



Syncretism of Religious Beliefs in Western Himalayas's Lahoul

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83

The goal of the article is to trace the intermingle and interinfluence between various religious traditions among the tribes of Western Himalayas, particularly, of those living in modern Himachal Pradesh state of India (district Lahoul and Spiti, L&S).

The areas in northern India, seemingly marked by either Hinduism, as in southern Himachal Pradesh, or Buddhism, as in northern part of the state (culturally more influenced by Western Tibet and Ladakh), represent the interesting case testifying about the amalgamation and syncretism of these religions with the local, so-called "primordial" beliefs, related to animism, fetishism, shamanism; and between themselves. The existence and preservation of the syncretic beliefs could help to explain the nature of culture-religion interplay and mechanism of developing by them the respective functions, such as functions of adaptation and pattern maintenance.

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my knowledge and understanding of Lahoul, its generous people and beautiful traditions.

Historiography

The Western Himalaya's region, particularly, the areas comprising modern Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir states of India, have always attracted scholars, pilgrims, travellers, administrators, missionaries. As a land of ancient history, Lahoul was mentioned by Xuan Zang, a famous Buddhist monk travelling in 635 CE to India from China (Si-Yu-Ki [1884] 2003: 177). Throughout the millennium being at the crossroads between Indian (Kulu, Chamba, Punjab) and Tibetan kingdoms and states, Lahoul became an important area of political, trade and religious interlinks. Information on this could be partially retrieved from the old Ladakh and local chronicles, particularly those depicting the trade between the kings of Ladakh and Kulu, genealogical trees of the chiefs of ruling families of Kolon, Tinan, Barbogs (Francke [1926] 1994: 195-224).

84

Throughout XIX – early XX centuries European and British scholars, missionaries and administrators contributed towards the general study of Lahoul's geography, history, religions, traditions, trade. From the observations made by one of the first Europeans travelled in Western Himalayas—W. Moorcroft during 1819-25—there could be known brief depictions of religious traditions related to 'the deity Gegan, the patron of Lahoul'; or of the Buddhist or Hindu beliefs in which stones played an important role; or of the pilgrimage of Hindu fakirs to Trilokinath Temple (Moorcroft & Trebeck 1841: 192-4).

Archaeological Survey of India's first president A. Cunningham was one of major scholars of Indian history in the Victorian period. Though not specifically analysing Lahoul, he still was instrumental in bringing to the public and academic field historical and cultural antiquity of the region (Cunningham 1871). Equally similar, in own way, German scholar Emile Schlagintweit, along with his three brothers whom he survived, was one of those extensively working on Buddhism in Tibet and in Himalayas, who travelled to the region and comprehensively studied religion in 1850s (Schlagintweit 1863).

Perhaps, one of significant studies of Lahoul was related to the activity of Moravian mission (Moravian Church, or *Unitas Fratrum*) in Lahoul, with the centre at Keylong.¹ Indian Civil Service of British India established good relations with them and even supported the mission. Thus, Pastor A. Francke has been assigned a task to travel in some



parts of Tibet following, his famous scholarly works have been published through the support of the Government of Punjab. The other practical form was that 'the mission keeps statistics of rain and snowfall at Kyelang for the Meteorological Department' (Gazetteer [1917] 2003: 206-8).

Pastor A. Francke's highly acclaimed works became an invaluable source on the history of Lahoul or Garzha (in Tibetan language). It was him who specified that 'Gar-za is used in two ways; sometimes it signifies the whole of Lahul, and sometimes it is used as the name of the Chandra and Bhaga valleys only [...]'. (Francke [1926] 1994: 223) Through his translation of chronicles of the ruling families of Lahoul there could be restored political, social and religious history. Such was for example the change of the last name of the ruling family of Ko-lon (Kyelong) to 'Chand' 'with the view to making the chiefs of Ko-lon appear as descendants from Rajput ancestors. This, they thought, would raise them in the eyes of the Kulu kings' (Francke [1926] 1994: 206).

At Keylong (since 1854) and later Leh (since 1890) the mission was very active in scholarly, educational and practical fields: 'they have assisted investigation into folklore, language, customs and religion: they have introduced the Christian religion and made some converts; their example and assistance on all necessary occasions has been most beneficial to the people at large' through introducing potatoes, oats and rye, and the Lombardy poplar (Gazetteer [1917] 2003: 207f.). It could be added that Moravian mission became an actor itself in the religious field through direct and indirect proselytism and participation, though didn't succeed at the end, and with the beginning of the first world war, in 1915 its last representatives have been repatriated from India to Germany.

At the beginning of twentieth century the British administrators continued compiling series of governmental Gazetteers, which became the source of multi-facet information and observations. Lahoul became an object of studying as well. One of the most comprehensive works of this type was three-volume "Glossary of the tribes and castes of the Punjab and the North West Frontier Province" compiled by H. A. Rose in 1919, which has been largely based on the Census Reports for the Punjab made in 1883 and 1892 by D. Ibbetson and E. Maclagan (Rose [1919] 1990: 90f.). There one could find first-hand observations on the religious situation in Lahoul, particularly those relating to Buddhism and Hinduism. Another research was the two-volume work by J.



Hutchison and J. Ph. Vogel on the history of the Panjab hill state with general depiction of all districts of then great Punjab that included contemporary Lahoul and Spiti districts (Hutchison & Vogel [1933] 1994).

In a post-1947 period the study of Lahoul has been implemented by both Indian and foreign scholars who dealt with various aspects including the history of Buddhism in Western Himalayas in general (Handa 2001) and in Lahoul particularly, with a focus on the Drukpa lineage (Garsha 2011); on folklore, rituals, myths (Thakur 1997); or personal narratives of the work in Lahoul and various legends and rituals as written by Manohar Singh Gill from Indian Administrative Service. In 1962 he was appointed deputy commissioner of the district and 'was rich in time' to explore the culture and life of the Lahouli people. Some of his observations of local myths were based on the stories told by his local helper Tshering Dorje and became a valuable source on the history and culture (Gill 2010).

Photo 1: N. K. Roerich's painting "Buddhist monk returning from Lahul"





The contemporary western scholarship continued exploring the region, through various aspects of the history of Buddhism (Snellgrove 1982) and circling its sacred mountains (Thurman & Wise 1999), monastic art (Klimburg-Salter 1982), landscape and symbolism of religious pilgrimage and mandala (Stutchbury 1994; Widorn & Kinberger 2009). It should be summed that Lahoul has been studied from historical, archaeological, religious, art, cultural anthropology perspectives. It has been visually memorised in the art as well (Photo 1). In early and middle of the twentieth century Lahoul's beautiful landscapes and mystical perception of the area filled with religious vibrations in the air, have been reflected by Russian painter who lived in India—Nicolas Roerich (1874-1947). However, from the sociology of religion perspective, there is yet still a broad vista to explore Lahoul's cultural and religious ecosystems.

Methodology

The issue of syncretism of religious beliefs is inseparable from the culture-religion interplay and could be best understood from the prism of systemic approach. How religions interact, influence, enrich or absorb each other—is an issue both millennia year old and yet an always new and actual. However, seemingly a religious domain, this issue intrinsically relates to and is associated with the domain of culture. Therefore, it could be said that to study religious syncretism is to study culture-religion interplay.

Methodologically, this could be done based on systems approach, and some core propositions elaborated by T. Parsons regarding four-fold functional systems scheme (cultural, social, individual/personality, biological), the functions they perform, and media of the exchanges taking place among them (Parsons 1985). Elaborating on these ideas of Parsons further, it could be proposed that religion being part of cultural system (or its value-based standards) should follow the same patterns as culture does, and therefore should be equally viewed upon through institutional, relational, cognitive and reflexive/organic planes. The major proposition for our theme is that religion should acquire institutional, social, individual character and, similarly like culture, entail the same following functions, i.e.:

- 1) function of pattern maintenance/model preservation (which is mostly performed on institutional plane that corresponds to cultural system);



- 2) function of integration (on relational plane that corresponds to social system);
- 3) function of goal attainment (on cognitive plane that relates to individual system);
- 4) function of adaptation (on organic plane that corresponds to biological system).

In the processes of interaction with the cultural or religious "other", various functions and forms of interaction can be highlighted. If seen from bottom-upwards approach, then the function of adaptation could be viewed as the basic one (since it operates on the organic, biological, basic level/plane). Religion develops this function towards any cultural environment where it works, and especially in a new one. Like in a biological field, this function is mostly manifested/utilised during the birth and formative years of any religion, or while it encounters another cultural milieu. In the latter case the religious "newcomer" is doomed to highlight its functions of adaptation to survive, make roots and occupy certain space in a new cultural environment. The general correlation between planes, systems, functions, results of interaction is presented below in the Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation between planes, systems, functions, outputs of interaction

Plane	System	Function	Outputs/Results of Interaction (with the Other)
Institutional Plane	Cultural System	Function of Pattern Maintenance	(4) Syncretism
Relational Plane	Social System	Function of Integration	(3) Amalgamation, Acceptance
Cognitive Plane	Individual System	Function of Goal Attainment	(2) Knowing, Understanding, Learning
Organic Plane	Biological System	Function of Adaptation	(1) Adaptation, Acquaintance, Seeing

Source: Elaborated by Laura Yerekesheva, based on systems-functions (structural functionalism) approach developed by T. Parsons (1985).



As can be seen from the Table, various results of interaction, or consequent stages, combined in groups starting from the lowest to highest, i.e. (1) seeing, acquaintance, adaptation, (2) learning, understanding, knowing, (3) acceptance, amalgamation, (4) syncretism exist. These stages could be also described as a certain evolutionary way of interacting with others from so called birth towards maturity.

The first three groups of outputs of interactions (with corresponding functions) best illustrate the process of encounters, meeting and understanding the "other", and entails narratives, history of interactions. Syncretism or the highest result of interaction, correlates to the most comprehensive plane—institutional, with cultural systems at work. On this level religions operate on the cultural level and this entails deep interactions between religions and cultures. It is on this level that both cultures and religions perform the function of pattern maintenance to keep, preserve, sustain and maintain the systems and ways of life, through both formal and informal institutions.

Thus, religions operating on this level, become a part of cultural systems contributing towards systems' stability. In a view of our analysis this means that any religion entering any cultural milieu, inevitably acquires specific cultural forms elaborated by this or that culture.

In case of the encounters among "primordial" beliefs such as animism, fetishism, shamanism on the one side, and Buddhism (and Hinduism) on the other, there could be proposed that the primordial elements didn't "exit" the cultural and religious milieu; though being marginalised, yet they still continued occupying some part in the religious picture of the people. Throughout the article an attempt will be made to highlight these features that still exist in the religious beliefs, rites, practices and traditions of the people of Lahoul. This may lead to another major proposition that while discussing cultures and religions, there inevitably comes an issue of syncretism. In other words, there are no "pure"/"clean" cultures and religions, they all are result of interaction and amalgamation that on the level of cultural system led to a syncretism.

Therefore, any culture could be visualised as a certain whole, a pie, a result of work of various ingredients, a kneading, a thorough mix and cohesion that have own specific taste, colour, form. Any representation of creative symbolism in art, music, literature, architecture, etc. (like canvases, mosaic, or symphony) could be served as the bright



metaphor of this. Various functions, ranged from adaptation towards pattern maintenance, are the ways, methods by which cultures, religions, societies, communities, individuals meet and interact. Consequently, the evolving results could be also ranged from "seeing" towards "syncretism".

Thus, while discussing certain culture as a result of previous interactions, various inputs made by different contributors, cultural or religious Others should be taken into account. This is a case of religious amalgamation and syncretism too, though going back to and finding the "pure" primordial believe in its pristine and crystallised form is always a difficult and sometimes even impossible task. The scholar can operate on the approximate level, since any religion in its latest development and assertion of own rules and vision of the world, always behave protectively, and tries to minimise either the influence of other religious doctrines or, even if accepting it, to eliminate its roots or dissolve forms in due course. The analysis of social roots of religious beliefs and social solidarity made by Emile Durkheim² (Durkheim 2001) gives theoretical ground for understanding the role and contribution of primordial collective beliefs (shamanism, fetishism, animism, totemism, magic) towards social cohesion irrespectively of other newest religious forms.

90

Our task is to find and analyse these primordial elements in existing modern beliefs to support the thesis of syncretism operating on the cultural level, and of religions being part of cultures. The religious beliefs of people of Lahoul provide the splendid opportunity to analyse the above-mentioned methodological standpoint. In a course of research, the author made field trips to subdivisions of districts of Lahoul and Spiti, Kinnaur, Kulu, Manali, Mandi (of Himachal Pradesh) and to Ladakh (of Jammu and Kashmir) in December 2010 and in summer 2011, during the ICCR Visiting Fellowship at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Shimla (India).

Direct observation of the life and religious rituals have been done during the trips to villages and towns (Kardang, Kyelong, Rewalsar, Sarahan, Leh, etc.); Buddhist monasteries (Kardang, Thubcholing, Gemur, Shashur, Tabo, Kaza, Key – in Lahoul and Spiti; Rewalsar in Mandi; Alchi, Hemis, Thiksey – in Ladakh); temples and venerated places (Jabjes, Gandhola, Trilokinath, Sissu, Sangam Sacred Charnel Ground, Markula/Udaipur, sacred caves, etc.), as well to Bon pa monastery in the vicinity of Shimla.



Geography and cultural environment of Lahoul

Religious identity of the people of Western Himalayas is inseparable from the polyethnic, poly-religious mosaic syncretic culture of India in general, its northern part in particular, dominated by the presence of mighty Western Himalayan mountain range. The Western Himalayas stretching from north-west towards south-east, joins other mountain systems of Central and South Asia.

Mountain valley geography, climate and topography of Lahoul dictated the specific economy, social and cultural ways of living. Rohtang (La) Pass, the major pass cutting/connecting the region from/with the plains laying to the south of it, has been operating for three to four months only opening in end of June throughout end of September (Photo 2).

Photo 2: View from Rohtang La Pass on Lahoul



Source: Laura Yerekesheva.

For the rest of the year the local population has been cut from the world. Similarly, the Kunzum (La) Pass on the eastern part of Lahoul, dividing it from Spiti, and Baralacha (La) pass on the north, serving as a division line with Ladakh, determined the secluded character of Lahoul throughout most part of the year, and an exaltation of activity in summer time. In practice this was reflected in the active trade and



fairs in summer in the valleys and beyond, spreading to Ladakh to the north and Kinnaur, Kulu, Manali to the south. With trade and fairs, came religious interactions leading to the penetration of doctrines, beliefs and rites.

Out of modern Himachal Pradesh state's 12 districts (with total population of slightly more than 6 mln people), L&S is largest by territory and yet one of smallest by number of population, having only 33,224 people (Handa 2001: 93f.). It could be agreed with the view that Lahoul (and other parts of the Buddhism-influenced area in Western Himalaya) that the region 'is the least inhabited, yet religio-culturally the most rich part of the country' (Handa 2001: 95).

Along with the physical, political and economic geography, Lahoul could be described in terms of spiritual geography as well. From the perspectives of religious devotees, Lahoul's geography is a sacred one. Called by Vajrayana (Tantric) Buddhists a *Garsha Khandroling*, 'The Land of Dakinis', Lahoul is the pilgrimage land where for about two millennia great yogis, teachers and *mahasiddhas* of both Hinduism and Buddhism (including Nagarjuna, Ghantapa, Shaiva yogis from Kashmir, and great yogis from Tibet) meditated, taught, got their realisation (Garsha 2011: 5).

92

The sacredness of Lahoul could be also seen in religious symbolism of *mandala*, a sacred mapping and cartography representing key concepts and ideas of the teaching. Mandala could be seen both as a cartography and physical realm of sacred symbolism through pilgrimage. As described by scholars, 'we have travelled the mandala as big as the entire region', where 'the projection of ritual practice and worship on a local landscape sanctified by the miraculous acting and meditation of yogis and siddhas, has reshaped the physical space' (Widorn & Kinberger 2009: 303).

For this reason, the geography of Lahoul could be viewed from various lenses— as a physical, historical-political, and sacred-spiritual one. Its horizontal and vertical dimensions could speak about both expanded relations, and cultural and religious interactions on the one side, and intense deep reflection leading to meditation and enlightenment, on the other. However, irrespectively of these perspectives and dimensions, they all share the basic denominator that cohere and binds various elements into a shared cultural ecosystem.



Cross-religious interactions

Many religious forms contribute towards Lahoul's mosaic religious canvas—Vajrayana (Tantric) Buddhism (predominantly in the northern and north-eastern parts boarding with Ladakh and Tibet), mixed Buddhism-Hinduism form; animism, shamanism; Hinduism (mainly in a southern part).

Historically being a part or subject of various kingdoms, throughout the centuries Lahoul interacted with its immediate and extended neighbours. Political history of Lahoul reflects its domination by Tibetans to whom they had to pay taxes around 7 CE, by the southern kingdoms of Chamba and Kulu around same period and after, and even by the foreign invaders from the far north, 'probably Yarkand, who held the country for ten years [...] about 8 CE. The invaders seem to have retired or been driven out' (Gazetteers [1917] 2003: 189).

Famous Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang (or Hiuen Tsiang) on his way to India in 7 century CE, came across Kulu (K'iu-Lu-To or Kuluta) and Lahoul (Lo-u-lo). His depiction suggests existence of mixed religious ecosystem in the region: sacred geography shared jointly by adepts of both religions, with Buddhist and Hindu temples for adepts of various schools and numerous sects 'without distinction'; where Arhats, rishis come for meditation in the caves and where Buddha (Tathagata) himself used to practice there with his followers (Si-Yu-Ki [1884] 2003: 177).

There were fights for Lahoul between the kings of Kulu and Tibet, in whose southern vicinity was Lahoul; and with political influence came also religious one. As Punjab gazetteers mentioned in 1917, 'Tibetan influence had however established itself, and the Buddhism of India, which had entered Lahul in the eighth century, was ousted by Lamaism brought by Nyima gon from Central Tibet' (Gazetteers [1917] 2003: 189). The further history of domination by either Tibetans, or Kulu, and then by the Sikhs since 1700s, until British Raj in the middle of XIX century (1846) speaks about the constant interplay between the religious and cultural traditions associated with each new ruler, dynasty or reign.

Initially Buddhism and Hinduism from India made an imprint on both religious and cultural forms of beliefs. Regarding Buddhism, authors define different periods of its beginning and waves of the spread in Lahoul: as early as the era of Emperor 'Ashoka (2250 years ago), then during the Great Kushan Empire (about 1800 years ago) which continued through the successive Greater Kashmir kingdoms, up



to the 10th century CE' (Garsha 2011: 9). According to others, Buddhism started since 8 century CE, with the proselytism of one of the main Buddhist missionaries who introduced this religion to northern India—Padma Sambhava, with whose name the establishment of some monasteries in the district is also associated.³

Later on, 'Lamaistic Buddhism entered Lahul in 11-12 centuries and from about 1150 to 1647 Lahul formed in a loose way part of the Ladakhi empire'. As far as Hinduism is concerned, it is stated that its introduction took place into the valley from the southern Chamba state in the 11 century CE (Rose [1911] 1990: 91f.).

The spread of esoteric tradition of Tantric Vajrayana Buddhism, and several schools (Kangyu, Nyigma, Drukpa, Gelugpa, among which the Drukpa tradition has especial significance in Lahoul) highlighted and further reinforced the spiritual and mystic view of the world through tradition *Chakrasamvara/Yidam* including meditation, pilgrimage, worshipping, chanting mantras, rituals, mandalas, visualisation, spells, *dharani* or magic formula, protective verses or phrases, etc.

It should be mentioned, that Buddhism itself absorbed various aspects of traditional beliefs such as believe in spirits and souls of the dead, and local protectors of the places (what could be correlated with the *genii* of the places in ancient Greek traditions). The esoteric traditions were based on various Tantric deities, including the cults of Buddhakapala in the form of Kapaleshvara and of Jambhala (Jamalu). The earliest forms of beliefs in spirits also absorbed by the Tantric Vajrayana Buddhism became exponent as one of key symbols of this school in general. Numerous references to the bodhisattvas as protectors, their role in everyday life of the people, the *cham* mask dances depicting the protecting deities and forces of nature, role of healers and other elements of rituals including magic, have been intertwined with purely Buddhist doctrinal teachings.

The concept of Dakini is a bright indicator of the survival of primordial animistic beliefs in spirits of the places who protect from demonic forces. It is believed that Dakinis, non-visible fairies and spirits who inhabit Lahoul and live in mountains and in the places of special divine powers, are an inevitable element of tantric practices. Due to their important role it is not surprising that Dakinis even marked the whole topography of the space by giving their name to the whole area of Lahoul as Garsha or 'the Land of Dakinis'.

One of the most important such places is the Markula temple in Lahoul's Maru/Udaipur which is highly venerated for being one of 24



abodes of Dakinis worldwide, 'a site of power where the negative forces of evil are conquered' (Garsha 2011: 35). The initial belief in protection from the evil that local deities and Dakinis could extend to people and places has been later transformed into the concept of Vajravarahi in Tantric Buddhism, with the developed concept of inner subjugation by practitioners and achieving inner and mental realisation. If for tantric practitioner, the Markula place is a site of inner realisation allowing to imbibe subtle energies and, through implementing tantric practices, to reach the Buddhahood; then for people and general public it is a place where delusions and obstacles in everyday life are removed.

Influences between beliefs associated with crucial role of nature for people and communities have been taking place in Lahoul for a long time and that was reflected in beliefs, mythology, epics, rites. On the one hand, there are cults of mountains, rivers, stones, some animals, birds, on the other hand—belief in invisible magic forces or spirits and protectors of the place. These totemic and animistic perceptions survived the time, occupied important place in the total ecosystem of beliefs of Lahouli people, showed its steadiness and sustainability, as well as adaptation to new incoming religious views, i.e. Hinduism and Buddhism. The interaction of shamanic, totemic and animistic beliefs with major religious traditions in northern India showed both the significance of these beliefs in the religious perceptions of local people, and contribution towards holistic poly-religious syncretic milieu in Lahoul. Below there will be analysed most representative cases of religious interactions—between primordial beliefs such as animism, totemism on the one side, and Buddhism and Hinduism on the other; as well as between Buddhism and Hinduism.

Primordial beliefs in relation to Buddhism and Hinduism

Cult of mountains

In a mountain area cult of mountains was reflected in the piety before their majestic height and beauty, and in eloquent mythology, oral epics and traditions. As a sacred place, an abode of gods and deities, the mountains acquired a sacred dimension and power over people, their life and even time. In Hinduism, for example, Kinnaur Kailash mountain, an abode of Lord Shiva is one of most sacred places with elaborated iconography, pilgrimages and rituals.⁴

Similarly, in Lahoul there could be found numerous legends and mythologies on origin of this or that place or tradition that have been



associated with mountains. Among them are the legends on creation of Rohtang (La) Pass, one of the key factors of economic life of the people, linking them with the plains to the south.

The legends about mountains are representative for they show the interinfluence between primordial beliefs in forces of nature and its adaptation by Hinduism and Buddhism. Through adapting the existed earlier legends both Hinduism and Buddhism showed their functions of adaptation. As was discussed above, this function of religion is crucial when it comes to meeting new, Other cultural and religious milieu. Through adaptation as a first step towards knowing the Other, any new coming religion needed to develop own set of adapting mechanisms that could help in its succeeding. In other words, the tasks of conversion to new faith requires adaptation to already existed cultural and religious environment with the help of already developed instruments, mechanisms and tools. Mythology and epics can reflect this process of encounters that otherwise sometimes could be difficult to trace.

From this perspective, the legends on the creation of Rohtang (La) Pass are very representative. As a geographic feature dividing southern plains from mountain areas, Rohtang Pass could be also viewed as a certain cultural marker highlighting Hinduism- and Buddhism-influenced areas. For our theme it is interesting to notice various interpretations of the legend as developed by people living from both sides of the Pass, i.e. from Lahoul to the north of it and from Kullu on the southern part from it (Singh Gill 2010: 19-23).

Both versions reflect the imprint left on the beliefs by Hinduism to the south of Rohtang in Kulu, and by Buddhism—to the north or in Lahoul. In the "southern", or Kulu version one of the major Hindu gods, Lord Shiva, was crucial in opening the path for people after being asked by them. As Gill writes, the place, 'the hillock above Manali', where Shiva landed after making a giant leap, is still a highly venerated by the locals, and temple in praise of Shiva around the rock was built there afterwards (Gill 2010: 20f.).

The major theme of the legend by the version of Lahoul people reflects the links that existed between Lahoul with its northern big neighbour, Tibet. Tibetan culture and Buddhism became a main background of the legend, associated with the Tibetan king Gyapo Gyaser, who 'gave a powerful blow with his magic hunting crop and created a great dent in the mountain chain above Khoksar', which became known as the Rohtang (La) Pass (Singh Gill 2010: 21) (Photo 3).



Photo 3: Khoksar in Lahoul after crossing Rohtang La Pass



97

Source: Laura Yerekesheva.

The details of the northern version of the legend reveal an interesting moment relating to the attitude of the Buddhists towards Hinduism which prevailed at the time when the legend spread. In it one could find the view on more protective character of Buddhism vis-à-vis Hinduism, whether it comes to the idea of not being mingled with Hindu people, or rather negative attitude to that belief. This could be traced throughout the legend. According to it, Tibetan king Gyapo Gyaser wanted to make second blow to make the dent (pass) lower, however, he was restrained by *devi* who advised him: 'If you make the pass too low and easy, the Buddhist people of Lahaul will mingle with the people of Kulu and plains. This will not be good' (Singh Gill 2010: 21).

In another episode one could find a depiction of the place, where the Other lives, as a dangerous place full of pitfalls and temptations that could harm the Buddhist king. At the other side of, over the Rohtang (La) Pass, there lived beautiful *rakshasani*, and that place was associated with the seduction of the king and his failure to implement his duty to reign while staying in the Other land, i.e. in Kulu.



Thus, the legends as an epitome of people's collective subconsciousness reveal different attitude towards the Other's religious set of ideas dominant in both sides of the Rohtang (La) Pass. Regarding religious beliefs, they made certain powerful imprint on the mind of people. This was reflected in localisation of the main gods and deities such as Shiva and real political figures like Tibetan king Gyapo Gyaser. Their characters were creatively adjusted within the frames of the mythology vis-à-vis general context as regards to role of nature, particularly, mountains.

The whole Lahoul and mountains are highly revered by the people, meditators and pilgrims. The sacred geography of this place is associated with and mostly represented by the veneration of the mountains, among which the sacred Drilbu Ri Mountain occupy a special place. Its double-peak summit 'is worshipped as the natural form of Chakrasamvara and Vajravarahi in union [...] The spiritual significance of this union is a key to Tantra' (Garsha 2011: 124).

The ancient tradition of veneration of the mountain as a sacred place, has been incorporated and interpreted from Buddhist perspective, to visually show and explain the basic principle of tantra—the union of wisdom (represented by female, Yum) and means (represented by male, Yab) principles. Hence, in Buddhist tradition the name of the sacred mountain Drilbu Ri standing in the middle of the Lahoul, is known as "The Mountain of Spontaneous Union".

Circumambulation (*kora* in Buddhist tradition) of the sacred mountain is believed to purify oneself of negativity and enhance a positive energy. The several circles of it, i.e. most inner one around the Drilbu Ri peak, the middle and large (following the natural flow of the Chandra and Bhaga rivers) are also could be viewed as elements of sacred geography, codified in mandala cartography (more on this see Stutchbury 1994; Widorn & Kinberger 2009: 292-304).

Hierarchy of the Gods

Along with the mountains as an object of worshipping, another sample of intertwin between the primordial and so called "established" religions, particularly, Buddhism, was a high role played by an acting force—a hero, actor, deity, god. According to primordial local beliefs, each place in western Himalayas (as elsewhere) had its own local protector or *devata* (*devta*)—the deity, spirit of the place safeguarding it from filth and misfortunes and regulating general life of people. This specificity was typical for Lahoul too. Devata/devta protected place and



was closely associated with it, this was reflected in the toponymy and mythology. Naturally, that in mountain areas perception of devata was closely associated with the mountains.

It was believed that major and most important *devata*, protector of Lahoul was Gyephang Devta. He was venerated as a chief deity of Lahoul, whose spirit lives on the top of the mountain bearing his name, i.e. Gyephang peak (height 13,050 feet or 5,870 m) (Singh Gill 2010: 24). This peak could be seen from any place of Lahoul, and especially, from its both opposite sides, i.e. the Rohtang (La) Pass in the south, and Baralacha (La) Pass in the north. This geographic feature became an important marker in the religious perception of people who believed that Gyephang Devta as a Protector of Lahoul surveys the whole region and keeps everything under his control.

Gyephang Devta has been highly venerated in Lahoul for 'times immemorial', he was regarded as the younger brother of 'Jamalu Devata' (Handa 2001: 105). There is a temple at the Sissu village in his honour where at summertime a festival is held there (Photo 4). It is believed that passing by this place, the stranger should by all means stop and pay respect to the Gyephang devta to get his blessings and to 'open' the safe road ahead for a smooth trip further.

99

According to local legend, Gyephang Devta came from Ladakh with followers including his mother, across the Baralacha (La) Pass by overcoming the high passes and winning the struggle against *rakshasas* (malignant demons) who lived in Lahoul and who wanted to preserve their place intact. The legend said that he brought with himself (in his mouth, so to hid them from rakshasas) the seeds of grain such as barley, wheat and buckwheat to learn people how to grow and cultivate them. For that particularly the local people highly praised and esteemed him (Singh Gill 2010: 24f.).

This legend is a bright sample of the interplay between local beliefs (animism and totemism) spread in Lahoul and Buddhism with its "civilised" role in advancing people's development. As a savior of people who introduced new food materials and technologies, Gyephang Devta has been iconised and deified as a local *genii*, a protector of the place. It seems that the legend reflects a process of penetration of Buddhism and its spread in the area, through highlighting dichotomic differentiation between "previous" and "current", cultural We-Other. In this dichotomy "previous", or Other was labelled as rakshasas striving to preserve their domain and old status-quo, while Buddhism, the



"current", or We was associated with Gyephang Devta and advancement and protection brought by him.

Photo 4: Gyephang Devta Temple at Sissu





The legend is a sample of a typological regularity as far as the "civilising" role of an "established or advanced" religion in a new place, context and time is concerned. A typologically similar narration could be traced in another cultural context, in ancient and early mediaeval China, also related to the role of Buddhism vis-à-vis local beliefs (or pagan, in Christian terminology). The primordial beliefs were associated with the various forces of nature, unlimited, uncontrolled and "wild" exaltation of feelings, behaviour, thoughts. To conquer this 'wild' nature of a person within himself and in his relation within the communities, Buddhism (and Confucianism) played a "civilised", polished, balancing and regulatory role in subduing and suppressing the wild beginning in a person. Famous "Journey to the West", a 16-century Ming-dynasty popular novel that has been immensely popular in China for over 400 years⁵ became an iconic one in presenting through Buddhist iconography and folk language the main idea of subduing local 'wild' forces. The role of Buddhism was represented by the monk who in his travels to the western countries (to India) in a search of a sacred knowledge conquered various malignant forces and made them friends adjusted to his (Buddhist) norms.

101

Equally, the legend on Gyephang Devta demonstrates the conquer by Buddhism of the primordial beliefs, and prosperity and advancement brought by it. The paradox of this could be seen in the fact that though Gyephang Devta brought Buddhism in Lahoul, yet the traditional perceptions of the people still used the lexis and perceptions adhering to previous set of ideas, which seemingly being eliminated, yet didn't disappear completely. Even the fact of deification of Gyephang Devta as a deity, patron of Lahoul whose spirit lives on the top of the mountain, refers to old beliefs of role of spirits related to the nature and its sometimes 'wild' forces. The way how Gyephang Devta is venerated at the temple at Sissu village also reflects the old idea of sacrifice, moreover, the earlier practiced ritual had almost nothing at all with Buddhist concepts of non-violence. The Kangra District Gazetteer mentioned in 1897 that 'sheep sacrificed to Gyephang are slain by having their bellies slit open and the gall extracted while they are still alive' (cit. in Singh Gill 2010: 24).⁶

However, according to modern Buddhist authors, 'worshipping the fierce Gepang can be done within Buddhism if the rites follow basic ethics and never confuse him with an ultimate refuge. As is well known, Gepang himself cannot receive offerings stained by blood' (Garsha 2011: 7). It looks like previous practice of animal sacrifice to Gyephang Devta, became an issue of concern for Buddhist preachers,



hence the attention is particularly given to the importance of ethical norms.

There is another issue related to the discussed idea, i.e. hierarchy and 'substitution' of the Gods. Looking top-down a three-level hierarchy of gods, deities and protectors can be seen in Lahoul. While Buddha, from a popular perception is the supreme Lord of the universe, and Gyephang Devta is a chief patron, protector of Lahoul; then on the basic local level the main deity to whom people pray and whom they ask to fulfill their wishes, are local village deities. Their adoration and veneration are another sample of amalgamation between various religious traditions. It shows how deeply primordial beliefs are fixed in the subconsciousness of folk people and contribute towards shaping their religious view of the world.

On this basic everyday grassroot level, it is these deities who protect people and extend help and support. It is they whom the villagers venerate and make offerings to. As was evident from the talks with the natives of Kardang village in Lahoul, the rank and file families of this village associate their life with the working of and blessings by their village deity—Gyalva Gatsampa.⁷ Being a Buddhists, believing in Buddha, yet they address all their issues to be resolved and prayers mainly to Gyalva Gatsampa. Gyalva Gatsampa (1189-1258) was a yogi and a renown Mahasiddha in Vajrayana (Tantric) Buddhism (Drukpa lineage) who visited Lahoul several times and meditated extensively there in caves.⁸ (Photo 5) This practice of hierarchy when an absolute Buddha, or *Chakrasamvara* and an ultimate refuge becomes an abstract one vis-à-vis local deity and protector, i.e. Gyalva Gatsampa, speaks about vitality of primordial beliefs, such as believe in spirits/protectors of the places.

Local deities who play the role of protectors (or spirits from shamanic perspective) are the mainstream and most important element of everyday beliefs of the people. It is not surprising that the local folklore extensively and devotionally keeps and spreads the oral tradition and numerous stories associated with Gyalva Gatsampa. Of particular interest are those related to his meditation and full realisation of his spiritual forces. This realisation allowed him to acquire extra-normal powers that enabled him to fly, leave huge imprints of parts of his body on rocks and in caves, which consequently became sacred spots, and around which either temples had been built, or they were highly venerated as a part of pilgrimage route in Lahoul.



Photo 5: Gyalva Gatsampa statue in Jabjes Monastery



103

Source: Laura Yerekesheva.

Mystical and paranormal powers of Gyalwa Gatsampa was just another dimension of previous shamanic and mythologised perception of the world with high role of spirits and heroes, local genii able to perform miracles and protect people. These beliefs didn't disappear, moreover, they had been adapted by Buddhism that explained paranormal qualities of Gyalwa Gatsampa to be a result of his achieving full



realisation and Buddhahood. Today these beliefs keep occupying enormous space in religious picture of local people, in a "processed" syncretic form.

Though Buddhism accepted and acknowledged this "modified" form of adoration Gyalwa Gatsampa, it seems to be still an issue of concern, when Gyephang Devta or Gyalva Gatsampa should never be confused with an ultimate refuge or reaching Buddhahood (see above). Thus, in Lahoul a specific "bottom-top" hierarchy of the Gods with high role of local deities on the village (Gyalva Gatsampa), region-wide (Gyephang Devta) levels can be identified, who are revered sometimes even more than Buddha himself.

Cult of stones

In Kardang there is an old Jabjes monastery devoted to Gyalva Gatsampa, located in between the village's houses (Photo 6). With typically Buddhist traditional interior, it is a place of the sacred big stone with the imprints of Gylava Gatsampa's knee and other parts of the body (genitals). The stone is highly venerated, it is said that people should make a circle around it to make a wish come true.

104

According to the legend Gyalva Gatsampa while flying, once chased the *dakini* (fairy) in the form of dove, who escaped from him under the stone, where Gyalva in his efforts to catch her had left huge imprint of parts of his body on the big rock, around which the veneration place and later monastery was built. Even nowadays one could see the imprints on the rock, that became polished due to numerous touches made by pilgrims and locals, who believe in the power of getting sacred energy (or *manna* in Max Weber's terminology, *prana* in Indian, *qi* in Chinese, and *qut* in Turkic traditions) through circling and touching the rock. The monastery is inside decorated in a typically Buddhist style, yet is a sample of survival of the fetishism and animism being incorporated by Buddhism.



Photo 6: Jabjes Monastery in Kardang village



105

Source: Laura Yerekeshva.

Cult of stones (similar to cult of mountains) was a part of adoration of nature going deep back to the dawn of history. Stones of unusual forms, shapes, colour, holes were regarded as a blessing from the Gods, a concentration of pure energy that could heal and protect. The mentioned above circumambulation of the Drilby Ri mountain's inner circle was considered as a sacred and purifying act. Yet equal significance bears also an act of veneration of three stone constructions there through prayers and symbolical acts of 'lamp offerings, smoke offerings, hanging of prayer flags and other rites' (Garsha 2011: 32).

Circling around stones was an important element of the rituals of protection and fulfilling wishes. In Kazakh tradition, for example, the term *ainalayin*/circling around is associated with the healing, recovering and protection. In Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism *parikrama/pradakshina* refers to circumambulation of sacred places to purify oneself and imbibe their energy. Stones were also important markers commemorating both people and events of high significance. In the history of a humankind irrespectively of regions, stones were also the open natural books where people inscribed their petroglyphs



and letters, made drawings, and even used them as a governmental instrument of conveying the messages as was the case of Ashoka and his edicts, set all over his vast Empire in III century BCE. The stone images of the people, *balbaly*, practiced by ancient Turkic people of Central Asia, Altai, Mongolia and Eurasia was a commemoration of the dead, shamans or warriors holding bowl and knife. And, perhaps, one of the most famous stones known today is Kaaba whose unusual origin (as a meteorite), form and colour paved a way towards its veneration and later incorporation by Islam. As a result, it became one of major symbols and pilgrimage destination of this religion, i.e. *hajj*.

The stones in Lahoul are deeply associated with the activity of Gyalva Gatsampa and Dakinis, who left the huge imprints of their foots and other parts of the body on numerous rocks and caves throughout the valleys and around Drilbu Ri mountain. These places are highly venerated by people and became pilgrimage spots, a part of tantric practice (both in Buddhism and Hindusim). For example, the Markula temple site at Maru/Udaipur is a place where the imprints of Dakinis' foot are highly venerated by both locals and pilgrims who specially come to visit the highly "energised" places where the evil forces are conquered. The Markula place is famous for several (three) Dakinis' foot imprints in the rock, under the tree (the spot has been sheltered and venerated) and on the bank of a river.

106

The other bright sample of the cult of stones is the "Heavy stone", which lies in Markula and is believed by the tantric practitioners as the "Buddha's toe" and 'the actual tantric spot': '[...] unless some purity is achieved, a single person cannot lift this rock from the ground despite its modest size, because of the Underground Dakinis [...]' (Garsha 2011: 37). In Lahoul's history the stone images have been rather widely spread. One of the relatively modern accounts of them was mentioned by Rose:

a slab of stone is put up by the roadside in memory of the deceased person and on many of them is a rock-carving of a human figure in the centre or a portrait of the deceased in relief. Those erected recently have a spot smeared with oil in the centre. In the village temples stone slabs are also found on which are carved rows of figures, often exceeding ten in numbers. These too are well bathed in oil. At irregular intervals rich families which have lost a member continue to feast the whole village and a slab with these portraits of the dead is placed in the temple in recognition of this. (Rose [1919] 1990: 91)



This passage is very representative. It shows that cult of stones was intertwined with the cult of dead people and their spirits, whom living people, usually relatives, need to remember through sharing meals with neighbours. It could be of typological regularity, since the similar traditions could be found almost everywhere in the world, though perhaps not in a pristine, but a modified way⁹. The fact mentioned in the Glossary that 'recent slabs have a spot smeared with oil in the centre' refers to the influence of Hinduism through adding its own symbols and meaning to the existing cultural and religious perceptions of the Lahoulians. The stone worshipping in Hinduism is brightly represented by the cult of phallus symbolising Shiva who also is represented through the image of the polished stone.

The intermingle of various beliefs became a distinguished marker of cultural and religious milieu. In Kardang village (Photo 7) the veneration of stones could be viewed from the perspectives of both primordial beliefs and Hinduism as well.

Photo 7: View at Kardang village from Kardang Monastery

107



Source: Laura Yerekesheva.



Few meters away from the Jabjes monastery which is a place of highly venerated rock imprints of Gyalva Gatsampa, within the house where the author stayed in the village, there is special place adjoining the house, where the cult objects are kept. The most interesting thing was the object itself—a special stone kept in the far distance from the low ceiling space, that was kept closed all the time except for the periods of worshipping (Photo 8).

At the same time, when it comes to the interior of the three story-house, its furnishing and design, particularly of the worship place, it fully reflects the Buddhist traditional iconography. *Thangkas*, images and statues of the Buddhas, rosary beads, cups and trays with offerings, incense sticks and special bowls are typical for Vajrayana Buddhism worship rooms and corners that could be found everywhere in the Lahoul. The 'standard' setting is intermingled with the photos of some family members or precious items made of copper, bronze or silver. Without doubt, the worship room is the most precious place in the house, which is kept closed and venerated, as per Buddhist tradition.

The intermingle of various religious traditions reflected in the rites, interior, design of the house of one particular family speaks about the syncretic perceptions being expressed and followed in a natural way. The Buddhist beliefs were intertwined with the 'rudimental' cults related to animism, fetishism and totemism in a smooth and organic fashion, that made difficult to recognise and distinguish primordial elements in the "established" teaching of Buddhism. Similar way, the addition of Hinduism into the existed system of ideas enhance the multi-facet syncretic character of beliefs.

The procedure of worshipping included the oiling of the stone and reciting the praying words, or sometimes just oiling and polishing it. A particular member of the family could do this, even children, who were given "assignment" by fathers¹⁰ to perform this duty for the benefit of the whole family. The symbol of the stone though less polished than those relating to Shivaism, yet could be correlated also to the Hinduism, as far as *shiv lingam* worship is concerned.



Photo 8: Worshipping stone inside place



109

Source: Laura Yerekesheva.

Buddhism and Hinduism

Relations between Hinduism and Buddhism underwent long history. Not going much into discussions whether Buddhism could be considered an offspring of Hinduism or is a separate religion, it is



succinct to say here that throughout thousands of years of interaction a shared cultural ecosystem has developed that enabled both religious traditions to imbibe the features and elements of each other and develop and crystallise them further.

The shared broad cultural field with numerous traditions contributed to great legacy of India—the multitude of various expressions and acceptance of the "Other". When it comes to religious and ethnic diversity and religious syncretism India is an amazing and special place. In modern Himachal Pradesh state, there are several sacred places which are visited by people of both traditions. At Rewalsar's site (cave, temple) which is considered to be a sacred place of pilgrimage for Buddhists, associated with Guru Padmasambhava who brought Buddhist teaching in the area in 8 CE, many Hindus and the Sikhs equally come there for worshipping. Or vice versa, in Sarahan's Kali Bari Hindu Temple the Buddhists come, pray and worship the same way as the Hindus.

Lahoul too, reflected this legacy of intertwined shared cultural ecosystem. Throughout its history, irrespectively of under whose political domination Lahoul was, this interplay of various cultural and religious traditions continued and marked the region. This has been manifested in various ways, in religions or names which local ruling families acquired (such as Jos that changed their names into Thakurs and later called themselves Rajputs), in anthropological features and appearance, ideas and perceptions, clothes and ways of living. There could be highlighted several samples of this intermixture in Lahoul.

The mentioned above Markula temple, a place of Dakinis could be treated in both ways. Oral traditions, temple interior design, artefacts and statues indicate that the same sacred space and objects are viewed and interpreted from dual lenses. What is Dakinins and Vajra-varahi for a Buddhist perspective, is Markula Devi and the Goddess Mahishasurmardini for the Hindu tradition. Irrespectively of the name, however, both of them deal with slaying the demons/delusions, having their blood in the skull cup. Both of them protect the place and its people, and both of them symbolically "participate" in the sacred tantric rituals and practices. The other brightest epiphany of this is the Trilokinath temple in Phakpa/ Trilokinath, a village not far from Markula/Udaipur in Lahoul's Chandrabhaga valley, that is also shared by Buddhists and Hindus altogether (Photo 9).



Photo 9: View at Trilokinath temple from distance



111

Source: Laura Yerekesheva.

The temple Trilokinath, a bright representative case of this amalgamation, is devoted to the "Lord of the Three Worlds". Under this name the worshippers appeal to Avaloketishvara (the Goddess of Mercy and Compassion) in Buddhist tradition, and Shiva in Hinduism. The uniqueness of this temple is in its acceptance by both Hinduism, Buddhism, it is equally venerated by both religions and represents a significant pilgrimage place for their followers. The interinfluence of religious traditions resulted in the difficulty to strictly categorise the place as a purely Hindu or Buddhist one (Photo 10).

Some authors state that on that place there was probably earliest Indian Buddhist monastery in 2 CE, to have been founded by Nagarjuna himself, of which no remnants are left till day. Later, the transformations took place and 'Buddhism and Hinduism seemed to have been blended when Chamba turned Hindu and gained loose control over the valley', however, the temple itself was built around the end of 9 to early 10 century CE (Garsha 2011: 42f.). The others, like British colonial Indian Civil Service officers narrate what they have seen and heard, as 'there is no doubt that the worship of Trilokinath at Tunde is essentially that of Shiva, though the temple is staffed by



Buddhist priests, and the god has been adopted by the lamas' (Gazetteer [1917] 2003: 202) (Photo 11).

Photo 10: Pile of stones with images of Shiva and Buddhist praying mantras



112

Source: Laura Yerekesheva.

Photo 11: Shiv Lingam worshipping place in the yard of Trilokinath temple



Source: Laura Yerekesheva.



Along with the temple itself, the main object of adoration and veneration is the statue (dating to 10 century CE) of seated marble Avalokiteshvara (Buddha of Universal Mercy and Compassion) or Shiva, on the head of which is crowned Amitabha or Buddha of Infinite Light (Photo 12).

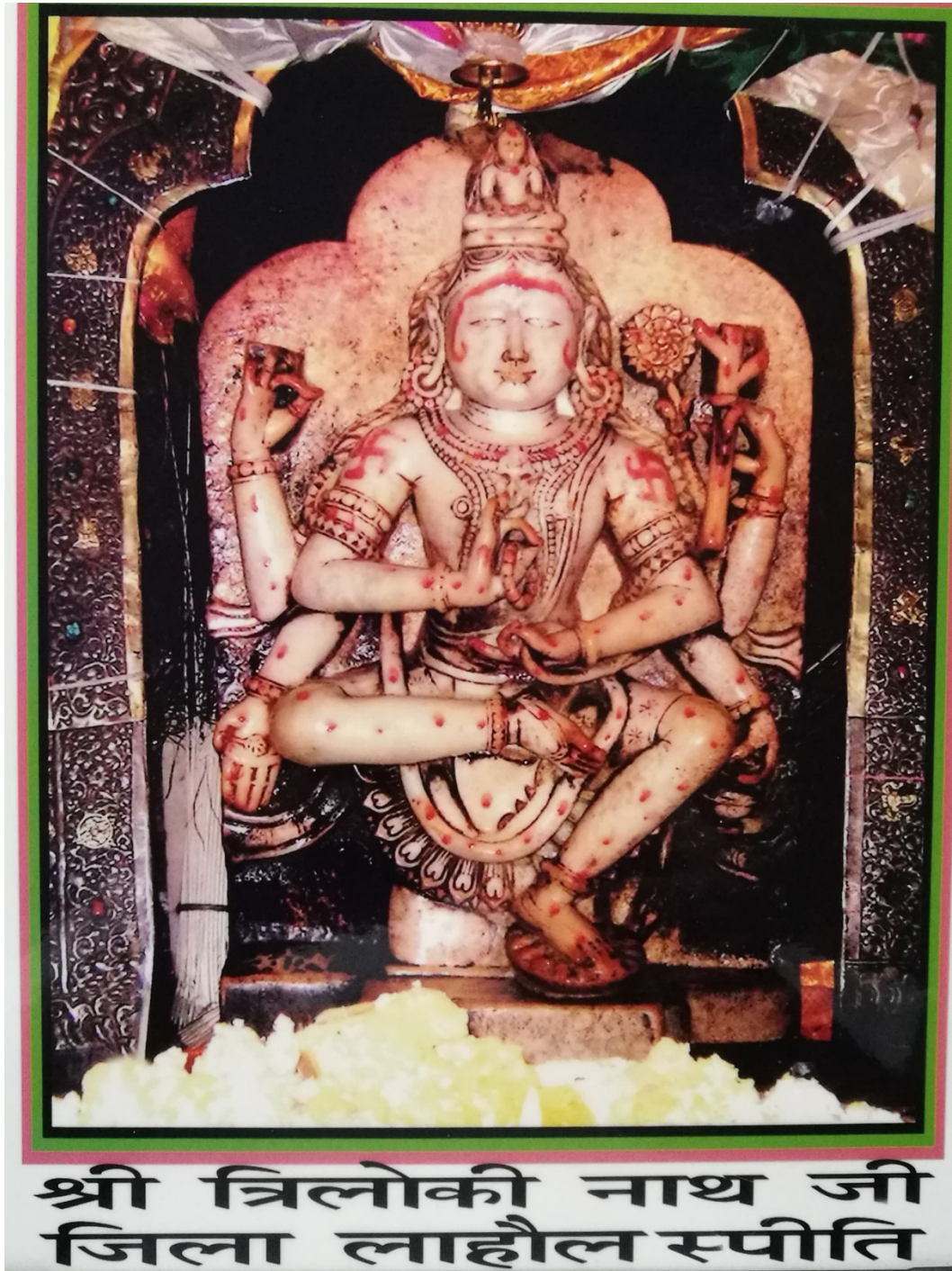
Photo 12: Shiva/Avalokiteshvara statue decorated





Iconography of the image is worth special mentioning. This double posture of two Gods in one statue is a unique symbolical representation of the dual sacredness of the place itself (Photo 13).

Photo 13. Shiva/Avalokiteshvara statue undecorated





The beautifully carved six hand statue of milky white marble is extremely highly venerated by both traditions and is associated with myths and legends, which for purpose of the current article are of a special importance. They indicate the continuing role of primordial cults of nature, particularly, the spirits of river and water in general. For example, the lake spot from where the Avalokiteshvara (or Chenrezik in Tibetan language) was believed to appear to the people, is regarded as his original home and was called as Omay Tso (or Milky Lake). 'A local festival comprises a pilgrimage to these water springs. It is meant to urge the deity of Great Compassion to remain contented in the village and not yearn for the mountain abode' (Garsha 2011: 45). Here one could find the continuation of the old tradition associating Gods and deities with nature.

Conclusion

Analysis of the specificity of religious beliefs in Lahoul shows both regularity and specificity of cultural and religious interactions. The belief systems ranges from primordial shamanism, animism, totemism to Buddhism and Hinduism make religious picture of Lahoul bright and multi-faceted. On the one hand, the primordial beliefs have been incorporated by Hinduism and Buddhism and became their organic part, though as a rule not so distinctly recognisable and traceable. On the other hand, one could find the synergy between the Hinduism and Buddhism themselves.

All this could be better understood through various functions of religion. The function of adaptation for Hinduism and Buddhism was a primary one when it came to their encounters with the primordial beliefs, according to which at the initial stage both teachings should adapt themselves to existed environment. Later on, this led to the need to develop more strong social integration and cohesion what activates the function of the integration with religious amalgamation as its key result. And further, the function of model attainment is a crucial when it comes to preserving and maintaining the elaborated model of existence, where the religions not only co-exist, rather are intertwined and synergised. Syncretism is a main result of this process. Syncretism itself becomes possible through the pattern maintenance function, where all religious symbols acquire the cultural dimension, because the pattern maintenance function is operational on the level of deeply rooted cultural symbolism with the developed and institutionalised traditions and the ways of its transmittance.



Here one can say that the case of specific institutionalisation of the interreligious syncretism became a way of living of the people of Lahoul exactly on the deep cultural level, or on the institutional (both formal and informal) plane. Due to this the function of pattern maintenance became possible. Thus, we could highlight the decisive role of culture as an all embracing system vis-à-vis religion, and as a necessary background and shared ecosystem that is required for the syncretism among different religious beliefs. Once this shared cultural ecosystem is established and advanced, then only religious amalgamation and syncretism can be developed.

In its own turn, religious interinfluence and interpretation can speak about various cross-cutting and typologically similar ways of explaining the world. It is this plurality and multiplicity that speaks about the highest understanding of the basic principles of life that have been culturally encoded in Indian tradition as "live and let others live". The shared cultural ecosystem only allowed perceiving the same objects from two lenses, the epitome of which is the Trilokinath temple statue. Numerous and various religious and political interflows and waves in the history of Lahoul contributed to the amalgamation and creation of a broad cultural milieu or ecosystem with its marked and brightly imprinted on the shared perception of the sacred time, space and Gods.

Endnotes

¹ The Kangra District Gazetteer states that there were four stations of this Mission in Central Asia: 'at Leh and Khalatse in Ladak, at Poo in Bashahr, and at Kyelang in Lahul [...]. Kyelang was the first station, and thither in 1854 came Pastors Heyde, Pagel and Yaschke [...]' (Gazetteer [1917] 2003: 206). This was perhaps the only relatively extended written information on the Moravian mission.

² More on this see: Laura Yerekesheva. 2008. Towards analysis of E. Durkheim's sociology of religion. *SOCIS-Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* (Sociological Researches), 12, pp. 117-26).

³ Some authors question the association of Lahoul with the activity of Guru Padmasambhava: 'There is no indication, in ancient texts or in the oral tradition, or of any single event connecting Lahoul with Guru Padmasambhava [...] The whole modern story that connects Lahoul with Padmasambhava fully collapses' (Garsha 2011: 126f.).

⁴ More on the circumambulation around Kailas see in Thurman & Wise 1999.

⁵ The novel was based on the real story of travels of Buddhist monk Xuan Zang through Central Asia to India, who 'traversed 138 states, writing a brilliant page not only in the history of Buddhist culture but also in the history of Sino-Indian cultural exchanges. All kinds of stories about Xuangzang's quest for the scriptures soon circulated among the people, and with the passage of time and the gradual geographical spread of these stories, they acquired a more and more mystical coloring' (Shi Changyu 2011: 1f.).



⁶ In 1917 Kangra District Gazetteer the British authors mentioned the practice of eating meat of sheep and goats, even calves (in latter case which is done secretly) among 'the Buddhists, half Buddhists, Lohars and Shipis'. 'Slaughtering yaks during winter is still practiced in Darcha (Dartse), Rarig and other villages above Kyelong, but it is done very secretly, and nobody will acknowledge the fact' (Kangra Gazetteers [1917] 2003: 200).

⁷ In some texts (see, for example, Garsha 2011: 62) his name is written as Gyalwa Gotsangpa.

⁸ In Buddhist Drugpa lineage he stands second in the hierarchy after the First Gyalwang Drukpa (1161-1211) and is said to reach Buddhahood and being later recognised as an emanation of Jetsun Milarepa (Garsha 2011: 58, 62).

⁹ Among Turkic people of Central Asia even nowadays, for example, the tradition of "as" or remembering the spirit of the deceased person through organising and sharing meal with relatives, friends and neighbours is still a basic element of traditional culture, both urban and rural.

¹⁰ "Fathers" are used here in plural form, since even in the second half of XX century in Lahoul, though not everywhere, the tradition of polyandry (when several brothers had one wife) was observed. In family where I stayed that tradition was kept by the fathers, born around 1930-40s. Their children already didn't follow this tradition. Nowadays it is said it is not observed anymore in Lahoul.

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