fully integrated with scientific history. However, scientific history is fragile enough to provide us any insight on the pre 10th CE period aside from fragmentary pieces of information. We have an inscription dating to 1st CE and then recorded history in the form of The Royal Chronicle and many other minor chronicles. Even the travelogues of some prominent travelers also enrich our knowledge regarding this part of Ladakh history. We have a sort of broken historical perspective with some gaps of centuries together. We are not aware about the earliest past till the beginning of Common Era. From 1st CE to 10thCE, we are also without history in case of Ladakh. By Ladakh we mean here the western part of the Tibet as geographically it is. In such a situation, we are left with only two options to know the earliest past of the Ladakh till 10th CE. First of all the archaeological sources and secondly the folk lore which is fortunately rich in case of Ladakh.

From archaeological remains of Ladakh, it is established that the human activity in Ladakh began almost 6000 BP¹. We do find the expression of passionate graffiti making which is believed to be the hallmark of Bronze and Iron Age man. We find plenty of such specimens depicting this passion in length and breadth of Ladakh and its adjoining areas like Lahul, Spiti and Kullu. Archaeologists especially from Archaeological Survey of India and Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology have unearthed the human settlements belonging to the period 2000 BCE. We also find some fortification remains as well which depicts not only a permanent sedentary way of life but also a certain way of political development as well. It may also reflect that Ladakh remained prone to violence² due to the conflicts which could have arisen due to the scarce natural resources. It seems that the Ladakh remained prone to immigrants subject to its location as cross roads. From the geographical perspective it is apparent that the life could have existed in the pocketed patches amidst the valleys drained by the complex river systems if not only still largely. Without the availability of food, we cannot imagine life especially in a climate that Ladakh has. Its rugged terrain which although could have been different from the present situation mainly due to the large scale activity of climatic factors and large scale weathering. As we observe, the presence of flora and fauna with some exceptions, concentrated in these green pockets, it seems that the earliest part of Ladakh's history developed here, in the Oases region. Another thing that seems could have happened is the large scale migrations and immigrations. Such a tendency could have changed the evolving historical trends till the formation of primitive political units. The segregated position of these green pockets or oases could have formed the intra boundaries between these units. In such conditions with least arable land, conflicts could have been a routine between the natives and the immigrants. In such a situation, if there were any political units, they could have been prone to transformation.

As we are aware that Ladakh, especially the upper Ladakh (Leh to be exact)³ remained the hub of Trans Himalayan trade which included merchandise from India, Yarkand, China and other Central Asian regions. The lower Ladakh (*Sham*) especially its habitable areas away from the route leading from Srinagar to Leh, could have been to a large extent secluded. It is quite possible that a self-sufficient economy could have sustained such units. According to Major M.L.A Gompertz, the self-sufficient economy remained as the basic mode of economy in Ladakh till late 8th CE.⁴ We cannot skip the nomads who seem to have occupied the region earlier than the sedentary people. Chang Pas as they are known even today are the best adapted to the high altitude climate and severe geographic conditions. We cannot claim that Ladakh was inhabited by a single race till the arrival of Tibetans from the Central Tibet after the chaos created due to the assassination of Lang Darma. The various geographical divisions of Ladakh inhabit different ethnicities which add a multi ethnic colour to the portrait of Ladakh. It seems that Ladakh came under the influence of Kushanas which is attested by the presence of the inscription of Vima Kadphises. As in case of Asoka, we consider the stretch of his territory till we find his inscriptions, if that method of historicity is applied in this case, it becomes evident that Ladakh was a part of Kushana Empire which could have initiated a reign of political, cultural and religious influx. This influx is further strengthened by the first wave of Buddhism that entered Ladakh via Kashmir.⁵

It is generally believed that Dards were the first to colonize the lower regions of Ladakh on somewhat permanent basis. Mons an Indo-Iranian people followed.⁶ The political history can only be what can be called in better term a protohistory. At this juncture the folk lore and traditional legends help us to have though not true historical overview. Reeve Heber suggests altogether a new version of the earliest settlers. He believes that the Tibetan Nomads were the first to colonize the Western Tibet. Bon Chos, the animistic cult which was followed before the coming of Buddhism to Ladakh was introduced by them. He further believes that though they were

¹ Op.cit. Janet Rizvi, p.60.

² Ibid. p.60-61

³ K. Warikoo, *Gateway to central Asia, the trans Himalayan Trade of Ladakh*, Published in Recent research on Ladakh 4 & 5, Motilal Banarsidas Publishers, New Delhi, p.235.

⁴ Op.cit, Nawang Tsering Shakspo, Introduction, VI

⁵ Op.cit, H.N Kaul, p.40.

⁶ Op.cit, Parvez Dewa, p.14.

earlier to come but last to settle.¹ It seems that Ladakh remained for a long period a heaven for immigrants because of its earlier mentioned location as a Cross road. It seems that the political evolution in Ladakh was much slower than its immediate neighbor in south, Kashmir where 8thCE saw the zenith of empire building under zealous Lalidaditya Muktapida, the great builder of Martand like majestic temples. It can't be denied that Kashmir and Ladakh could have had relations before the recorded history of Ladakh. Though the nature of relations could have been more cultural and less political mostly due to the blooming Buddhism in Kashmir.

As revealed by the recent research of V.N Vohra and others ,there seems to have been flourishing Republican Oligarchies like that of Huge whose chief has been named as Gyalpoche. Another concept that has evolved recently is that of Cesar. It shows that the western Tibet was under the influence of Turks .It is based utterly on the basis of folk lore and some numismatic evidences. Likewise we encounter with the legends of Tha Tha Khan. There are many detailed legends regarding him. Prior to the coming of Tibetan people after the assassination of Glang Darma ,the western Tibet found a rapid immigration of Tibetans who colonized hitherto barren regions. Regarding the clashes between the local chiefs and much historicized Gesar we find many folk songs eulogizing the native heroes.

Conclusion

From the Chronicle of the Kings of Ladakh, it is evident that prior to the coming of Nyma-gon, there existed chiefdoms headed by a chief called *Gyelpo*.²It seems that after the downfall of the Kushans, this peripheral region got politically divided into various chiefdoms. Among such chiefdoms we find the mention of Shyok in the Chronicle of Kings of Ladakh. The Gyelpo of Shyok in order to defend his territory from the Khotanese invaders asked for the help of Nyma-gon. O.C Handa even believes that prior to the establishment of what we generally call first Ladakhi Dynasty; there were theocratic oligarchies in the Ladakh under the Bon tradition.³From this discussion, it is evident that historically there was no break in case of Ladakh. What we consider historically missing may be largely due to absence or non-exploration of the related historical stuff. From 6000 BCE to 10th CE, we do find a historical Ladakh which becomes more historical 10th CE afterwards due to prevalence of historical sources especially the literary sources. Though the period beyond 1st century CE to 10th century CE is in true historical sense an era of historical obliviousness, but a blend of oral traditions and archaeological remains do help us to understand this long era in the history of Ladakh.

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¹Ibid.

²Op.cit, O.C Handa,p.127.

³ Ibid.p.100