

8-2013

## Religious Fundamentalism in Zanskar, Indian Himalaya

Salomé Deboos

*university of Strasbourg*, [salome.deboos@googlemail.com](mailto:salome.deboos@googlemail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya>

### Recommended Citation

Deboos, Salomé (2013) "Religious Fundamentalism in Zanskar, Indian Himalaya," *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*: Vol. 32: No. 1, Article 12.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol32/iss1/12>

This Research Article is brought to you for free and open access by the DigitalCommons@Macalester College at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact [scholarpub@macalester.edu](mailto:scholarpub@macalester.edu).

## RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM IN ZANSKAR, INDIAN HIMALAYA

Zanskar valley in the Indian Himalayas is at a turning point in its history. After centuries of Buddhist-Muslim marriages, these are now rejected by both religious groups. This paper addresses the impact of the rise of religious fundamentalism on social regulation and communal negotiation in Padum and Zanskari society. This is a Tibeto-Burman speaking Himalayan population made up of a majority of Mahayana-Buddhists and a minority of Sunni-Muslims. Based on ethnographic research conducted since 2001 in the local language, the anthropological approach presented here emphasizes the importance of speech acts and also uses a socio-cultural and psycho-sociological perspective. It stresses historical and bibliographical investigations as well as research on the latest local political developments.

Authorities imposed curfew restrictions in remote Zanskar in Ladakh as Muslims and Buddhists clashed over conversion for the second time since September 24. Police said three persons including the local Tehsildar, the highest civilian officer who operates from Padam, the centre of the town, was injured and is being flown to Srinagar for treatment. [ . . . ]

Around 26 Buddhist from six families converted to Islam in the local Jamia Masjid on the last Friday of September. Of them five are residents of Padam, the centre of the remote town, and one lived in Zangla. As the local Muslim minority took the converts on their shoulders and moved around in the market, it triggered tensions.

In the immediate reaction, the Buddhist majority, enforced a strike and started social boycott of the converts. Zanskar Buddhist Association that is the main party of the majority community led a campaign against the conversions. Apart from writing letters to the Muslim community leaders, they had threatened of a larger agitation in case it does not stop. They accuse Muslims of luring the families to Islam, an allegation that the local clergy rejects.

During the last fortnight, however, the pressures from the majority community created a situation that the family living in Zangla, returned back to Buddhist fold making Muslims allege that it was done under pressure. This triggered the new tensions . . . in which three persons were injured and police imposed curfew restrictions.

(Hussein 2012)

This paper addresses the impact of the rise of religious fundamentalism on social regulation and communal negotiation through a discussion of different speech acts in Padum and Zanskari society, a Himalayan population speaking a Tibeto-Burman language and composed of a majority of Mahayana-Buddhists and a minority of Sunni-Muslims.

Since 2001, I have been carrying out research on this region. One morning in December 2004, I sat down with the grandfather of the family I was staying with to talk about local history and Muslim families in Padum. In front of everyone, he asked me if I had

already been to see the King of Padum (*Gyalpo*) and Shamsat Din, the eldest man in the most ancient Muslim family from Padum. I replied that I hadn't. He then got up and went off for a walk. A few days later, I went to meet the King of Padum and later, Shamsat Din. Both gave me the same version of the history of the arrival of the Muslims in Zanskar:

Around three hundred fifty years ago, the King of Padum sent Zanskarpas to Kashmir to bring back two Kashmiris, a butcher and a secretary. The butcher

would be in charge of slaughtering animals thus avoiding Buddhists from Zanskar from gaining bad karma by killing animals in order to eat them. The secretary had to be fluent in Urdu to write and communicate with the Moghuls. Then, to facilitate their stay in Padum, the King gave each of them a Buddhist woman who converted by marriage.

The King of Padum also told me about the history of some Buddhist families in Padum and then told me to go and meet the Imam to talk about Muslim families. Then the grandfather introduced me to the Imam. It was only after these interviews with these dignitaries that the grandfather agreed to talk about local history as well as about the other Zanskarpa families.

My anthropological approach uses a socio-cultural and psycho-sociological perspective informed by ethnography, and also stresses the importance of historical and bibliographical investigation, in spite of the relative lack of historical documentation on Zanskar (Friedl 1983). My previous work (Deboos 2010) highlighted the correlation between political experiences and the construction of local history. The accounts provided by Zanskarpa enable us to comprehend this local narrative about history both in the way it is told and perceived, and in the way it is experienced by most people as a historical reality (Deboos 2010). The history that a community forges for itself about its common past—its traditional history—holds great importance and the memories of the successive generations help to constantly reshape or reinforce it.

Most of my interviews with Zanskarpa in Zanskari language were preceded by the same question: “did you ask such and such a person before?”. I could therefore appreciate how my own “socialization through language, and to use language, consist[ed] of empirically delineable understandings and practices that [were] disseminated across social space and enacted in situated contexts” (Kulick and Schiefflin 2004:365). Understanding this enabled me to appreciate the role of language and especially speech interactions in Zanskari society (Descombes 2005:3). “Words do not merely represent meanings, but rather they fulfil a social function, and that is their principal aim. [One should pay] attention to the give and take of utterances [... and see] language not as an instrument of reflection but as a mode of action” (Keating and Egbert 2009:169). Speeches impact the Padumpa social network, its organization as an institution, and its regulation through negotiation. They give a clue to understanding the “web of order” (Pirie 2002) in this Muslim-Buddhist community.

An important fact is that the knowledgeable, erudite, speech uttered by the King is recognized by both Buddhists and Muslims in Padum. The Padumpa can be considered as a unit constituted around the King to negotiate and avoid social drama (Turner 1969). Indeed, if speeches and

words may create tension between people, they also may be considered as powerful tools to organize the community and the latter attitude was the prevailing one in the early 2000's. Hence speech acts, as an institution and a component of social discourse, become essential in the development and the maintenance of the social network and especially in the building of Buddhist-Muslim relationships within the community. Therefore, knowledge about speeches “is knowledge of ‘social context’ or ‘situation’; and it is knowledge which the individual must have merely to sustain his co-presence with other participants in any ongoing activity, and thus be in a position to speak, let alone speak in a socially appropriate fashion. It is in this respect that an understanding of the regulation of participation can be seen as a necessary aspect of the ethnography of speaking” (Philips in Bauman & Sherzer 1974: 109). For these reasons in the early 2000s, the inhabitants considered themselves as *Padumpa* before making reference to their religious affiliation. Zanskarpas usually talk about their belonging to Padum and Zanskar, and of the importance of locality, which takes priority over any religious affiliation.

In this context, the recent events described at the beginning of this paper suggest that being a native from Padum is now becoming less important than the affirmation of religious affiliation. In this paper, after describing the Padum community, I will point out changes related to the rise of new religious fundamentalisms, and show how these affect social regulation through speech acts and the dissemination of knowledge.

Situated at an altitude of between 3600m and 4000m, Zanskar is nestled between the Himalayan chain and the Indus valley, bordering China, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Geographically, Zanskar constitutes one of the five regions of Ladakh; the four others are Purig, Nubra, Rupshu and Ladakh. Administratively, the Zanskar valley is a *tehsil* of the district of Kargil which itself is a Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC), like Leh district. Padum is the capital of Zanskar.

The climate of Zanskar is harsh. Abundant snowfalls cut off the roads from November to June each year. Since 1980 a 232km highway connects Padum (the capital of Zanskar) to Kargil via the Penzi La pass (altitude of 4400m). It is a 12-hour bus ride to Kargil and several days walk to leave Zanskar via the different passes, which reach a maximum height of 5300m. Zanskar is populated by 13,673 people classified by the Indian authorities as a “boto<sup>1</sup>” Scheduled Tribe, who are followers of Mahayana Buddhism (92.7 percent) or Sunni Islam (7.3 percent).

Whereas conflictual relations between Buddhists and Muslims are widespread in the neighbouring valleys, in Padum, inter-religious marriages were still common until very recently. The last one took place in 1997. Zanskarpas usually talk about their belonging to Padum and Zanskar,

1. “Boto” means “Buddhist” or “Buddhism” in the Zanskari language

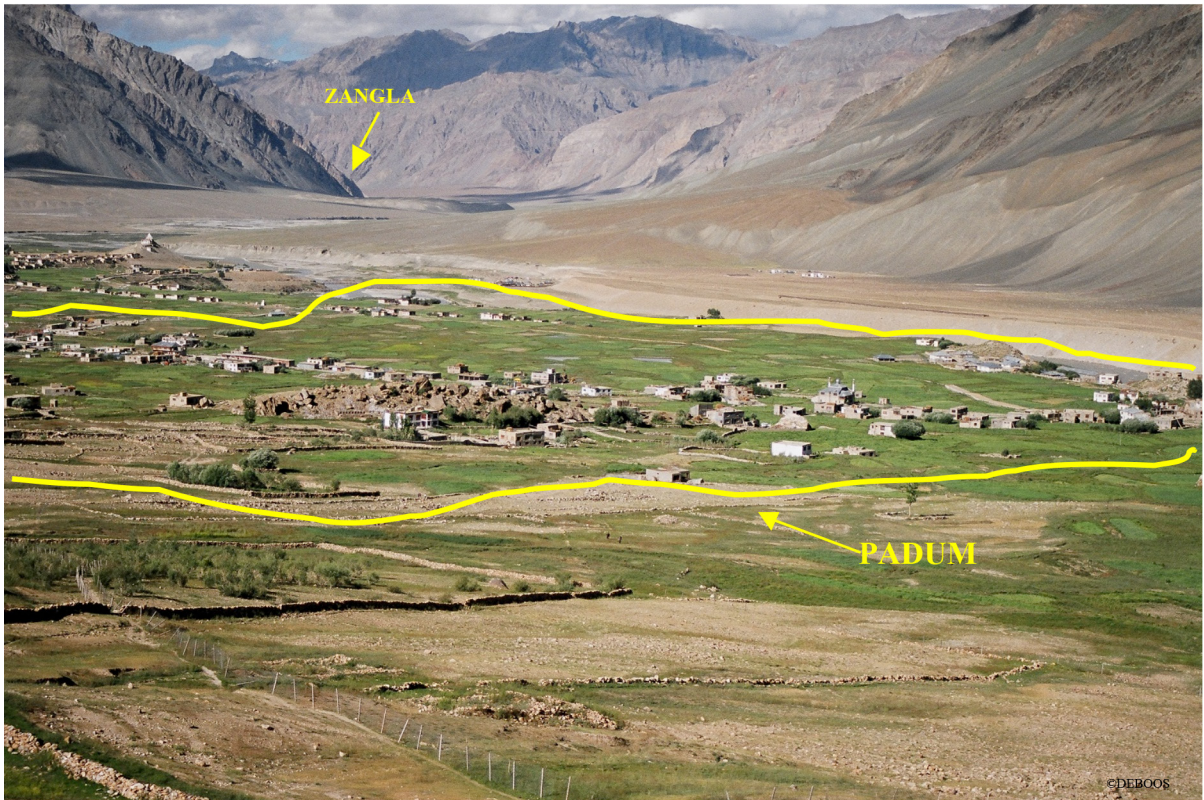


FIG 1: THE VILLAGE OF PADUM IN ZANSKAR. PADUM, AUGUST 2012. PHOTO: SALOME DEBOOS.

and when they describe their representation of the world, they all place Padum in the centre of the picture without really being able to position Lhasa or Mecca very clearly (Deboos 2010). Moreover, local political organization includes a Buddhist king (*Gyalpo*) who, although officially stripped of his administrative functions, still has great power and high status within the community. It also includes a Muslim *Lambardar*<sup>2</sup> who has been democratically chosen and invested with a local administrative function. A third important dignitary, the *Tehsildar* or Executive Magistrate, holds court related to land, tax and revenue matters, a position which has a lot of authority, power and respect. In Zaskar, the *Tehsildar* is also in charge of the census and the electoral register as well as of delivering the “tribe affiliation form” essential to being recognized as belonging to a “scheduled tribe” and getting official registration from Kargil and Srinagar.

As I indicated before, I could not get any information about Buddhist and Muslim families’ properties before meeting the King (*Gyalpo*) of Padum. He is a Buddhist and in the past was the one who decided the date on which people could move cattle, the date of the harvest, etc. Even if today he has no administrative recognition, Padumpa still seek his advice in family quarrels or for many other

2. An authority like a mayor, who reports to the *Tehsildar*, the Magistrate, regarding the domestic affairs of the community.

reasons. His house is located in the old Padum, not far from the old mosque and the former Buddhist monastery. He is at home most of the day except during the summer season when he checks out the water distribution in the fields. Laypersons can just knock at his door, and the *Gyalpo*’s wife will welcome them with sweet-tea and salt-tea. He knows exactly who belongs to which family and is able to name each Muslim and Buddhist from Padum. His house is always full of people asking him for advice and solutions about their conflicts, tensions and problems. The local Muslims respect him and do not interfere in the King’s consultations. He also has some formal knowledge due to his studies to become an English teacher for primary governmental-school. The *Gyalpo* is the memory of the community, and therefore he takes part in the elders’ council, where his recommendations and suggestions are taken into account in the final decision. When the Padumpa had to choose a new *Lambardar*, most of the senior members of the community would say: “what *Gyalpo* said is that ...”. He is considered as expressing knowledge through experience and status.

Since the Jammu and Kashmir *Lambardari* Act of 1972, the *Lambardar* is a hereditary tax collector and has wide ranging governmental powers, including the policing authority of the village, and many other governmental and administrative perks. Therefore, the *Lambardar* has great power in the mediation between laypeople and the Magistrate’s Court. Most of the time, people do ask the *Lambardar* to represent



them in the land quarrels or quarrels related to heritage.

Thus, two kinds of speech acts organize the social peace in such way that social drama is avoided: the first one comes from the *Gyalpo*, who incarnates the voice of tradition and experience through the ages, and the second from the *Lambardar*, who enunciates the final, official and administrative decisions. Both are expected to respect each other and not interfere in each other's consultations.

## RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BUDDHISTS AND MUSLIMS IN PADUM

The Zaskar valley represents a particular spatiotemporal unit, that because of its geographical location, is literally cut off from the rest of the world for between 6 and 8 months a year, when the road and passes are closed and the Chadar (the frozen Zaskar River) provides the only access or way out of the valley. This geographical feature gives a strong sense of homogeneity on which *Padumpa* identity has been constructed over time. Within the community of Padum, similarities and differences between Buddhists and Sunni Muslims are, according to circumstances, either stressed or downplayed. Indeed, until recently, a Buddhist father preferred to give his daughter in marriage to a Muslim family rather than see her leave the valley to marry into a Buddhist family elsewhere. Even if it is beginning to change, many Sunni Muslim families still have among them Buddhist women (belonging to different age groups) converted by marriage. In this paper, I shall reserve the designation "group" to one of the two religious affiliations (Buddhist or Muslim) that together constitute the local community in Padum. I will use the term "community" to refer to the way Padumpa define themselves as belonging to one social, cultural and historical unit.

In contrast, in the neighbouring valleys such as the Suru and High Indus Valleys, Buddhists and Muslims live in a state of more or less constant tension: Buddhists and Muslims usually boycott shops from each others, they avoid visiting each others. In 2006, some serious riots popped up between Muslims and Buddhists taxi-drivers in Kargil, several drivers were injured and one Buddhist taxi-driver from Zaskar died. Thus, in Kargil, the two religious groups share the same neighbourhoods but have little contact. In Leh town, where the majority of the Muslims are Shias, when *Muharam*<sup>3</sup> festival time comes, they flagellate themselves in the street. Buddhists condemn such practices, which are against their beliefs and considerations about life. Such practices do not exist in Zaskar where Muslims are Sunni. Moreover, in Zaskar at the end of the month of Ramadan, in Padum, Buddhists offer a white auspicious scarf (*katak*) to Muslims to congratulate them, especially when they are related through inter-religious marriage.

In the Zaskar valley, as far as I could ascertain, significant

3. Muharam festival celebrates the death of Hussayn, son of Ali and Fatima (the prophet's daughter).

acts of anti-social behaviour or public violence are so rare that none of them has been recorded for a century, a fact also noted by other scholars working on Zaskar (Gutschow 1998). However, domestic violence exists but is considered as a "childish act" by the Zaskarpa. Furthermore, in the commonly accepted meaning of the word, violence (*nodches* – to hurt; (*r*)*tibches*, (*s*)*gyelches* – to knock down) is considered to be "impetuous" behaviour having no limits to contain it. It is therefore necessary to define clearly what I mean when I use the terms "violence" and "conflict." From an anthropological point of view the term *violence* (Michaud 1973), being polysemic, is as difficult to define as it is easy to identify. I will consider violence in its widest sense both symbolically (especially in the internal organization of Zaskarpa society, following both inferred and expressed rules) and literally as it is expressed openly in everyday life (malicious gossip or domestic violence in particular) within the community. I will reserve the term "conflict" for situations of tension, explicit or not, which can develop into a form of open opposition leading to a physical or verbal manifestation of violence. Furthermore, following Gluckman's work (2004; 2006), I will attempt to show how conflict can correspond or not to acts which, far from threatening social unity, rather illustrate the integrative capacity of the system that organises it. I will do this while at the same time resisting the functionalist tendencies of this author.<sup>4</sup>

## SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND THE RISE OF RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISMS

The situation in Ladakh since the last Ladakh Autonomous Hill Council elections in Kargil in 2008 and Leh in 2009, has been characterized by the development of new political and religious groups (Pirie 2007) which define their aim and themselves either as "defenders of Buddhist (Mahayana) Culture" or as "protectors of the Islam doxa". This was also the case for the last political elections for the *Panchayat* in 2011. As these groups claim a very strict practice of following

4. Gluckman argued that conflict and rebellion are inherent in society, as each individual or group of individuals struggles to achieve their own private interests. Gluckman claimed that conflict led to resolution. That is, once opposing parties engage in a conflict, the stage of resolution is often reached based on the existing tradition of the society. One of Gluckman's most distinguished studies was on the rituals of rebellion. He showed that ritualized forms of hostility, in which individuals engage in certain types of behavior to express their disagreement with the leaders or those in power, actually have beneficial effects on the social order. Through the controlled expression of hostility to authority, social cohesion is ultimately preserved. Thanks to a functionalist analysis, Gluckman developed the principle of the "cross-cutting" of ties or alliances, based on the assumption that conflicts are inevitable in social systems and even serve toward the maintenance of these social systems. He noted that groups within any society have an inherent tendency to break apart and then become bound together again by new alliances. In this way, conflicts in one set of relationships are assimilated and compensated for in the resulting alliances. Thus, conflicts are overcome through the medium of alliances and allegiances. Even though the alliances and allegiances are broken and reformed, the social system as a whole is still maintained (Gluckman 2004).

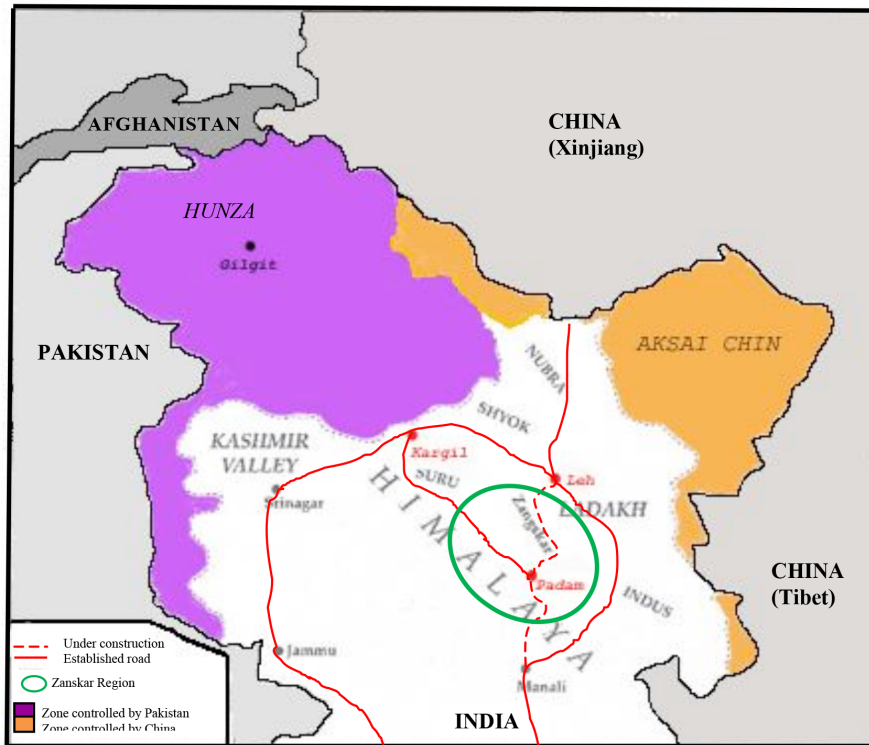


FIG. 2 : "ZANSKAR REGION, LADAKH, CIRCLED." MAP: S. DEBOOS

the basic rules and teachings of Buddhism and Islam, I shall call them Buddhist and Muslim fundamentalists.

Zanskar is the Buddhist majority belt of the Kargil district, which has a Muslim majority. Conversions have remained a major issue in the Ladakh Region. Though earlier the tradition of polyandry was a factor leading to conversions and inter-faith marriages, its incidence is now much reduced. Although Muslims and Buddhists have inter-married for centuries in the whole region, including Zanskar, in the Ladakh Area inter-faith marriages became a major issue in 1989. Due to the tension arising in Kashmir, the Ladakh Area applied for Union Territory Status under the Indian Constitution. This demand was handled by a young generation of Buddhist leaders, among them some members of the Buddhist Ladakh Association (LBA). A series of "scuffles" (Bray 2007:7) between Muslims and Buddhists later turned into real riots and was followed by a social boycott from both religious groups against each other. As a result, in 1990 the central government of India recognized the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council for Leh (Pirie 2007; Van Beek & Pirie 2008).

The twin district of Ladakh has been witnessing peculiar demographic upheavals especially after it was opened for tourism. In the forty years before 2001, census analysis suggests the Buddhists have lost 7.96 percent of their percentage share in the combined population of Leh and Kargil districts. Though Muslims have improved their tally by 1.97 percent, the real gainers are Hindus, who witnessed an improvement of 5.57 percent, almost tripling their share

since 1981. In the last census of 2011, Muslims constituted 47.40 percent of Ladakh with Buddhists at 45.87 percent. Hindus, Sikhs and Christians represent respectively 6.22, 0.31 and 0.17 percent of the population (official census 2011).

The Ladakh area, at the boundaries of China, Afghanistan and Pakistan, is also involved in national policy as well as economic and security issues (Fewkes 2009; Warikoo 2009). In fact, as Warikoo (2009: x) noticed, the Ladakh area is a unique geo-strategic location. Since the nineteenth century, the exchanges that took place in this area were influenced by the state of diplomatic relations between Britain, Russia and China. Further, the Karakorum Range and the Zanskar Range are known to have untapped ores and fossil resources, and at the same time, the desolate and uninhabited area of the Karakorum Range presents highly sensitive security and military issues as P.N. Jallali mentions "a dimension that bring to mind a hundred year long unending debate which highlights the importance of the Himalayan rampart [...] where the huge land masses of the five nations meet" (Jalali, in Warikoo 2009:36). In addition, since the beginning of 1996, the civil war in Nepal has encouraged tourists to turn to Ladakh and especially, since 2002, to the Zanskar trek, a 20-day expedition with guides and Sherpas. Finally, Ladakh and Kashmir are not only tourist destinations they are also targeted by religious pilgrims: Hindu, Muslims and Buddhists all have shrines in the Himalayas.

One of the main questions underscoring political and religious discourses in Ladakh for the last decade has been whether Ladakh is, or is not, an exclusively Buddhist land?

During the last three decades, many texts have attempted to find answers to the question of the religious color of the land by recomposing historical events. Among them are two books, *Buddhism in Kashmir* by N.K.Singh (2000), and *Emergence of Islam in Ladakh* by Z.u.A Aabedi (2009). This new literature, described by its authors and some of its readers as scientific and historically proven, follows a political movement initiated by Buddhist and Muslim religious radicals in Ladakh in the 1980s (Pirie 2006:175). They promote a new insidious identification process which stresses not, as before, territorial or village affiliation but confessional affiliation. Pirie described it at the beginning of the 2000s for Ladakh as a consequence of the inter-religious tensions between Buddhists and Muslims in Leh in the 1980s and the 1990s, corresponding to the electoral success of the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA). As she notes, "In the 1980s and early 1990s the LBA became, and has remained, a campaigning organisation whose activities also lead to drastic divisions between the Buddhist and Muslim populations of Ladakh and to violent, communal antagonism between them" (Pirie 2006 :178).

The situation in the Zaskar valley is different from the one in Ladakh district. First of all, the road linking Kargil to Padum was only built in 1980. Thus, Zaskar remained a remote place somewhat apart from the global market main stream which meanwhile spread to Ladakh. Secondly, Zaskar is a "restricted area" which means it has seen less migration than Ladakh. The valley has only been opened for tourism recently (in the late 1990s). Furthermore, Zaskarpa were not traditionally involved in the Silk Road trade, and most of them were doing trade on the high-path at the Zaskar valley boundary through the high passes of Penzi La and Omasi La. Moreover, even if Zaskarpa were involved in other kinds of regional trade such as butter, salt, etc, the Zaskar population met, visited and shared ideas with Ladakhi people during important festivals or pilgrimages such as attending the Dalai Lama's teaching conferences. In 1980 and 1988, the Dalai Lama came to Padum and Buddhists and Muslims organised the visit of His Holiness together: an old muslim from Padum, Abdul Aziz, told me in November 2005 that he cooked several dishes for the Dalai Lama, and the King of Padum added that the male council of Padum, composed of Buddhists and Muslims, agreed on the organization of his Holiness' visit, and planned it together. During his stay in Padum, the Dalai Lama and the Imam met in Padum (Deboos 2010:90).

In 1999, following the Indo-Pakistani Kargil war, India strengthened its control over the frontiers and especially along the main road between Srinagar and Leh through Drass and Kargil. At the same time, the Zaskar valley saw an increase of European trekkers and became aware of inter-religious tensions in Leh and Kargil. The Ladakh Buddhist Association, which is also a political party, led boycotts along with other religious-based political actions (Pirie 2006:180) and as they explained, intended "to use religion to create a

sustained movement" (Van Beek & Bertelsen 1997:54) so as to attract western NGOs to fund Buddhist social and cultural heritage association and Buddhist schools.

At the same time, one of the windfalls of the main road was that the younger generation of Buddhists and Muslims was beginning to be sent by their parents to Srinagar, Kargil, Leh, Jammu, Manali or Dehra Dun to study in secondary schools, high schools or colleges and universities. Taking advantage of the reservations policy in the Indian Constitution, since 2005 these young adults were able to return to their villages to work as civil servants in their own valley.

Since the end of the last decade, the global market and the tourism economy have more and more impacted the local Zaskari economy. Local NGOs sponsored by Switzerland, France or other European countries claim the area to be a "Buddhist land" or "The Himalayas as Buddhism's nest" as numerous trek flyers and tourist agencies advertising mentioned, or as Richard Geer quotes in the movie "Journey from Zaskar" (2010, Jupiter Film distribution). After their studies and when they are looking for jobs, the young Zaskarpa generation is targeted mostly by these foreign NGOs who consider them as a local guarantee of the good use of their budgets. This educated generation in their thirties is also now trusted in community negotiations: the council of elders has great consideration for their knowledge and acknowledge their advice. The erudite discourse thus does not only reside with the King anymore. It has become split and disseminated among young graduates from Padum. In addition, these young Buddhists are involved in political parties like the LBA and agree with the mainly European concerns about religion as a marker of a territory.

In response to this rise of a Buddhist fundamentalist party, Muslims from Kargil have strengthened their position among Padumpa. Whereas Zaskar's Muslims are Sunni, in the neighbouring Suru valley, like in Kargil, they are Shias (95 percent). Thus, Muslim Padumpa have withdrawn upon themselves: in marriage arrangements they pay greater attention to the religious origin of the bride and the groom. Where in the past, Zaskarpa were greatly concerned with finding a Zaskarpa partner, nowadays, as they have recently told me, they consider the partner as being worthy when he/she is Sunni no matter if he/she is from Srinagar or Zaskar. In this withdrawal upon themselves as a religious group, they have also developed a new identity. At the same time, they have started to reconsider the way they learn and read the Quran. Up to September 2012, the main criterion for the choice of the Imam of Padum among Muslims from Zaskar was his voice, which should be "beautiful" to be able to sing the holy Quran with "harmony". We "choose him because the Imam's voice should be beautiful enough to carry our prayers in the name of Allah" an old Muslim man from Padum said in 2005. The current Imam in Padum did not go to any *madrassa* to study Islamic philosophy. In 2010, men from Padum told me that they do not go to the mosque to listen to preachers but only to pray and meet each other.

They also point out that they do not exchange views on the Quran nor on the *Shari'a*, and the Imam does not emphasize the fact that they all belong to the *Umma*. Indeed, most Padum Muslims do not understand the Quran, although they have learned it by heart and recite it from memory (Deboos 2012:152). Most believers, both male and female, told me that “what is important is not to understand the Holy Quran, but to say it with faith and to sing it with a beautiful voice”. Therefore, through the “beautiful” voice of the Imam, Allah should bless Muslims. The Imam’s speech is not only orally aesthetic. It is directed at another form of aesthetics as it also relates to the religious and the cosmological dimensions as the Imam is in charge of prayers and of ensuring God’s blessing of the Muslims’ group and by extension, of Padum. But these specifically Muslim religious speech acts are now deeply questioned, especially as recently, a mullah from the Islamic University in Lucknow has come each summer to teach the Quran in the new Padum Madrasa. This and the recent riots are deeply transforming the way Muslims from Padum experience their faith and assess clerical competence. Now religious speech is not purely aesthetic and spiritual anymore, but, mainly through the outside influences I have described, has now also become scholarly and political.

## CONCLUSION

Since 2001 I have witnessed the transformations in the way Zanskarpa express their own identity. As a researcher, I could get speech acts from several generations and all agreed that being a native from Zanskar was and remains an important issue, but more recently, they also insist on being part of a Buddhist or Muslim religious group.

On the level of speech acts the transformation concerns both the community and the Muslim group. For the community, speech acts from the *Gyalpo*, or the *Lambardar*, or the *Tehsildar* or the Imam, have a capacity for social regulation which is based on respect for the knowledge of dignitaries and emphasizes the interaction between individualities defined as being *from Padum*. When new actors interact in these consultations, such as young educated people, a different kind of knowledge is involved, and the balance of the social regulation is remodelled.

This is the case with the young Zanskarpas who, thanks to the positive discrimination policy in the Indian Constitution, have a better chance of funding and completing their studies in the Universities of Srinagar, Jammu or Delhi. During their stays away from Zanskar, they use their faith-group connections to get facilities such as places to stay or to eat. Then, after graduation, they obtain administrative positions in Zanskar, or, while waiting for a position in Zanskar, they serve in some other places in Jammu and Kashmir State.

Hence, the recognition by both faith-groups of the importance of the tradition has tended to change. These new young social actors who are self confident in possessing the “real” knowledge about community management, some of which stresses the dominance of religious affiliation over

local belonging, get more and more administrative, political and economical power. Inside the Muslim group, the whole orientation towards the Quran seems to be tilting from considerations of beauty and aesthetics in the enunciation of the holy text towards its interpretation, thus opening the way to its political instrumentalization. Inside the Buddhist group, the Ladakh Buddhist Association funds the re-writing of the regional history and claim for the preservation of Tibetan heritage. As a result, the focus in the way Zanskarpa young generation identify themselves has shifted from Zanskarpa Buddhist or Muslim to Buddhist or Muslim from Zanskar.

So, as a Zanskarpa told me in January 2013 on the phone, “taksa Zanskar sokpo song, mi ma zer!!! Ngoula, Boto Kage niampo zerspen, tcha niampo tungspen, taksa minduk, tsar!!!”, [now the Zanskar became bad, people don’t talk to each other anymore!!! Before, Buddhists and Muslims were talking each other, they were drinking tea with each other, now not, this is finished!!!!]

## REFERENCES

- Aabedi, Z. ul A. 2009. *Emergence of Islam in Ladakh*. Delhi: Atlantic.
- Bidima, J.G. 1997. *La Palabre: Une Juridiction de la Parole*. Paris: Michalon.
- Bray, J. 2007. “Old Religions, New Identities and Conflicting Values in Ladakh.” Paper presented at the International Conference on “Religion, Conflict and Development”. University of Passau (Germany), 25-27 June. Available online at: [http://www.phil.uni-passau.de/fileadmin/group\\_upload/45/pdf/conferences/paper\\_j\\_bray.pdf](http://www.phil.uni-passau.de/fileadmin/group_upload/45/pdf/conferences/paper_j_bray.pdf). Accessed 9 January 2013.
- Deboos, S. 2010. *Être musulman au Zanskar. Himalaya indien*. Saarbrücken: EUE
- De Nebesky-Wojkowitz, R. 1996 [1993]. *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: the Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*. Delhi: Book Faith India.
- Descombes, V. 2005 “Edmond Ortigues et le tournant linguistique.” *LHomme* 175/176: 455-474.
- Duranti, A. 1997. *Linguistic Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2004. *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Fewkes, J.H. 2009. *Trade and Contemporary Society along the Silk Road: An ethno-history of Ladakh*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Friedl, W. 1983. *Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft und Materielle Kultur in Zanskar (Ladakh)*. Sankt Augustin: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag.
- Gluckman, M. 2004 [1963]. *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa*. London: Routledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2006 [1964]. *Closed systems and Open Minds: The limits of naivety in social anthropology*. Chicago: Aldine Transaction.



- Gutschow, K. 1998. *An Economy of Merit: Women and Buddhist Monasticism in Zanskar, Northwest India*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hoiyer, H. 1954. *Language in Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Hussain, M. 2012. "Zanskar under curfew after rioting over conversions." *Economic Times*, October 24. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/auw8src>
- Hymes, D. 1974. *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An ethnographic approach*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Keating, E. and M. Edgert. 2004. "Conversation as a Cultural Activity". In A. Duranti, ed., *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Levi-Strauss, C. 2008. *L'Identité*. Paris: Presse Universitaire de France.
- Malinowski, B. 1923. "The problem of Meaning in Primitive Language." In C.K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, eds., *The Meaning of Meaning*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Michaud, Y. 1986 [1973]. *La Violence*. Paris: P.U.F.
- Philips, S.U. 1974. "Warm springs 'India Time': How the regulation of participation affects the progression of events". In R. Bauman and J. Sherzer, eds., *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Pirie, F. 2002. "*The Fragile Web of Order: Conflict avoidance and dispute resolution in Ladakh*". Thesis (Ph.D.)— Oxford University.
- Ricoeur, P. 1990. *Soi-même comme un autre*. Paris: Seuil
- Sink, N.K. 2011 [2000]. *Buddhism in Kashmir*. Srinagar: Gulshan.
- Testard, A. 2007. *Critique du Don : étude sur la circulation non marchande*. Paris: Syllepse.
- Turner, V. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*. London: Aldine Transaction.
- Van Beek, M. and F. Pirie. 2008. *Modern Ladakh: An Anthropological Perspectives on Continuity and Change*. Leiden: Brill.
- Van Beek, M. and Bertelsen, K.B. 1997. "No present without past: the 1989 agitation in Ladakh." In T. Dodin & H. Räther, eds, *Recent research on Ladakh. 7, Proceedings of the 7th Colloquium of the International Association for Ladakh Studies*. Ulm: Dipl. Biol. Ulrike Ziegler, Universität Ulm, Abteil Anthropologie.
- Warikoo, K. 2009. *Himalayan Frontiers of India: Historical, geopolitical and strategic perspectives*. Abingdon: Routledge

## Back Issues of Himalaya are available

Back issues of *Himalaya/Himalayan Research Bulletin*, from 1981 onwards, are available for \$5.00 an issue.

Complete back runs of the journal are available to individual members for \$300.00, and for institutional subscribers for \$500.00, plus postage.

For more information, contact the Editor at [himalaya@anhs-himalaya.org](mailto:himalaya@anhs-himalaya.org)